Fire Hall Chat Draws More Than 100 Residents for Data Center Discussion

More than 100 people attended Civic West's September 17 Fire Hall Chat, **"If a Data Center Knocks: What Should West Fargo Do?"** The standing-room-only audience brought a wide range of questions about what data center development could mean for West Fargo and surrounding communities.

The discussion was moderated by **Dennis Cooley**, director of the NDSU Northern Plains Ethics Institute. Panelists included **Matthew Marshall of Minnkota Power Cooperative, Dr. Anne Denton of NDSU Computer Science, Paul Matthys of Cass County Electric Cooperative, Michael Swartz of Harwood, and Dr. Robert Mayo of the NDSU Challey Institute for Global Innovation and Growth.** West Fargo Mayor **Eric Gjerdevig** provided concluding comments.

Questions from the Community

The audience raised questions about both the potential benefits and concerns associated with data center development. Major topics included:

- **Electricity and utility costs:** How large data center loads could affect electricity generation, transmission, capacity and potentially customer rates.
- **Site selection and farmland:** Why productive agricultural land is being considered and whether alternative locations could be used.
- **Transparency and NDAs:** What information may be covered by non-disclosure agreements, why NDAs are used, and how residents can participate when information is not publicly available.
- **Decommissioning and long-term responsibility:** What happens if a data center becomes obsolete, fails financially or is no longer needed, and who would be responsible for cleanup and reuse of the site.
- **Public involvement and local control:** What role residents should have in decisions and how local, county and state authorities should work together.
- **Energy and environmental impacts:** Questions about natural gas, renewable energy, water use, transmission infrastructure, noise, air quality and other potential environmental effects.
- **Jobs and economic benefits:** Questions about employment, tax revenue, tax incentives and the broader economic impact on local communities.
- **The future of AI and technology:** How rapidly changing AI technology could affect the need for data centers over the next five to ten years and what could happen to large facilities if technology changes significantly.

The number of questions submitted by residents exceeded the time available for the discussion. Additional questions addressed pollution, water and natural resources, transmission capacity, health concerns, employment, local control, utility profits, long-term community impacts and the future growth of AI.

A Community Conversation

The breadth of questions demonstrated significant community interest in understanding the potential implications of data center development before decisions are made.

Civic West has made the **full list of questions submitted by audience members** available for residents who want to see the issues raised during the discussion.

Read the full list of audience questions in additional documents attached.

Watch the September 17 Fire Hall Chat:
Civic West on YouTube

Why This Conversation Took Place

The Fire Hall Chat followed action by the West Fargo City Commission on July 6, when the Commission directed city staff to evaluate options for public engagement regarding potential data center development in West Fargo.

At that meeting, Mayor Eric Gjerdevig emphasized that no data center development was then under consideration, but that the Commission should establish a **"community-informed framework"** to guide consideration of future proposals.

Watch the July 6 City Commission discussion:
West Fargo City Commission Meeting — July 6

The September Fire Hall Chat was one opportunity for community members to ask questions, hear different perspectives and contribute to the broader conversation about how West Fargo should approach potential data center development.

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