

Courting Telus

Will B.C.'s telecommunications giant opt to sail its flagship data centre into Tournament Capital?

BY SHANNON LINDEN >> KAMLOOPS BUSINESS

The brown hoodoo hills have a beauty all their own, but it's the River City's green appeal that intrigues Canada's second largest telecommunications company.

Telus is set to construct its third data centre in B.C. and is looking at the geologically stable Interior as the ideal region. Kamloops has made the short list of potential sites, in part due to environmental considerations.

"Kamloops is certainly on our radar screen," Telus media relations representative Shawn Hall hinted. "When we announced the project last year, the response was overwhelming. The flood of interest came from individual property owners, municipalities and engineering firms."

Naturally, sifting through all those applications has delayed decision-making, but according to Hall, Telus is doing its due diligence, giving all interested parties equal examination with the intention of building the best possible data centre for the province.

Which is what, exactly?

Colloquially known as server farms, data centres are facilities used to house computer systems and their components. Thousands of servers are networked together and linked to the outside world via fiber-optic cables, ultimately allowing Web properties to function smoothly.

The proposed new centre would be Telus's ninth in Canada and its most ambitious yet.

"It's a really big deal," Hall explained. "This centre will be a flagship, 200,000 square feet in size, and one of the greenest in North America."

To get an idea of just how huge that is, consider that Facebook, the social network giant, recently announced plans to build a \$188-million, 147,000-square-foot data centre in Prineville, Ore.

While Hall wouldn't disclose the dollar

figure involved in construction of the B.C. centre, he did project some numbers in terms of job creation. Upwards of 200 construction workers would be employed over the course of a year or more of building. Once complete, the centre would offer full-time jobs to anywhere from 40 to 200 people, depending on the type of services clients require.

"Some clients need simple data storage; others need more intricate services," Hall said.

"A number of the jobs would be local while others will be off site." Ultimately, the centre's potential to employ people may grow with time.

If bigger is better, greener is greater. Telus prides itself on what the company calls its "triple-bottom-line philosophy," in which the financial implications of projects, environmental impact and social spinoffs are all considered.

"B.C. is an ideal site for the new centre because the province is rich in clean power," Hall said.

"We're looking at options like geothermal and hydro power, as well as opportunities to co-locate with another large facility."

Data centres use a lot of power, half of which goes to cooling due to the vast amount of heat created by servers. Locating next to a large, cold-water river would allow easy access to water for effective, environmentally sound cooling. Co-locating with another large facility also makes sense. Not only would power consumption be dramatically reduced, but Telus could sell the site's byproduct — the heat it generates.

"For example," Hall explained, "pulp mills use heat to dry chips, so perhaps they can siphon heat from the servers instead of using another source. Or maybe a large building, such as a post-secondary institution, could be heated.

"The challenge in choosing a site is balancing all interests. The site needs redundant access to data backbone, safety and security, access to power, a skilled employee base and environmental opportunities."

While he wouldn't reveal the other cities in the running, Hall did suggest a decision isn't far off. By mid-spring, Telus will announce where the company plans to chart its next course. **KB**

