



June 17, 2026

Large-Scale Data Center UDC Amendment Planning Commission Action Item

Background

- Zoning code treats smaller data centers as storage use
- Large-scale data centers not addressed in UDC – currently no standards
- Zoning Administrator Determination classifies as a Utility Generating System Use
- Proposed regulations to establish guardrails



Timeline to Date

- August 6, 2025: Mayor & Council requested UDC amendment
- August 19, 2025: Large Quantity Water Users Ordinance adopted
- September 17, 2025: Initial Planning Commission Study Session
- December 2025 to March 2026: Technical Advisory Committee convened to guide standards
- February to March 2026: Community Meetings Held
- April 7, 2026: Mayor & Council Study Session
- May 6, 2026: Second Planning Commission Study Session
- June 3, 2026: Planning Commission Public Hearing

Proposal Overview



NOISE

- Noise limits at property line
- Sound walls or roof screening



GENERATOR USE

- Battery backup used first during power disruptions
- No “load shifting” (no running generators instead of using grid power)



WATER SUPPLY CERTIFICATION

- Must comply with Large Quantity Water User Ordinance (if Tucson Water customer)
- Must demonstrate adequate water supply
- No potable water for cooling (if not covered by large water user ordinance)



ENERGY DISCLOSURE

- Must demonstrate adequate energy supply at application
- Must disclose energy use and mix (including renewables)



LANDSCAPING

- 40 ft enhanced landscape buffers
- Reduced parking requirements for data centers
- Max 40% lot coverage; remainder as open space
- Re-vegetate disturbed land with native plants

Planning Commission Public Hearing

Held June 3, 2026

- 12 members of the public spoke
 - 1 spoke in support
 - 11 spoke in opposition to all or portions of the proposal
- After closing of hearing, feedback provided on:
 - Legal considerations
 - Water-related concerns
 - Additional research, noise and health standards
 - Recommended revisions and clarifications
- The Commission voted 10-0 to revisit the item within 45 days to allow staff to incorporate feedback.



Feedback Received

Comments from the Planning Commission covered a wide range of topics

- Large-Scale Data Center Definition
- Geospatial Analysis
- Review Process
- Public Notice
- Noise Impacts
- Regulation of Backup Power
- Open Space
- Lot Coverage Standards
- Decommissioning
- Minor Corrections

Large-Scale Data Center Definition





- Propose removing the term “controlling interest”
- Rely on the existing UDC definition of “Site”

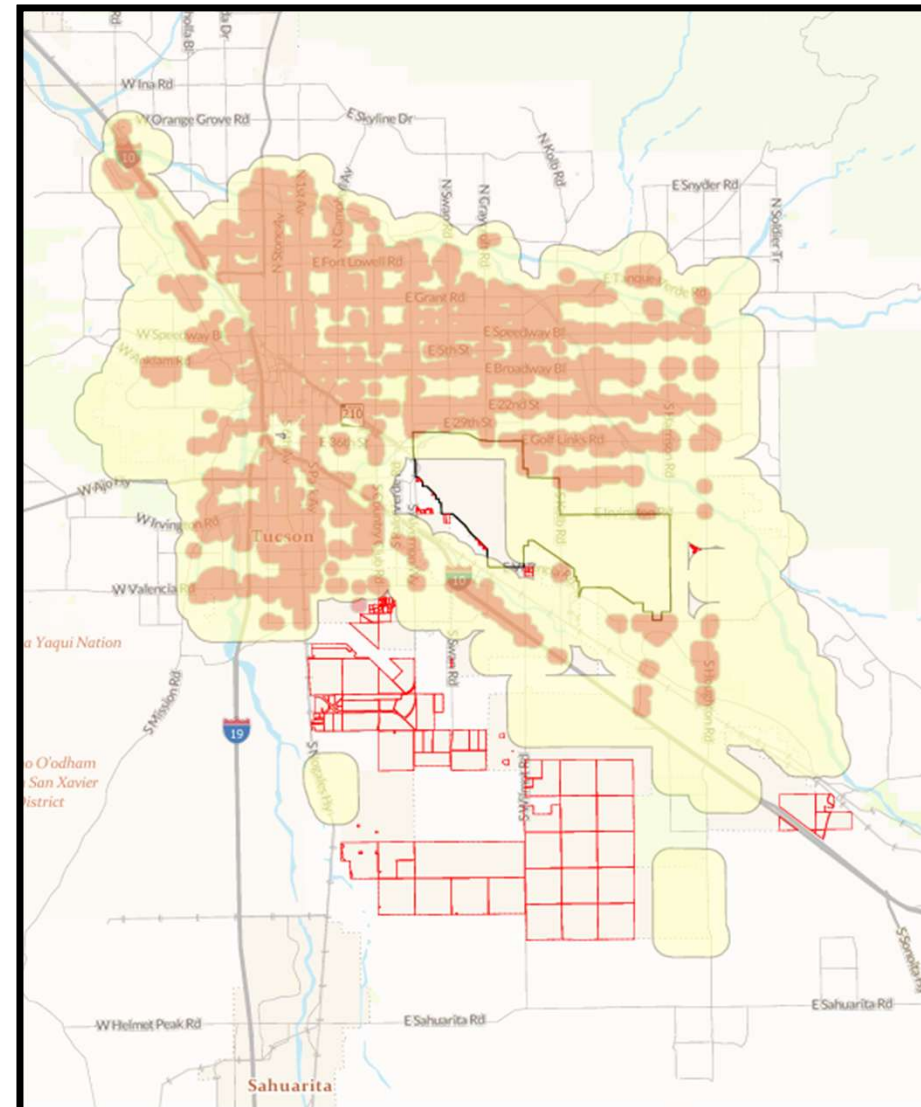
Any facility, multiple facilities, or portion of a facility on a contiguous site, and a gross floor area greater than 25,000 square feet or uses greater than 20 megawatts (MW) of energy, housing networked computer systems and/or telecommunications equipment used for remote storage, processing, and distribution of data. Large Scale Data Centers are permitted through adoption or major amendment of a Planned Area Development (PAD) or a Planned Community Development (PCD) and are subject to Use Specific Standards 4.9.11.D.



