

FROM DEMAND DRIVERS TO
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS:
**Data Centers that
Work for Ohioans**



**Save
Ohio
Parks**

May 2026 | hello@saveohioparks.org



The Amazon data center on Scioto-Darby Creek Road sits directly next to homes in Darby Glen subdivision in Hilliard.

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Executive Summary

A surge of investment in data centers has strained the electric grid nationwide, and Ohio is no exception. With over 200 data centers, Ohio ranks fifth in the country for data center growth. This investment comes with a cost, however – data centers use tremendous amounts of energy and water, threatening to drive up costs for consumers, destabilize our grid, and pollute our air and water.

Recognizing these risks, Ohio can capitalize on the economic opportunities of data centers while ensuring that their growth benefits local communities. Meeting the energy demand of data centers requires a more flexible and decentralized electric system. It will require massive investment – and also creates an opportunity to modernize the grid and build a more resilient and sustainable energy system.

In the clean energy manufacturing sector, Ohio is already leading the field with two major solar manufacturers and significant investments in battery cell manufacturing. Thousands of Ohioans are employed in the growing carbon-free energy sector. In contrast, Ohio counties with the most fracking for fossil fuels have seen a loss in employment and population since the fracking boom began in 2008.

Ohio should leverage the data center buildout to expand its leadership in carbon-free energy manufacturing. Data centers should be required to meet their energy needs with solar, wind, and battery storage, either by building large-scale plants or by investing in distributed energy resources like residential solar and batteries.

This report focuses on the energy sector impacts of data centers and potential policies to mitigate those impacts while meeting energy demand. It makes recommendations for regulating data centers, as well as for policy reforms to support a more distributed, resilient, and sustainable energy system. If data center investment can be channeled into tomorrow's clean infrastructure, the data center boom can benefit all Ohioans.

Summary of Recommendations

- Place a **moratorium on data center approvals** until new regulations are adopted. Prohibit the use of non-disclosure agreements and require public consultation in siting decisions.
- Require data centers to **meet or offset their energy demand with 100% solar, wind, and energy storage**, either co-located or off-site, by investing in utility-scale, community, or residential energy resources.
- Require data centers to implement **best practices for energy efficiency** and workload flexibility.
- **Update Ohio energy laws** to allow community energy, virtual net metering, and demand response flexibility.
- **Ensure parity in Ohio law** among all sources of energy, with the same provisions for state control and local input for oil, gas, solar, wind, battery storage, and others.
- **Ensure data centers pay necessary grid modernization costs** to support grid reliability.
- Require **water efficiency measures** and public reporting on water use. Require discharge water to be filtered and monitor discharge to ensure compliance.



An Amazon data center sits directly across Leppert Road from homes in the Carr Farms neighborhood of Hilliard.

Overview of Data Centers in Ohio

Ohio is quickly becoming a hub for data centers, in part as a result of its successful tax and incentive packages for the sector. Ohio currently has 203 data centers,¹ which places the state fifth in the country. Of these, more than 130 are in the Columbus area. The already-built data centers represent about 1.2 GW (1,170 MW) of energy demand; in 2023 they accounted for 1.6% of total energy use in Ohio.² AEP expects this number to continue to grow. In 2024 AEP told PUCO it had an additional 50 data centers awaiting interconnection.³

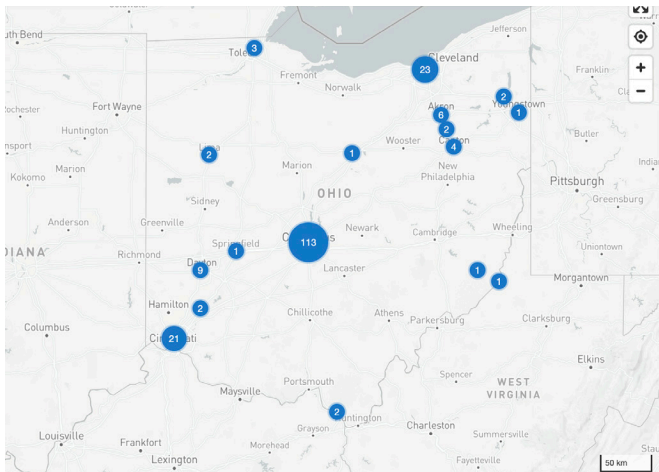


Image: Map from datacentermap.com showing the locations of 190+ data centers in Ohio.

AEP defines a data center as “a facility (a) used primarily or exclusively for electronic information services such as the management, storage, processing, and dissemination of electronic data and information through the use of computer systems, servers, networking equipment, and related components that (b) has an aggregate monthly maximum demand of greater than 25,000 kW.”⁴

Data centers can bring a range of economic benefits. The Ohio Business Roundtable states that data centers are “essential for economic expansion, serving as catalysts for attracting businesses, creating jobs, and fostering technological growth.”⁵ The Ohio Chamber of Commerce is similarly enthusiastic, noting the “sector now ranks among Ohio’s most significant industries —

and growth trajectories suggest continued expansion through the decade.”⁶ By 2030, the Chamber says, data centers may rival the automotive and agricultural sectors in importance in Ohio.⁷

Industry groups report that data centers already contribute significantly to Ohio jobs and income, although other groups dispute these claims. The Ohio Chamber credits data centers with supporting 95,217 total jobs in 2024 and adding \$11.8 billion to Ohio’s gross domestic product (GDP).⁸ The Ohio Business Roundtable finds that “more than 10,000 construction workers are building or maintaining data centers in Central Ohio” and says Google employs 1,000 IT workers in Ohio.⁹ Industry groups assert that proximity to data centers also attracts additional business and results in infrastructure upgrades that benefit citizens more broadly.

