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OKC Council places emergency moratorium on data centers



The Oklahoma City Council has placed an emergency moratorium on data centers like this Amazon facility in New Carlisle, Indiana. REUTERS/JIM VONDRUSKA/FILE PHOTO

BY SAM ROYKA
The Journal Record

The Oklahoma City Council unanimously voted to place an emergency moratorium on data centers until the end of the year.

During its regular meeting Tuesday, the council acknowledged amendments to come, joining Tulsa in the pause on data centers while the cities develop data center ordinances. City Planning Director Geoff Butler said city staff already have a draft ordinance planned for council review this summer, but it could come up earlier.

The moratorium pauses all new rezoning and building permits that deal with construction, expansion, or use of property for datacenter purposes in city limits, with exceptions for some pending rezoning requests. However, if the code is amended before Dec. 31, it could be lifted.

The council heard from residents and data center owners in the Oklahoma City area.

Concerned residents included Taylor Sanchez, who is part of Honor the Earth, an indigenous-led organization for environmental justice and indigenous rights founded in 1993 by activist Winona LaDuke

along with Amy Ray and Emily Saliers of The Indigo Girls.

It's no secret that hyperscale data centers are fueling the generative AI boom; however, data centers also house an array of other uses like data processing and cryptocurrency. Sanchez said a municipal-level moratorium is one of few tools that communities have to protect themselves from sudden changes.

Developers, she said, are making billions building data centers in other communities that they would not build in their own. Sanchez said a moratorium would slow down that process, allowing for prior and informed consent.

"We're seeing city and tribal officials being approached with NDAs in hand, foregoing transparency with communities about projects," Sanchez said.

In McAlester, she described a developer with an active proposal that does not want to meet the community about the project until after it is approved.

"This is all too often the case because community approval or rejection is seen as potential to derail the project, especially as the public is becoming more informed about the public health disaster that hyper-

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House Minority Leader Cyndi Munson, D-Oklahoma City, speaks to her legislative colleagues, staff, friends and family members in her farewell address on the House floor on Tuesday. PHOTO/KATRINA CRUMBACHER, THE JOURNAL RECORD

Munson delivers farewell speech as gubernatorial bid looms

BY KATRINA CRUMBACHER
The Journal Record

Weeks ahead of an anticipated early sine die adjournment, House Minority Leader Cyndi Munson, D-Oklahoma City, gave her farewell speech in front of colleagues, staff and gallery spectators less than an hour into Tuesday's floor session.

Munson is running as the only Democratic candidate in Oklahoma's gubernatorial race instead of pursuing a final term as a legislator, despite remaining eligible. Oklahoma term limits dictate Munson may serve in the legislature until 2028.

Near the beginning of her speech, Munson said she wished legislators could make these kinds of speeches on the floor at the beginning of their terms, saying it would give lawmakers greater insight into their new colleagues' backgrounds and lived experiences.

"This is when we get to see the most human side of each other and relate to each other in a way that I believe would help us get through some of our toughest policy disagreements," Munson said. "When else do we get to see adult men and women with titles and responsibilities show their vulnerable side, the real stuff beneath the surface that drives us to do the work that we do?"

Munson first ran to represent House District 85 in 2014 but lost, earning 44% of the vote against then-incumbent Rep. David Dank. Munson said that loss helped her understand how "you can do everything right and work hard and yet still fall short."

After Dank died in April 2015, leaving his seat open, Munson ran again, this time winning in a September special election against Republican Chip Carter after having earned nearly 54% of the vote. That win made Munson the first Asian-American woman elected to the Oklahoma Legislature.

"Would you believe in those 13 years of door knocking," Munson said, "I spent the majority of my time earning the votes of registered Republicans? I share this because it's the best part of my journey, knowing I stand in my values while listening to the concerns of my constituents who don't align with me

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Oklahoma City Comets infielder Ryan Fitzgerald preps to throw a baseball from third base March 28 against the Albuquerque Isotopes at Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark. PHOTO/OKLAHOMA CITY COMETS

Comets return home for six-game series with Tacoma

The Oklahoma City Comets open a six-game home series against the Tacoma Rainiers this week at Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark, packed with promotions running through Sunday.

Wednesday's game starts at 6:05 p.m., followed by an 11:05 a.m. Thursday field trip day game where students can attend for \$14 per person in groups of 10 or more, including a sack lunch and souvenir hat.

