

Site diligence & kill-gate checklist

The Definitive Guide to AI Data Centers — aidatacenterguide.com · v1.0 · defaults as of 2026-07 · Canonical chapter: Ch 3.13 — Market Clusters & the Site-Scoring Playbook

Intended user: siting / development team screening candidate sites before spending diligence money. **How to use:** run §1 kill gates first — a fatal gate disqualifies the site regardless of the weighted score. Only sites that pass every gate get the §2 scorecard and §3 diligence plan. Shaded amber cells are a worked example (reference case: ~100 MW-class AI campus); blue cells are yours to fill.

Document control

Project / candidate site		Revision	
Prepared by / date		Reviewed by (development lead)	
Approved by (investment committee)		Decision (proceed / hold / kill)	

§1 — Kill gates (run before any scoring)

A kill gate cannot be averaged away by incentives or land price. Evidence must be documentary — a verbal utility assurance is not evidence. Thresholds align with the guide's site-scoring calculator (power or interconnect $\leq 2/10$, water $\leq 1/10$ disqualify).

Gate	Disqualifying condition	Evidence required	Worked example (REFERENCE)	This site
Power availability / speed-to-MW	No documented path to the first energization block ($\geq 25\%$ of design MW) inside the business-case window	Utility load-study response or executed study agreement; queue position with milestones; BYOP permits status if off-grid	PASS — utility letter: 60 MW at M+30, balance M+48	
Interconnection & permitting path	Interconnection or a required land-use/air permit has no defined process or a hard local moratorium	Interconnection study status; zoning verification letter; moratorium/ordinance search (county + municipality)	PASS — by-right industrial zoning; no moratorium	
Water for the design basis	Design cooling architecture's make-up water cannot be sourced or permitted (or forces a redesign that breaks the pro-forma)	Will-serve letter or withdrawal-permit pre-application meeting notes; drought/curtailment priority class	PASS — closed-loop DLC design; potable make-up < 10 ML/yr	
Fatal-flaw hazards	Site in a regulatory floodway, unmitigable wetlands take, or incompatible adjacent use (e.g. ammonia terminal blast radius)	FEMA/authority flood map, wetlands delineation desktop, Phase I ESA, adjacent-use survey	PASS — Zone X; Phase I clean	
Control of the land	Land cannot be optioned/controlled before diligence spend, or title carries unresolvable encumbrances	Option/PSA status; preliminary title report	PASS — 24-mo option executed	

§2 — Weighted scorecard (only for sites that pass §1)

Score each criterion 0–10 with the anchors below; the weights are the guide's 2026 hierarchy (power leads). Tune weights to your workload — training tolerates latency and remoteness, inference does not — and record any re-weighting in the revision block. Bands: ≥ 80 Tier-1 site · 65–79 strong · 50–64 workable with mitigation · < 50 weak.

Criterion	Weight	Score anchors (0 · 5 · 10)	Example score (REF)	Score	Weighted
Power availability & speed-to-MW	30%	0 = no path · 5 = full MW in ~4 yr · 10 = contracted power inside 24 mo	7		
Interconnect & permitting	20%	0 = hostile/moratorium · 5 = defined path, average queue · 10 = by-right + executed studies	6		
Power price / PPA structure	15%	0 = $> \$0.12/\text{kWh}$ volatile · 5 = $\sim \$0.08$ · 10 = $< \$0.05$ contracted long-term	6		
Land & expandability	15%	0 = constrained parcel · 5 = design fits, no phase 2 · 10 = campus-scale with control of adjacency	7		

Water & climate	10%	0 = scarce + hot · 5 = adequate with conditions · 10 = abundant + free-cooling climate	6		
Incentives / tax	10%	0 = punitive · 5 = neutral · 10 = executed abatement/exemption package	5		
Total (Σ score × weight ÷ 10)			63.5 — workable with mitigation		

§3 — Diligence checklist (evidence, owner, status per item)

Domain	Items to close before FID	Owner	Status / date
Power & interconnection	Load study; queue position & cluster reform exposure; delivery voltage & substation scope split; firm vs interruptible tariff; curtailment/DR obligations; BYOP fuel path if applicable		
Land, title & entitlements	ALTA survey; title commitment; zoning & height/noise limits; setbacks; protective covenants; option-to-close schedule		
Water & wastewater	Will-serve; withdrawal/discharge permits; curtailment priority; chemistry (for DLC make-up); geotech for wells if applicable		
Environmental & hazards	Phase I/II ESA; wetlands & species; flood & seismic design category; wildfire/wind/hail exposure; air-permit class for gensets (or BYOP plant)		
Network	≥2 diverse fiber paths (documented separacy); long-haul latency to target metros; dark-fiber vs lit economics		
Community & tax	Host-community sentiment scan; abatement/PILOT terms; noise/visual commitments; decommissioning bond requirements		
Constructability	Geotech; heavy-haul route survey (transformer delivery); labor market depth; laydown acreage; utility outage windows for tie-in		

Template v1.0 (2026-07) — aidatacenterguide.com/templates. This checklist is a screening frame, not legal or engineering advice; gate thresholds and weights must be adopted by the named approver for the specific project.