

## Case Study:

IT Director, Peter Wallace, Attributes City Leaders  
Vision for Overwhelming Success with GIS  
City of Boynton Beach, Florida

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## IT Director, Peter Wallace, Attributes City Leaders Vision for Overwhelming Success with GIS

City of Boynton Beach, Florida



The City of Boynton Beach, Florida, has one of America's most extensive, most effective and most highly respected GIS programs. It's an unqualified success by any measure.

But five years ago, GIS technology was in its infancy, and Boynton Beach was embarking upon a voyage in uncharted territory.

Peter Wallace, the City's IT director, was at the helm when the journey began, and attributes the success of the project to the support of city leaders, the willingness of managers to set aside department priorities for big picture goals, and the ability of everyone involved to see the emerging technology's enormous potential.

"It was a huge undertaking, a monumental investment in time and energy, and with technology, there's always the temptation to start out slowly and gradually make changes," Wallace said. "But in local government, as much as 80 percent of our work is land or geography related, and we were convinced that GIS had the power to revolutionize the way we run the City and serve our citizens. We decided to make a full commitment and do it right."

The City's first step was to form an interdepartmental steering committee.

"The steering committee was the key to reducing departmental barriers. We were there to identify business solutions that could help the entire organization, he said."

To further encourage innovative thinking while working across business units, the group decided to hire a GIS consulting firm.

"Geographic Technologies Group came highly recommended and met the criteria we were looking for. They had extensive GIS knowledge, they were very interested in our specific needs, and they had a great vision for the future. We knew that when it came time to implement the plan, the genius would be in the details, and GTG seemed very attentive to that," Wallace said.

GTG's needs assessment gave City Council members and staff members a clear idea of what they were getting into. Upgrading the infrastructure, including replacing the City's entire bandwidth, would have to be done first. New servers had to be purchased to accommodate the huge databases, and ESRI licenses had to be leased.

"The database is the common thread that supports the business functions of the City and we knew the success of GIS depended on it. Water bills, building permits and other fees are generated and invoiced from the land management database hosted on the City's A/S 400."

Once the needs assessment was accepted by the City Council, the committee issued an RFP for developing and implementing the GIS plan. "We went through the selection implementation plan was recommended. It covered all of the bases: organizational structure, staffing, training, data conversion, integration with the city's HTE™ legacy systems, software, hardware and networking recommendations, field data collection solutions, an intranet browser solution, annual plan updates and a GIS pilot study of a four-block area.

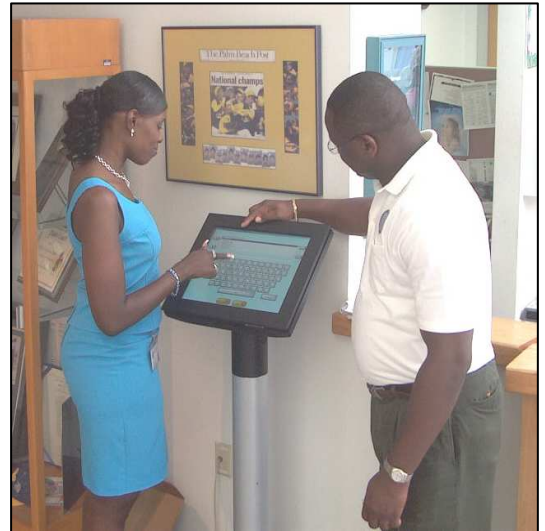
While support for the project was widespread from the beginning, not everyone was convinced of the need for GIS, and the steering committee worked hard to convert the skeptics. They made presentations to audiences internally and externally, even attending community functions to show the system off to citizens.

"We did lots of road shows," he said. "We had to increase the understanding of GIS and explain to people exactly how we could use it, but once we started giving examples of things we would be able to do, everyone got excited. Being on the cutting edge definitely appealed to us."

The Steering committee identified many opportunities to improve work processes and efficiency, but also found innovative ways to deliver service directly to citizens using GIS technology.

The City did not have FEMA flood maps and evacuation zones in digital form, but GIS technology made the conversion of CAD data possible, including flood zones and emergency evacuation routes. The flood information was made accessible via kiosk at City Hall, the Police Department, City Hall @ the Mall and, on the City's Web site.

Another outgrowth of GIS was the Citizen Action System (CAS). The City Manager's Office and other departments each used their own systems to track complaints and other citizen comments, but there was no way to share information or link the databases. CAS provided a centralized database for tracking and responding to citizen concerns and comments. It improved communication with the public and allows the city to quickly and effectively respond to requests. Citizens can call anyone on the city staff, have their issue logged and routed to the correct department, and be notified of the resolution quickly.



**LGkiosk**

The Florida City and County Management Association in 2002 gave its first place award for innovation to the City of Boynton Beach's CAS. "The recognition has been great," Wallace said, "but the most important thing is the way GIS has become fully integrated into the way we operate the city. Everyone uses the technology and everyone wants to learn more. Walk into any department in Boynton Beach—Community Development, Utilities, Public Works, the Fire Department—and you'll see critical processes using GIS."

This summer, Peter Wallace will make a presentation to Florida League of Cities annual conference, but this time, he won't be selling the benefits of GIS, he'll be telling the story of a successful implementation. Among his messages to participants:

- A master plan is a vital first step.
- Coordination is key to success.
- Identify and target realistic "high impact projects" to ensure quick, visible wins.
- Educate everyone.
- Make GIS easy to use.
- Make the project enterprise-wide.
- Carefully document the results and quantify the return on investment.
- Show how GIS saves lives, time and money.

"Sometimes it seems amazing that we've come this far so quickly. I know we worked hard, but to look around and see that GIS has changed everything for the better, that's the ultimate reward. All of our hard work was worth it."

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