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The Fayetteville Observer

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Dispatcher Sharon Trollinger takes a call at the City 911 Communications Center on Wednesday, May 10, 2023. PHOTOS BY ANDREW CRAFT/THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER

NC works on bill to regulate data centers

Gareth McGrath
USA TODAY NETWORK

Responding to public concern over rising electric bills and the role data centers are playing in proposed rate hikes, the N.C. General Assembly in a rare display of bipartisanship is working on a bill that aims to protect existing customers from shouldering the costs of meeting the additional power needs.

The public opposition to data centers has emerged quickly and vocally in recent months, both in North Carolina and nationally, as utilities across the country struggle with the massive power needs of the server farms that are increasingly needed to fuel the artificial intelligence (AI) boom sweeping many industries.

The result has seen lawmakers looking for ways to protect ratepayers from costs associated with new data center demand.

'A good deal for the state as a whole'

In mid-February 2026, the N.C. Energy Policy Task Force formed by Gov. Josh Stein last year published its first report, and it paints a challenging picture for how the state is going to balance the need to keep the lights on while meeting surging power demand.

A primary focus of the report was who should bear the burden of paying for new power generation, since projected energy demand growth is expected to be fueled largely by a few large users – namely data centers.

"Given concern over rising utility bills and data centers primary role as a driver for growing electricity demand, we need to make sure we're allowing for projects that are a good deal for the state as a whole," said Will Scott, N.C. policy director for Environmental Defense Fund and a member of the task force, told the StarNews in February.

According to Duke Energy's load forecast in its 2025 Carolinas Resource

See DATA CENTERS, Page 2A

'Our goal is one consolidated'

Fayetteville leaders caught off guard by 911 center bill

Coral Aponte
Fayetteville Observer
USA TODAY NETWORK

State Sen. Val Applewhite says local leaders were blindsided June 16 by a bill in the North Carolina General Assembly that would give Cumberland County commissioners the power to create a joint 911 center with the city – a project nearly two decades in the making.

While both Fayetteville and Cumberland County have long supported consolidation, the effort has stalled over questions about cost, operations and who would run the center.

House Bill 1220, section six, would allow commissioners to unilaterally combine Fayetteville and Cumberland County's separate 911 call centers into one. Ap-



State Sen. Val Applewhite said local leaders were blindsided by June 16 bill introduced by Rep. Diane Wheatley in the North Carolina General Assembly.

plewhite, Fayetteville Mayor Mitch Colvin and Fayetteville Police Chief Roberto Bryan were among the local leaders who were not made aware of the bill before it was introduced, Applewhite said.

N.C. Rep. Diane Wheatley, a Republican whose House 43 district includes part of Cumberland County, sponsored the bill. Applewhite, a Democrat whose Senate District 19 also includes part of Cumberland County, emailed Wheatley about the surprise bill.

"I am deeply concerned by both the substance of this provision and the apparent lack of collaboration surrounding the development of this Bill," Applewhite wrote in a June 17 email to Wheatley, which she shared with The Fayetteville

See 911, Page 6A

Fayetteville council pushes budget despite friction

Coral Aponte
Fayetteville Observer
USA TODAY NETWORK

After a contentious budget work session June 15, the Fayetteville City Council voted 9-1, with Council member Shaun McMillan voting no, to move forward with a proposed budget of about \$324 million for consideration at its June 22 regular meeting.

Disagreements over transparency, spending priorities and the budget decision-making process dominated the

discussion.

Mayor Mitch Colvin presented his proposed budget to the council during a June 12 work session. The proposal included funding for two mental health teams for the Office of Community Safety, drones for the Police Department and a 3% salary increase for all city employees, unlike the city manager's recommended budget, which called for a 4% increase.

The spending plan does not include an increase in the city's property tax rate. The city manager's proposed bud-

get of \$322.8 budget called for a 3% increase.

The council voted on the items as a package rather than individually, sparking criticism from council members Shaun McMillan and Stephon Ferguson. They said separate votes would provide greater transparency and allow residents to see where council members stand on specific spending proposals.

Council member Deno Hondros said the council has voted on individual items before, but doing so takes more time.

"This is the more efficient way to do it. If you want to try to do it that way, we should all clear our schedules for this month," Hondros said.

The debate continued in Monday's meeting.

Ferguson opened the meeting by saying he does not agree with the budget process.

"I don't want to be on record for supporting things that I don't support. At the same time, I don't want to be on the

See BUDGET, Page 2A

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