

The Ontario Cadastre - An Opportunity of a Lifetime!

By Mike Power, O.L.S., O.L.I.P.

What do Genworth Financial, Union Gas, Risk Management Services and LawPro have in common? If you attended this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in London you heard that much of their collective core business is dependent upon the work of the surveyor. Mapping and geospatial correlation of their own data sets is fundamental to what each of their companies do, in one way or another, to protect the interests of the public. Sound familiar?

In the wake of the directive received at the 2010 AGM, which was to evaluate the feasibility and return on investment (ROI) associated with the building and maintenance of a new cadastre, the resulting Task Force took the notion to the streets, literally, to determine if there were industry or market segments that had an appetite to invest in an accurate and maintained cadastre if it were to become available. The result was an overwhelming and resounding yes. Of course it's one thing for the Task Force to report that back to the membership, it's quite something else to have industry leaders agree to travel to London at their own expense to be part of a panel to deliver the message at the AGM themselves.

Laverne Hanley from Union Gas has been involved in engineering and mapping for most of his career. A past President of the Ontario Chapter of the Geospatial Information Technology Association and Vice-Chair of the CSA S250 Technical Committee, he articulated the need for "One comprehensive cadastral fabric for Ontario, used by all stakeholders in the planning, design and operations of surface and underground infrastructure." The key, however, is that it needs to be of a consistent quality across the province, updated within 3 weeks of receiving a change notification, ideally available 'on demand' by end users from a single clearing house, affordable and complete. He went on to suggest the notion of a Data Sharing Collective, fundamentally a provincial map clearing house where your membership establishes you into a data sharing agreement with all the other members of the collective. Their respective membership fees address the ongoing operational costs making the data therein available for research and review across the collective.

Peter Robinson-Gray, Manager of Risk Technology at Genworth Financial, has been an extensive user of products derived from and bundled with mapping data. As he succinctly put it in his presentation; "Information is critical to making better and faster decisions. Gathering, managing and organizing trusted information is the challenge." As one

of the industry's leading suppliers of mortgage insurance to financial institutions, Peter's mandate is to develop processes and facilitate access to data that helps the underwriting teams manage Genworth's risk in either over or under insuring a property's mortgage. The key in any data management activity is in having an accurate and reliable base upon which other data can be commingled and business decisions arrived at quickly.

As the National Director of iClarify, a division of the country's largest service arm to the property insurance marketplace, Jeff Sutton echoed the sentiments of the other speakers. Known accuracy, currently maintained, readily available and affordable survey data would be of great benefit to their practice of risk management for property insurance underwriters. Furthermore, it would also help with delivering spatial relevance to the large repositories of environmental data that is currently accessed for the performance of Phase I and II environmental assessments. Much like Genworth, iClarify is a consumer of derivative or bundled products which owes its heritage to the raw survey fabric.

The final panelist, Ray Leclair, Vice President of LawPRO climbed the steps to the podium with a certain amount of trepidation. Not only was this likely the first time that an executive from the Title Insurance industry addressed a gathering of surveyors, but he did it knowing that Izaak de Rijcke was presenting a session on Marketable Title versus Insurable Title earlier in the morning. Ray discussed how, contrary to the beliefs held by many in the room, the Title Insurance industry actually had a need for an accurate cadastre, used not only to support their legal clientele, but to help them mitigate their risks when providing insurance. One might suggest that helping the entity that reduced the frequency of calls for retracements, or the sale of Surveyor's Real Property Reports (SRPRs) is done at your own peril and ultimate demise. Ray would suggest that time has changed the notion that if surveyors did a better job of indexing their surveys, making them easily accessible and uniformly affordable then they could help themselves stay a part of the property transaction by assisting in the mitigation of risk. Not every transaction requires the purchase of an SRPR, but perhaps every purchase could involve the viewing of one. A survey quality digital cadastre with supporting SRPR overlaid on orthoimagery might flag changes to a property for which a search for a permit might be conducted, an evaluation of the legality of a shared use


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driveway or perhaps a bylaw infraction due to an out building being too close to a property line. The fact is that there are lots of opportunities for a surveyor's work to be a part of the property transaction; it just may not be the same work that was done in the past.

While the panellists came from different industry groups, their message was consistent; "Stay the Course"; make the cadastral initiative work; put yourselves in a position to participate in value added service offerings based on the new fabric and help the rest of the land information professional community do their jobs in protecting the interests of the public as well. For this isn't a credo held exclusively by surveyors!

Without having shared notes with the panel members, Dan Mathieson, the Mayor of Stratford, Chairman of the Board of the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation and the AGM's keynote speaker eloquently spoke of the shared vision the survey community must have of its future. He spoke in terms of the developments that have occurred in Stratford over the past decade, being quick to place much of the credit at the feet of the City's forefathers. For at a critical juncture in the life of the municipality they made some very difficult strategic decisions in an effort to fulfill what they shared as a vision of the City for the future. The result, as he pointed out, under the tutelage of a successive string of City leaders who shared the same goals, is that a diverse

community, which has managed to seamlessly integrate technology, the arts, manufacturing and agriculture with a quality of life unsurpassed by many other jurisdictions emerged. Instead of it being a political commercial, he went on to address the challenges facing the profession as well as those whose work relied upon the work of the surveyor.

At a crossroads, we have a unique opportunity to establish our vision for the future, take responsibility for collaborating with other members of our profession and create a survey quality cadastre that can be relied upon by professionals in all industry groups. We should be careful not to let this opportunity slip through our fingers, if only for fear of being chided by our successors for being the generation of surveyors who could have changed the future - but deliberately chose to leave things the way they were. For contrary to popular myth, the meek shall not inherit the earth, and nothing comes to he who waits. An opportunity of a lifetime, by definition, comes along only once! 

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