Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Information Resource Exchange Group
Highlights from meeting of Wednesday, December 11, 2013

The 89th meeting of the Information Resources Exchange Group (IREG) was called to order at the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's office by Noemi Mendez, Information Services Specialist at the U.S. Census Bureau, and IREG Chair. Fifty-six people were in attendance. Highlights from the September 11 meeting were available as a handout and on the internet.

Presentations

Robert Cheetham, Founder and Owner, Azavea began the geospatial presentations with ideas on the future of GIS, mapping, geospatial technology, tools, and social connections. As internet speeds and reliability increases, more data processing can occur on the web allowing large data sets to be analyzed and mined for useful information worldwide. Collaboration is a key asset in the web industry and provides a driving force for innovation. Open data standards provide access and interoperability and fulfills the public's interest in governmental data.

John Duchneskie, Graphics Editor, Philadelphia Inquirer shared how he uses GIS as a journalist. Although he is not a programmer or GIS Analyst, he uses graphic representations of data to enhance his stories and provide additional perspective for readers of the Inquirer. He noted that mapping data can be the impetus for a story or merely serve as an illustration. The data analysis provides evidence for investigative journalism and builds credibility in reporting.

Aaron Ogle, Chief Technology Office, OpenPlans demoed Leaflet, highlighting its simplicity, performance and usability. Leaflet supports a variety of plugins, keeping the core library small and allowing for each application to be extremely light and customized. OpenPlans has used Leaflet for clients ranging from Chicago Bike Share to New York City Taxi Stands.

Andrew Hill, Senior Scientist, Vizzuality presented an online data analysis and mapping resource called CartoDB. CartoDB is a complete solution to providing beautiful, easy to understand data visualizations. It also provides an integrated admin interface and database for easy manipulation and configuration of data. Andrew also hosted a workshop on getting started with CartoDB following the meeting.

Dana Bauer, Developer and Community Advocate, Rackspace and Michelle Schmitt, Principal, Maneto Mapping and Analysis gave examples of how balloon mapping can be a cost effective and valuable resource to urban planning. Their experiments in Philadelphia included pedestrian counts of Eakins Oval during the summer of 2013 where they found citizens are interested in the process and provided valuable feedback. Their goal through balloon mapping is to understand the use of public space, guide investment, and evaluate the success of public space initiatives.

Lauren Gilchrist, Manager of Research & Analysis, Center City District explored the various

demographic datasets used by the Center City District in their annual analysis and reporting to help shape public policy and economic research in Philadelphia. Various agencies, including U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, and U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, provide regional-, county-, and municipal-level data valuable for economic development.

Andrew Thompson, Community Evangelist, Azavea shared insights on how civic hacking can benefit local government and how to successfully host a civic hacking event. Building on open data initiatives and focusing on providing high-quality datasets gives agencies and organizations a task, but experts are needed to use and interpret data. Local citizens can provide a fresh perspective on relationships between disparate datasets, identify errors, provided feedback, and create innovative metrics. Hosting open data online and providing easy to use APIs to developers can provide valuable information to the public and fulfill state and federal regulations.

Mike Tedeschi, Lead UI/UX Designer, Azavea presented his process for developing high quality user experience and user interface design in web and mapping applications. For developers, the goal is not to provide data, but useful information. Applications should work as users expect, not as developers expect. Equipping users to perform the work they need to do is most important. Fewer features and less functionality can be beneficial if it improves user performance.

Atanas Entchev, ENTCHEV GIS Architects presented his observations on why developers and users miscommunicate, the problems that exist in the development process, and how to bridge the gap in communication. Defining metrics and avoiding fuzzy terminology and emotions can encourage professional understanding. Connecting with users before beginning development of new applications can help ensure that the requirements and specifications are accurate and valuable. He also supported quality search results, auto-complete functionality, and simplicity over web maps, complex data layers, and complicated interfaces.

John Reiser, Coordinator, Geospatial Research Lab, Rowan University presented the future of web maps as the next boring thing. The popularity of web mapping will eventually lead to web maps being commonplace and instantly recognizable by the general public. In order to maintain relevance and function and avoid obscurity, three principles should be remembered during the development process. First, usefulness for the users is most important. Web mapping applications must provide relevant, usable information. In addition, applications need to be accessible. Operations and functionality that cannot be performed by every users prevents the application from succeeding in its goals. Finally, applications and workflows must be understandable. Overly complex applications are burdensome for users, and high learning curves lead to applications that are quickly abandoned.

Other Business
- A workshop lead by Andrew Hill on how to use CartoDB followed the meeting. The workshop included an introduction to the online user interface and solutions to common

data mapping and representation requests.

- Jason Miller, GIS Specialist, Burlington County Bridge Commission was nominated for chair by Joe Fazekas. There being no additional nominations from the floor, Jason Miller was unanimously elected as chair for calendar year 2014. Cynthia McCoy, GIS Risk Analyst, FEMA Region III was nominated as vice chair for 2014 by Joe Fazekas. There being no additional nominations from the floor, Cynthia McCoy was unanimously elected as vice chair.
- The 2014 IREG meeting dates are March 5th, June 4th, September 10th, and December 10th and are scheduled to take place at DVRPC.