

Residents resist proposed Amazon development, data center projects in Montgomery County

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Two enormous data center projects in Montgomery County are a focus of controversy.

Monday night, tempers flared as leaders discussed the data centers at a Montgomery County town hall.

The county commission recently signed off on land-use approvals for the projects.

"There are so many economic values this project brings. We're talking thousands of construction jobs for multiple jobs. We're talking hundreds of permanent jobs for our graduating students out of the local schools. We're talking tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue," Steve Etcher, a member of the Greater Montgomery County Economic Development Council, said.

Amazon has been confirmed as "Project Green". The people behind "Project Spade" remain a mystery.

Both facilities would be located near the I-70 and Highway 19 interchange. Amazon's development in the northeast quadrant and Project Spade the southeast quadrant.

Project Green would span roughly 1,000 acres in Montgomery County. The first stage would consist of four buildings, each around 220,000 square feet. A site plan identifies a second phase of approximately 13 additional similar structures. This site would be fully fenced.

Project Spade includes three buildings, each more approximately 1,080,920 square feet. Each building alone would take up the space of more than 15 football fields. Documents show the project would span 780 acres in unincorporated Montgomery County and 130 acres within the city limits of New Florence.

"Is it going to affect our well pressure? We have a lot of irrigation systems around here and they say sometimes that can affect things," Tammy Ridgley, a Montgomery County resident, said.

Ridgley said over half of area residents use well water.

"There are so many things that we have questions on that our commissioners and everyone that's kind of ram-rodging this, they don't have answers to either."

Energy was another main concern at Monday's town hall.

"The increase in power and how much its going to use, what is it going to do to our bills?" Ridgely asked. "I mean it seems nominal but to a community of 12,000 people it means a lot."

Leaders provided some answers.

"We've got studies showing that the aquifer is more than sufficient to accommodate any use that we would be predicting," Etcher said.

"Any environment concern we will take very very seriously. Any water that is discharged from these facilities will go through a state regulated state permitted wastewater treatment plants, so what we'll be putting out in the stream will be of the highest quality possible. We've already done some environmental studies in terms of are there any endangered species or culture resources impacted and those all came back negative. It's really this idea of air quality, which DNR oversees that."

Rob Dixon, with Ameren Missouri, addressed electricity concerns at the meeting. "We can serve them, we've got the power to do so. We've got the power to continue to serve all of our customers. And we can do it in a way that makes sure that they are going to pay their fair share."

Both Dixon and Etcher referenced Missouri regulations that ensure large users pay their fair share for electricity.

But among many residents, doubt still remains.

"Everybody can say things. We want it in writing. We want to know that our community is protected when we are doing this," Ridgely said.

Not all attendees of the town hall opposed the projects. One man spoke about possible benefits of the developments, but he was quickly dismissed by the crowd.

Other residents at the meeting raised eyebrows about a non-disclosure agreement signed by commissioners.

Presiding Commissioner Ryan Poston addressed these questions.

"We signed an NDA, looked at over by legal council for the south project. Why? Because the people that are over here screaming right now, they would have been over there screaming at the land owners because they wanted to sell their properties. We did that just as much to protect the landowners as we did ourselves."

Stephanie Garcia grew up in Montgomery County, where her parents still live.

Their land would bump up to one of the projects.

She said her parents were not contacted by Amazon, nor by the county about the development.

"Now my parents are wondering what are they supposed to do with this land, because no one is going to buy it," she said. "If they can't take the noise, the construction, everything going on, they have no choice. They will have to basically vacate the property."

Garcia said she grew up on the gravel roads now jeopardized by the proposals.

"Them coming in, they're taking all those memories from all of us, not just me," she said. "And as much as I wanted for my kids to be raised here, to come back, that's gone. They've taken it from us."

Ridgely said she feared for the community. "I have an 18-year-old daughter that wants to come back after college and be a veterinarian here. She is worried that she will not come back to the same community when she graduates in six years."

Poston said no decisions had been made yet. Etcher said next steps consist of due diligence regarding system impacts and agreements.

"I think it's the most positive thing we've had here in a hundred years. And probably the last time we had this much turmoil was when the railroad went through back in the 1800s and no one wanted to give them any land," David Johnson, a member of the Greater Montgomery Economic Development Council, said.

Documents indicated property closings for both projects would occur in the first quarter of 2026.