INDEPENDENT RESEARCH REPORT

How a Data Center Gets Approved in Virginia

The approval route in each of Virginia's 133 counties and independent cities, and whether it triggers the state site assessment

Companion to the Virginia Data Center Entitlement Route Register, version 1.1



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November 2026 · Version 1.0

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.24323725 ORCID: 0009-0005-7422-9881

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Type	Independent research report
Series	Virginia Data Center Series
Version	1.0

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ORCID	0009-0005-7422-9881

DOI	10.5281/zenodo.24323725
Cite all versions	10.5281/zenodo.24323724
Companion dataset DOI	10.5281/zenodo.24151023
Current through	November 19, 2026
Last full source audit	November 15, 2026
Published	November 2026

Companion dataset: *Virginia Data Center Entitlement Route Register*, version 1.1. It holds the CSV, sources file, workbook with codebook and a file of every cell changed since version 1.0. Version DOI 10.5281/zenodo.24374645; all versions 10.5281/zenodo.24151023.

Interactive map, with a page for every county and city: tommynturner.com/places.

Disclosure: The author serves on the advisory board of an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation-funded study at Emory University on data centers and the Southern energy buildout. The study had no role in this report.

How to cite: Turner, Tommy N. 2026. How a Data Center Gets Approved in Virginia. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24323724.

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PART ONE

The findings and the statute

1. SUMMARY

A data center can be approved in Virginia by one of two kinds of decision. In some places the zoning ordinance already allows it by right, and the project needs only the administrative permits any building needs. In others a public body has to vote, usually on a rezoning, a special exception or a special use permit. The difference decides whether a public body ever gets to say no to the use. Under a statute enacted in 2026, it also decides whether the state's site assessment applies. Va. Code § 15.2-2209.5 requires that assessment before a locality approves any of those three for a new facility expected to need 100 megawatts or more. The statute does not reach a data center approved by any other route.[1]

This report records how a data center is approved in each of the 133 counties and independent cities, as of November 19, 2026. The full record, with the ordinance text, citation and source for every row, is the Virginia Data Center Entitlement Route Register.[2] Appendix A gives each locality's coded entry on one line.

Findings

- **By right somewhere in 47 of the 133.** In eighteen of them the ordinance lists a data center as a use and permits it by right in a zoning district. In 22 it arrives under a general category such as data processing or offices, and in the rest through an overlay or parcel set, or an administrator's finding. In ten of the 47 the locality has not said, on the record read, how it reads that category or finding.
- **The assessment is out of reach somewhere in 44.** In those counties and cities at least one route avoids all three approvals (in Albemarle County, only within a size cap: an aggregate 40,000 square feet of gross floor area per lot for a stand-alone data center), and a data center approved that way never reaches the statutory assessment. Seven of them are coded as having no zoning ordinance.
- **A vote is required everywhere in 41.** In those localities every route open to a data center runs through a rezoning, a special exception or a special use permit. In 38 more the register finds no approval route short of amending the ordinance. The other ten are the unresolved by-right rows in the first finding.
- **The ordinances are moving.** In 52 localities a change to how a data center is approved has been adopted, in 38 of them since the start of 2025; for three the records reviewed do not establish a single year. In 22, the record shows a by-right route before the change and none after; in four, it shows the opposite. Another sixteen that have adopted nothing have a change drafted, initiated or set for hearing.
- **Written answers came from 21 of the 42 counties and cities asked.** In several, the answer differed from what the published text alone would suggest.

What the record cannot support

The register counts ordinances. A count of localities is a count of local governments, and a by-right district may be a single parcel. Where a row mentions a project or an acreage, it does so to

explain the ordinance; the register makes no attempt to list projects or measure land. Nor does it weigh whether by-right approval is good policy.

2. WHAT THE REGISTER ASKS

Every row in the register answers one question: if a developer proposed a data center in this locality today, what approval would it need, and would that approval be a rezoning, a special exception or a special use permit?

It does not ask whether a locality wants data centers or whether any are built there. Nor does it measure how much land is zoned for them. It asks what the ordinance does with the use, read from the ordinance itself and, where the locality has said how it administers a provision, from that statement.

Why the three approvals matter

A rezoning, a special exception and a special use permit share two features. Each is decided by the governing body or a board after a public hearing, and each can carry conditions tied to the particular project. On a rezoning the applicant offers them. By-right approval has neither. If the ordinance permits the use in the district, the applicant files a site plan, which is reviewed against the written standards. Whether the use belongs there is not up for decision.

Section 15.2-2209.5 added a further consequence to the line between the two kinds of decision. Before approving a rezoning, special exception or special use permit for a new facility the applicant reasonably expects to need 100 megawatts or more, a locality must require a site assessment. The assessment must examine the facility's sound profile on homes and schools within 500 feet of the property line, and the locality may require it to cover ground and surface water, farmland, parks, registered historic sites and forestland. The serving utility must also describe the substations it will use and the transmission voltage required. An expansion of an approved facility that “does not exceed an additional 100 megawatts” is exempt. The statute does not limit any locality's existing zoning authority.[1]

How a row is read

Each row records the route, the district or parcels where it applies, the ordinance's own name for the use if it has one, the provision relied on, and what the ordinance does with a use it does not list. Where the locality's own record shows how it administers a provision, the row follows that practice; otherwise it follows the text and says so. Each row also carries a confidence level and, where a document is still outstanding, names the one whose reading would most firm the row up. Appendix B explains the codes.

