

**JACKSON COUNTY ZONING COMMISSION
JOINT WORK SESSION WITH THE JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

Monday, June 15, 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; Commissioners Monica McHugh, Sandra Gerlach, Emerita Kies, Kristine Pfab, Tom Stewart, and Brian Venema

Board of Supervisors Present: Chair Don Schwenker, Nin Flagel, and Mike Steines

Staff Present: Alisa Smith, Auditor and Becca Pflughaupt, Zoning Administrator

Others Present: Members of the public attending in person and through Zoom

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Burke called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call was taken, with all seven members of the Zoning Commission present. Members of the Jackson County Board of Supervisors and County staff were also recognized.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Stewart and seconded by Gerlach to approve the agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

PURPOSE OF JOINT WORK SESSION

Chair Burke explained that the meeting was a joint work session between the Jackson County Zoning Commission and the Jackson County Board of Supervisors to discuss the draft High-Density Computing Facilities Ordinance. High-density computing facilities may also be referred to as data centers, data-processing facilities, data-mining facilities, or similar uses.

It was clarified that the meeting was not related to a specific proposed site or pending application. The Zoning Department was not aware of any pending high-density computing facility application or proposed location in Jackson County.

The meeting was not a formal public hearing, and no final recommendation or adoption of the ordinance would occur. The purpose was to review the current draft, discuss proposed standards, receive public input, and identify additional direction before the Zoning Commission considers a formal recommendation at a future meeting.

BACKGROUND

Z.A. Pflughaupt provided background regarding the ordinance. In early 2025, the Zoning Commission reviewed a site-specific request involving a proposed data-processing or data-mining facility. During that process, concerns were raised regarding location, setbacks, proximity

to residences, noise, fire risk, electrical demand, environmental impacts, electronic waste, water use, cleanup, decommissioning, and whether this type of use was appropriate in an agricultural area.

Those concerns helped shape the ordinance under review. The draft ordinance had appeared on publicly noticed Zoning Commission agendas and work-session notices over several months.

Although some meetings had been canceled because of weather or other circumstances, the Commission had continued working on the ordinance since November 2025.

The proposed ordinance would apply only within unincorporated Jackson County. Incorporated cities would retain authority over land-use regulations within their jurisdictions.

JOINT WORK-SESSION DISCUSSION

The Commission and Board reviewed and discussed the proposed standards, including siting, setbacks, water use, noise, vibration, electrical infrastructure, emergency access, road use, monitoring, enforcement, and decommissioning.

Electrical capacity and infrastructure: Concern was expressed that a high-density computing facility could consume a substantial portion of the electrical capacity available in the area and limit opportunities for future residential, commercial, or industrial growth. A possible requirement to preserve approximately 20 to 30 percent of available capacity was discussed. It was noted that the Zoning Commission's authority is primarily related to land use and may not extend to regulating the operating decisions of private utility providers. The current draft requires an applicant to disclose the proposed maximum electrical service load. Additional review was recommended regarding utility capacity, infrastructure improvements, and responsibility for associated costs.

Setbacks: The draft's proposed setbacks of 500 feet from property lines and 1,000 feet from occupied structures were discussed. Suggestions included increasing the property-line setback to 1,000 feet or increasing the occupied-structure setback to approximately one-quarter mile. It was noted that setbacks must protect neighboring property owners while remaining reasonable, supportable, and legally defensible. The Commission discussed its experience developing the County's wind-energy regulations and the importance of relying on identifiable land-use impacts rather than arbitrary distances.

Noise and vibration: The daytime and nighttime periods used for vibration standards were reviewed. The draft allowed higher vibration levels until 10:00 p.m. Concern was expressed that the nighttime standard should begin earlier, such as 7:00 or 8:00 p.m., particularly for families with children and rural residents accustomed to lower background noise. Members also discussed the distinction between noise and vibration standards and the effects of continuous sound in rural areas.

Cooling systems and water use: Members discussed air-cooled systems and closed-loop cooling systems. While air-cooled systems may use less water, concerns were raised about noise generated by large cooling fans. Closed-loop cooling was discussed as potentially quieter but

more costly. Protection of groundwater and other natural resources remained a primary concern.

Testing and monitoring costs: The draft requires baseline and subsequent testing of noise and vibration. Members recommended revising the organization and wording of these provisions so it is unmistakably clear that all required testing, including additional testing resulting from complaints or suspected violations, must be conducted at the sole expense of the facility owner or operator.

Mandatory versus discretionary language: Members recommended further review of the draft's use of "shall" and "may," particularly where the County intends a requirement to be mandatory. Additional County Attorney review was requested.

Enforcement and legal defensibility: The Commission and Board discussed the importance of adopting meaningful and enforceable standards while avoiding provisions that could be considered arbitrary or legally vulnerable. Members emphasized that an ordinance supported by documented land-use impacts would provide stronger protection than an outright prohibition that could be challenged or preempted.

Members of the Board of Supervisors commended the Zoning Commission and staff for the research and work completed on the draft.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public-comment portion of the work session was opened. Speakers were asked to provide their name and general area of residence and were limited to three minutes. It was explained that comments and questions would be taken under consideration but might not receive an immediate response.

