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INSIDE THIS EDITION

EDITOR'S NOTE. This issue follows the compute economy from the Asheville G20 gathering to the state and county decisions that will determine whether South Carolina captures its durable benefits. The common assignment is implementation: finance infrastructure, judge large loads by performance, protect digital rights as data is aggregated, and replace temporary moratoria with clear local rules.

LEAD STORY

From Asheville to Charleston: The Compute Economy Becomes Public Policy

A national projection about American compute dominance creates a state-level assignment: South Carolina must build the power, infrastructure, workforce and rules needed to compete.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent used an interview with Larry Kudlow during the Asheville G20 gathering to describe computing capacity as a strategic American asset. Bessent said the United States accounted for roughly 60% of global compute in 2025 and projected that share could reach approximately 80% by 2030.

The projection is significant for South Carolina because Bessent is a South Carolinian and because the state already understands how national economic shifts become local opportunities. Boeing in Charleston, advanced manufacturing across the Upstate and the Port of Charleston all demonstrate that infrastructure decisions made years earlier can shape decades of growth.

Compute is becoming another layer of that economic foundation. Data centers generate the capacity that powers artificial intelligence, cloud services, digital payments, cybersecurity, logistics and modern manufacturing. The facilities may look like private industrial projects, but their effects reach power generation, transmission, construction, workforce development, tax policy and rural land use.

> **South Carolina should not merely host the compute economy. It should help design the rules by which that economy operates.**

The physical economy behind artificial intelligence

Bessent also emphasized that the digital buildout begins with physical work. Before a manufacturing facility produces anything, it must be constructed. Before an artificial-intelligence system can run, someone must build the data center, install the electrical equipment, connect the fiber, construct the cooling system and expand the power supply.

That makes the compute economy a potential blue-collar renaissance – but only if South Carolina connects announced investment to South Carolina workers, contractors and technical colleges. The state should distinguish temporary construction employment from permanent operating positions while still recognizing the economic value of a multi-year construction cycle and the supplier ecosystem surrounding it.

Charleston and the statewide opportunity

Charleston is already connected to the global economy through aerospace, automotive supply chains, the port and advanced manufacturing. Rural counties offer a different but complementary opportunity: high-capital projects can strengthen the tax base while placing fewer continuing demands on roads, schools and public services than large residential growth, provided the projects are properly sited and negotiated.

The opportunity is not automatic. South Carolina must protect existing ratepayers, require large customers to bear the costs created to serve them, address water and noise, establish transparent local procedures and reward projects that can reduce demand during grid stress.

The General Assembly's 2027 debate should therefore be about more than whether data centers are allowed. It should establish a framework for energy campuses, performance-based project tiers, full infrastructure-cost responsibility, workforce commitments and community benefits. The state should build technology that works for South Carolinians, not force communities to accommodate technology without rules.

If Bessent's projection is even directionally correct, the competition is already underway. The states that combine energy, land, workforce, capital and public trust will capture the durable benefits. South Carolina has the ingredients. The next step is turning them into policy.

Source: Bessent interview with Larry Kudlow →

INFRASTRUCTURE

South Carolina's Infrastructure Bill Is Due - Who Pays?

Growth is exposing the age and capacity of South Carolina's pipes, pumps, roads and power systems. Rural counties need new revenue streams, not another unfunded obligation.

South Carolina is growing faster than portions of its public infrastructure can comfortably support. Sewer spills reported across Lexington, Columbia and other communities are not merely environmental stories. They are evidence of systems that require maintenance, expansion and new capital.

The question is not whether the work must be done. It is who will pay for it.

Counties can increase taxes and utility rates, seek state and federal appropriations, issue debt or attract new sources of private investment and recurring revenue. For rural counties with limited tax bases, those choices are especially difficult. A properly sited and carefully negotiated high-capital project can become part of the answer.

The appropriations show the scale of need

South Carolina's enacted appropriations legislation includes scores of water, sewer, resilience, workforce and local-infrastructure projects. Act 261 directs $24.932 million through the Rural Infrastructure Authority and $6.5925 million through the Office of Resilience. It also includes $6.1379 million for three identified career and technical education initiatives: $5 million for the Daniel Morgan Technology Center, $887,900 for Greenwood School District 50 and $250,000 for a Lexington-Richland apprenticeship pipeline. One-time appropriations, however, cannot substitute for a durable local revenue base.

