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Councilor, District 20

Indianapolis-Marion County City-County Council



MEMORANDUM

School-Proximity Context and Existing Conditions

To:	Members of the Metropolitan Development Commission / Hearing Examiner
From:	Councilor Michael-Paul Hart
Re:	2026-CVR-815 / 2026-CPL-815 305 Fintail Drive Warren Township, Council District #20
Date:	June 8, 2026

This memorandum addresses the concern that the proposed DC BLOX data center is too close to Irvington Community Elementary School. Student safety, construction dust, noise, air quality, traffic, and brownfield management are legitimate issues and should be reviewed carefully.

The review, however, should be based on the full existing context around the school, not distance alone. Irvington Community Elementary School operates along an established urban corridor near East Washington Street, South Kitley Avenue, the Pennsy Trail, a long-standing public lodging use, existing commercial activity, and the former Ford/Visteon industrial property now being redeveloped as Thunderbird Commerce Center.

The question is not whether children matter. They do. The question is whether this specific restricted-access data center use, with enforceable conditions, creates a greater school-related risk than the existing conditions already operating around the school and the corridor.

Bottom line: School proximity should be evaluated through actual risk and daily operating profile, not distance alone. The school opened while the former Ford/Visteon plant was still active; IDEM later stated chlorinated solvents were used throughout Ford plant operations. That history strengthens the need for brownfield safeguards, but it also confirms that industrial context near the school predates the data center petition. A secured data center is not impact-free, but its key issues - noise, generator testing, construction dust, fuel storage, traffic, and site management - can be reviewed and controlled through measurable commitments.

1. The key chronology matters

The current objection often presents the data center as if it would newly introduce industrial conditions near Irvington Community Elementary School. The timeline shows something different: the school opened and operated while the adjacent Ford/Visteon industrial site was still active.

Date / period	Documented record	School-proximity relevance
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1956-1957	The English/Shadeland automotive components factory was established during this period. [3]	The area had a major manufacturing presence decades before the school opened.
2002	Irvington Community Schools states it opened its doors in 2002; Indy.gov also lists Irvington Community Elementary School as opened in 2002. [1], [2]	The school is a long-standing community asset, but it was established in an already developed corridor.
2002-2007 / 2011	DC BLOX states the factory closed in 2007; IBJ reported the hydraulic steering factory closed in 2011 after an extended shutdown timeline. [3], [4]	Under either timeline, the school opened and operated while the Ford/Visteon industrial operation was still active.
Historical operations	Mirror Indy reported that IDEM stated chlorinated solvents were used throughout the history of Ford plant operations and that chemicals, including vinyl chloride, remain monitored in groundwater. [5]	This should be stated carefully: it supports the industrial-overlap point and the need for strict brownfield controls; it does not, by itself, prove student exposure.
2017 and after	DC BLOX states the former factory was demolished in 2017 and the site was later renamed Thunderbird Commerce Center for logistics, manufacturing, and job creation. [3]	The data center petition is part of redevelopment of an already-industrial property, not a first-time industrial intrusion near the school.

2. What the Ford/Visteon overlap means - and what it does not mean

The overlap is important because it changes the framing. Irvington Community Elementary School opened in 2002 while the Ford/Visteon industrial operation was still active. The school has therefore existed in proximity to industrial land use for its entire history.

That overlap is especially relevant because IDEM later stated that chlorinated solvents were used throughout Ford plant operations. Vinyl chloride, one of the monitored groundwater chemicals reported in connection with the site, is identified by EPA as a known human carcinogen. [5], [6] This is exactly why soil management, vapor controls where applicable, groundwater protections, dust suppression, and agency compliance should be required during redevelopment.

At the same time, the record should not be overstated. The available sources confirm industrial operations, chemical-use history, and monitored groundwater contamination. They do not, standing alone, prove that students were exposed, that school drinking water was affected, that airborne exposure occurred, or that school leadership knew about specific contaminants when the school opened. The defensible conclusion is narrower and stronger: the school opened and operated next to an active industrial site during the historical period covered by IDEM's later statement about chlorinated solvent use.

