

A Faster, Smarter Frankfort

By Jeff Cook, Director of Community Development



As the saying goes, the world is changing so you better change with it. Nowhere else is the expression more true than in the field of information technology. Who would have guessed that your cell phone could take a photo of a barcode, check it against a database and then report back not only where you can buy the product, but also at what price.

You might ask, why is community development talking about technology? The fact of the matter is that your community development department is involved in much more than planning and administering the physical development of the Village. As technology transforms the world we live in, we must also adapt and transform the ways we work and manage information as a village.

One powerful resource is the Village's geographic information system (GIS). The GIS includes a collection of data about the Village and provides tools to analyze, map and communicate the information. You can think of it as Google Maps on steroids.

For instance, the utility department might repair a section of water main several times over a five or ten year period. The seemingly obvious solution is to replace the water main, but if the problem is

recurrent pressure changes, the solution is not only different but also much cheaper. Using GIS tools, we can unveil underlying patterns that can help your officials make the best decisions and employ the appropriate solutions.

Benefits of developing the GIS extend well beyond infrastructure investment decisions. Quick access to accurate information can improve efficiency across the board and enable the Village to truly "do more with less." At no other time is efficiency more important than in today's economy, as budgets tighten and expectations rise.

This summer we will work closely with the utility and public works departments to further develop the Village's GIS and train more staff on its use. You might see Village staff GPS-correcting the location of manholes or valve vaults, verifying the accuracy of existing maps, or using GIS to track maintenance activities. Although GIS remains a secondary activity of community development, we plan to migrate to a server-based GIS this year, which provides the ability to distribute information throughout the Village offices, our website or maybe even cell phones.

As GIS is integrated into all areas of the operation, it's not what we know the GIS can do that is so exciting. It's what we don't know it can do that will likely prove most useful. And in a way, implementing this technology really is community development – from the inside, out. ■

How can you help develop the GIS?

This is an interactive experiment on the concept of "many hands make light work."

The photograph below is a "B-Box." It is the visible part of the control valve between your water service line and the public water main. You probably know where your B-Box is just from mowing the lawn.



It would take Village staff a long time to visit every property to locate and record a specific location of each B-Box, but it will probably take you just a few minutes.

To participate, send an email to gis@vofil.com. Attach a digital photograph of your B-Box in context with nearby improvements; provide measurements describing the location of the B-Box and tell us your address. Try to relate the location of the B-Box to fixed points such as a light pole, fire hydrant, corner of the house, sidewalks or driveways.

If the experiment works well, staff will look for other ways to help you contribute.

Thanks for your help!