

Subject: Website/ Gilbert map

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Thank you for the mention of the MAPS committee and the publication of the sold-properties map recently provided to Gilbert.

The geographic information service that exists within the framework of the city and county assessor's office has recently been bearing visible results. It has been a valuable resource for local government departments for several years. The system integrates various files from a variety of departments and offices by linking them to the location of the parcels. This system would not be possible without the cooperation of the elected Story County officials and various staff members within the Story County and Ames City organizations. The GIS allows much more efficient access to data than previous systems.

Gary Bilyeu and I have been committed to sharing this access by including a budget for the MAPS project within our department budgets, and requesting our respective Conference Boards to fund it. Years ago, the Conference Boards understood that the wide use of the information by several departments could eliminate duplication of efforts. Numerous specialized maps that had been maintained by several departments for specific purposes have been eliminated and current real estate information is much more widely available.

A common, accurate, base map is maintained digitally by the Story County Auditor's office map technician, Scott Wall. The server system, software, training, and public website are funded by the MAPS budgets through the two assessor's offices budgets. Special projects such as the May, 2003 aerial photography are also funneled through MAPS. Currently, we employ a temporary coordinator, Anne Packard whose office is located in the County Assessor's office. She produced the town and city maps and is available to the MAPS committee members.

Current projects include homeland security work with emergency services, and development of services for E-911 and dispatch. GIS is a work in progress. It is never complete because the data associated with the parcels - ownership, value, classification, zoning, land use, etc. - changes daily. As the project has matured, we have discovered that no matter how much the system is refined, more features and details are requested by the departments and the public. Full development is a matter of time and money - there is never too much of either. The MAPS committee

coordinates and prioritizes development of the system. Conference Board funding ensures representation of the interests of the entire county. The boards include the Board of Supervisors, school boards of directors, mayors, and in Ames, the city council.

The official Story County plat maps are now based on the GIS maps. Likewise the official Ames zoning and land use maps, the E911 maps, Story County zoning maps and several others. We anticipate that the map base will also be provided to federal agencies such as the census bureau and FEMA in the future.

Access to the county map database is available to the public through either assessor's website - www.amesassessor.org or www.storryassessor.org Note that coverage for the entire county is available from either site. They are actually the same web site with slightly different front pages and links, hosted by the ProMap Corp. in Ames..

On the opening page, there is an option to View Map. Selecting this brings up a map of the whole county. New users should read the Quickstart Guide and Toolbox Options links first. These are short but informative pages. Also, go to the upper right corner the first time you use the site and select Options to set the default size of the map window.

Once the map is visible, you can click and drag the cursor to define the area to zoom to. It is also possible to search for a parcel first, then use the Show Map option at the bottom of the screen that will zoom to the parcel. As the map scale shows closer views, the data available on the right side changes. At fairly close scale, parcel dimensions are visible.

There is also aerial photography - either 2003 or 1998 - that can be turned on, but this will slow the access. If photography is needed, it should be activated after zooming-in. Changes to the selected information are activated by clicking the Refresh Map button at the bottom of the list - you may need to scroll down to get to the button. The current version of the on-line maps is a trial, and some features and options may be added or eliminated due to speed and server considerations in the near future.

Map images can be right-clicked to save as an image or to print, but the quality may be limited by the screen resolution.

Creation of the website and the display of associated information started with the County Assessor's office, and has developed into the most useful method of providing information to the taxpayers I have ever seen. The two websites generate thousands of "hits" every day.

Within Ames, the variety of information that can be accessed through the assessor's website is simply amazing. Not only can you see that the zoning is, for instance, "HOC", the zoning designation is a link to a description of the zone. If that's not enough information, there is a further link to the City Attorney's web site with the full text of the zoning ordinance. A parcel with a special use permit or a variance usually has a link to the

permit of variance - courtesy of the city clerk's office and the city planning department. Note that text highlighted in a different color is usually a hotlink to more information.

Information about every Story County property's assessed value, taxes due, current ownership, and legal description is provided from Story County's real estate system, thanks to the county's information technology department, the Auditor and the Treasurer. This information is typically updated nightly. A link was added recently to the on-line payment of property taxes through the Treasurer's statewide system.

Each assessor provides data on building size, description, photos, and recent sales. It is possible to search the residential sales to find comparable sales. We've never seen so many well-prepared assessment appeals before.

The impact of this project cannot be overstated. Many city and county employees use the website as their first means of accessing real estate information. The volume of telephone inquires and requests for copies of records in my office has diminished by at least 2/3 since the system went on-line. This has increased productivity in my department.

The two assessor's websites and the access provided to the GIS system for the public is a valuable resource. Local appraisers, insurance agents, Realtors, attorneys and others rapidly adopted the web access and frequently comment on how useful it is. They especially appreciate the ability to research from their home or office, 24 hours a day. Use by the general public is growing steadily as more citizen become aware of the site and the potential uses of the information.

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