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Questions and Answers For Recorders About Land Records And GIS Integration

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PROPERTY RECORDS INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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Executive Summary

Integrating Geographic Information Systems (GIS) with land records and Land Records Management Systems (LRMS) helps reduce fraud, improve public engagement, and deliver data in more user-friendly formats. GIS integration improves data access to the public, offers a modern approach to land records searching, and suggest insight into trends and patterns in land transactions. Integration combines deeds, mortgages, liens, and other land records with property data including improvements, permits, zoning, flood hazard area, restricted areas, and other data maintained by local and state government. GIS and land records integration delivers tools to better understand land use patterns, visualize relationships and provides information property owners, prospective purchasers, regulators, and policy makers.

Office Benefits

1. As a land records official, how does the integration of land records and GIS benefit my office?

   Land records are the fundamental starting point for some of the most critical functions of government, including real property assessment and taxation. Land records are also key in making updates, changes, and corrections to one of the most essential "layers" defined in GIS: the parcel layer (cadastral layer).

   Both government and business use public records. GIS integration can speed access to records in a geographic context. For example, recorded documents can be queried by location, parcel identification number (PIN), grantor/grantee, legal descriptions, and document recording numbers that support title searches. Integration is also an effective method for improving the quality of public records, with all data available through a single access point. Access is improved in ways that offer new revenue streams by providing more ways to locate and then purchase documents.

Record Processing

1. Would land records/GIS integration slow down record processing in my office?

   No, it should not. Integration can reduce backlogs and improve recording functions and processes. Given the overall recording and map filing workflows, substantial improvements have been seen through integration. The onus is on the preparer to properly ready the document for indexing and recording. Integration can facilitate the preparer's ability to confirm key elements of a document before it is presented for recording. Any new verification steps, e.g., checking for a correct PIN, should take minimal time prior to recording, and these steps can often be automated.

2. How are addresses and proper parcel numbering important to GIS integration?

   The PIN is the link between land records and the property location within GIS. Unique addresses are crucial to many local government functions, including emergency services, public utilities, assessment functions, and navigation services. Addresses in the GIS can be mapped and shared with all local government departments allowing for additional data integration.

   Like addresses, PINs can be maintained on a jurisdiction-wide basis and should not be reused. GIS integration enables searching land records data by location, including PINs and addresses.

Staff and Cost

1. Would I need additional staff members in my office to undertake land records/GIS integration?

   Adding a GIS staff member to the recorder's office could expedite integration. Additional staff depends on your needs and where the current GIS staff resides within your organizational structure. It is very important to examine workloads in multiple, affected departments.

2. Does the staff's recording process change with GIS integration?

   No, if the PIN is being indexed there is no change to the recording process. Yes, if the PIN is not being indexed, the process should be changed to integrate the PIN and establish a link to the GIS.

3. What resources are available to assist with integrating land records with GIS?

   Most states have a land records modernization organization or a statewide group of recorders. PRIA has made land records/GIS integration a multi-year initiative, including an integration white paper, an integration toolkit, and a PIN FAQs, along with multiple conference presentations and webinars.

   The Urban and Regional Information System Association (URISA) is a great resource of GIS experiences from across the U.S. and Canada. The LRMS and GIS vendors are also good sources of information. Visit other jurisdictions in your state, or in a nearby state, and talk to their GIS offices or recorders.

4. What funding sources have been used to help cover the costs of land records/ GIS integration?

   There are several federal and state sources for funding. Many states have a technology fund or a special purpose fund which could be designated for GIS integration. Several examples are noted in Appendix 2 below.

Public Benefits

1. How can the public benefit from land records/GIS integration in the recorder's office?

   By making GIS maps available directly to the public and other governmental entities, users can access integrated GIS information directly at anytime from anywhere.

   By having integrated records along with aerial photographs, the location of properties is more easily verified and the chances of transferring the wrong property are greatly reduced. Multiple government records can be accessed with a simple map-based search.

2. How is aerial imagery used in GIS?

   Aerial imagery is now a standard component of the GIS base map. Historical imagery can be accessed and then compared to newer imagery in the GIS databases, thus allowing for historic perspective over time. "Oblique" imagery or helicopter perspective views are utilized to show the sides of buildings. Even street level imagery can be shared and added to the GIS.

   The ability to now link imagery to land records is just another example of the "value added" by the GIS component of land records/GIS integration.

