

# Case Studies

---

To better understand the concerns and strategies of members of datacenter opposition groups, we reached out to organizers directly. These sections include excerpts and summaries of three interviewees' accounts.

## Independence, Missouri

---

We reached out to the 117,000-member group *Stop the AI Data Center in Independence* to learn about their story.

The group began in the weeks following December 9, 2025 when the city of Independence, Missouri unveiled plans for a 2.5 million-square-foot data center campus. The plans were pending the city's approval of a 90% tax cut for Nebius, the company behind the data center. The Facebook post announcing the project received hundreds of angry reactions, but city officials had signed NDAs so questions had to wait until January 12, when Nebius held a Q&A followed by a "study session" with council members.

Misty Vaughn, one of the group's founders, said she knew from the get-go it was smoke and mirrors, "Our city is mostly working class, who can make a 3:30 Q&A session?" Those who were able to attend did not get their questions answered, she said. In the study session that followed, when Vaughn asked Councilmember McCandless if there was any way to slow things down, "she said, 'Nope' to my face, and to every other resident's face. And so we created a Facebook group."

After the Q&A session, council members wanted to move forward with the vote in two weeks, but residents convinced them to postpone it to March 2. "We voiced that this is moving too fast. None of our questions are being answered," Vaughn said. They sent a letter to the mayor with 43 questions, who then sent it to Nebius's lawyers for answers. Nebius has still not answered most questions.<sup>1</sup>

Between January 12 and the vote on March 2, the group hosted weekly meetings at public libraries and local churches. "We brought in everybody," including the council members, who Vaughn said were not hosting their own forums to engage with residents. Most of the council members came to the group's final meeting before the tax abatement vote. Vaughn asked Councilmember Perkins, who represents her district, how many community members it would take for him to vote no. "He said 'No number. There's no number that would get me to vote no,' which really stuck, having a council member say that to our face."

Vaughn said about Nebius, "they don't need to convince the 120,000 residents that live here. They just need to convince seven people."

---

<sup>1</sup> City of Independence, Mo. [[Responses to Resident Questions Regarding Nebius Data Center](#)]. Obtained from Misty Vaughn

And what's funny is, every single one of these councilmembers was put on NDA.” Cities like Independence, she argued, make perfect targets for tech companies. “We have had to cut so many things to stay afloat. So when you've got a billion dollar tech company coming in, you've got city council drooling over this deal.” During the study session, the first question Councilmember Fears asked Nebius was, “you did say billion, right, with a B?”

One of the core concerns of group members is water. “Our aquifer is extremely pure,” Vaughn said, “it's one of the best water supplies in the country.”<sup>2</sup> This has caused residents from surrounding cities to join the group as well, as the project introduces large-scale industrial infrastructure above a drinking water source relied on by 250,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

The group has been demanding answers about the cooling process, citing concerns about both the consumption and contamination of their water supply after learning about the chemicals used in other data center cooling systems.<sup>4,5</sup> Vaughn has pressed city council for information on the chemicals that will be deployed in the cooling process. She said they received “bizarre answers,” such as Councilmember McCandless claiming that only “salt or soap” will be used. “We're not stupid,” Vaughn said.

The Nebius campus will have up to 1.2 gigawatts of capacity, more than four times the city's current peak electricity usage.<sup>6,7</sup>

To meet this demand, Independence plans to rebuild a shuttered natural gas facility and increase its total capacity from 90 megawatts to an eventual 1.1 gigawatts.<sup>8</sup> Vaughn notes that the surrounding area looks nothing like it did when the plant first opened in 1958, “there are now elementary schools nearby, there are communities and neighborhoods around there.”

The air pollution from the power plant would be worsened by on-site diesel generators at the data center itself. City officials told residents these would only run briefly during outages, but that restriction appears nowhere in the contract.

The day city council voted on the tax cut, the group mobilized a packed room with public comment going until 11:45 PM. Despite the magnitude of the opposition, the measure passed 5-2.

The group proceeded to collect thousands of signatures to force a referendum on the tax cut. Despite abiding by a section of the city charter, the effort was blocked on technicalities.

