WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

Civic West Fire Hall Chat: "If a Data Center Knocks: What should West Fargo do?"

September 17, 2026

Civic West - West Fargo - YouTube

Moderator: Dennis Cooley (NDSU Northern Plains Ethics Institute)
Panelists: Matthew Marshall (Minnkota Power Cooperative), Dr. Anne Denton (NDSU computer science), Paul Matthys (Cass County Electric Cooperative), Michael Swartz (Harwood resident), Dr. Robert Mayo (NDSU Challey Institute for Global Innovation and Growth). Respondent: West Fargo Mayor Eric Gjerdevig

Questions addressed to panel (with time stamps for video)

[32:07] For Matthew Marshal / Paul Matthys: Is it true that having a data center being served by your power company could in fact lower rates for individual rate payers? If so, how?

[37:11] Merged topics: What if the data center fails?

- For Dr. Denton / Dr. Mayo: What if data center usage becomes passé? What happens to those enormous facilities if they are no longer useful? Why put them on top of the best farmland in the world?
- If the data center fails momentarily and goes bankrupt, who pays for the cleanup of the center site?
- If a data center is constructed, what can it be used for if technology moves on?
- With everything having a limited lifespan, is there any planning for decommissioning so the state / county / city isn't left cleaning up after the data centers have no use?

[48:16] Merged topics: What can residents do?

- For Michael Swartz: Were there community meetings prior to the data center "arrival", and did people just not attend? How could this have been handled better in your opinion as an average citizen?
- How does a resident make sure the data centers are made to benefit residents?

[55:41] Merged topics: Minnkota / Cass County Electric Coop. questions

- For Paul Matthys: When Applied Digital expands, how is Cass going to supply them? Or is another electric company going to supply them?
- Where does Minnkota Power plan to deliver 280 mw from, and how much capacity is left at the power source for future loads / data centers?

[1:00:46] Merged topics: Farmland concerns

- Site selection! Locations that have either been chosen or considered for data center sites (specifically in Cass County ND) are productive and valuable agriculture producing areas. Why are these farms / agriculture being taken out of production? Ag/Farming is our industry, not data centers!
- Why do data centers need to be built on rich farmland?

[1:03:46] Merged topics: NDAs / transparency

- Why are public officials able to sign / enter into NDAs? What sort of information is included within these NDAs?
- Why are NDAs so important?
- If data centers are so great, why are municipalities using NDAs?
- What do you think of NDAs that ND govt. officials (Armstrong, etc.) think are fine. So who is representing the citizens of this state?

1:11:17] Merged topics: Why natural gas / why not renewable energy?

- Is it reasonable to require a new data center to use (or partially use) renewable energy instead of natural gas?
- What alternate sources of power will be used to power these data centers? (Hydro, wind, solar alternatives)

- For Paul Matthys: Can a solar field be built atop a data center to supplement power needs?
- Where does the extra power generation necessary to support a large data center come from? Isn't that the source of upward price pressure? Same concern with the distribution network? And not just the local connections?

[1:12:39] Merged topics: Distance

- Does location proximity to Metro area matter? Why not build data centers on low-productive farmland? (i.e. Central & Western ND)
- If natural gas will be used by data centers to generate their own power, why are they being built 400 miles from the source of natural gas?
- If data centers should be built away from cities, will that inhibit growth of the city in that direction?
- How close/far can data centers be apart from each other? Do they get any help from the cities or state?

[1:20:00] Merged topics: Lack of transparency / public involvement

- For Dr. Robert Mayo: The developer touts transparency but does not deliver with clear answers. How can we trust undelivered transparency or misleading information?
- What is an appropriate regulatory framework? What role did the state play in permitting the Harwood project? What role should public service commission play?

[1:32:02] Response from West Fargo Mayor Gjerdevig.

Questions not posed because of lack of time

What are the pollution statistics of currently-developed data centers, such as noise-, air-, and water-pollution?

How do you ensure that data centers add tax revenue to a community rather than sidestep through tax breaks?

Do we not care about our country's resources? (Water, good cropland, noise, animal health, etc.) Billionaires are making money and the citizens suffer!

I found this meeting on the news at lunch but couldn't find the place online. Fortunately a prior firefighter knew about this place. Is this another symptom of hiding information?

Does ND have adequate transmission line capacity for all the data center development + future residential demand? If not, what is planned to correct this, and who will pay for it?

What is a hard question local officials should be asking when considering a data center?

NOBODY was on the panel to discuss the health issues!

Is a "handful of employees" a lot? What are the health problems of the employees / surrounding residents?

What percentage of the population is required to warrant a data center? 25%, 10 people… I talk to <u>many</u> people who don't want or need them.

As a daycare teacher, I wonder how city promotion of AI will affect our youth. How does the city plan to monitor AI so it does not hamper adolescent minds?

<u>Low numbers</u> of jobs created once built. Why are they good employers?

How many studies have been done on the environmental & community impacts long-term of the data centers in ND?

Do the ND data centers *actually* create jobs?

Combine all of the problems created by data centers. Where is the benefit? I have a CRT tv, listen to an FM radio, hate electronics in my car that makes it more expensive to maintain.

Whether direct murder or indirect removal of health/life services by corrupt data providers (people and/or machines), are you willing to let these things end the lives of our kids or grandkids while you are assuming this will never happen? EMF's, pollution, sound / vibration, hyper-heating, reduction of water, using aquifers which aren't replenished and create sinkholes…

So what? <u>No downside?!</u>

Energy Generation and Transmission Industry successfully lobbied for law (HB1258) that gave power to the Public Service Commission to SUPERSEDE local control on regulation that is involved in data centers (or could be). Please explain why it is better for our communities that member-owned co-ops are lobbying to take away local control by giving it into the hands of the centralized & statewide regulators?

For Paul Matthys: Will the electric company go after Harwood if amendment on ballot goes through in November? Residents of Harwood were told by city council members the electric company would sue the town?

How much profit does Cass County Electric expect to make from the proposed data center?

For Matthew Marshall and Paul Matthys: How long did the extensive engineering studies take before the developer was able to design, plan, and build?

With the boom of generative AI (AI-generated artwork, AI speech modules, etc.) and how detrimental it has been to credibility and reliability online, will further developments put <u>hard</u> restrictions in place, or will continuous growth continue to take more and more power, water, and space as usage rises?

With how many instances there are of AI being used maliciously, like AI-generated CSAM (child sexual abuse material), using AI-produced voices to trick people on phone calls into financial scams, and false advertisement for all sorts of products, is it even worth supporting more data centers being built?

For Dr. Denton: What do you see in the next 5-10 years with the AI industry? (i.e. Less servers)