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## A county tax break poster child

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One of the most frustrating aspects of serving as a Polk County Commissioner is how disconnected most citizens are from local government. I understand why because people are busy living their lives, and reliable information is increasingly hard to find.

Local media often approaches stories with a predetermined angle and never sticks to the facts, and social media is a breeding ground for misinformation. When you can see the larger picture, this disconnect can be especially discouraging.

Recently, your Polk County Commission approved a project that has generated a wave of criticism for giving a TAX BREAK to a new business. I'm referring to the new data center planned for Fort Meade.

For those unfamiliar, a data center is a large, highly secure facility filled with sophisticated computer hardware. These microchips process immense amounts of information and power much of the digital world. Google, Facebook, Amazon, cloud storage, website hosting... you name it. If you back up your phone, run a business website, or stream a movie, you're using a data center. In short, this is the cloud.

### Why Fort Meade?

The site is on former phosphate mining land, property that isn't particularly useful for much else. Today, all of the land designated for this project collectively generates only about \$4,000 per year in property tax. That is essentially negligible.

The new location was selected for several practical reasons:

### **1. Water supply**

Data centers require large amounts of water to cool equipment. Fort Meade has an abundant supply of reclaimed water that formerly served the phosphate industry. That industry is declining and no longer needs it, making this a perfect and responsible transition. This is not potable drinking water, and it places no additional demand on sewer capacity.

### **2. Electric power**

Data centers also require large volumes of electricity. This site sits next to an existing power plant and only nineteen power poles will be needed to connect it. That makes this location ideal and keeps additional infrastructure minimal.

### **Low impact on the community**

Unlike warehouses, manufacturing facilities, or large housing developments, data centers generate no traffic and require minimal public infrastructure. They do not bring fleets of semi-trucks or large daily commuter flows.

The facility will employ over 50 highly-skilled workers earning over \$100,000 annually, an excellent addition to the local economy, but not enough employees to strain local roads or housing. Likewise, this project will place no meaningful burden on schools, fire services, law enforcement or any other government services.

The building will sit more than a quarter mile from the nearest residence and will be screened behind a dense forest buffer, making it nearly invisible.

### **What does the community gain?**

The financial benefits to Fort Meade, our schools, and Polk County are enormous.

**Fort Meade:**

Its annual budget is roughly \$23 million.

This project will generate an additional \$23 million in property tax revenue each year, doubling the city's annual revenue overnight.

**Polk County Public Schools:**

Schools will receive more than \$15 million annually in new property tax revenue. I strongly suggest this funding go toward teacher pay.

**Polk County (BOCC):**

The County will receive approximately \$1.5 million per year for the first ten years, then around \$20 million annually thereafter.

**Local jobs now and later:**

Construction will require significant participation from local contractors and trades.

The project ultimately represents \$20 billion in capital investment, an unprecedented economic infusion to our county.

All of this comes with no major infrastructure costs and no major service impacts.

To sum it up, this TAX BREAK brings in at least 395 million dollars in new tax revenue to Ft Meade, schools and the BOCC in the next 10 years and 530 million the following 10 years.

**The alternative**

We could leave this land idle, continue collecting \$4,000 per year in taxes until a national homebuilder decides Fort Meade is the new frontier. Or we can embrace a technological industry that provides dramatic economic growth with minimal footprint.

For me, the choice was simple. I chose prosperity for Fort Meade and for Polk County.