

## Case Study:

GIS and Walk-in Traffic: 30% Decrease in Staff Time plus a 40% Increase in Responsibilities  
City of Kingsport, Tennessee

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## In a Nutshell

The Planning Department in Kingsport, Tennessee, is rewriting the calculus of productivity. A 30 percent reduction in staff plus a 40 percent increase in responsibilities equals better, quicker service and more accurate information for citizens, co-workers, and elected officials. It's not fuzzy math, it's Geographic Technologies Group, Inc.

Planning Department officials attribute the gains to GTG's LGviewer, an easy-to-learn, user-friendly GIS complement to HTE's land-based products, like HTE Planning & Zoning, Work Orders, Building Permits and Customer Information System (CIS) for Utilities.

## Background

Housed under Kingsport's Economic Development Department, GIS Manager Jake White and the planning staff serve the Metro Planning Organization, virtually every city department, and the public. The City is growing rapidly, continually adding new subdivisions and businesses.

"We are perpetually swamped with requests," White said. "And everyone wants the information immediately. We have data critical to all city services—water, sewer, garbage collection, police, and fire. And our jurisdiction has recently grown considerably."



Like most government planning offices, Kingsport has a great deal of walk-in traffic. "The client usually thinks his question is simple, but inevitably we'll need to consult a handful of maps to answer it," said Planner Alan Webb. "There's usually a tax component, utilities issue and a zoning question, among other things. You can imagine how time-consuming it is to research manually, gathering information from different sources."

To compound matters, some maps were updated only annually, meaning data could be as much as a year old. "How useful can that be?" Webb asks.

City draftsmen had to update zoning maps by hand, and sometimes the various maps planners were using were not drawn to the same scale.

"All this was a recipe for confusion, frustration and inaccuracy," White said. "Important decisions deserve accurate, timely information."

Determined to provide his internal and external customers with the best service possible, White began to research solutions.



"I wanted a sophisticated, powerful program with a non-technical interface, one that wouldn't take a GIS expert to operate. I saw some programs that would require the users to go through extensive training, and would be very labor intensive for the GIS department to support," White said. "That would not have worked out well for us." At a GIS conference he discovered Geographic Technologies Group products and saw LGviewer in action. "I talked to their customers, researched it on the Web and then I saw a demo. I knew very quickly it was the product for us," he said.

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### The LG Solution

LGviewer is based on ESRI Map Objects technology. It enables dynamic linking and configuration of all HTE land-based solutions. All of the GIS data are integrated, allowing users to see maps with layers of many unrelated variables. A public works manager, for example, could request a map of all outstanding work requests, rendered on a display according to urgency or priority. In Kingsport, the product is on the desktops of the City's five planners. They launch the software first thing each morning and are ready for any requests that come their way.

White says many of the people who receive the reports, such as planning commission members, probably assume the work is coming from the GIS staff. "It looks very sophisticated; I'm sure a lot of people don't realize this is something the planners are able to do from their desks."

"It's great to be able to answer a customer's question immediately by setting up the query and instantly seeing a printed map. The customer gets the information they need in a format they can easily understand, and we look very professional" said Webb. "Without LGviewer, it was easy to fall behind because we had to take the information request, do the work, and then call the customer back and explain what we had found."



It's also easy to enter new information into the database, Webb said. "When there is a new subdivision approved, or zoning changes, we can just input the new plats and the database is immediately updated. Before, tax maps used to just come out yearly and all the work had to be done by hand.

"This has been a blessing. It's really incredible that with two or three mouse clicks I can do what used to take an hour."

Until recently the Kingsport Planning Department had nine employees; today it has six. And two years ago, the planning region increased from 62 square miles to 100 square miles, with a corresponding population change from 40,000 to 70,000. Doing more with less is a familiar challenge facing government agencies, and more often than not, technology is being asked to fill the gap.

"We could have never kept up with the growth we've seen and the additional demands without LGviewer," Webb said. "It's been a Godsend, and that's a fact."

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