

https://www.shelbynews.com/news/councilor-means-davis-tours-data-center-facility-to-do-due-diligence/article_54511986-e997-534b-9acb-799e17d871dd.html

Editor's Note: The Shelbyville News does not hold a position regarding the current debate about a data center being built in Shelbyville. TSN reporter Hannah Gunnell had the opportunity to join City Council member Betsy Means-Davis on this trip. The following article is strictly based on observations made of the facilities in New Albany, as well as an interview with Means-Davis. It is not meant as an endorsement for or against the potential project.

NEW ALBANY, OHIO Shelbyville Council member Betsy Means-Davis took a field trip to New Albany, Ohio on Friday to tour the town's International Business Park and learn more regarding data centers.

"I think the trip today really helped to answer some questions about what a data center looks like, what it sounds like, and what it does or does not smell like," she said on the drive home.

New Albany, Ohio is roughly 3 hours away from Shelbyville, and located on the northeast side of Columbus, Ohio. New Albany has about 11,000 residents, but its International Business Park boasts 25,000 employees, according to information obtained at the town's City Hall.

The New Albany International Business Park includes specialized industry clusters for enterprises such as Health and Life Sciences, High-Tech Manufacturing and Logistics, Personal Care and Beauty Campus, Corporate Offices, Semiconductor Industry, and Information Technology and Mission Critical (i.e, data centers).

Means-Davis had the opportunity to view data centers owned by Meta, Google, and QTC. She did not enter the facilities, but observed their operations from the public roads and walking trails that ran nearby. These facilities are significantly larger than the data center Prologis is proposing on Shelbyville's east side.

New Albany built its first data center investment in 2010, with the first hyper-scale data center investment in 2015, according to information obtained from the city's website. Meta began construction in 2017, and is currently constructing additional facilities, and Google began construction in 2019.

By 2024, there were more than 15 total data centers under construction.

Means-Davis said she observed that construction activity was louder than the data centers.

"I was surprised that I couldn't hear the data center aside from the road," she said. "The noise on the road was louder than what we heard. I was impressed by how they had berms set up with the trees, and they had fencing around it, so you didn't really notice the data center was there."

TSN also noted that the buildings were quieter than social media would have people believe. The loudest building was a Google facility that utilized evaporative cooling, so the chillers were on top of the building. TSN viewed that building from two property lines, one with a berm and one without, and the one with the berm was significantly quieter, and also blocked the view. But even from the property line without the berm, the chillers sounded like a dryer running in the background. Means-Davis took videos of the buildings to capture the sound.

The proposed Prologis data center for Shelbyville would use closed-loop cooling and would not have chillers like what TSN observed on the Google building.

It was also worth noting that a house directly across the street from this Google building without the berm was listed for sale for \$700,000. Shelbyville residents have expressed concern that a data center would lower property values.

"Granted, it was a fancy house, but farther behind it there was a housing addition similar to what we're putting in here in Shelbyville with Isabelle Farms, and they were going to \$400,000-\$500,000 right there, next to the data center," Means-Davis said.

Also in terms of sound, TSN observed diesel generators between two QTC data centers, but they were not running. There was no smell. (Prologis said during its data center pitches that the Shelbyville sites would have diesel generators to back up power but would not be running all the time.) TSN also observed those generators were laid out on an asphalt pad between the two buildings in a way to where the buildings could block some of the sound when they are running.

"The most noise I heard today was from traffic," Means-Davis said. "The generators were between buildings, so you couldn't really see them. ... With

the proper berms and trees and such, it's not going to be an eyesore for the community. Also there weren't smokestacks. There weren't poofs of air pollution going on. I didn't smell anything and I have a strong sense of smell."

TSN did not observe any flooding, despite the rain New Albany saw prior to the trip.

Means-Davis also had the opportunity to speak with residents and workers in the town's shopping center two miles outside the Business Park about how they are affected by the park. Multiple residents noted they didn't even know there were data centers there.

"It was nice to go and meet people who lived in the community, who worked in the community some people didn't even realize there was a data center there, which was interesting especially because we have so many fears and questions that are not answered," she said.

The residents who have lived in the community for a long time didn't note much negative impact, with a majority of the negativity focusing on the construction.

Means-Davis ran into a community member, Dean Swartz, who happened to serve on the town's Plan Commission at the time the Business Park was developing.

"The whole idea was not to grow super crazy," Swartz said, noting the town established a strategic plan for the Business Park area and updated it every five years.

"One man we ran into buying dog food worked on the Plan Commission," Means-Davis said. "He was able to explain how they set parameters on how they built the data centers, and I think if we plan things correctly, whatever industry we put in, I think that's something our Planning Commission can have great control over how things are set up, how they look going forward."

Taxes from the data center park were used to fund the construction of the town's shopping center, which included brick facades, accessible sidewalks, and multiple local businesses. The whole area was meant to look like colonial Virginia, Swartz said, including town buildings and even the local schools.

"It was like walking into a Hallmark movie," Means-Davis said. "It was

beautiful."

New Albany implemented a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) for the Business Park. The CRA formula establishes a minimum annual service payment that Business Park companies are expected to pay, which is "intended to generate the same income tax collections as a manufacturing facility or office building," according to the city's website.

This payment can be achieved through multiple different revenue streams, including Tax Increment Financing (TIF) collections and income tax (Ohio allows its municipalities to tax the income of employees at businesses located in certain districts).

Those businesses are also expected to be active community members by getting involved in New Albany, according to the city's website. This includes donating to city-sponsored events, becoming members of the New Albany Chamber of Commerce, contributing to the New Albany Community Foundation, supporting local veterans, offering company-sponsored community grants, and hosting educational initiatives.

Means-Davis has plans to see additional data centers before the next Shelbyville City Council meeting on Jan. 21, including one owned by Prologis in the Chicago area later this week.

"[New Albany] is what's been called the 'gold standard' of data centers around us," she said. "It's the first one I've gotten to see. I'll be interested to see what others look like."

She hopes to view the New Carlisle, Ind. data center as well.

Means-Davis said she would encourage Shelbyville Plan Commission members to view more data centers. She also described (and TSN observed) the benefits of the berms, trees along the berms, both decorative and security fencing at each facility, and large setbacks from the road, which she liked.

"I think we need to take a detailed look about what our plans and goals are so we can help better serve our constituents," she said.

Means-Davis would like the city to come up with an ordinance that outlines what they expect just like it does for any other industry. This ordinance would include strict requirements about what Shelbyville wants, including large

setbacks and safe environmental standards.

She has requested the next City Council meeting take place at Shelbyville High School to ensure adequate space and time to speak for the public.

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