



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Franklin County, VA  
Program Title: Parcel Update Timeline  
Program Category: Customer Service

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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## **VACO Award Application from Franklin County – GIS Office (1 of 2)**

### **Parcel Update Timeline – Project Overview**

#### **The Problem – A Summary**

In Franklin County, the amount of time required for geometry changes to parcel boundaries being reflected in the County's various internal and public GIS resources typically took three to six months. These changes included any splits, subdivisions, line vacations, boundary line adjustments, etc. within the parcel layer. One hidden problem was that new parcels would be totally excluded and unsearchable until their new parcel geometry was created. Without parcel geometry and a parcel number to which real estate data could be associated, the information for those new parcels was excluded from public access. This was a particular inconvenience for members of several local professional communities as well as a hinderance for multiple County departments. Indeed, the amount of time these changes required to become available, both internally and publicly, was a long-standing challenge. This timeline had persisted, however, since the County adopted its first online GIS resources. So, this problem, though long acknowledged, had not changed or been seriously addressed for many years.

#### **The Collaborative Effort – The Process**

Recognizing that the problem had to be addressed, and in a sincere effort to improve customer service, a workgroup was formed. Representatives from the County Administrator's Office, the Commissioner of Revenue's Office, the Clerk of Circuit Court's Office, the County Treasurer's Office, the Planning & Zoning Office, Information Technology, and the County GIS Office assembled to map out the entire parcel update process. This mapping took the process from original plat submission to all parcel updates being available to the public via self-service GIS viewers. All participants contributed their individual parts of the existing process, and their reasoning for adopting the steps they leveraged.

The full workflow began with the sometimes iterative process of gaining Planning & Zoning approval of new plats. It then moved on to the plat being recorded with the Clerk of Court. The Clerk's Office, however, would typically hold and batch all plats received until enough plats had been assembled to constitute a new plat book. This batching was also a cost-saving measure as, once enough were batched, the bundled hard copies were sent via FedEx to a third-party service provider. Once received by the third-party service provider, they would scan the plats and upload the files into the digital plat management solution they host for the County. Once available online to County staff, the Commissioner of Revenue's Office would process the changes into the County's CAMA system. Once the Commissioner's Office completed their processing of the plats, marked-up copies would be provided to the GIS Office. The GIS Office would then work with the marked-up copies to make appropriate edits to the County's GIS tax parcel data. Once completed, the updated layer would be pushed out to the Web.

### **The Collaborative Effort – A Major Sticking Point**

The primary sticking point boiled down to the fact that the Clerk of Court manages plats and deeds in terms of deed/plat books and pages. So their natural inclination was to batch plats as received until a sufficient number had been gathered to assemble a new plat book. The Commissioner's Office, on the other hand, manages their tax roles based on months and years. So, for them, the calendar drives their processes. So, this appeared to be a case of conflicting mandates. The Commissioner's Office needed a steadier and faster flow of data, and the Clerk's practice of batching plats – though completely sensible and responsible for their part - was holding up the Commissioner's process. That said, it would have been cost-prohibitive and grossly inefficient to ship new plats as they were received, especially when some weeks might have been far lighter than others.

### **The Collaborative Effort – An Innovative Solution**

So, a solution was proposed that required a modification on the part of everyone's workflow, plus the introduction of some new technology. The solution started with the acquisition of a large format scanner for the Clerk's Office. That would allow the Clerk's staff to scan new plats as they are recorded. This was a process the Clerk's Office took on as it also gave them more immediate access to plats for their own reference and record-keeping. The scanner saves scanned plats as PDFs into a shared folder accessible by both the Commissioner's Office and the GIS Office. Weekly, the GIS Office uploads scanned plats to the third-party host company for ingestion into the County's digital plat management solution. Previously, the host company had scanned plats as a courtesy, so since they now received the scanned plats in a suitable format, they were not bothered by this change in the least.

