

# The City of Seattle

## Resolution \_\_\_\_\_ 32204 \_\_\_\_\_

**A resolution** relating to data centers; committing to studying the potential for data centers to impact electrical grid capacity and reliability, water usage, utility rates, land use and development, jobs and the economy, and public health; and requesting engagement and cooperation from the Executive in the development of data center policies and potential legislation; and anticipates related legislative action.

**Recitals:**

Data centers may be generally defined as facilities used primarily for the housing, operation, or co-location of computer and communications equipment and handling, storing, managing, processing, and backing up of digital data, and associated infrastructure such as cooling systems, backup power systems, and battery storage.

Businesses, government entities, including public safety, as well as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and others all rely on the data storage and processing that data centers provide.

Several smaller scale data centers exist in Seattle today, all in Downtown Seattle.

The growth in the use of artificial intelligence has led to rapidly accelerating demand for new, hyperscale data centers.

New data centers require great amounts of electricity for operation, resulting in significant increases in demand for electricity and requiring investment in new infrastructure to meet demand.

The International Energy Agency reports that electricity consumption globally from data centers has grown 12 percent per year in the last five years.

The Yale Clean Energy Forum reports that data centers may consume roughly 12 percent of total U.S. power consumption by 2028 with a more conservative estimate of 9 percent of U.S. power consumption by 2030.

For perspective, the estimates of data center power consumption mean that by 2030 the U.S. may consume more electricity to power data processing than for the manufacture of all its steel, aluminum, cement, and other energy-intensive goods combined.

Increased demand for electricity and expanded infrastructure investment exacerbate and drive up cost pressures on electric utilities to raise rates on residential and business customers.

Seattle City Light, like other public electrical utilities, is evaluating ratepayer protections to address and minimize the shifting of data center costs to customers other than data center operators.

Washington State is a highly desirable place for the location of data centers due to relatively low power costs and access to water, especially along rivers.

Access to water is critical for the location of data centers because they use substantial amounts of water for cooling.

Research from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory shows that about 20 percent of U.S. data centers rely on watersheds—sources of freshwater—that are currently stressed by drought and other factors, a mid-sized data center consumes about 300,000 gallons of water per day, and such water consumption ranks data centers among the top ten water users in U.S. industrial and commercial sectors.

Data centers' water use reduces water available for municipalities, businesses, fisheries, wildlife habitat, recreation, and tribal rights and resources.

Data centers may rely on or burn fossil fuels to generate electricity for their operation, releasing harmful particulate matter pollutants and greenhouse gases that can damage the health of the local community and the climate more broadly.

Similarly, data centers' cooling systems can release greenhouse gases in the form of hydrofluorocarbons and other fluorinated gases and harmful anti-microbial emissions.

Data centers generate significant heat and may raise surrounding air and land temperatures.

Data centers create noise pollution in the surrounding community from fans and cooling systems and the onsite diesel engines and gas turbines used to generate power.

Data center construction has been shown to produce a boom-and-bust effect in the local economy with short-term employment gains for construction and few jobs created for the long-term operation of the data center.

The cumulative impacts of multiple data center developments or expansions may

exceed the impacts of any single project and therefore warrant thorough analysis and public oversight.

Data centers threaten the health of tribal communities and treaty-protected resources, including water and fisheries as well as the broader natural and built environment.

Cybersecurity Best Practices for Smart Cities, a joint publication of the U.S.

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency with other U.S. security agencies and those of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, reports that technological innovation and data-driven decision-making can make cities vulnerable to theft of critical infrastructure data and proprietary information, ransomware operations, and destructive cyberattacks. Therefore,

**Be it resolved by the City Council of The City of Seattle, the Mayor concurring:**

Section 1. The City will study the potential for data centers to impact:

- A. Electrical grid capacity and reliability by burdening the electrical transmission system and requiring commensurate capital improvements;
- B. Water usage by consuming large quantities of fresh water to cool equipment;
- C. Utility rates by increasing demand for power and increasing capital costs that Seattle City Light must pass on to all customer classes;
- D. Land use and development by occupying large amounts of scarce commercial and industrial space;
- E. Jobs and the economy by supporting increased adoption of automation technologies that make human workers redundant while employing few local workers for

operation and simultaneously exporting income to corporations and individuals that may or may not reside in Seattle;

F. Public health by producing noise, light, water, and air pollution;

G. The rights of Federally Recognized Tribes, Urban Indians, and native communities to exercise any express or implied treaty rights to access and fish in all usual and accustomed places as has occurred since time immemorial; and

H. The successful operation and resiliency of existing businesses, government entities, including public safety, as well as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and others.

Section 2. As elected stewards of the health, safety, environment, and general welfare of the people of the City of Seattle, Council requests the cooperation of the Executive across City departments in the timely development of policies to guide potential legislation, budget appropriations, and departmental actions to reduce or mitigate any deleterious effects, to hold data center investors and operators accountable for the costs and effects of their operations, and to harvest and maximize any benefits of data center development and operation in Seattle.

Section 3. Closely following the adoption of this resolution, Council intends to consider and take action on an ordinance to establish a moratorium that would prohibit the filing, acceptance, processing, or approval of applications for new or expanded data centers, as principal or accessory uses, to allow the City time to consider and adopt appropriate permanent legislation.

Section 4. As part of future legislative action to enact the 2027 and 2028 rates for Seattle City Light customers, the Council anticipates establishing a new customer class

and conditions of service for new or existing data centers whose electricity demand constitutes a new large load.

LEG Data Center Policy Development RES  
Eric McConaghy  
D5

Adopted by the City Council and signed in open session in authentication of its  
adoption on June 9, 2026 .



\_\_\_\_\_  
President \_\_\_\_\_ of the City Council

Signed in concurrence on June 12, 2026 .



\_\_\_\_\_  
Katie B. Wilson, Mayor

Attested on June 12, 2026 .



\_\_\_\_\_  
Scheereen Dedman, City Clerk

Seal