

Harmony, MN: Joint Planning Session Minutes

Date: February 4, 2026

Next Meeting: February 18th, 2026

Facilitator: Hurley

Meeting Called to Order: 6:01 PM

Present: Mayor Steve Donney, Council Members Jesse Grabau, Kyle Scheevel, and Tara Morem. EDA Board Members Stuart Morem, Greg Schieber, Kelsey Bergey. Planning and Zoning Board Members Rod Johnson & Miles Petree.

Others Present: Chris Hahn (CEDA), Alissa Stelpflug (Administrator), Katrina Hurley (Facilitator), Amy Bishop, Aaron Bishop and Ann Lyons.

Absent: Keith McIntosh (Council), Jim Strozyk and Eric Olson (Planning and Zoning)

1. Opening and Purpose of Meeting

Hurley opened the meeting by explaining that this session continued the work from the previous joint planning meetings. The purpose was to review and refine definitions that will later be used in drafting the city's data center ordinance. She emphasized that no decisions would be made during this session and that the goal was to maintain transparency and ensure that all boards and the community understand the terminology before the ordinance is drafted. She noted that there were twenty-six definitions to complete, with an estimated four minutes allotted for each.

She reminded the group that once definitions are finalized, they will be incorporated into a draft ordinance, reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and then forwarded to the City Council for action.

2. Review of Definitions

2.1 Buffer and Landscape Buffer

The group reviewed the existing definition of "buffer," which described a strip of land maintained in permanent vegetation. Members discussed broadening the definition to include structures such as fences or walls, since buffers may serve both visual and noise-mitigation purposes. The group agreed to combine "buffer" and "landscape buffer" into a single definition that includes both vegetation and structural elements. The revised definition will state that a buffer is a strip of land maintained in permanent vegetation and/or structures designed to intercept pollutants and mitigate environmental concerns.

2.2 Screening

The group discussed the distinction between buffers and screening. Screening is used primarily

for visual mitigation, while buffers may address noise as well. Examples from other municipalities were reviewed, and the group agreed to keep screening as a separate definition. The preferred wording describes screening as a visually solid barrier such as a wall, fence, or building. Members noted that defining screening clearly helps prevent loopholes, such as the installation of flimsy or ineffective materials.

2.3 Utility Infrastructure

The group considered whether to list specific components of utility infrastructure or rely on a broader definition. Some members preferred including examples such as substations, transmission lines, water mains, sewer lines, and stormwater systems, while others emphasized the importance of using “including but not limited to” to avoid unintentionally excluding future technologies. The group agreed to include examples while retaining broad language to prevent workarounds.

2.4 Public Utility

The Minnesota statutory definition of public utility was reviewed. The group discussed the importance of ensuring that data centers cannot bypass local utilities by bringing in their own power sources, such as nuclear microreactors or large generator farms. Members agreed to adopt a definition consistent with state statute and Harmony’s existing electric utility language, which clarifies that the city operates its own municipal electric system.

2.5 Substation and Transmission Line

The group adopted the Minnesota Energy Code definition for substations. Transmission lines were defined as high-voltage electric lines that transport power from generation to distribution.

2.6 Interconnection

The group agreed that the definition of interconnection should be developed in consultation with MiEnergy to ensure accuracy.

2.7 Emissions and Air Pollution

Members discussed the need to regulate generator emissions and avoid relying solely on federal standards. The group agreed to use Minnesota language referencing particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, and nitrogen oxides.

2.8 Energy Use, Load, Megawatt, and Peak Demand

The group discussed whether Harmony should regulate peak demand. Concerns were raised about regional grid stress, potential rate increases for residents, and examples from other communities that experienced unexpected cost spikes. The group agreed to include definitions

for these terms even if later policy decisions differ.

2.9 Hazardous Materials, Wastewater, and Effluent

The group adopted Minnesota statutory definitions for hazardous materials, wastewater, and effluent. Members noted concerns about new cooling chemicals and “forever chemicals” used in some data center systems.

2.10 Security, Access Control, and Surveillance

The group adopted Minnesota’s definition of enhanced security. It was noted that data centers are expected to provide 24/7 emergency contact signage.

2.11 Employment, Local Hiring, and Apprenticeship

The group determined that prevailing wage requirements are already governed by state law and that no additional definition was needed.

2.12 PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes)

The group agreed to include a definition of PILOT. Members noted that data centers receive a thirty-five-year state sales tax exemption on equipment, making PILOT agreements an important tool for local revenue.

2.13 Environmental Review (EAW, EIS, AUAR)

The group adopted Minnesota definitions for environmental review processes, including Environmental Assessment Worksheets, Environmental Impact Statements, and Alternative Urban Areawide Reviews.

2.14 Nonconforming Use, Amortization, and Conditional Use Permit

The group adopted standard zoning definitions for these terms.

2.15 Groundwater Impact

The group adopted Minnesota’s definition of groundwater and noted that this definition will be necessary for groundwater impact studies.

2.16 Site Plan and Site Plan Review

Harmony already has similar language in its ordinances. The group agreed to include buffering requirements within the site plan review process.

2.17 Monitoring, Reporting, Compliance, and Enforcement

The group added development agreements to the definitions of monitoring and compliance. Reporting requirements will include submission to both the City of Harmony and any required regulatory agencies.

2.18 Closed-Loop Cooling

The group agreed to define closed-loop cooling as a system that recirculates coolant without continuous discharge and uses zero water. This definition was chosen to avoid loopholes where “closed loop” systems still draw significant groundwater.

2.19 Enforcement Action

The group adopted the Minneapolis definition of enforcement action.

2.20 Clawback Provision

The group agreed to include clawback provisions for any future incentives offered to data centers.

2.21 Financial Assurance

The group discussed the need to ensure that funds are available for decommissioning or site restoration. Members agreed to allow either escrow or bond options.

2.22 Escrow

Escrow was defined as a financial account held to ensure funds are available for obligations. The group removed the phrase “third party” to allow the city to hold escrow funds directly if needed.

2.23 Performance Bond

The group agreed to include performance bonds as an available tool for ensuring compliance.

2.24 Operational Reporting

The group agreed that annual reporting on water use, energy use, and compliance will be required.

2.25 Adaptive Management Trigger

The group agreed to include a definition that allows review if impacts exceed projections.

2.26 Emergency Response Plan

The group agreed to follow Minnesota requirements for emergency response planning. Hurley will refine the definition further.

2.27 Complaint Resolution Protocol

The group agreed that data centers must maintain a formal process for addressing resident concerns.

2.28 Transferability of Permit

The group agreed to define transferability and require city approval before any permit is transferred to another operator.

2.29 Revocation and Default

The group adopted standard definitions for revocation and default as they apply to zoning and development agreements.

3. Closing Notes

All definitions have now been drafted. The next meetings will focus on standards and safeguards, including noise limits, setbacks, water use, operational limits, community benefit agreements, and fiscal protections. Several environmental organizations will observe future meetings but will not participate.

4. Upcoming Meetings

The next meetings are scheduled for February 18, March 4, and March 18.