ABOUT MERRITT

Well known as the Country Music Capital of Canada, the City of Merritt is in the heart of the Nicola Valley. Located just 271 kilometres northeast of Vancouver, Merritt has a population of approximately 8,000 and, as the commercial center of the Valley, a trading area of over 15,000.

In 1986, after years of lobbying, the Coquihalla toll highway was completed, providing a freeway link between Merritt and the Lower Mainland of BC. Connections to Kamloops and Kelowna followed. The completion of this interior highway network placed Merritt at the hub of transportation and communications in the southern interior and precipitated economic changes that continue today.

NO GIS TOOLS

Sean O'Flaherty is the Development Services Officer for Merritt, working for the Planning & Development Services Department. He also works closely with the Public Works Manager, Shawn Boven, helping to fulfill his requirement for GIS positioning of inventory items like fire hydrants, manholes, catch basins, sidewalks and more.

When Sean joined the City of Merritt in 2007, the City had only recently become a member of ICIS (2005) but had not yet tapped into benefits of membership. At that time, they had no GIS software at all. As part of the Thompson Nicola Regional District, they had always submitted data and data requests through the Regional District or used consultants.

CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Merritt's membership in ICIS was a solution to a big problem. Their participation in ICIS gave them access to funding through the Society's CivicSpatial program. The grant was used to jump start their GIS effort by enabling the purchase of necessary software and hardware.

The acquisition of the right tools for the job was the catalyst for updating the accuracy and currency of Merritt's data. The City was able to hire a contractor to survey the city. The contractor used the latest GIS software to provide the updated cadastral. ICIS funding support for increased accuracy also spurred on Merritt to invest an additional $60K in ortho-photography.

"By making an investment in creating our own GIS data, the City of Merritt is saving thousands of dollars every year in real costs by being able to do things internally versus being forced to contract," remarks Sean O'Flaherty. "There are also less tangible productivity improvements being realized every day by being able to handle internal queries quicker and more efficiently."

The investment has also paid dividends in enabling Sean to meet the requirements of the Public Works Department.

Inventory control has improved and has helped the City with PSAB Reporting and Asset Reporting. This reporting is an annual requirement of the provincial government.

TALKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

In a city where the Planning Department's motto is; 'Progress while preserving Merritt's best interests'; the objective moving forward is to use future funding to update Merritt's ortho-photography, and build database linkages with their financial management system. "We also plan to deploy a software enhancement in 2010 so that we can share the power of all of the data within the office and externally," states O'Flaherty.

"The availability of the CivicSpatial funding through ICIS has made a big difference for the City of Merritt. The problem now is that our data is so good that other agency data that has been used to assist with business decisions is no longer usable or has to be used with extreme caution. ICIS has helped us raise the bar."

Sean O'Flaherty
Development Services Officer
City of Merritt, BC