

Smile: You May Have Been on Candid Camera Updated GIS System to Benefit Economic Development



A van mounted with front and side cameras was used to photograph streets and buildings throughout Clark County.

Back in April and early May you might have seen cars cruising our city and county streets armed with cameras.

Overhead, you were probably unaware that an airplane was flying about capturing a birds-eye view of Clark County.

Not to worry, there was nothing sinister occurring. Well, maybe you should worry if your activities were of the criminal kind. Those photos just might be used by the Sheriff's Department or the City Police when conducting raids.

Used in many ways

Or, the Geographical Information System (GIS) also might be used by the fire department to save valuable time in locating a fire hydrant or determining the best approach to a building that's in flames.

Until now, such views of where we live were available only through Google Earth. In Springfield and Clark County, as in most cities, only aerial photos have been available.

Clark County is the second in Ohio after Wood County to utilize the iLookAbout system that provides a 180-degree street level view of locations around the county.

The public, however, will only have access to a static front end view of a particular property due to licensing restrictions. Internally, within the city and county offices, users will have a crystal clear streetscape view of a specific address.

The uses for such a system are many.

County Senior GIS Specialist Shayne Gray said one of his duties is addressing and mapping road signs for the 911 system.

"When I have a question, I pull up the existing images and I can't make out the house numbers so I usually have to have someone drive by and verify the address," he said

Images sharper

With these sharper images, he will be able to zoom in on the house number.

"The difference is pretty amazing from what we have now," Gray said.

The utilities department can look at manholes, sidewalks, curbs, street lights, stop signs, street signs and road conditions as taken on that April-May date.

Economic development officials have found what's now available on the site of great value, but the improvements will make Springfield and Clark County even more responsive to the needs of a prospective business.

City, county merge systems

For one, the city and county are merging their GIS systems under the direction of the county auditor's office.

Prior to merging, a person might mistakenly call the county for information about a city property and be told to call the city or vice versa.

Additional data to be included in the new mapping data are:

- Location of sewer and water lines

- Does the property have city sewer and water?
- Where are the lines located in relation to the building or the property?
- Is the property in an Enterprise Zone, making it eligible for a property tax exemption?

Economic development tool

"It's not always easy information to get, especially quickly," said David Zak, Chamber Vice President, Economic Development. "This is great information to have at my fingertips."

County Auditor George Sodders said it will put local economic development officials at an advantage because they will be able to respond more rapidly to inquiries.

"This will be a real plus for development," he said.

Zak said he will be able to answer an inquiry about the nearest sewer and water line and the depth from the new information without having to make a phone call.

Additionally, he will get not only an updated aerial view of a property, but now will have at least a static street view.

"Clark County has done a nice job with the GIS system for a while and the information is extremely useful in economic development. It helps us fulfill one of our most important functions, which is to be aware of and maintain current information on properties that become available," Zak said.

Homeowners can use system

Homeowners can get detailed information on the site, too. Information on single-family homes with previous sale prices, previous owner, square footage, layout and additional details are currently available. A current photo will be added as will a 2005 photo.

Tanya Schilling, Director of Computer Operations in the auditor's office, said two additions are a levy estimator on a specific property if, for example, a school district has proposed a levy. Additionally, a tax estimator has been included so if buying in a particular district and knowing the market value, it will estimate taxes for the property.

"We are trying to put as much information on the Web so they don't have to call in here or come in here," Schilling said.