

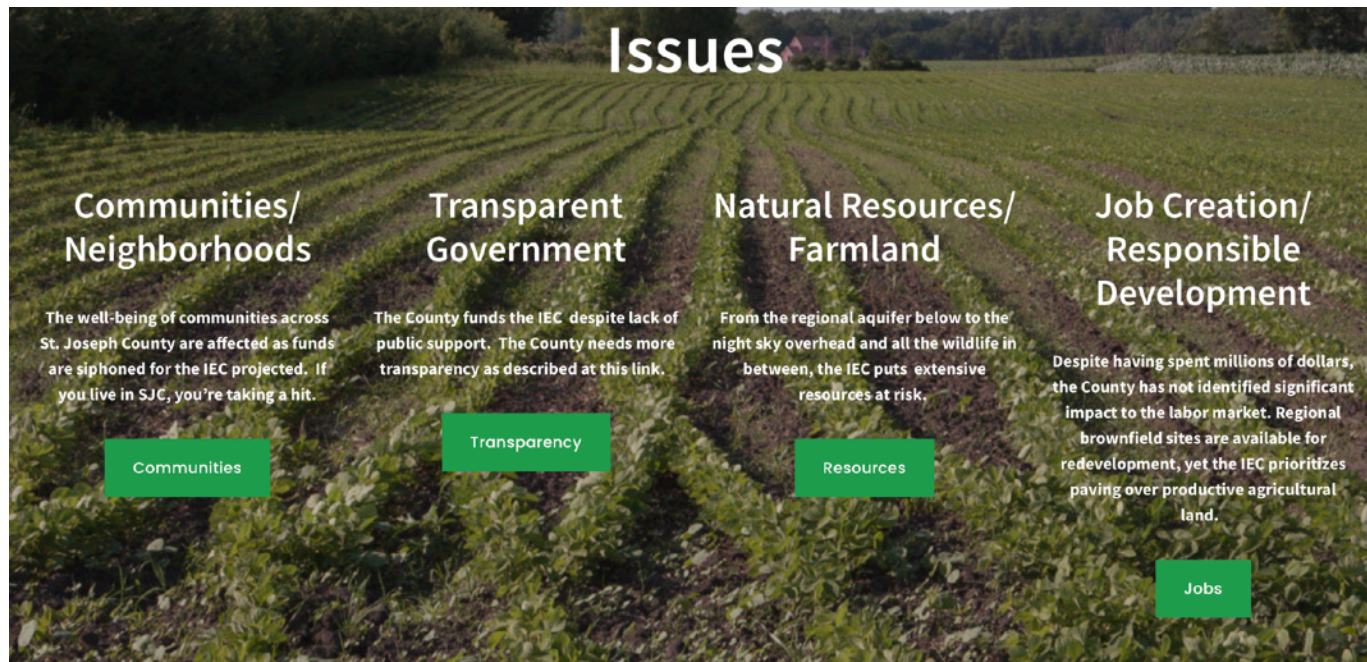
Per the St. Joseph County (SJC) Council, solar energy systems are the most offensive industry in SJC and merit financial encumbrances unlike any cost imposed on other businesses, including data centers. Ordinance 47-25 (formerly Bill 17-25) penalizes the solar industry rather than address the legitimate concerns of landowners who's property values are impacted by County-sanctioned development.

The added costs for solar energy will likely either dissuade local construction and decimate the local solar industry, or be paid by the utility and passed on to all ratepayers.



Yes, the SJC Council needs to address egregious impositions of industry on County landowners. However, SJC legislators impacted the trend of property values years ago by advancing the Indiana Enterprise Center (IEC) in a rural area. Some property values will go up, others will come down.

Voicing concern for a region at risk, citizens sought better stewardship of financial and natural resources in St. Joseph County. Many people consider solar farms to be favorable development over inevitable alternatives.



Just prior to Bill 17-25 on the 2025 July 8 agenda, a supportive SJC Council Member essentially said about proposed sprawl (in Bill 49-25), "It's in my district, but in the IEC boundary, so I'm not opposed." If it were not solar arrays that are coming to the countryside today and being contested now, it will likely be a much more intrusive industry coming to the countryside soon. Large scale solar energy systems are the bogeyman du jour in the midst of greater offenders.

