

Communiqué

Special Points of Interest

- Let's Get Moving! Open House on January 19, 2016 and February 26th, 2016
- Housing Snapshot of Cowlitz County
- The DIKW model of GIS explained
- The Castle Rock Park Plan Update moves forward

Inside this Issue

Closing the Gap	2
Castle Rock Park Plan Update	3
Housing Snapshot of Cowlitz County	3
Economic Development	5
Board Meeting Highlights	5
Fall meetings	5
Elements of GIS	6

The Shared Community

by Bill Fashing



According to the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) a “regional council (RC) or council of governments (COG) is a multi-service entity with state and locally defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs while carrying out its function as a planning organization, technical assistance provider, and “visionary” to its member local governments. As such, COGs and RCs are accountable to local units of government and effective partners for state and federal governments.”

Over the more than 50 year history of the CWCOG, the organization has fulfilled a variety of roles for its members in an on-going effort to meet the shared needs and expectations of our member agencies and support the region moving forward.

Recent discussions regarding shared economies such as car and bike sharing and establishment of firms like Zipcar are changing how communities think. Yet COGs and their member agencies are no strangers to this idea, having participated in a shared economy for years. As your local COG, we have assisted in providing multiple resources and coordinating project efforts otherwise conducted by multiple entities in an overlapping manner. We have shared community planners filling in the capacity needs of our membership. We’ve provided regional transportation and economic development support lessening impacts on local entities by working to leverage overall resources to meet the numerous mandates on local governments. Through these efforts and many others we have helped our members reduce duplication and increase efficiencies of various programs.

In an effort to enhance the shared approach, the CWCOG will embark on a strategic planning process during the first quarter of 2016. We will start by examining the agency through six questions as proposed by Patrick Lencioni in the book titled *The Advantage* in order to bring clarity to the process and purpose of the CWCOG.

The questions are:

1. Why are we here?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?
4. How will we succeed?
5. What is most important, right now?
6. Who must do what? Addressing roles & responsibilities.

Once completed, we will have gained a fresh perspective that will lend itself to a new and purposeful focus allowing the CWCOG to better serve its members thus bringing an enhanced value and essential support to the region.

Your input is greatly desired and highly appreciated throughout this endeavor. I hope you will take the time to think about these 6 questions as they relate to your agency and various roles in the community. Your input through this process will provide a positive impact on several levels both to our agency and our region for years to come.

You can email your thoughts to bfashing@cwco.org. I am also open and available to meet face to face to discuss the process, the future focus, and the direction of our organization.

*Best wishes for
the New Year
from the
CWCOG Staff!*



Closing the Gaps: Connecting Cowlitz County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

by Judith Donovan

Walkable and bikeable communities are places where it feels natural to hop on a bicycle or take a stroll to reach your destination. This is a community where it is safe, convenient, and comfortable to make an active trip. Streets and transit routes are connected and integrated by walking and biking paths; safe crossings of busy streets are frequent; directional signs make it easy to navigate; and pedestrian and bicycle facilities connect to key destinations.

One important element of the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan is to develop an integrated non-motorized transportation system. There is an extensive - yet disjointed - active transportation network. The connection of these detached bicycle and pedestrian facilities to one another and to key destinations will result in a comprehensive network that will provide users with travel choices for some of their daily trips.

On Tuesday, January 19, 2016 CWCOG and Walkable Cowlitz will be

hosting a public open house at the Youth and Family Link, 907 Douglas Street in Longview. The goal of the event is to gather public input regarding the proposed network of on and off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities, linking destinations from one end of Cowlitz County to the other. Feel free to drop in anytime between 5PM to 7PM. Please see the flyer below for information regarding the Wahkiakum County event. We are looking forward to seeing you there!



Let's Get Moving!

Come and discuss pedestrian and bicycle access. Share your thoughts about the proposed network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and help us identify new routes for residents and visitors to ride bikes and walk.

Your input will help guide the development of active transportation projects in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties for the next 20 years.

Cowlitz County Meeting

When: January 19, 2016
5pm-7pm
Where: Youth & Family Link, Kelly Rm
907 Douglas Street
Longview, WA 98632

Wahkiakum County Meeting

When: February 26th, 2016
10am-12pm
Where: Cathlamet Community Center
101 Main St
Cathlamet, WA 98612

OPEN HOUSE FORMAT

Stop by any time during the meetings to provide your input.



