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URISA-OC Event Shows Diversity of Benefits From GIS Technologies

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GIS technologies and data have become vital municipal resources for purposes of planning, business development and delivery of services to citizens, the latest URISA-OC Municipal Update event has shown.

Sessions at the event, presented to members of URISA's Ontario Chapter on November 8, demonstrated the diverse ways in which the future of municipalities is being affected by how they apply GIS technologies – or don't apply them.

One presenter, Wally Kowalenko of the City of Toronto, advocated for the province-wide establishment of data standards for underground utilities, saying that public safety is compromised by the current lack of knowledge about the location and age of pipelines and other utilities.

An article based on this presentation, made on behalf of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors and the Regional Public Works Commissioners of Ontario, appears on page 8.

Other presentations, including one by the Region of Waterloo, concentrated on innovations and service improvements made possible by GIS technologies.

The Region of Waterloo was host municipality for the event, which took place at Doon Heritage Crossroads in Kitchener, a business conference centre and home of the Waterloo County Hall of Fame.

Nigel Roberts, manager of e-Government services and GIS for the Region

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URISA-OC past president Catherine Baldelli tells how GIS is starting to put Milton on the map.

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of Waterloo, and Neil Malcolm, principal planner (transit), showed how a major project to improve the Region's transit system is being built on a foundation of GIS data.

By September 2006, the Region of Waterloo intends to implement technologies to enhance a new express bus serving the Region's main transportation corridor, and giving citizens real-time information on bus routes and arrival times.

All of these technologies will depend on the compilation and analysis of GIS data. Details can be found in an article beginning on page 11.

GIS has become "the glue that integrates systems," said Al Little, manager of GIS services for the City of Hamilton. "We are using GIS to bring things together and present information for many uses." Little's presentation centred on the My.Hamilton Web portal, which was relaunched September 13, 2005, to coincide with the launch of the MyHamilton community portal.

The community portal, www.myhamilton.ca, incorporates the City of Hamilton's Web site, including a link to Map.Hamilton. Visitors to the mapping site now will find more user-friendly services of greater variety. The site detects a user's screen size and adjusts the map view accordingly, and users can also customize how maps appear on their screens by changing, colours and symbology.

The site makes expanded use of Web services and new Intergraph and .Net technologies so that maps can be integrated with other applications. For example, the MapIT service is a quick and simple way to create a location map based on an address. The map can be integrated into any other pages that contain location-based information, such as the events calendar.

Bill Latchford, manager of GIS services for the City of Brampton, sets up the laptop for his session.

Nigel Roberts, left, and Neil Malcolm prepare to make their presentation on the use of GIS in Waterloo Region's transit planning.

Integration of information is also the catalyst for building GIS capabilities in the Town of Milton. Catherine Baldelli, GIS coordinator for Milton and past-president of URISA-OC, explained how Milton's fast-growing population has prompted a realization that GIS technologies are essential for planning and service-delivery purposes.

An initial Web-mapping application went live Aug. 24, 2004, at www.milton.ca, and now the Town's strategic plan has established a GIS group within the IT department, charged with meeting the growing

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demand for GIS services from Town staff.

"We are using GIS to bring together our different databases so we can have data integrity," Baldelli said. "Town staff are very excited at the prospects. For many, just having parcel information at their fingertips is a wow."

At a much larger municipality, the Region of Peel, demand for GIS services is also rising because of rapid population growth. GIS data underlies a new methodology being used to ascertain the Region's future state, said Roman Kuczynski, principal planner, and Ron Jaros, planning manager.

Numerous spatial data sets such as property data, subdivision applications and orthodigital photos are being aggregated into a single source called the Peel Data Centre, and analyzed according to various criteria to identify developable lands.

Results from these analyses go into forecasting and research related to growth management. Even more intriguing, discussions are under way with the Ontario government to see whether a provincial methodology might be developed using similar techniques.

Roman Kuczynski, left, and Ron Jaros of the Region of Peel pose before their presentation.

Tim Hu of Teranet enterprises, president of URISA-OC, welcomes attendees to the Municipal Update event.

The City of Brampton, too, has embraced GIS as a governance tool. Bill Latchford, manager of GIS services, said Brampton's enterprise GIS has become a primary data source for any master plans being created by the City.

"2005 will be first year that the official plan is fully produced out of the GIS and is no longer CAD-based," he said.

Al Little, manager of GIS services for the City of Hamilton, talks about the relaunch of Map.Hamilton.

Latchford described recent developments in the enterprise GIS, which won an ESIG award for excellence at URISA's international conference in Kansas City in October. Latest updates include the launch of an economic development selection tool, relaunch of the City's Web site with simplified mapping tools and more capabilities for citizen surveys, and creation of a public visualization and communication tool that helps citizens to envision how proposed new buildings will appear.

The Municipal Update event attracted more than 50 attendees and received very favourable comment from URISA-OC members. PowerPoint summaries of presentations can be viewed at www.urisaoc.ca/subPage.asp?id=159.