At the same time, growing public opposition to unrestricted data center growth has led to numerous local moratoriums on data center development. In the suburbs of Columbus, Washington Township passed a moratorium on December 8, 2025. Nearby Jerome Township had passed a moratorium in September 2025, but approved four new data centers in late December, including two co-located fuel cells.¹⁰ Also in December, the Waterville City Council (near Toledo) passed a six-month moratorium on data centers to “protect the community from what we don’t know.”¹¹ South Bloomfield Village and Ashville, Ohio, just south of Columbus, passed similar moratoriums,¹² though Ashville Village Council recently approved an agreement with EdgeConneX to build an 800 MW gas plant to power a data center complex.¹³

In March a group of rural Ohioans submitted language¹⁴ for a statewide constitutional ballot initiative that would ban data centers larger than 25 MW.¹⁵ The Ohio Ballot Board approved the group to begin collecting signatures; the group must collect more than 413,000 valid signatures from half of Ohio’s 88 counties by July 1 to put the initiative on the November ballot.¹⁶

Residents who oppose data centers have expressed concern about noise levels and property values, in addition to the energy and water impacts.¹⁷ The Ohio Chamber acknowledged that managing environmental impacts and ensuring local benefits will help ensure data centers maintain social license and avoid public backlash.¹⁸

Apart from environmental concerns, data center critics have pointed to ethical issues with artificial intelligence,¹⁹ including privacy concerns, use in warfare and surveillance, use in educational and medical settings, and job displacement. Authors and creators have taken legal action against AI companies that used their works without consent to train large language models.²⁰ Meanwhile, some financial analysts warn of an “AI bubble” that could burst with significant economic impact.²¹

While acknowledging these concerns, this report focuses on data centers’ environmental impacts, especially regarding Ohio’s energy system. It is also important to acknowledge that data centers also have significant impacts on the water system due to their extensive water use, potentially posing risks to Ohio’s freshwater reserves.

Energy System Impacts of Data Centers

Uncontrolled data center growth presents significant risks for Ohio’s energy system.

Data centers’ energy demand has contributed to rising energy prices, and creates a risk of grid instability or electrical outages.

Their choice of fuel for electricity generation has significant environmental justice implications at every point in the process including extraction, use, and waste disposal.



Energy System Impacts: Rising Energy Costs and Grid Reliability

Data centers have immense energy demands, which are quickly surpassing current production and could strain grid stability. Currently, data centers in Ohio represent an energy load of approximately 1.2 GW, equivalent to the production capacity of a nuclear power plant.²² In 2024, AEP told the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) there were 50 new data centers awaiting interconnection representing an additional 30 GW of demand,²³ 25 times more than current data center use.

When demand exceeds supply, energy prices rise, driving up electricity costs for everyone – including households. On average, Ohio electric bills increased 30% from 2015 to 2025.²⁴ In Columbus, a typical monthly home electric bill jumped \$27 in 2025, and one analyst predicted an additional 10 to 15% increase from 2025 to 2026.²⁵ A report by Monitoring Analytics, the independent market monitor for PJM Interconnection, found that data centers were responsible for 63% of the increase in capacity prices across the PJM region and an average increase of \$16 per month for Ohio residential bills.²⁶ The report concluded that “ratepayers are subsidizing the cost of building energy infrastructure to support the data center buildout.”²⁷

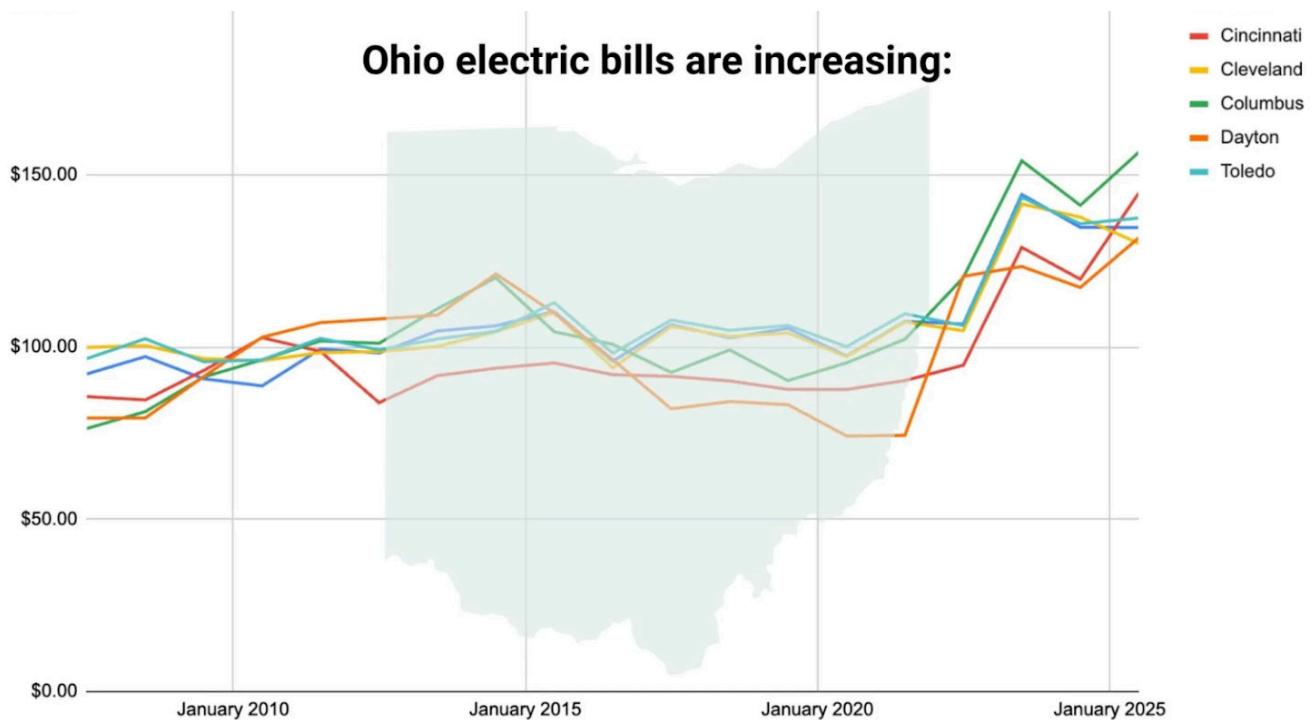


Image: A chart created by Signal Statewide using PUCO data shows the increase in Ohio electric bills since 2010.²⁸

