

Commission discusses how it will address data centers

By Hector Flores

Data centers are a hot topic across the world and especially here in Florida. The facilities use hundreds or even more servers to process, store, and manage data. They are used to operate websites, run business applications and most recently train and run artificial intelligence systems.

The size of a data center ranges based on its use, but the type that have generated both concern and excitement in recent years can exceed 1 million square feet. Proponents of data centers point to their economic impact, high-wage jobs and their central role in the emergence of AI in everyone's lives. Critics point to the massive amount of energy and water the centers consume, as well as the noise they generate and potential environmental impacts.

A new state law passed in May by the Florida Legislature and signed by the governor, F.S. 163.326, gives local governments the authority to regulate the development of data centers. On Tuesday, the Charlotte County Commission held a workshop where they received a presentation from staff on the data center issue and held a robust discussion.

The county's planning and zoning official told commissioners his interpretation of current county land use policies may not allow a data center to be constructed here. The official and county attorney, however, cautioned enforcement of that determination was subject to appeal, both to the county Board of Zoning Appeals and in court. The board was concerned the status quo would take them out of the decision loop were a developer to attempt to push through the current prohibition through the BZA or in court.

The result of the board's discussion was a consensus that Charlotte County is not the place for data centers. It directed the Community Development Department and County Attorney's Office to research the issue and bring back proposed comprehensive plan amendments and/or ordinances that would prohibit data centers from being constructed in Charlotte County.

The board will revisit the issue at future meetings. To view the workshop, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/CCTV and click on Video On-Demand Archives.

NACo awards

Charlotte County earned 33 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards. The awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents. Launched in 1970, the program is designed to celebrate innovation in county government.

I want to congratulate everyone involved in the programs and services that earned this distinction. Recognition like this not only reflects well on the people doing the work, it

underscores to members of our community that my colleagues are working for them with distinction, employing creativity, initiative and best practices in the delivery of public services.

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