

WEST WHITELAND TOWNSHIP

PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

Minutes of the first January meeting

January 6, 2026

Members Present

Denise Jones, Vice-Chair
Keith Choper
Dan Cote
Priyanka Gupta
Virginia Kerlake
Todd Rouse

Township Personnel Present

John Weller, Planning Director
Patrick Gorman, Township Planner
Pam Gural-Bear, Township Manager

Rajesh Kumbhardare, Supervisor

I. CALL TO ORDER

Denise Jones called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and asked all to rise for the pledge to the flag and for a moment of silence for our first responders.

The Commission welcomed newly-appointed members Priyanka Gupta and Keith Choper.

II. REORGANIZATION

Ms. Jones made a motion, seconded by Mr. Cote, to nominate Keith Choper as Chair. The motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Jones yielded the Chair to Mr. Choper.

Mr. Cote made a motion, seconded by Ms. Kerlake, to nominate Denise Jones as Vice-Chair. The motion was unanimously approved.

III. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Weller advised that the Township Solicitor prefers that the Commission issue a formal motion and vote approving meeting minutes rather than accepting the minutes as was done at the December 2, 2025, meeting.

MOTION: To approve the minutes of December 2, 2025, as presented. (Jones/Kerlake)

ACTION: Passed, 4-0-2, with Ms. Gupta and Mr. Choper abstaining as they did not attend the meeting.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

V. PLANS

None.

VI. DISCUSSION

Update on regulations for Data Centers

Mr. Weller reviewed his memorandum of January 2, noting that on December 11, Patrick Gorman and he participated in a webinar sponsored by Penn State about data centers and their regulation. The instructors pointed out what data center developers look for when selecting a site: a robust power grid, existing broadband infrastructure, at least fifty acres of land, and readily available water for cooling. Typical community concerns include impact upon energy resources and water supply, noise, the effects of very large buildings, and decommissioning: what happens to the large buildings when technology changes and renders them obsolete.

Although the Zoning Ordinance does not specifically permit data centers, Mr. Weller advised that the “catch all” provision in §325-19.B(11)(i) of the Zoning Ordinance allows them as a conditional use in the General Industrial (I-2) zoning district. While this is sufficient to satisfy the legal requirement to accommodate all legal uses of property, he asked members to consider whether there are other locations in the Township that would be suitable for data centers as well as what concerns should be addressed by new regulations. He added that, while the Township has the ability to attach reasonable conditions to the approval of a conditional use, the regulations should address issues that we know will be of concern.

Mr. Weller noted that some data center developers have Community Benefit Agreements, but Ms. Kerlake said these agreements are pushed by the industry and do not necessarily offer protections. The developers may also tout a tax revenue benefit, but this would be based upon property taxes: data centers do not create many permanent new jobs. She added that the data center recently approved in East Whiteland Township will have 1.5 million sq.ft. of floor space but will employ only about thirty full-time employees; it will also be second largest energy user in PECO’s service area. Ms. Kerlake also stressed the need for a decommissioning strategy that includes a timeline and requires posting a bond so that taxpayers are protected financially if a data center is simply abandoned when it becomes obsolete.

Mr. Kumbhardare noted that pulling water from the ground for cooling is cheap but can cause the water table to drop. There needs to be a limit to the how much water can be extracted per day. And even with closed loop systems, the water can be contaminated. Members agreed that developers should demonstrate that water capacity is available and will not adversely impact homes and businesses. A plan for water consumption and on-site treatment should be required. There should be a similar requirement for energy consumption to show that the capacity is available and that rates for existing residents and businesses will not increase as a result due to the data center.

Mr. Rouse noted the possibility of decreased property values due to noise/vibration from cooling systems and back-up generators.

Ms. Kerlake added the need for adequate setback requirements, noting that the area zoned I-2 abuts the residential R-1 district.

There was discussion about the various sizes of data centers. “Micro” centers are smaller than 5,000 sq. ft., but an “average” data center can be up to 100,000 sq.ft.) with hyperscale being anything over 100,000 sq.ft. - and can be millions of square feet. While proposed regulations are needed to address average and hyperscale centers (as they have the most

impact on the environment and resources) Mr. Kumbhardare cautioned that even a small data center that is poorly designed can be problematic. It was noted that a minimum of 50 acres is needed for hyperscale centers; the East Whiteland facility is on a 75-acre site.

Recognizing that the larger data centers are often built in phases, Mr. Cote asked if conditional use conditions can be imposed at each phase. Mr. Weller said he believed they could.

Mr. Choper advised of the need to consider atmospheric discharge that can come from cooling towers and/or stacks impacting air quality. Height restrictions on towers should also be considered rather than being left to the determination of the Zoning Hearing Board.

Regarding noise, Mr. Gorman suggested a sound study to establish acceptable decibel levels. Mr. Choper noted the challenge in measuring and enforcing such levels.

Mr. Choper asked if there was a data center nearby that the Commission could visit. While the closest hyperscale centers are in Virginia and West Virginia, Mr. Kumbhardare mentioned the TierPoint - Valley Forge Data Center in Oaks.

Ms. Kerslake stressed the need for approved emergency plans, and Mr. Kumbhardare suggested that a fee be paid to the fire company to compensate for any specialized resources that may be needed to respond to an electrical fire at the scale of the facility.

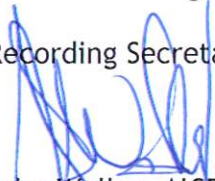
With much of the I-2 district in the carbonate district, the special regulations regarding water in this area were discussed. Article XV of the Zoning Ordinance already restricts activities in the carbonate area, prohibiting new wells and other water extraction. There was further discussion as to whether a large data center was even possible given the lack of available land and the energy and water requirements of large centers. It was pointed out that some data center proposals include plans for an on-site power plant. Ms. Kerslake also cautioned that a developer could buy already-occupied land.

Mr. Weller suggested that perhaps generic regulations with the requirement that the developer address each individual point of concern to the Township's satisfaction would be a way to go. Staff will continue to work on a draft Ordinance for the Commission's future review.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Recording Secretary,



John Weller, AICP
Director of Planning & Zoning

