

Meeting Summary
MetroGIS Coordinating Committee
MN Counties Insurance Trust Bldg. – Room 313
December 15, 2004

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Harper called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Members Present: *Academics:* Will Craig (U of M); *Business Geographics:* Chet Harrison (CB Richard Ellis); *Cities:* Steve Lorbach (AMM: core cities - City of St. Paul) and Bob Cockriel (AMM: suburban cities - City of Bloomington); *Counties:* Scott Simmer (alternate for Bill Brown; Hennepin), Dave Drealan (Carver), John Slusarczyk (Anoka), Randy Knippel (Dakota), David Claypool (Ramsey), Jim Hentges (Scott) and Jane Harper (Washington); *Federal:* Ron Wencl (USGS); *Metropolitan:* David Bitner (Metropolitan Airports Commission), Rick Gelbmann (Metropolitan Council), Nancy Read (Metropolitan Mosquito Control District), and Gordon Chinander, alternate for Nancy Pollock; Metropolitan 911 Board); *Schools:* Dick Carlstrom (alternate for Lee Whitcraft; TIES); *Special Expertise:* Brad Henry (URS Corp.); *State:* David Arbeit (LMIC), Joella Givens (Mn/DOT), and Robert Maki (DNR); *Utilities:* Al Laumeyer (CenterPoint Energy); *Watershed/Water Management Organizations:* Ned Phillips (Rice Creek Watershed District).

Members Absent: *GIS Consultants:* Larry Charboneau (The Lawrence Group); *Non-Profits:* [vacant].

Support Staff: Steve Fester, Paul Hanson, Randall Johnson, and Mark Kotz (MetroGIS); Trudy Richter (Richardson, Richter, and Assoc., Inc.).

2. ACCEPT AGENDA

Henry moved and Bitner seconded to approve the agenda, as submitted. Motion carried, ayes all.

3. ACCEPT MEETING SUMMARY

Gelbmann moved and Wencl seconded to approve the summary for the Committee's September 29, 2004 meeting, as submitted. Motion carried, ayes all.

4. SUMMARY OF OCTOBER 27 POLICY BOARD MEETING

Chairperson Harper summarized the major topics considered by the Policy Board at its October 27, 2004 meeting and thanked Craig for his efforts to shepherd acceptance by the University of Minnesota Population Center of the custodianship for the Socioeconomic Resources Page.

5. ACTION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

a) 2004 Accomplishments

The Staff Coordinator summarized the major accomplishments in 2004, as outlined in the staff report, and recommended that the general theme for the 2004 annual report remain the same as for 2003 – how MetroGIS's efforts are making a difference. Staff also recommended adding a new component to the theme for 2004 of "How MetroGIS's efforts are also fostering improved efficiencies via E-government methods." No additions or modifications were offered concerning the listing of accomplishments or proposed annual report themes.

b) 2004 Annual Performance Measures Report

The Staff Coordinator handed out a revised staff report with a corrected table at the top of page 2. The Committee recommended three modifications to the report prior to submitting it to the Policy Board for consideration: 1) move bullets 5 and 6 in the Findings and Conclusions Section to the top of the list, 2) add the 2003 and 2004 totals plus a percent changed column to the table at the top of page 2, and 3) incorporate the footnote into the table.

Motion:

Craig moved and Henry seconded to recommend that the Policy Board approve the 2004 Annual Performance Measures Report and conclusions as modified by the Coordinating Committee.

Motion carried, ayes all.

c) 2005 Program Objectives and Workplan

The Staff Coordinator summarized the major objectives listed in Attachment A to the staff report. No changes were suggested to the 2005 workplan objectives or the detailed 2005 workplan recommended by staff other than to incorporate outreach to the non-traditional user to encourage use of the data and services supported by MetroGIS.

Motion:

Givens moved and Henry seconded to recommend that the Policy Board approve the Proposed Major 2005 Program Objectives for MetroGIS and approve the detailed workplan to implement the proposed Major Program Objectives for MetroGIS in 2005, subject to incorporating an objective to target non-traditional users of MetroGIS's services in the 2005 outreach efforts.