Given the astronomical estimates of demand growth, there is a risk of utilities overbuilding energy supply – building generation facilities that will not ultimately be needed. Some experts believe speculative interconnection requests account for 5 to 10 times the real number of data centers, since developers “shop around” for faster interconnection opportunities by submitting multiple requests in different locations.²⁹ This creates a risk of overbuilding generation capacity that could burden utilities with stranded assets: “Systematic over-forecasting like this means that utilities have spent billions of dollars building power plants for loads that did not materialize, leaving regular ratepayers to foot the bill.”³⁰

In addition to directly causing higher prices by increasing energy demand, data centers indirectly push electricity prices up by forcing utilities to make expensive grid upgrades to handle increased transmission needs. Without these upgrades, the larger transmission load could contribute to grid congestion and instability. According to the Pew Research Center, “smaller businesses and U.S. households often shoulder these costs unless ratepayer protections are put in place.”³¹

The increase in energy prices has social justice implications, since lower-income households typically spend a larger share of their income on energy costs – meaning those who are least able to afford it end up spending disproportionately more of their income on energy. On average, low-income households spend nearly 20% of their income on energy,³² three times as much of their income compared to non-low-income households.³³ Lower-income households often live in buildings that are older, poorly weatherized, and less energy efficient, contributing to higher energy bills. A household is considered severely energy burdened when spending more than 10% of their income on energy costs, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.³⁴

When facing already high energy burdens, increasing energy prices may cause households to cut other expenses to avoid missed energy payments. “In 2020, nearly 34 million U.S. households reported reducing or forgoing food or medicine or leaving the home at unsafe temperatures in order to pay their energy bills,” the nonpartisan RMI research institute found.³⁵ Higher energy prices spill over into negative social and

economic impacts, especially for low-income households.

AEP Ohio has taken steps to mitigate the impact on retail energy prices by establishing a new rate package for large load users. The rate requires new data centers to commit to paying for at least 85% of the capacity they requested for 12 years, even if they use less electricity, to cover the costs of AEP building out the generation and transmission capacity. “The rules aim to protect against scenarios in which AEP would make investments to serve a data center and then the developer abandons its plans,” AEP told Inside Climate News.³⁶ This policy seems to have been effective in reducing speculative data center requests, with data requests for interconnection dropping from 30GW in 2025 to 5.6GW as of March 2026.³⁷

While AEP’s policy helps protect residential customers from price increases, it does not address the environmental impacts of the additional generation needed to meet this demand.

Further, the rate only applies to AEP service areas, and Ohioans could still see price increases from other utilities.



Fuel Choice Impacts: Environmental and Health Risks with Justice Implications

The location and fuel choice of data centers have significant environmental justice implications for Ohioans. If data centers use fossil fuels for generation, there are air pollution and health impacts from cradle to grave, including at the points of gas extraction, energy generation, and waste disposal.

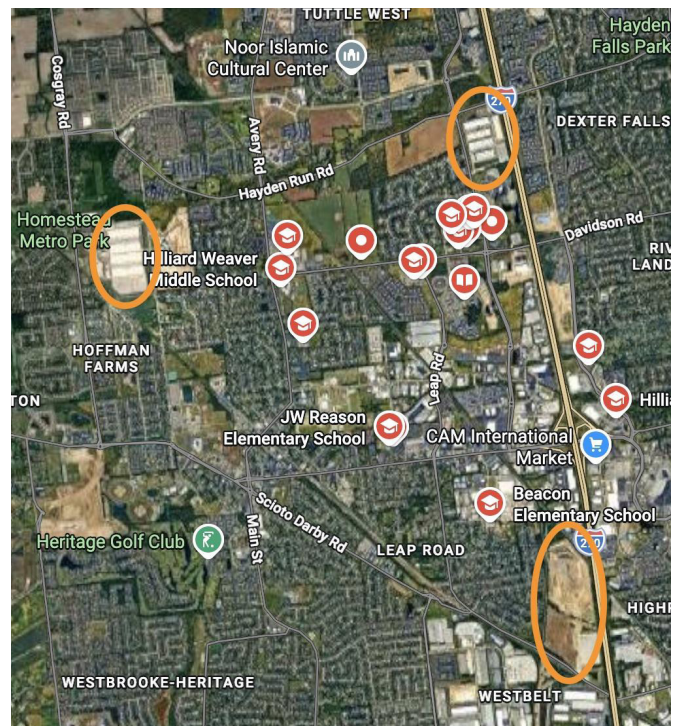


Image: A Google Maps screenshot shows three data centers (circled in orange) surrounded by homes, schools, and parks.

Data centers are frequently located in residential areas and increasingly rely on co-located (“behind the meter” or BTM) energy generation to avoid the lengthy interconnection queues to connect to the grid. Behind the meter facilities supply electricity directly to the data center. Since the on-site space is rarely sufficient for wind or solar, data centers have turned to gas for on-site generation – resulting in major gas generation facilities for data centers in residential areas. In other words, data centers are building utility-scale gas-fired power plants and spewing pollutants directly into neighborhoods.

