

TOWN OF MORRIS
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
Memorandum- Battery Energy Storage Systems and Data Centers

Prepared by Janell Mullen, consultant Town Planner dated June 2026

BACKGROUND

This issue is becoming one of the most significant emerging land-use challenges facing Connecticut Planning & Zoning Commissions. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and large-scale data centers are moving from being niche infrastructure projects to major land-use developments that can have profound impacts on local zoning, public safety, utilities, environmental resources, and the scenic quality of a small town like Morris.

DEFINITIONS-

As outlined in the Moratorium Memorandum

A. Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) is defined as:

A stationary system or facility designed to store electrical energy using rechargeable batteries or similar technologies for later use, whether as a principal use or accessory use. Such systems include all associated components and infrastructure, including but not limited to:

- Battery modules, racks, or containers;
- Power conversion systems, including inverters and transformers;
- Thermal management and cooling systems;
- Fire detection and suppression systems;
- Control systems and associated equipment;
- Fencing, screening, and security infrastructure.

This definition includes grid-scale, commercial, and utility-owned energy storage facilities, whether standalone or co-located with renewable energy systems or substations.

BESS are large-scale facilities that store electricity and discharge it when needed. Utility-scale systems can occupy several acres and contains hundreds of lithium-ion battery cabinets.

B. Data Center is defined as:

A facility, structure, or campus of structures primarily used for the storage, processing, and distribution of digital data and information, including cloud-based services and network operations. Data Centers typically include:

- High-density server and data storage equipment;
- Telecommunications and networking infrastructure;
- Mechanical systems for cooling, including HVAC or liquid cooling systems;
- On-site electrical substations, backup generators, and/or battery storage systems;
- Security, monitoring, and operational support infrastructure.

This definition includes hyperscale, colocation, and enterprise data centers, but does not include small-scale server rooms or equipment that are clearly incidental and accessory to a permitted principal use.

Traditional Data Centers were often 25,000-100,000 square feet. Modern AI facilities can exceed:

- 500,000 square feet
- 100+ MW electrical demand
- Tens of millions of gallons of cooling water annually

WHY CT IS VULNERABLE

Connecticut is actively encouraging both industries.

The state has established tax incentives and a dedicated office to attract data center development. Connecticut law provides significant tax benefits for qualified data centers and state agencies are actively marketing Connecticut as a data center infrastructure destination.

At the same time, the state's electric grid modernization efforts and renewable energy goals are driving demand for utility-scale battery storage facilities.

Many CT towns are beginning to realize they have little or no zoning language addressing either use.

Connecticut offers:

- Strong electric infrastructure
- Fiber connectivity
- Proximity to New York and Boston
- Tax incentives
- Available industrial land

WHAT CT TOWNS ARE DOING

Morris – Two year moratorium

Groton- One-year moratorium on data centers and developed regulations governing their location and operation.

NEXT STEPS

For BESS

1. Create a formal definition
2. Require Special Permits
3. Establish setbacks from
 - Residences
 - Schools

- Public Water Supplies
 - Bantam Lake
4. Require emergency response plans
 5. Require independent engineering review
 6. Require decommissioning bonds
 7. Restrict facilities to industrial districts and/or adaptive reuse of existing buildings

For Data Centers

1. Define data centers as separate land use
2. Limit them to industrial districts
3. Establish maximum building footprint
4. Require noise studies
5. Require visual screening
6. Evaluate electrical demand impacts
7. Evaluate water consumption and disposal
8. Require back-up power regulations
9. Require host-community benefit agreements

For small towns like Morris, the immediate threat or near-term pressure of development is likely:

- Utility-scale battery storage
- Grid-support facilities
- Solar-plus storage projects
- Facilities tied to transmission upgrades