

Statement to Miramichi City Council

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an Indigenous perspective on a proposed data centre development.

As an Indigenous entrepreneur, I see an opportunity to approach this project not simply as a major infrastructure investment, but as an opportunity to build meaningful and lasting relationships with Indigenous communities while creating economic benefits for the entire region.

For me, the conversation is about **participation, partnership, and creating economic opportunities that extend well beyond the construction of the facility itself.**

A project of this scale has the potential to generate significant economic activity in the region. During construction, it can create employment for tradespeople, contractors, engineers, consultants, suppliers, transportation companies, and other local businesses. Once operational, a data centre can contribute to a more diversified regional economy through permanent employment, ongoing procurement, professional services, maintenance, security, facilities management, technology, and other supporting industries.

There are also important **municipal and regional fiscal benefits** to consider. A major development can expand the local tax base through increased property assessment and property-tax revenues. Those revenues can help municipalities support public services, infrastructure, roads, emergency services, community facilities, and other priorities without relying solely on residential taxpayers.

The broader economic impact can extend beyond property taxes. Construction activity generates spending throughout the local economy, while permanent operations create ongoing demand for goods and services. Employees and contractors spend money in local communities, supporting restaurants, retailers, accommodations, transportation providers, professional services, and other businesses.

In other words, the economic benefit is not limited to the property where the data centre is located. **Investment of this scale can create a ripple effect throughout the regional economy.**

If a project of this scale moves forward, I believe Indigenous communities should have a meaningful role in the economic benefits it creates. That means working proactively with Indigenous communities and businesses from the beginning.

There is an opportunity to establish clear and substantial Indigenous participation targets, including **Indigenous hiring, training, apprenticeships, procurement, subcontracting, and business development opportunities** throughout the life of the project.

Indigenous businesses have the capacity to contribute across many areas, from construction and trades to professional services, transportation, security, facilities management, technology, environmental services, and ongoing operations. With early engagement and intentional planning, these opportunities can create long-term economic capacity rather than short-term benefits.

We need to look beyond employment numbers and consider how Indigenous communities can become **partners in the broader economic ecosystem** surrounding the data centre.

This is an opportunity to build relationships that can lead to Indigenous businesses growing alongside the project, developing new capabilities, creating additional employment, and potentially participating in future investment and ownership opportunities.

There is also an opportunity to use this project as a catalyst for **regional economic development and diversification**.

Major digital infrastructure can help position a region for future investment by demonstrating that it has the land, infrastructure, workforce, energy capacity, connectivity, and business environment necessary to support technology-intensive industries. A successful development can potentially attract additional businesses and investment that want to locate near reliable digital infrastructure.

That means the conversation should not only be about what the data centre brings to the municipality today, but also about what it could help the region build over the next 10, 20, or 30 years.

We should also consider the potential for **local and regional supply chains**. Wherever possible, project proponents should be encouraged to identify local and Indigenous suppliers early, break larger contracts into opportunities that smaller businesses can realistically compete for, and provide sufficient notice and support so that local businesses can prepare.

This approach can help ensure that more of the economic value generated by the project remains within the region.

Sustainable development should also be central to this conversation. Large infrastructure projects have significant environmental and resource considerations, and Indigenous perspectives can contribute valuable knowledge and experience in stewardship, environmental monitoring, and responsible development.

Economic growth and environmental responsibility should be pursued together.

There is another opportunity that I believe is particularly important for Indigenous communities: **data sovereignty**.

As governments, businesses, and communities increasingly depend on digital infrastructure, we need to think about where Indigenous data is stored, who controls it, and how it is governed.

The development of sovereign data-centre capacity could provide an opportunity for Indigenous communities and organizations to securely host and manage **our own data, information, and digital assets** under governance frameworks that respect Indigenous rights, privacy, culture, and self-determination.

That could become an important part of the digital future of Indigenous communities.

There is also a potential opportunity to develop **Indigenous participation in the digital economy itself**, rather than limiting Indigenous involvement to construction and traditional procurement. Over time, this could include technology services, cybersecurity, data management, digital infrastructure, professional services, and potentially equity or ownership participation.

That is the difference between simply benefiting from a project and **building long-term economic capacity around it.**

So, when I look at a data centre, I don't only see buildings, servers, and technology.

I see the possibility of **economic participation, skills development, Indigenous business growth, regional employment, increased municipal revenues, a stronger tax base, local procurement, digital capacity, investment attraction, and greater control over our own data.**

I also see an opportunity for municipalities, Indigenous communities, businesses, and the project developer to establish a model for how major infrastructure projects can create shared prosperity.

If we approach this development with intention, transparency, measurable Indigenous participation, meaningful procurement opportunities, responsible environmental practices, local economic commitments, and a commitment to Indigenous data sovereignty, we have an opportunity to create something that contributes to the long-term growth of the entire region.

The question should not simply be, "**What will this project bring to our community?**"

We should also be asking, "**What can this project help our community and our region become?**"

If we plan properly, the benefits can extend well beyond the construction phase. They can include stronger local businesses, new skills and careers, increased municipal revenues, a broader tax base, Indigenous economic participation, new investment, and opportunities for future generations.

For me, that is what responsible economic development looks like: **creating opportunity today while building capacity, ownership, and prosperity for future generations.**

Thank you.

Jim Ward