Governor Henry McMaster's decision to sign H.3305 without a line-item veto – including the Office of Resilience projects – underscores that drainage, flood control, water, sewer and public-safety capacity are continuing economic-development obligations, not isolated emergencies.

The compromise reveals the political fault lines

The final result emerged from broader budget negotiations balancing different priorities. Senate Republicans emphasized spending restraint, income-tax reductions, expanded property-tax relief and core infrastructure. The House defended a broader set of local infrastructure, resilience, workforce and community projects. H.3305 became the supplemental vehicle for many of those local expenditures, with the House ultimately concurring in the Senate amendment.

Freedom Caucus members represent a third pressure: the argument that recurring spending growth and one-time appropriations require deeper structural reform. Their stated priorities include zero-based budgeting, enforceable spending caps, accelerated income-tax reductions and stronger disclosure and reporting requirements for earmarks.

Public opposition is not a single constituency. It includes residents raising legitimate concerns about power, water, noise, land use, property values and public costs; conservation and environmental organizations pressing resource and emissions questions; and, in a separate category, national reporting alleging that some campaigns are being amplified by networks connected to foreign funding. Those allegations require attribution and proof and should not be used to dismiss genuine local opposition.

> **The State House debate concerns taxes, spending and budget reform. The public debate concerns infrastructure, development and trust. Data-center policy is where those pressures are converging.**

Source: South Carolina H.3305 →

Source: Senate budget priorities →

Source: South Carolina Freedom Caucus agenda →

Source: Reporting on organized opposition networks →

What future development can shift

Properly negotiated development agreements can shift project-driven costs for substations, utility extensions, roads, drainage, public safety, permitting and workforce preparation from the general taxpayer to the project creating the demand. Recurring county revenue can then help finance broader community needs that would otherwise return to the state budget. The objective is not to make one industry pay for every existing deficiency; it is to prevent new growth from adding another unfunded obligation.

Development can finance capacity – if the agreement is right

A data center or energy campus should not be presented as a universal solution. A poorly located project can create new power, water, noise and land-use problems. A speculative project can reserve capacity without delivering the investment. An incentive agreement can shift risk to taxpayers if performance commitments are weak.

But a credible project can finance new substations, water or sewer extensions, road improvements and workforce partnerships while contributing substantial assessed value. Because such facilities generally have high capital investment relative to permanent headcount, they may provide rural counties with revenue without creating the same school, traffic and service demands associated with large residential development.

A better negotiating standard

Counties should begin negotiations by calculating the full public cost of the project and the infrastructure improvements the community already needs. The development agreement should identify who pays for each improvement, who owns it, whether it serves the broader community and what happens if the project is delayed or abandoned.

The public should also be able to see the net result: new revenue, incentives granted, infrastructure obligations, construction and permanent employment, water demand, power demand and enforceable community benefits.

> **The issue is not growth versus no growth. It is whether growth pays for the capacity it requires and leaves the community stronger.**

Source: South Carolina H.3305 appropriations legislation →

DIGITAL RIGHTS

The Audit Worked - After 2,700 Unauthorized Searches

The Colleton County Flock audit demonstrates both the value of auditability and the danger of waiting until misuse has already occurred.

An audit of Flock license-plate-reader activity in Colleton County reportedly identified approximately 2,700 unauthorized searches involving 14 people. A lieutenant was terminated, and the matter was referred to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division for review.

The issue widened on August 31, when the sheriff's office announced that a second lieutenant had been terminated after an audit identified 62 additional unauthorized searches. The second case reinforces the need for recurring review rather than an audit conducted only after a specific concern arises.

The first lesson is that audit logs matter. Without a record showing who searched, when they searched and what purpose they entered, the conduct might never have been detected.

The second lesson is less reassuring: an audit is not a complete safeguard if thousands of questionable searches can occur before anyone reviews it.

Guardrails, not a blanket ban

Automated license-plate readers can help locate stolen vehicles, identify suspects and support time-sensitive investigations. The policy question is not whether law enforcement may use modern tools. It is whether access is limited to legitimate purposes and whether violations produce timely consequences.

A statewide framework should address authorization, documented search purpose, retention, access by outside agencies, audit frequency, prohibited uses, public reporting and disciplinary procedures. Sensitive investigative details can remain protected while aggregate use and compliance information are disclosed.

