



Planning Board Meeting Minutes
March 10 , 2026
City Hall – 6:30 PM.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Launderville at 6:30 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Attendance

Lucille Launderville
Travis Cruse
Stephanie Hanson
David Van der Vossen
Chris Sekula

Absent

Carrie Moffett (excused)
Sharon Zakszeski (excused)

Nicole Morgan, Assistant City Manager
Jim Stachura, Stormwater Engineer
Tanya Shannon, City Clerk
Kim Sherwood, Board Liaison

Chair Launderville excused the absences of Ms. Moffett and Ms. Zakszeski from the meeting.

3. Approval of Agenda

Chair Launderville requested an amendment to the agenda to include, under New Business, the rescheduling of the Planning Board's April 14 Regular Meeting. A motion to approve the amended agenda was made by Mr. Van der Vossen and seconded by Mr. Cruse. **Vote 5-0; Motion Carried.**

4. Potential Conflict of Interest/Association Disclosure

If any Board member knows of any conflict of interest or association with any item on this agenda, please so state at this time. None stated.

5. Approval of the Minutes

Mr. Van der Vossen requested an amendment to the minutes to clarify the storm event return period. The revised statement specifies that Mr. Van der Vossen requests clarification in the Stormwater System section on page 38 regarding improvements to system functions and resilience to withstand at least a 25-year storm event. He further notes that the Dam section does not include a similar discussion, despite recent engineering evaluations of the dams. Therefore, clarification is also sought on the storm event return period for which the dams are designed, including capacity and design considerations, recognizing that the exact return period may remain uncertain.

Ms. Sekula moved to approve the February 10th minutes as amended and seconded by Mr. Cruse. **Vote 5-0; Motion Carried.**

6. Public Comment- none

7. Old Business

1. Foundation Requirements

Ms. Morgan provided an update on her discussions with the BOC regarding proposed amendments to foundation requirements and lot drainage plans. Initially, it was believed that regulation of finished floor elevations could proceed, but the city attorney has since expressed uncertainty about the City's authority to do so. While Carolina Shores regulates these matters through its stormwater permit, the attorney is researching how they accomplished this and whether a Local Act might grant similar authority. Ms. Morgan is awaiting final legal guidance before taking further action on FFE regulation. At the March BOC meeting, members emphasized that a one-size-fits-all approach to FFE may not be appropriate. There was also a request to clarify the definition of a "stand-alone lot" and specify when a drainage plan must be engineered. In response, staff revised the proposed ordinance by removing the FFE requirement for additional research and updating the drainage plan language to better define stand-alone lots. With these changes, the BOC approved the Text Amendment, which is now in effect. Ms. Morgan and the Stormwater Engineer are considering alternative measures, such as creating a stormwater overlay, to avoid a blanket, one-size-fits-all requirement.

She stated that the potential overlay requires supporting research and background. FEMA has provided an advisory flood map, which is non-regulatory and optional, but offers information on future flooding. Additionally, they are considering reviewing soil survey maps to assess its suitability for building dwellings. Ms. Morgan noted that staff are considering these factors to develop a stormwater overlay.

However, she added that it remains uncertain whether this approach will be permissible and that staff will continue to consult with the city attorney.

8. New Business

1. Consideration of Rescheduling of the April and May 2026 Planning Board Meeting

Due to the Board of Commissioners rescheduling their regular monthly meetings from April 7th to April 14th and from May 3rd to May 12th, which would have conflicted with the Planning Board's regular meeting dates, the Planning Board agreed to move their meetings to Thursday, April 16th at 6:30 pm and Thursday, May 14th at 6:30 pm. Public Notice will be posted by the City Clerk.

2. Data Centers

Ms. Morgan stated that there is currently no interest in operating data centers in the city, but emphasized the importance of being prepared for potential applications. She shared a PowerPoint overview outlining the purpose and structure of data centers.

Why Data Centers Matter for Planning

- Economic Impact - construction jobs, tax revenue
- Infrastructure Needs - electricity, water, fiber, roads
- Community Impacts - visual, noise, environmental considerations
- Land Use Compatibility
- Rapid Growth

Data centers consume vast amounts of electricity

- Many data centers rely on water-based cooling systems
- Data centers require few permanent employees relative to their size Data centers are typically large, warehouse-scale buildings
- Cooling equipment and backup generators create continuous noise and potential air emissions and fuel storage considerations
- Data centers require specialized infrastructure (fiber optic connections, substations, secure access roads, etc.)

