

# **Final Report and Recommendations of the Community Development Committee MetroGIS Workgroup**

**May 1, 2006**

## **Background**

The Metropolitan Council performed a program evaluation and audit of the Council's involvement with MetroGIS in 2005 (See Appendix A). The report outlined five potential scenarios for the future of MetroGIS:

1. Maintain the current structure with no major changes
2. Cost sharing
3. The withdrawal of Council funding
4. The Policy Board as advisory to the Council
5. Create a fee structure

In addition, the Report made four recommendations which were endorsed and addressed by Council management:

1. The Metropolitan Council should assess the positive and negative attributes of the options (scenarios) presented and determine the optimal placement of MetroGIS and its relationship and reportability to the Council.
2. Financial accountability measures for MetroGIS should be established and practiced.
3. The Council should continue to evaluate the role, products and cost-effectiveness of MetroGIS on an ongoing basis.
4. A clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the Council, the MetroGIS Policy Board, Liaison, and Coordinating Committee should be developed to support communication and coordination and ensure that all parties have a clear idea of their role in the MetroGIS program.

The Program Evaluation and Audit Report was presented to the Council's Community Development Committee on November 7, 2005. In order to fully address the recommendations made in the report, the Committee created a workgroup consisting of four Council members (Annette Meeks, Chair; Tony Pistilli, Vice Chair; Kris Sanda; Julius Smith) and the Chair of the MetroGIS Policy Board (Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt). The workgroup was charged with reviewing the Audit Report and with developing its recommendations to the Committee and the full Council. The workgroup met five times during the period, February – April, 2006.

## Activities of the Workgroup

After receiving a brief overview of Metropolitan Council's need for GIS data, and the history of its involvement with MetroGIS, the workgroup identified a number of questions requiring additional research by staff. Several additional questions were identified during the course of the workgroup's activities. The questions and their answers are included as an attachment to this report (see Appendix B)

Based on the recommendations of the Program Evaluation and Audit Report and their own discussions, the workgroup identified a number of issues to address and resolve, in order for the workgroup to make its recommendations.

## Issues and Workgroup Recommendations

### Governance Issues

1. ***Should MetroGIS retain its current governance structure with no major changes?*** Yes. The current governance structure of the MetroGIS Policy Board advised by its MetroGIS Coordinating Committee is a reasonable and well-established arrangement.
2. ***Should the MetroGIS Policy Board become an advisory committee of the Council?*** No. As indicated in Recommendation 1, the current basic structure should be retained. Many issues addressed by the MetroGIS Policy Board do not require direct attention by the full Council, provided there is effective and sound communication with the Council, through its staff and the Council's member-representative on the MetroGIS Policy Board.

### Funding Issues

3. ***Should Metropolitan Council withdraw funding for MetroGIS?*** No. MetroGIS is a valuable and cost-effective source of data that the Council requires for its business purposes. The amount of funding is subject to Council scrutiny during annual budget reviews and should reflect programs and activities that are commensurate with the Council's mission.
4. ***Should Metropolitan Council seek cost sharing from other governmental units for the functions of fostering collaboration, assembling/distributing data, and/or creating/maintaining data?*** No changes from the current arrangement are necessary. Other governmental units already share in the costs of creating/maintaining some data on a case-by-case basis. Some federal support has been received for the functions of fostering collaboration and assembling/distributing data. The current arrangement is viable as long as the Council realizes a positive return on its investment through the funds and resources directed to MetroGIS.

5. ***Should there be a suggestion to involve the State and other relevant partners in creating a statewide equivalent of MetroGIS?*** Yes. The workgroup sees opportunities to share the benefits of the MetroGIS data sharing approach sharing, beyond the seven-county metropolitan area, particularly with adjacent counties. The workgroup found that some efforts to improve statewide GIS collaboration are already underway. The Council should continue to support and encourage such efforts.
6. ***Should entities contributing data to MetroGIS charge a fee to for-profit and nonprofit organizations for MetroGIS data?*** While it is not necessary to modify the current practices at this time, the feasibility of appropriate user fees should be considered periodically (as the Policy Board has done). Currently, such charges are already assessed in the cases of two MetroGIS products, i.e., the data sets for street centerlines and for parcels through the licensing agreements that apply to each.

