



## **Pennsylvania GIS Congress**

**A Strategy & Report on establishment of a Pennsylvania Geospatial Council**

**Prepared for the  
Pennsylvania Mapping and Geographic Information Consortium  
(PaMAGIC)**

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## Pennsylvania GIS Congress

More than 60 individuals participated in a GIS “congress” on January 14, 2010 to discuss a strategy for establishing a GIS Coordination Council in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Approximately 50 persons attended a session at the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS) in Enola, PA and 15 participated via conference call and WebEx.

The meeting was facilitated by John and Nick Palatiello of the firm of John M. Palatiello & Associates, Inc., Reston, VA.

The meeting was opened by Glenn McNichol, President of the convening organization, PaMAGIC, the Pennsylvania Mapping and Geographic Information Consortium. Mr. McNichol introduced the facilitators for the meeting.

The audience included a cross section of stakeholders from the broad geospatial community: data producers, users and IT professionals; government at all levels; private sector; universities; and non-profit associations.

Participants contributed reasons a GIS Council was needed in Pennsylvania. Among those listed was:

- Cost savings
- Increase the visibility of GIS in the Commonwealth and make GIS pervasive throughout government
- Provide business opportunities
- Provide a focus for base mapping
- To educate and inform elected officials of the benefits and applications of GIS
- Provide the spatial data infrastructure needed for effective emergency preparedness and response
- Provide a governance and organizational structure
- Enhance the efficiency and safety of utility operations and applications
- Stabilize funding
- Encourage standards
- Facilitate a strategic statewide approach to projects and investments
- Open lines of communication between different levels of government
- Provide a program to take advantage of economies of scale and to leverage investments
- Provide a forum to facilitate new partnerships and collaboration between public, academic and government sectors
- Provides stability in the management of GIS activities that transcend changing administrations
- A tool for transparency in decision making.

These benefits, along with those outlined in a [Geospatial Coordination Strategic Plan for Pennsylvania](#) provide the major talking points for advocacy of a Council.

A discussion was held to solicit from the audience the outcome of doing nothing. This discussion listed a number of disadvantages the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will suffer and experience if a GIS Council is not established. Items listed were:

- Taxpayers will continue to pay for duplication of data collection efforts
- A proliferation of data for each layer will occur without an authoritative single source and a fractionalization of redundant efforts
- Gaps in statewide coverage
- Lack of consistency in statewide data sets
- Lack of efficiency
- Inability to prepare for or respond to emergencies
- Public health, welfare and safety will be adversely affected
- The Commonwealth's economic development efforts will suffer as a result of not having GIS data that other states have for business recruitment, natural resource development, impacting such potential job-creating activities as Marcellus Shale.

Although legislation to establish a GIS Council has been introduced in the Pennsylvania General Assembly in the past, such efforts have not been successful. The participants conducted an evaluation of those efforts to determine why they did not succeed.

- The members of the geospatial community are largely technically-oriented, not politically oriented; the community is not experienced in or knowledgeable of effective strategies and tactics for educating and informing elected officials, particularly in the General Assembly; while the challenge has always been political (not technical), a community of technologists are not experienced in political activities
- The community has not identified and supported a political champion
- Those who do communicate with legislators often get muddled in details and fail to articulate a big picture vision
- A coherent, effective common message that is articulated by all members of the community has never been developed or communicated, nor has there been a strategy for all stakeholders to implement; there has not been an effective coalition of stakeholders working in a coordinated, strategic manner in support of a Council bill; and the community at large has not been mobilized to support the bill
- The complexity of the technology and the inability of the community to communicate with legislators with a simple message
- Cost savings have not been quantified or articulated, a cost/benefit analysis has not been conducted, and a business case or return on investment (ROI) analysis has not been made
- Turf battles and institutional rivalries have not been overcome (e.g. Executive Branch vs. Legislative Branch).

The past success in establishing and funding programs such as PA One-Call and the PAMAP program were evaluated to determine positive lessons learned. Major points made were:

- PA One-Call was successful because it found ways to be self sustainable
- PAMAP was created because there was a champion in the Governor’s Cabinet (the Secretary of DCNR) who had a good working relationship with the governor and the business need was made apparent at that time.

There was a discussion of what legal responsibilities individuals or organizations have with regard to communicating with the General Assembly and whether such activities fall within the Pennsylvania law definition of “lobbying”.

