

CITY COUNCIL PREVIEW #7: MARCH 10, 2025

This week's Council agenda has two major items to discuss. There's Ordinance #6 and there's the Data Center.

Ordinance #6 requires businesses seeking public incentives to document that they do a safe, above-board business. Ordinance #6 may have the votes to pass but not to withstand an expected mayoral veto. While this version may have failed in its current form, do not be surprised if discussions regarding the best way to support local labor continue and that the issue does not go away.

The hot topic on the public's mind is not the ordinance or Council politics, however, it's "What the heck is going on with this data center?" Mayor Costas attempted to address this with a remarkably tone-deaf statement released on Thursday, March 6. It tells those concerned that no rational opinion could be drawn about the proposal because there's no project. Which is true in a very narrow technical sense: there is no formal proposal as the city defines it. That someone is spending money to investigate a data center's feasibility with the RDC's and the Mayor's approval makes it a project in most people's eyes.

The outrage comes because it appears that the Mayor is jumping on a slippery slope to a data center, and everyone can see it. Money spent on the feasibility study is an investment and we can't jeopardize that lest we destroy Valpo's reputation among future developers. The camel's nose is under the tent, as the saying goes. Might as well learn to live with a camel!

This is not the playbook that opponents wish to play by, and it's one the Mayor should throw out in favor of actual openness and transparency. Letting the Environment Advisory Board investigate its impact is a start, but it concedes that the project could proceed at that site. Let the Board consider other sites, too, if we're to explore Valparaiso as a data center home; or let it consider the best use for that taxpayer-owned parcel of land.

Because fundamentally, the question that the public is asking is what should happen to the land that the city bought for the sports park using taxpayer money. It is saying that it should not be up to the super-secretive RDC to determine the fate of that land; that question should be part of a robust public discussion. ARPA money was used to purchase the land. It belongs to Valparaiso, not the RDC, and Valparaiso should decide on its fate.