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Gonzales may get data center

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A 64,000-square-foot former Albertson's grocery store in Gonzales could become a corporate data center if efforts by the Ascension Economic Development Corp. succeed.

Located at Burnside Avenue and Airline Highway, the 2.78-acre site resides at one of the city's busiest intersections.

It's not the vehicle traffic that makes a compelling case for a potential data center.

It's another kind of traffic.

"Every time I drove past that site, I thought that would make a good data center," said Mike Eades, the AEDC chief executive officer. "It's right across the street from Eatel's main switching center."

The telecommunications lines and reliable power supply are key priorities for electronic data services. Before he moved from Virginia to Louisiana a year ago, Eades performed site selection consulting work for clients, including one that developed a data center.

Though data storage and Web-hosting services provided by such centers don't carry a large job count (AEDC expects 10 or fewer employees), they bring considerable capital investment.

"These things can run an enormous amount of money," said Eades, who helped bring \$84 million in improvements to a 30,000-square-foot space in Virginia. The Gonzales building is twice that size.

In recent years, demand has grown for information that's

backed up off-site, and secure hosting services for federal and corporate clients makes such centers attractive, Eades said.

AEDC will pursue a major player in the electronic data services arena by marketing the site directly to about a dozen companies that specialize in operating data centers.

The economic development group is working with Eatel, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Entergy Corp., Stirling Properties and the city of Gonzales on the project.

Stirling lists the former Albertson's property value at \$2.5 million. A Walgreen Co. sale in 2007 converted the front 2.2 acres at the intersection into a 15,000-square-foot drugstore.

That deal consumed most of the former Albertson's parking and made the building less viable as a retail store, but Eades said parking wouldn't be an issue for a data center operator.

A data center could serve a single federal or corporate client or provide hosting services to multiple clients, he said.