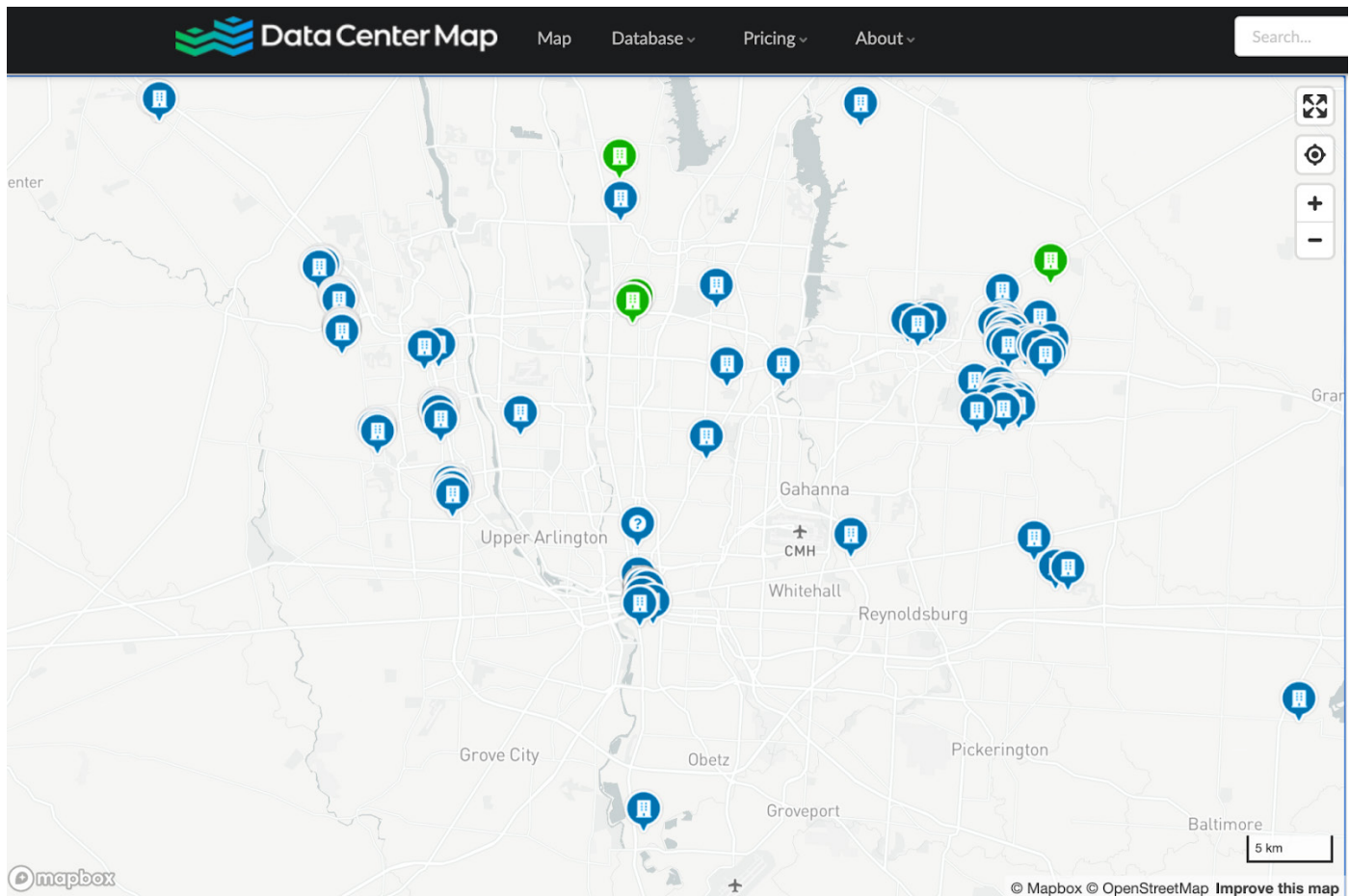


Image: Map of data center locations in the Columbus area from datacentermap.com. More than 130 data centers are located in the metropolitan area, many in residential neighborhoods.

These pollutants come with significant and well-established health impacts. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is heavier than air and tends to concentrate in low areas.³⁸ Research has found “physiological changes occur at CO₂ exposures levels between 500 and 5000 ppm” – levels only slightly elevated from the existing baseline of 427 ppm.³⁹ Short-term exposure to CO₂ concentrations above 1000 ppm reduce cognitive performance, including decision making and problem resolution.⁴⁰ Long-term exposure to heightened CO₂ levels has been linked to respiratory disorders and pulmonary disease.⁴¹

In New Albany, just outside Columbus, a Meta data center plans to install 400 MW of on-site gas combustion generation. Meta expects the data center to be the first in the world to exceed 1 GW in capacity, enough electricity to power approximately 830,000 homes,⁴² approximately 230 times the

electricity needed to power all the homes in New Albany. Gas power plants have a typical lifespan of 25 to 30 years, so this infrastructure will continue to pollute and require fracking to maintain its fuel supply for decades into the future.

For some data centers, AEP has proposed using on-site gas fuel cells for 7 to 10 years until the grid can meet data center demand.⁴³ Fuel cells create less particulate air pollution than a traditional power plant. Still, when using gas, fuel cells emit huge quantities of carbon dioxide. According to their spec sheet, the fuel cells manufactured by Bloom Energy will emit 679 to 833 pounds of carbon dioxide per MWh.⁴⁴ The fuel cells will also require significant gas infrastructure and storage to ensure a consistent fuel supply.



Image: A photograph of fuel cells included by AEP in its filing with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

A planned data center in Hilliard, a suburb of Columbus, would place gas fuel cells in a residential neighborhood adjacent to a park and school. The fuel cells could emit up to 1.45 million pounds of carbon dioxide per day in the immediate vicinity of an elementary school where children are learning.⁴⁵ Local residents are deeply concerned, but since Ohio's 2025 energy law (HB15) provided expedited approvals for behind the meter gas plants, there was no public notice, no public information session, and no public hearing about the project.⁴⁶

Since data centers require highly reliable power (aiming for 99.999% uptime), they also typically include on-site backup diesel generators and fuel storage. For example, the Hilliard data center includes plans for 158 diesel generators.⁴⁷ In the case of an electrical outage, hundreds of diesel generators across Columbus would simultaneously come online, creating a risk of significant local air pollution. As data centers become larger, so do their back-up fuel requirements, and large on-site fuel storage tanks create significant fire and environmental risks. Gas- or diesel-powered on-site generation also requires pipelines or frequent tanker trucks passing through residential areas, with attendant safety and environmental risks.