3. WHAT THE REGISTER SHOWS ABOUT THE STATUTE

Section 15.2-2209.5 ties the state's site assessment to three instruments: the rezoning, the special exception and the special use permit. A new facility expected to need 100 megawatts or more is subject to the assessment when it needs one of them, unless it is an expansion small enough for the statute to exempt. Approved by right, the same facility never is.[1]

That puts the statute's reach in the hands of local zoning text, in many places written for other kinds of buildings and some of it far older than the statute. Hanover County staff told a county committee in June 2026 that the use appears in the county's ordinance “as early as 1979.”[3]

On the register's reading, that text keeps the assessment out of reach somewhere in 44 of the 133 counties and cities. In 37 of them a data center can be approved by right, and the other seven are coded as having no zoning ordinance. In ten more the answer turns on how a general category or an administrator's finding would be read, and the locality has not said on the record read.

Where the record shows which way a change moved, it has mostly moved toward the statute. Of the 52 localities that have changed how a data center is approved, 22 had a by-right route before the change and have none after. In eighteen of those a data center now needs a special permit (Appendix B) and in one a rezoning, so a new facility expected to need 100 megawatts or more there is now subject to the assessment. The other three left no route at all. In four the change ran the other way: Botetourt County, Charles City County, Pittsylvania County and Prince Edward County wrote a by-right route where the ordinance had not addressed the use or had required a permit. For seven of the 52, the records reviewed do not establish the route before the change.

Under the statute, a locality brings every large facility within the assessment only by requiring one of the three approvals wherever a data center can go. Of the 133, 41 have done that, three of them by admitting the use only in a district that must first be reached by rezoning.

PART TWO

The statewide picture

4. THE STATEWIDE MAP

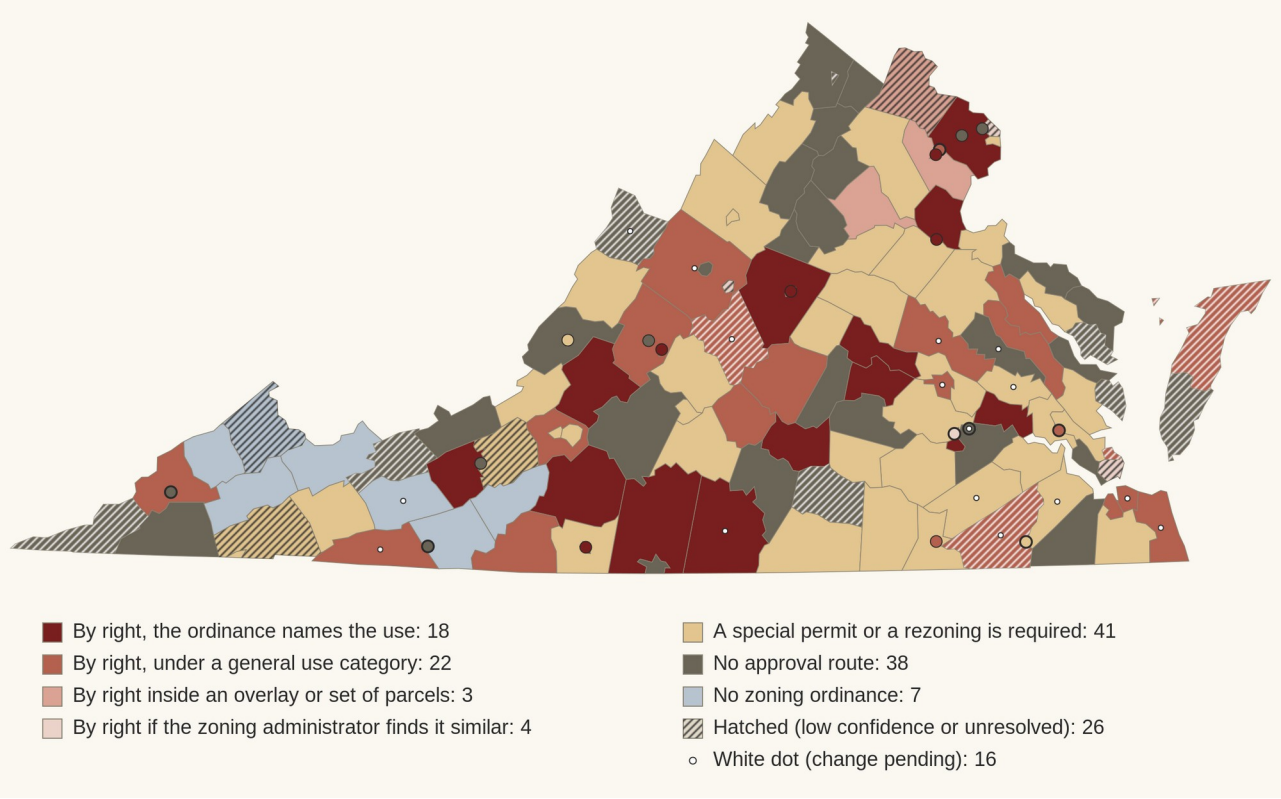


Figure 1. How a data center is approved in each Virginia county and independent city, November 19, 2026. Colors give the route. Small cities are drawn as circles. Hatching, or a heavy ring around a small city's circle, marks a row at low confidence or one whose answer turns on something unresolved. A white dot marks a locality that has adopted no change and has one drafted, initiated or set for hearing.[2,4]

