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Council to Demand Transparency and Real Change in Menomonie's Data Center Process

Over the past few weeks, the potential data center project has sparked intense debate in our community. As council members, we have a duty not only to listen, but to lead with diligence and transparency. Our responsibility is to carefully weigh both the potential benefits and the possible harms this project could bring to Menomonie, and to ensure that the process is fair, open, and accountable.

In doing that work, I believe it is important to look at the full picture, not just listen to the loudest or most fearful voices, but also the broader facts about industry trends, economic development impacts, and the perspectives of the workers who would be employed to build this project.

First, there isn't a single use for a data center. They are quickly becoming the backbone of our digital lives, from your emails and Facebook posts to the systems that power business operations, commerce, and research. Unless a company maintains its own servers in-house (which fewer and fewer are doing, especially smaller businesses), it relies on a data center. As our economy and infrastructure continue moving to the cloud, these facilities are not optional; they are essential. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) only accelerates the demand.

At the same time, it's important to note that each data center can be built and operated with a specific purpose in mind—for cloud storage, AI processing, commerce platforms, or other applications. We don't yet know what the purpose of a Menomonie facility would be until a development proposal is formally brought forward. That's why transparency and oversight are critical at this stage.

That does not mean the industry should go unregulated or unchecked. I strongly believe there must be federal regulation to safeguard consumers nationwide—particularly around three areas: protecting individual privacy, ensuring responsible water use, and addressing energy consumption. Here in Wisconsin, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) already helps shield Menomonie residents from large rate hikes by spreading costs across the broader region. And our utility provider, Xcel Energy, has current plans of



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modernizing infrastructure not solely because of potential data centers, but because energy demand and the broader landscape are changing and require long-term investment.

Secondly, broadening our tax base is critical. Menomonie currently is in the lowest tier for credit rating in the state. We are borrowing just to maintain, while our downtown deteriorates, our roads go unkept, and our lake remains unhealthy. A project this scale would give us the tax base to repair and reinvest in our community, while also giving the opportunity to reduce the burden on residents by lowering property taxes.

I have heard the Mayor claim that “everyone would love to be in Menomonie’s shoes”, and unfortunately that is not true. Eau Claire, Hudson, Chippewa Falls, and River Falls are not seeking our advice as their communities grow and thrive. They are investing in housing, infrastructure, and their community while Menomonie struggles with a 1% population increase and declining housing stock. We desperately need to take action.

Third, I recently met with representatives from the Build Trades Union. They have over 6,300 trained, certified union members in the Chippewa Valley and Dunn County area ready to work on this project. That means local jobs and local paychecks. Even if some traveling workers end up being needed, it helps support apprenticeships and training programs for our own workforce.

Their members are currently working on a data center project in Racine, logging 180,000 man-hours a week—and reporting safe, fair working conditions. These are family-sustaining wages, putting food on the table and stability in the community. Especially during times of national economic uncertainty and shifting federal policies, having a reliable project here in Menomonie would give workers peace of mind and our families security.

It’s important to be clear that this project is not a done deal. Right now, it is set up to go through public oversight and council decision-making, unless the Mayor’s office attempts to take it off course. The City and its residents have real tools to influence this process: we can choose not to allow Tax Increment Financing, and we can negotiate a development agreement that holds the developer accountable—or reject it if it doesn’t meet our community’s standards.



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That's why it is so important to bring forward every perspective. I am not saying I am for or against this project today, because we do not yet have the full details of the specific proposal. But I am saying every voice deserves to be heard before decisions are made.

Lastly, in the past several weeks, I've spoken one-on-one with many of my fellow council members. We share deep frustration with how this project has been handled by city leadership—the lack of communication, the lack of transparency, and the way it has left both the public and council scrambling to keep up. Tonight, we will be requesting real change to ensure this process never unfolds like this again.

At the same time, I want to speak directly to those who are passionate about stopping this project. Your organizing matters—and it should not stop at City Hall. The truth is, many of the biggest questions about data centers—around privacy, water use, and energy consumption—require state and federal regulation. If you want to see lasting change, take your energy and your advocacy to Madison and Washington. Fight for the laws and protections that will ensure these industries serve the public interest across Wisconsin and across the country. I am right there with you.

Menomonie deserves a voice in shaping its future. I am committed to making sure every voice is heard, not just the loudest, not just the most fearful, and not just the most opportunistic. Together, we must demand transparency, accountability, and the kind of leadership that puts our community first.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sydney Brennan". The signature is stylized with large, flowing letters.

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