Friday brings Dodgers Celebration Night at 7:05 p.m., honoring the Los Angeles Dodgers' three World Series titles in the past six years. The first 1,000 fans receive a

themed poster, and postgame fireworks presented by New-castle Casino follow the game. Bedlam Night pregame activities also tip off Friday in honor of the Oklahoma-Oklahoma State rivalry.

Saturday's 6:05 p.m. game features Way Off Broadway Night presented by Courtyard Oklahoma City Downtown, celebrating fan-favorite musicals with themed entertainment. The series closes Sunday at 4:05 p.m. with a Family Sunday, including pregame autographs and a postgame kids' base run.

Single-game tickets start at \$9 at okccomets.com.

-Journal Record staff

OKLAHOMA CITY ODOT names student winners, rebrands art contest

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation has announced the 2026 winners of its annual student art contest while unveiling a rebranded initiative aimed at promoting environmental awareness.

Now titled the Keep Our Land Grand Art Contest, the program encourages students to create artwork highlighting the importance of litter-free communities. Nearly 2,200 students from about 200 schools in 67 counties participated this year.

Fifteen students across four grade divisions earned top honors, with first-place winners receiving \$300. Additional awards recognized poster, postcard and entry form designs.

Winners were honored April 15 during a ceremony at the Oklahoma State Capitol. Their artwork will be featured in the agency's 2027 calendar, set for release in December.

ODOT officials said the program aims to inspire students to take an active role in environmental responsibility as the state continues to address litter through education and cleanup efforts.

-Staff report

OKLAHOMA CITY Whiskey Cake Kitchen & Bar to close

Whiskey Cake Kitchen & Bar in Oklahoma City will close its doors later this month, with its final day of service set for April 26, according to announcements shared by the restaurant.

The farm-to-table style restaurant, located at 1845 NW Expressway near Penn Square Mall, has been a staple for American comfort food, craft cocktails and whiskey-focused drinks since opening in the metro.

"Oklahoma City, you've meant everything to us," the restaurant said in a social media post. "After 12 incredible years, we'll be closing our Whiskey Cake OKC location on April 26th as our lease comes to an end. When we opened our doors in 2014, we hoped to become a place where you'd gather and feel at home. And you made that happen in ways we never could have imagined. This restaurant has been more than just a place to dine; it's been part of your stories and your everyday moments."

Whiskey Cake has encouraged guests to visit before its final day of operations later this month.

-Staff report

EDMOND Edmond Chamber hosts ribbon-cutting for Ally Rocks Fund

The Edmond Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon cutting for Ally Rocks Fund during Heard on Hurd, highlighting a new initiative focused on impaired driving awareness.

The event introduced the Impairment Challenge program, which aims to engage the community through educational experiences that demonstrate the dangers of impaired driving. The initiative brings together organizations across Edmond and Oklahoma County to promote prevention through coordinated outreach.

Ally Rocks 405, led by Danette Goad, focuses on education, advocacy and support for first responders, driving-age youth and the broader community. The organization works to raise awareness and encourage safer decision-making.

Community partners involved in the effort include the Oklahoma County Sheriff's Office, Edmond Fire Department, Citizens Bank of Edmond and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol.

The event drew community leaders and public safety officials, emphasizing collaboration in addressing impaired driving and promoting public safety.

-Staff report

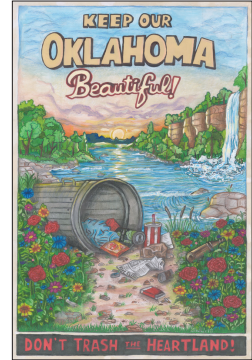
EDMOND Traveling Vietnam memorial to visit Edmond

VFW Post 4938 will host The Wall That Heals, a traveling, three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, at Mitch Park from May 14-17.

The exhibit honors more than 58,000 U.S. service members who died in the Vietnam War and will be open to the public 24 hours a day with free admission. LED lighting will allow for viewing at all hours.

Spanning 375 feet in length and standing 7.5 feet tall at its apex, the replica is designed to provide an experience similar to visiting the original memorial in Washington, D.C.

The site will also include educational programming for schools, families and community groups, along with recognition through the In Memory Program for veterans who returned home but later died from causes related to



The Keep Our Land Grand Contest Winner promotional poster, created by Bryan County 11th grade student Rilyn T., features the message, "Keep our Oklahoma beautiful! Don't trash the heartland!" PHOTO/ODOT

their service, including Agent Orange exposure and PTSD.

"Bringing this exhibit to Edmond is a profound honor for our community," said Col. Mustafa "KUJO" Koprucu, USAF (Ret.). "It provides a space for veterans to receive long-overdue recognition, for families to remember their loved ones, and for our younger generations to learn about the history and impact of the Vietnam War."

