

Maine GeoLibrary Board
GIS Strategic Plan and Integrated Land Records Information System
Information Gathering Forum Notes
Auburn, Maine | April 29, 2008

Project: Strategic and Business Plan Development in Support of the NSDI Future Directions Fifty States Initiative & Property Boundary Data Capture and Integration Framework

Attendance: There were 17 attendees at the meeting. (Please refer to the attached list of attendees – Attachment A.)

Discussion:

► **Introductions**

The Forum began with introductions of the Sewall Team of Bruce Oswald of Oswald Associates and Rich Sutton of Reference Standard. The attendees were then asked to introduce themselves. Of the seventeen attendees, fourteen were from municipal government; two were from regional councils and one was a county Registry of Deeds. The attendees were asked how many knew of the Maine GeoLibrary Board. Only three of the group knew of the Board.

Attendees were also notified about the new GeoLibrary List Serve and encouraged to sign up for it as a means to keep abreast of the latest GIS events in the state and to communicate with others in the GIS community. The city was thanked for providing the space and the refreshments for the Forum.

► **Background on Project**

Bruce Oswald provided background on the GeoLibrary Board. He noted that it was established by an act of the Legislature in 2002 as a statewide network to organize, catalog and provide access to geographic information. He stated that its original funding had come through a \$2.3 million bond issue which the Board had spent judiciously on the state clearinghouse, a statewide digital orthoimagery program (by matching \$1.6 million in additional funding from the United States Geological Survey (USGS), \$350 thousand on developing a state tax parcel standard and then providing grants to create and upgrade tax parcel data as well as many other things. In addition, he noted that the Board was working with various parties to establish a state GIS portal which would be live in the not too distant future. Lastly, he indicated that the Board represented a wide constituency from those in State and municipal government and regional councils to real estate, development, education, utilities, surveyors, GIS vendors and the State CIO.

Mr. Oswald reported that the Board was a viable functioning organization, but, after 6 years, had nearly expended all the funds that it had been given and felt that it needed to step back and, with the help of the geospatial community in Maine, analyze Maine's statewide geospatial needs and develop plans for the future of GIS in Maine. He stated that the Board felt that these plans needed to include a path toward obtaining a sustainable funding source capable of meeting those needs. Lastly, he noted that the Board wished to develop a framework and functional specifications for integrating land records information in the state.

Mr. Oswald stated that the Board had applied for and received a matching grant from the USGS to update Maine's 2002 GIS strategic plan and design a statewide integrated land records system as part of the National States Geographic Information Council's (NSGIC) Fifty States Initiative. He noted that the project called for not only updating the strategic plan, but also bringing it into alignment with NSGIC's strategic criteria, and, in particular, focusing on: coordination of local

governments, academia and the private sector; developing sustainable funding sources; and cultivating political champions to grow support for future geospatial initiatives.

He then provided the attendees with information on the blog site developed for gathering information and holding project discussion on the land records information system (<http://maineplan.blogspot.com>).

He noted that there was currently an on-line survey which the Sewall Team was using to gather project data at:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=mYgDWSHUtJCEpX2cUAXGQ_3d_3d

and encouraged all to spend a few minutes completing it. Lastly, he encouraged all to initiate a dialogue on the new Maine GIS List Serve at:

GEOLIBRARY-L-request@LISTS.MAINE.EDU.

► **Purpose of Forum/Review of Approach**

Bruce Oswald explained the purpose of the Forum with to inform the attendees on the details of the project and to gather their input on both the GIS strategic planning update and the development of an integrated land records information system for Maine. He went on to review the overall project approach with the attendees.

Strategic Planning

Bruce Oswald discussed the NSGIC coordinating criteria that the updated plan needed to align with. They included:

- Strategic and business plans
- A full-time paid GIS coordinator and staff
- Clearly defined authority and responsibility for coordination
- A relationship with the chief information officer
- A political or executive champion is involved in coordination
- A tie into national programs
- An inter-governmental working environment free of "turf wars"
- Sustainable funding mechanisms
- Contracting authority and cost sharing mechanisms
- Statewide coordination efforts that can be a conduit for federal initiatives

He then provided examples of initiatives that coordination programs across the country had done. He also talked about how GIS champions are cultivated and sustainable funding sources are achieved.

- **GIS Needs**

Next, he asked the attendees to address their GIS needs. These included:

- **Data**

- There is a need better metadata or an easier way to find and access data from State, county and municipal governments. This could improve efficiency and lower costs.
- The attendees made it clear that they felt much of the State data was not listed or just too hard to find. They stated that it was a problem just knowing what data was out there! In particular, they indicated that they:
 - Don't know what data is available nor what to ask for.

- ▶ Don't know when updates are available (i.e. accident data from DOT just seems to appear without any announcements to the user community). (This appeared to be a trend for much of the data.)
 - Communities and State don't know what local data has been created.
 - There is a need for an open dialogue between counties, municipals and State governments about what format that data is needed in.
 - There is an overall need for much better data management.
 - There is a need for collaborative data products which are developed to meet federal, state, regional, county and municipal needs
 - ▶ Imagery – Imagery needs to be completed on a statewide basis every 3-5 years.
 - **Training/outreach to users**
 - Because the technology is not easy to use, there is a significant need for training.
 - **Development of Applications** (Potentially shared or administered jointly)
 - If technology isn't used on a regular basis, it is hard to maintain the ability to use it.
 - Need simple-to-use municipal applications (desktop and on-line)
 - Need applications that are incorporated into tool which is used daily
 - **Hard to find GIS people to hire**
 - **Cost of software**
 - The cost of software is an inhibitor to the use of the technology. It was suggested that there be regional storehouses of software & data.
 - **Improved Communication**
 - There is a need to communicate much better. It was pointed out that a lot of folks around the state don't know how important an integrated land records information system is to the state and how it could improve government efficiencies, make it more responsive to business and citizens and lower overall costs for the state in the long term.
 - It was noted that previous studies by the Board provided little or no feedback to the participants. The attendees asked that the Board take note of this and make sure that they were informed as the project moved forward.
 - **Deed Standards**
 - It was noted that there was a need for deed standards as there were currently no standards enforced on how they were written.
 - **Miscellaneous**
 - It was noted that there was a need for consolidation of GIS efforts to lower overall costs and improve efficiencies. It was suggested that regional approaches to GIS along with Counties handling the assessing for the municipalities could be a potential solution.
- **Important Actions**
 - The attendees were asked what they felt the most important things that the Board could do. The indicated that the development of more collaborative data products such as imagery (which should be repeated every 3-5 years) was what they wanted.
- **SWOT Analysis**

The group then did a SWOT analysis of the GeoLibrary Board. The results are as follows:

 - **Strengths**
 - The previous development of state imagery was seen as a significant strength of the Board. The group noted that there was a need to continue with that on a regular basis as well as develop an updating process for other data.

- **Weaknesses**
 - o Communication/Marketing
 - ▶ Most attendees in the room did not know about the Board.
 - ▶ A lot of folks across the state don't know the importance that an integrated land records information system is for the state.
 - o There was agreement that the lack of ease of use (and finding) of data and technology was a significant weakness. (If, at least, there was better access to more data at the state and local level, this could become a strength instead of a weakness.)
 - o The group wanted feedback on studies like this. On the last one, they never knew what happened to the results of the study.
 - o The group wanted standards for the folks that write the deeds.
- **Opportunities**
 - o The Board needs to look for things of greater value for the public and implement them.
 - o Take advantage of the push towards consolidation of government services by taking a regional approach to the development of GIS in communities that are lacking those capabilities.
 - o Establish regional repositories of data, etc.
- **Threats**
 - o Lack of funding to continue.
 - o No champion.
 - o Lack of publicity of what the Board does. People making choices on what to fund do not understand what the benefits that the Board brings to the state. The Board needs to educate the citizens on what it has and what it can do as do all GIS providers.
 - o Fear of making too much information available to easily. (Invasion of the public's privacy.)
- **Potential political or executive champions**

