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FOX23 Investigates: Tulsa councilor calls Project Anthem deal "bad," identifies Meta as company behind project

Janna Clark

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TULSA, Okla. — Residents across Green Country have pushed back against proposed data centers and in Coweta, one project was recently withdrawn.

In east Tulsa, concerns are mounting as construction continues on a large-scale development and now a city councilor said Tulsa may have agreed to a costly deal.

Construction is underway on a 340-acre data center near East 11th Street and the Creek Turnpike.

Neighbors said the impact is already being felt.

"It's loud right now," said Cheyenna Morgan, who lives about three miles away from the project.

She said she's worried about the long-term effects, including constant noise, as well as the amount of land, water and electricity the facility will require.





"These facilities use as much power as entire cities or towns," she stated.

Tulsa City Councilor Laura Bellis said she has heard similar concerns from constituents, particularly about rising utility costs.

"Yes, and we already see that they are," Bellis said when asked if utility rates could increase. "The cost burden is being shared by all of us."

Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO) confirmed data centers are one factor behind a rate increase filed last year that is still under review.

In a statement, PSO said large energy users, including data centers, are seeking to invest in new facilities, but emphasized that new customers should pay their fair share of system costs.

When Partner Tulsa first approved the project, known as Project Anthem, economic developers highlighted potential benefits, including construction jobs and about 50 permanent positions with an average salary of \$65,000.

The City also approved significant tax incentives, aiming to spur development in a more remote part of east Tulsa.

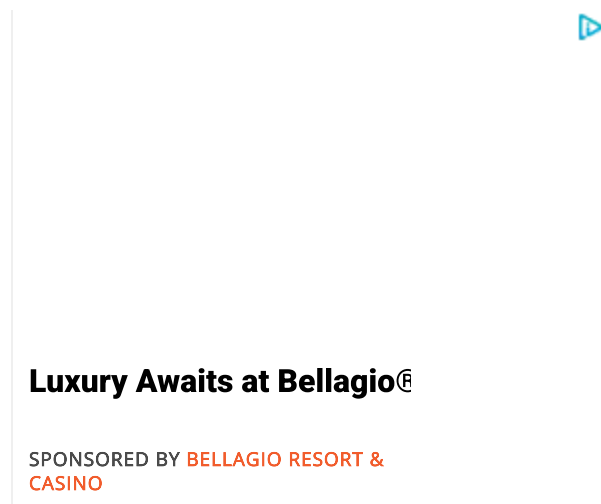
However, Bellis now questions whether the benefits outweigh the costs.

"We have to wonder if this is worth it," she said, citing the relatively small number of jobs compared to the project's resource demands.

Bellis was on the council when the project was approved in 2023. She said at the time, leaders had limited information about the broader impacts of data centers.

"We were kind of flying a little bit blind."

The Tulsa City Council has since approved a nine-month moratorium on new data center developments to allow time for further study.



The pause does not apply to Project Anthem, which is already under construction.

The City granted the project an 85% property tax abatement over 25 years.

Even with those incentives, estimates show the development could generate about \$36 million in tax revenue over that period.

Still, Bellis said she believes Tulsa could have negotiated a better deal.

"I think we did get taken advantage of," she said, adding that some of the world's largest tech companies may build in communities even without tax incentives. "We are missing out on revenue that we could have gotten."

Bellis also revealed the company behind Project Anthem is Meta, the parent company of Facebook, after she met with representatives and chose not to sign a nondisclosure agreement.

"It is one of the largest, richest companies in the world," she said, stating she doesn't believe such a company needs local tax breaks.

The corporation has explored expanding the project with a second phase added to an additional 340 acres, but recently withdrew that application.

Bellis said she expects the company could still pursue expansion in the future.

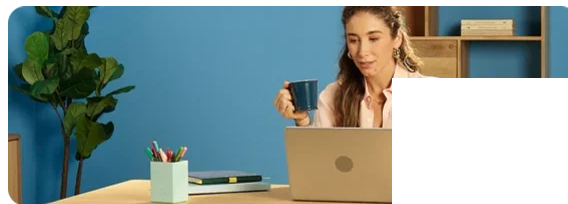
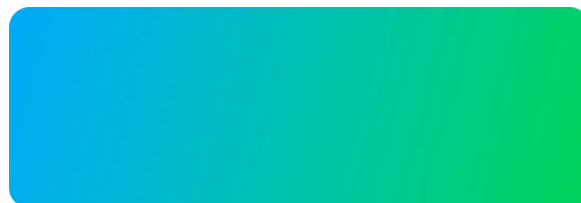
While acknowledging the rapid growth of artificial intelligence and data infrastructure, Bellis said she remains skeptical.

"I personally don't think that there's benefits that outweigh the harms that we already know about."

Some residents agree.

Morgan said she does not believe the average Tulsan will benefit from the project.

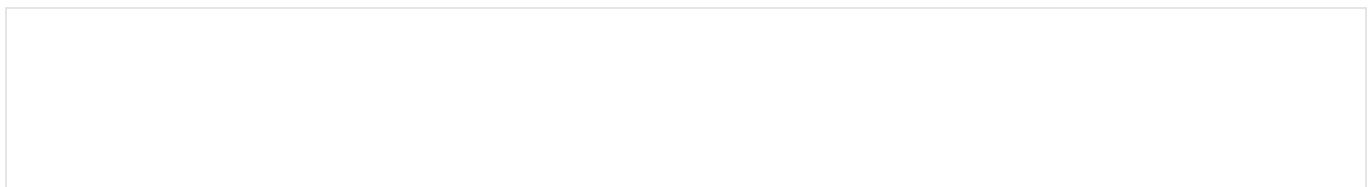
When Morgan was asked who stood to gain from the data center project, she stated, "Tech companies, their pocketbooks, big tech CEOs."



Neither Meta nor the City of Tulsa has officially confirmed Meta's involvement in Project Anthem.

FOX23 reached out to Meta for comment, but has not received a response.

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