Geospatial Analysis

- Staff conducted a geospatial analysis of sites within the City of Tucson that fall outside of the proposed separation distances
- Analysis shows parcels greater than 2,640 feet from residential zoning and 1,000 feet of commercial/office zoning

-  Residential Zoning, (RX-1, RX-2, MH-1, MH-2, R-1, R-2, and R-3) - buffer 2,640 ft
-  Commercial and Office Zoning - buffer 1,000 ft
-  Davis Monthan Air Force Base
-  Parcels outside of Residential, excluding RH, (2,640 ft buffer) and Commercial/Office (1,000 ft buffer)



Review Process

- Proposed regulations would require establishing a PAD or PCD:
 - Zoning Examiner public hearing and recommendation
 - Mayor and Council public hearing and action
 - Planning Commission does not review, unless a Plan Amendment is necessary
- The Commission requested to potentially review future large-scale data center proposals
- Creating different review requirements for only one land use is legally challenging



Public Notice

- Current UDC notice requirements are based on state statute and tied to property ownership
- Staff evaluated expanding notice requirements to include all residents, not just property owners
- Revised language removes reference to property owners and cites public notice requirements established elsewhere in the code
 - Allows future noticing changes without amending the large-scale data center standards separately
- PDSD is working with City IT on an opt-in electronic notification tool outside of this code proposal

Noise Impacts

- Staff reviewed available information on infrasound from large wind turbines and large-scale data centers
- Review focused on whether peer-reviewed research or established standards provide clear guidance for separation distances
- Staff found no relevant standards or peer-reviewed research establishing infrasound-based separation distances
- Proposed code language was updated to require infrasound assessment as part of the required noise study



Regulation of Backup Power

Proposed changes to generator operation and battery backup standards

- No routine or primary power generation - limited to utility requests, outages, grid instability, testing, and maintenance
- Low-emitting generators preferred, higher-emitting models must meet Tier IV standards
- Must include at least two hours of battery backup
- Battery systems first-line response during grid instability
- Must be able to disconnect load from the grid upon utility request
- Non-emergency maintenance limited to weekdays, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.



Open Space

- Added language allowing additional separation from sensitive environmental areas.
 - Natural areas, riparian corridors, or open space may warrant a 2,640-foot, or one-half-mile, separation distance.
 - Separation would be determined by the Zoning Administrator, in consultation with City staff, through Environmental Resource Report review.



Off Site Mitigation of Lot Coverage Standard

- Proposed regulations establish a 40% lot coverage maximum
- Based on feedback and discussion with the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, recommend an offsite mitigation option with a minimum 2 to 1 offset to allow open space protections of other environmentally sensitive areas in consideration of increased lot coverage
- Would allow lot coverage standard to reviewed on a case-by-case basis through PAD/PCD process
- Encourages greater flexibility and protection of ecologically sensitive areas



Proposed Off Site Mitigation Language

The updated draft regulations propose the following under Section 4.9.11.D.7

An Environmental Resource Report (ERR) is required. The ERR shall identify the most appropriate area for development. Lot coverage is limited to 40% and the remaining land area shall be dedicated as natural open space and reserved in perpetuity, unless an offsite mitigation plan with a minimum 2 to 1 offset of land area is approved through the PAD/PCD. Salvage of native plants shall be permitted on the development area. Any disturbed area shall be revegetated with native plants.

Decommissioning and Minor Corrections

- Request to add decommissioning requirements where appropriate to address environmental remediation and restoration or revegetation of disturbed areas
 - Decommissioning standards are beyond the scope of zoning regulations
 - Decommissioning may be considered as a condition for proposed large-scale data center PAD or PCD requests
- Staff addressed any typos noted by Commissioners



Large-Scale Data Center Ordinance Process



Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the Planning Commission make a recommendation to Mayor and Council to adopt the Unified Development Code Amendment for Large-Scale Data Centers as proposed.



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