

## Using SB 484 to Protect Rural Character

### *Strategic Policy Recommendations for the Village of Indiantown 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update May 2026*

#### Executive Summary

The Village of Indiantown is at a pivotal moment. Proposed data center developments, including a Florida Power & Light (FPL) Planned Unit Development (PUD) that would include a data center, combined with the recent passage of CS/CS/SB 484 (2026), create both significant risks to the Village's rural character and a powerful opportunity to protect it.

**SB 484 does not strip local governments of authority.** On the contrary, it explicitly affirms and reinforces the Village's power to regulate large-scale data centers and other high-impact facilities through its Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations. The bill's legislative findings in s. 163.326, F.S., recognize that these facilities present "unique planning, infrastructure, and compatibility considerations" that local governments are expected — and empowered — to address.

The timing could not be better. The Village is currently updating its Comprehensive Plan to a 2050 horizon. This update represents the single best opportunity to establish clear, enforceable policies that will guide how data centers and similar large-scale projects are evaluated for years to come. Once major projects are approved or vested, the Village's leverage diminishes significantly.

This paper explains the threat, clarifies what SB 484 actually does, identifies critical gaps in the current draft 2050 plan, and provides specific, actionable policy recommendations the Village can adopt now to protect its rural lifestyle and small-town character while still allowing appropriate economic development.

#### The Emerging Threat: Data Centers and Large-Scale Industrial Development

##### Why Data Centers Are Different

Data centers are not typical commercial or industrial uses. Modern hyperscale and AI-focused data centers present a unique combination of impacts that are particularly damaging to rural character:

- **Massive scale:** Buildings often exceed 500,000–1,000,000+ square feet with heights of 60–100+ feet, creating an industrial visual presence unlike anything currently in Indiantown.
- **24/7 operations and lighting:** Constant activity, security lighting, and noise from cooling systems and backup generators fundamentally alter the quiet, dark rural nighttime environment.
- **Enormous infrastructure demands:** A single large data center can require 50–200+ megawatts of power and millions of gallons of water per day for cooling, placing extraordinary pressure on local infrastructure and resources.
- **Heavy truck traffic:** Construction and ongoing operations generate significant truck traffic on rural roads not designed for that volume or weight.
- **Limited local economic benefit relative to impact:** While data centers create some construction and maintenance jobs, they are highly automated and often provide limited ongoing employment relative to their footprint and infrastructure demands.

##### The FPL PUD and Data Center Proposal

The proposed FPL Planned Unit Development that includes a data center represents exactly the type of large-scale, high-impact project that could permanently alter the character of Indiantown's rural edges. Without clear policy direction in the Comprehensive Plan, the Village has limited tools to shape or condition such a project in ways that protect surrounding rural residential areas and the overall rural lifestyle residents value.

##### Understanding SB 484 (2026): What It Actually Does

There has been some confusion about SB 484. It is important to be precise about what the bill does and does not do.

## What SB 484 Does

- **Affirms local government authority:** The bill explicitly states that local governments retain full power and responsibility over comprehensive planning and land development regulations for large-load customers (data centers with 50+ MW peak load).
- **Creates legislative findings supporting strong local regulation:** Section 163.326, F.S., finds that large-load facilities present “unique planning, infrastructure, and compatibility considerations” and states that these issues “shall be addressed through local comprehensive planning and land development regulations.”
- **Protects ratepayers:** Requires the Public Service Commission to ensure large-load customers pay their full cost of service so costs are not shifted to other ratepayers.
- **Encourages reclaimed water use:** Requires large-scale data centers to use reclaimed water for cooling when environmentally, economically, and technically feasible.
- **Limits secret deals:** Prohibits (with some limitations in the final version) nondisclosure agreements that hide data center plans from the public.

## What SB 484 Does NOT Do

- It does not preempt or override local zoning or comprehensive plan authority.
- It does not force local governments to approve data centers.
- It does not prevent local governments from adopting strict standards, buffers, or even prohibitions in certain land use categories.
- It does not create a “right” for data centers to locate anywhere they want.

