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At-A-Glance

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GIS TECHNOLOGY IS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS

GIS allows you to drill all the way down to a small parcel and gives prospects a way to quickly determine if a piece of land might meet their requirements.

No question about it. Computer-based geographic information systems (GIS) can help a community put its best foot forward to developers and businesses.

GIS helps the Greater Fort Bend Economic Development Council in Sugar Land, Texas, speed up the data-gathering and decision-making process, said Jeffrey C. Wiley, executive vice president of the council.

"Instead of spending weeks to put together up to 10 maps, with separate data on flooding, topography, electrical grids, gas pipelines and other data, we can now present prospects with a concise 30 minute overview," Wiley said. "We can easily go from a county overlay, and drill all the way down to a small parcel in our central appraisal district (CAD), and give prospects all the details they need to know whether that piece of land is going to qualify for their needs."

According to Wiley, GIS technology is an important tool for developers.

"The real benefit of our GIS is that it allows developers who contact our department to really explore their options very quickly and not spend a lot of time on engineering studies and other analyses," he said.

As a presentation tool, there's no comparison, Wiley said.

"With GIS, we've got a tremendous amount of information that now can be carried on a laptop and reviewed on site," he said. "The data doesn't have to be retrieved off the server. It has revolutionized the way that we can demonstrate economic opportunities for our clients, and helps visualize those opportunities, as well."

Fort Bend's GIS tool enables overlaying demographic and precinct data on community maps for a variety of activities, including site selection, redevelopment initiatives and bond issue campaigns.

The Greater Fort Bend EDC has earned a Global Innovator's Award from CoreNet Global for its DEVELOPRO GIS software application. DEVELOPRO was created in partnership with LJA Engineering and Surveying, Inc., and features a 72-inch, touch-

sensitive screen connected to a customized computer system (*www.developroinc.net/contact.html*).

The council's GIS setup uses a base map, which is a digitized aerial photograph of Fort Bend County, and displays more than 50 layers of information on top of the color aerial map. Water features, county mobility plans, pipelines, electrical distribution lines, traffic counts, rail lines, utility districts, potential wetlands, flood zones and school district boundaries are some of the data sets that can be viewed on the Fort Bend GIS.

GIS, Wiley pointed out, enables site location executives to better visualize prospective parcels to expand their businesses.

"I don't think there's any question that it's been a major asset in our marketing effort," he said.

Fort Bend ranks No. 2 among Texas counties in absolute growth, and the Greater Fort Bend EDC has assisted in more than 100 relocations and expansions into the county. These projects have resulted in additional tax valuations of $1.3 billion and 14,700 jobs.

Palm Coast, Fla., economic development organizations also have taken advantage of GIS technology for all kinds of analyses, said Nick Sacia, deputy director of Enterprise Flagler in Palm Coast.

His organization promotes the existing business

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community and recruits new businesses to Flagler County, which is between Daytona Beach and St. Augustine.

"With our ArcView GIS, we can quickly produce detailed land analyses that show the size of a site, as well as locations, size and other information on wetlands and flood plain areas within the site," Sacia said.

With its GIS, Enterprise Flagler personnel can quickly provide data on number of businesses in the area, and how those businesses are clustered.

"We use our GIS tools to keep track of businesses in the area," Sacia said. "We geo-code the addresses of the businesses in the county and place them on the map."

The vendor for Enterprise Flagler's ArcView GIS is ESRI, a GIS software developer (*www.esri.com/software/arcview/*).

Partnering can only help an E.D. department in its GIS efforts.

"Municipalities, the county and the EDC here have a very cooperative atmosphere," Wiley said. "We share expenses, so we are able to operate our GIS at fairly low costs."

Michael S. Ammann, president of the Solano EDC in Fairfield, Calif., agrees.

"Other communities can certainly learn from our cooperative model," he said. "Solano County is the first county to pull together three existing city online GIS property inventories into partnership with four other communities and the county to better market available properties to site selectors, corporate real estate managers and national brokerages."

Solano County's Online GIS property inventory at *www.solanoprospector.com* is especially robust.

Economic development directors should get acquainted with GIS experts at the county property appraisers office or other county offices, Sacia said.

"They probably have a GIS staffer who can help E.D. people get established," he said.

Sacia said vendors such as ESRI have user's groups and stage how-to classes.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has a GIS subcommittee that maintains an electronic bulletin board and holds educational sessions at NACo's summer conference. The subcommittee also partners with ESRI on executive briefings and hands-on training.

For more information, contact Kevin Neimond at NACo's GIS Education and Outreach Office at (202) 942-4247 or by e-mail at kneimond@naco.org.

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WORK FORCE FACTS

NATIONS WHERE WORKERS HAVE THE TOOLS TO GET THE JOB DONE

Countries such as the United States and Canada are usually near the top of worldwide worker productivity and business efficiency. One possible reason: Workers in those countries are early adopters of productivity-enhancing IT equipment and other tools.

Businesses in Sweden, Ireland, Britain and Canada excel at using information technology to improve their operations, according to a country-by-country survey by consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton. The United States, which was in the top three last year, dropped four places in this year's survey.

The study relied on a "Sophistication Index" to determine how eagerly and capably countries have embraced information technology, including wireless and Internet access. Phone interviews with executives at 8,000 businesses in 11 countries formed the basis of the survey.

Sweden rose from No. 5 to No. 1 in the survey between 2003 and 2004 because both large and small businesses there have universally embraced computer and communications technology.

Ireland was ranked No. 2 because of its huge pool of knowledge workers who rely on cutting-edge information technology.

Another ranking, the IDC's Information Society Index (ISI) survey, measured the abilities of 53 nations to participate in the information revolution. The IDC used IT spending as a percentage of GDP, the number of Internet users within a country, broadband and wireless adoption in the population, mobile handset shipments, and other measures to come up with its rankings.

In the IDC report, Denmark, Sweden, the United States, Switzerland and Canada are the top five countries. The United States scored highest in the IDC report on number of PCs per household and software spending. The United States also continues to be the world's largest consumer of computer products and services.

Five countries — Sweden, Great Britain, South Korea, Canada, and the United States — scored in the top 10 for both the IDC and Booz Allen Hamilton surveys.

Compiled by Michael Keating, senior research editor of Expansion Management. He can be reached at mkeating@penton.com.

COUNTRIES THAT LEAD IN PUTTING IT EQUIPMENT & OTHER TECH TOOLS TO WORK

COUNTRY	BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON SOPHISTICATION INDEX COUNTRY RANKING	IDC INFORMATION SOCIETY INDEX RANKING	INFORMATION SOCIETY INDEX SCORE
SWEDEN	1	2	958
IRELAND	2	NA	NA
GREAT BRITAIN	3	10	870
GERMANY	4	NA	NA
SOUTH KOREA	5	8	904
CANADA	6	5	925
UNITED STATES	7	3	938
AUSTRALIA	8	NA	NA
ITALY	9	NA	NA
JAPAN	10	NA	NA

Sources: Booz Allen Hamilton, IDC