Public comments included the following:

Several speakers thanked the Zoning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and staff for being proactive and for the time, research, and due diligence devoted to the ordinance.

Residents requested consideration of larger setbacks, including a one-quarter-mile setback from occupied structures or a 1,000-foot setback from property lines. Concern was expressed that a 1,000-foot setback from an existing residence might still be insufficient to protect neighboring residents.

Speakers questioned whether air-cooled systems should be permitted because of the noise produced by large cooling fans and asked the Commission to consider requiring closed-loop cooling systems.

Concern was expressed that permitting a large data center could alter the character and identity of Jackson County.

Questions were raised regarding who would pay for electrical substations, transmission improvements, and other infrastructure needed to serve a facility and whether those costs could result in increased utility rates for existing customers.

Speakers asked for additional information regarding the source and long-term availability of cooling water, potential evaporation or atmospheric effects, groundwater impacts, and the disposal of obsolete computer equipment and electronic waste.

A speaker requested stronger protection of the Grant Wood Scenic Byway viewshed and recommended using mandatory language comparable to the County's wind-energy regulations. Multiple speakers raised concerns regarding enforcement. They requested clearly defined penalties that would be significant enough to deter violations rather than merely becoming a cost of doing business.

Questions were raised regarding whether the County could guarantee that a facility would not result in costs to taxpayers or utility customers. Some speakers also requested additional public education and consideration of whether the matter could be submitted to a countywide vote. Concern was expressed that using most of the area's available electrical or water capacity could prevent future economic-development opportunities that might provide more employment or long-term benefit to the County.

Other concerns included quality of life, continuous noise and vibration, air quality, water supply, prime agricultural land, livestock impacts, property values, property taxes, expansion of facilities after initial construction, and the ability of the County to enforce its regulations against well-funded companies.

Speakers requested continuation or extension of the existing moratorium until an ordinance is adopted.

Written comments received through Zoom also requested additional work sessions, a 1,000-foot property-line setback, strict penalties, and stronger provisions addressing violations and company compliance.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION

Following public comment, the Commission and Board discussed several matters requiring additional review.

The County's general penalty provisions were being reviewed and would be coordinated with the high-density computing ordinance and other County regulations. Members agreed that penalties should be sufficient and proportionate to the seriousness of a violation.

The existing moratorium on data centers, data-processing facilities, and data-mining facilities was scheduled to expire at the end of August 2026. Z.A. Pflughaupt stated that an extension could be brought to the Board of Supervisors for consideration if the ordinance was not completed before the moratorium expired.

The Commission requested clarification from the County Attorney regarding whether a countywide public vote on the ordinance would be legally permissible. It was noted that zoning ordinances are generally adopted through the statutory recommendation, public-hearing, and ordinance-adoption process rather than through a ballot question.

It was again emphasized that the County had no pending high-density computing facility application or proposed site. The prior site-specific request had prompted the County to begin developing regulations and the Board of Supervisors had adopted the moratorium to allow sufficient time for that work.

The Commission identified the following matters for consideration in the next draft:

Clarification that the ordinance applies only within unincorporated Jackson County;

Additional language regarding the Grant Wood Scenic Byway and protection of scenic viewsheds;

Clarification that the ordinance applies to true high-density computing facilities and not ordinary office computers, small server rooms, live-streaming equipment, or similar customary technology uses;

Further County Attorney review of mandatory and discretionary language;

Possible revisions to setbacks;

Review of permitted cooling systems and related noise and water impacts;

Review of daytime and nighttime noise and vibration periods;

Clear placement of responsibility for all required testing and monitoring costs on the facility owner or operator;

Review of enforcement provisions and penalties; and

Further consideration of electrical capacity, infrastructure costs, water use, and long-term resource availability.

Work on the draft was expected to continue during July and August.

Once the Zoning Commission completes its review, a formal recommendation would be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors. The Board's adoption process would include at least one public hearing and three readings and votes on the proposed ordinance. For an ordinance of this nature, the readings were expected to occur at three separate Board meetings.

Members of the public were encouraged to review the draft ordinance, contact County officials with questions or comments, attend future meetings, and subscribe to meeting and agenda notifications through the County website. It was noted that the County had voluntarily made the working draft available to promote transparency and public participation.

The next regular Zoning Commission meeting was scheduled for Monday, July 20, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.

A final question was raised regarding the financial benefit of high-density computing facilities to the County. Discussion noted that some containerized or minimally improved data-mining operations may generate relatively little property-tax revenue compared with their utility demands. The draft ordinance would require facilities to be housed within permanent buildings rather than portable shipping containers. It was also noted that the taxable value of a building generally does not include the value of the computer equipment or business operations housed inside it. Members discussed the rapidly changing nature of the technology and reiterated that the purpose of the ordinance was to establish a defensible framework that would protect the County if a proposal were received.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by McHugh and seconded by Gerlach to adjourn. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:13 p.m.

Becca Pflughaupt, Zoning Administrator

Adopted 7/20/2026