Other than appearances, there are no other significant and compelling reasons to suggest ground mounted solar arrays degrade property values. Rather than adopt satisfactory guidelines for lessening the visual impact—which the Council did in October 2024 with extended setbacks and screening requirements—the SJC Council is deeming sightlines as the lone attribute affecting a property's asking price.

Ordinance 47-25 is capricious in singling out solar energy systems ; it imposes a costly burden on local solar businesses and opportunities; it is contrary to Indiana state law; and it denies County residents improved quality of life.

Before impeding solar energy, County officials should consider the following observations from the fence line:

SJC Solar Arrays

1. Low to the ground
2. Set back 500 feet from non-participating properties
3. Dark at night
4. Visually unobtrusive
5. Supportive of agrivoltaics and animal husbandry
6. Soil can be re-farmed after use
7. No air pollution
8. Don't require water to operate
9. Provide habitat for pollinators, insects, and animals
10. Increase long-term land values as "land banks"
11. Minimize lessening of bucolic countryside
12. Provide renewable energy
13. Diversify and strengthen electric grid
14. Supports peak demands
15. Increase quality-of-life assets



Other SJC Industries

1. Many stories obstruct the horizon
2. Required setback at 50 feet
3. Significant light pollution
4. Visually offensive
5. Paved over
6. Land committed to industrial use
7. Fine particulate matter from energy consumption
8. Consume vast quantities from aquifers
9. Land loss facilitates habitat loss
10. Cannot convert space to quality-of-life uses
11. Obliterate bucolic environment
12. Consume vast quantities of energy
13. Centralizes and weakens electric grid
14. Causes peak demands
15. Decrease quality-of-life assets



Ordinance 47-25 is Contrary to State Law

Ordinance 47-25 puts an onerous financial burden on solar developers by requiring a surety bond equal to 20% of the value of every property within one mile, along with other added costs. No other business in St. Joseph County is saddled with this capricious expense.

Such a financial imposition is likely illegal under Indiana Code Title 36. Local Government § 36-7-2-8:

...(b) A unit may not adopt any ordinance which has the effect of prohibiting or of unreasonably restricting the use of solar energy systems other than for the preservation or protection of the public health and safety

(c) This section does not apply to ordinances which impose reasonable restrictions on solar energy systems. However, it is the policy of this state to promote and encourage the use of solar energy systems and to remove obstacles to their use. Reasonable restrictions on solar energy systems are those restrictions which:

(1) do not significantly increase the cost of the system or significantly decrease its efficiency...

Just because some other Indiana counties have new ordinances that skirt State law does not give SJC the authority to do so. Expect legal challenges. That's not a threat or bullying; rather, extant State law is a legitimate reason not to adopt Ordinance 47-25.