The interactive version, with a page for every county and city:
tommynturner.com/places

By right somewhere: 47 localities, ten of them on a reading the locality has not confirmed. A vote required: 41, of which 38 need a special permit of some kind (Appendix B) and three a rezoning. No route: 38. The remaining seven are coded as having no zoning ordinance.

Where the patterns fall

The seven counties coded as having no zoning ordinance lie in the west in two groups, between Floyd County and the Kentucky line: Buchanan County, Carroll County, Dickenson County, Floyd County, Russell County, Tazewell County and Wythe County. The 22 localities that moved off by right have no single home. They run from the City of Bristol in the far southwest to the City of Chesapeake in Hampton Roads, with groups around Richmond and Fredericksburg, in the Shenandoah Valley and in Southside.

5. BY RIGHT: NAMED USES, GENERAL CATEGORIES AND SIZE CAPS

Of the 47 localities where the register finds a by-right route, eighteen list a data center as a use and permit it in a zoning district. In 22 more, the by-right route runs through a general category such as “data processing” or “computer centers,” often one written before data centers were a land use anyone planned for. A few of those category entries were written or amended recently, and some definitions now name data centers inside the general use. In three the route runs through an overlay or a defined set of parcels, some of which name the use, and in four it depends on the zoning administrator finding a data center similar to a listed use. In ten of the 47, the route turns on a reading the locality has not confirmed on the record read. Table 1 lists all 47 and marks those ten unresolved.

Table 1. The 47 counties and cities where the register finds a by-right route, by form

Form	County or city	State assessment	Confidence
By right, use named	Albemarle County	No, within a size cap	High
By right, use named	Botetourt County	No	Medium
By right, use named	City of Buena Vista	No	Medium
By right, use named	Charles City County	No	Medium
By right, use named	City of Charlottesville	No	High
By right, use named	Fairfax County	No	Medium
By right, use named	Franklin County	No	Medium
By right, use named	City of Fredericksburg	No	Medium
By right, use named	Goochland County	No	Medium
By right, use named	Halifax County	No	Medium
By right, use named	City of Manassas	No	High
By right, use named	City of Martinsville	No	High
By right, use named	City of Petersburg	No	Medium
By right, use named	Pittsylvania County	No	High
By right, use named	Powhatan County	No	Medium
By right, use named	Prince Edward County	No	Medium
By right, use named	Pulaski County	No	Medium
By right, use named	Stafford County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Accomack County	Unresolved	Low
By right, general category	Appomattox County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Augusta County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Buckingham County	No	Medium
By right, general category	City of Emporia	No	Medium
By right, general category	Essex County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Grayson County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Hanover County	No	Medium
By right, general category	King and Queen County	No	Medium
By right, general category	City of Manassas Park	Unresolved	Low
By right, general category	Nelson County	Unresolved	Low
By right, general category	City of Norfolk	No	Medium
By right, general category	Patrick County	No	Medium
By right, general category	City of Poquoson	Unresolved	Low
By right, general category	City of Portsmouth	No	Medium

Form	County or city	State assessment	Confidence
By right, general category	City of Richmond	No	Medium
By right, general category	Roanoke County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Rockbridge County	No	Medium
By right, general category	Southampton County	Unresolved	Low
By right, general category	City of Virginia Beach	No	Medium
By right, general category	City of Williamsburg	Unresolved	Low
By right, general category	Wise County	No	Medium
By right, overlay or parcels	Culpeper County	No	Medium
By right, overlay or parcels	Loudoun County	No	Low
By right, overlay or parcels	Prince William County	No	Medium
By right on administrator's finding	Arlington County	Unresolved	Medium
By right on administrator's finding	City of Colonial Heights	Unresolved	Medium
By right on administrator's finding	City of Hampton	Unresolved	Medium
By right on administrator's finding	City of Waynesboro	Unresolved	Medium

The general categories are hard to settle. A category such as “data processing” could describe a payroll office with 40 clerks or a 300-megawatt server campus with a dozen staff. In six of the 22 localities, nothing in the records reviewed ties the category to a data center, and the row is coded as unresolved. Localities asked about categories of this kind answered both ways, as Section 9 sets out.

