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County Leaders Call for Local Voice in Data Center Development

In testimony before House committee, Victoria County Judge Ben Zeller and Tom Green County Commissioner Shawn Nanny seek targeted safeguards for counties.

AUSTIN — Victoria County Judge Ben Zeller and Tom Green County Precinct 4 Commissioner Shawn Nanny testified before the Texas House Committee on Natural Resources, urging lawmakers to adopt targeted safeguards that protect water resources and give county government a meaningful voice in evaluating the impacts of large-scale data center development.

The two officials appeared before the committee June 23 at the invitation of the panel's chairman, state Rep. Cody Harris, R-Palestine. Zeller and Nanny said Texas could continue leading the nation in economic growth while ensuring communities have the tools needed to address major infrastructure and resource concerns.

Judge Zeller, who also serves as legislative chairman of the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas, said counties support economic development and recognize the important role technology plays in the state's economy.

"Texas counties support economic growth," Zeller told the committee. "Commissioners courts and county judges work every day to build our local economies and provide public safety, emergency management and the wide array of essential public services that have made the Texas Miracle possible."

At the same time, Zeller said, "our success requires that the economic development and the projects that we welcome today don't jeopardize the resources future generations of Texans will depend on tomorrow."

Current law leaves counties with limited authority to address projects of extraordinary scale, despite communities often bearing the direct impacts, Zeller said. He encouraged lawmakers to consider narrowly tailored reforms that would allow counties to:



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- Require reasonable buffer zones and noise mitigation standards for large-scale data center facilities near homes, schools and agricultural operations.
- Require certified water impact statements and environmental safety plans for large industrial users.
- Provide mandatory public hearings for projects exceeding defined megawatt thresholds.

The goal is “not choosing between economic growth and preservation of resources but insisting on both,” Zeller said. “Unless we can commit to both, it’s unlikely we will sustain either one in the long term.”

Commissioner Nanny shared firsthand experiences from Tom Green County, where residents in the drought-prone region have raised concerns about water supplies, transparency and the long-term impact of hyper-scale data center development.

“Most anybody would say that water is our most precious and valuable resource, but I disagree,” Nanny said, reading an excerpt from remarks he gave during a community hearing on a proposed data center in his precinct. “Our most valuable resource is the people who live here.”

Nanny said local communities should remain central to decisions surrounding major development projects. “Please put some parameters in place on hyper-scale data center construction,” he said. “Allow local elected officials the authority to properly represent their constituents.”

Nanny’s heartfelt testimony drew applause from those in attendance, and Chair Harris praised Nanny’s storytelling abilities.

Judge Zeller and Commissioner Nanny thanked committee members for the opportunity to testify and encouraged lawmakers to pursue practical solutions that balance economic opportunity with responsible stewardship.

Archived video of the hearing [is available here](#). Zeller’s testimony begins at 8:11:35, and Nanny’s begins at 8:19:00.

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