

Case Study:

IT Manager, Drew Gidlof Makes GIS a Viable
Technology for the City
City of West Sacramento, California

Geographic Technologies Group

*Understanding
Local Government*

IT Manager, Drew Gidlof Makes GIS a Viable Technology for the City

City of West Sacramento,
California



Over the years, there was never a shortage of enthusiasm for GIS technology in West Sacramento, California, but two years ago the city found itself at an important crossroads.

When the enthusiasm for the new technology superseded adequate funding, broad-based commitment and realistic goals, a series of false starts resulted.

"I felt we had one last shot to make a GIS system a viable technology for the city," said Drew Gidlof, who had just been appointed the city's IT manager in July 2002 after serving as the Network Manager since August 1996. "GIS was at a low point. We had played with attempts using internal staff, developing in-house plans and using CAD technology since the mid 90s, but we weren't where we needed to be."

Still, city department managers were hungry for expanded GIS functionality, and turned to the City I.T. division to supply it.

"My challenges were to give our people the tools they needed to do their jobs today while focusing on the long-term needs of the city, which called for careful, deliberate planning. And, of course, we had to find a way to pay for it all," he said.

Gidlof and colleagues in West Sacramento's Redevelopment Agency, Community Development and Finance departments developed an innovative strategy to provide funding: a technology fee, which is capped at \$1,000, on all new building and engineering permits issued in the fast-growing community.

"We felt that most of the need for GIS technology was being generated by the community's growth, and that this was a fair way to finance our ability to respond to the needs. The fee is designed to pay for about 60-70 percent of our GIS system," he said. The idea has captured the attention of colleagues in other cities, as well.

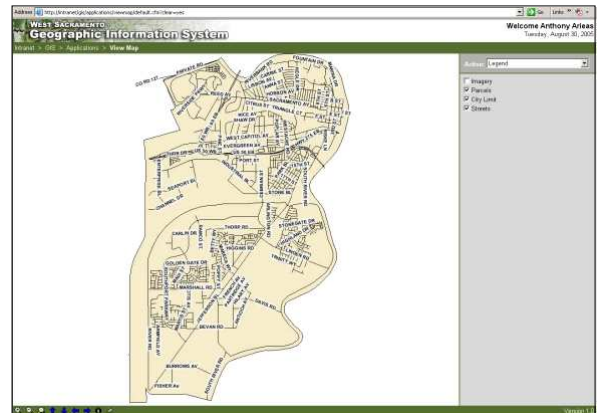
The City also applied for and received a Community Development Block Grant, which allowed officials to work with an outside vendor to develop a needs assessment and implementation plan.

"For me, the involvement of outside experts was key," Gidlof said. "For this to work, we needed the commitment internally and the experience and perspective of people who had done this in many other communities."

Gidlof assembled a committee of GIS and I.T. managers, and experienced GIS users from inside and outside the organization to evaluate the six vendors who responded to his RFP and to cut the list to three. Those three were evaluated by a committee of city managers, who made the final decision.

"Geographic Technologies Group was the unanimous choice of the committee. Everyone agreed these were the people we wanted to work with."

The next step was securing City Council approval, but that proved to not be difficult.



ViewMap

"I think the successes technology initiatives have had in the city in the past laid the groundwork for this request. That, and the fact we have a very technology-savvy council, helped the proposal fly. The city manager began working with the council several years ago to set annual goals and GIS had been steadily moving up the list of priorities. I think the city leadership saw the potential of GIS and believed we were well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities it offers," Gidlof said.

GTG worked closely with city department managers to develop a plan that is helping West Sacramento make up for lost time.

"The plan was completed in March and since then we've developed five or six applications using our existing data. Our vision is that by this time next year, we'll be able to extend all of this functionality to the public on the Internet. We're testing everything for six to nine months on our intranet site before releasing it to the public, but so far we haven't encountered any major problems," he said.

City leaders and staff are particularly excited about an application they've developed to aide developers in estimating impact fees on projects under consideration.

"It's called Site Selector and we've designed it with the help from some of our Community Development and Redevelopment Agency staff. It allows developers to click on a parcel, fill in information about how they intend to use it, and then receive an estimate of the impact fees," Gidlof said. "A nice feature is that they'll be able to save the file on our system, call one of our staff members, and go over the information in detail. They can make modifications and receive a more accurate estimate. This will be a huge hit once it's available on the Internet."

Some of the other applications under development include tying building permits and water usage information to the GIS system; displaying fire and police call for service information; and tying in assessor historical information to parcels, so staff and users throughout the City can use the information by way of the Web-based intranet system.



Parcel Report

The Sphere of Influence program lets council members and staff, preview the parcels or associated projects that are within their area of influence because of property they own. City employees can pull mailing labels by parcels, streets, or project areas, allowing quick communication when, for example, a street will be under construction and residents need to be notified.

"They can export the data to an Excel file and print it on their desktop," Gidlof said.

The new GIS successes in West Sacramento have all but obliterated the memories of earlier false starts.

"No one here thinks about the past shortcomings any more. We are all focused on the future, and the exciting GIS applications we want to develop tomorrow," Gidlof said.

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