A RESOURCE FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS

BEYOND THE BUILDING

The Glenn Heights Approach to Data Center Education & Community Engagement

FACTS. PROCESS. COMMUNITY.

THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION

How can municipal leaders help residents evaluate a complex development proposal without turning public education into an endorsement or opposition campaign?

THE GLENN HEIGHTS PRINCIPLE

Explain what is known. Identify what remains uncertain. Distinguish land-use decisions from later project approvals. Make room for informed participation throughout the process.

Presented by Mayor Sonja A. Brown

City of Glenn Heights, Texas | National League of Cities Small Cities Council

PEOPLE. PROGRESS. POSSIBILITIES.

THE GLENN HEIGHTS APPROACH

Education before advocacy

The proposed AMF Mission Critical project prompted questions about water, power, environmental effects, traffic, jobs, neighborhood impacts and public accountability. Glenn Heights used multiple educational formats to make those questions easier to examine.

01

A TEN-CHAPTER SERIES

Understanding Data Centers: Facts. Process. Community. Topics included water, electricity, environment, traffic, employment, property values, community benefits and approvals.

02

A FIRSTHAND FACILITY TOUR

Residents and City representatives visited an operating cloud facility in Richardson for an exterior observation tour. The visit was educational, not a comparison proving identical impacts.

03

CONSISTENT TOUR MATERIALS

A welcome letter, informational sheet and structured observation form gave participants a common framework for what to look for and what to ask.

04

STRUCTURED COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Observation sheets invited comments about noise, traffic, screening, building appearance, surroundings and unanswered questions. Responses should be retained and reported faithfully.

05

ONGOING RESIDENT Q&A

Questions were addressed with a distinction between developer representations, verified facts and project-specific information still needed.

Key Distinction

Rezoning establishes permitted land uses; it is not the same as approval of a final site plan.

DUE DILIGENCE

A practical municipal checklist

Before making claims about a proposed data center, ask for project-specific documentation. Requirements and decision authority vary by jurisdiction and stage of review.

- [ ] **LAND USE & PROCESS**
  What has been approved? What applications, hearings, plans and permits remain?
- [ ] **ELECTRICITY & BACKUP POWER**
  What is the proposed load? What grid upgrades and backup systems are needed? Who pays?
- [ ] **WATER & DRAINAGE**
  What cooling design is proposed? What are normal and peak water demands? How is runoff managed?
- [ ] **NOISE, LIGHT & ENVIRONMENT**
  What equipment, acoustic analysis, lighting controls, setbacks and buffers are proposed?
- [ ] **TRAFFIC & PUBLIC SAFETY**
  What are construction routes, delivery volumes, site access, emergency plans and long-term trips?
- [ ] **FISCAL & COMMUNITY VALUE**
  What are projected net revenues, incentives, infrastructure obligations and enforceable benefits?
- [ ] **TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY**
  Who tracks conditions, milestones, complaints and commitments after approvals are issued?

What municipal leaders need from developers

Clear project descriptions; verifiable utility and operating assumptions; technical studies, defined responsibilities, and trackable commitments.

SIX PRACTICAL STEPS

Turn questions into a process

1

ESTABLISH THE RECORD

Create a plain-language inventory of approvals, agreements, known facts and missing information.

2

LISTEN AND CATEGORIZE

Collect resident questions and organize them by issue, location, impact and decision stage.

3

EDUCATE CONSISTENTLY

Use accessible chapters, FAQs and briefings; distinguish facts, estimates and open questions.

4

CREATE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Consider facility visits, expert briefings and structured observation tools without promising identical outcomes.

5

DOCUMENT AND REPORT BACK

Retain source responses, summarize themes objectively and show how unanswered questions are being addressed.

6

TRACK THE PROCESS

Publish meaningful milestones, remaining approvals and responsibilities; monitor enforceable commitments.

Leadership does not require every resident to agree. It requires a commitment to factual information, a clear process and meaningful opportunities to participate.

— Mayor Sonja A. Brown

PEOPLE. PROGRESS. POSSIBILITIES.

Explore the complete series

Understanding Data Centers

Facts. Process. Community. | Scan to explore