

Planning and Zoning Board



Study Session Minutes

Mesa City Council Chambers – Lower Level, 57 East 1st Street

Date: June 25, 2025 Time: 3:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Benjamin Ayers
Jeff Pitcher
Troy Peterson
Genessee Montes*
Jamie Blakeman
Jayson Carpenter
Chase Farnsworth*

MEMBERS ABSENT

(*Boardmembers and staff participated in the meeting through the use of telephonic and video conference equipment)

STAFF PRESENT:

Mary Kopaskie-Brown
Rachel Nettles
Evan Balmer
Alexis Wagner

OTHERS PRESENT:

1 Call meeting to order.

Chair Ayers called the meeting to order and excused Boardmember Montes and declared a quorum present; the meeting was called to order at 3:05 pm.

2 Review items on the agenda for the June 25, 2025, regular Planning and Zoning Board Hearing.

Staff Planner Rachel Phillips presented proposed amendments to Chapters 6, 7, 22, 31, 32, and 86 of Title 11 of the Mesa City Code pertaining to Data Centers and Planned Area Development Overlay Districts. See attached presentation

Boardmember Carpenter clarified the proposed 400-foot separation requirement for data centers, confirming that the standard would apply only at the time of data center development—not to future residential uses.

Planning Director, Mary Kopaskie-Brown, clarified that “sensitive uses” include not just residential but also schools, parks, churches, and similar public gathering places. There was also discussion on how temporary uses would be evaluated, with staff stating they would consider the permanent, entitled land use when reviewing applications.

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 25, 2025 PLANNING & ZONING STUDY SESSION

Boardmember Blakeman questioned how the City of Mesa defines and maintains balance in such a dynamic environment. She expressed concern about whether the proposed text amendments align with the city's long-term vision, asking if they support the kind of balanced growth Mesa aims to achieve. Boardmember Blakeman emphasized the importance of looking ahead strategically to ensure the city remains forward-thinking in its approach to development.

Chair Ayers echoed Boardmember Blakeman's concerns and emphasized the importance of thinking proactively rather than reactively. He questioned whether the city had considered embracing a leadership role in data center development, recognizing their inevitability and growing importance. Chair Ayers encouraged a forward-looking, strategic approach and suggested that Mesa explore the potential benefits of positioning itself as a global leader in this industry.

Economic Development Director, Jaye O'Donnell, acknowledged Mesa's leadership in attracting data centers due to low natural disaster risk and affordable power rates. She said the amendment provides needed oversight as the city approaches a critical mass, noting that additional data centers could limit opportunities for other industries due to power constraints. She emphasized the importance of balancing future growth and suggested other communities in the region are also equipped to support this type of development.

Development Services Director, Nana Appiah, explained that Mesa has spent years working to keep a healthy balance between residential, commercial, and industrial land. A few years ago, the city paused converting industrial land to residential because too much was being lost. Since then, they've added more industrial space but are now being careful not to overbuild. He said the city is always re-evaluating its needs and wants to make sure it leaves room for future opportunities, not just data centers.

Ms. Phillips clarified that the city does not currently require proof of power availability during the land use entitlement process, and the proposed text amendments won't change that. Instead, if the site is within Mesa's service area, applicants must provide an initial estimate of power demand to help the city plan future infrastructure. For sites served by private utilities, the city does not regulate when power arrangements must be secured. She added that site plan approvals expire after two years, with a possible one-year extension, which could impact projects still waiting on power.

Assistant City Attorney, Sarah Steadman, explained that under Prop 207, applicants seeking a waiver must include a demand for just compensation, but they are not required to submit supporting documentation upfront. While the city could request backup if the amount seems unreasonable, it's not part of the standard application process. She noted that the waiver form will be similar to the one used for drive-through requests and will include a space for applicants to state their compensation amount.

Boardmember Blakeman acknowledged the extensive outreach but noted that despite staff's efforts, industry stakeholders were still expressing dissatisfaction and requesting more time. She questioned whether that signaled unresolved concerns and emphasized the importance of evaluating whether the outreach had truly addressed stakeholder needs.

