



AREADEVELOPMENT

Balanced. Personalized. **Growth.**

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

PROPERTY MARKETS | **DATA CENTERS**

How to Overcome NIMBYism in Data Centers

A guide to turning community opposition into constructive criticism and assuaging fears about data center development.



W. Ford Graham, Senior Vice President, McGuireWoods Consulting



Christopher D. Lloyd, Senior Vice President and Director, Infrastructure and Economic Development, McGuireWoods Consulting

Q2 2024



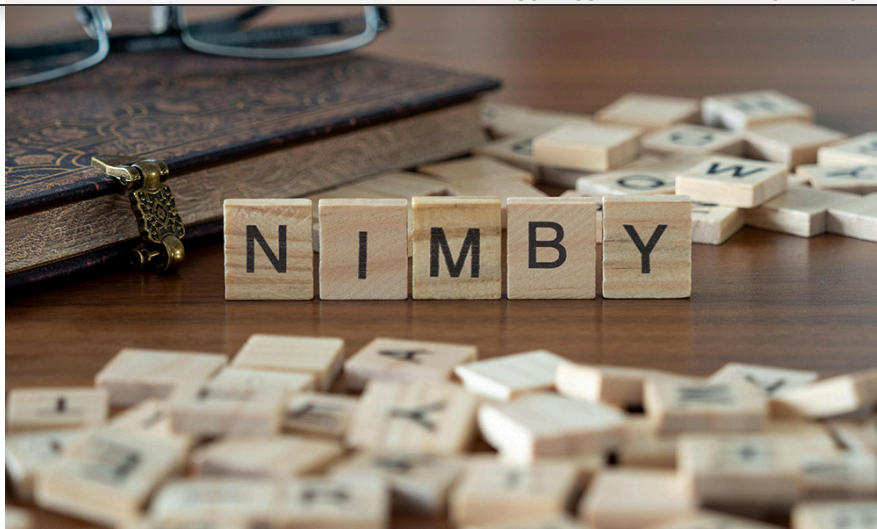
PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Microsoft Plans Kenosha, Wisconsin, Data Center Operations
02/01/2025

Compass Datacenters Plans Meridian, Mississippi, Operations
01/12/2025

Edged Establishes Kansas City, Missouri, Data Center Operations
12/20/2024

CAM Construction Services Plans Glasgow, Missouri, Manufacturing Complex
12/16/2024



It has been a wild ride in economic development these last few years. In the United States alone, we saw the COVID doldrums of months of nothingness give way to the rush to expand our nation's warehouse inventory to ensure redundancy in our supply chain. We saw an uptick in onshoring and nearshoring that helped enable diversity of suppliers. And that growth has now been eclipsed by the explosion of megaprojects over the last two years. Fueled by the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, and the administration's push to lead the world in electric-vehicle-related technology, massive multibillion dollar projects with hundreds of accompanying jobs became the new norm for many communities..

RELATED RESEARCH

Industrial Space Continues Boon for Greater Richmond

AD

Industry in the Era of the Electron

AD

Data Center Sites: What's Your Connection?

AD

Unfortunately, in many cases, the companies and their economic development shepherds sprinted eyes-closed into the quagmire of NIMBYism.

NIMBYism, aka Not in My Backyard syndrome, is not new. It is an age-old issue of neighboring property

owners/renters wanting things to stay as they are, often paired with a rational concern about the unknown ramifications of a new industrial neighbor. Unfortunately, our general connectivity to social media and a growing distrust in institutions (federal, local, or otherwise), has led to an irrational proliferation of misinformation and conspiracy theories about economic development projects with proverbial monsters behind every door. As a result, traditional NIMBYism has morphed into BANANA's (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone) and CAVEs (Citizens Against Virtually Everything), and we now see that a small vocal group of media savvy activists can influence political decision-making.

While these challenges are proliferating for projects of all sizes, the proliferation of data centers, pushed by the word's insatiable consumption of ever-more-

Valuable, job-creating, tax-

Center Operations

12/13/2024

C BLOX Plans Montgomery-Huntsville, Alabama, Data Center Operations

12/12/2024

Vantage Data Centers Plans Storey County, Nevada, Operations

11/29/2024

[All News Items](#)



TIPS: SEND US BUSINESS EXPANSION OR RELOCATION NEWS

MOST READ

1. 2024's Leading Metro Locations: U.S. Cities on the Rise Amid an Economic Reshuffling
Q4 2024 AREADEVELOPMENT
2. The Workforce Factor: How States Are Competing to Build Tomorrow's Talent
Q4 2024 AREADEVELOPMENT
3. Best Practices in Incentives Procurement
Q4 2024
4. Five Strategies to Tackle the Data Center Talent Shortage
Q4 2024 AREADEVELOPMENT
5. Microsoft-Three Mile Island Deal Could Signal Path for Nuclear Power to Strengthen Partnerships with Big Tech
Q4 2024 AREADEVELOPMENT
6. Industries Look for Employees in Nontraditional Spaces Amid Labor Shortage
Q4 2024 AREADEVELOPMENT
7. Why Decarbonization Goals Start with Site Selection
Q4 2024 AREADEVELOPMENT

expansive cloud storage requirements, and the growth of AI, has drawn the particular ire of many community opponents. Although there should always be room for a healthy debate over the value of a proposed project's job creation and investment, the prevailing rhetoric is often less about facts and data, and more akin to who can yell the loudest.

Despite the perceived doom and gloom, there are strategies that local officials, economic developers, and their data-center projects can employ to deal respectfully with these community concerns. Although not a panacea, taking a page out of a traditional, grass roots political campaign plan and implementing it locally to educate and inform about the value that data centers can bring can help smooth the community approval process. Moreover, the concept can be distilled into two core principles: 1) implement a concerted, strategic data-driven effort and 2) start yesterday.

Clearly Define the Project

Nothing breeds questions like a changing project scope. Before going public with a project, come to internal agreement on its scope – the size, timeline, potential impacts, and other aspects of the project so the message doesn't continue to shift thereby causing suspicion.

Highlight the Alternatives

Prepare a comparative pros and cons analysis of data centers vs potential alternative uses for the site and share that information with the public. Review what could also be developed at the site – presuming that development will happen – and go to the community and ask what would be the preferred use. Are jobs a higher priority than capital investment? How do neighbors feel about traffic impacts?

Get to Know the Community

Do your homework on the movers and shakers in the community – who influences whom, which organizations are respected and trusted, and find champions for development.

Gauge True Community Sentiment

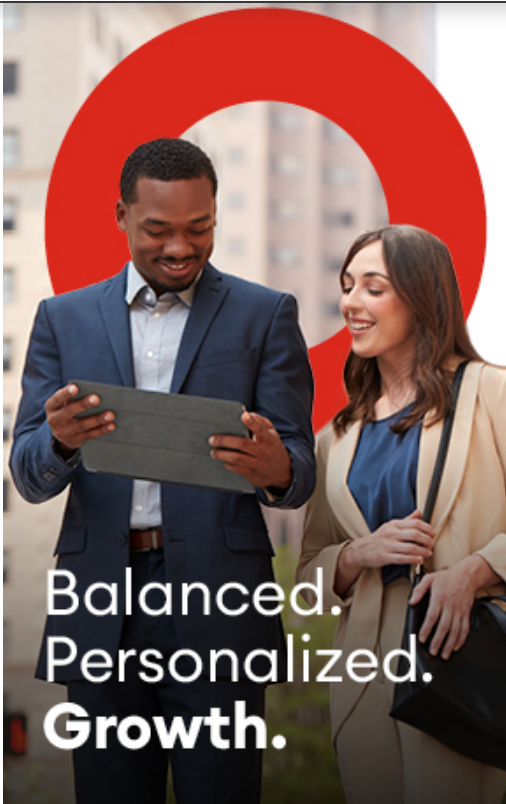
Listening to the community is so vital. Often, project developers are so eager to tell their story that they launch immediately into a pitch without seeking input first. Seek out opinions from a variety of stakeholders and work to incorporate reasonable suggestions into the project.

Combat “Dis-” and “Mis-” with Correct Information

It is summarily important to have a thoroughly developed plan in place to roll out the nuances of the project to the public as soon as possible. Key items in

Taking a page out of a traditional, grass roots political

economic development projects that would otherwise fit perfectly into the fabric of a community, can be delayed or derailed through the efforts of a small but vocal assemblage of misinformed (or misaligned) citizen activists.



Balanced.
Personalized.
Growth.

JobsOhio. **GROW YOUR BUSINESS**

FOLLOW AREA DEVELOPMENT



LINKEDIN



RSS

NEWSLETTERS

☒ **Insider:** Exclusive content from Area Development Magazine focusing on all aspects of site and facility planning from state and local incentives to corporate surveys and beyond, delivered right to your inbox monthly

☒ **This Week:** Site selection, facility planning and workforce development thought leadership curated from around the web delivered to your inbox weekly

SIGN UP

AREADEVELOPMENT

implementing it locally to educate and inform about the value that data centers can bring can help smooth the community approval process.

SITE SELECTION FACILITY PLANNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS+PLACE AD EDITORIAL BOARD

FOLLOW 

 SEARCH

a website and social media landing pages that provide answers to common questions, arm elected officials with those same questions and answers so they can more thoroughly respond when asked by constituents, host information sessions that are well publicized and open to the public, and participate, in-person, in all scheduled public hearings related to the project and its development.