Castle Rock Park Plan Update

by Deborah Johnson

The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments is working with the City of Castle Rock to update its park and recreation plan, a joint product with the Castle Rock School District. Staff has been working with the Castle Rock Park Board, which just completed a new public opinion survey on what is needed in Castle Rock parks. Next up, the technical chapter analyzing demand will be reviewed.

Last updated in 2011, the new plan will satisfy the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) criteria for grant eligibility. The RCO administers grant funds overseen by the Recrea-

tion and Conservation Funding Board, which includes awards for boating facilities, outdoor recreation, and off-road vehicles (including bicycles), as well as several conservation/environmental protection funds. In order to remain eligible, local communities must update their plans on at least six-year intervals.

674

...people participated in the Castle Rock Park Plan Update Survey.

Ultimately, the plan will create the city and school district's "to do" list for future projects, both in terms of upgrading or adding to existing park and recreation facilities and developing new ones. Castle Rock has a history of success in achieving state awards for its leisure facilities.

This work is facilitated by an extended work contract between City of Castle Rock and CWCOG, which offers member jurisdictions the ability to absorb targeted professional work through its staff. CWCOG staff is ready to assist with a wide variety of planning efforts. Call Bill Fashing to explore the possibilities.

Housing Snapshot of Cowlitz County

by Sam Rubin and Melissa Taylor

Recently the U.S. Census Bureau released the 2014 5-year estimates data gathered through the American Community Survey. This survey shows housing and population data for the past five years and is the most current comprehensive data set available. A few things to take away from this new data release are detailed below.

Wages

The median household income for residents of Cowlitz County in 2014 was \$46,571 which was a 15 percent

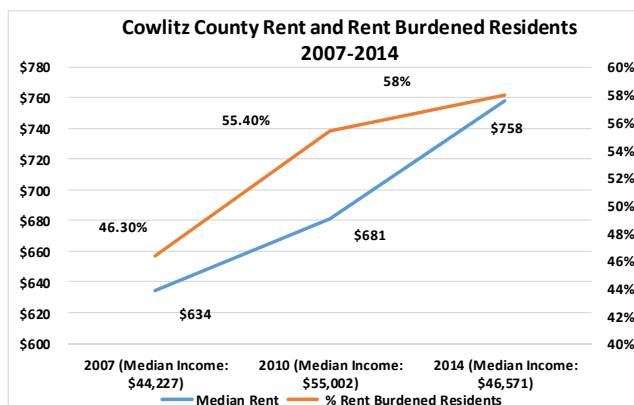
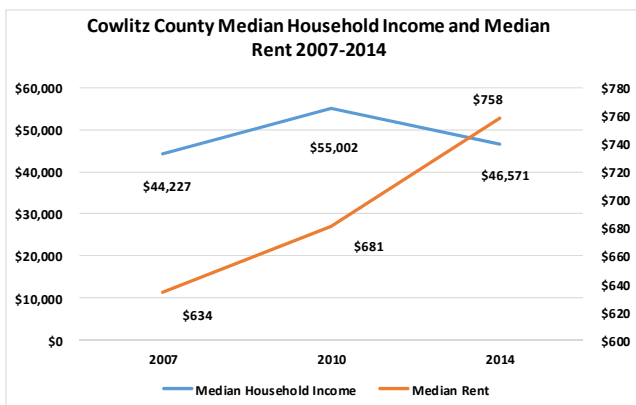
decrease from the 2010 median household income of \$55,002. However, over the long term, the 2014 median household income has increased 5% since the 2007 median income of \$44,227.

Rent

Median rent in Cowlitz County for 2014 was \$758. Rental costs have continually increased over the past several years, culminating in a 20 percent increase from 2007's median rent of \$634. A closely associated trend is a significant increase in the

proportion of rent-burdened residents in the County. "Rent burdened" refers to households that spend 30% or more of their gross income on housing costs. In 2007, just under half (46.3%) of Cowlitz County residents spent more than 30% of their gross income on rent, compared to 2014, when well over half (58.4%) paid over 30%. In 2014, more than half of all county renters (51.4%) were paying more than 35% of income for housing. This is not surprising, given that wages in

(Continued on page 4)



58.4%
...of Cowlitz County residents spent more than 30% of their gross income on rent in 2014.