Image: Inovateus Solar



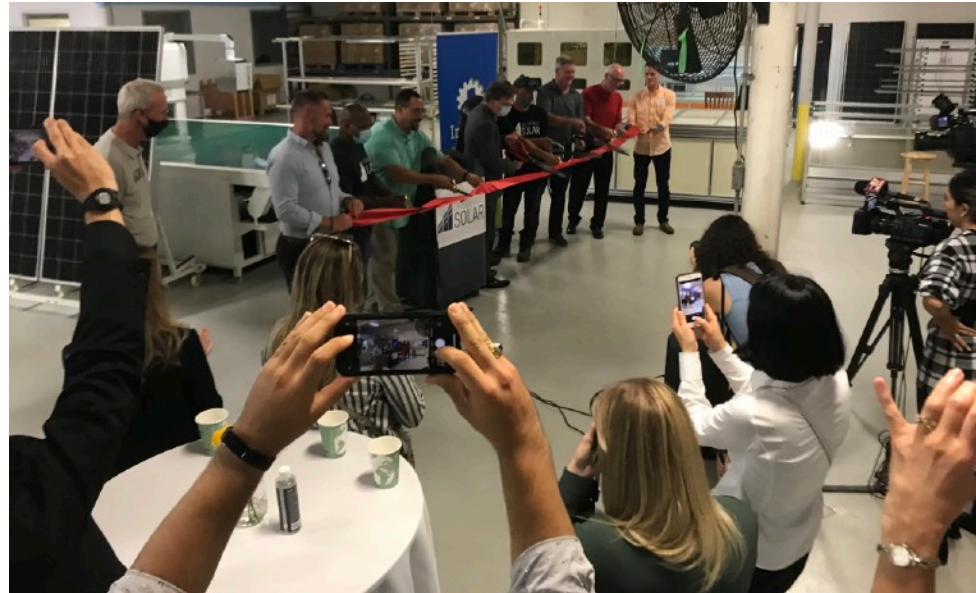
Image: Inovateus Solar

Inovateus Solar, one of the largest solar companies in the Midwest, is based in South Bend. In developing the Honeysuckle Solar Project in the IEC district, Inovateus Solar showed their national leadership in solar stewardship and sustainability practices, which is a model for all industries.

By significantly increasing the cost of solar deployment, Ordinance 47-25 will deter further investment in clean, renewable energy projects in SJC. In addition to Inovateus Solar, jobs and businesses impacted by the bill include machinists, electricians, accountants, warehouse workers, truckers, restaurants, hotels, and more.

Tax revenues and corporate support of the community decrease with job losses.





Ordinance 47-25 will cost jobs and tax revenues.

Yes, solar panels are manufactured in South Bend, IN. Crossroads Solar employs formerly incarcerated men and women who have been trained while at prison to be skilled technicians. In addition to employment, the local business reduces prison recidivism in SJC.

Recently the manufacturer expanded within SJC to a larger site. The business is growing. However, Ordinance 47-25 will have a severe impact on Crossroads Solar, lessening its contribution to the County's well-being.



Ordinance 47-25 is extremism gone amok. Opposition to solar energy is detrimental to the well being of future generations.

A pilot program in SJC was teaching students to operate drones, with the goal to use photogrammetry in the design process of solar installations. However, subsequent changes in solar legislation meant the students would eventually have to leave the state if they later pursued such clean energy jobs.

Ordinance 47-25 is another opportunity-killing scheme that targets solar energy rather than addressing landowner concerns legitimately.



Image: IBEW Local 531

Stunting the construction of solar arrays greater than 40,000 square feet, Ordinance 47-25 will cost skilled jobs like those used to develop the Honeysuckle Solar Project in the IEC. From <https://lightsourcebp.com/us/project/honeysuckle-solar/>:

- The project supports US manufacturers, with solar panels from First Solar, smart solar trackers from Array Technologies and steel from Nucor. Notably, the torque tube components of the smart solar trackers were manufactured locally at LockJoint Tube, also within St. Joseph County.
- The project created approximately 200 direct construction jobs in addition to supporting US jobs across the American-made solar supply chain.
- 85% of the direct construction force lived in St. Joseph County and the surrounding counties. The construction contractor, South Bend based Inovateus Solar LLC, focused on utilizing local labor for the mechanical, electrical and civil work on site.
- Honeysuckle Solar offered positions at all levels, with participation from labor unions, including IBEW Local 153, IUOE Local 150 and LiUNA Local 645. Entry level workers gained hands-on experience and training, which can lead to enrollment in apprenticeship programs that create lifelong, family sustaining careers.

A Google Earth map (left) shows parts of the Honeysuckle Solar Project north of US-20 and parts of the Amazon data center south of US-20.

