



# MetroGIS

*Laying the groundwork for new growth*

## 2006 Annual Report

Like an athlete preparing for the next level of challenge, MetroGIS had an important year of laying the groundwork in 2006 for what has the potential to be an exciting phase of growth and achievement.

A fundamental accomplishment was that the Metropolitan Council, following an internal audit and subsequent study, renewed its commitment as a primary sponsor of MetroGIS activities. The Council found that MetroGIS "provides a clear benefit to the Council" and that MetroGIS "has provided a cost-effective way to develop and manage GIS data." The Council also recognized the value of the forum that MetroGIS provides for participating governments "to plan collaboratively to take advantage of future development in GIS and related technologies."

Exploring the future of GIS was exactly the goal of a remarkable forum that MetroGIS sponsored in June 2006 called "Imagining Possibilities: The Next Frontier for Geographic Information Technology." Nearly 250 people attended the event at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute. MetroGIS attracted four internationally known speakers who shared their vision of the capabilities that geospatial technology will enable within five years. A panel of local experts followed each speaker, engaging in exciting dialogues about the ideas presented. Over lunch, more than a dozen demonstrations of GIS technology and its uses were presented. The event inspired and re-energized our stakeholders.

MetroGIS is exploring its own future, too. We've got a solid track record of developing data standards and creating regional datasets that make widespread regional data-sharing possible. We've got newly upgraded web-based tools, DataFinder and DataFinder Café, which provide state-of-the-art data discovery and access capabilities.

How might we build on our successes to further benefit the regional economy and save taxpayers' money by working collaboratively?



**Victoria Reinhardt**  
Chair, MetroGIS Policy Board  
Ramsey County Commissioner

Here are some possibilities:

- ◆ Expanding our policy of allowing view-only access to licensed data - as is now possible with The Lawrence Group street centerline data - to other datasets, like the regional parcel data. This would help facilitate our next big leap: development of applications to share among governments.
- ◆ Expanding the Policy Board to representatives of the nonprofit and private sectors. We've discovered that building trust and working collaboratively among government and academic organizations has reaped efficiencies

and effectiveness. Broadening our collaboration with the nonprofit and private sectors could provide further benefits. This may require creative solutions for questions of intellectual property and revenue sharing, but it isn't beyond our capabilities.

- ◆ Engaging counties that surround the metro region because, as we know, the region's geographic boundaries recognized 40 years ago don't really reflect the boundaries of the regional economy today. The Metropolitan Council's study group said that the Council should support and encourage efforts to improve extra-regional and statewide GIS collaboration.

In February this year MetroGIS gathered its key stakeholders for a workshop to provide strategic direction as we develop the next business plan by mid-year. The exchange was dynamic and led to identifying key priorities and, perhaps, a new mission statement. By the end of the day, it became apparent that our mission statement must be revised to better reflect the benefits of our collaboration to the region.

Those benefits are well-documented and plentiful, from preventing disease outbreaks to tracking crime patterns to planning neighborhoods. I'm confident that the groundwork we laid in 2006 will lead to an even stronger and more vibrant MetroGIS in the future. Stay tuned.

## Conference explores frontiers of geospatial technology

Imagine a world where GIS experts are "the new rock stars." Where you point a hand-held device at a building and up pops text on the building's history. Where open-source mapping tools are ubiquitous.

In June 2006, MetroGIS sponsored a forum entitled "Imagining Possibilities: The Next Frontier for Geographic Information Technology." Four internationally known speakers explained a dizzying array of new GIS technologies and potential applications, and shared their vision of what geospatial technology will enable in the future.

"The future will favor organizations that harness the power of GIS," said Clint Brown, director of software products for Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. Other speakers and panelists explored issues related to data standards, organizational structures needed to make the best use of GIS, and the need to educate policymakers and the public about what GIS can do. About 250 GIS practitioners and policymakers attended the event.

### More 2006 milestones

**Metropolitan Council supports MetroGIS.** After a study of several months, the Metropolitan Council renewed its commitment to support MetroGIS. The Council found that MetroGIS benefits both the Council and the region as a whole, and endorsed efforts to encourage similar collaboration statewide.

**View-only access of licensed data provided.** MetroGIS reached agreement with The Lawrence Group (TLG) to continue to provide access to the TLG Street Centerline Dataset as the endorsed regional street centerline dataset. The new agreement authorizes licensed users to incorporate the TLG dataset

into web-based applications they host, provided access by non-licensed users is restricted to view only. This access provision is the first of its kind and represents a major step forward toward policy innovations that balance intellectual property rights with the desire to use licensed data in web-based applications. Discussions are underway to determine if a similar agreement can be reached with counties for view-only access to parcel data by non-licensed users.

**Partnerships proposed beyond government.** MetroGIS continued work on an initiative to more fully engage the private sector in data-sharing activities. Five proposals have been identified for exploration by a team composed of representatives of non-profit and private sector interests:

- ◆ Foster statewide adoption of principles that underpin MetroGIS. Statewide data standards and common licensing agreements would make data-sharing easier and foster greater economic activity.
- ◆ Foster an open source data model for MetroGIS. Such a model would improve data quality and timeliness, and reduce costs for development and upgrading of core data sets.
- ◆ Implement an "application finder" concept. Similar to DataFinder, this in-progress pilot project will produce a directory of shared geospatial web services, software components and tools for MetroGIS stakeholders.
- ◆ Foster a marketplace for geospatial resources. Building on an open source model, this concept would greatly enhance geospatial data and application access options, with arrangements ranging from bartering to subscriptions.
- ◆ Expand the MetroGIS Policy Board to include non-government interests, e.g., one or more senior non-profit and for-profit officials.

**DataFinder Café upgraded.** Following a user survey in 2005, MetroGIS initiated an upgrade of DataFinder Café, the web-based data discovery and distribution tool. The upgrade was completed in 2006, and the site once again serves as a state-of-the-art tool for finding and downloading data. The number of data downloads continues to grow.

#### MetroGIS Policy Board Members – 2006

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[www.metrogis.org](http://www.metrogis.org) – For current information on MetroGIS activities  
[www.datafinder.org](http://www.datafinder.org) – For a directory of available geographic data in the region