The boom in megaprojects and the proliferation of data centers in both urban and rural parts of America has led to a surge in NIMBYism. Valuable, job-creating, tax-generating economic development projects that would otherwise fit perfectly into the fabric of a community, can be delayed or derailed through the efforts of a small but vocal assemblage of misinformed (or misaligned) citizen activists. Economic developers and companies can overcome (or at the very least diminish) negative rhetoric and misinformation by developing and implementing a strategic public engagement plan in the early stages of a project's life cycle. The larger the scope and impact of the potential project, the greater the need to muster the appropriate resources to ensure that the public is properly informed and engaged.



W. Ford Graham, Senior Vice President, McGuireWoods Consulting

W. Ford Graham is a senior vice president on McGuireWoods Consulting's national infrastructure and economic development team and a partner with McGuireWoods. Ford has a depth of experience working in the economic development sector, where he has been one of the leading recruiters of international companies to the Southeastern United States. He has facilitated new industry and industrial expansion in over 123 projects, which have resulted in commitments of more than 11,000 new jobs and \$3.9 billion in new investment. Ford's practice focuses on companies opening or expanding operations in the U.S. In addition to economic incentives, Ford assists companies with the full spectrum of legal needs that arise when companies enter new markets. Most recently, Ford was a partner at an international AmLaw 100 law firm, and he previously served as director of international strategy and trade for the South Carolina Department of Commerce. In that role, he directed all aspects of the agency's international efforts, including South Carolina's four international offices in Delhi, Munich, Shanghai, and Tokyo, uncovering foreign direct investment opportunities, and assisting South Carolina companies with exporting their products to the rest of the world. Before that, he worked as general counsel for a real estate development/investment firm and served as a judicial clerk in the 5th and 14th Judicial Circuits of South Carolina. Ford also served as a United States Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala.

TOP STATES FOR BUSINESS

2022 Top States Commentary: Responsiveness to Projects Big — and Small — Lands a Core Group of States on Top

Q3 2022



Christopher D. Lloyd, Senior Vice President and Director, Infrastructure and Economic Development, McGuireWoods Consulting

Christopher Lloyd leads the McGuireWoods Consulting Infrastructure and Economic Development team where he specializes in site selection and economic development incentives negotiations. Lloyd has also worked closely with clients on numerous public-private partnership projects for transportation and other infrastructure as well as playing a leading role in the development and passage of Virginia's public-private partnership laws. These statutes have since become model legislation for use in other states. As a result of this work, Lloyd has become a frequent speaker on economic

TOP STATES FOR BUSINESS

2023 Top States Commentary: The Importance of Speed to Market

Q3 2023



TOP STATES FOR BUSINESS

2020 Top States Commentary: Long-Term Economic Development Policies-Constants in a Changing World

Q3 2020



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Hitting the Reset Button: How to Pivot the Perception of Economic Development

Q2 2020

ECONOMICS/ GOVERNMENT POLICY

Economic Development in an Era of Political Uncertainty

November 2012



RELATED TOPICS AND ARTICLES

DATA CENTERS

GOVERNMENT POLICY / BUSINESS
CLIMATE

ENERGY / CLEAN TECH

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Unlock Efficiency and Performance in Data Centers

The Colossus of Memphis: Elon Musk's Supercomputing Investment Transforms the Region

AEP Ohio Proposes Controversial Data Center Rate Hike Amid Power Demand Surge

The Data Center Odyssey in Mexico
In Focus: AI's Influence on Data Center Growth

Exclusive Research

LEADING METRO LOCATIONS



2024's Leading Metro Locations: U.S. Cities on the Rise Amid an Economic Reshuffling

TOP STATES FOR BUSINESS



Top States for Doing Business in 2024: A Continued Legacy of Excellence

CORPORATE EXEC SURVEY RESULTS



38th Annual Corporate Survey: Are Unrealized Predictions of an Economic Slump Leading Small to Mid-Size Companies to Put Off Expansion Plans?

CORPORATE EXEC SURVEY RESULTS



20th Annual Consultants Survey: Clients Prioritize Access to Skilled Labor, Responsive State & Local Government

AREA DEVELOPMENT

HOME

ABOUT

CONTACT

ADVERTISE

FAQ

PRIVACY

TERMS

SITE SELECTION

FACILITY PLANNING

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS+PLACE

AD EDITORIAL BOARD

RELATED RESOURCES

FOLLOW

SEARCH

Magazine Subscription/Renewal

Newsletter

Current Issue

Contact Area Development

Advertise

Asset / Facility Management

Labor / Workforce Development

Site Selection

Business Expansion / Economic Development News

Gold & Silver Shovel Economic Development Awards

Annual Corporate & Consultants Survey Results

Leading Metro Locations

Top States for Doing Business

CONSULTANTS FORUM

Events focusing on best practices in economic development, bringing together industry leading consultants with economic development professionals.

AREA DEVELOPMENT

All contents copyright 2024 Halcyon Business Publications, Inc.