City of Plymouth
Community Development

Understanding Data Centers: Key Facts and Local Context

What are data centers?

Data centers are physical facilities that organizations use to store their computing machines and related hardware. This includes information technology (IT) systems infrastructure like servers, data storage drives, and network equipment. Data centers have accompanying accessory uses such as utilities, external mechanical equipment, water towers, and security facilities that may be located on the same site. Data centers form the backbone of the digital world. They support typical everyday tasks such as internet usage, online shopping, gaming, and streaming services. Businesses need data centers for complex processes such as cloud computing, cybersecurity, ecommerce, communications, data processing, and artificial intelligence (AI) driven uses.

Types of data centers:

Enterprise data centers	Managed data centers	Colocation data centers
Privately owned facilities built to support one company's internal data and IT operations.	Third-party facilities that handle another company's hardware, data, and IT systems.	Let businesses rent space for servers while also providing services like maintenance, backup power, and network connections.
Cloud data centers	**Edge data centers**	**Hyperscale data centers**
Owned by cloud providers, who manage the hardware so customers can run websites, apps, and services remotely.	Smaller facilities placed near users to speed up data processing and reduce delays, often linking back to larger data centers.	Large facilities built for massive data processing, allowing companies like Amazon, Google, and Microsoft to operate services at global scale.

Can a hyperscale data center be located in the City of Plymouth?

Recent media coverage has highlighted several area municipalities exploring the possibility of hosting hyperscale data centers. These facilities typically require very large, contiguous development sites—often 200 acres or more. By comparison, all industrially zoned property within the City of Plymouth totals just 168 acres, meaning the City simply does not have a parcel large enough to accommodate a hyperscale facility.

Additionally, Section 78-35 of the City's zoning ordinance states: "Each district, as created in this article, shall be subject to the regulations contained in this ordinance. Uses not expressly permitted are prohibited. Uses for enterprises or purposes that are contrary to federal, state, or local laws or ordinances are prohibited." Data centers are not expressly permitted. They are therefore prohibited. For these reasons—limited land availability and current zoning regulations—a hyperscale data center cannot be located within the City of Plymouth.