Planning and Zoning Board

Meeting Minutes

Mesa City Council Chambers – Upper Level, 57 East 1st Street
Date: June 25, 2025 Time: 4:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:	MEMBERS ABSENT
Benjamin Ayers	
Jeff Pitcher	
Troy Peterson	
Genessee Montes*	
Jamie Blakeman	
Jayson Carpenter	
Chase Farnsworth*	

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

STAFF PRESENT:	OTHERS PRESENT:
Mary Kopaskie-Brown	
Rachel Nettles	
Evan Balmer	
Alexis Wagner	

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 4:15 pm.

1 Take action on all consent agenda items.

It was moved by Boardmember Peterson, seconded by Boardmember Carpenter, that the consent agenda items be approved.

Vote (6-0; Boardmember Montes, absent)
Upon tabulation of vote, it showed:
AYES –Ayers, Pitcher, Peterson, Blakeman, Carpenter, Farnsworth
NAYS – None

Items on the Consent Agenda

2 Approval of minutes from previous meetings.

***2-a** Minutes from the June 11, 2025, Planning and Zoning Board meeting.

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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

Items not on the Consent Agenda

3 Review, discuss and make a recommendation to the City Council regarding the following proposed amendment to the Mesa Zoning Ordinance:

3-a 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. The amendments include, but are not limited to: adding a definition for Data Center; modifying land use tables to add Data Center; establishing development and other standards specific to Data Centers; adding a minimum parking requirement for Data Centers; amending the purpose, land use regulations, and development standards related to the Planned Area Development (PAD) Overlay District to, among other things, allow land uses to be permitted through approval of PAD Overlay Districts; modifying the definition of Indoor Warehousing And Storage. **(Citywide)**

Planner: Rachel Phillips
Staff Recommendation: Adoption

Summary:

The following individuals offered a series of comments in opposition to the 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.

- **Russel D Smoldon, Data Center Coalition**
- **Ben Graff, a representative for Novva**
- **Cepand Alizadeh, Government Relations Specialist for the Arizona Technology Council**
- **Tom Maples, a representative of the 7X24 Exchange**
- **Mark Bower, with Jones, Lang and LaSalle**

The following individuals offered a series of comments in support of the 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.

- **Anthony Grinevick, a Mesa resident**

Planning Director Mary Kopaskie-Brown responded to public comments by stating that the concerns raised regarding waivers, building height, setbacks, screening, acoustics, and accessory uses had already been addressed by staff following the previous meeting. She noted that additional time for review would likely not change Staff's recommendation, which is based on best practices both within and outside the region. She clarified that the definition of "rezoning" is provided in a separate chapter of the zoning ordinance. Regarding the waiver process, she explained that it is a well-established tool previously used successfully for drive-thru restaurants, emphasizing that the waiver is tied to the property, not the owner, and involves no cost. She also noted that staff intentionally excluded Planned Area Development (PAD) deviations for data centers to maintain the character of surrounding land uses and ensure consistent application of standards. The purpose of the ordinance, she stated, is not to prohibit data centers but to regulate them in a way that mitigates impacts while supporting economic diversification. Data centers would still be permitted in the Light Industrial (LI) zoning

district through the waiver process. In response to a board member's question, she clarified that the waiver applies only to the use of the property as a data center and not to the associated development standards, which must still be met by any new development.

Assistant Planning Director Rachel Phillips clarified in response to Boardmember Carpenter's question that the 400-foot setback is measured from the property line of the nearest residentially zoned property or residential use—not from the data center's own property line. She confirmed that the area within the setback could be used for ancillary purposes related to the data center, such as landscaping, retention, parking, office space, or utility support, but not for any mechanical equipment.

Boardmembers acknowledged the extensive public input and staff's efforts to revise the ordinance. They noted that the amendment allows data centers with added standards to reduce impacts on nearby residential areas. Some members expressed concern about the speed of the process and suggested more time may be needed before City Council review.

Boardmember Montes joined the meeting virtually at 4:53 pm.

Further discussion ensued with Boardmembers emphasizing the importance of addressing outstanding public concerns and clarifying ordinance language before the item proceeds to City Council. While staff indicated that many comments had been addressed, Boardmembers noted that several stakeholders continue to request additional time and clarity. Additional comments also highlighted the importance of balancing neighborhood land uses and considering future data center and AI needs in the ordinance framework.

Chair Ayers motioned to recommend adoption to City Council regarding the 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. The motion was seconded by Boardmember Carpenter.

Vote (6-1)
Upon tabulation of vote, it showed:
AYES –Ayers, Pitcher, Peterson, Montes, Blakeman, Carpenter, Farnsworth
NAYS – None

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4 Adjournment.

Boardmember Carpenter motioned to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Boardmember Peterson

Vote (7-0)
Upon tabulation of vote, it showed:
AYES –Ayers, Pitcher, Peterson, Montes, Blakeman, Carpenter, Farnsworth
NAYS – None

The public hearing was adjourned at 5:05 pm.

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Si necesita asistencia o traducción en español, favor de llamar al menos 48 horas antes de la reunión al (480) 644-2767.

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

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

- 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

- 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

- Modifications to Chapter 11 (Planned Area Development Overlay District)
  - Permit land uses not allowed by the underlaying 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

- 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, Whithey 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

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

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

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.

Example:
Separation - 202 ft.
Building height - 70’ 6”

Main Industry Comments

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

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

- **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

- **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?

mesa·az