T. Terry: 01/19/2026

AN ORDINANCE

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CHAPTER 27, ARTICLES 4, 6, 7, AND 9 OF THE CODE OF DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA, AS REVISED 1988, TO ADD REGULATIONS FOR DATA CENTERS IN DEKALB COUNTY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

WHEREAS, the Governing Authority of DeKalb County is tasked with protecting the County's health, safety, and general welfare, and the Board of Commissioners is authorized to exercise zoning powers; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary to provide a definition for data centers; and,

WHEREAS, it is necessary to establish design and development standards for data centers to ensure that there is no discernible impact on adjacent properties or residential areas; and,

WHEREAS, to ensure that all data centers will only operate in compliance with applicable environmental standards and best practices within the O-I (Office-Institutional), O-D (Office-Distribution), M (Light Industrial) and M-2 (Heavy Industrial) Districts, and to minimize any adverse impacts on neighboring residential, office, and commercial districts, including but not limited to acoustic emissions, particle pollution, water usage, and energy consumption; and,

WHEREAS, to ensure that growth and density around high-capacity transit stops focuses on pedestrian orientation and is not hindered by development that does not generate increased pedestrian activity; and,

WHEREAS, in pursuit of a more sustainable and equitable future, it is critical to protect at-risk uses, such as parks, trails, schools, daycares, senior care facilities, and other areas from intensive development that may pose adverse health and environmental impacts; and,

WHEREAS, it is desirable to promote development that minimizes environmental impacts and integrates with existing and planned land uses of DeKalb County; and,

WHEREAS, to recognize the rapid changes within the data center industry and to account for the lifecycle of sites, ensuring that developments can be adaptively reused and can be revitalized with the possibility of future reuse; and,

WHEREAS, to ensure that development of data centers remains compatible with all character areas and that their use is located within the appropriate character area(s) designated in the 2050 Comprehensive Unified Plan;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Governing Authority of DeKalb County, Georgia, that Chapter 27 of the Code of DeKalb County, as revised 1988, is hereby amended as follows:

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PART I. ENACTMENT

By amending section 27-4.1.3 (Use Table) to include data centers as follows:

KEY:	P - Permitted use		SA - Special administrative permit from director of planning												
	Pa - Permitted as an accessory		SP - Special land use permit from BoC (SLUP)												
Use	RE	RLG	OI	OIT	NS	C-1	C-2	OD	M	M-2	MU-1	MU-2	MU-3	MU-4,5	See Section 4.2 ✓
INDUSTRIAL															
Data centers															
Data center, accessory**			P					P							✓
Data center, minor**			SP					SP	P	P					✓
Data Center, medium**			SP					SP	P	P					✓
Data center, major (in industrial and light industrial character areas)**									SP	SP					✓
Data center, campus (in industrial and light industrial character areas)**									SP	SP					✓
Data centers, major or campus in all other character areas**															✓
Data centers, redevelopment of existing industrial sites to medium, major, or campus**/***									P	P					✓
**In the event of a contradiction between the Use Table and the language stated in section 27-4.2.64(A), the application shall adhere to written clauses in section 27-4.2.64(A).															
***See section 27-4.2.64(G) for all application requirements for data centers on redeveloped industrial sites and limited exemptions from Special Land Use Permit requirements.															

Note: In the event of a contradiction between the Use Table and the language stated in section 27-4.2.64, the application shall adhere to the written clauses in section 27-4.2.64.

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By amending section 27-9.1.3 – Defined terms *of the Code of DeKalb County, to add the following terms:*

Closed loop system: A system that constantly reuses and recycles an initial load of water within its operation, significantly reducing the draw on external water sources and minimizing wastewater discharge. A closed loop system shall not use evaporative cooling, and may consist of methods including, but not limited to, air-cooled (dry) cooling, rear-door heat exchanger cooling, hybrid dry economizer cooling, direct-to-chip cooling, or immersion cooling.

Data center: A physical room, building, or facility that houses infrastructure for building, running, delivering, or transmitting technological applications and services, or for storing and managing the data associated with technological equipment, applications, systems or services.

