

**JACKSON COUNTY ZONING COMMISSION
PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

Monday, May 18, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

Community Room, Jackson County Courthouse
201 W. Platt Street, Maquoketa, Iowa
Optional Zoom access was available.

Commissioners Present: Chair Mike Burke; Vice Chair Monica McHugh, via Zoom; Brian Venema; Emerita Kies, via Zoom; Sandra Gerlach; Tom Stewart
Commissioners Absent and Excused: Kristine Pfab

Staff Present: Becca Pflughaupt, Zoning Administrator

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chair Mike Burke at approximately 7:00 p.m. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was present. Staff addressed technical issues with the Zoom connection before proceeding with the agenda.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion was made by Stewart and seconded by Gerlach to approve the May 18, 2026 agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the minutes of the April 20, 2026 meeting. Z.A. Pflughaupt stated that the incorrect date appearing in the header had been corrected.

The Commission also discussed whether Tom Stewart or Monica McHugh should be identified as Vice Chair during portions of the April 20 meeting because the election of officers occurred during that meeting. Staff was directed to determine the appropriate designation and make any necessary correction.

Motion was made by Kies and seconded by Venema to approve the April 20, 2026 meeting minutes with the corrected header date and any necessary correction to the officer designation. Motion carried unanimously.

WORK SESSION: DRAFT HIGH-DENSITY COMPUTING FACILITIES ORDINANCE

The Commission continued its work session regarding the draft High-Density Computing Facilities, or HDCF, Ordinance. No public hearing was held, and no formal recommendation or other action was taken on the draft ordinance.

Z.A. Pflughaupt distributed a commissioner handout summarizing the purpose of the proposed revisions and the major provisions of the ordinance. The Commission reviewed the draft section by section and provided direction regarding additional revisions and clarifications.

Initial Text Corrections and Clarifications

The Commission identified the following potential revisions:

- **Well separation:** The language establishing a 500-foot separation from wells should be clarified so that it applies to public wells and/or wells located on nonparticipating properties rather than preventing a facility from being located near a well serving the facility's own property.
- **Chemical-storage standards:** The Commission questioned whether National Fire Protection Association standards were the appropriate reference for chemical-storage provisions and suggested reviewing whether Iowa DNR, EPA, or other regulatory standards would be more appropriate.
- **Terminology and grammar:** References to "an HDCF" should be revised to "a HDCF" and used consistently throughout the ordinance.
- **Fees and costs:** Provisions requiring the payment of fees, review expenses, or other costs should clearly identify the owner or operator as the responsible party and clarify where payment is to be made.
- **Hazardous releases:** The Commission discussed adding air or atmosphere to the provisions addressing the discharge of hazardous materials to soil, groundwater, and surface water. Staff was directed to develop language while recognizing the regulatory authority of the Iowa DNR, EPA, and other agencies.
- **County responsibilities:** The Commission discussed whether provisions requiring records, notices, or other administrative duties should identify a particular County office. The consensus was to generally retain references to "Jackson County," allowing the Board of Supervisors to designate the appropriate department or official.

Purpose, Definitions, and Applicability

Staff explained that the purpose and intent section describes the ordinance as addressing the siting and land-use impacts of HDCFs, including infrastructure, natural-resource protection, compatibility with neighboring properties, and decommissioning.

Additional definitions had been included to provide consistency for key terms used throughout the ordinance.

The applicability provisions would establish that a HDCF is not permitted by right and may only be considered in the M-1 Industrial, M-2 Heavy Industrial, and C-1 Highway Commercial Districts with approval by the Board of Adjustment. The draft also identifies prohibited or restricted locations and general siting requirements.

Application and Review Requirements

Staff explained that the revised application requirements were intended to provide the County with information comparable to what would be expected for another major, high-impact land use or industrial development.

The proposed application materials include:

- An operations plan describing hours, staffing, maintenance, deliveries, security, generators, and emergency contacts;
- A phasing and expansion plan identifying whether the proposal consists of a single building or a longer-term buildout;

- A utility infrastructure plan identifying substations, transformers, utility yards, easements, service access, and related infrastructure;
- Information regarding sanitary facilities and potable-water service;
- Stormwater, grading, drainage, and erosion-control information;
- A traffic-impact statement for review by the County Engineer;
- Information regarding backup power, generators, fuel, batteries, coolant, and containment;
- Emergency-access and safety-coordination information; and
- A list of required agency permits and approvals.

Staff emphasized that County zoning approval would not replace permits or approvals required by the Iowa DNR, state electrical authorities, Environmental Health, the County Engineer, utilities, or other agencies having jurisdiction.

Setbacks, Noise, Cooling, and Utility Coordination

Staff reviewed the proposed setbacks and separation standards. The draft was intended to be consistent with the wind-energy ordinance where similar concerns exist, particularly regarding natural-resource protection, while remaining tailored to HDCF impacts.

The draft noise provisions use a 50 dBA standard and require baseline, post-startup, complaint-based, expansion or modification, and periodic testing. Periodic testing was proposed at three-year intervals. Vibration standards were also included.

The cooling-system provisions generally require air-cooled or closed-loop cooling systems. Alternative systems would require Board of Adjustment review and specific findings. Iowa DNR authority over water withdrawals and water-use permits would remain separate from County zoning review.