According to co-founder Rachel Gonzalez, Independence residents felt they had been denied the right to vote, and the issue received significant attention in local media. Three group members formed a press team and said yes to every media inquiry. Gonzalez said this paid off, as it prevented Nebius from controlling the narrative.

<sup>2</sup> City of Independence, Mo., “[2023 Consumer Confidence Report](#).”

<sup>3</sup> City of Independence, Mo., “[Water Service Area](#).”

<sup>4</sup> Hardin, “[Data Centers Are Contributing to PFAS Forever Chemical Pollution](#).”

<sup>5</sup> Yang et al., “[Toxicity Assessment of 14 Biocides for Industrial Circulating Cooling Water System](#).”

<sup>6</sup> Nebius, “[Nebius x Independence, Missouri](#).”

<sup>7</sup> DKMT Consulting, “[Independence Power and Light Cost Benefit Analysis](#).”

<sup>8</sup> City of Independence, Mo., “[Data Center FAQs](#).”

She added that they mentioned the Facebook group in every interview. Their group quickly grew from ten thousand to a hundred thousand members.

In the following month, two councilmembers who voted for the tax abatement were up for reelection. Both were voted out of office, including McCandless, who also lost her bid for mayor despite winning the primary prior to the vote on the tax cut. Despite changes in leadership, the contract will still go into effect unless challenged by other means. The group's organizers say next steps are supporting the residents who neighbor the data center site and are trying to put together their own lawsuit.

## Additional Highlight: Festus, Missouri

The city council election in Independence, Missouri is not an isolated case. Pro data center officials in another Missouri town fared similarly. After the city council of Festus, Missouri approved plans for a data center, dismissing local opposition, the group *No Data Center in Festus* coordinated to vote out all four incumbent city council members who were up for reelection.<sup>9</sup> Their Facebook group had less than three thousand group members. They have now started a lawsuit against both the developer of the data center and the city of Festus, alleging lawmakers broke government transparency laws and held illegal private meetings with developers.<sup>10</sup>

## Ohio

In April 2026, the Ohio Ballot Board certified a proposal for a constitutional amendment prohibiting the construction of new data centers with a peak load exceeding 25 megawatts.<sup>11</sup> The amendment was proposed by *Conserve Ohio*, an initiative by members of the Facebook group *Ohio Residents for Responsible Development*. If 413,000 valid signatures are collected by July 1, the measure will appear as a statewide referendum on the November ballot.

In January, residents of Mount Orab, Ohio reported that when they sought information about housing demolitions, local officials stated they had signed non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and could not share details. Jessica Baker, a co-petitioner and organizer who lives in a nearby village, recalled seeing news coverage of a resident inquiring about the sites at a council meeting. "They couldn't tell him anything because they had signed NDAs, and I was like... what? You're elected. What?" Baker dug deeper and posted a video about her findings on her personal Facebook page. It got over 350,000 views and membership in Ohio opposition Facebook groups skyrocketed.

Residents began extensively investigating the projects, including tracing land purchases through shell LLCs and filing public records requests. They post all findings to their public Facebook pages, where they have identified data center developments across southern Ohio as well as a pattern of data centers clustering around water systems and electricity infrastructure.

<sup>9</sup> Mansouri, "[Festus Voters Oust Every Incumbent.](#)"

<sup>10</sup> Grawitch, "[Group Sues Festus and Proposed Developer.](#)"

<sup>11</sup> Ohio Attorney General's Office, "[Title and Summary Certified.](#)"

Reasons for opposition include electricity demand, water usage, land conversion, and limited permanent job creation. Baker's group uncovered plans for a "1000+ acre mega-site" data center in Mount Orab, for which 2,000 megawatts has been requested.<sup>12</sup> The village's 4,500 residents currently rely on only 10-15 megawatts.

With at least 77 data centers proposed in addition to the 200 currently active across Ohio, local volunteers decided to initiate a statewide ballot initiative.<sup>13</sup> Ohio is one of the 18 states that allows citizen-initiated constitutional amendments.<sup>14</sup>

To qualify for the ballot, organizers must collect over 413,000 valid signatures from at least 44 counties. The petition and information about signing locations are hosted on [conserveohio.com](https://conserveohio.com).