The benefits for all sides were immediate. The Clerk's Office could return the hard copy to the citizen recording the plat immediately. Previously they would have to retrieve a recorded copy from the Clerk's Office after the host company had scanned it and uploaded it. Now they walked out with a recorded copy on the same day. This was better for the Clerk's Office and better for the citizens who are recording plats. Similarly, the Commissioner's Office has access to the scans as soon as they are recorded. So they can be working on their part of the process concurrent to the third-party doing their part. Before, they had to wait until the third-party had completed their process.

The GIS Office has two primary parts in this new workflow. They have stepped in and taken ownership of getting the scans uploaded to the County's FTP server and sending a download link to the third-party host company for processing. Then, after the Commissioner's Office has completed their processing of plats, they take the plat and ingest it into the County's parcel geometry. From there, it's propagated out to the County's internal and public GIS resources for consumption by users.

So, the current workflow now involves the following departments playing the following roles:

- Planning & Zoning Office
  - o Reviews and processes plats, sometimes back and forth with the submitter multiple times.
  - o Approves plats for acceptance by the County.
- The Clerk of Court
  - o Records new plats.
  - o Scans new plats.
- The Commissioner of Revenue
  - o Updates tax records in the County's CAMA system.
  - o Ensures the trail of legal documentation is followed.
  - o Assigns new parcel numbers as needed.
- The GIS Office
  - o Pushes scans of new plats to the third-party host.
  - o Manages the files in the shared folder.
  - o Received marked-up plats from the Commissioner's Office and edits the County's parcel data accordingly.
  - o Pushes updated parcel geometry to the County's public and internal GIS resources.

As a side note, it was determined in the workgroup that, while the Treasurer's Office will obviously play a role in ultimately collecting fees and taxes, they do not have a hands-on role in the actual parcel updating workflow. So, they participated to the point of determining that they had no role to play in this updated workflow, which was good to identify as well.

### **The Collaborative Effort – Financial Impact**

The financial impact is that the one-time expense of a large format scanner was identified and covered with carry-over funding. The GIS Office researched the equipment, the County Administrator's office identified the funding, and the Clerk's Office took receipt of the device. It was installed, configured, and tested with the assistance of County IT. Clerk staff were trained and supported in its use by the GIS Office. So, the only

financial impact was the one-time cost of the scanner. Any staff time consumed in this new workflow is more or less the equivalent of previous tasks that were related to the prior workflow. Thus, any financial impact on staff time was either a slight savings or negligible either way. The result of the staff time expended, however, yields a far more efficient and beneficial process than anything prior.

### **The Collaborative Effort – Ultimate Result**

The result is that, under regular operational conditions, the timeline for a parcel edit to go from being recorded with the Clerk of Court to being available to the public averages about one to two weeks. There are still situations and circumstances that can cause delays or backups (reassessment, closing of the annual books, etc.), but the typical timeline is greatly improved. As an experiment, to test the workflows ultimate capabilities, a test was performed. A plat was recorded in the morning and scanned by Clerk staff. That same morning, the Commissioner's staff processed the plat fully and provided a marked-up to the GIS Office. That afternoon, the GIS Office updated the parcel geometry and ran the parcel data update script. This script joins the Commissioner's CAMA data to the GIS data layer and propagates the updates out to multiple parcels layers in the County's GIS enterprise. The data being pushed to the Web in this way was then accessible and viewable by staff before the end of that day. So, this test proves that, under ideal conditions, the new workflow is actually capable of generating a same-day update. In the normal course of business, a same-day timeline is neither sustainable nor even practical. But in that it has been demonstrated as possible, the new workflow represents a substantial process improvement. This improvement benefits all who use parcel data in their daily operations, both internally and publicly.

### **The Final Word**

We are proud of this significant process improvement, and we are happy to serve the citizens of Franklin County better as a result of it. Most of all, we are proud of what this successful project says about the health of Franklin County's culture of collaboration, fiscal responsibility, and customer service.