Motion carried, ayes all.

d) 2005 Budget

The Staff Coordinator summarized the proposed 2005 budget as detailed in the staff report, noting the total amount of funding support remains the same as was preliminarily requested from the Metropolitan Council last spring. In response to a question from Read, a typographical error was discovered in the Line Item Change description. The reference to \$25,500 should have read \$27,500 and will be corrected for the report to the Policy Board. Gelbmann commented that \$22,000 of the \$50,000 allocated for Data Maintenance Agreements and Enhancements will be available in 2005 for Regional GIS Projects, noting that the Committee will be presented with candidate projects at its March and/or June meetings to establish priorities for the available funding. Staff concluded their comments by noting that several preliminary candidate projects for these project funds were listed for the Committee's information in the Reference Section of the staff report (Item 5 on page 26) and that any ideas that might surface at the proposed retreat would be topics for further consideration.

Other than a comment from the Committee Chair that the \$22,000 in project funding should be highlighted in the presentation to the Policy Board, the Committee offered no other comments.

Motion:

Henry moved and Gelbmann seconded to recommend that the Policy Board approve the proposed 2005 detailed budget allocations for MetroGIS. Motion carried, ayes all.

e) GIS Demonstration for January Policy Board meeting

The Staff Coordinator noted that at its last meeting the Committee agreed that a presentation of the pending Regional Mailing Label Application would be a suitable topic for the Policy Board's January GIS Demonstration. Mark Kotz, member of the MetroGIS support staff, was then introduced to demonstrate how this application works in a manner suitable for presentation to policy makers.

Following his demonstration, Kotz identified several enhancements to the application that have been identified during the final testing, noting that they have not been pursued because they were beyond the scope of the initial project. He also noted that staff would prefer to use a coordinated process to identify any additional desired enhancements 6 months to a year after the application is available and pursue the highest priorities as a mass upgrade as opposed to one at a time. The Staff Coordinator further commented that another reason for not pursuing any of these enhancements at this time is that some members of the Committee have asked the question, "Are We (MetroGIS) Done", which will be the

theme of the proposed retreat this coming spring. Until there is clear direction from the Committee as to priorities for MetroGIS's resources, no additional work on this application is proposed. Staff did, however, agree that prior to the Policy Board meeting, the level of effort that would be needed to accomplish currently known preferences for enhancements would be investigated. Chairperson Harper argued that if the effort is relatively small to accomplish enhancements that would make substantive improvements to workflow, they should be considered for the first release. In this light, Committee members suggested that the following enhancements be added to the list of currently identified enhancement preferences for future consideration:

- Add the number of labels created to the information passed along to the user if not already provided.
- Clarify how the application deals with property that does not have a street address. (Mark agreed to investigate before the Policy Board meeting in the event a related question is asked.)
- Add the ability to create a user-defined text string for the addressee in cases where the label is for the actual property address in addition to the default options of occupant, resident, etc.
- Add clear and concise help instructions to help the novice user utilize the application.
- Consider a programming interface to enable the application's functionality to be accessed by another application.
- Ability to deliver the data via a non-GIS interface. Kotz noted this option has been contemplated but no action has been taken.

Read asked if this application will overlap with applications currently in existence. Drealan responded that none of the existing applications are regional and that there is a clear need for a tool that allows the user to generate mailing labels in a consistent format across county boundaries. Other members concurred that this application will complement the existing applications. Read concluded her remarks by stating that demonstration of this application to the Policy Board is a wonderful example of what collaboration can accomplish in terms of improved efficiencies, and that its use will increase cross-jurisdictional use of data, which she hopes will lead to more uniformity across county produced data.

Simmer commented that the parcel data Hennepin County currently submits to MetroGIS for the regional parcel dataset includes PINs for condominium and cooperative garages that probably should be removed before using those data with this application.

