Amazon announces it will own data center in Montgomery County

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By William Carroll, Staff Writer

Amazon is finalizing plans for a next-generation data center to be located in Montgomery County.

The project is one of two proposed data center projects planned in Montgomery County, officials confirmed Friday.

Amazon Web Services of the Americas Vice President of Public Policy Shannon Kellogg said that Amazon is in the final stages of evaluating the potential site in Montgomery County. He said the proposed campus to be located on the 1,000 acres northeast of New Florence would include multiple data centers, that when completed would support over several hundred high-wage jobs, not including all the jobs during the construction phase of the project. Kellogg said Amazon is interested in Montgomery County due to the talented workforce in the region, reliable infrastructure, available land and the pro-business environment in the community.

"We like to go where we are wanted," Kellogg told The Standard. "We see a lot of strong positives in Montgomery County."

Kellogg reiterated that the proposed project would provide new construction jobs during the build-out phase as well as long-term technology jobs when the facility is fully operational. He also touted the significant tax revenues to Montgomery

County, which he said would amount to "tens of millions of dollars" in future tax revenue.

The Greater Montgomery County Economic Development Council has worked closely with Amazon on the development project.

"As the economic development entity responsible for business attraction in Montgomery County, the EDC is excited about the opportunity to work with Amazon on this transformational project," said Brent Speight, president of the Greater Montgomery County Economic Development Council, in a press release. "This project will provide long-term benefits and exceptional opportunities for our community, and we look forward to what's ahead."

Energy rate questions
One of the concerns of local residents has been the effect large-load customers like data centers could potentially have regarding residential electric rates. In a previous interview, Ameren Missouri Senior Director of Economic, Community and Business Development Rob Dixon said that such customers will pay their fair share of rates, including the entire costs of any infrastructure improvements relating to their facilities. Kellogg said the potential Amazon facility will be served through the existing grid planning process and would not require any new electricity generating facility.

"Our track record when we do these projects is to collaboratively work with power providers and utilities to support responsible grid development and that supports all users," Kellogg said.

Kellogg noted in other states where Amazon has built facilities their normal process has been to pay for any new substations that might be required and then turn those over to the energy companies. Kellogg gave several examples of power companies Amazon has worked with in the past including Entergy in Mississippi, Georgia Power and Dominion Energy in Virginia.

"All of those utilities have put out data that shows that data centers are not causing increases in power rates for rate payers," he said. "In fact, a number of the data points show that data center investments are helping to modernize the grid and bring down costs."

Water usage

Another concern of local residents, especially those with wells on their property, is the concern that data centers will negatively affect the availability of water to local residents. With respect to this concern, Kellogg said Amazon has already engaged a third-party independent study that has confirmed that the proposed data center's water consumption will amount to a very small fraction of the local aquifer's sustainable yield.

Kellogg added that due to the climate in Missouri, Amazon is looking at utilizing water in the proposed data centers for less than eight percent of the year (29.2 days). The rest of the year the center would be air cooled, Kellogg said.

AWS US Policy Communications and Public Affairs Lead Preston Grisham said in this project he believes the water cooling system to be used would be a direct evaporative cooling system.

Kellogg said the way the facility would be designed would also minimize impact on local water resources. One of the ways they would do that is by investing over $5 million to drill wells that are 600 feet deeper than residential wells. He said the water system Amazon uses is also twice as efficient as the average industry data center.

"We constantly innovate in the data center, including how we are cooling," Kellogg said.

Light, noise and other related issues

Grisham said Amazon works closely with neighboring communities to make sure any light on the campus does not leak out.

Kellogg said when the buildings are finished Amazon has not received complaints on lighting based upon how they design the data center campuses.

Data centers produce continuous sound due to the cooling of the server racks, Kellogg said. He explained historically older equipment produced tones in low frequencies, but newer designs are resulting in reductions in tones. He said Amazon completes comprehensive sound modeling for their data centers to evaluate any potential impacts and identify mitigation measures that may be required.

A release from Montgomery County Planning and Zoning said as part of the site plan application, a written statement has been submitted documenting how the project will mitigate noise, vibration, smoke, dust, toxic materials, odors, fire, glare, explosion and similar byproducts.

"In every jurisdiction we operate in we follow every applicable law and regulation," Kellogg said, adding the facility will follow all federal regulations regarding the safety and welfare of area residents.