HEARD COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION
September 22, 2026 – 5:30 P.M.

The Heard County Board of Commissioners held a work session on September 22, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. in the Commission Chamber of the Heard County Administration Building. In attendance at the meeting were Chairman Tracy McCormick, District 1 Commissioner Curtis Mock, District 3 Commissioner Iris Harris, and District 5 Commissioner David Walls. District 2 Commissioner James Perry and District 4 Commissioner Larry Hammond were absent.

Chairman McCormick called the meeting to order to gather citizen input regarding data center development and the potential adoption of a Data Center Ordinance. The meeting focused on hearing public concerns, recommendations, and ideas regarding whether data centers should be permitted in Heard County and, if so, under what conditions.

Angie McCullough delivered the invocation. The Chairman welcomed attendees and expressed appreciation for the large turnout, emphasizing the importance of public involvement in the ordinance development process. Citizens were invited to speak and provide comments for or against data center development.

A number of residents addressed the Board regarding the potential impacts of data center development in Heard County. Several speakers expressed concerns that expanding electrical infrastructure throughout the region could attract future data center projects into the county. Concerns were raised regarding groundwater use, water availability during drought conditions, agricultural land preservation, noise generation, and potential impacts on rural quality of life.

Residents urged the Board to consider strong development standards, including special use permit requirements, substantial setbacks from residential properties, independent impact studies funded by developers, strict noise limitations, and requirements for future site restoration and decommissioning.

Several speakers recommended that any ordinance include protections to preserve Heard County's agricultural heritage and rural character. Others emphasized that while data centers may generate tax revenue, they typically create relatively few permanent jobs when compared to their size and resource demands.

Throughout the discussion, many residents advocated for extending the existing moratorium until additional information becomes available. Speakers emphasized that data center technology and artificial intelligence are evolving rapidly and suggested that delaying a decision could provide the county with better information and more options in the future.

Several citizens also proposed placing the issue before voters through a referendum or some form of countywide public engagement process to better gauge community sentiment.

Water availability emerged as one of the most frequently discussed topics during the meeting. Residents raised concerns regarding the county's existing water infrastructure, private wells, agricultural operations, livestock producers, and the effects that large industrial water users could have on local resources.

Speakers questioned whether current water supplies would be sufficient to support large-scale facilities and what responsibilities the county would assume if water resources became strained.

Concerns were also expressed regarding noise, lighting, wildlife habitat disruption, hunting impacts, and long-term changes to community character.

Several residents stressed that some environmental impacts could be difficult or impossible to reverse once development occurs.

Multiple speakers discussed the rapidly evolving nature of data center technology and artificial intelligence. Several residents suggested that current large-scale data center models could become obsolete within a relatively short time frame as technology continues to advance.

Citizens encouraged the Board to carefully consider whether long-term commitments of land, water, and infrastructure are justified for an industry that may change significantly over the coming years. Others argued that digital infrastructure and data storage demands will continue to grow and that future technological developments should be monitored before decisions are made.

Numerous suggestions were offered for potential inclusion in a future ordinance should the county decide to permit data centers. Recommendations included prohibiting non-disclosure agreements between the county and developers, requiring substantial residential setback distances, mandating developer-funded infrastructure improvements, establishing decommissioning requirements, and requiring restoration bonds to ensure sites can be returned to productive use if abandoned.

Additional recommendations included requiring operators to provide their own power generation where possible, limiting impacts on local utility systems, requiring developers to assume all costs associated with dedicated infrastructure, and implementing penalties for facilities that cease operations prematurely or remove taxable assets after receiving incentives.

Citizens also discussed requiring financial guarantees to prevent abandoned facilities from becoming a burden on taxpayers.

Speakers discussed both the potential benefits and risks associated with tax revenue generated by data centers. Several residents questioned whether tax incentives or property tax reductions would remain sustainable long-term if data centers later downsized, relocated, or ceased operations.

Concerns were raised about the possibility of county budgets and household finances becoming dependent upon temporary revenue sources. Citizens encouraged the Board to consider long-term economic impacts rather than focusing solely on immediate financial benefits.

One resident who works directly in data center construction provided observations regarding ongoing projects in Georgia. She expressed concerns about infrastructure demands, construction traffic, utility capacity, and the specialized workforce required to build and operate large facilities. She noted that

many workers on current projects come from outside the local area and questioned how much direct employment benefit local residents would receive.

Board members thanked attendees for their respectful participation and constructive input throughout the process. Commissioners acknowledged the considerable amount of research and effort citizens have dedicated to studying the issue and noted that many of the recommendations presented would be considered as ordinance discussions continue.

The Board indicated that additional work sessions and discussions will likely be held as the county continues evaluating potential ordinance language and gathering public input. Officials emphasized that no final decisions have been made and that public participation will continue to be encouraged.

With no further business to discuss, Commissioner Harris made a motion to adjourn the work session. Commissioner Walls seconded the motion. Commissioners Harris, Walls, and Mock voted in favor of the motion. The motion carried, and the work session was adjourned.

End time 6:28 p.m.

Katrina Billingsley

County Clerk

Date 10/20/2026

Tracy Mock

Chairman