Oconee County supplied one local model when it adopted Ordinance 2026-26, the Protection from Mass Surveillance Ordinance, after third reading and a public hearing on August 18. The ordinance adds another source for statewide lawmakers, but a county-by-county patchwork cannot substitute for consistent rights and enforcement.

The Digital Bill of Rights provides the foundation

South Carolina's proposed Citizens Digital Bill of Rights would establish the broader principles: due process, transparency, data minimization, auditability and meaningful limits on government access. A separate ALPR statute can then apply those principles to Flock and similar systems.

That layered approach is stronger than regulating one vendor. Technology and contractors will change. The citizen's rights should not.

The AI assistant raises the aggregation question

South Carolina's AI Resident Assistant shows why those principles must follow the data rather than the name of the application. The state's published terms warn that communications may be subject to the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act and prohibit certain sensitive-data and surveillance uses. They do not explain how long ordinary prompts are retained, whether they are connected to My SC.GOV identities, which vendors may access them, whether they are used for model training or whether they may be combined with other government records.

Those are not allegations about the assistant. They are the questions a Citizens Digital Bill of Rights should answer before individually modest interactions become an aggregated record of a resident's interests, needs and behavior.

The Colleton audit should therefore be treated as proof of concept and a warning. The system created a record that allowed misconduct to be identified. South Carolina's next task is ensuring that reviews occur soon enough, access controls are strong enough and consequences are clear enough to prevent another 2,700 searches.

> **Accountability should not depend on discovering misuse after it has become routine.**

Source: Colleton County Flock audit reporting →

Source: Second Colleton County Flock termination →

Source: Oconee County Ordinance 2026-26 →

Source: SC AI Resident Assistant terms and conditions →

ENERGY POLICY

Valara and the Case for Performance-Based Compute Rules

A PSC jurisdictional ruling, a separate land-use lawsuit and South Carolina's emerging PPA precedent are converging on the same 2027 question: how should the state evaluate very large privately powered compute campuses?

The Valara project in Spartanburg County has become a test of two different systems of oversight.

On August 27, the South Carolina Public Service Commission concluded that Valara's proposed private, behind-the-meter generation would not be regulated as a public utility facility under the Utility Facility Siting and Environmental Protection Act because the generated power would not be exported to the grid for public use. The jurisdictional ruling does not eliminate Department of Environmental Services permitting or local land-use requirements, but it raises an important legislative question about generation built at extraordinary scale to serve a colocated private load.

Separately, Concerned Citizens of Spartanburg County filed suit in the county Court of Common Pleas. The plaintiffs moved for a preliminary injunction – not a temporary restraining order – seeking to halt construction, excavation, land disturbance and further county processing while the litigation proceeds.

The case, Concerned Citizens of Spartanburg County v. Valara Holdings LLC, Spartanburg County and the County Administrator, Case No. 2026-CP-42-03416, alleges that the project was improperly processed as a minor land development instead of receiving Planning Commission review as a major development. The allegations are disputed. As of publication, the preliminary-injunction motion remained pending and was listed on the September 17 motions roster. SC Digital Ledger is monitoring the docket.

From project labels to measurable performance

The 2027 debate should not begin by assuming that every data center creates the same risks or benefits. South Carolina can establish merit-based tiers based on measurable performance: load factor, efficiency, interruptibility, demand response, storage, behind-the-meter generation, grid exports, contract duration, infrastructure cost responsibility and community benefit.

A project that finances new generation, reduces demand during emergencies and protects other customers from stranded costs should not receive the same treatment as an inflexible project that asks the grid to absorb its risk.

S.163 offers a starting precedent

S.163, enacted as Act 208, applies to qualifying digital-asset mining businesses drawing more than one megawatt. Section 34-47-50 requires such a business to avoid additional grid stress and, when requested by the PSC, provide a power-purchase agreement demonstrating its ability to reduce power during grid stress.

The law does not itself create tiers for conventional data centers. It does, however, establish a statutory precedent for judging a compute load by how it performs on the grid rather than by its label alone.

A power-purchase agreement should not receive automatic credit. Policymakers must ask whether the generation is new and deliverable to the relevant region, whether it is firm or intermittent, whether storage is included, who pays for capacity and transmission and whether curtailment obligations are enforceable.

