

## **GIS Empowers Planning, Zoning and Building**

The Planning, Zoning and Building Department's daily workflow historically involved parcel-level research using multiple data sources. Multiple sets of static paper maps were consulted to determine the land use, zoning and flood zone information for a property. The data on these maps would only be as current as the day the map was manually updated. Reviewing an application using out-of-date data could lessen the integrity of decisions made by staff.

GIS Technology has made it possible to capture the data found on paper maps by creating computer-based "intelligent" features that allow a user to analyze, manage and display this data graphically. Regular updates to these features allow PZ&B staff to access up-to-date information as necessary. Search and analysis tools are available that assist users in quickly assessing any area of the county. PZ&B is also able to share consistently updated data across the enterprise GIS system benefiting other departments within the County.

This technology has now been incorporated into PZ&B's EPZB System. The GIS data is utilized "behind the scenes" through spatial queries using parcel data. The result is a conveniently displayed report. The data can also be accessed through the EZInfo web application. Staff can retrieve information regarding the property's owner, land use and current zoning all in one place. EZInfo also lets users keep track of where new applications are in the zoning process, as well as giving a history of zoning activity. Staff can visualize the information on a map and see the property in relation to its surrounding area.

Customers often require zoning, land use and flood zone information. Previously, they contacted PZ&B by phone or came into the office to access this information. Now this information can be retrieved online in a quick and efficient manner. By making this information available to the public via the Internet, applicants are better prepared beforehand. This not only makes the application process move more efficiently, it in turn cuts down on the wait time for the public to get the information they need.

For many years, Planners have used GIS analysis and models to create various scenarios showing the impact a development would have on a community or the county as a whole. This type of analysis is also used to identify specific neighborhoods needing additional county resources. Using GIS, this information can easily be shared with others and displayed in reports and maps.

Beyond the daily benefits of using GIS, PZ&B has also provided support for hurricane damage assessment. GIS allows staff to more effectively collect and analyze damage assessment data following a hurricane or storm event. This information is extremely valuable for producing a visual overview of the damage after a storm. By automating the process through digital data collection in the field, PZ&B can reduce errors and accelerate the delivery of critical information to agencies like FEMA which aid in the County's recovery.