

A Beautiful Town, A Team's Vision and a Total GIS

Town of Leesburg, Virginia



Baghdad may be more than 6,200 miles from Leesburg, Virginia, but when it came time for the Town Council to vote on funding for a local GIS project, America's Shock and Awe campaign offered valuable lessons.

Leesburg GIS coordinator John Callahan considers it his \$100,000 analogy. "The war in Iraq had just started, and every day on the news we saw how our military used geographic data to pinpoint and hit very specific targets while doing little collateral damage. The council was wavering on our need for GIS data until I was able to point out that the way the military relied on geographic information to do their jobs was very similar to the way our public safety agencies and planning departments operate.

"We went from having two or three council members in favor of the plan to a 7-0 vote for funding," Callahan said.

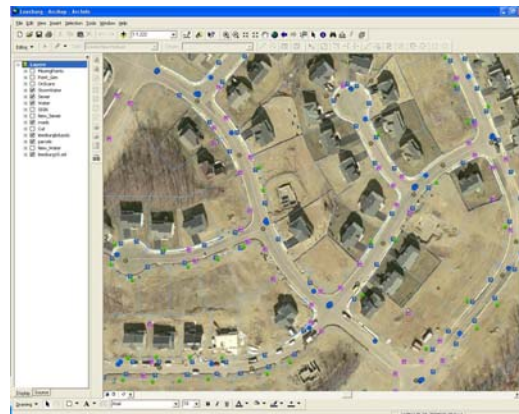
The Leesburg Town Council got it, and since the project got underway, town employees and citizens get it, too.

Leesburg chose Geographic Technologies Group for a full-scale GIS Needs Assessment and then Strategic Plan and Implementation Services, which included a GPS inventory, database design and data conversion. The town also purchased GTG's PINMapper software and GISmoWeb intranet solution.

For Virginia's most rapidly growing municipality, GTG was the perfect fit.

"We chose GTG twice, once for our needs assessment project and again for the three-year implementation plan," Callahan said. "Both times they were up against the best firms in the country, and both times they won our business, hands down. Their approach, their people, their tremendous experience with local governments and their costs all put them over the top."

The process helped Leesburg jump-start its GIS initiative, identify optimal uses of GPS and Web-based tools, build support for the project throughout the organization and set important priorities.



"We knew that once we introduced GIS and showed people what it could do, the technology would quickly become indispensable, and that's exactly what's happened in the year we've been into it," Callahan said.

The projects spawned widespread growth of GIS usage throughout the town's government.

"We're becoming more immersed in GIS every day and the more we see, the more we want," Callahan said. "I think we've effectively piqued everyone's interest. Right now the utilities department is seeing what GIS can do for them, and they want it all."

Currently two years into the plan, Leesburg is embarking on an additional project that grew out of the field data collection initiative. "We got funding to collect GPS data for the town's sanitary sewer system, storm sewers, water system and street signs."

He said departments are quickly discovering they can be more responsive to citizen requests for maps, and that the quality of information they can provide to decision makers has increased dramatically since the GTG engagement began.

"The town council members have commented many times that the quality of maps is great, and that they have a better understanding of what kind of changes are occurring in the town. It's easier to see what problems are on the horizon and, of course, better information always results in better decisions."

Megan Gedney of the Leesburg Planning Department says it's now easier to explain and show how the town's rapid transition from undeveloped land to residential and commercial use is occurring.

"Our population almost doubled between 1990 and 2000 resulting in a huge impact on our town with changes in land use and a growing road network," she said. "GIS information makes it easier for us to make planning and zoning decisions because we can more easily visualize the consequences of our decisions. We can consider problems in a holistic way.

"And it's always great to be able to easily print high quality maps for the public." Leesburg Police Chief Joseph Price also believes GIS capabilities enhance his department.

"He loves it," Callahan said. "The Police Department uses PINMapper, which gives them full crime analysis information at their fingertips. The interface is simple and they can get anything out of the database that they can imagine wanting."

PINMapper uses ESRI's map objects software to integrate geographic data with public safety records management systems. It offers hot spot/trend analysis, queries by date and time, neighborhood, landmarks, beats and any user-defined areas such as circles, lines, points, etc.

"I think people everywhere are becoming savvier about GIS technology and what it can offer because of things like navigation systems in cars and MapQuest on the Internet. It's only natural that they expect government agencies to be able to provide the same type of information at the drop of a hat. I feel like GTG has enabled Leesburg to be on the cutting edge of GIS technology. Our citizens expect that, and they deserve it," Callahan said.

Earlier this year, the town staff recognized Callahan's efforts with the prestigious Leesburg Customer Service Award.

"I think it's a testament to the popularity of GIS information. People felt like I've been there to support them, to help them do their jobs more effectively. It's a nice compliment."

Geographic Technologies Group

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