



Lake County Creates No-Cost Solution for Development Application Tracking

A Case Study

Highlights

- No cost web based access to development information
- Government transparency
- Empower staff with simple map making functions

Return on Investment (ROI)

- Less phone time = more productive staff time
- Better informed public
- More highly trained technical staff can concentrate on more advanced projects

Contact Us

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Using Cloud Computing technology and a simple internet browser interface, Lake County's Growth Management Department is able to share with the public information and locations of proposed commercial and residential developments that are under review by the Development Review Staff at no cost to the tax payer.



Background

During the housing boom of the 1990's and 2000's Lake County changed from a mostly rural agricultural makeup to more urban. From 2000 to 2009 alone the population increased from approximately 210,000 to over 306,000—a 68% increase—and the number of housing units jumped by over 70%. With the internet becoming widely used in county offices in the late 1990's, and a GIS started in 1998, Lake County was doing

everything it could to keep up with growth—not only in population, but in information and the demand for service.

The Issue

Lake County government has always prided itself on its transparency to the public and has willingly shared public information freely. However, most of the information pertaining to new development activity and the Development Review process had to be requested which generated a fair number of phone calls and walk-in visits. Prior to the internet there was no cost effective method of disseminating this fast-flowing stream of dynamic data, and even since the county “went online”, there was still no central point of distribution to the public at large for the dissemination of information about proposed development in an easily understood format.

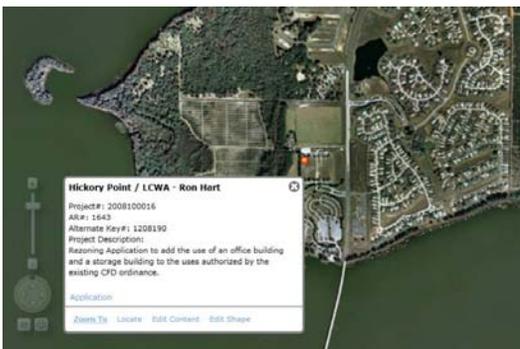
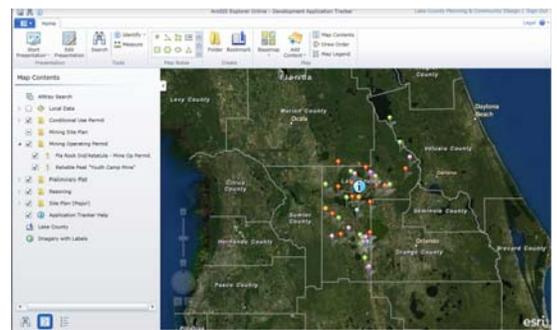
As development activity increased, citizens, unaware of new development proposals, would call the county offices asking for information. County staff began spending more and more time trying to answer these questions and less time on managing the continued influx of development requests.

By 2007 it was realized that an interactive web map might be the answer. Development activity could be identified spatially with information attached that could show details of the proposal. But the county GIS and programming staff were already stretched thin and the project became a lower priority as other more pressing projects dominated the time of staff. With the downturn in the economy and subsequent staff lay-offs the project was nearly abandoned due to the lack of resources and staff.

The Solution

Thanks to the growth of Cloud Computing - “internet-based computing, whereby shared resources, software, and information are provided to computers and other devices on demand”¹ - there now exists [ArcGIS Explorer Online](#). This is a web based mapping application that allows users to quickly create and share spatial information. Lake County is now leveraging this new resource as a platform for an interactive map called [Development Application Tracker](#) that graphically displays the locations of proposed developments within the county along with a brief description of the project. A staff case manager with no programming or GIS mapping experience is able to quickly create and maintain the map to identify the location of developments and then share that map on the World Wide Web.

Anyone with a computer and internet connection can now view the [Development Application Tracker](#) map, locate their neighborhood and see what property is under consideration for development. By simply clicking on a pin on the map the user can get the applicants name, the project number, the alternate key number (the tax account number), and a brief description of the project. An information icon in the center of the map acts like a “Help”



button explaining how to

use the map and where to go for additional information. There is also a link to the Planning & Community Design Division web page where citizens can get more information and can become more active participants in county growth.

The Benefits

By using a free web based application that requires no special skills in programming or web development, Lake County has avoided the costs of web application development; increased the number of staff that can take charge of their own information to get it to the public in a timely manner; and reduced the time needed to answer phone calls for simple questions, allowing

staff to become more productive. As demonstrated in the Lake County Case Study, [Lake County GIS Web Solutions Realizes a Staggering Return on Investment](#), saving staff time can offset thousands of tax dollars annually. It also helps citizens be more informed to make better decisions, and increases government transparency.

Additionally, by placing the creation and update of simple mapping applications in the hands of less technical staff, county programmers, web developers, and GIS staff are free to concentrate on more highly skilled tasks that will in turn add additional benefits and return on investment to Lake County.

¹ Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloud_computing