Organizers said the event will include opportunities for volunteering, guided tours and donations.

-Staff report

TULSA Tulsa urges caution during Work Zone Awareness Week

The City of Tulsa is recognizing Work Zone Awareness Week, April 20-24, and urging drivers to slow down and remain alert in construction zones.

City officials said more than 200 active construction zones are in place during peak season, requiring drivers to adjust to lane shifts, reduced speeds and changing traffic patterns.

The national campaign theme, "Safe Actions Save Lives," emphasizes the role driver behavior plays in preventing crashes. Officials noted most work zone accidents are caused by distracted driving, speeding or following too closely.

Public Works Director Terry Ball said drivers should stay focused and avoid distractions to help protect road workers and others on the road.

Transportation officials report that nationally, four out of five work zone fatalities involve drivers or passengers rather than workers.

Drivers are encouraged to follow posted signs, maintain safe distances and allow extra travel time.

-Staff report

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The Journal Record welcomes original, signed letters of up to 200 words on any public issue. Longer submissions focusing on business topics may be considered for a guest column. Letters may be edited for length, style and content. Submissions must be addressed to The Journal Record and include your name, address and daytime telephone number for verification. Letters submitted become the property of The Journal Record, which retains all rights on it, when or how a submission is published. Submit letters by one of three ways.

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ON THE TOWN

Thunder playoff energy spreads across Oklahoma City

As our community roots for the OKC Thunder in the playoffs, it has been fun to make the rounds to see all the ways and in all the spaces we're celebrating together.

I went to as many Thunder-related events as I could leading up to and at Game 1 against the Phoenix Suns on Sunday, and I loved watching that victory from inside the Paycom Center arena. On Wednesday, I'll be looking for other places to cheer when Game 2 tips off at 8:30 p.m.

Last weekend, I started at Loud City HQ Friday night to see the end of the weeklong Thunder playoff hub and pop-up at NW 4th and Shartel. There, the official Thunder DJ "Emcee One" – Marcus Anthony Guinn – was hosting the beats behind a giant basketball-shaped podium. He said events like the Loud City HQ let guests channel playoff excitement. "The Loud City is electric, and this is where the electricity starts to just bubble up," he said.

Kira Odum, Loud City event lead for the Thunder; Kat Waddell, event manager; and Tanner Sikes, manager of fan development, noted that they had as many as 802 fans a night lining up for giveaways, merchandise, drinks, Singo Music Bingo and virtual experiences. There were nooks to explore in every space;

members of the Storm Chasers pep squad hosted.



LILLIE-BETH BRINKMAN

The next day, I stopped by Dewey Park at 35th and North Lindsey for the Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department's booth and walked away with paper origami Thunder jerseys, colorful posters and Thunder gear.

Then on Sunday before the game, I enjoyed Thunder UP in the Park, the free pregame celebration that will be before each home playoff game in Scissortail Park just south of the Paycom Center. There are youth zones, Thunder-themed activities, face-painting, live music, giveaways and performances from Thunder entertainers. People were dancing to the "Cupid Shuffle" and staying through the Thunder Drummers and Rumble the Bison leading a parade to the Paycom Center in time for kickoff. I also visited with Thunder Artists Group artist Jordan Morris (@thrumyecz_).

I think everyone is as excited about our team as I am. I'm ready to explore more community Thunder fun during the playoffs.

OKANA Boardwalk open house

A new outdoor hub for dining, drinks, entertainment and connection is the focus at OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark during a free open house from 5 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, April 23.

The community is invited to experience The Boardwalk with chef tastings, live entertainment, wellness experiences and interactive activities, a news release noted. Enjoy food and cocktail tastings from Boardwalk restaurants Smokehouse Social, Curveball Kitchen and Bullseye, virtual sport simulator bay samplings, lawn games, mini chair massages from The Spa at OKANA, Pilates on the Lawn by Club Pilates Yukon, live music from Born in November, a vendor market and fire show finale.

Have an idea, item or event for On the Town? Email lillie.beth@yahoo.com.

OFFICE VISIT

14 years of progress and lessons in public health at TSET

As I close out my time at TSET, it's prompted a lot of reflection. This is my final TSET column and next month you will hear from interim Executive Director Lance Thomas.

I am leaving the agency at the end of April – after 14 years of service, including seven years as the executive director. When I started at TSET, it was a small state agency, with barely a decade of history.



JULIE BISBEE

At that time, smoking was still permitted on school campuses, restaurants had smoking rooms and there was a smoking room in the basement of the state Capitol.