Data center, accessory: Minor data centers shall only be permitted on parcels zoned Office-Institutional (OI) and Office-Distribution (OD) as an accessory use if under 2,000 square feet.

~~*Data center, campus*: A data center campus is a geographically contiguous development of one or multiple buildings built across one or multiple phases totaling at least 500,000 square feet.~~

Data center, major: A major data center has an area between 100,000 square feet and 499,999 square feet and has a substation.

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Data center, medium: A medium data center has an area between 20,000 square feet and 99,999 square feet and may include a substation.

Data center, minor: A minor data center has an area of less than 20,000 square feet and does not have a substation.

High-capacity transit stop: A high-capacity transit stop is a designated location where transit vehicles designed to transport large volumes of passengers operate. These stops serve major public transportation modes such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Arterial Rapid Transit (ART), Commuter Rail Transit (CRT), Light Rail Transit (LRT), and Heavy Rail Transit (HRT).

Load: The total power consumed by servers, storage, cooling, ventilation, generators, and other networking devices that operate within a data center.

Megawatt (MW): The unit of measurement for electricity that is equivalent to one million watts. This is commonly used to measure the total power consumption of a data center.

Substation: An electric utility facility that converts higher voltages to lower voltages within, or separate from, a data center to deliver sufficient power at maximum efficiency; may operate independently as a dedicated site once directly connected to a transmission line(s).

Square footage, data centers: The square footage of a data center shall include the total square footage of each floor in the data center development, the square footage of any supporting uses, and the square footage of any additional exterior equipment, such as substations, electrical yards, mechanical yards, and all other exposed equipment, located within the property boundaries.

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By adding section 27-4.2.64 -Data Center Supplemental Regulations of the Code of DeKalb County, as revised 1988, as follows:

Section 27-4.2.64. - Data center supplemental regulations.

A. Permitted locations.

~~1. Accessory data centers shall only be permitted on parcels zoned Office-Institutional (O-I) and Office-Distribution (O-D) as an accessory use if under 2,000 square feet.~~

~~2. Minor data centers and medium data centers shall only be permitted as a primary use by-right in Light Industrial (M) and Heavy Industrial (M-2) zoning districts.~~

~~3. Minor and medium data centers on parcels zoned Office-Institutional (O-I) and Office-Distribution (O-D) shall require approval of a Special Land Use Permit, regardless of future fand use designation.~~

~~4.~~1. ~~Major data centers and campus data centers shall only be permitted in the Light Industrial (M) or Heavy Industrial (M-2) zoning districts on parcels with Light Industrial (LIND) or Heavy Industrial (IND) future land use designations, with the approval of a Special Land Use Permit.~~

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~~5.~~2. No data centers shall be allowed in any Activity Center.
~~6.~~3. In the event of a contradiction between the Use Table and the language stated in section 27-4.2.64, the application shall adhere to the written clauses in section 27-4.2.64.