Chairperson Harper encouraged staff to make an effort to market the availability of the pending Mailing Label Application to local governments.

Lastly, the Committee concurred with staff's suggestion to invite the Riley-Purgatory-Bluff Creek Watershed District to present their testimonial to the benefits of MetroGIS at the Policy Board's April meeting. Craig asked staff to add the presentation options discussed at the September meeting to the list of candidates for future presentations.

f) Existing Land Use Information Need: Version I Regional Solution

Paul Hanson, lead staff to the Existing Land Use Workgroup, summarized the efforts of this workgroup and its recommendations, as presented in the staff report and accompanying white paper. ([Click here](#) for the presentation slides.) Three major options were investigated for a strategy or design to manage existing land use data needed to answer land use-related information needs that had been identified in 1997 as priorities for MetroGIS. The three major options were: 1) Traditional hierarchical – single dimension model, 2) American Planning Association's (APA) Land Based Classification Standards, and 3) Built Environment concept contemplated by the Metropolitan Council's GIS Unit.

Hanson explained several pilot studies conducted by workgroup members to compare and contrast each of the three options and the results of subsequent efforts to vet their findings and preliminary conclusions with community development practitioners. Despite concerns for limited expertise with the APA's strategy, that it has been rarely implemented to date, and is frequently perceived as complicated, the

workgroup concluded the Land Based Classification Standards (LBCS) is the most versatile and worthy of further consideration by MetroGIS. These findings were in large part because the LBCS provides a container that accommodates five types of land description information (activity, function, structure, site characteristic and ownership) and is intended to incorporate a high level of detail generally only available from local experts. Another important finding was that the LBCS is also more expandable and flexible than the traditional strategy, which has been found to not work well in multi-jurisdictions/regional implementations.

Hanson summarized the specifics of the Workgroup's two-part recommendation: Part one would involve the Metropolitan Council building a Version 1 LBCS data structure and assisting MetroGIS with an outreach program to engage APA, MnAPA, Association of Metropolitan Municipalities, Sensible Land Use Coalition, etc. to promote the benefits of local communities agreeing to supply the actual data to populate the LBCS data structure. Part two would begin immediately in the form of a Phase II workgroup tasked with identifying best practices for answering existing land use-related information needs of the MetroGIS community that go beyond the capabilities of the proposed Version 1 data structure.

Following Hanson's presentation, Committee members posed the following clarifying questions before voting on the proposal:

- 1) What would the spatial resolution be? Response: Generally, the community providing the data would decide the spatial resolution of the data, but it is expected that much of the data would be at the subparcel level where there are multiple uses on a parcel.
- 2) Is there any currently documented benefit to support the proposed outreach efforts? Response: General information exists, but a key role of the proposed outreach component for the Version I effort would be to refine this information and make it relevant to the needs in this area. This effort would include a more thorough review of the APA site than has been conducted to date. One of the main benefits that needs to be clearly articulated is that providing a means to address several of the current priority information needs that have been identified by the MetroGIS community will require the multi-dimensional data structure that is embodied in the LBCS. It was agreed that a few key information needs should be cited that the proposed data structure could address, which could not otherwise be addressed or at least not as well addressed.
- 3) What is the definition of vacant land? Response: The concept of vacant land is information that is derived from the each of the five types of land description information maintained in the LBCS system. In other words, "vacant" is not a coded descriptor in the system.
- 4) How would the effort be financed? Response: The proposal is that the Metropolitan Council would pay for the staff resources needed to develop the LBCS data structure and load in the first version of data obtained from the Council's 2005 flight. MetroGIS resources would then be used to support the outreach effort, together with supplemental staff support from the Council GIS staff responsible for building the Version I product, to encourage local experts to enhance the first pass data with more detailed information known locally.