#### Accountability Issues

7. ***What measures of financial accountability should be established and practiced for MetroGIS relative to the Metropolitan Council?*** The Council should review its support for MetroGIS at least annually, in conjunction with budget proposals. This review should include an analysis of past and expected Council expenditures for MetroGIS Coordination, MetroGIS Participation, and Metropolitan Council GIS (non-MetroGIS). The review should include consideration of whether the Metropolitan Council's continued involvement with MetroGIS is warranted. Reports on MetroGIS issues should be made to the Council or designated standing Council committee more frequently – perhaps quarterly. The workgroup found that Council management had already implemented the recommended practice of coding activities to the appropriate accounts.
8. ***How should the Council evaluate on an ongoing basis the role, products and cost-effectiveness of MetroGIS relative to the Metropolitan Council?*** The Council should continue to ask two principal questions: (1) Does the Council need the data and other collaborative benefits that it gains through MetroGIS?; and (2) Are there other, more cost-effective ways for the Council to obtain the needed data and benefits?
9. ***What are the proper roles and responsibilities of the Council, the MetroGIS Policy Board, Liaison, and Coordinating Committee?*** The relationship is collaborative in nature. The roles and responsibilities that have developed over the years are reasonable and are described in detail in MetroGIS documents and initial Council meeting records. They have not been formally memorialized by the Council, e.g., through a resolution that describes and authenticates the relationship with MetroGIS. When the Council receives this report, it should initiate the additional step of certifying its relationship with and support of MetroGIS.
10. ***Should MetroGIS be regarded as a project that will one day complete its work, such as the long standing work product the Parcel Data Sharing Agreement executed in 2004, or should it be regarded as an ongoing activity, separate from the Metropolitan***

***Council's GIS function?*** This is a valid management question that deserves to be explored at least annually. As a collaborative partnership, there will likely be some role for MetroGIS for many years to come. However, specific MetroGIS projects will be started and will be finished, and the nature of the collaboration itself could change significantly over time. The Council, as well as the Policy Board, should be attentive to this.

11. ***What more would Metropolitan Council want to ensure accountability?*** The Council needs current and substantive information primarily from Council staff and from the Council member-liaison to the Policy Board. It is reasonable to expect that while GIS data needs will continue, the costs to produce it generally will decline. The Council should expect that cost-effective application and software development projects will be explored in connection with the 13 identified MetroGIS information needs that are moving closer to completion. Dependable, accurate information will provide the Council an important tool for ensuring accountability.

## **Conclusion**

The workgroup concludes that MetroGIS has performed a substantial service for Metropolitan Council since its inception in 1995. It is necessary for the Council to have access to regional GIS data, most of which are derived from local sources. MetroGIS has provided a cost-effective way to develop and manage such data in accordance with standards which have been accepted by all relevant parties. In addition, MetroGIS provides a valuable forum for those parties to plan collaboratively to take advantage of future developments in GIS and related technologies. Consequently, the workgroup recommends that the Council continue a sustained commitment to MetroGIS as an ongoing program.

The workgroup further recommends that, with or following the acceptance of this report by the Council, the Council formally certify its relationship with MetroGIS in the context of 2006 and the future. The certification should incorporate applicable principles and descriptions drawn from reports and information approved by the Council that include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The Council accepts the responsibility to designate a Councilmember as a representative on the MetroGIS Policy Board, and to direct the Regional Administrator to assign senior Council management representation on the MetroGIS Coordinating Committee.
2. The Council accepts the responsibility of providing staff and physical resources to foster MetroGIS collaboration. Council management shall indicate annually to the MetroGIS Policy Board what services it can provide to foster such collaboration, and how the Council and MetroGIS should be mutually accountable to ensure that agreed-upon services meet the needs of both entities.

3. The Council will examine, at least annually, proposals for Council involvement as a MetroGIS participant, to fund or otherwise provide resources to support specific projects and priorities above and beyond the Council's responsibility to foster collaboration.
4. Senior Council management will coordinate with the Council's member-representative to the MetroGIS Policy Board, to ensure that the Council's position on relevant MetroGIS issues is consistently and accurately represented.

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