> **The next generation of compute policy should reward performance, allocate costs and close gaps between local and state review.**

Source: PSC August 27 Valara directive →

Source: South Carolina Judicial Branch case-records search →

Source: South Carolina S.163 →

WORKFORCE

The Blue-Collar Compute Economy

South Carolina cannot build an AI economy with software alone. It will take electricians, pipefitters, welders, HVAC technicians, fiber installers, cybersecurity workers and construction managers.

Bessent's Asheville message was not limited to artificial intelligence, capital markets or America's share of global computing capacity. He emphasized the physical work that comes first: manufacturing facilities must be built, data centers must be constructed and energy infrastructure must be installed.

That makes the emerging compute economy a blue-collar workforce issue as much as a technology issue.

The opportunity should be described honestly. Large data centers can require hundreds or thousands of workers during development, yet employ a comparatively modest permanent operating staff once completed. Policymakers should distinguish temporary construction employment from permanent jobs rather than presenting every announced position as equivalent.

Still, permanent headcount is not the only measure of value. Construction can last several years. Campuses may expand through multiple phases. Supporting work can include electrical contracting, cooling-system installation, fiber construction, equipment maintenance, cybersecurity, logistics, engineering and power-system upgrades.

Training must begin with employer demand

South Carolina has invested in career and technical education, apprenticeships and workforce pipelines. Facilities and programs, however, are inputs. The outcomes that matter are completion, placement, wages, retention and advancement.

> **Apprenticeships should never be a holding pattern. They should be a bridge to a real job, a real career and a real future.**

That requires a demand-led workforce strategy. Before creating another program, state and local leaders should identify the employers prepared to hire its graduates, the credentials those employers recognize and the wages workers can expect at each stage of their careers.

Make workforce commitments measurable

Projects receiving substantial tax treatment, infrastructure support or expedited review should submit workforce plans covering construction employment by trade and phase, permanent employment after each phase, technical-college and apprenticeship partnerships, recognized credentials, wage progression and opportunities for South Carolina contractors and suppliers.

Annual reporting should follow completions, placements, retention and earnings. Material commitments used to justify public support should be enforceable, with remedies when they are not fulfilled.

A rural opportunity – with conditions

Compute infrastructure does not need to urbanize every community it enters. Properly planned, a high-capital project can strengthen the tax base and finance utility improvements without producing the continuing traffic and service demands associated with large residential growth.

But a rural county can also approve a project advertised as transformational only to discover that most construction labor came from outside the region, permanent staffing is limited and new infrastructure primarily serves the project. Community benefits therefore need to be identified before approval and measured afterward.

South Carolina already has important pieces of the compute economy: advanced manufacturing, logistics, technical colleges and a workforce accustomed to complex industrial construction. Its advantage will depend on connecting those pieces and ensuring that the people who build the compute economy are among its principal beneficiaries.

Source: Bessent interview with Larry Kudlow →

Source: South Carolina H.3305 appropriations legislation →

COUNTY WATCH

County Watch: Building the Road Beyond Moratoria

Temporary pauses are spreading across South Carolina. The next test is whether counties can convert them quickly into clear rules and return qualified projects to a predictable approval process.

Data-center moratoria have become the default response when counties discover that existing zoning and infrastructure rules were not written for large compute projects. The concern is understandable. Counties need time to examine power, water, noise, setbacks, public notice, infrastructure costs and the credibility of promised investment.

But a moratorium is not a development policy. It is only time purchased to create one.

Is the county using its pause to build a pathway for responsible development, or merely extending uncertainty?

Chester: Build a model

Chester County approved a six-month pause after adopting some of South Carolina's earliest data-center zoning provisions addressing water use, noise and setbacks. County leaders said the pause would support research, public workshops and expert testimony concerning utility capacity, economic effects, environmental impacts and community concerns.

Chester has industrial land and proximity to transmission and substation infrastructure. Its workshops should produce an ordinance, standard disclosure form and defined approval process before the pause expires. The resulting framework could become a model for other rural counties.

Source: Chester County announcement →

Clarendon: Close the process gap without losing the opportunity

Project 59 would reportedly convert an existing approximately 100,000-square-foot building in the Clarendon County Industrial Park near Manning into a smaller data center. Public descriptions place the proposed investment at approximately $130 million, with 28 permanent positions. A Santee Electric Cooperative capacity assessment was reportedly due September 4; no public result had been located as of publication. The project's power and possible substation requirements therefore remain an active source check.

