

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Adirondack Park Prototype Makes Data Accessible

Albany, NY - The New York State Center for Technology in Government has completed a project that will make information about the Adirondack Park easier to find and use. The research report, Balancing Environmental Quality and Economic Vitality in the Adirondack Park, shows how a computerized geographic information and document system can combine layers of information on natural resources, real property, and physical and civil infrastructure into a single database to answer development questions quickly and easily.

The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) worked with Computer Sciences Corporation and other corporate partners and with the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) to create an "electronic reference desk" prototype that allows agency staff to locate a parcel of land on an electronic map and view all the information needed to determine whether a new development can take place on the site. The system uses electronic maps, as well as documents like deeds, tax information, and other data to present a visual display for the computer user. Agency Chairman Gregory Campbell expressed his appreciation. "Learning how technology can help us work faster, save costs and at the same time, better serve the public is the essential lesson for all of government today."

Land in 12 counties and 105 towns comprise New York's six million acre Adirondack Park. It is the largest state park in the contiguous United States and the largest natural area and designated wilderness east of the Mississippi. The land is owned by the State (42%) as part of the Forest Preserve, and by private interests (58%) for residences or businesses. Maintaining the delicate balance between environmental quality and economic vitality in the region is the mission of the Adirondack Park Agency which must make judgments based on the complex laws regulating land use.

The APA answers 4500 citizen inquiries and issues 400 development permits each year. Gathering all the information necessary to respond to citizens has been an arduous and time-consuming process. Records about real estate must be compared to legal documents, jurisdictional advice, and considerations about endangered species and wetland protection. The staff needed to search extensive paper files causing time delays. For some major projects the turnaround time from inquiry to permission-to-build was weeks or months.

The CTG project demonstrated that a computerized GIS can significantly decrease the amount of time needed to answer a question from the public. For example, telephone calls (which represent two-thirds of APA's total customer contacts) took an average of three days to answer fully before the prototype was built. By using the prototype APA staff could respond in minutes. For other transactions customer waiting time was reduced by 40%. A fast response time makes it possible for citizens to secure mortgages and to proceed with project planning more quickly. The time savings translate into cost savings for both the APA and those seeking answers to land use questions.

According to APA Director of Planning John Banta, "The project helped us identify and test many ways to improve customer service." CTG Director Sharon Dawes said, "The APA project shows how the right technology can help a very small agency do a very big job."

The prototype was developed with data primarily for land in Essex County, but its application can be expanded to other counties with full implementation of the system. APA staff and CTG researchers were able to identify activities, such as phone transactions, map seeking, planning referrals and enforcements where technology would improve responsiveness and reduce operating costs.

The Center for Technology in Government, an Innovations in American Government award winner, forms strategic partnerships with government agencies, technology corporations, and university faculty and students. Thirty-one high tech companies, more than thirty government agencies, and a dozen academic researchers have participated in Center projects since its inception in 1993. Its mission is to solve problems related to public services through the use of information technology in state and local government.