Lexington council to host data center zoning meeting

BY PIPER HANSEN
phansen@herald-leader.com

The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council will host a special meeting Oct. 6 to receive public comment and discuss zoning rules and regulations related to data centers.

Council, according to a release from the body, will receive the planning commission's recommendations and formally schedule the special meeting at its Aug. 25 work session. The special meeting will take place later this fall at 5:30 p.m. in Council Chambers.

A committee of the whole meeting includes all 15 members of council where they meet as one group to discuss major issues. Special meetings must be voted on to be scheduled and focus on specific, high-priority topics. The full council could vote at the meeting to adopt a zoning ordinance text amendment, with or without changes.

In the release, Fifth District Council Member Liz Sheehan, who chairs the General Government & Planning Committee and sponsored two recent data center-related ordinances, said the special meeting is proposed to hear directly from residents.

MATT GOINS

Mayor Linda Gorton presented her budget proposal for the next fiscal year beginning July 1 to the Urban County Council in council chambers at the LFUCG Government Center.

"We have been working diligently to craft rules for data centers that fit Lexington's needs, and we want the public to offer us in-person feedback on these regulations at a more accessible time of day than our typical afternoon meetings," she said.

Though it said it was pressed for time to come up with the best version of guidelines, the commission recommended data centers larger than 40,000 square feet be banned at a more than six-hour meeting July 30 to hash out details of a zoning ordinance text amendment.

The size and other recommendations are part of a zoning ordinance text amendment, or a change — an addition or deletion — made to a local government's existing zoning code, or the rules that control how land is used.

The amendment process was initiated in early June after the Herald-Leader reported DartPoints purchased a former Lexmark property in order to repurpose an existing data center on New Circle Road to serve the company's customers.

At the same meeting where the amendment process was initiated, council passed a moratorium on data center development, which paused permitting, development plan approval and acceptance of zone change requests until at least Oct. 31.

Based on feedback, the commission made changes to the amendment including requiring additional information for data center applications, and it now outlines how close a facility can be to residential areas, schools and hospitals.

The amendment also includes definitions for what should be considered a data center and specifically excludes small server rooms to avoid conflict with information technology businesses that host data.

The commission recommends several other conditional uses be put in place, so the amendment includes size and power capacity requirements a developer must meet if it wants to locate a data center in Fayette County.

Council is continuing to solicit feedback through its Engage Lexington online forum which also serves as an information hub on data center developments.

More than 40 people spoke at the commission's July 30 public hearing, largely opining the amendment did not go far enough.

While several of the recommended changes speakers pleaded for were adopted by the commission, many residents simply said they do not want any new data centers in Lexington.

DCCC backs Dembo in key Kentucky House race

BY JOHN CHEVES
jcheves@herald-leader.com

For the first time in eight years, national Democratic Party leaders are showing serious interest in wresting Central Kentucky's 6th Congressional District from Republican control.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee will announce Thursday that it's placing Democratic House nominee Zach Dembo in its 2026 Red to Blue program, meant to use key competitive races to flip control of the U.S. House of Representatives this fall, the Herald-Leader has learned.

Getting added to the Red to Blue program means the DCCC would invest a slew of resources into Dembo's candidacy, including fundraising and organizational support, staffing, strategy and training. It also highlights his race, for donors, as one of what the DCCC considers its most promising opportunities to flip the House.

The last time the DCCC invested its time and money in a 6th Congressional District race was 2018, when Democrat Amy McGrath tried to oust U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, R-Lexington, but narrowly lost by 51% to 48%.

Barr ended up serving seven terms in the House before deciding to run this year for the Senate.

The Democrats sense this could be an even more promising year, with an open House seat and an incumbent Republican president who is sinking in the polls. A recent DCCC survey of likely voters in the Lexington-based 6th District showed a dead heat for the Nov. 3 election, with 47% supporting Dembo, 47% supporting Republican Ralph Alvarado and 6% undecided.

Dembo is a Navy veteran and former assistant U.S. attorney in Lexington. Alvarado is a doctor and former state senator from Winchester.

Dembo has won an endorsement from Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, for whom he worked as an aide, while Alvarado touts his own endorsement from Republican President Donald Trump.

"From serving our country in uniform, to serving alongside Gov. Andy Beshear to help move Kentucky forward, prosecutor Zach Dembo has proven that he will always put service over self and take on corruption wherever he sees it," DCCC Chairwoman Suzan DelBene, a Democratic congresswoman from Washington, said in a prepared statement along with the Dembo announcement.

Serbia turns to Russia to help fight wildfires

Reuters

BELGRADE

Serbia has turned to Russia for help in fighting wildfires because of a lack of available planes from the European Union, its interior ministry said.

A Russian Emergencies Ministry IL-76P firefighting plane landed in the southern city of Nis on Wednesday evening and was deployed on Thursday to tackle a wildfire in the Deliblatska Pescara natural protected reserve that has raged for weeks.

Serbia is not a member of the EU but has access to emergency EU help under the bloc's Civil Protection Mechanism. This summer, Belgrade sent a firefighting helicopter and emergency response team to help Spain combat wildfires under that mechanism, but wildfires across Europe have sapped EU resources.

"Considering that there are no firefighting aircraft of this capacity available within the EU...the arriving Russian aircraft will significantly strengthen our capacities in fighting the fires," Luka Causic, head of the Interior Ministry's Department for Emergency Situations, said late on Wednesday.

The EU did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Russian planes are forbidden from flying over European airspace under sanctions imposed over its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, but humanitarian aid is exempt.

On its way to Serbia, the Russian plane crossed the airspace of EU and NATO member Bulgaria following a request from Belgrade, the BTA news agency reported, citing a statement by Bulgaria's Ministry of Transport and Communications.

The plane's arrival is another sign of Serbia's balancing act between Russia, with which it has historical ties, and the EU, which it hopes to join. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Serbia this month, but Belgrade has not joined sanctions against Russia over the war in Ukraine.

"We came here to work. It is not the first time; we feel like at home here," pilot Andrei Vidlov told state RTS news on Wednesday after he landed the plane.

Serbian media said the aircraft was sent on instructions from Russian President Vladimir Putin, following a request for assistance by Serbia. Reuters could not immediately confirm this.

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