

MINUTES
DATA CENTER STUDY COMMITTEE
Council Chambers
City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue
Tuesday, September 29, 2026

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Council Member Gloria Betcher, Members present were Council Subcommittee Members Gloria Betcher, Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, and Trey Anderson, and Study Committee Members Merate Barakat (arrived at 7:08), Jacob Gallagher, Bill Gutowski, Lu Liu, Scott Nelson, Chloe Parsons (arrived at 6:06), Jim Pease, Tim Stewart, David Taylor, Lee Anne Willson, Duane Wolf, and Yiwen Wu. Sid Juwarker, Jeff Kopaska, and Rob Pfaff were not present.

Beatty-Hansen suggested that the Introductions (item 2 on the agenda) occur before the charge is read (item 1 on the agenda).

Introduction of Study Committee Members, City Council Subcommittee, and City Staff

Council Subcommittee members and Interim City Attorney Jane Chang introduced themselves and their role as liaisons and facilitators. All Committee members present introduced themselves and their areas of expertise that will contribute to the research focus.

Review of Action Plan approved by Council, including Study Committee charge

Betcher reviewed the Action Plan, Study Committee charge, and the timeline for the research and deliverables, explaining the scope of the research to be completed. The basic charge of the Committee is to research and report on "issues related to data centers: heat generation, localized temperature increases, and impacts on wildlife habitats and human health," which are not included in the code-focused work of City Staff. Committee members asked questions about acceptable topics for research. Betcher clarified expectations. The Committee will decide on research focuses during the next meeting.

Review of Iowa Open Meetings Law Requirements by Interim City Attorney Chang

Interim City Attorney Chang reviewed requirements for all open Committee meetings with a quorum of members present, including posting of the Agenda at least 24 hours prior to the meeting, accessibility to the public, the use of City-assigned email addresses and Microsoft Teams group for interaction and compliance with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

Chang clarified that Open Meetings rules do not apply to subcommittees with fewer than 7 members. She advised that any research teams created be kept small and that all communication between team members be done via the chat function within the City-established the Teams group, where files may also be stored. If emails are sent to the entire

Committee, members should respond individually to the sender, not to the entire group, to avoid deliberation and unintentional violation of Open Meetings Law requirements.

Chang also told the Committee that drafts of their work that might be shared internally are considered "work product" and are not public documents subject to FOIA requests.

Discussion of State of Iowa Open Meetings Training Requirement

Members of the Committee who are untrained in Open Meetings Law must complete training and receive a certificate before December 21. Betcher volunteered to look into the upcoming trainings and distribute that information to the Committee members.

Discussion of Committee Operations

Betcher reviewed expectations for the operations of the Committee.

Because meetings of the whole Committee are Open Meetings, minutes must be taken at each meeting. These minutes should reflect business conducted and record the outcome of votes taken. Minutes should usually be completed within a week of the meeting being recorded and should be sent to the City Clerk's Office and posted to the Committee Teams site for Committee review and use.

Meeting Agendas must be submitted to the Clerk's Office at least 24 hours before the planned meeting occurs so that the Agenda may be posted to the City Website and noticed on the City Events calendar.

City email addresses will be created for all Committee members to facilitate the collection of information for FOIA requests. A joint email for the entire Committee, including the City Council Subcommittee members, should also be ready by next week sometime. Committee members should use these email addresses and Teams for Committee business.

City staff will be available to provide assistance with technology questions and other issues but will not be running meetings or attending unless requested. The Clerk's Office can type up minutes if necessary from notes provided. The City Council Subcommittee will help to troubleshoot, so contact them with questions. Betcher will provide a list of City Staff contacts for questions/assistance.

Meetings of the whole Committee must be held in locations that are open to the public. Recommended locations are Conference Rooms 135 or 235 at City Hall, for anticipated low-attendance meetings; the Council Chamber, the Water Plant conference room, or the Public Library, for anticipated large-attendance meetings. The Committee should decide whether the meetings will be open to the Public via Teams as well.

Using Teams makes remote participation possible. Members of the Committee should coordinate remote participation through the Committee Chair.

Booking of meeting rooms should be done through the City Clerk's Office, preferably well in advance of a meeting of the whole Committee, so the location may be included on the posted Agenda. Meetings of research subcommittees may occur remotely or in person and are not subject to Open Meetings Law if fewer than 7 Committee members participate.

Members of the Committee may speak to the press as individuals, as long as they do not represent their comments as coming from or speaking for the Committee. If the Committee as a whole wishes, it may appoint a press spokesperson to whom all press questions are directed. Deciding this would require deliberation and a vote at a meeting of the whole Committee.

If members of the Committee are lobbied by the public or start receiving many emails that offer unsolicited advice or opinions, the Committee members should refer those members of the public to the City Council and/or the Council Subcommittee and provide the Mayor and Council email address <MayorCouncil@cityofames.org>. The Council welcomes and receives input regularly from members of the public, and that is the preferred avenue for the public to continue to provide input on the data center issue.

The role of the Study Committee is to present research findings to the Council in a final report in as unbiased a way as possible. Committee members asked about the type of documents that they should focus on. Betcher described the resources that might be consulted as including, but not limited to, published, peer-reviewed articles; materials published by trade organizations that bear on the topics under the Committee's charge; materials posted on city, county, state, or national websites related to the Committee's charge; and any other published, factual resources the Committee identifies as helpful to creating a report.

Not all fields of research have a large body of published information on data-center-specific impacts on the natural environment or human and animal health. Betcher encouraged extrapolating from sources that might not bear specifically on data centers; for example, research on the impacts of heat islands on wildlife, but not specifically heat islands created by data centers, might help to understand the impact of data centers on wildlife. The Committee should determine the specific topics of research focus in a future meeting and establish any study teams moving forward.

If the Committee members wish to consult with other experts, they may do so in aid of their research charge. Betcher will supply a list of experts who applied for the Committee but were not selected and who have offered their continuing assistance.

Liu asked if the City has an AI use policy. The Interim City Attorney will look into whether the City has such a policy. The Committee might want to explore creating such a policy for the purposes of research. That may be a future agenda item.

Selection of Chair and Chair Pro-Tem

Merate Barakat volunteered to be Committee Chair, Chloe Parsons volunteered to be Chair Pro-Tem, and Lee Anne Willson volunteered to take minutes.

A motion was made and seconded to accept these volunteers as a slate of officers. The motion passed unanimously.

Setting of Next Meeting Time and Place

Committee members consulted their calendars, and determined that Monday night at 6 p.m. worked best for most people. Chair Barakat will work with the City Clerk's Office to schedule a room for a meeting on October 5 at 6 p.m.

Committee Comments

Committee members Willson, Pease, Liu, Wu, and Gallagher expressed appreciation for appointment to a Committee that could make an impact on Ames and the Council's policy-making, while also creating a model for the process that other communities might apply to their data center decisions. There is broad Committee recognition that performing research on this quickly evolving field will prove challenging.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.