Environmental Justice: If data centers rely

on gas for energy generation, they also contribute to negative environmental and health impacts at the site of extraction in Appalachian Ohio. Fracking and unconventional drilling causes significant local health, environmental, and social impacts. Residents report increased levels of cancer and other illnesses, water contamination, truck spills, and road accidents. One study found that children living near fracking developments are two to three times more likely to be diagnosed with leukemia as those who do not live near oil and gas extraction.⁴⁸ Safety is another concern, as public records show the Ohio oil and gas industry has experienced an accident or incident on average every 1.5 days.⁴⁹

Disposal of fracking waste is another environmental justice issue. Permits issued by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources allow each fracking well to take between 40 million and 60 million gallons of fresh water from Ohio lakes and streams. Sand and undisclosed toxic chemicals are added, then injected at high pressure into the earth to break up rock and release oil and gas. When this mixture returns to the surface, it brings up naturally occurring radioactive elements, resulting in waste hundreds of times more radioactive than what the EPA considers safe.⁵⁰

In addition to billions of gallons of radioactive waste produced each year by the Ohio fracking industry, the state also receives fracking waste from neighboring states.

There are 232 Class II waste injection wells in Ohio, vastly outnumbering the 16 wells in Pennsylvania and 70 in West Virginia.⁵¹ Wastewater is injected at high pressure, and is documented to migrate from injection wells into nearby orphan wells⁵² and production wells,⁵³ and to threaten drinking water.⁵⁴ Residents of Washington County, along with Marietta City Council and county water authorities, are seeking a moratorium on new injection wells.⁵⁵

Despite years of robust fracking activity, people living in the areas of Ohio being fracked have not benefited. Promised jobs in the industry have not materialized or have brought unacceptable levels of risks. In the 30 largest gas-producing counties of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, total jobs have fallen by 1% since the fracking boom started in 2008.⁵⁶ Population has dropped by 3%, the number of employed persons has fallen by 4%, and income has grown at just three-quarters the rate of national growth.⁵⁷

Growing demand for gas has greatly increased pressure to allow fracking or unconventional drilling in Ohio's state parks and public lands, with over 17,000 acres of public land nominated for oil and gas extraction in the first quarter of 2026 alone.⁵⁸ This creates environmental and health risks in recreational areas and threatens to undermine Ohio's tourism economy. A recent study found that outdoor recreation contributed \$20 billion to Ohio's economy in 2024.⁵⁹ Despite this, officials voted in March to approve fracking on more than 8,700 acres of public land, including a state park and two wildlife preserves.⁶⁰ Data center

reliance on gas-powered electric generation will only exacerbate these impacts on Ohio's natural lands and economically disadvantaged Appalachian communities.

Options for Meeting Energy Demand

Data centers have three main options for meeting their energy needs:

- Relying on the electric grid. Data centers are already moving away from this option due to long interconnection queues and public concern about increasing energy prices.
- Building co-located generation capacity, often referred to as behind the meter.
- Building offsite generation capacity and relying on the grid for transmission. This could be centralized in industrial-scale generation plants, or decentralized through the installation of residential solar, battery storage, and other resources.

Behind the meter: Co-locating energy generation with data centers mitigates the need for costly grid improvements and avoids driving up energy prices by ensuring large load users meet their own demand. BTM options are limited by the space available; data center facilities typically do not have space to install enough solar or wind to meet their high energy demand. Instead, Ohio data centers are increasingly meeting their energy needs with onsite gas combustion generation or gas fuel cells. This brings air pollution and carbon emissions into residential areas, with negative health and environmental impacts. Supplying gas to these facilities also requires continued fracking of Ohio land, with the environmental, health, and justice impacts discussed above. Thermoelectric generation (such as conventional gas or diesel generators) also results in higher water use for cooling.

Battery storage: Rather than (or in addition to) using on-site fossil generation, data centers could install grid-scale battery energy storage systems. This would allow



Fracking infrastructure in Wayne, Ohio. Photo by Ted Auch, FracTracker Alliance.

them to store energy from the grid when demand is low, such as overnight, and use energy from the batteries when demand is higher. This offers additional resilience to both the data center and the broader energy grid. It allows data centers to rely on battery energy during grid outages, and avoids placing combustion-based generation in residential areas.

Battery storage is becoming increasingly price-competitive and currently can be installed for around \$125/kWh, resulting in a levelized cost of storage of \$65/MWh.⁶¹ Battery storage also contributes to broader grid stability, since it serves as “spinning reserves” – energy that can be brought online in less than 10 minutes.⁶² Electric utilities could call upon large battery storage systems during peak demand, maintaining sufficient supply for all customers.

Offsite generation: Data centers could offset their energy demand by building offsite, grid-connected generation. For this approach to be feasible, Ohio policymakers would need to pass virtual net metering legislation to allow data centers to receive credit for energy generation they build at an offsite facility, such as a solar plant located elsewhere in the state. Data centers should cover the cost of the necessary grid improvements to manage increased transmission demands. In this scenario, wind,

solar, and battery storage are the cheapest and fastest technologies to bring capacity online.⁶³ One study recommended locating wind, solar, and storage at existing gas or coal plants since these locations already have an interconnection to the grid and may have space available to deploy renewables and battery storage.⁶⁴

Similarly, data centers could offset their energy demand by paying for distributed renewable energy generation, storage, and demand flexibility upgrades for nearby homes. For example, a data center could install rooftop solar, home battery storage, bidirectional electric vehicle (EV) chargers, smart thermostats, and energy-efficient heat pumps in surrounding homes. Residential solar and battery storage would decrease household use of energy from the grid, freeing up grid capacity for the data center. To support these measures, Ohio may need to pass legislation to support demand flexibility and virtual power plants. Other states have considered requiring data centers to pay into a state-managed fund to provide rebates for distributed energy resources like residential solar, battery storage, and smart appliances.