3. The nearby motel is a separate, more direct student-safety context

The school-proximity review should also consider the existing uses closest to the school. A provided map measurement shows Skyline Motel at 6617 East Washington Street roughly 500 feet from Irvington Community Elementary School. IndyGo's Blue Line environmental documentation identifies Skyline Motel at that address, built circa 1957 and determined eligible as a historic property. [7]

This is not included to attack the motel or the people who use it. It is included because a 24-hour public lodging use near an elementary school creates a different and more direct student-safety profile than a secured data center. A motel is open to the public, operates overnight, allows transient occupancy, and creates ongoing public interaction. A data center is a restricted-access facility with limited public entry.

There is also a documented public record. WRTV reported that a 2015 multi-agency sweep involving IMPD, the State Fire Marshal, Code Enforcement, and the Marion County Public Health Department identified 37 violations at Skyline Motel. [8] WFYI later reported that the Council passed a high-crime hotel ordinance based

primarily on emergency calls per room and quoted Skyline Motel's owner during the debate over how that ordinance would apply. [9]

Those records do not prove any specific current condition at the motel. They do show that motel-related code, health, and public-safety concerns are real land-use issues near schools and neighborhoods. If child welfare is the standard, those existing nearby conditions should not be omitted while the data center is treated as the only relevant school-proximity issue.

4. Distance alone is not the correct test

A balanced school-proximity review should compare the type of use, public access, daily activity, and enforceable controls. The concern is not simply whether a use is near the school; it is what that use actually does near the school.

Issue	Existing school-area context	Proposed data center context	Review implication
Public interaction	East Washington Street, retail activity, the Pennsy Trail, and a 24-hour motel create routine public interaction near the school.	A data center is a secured facility with restricted public access.	Student-safety risk should be evaluated by actual interaction, not distance alone.
Noise	IndyGo estimates general corridor noise along the Blue Line corridor between 65 and 70 decibels because of existing roadways. [7]	DC BLOX materials reference property-line sound limits and generator-testing restrictions. [10], [11]	Modeled data center sound should be compared against existing ambient conditions and enforced through testing.
Construction dust	The Thunderbird property has already been part of industrial redevelopment, and residents have reported past dust concerns during construction on the site. [5]	Additional construction would create dust risk if the petition proceeds.	Dust suppression, track-out controls, covered loads where appropriate, and soil management should be enforceable.
Air / generators	The existing area includes roadway, commercial, and industrial activity; the former Ford site also has a brownfield history.	The data center issue is primarily backup-generator testing and emergency operation, not continuous public occupancy.	Require IDEM compliance, diesel particulate filters, maintenance documentation, and noncompliance reporting.
Traffic and access	The school already operates near East Washington Street and an active urban/commercial corridor.	The plan estimates limited routine vendor/customer visits and employee commuters at full buildout. [10]	Construction traffic and access routes should avoid school pickup/drop-off conflicts where practical.

5. Conditions that should be required if approved

The data center is not impact-free. If approved, the school-related concerns should be addressed through clear, measurable commitments rather than general assurances.

Concern	Recommended enforceable condition
Sound	Require a qualified pre-permit acoustical study, a fixed property-line limit, annual testing, public reporting to the Administrator and district Councilor, and corrective action for exceedances.
Generator testing	Limit testing hours; prohibit evening/night testing; avoid weekends/holidays where feasible; require records of testing dates, duration, and operating status.
Generator emissions	Require IDEM air-permit compliance, diesel particulate filters, maintenance documentation, and prompt reporting of any noncompliance.
Construction dust and brownfield work	Require dust suppression, track-out controls, stabilized entrances, erosion and sediment controls, soil-management protocols, covered loads where appropriate, and a direct construction-contact process for school/neighborhood concerns.

