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To: [planadmin](#)
Subject: Midtown Redevelopment Proposal - Public Comments
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Hello,

I live in the Riverwest neighborhood and I am contacting you about the proposed Midtown Data Center.

Let me first make clear that I am writing to voice my opposition to this project.

The long and short of it is, data centers, computer research facilities, and projects like them are a widespread attempt to establish a permanent surveillance infrastructure in the U.S. This should be clear to anyone looking at data here, as we will discuss below. And to clarify I understand this will not be a large-scale hyperdata center, but I do not find that a compelling reason to proceed with the “computer research” portion of the proposed development.

Who am I to be making this claim? I earned an interdisciplinary B.A. from UWM in Media Studies which broadly encompassed information sciences, communication sciences, and mass media systems. The program’s stated goal is to teach “the knowledge and skills to use the technology efficiently, effectively and ethically in business, media or the creative arts.” With that being said, I would like to consider the economics of this decision, the ethics of this decision, and the material affects of this decision.

Before we discuss the ethics of allowing these companies to benefit from our community, let’s talk about data centers and other tech projects as a neutral piece of infrastructure and their impact on residents. As of June 2026, many townships around the U.S. now find themselves living next to established data centers, so we know with more certainty what the actual impacts on community members are, not just the projected impacts. Americans all across the nation describe life-altering levels of light and noise pollution, decreased water quality, heat island effects, higher electric bills, and lowered property values. This is true not only for hyperscale data centers, but for data centers of all sizes.

As Wisconsin Watch reported, WeEnergies is already arguing that we as ratepayers should be the ones to take on the additional financial risk for data centers. (<https://wisconsinwatch.org/2026/06/wisconsin-we-energies-data-center-credit-standards-regulators-utility-psc-energy/>) This comes on the heels of years of increased rates for regular consumers and record profits for the company. The CEO of WeEnergies has spoken about record profits of \$1.6 Billion for the company and company executives, while paying \$0 in taxes and leaving ratepayers with increasingly burdensome utility costs during a cost-of-living crisis.

Additionally, there is the actual usage of this infrastructure to consider. While most people associate data centers with training for Large Language Models, generative AI, and other AI tools, data centers have many uses. An argument I have heard from city officials in support of this project is that it will not be used for AI, therefore the opposition to this project is simply misinformed. However, I want us to consider what value these data centers and similar

projects actually have for tech companies and the people exercising power in the United States today.

If you are not familiar with media studies, a large part of our focus of study has been on how media systems and our society have changed since the invention of the internet and the associated digital technologies it has led to. For those who may not know, the Internet began as a Department of Defense project called “ARPANET.” I bring this up to highlight a relationship between the interests of the state and their investments in new technologies. Naturally, as the state chooses which projects it funds, it chooses those that hold relevance to their aims and objectives. This means often, when new technologies receive large sums of investments, it is because they hold substantial economic interest to the so-called “defense sector.”

The U.S. defense sector has been investing heavily in certain kinds of technologies since 2020. These include things like:

- * “Cop Cities,” artificial cities for practicing repression tactics
- * AI facial recognition tools like the “Mobile Fortify” tool used by ICE agents
- * Data scrapers like “Flock” cameras and the “SignalTrace” tool they are now integrating into their cameras to scrape data from smart devices that pass them

These technologies accumulate VAST amounts of data. This data must be stored somewhere. The “cloud” is a physical place on Earth, rooms full of servers storing precious, monetizable data. Flock alone claims to store video data collected from their cameras for 30 days. And thus, it is clear that the real value of these data centers to tech companies and the defense sector is as surveillance infrastructure, financed by ratepayers and communities, that continue to further extract wealth and resources while deteriorating the communities around them.

Furthermore, these “investments” are just bad economics for us. We often find ourselves giving up FAR more in benefits to these companies than we will ever receive. It baffles me how community leaders in towns and cities across the U.S. have justified these frankly absurdly unbalanced contracts. What is it we are actually agreeing to with these predatory contracts?

As mentioned, We Energies supports giving these tech projects financial benefits despite increased risk to regular consumers (<https://www.wpr.org/news/psc-we-energies-proposed-data-center-rates-risks-customers>). Companies always promise that towns will see economic benefits, but how could we if we are giving them attractive tax breaks and economic incentives to “choose us!” As we have seen in the many cases of multinational corporations in export-processing zones, these companies look for the best deal for themselves, make once independent communities dependent on their economic well-being, and rarely deliver on their promises of jobs.

I mean, for fucks sake we just went through this with FoxConn a decade ago. How many times will we fall for this scheme? Trent Overhue (and developers like him) are grifters trying to make a quick buck off of us, and right now data centers, computer research facilities, AI tools and infrastructure are hot. It’s all part of an industry with substantial, and fast-moving commerce and everyone is trying to get theirs before this bubble bursts. I cannot stress enough that these are volatile industries and as we witnessed with NFTs and crypto, these new technologies arrive quickly and are rarely widely adopted. If the tech industry was not currently being propped up by the state and the defense sector I sincerely believe the bubble

would have burst already. But since it is being artificially propped up, it continues to leech off our communities and desperately build infrastructure it hopes will outlive this bubble.

The secretive way the city has gone about this deal has done a great deal of damage to community trust. I urge you to please see these kinds of deals for what they are, one-sided wins for the companies at the expense of a great financial burden to the communities that are taking the risks, costs, and losses. Regardless of whether the companies themselves succeed or fail, we will be no better off on the other side of these deals. Please do your civic duty to protect Milwaukee and Milwaukeeans from these exercises of corporate power. I know this site has been a nuisance to the city, but surely it is possible to continue the redevelopment plan to install housing units and community services without further entrenching the tech industry in Milwaukee.

Please understand also that we as citizens of Milwaukee are prepared to fight this project.

Kind regards,
Marlo-Aaron Lawler-Yelk