B. Buffer and screening requirements.

1. No data center in a Light Industrial (M) or Heavy Industrial (M-2) zoning district shall be permitted within 500 feet of the property line of any mixed-use or residentially zoned parcel.
2. No data center in Light Industrial (M) or Heavy Industrial (M-2) zoning district shall be permitted within 500 feet of the property line of any DeKalb County park(s) and/or trail(s).
3. If an interstate roadway, state highway, or major arterial road abuts the property line of a data center, the required distance between a data center and a residentially zoned property is reduced to 300 feet along the property line where the interstate roadway, state highway, or major arterial is located.
4. Major ~~or campus data~~ centers shall not be allowed where any of their property lines are within 2,640 feet (a half-mile) of a high-capacity transit stop.
5. Major ~~and campus data~~ centers shall maintain a minimum transitional buffer of 100 feet along all property lines abutting any property used for or zoned non-industrial.
6. Major data centers ~~and campus data centers~~ shall provide a 20-foot-wide landscaped buffer, which shall comply with the requirements of section 27-5.4.5. The landscape buffer shall be located along all property lines of the subject site. Additionally, the landscape buffer may be within the 100-foot transitional buffer and shall include a minimum 8-foot-high wall, see section 27-5.4.7. A minimum of one canopy tree shall be planted for every 30 feet of property frontage if the subject site abuts publicly accessible right-of-way or non-industrially zoned properties. These improvements may be located within the required 100-foot transitional buffer described in section 27-4.2.64(B)(5), if applicable.
7. Screening requirements contained in this subsection beyond those otherwise required in Chapter 27 shall not apply to minor or medium data centers.
8. Minor data centers and medium data centers shall comply with the transitional buffer requirements contained in section 27-5.4.5.
9. The required buffer described in sections 27-4.2.64(B)(1) through (3) may be reduced by the Board of Commissioners as part of an approved Special Land Use Permit (SLUP).
10. Distance shall be measured from the edge of any building, substation, drive, street, parking lot, structure, or improvement to the nearest property line in a straight line (i.e. “as the crow flies”).

C. Architectural and design requirements.

1. When within 300 feet of a publicly accessible road or right-of-way, a medium~~,~~ or major~~, or campus~~ data center, a minimum of thirty (30) percent of the width of the front façade at the ground level or any building shall consist of fenestration. Murals or other decorative treatments may count towards the fenestration requirements, up to 10% of the

front facade. Fenestration requirements listed in this section beyond those otherwise required in Chapter 27 shall not apply to minor data centers.

a) A mural shall be a large image, such as a painting, applied directly to a wall. Murals are public art and shall not be used for commercial advertising.

2. A minimum of ten percent (10%) of the width of side and rear facades shall incorporate decorative faux windows, architecturally glazed windows, or other decorative treatment, such as murals.
3. The following materials shall not be utilized on any building façade: aluminum siding; corrugated steel; vinyl siding; plywood; pressed wood products; synthetic stucco; or unfinished concrete block.

~~4. A data center campus shall have unified landscape and architectural elements.~~

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~~5.~~4. Building height for any data center shall not exceed seventy-five (75) feet in Light Industrial (M) and Heavy Industrial (M-2) zoning districts, which shall be measured from average finished grade (determined by averaging the elevations of the finished grade around the entire footprint of the structure) to the top of the highest roof beams on a flat roof, to the deck level on a mansard roof, and to the average distance between the eaves and the ridge level for gable, hip, shed, and gambrel roofs. Rooftop mechanical equipment, including but not limited to heating, air conditioning, ventilation, generators, and similar equipment shall not exceed a height of thirty (30) feet. Data centers in other zoning districts shall comply with the height limit requirements of the relevant zoning district.

~~6.~~5. Any rooftop mechanical equipment, including but not limited to heating, air conditioning, ventilation, generators, and similar equipment, shall be screened with a parapet wall, false roof, or other building element so as to fully conceal the mechanical equipment from the adjacent roadways and properties and from the site itself.

a) The parapet wall, false roof, or building element shall be designed to be architecturally integrated with the building's overall design.
b) No screening shall be required for renewable energy infrastructure equipment, including but not limited to solar energy systems, wind energy systems, and other power generation equipment.
c) No screening shall be required for any green infrastructure, including but not limited to green roofs, rooftop cisterns, and other bioretention equipment.

~~7.~~6. All data centers shall comply with the transitional height plane standards contained in section 27-5.2.4.

~~8.~~7. If an application includes the use of renewable energy sources to offset one hundred (100)~~at least forty-five (45)~~ percent of a medium~~,~~ or major~~, or campus~~ data center's total energy usage, the project shall be permitted to increase the height of a building to a maximum of one hundred fifty (150) feet, subject to compliance with required transitional building height planes. Renewable energy sources may consist of solar panels, on-site solar farm, small-scale wind turbines, waste heat recovery, and other renewable energy sources.