The latter question evolved into a discussion of incentives to encourage local community experts to participate in the refinement of the first pass data. Harper encouraged the Council to inform local community representatives of this proposal when circulating information about the pending 2008 Comprehensive Plan Update process and encourage them to consider critiquing the first pass data as opposed to updating their existing land use data in some other manner. All agreed the timing is consistent with the current proposal, but also that outreach will be critical.

The final discussion topic occurred in response to a member's suggestion that the proposed LBCS data structure, once operational, should be a requirement for submittal of existing land use data to the Council as part of the upcoming 2008 Comprehensive Planning process. In response, the Staff Coordinator commented that a fundamental premise of MetroGIS is that all best practices and related regional solutions are implemented on a voluntary basis to void any perception of a top-down decision structure and the inevitable criticism of unfunded mandates imposed upon local government. In response, staff was

encouraged to investigate if some technical and/or financial assistance could be provided to communities as an incentive to participate.

Motion:

Drealan moved and Maki seconded to recommend:

- 1) That the Policy Board approve the proposed Phase I regional solution that includes:
 - a) Development and distribution by the Metropolitan Council of a Version I Existing Land Use database based upon the APA's Land Based Classification System through a Metropolitan Council-maintained web-based application, contingent upon the execution of the Regional Parcel Data Sharing Agreement with the seven metro area counties and the Council's completion of its proposed 2005 Land Use Plan Update project.
 - b) The creation of an Outreach Strategy Workgroup to educate users of Version I, monitor data access, and encourage communities to enhance data in an effort to create and maintain a community-based Version II database, subject to the Committee's approval of the outreach strategy before it is implemented.
- 2) Create a Phase II Existing Land Use Workgroup to define "best practices" in meeting complex land-based information needs beginning in 2005. (*Editor's note: a decision regarding the liaison to the Coordinating Committee was postponed until workgroup candidates are identified.*)

Motion carried, ayes all.

g) Search Mechanism for Geospatial Applications: Concept Approval

Mark Kotz, member of the MetroGIS support staff, summarized the information contained in the staff report using a [short slide presentation](#) and presented staff's recommendation that the Committee endorse the concept for further development and that it create a workgroup to propose solutions needed to move from concept to implementation.

A key message of Kotz's presentation was that up until now MetroGIS's efforts have focused on the data component of addressing priority common information needs and on GIS professionals' need for data with certain specifications. The ApplicationFinder concept is a recognition that applications are also an important component in the process of addressing priority common information needs. Kotz noted that the DataFinder tool was implemented to discover and promote sharing of existing data assets. Similarly, the proposed ApplicationFinder tool is intended to assist in the discovery of existing applications that automate manipulation of the raw data. With a means in place to discover existing applications relevant to addressing priority common information needs, the investment in these tools can be leveraged just as DataFinder promotes the leveraging of investment in existing data assets.

A key difference between DataFinder and ApplicationFinder is the assumption that the ApplicationFinder tool will need to be more user-friendly to the non-GIS professional than the DataFinder tool. The audience for this application finder is predominantly individuals who do not have the skills or resources to manipulate raw geospatial data on their own, but can make use of an application to manipulate the data to answer their information needs.

Kotz offered some examples of design specifications that need to be resolved before the concept can be fully implemented (e.g. scope issues, categorization design, documentation scheme for applications).

Following Kotz's presentation, a Committee discussion ensued. Highlights of the discussion follow:

Chairperson Harper opened the discussion by noting that the Policy Board has expressed interest in seeing what MetroGIS's services might look like as applications begin to play a larger role in its efforts and that the proposed tool would help the Board understand the breadth of activity. Arbeit commented that the Governor's Council on Geographic Information (GCGI) is also taking an active role in a related effort to define a comprehensive geospatial infrastructure architecture for Minnesota and that this type of tool

would complement that work. He commented that ApplicationFinder's concept purpose could be simply stated as "cool tools you may find useful". He liked its simplicity and promise of a short path to getting something useful to the user community.

Givens commented that she likes the idea of a centralized location to search for existing applications, which minimizes the need to start from scratch. She also commented that the concept has value in that it could provide a resource when she needs a proof of concept to demonstrate a possible solution for an internal need.

