

OFFICIAL
MINUTES OF THE
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR
THE MISSISSIPPI COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR
REMOTE SENSING AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

JULY 15, 2004

The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) met at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 15, 2004, at the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in Jackson, Mississippi. Chairman Phil Sullivan opened the meeting by stating the PAC has looked forward to this particular meeting where we will hear from the Council chairman and vice chairman. The theme of this meeting is data distribution policy – which issues need to be answered and which ones can wait. Following self introductions of all in attendance, Chairman Sullivan asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous PAC meeting, held on May 10, 2004. Sam Russell moved for adoption of the minutes, and Charles Swann seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Craig Orgeron of Information Technology Services (ITS) reported on the attempt to get survey information from local government officials while they attended the Mississippi Municipal League state conference. Only three surveys were filled out. Jeanie Smith explained that this was a big, busy meeting. Also, the level of understanding of the attendees was reflected in a common question that asked, “What is data?” Phil Sullivan said he has found that same level of understanding among supervisors. Jim Steil volunteered to have one of the MARIS staff follow up the survey effort by phone contacts.

Chairman Sullivan pointed out that the “What is data?” question again shows the need for education. Then followed a brief discussion of what type of information is the “data” that is being asked for. Such things as water mains, roads, list of information with locations, maps on walls, were named. It was noted that Planning and Development Districts (PDDs) do a lot of work for the counties and cities and they might be able to help determine available data. Chuck Carr commented that roughly half of the PDDs are active in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and they could help with getting lists of available data.

Phil Sullivan introduced Council Chairman Charles Chisolm and Vice Chairman David Litchlitter. Charles Chisolm of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) stated that his motivation for this effort came from a belief that the citizens of Mississippi will be benefited in a profound, long term, important way as a result of this activity. He cited statements he had heard by people in positions of authority that without the kind of data available and delivery system that is envisioned in this effort, a state will not be able to compete in such important areas as site locations for new businesses. However, this whole effort remains in a low profile with no funding or staffing. Yet, this is important to the future of our state. It will be important that we move at a pace that the Council is comfortable with. The Council is an agency with no money; yet progress can be made in important areas. This is not a technical exercise; it is a policy exercise. Agency heads will decide to collaborate, county officials and mayors will agree to joint efforts, and the citizens will benefit.

Charles Chisolm said he has a very clear vision of where this effort needs to go. The first of three points is coordination. There is an opportunity to coordinate the dollars being spent for

remote sensing data acquisition as well as hardware, software, and data purchases. He mentioned several examples which demonstrate the need to coordinate. He hopes to make good progress with coordination in the next 12 months. He believes this can be achieved without a lot of money and without constraining anyone. The second point is the delivery system. There is a coordination aspect to this point and ITS is responsible for the delivery system. The third point is the Mississippi Digital Earth Model (MDEM). It will take a financial investment to make this happen. He said some are working the Washington, D.C., connections in hopes of finding some funding for MDEM data development. Charles thinks that MDEM will be done in pieces over a seven- to eight-year time frame. One example of federal possibilities is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) coastal and Mississippi River responsibilities that cover nearly two-thirds of the state. Again, we need to think in terms of years. Charles will be meeting with the Mississippi Development Authority to discuss MDEM opportunities. Charles ended by saying that coordination can be done that will be beneficial, and we must move at a pace which is slower than many want.

Phil Sullivan noted that the survey is a part of coordination and thanked the Mississippi Municipal League and the Mississippi Association of Supervisors for their help. He stated it is hard to slow down when you are excited about the project.

Vice Chairman David Litchliter of ITS began by saying Charles hit the major points very well. He then discussed how ITS is to use its weight to make purchasing of hardware and software at reduced cost available to state and local government. He wants to develop a purchasing vehicle which allows local government to make good purchasing decisions by adding GIS to a long list of such services ITS hosts. He noted that this presents policy issues and impacts which will require input from the PAC. He feels the biggest requirement to ITS from the legislation is the clearinghouse, which itself will probably touch on fifty policy issues that need to be worked out, i.e. privacy, funding, etc. David thinks technology issues are not a big problem; policy is the challenge. There are questions such as, "Can the smaller cities participate through applications developed to meet their needs, and will data be hosted for their use at ITS in such a way that all they need is some training?" He noted there is a fear out there that the state will take over their data. "That is not going to happen," he responded. "We want to help them." This vision is big enough that hundreds could work on it, but we will have to make it happen with the few we have. He is encouraging his staff to look at what other states have done and pick up on the "do's" and "do not's". He also noted the benefit of the diversity we have on the PAC.

David and Phil then opened the floor for questions and discussion. Jeanie Smith of the Mississippi Municipal League (MML) asked about establishing priorities for the needed policies and received a "yes" from Charles Chisolm. Charles noted we must take one at a time, be realistic as to time frame, and not expect to do it perfectly. We will learn to live with good, not perfect. Phil asked the Council to start this effort. Charles stated that coordination will be the focus. Mayor Shirley Hall stated that purchasing is very important. Local governments need the envisioned purchasing Expressed Products List (EPL) mechanism. Sam Russell suggested the state get a state price from Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) and perhaps establish a list serve. The list serve could help everyone become aware of what activities are ongoing and coming. It was also noted that there are working groups which meet monthly in different parts of the state and tying in with them would be beneficial. David Litchliter said ITS is relying on the PAC and Technical Users Group (TUG) to identify the vendors ITS needs on its EPL. Claude Johnson of ITS stated that they were targeting the four largest vendors in GIS in

the state for their initial EPL. Russ Beard of NOAA asked about the possibilities of state/federal joint efforts. Charles Chisolm said that there has not been much success with the federal government agencies other than with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with its Flood Map Modernization program. Charles said he will be campaigning in Washington, D.C. next week. All agreed that coordination with federal efforts will be good for everyone. Charles Swann of Mississippi Mineral Resources Institute (MMRI) asked how he could coordinate with the Council in offering their digital data.

Phil Sullivan then asked for a motion which would ask the Council to assign five issues for PAC action. Sam Russell made the motion which was seconded by Emad Al-Turk. Jeanie Smith made the motion that the previous motion be amended to have the PAC make two suggestions of the five. The list serve and purchasing were mentioned. Tom Strange seconded the amended motion followed by a brief discussion which asked who is going to take the lead. Others agreed that leadership was needed, citing it has been two years and there is not an established website. The amendment passed and the amended initial motion passed. This will be delivered to the next Council meeting on September 2. Claude Johnson of ITS informed the group that ITS does have a Council website available for review and comment.

The next PAC meeting will be held one week after the next Council meeting, which is September 2, 2004.

The MML plans to send out the survey the week following this meeting and will send it to the city clerks and mayors. They will try email first, then fax, and finally phone.

Phil Sullivan asked for help from the PDDs in the survey effort. Chuck Carr said he could contact PDDs.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.