Today, that seems hard to believe. It's a lesson in progress and what a dedicated group of organizations can do when they work together. I'm proud that TSET has been at the core of pushing for local health change and statewide policy that saves lives.

TSET recently celebrated its 25th anniversary – and because of TSET's consistent investment in proven programs that prevent and reduce tobacco use, Oklahoma successes have outpaced other states with similar smoking laws and taxes. Adult smoking dropped from 28.6% in 2001 to 14.1% in 2024. Youth smoking is now at 4%, and efforts to reduce youth vaping are paying off.

I remember the first year the smoking rate dropped to the teens – we had balloons and party hats to mark the occasion. We knew if we followed proven programs and invested in what works, smoking rates in Oklahoma would continue to decline.

TSET's grants have also matured and now include funding that supports communities making healthy choices – being active, fostering connection. Seeing a town come together around a walking track, or a non-profit transforming their outdoor space from a barren parking lot to an inviting exercise space and community garden. The magic is not in the grantmaking but the bonds and connections that happen BECAUSE of the grant. That's where sustainable, authentic change happens.

The efforts to promote healthy choices are done in pursuit of reducing risk factors for cancer and chronic disease.

During my time at TSET, the TSET Board of Directors has been focused on closing gaps, such as the continued support of the OU Health Stephenson Cancer Center, one of 73 National Cancer Institute certified locations in the country.

TSET dollars fund impact and measurable outcomes: number of patients screened, number of patients enrolled in clinical trials. For me, this is driven home when a 40-year-old mother tells her survivor story and celebrates milestones with her family because of cutting-edge cancer care.

As I reflect on my time at TSET, I'm humbled to have played a part in helping so many Oklahomans improve their health, build community and celebrate more occasions with the people who matter most. I'm proud of this work, and excited to see what lies ahead.

TSET is, after all, the people's trust for health and the mission endures beyond any one leader.

Julie Bisbee is executive director of Oklahoma's Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust.

BUSINESS STRATEGY

Core to Shore expands: What it means for downtown and Capitol Hill

This spring the OKC City Council approved a significant amendment to the Core to Shore TIF (Tax Increment Financing) plan, reflecting both the progress downtown has made and the opportunity that remains. The plan spans from the urban core of downtown south to the Oklahoma River, and now extends further to include Capitol Hill as a dedicated increment district. Alongside other strategic changes, this expansion opens new doors for investment, housing, and public improvements across a broader part of the city.



KENTON TSOODLE

The Alliance has been a partner in this work from the beginning, and we are proud to see it move forward. With City Council approval in hand, our focus shifts to implementation and to helping ensure the plan's potential translates into real results.

Two of those projects are already taking shape downtown in historic 1920s buildings. The Cotton Exchange Building at 228 Robert S. Kerr Avenue is set to be converted into 100 residential units and The Robinson Renaissance Building at 119 N. Robinson Avenue is to be redeveloped as The Robinson, adding 106 apartment units. Each has received City Council approval for TIF incentive allocations, reflecting the kind of adaptive reuse the plan encourages: converting underutilized historic buildings into housing in the heart of the city.

As other projects like The Harlow have demonstrated, demand for downtown urban living is real and growing, and the expanded plan creates more opportunities to respond to it. The amendment also shifts emphasis toward complementary development around the new Oklahoma City Arena and the upcoming multipurpose stadium, major public investments that create the kind of momentum TIF is designed to leverage.

TIF works by establishing a base property tax value at the time a district is activated. As development occurs and property values rise, the incremental increase in tax revenue above that base is captured and can be reinvested within the project area for public improvements, infrastructure, and assistance in financing eligible development projects. Taxing entities continue to receive revenues based on the established base value throughout the life of the district. It is not a tax increase, and it is designed to be used when and where development would otherwise be unlikely to occur on its own.

For Capitol Hill, the plan opens a different kind of opportunity. The area has long been part of the broader Core to Shore project area, but a dedicated increment district means it can now more directly access TIF resources. Last fall, the community celebrated the opening of Plaza Calle Dos Cinco, a new outdoor gathering space on Harvey Avenue that celebrates the neighborhood's deep Hispanic heritage. That kind of community investment speaks to what Capitol Hill already is, and the dedicated increment district opens the door to more.

Oklahoma City has a track record of using TIF well, and this expansion reflects both the progress made over the last decade and the ambition to do more. We look forward to what comes next for downtown, Capitol Hill, and the broader project area.

Kenton Tsoodle is the president of The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City.