(Continued from page 3)

Cowlitz County have increased 5% overall since 2007, while rental costs have increased 20%.

Homeownership

Homeownership rates in Cowlitz County have declined since the housing market “bust,” with 67.4% of residents living in an owner-occupied housing unit and 32.5% of residents living in a rented unit in 2007. In 2014, 66.1% of residents lived in an owner-occupied housing unit and 33.9% were renters.

Individually these statistics detail one specific aspect of the housing market, but from a broader approach, these numbers—coupled with historic information—paint an interesting picture of Cowlitz County. Trends in the 2007 and 2014 data highlight that 1) the percentage of renters is increasing in Cowlitz County, 2) those

renters are paying higher rents, and 3) increased rent and decreased household income has resulted in a greater share of rent-burdened households.

Other variables impacting the local rental market include the influx of residents from the Vancouver/Portland area migrating into Cowlitz County in search of more affordable units. This is potentially a factor in increasing rents and a decreasing rental vacancy rate since 2010. Additionally, the shift in homeownership impacts the ability of local service agencies to respond to housing crises of county residents. Many homeless programs in the county are funded through local document recording fees, which are directly related to the strength of our local housing market. When someone purchases a home in Cowlitz County there is an associated fee paid to the County Auditor to record documentation of the purchase. This fee is then used to fund local homeless/housing programs in the County. When there are fewer people purchasing homes, these fees are diminished, ultimately decreasing the funds available for County homeless and housing programs.

Watch for a full analysis on Wahkiakum County in our next issue.



Wahkiakum County Housing Summary

2014 (5 year est. 2010-2014)

Total Housing Units	2,083
Homeowner Vacancy rate	1.9%
Rental Vacancy rate	2.9%
Owner-occupied	1,319 (76.9%)
Renter-occupied	397 (23.1%)
Median Rent	\$613
Gross Rent as a percentage of household income	
30.0-34.9 percent	32 (9.1%)
35.0 percent or more	325 (64.3%)
30% or greater	257 (73.4%)
Median Household Income	\$44,500

Cowlitz County Housing Summary

	2014 (5 year est. 2010-2014)	2007 (3 year est. 2005-2007)
Total Housing Units	43,451	41,059
Homeowner Vacancy rate	2%	1.2%
Rental Vacancy rate	5%	4.8%
Owner-occupied	26,290 (66.1%)	25,562 (67.4%)
Renter-occupied	13,475 (33.9%)	12,369 (32.6%)
Median Rent	\$758	\$634
Gross Rent as a percentage of household income		
30.0-34.9 percent	908 (7.2%)	1,011(8.2%)
35.0 percent or more	6,524 (51.4%)	4,718 (38.1%)
30% or greater	58%	46.30%
Median Household Income	\$46,571	\$44,227

What does environmental review have to do with economic development? (Part Two)

by Deborah Johnson

In our last newsletter, we looked at which public actions are subject to review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). Now, let’s examine the “who.” Does SEPA apply just to cities or counties? No. Special purpose districts such as ports, public utilities, and public facilities districts

are included in SEPA’s “agency” definition: “Any state or local governmental body, board, commission, department, or officer” that is authorized to undertake the actions described above. It’s important to note the distinction between special purpose districts that might engage in economic development activities and economic development districts (EDDs) themselves. EDDs are created under federal rather than state or local designation. Therefore, their activities are not subject to SEPA review.

Sometimes, a district serves as its own “lead agency” regarding the environmental document. This means that it will be responsible for both evaluating the environmental consequences of a proposed action and making a decision about the relevance of those consequences to the environment. Simply put, this will direct the environmental determination that is made about the project. Specific to policy actions, the state *SEPA Handbook* says that a special district will act as lead agency when it is proposing a non-project action, such as the adoption of an ordinance, policy, plan, rule, etc.

