

Iowa Counties Information Technology

7-Dec-05

Planning for a County GIS: What You Can Do To Get Ready!

Here are some suggestions compiled by ICIT members of steps you can take as you prepare for county-wide GIS. These are listed in no particular order and may not apply to every county situation.

- Form a GIS Committee that will determine such things as:
 - Workflow of the parcel maintenance.
 - Who will be responsible for software maintenance and upgrades.
 - Contact person for software/hardware vendors.
 - Who will be the contact person for collaborations with other entities/counties/state?
- Work with each county department to determine its goals regarding GIS, especially with potentially big users such as engineers, assessors, auditors, conservation, emergency management, and public health.
- Create a general GIS information website to provide contacts and status reports on your projects. This could also be used in the beginning to let others in the county what the status is of obtaining a GIS or during the data conversion process.
- Send out a quarterly newsletter highlighting the benefits of GIS, the progress of your county moving towards it, and state and local projects that involve this technology.
- Create a system/database to track edits and maintenance. Even if you are a single person shop, you need to track what, when, where and why. This information can be used in justifying additional staff. It is easier putting this in place before the editing starts. Make sure you have report writing capabilities to generate status reports.
- Obtain a copy of the GIS software you will be using to start learning it before a major data conversion takes place.
- Visit the IGIC Data Resources page at <http://igic.gis.iastate.edu/resources/data/> to see where you can download images, road centerlines, soil data, etc. This would work well with learning the software and allow someone to make simple road maps, etc.
- Conduct a pilot project, usually this is included in a major conversion project. If not, this is a great way to give people an idea of what GIS will do for them
- Create a showcase project, using local data, to illustrate software capabilities.
- Set up training workshops/classes for the GIS users.
- Collect and review data sharing and distribution policies from other counties and begin development of county's policies. Once data and images are available, other entities, including for-profit data resellers, will come looking for it.
- Review what maps and databases are currently being maintained by the county. Determine which ones can be converted to a GIS, such as a school district map or voting precinct map. Determine which will need to be converted by a vendor or which can be done "in-house."
- Purchase a GPS unit and learn how to use it. Begin collecting data necessary for the county, such as sign locations, critical facilities, driveway points, etc.
- Invite 1 to 3 GIS professionals from neighboring counties to demonstrate and discuss their systems to the GIS Committee, Board, and the public. More demonstrations the better.
- Make sure you have an adequate network and PCs to handle the new load. You will need more power! Also keep in mind orthophotography takes up a lot of space on the servers. Although storage is cheap, you will need to budget for it and have it in place before the data arrives.

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- Give your staff adequate time to conduct their work. GIS software requires significant time to learn and operate. Your workflows will need to change to accommodate it. Prepare now by identifying what current tasks can be eliminated or phased out over time. Don't expect your staff to learn GIS and maintain the status quo at the same. It won't work.
- Prepare your Board for future expenses and changes in job descriptions. Current staff will likely be asked to do more than in the past. Make sure the staff is up to the task. Give them a trial period to absorb the technology. Although it may be hard to get someone out of a position, you will benefit in the long run. Keeping someone that is not skilled in a position, causes them stress and hurts production.