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Data Centers Are Coming to Will, DuPage & Grundy Counties

What we know, what we don't, and what to ask before they're approved

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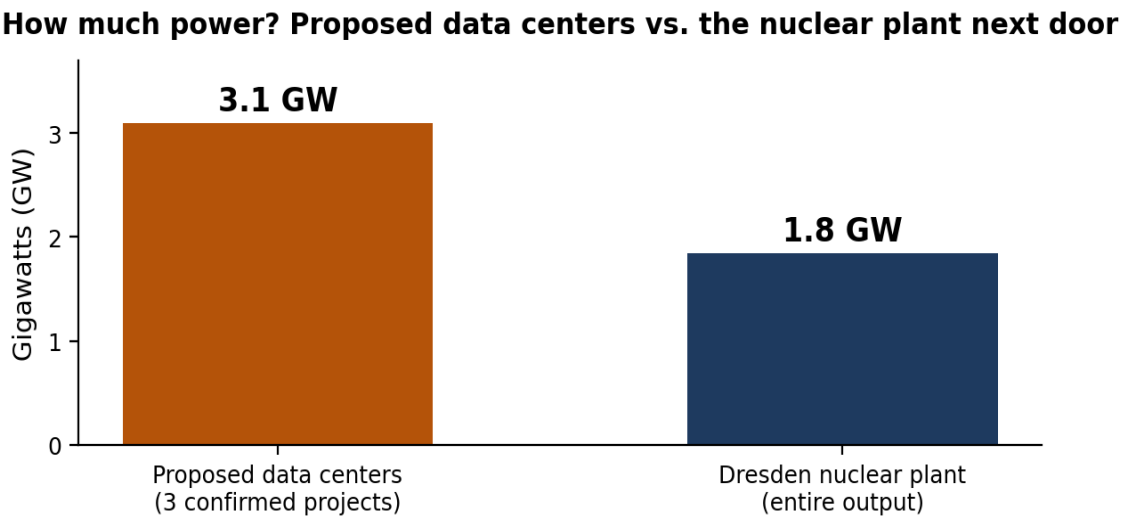
The bottom line, up front

- At least **~3.1 gigawatts** of data-center power demand is already proposed across our three counties — **more than the entire Dresden nuclear plant produces.**
- The idea that these projects will **"provide their own power" is not true.** Public filings show they draw that power **from the ComEd grid** — the same grid forecast to run short by 2029.
- The idea that they will **"pay for their own water" is unproven.** One project (Joliet) disclosed low, closed-loop water use; another (Morris) has the city looking at building new water facilities; and **Illinois has no law requiring data centers to even report their water use** — all on an aquifer that is already being drained.
- The one moment residents have real leverage is **before a project is approved.** After the vote, the real numbers only surface in later filings.

What's being proposed

These are the larger projects that are public. There are almost certainly more — many are filed under shell companies with code names, so even a complete count is hard to get.

County	Project / Developer	Power	Status
Will	Joliet Technology Center — PowerHouse + Hillwood (795 acres, 24 bldgs)	**1,800 MW**	Approved
Grundy	Morris Technology Park — Tract (343 acres, 2.9M sq ft)	**1,000 MW**	Proposed
Grundy	Coal City Campus — Aligned (11 buildings, ~300 acres)	not disclosed	Proposed
Grundy	Grundy site — Cielo Digital	**300 MW**	Proposed
DuPage	Wood Dale — CyrusOne (6 buildings, ~1.4M sq ft)	not disclosed	In development
DuPage	Lisle, Itasca (NTT), Carol Stream — smaller sites	~50 MW & less	Proposed / building



Just three confirmed projects would need roughly 1.7 times the entire output of the Dresden nuclear station in Grundy County. This is why the "they bring their own power" claim does not add up.

Claim 1: "They'll provide their own power." — This is not what the filings say.

The projects do not build their own power plants. They connect to the ComEd electric grid, the same grid that serves your home:

- **Morris (Tract, 1,000 MW):** federal regulators (FERC) approved a transmission agreement with ComEd on April 20, 2026 to supply up to 1 gigawatt **from the grid.**
- **Joliet (1,800 MW):** the developer's own consultants told the City Council that ComEd and the regional grid operator, PJM, reviewed the connection to the grid.
- They are clustering near the Dresden nuclear plant precisely **to draw that firm power off the grid** — not to generate their own.

And the grid is already tight. PJM (our regional grid) could be about 15 GW short of power by 2030, and ComEd forecasts shortfalls in northern Illinois by 2029. Regulators found that **about 70% of this year's regional electricity-cost increase came from data-center demand.** That cost is shared by all ratepayers — including you.

Claim 2: "They'll pay for their own water." — Partly true, mostly unproven.