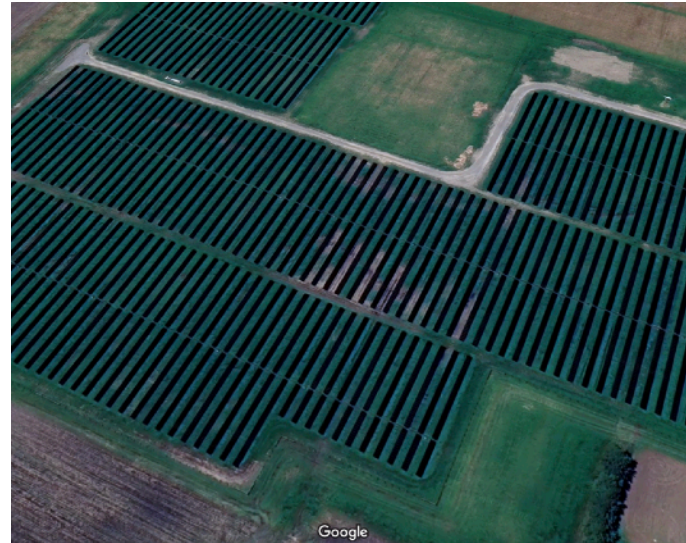
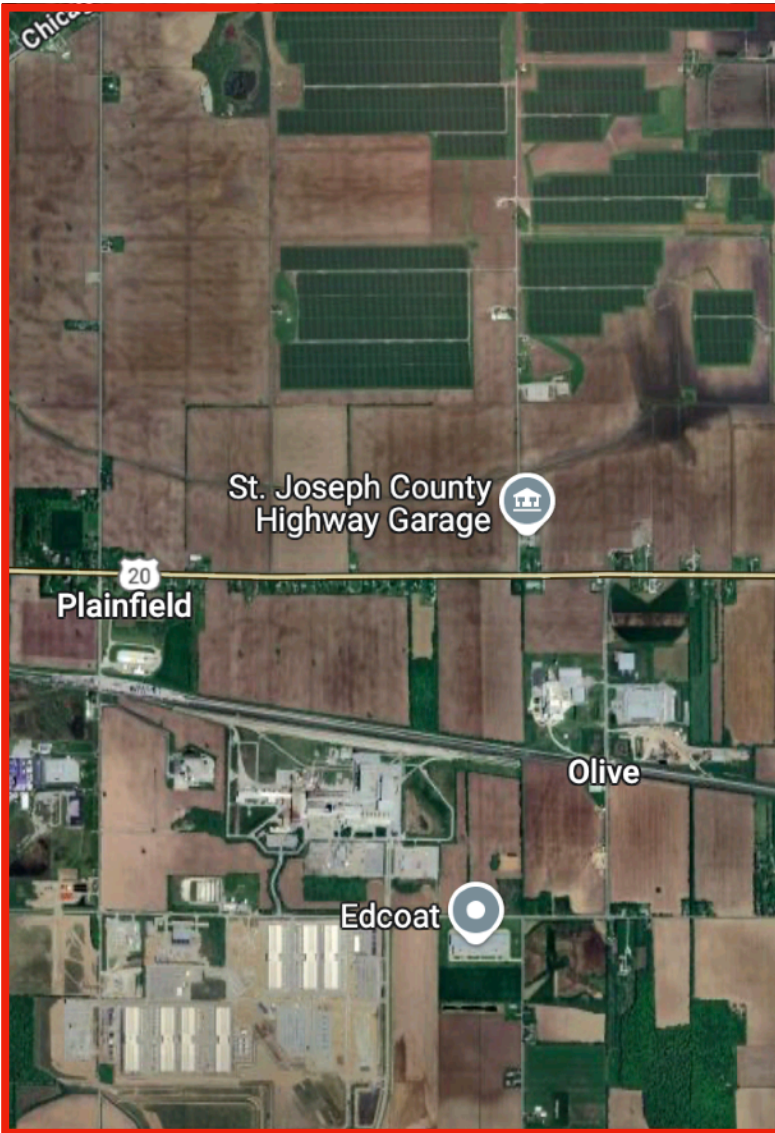




Image: Michael Clubb/South Bend Tribune, 2025 July 10

Aerial views show the respective footprints on the land.

Solar panels with large buffers of green crops have pollinator plants underneath and livestock grazing the farmland. There are no significant out-buildings, parking lots or visual obstructions above about 15 feet.

Required setbacks are 500 feet from non-participating residential property; 250 feet from parks or nature preserves.