Mr. Appiah responded that while not everyone may agree with the outcome, it doesn't mean their concerns weren't heard or answered. He clarified that the requests for more time stem from disagreement with the proposed regulations—not a lack of information or communication.

Note: Audio recordings of the Planning & Zoning Board Meetings are available in the Planning Division Office for review. They are also "live broadcasted" through the City of Mesa's website at www.mesaaz.gov

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 25, 2025 PLANNING & ZONING STUDY SESSION

He emphasized that the city is confident in the process and noted that additional feedback can still be provided at the City Council level.

3 Planning Director Update: None

4 Adjournment.

Boardmember Perterson motioned to adjourn the study session. The motion was seconded by Boardmember Carpenter.

The study session was adjourned at 4:07 pm.

Vote (6-0; Boardmember Montes, absent)

Upon tabulation of vote, it showed:

AYES –Ayers, Pitcher, Peterson, Blakeman, Carpenter, Farnsworth

NAYS – None

Respectfully submitted,

Benjamin Ayers
Planning and Zoning Board Chair

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DATA CENTER & PAD TEXT AMENDMENTS

June 25, 2025

Mary Kopaskie-Brown, Planning Director

Rachel Phillips, Assistant Planning Director

Jaye O'Donnell, Economic Development Director

Sean Pesek, Senior Planner

Background

- Staff directed by City Council to draft a text amendment to address Data Centers and their unique operations
- Data Centers not a defined use within the Mesa Zoning Ordinance
- Interpreted to most closely resemble and reviewed as Indoor Warehousing and Storage
- Over the past 6 years, 15 data centers have been constructed, approved or proposed
- Text Amendments heard by Planning & Zoning Board on June 11th
- Item continued to allow for additional public participation

Purpose of the Amendments

- **Scale & Proliferation:** Mesa has seen a rapid increase in large data-centers; their number and size warrant dedicated standards rather than case-by-case review.
- **Address Distinct Impacts:** Generator/cooling noise and large mechanical yards and substations can affect nearby neighborhoods if not carefully managed.
- **Land Use Compatibility & Community Expectations:** Zoning and setback/separation from residential use, addresses two-plus years of community feedback regarding the siting of data centers.
- **Utility Demand & Coordination:** Early evaluation of water and energy demand lets City utilities plan capacity upgrades proactively and prevent service disruptions.
- **Clear Standards & Predictability:** Clear standards ensure higher quality design outcomes and provide applicants predictability

Economic Impacts

4

Considerations for Future Data Center Development

- Scale and pace of growth highlights the need for clear development standards
- Strategic balance needed:
 - Land availability + market readiness
 - Utility capacity and long-term infrastructure planning
 - Impacts on surrounding land uses (noise, compatibility)
 - Low job density vs. fiscal/economic benefits
 - Sustainability + alignment with community goals
- Adopting the proposed text amendments to support responsible, sustainable, and balanced economic growth

Proposed Data Center & PAD Text Amendments



Proposed Amendments

6

- Create a land use definition of Data Center
- Permit Data Centers in the General Industrial (GI) and Heavy Industrial (HI) Districts
 - If compliant with all standards of proposed Section 11-31-36: Data Centers
 - When specifically authorized and approved through a Planned Area Development (PAD) Overlay District
- Amendments do not ban data centers



Proposed Amendments

7

- Establish criteria for Data Centers as an accessory use
- Permitted in Commercial and Employment Zoning Districts
- Not subject to Section 11-31-36: Data Centers
 - Exclusively serves the on-site property owner
 - Does not lease data storage or processing services to third parties
 - Occupies no more than 10% of the building

Proposed Amendments Additional Application Requirements

- Operational Plan
- Good Neighbor Policy
- Water Consumption and Thermal Management Report, describing:
 - Cooling system design - water or air cooled
 - Water usage
- Wastewater Report
- Electric and Natural Gas (Energy) Service Report
 - If in the City's service area - estimated demand
- Initial Sound Study