Requiring or incentivizing solar and battery energy storage also supports Ohio jobs if data centers are encouraged to buy panels and batteries made in state. Ohio is a leading

manufacturer of solar panels through companies like First Solar in Perrysburg, which employs 2,400 workers, and Illuminate USA in Pataskala, which employs 1,000 people with plans to expand to over 1,500 employees. The solar industry as a whole employs over 8,179 people in Ohio.⁶⁵

Ohio is quickly growing as a hub for grid-scale battery manufacturing as well, with significant investments in electric vehicle battery cell manufacturing. In Warren, Ohio, a joint venture between General Motors and LG Energy Solution manufactures high-performance EV batteries and employs 2,000 people. In Fayette County, Ohio, a Honda battery plant is expected to produce 40 GWh of energy storage per year.⁶⁶ Encouraging data centers to buy solar and batteries from Ohio manufacturers creates a virtuous cycle that supports local investment, jobs, and advanced manufacturing growth.

Reducing peak demand: One last tool for meeting growing energy demand would be to reduce peak demand through energy efficiency and demand flexibility measures. Policy could require data centers to operate more efficiently or flexibly; for example, some data processing is not time sensitive and can be done in off-peak hours.⁶⁷ A study by Duke University found that if data centers curtail their demand by 40 hours a year on average, the United States could avoid building 100 GW in new energy generation, representing savings of \$100 to \$150 billion. The demand curtailments would require data centers to reduce their energy usage (or draw from energy storage) by 50% for 2.5 hours at a time.⁶⁸

Alternatively, data centers could pay for residential energy efficiency upgrades (such as energy-efficient heat pumps and hot water heaters) to reduce household energy use. These appliances can also shift energy use away from peak periods, reducing total demand on the grid. This could bring down peak demand, reducing the total load on the electrical system and avoiding the need to build out additional generation and transmission capacity.

Policy Approaches

Ohio Energy Policy: A Brief History

Ohio's energy policy over the past two decades is the story of ever-increasing restrictions on renewable energy such as solar and wind, without matching restrictions on oil and gas.

In 2008, a bipartisan legislature passed Senate Bill 221 to create the state's Advanced Energy Portfolio Standard.⁶⁹ This law required in-state electric generation to use increasing amounts of "alternative" sources each year, including solar and wind. The law also included provisions for energy efficiency standards, solar ready schools, and greenhouse gas emissions reporting. SB 221 encouraged the development of projects such as the Blue Creek Wind Farm in Van Wert and Paulding Counties in 2012, which inked a 20-year agreement to supply 50 MW of electricity every year to Ohio State University.⁷⁰

In 2014, Senate Bill 310 froze the state's renewable energy and energy efficiency standards until 2017.⁷¹ That same year, a provision in the state budget bill tripled the wind turbine setback requirement to 1,125 feet from the nearest property line, bringing over 3,300 MW of proposed and approved wind projects to a halt.⁷²

In 2017, Ohio's renewable energy and energy efficiency standards returned after Governor John Kasich vetoed a bill that would have extended the freeze another two years.⁷³ However, in 2019, the legislature passed House Bill 6, dubbed "the worst energy bill of the 21st century."⁷⁴ In addition to providing bailouts for two nuclear plants and two coal plants, HB 6 also killed Ohio's renewable energy and energy efficiency standards. The \$60 million bribery scheme behind the passage of HB 6⁷⁵ eventually led to four federal convictions, including a 20-year sentence for former House Speaker Larry Householder,⁷⁶ and two suicides, including of former PUCO chair Sam Randazzo.⁷⁷

In 2021, the legislature passed Senate Bill 52, which allows county commissioners to

Over 5.3 GW of solar and wind energy was never built in Ohio due to restrictions, withdrawals, and missed development — almost enough to power 5.6 GW of AEP data center interconnection requests. The data center energy crunch would not exist had Ohio built out its renewable energy potential.

ban solar and wind projects in all or part of a county.⁷⁸ As of September 2025, 37 Ohio counties had passed solar exclusion zones in at least one township.⁷⁹ Even in counties that have not banned solar and wind projects, or where project applications predate SB 52, the Ohio Power Siting Board has given great weight to local opposition in their project review. To date the board has recommended denial of seven solar projects, with five others withdrawing from the state. These projects represent over 2,000 MW of lost solar capacity in Ohio – enough to power Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati combined.⁸⁰

Together, the restrictions on wind and solar have cost Ohio over 5.3 GW of generation capacity in projects denied or withdrawn, plus years of missed development as energy companies left for more favorable markets. As noted above, AEP reported 5.6 GW of data center interconnection requests as of March 2026. The data center energy crunch would not exist had Ohio built out its renewable energy potential.

SB 52 applied only to solar and wind energy, while gas project siting remains exclusively

under the purview of the Ohio Power Siting Board. County commissioners were not granted the same authority to ban gas projects at the local level, nor was local opposition granted the same weight in the permitting process for gas.

Permits for fracking wells are determined solely by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Oil and Gas Resources.⁸¹ While written public comments are accepted regarding nominations to frack public lands, the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission does not allow the public to speak at its meetings and routinely approves almost every nomination despite hundreds of public comments in opposition.