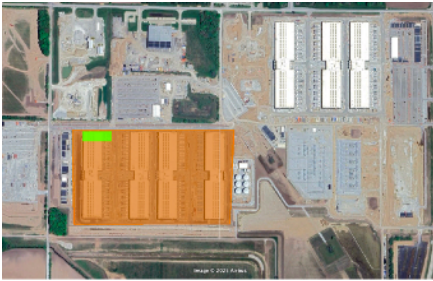


Image: New York Times, 2025 June 24

Data centers feature vast buildings, each larger than a football stadium, with the space in between paved over or filled with tall diesel generators and other requisite equipment.

Required setbacks are 50 feet.

Nothing is bucolic about data centers (or many other industrial sites) yet they are not held to the same visual requirements as the less intrusive solar arrays, per Ordinance 47-25.



Ordinance 47-25 puts financial burdens on any large-scale solar energy system (LS-SES), which SJC defines as 40,000 square feet (shown in green) or more of total solar panel area. The bill's costs will dissuade solar construction above that size.

The area around four data center buildings equals 2,000,000 square feet (shown in orange). Amazon seeks to build about 30 buildings in the IEC.

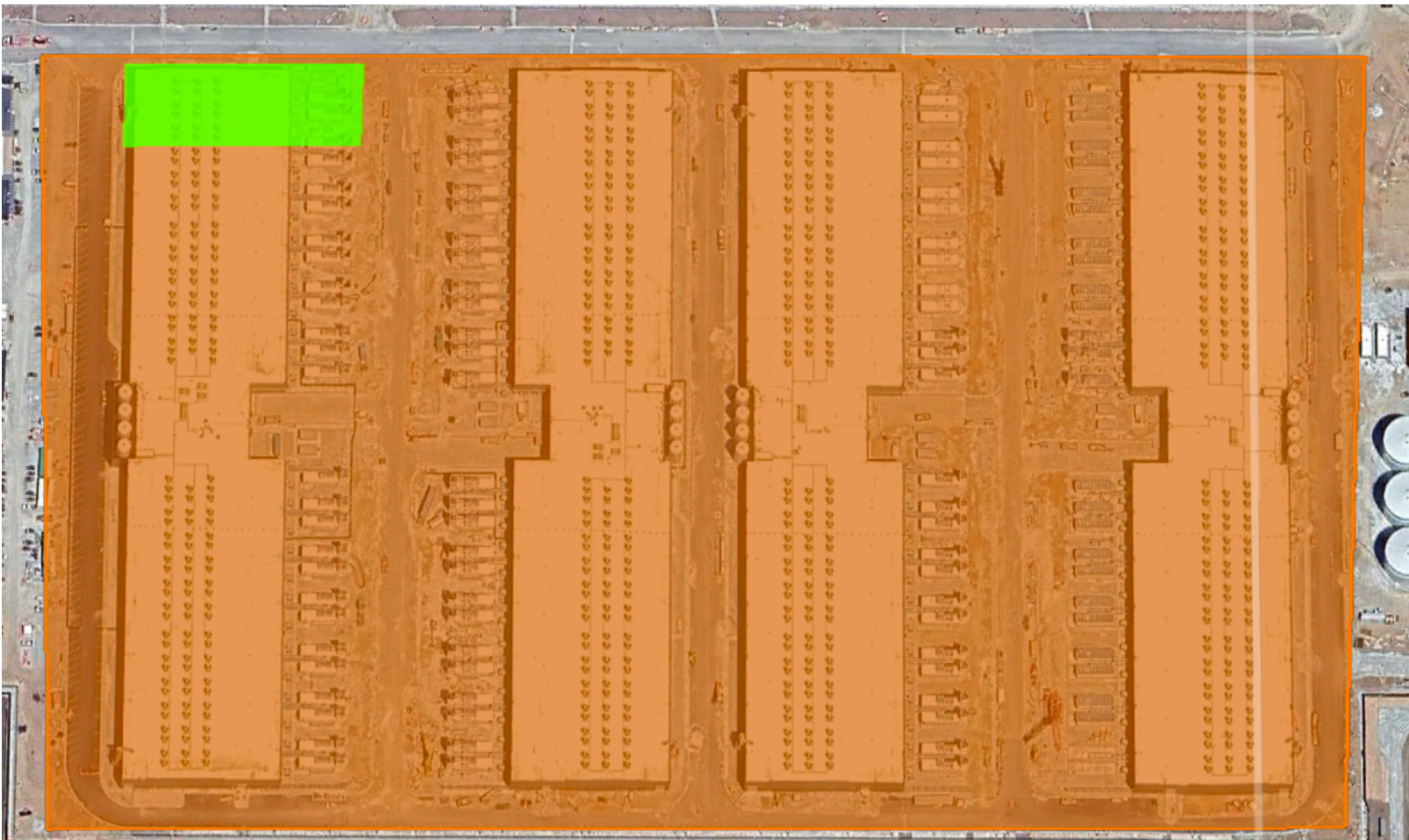


Image: Adapted from 2025 Airbus, Google Earth



Solar panels in the IEC are only slightly higher than the fence, so they present a small face to the road.

Other than minimal appearance considerations, there are no other compelling reasons to suggest ground mounted panels degrade property values.



Data centers, and many other industries in the IEC, are significantly higher than the surrounding fence. Visually, they are vastly more imposing and likely to degrade property values.



A solar array at night is dark and silent. With no light pollution, darkness dominates the night naturally. Only car headlights illuminate the landscape, and the horizon is clear toward other farmland.

A 2018 survey suggests the night sky over the IEC had a darkness level (20.46 magnitudes per square arc-second), befitting a modern rural setting.



Data centers are illuminated throughout the night. Bright light clutter along the horizon is visible for miles away.

An updated sky survey of the region will likely show a degradation of the night sky.

Half of the lifespan of these two developments is from sunset to sunrise. The two industries are not at all comparable in how they impact property values within one mile.



Image: [lightsourcebp](https://lightsourcebp.com)



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Solar farms like the Honeysuckle Solar Project in New Carlisle actually look more bucolic than most of their industrial counterparts that are not subject to Ordinance 47-25's requirements.

From <https://lightsourcebp.com/us/news/solar-synergy-in-indiana/>:

