

April 15, 2026

The Honorable Jaret Landon Williams
Mayor, City of Fort Meade
8 West Broadway Street
Fort Meade, FL 33841

Mayor Williams,

This letter is in follow up to the City of Fort Meade's April 14 approval to enter into a development agreement with Florida Ecopark LLC for a proposed hyperscale data center known as "Project Stonebridge" (the Project). As noted by the City Commission, the approval is contingent on the receipt of a consumptive use permit by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). Of note, the SWFWMD permit is just one of several permits the Project has yet to obtain. If the Project is ultimately successful, it would result in the construction of a 4,400,000ft² hyperscale data center facility, including associated structures, electrical substations, and utility facilities.

Upon review of readily available project information provided by the City and its development partner (the Developer), it is readily clear that the Project—if ultimately permitted and constructed—**presents significant risks to Central Florida's energy capacity, water resources, and transportation infrastructure.** Given the valid concerns that have been conveyed by your constituents and the Commission's decision to move forward regardless, I write to you in the spirit of transparency as it relates to the potential impacts the Project presents on Florida's natural resources, transportation infrastructure, economy, and way of life.

Under your leadership, the City of Fort Meade plans to venture on a path to enable a massive technology center for speculative purposes—especially given that a data center operator has not yet been disclosed. Further, the development will require extensive commitments of natural resources including water and energy, all of which need to be adequately and transparently addressed in the Sunshine to preserve the quality of life in the community and regain trust from your citizenry.

Moreover, as with all economic development proposals—especially one such as this that has several competing needs that will disrupt the area's infrastructure—an accounting of pros and cons for the community should be honest, publicly accessible, and transparent. Unfortunately, the path the City and its development partner have chosen thus far is a path that seeks to back into a "yes" with a series of questions yet unanswered regarding water, energy, infrastructure and terrain—all of which directly impact your citizens and neighboring regional communities.

Energy Capacity

As of this writing, the City, nor its development partner, have conveyed its plans to bring the necessary electric energy resources online to meet the development's proposed timeline. The location of the facility is within the territory of an Investor-Owned Utility that has not received approval from the Florida Public Service Commission on a rate structure that meaningfully protects Florida's residential customers and small businesses from footing the bill for energy needs of large-load customers, such as hyperscale data centers.

Water Resources

As noted in the April 14, 2026, correspondence from SWFWMD to the City, the Project is anticipated to have a minimum demand of 50,000 gallons of water per day. Based on the Department's preliminary review, the projected demand for potable water appears woefully underestimated for a 4,400,000ft² data center.

As outlined in the agreement, the Developer is required to undertake the design, engineering, permitting, and construction of certain water-related improvements to serve the Project. To date, neither the City nor its development partner, has applied for or received approval as outlined in the referenced correspondence. Further, as the Project is located within the Central Florida Water Initiative planning area, there are rules and restrictions that may prohibit any additional industrial/commercial quantities of water for the City, including the referenced 50,000 gallons.

Environmental Permitting

The City and its development partner have represented that heavy coordination with the State and permitting agencies has been completed, but as outlined in this writing and as referenced in the SWFWMD correspondence, critical information has not been provided to equip regulators with the information necessary to make informed permitting decisions.

Of note, the referenced permit is just one of several that may be required given the scope of the Project. In addition to a state environmental resource permit, the Project will have to obtain several additional permits as more detail comes to light, including permits related to the region's air quality, water quality and stormwater management, and mitigation plans to protect the region's wildlife. To ensure that City staff are educated on these requirements, the Department is happy to connect you with the applicable state permitting agencies to facilitate discussions.

Transportation Infrastructure

In consultation with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), additional information included in the Applicant's Traffic Impact Analysis and April 14 meeting packet shed light on a substantial increase in travel demand that merits explicit evaluation and mitigation, which are not included in the development agreement.

Roadway Congestion

While Fort Meade is a rural community, it lies just south of one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation. Nestled off SR-17, the Project is also within the vicinity of US 98, SR 62, and SR 64. While the referenced modeling notes increased trips on SR-17, a larger review of the impacts within the broader transportation network are warranted.

Further, it should also be noted that no roadway capacity or widening projects are currently included in the FDOT five-year work program and no state financial resources are currently planned to support traffic mitigation construction or construction-related congestion.

Rail Coordination

While the site plan depicts the construction of a proposed crossing of a CSX rail corridor, publicly available materials fail to reference the requirement for approval from CSX Transportation, nor do they acknowledge the physical constraints of the location, which does not appear to provide adequate space to accommodate a safe rail crossing. Coordination with CSX—resulting in written approval—should be expressly required. In addition to obtaining CSX approval, the proposal fails to meet the requirements under s. 335.141, FS and Chapter 14-17.012, FAC which may require the Developer to propose closing existing crossings within the corridor in order to obtain approval for additional crossings in this critical freight corridor through a final order and stipulation.

Aviation Coordination

The Development Agreement also states that the City will make good faith efforts to cooperate with the Developer regarding potential vertiport facilities on the property. FDOT's recently launched Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) business plan includes proposed vertiports in Lakeland and Sebring, but no plans for Fort Meade are proposed, considered, or underway. Given the proximity of the site to SunTrax AirGround, the feasibility of a vertiport facility at the site is unlikely. Moreover, if the City or its development partner plan to construct or operate aircraft from the site that decision does not rest with either party—that is a decision subject to the review, approval, and oversight of the State.

Additional Considerations

As Florida's Secretary of Commerce, I take my responsibility to support our state's economic competitiveness and quality of life seriously, doing so in a manner that promotes total transparency when reporting the benefits of a project to a community. To date, the benefits of the Project to those metrics are anything but clear.

- 1) The Developer's January 29, 2026, PowerPoint presentation to the City Commission plainly misrepresents the readiness and status of the water and energy necessary to sustainably support this project (reference the details above and below). The Department can say confidently that this is a reverse engineering of steps necessary to responsibly implement a project of such scale, and it gives the appearance that the hope is to effectively back regulators into a yes, rather than following appropriate processes.
- 2) The Developer's representation that the City would be receiving a \$10 million contribution is not new revenue—it is simply an advanced payment of property taxes as part of an agreement to provide tax credits.
- 3) The Developer's projected creation of more than 450 jobs employed directly at the data center may seem substantial, but the City's staff report did not provide any supporting data and analysis on what this projection is based on.

This is most likely a severe over projection as it is plain-sightedly inconsistent with the real-world job creation realities of hyperscale data centers, which largely rely on small teams of local technicians and are otherwise generally managed by remote workers.

One could reasonably assume that the vast majority of those jobs are largely comprised of temporary construction workers who are likely not permanent members of the community, and, moreover, are not representative of a sustainable benefit to the community.

The Department is also certain that this does not represent indirect job creation, as indirect job creation for information technology projects is relatively humble and, for example, nowhere near the level of indirect job creation that a manufacturing project would generate.

The proposed development is fundamentally flawed in its public facility planning and expectations of impact on the City of Fort Meade and the citizenry. In light of these deficiencies, your citizenry can breathe a sigh of relief that what passed yesterday is far from "approved" and the hurdles ahead all but guarantee challenges that are indeed ripe for public input.

Sincerely,



J. Alex Kelly

cc:

Brian Armstrong, Executive Director, Southwest Florida Water Management District
Alexis Lambert, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Jared Perdue, Secretary, Florida Department of Transportation
Roger Young, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission