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Braidwood data center delay

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

A \$40 million data center being planned in Braidwood by developers Western Hospitality Partners (WHP) of New York may be at the mercy of utility giant ComEd who wants data centers to pay saying that hooking up to the grid must be paid up front.

The eight-building campus planned for property near I-55 and Reed Road is indefinitely on hold as of January due to ComEd infrastructure constraints and regulatory demands.

To be clear, regulations for data centers are increasing due to electricity demand, grid reliability and environmental impact.

Braidwood data center

In March 2025, WHP's proposal for a data center data center consisting of eight buildings and two substations was reported here. The bulk of the center was to be located on North Kankakee Street near East Reed Road, just off the Reed Road exit

of Interstate 55.

The area is considered ideal due to its proximity to the Braidwood Nuclear Generating Station. Data centers are increasingly located near nuclear power plants to secure 24/7 carbon free, high density power essential for AI workloads.

WHP pursued purchase of a 158-acre parcel located at 26125 W. Kennedy Road in Braidwood (PIN 02-24-18-100-027-0000). According to county records, the purchaser paid \$3,150,000, and the property closed on Aug. 28, 2025.

On Nov. 12, 2025, the Braidwood City Council passed a motion for an inducement resolution, opening the door for a possible fourth TIF (Tax Increment Financing) district. An inducement resolution is a formal declaration of intent by the city, to potentially issue tax-exempt bonds for the proposed data center.

According to Bryan Wellner, attorney for the City of Braidwood, the resolution passed only to ensure that, in the event the TIF district is established, eligible expenses could be reimbursed by increment pro-

duced from the TIF.

"The city was only exploring the option of TIF as a result of the data center and infrastructure upgrades needed for its development," Wellner said. "I think it's unlikely the city will establish the data center TIF district if the data center is not approved within the city."

Drain on resources

The data center planned for Braidwood—and indeed those proposed throughout the country—consume enormous amounts of energy, water, generate noise, and have high carbon footprints, often straining local utility grids and resources. The rapid expansion brings concerns regarding the loss of open space and increased utility costs for residents.

According to media company Data Center Dynamics, ComEd, has introduced new rules requiring large-load energy users such as data centers to make financial commitments for future large-scale projects to shield rate-payers from footing the bill for the transmission infrastructure.

Show us the money

ComEd will require "firm financial commitments" from developers of projects of at least 50 megawatts. Additionally, data centers will have to provide a letter of credit for 10 years of transmission service revenues.

On Jan. 6, ComEd introduced stricter rules for data centers and other large-load customers aiming to prevent the rapid rise in energy demand. The utility has implemented "Transmission Security Agreements" (TSAs) that demand financial commitments up front for new projects.

According to ComEd CEO Gil Quiniones, the agreements will enable ComEd to "better ensure that the customers who impose very large demands on the system are paying their fair share."

"These new transmission security agreements are a model for how utilities and the developers of large load projects—regardless of industry sector—can come together to meet growing power requests responsibly," Quiniones said. "By having TSAs in place, ComEd can better

SEE DATA CENTER PAGE 2



Courtesy photo

FOUR MEMBERS from the Reed-Custer Theater Department recently participated on the All-State musical "Newsies", become the first in RCHS history to be selected to the 50th annual Illinois High School Theatre Festival. They include (from left) Mark Martinez, Morgan Lamping and Cameron Junkroski, along with Reed-Custer theater director James Reinbacher.

R-C group takes center stage to make history

For the first time in school history, Reed-Custer High School took center stage at the highest level of high school theater in Illinois.

Three students and the school's theater director were selected to participate in the 2026 Illinois High School Theatre Festival (IHSTF) All-State Production, a rare and prestigious honor reserved for the top student performers and technicians in the state.

This year's All-State musical, Disney's Newsies, celebrated the 50th annual Illinois High School Theatre Festival, held Jan. 8-10, 2026, at Illinois State University.