Proposed Amendments Development Standards

- Separation from residential - 400 ft.
- Height - max. 60 ft.
- Building Placement and Design
- Architectural Design
 - All sided architecture - publicly visible
 - Additional articulation
 - Glazing requirements
 - Architectural features
- Truck Dock, Loading, and Service Areas
- Fences and Freestanding Walls
- Mechanical Equipment
- Substation Screening
- Utility Standards

Proposed Amendments Operational Standards

- Sound Studies
 - Within 30 days of the issuance of certificate of occupancy
 - Annual - for 5 yrs.
- Back up Generators
 - Noticing
 - Hours of operation - normal operation and exceptions



Proposed Amendments

11

- Modifications to Chapter 11 (Planned Area Development Overlay District)
 - Permit land uses not allowed by the underlying zoning district
 - If permitted, additional land uses must adhere to specific use and activity standards



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public Participation

- May 27th - Email sent to the Long Range Planning email list
 - Notifying that the draft amendments were posted on the City of Mesa's Long Range Planning website for review
 - Encouraged to review and share feedback
 - 108 recipients
- Staff met one-on-one with, talked with, and/or corresponded with representatives from the following organizations:
 - Data Center Coalition
 - SRP
 - Valley Partnership
 - Edgecore
 - Google
 - Meta
 - Pacific Proving Ground
 - Legacy Business Park
 - Cyrus One
 - Novva
 - C-1 Mesa LLC
 - Berry Riddell LLC

Public Participation

- Additional email sent to stakeholders on June 12th
 - Notifying stakeholders that the item was continued to June 25th
 - Offering to meet to discuss amendments
 - Requesting any feedback by June 17th at noon to consider incorporating
 - 363 recipients
- Public feedback
 - Industry - consistent with previous comments
 - Public - In favor of the amendments but want greater oversight and regulations to apply to Eastmark
- Table with all comments received by June 17th and responses provided in agenda packet
- All emails and comment cards provided by June 18th provided in agenda packet
- Redline Ordinance and Section 11-31-36 provided to track changes

Public Participation

- Comments from over 175 residents
- Comments from 37 industry stakeholders
 - Representing 27 organizations
 - 10 individual stakeholder meetings with staff
 - 26 direct responses from staff
 - Responses to all comments provided before June 18th provided in the comment summary exhibit

Public Participation – Update

16

- Industry Stakeholders Engaged:

- Ben Graf, Mike Josh, Peter Furlow, Quarles & Brady (Novva) (Meta)
- Clay Allsop, Google
- Cepand Alizadeh, Arizona Technology Council
- Derek Petersen, C-1 Mesa LLC
- Karla Moran, SRP
- Wendy Riddell & Kaelee Palmer, Berry Riddell, LLC
- Korey Wilkes, Butler Design Group
- Bill Jibjiniak, John Bean, & Justin Taylor, Edgecore & Alex Hayes, Whitney Morris Baugh, PLC (Edgecore)
- Ryan Gruver (Arizona Data Center Alliance)
- Jill Hegardt, DMB Associates
- Dan Diorio & Karla Boender, State Policy & Emily Rice, b3 Strategies (Data Center Coalition)
- Russell Smolden (Data Center Coalition)
- Michael Schwob, Schwob Acoustics
- Shannon Heinze, Mesa Chamber of Commerce
- Steven Glenn Zylstra (SCITECH Institute)
- Stuart Goodman, Goodman Schwartz Public Affairs (Apple)
- Susan Demmitt, Gammage & Burnham (Legacy Business Park)
- Tim White, CEM, CBCP, CSDP
- Valeria Galindo, JLL
- Valerie Crafton, VAL Consultants
- Alisa Lyons, Sloan Lyons (Valley Partnership)
- Peter Costa, Baltu Technologies
- Tom Maples & Nathan Lentz, DPR Construction
- John Baumer, Commercial Real Estate Development Association (NAIOP Arizona)

