



Fort Wayne Data Center: The Price of Progress

Over the past several years, cities across the country have competed to bring large data centers into their communities by offering land, tax incentives, and other benefits. Companies like Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta say these data centers are necessary to support artificial intelligence, and the digital services people use every day. In 2024, Google announced plans to build a major data center campus in Fort Wayne as part of a \$2 billion investment that is expected to create around 200 permanent jobs (Indiana Economic Development Corporation, 2024). At first glance, this sounds like an inherently positive investment into Fort Wayne. But when local leaders make decisions like this, they have to think beyond just the headlines, and flashy numbers. They have to ask whether the project will actually make life better for the people who already live in their community, or will only benefit a select few at the cost of others. Even though data centers are becoming more prevalent every year, I believe Fort Wayne should be cautious about welcoming more of them because the long-term costs to the community are greater than the long-term benefits.

A data center is basically a building filled with thousands of computers called servers. Those servers store and process the information behind almost every online action. Watching Netflix, backing up photos, using Google Drive, streaming music, or asking an AI chatbot a question all depend on data centers. Since these servers run at all times, they use a huge amount of electricity and generate a lot of heat. Because of that, data centers need large cooling systems, backup generators, and consistent maintenance (Google Data Centers). They may not look very different from warehouses on the outside, but they are some of the most energy-intensive buildings being built today.

On the contrary, there are some real benefits to bringing a company like Google to Fort Wayne. The construction phase creates numerous jobs, there is more business for local small businesses, and having a major technology company invest in the city can attract attention from other businesses, and lead to more economic development. Those are all positive outcomes so it is understandable why many people support projects like this, especially when communities are looking for ways to grow their economy such as ours. (Indiana Economic Development Corporation, 2024).

The problem is that those benefits do not last once construction is finished, data centers usually do not employ nearly as many people as most other developments of a similar size. Google has said the Fort Wayne project is expected to create around 200 permanent jobs (Indiana Economic Development Corporation, 2024). While those are good jobs in which people can make a living off of, 200 permanent positions is a relatively small number for a project that costs \$2 billion. Most of the work inside a data center is automated, so there simply are not as many employees needed to keep it running. The biggest economic boost happens during construction, but the demands on local resources continue long after the construction crews leave. That begs the question on if building this data center is worth it for temporary benefits and a small number of jobs, while the data center they are building could possibly replace jobs through artificial intelligence.

One of my biggest concerns is the amount of electricity these facilities require. Data centers operate every hour of every day, and the growth of artificial intelligence is causing energy demand to increase even more. According to the International Energy Agency, electricity use from data centers is expected to rise significantly over the next several years because of AI and cloud computing (International Energy Agency, 2025). Meeting that demand often means

upgrading power lines, substations, and other parts of the electric grid. Even if Google helps pay for those improvements, the community still has to support an electric system that is under more pressure than before. The electrical grid is old, and barely supports what we have now, so you have to ask the question of whether it is fair to put all of this pressure on a data center that many citizens of Fort Wayne will not see benefits from.

There is also a bigger issue that goes beyond Fort Wayne itself. Data centers are being built largely because of the rapid growth of artificial intelligence, and AI has the potential to reshape the job market, in which many fear are not going to be beneficial for the majority of Americans. Many experts believe AI will automate portions of jobs in industries like customer service, transportation, finance, manufacturing, and even some office work. While AI will almost certainly create new careers, those new opportunities may not be available to everyone who is displaced. At the same time, much of the financial benefit from AI is likely to go to the relatively small number of technology companies that own the computing infrastructure and develop these systems. This could lead to greater economic inequality, where productivity and corporate profits increase while many workers struggle to adapt. If communities like Fort Wayne are helping build the infrastructure that makes this transition possible, local leaders should also consider whether the long-term social and economic effects truly serve the public interest rather than primarily benefiting a handful of large corporations.

Tax incentives are another reason I think people should be cautious. Cities and states offer tax breaks to attract major companies, but that money has to come from somewhere. Every dollar that is not spent in tax breaks for data centers is a dollar that cannot be spent on schools, roads, public safety, parks, or other community needs. Sometimes incentives are worth it, but in this case I am not convinced the return is large enough. If a project creates relatively few

permanent jobs while placing heavy demands on electricity, water, and public infrastructure while potentially automating jobs, then local officials should ask whether those incentives are really benefiting residents.

I am not arguing that data centers are unnecessary, or inherently bad. They are an important part of the internet and will continue to support our online needs, and the rising demand for more internet capabilities is an issue we need to deal with. However, the real question is whether Fort Wayne should make this kind of development a priority. In my opinion, economic development should be judged by how much it improves the lives of the people who live in the community. Projects that create more permanent jobs while putting less strain on public resources would be a better investment for Fort Wayne.

Overall, I think Fort Wayne should be cautious about building data centers. Google's investment will certainly bring some benefits, but it also comes with long-term costs that ought not to be ignored in pursuit of economic development. Increased electricity demand, broad implications of what AI can do to the job market, and generous tax incentives all raise legitimate questions about whether this is the right direction for the city, and its citizens. Before approving more projects like this, local leaders should make sure companies are providing clear benefits that outweigh the costs. In the end, I believe Fort Wayne would be better served by attracting businesses that create more lasting opportunities for residents while using fewer public resources, and promoting goods that benefit everybody instead of a select few.

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