

# Vernonia GIS Ready To Take the Next Step

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According to Pickner and Fousek, Vernonia GIS will be used by the city to assist in land use issues, including code and permit enforcement as well as by city staff for property parcel management. It will also be used on multiple levels by the Public Works Department to map utilities, track and schedule maintenance, and plan street repairs and improvements. It is already being used for flood plain management and will be used as part of the Transportation Plan Update that the city has just begun. Pickner has already begun reorganizing the database that the city already has, so information is easily accessible and can be more easily analyzed. And the system will also be used to catalogue and manage assets that are valuable to the city, like water meters.

"For me, personally, it is a treat to see the GIS platform emerging," says City Administrator Haack. "I cut my teeth in college learning geology and geography using pencils and paper to create maps that led to a social science degree, so it is humbling to see what changes are made in this field since the 60's and 70's and what a service to a community mapping still is."

Maybe most importantly, Vernonia GIS will give the City a way to document its "Institutional Memory"-- in other words, the recording of information that is often lost or hard to recover or locate when the city has a changeover in personnel, staff, committee members or elected officials. "A key function of GIS," says Fousek, "is that when things happen, the system is recording them and storing them forever. So when the City wants to do something, they can have a realistic snapshot of what is really going on, and a clear understanding of how a

project or issue developed to a certain point."

Fousek and Pickner believe Vernonia GIS will help the City make better decisions, save money, and improve efficiency and help the city manage itself, its staff, its projects and funding.

"In my experience with GIS, that's what it's always been about-- find a way to improve systems that are already in place or to model information in a way that a computer can analyze it much more effectively than individuals can," says Pickner.

Pickner officially started working on the project on September 1st. He is a 2005 graduate of Southern Oregon University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Geography, with a Minor in Land Use Planning. He also holds a GIS Graduate Certificate from Portland State University.

Vernonia GIS will be looking at past records and data sets and analyzing project management methods. It's further development is expected to uncover many inefficiencies, past mistakes and poor decision-making by the city. "We're obviously going to find issues," says Pickner. "But the idea is that from this point forward, let's try to improve how we are functioning."

"My vision is to find major challenges for the city," says Pickner. "What are the most important things that we can set up and help the city do for long-term use-- get them identified, developed and put in place."

The use of data in a spatial format as opposed to rows and columns is what makes GIS so unique and functional in a public jurisdiction. GIS often works in map formats and has the ability to place layers of data over those maps to help analyze and show patterns and clusters. "I'm really taking tools that have been

designed for other municipalities and just utilizing them," says Pickner. "I'm not reinventing the wheel, I'm just taking the wheel and attaching it to Vernonia."

Pickner is very aware of the city's current limited financial resources and will focus on developing programs that will be cost-effective or save the city money. "I know the city has a very limited budget, so my goal is to find individual projects that will benefit the city and hopefully provide extra funding," says Pickner. "That is a huge goal of mine-- find ways to save or make the city money." "GIS allows you to pinpoint where best to spend resources," says Fousek. "When the city makes a decision to spend capital on projects, they and the citizens know, because we have this system in place, that the money is being spent in the best possible way and are getting the most improvement for the dollar."

And that's where, according to Fousek and Pickner, the rest of Vernonia citizens can play a role.

"For users of GIS, it is often defined as 'Hardware, Software, Data, and People'-- and 'People' is the most important factor," says Fousek. "And it's not just GIS People, but the end-users and the people who benefit from what the GIS system is doing. In other words, the community as a whole."

Fousek and Pickner are still developing ideas about how to best communicate with the Vernonia community about the development of the GIS system, and how to receive and integrate community input. But for Vernonia GIS to be most effective, it will need citizen involvement on some level.

"The benefit of getting multiple inputs is that it allows us to develop it further," says Pickner. "Without that input, there are the limitations of us not knowing what we are missing. I really

feel a major design piece for this project for the city is to find the flaws in the system. If we can set up a system that makes the city manage itself better, then it will really provide the benefit that it initially set out to do."

Fousek believes that Vernonia is actually getting itself ahead of the curve by developing a GIS system early. GIS will be the wave of the future as far as collecting, recording and sharing data and information. The system that he and Pickner are envisioning for this small community of 2,370 people will be the envy of small communities around the state. "This will be as good or better than any system that a town of this size has anywhere in the state of Oregon," says Fousek. "It's pretty rare for a city of this size to have this kind of system," adds Pickner.

Fousek believes a good GIS system will help when the city goes to recruit new staff. He also believes it will help the city deal with future requirements as GIS becomes more mainstream and used by more county and state agencies. "The state will eventually demand that every public jurisdiction have a GIS system and be able to provide specific GIS data," says Fousek. "Some of these systems are already being built by the state."

As Vernonia GIS develops, even more uses will hopefully be uncovered. Pickner is planning to write a monthly newspaper column that will be printed in *Vernonia's Voice* which will help keep the citizens of Vernonia informed about the progress of Vernonia GIS.

*If you have questions or would like more information about Vernonia GIS, you can contact Sean Pickner at [vernoniagis@gmail.com](mailto:vernoniagis@gmail.com)*

