

RICE TOWNSHIP ORDINANCE NO. 1-2026

AN ORDINANCE OF RICE TOWNSHIP, LUZERNE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, AMENDING THE RICE TOWNSHIP ZONING ORDINANCE TO DEFINE AND ADD SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF DATA CENTERS, DATA CENTER CAMPUSES, AND DATA CENTER ACCESSORY USES

WHEREAS, Article VI of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, 53 P.S. §§ 10601, *et seq.*, authorizes Rice Township to enact, amend, and repeal zoning ordinances within Rice Township; and

WHEREAS, the Rice Township Board of Supervisors deems it in the best interests of the general welfare of the residents of Rice Township to update and amend provisions of the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance to provide for the construction of Data Centers, Data Center Campuses, and Data Center Accessory Uses as a conditional use in the I-1 Industrial District of Rice Township given their potential to place intense demands on utilities and infrastructure and to provide standards for the scale and compatibility of such uses; and

WHEREAS, the Rice Township Board of Supervisors has duly discussed, legally advertised, and held public hearings in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Code as well as the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance in accordance with the provisions and outlined therein;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY ORDAINED AND ENACTED by the Board of Supervisors of Rice Township, pursuant to authority granted to it under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as follows:

Section 1. Title

This Section shall be known as and may be cited as "The Rice Township Data Center Section" referred to herein as the "Section", amending the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance.

Section 2. Interpretation

This Section is an addition to the Zoning Ordinance, and is not intended to, and does not, excuse any landowner from compliance with any other Sections or provisions of the Zoning Ordinance, as amended from time to time. Whenever possible, this Section and the Zoning Ordinance should be construed and interpreted as being consistent, and not in conflict.

Section 3. Definitions

For the purposes of this Section, words and terms used herein shall be interpreted as follows, and shall be read in addition to and consistent with the definitions of Article 2 of the Zoning Ordinance:

The Rice Township Zoning Ordinance, Article II, Section 203, entitled "Definitions" is hereby amended as follows by adding:

DATA CENTER:

A facility, or part thereof, used primarily for the storage, management, processing, and transmission of digital data, including servers, computer equipment, network hardware, and associated components. A Data Center may include, as accessory uses, on the same lot or contiguous lots under common ownership or control: (a) backup generators; (b) cooling and ventilation equipment; (c) electrical substations; (d) fuel storage for backup power; (e) office space for facility administration; and (f) on-site security facilities. A Data Center shall not include telecommunication switching stations serving the general public, broadcast studios, or uses otherwise classified in this Ordinance.

DATA CENTER ACCESSORY USE:

Ancillary uses or structures secondary and incidental to a Data Center use, including but not limited to: administrative, logistical, fiber optic, storage, and security buildings or structures; sources of electrical power such as generators used to provide temporary power when the main source of power is interrupted; electrical substations; utility lines; domestic and non-contact cooling water and wastewater treatment facilities; water holding facilities; pump stations; water towers; environmental controls (air conditioning or cooling towers, fire suppression, and related equipment); security features, provided such data center accessory uses/structures are located on the same tract or assemblage of adjacent parcels developed as a unified development with a Data Center. The use shall not include energy generation systems used or intended to be used to supply power to the Data Center during normal operations.

DATA CENTER CAMPUS

A Development of multiple Data Centers at the time of submittal of a land development plan as required by the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance.

Section 4. Data Center and Data Center Campuses shall be conditional uses within the I-1 Industrial District. In all other zoning districts, they are prohibited including as an accessory use.

The location, design, and operation of such facilities within the I-1 Industrial Zoning District shall not adversely affect the character of any adjacent residential properties. Outside lighting shall be directed away from adjacent properties.

§ 508 of the Schedule of Uses—I-1 Industrial District shall be amended to add “Data Centers, Data Center Accessory Uses” and mark “Data Centers, Data Center Accessory Uses” as “C—Conditional Use” in the I-1 Industrial District.

Schedule of Development Standards, I-1 Zoning District, shall be amended as follows: _____

Data Centers, Data Center Accessory Uses shall comply with the Building Regulations set forth herein on the currently adopted Schedule of Development Standards but for those regulations relating to Minimum Lot Size (Square Feet) and Maximum Building Height, as Data Centers shall instead comply with those building regulations found in § 508.