- **Joliet did well here:** it disclosed a **closed-loop cooling** system and said daily water use would stay **below 150,000 gallons** for the whole campus. If that holds, its water impact is genuinely small. Credit where it is due.
- **Morris did not:** water is unresolved. A city alderman voted against the project over water, and the mayor says the city is **"exploring construction of a larger water facility"** to support it — the opposite of the company paying its own way.
- **The bigger picture:** the deep aquifer under Will and Grundy is **already being drained.** Six area suburbs — including Joliet, Channahon and Minooka — are so short on groundwater that they are building a **$1.5 billion pipeline to Lake Michigan** (finished around 2030). Deep aquifers take **centuries** to refill.
- **And there is no rule requiring disclosure.** Illinois failed to pass a law that would have required data centers to report their water use. So for most projects, we simply do not know.

How big a problem is this really?

The power problem is large and confirmed. The water problem is real but depends on the project — and sits on an aquifer that is already failing.

- **Power:** more than 3 gigawatts of new demand, drawn from a grid heading toward a shortage — roughly a fifth of the entire regional shortfall, from our three counties alone. It flows straight to everyone's electric bills.
- **Water:** some projects may be fine; others are unknown; and all of them draw from a shared, shrinking aquifer with no requirement to even report how much they use.

Why are these being built — and what if the demand doesn't come?

These campuses are not mainly for *training* AI models — they are for *running* them for users. The industry is betting that demand will explode as AI "agents," reasoning models, and video generation use far more computing power per task, and as AI gets built into more products.

But much of this is a **speculative race.** Every company is adding capacity on the assumption the demand will arrive. If it doesn't — or if AI never earns back its enormous cost — a community can be left holding the water use, the grid strain, and the tax breaks for buildings that sit half-empty or are abandoned. That is exactly why the **decommissioning bond** and **rate-protection** conditions below matter: they protect you if the boom does not last.

What residents can ask for — before the vote

The state declined to set rules, so the only real leverage is at the **local approval hearing.** Once a project is approved, the binding numbers move to other agencies where there is no public vote. Before approval, residents and officials can ask that these be made **conditions of approval**, in writing:

- A **binding cap** on power (megawatts) and on water use (gallons per day).
- A **requirement to use closed-loop or air cooling** (no evaporative cooling), which caps water at the source.
- A **quarterly water-use report** to the Illinois State Water Survey.
- A **"capacity assurance"** from ComEd that the project will not raise local rates.
- A **decommissioning bond** so taxpayers are not left with an empty site.
- Public **disclosure of the end tenant** (the company that will actually use it).

Who decides — and how to be heard

Data centers usually need a **special-use permit.** Who votes on it depends on whether the site sits inside a city/village or on unincorporated county land — but in both cases, **the public may speak at a hearing before the vote.**

- **If the project is in a city or village** (for example Joliet, Morris, or Coal City): the **Plan Commission** holds the public hearing, and the **Mayor and City Council or Village Board** cast the final vote. Contact your council or village-board members.
- **If the project is on unincorporated county land:** the **Zoning Board of Appeals** holds the public hearing, the **Land Use / Planning & Zoning Committee** reviews it, and the **County Board** casts the final vote. Contact your County Board member for your district.

• **To find your hearing dates and who represents you,** call your county or village clerk, or check the Planning & Zoning department: **Will County** Land Use Department; **Grundy County** Planning & Zoning Office (grundycountyil.gov); **DuPage County** Building & Zoning Department (dupagecounty.gov).

Make your voice count — before the vote

The special-use permit is where conditions must be attached, **in writing, before the vote.** Attend the **Zoning Board of Appeals** or **Plan Commission** hearing, and contact your **County Board member** (unincorporated land) or your **Mayor and City Council / Village Board** (city or village) to ask for the protections above. Share this explainer with neighbors.

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Where these numbers come from

1. Joliet Technology Center approval, 1.8 GW, water and closed-loop disclosure: Shaw Local / The Herald-News; Data Center Dynamics.
2. Tract Morris Technology Park, 1 GW, FERC-approved ComEd transmission agreement (Apr 20, 2026): Data Center Dynamics; The Real Deal Chicago.
3. Aligned Coal City and Cielo Grundy projects: Village of Coal City; Cleanview; WCSJ News.
4. PJM grid shortfall (~15 GW by 2030), ComEd shortfalls by 2029, 70% of cost increase from data centers: PJM Independent Market Monitor; Citizens Utility Board; ArentFox Schiff; Introl.
5. Aquifer depletion and the $1.5B Lake Michigan pipeline: Illinois State Water Survey; Great Lakes Now; Inside Climate News.
6. Failed Illinois water/energy disclosure law: Circle of Blue.
7. Dresden nuclear output (~1,845 MW) and 2025 license renewal: Constellation Energy; U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

This is an independent explainer compiled from public filings and news reporting by flemінganalytic.com. Power and water figures are as reported and may change as projects proceed; "proposed" projects are not yet built. Figures attributed to a developer — such as Joliet's stated water use — reflect statements made to local officials and should be verified with your county; figures from FERC and ComEd filings are on the independent public record. This document is for public information and is not legal advice.