County officials moved to pause additional projects after recognizing that existing zoning provisions could allow certain industrial-site developments to proceed without the degree of public review residents expected. Clarendon should use the current project to create a repeatable disclosure process addressing load, infrastructure costs, water, cooling, noise, employment and emergency curtailment.

Source: Clarendon County public notice →

Fairfield: Turn twelve months into a work schedule

Fairfield County's proposed 12-month moratorium passed second reading August 10, followed by an August 31 public hearing; final reading was scheduled for September 14. The county also acted separately concerning data-center development on county-owned property. Until final passage is confirmed, the ordinance should be described as proposed rather than fully effective.

Fairfield's review should identify suitable industrial areas, available electric and water capacity, infrastructure improvements and the investment necessary to produce a meaningful net benefit. It should define what a qualified project must demonstrate before applications reopen.

Source: Fairfield County August 31 meeting notice →

Newberry: Define what would make the next project acceptable

Newberry County rejected the Project Altair land transaction and enacted a 12-month pause on accepting new data-center permits. The next phase should not be limited to documenting why one proposal failed. County leaders should define the characteristics that would make a future project acceptable and publish a schedule for drafting, public review and adoption.

Source: Newberry County statement →

McCormick: Move from opposition to written standards

The McCormick County Planning Commission recommended against rezoning approximately 1,000 acres connected to a proposed data-center development and supported a nine-month pause and new ordinance. As of publication, county materials described the moratorium ordinance as proposed rather than finally enacted. Rejecting one proposal does not answer how the county will evaluate the next one.

McCormick needs written standards defining acceptable scale, setbacks, buffering, power and water requirements, noise levels and infrastructure obligations. Protecting rural character and permitting carefully scaled investment need not be mutually exclusive.

Source: McCormick County coverage →

A 180-day road from pause to policy

Within 30 days, a county should inventory its zoning, utility and infrastructure gaps. Within 60 days, it should conduct utility, technical and public workshops. Within 90 days, it should release draft standards and a model development agreement. Within 120 days, it should hold formal public review. Within 180 days, it should adopt an ordinance and reopen the application process.

South Carolina can accelerate that work with a voluntary Data Center Development Toolkit: a model ordinance, standard disclosure form, water and noise benchmarks, utility-capacity questions, workforce and community-benefit provisions, decommissioning requirements and a predictable review timetable.

SCETA is reviewing the toolkit as an in-house ASCENDSC initiative, bringing together its subject-matter experts in energy systems, utility regulation, compute infrastructure, economic development and public policy. The initiative is intended to give state and local leaders a practical, technically informed resource for replacing temporary moratoria with clear, accountable standards.

The state's goal should be to make broad moratoria unnecessary. Counties with established rules, reliable technical information and transparent procedures can evaluate proposals on their merits. That is how South Carolina moves from reactive pauses to managed growth.

SOUTHEAST WATCH

Southeast Competitive Watch: Pauses Are Becoming Policy

South Carolina is not the only state confronting compute growth. The competitive question is which states can replace uncertainty with enforceable rules and do it first.

The Southeast is not retreating from compute infrastructure. It is moving into a more disciplined phase in which grid access, incentives and local approval increasingly depend on measurable performance.

North Carolina: Charlotte puts a clock on its pause

Charlotte adopted a 150-day moratorium on new telecommunications and data-storage facilities on June 8. The pause expires November 5 and includes a defined period for public engagement and development of new land-use standards.

That fixed timetable matters. The city identified a zoning problem, stopped new applications temporarily and established a deadline for returning with rules. South Carolina counties considering year-long pauses should examine whether the necessary work can be completed more quickly.

Source: Charlotte data-center moratorium FAQ →

Georgia: Construction leadership creates a workforce benchmark

The Atlanta region now leads the United States in data-center construction, with nearly 2.9 gigawatts underway, according to CBRE figures reported by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. The market ended June with only 1.6% vacancy, and approximately 80% of the new capacity was already preleased. Demand is not the immediate constraint. Deliverable power and supporting infrastructure are.

The buildout is reshaping Georgia's construction economy. T5 Data Centers said revenue from the construction operation it is spinning off as EverOn grew from $87 million in 2021 to nearly $1.7 billion last year. At T5's Lithia Springs project, approximately 1,200 tradespeople reportedly worked on the site each day, with the work performed by Georgia companies. That is the blue-collar compute economy in measurable form: electrical, mechanical, fiber, cooling, concrete, steel, project management and continuing facility operations.

