

Kentucky data center alarmists' biggest objections are myths



Your Turn
Andrew McNeill
Guest columnist

Remember the internet in the 1990s? Yahoo's home page had categorized links like News & Media, Business & Economy or Science. Clicking those links opened new pages with more links, without accounting for relevance or personal preferences. Yahoo had a search box, but search wasn't a thing until Google came along.

Google still dominates conventional search but engagement with chatbots like ChatGPT is rapidly accelerating. Last year, Google embedded its Gemini A.I. in their Chrome browser. The search giant knows where the future is moving.

We are witnessing the earliest stages of artificial intelligence and quantum computing. Decades from now, the younger generation will look back amazed that their digital lives once relied on unsophisticated search engines and relatively simple algorithms.

Major economic shifts require new infrastructure. In our current moment, that means data centers. Progress has always stirred apprehension about the unknown, and the pushback we're seeing today is nothing new.

In the 19th century, small mobs of artisans broke into English factories to destroy the mechanized looms that were

gaining a foothold in the textile industry. While the Luddites earned a place in history textbooks, the industrial revolution marched forward, spreading phenomenal prosperity and raising living standards for the billions of us who have followed.

Thankfully, today's equivalents — the NIMBYs — don't need to resort to violence. Their alarm with data centers manifests itself at local zoning board meetings and on social media platforms made possible by the same data centers they oppose.

Data center myths

It's concerning that their narrow view has penetrated broader public opinion, especially since compelling evidence disproves their claims. Let's examine three.

"Data centers raise electricity rates."

Actually, they don't. Just last month, American Electric Power announced a base-rate reduction for its Indiana customers. The reason for the lower rates: load growth and increased revenue from large customers, including data centers.

Also, consider this headline from the Washington Post: "There's a reason electricity prices have been rising. And it's not data centers." If the data center doomers haven't convinced the Post's "climate zeitgeist reporter" then that should tell us something.

"Data centers strain local water supplies."

One of Kentucky's competitive ad-

vantages is access to abundant water and a regulatory framework that has dealt with large-volume water withdrawal for decades. Over time, technologies like closed-loop cooling, along with water reuse and recycling, will significantly diminish the water required to operate the facilities.

"Data centers don't create good jobs."

Tell that to the thousands of skilled laborers who build, wire and plumb the facilities. Amazon is posting entry-level data center technician positions in Hilliard, Ohio, paying \$50,000-\$70,000 a year (plus benefits). Management positions in Amazon's data centers pay salaries north of \$130,000.

Critics respond that their argument isn't about the type of positions but what they say is a small number of permanent jobs. As compared to what? Not having these jobs at all? Letting them go to Ohio, Indiana or another surrounding state?

Fair legislation

Anchor investments initiate industry clusters, networks of economic relationships that create a competitive advantage for related firms in a particular region. Suppliers that want to provide goods, services and logistics will be as important to future job creation as the data centers themselves. However, Kentucky needs the data centers first to get those jobs.

With only a few weeks left in the 2026 legislative session, how is this playing

out in the General Assembly?

There's consensus that these technology giants should pay their fair share for their energy needs. Legislation moving through the process intends to provide state-level protections for electricity ratepayers.

The bill sponsor, Rep. Josh Bray, R-Mt. Vernon, sees the opportunity with the right policy framework. The current version is inconsistent with the Ratepayer Protection Pledge, signed last week at the White House. It applies a one-size-fits-all approach to a challenge that requires nuance and flexibility.

There's still time to get it right. Bray is a thoughtful legislator and should be open to changes in the Senate that account for the differences in how our state's utilities provide power to their customers.

Transformational investments don't fall out of the sky, and the sky isn't falling as data center critics would have us believe.

Amazon, Google and Meta have announced \$23 billion in combined investment in Indiana. Their General Assembly took a "do no harm" approach in its recent legislative session.

Frankfort would be wise to follow Indianapolis's lead.

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Expensive appeals put family court oversight out of reach for many



Your Turn
Lee Ann Thompson
Guest columnist

In a family courtroom, a decision announced in minutes can reshape a child's life for years. Parents sit quietly while lawyers argue about where a child will live, how often a parent will see them and how assets will be divided. When the ruling comes, the consequences are immediate and often permanent.

Because the stakes are high, the public expects these decisions to be transparent and open to review when mistakes occur.

Family courts perform one of the most powerful roles in the justice system. Judges resolve emotionally complex disputes involving children, parental rights and financial stability; decisions that shape families for decades. Because the consequences are significant, the structures surrounding these decisions deserve public attention.

Family courts handle thousands of cases each year in Kentucky, and they represent a significant portion of civil court filings. Despite their impact, appellate review of family court decisions is relatively rare. Because appeals are expensive, trial court rulings become the final word.

Frequent concerns

Within the family court system, the

most frequently discussed concerns are the financial structure of court-appointed professionals, the cost of appeals, the reliability of courtroom records and professional pressures facing attorneys who regularly practice before the same judges.

Family courts rely on court-appointed professionals such as guardians ad litem, custody evaluators and parenting coordinators to assist judges in determining what arrangements serve a child's best interests. These roles provide insight in cases involving conflict, allegations of abuse or parenting disputes. The structure surrounding these appointments deserves closer examination.

