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DCB

Columbia County's Ban on Data Center Non-disclosure Agreements (NDAs)

Columbia County, Wisconsin, has formally prohibited its supervisors from signing nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) related to data center projects. Here is the language adopted by the county board:

> *"No County Board member may enter into an agreement that is in any way related to conducting county business, including a nondisclosure agreement, that has the purpose or effect of concealing the details of or preventing public review. This includes, but is not limited to, agreements related to data centers, utility scale solar, wind, or battery energy storage system (BESS) projects."*
> LinkedIn

Background:

This policy change follows a high-profile but ultimately abandoned $10 billion artificial intelligence data center proposal in the town of Pacific, about 35 miles north of Madison.

- **Developer:** Stonebridge real estate development company, Maryland-based Wisconsin Watch.
- **Scale:** Estimated $10 billion, 400 permanent jobs, planned opening in 2027 Wisconsin Watch.
- **Timeline:** First mentioned in late 2025 in a local news report; initial contact with county officials began in August 2025 Wisconsin Watch.
- **Outcome:** The project "quietly vanished" after Town Chair Steven Pate told the developer that any proposal must be discussed at a public meeting with the full town board Wisconsin Watch+1.

The NDA Ban

Following this episode, Columbia County supervisors are now barred from signing NDAs tied to data center projects LinkedIn.

- **Rationale:** Supervisor Denise Brusveen said the move was intended to "be very clear to the public that they should be able to trust us" LinkedIn.

- **Implication:** Any discussions about data center proposals must be conducted in public, with full board participation, and without confidentiality agreements that would prevent disclosure.

The decision comes amid growing public scrutiny of how data center projects are negotiated. In other jurisdictions, residents have raised concerns that NDAs are used to limit transparency about contracts, environmental impacts, and project timelines citizenportal.ai+1. In Columbia County, the ban is part of a broader effort to restore trust and ensure that major infrastructure projects are handled openly.

In short: Columbia County's resolution closes the door on NDAs for data center deals, ensuring that any such proposals are discussed in the open and that officials cannot hide details from the public Wisconsin Watch+1.

Communities that signed NDAs for data-center proposals

Five communities in Wisconsin have signed NDAs:

- **Beaver Dam (Dodge County)** — NDA signed **Dec. 1, 2023** with Balloonist LLC (https://www.newsbreak.com/gazettextra-1591337/4463981741139-data-center-secrecy-deals-janesville-other-wisconsin-communities-have-signed-ndas)
- **Menomonie (Dunn County)** — NDA signed **Feb. 2024** with Balloonist LLC
- **Kenosha (Kenosha County)** — NDA signed **May 2024** with Microsoft
- **Janesville (Rock County)** — NDA signed **Sept. 2025** after issuing an RFP in July
- **Town of Beloit (Rock County)** — NDA signed **Feb. 2025** with Cambrin LLC (https://milwaukeenns.org/2026/03/23/wisconsin-data-center-secrecy-ndas-nondisclosure-agreements-communities-scrutiny/)

Columbia County's ban on NDAs stands out as a transparency-first model, contrasting sharply with the confidential NDA-based negotiations common in many data center deals and with restrictive covenant frameworks like those used in Columbia County, Georgia.

State Legislation

Sen. André Jacque authored **Senate Bill 969** to ban NDAs related to data-center development. State Affairs. The same bill is referenced again in a second report on the committee vote WisPolitics. It cleared the Senate Committee on Utilities, Technology and Tourism on March 13 on a bipartisan vote.