**Key Takeaway:** SB 484 is not a threat to local control — it is a legislative endorsement of strong local regulation. The State is telling communities like Indiantown: “These facilities have big impacts. Use your Comprehensive Plan and LDRs to manage them appropriately.” The Village should take this invitation seriously and act now while the 2050 plan is still in draft form.

## Why Now? The Critical Window of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update

The Village is currently in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan from the 2019 version to a 2050 horizon. This is not just a routine update — it is the single most important land use policy action the Village will take in the next decade.

### Why the Timing Matters

1. **Policies adopted now will guide decisions for 20+ years.** Once the plan is adopted, it becomes the legal foundation for all future land use decisions. Amending it later is difficult and time-consuming.
2. **Major projects are on the horizon.** The proposed FPL PUD and data center developments are moving forward. If the Village does not have clear policies in place before these applications advance significantly, it will have far less leverage.
3. **SB 484 creates a narrow but powerful window.** The bill’s affirmation of local authority is fresh. The Village can cite the new legislative findings directly in its plan, giving added legal weight to its policies.
4. **Once projects are approved or vested, options narrow dramatically.** Development rights, once granted, are difficult to unwind. The best time to set the rules is before the game is played.

**Risk of Inaction:** If the Village adopts the 2050 plan without specific policies addressing data centers and large-load facilities, it will be much harder — and potentially too late — to impose meaningful standards later. The draft plan as currently written has significant gaps in this area (see Gap Analysis document).

## Current Gaps in the Draft 2050 Plan

A comprehensive review of the draft 2050 Comprehensive Plan reveals several critical gaps regarding data centers and protection of rural character from large-scale industrial development:

- **No specific policies for data centers or large-load facilities.** The plan is silent on this emerging land use type.
- **Weak or nonexistent design and aesthetic standards.** There are no meaningful policies governing building scale, massing, materials, or visual impact in rural areas.

- **No dark skies or lighting standards.** Rural character is heavily dependent on dark night skies; the plan does not address this.
- **No rural road design distinctions.** The Transportation Element pushes multimodal design without distinguishing between urban and rural road standards.
- **Limited buffering and transition policies.** There are no enhanced buffering requirements specifically for large industrial uses adjacent to rural areas.
- **Economic Development Element lacks balancing language.** The new element promotes growth without acknowledging compatibility with rural character or the unique impacts of data centers.
- **No recognition of SB 484 or large-load facility considerations.** The plan does not reference the new state framework that explicitly supports strong local regulation of these facilities.

## How to Use SB 484 Powers: Recommended Policy Changes

The Village should use the authority affirmed by SB 484 to adopt clear, specific policies in the 2050 Comprehensive Plan. Below are recommended policy additions, organized by element.

### 1. Future Land Use Element – New Policy on Large-Scale Data Centers

#### **Recommended New Policy:**

#### **POLICY L-X.X.X Regulation of Large-Scale Data Centers and Large-Load Facilities**

In accordance with s. 163.326, F.S., the Village of Indiantown recognizes that large-scale data centers and other large-load electric customers present unique planning, infrastructure, and land use compatibility considerations. Data centers shall be prohibited in the Rural Community and Small Farm Residential future land use categories. Any proposed data center or large-load facility located in or within one (1) mile of areas designated for rural, residential, or agricultural use shall require approval through a special exception or planned unit development process and must demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Village Council, that the facility will not:

- Adversely affect the rural character, viewsheds, or scenic quality of the surrounding area;
- Generate noise, light, traffic, or other impacts incompatible with the rural lifestyle of adjacent properties;
- Overburden rural roads or infrastructure not designed for heavy industrial traffic; or
- Create cumulative impacts, when considered with other existing or approved facilities, that would fundamentally alter the rural character of the Village.

The Village shall require enhanced setbacks, visual buffering using native vegetation, dark skies compliant lighting with curfews where feasible, noise mitigation, and other conditions necessary to protect rural character. The Village may deny any application that fails to meet these standards.