3. Can GIS help detect property fraud?

   Current fraud detection services focus on the people and parties involved in the transaction. There are three critical elements in a property transaction:

   - the parties, i.e., grantors/grantees
   - the three R's, i.e., rights, restrictions, and responsibilities
   - the location i.e., PIN

   If the PIN was required to be indexed, it would be easy to determine if the current owner is the person attempting a transaction on the parcel.

Additional Information

1. What differences, if any, may arise with GIS integration with a Torrens jurisdiction recording system?

   Torrens jurisdictions often use additional identifiers, i.e., certificate numbers, which refer to an official document issued by an authority, whose title depends on the jurisdiction. It serves as evidence of ownership and other interests in property. The certificate contains details such as the property description, the name of the registered owner, any encumbrances (like mortgages or liens), and any other legal interests or rights affecting the land.

   The goal is to have all the indexes connected to the PIN to provide a single access to all documents. A Torrens system should link the PIN to both the certificate and the property record documents.

2. Does every user need access to the GIS application to see, update and edit the maps?

   No, anyone can view the GIS information through a web interface. Only select staff members who are responsible for map maintenance, or heavy analytical work will need to use full-featured GIS application. Many options for "reader" or "viewer" access currently exist. Most GIS users may simply be entering addresses or PIN numbers into their systems and accessing the correct records.

3. Where do I go for more information?

   PRIA has additional GIS resources available in the online Resource Library. URISA (Urban and Regional Information Systems Association) is also a good resource for more information on GIS.

Conclusion

GIS and land records integration will help recorders do their jobs more efficiently and participate in a technology-based local government. Without disrupting existing workflows, GIS is becoming the technology for integrating local government departments.

Stakeholder requirements will continue to grow with technological evolution and GIS will help recorders respond to these expectations. In addition to realizing the benefits of parcel-based indexing, recorders will better serve stakeholders by aggregating and integrating indexes with state parcel data maps. GIS and many other technologies will support the movement from costly software customizations to more cost-effective, configurable platforms.

Appendix 1 Funding Resources

https://home.treasury.gov/services/treasury-financial-assistance
Treasury has major programs that provide financial assistance to further Treasury's mission of maintaining a strong economy and creating economic and job opportunities by promoting the conditions that enable economic growth and stability at home and abroad, strengthening national security by combating threats and protecting the integrity of the financial system, and managing the U.S. Government's finances and resources effectively.

https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg/
The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program supports community development activities to build stronger and more resilient communities. Activities may address needs such as infrastructure, economic development projects, public facilities installation, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, clearance/acquisition, microenterprise assistance, code enforcement, homeowner assistance, etc.

https://home.treasury.gov/services/social-impact-partnerships/sippra-pay-for-results
The Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act (SIPPRA) was signed into law on February 9, 2018, and is intended to improve the effectiveness of certain social services. The federal government will pay for a project only if predetermined project outcomes have been met and validated by an independent evaluator, a system called a "pay for results partnership." The SIPPRA program is largely administered by the Department of the Treasury (Treasury).

https://www.grants.gov/
Federal funding opportunities published on Grants.gov are for organizations and entities supporting the development and management of government-funded programs and projects.

https://www.gao.gov/federal-grants-state-and-local-governments
The federal government awards hundreds of billions of dollars in grants to state and local governments each year. These grants help finance a broad range of services, including health care, education, social services, infrastructure, and public safety.

Appendix 2 Sample Legislation

The State of Colorado has an Electronic Recording Tech Fund - $1 per document recorded. The fund is used to develop, maintain, and enhance land records systems. This fund operates a little differently than the two noted below in that the Secretary of State maintains and operates this fund and awards grants to counties for the aforementioned purposes. More information can be found here: https://www.ertb.org.

The State of Kansas has a Register of Deeds fund established under State Statute 28-115A to be used for "(c) Moneys in the register of deeds technology fund shall be used by the register of deeds to acquire equipment and technological services for the storing, recording, archiving, retrieving, maintaining and handling of data recorded or stored in the office of the register of deeds." More information can be found here: Statute | Kansas State Legislature (kslegislature.org).

The State of Minnesota has a technology fund established under State Statute 357.18 County Recorder: "The $10 fee collected under subdivision 1, clause (1), shall be deposited in a technology fund for obtaining, maintaining, and updating current technology and equipment to provide services from the record system." More information can be found here: Sec. 357.18 MN Statutes