The group then provided the following list of potential political or executive champions that should be explored by the Board:

 - Emergency management (MEMA) at the state level
 - County emergency managers
 - Fire & Police Chiefs and Sheriff associations.
 - Realtors
 - Lawyers specializing in real estate transactions
- **Best sustainable funding sources for GIS in Maine**

The group then provided the following list of potential funding sources that should be explored by the Board:

 - Property transfer fees – make counties responsible.
 - Building permit fees – do this at the local level.
 - It was noted that funds from surcharges were often funneled off by legislative and executive branch leaders.

Integrated Land Records Information System

Rich Sutton provided project background, identifying how the ILRIS activities fit into the overall Strategic Planning process and what the State's intentions are with improving land records management.

There was brief review of the capture, integration, maintenance and distribution data components of the project, and discussion of whether privacy concerns are an issue that threatens the future of an integrated system.

ISSUES and OBSERVATIONS:

When presented with the question of why the current state of land records information is not more advanced, the options of privacy, tradition and no benefits were rejected and **cost** was determined to be the primary impediment.

Diane Godin, Deeds Register of Somerset County, outlined areas where the transfer of data between municipalities, county and state suffers **inefficiencies** and technical impediments. These include issues relating to the Maine Revenue Service transfer Transfer Tax Declaration document and documents associated with subdivision registering

Assessors from Lewiston outlined similar findings from the municipal perspective, voicing dissatisfaction with time delays in processing documents through MRS and incompleteness of information.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ILRIS INITIATIVE:

Is there any identified **revenue source** at present to pay for this initiative? Is the State going to pay for it?

Privacy is a big concern. We need to have a way to limit the information that is used outside of the towns. If there are going to be commercial vendors coming in to collect the data and sell it for use on the web, we should be able to control this.

How are we going to get **participation** from towns that don't even have digital parcel data of any kind yet? Some of these places aren't interested, and will actively resist this sort of an initiative.

Can the data be made available through Google Earth or other **web based tools**?

- When asked, most in the room identified themselves as active users of Google Earth with access to broadband internet

Data quality: What is being done about the actual condition of boundaries along municipal lines? There are big problems with the way parcels don't edgematch accurately at town boundaries. Are there any plans underway to survey these lines properly?

If there are examples of **best practices** that other states have established, we should be following these. Of course, Maine is probably unique in its needs in many ways, but we should modify what has worked elsewhere rather than reinventing the wheel.

It seems like counties are more willing to work with towns (and vice versa) than has been the case in the past, but there will still likely be **resistance to collaboration**.

QUESTIONS THE CADASTRAL LAYER SHOULD ANSWER:

- Can you generate an abutters list?
- Does the owner get his tax bill mailed out of state?
- Is the parcel in a floodzone?
- What is the official land use code of the parcel? And of those around it?
- Does the parcel have any easements associated with it?

- Is the parcel in the Tree Growth program?
- Is the parcel eligible for the Tree Growth program?
- What is the tax history of the parcel?
- Is the parcel a brownfield, or are there brownfields around it?

Conclusions:

While the group was small, it vigorously engaged each issue as it was brought forth. GIS needs were divided into data creation and maintenance. The primary needs mentioned were much better communication by the Board, better access to data and a methodology to alert users when new or updated data was posted, the development of a collaborative digital orthoimagery program, the need for training, and shared, regional software, applications and data. More than anything, this Forum demonstrated the need for the Board to have much better communications to its constituencies. The group also pointed out the need for the Board to demonstrate to non-GIS people around the state how GIS could solve significant problems or issues.

Land Records issues were discussed by many members present, but focus shifted to discussion between county and municipal representatives during the later stages of the forum. As with the Strategic session there were serious issues and concerns related to training and software availability, and cost of participation as at the forefront. While most of the participants saw genuine benefit in the prospect of dependable and current digital land records data over the entire state, there was not a general sense that a unified land records data set would be obtainable in the near future.

Attachment A – Forum Attendees

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