

10 Questions Communities Should Ask About AI Data Centers

A public civic infrastructure checklist for residents, landowners, local businesses, and local stakeholders reviewing major digital infrastructure proposals.

This checklist is a general public-information tool. It is not legal advice, engineering advice, environmental certification, lobbying guidance, or investment advice.

Purpose

AI infrastructure and data centers are not only technology issues. They can involve electricity demand, water systems, land use, public approvals, emergency resilience, and long-term local costs. Communities do not need panic. They need better questions, better document organization, and a clearer understanding of what decisions are being made.

Use this checklist to organize early review, prepare for public meetings, request documents, and identify issues that may require qualified legal, engineering, environmental, utility, or municipal review.

1. How much power will the project require?	Ask for the estimated megawatt load, expected peak demand, and whether the facility requires new substations, transmission upgrades, or special utility service.
2. Who pays for grid upgrades?	Clarify whether costs are paid by the developer, utility customers, public agencies, tax incentives, bonds, or other ratepayer-supported mechanisms.
3. What water source and cooling method will be used?	Ask whether the project uses potable water, recycled water, groundwater, air cooling, evaporative cooling, or another system - and who verifies actual use after approval.
4. Are backup generators, fuel cells, batteries, or on-site power systems involved?	Identify diesel, gas, battery storage, fuel-cell, solar, microgrid, or hybrid systems and whether they create noise, air-quality, safety, fire, or emergency-response concerns.

<p>5. What land-use approvals are required?</p>	<p>Check zoning, general plan consistency, conditional use permits, environmental review, parcel changes, easements, public hearings, and development agreements.</p>
<p>6. What public documents already exist?</p>	<p>Collect agendas, staff reports, environmental documents, utility filings, water-agency materials, developer presentations, public notices, and community comments.</p>
<p>7. What is the public decision timeline?</p>	<p>Identify hearing dates, comment deadlines, appeal periods, board votes, planning commission meetings, utility proceedings, and state/federal review windows.</p>
<p>8. What impacts are nearby residents and local businesses being asked to absorb?</p>	<p>Look at noise, traffic, air quality, lighting, emergency access, water demand, land conversion, electricity reliability, and property-adjacent concerns.</p>
<p>9. Are community benefits and mitigation commitments enforceable?</p>	<p>Ask whether promises are written into binding agreements, monitored over time, publicly reported, and connected to clear enforcement mechanisms.</p>
<p>10. What questions should local officials answer before approval?</p>	<p>Require plain-language answers on power, water, land, cost allocation, emergency resilience, public accountability, and long-term local tradeoffs.</p>

How to Use This Checklist

Create a project folder.

Save every agenda, notice, report, presentation, email, public comment, and meeting screenshot in one dated folder.

Build a timeline.

List when the project was first noticed, when public meetings occurred, when comment deadlines close, and when final votes are expected.

Separate facts from concerns.

Facts are documented items. Concerns are questions requiring answers. Keeping them separate makes public comments more credible.

Ask for plain-language answers.

Technical issues should be explained in a way residents, ratepayers, and local stakeholders can understand.

Escalate qualified questions.

For legal, engineering, environmental, utility, tax, or land-use conclusions, consult qualified professionals.

Documents to Request or Locate

Planning agendas; staff reports; environmental review documents; utility filings; water-agency materials; project descriptions; zoning records; development agreements; tax incentive materials; public notices; public comments; hearing videos; emergency-service comments; and any developer presentation materials.

When a Custom Brief May Help

A custom civic infrastructure brief may be useful when a community, landowner, business, attorney, consultant, or local stakeholder needs public documents organized into a clear issue summary, timeline, source index, question list, and watchpoint memo for a specific project or location.

Vallentis Civic Infrastructure Briefs

Vallentis prepares civic infrastructure briefs using publicly available information on energy demand, land use, water systems, digital infrastructure, utility pressure, and community preparedness. Briefs are designed to organize information and clarify questions; they do not replace legal, engineering, environmental, or government review.

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