

Program Event Report

GIS Seen as Tool for Economic Development

Web GIS tools are becoming economic-development lifelines for municipalities, members of URISA-Ontario Chapter heard at the chapter's most recent program event.

Speakers from the **City of Hamilton**, Cuesta Systems Inc., the Town of Newmarket and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent described how municipalities have become more competitive, and able to respond quickly to requests for information from prospective new businesses, by applying GIS technologies.

The program event, held October 7 at Newmarket Town Hall, had a theme of "GIS and Economic Development" and attracted several economic development officers from the Greater Toronto Area.

City of Hamilton Has the Answers



Norm Schleeahn

"The better the GIS information is within a municipality, and the more it is all housed in one spot, the easier it is for economic-development professionals to get the word out

about that information, and facilitate requests in a timely manner."

So said Norm Schleeahn, head of business development marketing for the City of Hamilton, in describing how the site selection tool on the City's Web GIS site saves "enormous" time for economic-development staff.

The award-winning site, www.map.hamilton.ca, can be used by anyone anywhere to find answers about properties and potential business and industrial locations, without the need to call City staff. By downloading a plug-in, viewing a map and clicking on a property, viewers have the option of:

- Obtaining more information about the property by linking to the MLS listing at www.icx.ca;
- Generating a demographic report for a specified region around the property;
- Generating a business report to find potential suppliers and competitors in the area.

When an interested viewer makes an inquiry, economic-development staff can respond much faster than before. Schleeahn related a recent instance when the city manager relayed a request for information about "every 50- to 100-acre site in the city."

Within two hours, by determining what the prospective buyer was actually interested in, economic-development and GIS staff were able to identify and send descriptions of two potential sites

that met the company's criteria, complete with aerial maps and photos.

Ontario Government Site Puts GIS in Forefront



Robert Murdoch

An economic-development Web site recently upgraded by the Ontario government shows that the province recognizes the fundamental value of GIS, one of the site's developers said.

Robert Murdoch, director of information management for Cuesta Systems Inc., told his URISA-OC audience that the www.reddi.gov.on.ca site brings GIS to the forefront for economic-development officers.

The site provides interactive tools, guides and resources to support local economic development and planning, particularly for rural communities. Ontario is the first province to implement an interactive Web site devoted to rural economic development.

The REDDI site (Rural Economic Development Data and Intelligence) was launched in 2002 by the Ministry

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of Municipal Affairs and Housing. It was updated in September of this year with new census data and tools.

The site is organized into five sections: Socio-economic Insight, Analyze Your Economy, Set Strategies, Implement Projects and Track Progress.

Cuesta helped create the tools in the Analyze Your Economy section. A five-step process guides users in identifying the competitive advantages of their communities by transforming raw data into reports on industries and labour, which can be compared with other Ontario communities.

It's all based on maps, at the insistence of the ministry, Murdoch explained in an interview.

"They wanted people to start from a map and go from there," he said. "Presenting an analysis as a series of Excel tables means nothing. But a shaded map, showing, for example, that this community is developing strength in the shoe industry and that one is not, gives people a better idea of what is going on.

"In my opinion, the Province definitely realizes that GIS is a fundamental tool for economic development."

Newmarket's Economy Made Transparent Online

A Web GIS tool called Navigate Newmarket Business has made the Town's economy instantly accessible to analysis by potential investors, GIS coordinator Annaliese Vollick said.

Vollick led her audience through a live



Annaliese Vollick

demonstration of the application, which was described in the Fall 2004 issue of this newsletter. It was launched last spring as part of a series of GIS projects supported by a \$400,000 grant from GeoSmart.

Navigate Newmarket Business provides Web access to spatial data pertaining to available industrial and commercial properties and to existing businesses. A user can search for properties according to various criteria – address, size, type, zoning – and generate a map and photographs as well as demographic and business reports for a designated area around the property.

The application is built on technology from ESRI and Orion Technology. Unlike in Hamilton, data is compiled and updated on Newmarket's Web server, rather than being linked to other sites.

There are links, however, to the Web sites of Newmarket businesses, and users can conduct searches for the location of businesses by SIC category. They can send e-mails to those businesses from www.newmarket.ca as well.

Site Selector Tool Aids Chatham-Kent

"An investor working from a desk

anywhere in the world can prepare a report within minutes on prospective sites in Chatham-Kent," said Jeff Ham, supervisor of applications and



Jeff Ham

Aileen Murray

development in the Information Technology Services department of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

Ham, together with Aileen Murray, manager of business attraction and retention, demonstrated the Site Locator Tool, accessible either at www.ckforbusiness.com or www.chatham-kent.ca.

Also built on ESRI/Orion technology, the tool enables potential investors to conduct custom searches for properties and businesses, and generate economic and demographic profiles by region.

The Site Locator tool is proving to be particularly useful in promoting the new Bloomfield Business Park alongside Highway 401, Murray said.

"It's very handy when you get an inquiry to be able to walk through the sites together online," she said. "We can both be searching at the same time for what works for them. That's a wonderful thing."