D. Operation requirements.

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1. Substations, electrical yards, mechanical yards, and any other exposed equipment shall not be located between the primary data center building and a public road or right-of-way and shall be screened from all adjacent public streets, private streets, trails, and parks.
2. All lighting other than street and pedestrian scale lighting shall a have "Dark Sky" design. There shall be no spillover from the fixture onto surrounding properties, including the street. All lights and poles shall have a permanent black finish.
3. All cooling and ventilation equipment shall operate on a closed-loop system.
4. Cooling, ventilation, and other external equipment shall not be located between the primary data center building and a public road or right-of-way, unless located on the rooftop of a data center building.
5. Mechanical and utility equipment shall comply with the screening requirements for site and parking area landscaping contained in section 27-4.2.64.(B) and (C) and Article 5 of the DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance.
6. Substations associated with the operation of a data center shall only be permitted in the O-D, M and M-2 zoning districts, and shall be subject to the following requirements:
    a) The substation shall be at least fifty (50) feet from any public right-of-way.
    b) The substation shall be screened from any adjoining property or public or private street with a minimum eight (8) foot tall decorative brick-faced wall.
    c) Vehicle storage and service equipment may not be collocated with the substation.

E. Noise and maintenance requirements.

1. Maximum permissible sound levels shall not exceed sixty-five (65) decibels (dB) during the daytime (7:01 a.m. to (9:59 p.m.) and fifty-five (55) decibels (dB) during the nighttime (10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) as measured from any property line.
2. Any generators on the property shall comply with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) New Source Performance Standards (NSPS) for at least Tier 4 emission standards.
    a) Testing for these generators shall not exceed 10 hours per month.
    b) Testing for these generators shall only occur between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
    c) Generators shall be fully enclosed within a sound attenuation wall for noise reduction and to reduce pollution.
    d) A generator testing log demonstrating compliance with these regulations shall be submitted as part of the annual compliance report to the Director of Planning and Sustainability or his/her/their designee.
3. Except for generator testing or commissioning activities, generator use is limited to backup/emergency use only. In no circumstances shall generators operate for more than 72 hours consecutively.

F. Application requirements for all data centers.

1. All applications for any new data center~~, regardless of SLUP requirements,~~ shall, in addition to any other application requirements of this code, provide the following information:

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a) Prior to an application for a Special Land Use Permit, the applicant shall confirm in writing that it is working with the applicable utility service provider to procure utility service in connection with the site. Prior to an application for a land disturbance permit, the applicant shall provide written confirmation that the applicable utility service (power) provider has agreed to provide service. The applicant must comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and ordinances pertaining to its activities at the site.
b) A noise impact assessment shall be required as part of the permitting process for any proposed data center and shall be assessed at a distance of 500 feet from the data center property line. The noise impact assessment shall:
    i. Define the scope of the assessment, including the geographic area, the noise sources to be studied, and the specific objectives of the assessment.
    ii. Measure pre-operation ambient noise, existing background noise, and provide acoustic mitigation strategies to ensure the post construction noise levels do not exceed sixty-five (65) decibels (dB) during the daytime (7:01 a.m. to 9:59 p.m.) and fifty-five (55) decibels (dB) during the nighttime (10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) as measured from all property lines.
c) A water consumption and sustainability plan shall address conservation and scarcity, outlining the total water requirement of the data center, including cooling needs, and any strategies to reduce or mitigate excessive water usage. The plan shall demonstrate that water usage will not significantly strain DeKalb County's water supply. The water consumption and sustainability plan shall specifically demonstrate:
    i. The vulnerability of the project and project site to water scarcity and drought.
    ii. Anticipated disturbance of public services, including but not limited to: transport, communication, sanitation, fresh water, and electricity supply.
    iii. Identify any drought monitoring and forecasting systems that exist in the project area.
    iv. Proposed water scarcity/drought management measures to alleviate risk, including water storage, alternative sources, and reduced use of resources.
    v. The adoption of advanced low-water or water-free cooling systems that align with the regional drought and water-scarcity planning of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District.
d) An energy consumption and sustainability plan shall include the energy load before construction of the data center and the projected daily operational load once constructed. This assessment shall demonstrate:
    i. Estimates of peak electricity demand and strategies for mitigating strain on local power infrastructure.
    ii. Estimates of proposed improvements and alternatives to minimize the need for additional transmission lines from the designated power provider.

