

Coal City Planning and Zoning Board Special Meeting
Meeting Minutes
July 27, 2026

1. Call Meeting to Order

The Coal City Planning & Zoning Board Special meeting was called to order at 7:00PM on Monday, July 27, 2026 by Maria Lewis, chairwoman. Roll call: Walt Mahaffay, Jill Breneman, Jason Peters, Brad Littleton, Amanda Burns, Cody Krug and Maria Lewis. Also, in attendance were, Trustees Pam Noffsinger and Bill Mincey, Kyle Watson, building official, Mark Heinle, village attorney and Matt Fritz, administrator.

2. Approval of Minutes — June 1, 2026

A motion to approve the minutes from the June 1, 2026 meeting was made and seconded. Upon roll call, the motion carried 7-0, with all members voting in favor.

3. Public Comment

The Chair read the public comment rules into the record, noting that each speaker would be limited to three minutes and that the board maintained a total of thirty minutes for public participation, consistent with the policy adopted by the Village Board of Trustees and pursuant to Section 2.06(g) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

The following residents addressed the board in opposition to the Aligned Data Center proposal:

Donna Petty raised multiple procedural and substantive concerns regarding the application. She questioned whether a statutory eligibility study had ever been performed for the Phillips parcel prior to its inclusion in the development district, and asked whether board members had reviewed such a study before approving the map amendment. She contended that the PUD application relies on five acres outside village limits whose proposed industrial annexation conflicts with Coal City's official Future Land Use Map and Comprehensive Plan. She further challenged the validity of the Magnum Economic Fiscal Contribution report, noting that the document references "Project Star Data Campus" rather than "Project Heartland," raising doubts about whether the study was prepared for this specific project. Ms. Petty also detailed concerns about the numerous code deviations sought by the applicant, including a 70-acre exposed substation visible from Reed Road, a 104-foot antenna, gravel lots, elimination of parking, and a 12-foot fence. On the subject of noise, she stated that the project would require approximately 220 generators, that a single generator operates above 80 decibels, and that approximately eight generators would be tested daily. She urged the board to deny the PUD application until the developer can demonstrate full compliance with applicable municipal ordinances.

Donald Vilt, voiced concerns of the Hauschild Annexation that happened at a previous meeting. He is in opposition of the data center. He indicated that they are noisy, there is pollution and is concerned with contamination in his well water.

Winter Wills, a recent Coal City High School graduate, spoke in opposition, questioning the broader community benefit of the data center compared to investment in local businesses along Broadway. She argued that funding local commercial establishments would generate more community interaction, create less strain on the energy grid, and better preserve water quality.

Leo McCants – 40 S Jugtoun Road. Read a statement they prepared indicating the disregard they felt from the board about the communities concerns .

Tom Crawford spoke emotionally about the long-term health and safety implications of the project for future generations, expressing concern about noise and airborne particulates, including silica sand, and urging the board to weigh those risks against the financial benefits.

Wayne Halligan of Richards Crossing raised concerns about the transparency of the PUD committee formation process. He stated that at prior village board meetings, residents had been told no committee had been formed and no names had been selected. He noted that within two days of a recent meeting, a named committee list appeared publicly. He questioned who was responsible for the apparent inconsistency, and suggested that a community open house scheduled for a Thursday during daytime hours was inaccessible to working residents. He advocated for a weekend session to allow broader participation.

Tracy Pearl, a teacher from Dwight, spoke on behalf of students with special needs, stating that the noise levels associated with data center generators would be physiologically and behaviorally harmful to children with autism and other sensory sensitivities, including those attending Coal City's early childhood school located approximately one mile from the proposed site. She also noted that bald eagles had been observed in the area on multiple occasions and expressed concern they would be displaced by the project.

Elizabeth Ashcraft of Hunters Run reiterated the request, made at a prior village board meeting, that at least two members of the opposition alliance be included on the PUD review committee. She noted that the committee list posted publicly did not include any such representatives and included individuals who do not reside in Coal City. She also expressed concern that many neighboring residents had indicated they would place their homes for sale if ground were broken on the project, and that local streets are not equipped to handle the associated construction traffic. She asked why no one had clearly articulated to residents what they stand to gain from the data center.