Size caps

In Albemarle County every by-right route is capped by size. A stand-alone data center is allowed by right up to an aggregate 40,000 square feet of gross floor area per lot. An accessory one is allowed on the same site as a permitted use if the site's primary user runs it for its own data and it, with its support systems and structures, takes no more than 25 percent of the primary use's gross floor area. Above 40,000 square feet, a stand-alone one needs one of the three approvals, which brings the assessment if the facility is expected to need 100 megawatts or more. In a few other localities some districts carry a cap and others do not; those rows are coded by the uncapped route.

6. APPROVAL WITHOUT THE ASSESSMENT

In 44 counties and cities there is at least one place where a data center can be approved with no rezoning, special exception or special use permit. Of those, 37 allow it by right. The other seven are coded as having no zoning ordinance, so there is nothing to rezone. Carroll County, one of them, has a stand-alone data center ordinance under which the Board of Supervisors approves a project's conformance with the comprehensive plan when the project exceeds the ordinance's size thresholds or lies outside an industrial park. That approval is not one of the three instruments the statute names.

In some of these 37 localities, other districts require a vote, and the by-right district may be small. A county counts as by right if any district or parcel set allows the use by right, however few acres it covers, and each row of the register says where. The count measures how many local governments have left at least one place where the statute does not require the assessment.

The statute question is unresolved in ten, all of them general-category or administrator-finding rows where the locality has not said on the record read which way it reads its own text.

PART THREE

Change

7. WHAT HAS CHANGED

In all, 52 counties and cities have adopted at least one change to how a data center is approved, and for 38 of them the change the register records was adopted in 2025 or later. One adoption, Washington County's, is known from a press report, and its row says so. Some changes created a data center use where the ordinance had none. Others added standards or took the use out of a by-right list. Figure 2 shows when they came.

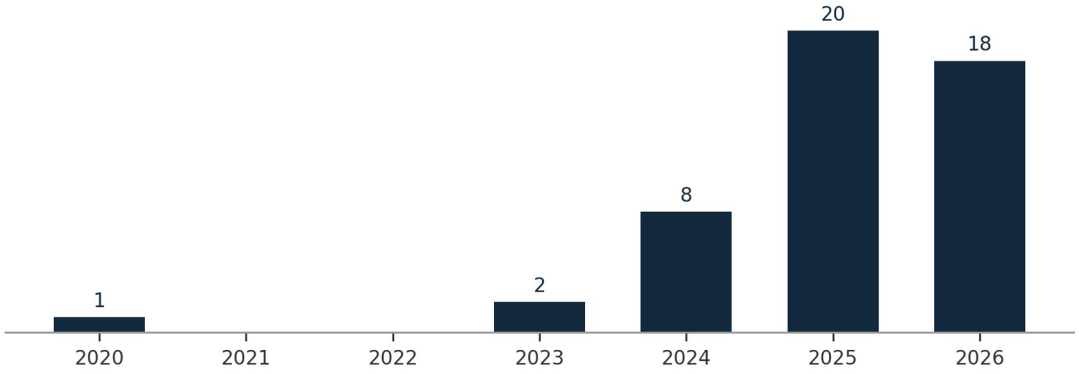


Figure 2. Adopted changes to how a data center is approved, by the year of the change each row records, in the 52 counties and independent cities with one. For three the records reviewed do not establish a single year; they are not shown. The 2026 bar runs through November 19, 2026.[2]

Taking the use out of a by-right list is the clearest trend in the register. In 22 localities a data center was allowed by right in some form before the change the register records, and is not now. Of them, eighteen now require a special permit, one a rezoning, and three have no route at all. Most of the changes are recent: sixteen of the 22 were adopted in 2025 or 2026. Three came earlier. The other three are the localities Figure 2 leaves out. Table 2 lists them.

Table 2. The 22 counties and cities that took away a by-right route

County or city	Before the change	Now	Change date
Amherst County	By right, use named	Special permit	2026-08-18
City of Bristol	By right, use named	Special permit	between 2023-07-24 and 2026-09-08
Brunswick County	By right, use named	Special permit	2026-09-16 (I-1); 2026-10-21 (B-1)
Campbell County	By right, use named	Special permit	2025-12-02
Caroline County	By right, use named	Rezoning	2024-12-10
City of Chesapeake	By right (form not established)	Special permit	2026-08-18
Chesterfield County	By right, use named	Special permit	2025-09-17
City of Danville	By right, use named	No approval route	2025-12-02
Fluvanna County	By right, use named	Special permit	2025-12-17
Frederick County	By right, use named	No approval route	2026-09-23
City of Harrisonburg	By right, general category	Special permit	2025-01-28
Henrico County	By right, use named	Special permit	2025-06-10

County or city	Before the change	Now	Change date
James City County	By right, general category	Special permit	2025-09-09
King George County	By right, use named	Special permit	2023-12-19
Louisa County	By right, overlay or parcels	Special permit	2024-08-05
City of Lynchburg	By right (form not established)	Special permit	2026-07-14
Mecklenburg County	By right (form not established)	Special permit	2026-05-11
Orange County	By right, use named	Special permit	not established
Rockingham County	By right, use named	Special permit	2025-09-10
Shenandoah County	By right, general category	Special permit	2026-06-23
Spotsylvania County	By right (form not established)	Special permit	not established
City of Suffolk	By right on administrator's finding	No approval route	2026-10-21

The four localities where the record shows the change running the other way, toward a by-right route, are named in Section 3.