Because these professionals are appointed by the court, Kentucky recognizes what courts call "quasi-judicial immunity," meaning court-appointed professionals are protected from certain civil lawsuits when acting within the scope of their duties.

Another issue raised by litigants involves the appointment process itself. Parents have little role in selecting the individual appointed, yet they must pay the associated fees.

In legal communities, many attorneys serve in multiple roles, such as advocates, mediators and court-appointed professionals. These dynamics can raise questions about transparency in how appointments are made. Even when no impropriety exists, critics argue that clearer guidelines around qualifications and appointments could strengthen public confidence in the process.

Questions also arise regarding training and expertise. Guardians ad litem

are often attorneys rather than licensed mental health professionals, yet their recommendations may address issues involving child development and family dynamics.

Family courts not only determine parenting arrangements; they also decide how families divide assets built over a lifetime. In disputes involving marital and non-marital property, one party may control access to financial records and business documents needed to establish value and ownership. Under Kentucky law, property acquired during a marriage is generally presumed to be marital unless a party proves otherwise, making access to documentation and financial records essential to resolving these disputes.

A challenging appellate system

The appellate system is intended to serve as a safeguard when trial courts make mistakes. But appeals require transcripts, legal briefings and years of litigation. For families already financially strained by ongoing proceedings, the cost of appellate review may place meaningful oversight out of reach.

Appeals in family court cases also carry a unique consequence: time. While appellate courts review legal arguments, the trial court's ruling remains in effect during the appeal process, even if it is later reversed. By the time an appeal is resolved, the missed milestones and lost time between parent and child cannot be restored. Childhood continues moving forward regardless of the legal process.

Courtroom records present another

challenge. Transcripts and recordings preserve what occurred during hearings and trials and form the backbone of appellate review. When records are incomplete or unavailable, demonstrating procedural errors becomes far more difficult.

Family court attorneys appear before the same judges repeatedly. A lawyer advocating strongly in one case may return to that same courtroom many times with different clients. Ethical rules require vigorous representation but the dynamics of a small legal community can create perceived tension between strong advocacy and maintaining working relationships. None of this diminishes the difficulty of the work family court judges perform.

Strengthening public trust

Public confidence in the judiciary depends on transparency, accessible oversight, reliable records and processes that allow mistakes to be addressed without insurmountable cost.

Family courts exist to serve families during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. Ensuring that the structure surrounding these decisions remains transparent, accountable and open to review strengthens public trust.

In family courts, justice is measured not only in legal outcomes but in time and stability and neither lost time with a child nor lost financial security can be restored.

Lee Ann Thompson is a Louisville resident who has closely followed family court policy issues and judicial transparency in Kentucky.

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industrial and residential real estate sit precariously close, in some cases, directly adjacent.

After a few hours of other hearings, the lawyer representing the companies finally rose to present the plan: to take one of the only large plots of land in the neighborhood not yet drained by industry and construct seven facilities housing tens of thousands of internet servers. He stressed that the Planning Commission's only role was to affirm the project's alignment with Louisville's Land Development Code, which provides for "telecommunications hotels" — an outdated term predating the scale of modern data centers — and upon this definition rested his entire argument for approval.

He also stressed that the land was zoned for the "heaviest industrial purposes." One glance at history destroys this argument, especially given the lawyer's own admission that multiple

homeowners had to be bought out. Their homes were not next to the proposed site, but directly on the parcel they intend to "develop." His arguments were so questionable, the audience often audibly laughed at his circular and evasive reasoning, and the meeting had to be called back into order.

Whereas the commissioners asked detailed questions about community impact on prior projects, their questions became legalistic and narrowly tailored to the Land Development Code when the data center was presented. They made almost no mention of the resources required to operate this facility, nor the effects on nearby residents. It became clear the final decision was made long before this meeting started. They were Louisville's last line of democratic defense from reckless technological innovation and a racist and classist industrial policy, and they failed to realize it.

Hope for the future

After this, most of the commissioners sat stone-faced as citizen after citi-

zen — both from Rubbertown and not, in person and virtually — rose to speak against the project. These citizens spoke of the hardships of living in Rubbertown and urged the commission not to make the problem worse. Some cited the astronomical levels of water and power that would be siphoned off; others raised concerns about air and noise pollution that can become a serious health issue if sustained. The commissioners had no questions for those who spoke in opposition, and after a defensive rebuttal from the attorney, all but one voted in favor.

Many people left the hearing enraged, but I felt weirdly calm and hopeful. I had never seen so much engagement at a local government hearing, especially from people so young. People raised on phones, tablets and computers just like me, who understood this data center was only one piece of the larger societal shift toward the primacy of technology and the growing irrelevance of humanity to those moving it forward. They stood up not only to protect their lungs and homes, but to protect their future.

We may not win in this case. Construction is slated to begin this year, but this passion is still needed in Louisville. Louisville Metro Police Department has already made arrests using drones with thermal imaging. Louisville Metro Government just hired a chief AI officer. The local government is also leaning into license plate readers and surveillance tech, even requesting access to citizens' Ring cameras to assist law enforcement.

"1984" was a prophecy, not a fiction, and if more people don't step up like those who did at this hearing, it may be our reality sooner rather than later. Our participation is the only force capable of ensuring technology does not continue to outpace democracy. Even then, there's no telling what the future may hold.

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