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iii. The use of sustainable alternatives for power generation, such as solar panels, small-scale wind turbines, or other renewable energy sources that will offset at least 10% of total power usage.
iv. A decommissioning plan for unsold or surplus data infrastructure, for recycling all on-site electronic infrastructure through certified recyclers that follow Responsible Recycling (R2) Standard for Electronics Recyclers and/or e-Stewards® Standard for Responsible Recycling and Reuse of Electronic Equipment.
v. Planned use of sustainable practices to limit or offset the data center's use of power and water.

e. A lighting plan shall show compliance with "Dark Sky design" principles, demonstrating that there will be no spillover onto surrounding properties. A conceptual lighting plan shall be submitted with the initial application. A complete lighting plan shall be submitted as part of a Land Development Permit application demonstrating compliance with the requirements of section 27-5.6.1.- Outdoor Lighting.
f. Transmission line impact assessment: a transmission line impact assessment shall identify the need for new or upgraded transmission lines to meet the data center's electricity requirements. This assessment shall include the potential environmental impact on public land, including tree removal from county-owned land and rights-of-way. This plan shall also include information on any planned substation's location and shall show the screening mechanism(s), which shall include a minimum of an eight (8) foot tall decorative brick-faced wall if potentially visible from a public or private right-of-way. Screening shall comply with section 27-4.2.64(B).
g. Tree preservation and reforestation plan: a tree preservation and reforestation plan shall outline plans to minimize tree removal and enhance urban forestry efforts.
h. Stormwater management plan: a stormwater management plan shall address how the site's development and operation shall manage stormwater runoff, as well as any mitigation measures to prevent negative impacts on local water systems.
i. Sewer plan: a sewer plan shall evaluate and include:
    i. Actual and expected daily sewer flow.
    ii. Identify potential or planned sanitary sewer capacity projects.
    iii. An on-site treatment plan, including any necessary equipment to conduct trace analyses and consistent monitoring of chemical use for on-site water preparation and treatment.
    iv. An analysis of the community's treatment system, or a private treatment system, to determine whether there is adequate capacity to serve the forecasted growth or has planned improvements to add capacity to accommodate the forecasted growth.
    v. Clear indication of pipe size, material type, percent grade, and length of all pipes.
    vi. A utility plan with direction of sewer flow.
    vii. Disclose pretreatment or discharge permit request if any effluent leaves the closed loop system to sanitary or storm sewers for the DeKalb

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County Department of Watershed Management Industrial Pretreatment Program Review.

viii. Submit a Closure and Disposal Plan at decommissioning covering treatment systems, chemical waste, and related infrastructure.

ix. Disclosure Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE) target or performance metric.

2. Additional Information: Any additional information requested by DeKalb County's Department of Watershed Management, Department of Fire Rescue, Department of Public Works, Code Compliance Administration, or Department of Planning & Sustainability shall be submitted before the application is deemed complete.
3. The owner and/or operator shall submit an annual compliance report that details any changes to, and continuation of all, assessments submitted with an application and demonstrating compliance and monitoring of all application requirements and conditions of zoning to the Director of Planning and Sustainability, or his/her/their designee no later than the first of January of each year.
4. The burden of showing compliance with all supplemental requirements of section 27-4.2.64 and/or conditions of zoning is the responsibility of the applicant and/or owner of the property or use.