P-Permitted NP-Not Permitted SE-Special Exception C-Conditional Use

R1	R2	B1	C1	I1
NP	NP	NP	NP	C

Section 5. The Rice Township Zoning Ordinance, Section 508.5 “Dimensional Regulations”, is amended as follows by adding Section 508.5(a):

DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS APPLICABLE TO DATA CENTERS AND DATA CENTER CAMPUSES FOR POWER GENERATION FACILITIES.

These dimensional regulations are applicable to a Data Center and/or a Data Center Campus for Power Generation Facilities. For all other principal buildings, structures and/or uses in the District, the enumerated dimensional regulations (Section 508.5) apply, unless more restrictive standards are applicable, including but not limited to Pennsylvania law and/or regulation, as well as supplementary regulations contained in Section 508-I-1 Industrial District or other applicable regulations in the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance.

- A. Minimum Lot Size: The minimum lot size or assemblage of adjacent parcels developed as a Data Center shall not be less than fifty (50) acres, inclusive of open space. Tracts divided by easements or rights-of-way but owned in common or otherwise developed as a unified development shall be deemed contiguous for the purposes of minimum tract size calculations.
- B. Maximum Building Square Footage: A Data Center may be a maximum of 250,000 square feet.
- C. Lot coverage: Not more than fifty-five percent (55%) of the lot area shall be covered with buildings, structures and/or impervious surfaces. Under a Master Plan, a developer may aggregate one or more lots under common ownership for purposes of calculating Lot Coverage.
- D. No Data Center, Small Modular Reactor, Battery Energy Storage System, or Data Center Accessory structure shall be 1,000 feet or less from a residential district or existing occupied residential uses’ property line, provided all sound level maximums are met (as set forth herein this Section).

- E. No Substation shall be less than five hundred (500) feet from a residential district or existing occupied residential uses' property line, provided all sound level maximums are met (as set forth herein this Section).
- F. Loading docks and truck maneuvering areas shall be setback not less than five hundred (500) feet from residential districts or existing occupied residential uses' property lines.
- G. Data Centers shall be located not less than one (1) mile from any Data Center on an adjoining property.
- H. Building Height: The maximum height of any building shall not exceed fifty (50) feet.

SUPPLEMENTAL REGULATIONS

- A. A Master Plan shall be submitted for purposes of developing a Data Center Campus. The Master Plan shall be subject to the governing regulations and provisions of the Rice Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.
- B. An application for Land Development Plan shall be submitted for purposes of developing a Data Center other than as part of a Master Plan. The Land Development Plan shall be subject to the governing regulations and provisions of the Rice Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.
 - a. Traffic Study. As part of the Land Development Application, a traffic impact study must be prepared to address both daily operational traffic and emergency response access to demonstrate that the facility will not adversely affect local road capacity or increase impacts beyond what is expected of other uses permitted in the I-1 Zoning District.
- C. After approval of the Master Plan has been obtained, any major modifications from the Master Plan shall be subject to the government regulations and provisions of the Rice Township Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.
- D. After approval of the Master Plan, the development of each lot, parcel, or building identified in the Master Plan shall be permitted by right.
- E. An individual site plan for each Data Center identified on the Master Plan or each phase of the development of the Data Center Campus demonstrating compliance with the Master Plan shall be submitted to the Zoning Officer prior to the issuance of a building permit. Copies of any applicable third-party permits shall be submitted to the Rice Township Zoning Officer prior to issuance of a building permit.
- F. Design Guidelines
 - a. Principal building facades shall avoid the use of undifferentiated surfaces by including at least two (2) of the following design elements and must occur at least every one hundred and fifty (150) horizontal feet or no less than three times the average height of the building change in building height: building step-backs or recesses; fenestration; change in building material; pattern, texture, and color; or use of accent materials.