More than 500 students from across Illinois auditioned for the opportunity. Only 123 were selected to make up the cast, crew and pit orchestra for the All-State Production, a col-

laborative, professional-level experience that brings together students who may never otherwise share the same stage.

Among them were Reed-Custer students Mark Martinez, Morgan Lamping and Cameron Junkroski, along with Reed-Custer theater director James Reinbacher, marking an unprecedented moment for the Comets' performing arts program.

Martinez earned a role in the cast as Morris Delancey, one of the antagonists in Newsies, stepping into a demanding part that required strong acting, singing and stage presence.

Junkroski portrayed Theodore Roosevelt, a featured role that calls for confidence, authority and charisma. Lamping was selected as a member of the production's crew, contributing behind the scenes to the technical execution

of the show.

Reinbacher was selected as a member of the production's creative team, joining fellow educators and professionals from across the state in shaping the overall vision of the All-State production.

The 2026 All-State Production was directed by Anna McSweeney of Addison Trail High School, with Alex Holod of District 88 serving as technical director and Joshua Trent Kimball as choreographer. Together, they led the students through an intensive rehearsal process that mirrored the expectations and pace of a professional theatrical production.

According to the Illinois Theatre Association, the All-State Production is a cornerstone of the annual festival and a singular experience in high school theater.

"The Illinois High

School All-State Production stands as a unique and unparalleled experience in the high school theater world," the organization states. "Students from across Illinois unite to create something special that wouldn't be possible through the efforts of any single school."

For Reed-Custer, the experience carried even greater significance. Never before had the school had students selected for the IHSTF All-State Production, making this year's participation a milestone for the program.

The production of Newsies not only highlighted the individual talents of Martinez, Lamping, Junkroski and Reinbacher, but also showcased Reed-Custer on a statewide stage during a landmark anniversary year for the festival.

City Hall putting businesses in the spotlight

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

The City of Braidwood wants to spotlight local businesses on the city's Facebook Page.

Mayor Todd Lyons spoke of the new program at the city council meeting on Jan. 27.

"We had our first City of Braidwood business spotlight which was Polk-A-Dot," Lyons said. "It's done by one of the clerks, Michelle. She had met with the owners and she put a brief story about Polk-A-Dot on our [Facebook] page."

Lyons shared that the featured post had 170 likes and 23 comments, mostly Polk-A-Dot customers sharing their favorite sandwiches, snacks, and entrees at the drive-in.

Lyons said the post was viewed 12,953 times.

The city council's goal is to draw attention to businesses within the city, and utilizing social media appears to be effective in publicizing local businesses.

Purchasing policy

The council revised the purchasing policy to change the amount of a purchase not requiring a quote from \$5,000 up to \$7,500. For purchases up to \$7,500, the department head or designee has the authority to approve the purchase.

City Center

The mayor reminded residents that the city was awarded an OSLAD grant from the state, explaining that the city will be reimbursed the \$600,000 matching grant, and the city has to spend the money before getting reimbursed. He said that the grant was "project specific."

"We submitted for a town center and what we're going to put there behind Casey's," Lyons said. "So, we can't change our plan halfway through. We were awarded that money and we're moving forward with the town center."

The mayor said he will be meeting with the Hitchcock Design Group Naperville during the first week of February.

Abandoned property

An abandoned house located at 585 W. Main Street has been vacant for several years, according to Administrative Consultant Steve Gulden. The courts have officially declared the property abandoned. After a 30-day notice that will expire near the end of February, the city will be awarded the deed to the house.

"We can sell it, tear it down," Gulden said. "We have to have discussions on what we want to do, but the house will be under our control which is a really good thing."

Another vacant property at 170 Roundhouse Lane was discussed. According to Gulden, a potential buyer wants to purchase the building, and transform it from a four- to six-unit apartment complex.

Bills to pay

The council approved bill payment of \$223,858.10. The motion was made by Finance Commissioner Liz Dixon.

