



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 7/14/2026

File #: 26-724

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Planning and Building Department

Agenda Section: Departmental

Vote Requirement: Majority

SUBJECT:

Petition to Consider Modifications to the Zoning Ordinance to Address Prohibition of Detention Facilities, Data Centers, Onshore Support Facilities for Offshore Oil, and Deep Sea Mining

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct staff to take the following actions:
 - a) Establish standards for Detention Facilities; and
 - b) Establish standards for onshore support facilities for offshore oil; and
 - c) Establish standards for onshore support facilities for deep sea mining and
 - d) Establish standards for data centers; and
2. Consider requesting staff to return with a temporary moratorium on accepting application for any or all these land use topics while updates to the zoning ordinance are completed.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This action supports the following areas of your Board's Strategic Plan.

Area of Focus: Safe & Healthy Communities

Strategic Plan Category: 1008 - Update General Plan ordinances for quality of environment

DISCUSSION:

This petition has been brought forward by staff to determine if there is interest from the Board of Supervisors in addressing any of the land use topics identified. Each of the subjects has been brought up in public conversations as needing to be addressed. There are not any applications currently pending for any of these uses. This item is to allow the Board to provide directions before an application for any of the listed uses is brought forward. The various use types may be considered for prohibition or regulation for the following reasons:

- A. Detention Facilities: Review of the proposed Amazon Distribution Facility in McKinleyville caused public suspicion that the objective of Amazon is to build this facility and turn it into a federal detention facility. There is a perception that Amazon facilities are converted into detention facilities. Amazon counters that there have not been any Amazon facilities converted to detention facilities. The current zoning only allows detention facilities in the Public Facility Zoning District, but an ordinance could be written to explicitly prohibit the use. This would provide reassurance to the public about any potential existing warehouse space being converted to detention facilities. For the proposed Amazon project in McKinleyville, the Business Park zoning already largely provides that protection. An ordinance would prohibit detention centers regardless of the zoning.

- B. Onshore support facilities for offshore oil: This has several levels for consideration. In November of 1983 the county electorate voted in favor of an initiative (Measure B) which required development of an ordinance to prohibit development of onshore support facilities without approval by the voters. This was never acted upon. In 2023 SB 703 was passed into law which removed onshore support facilities for offshore oil to be removed from the definition of “Coastal Dependent Use.” In this provision, onshore support facilities are no longer a principally permitted use. The Humboldt Bay Area Plan is being updated to reflect this change in the coastal act.

The question raised is whether onshore support facilities for offshore oil production should be prohibited so that applications are not even submitted.

- C. Onshore support facilities for deep sea mining: This is a slightly different issue but similar to onshore facilities supporting offshore oil. Onshore facilities for deep sea mining can be viewed as an economic opportunity, but there are also consequences associated with processing bulk materials taken from the ocean floor. There are issues associated with onshore development including how to address material taken from the ocean floor which may include wastewater disposal, waste material disposal, and associated concerns with water quality. It should also be noted that deep sea mining involves removal of non-renewable resources. The economic feasibility of deep-sea mining can have a limited lifespan dependent on the resource volume in an area. When the resources run out this could result in the onshore facilities supporting this activity being abandoned.
- D. Data centers: The concern with data centers has been brought up in several contexts, most recently as part of the public meeting for Amazon. The adverse effects associated with data centers include large usage of both electricity and water for cooling. Power usage can result in higher electricity rates for local electric customers. In addition, concern with power usage is the source of power. Electricity generated through carbon fuels emits greenhouse gases and other pollutants that can be detrimental to public health. If data centers are to be considered in Humboldt County there should be a requirement to obtain power from a non-carbon fuel source. Large (in some cases huge) backup generators are associated with data centers. This could be resolved by requiring battery storage as a backup power source. Water use by data centers in Humboldt County should set parameters on the source of water. Use of water such that it depletes ground water supplies or adversely affects public trust expectations should be precluded. Where there is sufficient water, it may not be an issue.

With each of these uses, the decision is whether to prohibit the use or to establish standards for permitting the use. Some uses may be considered incompatible with the values of Humboldt County.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

Should the Board of Supervisors choose to pursue regulation of any of these topics the work would be funded through the General Fund contribution to the Long-Range Planning Unit (1100-282.)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Developing an ordinance to prohibit a particular use does not take as much staff work as developing a regulatory program to allow the use. Staff are finding it costs in the neighborhood of \$50,000 to produce a regulatory ordinance.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Work on these ordinances will involve coordination with County Counsel’s office, and the Coastal Commission for uses in the Coastal Zone.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board could choose to take no action on any of these, could choose to address one or more, and could choose to either prohibit the uses or chose to regulate the uses.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

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Meeting of: N/A

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