- i. When a building has more than one principal façade, such principal building facades shall be consistent in terms of design, materials, details, and treatment.
- b. A green-wall treatment may be provided in lieu of up to 50% of the fenestration surface coverage of the façade requirements. The owner or the owner's agent is responsible for the repair, replacement, and maintenance of the green-wall for the duration of the use.
 - i. Green-wall areas must be provided to meet up to 30% total surface coverage area of the principal façade and must be distributed horizontally and vertically across the principal façade.
- c. Fenestration must comprise a minimum of 30% of the principal building's individual façade.
- d. Screening of Mechanical Equipment. In order to minimize visibility from adjacent roads and adjacent properties, ground level and rooftop mechanical and electrical equipment shall be screened. This screening may be provided by a principal building or existing vegetation that will remain on the property or is within a landscaping/buffer easement on an adjacent property. Mechanical and electrical equipment not screened by a principal building or existing vegetation shall be screened by a visually solid fence, screen wall or panel, parapet wall, or other visually solid screen that shall be constructed of materials compatible with those used in the exterior construction of the principal building and be designed to absorb noise and protect neighboring properties from noise pollution.
- e. Landscaping and Buffering. A buffer yard is required from a residential district or existing occupied residential uses' property line within the required setback from said property line. This buffer yard shall consist of a dense screen of evergreen and deciduous trees.
- f. Fencing. Fencing of the property is permitted provided that fencing along public or private streets is not chain link and does not include barbed wire or other visibly intrusive deterrence equipment.
- g. Refuse Collection and Loading Bay Screening. Refuse collection areas must be fully screened on all sides and loading bays must be screened from view at the ground level from all adjacent parcels and existing or planned public roads.

G. Emergency Management

- a. The applicant for a Data Center or Data Center Campus shall submit an Emergency Response Plan ("ERP") prepared by a qualified professional. The ERP shall:
 - i. Be reviewed and accepted by the local fire department and emergency management services as part of the land development process;
 - ii. Include detailed procedures for fire suppression, containment, ventilation, and evacuation including a designated assembly point during evacuations;
 - iii. Include an evaluation of the access roads and hydrant locations within the site to ensure suitable access for emergency equipment within the site;

- iv. The applicant shall furnish evidence of an on-site water supply adequate for and exclusively used for firefighting purposes. The supply must include ample water to mitigate a fire in anticipation of a 10-minute response time for fire service arrival and shall be approved by the local fire department and emergency management coordinators;
 - v. Ensure that all first responders receive adequate training specific to the installed system;
 - vi. Ensure property access for Township Code Enforcement officials and/or Fire Inspector or its designed representative for inspections;
 - vii. Ensure that all inspection fees are to be paid by the applicant and the pass/fail inspections, if failed will result in penalties;
 - viii. Include provisions for annual fire safety inspections demonstrating compliance with fire safety standards to be performed by a qualified professional on behalf of the Data Center;
 - ix. Include emergency contact listings, which must be visibly displayed; and
 - x. Provide for a minimum of quarterly fire drills.
 - b. Any Data Center use proposing battery storage or any other device or group of devices capable of storing energy in order to supply electrical energy at a later time, whether the energy is stored for use on-site or off-site, shall demonstrate compliance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 855, Installation of Stationary Energy Storage Systems, or similar standards and must include fire suppression systems designed specifically for battery storage.
 - c. No Data Center shall be approved unless the applicant demonstrates that procedures for fire suppression, containment, ventilation, and evacuation are sufficiently protective of public health, safety and welfare, including compliance with all local, state, and federal fire safety codes.
- H. The development under the Master Plan may be completed in one (1) year or more phases—provided that development commences within five (5) years of approval of the Master Plan. No further approvals shall be necessary for phased development of the Data Center Campus consistent with the approved Master Plan, and it shall not be subject to changes in zoning or subdivision ordinances enacted by Rice Township subsequent to the date of the Master Plan.
- I. An individual site plan for each Data Center or each phase of the development of the Data Center Campus shall be found to be consistent with the approved Master Plan if it is clearly identified in the approved Master Plan or if the site plan is found to be a minor modification to the approved Master Plan. The procedure for a major modification of the approved Master Plan shall be the same as the new Master Plan under this Chapter.
- a. A minor modification to an approved Master Plan is development that results in a rate of stormwater discharge and runoff from the site equal to or less than rates identified in the Stormwater Management Plan approved in connection with the Master Plan.
 - b. A major modification to an approved Master Plan is development that results in a rate of stormwater discharge and runoff from the site greater than the rates

identified in the Stormwater Management Plan approved in connection with the Master Plan.

- c. The applicant may submit to the Zoning Officer (either with the site plan or at the request of the Zoning Officer) any additional plans, studies, or reports demonstrating that the individual site plan for each Data Center or each phase of the development of the Data Center Campus is a minor modification.

J. Environmental Impact Statement

- a. All Data Center and/or Data Center Campus construction, as well as any accessory use of Data Centers and Data Center Campuses, must comply with § 806 of the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance and submit an Environmental Impact Statement to seek approval of a conditional use.
- b. The purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement is to disclose the environmental consequences of any proposed action concerning Data Centers, Data Center Campuses, and/or Data Center Accessory Uses. This requirement is designed to protect the natural environment with respect to water quality, water supply, soil erosion, pollution of any kind, flooding and waste disposal. Furthermore, the intent is to preserve trees and vegetation, to protect water courses, air quality, aquifers, and the general quality of life throughout Rice Township and its environs.
- c. Each proposed Data Center and/or Data Center Campus application shall provide evidence from the public utilities serving it that application for service is feasible and approved as part of the Land Development Application.
 - i. The applicant shall provide a letter from all applicable public utilities (i.e. electrical, water, and sewerage providers) certifying that these systems have the capacity to meet the demands of the proposed facility while maintaining the same levels of service to the existing residents and businesses of Rice Township.
 - ii. The applicant shall also obtain a similar certification letter from any applicable telecommunications and broadband providers serving Rice Township residents and businesses.
 - iii. As a part of the Environmental Impact Statement, each applicant shall incorporate a reasonable expectation or forecast of the utility supply needs of Rice Township residents and businesses over the life of the proposed Data Center and/or Data Center Campus.
 - iv. Applications shall clearly demonstrate, to the greatest extent possible, how electricity will be provided to accommodate the project's development and how the project's overall power demand relates to the overall regional network. This should include any on-site or off-site need for a new electrical substation, expansion of an existing substation, and/or any other electric infrastructure.
- d. A Vibration Study shall be provided that demonstrates that vibration resulting from the use of any proposed Data Center or Data Center Campus or Data Center Accessory Uses do not extend past the property boundaries of the

proposed Data Center or Data Center Campus and/or Data Center Accessory Use. This study shall be prepared by a qualified professional.

- K. General Regulations. Except as expressly set forth in this ordinance, a Data Center or Data Center Campus shall comply with all general regulations of the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance, Article 3, §§ 301-327, *et seq.* Where a conflict arises between Article 3 then the specific regulations governing the I-1 Industrial District shall control. See Article V, §§ 508-508(a).
- L. Water Supply. A Data Center and/or Data Center Campus, as well as any accessory use, shall utilize a closed loop cooling system.
 - a. Data Centers and Data Center Campuses shall deploy technologies for water conservation including, but not limited to, installing closed-loop or recirculation systems to reduce the demand for public water.
- M. Wastewater Management. Any Data Center and/or Data Center Campus, or accessory use, applicant shall demonstrate that adequate means of wastewater disposal have been provided for and approved by the Sewage Enforcement Officer and/or PA DEP. This would include wastewater management from any domestic wastewater as well as any wastewater used for cooling or industrial purposes. If public sewer will serve the use then the applicant shall prove that capacity is available.
- N. Sound/Noise. A Data Center Campus and/or Data Center must provide that the maximum A-weighted sound pressure level emitted from the use (whether one data center or multiple data centers are located on the property) as measured 1.5 meters above ground at the property line per ANSI S1.13-2020 (American National Standard—Measurement of Sound Pressure Levels in Air), will not exceed (i) 65 dB(A) during daytime hours (7:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.) and 55 dB(A) during the night time hours (10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.). The daytime level generally corresponds to interference with normal conversation while the nighttime level generally corresponds to interference with sleep. The decibel level limits shall be measured at the property lines of any neighboring property.
 - a. The developer will provide a sound analysis/study prior to the issuance of a final certificate of occupancy permit for each applicable phase of the Data Center Campus. The sound analysis will be performed by a professional/certified acoustic/sound engineer that can demonstrate qualifications by delivery of a resume to the Zoning Officer and the Developer.
 - b. The study must be submitted to the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and the Township Engineer for review and must demonstrate compliance with the noise regulations in this section. The noise study shall be updated and resubmitted to the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and Township Engineer within thirty (30) days of occupancy of any Data Center or any Data Centers or Accessory Use buildings or structures comprising a Data Center Campus.
 - c. Rice Township reserves the right to confirm any of the data and/or conclusions contained within the submitted noise/sound study and/or to retain its own third-party sound analysis/study.