Members of Ohio Residents for Responsible Development are currently gathering signatures while managing a network of statewide volunteers. Their goal is to collect 700,000 signatures, to include a buffer for any that are rejected.

---

<sup>12</sup> PJM Interconnection, "[DEOK Supplemental Projects](#)."

<sup>13</sup> Larson, "[The Rush to Build Ohio Data Centers](#)."

<sup>14</sup> Ballotpedia, "[Initiated Constitutional Amendment](#)."

---

## Sources cited

1. City of Independence, Mo. [Responses to Resident Questions Regarding Nebius Data Center]. February 19, 2026. Obtained from Misty Vaughn, April 12, 2026. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wOrT4u6TnwpNraW6xTxRJOzLtcF1g1m9/view>.
  2. City of Independence, Mo. “2023 Consumer Confidence Report.” August 13, 2024. <https://www.independencemo.gov/ccr>.
  3. City of Independence, Mo. “Water Service Area.” July 3, 2023. <https://www.independencemo.gov/government/city-departments/municipal-services/water-division/water-service-area>.
  4. Hardin, Andie May. “Data Centers Are Contributing to PFAS Forever Chemical Pollution.” Environmental and Energy Study Institute, 2026. <https://www.eesi.org/articles/view/data-centers-are-contributing-to-pfas-forever-chemical-pollution>.
  5. Yang, Heyun, Xiaoliang Li, Xin Cao, Sijia Lu, and Xing Zheng. “The Toxicity Assessment of 14 Biocides for Industrial Circulating Cooling Water System by Damage/Repair Pathway Profiling Analysis.” Environmental Toxicology and Pharmacology 100 (June 1, 2023): 104156–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.etap.2023.104156>.
  6. Nebius. “Nebius x Independence, Missouri.” 2025. <https://nebius.com/independencemo>.
  7. DKMT Consulting. “Independence Power and Light Cost Benefit Analysis.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.independencemo.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/DKMT%20IPL%20Cost%20Benefit%20Analysis%20Report%20August%206%202024.cleaned.pdf>.
  8. City of Independence, Mo. “Data Center FAQs.” December 16, 2025. <https://www.independencemo.gov/data-center-faqs>.
  9. Mansouri, Kavahn. “After \$6B Data Center Plan, Festus Voters Oust Every Incumbent Council Member.” STLPR, April 8, 2026. <https://www.stlpr.org/government-politics-issues/2026-04-08/6b-data-center-festus-voters-oust-every-incumbent-council-member>.
  10. Grawitch, Katie. “Data Center Opposition Group Sues Festus and Proposed Developer.” STLPR, April 10, 2026. <https://www.stlpr.org/government-politics-issues/2026-04-10/data-center-opposition-group-sues-city-festus-proposed-developer>.
-

11. Ohio Attorney General's Office. "Title and Summary Certified for Proposed 'Prohibition of Construction of a Data Center' Constitutional Amendment." March 2026.

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Media/News-Releases/March-2026/Title-and-Summary-Certified-for-Proposed-Prohibiti>.

12. PJM Interconnection. "DEOK Supplemental Projects." Transmission Expansion Advisory Committee, January 7, 2025. <https://www.pjm.com/-/media/DotCom/committees-groups/committees/teac/2025/20250107/20250107-item-09---deok-supplemental-projects.pdf>.

13. Larson, Zeb. "The Rush to Build Ohio Data Centers Tells Us Everything That's Wrong with Local and State Government." Ohio Capital Journal, February 19, 2026.

<https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2026/02/19/the-rush-to-build-ohio-data-centers-tells-us-everything-thats-wrong-with-local-and-state-government/>.

14. Ballotpedia. "Initiated Constitutional Amendment." Accessed April 17, 2026.

[https://ballotpedia.org/Initiated\\_constitutional\\_amendment](https://ballotpedia.org/Initiated_constitutional_amendment).

### **Additional sources**

Baker, Jessica. Interview by Sonali Malik. April 11, 2026.

Gonzalez, Rachel. Interview by Matthew Shaw. April 11, 2026.

Vaughn, Misty. Interview by Sonali Malik. April 12, 2026.