

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Information Resource Exchange Group

Highlights from meeting of Wednesday, March 6, 2013

The 86th meeting of the Information Resources Exchange Group (IREG) was called to order at DVRPC by Noemi Mendez, Information Services Specialist at the U.S. Census Bureau, Philadelphia Regional Office. Thirty four people were in attendance. Highlights from the December 12th meeting were available as a handout and on the internet.

Presentations

Brian Ivey, GIS Manager of the GIS Services Group from the City of Philadelphia, Office of Innovation & Technology (OIT) gave a brief history of the Enterprise GIS and Open Data Initiatives. The group started their mission over 20 years ago where as the Mayor's Office of Information Technology (MOIS) got first involved with IREG in 1991, and has evolved into the group that it is today. An early success was obtaining an ESRI Enterprise License Agreement (ELA) for all city departments using GIS software, instead of each department shopping for their software licences independently. The group manages a central licensing server for all Philadelphia city agencies. Streets and Water departments have been the largest drive to city GIS data, with street centerlines and parcel data the most used datasets. The focus is to share the GIS central warehouse of data (which has over 800 layers and tables), and over 120 connections of GIS desktops via Geodb2. A new executive order requires all Deputy Mayors to be Chief Data Officer and to produce three high-value datasets (not currently online) within 120 days, which will enhance transparency and attract interest to outside users. Sarah Cordivano, GIS Specialist at OIT discussed the city's current activities, including the Right to Know policy for data requests from outside regarding spatial data, which includes an indemnification form and limits to the use of City data. Through this process, which datasets are being requested is being collected. Data is published via the Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access (PASDA) public access geospatial information clearinghouse, and updated yearly using a manual FTP upload, with hopes to make the updating automatic in the near future. PASDA maintains a terms and conditions statement developed by the City for acceptable use of public data on their website. Additionally, OpenDataPhilly provides a public interface for up-to-date city data. The City's GIS Data Committee oversees quality of the GIS metadata and data production. The city's website www.phila.gov/map is a complete resource for finding city data maps. It always contains the latest data and puts many valuable datasets into a single application. Adding new datasets requires city departments to complete request form and receive approval from department directors, so that no sensitive or controversial data is being published, and that everyone is aware of what is being made public. David Walk, Senior GIS Developer at OIT discussed which direction the City is going and gave an overview of how the City is developing an application programming interface (API) for a Unified Land Record System, which will coordinate local street address mapping between all City departments, such as Licensing & Inspection, the Philadelphia Parking Authority and others. The City is implementing a pilot GIS server hosted by Amazon Web Services (AWS), which is considered a "cloud" solution, which provides on-demand scaling to handle varying traffic demands while keeping costs at a minimum.

Casey Thomas from AxisPhilly, a news organization that started publishing at the end of January 2013, where developers work directly with journalists to visualize data. Funded by the William Penn Foundation for the next 2 years, their mission is to create new tools for news, embeddable maps, open data explorers, and other forms of web applications. They maintain the OpenDataPhilly as a community-based project (for now) and soon to become an official data portal for the City of Philadelphia. One of their first applications was www.lobbying.ph which was developed at a previous hack-a-thon. The City requires all organizations to register to lobby in the City. Forms are available as .pdfs on www.phila.gov. The website provides a searchable database of lobbying records, which is searchable by various fields, and is manually updated as new data is released by the City. Another project AxisPhilly worked with is a crime change map that compares statistics before and after Mayor Nutter took office. Hovering your mouse over a neighborhood in this online app displays a data table with values and mini graphs. Casey demonstrated the Actual Value Initiative (AVI) application <http://apps.axisphilly.org/avi-map/> for Philadelphia real estate, which gives an easy to use map that helps users navigate through the data to find the information they are looking for on a given property. He also reviewed some of the various open source solutions used by AxisPhilly in developing these applications for citizens, and mentioned some of the projects that are in the works. Casey fielded many questions about his applications and the work that they do.

Other Business

- The Census Bureau provided 2010 Census Briefs and two articles regarding 2020 Census, updating the definition of Hispanic and removing the term 'Negro'. Economic Census data collection ended, and data should be released by the end of the year. To encourage innovation, APIs have been released (www.census.gov/developer) for limited datasets, including some American Community Survey data. A geography and minority data email list goes out on a monthly basis. Contact Noemi Mendez to be included.
- The DVRPC Work Program was approved for 2014, which starts on July 1, and is available for download from www.dvrpc.org. The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) is having their national conference, co-sponsored by DVRPC, here in Philadelphia on June 23-26, 2013. DVRPC is working with both DOTs. In NJ, DVRPC is working with data sharing of GIS information. In PA, DVRPC is under contract to look at local roads and collect data on small bridges to the state inventory for inspections.
- The Pennsylvania Geospatial Coordinating Committee bill is stalled in legislature.
- The City of Philadelphia's annual Summer GIS Intern program has 12 open positions.
- MAC-URISA is planning a spring meeting in June in Burlington County.
- Philly Tech Week will take place April 19-27. More info about events can be found at www.phillytechweek.com.
- The June 5th IREG meeting will be held at the Census Bureau at 833 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. The September 11 and December 11 meetings will take place at DVRPC, with the December meeting being a Geospatial/Open Source Workshop. For more information, or to help organize, please contact Chris Pollard or Jesse Strangfeld.