

JACKSON COUNTY ZONING COMMISSION

PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

Monday, August 17, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

Community Room, Jackson County Courthouse

201 W. Platt Street, Maquoketa, Iowa

Optional Zoom access was available. Members of the public attended both in person and via Zoom.

Commissioners Present: Chair Mike Burke; Vice Chair Monica McHugh; Brian Venema; Tom Stewart; Kristine Pfab; Sandra Gerlach

Commissioners Absent: Emerita Kies, excused

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. Six members were present, one member was absent and excused, and a quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion was made by McHugh and seconded by Gerlach to approve the August 17, 2026 agenda. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes of the July 20, 2026 Zoning Commission meeting. Chair Burke noted that he recalled a possible grammatical error in the draft but was uncertain whether a correction was necessary.

Motion by Stewart, seconded by Pfab, to approve the July 20, 2026 minutes, with a grammatical correction to be made if identified. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.

WORK SESSION: DRAFT HIGH-DENSITY COMPUTING FACILITIES ORDINANCE

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

Zoning Administrator Pflughaupt reviewed revisions incorporated into the August 17 working draft based on direction provided by the Commission at its July meeting. Revisions addressed property-line setbacks and recorded waivers; non-emergency generator testing and maintenance; scenic byway and visual-resource review; visual-impact and viewshed analysis; security fencing during decommissioning; road repair and financial assurance; applicant, developer and option-holder acknowledgments; and administrative drafting and cross-reference corrections.

The Commission indicated that the revisions could remain as drafted at this stage. Staff reported that provisions previously identified for County Attorney review remained pending. Because the Board of Supervisors had approved an extension of the HDCF moratorium, the Commission agreed that continued ordinance development could proceed deliberately while additional legal, technical and agency review is obtained.

The Commission continued discussion of the proposed setback from nonparticipating property lines. The working draft continues to identify 1,000 feet and 1,320 feet as alternatives under consideration. Staff reported that other counties are also continuing to evaluate data center regulations and, in some cases, revisiting previously adopted standards as additional information becomes available. No final setback distance was selected.

Staff presented alternative approaches for the zoning structure applicable to HDCFs. The current working draft allows HDCFs to be considered as conditional uses within the C-1, M-1 and M-2 districts. Discussion included whether a separate zoning district, overlay or other approval structure might provide additional review while maintaining appropriate checks and balances. The Commission noted that an HDCF proposed within an existing eligible commercial or industrial district would still be subject to the applicable conditional-use approval process. No change to the current zoning structure was directed at this time.

The Commission discussed whether an applicant should be required to conduct an informational meeting with neighboring property owners before the formal land-use hearing. Commissioners generally recognized the benefit of early communication but questioned whether such a requirement should apply only to HDCFs or more broadly to other large industrial or manufacturing uses.

Discussion also included economic-development or community-benefit agreements.

Commissioners expressed interest in ensuring that major developments provide benefits to the County but recognized that economic incentives, utility usage and similar matters may extend beyond the Zoning Commission's land-use authority. Staff agreed to continue researching what provisions, if any, could appropriately be addressed through zoning.

The Commission discussed potential cross-boundary impacts from facilities located near county lines, including impacts that may extend beyond the jurisdiction in which a facility is located. Staff presented the concept of adding regional-coordination language similar to provisions previously considered for wind energy development. Commissioners discussed coordination with neighboring counties and requested additional research regarding whether surrounding counties have adopted comparable cross-boundary provisions.

Following discussion, the Commission generally agreed that the HDCF working draft is in a good position for the present time. Staff will continue seeking County Attorney, agency and technical review and will return additional information or proposed revisions to the Commission as appropriate.

UTILITY-SCALE SOLAR AND BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

The Commission discussed the upcoming development of regulations for utility-scale solar energy conversion systems and battery energy storage systems (BESS).

Staff stated that preliminary ordinance drafts would be developed using Jackson County's existing regulations, including the wind energy ordinance, together with regulations and approaches used by other Iowa counties. The Commission agreed that utility-scale solar and BESS should be developed as separate ordinances but may be reviewed concurrently.

Discussion focused in part on emergency-response and fire-safety considerations.

Commissioners discussed recent reported incidents involving solar panels and batteries and requested that staff obtain factual information regarding those incidents as part of the research process.

The Commission supported obtaining input from local fire departments and emergency responders before development of the ordinances progresses substantially. Topics identified for further review included responder training and experience, specialized equipment, emergency access, fire safety, separation requirements, battery disposal and end-of-life considerations, and responsibility for costs associated with specialized training or equipment necessitated by a proposed facility.

Staff outlined an anticipated review process consisting of preliminary Commission review and revision, followed by a joint work session with the Board of Supervisors when the drafts are sufficiently developed, additional public input and revisions, and ultimately the formal public-hearing and recommendation process.

No public hearing or final ordinance action was taken.

ITEMS FROM STAFF

Zoning Administrator Pflughaupt stated that preliminary utility-scale solar and BESS ordinance drafts would be brought to the Commission for discussion at an upcoming meeting.

Staff also reported that several miscellaneous Zoning Ordinance text amendments, consisting primarily of clarifications and administrative revisions identified through continued use of the ordinance, were being prepared for County Attorney review. Those items may be brought to the Commission for discussion in September or October before proceeding through the formal public-hearing process.

Staff reported that no zoning applications were currently on file for Commission consideration.

ITEMS FROM COMMISSION

The Commission discussed the current moratoria applicable to utility-scale solar energy conversion systems and utility-scale battery energy storage systems. Staff confirmed that both moratoria are currently extended through August 31, 2027, unless terminated earlier following adoption of applicable regulations.

The Commission also briefly discussed its fall meeting schedule. September and October meetings will remain at 7:00 p.m., with the regular meeting time changing to 6:00 p.m. beginning in November. No December Zoning Commission meeting is currently scheduled.

ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC

Chair Burke invited comments from members of the public regarding matters not otherwise requiring action under the posted agenda.

A member of the public participating remotely stated that he resides near the Jackson-Dubuque County line and discussed a proposed data-center development in Dubuque County near the county boundary. He asked whether the Jackson County HDCF draft establishes a setback from a county line. Staff and the Commission clarified that the current draft does not establish a separate county-line setback and that a development physically extending into more than one county would be subject to the applicable approval processes of each jurisdiction. The commenter encouraged coordination between Jackson and Dubuque Counties regarding facilities located near their shared boundary.

Another member of the public, who stated that he is a Dubuque County resident involved with a citizen data-center accountability group, discussed efforts to compile information and compare ordinances being developed in multiple jurisdictions. He referenced recent educational and watershed discussions in Dubuque County, including information concerning water resources, and encouraged continued regional information-sharing and collaboration. He stated that the group had reviewed Jackson County's draft ordinance as part of its research and offered to share information and resources with the County.

No formal action was taken on public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made and seconded to adjourn the August 17, 2026 Zoning Commission meeting.

Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Becca Pflughaupt, Zoning Administrator

Adopted: 9/21/2026