Craig recognized that the ApplicationFinder concept is a departure from past practice in that the proposed concept is driven by the supply side (e.g., catalog of applications that exist), as opposed to responding to specific user needs, which has been the focus of MetroGIS's efforts to date (e.g., define commonly needed data and implement regional solutions to address these user needs). This comment led to a brief discussion of whether MetroGIS should apply the "endorsed regional strategy" paradigm to applications as it has for data. The Staff Coordinator responded that the current thinking is that in recognition of the vast number of applications that are likely to be involved, as opposed to a limited number of critical or framework data solutions, that the most prudent approach, at least to begin with, seemed to be to offer the catalog approach and promote an open-source philosophy to encourage sharing and continual improvement of the tools as they are used in multiple environments. Staff noted that the prospect of an "endorsed" application was discussed but the utility of "endorsement" by the Policy Board does not seem as critical as it is for the underlying data and, more critically, a lengthy endorsement process might be less productive than providing the user a way to search for what already exists. It was acknowledged that MetroGIS could focus its efforts on facilitating refinement of frequently used applications to build in needed additional functionality, which is the method used to arrive at the current Regional Mailing Label application.

Harrison commented that he would like to see the results of a comparison of the benefits of the proposed application as opposed to utilizing Google, noting that he is not sure that the proposed application, as he understands it, would outperform Google. Chairperson Harper concurred that a definitive proof of concept should be presented to the Committee before resources are committed to implementation.

Motion:

Craig moved and Givens seconded to authorize the creation of a workgroup tasked with formalizing, for the Committee's consideration, a proof of concept for ApplicationFinder, in particular, to demonstrate that the desired functionality can not be adequately achieved through the use of the established Google web-search tool. Motion carried, ayes all.

The following suggestions were offered to the workgroup to consider as it refines the concept:

- Permit an application to be listed in multiple categories to simplify the categorization dilemmas.
- Build in a direct means for the application owners to update links to their applications to minimize broken links.

The Staff Coordinator commented that the authorized workgroup would likely not be created until following the Committee's March meeting, given staff commitments on other projects that are in process.

h) Election of Officers

Chairperson Harper commented that she has enjoyed the opportunity to chair the Committee for the past two years and then opened the nominations for election of a new chairperson. Vice chair Drealan nominated Read. Cockriel moved and Drealan seconded to close the nominations and elect Read to Chair the Committee in 2005. Harper asked Read if she would accept if elected; she stated she would. Motioned carried, ayes all. Chairperson Read deferred to outgoing Chairperson Harper to chair the remainder of this meeting.

Outgoing Chairperson Harper opened the nominations for election of a new vice chairperson. Outgoing Vice Chairperson Drealan nominated Knippel. Cockriel moved and Drealan seconded to close the nominations and elect Knippel as the Committee's vice chair for 2005. Harper asked Knippel if he would accept if elected and he stated he would accept. Motioned carried, ayes all.

i) 2005 Meeting Schedule

Craig moved and Givens seconded to approve the 2005 meeting schedule, as recommended by the Staff Coordinator: All Wednesdays - March 30, June 29, September 21 and December 14. Motion carried, ayes all.

j) GIS Employment Inquiries: Policy For Communicating

This topic was postponed for consideration until the March 2005 meeting.

6. PROJECT UPDATES

The Staff Coordinator reported that the last two signed county data sharing agreements had been received that morning and the Metropolitan Council's approval was anticipated that afternoon. The meeting adjourned to celebrate this significant accomplishment of the first parcel data license document and licensure procedures that has been agreed upon by all seven counties to access the regional parcel dataset.

7. INFORMATION SHARING

No discussion

8. NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

March 30, 2005, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

9. ADJOURN

Craig moved and Read seconded to adjourn at 3:20 p.m. Motion carried, ayes all.

Prepared by,

Randall Johnson, AICP
MetroGIS Staff