

TRIDENT PROJECT

Mayor says data center planned for Aurora 'must be stopped'

Hundreds of neighbors turned out last week to decry the proposal

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Just days after Aurora Mayor Mike Coffman declared that a gigantic proposed data center in the city "must be stopped," a spokesman for the company behind the project said the 860,000-square-foot facility should be "evaluated based on verified facts."

Coffman posted his thoughts about Vantage Data Centers' Trident project late last week on Facebook, saying the project "must not go forward."

His post followed a City Council meeting last week during which hundreds of people living in neighborhoods near the site came out to decry the data center, which would be among Colorado's largest. Residents voiced concerns about the facilities' large water use and electric consumption, along with worries about noise.

Several cities in the state, including Denver, Thornton and Commerce City, have imposed temporary bans on new data centers as larger and larger — or hyperscale — facilities have sprouted. Hyperscale data centers are engineered for large-scale workloads and are at the heart of the burgeoning data-hungry artificial intelligence sector.

The Aurora council narrowly rejected a moratorium on data centers in August, but the city is hammering out rules for the facilities, including a just-passed ban on the use of water-hungry evaporative cooling systems by any business across the city.

Aurora, Coffman wrote, "must explore every available option, to include my calling the proposed Trident data center up for a public hearing and then asking the members of City Council for a 'no' vote to stop it from being built."

The mayor said he would do this regardless of any litigation Vantage might level against the city.

Mark Freeman, vice president of global marketing for the Denver-based company, wouldn't answer a question from The Denver Post about whether Vantage might take legal action against Aurora should the city kill its project.

Freeman said the company's proposed data center on a 108-acre site just inside the E-470 beltway at East 48th Avenue would use a closed-loop system that would require one initial 600,000-gallon injection of water and 2,200 gallons a day as part of ongoing operations — "about half the amount used by a similarly sized office building."

It would be designed to use 334 megawatts of electric power, he said, to run both "cloud and (artificial intelligence) workloads."

By comparison, nearby Denver International Airport uses 45 megawatts of electric power.

Freeman also said the site plan will comply with all noise ordinance standards in the city, with sound levels from the facility expected to be “similar to a typical office building or a dishwasher running in the next room.”

Aurora Councilwoman Amy Wiles, whose ward covers the proposed Trident site, recognizes the city is in a tricky position given that Vantage has been following the city’s approval process for more than a year and the site where it wants to build its center is zoned for that use.

“I wish this had been done sooner — I brought it up months ago,” she said Monday. “Ideally, when (the area) was first re-zoned, I wish it had been looked at a bit more closely to balance the need for business while also prioritizing our residents.”

Wiles said she still has questions about low-frequency noise and vibrations from data centers and how those might affect nearby neighbors.

Coffman, in his Facebook post, said the project received preliminary administrative approval without a public hearing “because a data center is a permitted use under the current zoning.” The parcel Vantage wants to develop was zoned “airport district” by the city four years ago — a designation that permits businesses like data centers.

The mayor is not against data centers per se, but he said more scrutiny needs to be applied in terms of where they are built.

“We need to update our development code so that we have realistic distances between residential developments and data centers,” he told The Post in a text response to questions Monday. “The city of Aurora has a land mass a little larger than Denver and about a third of our city is undeveloped, so there definitely are suitable locations for data centers that are far enough away from homes.”