

Harmony, MN: Joint Planning Session Minutes

Date: February 18th, 2026

Next Meeting: March 4th, 2026

Facilitator: Hurley

Meeting Called to Order: 6:00 PM

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

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

Absent: Jim Strozyk, Miles Petree and Eric Olson (Planning and Zoning)

1. Opening and Purpose of Meeting

The joint planning session convened with representatives from the City Council, Planning and Zoning, and the Economic Development Authority Board to begin drafting the Harmony Data Center Ordinance using the definitions finalized in prior meetings. The meeting opened with a brief orientation that explained the purpose of the session: to translate the previously agreed definitions into initial ordinance language for the highest-priority sections, to capture outstanding follow-up items, and to assign tasks for subsequent review. Hurley reminded attendees that no final votes would be taken tonight and that all recommendations would be forwarded to Planning & Zoning for formal consideration and then to City Council.

Participants affirmed the focus question that would guide the evening's work: what standards, safeguards, and requirements must Harmony include in its data center ordinance to protect community values, resources, and long-term interests. The group emphasized a shared commitment to preserving Harmony's rural character and natural resources while considering the town's economic interests. Attendees agreed to proceed with assuming positive intent and to pause for short breaks if discussions became heated.

The meeting reviewed the foundational work completed to date, noting that definitions had been finalized, follow-up items had been identified, best practices and Minnesota statutes had been reviewed, and Harmony's community values had been clarified. These completed items were acknowledged as the basis for drafting ordinance text this evening. Hurley summarized outstanding follow-up items that will require additional input or refinement, including final wording for the interconnection definition pending MiEnergy input, specification of acceptable screening materials, final utility infrastructure language, alignment with public utility requirements, technical details for closed-loop cooling systems, emergency response plan wording, permit transferability criteria, clawback triggers, financial assurance thresholds, operational reporting metrics, adaptive management triggers, and site plan buffering language.

The group reviewed and confirmed the ordinance structure to be used as a drafting framework, which includes purpose and intent, applicability, definitions, performance standards, water use and cooling, energy use and peak demand, noise, screening and buffering, utility infrastructure,

environmental review, reporting and compliance, enforcement and penalties, permit transferability, and financial assurance and decommissioning. The participants agreed to focus the evening's drafting on the sections judged to have the highest impact for Harmony's rural character and long-term resource protection: water use and cooling, noise, screening and buffering, energy use and peak demand, utility infrastructure, environmental review, and compliance and enforcement.

2. Water Use and Cooling

During the water use and cooling discussion, participants explored the differences between closed-loop cooling systems and zero-water cooling systems and considered whether the ordinance should require zero-water cooling or allow limited water use subject to strict controls. Several attendees raised concerns about the difficulty of setting and enforcing a water-use cap without robust monitoring and legal protections, and the group discussed the practical and legal challenges of enforcing limits, including the potential for protracted litigation. Hurley noted that zero-water systems are becoming more common and that newer chip and cooling technologies make lower-water or no-water designs increasingly feasible. The group drafted a starting provision stating that all data centers shall utilize closed-loop cooling systems that recirculate coolant without continuous discharge and shall use zero water for cooling operations, and that annual consumptive water use shall be reported to the City of Harmony and shall not exceed limits established by the City, while acknowledging that additional technical detail and feasibility confirmation will be required from utilities and vendors.

3. Noise, Screening, and Buffering

The noise, screening, and buffering discussion focused on whether Harmony should adopt Minnesota Pollution Control Agency standards or impose stricter local limits, how to protect nighttime hours, the appropriate frequency and scope of noise studies, and mitigation measures for backup generator noise. The group drafted a starting provision that noise shall not exceed .65 decibels and that noise studies shall be conducted prior to approval and every two years thereafter. The group also drafted a starting provision for buffering and screening that requires a buffer consisting of permanent vegetation and/or permanent structures along property boundaries and that screening shall consist of a visually solid barrier such as a wall, fence, berm, or building, with the understanding that the City will later specify minimum widths, plant species, and maintenance responsibilities. Hurley will follow up at the March meeting with further setback provisions.

4. Energy Use and Peak Demand

In the energy use and peak demand discussion, participants considered peak demand thresholds, reporting frequency, limits on backup generation, and emissions inventories. The group drafted a starting provision requiring data centers to report annual energy consumption, peak demand, and backup generator usage, and to submit emissions inventories annually, and they noted that additional specificity on metrics, reporting formats, and any peak demand caps will require consultation with utility partners and grid operators.

The utility infrastructure discussion emphasized the need for utility impact studies, careful siting and design criteria for substations, thoughtful routing for transmission lines, clear

interconnection requirements, and documentation of public utility agreements. The group drafted a starting provision that utility infrastructure, including substations and transmission lines, shall comply with all applicable state codes and shall require a utility impact study submitted to the City prior to approval, and they recorded that final interconnection wording is pending further MiEnergy input. This discussion will be further discussed at the March 4th meeting.

5. Conclusion

The meeting concluded with appreciation for participants' contributions and a reaffirmation that the draft language developed tonight will form the basis for subsequent legal review, technical consultation, and Planning & Zoning consideration. The next steps are to complete the drafting of the ordinance documentation and then proceed with drafting the conditional use permit, then followed by the community benefits agreement.