Georgia also demonstrates why growth cannot outrun public confidence. Power, water, noise and project scale have produced substantial opposition, while site selection and community engagement are becoming development constraints alongside power procurement. South Carolina should study both sides of Georgia's lead: the economic scale that clear rules can capture and the political risk created when infrastructure and community questions remain unanswered.

The competitive lesson is not simply that Georgia is building more. It is that South Carolina is competing for the contractors, skilled workers, grid investment and supplier businesses surrounding the projects. A predictable path beyond county moratoria can turn that regional demand into South Carolina jobs and capacity.

Source: Atlanta Journal-Constitution: Georgia leads U.S. data-center construction →

Source: CBRE: North America Data Center Trends H1 2026 →

Alabama: Require cost recovery and public benefit

Effective October 1, Alabama Act 2026-610 applies to data-center customers with expected peak demand of at least 150 megawatts. It directs the Public Service Commission to consider whether a utility contract will recover incremental generation, transmission and distribution costs from the customer.

The commission must also consider whether the agreement produces positive benefits for other customers, including lower costs, improved system efficiency and economic growth in the host community. That second test is significant: paying direct costs may not be enough if a very large project cannot demonstrate broader system or community value.

Source: Alabama SB270 enrolled legislation →

The emerging competitive standard

The regional model is taking shape. Local pauses should be short and structured. Developers should disclose project scale early. Utilities should screen speculative requests. Large customers should pay incremental costs and protect existing customers if a project is delayed or abandoned. Incentives should depend on verified investment, workforce and operating performance.

> **Here are the rules. Here is the timetable. Here is what the project must disclose, pay for and deliver. Meet those standards, and South Carolina is ready to proceed.**

South Carolina does not need to choose between an unrestricted development rush and a patchwork of permanent moratoria. Speed, certainty and accountability can become the state's competitive advantage.

WHAT COLUMBIA IS WATCHING

Regulatory and Infrastructure Watch

Dominion-NextEra: ownership, rates and customer commitments

Dominion Energy and NextEra Energy have asked the Public Service Commission to approve the transfer of control of Dominion Energy South Carolina. Docket 2026-186-EG now creates a public test of the transaction's rate, reliability, governance, investment and customer-benefit claims. The intervention deadline is September 10; customer hearings are scheduled for November 5 in Aiken, November 12 in North Charleston, November 17 in Columbia and December 8 before the Commission. The formal hearing begins December 8.

The petition proposes residential bill credits designed to equal $10 per month for a typical customer using 1,000 kilowatt-hours, for two years; actual credits would vary with usage. The Ledger will follow what is temporary, enforceable and committed to South Carolina infrastructure.

Disclosure: Publisher Dennis Fassuliotis submitted comments personally as a high-usage Dominion residential customer with solar generation, not on behalf of SCETA.

Source: [PSC Docket 2026-186-EG →]

Source: [Dominion-NextEra public-hearing notice →]

Canadys: reuse the site and clarify the pipeline

Santee Cooper's proposed Canadys natural-gas project illustrates how an existing industrial site and nearby transmission assets may shorten development and permitting work. Kinder Morgan has been selected as the proposed gas supplier, but its supply connection remains a proposal. Existing Carolina Gas Transmission assets are already at or near Canadys; the two should not be described as the same pipeline.

The efficiency case should identify which assets can be reused, what must be built, who bears routing and overrun risk and which permits remain.

Source: [Santee Cooper Canadys project →]

Source: [PSC Canadys filing →]

SC Emerging Tech Docket

SEPT. 10 – PSC Docket 2026-186-EG: intervention deadline for the Dominion-NextEra transaction.

SEPT. 17 – ASCENDSC Forum, Charleston: priority registration is open to ASCENDSC Collaborative and SCETA members, sponsors and partners, federal, state and local policymakers, county and municipal leaders, economic-development organizations, and invited industry and academic leaders. Attendance is limited and advance registration is required.

Source: [Register: ASCENDSC Forum →]

SEPT. 17 – Spartanburg Court of Common Pleas: Valara preliminary-injunction motion listed on the motions roster.