- Demand is expanding rapidly
- Without planning, data centers may locate in areas where they are not compatible with surrounding uses

NC Data Center Growth

- NC is a leader in data center growth
- Rapid construction in Charlotte & Raleigh
- Tech giants expanding (Amazon, Microsoft, Google)
- Community concerns (energy, water, utility impact)

Key Planning Considerations

- Define data center clearly in our UDO
- Identify appropriate zones for development
- Determine review process (by right, special-use, conditional zoning)
- Establish location and design standards (setbacks, buffers, access, height)
- Address utility and infrastructure impacts

Defining Data Centers

Section 5.2 of the City's UDO states uses not specifically listed in Section 5.5 (Table of Permitted Uses) shall be interpreted pursuant to the following:

Section 1.10 - Interpreting Permitted Uses

If a use is not specifically listed in any of the districts listed in this code, then such use shall be regulated as the use determined by the UDO Administrator to be most similar.

- A proposed data center could be interpreted under existing industrial, or telecommunications uses;
- Because the use is not defined, interpretation would fall to the UDO Administrator based on the most similar listed use;
- Having a clearing definition in the UDO provides clarity for staff, developers, and the Planning Board;
- A defined use allows the City to establish standards such as appropriate zoning districts, buffers, access requirements, and infrastructure considerations.

Typical Components of Modern Data Center Definitions

1. The definition should make clear that the primary function of the facility is digital data operations - language such as storage, processing, transmission of digital data.
2. Most definitions include the typical infrastructure found in data centers - servers, computer systems, network and telecommunications equipment, data storage systems, etc. This helps distinguish a data center from other industrial or office uses.
3. Modern data centers require large supporting systems, so including support infrastructure like cooling systems, backup generators, electrical substations, cooling equipment, etc. is often included.
4. To help prevent misinterpretation, it is important to list explicit exclusions, such as IT equipment that is incidental to another use, internet cafes, and gaming operations.
5. Technology evolves quickly, so using broader terms like "digital data processing infrastructure" versus "server farms" helps ensure the definition remains relevant in the future.
6. A clear definition allows staff to determine whether a proposed use qualifies as a data center. If the definition is unclear, applicants may argue their project is telecommunications infrastructure, office use, or warehouse use, which could lead to regulatory loopholes.

Identifying Appropriate Zoning Districts

- Determining the appropriate zoning district for data centers should balance land use compatibility, infrastructure capacity, and municipal goals.
- Large building footprints require sufficient lot size, generators and cooling towers would require sufficient buffering from sensitive areas (residential, schools, etc.), continuous operations may impact residential areas (noise, light), necessary infrastructure requires access to main roads.

Determining Review Process

- Permitted by Right
- Special-Use Permit
- Conditional Zoning

Establish Location & Design Standards

- Buffer from residential/sensitive uses
- Floodplain/wetlands

- Minimum lot size
- Setbacks
- Building height
- Landscaping/buffers
- Noise
- Lighting
- Fencing

Ms. Sekula asked about the average lot size for a data center. Ms. Morgan was not certain, but explained that 5,000 square feet is a typical building size, not counting parking and other supporting structures needed for the use. She added that these would be large-scale developments on large lots. Ms. Sekula then asked how many lots in the city could support this type of development. Ms. Morgan replied that people could combine properties to create a suitable lot.

Address Utility & Infrastructure Impacts

- Electrical Capacity
- Water Supply
- Wastewater Capacity
- Fuel storage
- Backup Systems
- Fiber & Communications
- Roads & Access

Recommended Next Steps

- Gather background - Gather industry standards from NC municipalities
- Define the use - Draft a clear definition of Data Center, including primary purpose, infrastructure, exclusions
- Determine appropriate zoning districts
- Establish approval process (by right, special-use permit, conditional zoning)
- Draft development standards
- Present to Planning Board for recommendation
- Conduct public hearing

- Present to Board of Commissions for approval

There was a discussion on regulating both lighting and noise. Ms. Morgan stated that these aspects would be governed according to the UDO and in consideration of the surrounding lots.

Ms. Hanson asked how it would affect the electrical grid. Ms. Morgan said that in Shallotte, developers must prove they have enough electrical capacity. She explained that more research is needed. Apex's report is over a hundred pages and contains a lot of useful information. She would like to review it and its sources before bringing back a summary. Ms. Morgan emphasized the importance of looking at multiple sources to understand the full picture.

There was discussion about the many incentives for data centers to develop, but also concerns about the cost to the city. Ms. Morgan said she read a report stating that data centers generate significant tax revenue and create jobs. They will bring construction and trade jobs in the short term, about 50-60 full-time jobs, many temporary jobs, and boost the local economy.

Ms. Sekula would like to see research on how these developments affect wildlife, since many residents care about preserving green space and protecting nature.

9. Other Business – none

10. Announcements- none

11. Adjourn

A motion was made by Ms. Hanson to adjourn and seconded by Mr. Cruse.
Vote 5-0; Motion Carried.

–7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Tanya Shannon, City Clerk.