8. PENDING CHANGES

Among localities that have adopted no change, sixteen have one drafted, initiated by the governing body or planning commission, or set for hearing. A study, a staff presentation or a member's question does not count as pending. A locality that has already adopted a change can have another under way, as the City of Petersburg does (in November its Council tabled the amendment for 90 days, by a press account); the register records that in the row and does not count it here. Table 3 gives the stage each row records.

Table 3. The sixteen counties and cities with a change pending

County or city	Route now	Stage on the record read
Augusta County	By right, general category	Staff draft Article VI.E (special use permit in two districts); Board directed changes October 26, 2026, due back November 23
Grayson County	By right, general category	Board motion of October 8, 2026, to require a special use permit for a data center; Planning Commission to work on the policy
Halifax County	By right, use named	Board voted 7-1 on March 2, 2026, to direct a draft; goal date October 1, 2026; outcome not read
Hanover County	By right, general category	Board voted 7-0 on June 24, 2026, to develop an ordinance; on September 24, 2026, the county's Community Development Committee paused discussion until its February meeting
Highland County	No approval route	Resolution of intent October 6, 2026; drafts on the November 4, 2026, agenda, one a conditional use in the Light Industrial district
City of Hopewell	No approval route	City staff report an amendment pending (email of November 17, 2026); draft and initiating action not read
Isle of Wight County	Special permit	Planning Commission work sessions on a draft (revision of October 20, 2026)
King William County	No approval route	Ordinance 09-26, initiated by the Planning Commission; tabled by the Board April 13, 2026; work session on the draft June 22, 2026; an October 26, 2026, proposal would fold it into the comprehensive plan update
Nelson County	By right, general category	Ordinance rewrite draft of October 28, 2026: data center by special use permit; not yet at public hearing
New Kent County	Special permit	Staff draft performance standards presented September 29, 2026; no action

County or city	Route now	Stage on the record read
City of Norfolk	By right, general category	Planning Commission initiated a text amendment August 27, 2026, and recommended approval October 22, 2026
City of Richmond	By right, general category	Code Refresh Public Review Draft #3 (August 17, 2026) marks the use not allowed in any district; not introduced
Southampton County	By right, general category	Planning Commission draft of November 12, 2026: conditional use permit in M-1 only
Sussex County	Special permit	Zoning ordinance rewrite; Board agreed November 5, 2026, to take it to public hearing December 17; whether the current draft carries a data center row not read
City of Virginia Beach	By right, general category	Council moratorium resolution of August 18, 2026, pending an ordinance regulating data centers
Wythe County	No zoning ordinance	Draft land use ordinance 4.02; Planning Commission hearing October 26, 2026; Board hearing tentatively December 3

9. WHAT LOCALITIES SAID

Between November 14 and 17, 2026, the author sent 43 localities (42 counties and cities and one town) a short written question built from the register's reading of each one's ordinance. Most questions asked how a specific provision treats a data center; a few asked whether the locality has a zoning ordinance at all, or what an earlier statement rested on. Written answers had come from 21 of them by November 19, 2026: City of Alexandria, Alleghany County, Augusta County, Bath County, City of Bristol, Clarke County, Cumberland County, Dickenson County, City of Fairfax, City of Falls Church, City of Hopewell, City of Lexington, Madison County, Northumberland County, Page County, Prince George County, Rappahannock County, City of Salem, City of Staunton, City of Williamsburg and Wise County.

The coded route and statute answer stood in twelve of the 21. In the rest, the answer settled a question the text left open or changed the row.

In one case the published code appears to be out of date. The City of Bristol's community development director wrote that the by-right listing for “Data or Call Center” had recently been removed in every district, leaving a special use permit, and that “it looks as though the ordinance was incorrectly updated in Municode.”[5] As read on November 14, the published code still listed the use by right in one business district.

Where a general category could be read either way, the answers split. The City of Fairfax and the City of Falls Church each have text that could support a route: an office group that includes data processing in Fairfax, and a special exception for “other uses” on large sites in one Falls Church district. Fairfax's zoning administrator wrote that “conventional Data Centers are currently not permitted in the City of Fairfax.”[6] Falls Church's zoning administrator wrote that “absent a zoning ordinance amendment establishing provisions for data centers, this use would not be permitted in the City under the current zoning framework.”[7] Augusta County's zoning administrator read the county's general category the other way, writing that the ordinance “allows a data center [as] a permitted use.”[8] Wise County's zoning administrator wrote that the Board had amended the ordinance to include data centers in its M-1 and M-2 districts.[9] The register codes Wise as by right under a general category, because the amendment added a data processing and computer centers use.

The City of Salem's instrument has its own name. The city treats a data center as a “Use Not Provided For,” approved by City Council, and its planning and zoning administrator wrote that “the permit process is the same as a special exception permit, however, it is a separate permit.”[10] The state code defines a special exception as “a special use that is a use not permitted in a particular district except by a special use permit granted under the provisions of this chapter and any zoning ordinances adopted herewith.”[11] The register reads Salem's permit as that instrument and codes it as triggering the assessment.