OCT. 15 – PSC Docket 2026-138-E: reply comments in the large-load proceeding.

NOV. 5 – Charlotte's 150-day data-center moratorium is scheduled to expire; first Dominion-NextEra customer hearing in Aiken.

NOV. 12, NOV. 17 and DEC. 8 – Additional Dominion-NextEra customer hearings; formal PSC hearing begins December 8.

OBSERVATIONAL, NOT A SCIENTIFIC POLL

Public Sentiment Watch

The useful question is not simply whether comments are supportive or opposed. It is what moves the discussion toward facts, standards and a workable public decision.

Question one: Is “data center” the trigger?

"Serious question for the group: are you opposed specifically to data centers, or to any large-load economic development project such as advanced manufacturing, cold storage, industrial processing, etc.? If the same project used similar power, water and infrastructure but had a different label, would the reaction be the same? Or have the words ‘data center’ simply become the trigger?"

The post added that good policy should regulate actual impacts – power, water, noise, siting, cost causation and community benefit – rather than the name on the building. The observed response was 76 reactions, 317 comments and 12 shares. Comments tested whether data centers differ from other industries in land consumption, continuous noise and heat, resource use, permanent employment and the value of the product or service to the host community. Some threads also veered into broader partisan conflict, illustrating how quickly an infrastructure question can become a political identity argument.

Question two: Is the concern AI or the infrastructure?

The second question asked whether concern centered on artificial intelligence itself – including surveillance, deepfakes, employment disruption, algorithmic control and loss of human agency – or on the physical infrastructure required to support it. It also asked whether strong legal protections would change participants’ views. The observed response was 31 reactions and 168 comments, approximately 5.4 comments for every reaction.

The responses placed natural resources, environmental and health effects, property values and taxes, developer performance, water, electricity, noise and pollution ahead of AI itself for some participants. The distinction matters: land-use and utility rules address physical impacts, while the proposed Citizens Digital Bill of Rights addresses data aggregation, surveillance, automated decision-making, consent and accountability.

Third post: the rant

The third post deliberately changed tone, using a satirical guide to recurring opposition arguments and asking participants to identify which criticisms were fair and which were not.

What the responses suggested

The three-post sequence appeared to create permission for previously quieter or more nuanced voices to enter the discussion. Commenters cited Berkeley County's experience with Google, the importance of closed-loop cooling and the relative effects of subdivisions, traffic and other development. Taken together, the questions suggest that public policy must address both sides of the debate: measurable infrastructure impacts and enforceable digital rights.

The early signal is not that opposition has disappeared. Infrastructure, water, electricity, noise, property values, developer performance, surveillance and loss of public control remain central concerns. The signal is that humor and a more open question can sometimes move discussion away from slogans and toward comparisons, conditions and project design.

> **Sentiment Watch measures the public conversation, not public opinion.**

Method: This is an observational review of public posts, comments, reactions and local coverage. It is not a scientific survey or representative poll. The Ledger tracks the issues driving concern, whether new facts change the conversation, whether previously silent support appears and whether civic pressure converts into clearer rules, measurable commitments and institutional response.

What Columbia Is Watching

1. COUNTY MORATORIA – Are Clarendon, Fairfield, McCormick, Newberry and Chester converting pauses into published work plans and ordinances?

2. LARGE-LOAD PERFORMANCE – Will the PSC and General Assembly distinguish flexible, interruptible and self-supplied compute loads from inflexible projects while protecting other customers?

3. DIGITAL-RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION – Can the Citizens Digital Bill of Rights connect AI assistants, identity, Flock/ALPR systems and government data aggregation through one enforceable foundation?

4. DOMINION-NEXTERA – Which customer benefits and infrastructure commitments survive beyond the proposed two-year credit?

5. CANADYS – Can reuse of an industrial site and existing infrastructure create a faster, more transparent permitting model?

6. GEORGIA'S LEAD – Can South Carolina capture the contractor, workforce and supplier economy while avoiding the public-trust failures accompanying rapid growth?

CLOSING VIEW

The Ledger View

South Carolina’s advantage will come from connecting rights, infrastructure and measurable performance: residents know how data is used, communities know what major projects require and deliver, utilities know who bears new-load costs, and developers know the rules before capital is committed.

Protect the individual. Establish the rules. Build the infrastructure. Then attract the industry. That is how moratoria become temporary and growth leaves counties stronger.