

La Grange OKs 'pause' on data centers, Oldham defers debate

Court questions
loopholes ahead of
June 26 vote

BY GRANT GERSTNER
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Photos by Grant Gerstner

Magistrates Kevin Woosley (left) and Stephanie Hawkins were both in favor of removing the exemption said to be requested by AT&T at the June 3 Oldham County Fiscal Court meeting.



Photos by Grant Gerstner

County Attorney D. Berry Baxter (left) and Judge Executive David Voegle both said hearing from an AT&T representative would be best before changing any language of the data center moratorium.

on how the Board of Adjustments votes on multiple appeals scheduled to be heard at 9 a.m. on June 19, which are against the classification of data centers as a “Private Utility.”

After the appeals are heard, the next steps are the Technical Review Committee, which could be held July 16 at the earliest, and then the Board of Adjustments for final approval, no sooner than August.

OLDHAM COUNTY FISCAL COURT

After conducting the first reading of the moratorium, discussion arose concerning an exemption of “broadband and telecommunications” providers and if votes can be held at first readings.

Concerns about the exemption were first mentioned by attendees during public comment, who said that the usage of the word “telecommunications” could provide a loophole for data center developers to still apply by claiming their data centers are for telecommunications purposes.

One attendee, Rob Houchens, said that regulations in Jefferson County use the word “telecommunications” in their definition of data centers, which worsens the risk of a loophole.

During the April 24 Study Review Committee Meeting, Planning and Development Director Ryan Fischer also mentioned the Jefferson County definition, as a large data center was

recently approved on Camp Ground Road, he said.

Fischer also said that “telecommunications hotel” is one of the nearest definitions of data centers in the American Planning Association Dictionary — a resource Planning and Development refers to as part of the American Planning Association.

Magistrate Woosley shared the concern of a possible loophole and asked to remove “telecommunications” exemption. He also asked where it came from, as it was not included on the moratorium when the court first approved it to be sent to the Planning Commission.

Judge Executive David Voegle replied that the exemption “was added simply because AT&T requested it. They felt like it had the potential to interfere with their delivery of services to existing [customers] within Oldham County. As you know, we entered into an agreement with AT&T to provide broadband service to all homes in Oldham County.”

Voegle agreed that the exemption is needed: “Now, if any of your homes happen to have your broadband go out, you can forget your service for 150 days because we’re not going to have any broadband for you or anybody else in this county. I don’t think this is unreasonable ... There is no loophole here.”

Later in the meeting when one attendee called out that they were concerned about a loophole, Voegle

replied “Well, you shouldn’t. How about trusting us a little bit?”

Voegle also said that he is “trying to be open-minded and fair to everybody” and “trying to think of the county as a whole,” but that he did not believe anyone was trying to “take us to the cleaners.”

Voegle also addressed claims made by an attendee at the La Grange City Council meeting that the data center would produce 90 decibels of noise: “We’re not going to allow 90 decibels. It might be 59 decibels of noise at the max, probably 49. We’re not going to do that, but somebody got up and made that assumption ... Let’s all give everybody an opportunity to be treated fairly here in our community.”

Magistrate Michael Logsdon suggested naming AT&T in the exemption and Magistrate Stephanie Hawkins said the exemption may not apply to AT&T due to the contract between AT&T and the court occurring long before the moratorium.

Voegle replied: “This is a first reading, if there’s confusion about exactly what AT&T was trying to accomplish we can invite a representative to come to the second reading of this and listen to their explanation.”

County Attorney D. Berry Baxter agreed that AT&T “should have an opportunity to come in and explain why they want that language in the ordinance.”

With some magistrates wanting

to remove the exemption anyway, the question soon arose as to if the court is allowed to make changes to the moratorium during the first reading.

Baxter had first said that the Kentucky Revised Statute is not clear on when changes have to be made, only that they must be put in writing. “We can eliminate that [exemption] at the second reading,” said Voegle. “Let’s give them the chance to say what their thinking is. Maybe there’s something that they know that we don’t ...”

Later in the meeting, Baxter said that the court would “have an opportunity to debate after the public hearing” that occurs at the second reading.

When Woosley requested that the court hold a special meeting on June 18 to conduct the second reading sooner, Voegle said “I don’t plan on calling a special meeting ... we can handle it on the 26th as part of our normal process.”

