

SPECIAL GUEST COLUMN

MetroGIS - A Great Investment for Our Region's Quality of Life

by Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt

Geographic Information Systems, commonly known as GIS, is a powerful tool for turning the data we need into easily understood information that will help plan our future. MetroGIS is an innovative collaborative for the development of regional data-sharing. Regional information is important to our quality of life in the metro area because business development, neighborhood planning, open space preservation, time-sensitive response to critical incidents or roadway expansion, to name a few, do not recognize governmental boundaries. Through the leadership of the Metropolitan Council, MetroGIS was formed in 1996. It includes public sector stakeholders representing the seven metropolitan counties, watershed districts, school districts, municipalities and the Metropolitan Council.



Data sharing saves valuable time and money. For example, GIS played a major role in recovery efforts in New York after 9/11. Closer to home, the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District has used MetroGIS to determine the affected area for mosquito borne diseases such as Lacrosse encephalitis within hours, instead of the days it took in the past. Quick action is critical when responding to a public health or public safety concern. City planners use GIS to create maps that compare housing stock or business centers, the Metropolitan Airports Commission saves a tremendous amount of time and money on its noise abatement program and school districts can select census data to project enrollment changes.

Taxpayers also benefit from regional data sharing. "With current, easily accessible data, government can make better decisions and communicate better with the public. Data sharing reduces data development and acquisition costs, which results in savings for taxpayers," said Roger Williams, the Metropolitan Council's representative on the MetroGIS Policy Board. The data-sharing agreements negotiated by MetroGIS with counties provide for free public sector access to data that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive.

MetroGIS is a powerful tool for the public sector and it will continue to develop solutions to the common information needs of its stakeholders. By working with private sector representatives, MetroGIS is exploring options to expand services to private entities.

The benefits associated with MetroGIS have a positive impact on the quality of life for each of us, and, therefore, play a key role in the economic vitality and growth in our region.

I am proud to be the Chair of the MetroGIS Policy committee. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you have about MetroGIS. Technical questions will be directed toward Randall Johnson at the Met Council who has been the lead staff person since inception, his phone number is 651-602-1638. Information can also be found on the web at www.metrogis.org.

Editors Note: The Public Policy Partnership and the Saint Paul Area Association of REALTORS® occasionally invite public officials and industry experts to address SPAAR members on a topic of interest to the real estate community in a special guest column. For more information on Commissioner Reinhardt, visit her Web site at www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/district7/index.asp or call the Saint Paul office at 651-224-9191.

You can reach the REALTOR® Public Policy Partnership team through the Association or by contacting Government Affairs Director Brian Strub at 651-772-6341 or bstrub@spaar.com.