

Henrico County / Varina District Data Center Development

Community Questions & Answers and Glossary

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This document provides an overview of data center development in the Varina District of Henrico County. It is intended for community members and nontechnical readers to understand local developments, policies, and environmental considerations. All statements are based on publicly available sources. This is not legal advice; individuals seeking legal guidance or formal challenges should consult attorneys.

Community members have also created a website to share updates and information:

saynotodatacentersvarina.com.

2. CHRONOLOGICAL Q&A: The Story Unfolded

Q: How was White Oak Technology Park in Sandston created?

- In the mid-1990s, Henrico County and its Economic Development Authority invested approximately \$44 million to establish White Oak Technology Park, aiming to attract high-tech industries.
- The site was rezoned and equipped with infrastructure, including dual-feed 230 kV transmission lines, multiple substations, and redundant water/sewer systems.
- White Oak Semiconductor occupied the site by 1998. After its closure, QTS converted the facility into a data center, followed later by a \$750 million expansion by Meta.
(Sources: *InterGlobix Magazine*, *Henrico County EDA*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*)

Q: When did data centers begin clustering in Sandston, and why?

- After QTS converted the site, White Oak became a hub for data centers.
- Factors attracting operators included fiber availability, power redundancy, and tax incentives.
- Many centers were allowed “by-right” under industrial zoning, contributing to the area becoming one of Virginia’s densest data center corridors.
(Sources: *InterGlobix*, *Richmond Citizen*, *Data Center Frontier*)

Q: What policy changes did Henrico implement regarding data centers?

- In June 2025, the Henrico Board of Supervisors adopted new rules requiring Provisional Use Permits (PUPs) for all new hyperscale data centers.
- Key requirements include 500-foot buffers, screening, and limits on generator testing.
(Sources: *Henrico Citizen*, *Data Center Frontier*)

Q: What was the Centra / Darbytown Road proposal in the Varina District?

- The proposal, led by Wagner Urban Logistics, planned an eight-building, 1 million-square-foot data center on a 200-acre site near George F. Baker Elementary School and the New Market Village neighborhood.
- Residents raised concerns regarding noise, traffic, environmental impacts, and proximity to schools. Questions were also raised about community benefits.
- As of October 2025, the developer withdrew the proposal following a Planning Commission recommendation for denial.
- Future options for the developer could include pursuing approval under previous zoning, exploring alternative sites, or legal challenges, all subject to Henrico County's 2025 PUP regulations.
(Sources: *Henrico Citizen*, *Data Center Dynamics*, *Richmond BizSense*, *Gorva*)

3. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EJ) CONSIDERATIONS

Q What concerns have community members expressed about potential impacts?

- **Noise, heat, and traffic:** Potential strain on nearby neighborhoods.
- **Proximity to schools and homes:** Possible effects on health and safety.
- **Utility usage:** Data centers require high energy and water, which could affect rates and reliability.
- **Open space/environmental impacts:** Expansion may affect wetlands, open spaces, and historic parcels.
- **Community notice:** Some residents noted limited prior communication regarding proposals.

4. LOCAL LEADERSHIP: MRS. ATKINS

Q: What has Alicia Atkins, Henrico School Board member done regarding this issue?

Mrs. Atkins, Henrico School Board member representing the Varina District, has publicly opposed the proposed Darbytown Road data center due to concerns about its proximity to George F. Baker Elementary School and potential environmental impacts.

Henrico School Board Work Session – August 14, 2025: During the meeting, Atkins expressed concerns about the proposed data center development located off Darbytown Road, near Baker Elementary School. She highlighted community concerns including noise pollution, environmental degradation, and the project's proximity to residential neighborhoods. Atkins emphasized that while she recognizes the potential economic benefits, the county's primary responsibility is to the health, safety, and future of students, staff, and the broader school community. She formally shared her opposition to the proposed development...

(Source: *Henrico School Board Work Session Minutes*)

Facebook Post – September 3, 2025: “Loved Ones: You are not alone. I stand with you, and I will not back down. Even if I am the only elected official opposing the project to build a data center at 2300 Darbytown Road, near Baker Elementary and Fareva.” (*Sources: Facebook*)

Henrico Citizen Statement – October 11, 2025: “To put this particular project near Baker Elementary School is beyond unfathomable to me. For me, the project itself is fine. That location is not, and sacrificing the health of our children and our planet, there’s no amount of money that would be able to make me align with it.” (*Sources: Henrico Citizen*)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **By-Right Use:** Land use automatically permitted under zoning regulations.
- **Data Center:** Facility housing servers and computing systems for processing or storing data.
- **Environmental Justice (EJ):** Fair treatment and involvement of all people in environmental decision-making.
- **Hyperscale Data Center:** Very large, high-capacity data facility, often for cloud computing or AI workloads.
- **Provisional Use Permit (PUP):** Special permit requiring public hearings and conditions.
- **White Oak Technology Park:** A 2,200-acre industrial and technology park in eastern Henrico County designed to attract high-tech industries.

Legal Notice & Disclaimer

This document is intended for educational purposes and community awareness. While it references publicly available data, it **is not legal advice**. Community members should consult professional legal and environmental experts before taking action based on this information.