

# Holyoke panel advances data center moratorium, ban for City Council to consider

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HOLYOKE — A City Council subcommittee voted Thursday to move forward a proposal about data centers, sending it to the full council for a decision after a long and often divided debate.

The City Council voted 4-1 to advance an amended measure that includes both a temporary moratorium and potential ban language on data centers; the full council will take it up Tuesday.

The revised order removes warehouses from the definition of data centers as an acceptable use and allows the Massachusetts Green High-Performance Computing Center to continue operating as permitted use of up to 12 megawatts.

While the committee voted to advance a permanent ban, Chair Meg Magrath-Smith said she also had the City Council assistant share the moratorium language with the council, in case the vote for the ban fails and council wants to consider a moratorium.

“Either way, a committee to study the issue will be formed to report to (the) council,” she said.

Councilors said the moratorium would have given the city time — up to two years — to research issues like electricity use, water demand, environmental effects and safety concerns. During that time, a special committee would gather data and report back with recommendations.

Still, councilors did not fully agree on the best approach.

Some members, including Councilor Israel Rivera, pushed for a full ban on new data centers, saying residents have raised strong concerns about environmental impacts and neighborhood effects.

Others supported the moratorium as a safer legal step, warning that an immediate ban could face challenges or fail to pass. They said the city needs more information before making a final decision.

“There’s a messiness here,” one councilor said, noting the lack of consensus.

The debate also touched on transparency and process.

Several councilors said they were frustrated with how quickly new language was introduced and called for more public input.

No public comment was taken at the Thursday meeting because of legal concerns, but residents will be able to speak when the full council takes up the issue.

## Earlier that day, a protest

Earlier that day, a protest opposing a proposed data center at 100 Water St. brought residents and organizers to City Hall, where they raised concerns about the project's potential impacts.

The rally, organized by groups including Indivisible, encouraged people to attend the council meeting later that evening.

The project, proposed for the former Hampden Papers site, was expected to use about 20 megawatts of power — enough to supply thousands of homes. Supporters said it would turn an idle property into a revenue source, generating roughly \$2 million annually in taxes.

But organizer Claire McGale, with The Real Majority Holyoke, said the project's costs could outweigh its benefits. She warned it could strain the power grid, raise utility costs and create environmental risks, including increased water use, noise and air pollution.

Critics also raised concerns about long-term planning, arguing the site could be better used for mixed-use development and projects that more directly benefit residents.

*A previous version of this story incorrectly described the committee's action; the ordinance committee advanced an amended proposal toward a ban and a temporary moratorium.*