Though the Oldham County Fiscal Court’s next meeting is scheduled for June 17, the second reading of the data center moratorium will not be held until June 26 due to the requirements of seven day notice in the Era for a second reading to be held.

As of publication date, no special-called meetings have been scheduled before June 26 to quicken the moratorium approval process.

Cuts that go deep

USDA takes away
funding for food
programs, affecting
farmers, school
nutrition and
communities

BY BOBBIE CURD
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Food programs that have been deemed as “nonessential” and defunded by the USDA are already being felt by communities. And those who have worked closely with the programs say this is only the beginning of the effects.

Back in March, the announcement that the USDA cut more than \$1 billion from food programs nationally took everyone by surprise. Kentucky alone lost \$3.2 million in promised funding for the Local Food for Schools Program, and \$6 million from the Local Food Purchase Agreement programs, earmarked to go to Kentucky farmers.

“What I’d like to know is — ‘nonessential’ to who?” asks Carlina Lloyd. She’s Oldham County School’s director of nutrition, and has been participating in the school food program since it began.

Lloyd, like everyone else, found out about the cuts through a press release — after she had already met with area farmers who the district orders from. She says having to backtrack and reach out to all of them and cancel orders, when she knew they had already begun to work on them, was heartbreaking.

She also wasn’t happy with the last-minute announcement. “That’s part of what made me the maddest — the USDA requires us to get all of these menus done for the next year in advance ... they should’ve known we’d be scrambling and needed more of a heads up. Not to mention all of the farmers I knew had already planted and ordered ...”

Andre Faul’s family farm operation, in Henry County, was also left scrambling. Faul Riverside Family Farm had been successfully working with Oldham’s district within



Photos courtesy of Carlina Lloyd/Oldham County Schools

Produce, chickens and other fresh goods were what Oldham Schools were able to purchase locally through the Local Food for Schools Program, which has now been cut by the federal government.



Photos courtesy of Carlina Lloyd/Oldham County Schools

Carlina Lloyd, Oldham Schools director of nutrition, was heart-broken when she had to contact local farmers she’d already ordered from to cancel.



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Produce, chickens and other fresh goods were what Oldham Schools were able to purchase locally through the Local Food for Schools Program, which has now been cut by the federal government.



the school food program, as well as participating in the assistance program — which works to pay farmers to grow and produce for pantries and other food assistance programs.

He says the farm, which focuses on sustainable farming and feeding locally, wasn’t as impacted as some

other farms that had already planted — but it was still a major hurdle to overcome.

Because the chicken order was already in process for the school district, Faul and his family began working on fundraising efforts ... “to see if we could at least cover our costs for the first delivery to the school.”



Faul says his customers came through, and in two weeks they were able to get the first delivery to the schools as a donation. Everyone he has talked to has been up in arms about the cuts, and they realized how important it was to the schools.

Lloyd says she was taken

aback by the kindness and concern of Faul and his customers, and that she “definitely did not expect him to do that.”

There’s a lot of confusion about why the USDA is cutting food assistance programs during a time when food banks are reporting unprecedented demands due

to combating rising food insecurity nationwide. The USDA’s own Food Security Report released last year shows that 47.4 million people in American households are experiencing hunger — that includes 13.8 million children, which is expected to be even higher at the next count. Hunger rates have reached the highest in almost a decade, according to the agency’s data. The nationwide cuts include \$660 million in school meal programs, as well.

Faul points out that cutting the Local Food for Schools program, and the assistance program, goes against the current administration’s proclaimed goal to “Make America Healthy Again.” In February, the president signed an executive order creating a commission to oversee the aim to “end the childhood chronic disease epidemic,” which also specifically points to obesity rates in children.

Lloyd is also puzzled by the contradiction, and adds that processed, frozen foods purchased from large corporations do not benefit children’s health, nor help teach them about how important locally raised food and farmers are to their communities.

Faul also noted how the administration boasts as being “ ‘supportive of the farmers and rural America,’ and ‘the forgotten people,’ so to speak.” He says these programs directly propped up and benefited those very people — various small farmers trying to make a living off of the land.

Lloyd says these programs benefited not only farmers, but the children and communities as a whole, if you can see the big picture. Growing up on a cattle farm in rural Missouri, she knows all too well about the struggles farmers face.

“Do they want us to be dependent on other countries for that, too, when we have everything we need here? They want us to be dependent on big corporations ... not local farmers.”

Huge federal cuts have