



Dear PaMAGIC Members and Friends:

If you are an avid reader of “PaMAGIC Matters”, then you will doubtless be aware that the Board’s primary focus this year has been to gather support for the formation of a Statewide Geospatial Coordination Council. Some might say that the formation of a statewide GIS council for Pennsylvania is an idea whose time has come, however, that is inaccurate. More to the point, the idea for a GIS council has come – and gone – time and time again.

This most recent push for the formation of a PA GIS council was brought about by the “Geospatial Coordination Strategic Plan for Pennsylvania” which was completed last May. The formation of a council was the primary recommendation of the Strategic Plan (*the rationale for establishing a PA GIS council is laid out in Section 4 of the Strategic Plan*).

Since last May’s Pennsylvania GIS Conference, the PaMAGIC board has taken up the mantle for council formation. In August, we hosted a work session to develop plans and materials aimed at educating legislators and decision makers on the importance of GIS and the need for a GIS Council. Board members and work session participants began seeking endorsements of the Strategic Plan and its call for the formation of a PA GIS council. To date, we have received endorsements from the following:

- Pennsylvania Chapter of the Management Association for Private Photogrammetric Surveyors (PA-MAPPS)
- Northwestern Pennsylvania GIS User Group
- Pennsylvania County GIS Professionals
- The Central Appalachian Chapter of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA-CAC)
- Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and Affiliates (PASSHE) GIS Consortium
- FEMA Region III
- American Planning Association - Pennsylvania Chapter (APA-PA)
- Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association (PMAA)

Moving forward, the PaMAGIC Board, in conjunction with PA-MAPPS, has organized a “GIS Congress” meeting. The aim of this meeting will be to determine the best course of action to make a council a reality. Of course we are continuing to seek endorsements of the Strategic Plan and welcome any additional support.

Aside from detailing the particulars of this current council formation endeavor, I feel I should relate some questions that were posed to me recently with regard to this topic: “*Why do we need a council?*”; “*What will we get out of it?*”; and “*Won’t a council just be another layer of government?*”. Upon answering, I noted the Strategic Plan’s recommendation. I went on to relate my experience with another state’s version of a GIS council, the New Jersey Geospatial Forum (NJGF). The NJGF seems to work well in terms of fostering communication about geospatial issues over a broad spectrum of users (Federal, State, County, Private Industry, and Non-Profit). Back in 2006, I participated in the Forum’s 2007 Orthoimagery Task Force. The task force was formed to “identify and clarify” issues pertaining to the 2007 flight. This task force brought together a diverse group of geospatial professionals who had an interest in, or experience with, orthoimagery. We were able to provide input to the State with regard to



PaMAGIC President's Letter – January 12, 2010

planning for their upcoming project. Through the NJ Geospatial Forum, various task forces have been formed to examine other issues that are important to the GIS community in the State. Examples of what a PA GIS council might do include the following: advocate for the resumption of state funding for the PAMAP program; increase support for PASDA; continue to develop data sharing standards; and promote GIS as an essential tool to help make government run more efficiently in an effort to provide citizens of the Commonwealth with better services.

As for adding an additional layer of government, in my opinion, the GIS council should not have that effect in the sense that it is supposed to be an advisory body. In other words, if a member or members of the GIS community feel that a particular issue needs attention, or (as was the case with the aforementioned NJ orthoimagery task force) the State wants the community's input on a GIS-related matter, or program, the GIS council could facilitate this exchange of information. Obviously, the eventual structure of the council, and which state agency (assuming that it's formed by either legislative action, or executive order) is the primary conduit for passing recommendations to the powers that be, will have a bearing on its efficacy.

It is my hope, and that of the PaMAGIC Board, that the Strategic Plan's vision of the creation of a GIS council comes to fruition. Although the process is far from complete, progress has been made. Only with the continued support of the PaMAGIC membership and the GIS community at-large, do we have a chance of making it happen.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn F. McNichol".

Glenn McNichol

PaMAGIC President, 2009-2010

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2009-2010 PaMAGIC Board

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