AIMS Coordinators Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2010
Host: Overland Park
Location: Overland Park City Hall

Announcements
The June Coordinator's Meeting will be hosted by Johnson County Emergency Communications, held in the new ECC building at 11811 S Sunset in Olathe.

Presentations

Police Cellphone Data – Steve Brown

Steve presented an opportunity they had to work with cellphone data. The OP Police Department was searching for a missing person and asked GIS to help with mapping cellphone towers and locations. The GIS analysis in this case did not help with the investigation but OP wanted to discuss the availability of working with this data.

They found that working with the cellphone companies was problematic at best. The requests must be worded in a structured manner and the returns from the companies are not very useful. In this case, OP received a handwritten list of cellphone tower IDs and locations and had to proceed from there.

In working with the police department and several cellphone venders, OP found that each vendor has their own delivery format and requires requests to be submitted in very different language.

OP would like to put a group together that would discuss the best way to approach the cellphone vendors to improve this situation. It was suggested that the 911 division at MARC be incorporated as the point agency on this since they have the closest contact with the cellphone companies.

Future discussions are definitely necessary on this topic.

Web Mapping – Doug Johnson

Doug presented OP's thought processes behind developing their web presence instead of delving into individual applications. He wanted to get across what was going through their design meetings when tasked with upgrading the GIS web presence in association with the city presence.

They were fortunate that their redesign of web applications coincided with the city's complete redesign of their website. OP GIS worked closely with OP IT staff and the consultant that was hired to design the new citywide website. Several recommended procedures came out of working with the design consultant that Doug wanted to share.

1. Focus Narrowly – each webpage should be designed strictly with the end user in mind. Do not create grandiose, all encompassing, webpages.

2. More Graphics/Fewer Words – the consultant pointed out that the old website relied far too heavily on paragraphs of text. The web user does not have a long attention span so capturing that attention with images works much better than excessive prose.

3. Show Only Most Important Info – the GIS staff took considerable time analyzing each webpage to determine what information to portray. Throwing everything and the kitchen sink on to a page because someone, somewhere, might be interested is not good design.

4. Keep Context As Current As Possible – users will quickly abandon your site if the information is not kept fresh.

Doug went into the design phase with the hope of being more tightly integrated into the city website as a whole and GIS was very successful in this. Given their high concentration of imagery, their design fit well with the consultant's ideas. There are a lot of maps showing up on the city pages, but the maps are secondary a lot of times to the content of the page.

OP has gone the route of building a single site that can be modified by setting parameters either in the design or in the call to that site. They have pages for What's Happening in My Neighborhood, Development Proposal and Zoning Maps all based off of the same template page and run through setting parameters. That way, they have one code base that can be easily maintained.

Data Development – Mike Nelson

OP publishes data from a development environment to a working environment on a nightly basis.

They have developed a table in SQL Server to help determine if their services are operational. The code in the web applications hit that table to determine if they have available ArcGIS services and proceed appropriately.

OP has developed two sets of caches, a simple cache for when detail is not important and a complex cache that incorporates more layers to give more detail to the application. These caches are rebuilt every Monday.

Mike also showed that OP has developed a table in SQL Server that combines all possible search terms and uses that in their search capabilities on the site. This allows users to search by address, intersection or place within their applications.

Code Development – Dave Fullerton

Dave went deep into the code realm to discuss workarounds he had to implement inside Flex to make their applications run smoothly.