- O. Waivers or Modifications. The Board of Supervisors may approve waivers or modifications for implementation of the Master Plan if a provision is shown to the Board's satisfaction to be unreasonable, cause undue hardship, or an alternative standard is demonstrated to provide equal or better outcomes.
- P. Power. All new electric lines, both transmission and distribution, must be underground.
- a. Minimum On-Site Generation. All Data Centers will:
 - i. Install roof-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) systems capable of generating at least 80% of their monthly electricity usage, averaged across the year including winter months.
 - ii. Ground-mounted solar systems are not permitted.
 - b. Minimum Generation+ REC and/or Green Energy Purchase Offset (Hybrid Pathway).
 - i. If rooftop size or structural limits prevent meeting the 80% on-site generation requirement then the on-site system must still produce 60% of monthly energy usage.
 - ii. The remaining shortfall may be offset by:
 - 1. Purchase and retirement of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) from certified programs (e.g. PJM OATS, WREGIS); and/or
 - 2. Energy purchased from an approved energy supplier certified under recognized green power programs.
 - 3. Documentation of REC retirement and/or green energy purchase must be submitted in annual reporting.
 - c. All generators, whether portable or fixed/permanent, shall be equipped with functioning mufflers and enclosures to comply with the noise limits in § 902.18 and all other applicable noise restrictions contained within the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance. Furthermore, all generators shall be Tier IV diesel certified generators.
 - i. Non-residential or non-light commercial portable or backup generators shall not be operated between 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. except during declared emergencies as ordered by Rice Township EMA.
 - d. Fuel storage and exhaust shall comply with applicable local and state fire codes.
 - e. No more than two (2) portable turbines shall be operated on any single non-residential or commercial property at the same time without a Temporary Use Permit.
 - i. Turbines shall be set back at least three hundred (300) feet from any residential property line and five hundred (500) feet from any dwelling not owned by the turbine operator.
 - ii. Turbines shall comply with all applicable noise limitations contained within the Rice Township Zoning Ordinance and shall have functional braking or shut-off mechanisms.
 - iii. Turbines shall be properly secured and maintained to prevent mechanical failure or debris hazards.
 - iv. Portable turbines may not be operated for more than ten (10) consecutive calendar days in a calendar year without a Temporary Use Permit.

Section 6. Off-Street Parking.

- v. Data Center and/or Data Center Campus: a minimum of 40 spaces per each Data Center.
- vi. Data Center: One (1) off-street loading or unloading space at least twelve (12) feet by fifty (50) feet per Data Center.
- vii. Except for the purposes of security, no parking for a Data Center Campus shall be located within two hundred (200) feet of a property line abutting a district having a residential use or parking shall be located on the side or rear of any building that is not adjacent to any residential use.
 - 1. At all times, the location and size of any areas designated for off-street parking shall be designed to minimize negative effects on abutting or adjacent residential uses.

Section 7. This Ordinance will be enforced by the Rice Township Zoning Officer. All appeals from decisions or actions made by the Zoning Officer in the enforcement of this ordinance shall be appealed to either the Rice Township Zoning Hearing Board or the Rice Township Board of Supervisors, according to applicable law.

Section 8. Severability.

If any section, provision, or portion of this Section/Ordinance shall be held invalid or unconstitutional by any Court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect any other section, clause, provision or portion of this Ordinance so long as it remains legally enforceable minus the invalid portion. The Borough reserves the right to amend this Section/Ordinance or any portion thereof from time to time as it shall deem advisable in the best interest of the promotion of the purposes and intent of this Ordinance, and the effective administration thereof.

Section 9. Effective Date

This Ordinance shall become effective immediately upon a majority vote of the Board of Supervisors or according to other applicable law, whichever is sooner.

ORDAINED AND ENACTED as an Ordinance by the Board of Supervisors of Rice Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, in lawful session duly assembled this _____ day of February _____, 2026.

Attest:

Rice Township Board of Supervisors:

CERTIFICATE OF ENACTMENT

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate copy of Ordinance No. 1-2026 adopted by the Board of Supervisors of Rice Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania at a regular meeting held on _____, 2026, pursuant to notice as required by law.

Dated: _____

Rice Township Secretary

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