Traffic and site access	Require a construction traffic plan, route management, no long-term commercial truck parking, no truck maintenance, and coordination to avoid school arrival/dismissal conflicts where practical.
Public transparency	Require written documentation of sound testing, generator testing, dust complaints, corrective action, and permit compliance to be available to the Administrator and district Councilor.

6. Core school-proximity conclusion

Irvington Community Elementary School is an important institution. The MDC should require serious review of noise, construction dust, air permitting, traffic, brownfield work, and site safety.

But the school-proximity claim should be evaluated in full context. The school opened in 2002 while the former Ford/Visteon industrial plant was still active. IDEM later stated that chlorinated solvents were used throughout Ford plant operations. The school also operates near East Washington Street, a long-standing motel roughly 500 feet away, the Pennsy Trail, nearby commercial activity, and the Thunderbird industrial redevelopment site.

The data center petition should therefore not be framed as if it introduces industrial land use near an otherwise isolated school for the first time. The better question is whether this specific proposed use, with enforceable commitments, creates a greater risk to students than the existing conditions already operating around the school.

Based on the current record, proximity to the school alone should not be treated as a basis for denial. The appropriate response is to require measurable controls for sound, generator testing, construction dust, soil management, fuel storage, traffic, public reporting, and enforcement.

Source Notes

The citations below are included to make factual assertions traceable. Internet sources were reviewed on June 8, 2026.

- [1] Irvington Community Schools, About Irvington Community Schools, stating ICS opened its doors in 2002. <https://ics-charter.org/about-irvington-community-schools/>
- [2] Indy.gov, Mayor-Sponsored Charter School listing for Irvington Community Elementary School, opened 2002 and mayor-sponsored beginning in 2009. <https://www.indy.gov/activity/find-a-mayor-sponsored-charter-school-mscs>
- [3] DC BLOX Indianapolis project page, Thunderbird site history, factory history, demolition timing, and I-3 zoning. <https://www.dcblox.com/indianapolisdatacenter/>
- [4] Indianapolis Business Journal, "Huge \$150M industrial campus planned at former Ford Visteon site on east side," reporting Ford closed the hydraulic steering factory in 2011. <https://www.ibj.com/articles/150m-project-planned-at-former-ford-visteon-site-on-east-side>
- [5] Mirror Indy, reporting on IDEM September 2025 letter regarding chlorinated solvents, monitored groundwater chemicals, vinyl chloride, and resident dust/brownfield concerns. <https://mirrorindy.org/dc-blox-data-center-east-indianapolis-irvington-pennsy-trail-michael-paul-hart-andy-nielsen/>
- [6] U.S. EPA, Risk Evaluation for Vinyl Chloride, identifying vinyl chloride as a known human carcinogen. <https://www.epa.gov/assessing-and-managing-chemicals-under-tsca/risk-evaluation-vinyl-chloride>
- [7] IndyGo, Blue Line Bus Rapid Transit Project Documented Categorical Exclusion, identifying Skyline Motel at 6617 E. Washington Street and discussing existing corridor noise. <https://www.indygo.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Blue-Line-Bus-Rapid-Transit-Project-DCE-April-2024.pdf>
- [8] WRTV, "Nearly 300 violations issued to Indy hotels," listing 37 violations at Skyline Motel in a 2015 multi-agency sweep. <https://www.wrtv.com/news/local-news/nearly-300-violations-issued-to-indy-hotels-following-two-day-sweep>
- [9] WFYI, "Council Passes Ordinance To Identify, Potentially Punish High-Crime Hotels," describing the high-crime hotel ordinance and quoting Skyline Motel ownership during the debate. <https://www.wfyi.org/wfyi-news/2018-03-13/council-passes-ordinance-to-identify-high-crime-hotels>

[10] DC BLOX Indy Plan of Operation, May 21, 2026. <https://www.dcblox.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/DC-BLOX-Indy-Plan-of-Operation-5.21.26.pdf>

[11] DC BLOX Indy Commitments Draft, May 21, 2026. <https://www.dcblox.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/DC-BLOX-Indy-Commitments-Draft-5.21.26.pdf>