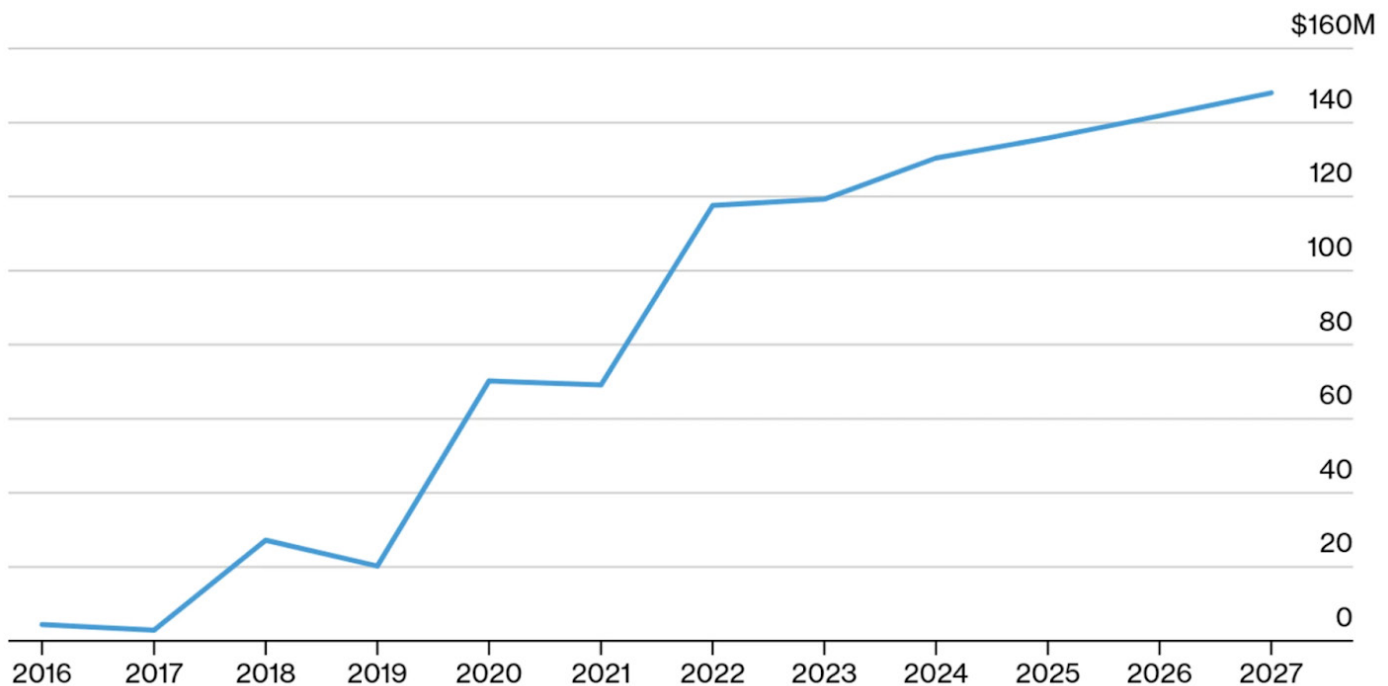
Most recently House Bill 15, signed into law in 2025,⁸² provided a major energy overhaul that repealed much of HB 6, including the coal plant bailouts, but did not restore Ohio’s renewable energy and energy efficiency standards. The law also allows large load users like data centers to site major energy facilities behind the meter, including utility-scale gas plants. For these behind the meter projects, the law provides an accelerated review of 45 days that does not require public notice, a public hearing, or consultation with local officials.

Ohio Data Center Policy

Ohio has proven an attractive destination for data center investment since it offers much of what data centers need — flat, undeveloped land; electric capacity; and relatively low cost real estate and labor.⁸³ Since 2013, Ohio has offered an exemption on state sales tax for data center equipment, which has helped grow the sector. When the Ohio General Assembly eliminated this incentive in the 2025 budget, Governor Mike DeWine vetoed the measure and said Ohio needed to retain the incentive to compete “with other states for technology jobs and capital investment.”⁸⁴ Ohio’s tax agency expects the state will forgo \$142 million in sales tax from data centers in FY 2026.⁸⁵ Additionally, local communities often offer tax abatements to encourage investment.

Mounting Cost of Ohio's Data Center Tax Break

Foregone sales tax revenue by fiscal year



Source: Ohio tax department reports; state development department surveys Note: FY2026 and FY2027 are estimated. Chart: Andrea Vittorio/Bloomberg Tax⁸⁶

If the sales tax exemption is retained, it could be used as leverage to negotiate community benefit agreements. Tax benefits for data centers could be made contingent upon the data center establishing energy and water efficiency measures; reporting publicly on their energy and water use; or subsidizing residential energy efficiency upgrades, rooftop solar, and energy storage.

Example Policies and Regulations

As data center growth has exploded, many states have considered or adopted specific sustainability and energy requirements for data centers. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, “many states now require sustainability benchmarks — such as LEED certification, clean energy use or strict energy-efficiency metrics — as prerequisites for financial benefits”⁸⁷ such as the tax incentives. Fourteen states enacted laws in 2025 focused on regulating the impacts of AI data centers.⁸⁸

A nonprofit energy analyst recommended that “every state should proactively regulate data center issues, and attempt to do so from all angles, comprehensively mitigating impacts to energy, water, emissions, public health, economic justice, and transparency.”⁸⁹

1.1 A bill for an act
 1.2 relating to data centers; modifying various environmental and energy regulatory
 1.3 requirements governing data centers; authorizing a clean energy and capacity tariff;
 1.4 modifying sales and use tax exemptions; imposing a fee; classifying data; adding
 1.5 and modifying various definitions; appropriating money; amending Minnesota
 1.6 Statutes 2024, sections 103G.265, by adding a subdivision; 103G.271, by adding
 1.7 a subdivision; 216B.02, by adding subdivisions; 216B.1691, subdivisions 2f, 2h,
 1.8 as amended; 216B.2402, subdivision 10; 216B.241, subdivisions 1a, 2a; 297A.68,
 1.9 subdivision 42; 297A.75, subdivision 1, as amended; proposing coding for new
 1.10 law in Minnesota Statutes, chapters 84; 103B; 116; 144; 216B.

1.11 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.12 Section 1. [84.0267] COORDINATION WITH MINNESOTA BUSINESS FIRST

1.13 STOP.

1.14 It is the policy of this state that inquiries related to the permitting of a data center are
 1.15 also referred to the Minnesota Business First Stop Program administered by the Department
 1.16 of Employment and Economic Development under section 116J.035, subdivision 8. The
 1.17 commissioner must take reasonable steps to ensure that agency permitting staff are aware
 1.18 of this policy and have the resources to efficiently refer those inquiries to Minnesota Business
 1.19 First Stop.