The utility-coordination provisions would require site-specific information so the County can evaluate whether the proposed location can reasonably be served and what land-use or infrastructure impacts may result. Staff explained that the provision would not regulate utility rates, service territory, capacity, or utility operations. The Commission agreed that the explanation tied the requirement to the County's land-use policy goals concerning the efficient provision of infrastructure and services.

Emergency Access and Safety Coordination

The Commission discussed provisions requiring site-access information, security-gate details, emergency contacts, utility disconnects, generators, fuel and coolant locations, and other information needed by emergency responders.

The draft would require the facility owner and operator to maintain current 24-hour emergency-contact information with the County. The Commission clarified that the Zoning Administrator would maintain the contact information rather than serve as the emergency contact.

Commissioners discussed how other industrial businesses coordinate with fire departments, emergency management, and the 911 communications center. It was noted that emergency responders generally maintain contact information and response plans for businesses located within their service areas.

The Commission agreed that the HDCF ordinance could include specific emergency-coordination requirements because of the unique electrical infrastructure, security, backup-power systems, fuel storage, and remote-operation characteristics of these facilities.

The Commission supported changing language stating that the emergency plan “may” be provided to the emergency-response agency having jurisdiction to require that the plan “shall” be provided. The plan would also be maintained on file with Jackson County, with the appropriate County officials responsible for distributing the information to emergency-response agencies.

Waste, Screening, Structural Standards, and Roads

Staff reviewed provisions intended to prevent obsolete computing equipment, electronic waste, batteries, coolant, and regulated materials from accumulating on the property. The provisions were intended to address land-use and site-maintenance concerns without duplicating Iowa DNR or EPA authority.

The screening, fencing, and lighting provisions address exterior impacts, scenic resources, site maintenance, and compatibility with neighboring properties.

The structural standards would require the primary computing equipment to be located within a fully enclosed permanent building. Permanent exterior support equipment could be permitted when shown on the approved site plan and otherwise compliant with the ordinance.

The road-use and infrastructure provisions connect the traffic-impact statement to County Engineer review. Depending upon the project, requirements could include road-condition surveys, designated construction routes, access permits, road-use agreements, financial assurances, and repair of damage caused by construction traffic.

Decommissioning and Enforcement

Staff explained that private agreements between a landowner and facility operator may not adequately protect neighboring properties, future landowners, or the County if a facility is abandoned or the operator dissolves or fails to remove the facility.

The decommissioning provisions are intended to prevent unused equipment, impervious surfaces, deteriorating structures, regulated materials, and site-restoration expenses from becoming the responsibility of future landowners or taxpayers.

The enforcement section includes notice procedures, penalties, cost recovery, and joint owner and operator responsibility.

Staff reviewed proposed language allowing the County to seek temporary injunctive or other lawful relief when a facility presents an imminent and documented threat to public health or safety, neighboring property, public infrastructure, or natural resources. Examples included an uncontrolled hazardous-material release, fire or explosion risk, or repeated operation in violation of enforceable noise or vibration limits. The language remained subject to County Attorney review for consistency with Iowa Code Chapter 335 and other applicable law.

Miscellaneous Provisions and Periodic Review

The miscellaneous section addresses transfer of ownership or operation, conflicts with other regulations, severability, referenced standards, periodic review, and responsibility for compliance-related costs.

The Commission discussed how the proposed three-year review of the ordinance or an approved facility would be tracked. Staff stated that the Zoning Office could place the review date on its calendar, or the Board of Supervisors could designate another County office. Commissioners noted that periodic review may be appropriate because HDCF technology and industry practices may change over time.

NEXT STEPS

The Commission discussed scheduling a joint work session with the Jackson County Board of Supervisors. Commissioners stated that the draft had been reviewed sufficiently by the Commission to begin discussion with the Supervisors, subject to completion of the remaining revisions and County Attorney review.

The next regularly scheduled Zoning Commission meeting was identified as Monday, June 15, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. Staff was directed to confirm the availability of the Board of Supervisors for a joint work session on that date.

OTHER BUSINESS

No additional items of business were presented.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

A member of the public asked whether the proposed setbacks, 1,000 feet from an occupied structure and 500 feet from a property line, would provide sufficient protection for neighboring properties. The speaker stated that noise and nuisance impacts were the primary concerns and asked the Commission to consider whether it would be comfortable with a facility located within 1,000 feet of a residence.

The Commission compared the proposed HDCF setbacks with the larger setbacks contained in the wind-energy ordinance. Commissioners noted that wind turbines and HDCFs create different impacts, including differences in structure height, but agreed that setbacks and the proposed 50 dBA noise limit should be discussed further with the Board of Supervisors. The possibility of a lower 45 dBA noise standard was also mentioned.

Staff stated that the Zoning Department was not aware of an active HDCF proposal in Jackson County at that time.

Another member of the public expressed appreciation for the Commission's work in developing regulations before an application was submitted and commented on the difficulties faced by jurisdictions that do not have county zoning regulations.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Stewart and seconded by Gerlach to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:01 p.m.

Becca Pflughaupt, Zoning Administrator
Adopted 7/20/2026