Main Industry Comments

17

Zoning Restrictions

Restricting data center development to GI and HI zoning categories, representing less than 1% of Mesa's land, imposes unnecessary barriers on future projects, particularly when the waiver process offers no guarantee of approval

- GI & HI account for approximately 4.2% of Mesa's land area and 21.3% of land area with Employment zoning
- If a waiver is submitted, Data Centers will be permitted in zoning districts that currently permit Indoor Warehousing and Storage
- Waiver will be granted if a valid claim under ARS 12-1134 and meets all the requirements in Section 12 of the ordinance

Main Industry Comments

18

Parking Requirements

Mandating one parking space per 1,000 gross square feet grossly overestimates actual needs for such facilities. This would result in expansive, unused lots that exacerbate the urban heat island effect without delivering practical benefits.

- Original proposed requirement was based off the common parking reduction requests seen from data centers
- Based on additional research, and input from stakeholders, parking requirement revised:
 - 1/5,000 SF for the first 200,000 SF and 1/10,000 SF thereafter

Main Industry Comments

19

Height Restrictions

Height restrictions are overly restrictive compared to allowances in other industrial and employment districts.

- Maximum height in the LI District is 40 ft. and maximum in the GI & HI is 50 ft.
- The 60 ft. maximum proposed with PAD approval is greater than what is allowed in Employment Districts, not more restrictive
- 66.7% or 10 out of the 15 approved data centers in Mesa meet the proposed maximum height

Main Industry Comments

Setback Requirements

Proposed setbacks are excessive, especially given the inclusion of screening and other mitigation measures.

- Amendment does not include a 400-ft. setback, rather a 400-ft. separation from residential zoning districts, residential uses, and other sensitive uses
- Data Centers produce noise, exhaust, and heat, and have visual impacts
- Separation mitigates potential impacts
- In line with other municipalities
 - Mariana - 400 ft. from residential and 100 ft. from non-residential uses
 - Tempe - proposing 500 ft. from residential uses
 - Phoenix - proposing 150 ft. from residential and additional standards when within 300 ft.

20



Example:
Separation - 202 ft.
Building height - 70' 6"

Main Industry Comments

21

Architectural Design Standards

Design requirements exceed what's appropriate and are inconsistent with underlying zoning.

- Staff directed by City Council to recommend additional development standards to:
 - Address compatibility
 - Mitigate potential adverse impacts
 - Address the unique size of these facilities
 - Ensure high-quality development

Main Industry Comments

22

Acoustic Standards

The acceptable sound study threshold is unclear. Ambient noise may rise over time, it should be based on a decibel level.

- Initial sound study document the baseline noise level at the nearest residential property line
- Baseline level could be very different depending on the context (e.g., adjacent to an arterial roadway)
- Requirement is that the baseline noise level at the nearest residential property line not be increased by the data center operations
- Ongoing studies ensure that existing conditions are maintained - accounts for phasing of development

Industry Response - Revisions Made

23

- **Waiver process**- clarified
 - Section 11-31-36 is not applicable to Eastmark
 - Data Centers with a waiver are legal conforming uses
 - Data centers that have approval or complete application submitted prior to effective date do not have to comply with Section 11-31-36
- **Accessory Use**- removed that it couldn't be in a stand along building
- **Substation Screening**- revised
 - Only ground-mounted equipment required to be screened
 - Design options for screening based on height of wall
- **Backup Generators**- revised to allow during “electric utility demand response event”

Industry Response - Revisions Made

24

- **Architectural Features-** Revised to allow Planning Director to approve others
- **Sound Studies-** revised
 - Measured taken during peak “routine” operational
 - Clarified sound study due within 30 days of CofO issuance
 - Conducted by “acoustical consultant”
- **Utility Undergrounding-** clarified requirement only applies to onsite or adjacent infrastructure
- **Building Orientation-** clarified that it applies to the primary (front) façade
- **Mechanical Equipment Location-** prioritize location away from public realm, when possible, at side or rear of building
- **Electric and Natural Gas (Energy) Service Report-** Clarified required if in the City’s service area for electric or natural gas



QUESTIONS?



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