More than 90% of the land area [is] available to provide a stable habitat for several decades over the solar farm's long life...

The first [seed] mix, which is growing between and beneath the rows of solar panels across the entire project, contains 25 species of grasses and flowering plants. This mix exceeds the requirements of the Indiana Solar Site Pollinator Habitat Planning Scorecard produced and published by Purdue University, with more than 75% native species blooming from spring through fall.

This mix was designed to be grazing-friendly in order to support a flock of sheep managed by an Indiana livestock farming family. A father and son duo keep nearly 1,000 sheep at the solar farm to maintain vegetation through a paid grazing contract. This has allowed them to expand their sheep business with new land access, while earning steady new revenue through the contract.

The Bee & Butterfly Habitat Fund designed and provided the second mix, which is featured in a "high-density" pollinator meadow on more than 20 acres around the site perimeter. This mix contains more than 50 species.



Ordinance 47-25 disregards the positive impact of large scale solar energy systems. This bill assumes a solar array in the community can only degrade a property's value. What happens when property values around a solar array go up and landowners secure improved leasing rates?

Or at decommissioning when the land reverts back to an open field, will all those enriched property owners within the one-mile zone then pay the solar system developer for salvaging their property values that will have been otherwise degraded by industrial development over the previous decades?

Solar arrays are like precious land banks. The soil is temporarily disrupted where wiring corridors and pile-driven posts are in the ground. At the end of the lease, say 20 years, it's all plucked out of the ground. Suddenly, upon decommission, there are vast swaths of virgin land that have been fallow for decades, available to be used as farmland, parks, housing, or a furthering of the industrialization the county has encouraged and approved on prime farmland. Or it simply becomes open land. With Ordinance 47-25, how do the surrounding property owners then compensate the solar developer for having increased property values with the developer's 20-year land bank?

Solar arrays don't degrade the aquifer, for they don't consume water—they only absorb sunlight. The water issues related to solar development are some standing water and mud on the roads (which they brushed away) during construction.

