

Data Centers: The Clean Energy Connection

By Marco C. Iafrate

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Introduction

News reports have quoted activists saying about Data Centers... “if they are so great, why force them on people?” We can say the same thing about Clean Energy... “If solar, wind, and battery are so great, why force it upon us?”

Our Ludington City officials are spreading the word that the City’s new CPACE program would not be able to finance a Data Center outside of City Limits. I looked into this, and they are technically incorrect because Clean Energy is used to power Data Centers.

My question is: why have our city officials proven themselves silent and tight-lipped on this subject until now... Why now?

Why now... when our anti-data center group is making such an impact? I believe they may have something up their sleeve with this CPACE program and I will continue monitoring it and speaking openly about it. I do this because it seems with every decision they make as a City Council there is something up their sleeve.

CPACE is a Clean Energy program that funds Data Centers... our City Manager admitted it after we’ve been saying it for a month. So, we are on the right track. Here’s why I think we are:

People say about Data Centers “if they are so great, why force them on people?” We can say the same thing about clean energy. “If solar, wind, and battery are so great, why force it upon us with the MPSC?”

Furthermore, why does the MPSC work with Data Centers to install clean energy that supposedly powers the Data Centers? Now we have established a connection. Both Data Centers and Clean Energies are being forced upon us and they work in collaboration.

From this point on... we need to get to know the work that the Michigan Public Service Commission does with Clean Energy and to understand how they actually work together with Data Centers.

Where the MPSC has been Involved with Data Centers Directly

The MPSC does **not** have siting authority over data centers themselves. The commission has stated this explicitly: under Michigan law, the Commission's jurisdiction is over the electricity and natural gas rates charged to a data center customer and the terms governing service from regulated utilities — it does not have authority over siting or construction of data centers, or permitting, or water use determinations.

Where the MPSC *has* played a controversial role is in approving the energy contracts that make these Data Center projects viable:

- **Saline Township ("Stargate" project, OpenAI/Oracle/Related Digital):** DTE filed a case with the MPSC seeking approval for energy contracts tied to a data center expected to consume about 1.4 gigawatts — roughly a quarter of DTE's current grid capacity. The MPSC conditionally approved DTE's contract with the data center developer through an "ex parte" process, meaning outside individuals and groups weren't permitted to file briefs or objections or take part in shaping the final contract. Attorney General Dana Nessel called this "a sham that only gives the illusion of transparency," and later filed a motion asking the MPSC to reopen the case as a contested proceeding, arguing that altered contract language could let DTE impose near-term costs on ratepayers before fully reconciling costs at the end of a 19-year contract. [Michigan Public](#)
- Notably, the **zoning fight in Saline Township was separate from the MPSC** — the township board voted to deny rezoning of 575 acres needed for the project, after which landowners and the developer sued, alleging the denial was unconstitutional exclusionary zoning, and the two sides settled, allowing the project to proceed. That's a township-level land use/constitutional dispute, not an MPSC citing order. [Planet Detroit](#)
- Here we will see what The U.S. Department of Energy says about the connection across the nation.
<https://www.energy.gov/oe/clean-energy-resources-meet-data-center-electricity-demand>

MPSC is Authorized for Government Overreach

in MI Statute: PA 233/234 of 2023

This is the law with real preemption teeth — but it's aimed at **utility-scale renewable energy and battery storage**, not data centers per se (though battery storage buildout is often tied to data center power demand):

- Public Acts 233 and 234 of 2023 preempt existing local siting authority, set statewide siting standards, and grant siting authority for utility-scale renewable

energy facilities to the MPSC, effective November 29, 2024. [Michigan Townships Association](#)

- The act provides that townships and other local units of government are generally preempted from citing control for utility-scale solar, wind, and battery storage facilities. Thresholds: 50 MW+ for solar, 100 MW+ for wind, and 50 MW+ for storage. [Georgetown-miDalton & Tomich](#)
- Based on PA 233, the MPSC can overrule local ordinances if it's convinced doing so is necessary to ensure a reliable electric grid. [MetroCA](#)
- When local governments reject DTE or Consumers from doing a clean energy project in their community, the utilities have been known to threaten counties like Mason... with the MPSC.
- PA 233 requires all local ordinances to be no stricter than one-size-fits-all statewide standards for a developer to use the local approval process — final decision-making lies with the MPSC, an appointed, rate-setting commission with no experience in local planning and zoning. A group called Citizens for Local Choice has launched an initiative to repeal PA 233 for the November ballot, seeking to restore local zoning authority. [Michigan Townships Association](#)
- **A live legal challenge:** 79 Michigan municipalities have appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court, arguing the MPSC "rewrote the rules" on compatible local ordinances and that this is agency overreach the Supreme Court has never permitted. [Foster Swift](#)

Pushback in progress

- A bipartisan legislative package (House Bills 5594–5596) would impose a one-year moratorium and bar the MPSC from approving agreements with data centers during that period, giving the state time to determine best locations and how to meet power demands — though Governor Whitmer's office has said it will oppose any legislation it views as opposing economic development. [Planet Detroit + 2](#)

MPSC Background

There are a lot of people and entities taking part in forcing Data Centers and Clean Energy into our communities. The MPSC has many stakeholders. As for the MPSC itself, it oversees DTE and Consumers...

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) regulates monopoly energy providers like DTE and Consumers Energy. It is tasked with approving rate hikes, setting reliability standards, and handling consumer complaints. However, the

commission often faces criticism from advocates who argue its decisions prioritize utility profits over everyday ratepayers.

They are supposed to be gatekeepers, but do not seem to be at all.

The Commission is made up of three people, appointed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer and advised and consented by the MI Senate and the MI House.

- **Daniel C. Scripps** — Chair
- **Katherine L. Peretick** — Commissioner
- **Shaquila Myers** — Commissioner

There's an active legislative push to change this structure entirely: a package introduced by state Rep. Reggie Miller (D-Van Buren Township) would amend the Michigan Constitution to have voters **elect** the commissioners directly instead of having them appointed, and would expand the commission from three to five seats. Advocates for the change cite growing public concern over MPSC decisions on data centers and large-scale infrastructure specifically.

Here's why: Myers' appointment specifically drew criticism from environmental justice advocates, who raised concerns about DTE Energy/Consumers Energy influence — noting that an account linked to former Speaker Tate had received a \$100,000 donation in 2023 from a nonprofit led by DTE executives.

Mason County Impact

In Mason County, we have NextEra Energy trying to get farmers in Amber Township to sell their land south of U.S. 10, they want a large-scale solar farm. We also have Jupiter Power wanting to build a Battery Storage Facility near the crossroads of Victory Corner Road and Fisher Road.

I have tracked in other communities that they build clean energy facilities in conjunction with a Data Center. All we need to do read these signs we're getting and then we realize that the case for secret plans for a Data Center here in the Ludington area... are that more valid. Furthermore, that clean energy is not so clean... but dirty.

Battery storage and grid interconnection (the Jupiter Power/NextEra leads) are the quiet, less-covered piece of this story — most media attention goes to the Data Centers themselves, not the transmission and storage buildout serving them.

These clean energy facilities, including our windmills in Summit and Riverton Townships... are a part of the interconnected power grid which has me watching not only for a Data Center but more clean energy propositions in our area.

On August 12, the MPSC is coming to West Shore Community College to hold a public hearing about the Power Grid.

About the Writer

Marco C. Iafrate is a trained investigative reporter, with an Oakland University degree, who has decided to enter the Independent Sector. He represents Ludington Against Data Centers, a Facebook Group, which he leads. In his home City of Ludington, he is running for City Council in the 4th Ward.