Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Technology and Information Services to hold hearings exploring the context of data center development and operations in the Philadelphia region, the demand for technology infrastructure to support increased use of digital services, and the impacts of its development on Philadelphia's communities.

WHEREAS, Data centers are specialized facilities that house computing, storage, and network equipment used by cloud providers, enterprises, government agencies, and research institutions which are critical to the tech industry; and

WHEREAS, Data centers support the digital economy, enabling services such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, telemedicine, and critical public information systems; and

WHEREAS, Having a forward-looking strategy concerning online infrastructure, including data centers, signals a commitment to the future of the technology industry locally, with impacts for the startup community, technology sector, and the possibility for high-skilled jobs offering family sustaining wages; and

WHEREAS, Data centers consume large amounts of electricity, produce substantial heat, and require cooling, backup power, and resilient infrastructure. A recent academic assessment of U.S. data centers found that they currently account for more than 4% of total U.S. electricity consumption, with 56% of that electricity derived from fossil fuels, yielding more than 105 million metric tons of CO_2e per year; and

WHEREAS, National studies indicate rapid growth in data center energy demand. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that data center loads have tripled over the past decade and are projected to double or triple again by 2028; and

WHEREAS, The proposed development of data centers poses the opportunity for positive impacts on economic and workforce development, for both the technology, research and development and the construction industries; and

WHEREAS, The growth of data centers in the region and the need for such facilities presents challenges for Philadelphia; including strain on the electric grid and possible price volatility or supply constraints, increases in carbon emissions if powered by fossil-dominated electricity generation, high demand for water to meet cooling demands, in some designs localized thermal impacts and potential heat island effects, infrastructure impacts such as roads, site runoff, and local utility capacity upgrades, as well as community impacts including noise from cooling fans or backup generators, land use, water use, and equity concerns if siting of such facilities is concentrated near disadvantaged neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, To manage these impacts and capture benefits of infrastructure development, including economic development, technology leadership, construction and high-skilled jobs, while protecting the public interest, Philadelphia must consider a forward-looking, strategic, and equitable approach to data center development which takes into account possible regulatory necessities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The Council Of The City of Philadelphia, that we hereby authorize the Committee on Technology and Information Services to hold hearings exploring the status of data center development and operations in the Philadelphia region, the demand for technology infrastructure to support increased use of digital services, and the impacts of its development on Philadelphia's communities.