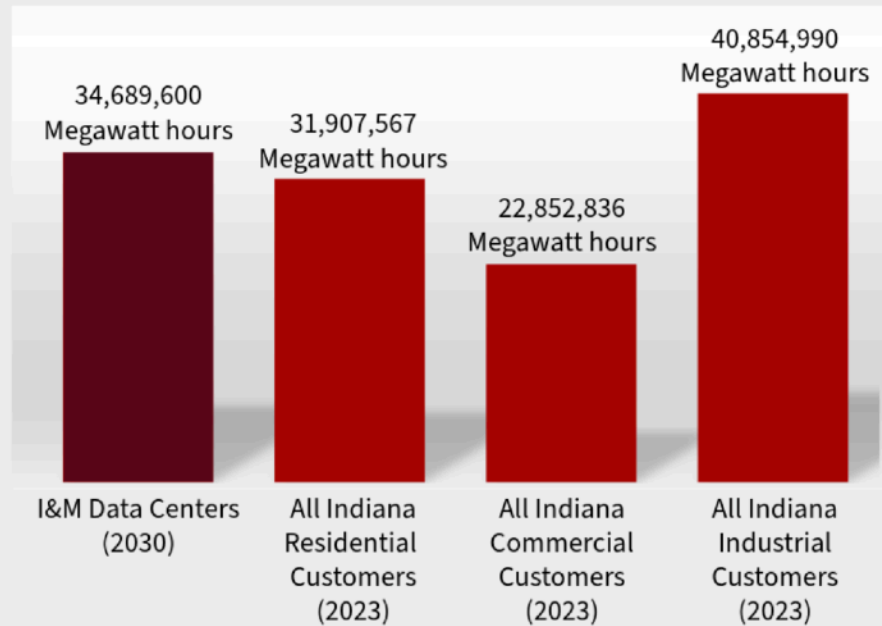
On the contrary, data centers withdraw vast amounts of water from the aquifer. Per a June 24, 2025, New York Times article (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/24/technology/amazon-ai-data-centers.html?searchResultPosition=1>):

To bury the fiber optic cables connecting the buildings and to install other underground infrastructure, Amazon had to pump water out of the wet ground. One permit application showed that the company requested permission to pump 2.2 million gallons an hour, for 730 days.

Once the data centers are operational, the amount of water withdrawn will continue to impact the aquifer, affecting nearby property values unlike the dry solar arrays.



Figure 1: I&M is forecasting that just a handful of hyperscaler data centers coming to Northern Indiana will use more electricity by 2030 than all Indiana residential customers, more than all Indiana commercial customers, and almost as much as all Indiana industrial customers use today.



Source: Workpaper BI-1 submitted in IURC Cause Number 46097

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In public filings, I&M Power revealed it needs massive amounts of energy from new sources—including nuclear and solar—to power the new data centers. Per I&M, the numbers are staggering.

On top of that, there is an overall increase in electrical demand I&M must meet. The energy has to come from somewhere.

The Indiana General Assembly in 2025 approved increased rates just for the research for small modular nuclear, but that technology is still in the distant timeline.

Meanwhile, solar energy has a proven clean track record and is a wise choice to deploy now. If Ordinance 47-25 is approved, increasing the cost of solar energy, the utility buying that electricity will be forced to pass on those additional costs to ratepayers.

Bottom line: Ordinance 47-25 will increase electric rates for all SJC residents and businesses.

I believe the content in this document to be true and accurate, but as an individual I don't have the resources of the data center developers to perfect my pitch to County legislators.

This is a common sense issue. Landowners near the IEC may see their property values impacted by industrial development. That became inevitable with the formation of the IEC in the midst of farmland.

The County has recently taken new steps to mitigate the visual impact of solar arrays with larger setbacks and more screening requirements unmatched for other businesses. Meanwhile, solar energy systems bring positive attributes to the community that actually improve the local quality of life.

Ordinance 47-25, even as amended, is capricious in singling out the solar industry, as if its appearances are more offensive than the bigger, brighter, noisier, and more imposing data centers the County has embraced. Those massive complexes have no assets that improve the land, the water, the air, the night. And yet the County states they don't impact property values when plopped on farmland.

Ordinance 47-25 should not become law. The bill is simply not fair while it fails the nearby landowners who have legitimate complaints.

Thank you for your considerations,

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