

# County's new GIS technology garners excitement

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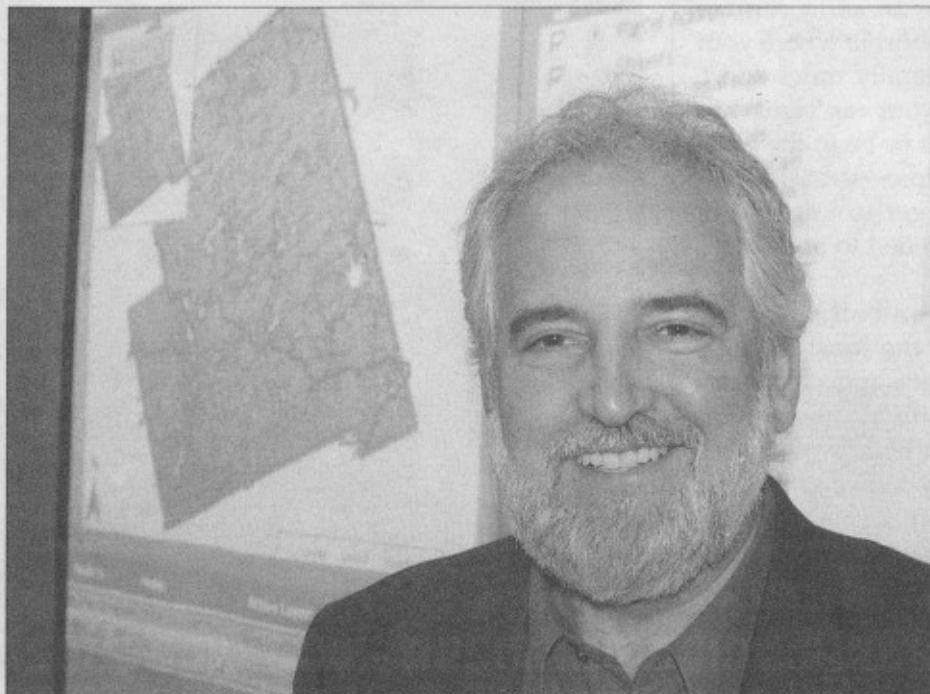
A year since it first put out a request for proposals, Haliburton County is now only a few weeks away from having its own fully operational Geographic Information System. The technology promises to make the job of municipal workers a whole lot smoother.

"I have had access to GIS before in my career and it definitely allows you to do more in less time," says Jane Tousaw, development services co-ordinator and planner for the county.

GIS is a multi-layered map that is connected to various database features, which can in turn be accessed and manipulated via the web. The possible applications for such a software are virtually endless, but the primary purpose of the acquisition is to help with land division applications, road planning, and emergency services. Tousaw says it will cut the time it takes to do land applications by as much as 50 per cent.

Part of the system will be password protected and accessible to municipal employees only. Whatever information is not protected by privacy laws will be fully accessible to the general public from their home computer.

What separates GIS from a typical atlas is that one can add and subtract layers to the map at will. So if you want to view the county's largest lakes, or know the elevation of residences around Tory Hill, or see where major buildings are located in Haliburton, you only have to click a checkmark box and the system will focus in on the desired information. Users can zoom in and zoom out, colour code map



MARTHA PERKINS/ECHO

Tony Bonnici says there are many possible applications to the Geographic Information System he has developed for the county.

information, browse, and do searches.

Its value-added component is that map features are linked to database information. For example, if you were new to the neighbourhood and wanted to invite all the residences on your lake to a house warming party, you could focus in on the vicinity and instantly be given all nearby mailing addresses. However, the names of owners would be withheld for privacy reasons. There is also what is called "metadata", or data about the data, which provides the sources for various types of information.

The system was developed by Tony Bonnici, owner of Geodata Resources

and a GIS professor at Fleming College's Lindsay campus. He implemented a similar system for Peterborough County.

Bonnici says the system is essentially an organized consolidation of already existing data.

"Nowadays there is a wealth of information that is already available. Organizations such as the Ministry of Natural Resources, Teranet (an electronic services provider), and MPAC. The information is available, it's a matter of bringing it together," says Bonnici.

At a meeting of the Economic Diversification Committee on April 5, Bonnici gave members and the public an

overview of the software and garnered suggestions for potential future applications. Some suggested inputting a business directory that can display the location and address of county businesses. Other said it would be useful to identify health resources, so that if you want a chiropractor you are only a click away from finding a name, phone number, and map location. It also garnered enthusiasm from the tourism sector.

"I think the GIS is absolutely amazing for trails," says Lindsay Elder, executive director for the Haliburton Highlands Trails and Tours Network.

Elder says that since they already have all the GPS coordinates for the hiking trails, along with many of the ski and snowmobile trails, it would be fairly straightforward to incorporate it into the county's GIS.

Carol Moffatt of the Stanhope museum wants to see the county go even further and integrate all tourist attractions, from boat launches to art galleries.

"Since they have invested all this energy, time, and money into this, why not take it that one step further and make it into a useful tool for tourism."

Bringing in the system has cost the county \$93,900 plus one full-time GIS technologist, Jessie Lougheed, who is responsible for maintaining it. The project was partially funded by grants from Human Resources Development Canada and GeoSmart, which contributed a total of \$55,000 to the initiative.

The system is presently 95 per cent complete and should be available for municipal workers by the end of April. Tousaw says it will be available to the public no later than January 2006.