

A Commitment to Implementing Enterprise GIS Solutions

City of Medford, Oregon



IT managers often find themselves fighting an uphill battle when bringing new technology to their organizations. Getting users to share their enthusiasm for new solutions, even those that will undoubtedly make their work easier, can be the hardest part of the job.

Since gold was discovered in their county in 1852, the people of the City of Medford have always been up for new adventures, and Aeschliman, a project manager in the City's Technology Services Department, has found that GIS was well received from the beginning.

"We started back in 1993, when I was in the Planning Department. We made a commitment to pilot a GIS program for one year, and realized pretty quickly we needed an implementation plan if things were going to go smoothly. We've come a long way since then with hardware and software and in understanding the importance of planning. In 2000, I transferred into the Technology Services Department to coordinate the GIS program citywide," he said.

Aeschliman built a core group of GIS experts without actually having any assigned staff. "Every City Department has someone assigned to work on GIS part time, and I coordinate all of the efforts. I'm really proud of what we've been able to accomplish working this way, stretching our resources."

Making the best use of available resources is one of the benefits of careful planning, he believes. When it was time to update the existing GIS Strategic Plan and choose a new GIS planning consultant, Medford turned to GTG for a needs assessment and a three-year phased implementation plan. The GIS Strategic Plan helped the City set priorities and organize efforts to accomplish key objectives. One of the areas of focus was to build a single geodatabase, integrating data from the City's various land-based information management applications and, where applicable, the County's tax maps.

"Sometimes when we compare the county's parcel layers to our zoning layers, the property lines don't match exactly. Making sure all of that information is consistent has been a high priority for us. The process has helped us build a good relationship with the County and when agencies work together, everyone benefits."

Another priority was to capitalize on a citywide wireless network based on Motorola's MeshNetworks Enabled Architecture (MEATM) technology, which leverages routing techniques originally developed for battlefield communications. The system essentially makes each laptop a router and gives police and firefighters direct field access to the City's GIS data.

"We're among a small number of cities using this technology," Aeschliman said. "It has so many advantages. Because it's a high speed network, we can send large documents, like video files, to our public safety workers in the field, minimizing the amount of data they have to keep on their hard drives and ensuring the GIS layers they are viewing are always current and accurate."

The GIS Strategic Plan calls for expanding the use of mapping technology by the police and fire departments even further over the next year.



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"We've identified ways we can continue to move forward with minimal staff and by using grants to finance some of our needs," he said. In one instance, GIS has improved the operation of the city-owned cemetery. "It's a really interesting situation," Aeschliman said. "It's been designated as a historical site, so it must be left as it is, and we have a lot of inquiries from people who either want to find family members or who want to buy a plot.

"We surveyed the cemetery, photographed every headstone and then put the name, location and the photograph on a map. Staff can now find which spaces are available, which are occupied, and whether there are any unoccupied spaces near a specific plot." The City plans to make the Cemetery data available to the public on its website.

In addition to outlining global priorities, the GTG-developed implementation plan outlines a host of initiatives for individual departments in Medford.

"We're planning to hire GIS staff and develop some applications, but we'll never lose sight of the need to always continue to refine and integrate our databases. I worked in the Planning Department for 20 years and I know how desperately people need data, and it has to be at their fingertips; going to a lot of different sources to collect information is not practical. This is one of the objectives our GTG plan is helping us achieve."



And, the logical next step for GIS is for the City to be able to serve data directly to the public.

"We realize there is still much we can do to provide our citizens access to the valuable repository of data we've spent significant time acquiring and I know the public will snap it up as soon as we put it out there. Just allowing people the tools to research the simplest questions would save us so much time and make the citizens happy at the same time. I can't wait to get there," Aeschliman said.

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