Excerpt of Minnesota's H.F. No. 16

States have taken different approaches to addressing the energy sector impacts of data centers:

- **Florida** has considered requiring data centers to bring their own generation with at least 20% renewable energy; otherwise data centers will pay a per-MWh fine into a fund that the state will use to provide rebates for residential energy efficiency upgrades or renewable energy investments (rooftop solar).
- **Illinois** has conditioned data center tax incentives on a requirement to attain certification through a green building standard or demonstrate carbon neutrality.⁹⁰
- **Minnesota** enacted a law that requires data centers to cover all the costs of their energy demand; to meet the state's clean energy standard of 100% renewables by 2040; requires water efficiency measures; and requires large-scale data centers to fund low-income energy conservation and weatherization projects in the state.⁹¹

- **New Jersey** passed a bill that would require 100% renewable or nuclear power and require quarterly reporting of data centers' energy and water use.⁹²
- **New York** legislators introduced a bill to require large load customers like data centers to "offset their energy footprint by funding the installation of energy-saving heat pumps, rooftop solar, and battery storage in New York homes."⁹³
- **Texas** has sought to avoid overbuilding electric capacity by requiring developers to disclose in their interconnection request if they have an identical request pending in other states.⁹⁴

Approaches in other countries:

- **Germany** has introduced standards to reduce data center energy consumption, promote renewable electricity, require the use of waste heat, and require continuous monitoring and reporting.⁹⁵

Detailed Recommendations

To avoid irreversible impacts and mitigate rising public opposition to data centers, **Ohio should take action to regulate the industry prior to approving any additional data centers.** Policymakers should consider the following steps:

Temporary Moratorium: Suspend new data center approvals until regulations on energy, water use, and community benefits can be established. Numerous Ohio localities have already taken steps in this direction; Ohio lawmakers should acknowledge those concerns and extend a statewide pause on new data center approvals. This would protect communities less able to organize in opposition — due to lack of information or other structural challenges — from becoming a new “sacrifice zone” while more politically active or organized communities prohibit data center growth.

Energy: Policymakers should seek to protect ratepayers from higher energy costs and ensure that energy demand is met with carbon-free energy to protect the health of citizens and the environment.

Policymakers should enact laws or regulations to place the following **requirements on data centers**:

- Require data centers to **implement best practices for energy efficiency and workload flexibility** to reduce peak demand.
- Require data centers to **meet their energy demand with carbon-free energy** by installing generation capacity either on- or off-site. This could include utility-scale plants, community energy projects, or distributed energy resources such as residential solar, battery storage, and bidirectional EV charges.
- Require data centers to **install battery storage to meet energy backup needs** for power outages of up to two hours, and only rely on diesel or other fossil fuel generation for longer grid outages. Require use of Level 4 backup generators to reduce air pollution.
- Incentivize data centers to **use solar panels and battery storage produced in Ohio** to support local jobs and economic development.
- Require data centers to **disclose other interconnection requests** to prevent venue-shopping and avoid overbuilding generation and transmission capacity.
- Require data centers to **contribute to grid modernization** to support increased transmission requirements.

To facilitate compliance with these requirements, policymakers should make the following **policy changes to Ohio law and regulations**:

- Pass community energy and demand-response legislation, both currently under consideration, and allow the creation of distributed power plants.
- Pass virtual net metering to allow data centers to build their own renewable generation offsite.
- Ensure parity among sources of energy generation by changing Ohio law to either:
 - △ Repeal SB 52 to restore sole authority to Ohio Power Siting Board to determine siting for all forms of energy generation including solar, wind, and gas; OR
 - △ Extend the provisions of SB 52 to all forms of energy generation, allowing counties to enact exclusion zones not just for solar and wind but also oil, gas, and nuclear.
- **Restore renewable energy standards** and energy efficiency standards to reduce peak load and total capacity needed.

- Create incentives for municipal utilities and rural electric cooperatives to invest in renewable generation and grid-scale battery storage.

Water: Protect Ohio's freshwater resources by mandating efficient water use and reporting. Policymakers should place the following **requirements on data centers**:

- Minimize use of thermal energy generation (gas or diesel generators) to reduce water use for cooling energy systems.
- Capture and reuse rainwater from their roofs and condensate from their cooling systems.
- Treat and reuse water onsite at industrial scale, and filter water prior to discharge.
- Substitute reclaimed municipal wastewater for potable water in cooling systems.
- Publicly report on water use and Water Usage Effectiveness.



Since the massive buildout of data centers began in Ohio, thousands of acres of Salt Fork State Park in Guernsey County have been targeted for fracking.

Waste Heat: Incentivize data centers to capture and reuse waste heat.

Noise: Require data centers to adopt best practices to prevent and mitigate noise pollution from data centers and any onsite generation.

Social:

- Prohibit the use of nondisclosure agreements.
- Require local consultation through the zoning process not just for data centers, but also for any behind-the-meter generation on data center property.
- End data center sales tax exemption so data centers pay their fair share of Ohio infrastructure and services, or make tax exemptions contingent upon meeting the requirements above.
- Encourage community benefit agreements so that data centers contribute to job training, local employment, and contribute to local infrastructure and services.

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From Demand Drivers to Development Partners:
Data Centers that Work for Ohioans

Lead Author: Rachel Kutzley

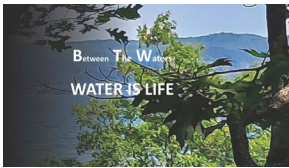
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*With consultation from the Save Ohio Parks
board members and staff and members of allied
environmental and civic organizations across Ohio.*

Endorsements



Between The Waters



Columbus Stand Up!



FaCT Ohio



Fresh Water
Accountability Project



Green Sanctuary
Committee, First Unitarian
Universalist Society
of Marietta



Heartwood



Mid-Ohio Valley
Climate Action



SOBE Concerned Citizens



Sunrise Athens



Third Act Ohio

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