G. Special Land Use Permit requirements.

~~1. Redevelopment of Existing Industrial Sites: A Special Land Use Permit (SLUP) shall not be required for the redevelopment, reuse, renovation, or reconstruction of a site to allow a medium, major, or campus data center located within the Light Industrial (M) or Heavy Industrial (M-2) zoning districts and designated as Light Industrial (LIND) or Heavy Industrial (IND) on the Future Land Use Map, provided that:~~

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~~a. The site was previously developed and contains existing industrial, warehouse, or manufacturing improvements that were in place prior to December 31, 2024, and there has not been an active business license within the previous six (6) months.~~

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~~b. The redevelopment replaces or repurposes previous development with a medium, major, or campus data center that complies fully with the supplemental regulations in section 27-4.2.64.~~

~~c. The redevelopment does not expand the site's total impervious surface area or building footprint by more than twenty-five (25) percent beyond existing conditions.~~

~~d. No portion of the site is within 500 feet of a residentially zoned property, unless separated by an interstate, state highway, or major arterial road as described in section 27-4.2.64(B)(1) and section 27-4.2.64(B)(3); and~~

~~e. The applicant submits all required technical plans and studies listed under section 27-4.2.64(F) (Application Requirements) with the Land Disturbance Permit application, to be reviewed administratively by County staff for compliance.~~

~~f. Redevelopment proposals that do not meet these conditions shall require approval of a Special Land Use Permit (SLUP).~~

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~~g. In the event of a contradiction between the Use Table and the language stated in section 27-4.2.64, the application shall adhere to the written clauses in section 27-4.2.64.~~

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1~~2~~. A Special Land Use Permit shall be required for any building expansion or height increase of any existing data centers.

2~~3~~. In addition to the standard Special Land Use Permit (SLUP) criteria listed in section 27-7.4.6., applications shall be evaluated on the following supplemental criteria:

a. Adequacy of operation and infrastructure equipment that ensures the most sustainable use of resource, energy, and water consumption to serve the proposed use.
b. Whether the proposed use demonstrates compliance to all plans and assessments required by this code, including but not limited to: noise impact assessment, water consumption and sustainability plan, energy consumption plan, lighting plan, transmission line impact assessment, tree preservation and reforestation plan, stormwater management plan, and sewer plan.
c. Compliance shall be deemed satisfied when all plans and assessments have been properly submitted, potential impacts have been identified, proposed feasible mitigation strategies have been identified, and adverse impacts on public health, the surrounding environment, and infrastructure have been minimized.

H. Parking requirements.

1. See Use Table 6.2 for Off-street Parking Ratios, Exhibit 2.

TABLE 6.2: Off-street Parking Ratios

Minimum and Maximum Parking Spaces

Industrial

Use	Minimum	Maximum Parking
Data centers, accessory, minor, and medium		One (1) space for each one thousand five hundred (1,500) square feet of floor area.
Data centers, major and campus		One (1) space for each two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet of floor area.

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Section 7.4.7. – Additional criteria for specified uses.

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F. In addition to the application requirements contained in Article 7, any application for a Special Land Use Permit (SLUP) related to any data center shall provide the following information where applicable:

1. Adequacy of operation and infrastructure equipment that ensures the most sustainable use of resources, energy, and water consumption to serve the proposed use.
2. Whether the proposed use demonstrates compliance to all plans and assessments required by this code, including but not limited to: noise impact assessment, water consumption and sustainability plan, energy consumption plan, lighting plan, transmission line impact assessment, tree preservation and reforestation plan, stormwater management plan, and sewer plan.
3. Compliance shall be deemed satisfied when all plans and assessments have been properly submitted, potential impacts have been identified, proposed feasible mitigation strategies have been identified, and adverse impacts on public health, the surrounding environment, and infrastructure have been minimized.

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ADOPTED by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, this _____ day of _____, **2026**

_____
CHAKIRA JOHNSON
Presiding Officer
Board of Commissioners DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED by the Chief Executive Officer of DeKalb County, this _____ day of _____, **2026.**

_____
LORRAINE COCHRAN-JOHNSON
Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

ATTEST:

_____
BARBARA H. SANDERS-NORWOOD, CCC
Clerk to the Board of Commissioners and
Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED AS TO SUBSTANCE:

_____
JULIANA A. NJOKU
Director, Planning and Sustainability

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

_____
TERRY G. PHILLIPS
Interim County Attorney

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