For information on such requirements, see:

[www.pano.org/publicpolicy/publicpolicy-lobbying\\_state\\_summary.php](http://www.pano.org/publicpolicy/publicpolicy-lobbying_state_summary.php)

[www.pagr.org](http://www.pagr.org)

[www.palobbyingservices.state.pa.us/Act134/Default.aspx](http://www.palobbyingservices.state.pa.us/Act134/Default.aspx)

Generally, individuals who are not paid to lobby, or who are volunteers, or are compensated less than \$2,500 per quarter to lobby, are not required to register as a lobbyist or file lobbying reports.

It was noted that all government employees should consult their supervisors prior to engaging in any communication (other than as an individual, private citizen), and staff or members of associations should consult their association leadership before engaging in any communication on behalf of the association or using the association’s name.

There was a brief discussion of the pros and cons of 3 different types of council formation: by Executive Order, by Legislation, and by Self Appointment. All participants favored a legislative approach, while one participant favored an Executive Order as well.

At this point, Mr. Garth Shipman, staff director for the Republicans on the House Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, discussed the latest draft of Representative Russ Fairchild’s legislation.

Pending final input from the organizations represented in the meeting, the bill will be introduced in the coming weeks.

It creates an advisory council with 17 members - 9 appointed by the Governor, 4 by each caucus, 4 organizational designees (PaMAGIC, PA-MAPPS, County GIS Pros & PA One-Call), and 6 ex-officio, non-voting members from the Governor’s Cabinet, and a Federal representative from USGS. The Council will meet four times per year, prepare an annual report with findings for the Governor, promote GIS technology, create task forces for specific issues, solicit public input, and establish a fund to accept appropriations or contributions to pay for the Council’s activities. The Office of Administration will provide administrative support from its existing funding. The bill differs from previous bills in that it accommodates concerns and feedback from the geospatial community and the Governor’s office.

The participants discussed steps it needs to take to build a consensus around Rep. Fairchild’s bill. The steps agreed to were as follows:

Each organization should review the draft bill and forward comments to Glenn McNichol before Thursday, January 21. Comments should be in two categories:

- (1) “deal-breaker” - something in or omitted from the bill that an organization strongly objects to and therefore would actively oppose the bill,
- (2) “I would like to have” suggestions that are not otherwise cause to oppose the bill.

On Thursday, January 21, there will be a conference call/WebEx. Each organization is to appoint two (2) delegates to represent the association on the call. The meeting is to gather comments on the draft bill and convey them to Mr. Shipman for rep. Fairchild.

PA One-Call has a meeting scheduled for January 27 in Harrisburg and offered a room for the delegates to meet. The purpose of that meeting is to finalize a strategy and begin implementation. By that time, a final bill will likely be drafted, a bill number and the committee of referral will be known.

The strategy for getting the bill passed is as follows:

- Organize a strong coalition to support the bill. The coalition will not only include those who have already endorsed the [Geospatial Coordination Strategic Plan for Pennsylvania](#), but other organizations that are involved in GIS and would benefit from the Council (e.g. PSATS, PA NENA, Tech Quest, engineers, architects, surveyors).
- Develop a simple, one-page, non-technical advocacy document with a layman, and legislator, as the target audience. The paper shall be non-technical.
- Develop a more detailed white paper that provides more background on the need for and benefits of a Council. The paper shall be non-technical and directed at laymen legislators.
- Coordinate among lobbyists representing members of the Coalition.
- Develop other tools for communication –
  - OpEds and letters to the editor for newspapers
  - Web site, Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, e-newsletter
  - Sample grass roots letter and emails for individual GIS stakeholders to send their legislators
  - Sample grass tops letter and emails for associations to send to legislators
- Once a bill is introduced, contact needs to be made with the House Democrat leadership and the chairman of the committee or jurisdiction.
- The focus will initially be in the House, with the Senate to come later.
- Contact should also be made with the Governor’s Office to indicate the coalition’s support for the bill and urge the Governor’s support.
- Virtually every county has a GIS office; they should individually contact their Representative in support and work within their county approval process to generate county letters to their Representatives.
- Organize a GIS Day in the Capitol for members of the community to visit their legislators.  
is another potential organization

Implementation of this plan by a coordinated, dedicated and motivated coalition of organizations, and grass roots individuals will greatly increase the likelihood of the Pennsylvania Geospatial Community making a GIS Council a reality.