

## **Proposal**

Submitted to Louisiana State University Center for Applied Information Technology and Learning  
In response to the Information Technology Initiative

### **Building Louisiana's Communities with Technology**

Frank M. Bosworth III, PhD, Professor (School of Architecture)  
Director, Office of Community Design and Development  
and

Marsha R. Cuddeback, Professional in Residence (School of Architecture)  
Program Director, Office of Community Design and Development

### **Background**

Many of Louisiana's small towns and cities are caught in the backwash of globalization with traditional industries downsizing or relocating leaving a legacy of an unskilled workforce, and economic problems that resonate through all aspects of citizen's lives. The physical manifestation of this is empty storefronts, reduced public services, weakened school systems, and disenfranchised communities. The Office of Community Design and Development works with these communities to assist them in developing strategies for economic development that build on community assets by developing a comprehensive master plan that identifies community goals and objectives, a process for implementation, and a description of the physical infrastructure needed to accomplish them. This is a time consuming and individualistic process that is complicated by the difficulty of finding basic information about the places in which we work. To meet the challenge of Louisiana's Vision 2020 for "to have a vibrant, balanced economy; a fully engaged, well-educated workforce; and a quality of life that places it among the top ten states in which to live, work, visit, and do business. ..." the first steps for each community must be to know what they have, create a vision and challenge for a new future, then develop a plan to achieve the vision.

We have made advances in the use of technology in community planning; however, these have been largely in the domain of the professional architect, landscape architect, planner, engineer and geographer focusing on the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and the internet to explain community phenomenon and inform the development of long range plans. Where towns and cities have integrated the use of GIS into their day-to-day planning processes it has improved the operation of government immeasurably. Unfortunately, most towns and cities in Louisiana do not have the financial resources, infrastructure or training to take advantage of these tools. It seems clear that in order to meet the challenge of Vision 2020 goal two to "...build the transportation and information infrastructures that will not only service business growth in Louisiana but will make Louisiana a leader in entrepreneurial endeavors. ..." towns and cities must have the basic information, a benchmark, to establish a place of beginning for the redevelopment process.

## **Our Vision**

The vision for this proposal is to determine how to make information about towns and cities available for the development of comprehensive master plans. Initially this effort would concentrate on the development of web-based information systems and Geographic Information Systems specifically for use in community planning and development. In order to achieve this, we envision a four-point approach:

1. Research into the best methods of integrating technology in to the community planning process. These might consist of researching how to integrate the findings of architecture and planning, spatial geography and economic development and apply them to every-day situations in Louisiana's towns and cities.
2. Building capacity through community outreach and training. This might consist of developing strategies for using distance education networks, the web, and direct instruction to build capacity within towns and cities to make them less reliant upon outside consultants for community decision-making. This training could extend to consulting firms building an awareness of larger community interests in the State and transmitting up-to-date information on research findings and best practices.
3. Technical assistance. This might consist of a web site that provides pertinent information to towns and cities as they embark on their planning process.
4. Preparing University graduates to work in these areas. Finally, by integrating issues of community planning into curricula at the University, graduates will be community development practitioners prepared to initiate this work across the State, expanding the reach of research findings and best practices.

## **Accepting the Challenge**

Louisiana State University is positioned to take on this challenge because it has in place the essential resources to undertake the work. The Office of Community Design and Development is actively involved across the State in community planning efforts and has the faculty and staff expertise to develop comprehensive community development plans. The College of Design in collaboration with the Department of Geography and Anthropology has developed an up-to-date GIS laboratory and has been engaged in both Statewide and local research and application efforts having completed over \$3,000,000 in sponsored research over the last ten years. Examples of recent and ongoing projects are: creation of the State of Louisiana internet-enabled digital atlas, land-use planning, flood zone delineation, terrain modeling and k-12 education initiative. The expertise of the CADGIS faculty and staff, and the faculty of the Department of Geography and Anthropology provide the necessary expertise for the implementation of GIS in communities across the State. The College of Business through its Small Business Development Center has a record of successful small business development. What is missing is an initiative for integrating these resources and making them available in a most broad and easily accessible manner. Accepting this challenge is a direct response to the University's strategic goals where LSU must: "...facilitate and encourage research

that benefits society and advances knowledge.” And “... contribute to the social, economic, and cultural well-being of society.”

This proposal requests the development of an IT faculty and supporting staff to address research and implementation of web-based and GIS technologies into interdisciplinary community planning and development. This request addresses the goals of the IT initiative as follows:

*Goal one: Better prepare students to enter the modern, IT-intensive workplace*

Students exposed to this approach to community development will be able to take advantage of technology intensive innovations impacting the operation of municipal government and will be conversant about how municipal infrastructure is able to interface with the requirements of technology driven enterprises seeking to locate in Louisiana

*Goal two: Focus more of our research enterprise on IT-related fields of discovery*

The facilitation of community planning and development through the application of information technology is an open field. Success in this area will position LSU in a national leadership position because it is a problem that is nation-wide.

*Goal three: Promote a more rapid deployment of new technologies into the marketplace.*

The development of an information technology intensive community planning process will allow information to be transmitted rapidly to communities across the State through the proposed technical assistance mechanism.