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Conception Bay South: Mapping a course for the future

By Janice Cunningham

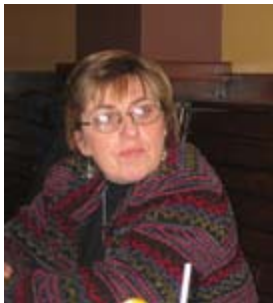
Conception Bay South (CBS), nestled on the south side of Newfoundland's Conception Bay, is a 26-kilometre-long amalgamation of nine original communities: Topsail, Chamberlains, Manuels, Long Pond, Foxtrap, Kelligrews, Upper Gullies, Lawrence Pond and Seal Cove. Located within minutes of St. John's, CBS is experiencing the growth pains that come with having one of the highest growth rates in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. To ease some of that pain, the town has sought the help of NRCan's Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI), located within the Earth Sciences Sector and funded by GeoConnections.



Conception Bay South [Dave Hammond - Cougar Helicopters]

"I heard about it by word of mouth," says Mary Bishop, the town's Director of Planning, "from a friend of mine in New Brunswick; then I went to the Web site to find out more."

SCI's mandate is to help communities in rural, coastal, Aboriginal and northern areas to learn, implement and use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to make decisions about their economic, environmental and social development.



Mary Bishop, program manager for Conception Bay South, explains how SCI has worked for her town.

For Mary, this seemed like the path to follow. The town proposed to develop a mapping system to allow property ownership, municipal infrastructure and land-use information to be organized into one comprehensive tool. Information would be integrated for use across departments, and staff would be trained using the town's own data.

In 2002, the town received \$30,000 from SCI to begin developing the system. This included new digital base mapping for the town, generating a street centreline database, plotting of fire hydrants, and mapping properties that were linked to the municipal assessment roll database. Aerial photography was geo-referenced to the mapping. SCI funds were also used to conduct initial training and buy some equipment. The project also had other partners — the provincial Department of Government Services and Lands and a private sector mapping contractor.

Mary's enthusiasm for the project is boundless. "The response from staff has been phenomenal," she says. "This mapping project will support many other projects; an inventory of town-owned properties, for example, and development of street and water and sewer systems maintenance schedules and costing." So far, 1,500 of the approximately 10,000 properties in the community have been added to the system.

New procedures have been put in place to capture data as it becomes available. Tax certificates (which include deeds and surveys) are now being copied to the Planning Department so that information can be added to the property database. The Fire Department is preparing a revised response map showing all the streets serviced with water and the location of fire hydrants.



The system is a work in progress and staff input has been key.

Engineering Project Co-ordinator Janice Haines, responsible for the town's civic address system, suggested assigning the civic number to each building "footprint," on the map. These numbers are linked to the municipal assessment roll, enabling staff to identify property owners quickly and easily. Other ideas include developing an emergency 911 system. " Other organizations, such as Elections Canada and Statistics Canada would find the database useful," says Mary. "More [organizations] are coming to us now for information."



Captain Dave Smith of the Conception Bay South Fire Department uses the GIS system to identify fire hydrant locations. He is currently updating the fire hydrant database to include maintenance information.

But how do you keep the momentum going? With Mary Bishop at the helm, there is no danger of CBS slowing down. This fiscal year, the town council has offered to help with the project. Mary initially asked for \$20,000. Council came back, says Mary with a laugh, and asked if she "could use \$50,000." The bulk of the funding will go to adding properties to the database and integrating the system into the municipal organization, she says. She also plans to provide more training for her staff.

"Without the support of the SCI project funds," says Mary, "I am quite sure that we would not be as far ahead as we are."

For more information about SCI projects and success stories, visit their Web site at www.sci.gc.ca.