Brenda Gerber of Fox Street focused on the proximity of the project to Coal City's early childhood school, which serves children as young as three years old, including those with developmental delays. She cited World Health Organization and audiological research indicating that 75 decibels is an unsafe sustained noise level for children, contrasting that with OSHA standards applicable to adult workers. She recounted a personal experience with a 2015 tornado that destroyed her home, and stated she would rather relive that experience than have the data center built so close to her family and the school. She asked what options are available to residents who cannot afford to relocate.

Tina Johnson of Diamond expressed concern about the risk of tornado damage to the data center given the area's history of severe weather, questioning what would happen if the facility were struck by a tornado. She also raised concerns about potential surveillance infrastructure, rising utility costs, and broader impacts on quality of life and also stated that vigilante things are going to happen with aggressive behavior and crime with people panicking.

The Chair closed the public comment period upon reaching the thirty-minute limit.

4. Request for Aligned Data Center P.U.D. Review Committee

The Chair provided a formal statement for the record regarding the status of the Aligned Data Center application. On Friday, July 24, 2026, the Village received a long-anticipated application for zoning relief from Aligned Data Centers and the respective property owners for a proposed data center development encompassing six parcels totaling approximately

320 acres located at the southeast corner of Reed Road and Carbon Hill Road. The area is predominantly zoned for industrial use (I-1) but is currently being farmed.

The Chair described the application as voluminous and detailed, and emphasized that the board was convening for the first time primarily to publicly disclose receipt of the application. The proposed development includes five two-story data center buildings with accessory offices, outdoor backup diesel generators, stormwater detention, truck docks, parking lots, facility lighting, landscaping, an electrical substation, and extension of Coal City utilities to the site.

The application technically encompasses three distinct requests for zoning relief: (1) preliminary and final Planned Unit Development approval; (2) annexation and rezoning to I-1 of a recently acquired residential property proposed for inclusion in the development area; and (3) preliminary and final subdivision plat approval.

The Chair explained the PUD review process in detail. Under the Coal City zoning code, this type of large-scale project requires a conditional use approval under the PUD framework, meaning the developer does not have an automatic right to build simply because the land is zoned industrial. The developer must affirmatively demonstrate compliance with applicable zoning standards. Any project over ten acres requires this additional layer of scrutiny. The PUD process enables the ZBA to recommend, and the Village Board to impose, custom site-specific conditions tailored to ensure the project is a good fit for its location, is well-designed, and addresses any special concerns. The Village Board will serve as the final decision maker on all requested zoning relief.

Prior to any public hearing, the application is first reviewed by a PUD Committee, a temporary body established under the village code to conduct a technical first-blush review of the application, identify areas of compliance or deficiency, and issue a written report to both the developer and the ZBA. That report will be made publicly available. The developer may then supplement or revise its application in response. The ZBA will subsequently provide notice of and conduct a public hearing, which the Chair noted is likely to span multiple evenings with no time cap, ensuring all stakeholders have a full opportunity to present information, ask questions, and offer comment.

The Chair noted that the PUD Committee is not a permanent body; it is constituted in response to a specific application and disbanded upon conclusion of its work. The last project requiring a PUD committee in Coal City was the North Arrow Senior Homes project. As the first step in the formal process, the Chair requested that the board pass a motion to request the Village Board appoint members to the PUD Committee so that the code-mandated evaluation process could begin.

A motion to request that the Village Board appoint members of the PUD Review Committee so that the evaluation process called for by the Village Code may begin was made by Breneman and seconded by Burns. Upon roll call, the motion carried 7-0, with all members voting in favor.

5. **Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by Mahaffay and seconded by Burns. The motion carried by unanimous vote and meeting adjourned at 7:48pm.



Linda Sula, Deputy Clerk