Northumberland County's zoning administrator wrote, “I have had the luxury of not having to deal with that yet,” and that if an application were made he thought a new use and ordinance would be written for it, “like medium to large solar facilities.”[12]

The City of Williamsburg has not decided. Its zoning administrator wrote that no determination has been made on whether a data center is a “data processing center” under the city's code, and that use determinations are made case by case from the details of a specific proposal. The reply adds: “The City has not received a proposal of that kind.”[13] The row stays unresolved. In that city, the answer for a general category awaits a specific proposal or a request for a written determination.

Highland County's zoning administrator answered neither of the author's emailed questions. In a telephone interview with the author, he said the county has no data center regulation and sees data centers as outside the scope of its light industrial district. The register codes Highland as having no approval route, at low confidence, on the author's notes of that call.[14]

Several replies noted that they were not formal zoning determinations. The register records each as the locality's stated position on the date given.

PART FOUR

Method

10. METHOD AND LIMITS

The register is built from public records: each locality's codified ordinance as posted, the adopting ordinances and minutes where they were read, and the localities' written answers. Highland County's row rests on the author's notes of a telephone interview with its zoning administrator on November 19, 2026, and carries low confidence. Some rows rest in part on a press report, and each of those says so.

Rows were read between November 4 and 17, 2026, and rows resting on a locality's answer were updated through November 19. The last full source audit, a currency check on November 15, looked for changes adopted after the rows then on hand were read. Meetings set or proposed for November 18 and 19, in Fluvanna, Brunswick and Loudoun counties, among others, are recorded as set or proposed; their outcomes were not read. Each row prints the source's codified-through or currency line where the source gives one, so a reader can tell how current the text was.

Confidence is recorded for every row. High means the ordinance was read directly, the citation verified and the answer unambiguous. Medium means the route is established but one element, such as the adopting ordinance or the scope of a provision, was not read. Low means the question the row turns on is still open on the record, or the coding itself rests on interview notes or a press report. On November 19, 2026, the rows stood at 25 high, 86 medium and 22 low, and 26 carried low confidence or an unresolved answer on the statute. The map hatches those rows.

Each count is a count of local ordinances. A locality's statement of how it reads its own ordinance is recorded as given, and can change without any amendment to the text. The register is also a dated observation: ordinances change, and anyone relying on a row should re-read the cited provision.

The five towns in the register were carried from earlier versions. They appear at the end of Appendix A and are left out of the report's statewide counts and the map.

APPENDIX A. THE REGISTER IN SHORT FORM

One line per county and independent city, then the five towns, from the register rows as of November 19, 2026. The color square repeats the map's color for the route. Dates are year-month-day where the record gives a day. Appendix B explains the columns. The full row for each locality, with the ordinance text, citation, source and open items, is in the register.[2]

	County or city	Route	State assessment	Change	Change date	Confidence
	Accomack County	By right, general category	Unresolved			Low
	Albemarle County	By right, use named	No, within a size cap	Adopted	2025-04-02	High
	City of Alexandria	Special permit	Yes			High
	Alleghany County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Amelia County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Amherst County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-08-18	High
	Appomattox County	By right, general category	No			Medium
	Arlington County	By right on administrator's finding	Unresolved			Medium
	Augusta County	By right, general category	No	Pending		Medium
	Bath County	Special permit	Yes			Medium
	Bedford County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Bland County	No approval route	No route			Low
	Botetourt County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2024-11-26	Medium
	City of Bristol	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	between 2023-07-24 and 2026-09-08	Medium
	Brunswick County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-09-16 (I-1); 2026-10-21 (B-1)	Medium
	Buchanan County	No zoning ordinance	No			Low
	Buckingham County	By right, general category	No			Medium
	City of Buena Vista	By right, use named	No			Medium
	Campbell County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-12-02	High
	Caroline County	Rezoning	Yes, on the rezoning	Adopted	2024-12-10	Medium
	Carroll County	No zoning ordinance	No	Adopted	2026-11-02 (emergency ordinance 2026-09-14, superseded)	Medium
	Charles City County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2024-04-23	Medium
	Charlotte County	No approval route	No route			High
	City of Charlottesville	By right, use named	No			High

