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RESOLUTION NO. 2026-PC-___

A RESOLUTION OF THE STARKE COUNTY PLAN COMMISSION ADOPTING WRITTEN FINDINGS OF FACT REGARDING THE REGULATION AND TOTAL PROHIBITION OF COMMERCIAL DATA CENTERS

WHEREAS, the Starke County Plan Commission ("Commission") is tasked with the preparation, review, and recommendation of zoning ordinances and amendments thereto for Starke County, Indiana, pursuant to Indiana Code § 36-7-4-600 *et seq.*; and

WHEREAS, the Commission recognizes that Commercial Data Centers represent a highly specialized and impactful industrial land use that requires regulatory treatment distinct from standard light industrial or commercial business uses; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has evaluated the operational impacts of Commercial Data Centers on the public health, safety, and general welfare of Starke County residents;

WHEREAS, the Commission has evaluated the Starke County Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, Indiana Code § 36-7-4-603 requires that in preparing and considering proposals, the Commission and the Board of County Commissioners shall pay reasonable regard to: (1) the comprehensive plan; (2) current conditions and the character of current structures and uses; (3) the most desirable use for which the land is adapted; (4) the conservation of property values; and (5) responsible growth and development;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Starke County Plan Commission that the following Findings of Fact are hereby adopted to support the regulation and total prohibition of Commercial Data Centers within all zoning districts under the territorial jurisdiction of the Commission:

Section 1. Reasonable Regard to the Comprehensive Plan (IC § 36-7-4-603(1))

- **1.01. Preservation of Rural Vision:** The Starke County Comprehensive Plan defines the county's long-term vision as a "whole-life community" that prioritizes the county's abundant natural resources, rural character, and quality of life assets. Commercial Data Centers are characterized by large, windowless, high-security industrial structures that inherently clash with the open, rural landscape and community-defined character outlined in the Plan.
- **1.02. Natural Resource Protection:** The Comprehensive Plan explicitly mandates the protection of natural resources, sensitive areas, and local waterways, specifically noting the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers. Commercial Data Centers consume quantities of water for industrial heat rejection and present runoff risks that directly conflict with the Plan's core directive to buffer and preserve local environmental assets.
- **1.03. Infrastructure and Economic Alignment:** The Comprehensive Plan prioritizes utility and public service infrastructure enhancements that directly serve and improve the quality of life for existing county residents. Commercial Data Centers consume electrical

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grid and infrastructure capacity for non-local data processing, which may fail to support local economic development that provides tangible public benefits to the citizens of Starke County.

Section 2. Reasonable Regard to Current Conditions and the Character of Current Structures and Uses (IC § 36-7-4-603(2))

- **2.01. Agricultural and Rural Character:** The current condition of unincorporated Starke County is defined by quiet agricultural production and rural residential living. The introduction of monolithic server campuses—requiring continuous security fencing, massive cooling infrastructure, and expansive substations—represents a drastic and hostile departure from the established visual and operational character of the county's current structures.
- **2.02. Acoustic Environment:** The current conditions of the county's rural zones rely on a peaceful acoustic environment. Commercial Data Centers generate a persistent, 24/7 low-frequency industrial hum from mechanical cooling fans, exhaust systems, generators, and chillers, which fundamentally alters and degrades the ambient conditions of the surrounding community.
- **2.03. Environmental Realities:** The current character of the county is heavily reliant on clean, accessible groundwater for private residential wells and crop irrigation. Operating large server infrastructure requires stocking substantial volumes of specialized chemical refrigerants, industrial coolants, and bulk fuel storage for emergency generation, introducing severe new contamination risks into the current environment and consumption of available natural resources.