"Included in this is almost \$50,000 for the squad car, so that checks in this two hundred and

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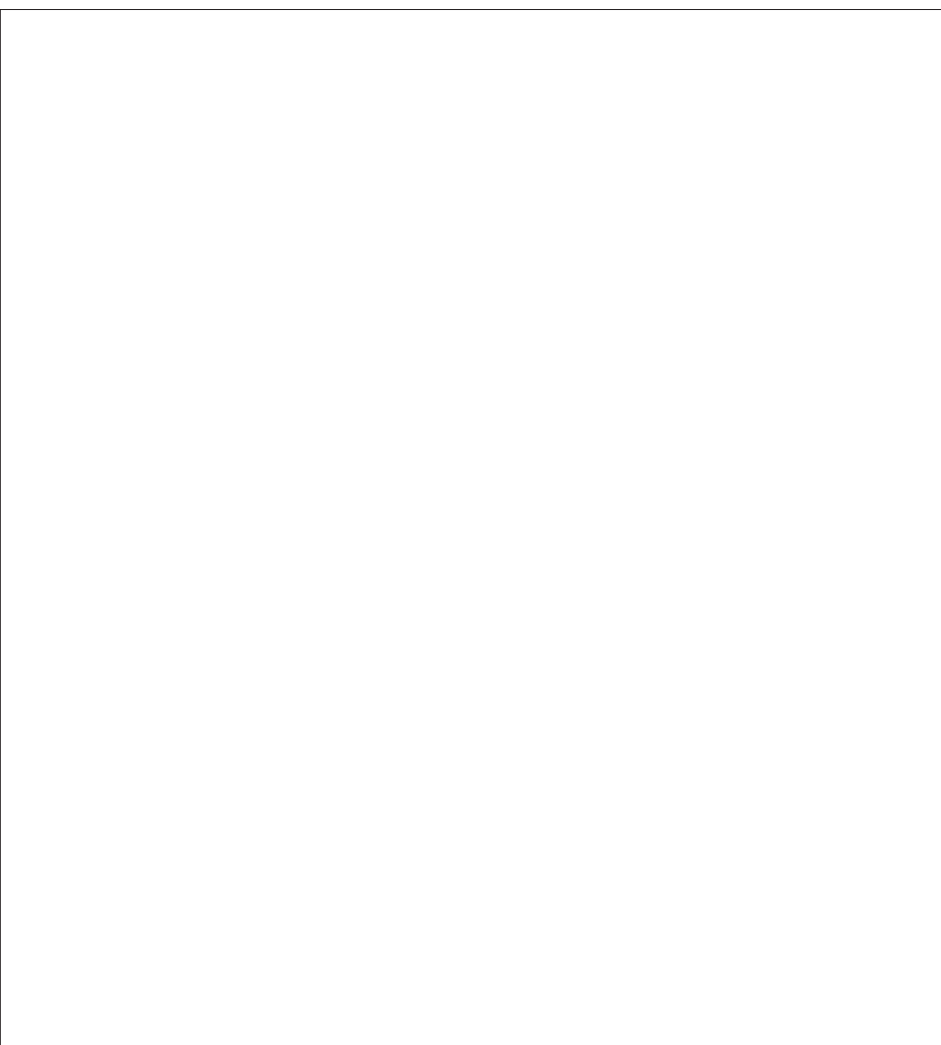


Photo by Eric Fisher

TAKING COMMAND of the third place match at 165 pounds is Reed-Custer's Reed Newbrough who won by 1:08 fall over Cole Russell of Pontiac.

Comets advance 5 to sectional

Reed-Custer turned in a hard-nosed performance Saturday at the 1A boy wrestling regional at Coal City, finishing third overall as a team and sending a deep group of wrestlers into the postseason spotlight.

The Comets piled up 126.5 points, trailing host and champion Coal City and runner-up Bishop McNamara. Reed-Custer crowned one regional champion, added two runners-up, two third-place finishers and multiple wrestlers who battled deep into the consolation rounds, underscoring the program's depth and competitiveness.

Regional champion

Reed-Custer's highlight came at 113 pounds, where Colton Drinkwine (30-4) put together a dominant championship run.

Drinkwine opened with a first-round pin, followed by a technical fall in the semifinals, before closing the title match with another tech fall over Coal City's Gavin Roudis. His performance gave the

Comets their lone individual regional title.

Runner-up finishes

At 120, Cole Harris (32-9) reached the finals after a key semifinal win over Coal City's Tyson Price. Harris finished second after falling to Seneca's Raiden Terry in the championship match.

Another runner-up finish came at 215, where Dominic Alaimo (34-9) advanced to the finals with a pin and a decision. Alaimo capped a strong day with second place after facing Coal City standout Cade Poyner in the title bout where he got pinned.

Third-place efforts

Reed-Custer also received podium finishes from Jayden Sanchez (33-12) at 132 pounds and Reed Newbrough (28-14) at 165.

Sanchez rebounded from a semifinal loss by rattling off a technical fall and a pin to earn third place, showing resilience through the back side of the bracket. Newbrough followed a similar path, responding to a semifinal defeat with two falls to claim third at 165.

Several other Comets

added valuable team points through strong consolation runs.

At 106, Collin Bryant (16-19) fought his way through the wrestlebacks with a technical fall before bowing out in the consolation semifinals.

At 138, Rylan West (26-15) earned an early pin and advanced to the semifinals before being eliminated.

At 144, Nathan Kuntz (12-27) picked up a consolation pin.

At 175, Nathan Vogler (25-17) placed fourth, advancing deep with a pin and a major decision.

At 190, Aiden Shultz (33-15) strung together multiple pins in the consolation bracket before falling one round short of a medal.

While Coal City controlled the team race with 10 champions, two seconds and one third, Reed-Custer's balanced lineup and postseason toughness were evident throughout the tournament.

Those Comets who finished among the top three at regional will advance to the Feb. 13-14 sectional at Coal City.



Photo by Eric Fisher

CHAMPIONSHIP MOVE „ Reed-Custer's Colton Drinkwine pivots on Coal City's Gavin Roudis on Saturday to score a 19-4 tech fall victory to earn the regional championship.

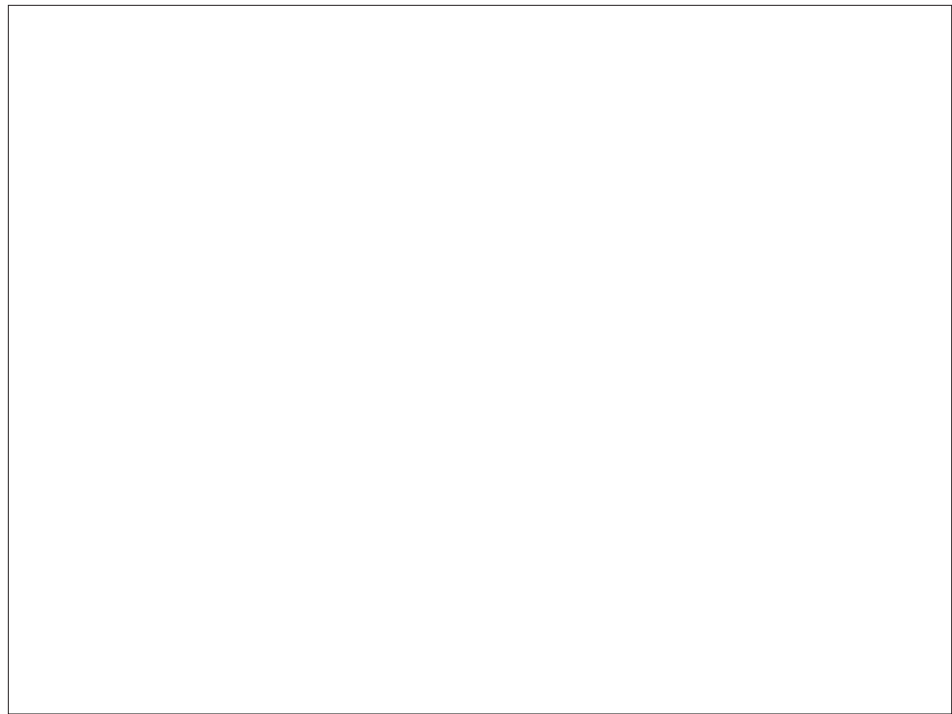
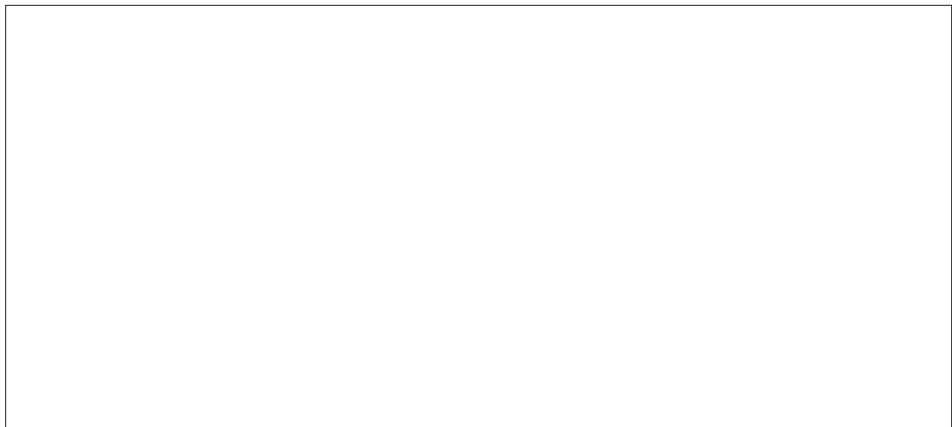


Photo by Eric Fisher

ON THE ATTACK at 132 pounds is Reed-Custer's Jayden Sanchez (left) who defeated Herscher's Carter Overacker to claim third place and qualify for the sectional.



THE REED-CUSTER wrestling team advances five qualifiers and one alternate to the sectional tournament which will be held Feb. 13-14 in Coal City. Those who medaled during the regional on Saturday include (from left) alternate 175 „ Nathan Vogler, 165 „ Reed Newbrough, 132 „ Jayden Sanchez, 113 „ regional champion Colton Drinkwine, 120 „ Cole Harris and 215 „ Dominic Alaimo.

Lady Comets edged by Serena, upend Streator

The Reed-Custer girls basketball team split its two games last week, earning a conference win before dropping a non-conference contest to stand at 12-12 overall and 5-6 in conference play.

The Comets opened the week with a strong defensive performance Thursday night, defeating Streator 43-34 at home in an Illinois Central Eight Conference matchup.

Reed-Custer set the tone early, jumping out to a 20-8 lead after the first quarter and never trailing the rest of the way. The Comets outscored the Bulldogs 16-9 in the third quarter to regain momentum after a low-scoring second period and held Streator to just 34 points.

Alyssa Wollenzien led the Comets with 19 points and eight steals, while senior Morgan Toler added 11 points and seven

rebounds. Harlie Liebermann chipped in eight points and Reed-Custer finished with 26 steals as a team.

On Tuesday, the Comets came up short 45-43 in a nonconference matchup at home to Serena in a game that went down to the final possessions.

Serena led 19-18 at half-time and held a two-point edge entering the fourth quarter. Both teams scored 13 points in the final period, but Reed-Custer was unable to close the gap late.

Wollenzien again paced the Comets with a game-high 20 points, adding nine rebounds and three steals. Liebermann scored 11 points, and Toler finished with six points and a team-high eight rebounds.

Reed-Custer will be back in action Thursday with a road game at Lisle before returning home Monday to host Coal City.