### 2. Economic Development Element – Balancing Language

#### **Recommended New Policy:**

#### **POLICY ED-X.X.X Compatibility with Rural Character**

The Village of Indiantown supports economic development that is compatible with its rural character, small-town lifestyle, and the quality of life of its residents. Large-scale data centers and other high-impact industrial uses shall be evaluated not only for job creation and tax base benefits, but also for their consistency with the Village's goals of preserving rural character, protecting surrounding agricultural lands, and maintaining the quiet, dark, and open landscape that defines Indiantown. The Village shall prioritize economic development opportunities that align with these values and shall carefully scrutinize proposals that would fundamentally alter the rural experience of residents.

### 3. Introduction / Vision – Explicit Recognition of SB 484 Framework

#### **Recommended Addition to Vision or Purpose Statement:**

The Village of Indiantown recognizes that large-scale data centers and other facilities with substantial electric or utility demands present unique planning challenges. Consistent with the legislative findings in s. 163.326, F.S., the Village shall address these challenges through its Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations to ensure that such development, if it occurs, is compatible with the Village's rural character and the quality of life of its residents.

## 4. Additional Supporting Policies (Summary)

The Village should also consider adding or strengthening policies in the following areas (detailed language available upon request):

- **Dark Skies / Outdoor Lighting:** Require full-cutoff fixtures, color temperature limits (3000K or lower), and curfews in rural areas.
- **Rural Road Design Standards:** Establish different design standards for roads in Rural Community and Small Farm Residential areas (narrower widths, open ditches, minimal lighting).
- **Enhanced Buffering:** Require significantly wider and more opaque buffers when large industrial uses are adjacent to rural or residential areas.
- **Viewshed Protection:** Require viewshed analysis for large structures on open or elevated rural land.
- **Infrastructure Impact Assessment:** Require detailed analysis of power, water, and traffic impacts as part of any data center application.

## Implementation Strategy for the May 16 Workshop and Beyond

### Recommended Actions

5. **At the May 16 Joint Workshop:** Publicly acknowledge SB 484 and its affirmation of local authority. State clearly that the Village intends to use its Comprehensive Plan to thoughtfully regulate data centers and protect rural character. Distribute or reference this paper and the companion policy documents.
6. **Request staff/consultant response:** Ask that the draft 2050 plan be revised to include specific policies addressing large-scale data centers and rural character protection, citing SB 484 as supporting authority.
7. **Submit formal written comments:** Provide the recommended policy language (from this paper and the companion Rural Character and Agricultural Preservation documents) as formal public comment before the plan is transmitted to the state.
8. **Coordinate with Martin County:** Engage Martin County early on regional issues (annexation, infrastructure, farmland preservation) related to data center development at the edges.
9. **Prepare LDR updates in parallel:** Begin drafting Land Development Regulation amendments that will implement the new Comprehensive Plan policies (design standards, buffering, lighting, etc.) so they can be adopted shortly after plan adoption.

## Conclusion: A Strategic Opportunity

SB 484 is not a threat to Indiantown's ability to protect its rural character — it is a legislative green light to do so. The bill explicitly recognizes that large-scale data centers have unique and significant impacts and that local governments have both the authority and the responsibility to address those impacts through their Comprehensive Plans.

The Village of Indiantown now has a narrow but powerful window to shape its future. By adopting clear, specific policies in the 2050 Comprehensive Plan that are grounded in the legislative findings of SB 484, the Village can:

- Welcome economic development that is compatible with its values
- Protect the rural lifestyle and small-town character that residents cherish
- Ensure that any data centers or large industrial projects that do locate in Indiantown meet the highest standards for compatibility, design, and community benefit
- Position the Village as a thoughtful, proactive community that plans for growth rather than simply reacting to it

The choice is clear. The tools are available. The time to act is now, while the 2050 Comprehensive Plan is still in draft form and before major development decisions are locked in.

*This paper and its companion documents (Rural Character Policy Proposals, Agricultural Land Preservation Recommendations, and Rural Lifestyle Gap Analysis) are offered as resources to support informed public comment and Village decision-making during the May 16, 2026 Joint Workshop and the subsequent plan review and adoption process.*