Section 3. Reasonable Regard to the Most Desirable Use for Which the Land is Adapted (IC § 36-7-4-603(3))

- **3.01. Agricultural Productivity:** The land within the county's territorial jurisdiction is primarily adapted for agricultural productivity. The large-scale conversion and permanent sterilization of prime tillable soil for industrial server parks disrupts the county's continuous agricultural zones and permanently strips the land of its most desirable and historic use.
- **3.02. Subsurface Drainage Tile Integrity:** The county's land has been meticulously adapted for farming through delicate subsurface drainage tile networks. Heavy industrial site grading, massive foundation installations, and persistent soil compaction associated with hyperscale facilities permanently destroy these systems. Because rural drainage systems are interconnected, destroying field tiles on a single large parcel creates a failure that disrupts drainage across surrounding farms.
- **3.03. Hydrological Adaptability:** The land is adapted to natural stormwater infiltration. Replacing open fields with expansive impervious surfaces—such as massive building footprints and paved clearings—dramatically accelerates stormwater runoff velocity and volume. This artificial landscape modification exacerbates peak localized discharge, directly threatening the capacity of regional stream networks and adjacent low-lying farm fields.

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Section 4. Reasonable Regard to the Conservation of Property Values (IC § 36-7-4-603(4))

- **4.01. Adjacent Property Value Depreciation:** The physical encroachment of massive industrial data compounds near rural residential areas causes measurable depreciation in surrounding home values. This equity loss is driven by the permanent degradation of rural viewsheds, the visual blight of extensive security fencing and substations, and the introduction of continuous background noise, pollution, and light pollution.
- **4.02. Land Use Incompatibility:** Under Indiana Code, zoning must foster the "highest and best use" of land by keeping neighboring uses compatible. Introducing monolithic digital processing facilities into active agricultural and quiet residential areas creates a severe structural incompatibility that undermines the long-term stability and value of existing neighbor equity.
- **4.03. Preservation of Equity:** The Commission finds that the total prohibition of Commercial Data Centers across all districts is a necessary and rational exercise of its zoning authority to conserve property values, preserve the equity of multi-generational residential properties, and protect the ongoing financial viability of long-term farming operations.

Section 5. Reasonable Regard to Responsible Growth and Development (IC § 36-7-4-603(5))

- **5.01. Electrical Grid Strain:** Reliable energy management is a foundational requirement for responsible regional growth. Introducing massive, continuous baseload demands from large-scale data facilities places an unprecedented burden on a regional grid that is currently undergoing rapid generation asset retirements and transitioning toward variable resource portfolios.
- **5.02. Local Oversubscription Risks:** Seeking to add gigawatt-scale industrial compute loads into a predominantly rural distribution footprint directly threatens the local grid infrastructure. It creates an immediate risk of oversubscribing utility substations, thereby undermining the long-term reliability and capacity margins responsibly needed to safely serve local residential, commercial, and traditional industrial users.
- **5.03. Water Supply Depletion:** Industrial data processing requires vast quantities of freshwater for operational cooling. Responsible growth dictates that the county must prioritize its limited freshwater resources for human consumption and agricultural sustenance. Permitting the extreme consumptive water use of a Commercial Data Center is fundamentally irresponsible development in a rural aquifer system.
- **5.04. Safety Constraints:** Present fire suppression services located in Starke County are undersized to manage and respond to a potential emergency situation which may arise on a data processing site.

Section 6. Legislative Determination

- **6.01. Basis for Regulation:** The Commission hereby determines that these Findings provide a comprehensive, data-backed, and legally rational basis under Indiana Code § 36-7-4-603 to prohibit Commercial Data Centers as both a principal use and an accessory

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use across all zoning districts to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of the residents of Starke County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Director of Planning and Building is hereby directed to forward these Findings of Fact to the Starke County Board of Commissioners in support of Ordinance No. 2026-____.

ADOPTED by the Starke County Plan Commission this ____ day of _____, 2026.

STARKE COUNTY PLAN COMMISSION

Mike VanDeMark
Chair

Dale Turner
Member

Mark Allen
Vice-Chair

Therese Pugh
Member

Gwen Rentz
Member

Crystal Keller
Member

Todd Leinbach
Member

Kenny Eagle
Member

ATTEST:

John McCurrie III
Secretary / Director of Planning and Building

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