

4

ADVANCING YORKEXPLORER THROUGH GEOCONNECTIONS FUNDING

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, February 19, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council accept the awarded funding of \$100,000 from the Public Agency Connectivity opportunity of the GeoConnections Program, Natural Resources Canada, prior to approval of the 2004 Business Plan and Budget.
2. The Regional Solicitor and Director of Geomatics be authorized to immediately negotiate a formal funding agreement with representatives of the GeoConnections program establishing the Advancing YorkExplorer Project deliverables and payment schedules.
3. The Regional Chair and Clerk be authorized to execute the final agreement prior to March 31, 2004.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks council endorsement for the Advancing YorkExplorer Project, acceptance of the GeoConnections grant and approval to proceed with the project. Approval is being sought at this time to ensure that proper authority is established when Geomatics enters negotiations with GeoConnections regarding funding levels to supplement application and data improvements in the 2004 YorkExplorer work plan.

3. BACKGROUND

YorkExplorer is one of the most visited components of the Region's website. In 2003, YorkExplorer had more than 6000 visitors and 48,930 maps were downloaded. Enhancement of YorkExplorer is an ongoing activity in order to create access to more geospatial information and maps while improving business processes of internal clients, partners and public access. An extensive user needs study of business units and YorkInfo Partners was conducted in 2003. Suggested enhancements were initiated as part of the approved Geomatics 2003 plan and included in the 2004 business plan. The resources to advance the technology base of YorkExplorer were included in the approved 2003 business plan and budget of the Information Technology and Services Division of the Finance Department at an amount of \$20,000 per year for 5 years for a dedicated web map server. The Advancing YorkExplorer Project will further improve YorkExplorer as an effective tool for staff and enhanced citizen access.

The GeoConnections program of the federal government announced a Public Agency Connectivity opportunity to support the publishing of geospatial information and services to the GeoConnections Discovery Portal. To do so requires adoption of Canadian Geographic Data Infrastructure endorsed standards and specifications. Conforming to these standards is consistent with the direction of YorkExplorer and the auditors' recommendations regarding data management and its continuous improvements. The results will be to provide Canadians with York Region links to on-demand access to geospatial data, tools and applications to and from all participants of the Canadian Geographic Data Infrastructure network and other agencies which comply with their published standards.

Recognizing the opportunity to meet user needs and auditors' recommendation for continuous improvement and documentation of information and data management, Geomatics developed and submitted a proposal to enhance access and usage of geospatial information through improvements to YorkExplorer. Key outcomes will be the addition of a geospatial information catalogue informing users regarding the data available to them through the Internet, spatial data internet services which are accessible by various mapping applications regardless of software manufacturer (a convention called "open standards"), and enhanced user interface and application assistance within YorkExplorer itself.

As a result, citizens of York Region will be able to include map layers from any organization that serves their data using the CGDI standards, geospatial information accessible only with the York Region network could be made available to any person with an Internet connection, spatial information can be incorporated with that of any local, regional, provincial or federal agency which employs the CGDI standards.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Option 1: Reject the GeoConnections funding and drop the Advancing YorkExplorer Project

This would limit the resources available for YorkExplorer to the current level. This would not allow Geomatics to migrate YorkExplorer onto an open standards architecture, and would greatly limit the development of metadata information and services. Efforts in YorkExplorer would be confined to support immediate user needs, limited data update and unavoidable technical advancements.

This course of action would see YorkExplorer remaining within its currently obsolete technology, and would impede York Region's ability to exchange geospatial information with its various business partners and its citizen's ability to view this information. The current technology does not support metadata servicing, making this information available allows users to discover and identify information of use to them, providing this

information will require processes well removed from any data maintenance and documentation processes.

Option 2: Accept the GeoConnections funding and act on the Advancing YorkExplorer Project

This would augment the resources available for YorkExplorer ensuring that the underlying technology can be updated and that the architecture is migrated to emerging standards. This would allow for the adoption of open standards to some of the geospatial data currently available in YorkExplorer and will define the data management procedures which will allow more data to be made available. It will allow the migration of core YorkExplorer functionalities to more a flexible technology platform building on current investments in data management and will ensure a sustainable system.

This course of action would see YorkExplorer moving to a more flexible technology allowing better access to current York Region geospatial information to its workers, citizens, and visitors. Metadata support will be strongly knit to data maintenance procedures and the new technology will enable the viewing of data from York Region, its partners, neighbouring regions, local, provincial and federal agencies that implement open standards.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed GeoConnections Advancing YorkExplorer Project is estimated at \$200,000 including a fifty percent (\$100,000) investment from GeoConnections. The Region's fifty percent contribution is comprised of in-kind investment, and cash contributions allocated within the proposed 2004 Geomatics and Information Technology Services business plan and budget as part of on going infrastructure improvements, leveraging investments of YorkInfo Partners and those already in place.

The GeoConnections investment augments the resources associated with the strategic improvements required of the technical architecture of YorkExplorer. A small proportion of the investment is required to adopt the CGDI specifications thereby meeting the qualifications of GeoConnections. One of the requirements for investment from GeoConnections is that sixty percent of the awarded grant (a proposed value of \$60,000) be contracted to the private sector.

In launching the project, the Region will not incur any advance expenses, since the proposed payment schedule calls for an advance payment at project launch and two additional subsequent payments.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Advancing YorkExplorer Project will enable new ways of information discovery and access leveraging the value of geographic information held by York Region and its YorkInfo partners, of which the nine local municipalities are a member.

The Town of Richmond Hill has agreed to contribute to this project through complementary activities identified within its 2004 work plan which will be incorporated into the metadata integration and access component of this project.

7. CONCLUSION

With the approval of Council to accept the award of \$100,000 from the GeoConnections program, Geomatics will undertake the Advancing YorkExplorer Project to the benefit of internal and external users of YorkExplorer.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.