	County or city	Route	State assessment	Change	Change date	Confidence
	City of Chesapeake	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-08-18	High
	Chesterfield County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-09-17	Medium
	Clarke County	No approval route	No route			High
	City of Colonial Heights	By right on administrator's finding	Unresolved			Medium
	City of Covington	Special permit	Yes			Medium
	Craig County	Special permit	Yes			Medium
	Culpeper County	By right, overlay or parcels	No	Adopted	2025-09-02	Medium
	Cumberland County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	City of Danville	No approval route	No route	Adopted	2025-12-02	Medium
	Dickenson County	No zoning ordinance	No			Medium
	Dinwiddie County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-01-21	Medium
	City of Emporia	By right, general category	No	Adopted	2025-09-24	Medium
	Essex County	By right, general category	No			Medium
	City of Fairfax	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Fairfax County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2024-09-10	Medium
	City of Falls Church	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Fauquier County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-10-08	High
	Floyd County	No zoning ordinance	No			Medium
	Fluvanna County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-12-17	High
	City of Franklin	Special permit	Yes			Low
	Franklin County	By right, use named	No			Medium
	Frederick County	No approval route	No route	Adopted	2026-09-23	High
	City of Fredericksburg	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2025-03-11	Medium
	City of Galax	No approval route	No route			Low
	Giles County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Gloucester County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2024-09-03	Medium
	Goochland County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2025-11-06	Medium
	Grayson County	By right, general category	No	Pending		Medium
	Greene County	No approval route	No route	Adopted	2025-02-25	High
	Greensville County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2024-06-03	Medium
	Halifax County	By right, use named	No	Pending		Medium
	City of Hampton	By right on administrator's finding	Unresolved			Medium

	County or city	Route	State assessment	Change	Change date	Confidence
	Hanover County	By right, general category	No	Pending		Medium
	City of Harrisonburg	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-01-28	Medium
	Henrico County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-06-10	Medium
	Henry County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-08-25	Medium
	Highland County	No approval route	No route	Pending		Low
	City of Hopewell	No approval route	No route	Pending		Low
	Isle of Wight County	Special permit	Yes	Pending		Medium
	James City County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-09-09	High
	King and Queen County	By right, general category	No			Medium
	King George County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2023-12-19	Medium
	King William County	No approval route	No route	Pending		Medium
	Lancaster County	No approval route	No route			Low
	Lee County	No approval route	No route			Low
	City of Lexington	No approval route	No route			High
	Loudoun County	By right, overlay or parcels	No	Adopted	2025-03-18	Low
	Louisa County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2024-08-05	Medium
	Lunenburg County	No approval route	No route			Low
	City of Lynchburg	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-07-14	High
	Madison County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	City of Manassas	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2026-02-23	High
	City of Manassas Park	By right, general category	Unresolved			Low
	City of Martinsville	By right, use named	No			High
	Mathews County	No approval route	No route			Low
	Mecklenburg County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-05-11	High
	Middlesex County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Montgomery County	Special permit	Yes			Low
	Nelson County	By right, general category	Unresolved	Pending		Low
	New Kent County	Special permit	Yes	Pending		Medium
	City of Newport News	No approval route	No route			Medium
	City of Norfolk	By right, general category	No	Pending		Medium
	Northampton County	No approval route	No route			Low
	Northumberland County	No approval route	No route			Medium

	County or city	Route	State assessment	Change	Change date	Confidence
	City of Norton	No approval route	No route			Low
	Nottoway County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-07-17	Medium
	Orange County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	not established	Medium
	Page County	No approval route	No route			High
	Patrick County	By right, general category	No			Medium
	City of Petersburg	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2025-01-21	Medium
	Pittsylvania County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2026-01-15	High
	City of Poquoson	By right, general category	Unresolved			Low
	City of Portsmouth	By right, general category	No			Medium
	Powhatan County	By right, use named	No			Medium
	Prince Edward County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2020-07-14	Medium
	Prince George County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Prince William County	By right, overlay or parcels	No	Adopted	2026-09-22	Medium
	Pulaski County	By right, use named	No			Medium
	City of Radford	No approval route	No route			Medium
	Rappahannock County	No approval route	No route			High
	City of Richmond	By right, general category	No	Pending		Medium
	Richmond County	Rezoning	Yes, on the rezoning			Medium
	City of Roanoke	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-07-06	Medium
	Roanoke County	By right, general category	No			Medium
	Rockbridge County	By right, general category	No	Adopted	2026-02-23	Medium
	Rockingham County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-09-10	Medium
	Russell County	No zoning ordinance	No			Medium
	City of Salem	Special permit	Yes			Medium
	Scott County	No approval route	No route			High
	Shenandoah County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-06-23	High
	Smyth County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-07-09	Medium
	Southampton County	By right, general category	Unresolved	Pending		Low
	Spotsylvania County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	not established	Medium
	Stafford County	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2023-10-17	Medium
	City of Staunton	No approval route	No route			Medium
	City of Suffolk	No approval route	No route	Adopted	2026-10-21	Medium

	County or city	Route	State assessment	Change	Change date	Confidence
	Surry County	Rezoning	Yes, on the rezoning	Adopted	2024-01-04	Medium
	Sussex County	Special permit	Yes	Pending		Medium
	Tazewell County	No zoning ordinance	No			Medium
	City of Virginia Beach	By right, general category	No	Pending		Medium
	Warren County	No approval route	No route	Withdrawn		High
	Washington County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-11-10 (per press)	Low
	City of Waynesboro	By right on administrator's finding	Unresolved			Medium
	Westmoreland County	No approval route	No route			Medium
	City of Williamsburg	By right, general category	Unresolved			Low
	City of Winchester	No approval route	No route			Low
	Wise County	By right, general category	No	Adopted	2025-06-12	Medium
	Wythe County	No zoning ordinance	No	Pending		Medium
	York County	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-06-17	High
	Towns, not counted in this report					
	Town of Blacksburg	By right on administrator's finding	Unresolved			Medium
	Town of Christiansburg	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-09-22	Medium
	Town of Culpeper	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2025-10-14	Medium
	Town of Orange	Special permit	Yes	Adopted	2026-02-17	Medium
	Town of South Hill	By right, use named	No	Adopted	2020-09	Medium

APPENDIX B. CODES

Code	Meaning
By right, use named	The ordinance names the use and permits it by right in at least one district
By right, general category	Permitted by right under a general use category not called a data center
By right, overlay or parcels	By right inside an overlay or a defined set of parcels laid on already-zoned land
By right on administrator's finding	By right only if the zoning administrator finds a data center similar to a listed use
Special permit	A conditional or special use permit, special exception or similar discretionary permit is required
Rezoning	The district that admits the use must first be reached by rezoning
No approval route	The ordinance gives no route to approval short of amending it
No zoning ordinance	No general zoning ordinance covers the area

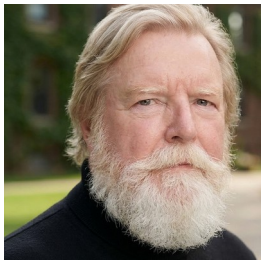
The “State assessment” column in Appendix A answers whether the route requires a rezoning, special exception or special use permit. “Yes” means every route open to a data center requires one of the three. “No” means a data center can be approved somewhere in the locality with none of the three. “No, within a size cap” means that holds only up to a stated size. “Yes, on the rezoning” means the only district that admits the use must be reached by rezoning. “Unresolved” means the answer turns on a determination not yet made or a reading the record does not settle. “No route” means no approval route currently exists.

“Change” is Adopted where an amendment has altered whether, where or by what route a data center may be approved, Pending where one is drafted, initiated or set for hearing and none has been adopted, and Withdrawn where a proposed amendment was withdrawn before adoption. “Change date” is the date of the adopted change the row records, in year-month-day form, or year and month where the record gives no day; a range or “not established” means the records reviewed do not settle it. Confidence levels are defined in Section 10. The full codebook, with fourteen coding rules, is the Codes sheet of the register workbook.

NOTES

1. Va. Code § 15.2-2209.5 (2026 Acts, cc. 567, 568), subsections A, B, C, F and G.
2. Virginia Data Center Entitlement Route Register, version 1.1, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.24374645 (all versions: 10.5281/zenodo.24151023). Every count, table and figure in this report is computed from its rows, and each row names its source.
3. Hanover County row of the register: county staff presentation to the Community Development Committee, June 12, 2026.
4. Boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau cartographic boundary files (2017), via us-atlas 3.0.1.
5. City of Bristol, Community Development Director, email of November 17, 2026.
6. City of Fairfax, Zoning Administrator, email of November 17, 2026.
7. City of Falls Church, Director / Zoning Administrator, email of November 17, 2026.
8. Augusta County, Zoning Administrator, email of November 17, 2026.
9. Wise County, Building Official / Zoning Administrator, email of November 17, 2026.
10. City of Salem, Planning & Zoning Administrator, email of November 17, 2026.
11. Va. Code § 15.2-2201, definition of “special exception.”
12. Northumberland County, Zoning Administrator (title from the county's Building and Zoning page; the email carries no signature), email of November 17, 2026.
13. City of Williamsburg, Zoning Administrator, email of November 18, 2026.
14. Highland County row of the register: the author's notes of a telephone interview with the county's zoning administrator, November 19, 2026.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tommy N. Turner is an independent researcher on land use, grid and local government policy, based in Williamsburg and Christiansburg, Virginia. He is the author of the Virginia Data Center Series: 51 reports, case studies and datasets, built from public records, on the data center buildout in Virginia, Georgia and Tennessee. He writes From the Record, a column for RTO Insider.

This report belongs to that series. Its coded entries are rows in a deposited register, and each row names the record it rests on.

His work also appears in Planetizen, Cardinal News and Virginia Mercury, and his op-eds have run in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, The Virginian-Pilot and Daily Press, The Virginia Gazette and The Roanoke Times.

Roughly three decades in corporate banking, banking technology and consulting preceded the research, including two years of corporate banking at Wachovia and seventeen years running banking systems through ownership transitions at Logica, Misys and Zoot Enterprises. He holds an MBA in Finance from Emory University's Goizueta Business School, a BBA in Accounting and Economics from the University of West Georgia, and a Higher Education Teaching Certificate from Harvard's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. Since July 2026, Turner has served on the advisory board of Data Centers and the Southern Energy Buildout: Implications for Electricity Costs, Energy Transition, and Energy Justice, a three-year Sloan Foundation-funded study at Emory University. This report is independent, self-funded work and is not part of that study.

How to cite: Cite the concept DOI, which resolves to the latest version: Turner, Tommy N. 2026. How a Data Center Gets Approved in Virginia. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24323724. Companion dataset: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24151023.

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