

Recommendations and Policy Options: Data Centers in Virginia

JLARC staff typically make recommendations to address findings during reviews. Staff also sometimes propose policy options rather than recommendations. The three most common reasons staff propose policy options rather than recommendations are: (1) the action proposed is a policy judgment best made by the General Assembly or other elected officials, (2) the evidence indicates that addressing a report finding is not necessarily required, but doing so could be beneficial, or (3) there are multiple ways in which a report finding could be addressed and there is insufficient evidence of a single best way to address the finding.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Virginia Economic Development Partnership should clarify in site characterization and development guidelines that potential data center sites are eligible for grants under the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 2

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to clarify that electric utilities have the authority to delay, but not deny, service to customers when the addition of customer load cannot be supported by the transmission system or available generation capacity. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 3

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to expand the Accelerated Renewable Buyers program, which allows large customers of energy utilities to claim credit for purchases of solar and wind *energy* to offset certain utility charges, to also allow customers to claim partial credit for purchases of *capacity* from battery energy storage systems based on the current PJM electric load carrying capacity rating. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 4

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to require that utilities establish a demand response program for large data center customers and to require that these customers participate in the program. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 5

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to direct Dominion Energy to develop a plan for addressing the risk of generation and transmission infrastructure costs being stranded with existing customers and file that plan with the State Corporation Commission as part of its biennial rate review filing or as a separate filing. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 6

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to expressly authorize local governments to (i) require proposed data center developments to submit water use estimates and (ii) consider water use when making rezoning and special use permit decisions related to data center development. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 7

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to expressly authorize local governments to require sound modeling studies for data center development projects prior to project approval. (Chapter 6)

RECOMMENDATION 8

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to expressly authorize local governments to establish and enforce maximum allowable sound levels for data center facilities, including (i) using alternative low frequency noise metrics and (ii) setting noise rules and enforcement mechanisms in their zoning ordinances, separate from existing noise ordinances. (Chapter 6)

Policy Options to Consider

POLICY OPTION 1

The General Assembly could consider amending the Code of Virginia to require that, as a condition of receiving the sales tax exemption, data center companies meet and certify to an energy management standard, such as the International Organization for Standardization's 50001 standard for energy management. (Chapter 3)

POLICY OPTION 2

The General Assembly could consider amending the Code of Virginia to allow electric cooperatives to create for-profit subsidiary companies that could fulfill their legal obligation to provide energy services (retail sales) to customers with load capacity of over 90 MW. (Chapter 4)

POLICY OPTION 3

The General Assembly could consider amending the Code of Virginia to require that electric utilities establish caps on participation in retail choice that protect ratepayers from undue costs, and that such caps be approved by the State Corporation Commission through a formal case process. (Chapter 4)

POLICY OPTION 4

The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to require that, as a condition of receiving the data center sales and use tax exemption, all new data center developments in the Northern Virginia Ozone Nonattainment Area use only Tier 4 generators, Tier 2 generators with selective catalytic reduction systems, or generators with equivalent or lower emission rates. (Chapter 5)

POLICY OPTION 5

The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to require that, as a condition of receiving the sales and use tax exemption, data center companies meet and certify to an environmental management standard, such as the International Organization for Standardization's 14001 standard for Environmental Management Systems. (Chapter 5)

POLICY OPTION 6

The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to require that, as a condition for receiving the sales and use tax exemption, data center companies conduct a Phase I historic resource study of a proposed development site, as well as a viewshed analysis when a proposed site is located within a certain distance of a registered historic site, and report the study findings to the appropriate locality prior to development. (Chapter 5)

POLICY OPTION 7

The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to require that, as a condition for receiving the sales and use tax exemption, data center companies conduct a sound modeling study prior to the development of a proposed data center that is to be located within a certain distance of a residential development or area zoned for residential development and provide the study findings to the appropriate locality. (Chapter 6)

POLICY OPTION 8

The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to extend the expiration date for the state's sales and use tax exemption for data centers from 2035 to 2050. (Chapter 7)

POLICY OPTION 9

The General Assembly could allow the sales and use tax exemption for data centers to expire in 2035. (Chapter 7)

POLICY OPTION 10

The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to extend a partial sales and use tax exemption for data centers from 2035 to 2050. (Chapter 7)
