

# Washtenaw County Commissioner Justin Hodge

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Over the last few days, I have watched a lot of heated rhetoric and misinformation flood social media regarding the proposed University of Michigan High-Performance Computing Center in Ypsilanti Township. A massive amount of that criticism has been directed at my colleague and friend, **Commissioner Annie Somerville**. It is deeply disappointing to see a dedicated public servant scapegoated for a project that she has actually spent years working to put guardrails around. We need to lower the political temperature and get back to the facts, clear up how local government actually works, and look at the real legislative record.

Let me start by making my own position completely clear: both personally and as a social worker, I unequivocally oppose war. My commitment to human dignity, community healing, and peaceful collaboration guides every single decision I make in public office. Because of these core values, I believe our community dialogues have to be grounded in absolute honesty, not in sensationalized claims meant to divide neighbors or mischaracterize public servants who are working hard for their constituents.

Public concern has been heavily fueled by claims that this facility is a military weapons plant that will turn our community into a target. In her recent social media posts, Ypsilanti Township Supervisor Brenda Stumbo went as far as calling the project a "Department of War contractor" and a "singular manufacturer of plutonium pits." This contrasts with her public support for the project in late 2024 when she stated, "This project represents a significant investment in Ypsilanti Township, chosen for its existing infrastructure and commitment to further development in the area. The decision to locate this facility here demonstrates our community's readiness to support cutting-edge research and innovation."

I find it to be fundamentally unfair that anyone would try to aggressively pivot on a project that began with their support to shift the community's frustration onto other elected officials. This is a shared challenge for our whole community. Trying to shift blame to specific elected officials does nothing to support our residents. It is completely reasonable for people's positions to change when more information is made available, but we should acknowledge for ourselves when that occurs and not attempt to ignore it or rewrite history.

Here are some key facts about the project that contradict the inflammatory claims being circulated online:

- Los Alamos National Laboratory is a scientific research institution operating under the civilian United States Department of Energy. It is not part of the Department of Defense (or Department of War). Los Alamos remains entirely under civilian energy and scientific oversight.
- The planned facility is strictly for advanced scientific computational research. There will be absolutely no hazardous nuclear materials on site and zero manufacturing of any kind.
- This high-performance computing power is dedicated to civilian scientific calculations. It will be used for breakthroughs in medicine, advanced drug discovery, climate change preparedness, and modeling severe weather risks with street-level precision. It has no role in real-time military operations.

To be clear, I am providing these facts because I want our discourse to be grounded in reality.

Personally, I have serious concerns about the project and the University of Michigan's constitutional authority to enact a project like this with limited to no community engagement and to not have to pay taxes. At the same time, I would much rather work collaboratively with the university to secure benefits and investments in our residents rather than needlessly antagonize them and receive nothing at all.

While I do not have the authority to change the state constitution, I do have the ability to act at the county level. I can say with confidence that the Washtenaw County Government has exercised its full authority related to data centers and will work to ensure that we continue to do so. Here is a summary of the actions we have taken thus far, which represent the limit of our legal authority as a county government:

Resolution 24-193: The Board officially opposed Michigan legislative efforts to grant tax exemptions to enterprise data centers. The resolution notes that these tax breaks would incentivize energy-intensive facilities, delay Michigan's clean energy transition, strain local water resources, and unfairly shift infrastructure costs onto everyday ratepayers without ensuring corporate alignment with county sustainability goals.

Resolution 25-197: In response to documented harms regarding high energy/water usage, massive noise levels, and public health risks, the Board directed staff to build a data center toolkit and outreach plan for local governments. It urges local units to require developers to submit detailed water, energy, environmental, and noise studies, hold public hearings, utilize 100% renewable energy, avoid water-wasteful cooling, and commit to local union hiring targets.

Resolution 26-054: The Board praised several local townships and cities (such as Ann Arbor, Pittsfield, and Ypsilanti) for using their authority to pause development of data centers while updating zoning to address noise and water consumption concerns. It encourages other municipalities to do the same until strict standards, like 100% renewable energy and local labor guarantees, are met. The County Resiliency Office was also directed to maintain an updated Data Center Resource Library.

Resolution 26-055: The resolution supports House Bill 5362 to claw back the \$100 million state grant given to the University of Michigan for its high-performance computing facility in Ypsilanti Township, arguing taxpayer funds should go to projects with locally-negotiated community benefits rather than tax-exempt facilities. It also supports a proposed Michigan Constitutional Amendment to strip universities of their zoning immunity for non-academic industrial developments.

With that context, the narrative that **Commissioner Annie Somerville** has been passive or complicit with corporate overreach is completely dismantled by her actual voting record. While others were celebrating this project without scrutiny the **Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners** through these resolutions has been a leading voice on this issue. Neighboring communities took that county toolkit and successfully exercised their authority. As the author of the resolution encouraging moratoriums, I am especially grateful to every local government that has taken us up on our offer to provide resources and assist with strategy to protect our communities.