The complexity of SEPA review will vary widely depending on the action to which it applies. The process begins with an environmental checklist that assesses the impact of the proposed action upon various elements of the environment. From there, the lead agency will evaluate those impacts and issue a “threshold determination.” This is the determination of non-significance (DNS), mitigated determination of non-significance (MDNS), or determination of significance (DS) that we’ve often heard of in conjunction with development permits. They apply equally to non-project actions and will, in turn, dictate what an agency must do from there. A policy document could proceed on to adoption in short order with a DNS, while a MDNS would involve some kind of mitigating action on the agency’s part. A DS implies a more in-depth exploration of environmental impacts, usually involving an environmental impact statement.

Coming up in Part 3: our next issue will look at best practices for conducting SEPA review related to economic development.

2016 Winter Calendar

January

- 6 Cowlitz Housing 1st Steering Committee
- 7 Cowlitz Area TAC**
- 8 Cowlitz RIF*
- 12 Wahkiakum RIF*
- 19 COG Exec. Committee
- 20 Cowlitz Housing 1st Coalition
- 21 COG Board Meeting
- 28 Project Homeless Connect

February

- 3 Cowlitz Housing 1st Steering Committee
- 4 SWEDC
- 4 Cowlitz Area TAC**
- 16 COG Exec. Committee
- 17 Cowlitz Housing 1st Coalition
- 24 PCOG TAC**
- 25 COG Board Meeting
- 26 Wahkiakum TAC**

March

- 2 Cowlitz Housing 1st Steering Committee
- 3 Cowlitz Area TAC**
- 11 Cowlitz RIF*
- 15 COG Exec. Committee
- 16 Cowlitz Housing 1st Coalition
- 24 COG Board Meeting

*RIF– Required Information Forum
 **TAC– Technical Advisory Committee

Board Meeting Highlights

October

- Approved the 2016-2040 Metro/Regional Transportation Plan

November

- Accepted report on the Medical Rate Stabilization Committee

December

- Approved 2016 Budget
- Elected Michael Green as the 2016 COG Board Chairperson and Troy Stariha as the 2016 Vice Chairperson.

DIKW Model for GIS

by Sam Rubin

Geographic Information Systems, or GIS, is a powerful tool that helps facilitate the decision making process in both the public and private world. A common misconception about GIS is that it is a tool simply for making maps or displaying data. Making maps is a vital element of sharing data but is only one element of the many facets of what makes GIS such a powerful tool. The real power of GIS comes from the ability of interpreting data to influence decisions and decision-makers. A simple way of understanding how a GIS does this is shown in a DIKW model.

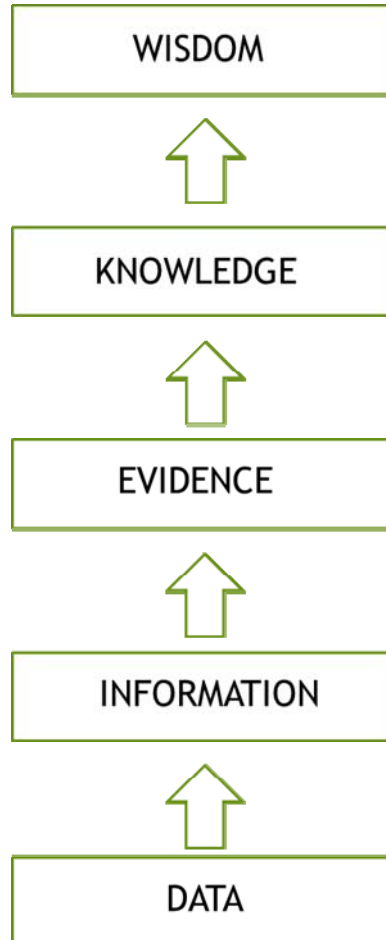
The first tier in the DIKW model is Data. Data is the foundation of what comprises a GIS. Data or datum consists of numbers, text, or symbols and is not aligned with any particular bias. Examples include temperature, time, or a geographic location.

The next tier is Information. Information is data that is compiled with a purpose in mind. Information is data serving a purpose. By compiling data into information and gathering information from multiple sources it creates the next tier, which is Evidence. Evidence is the compilation of information relating to a specific issue or problem.

Compiling Evidence is essentially the equivalent of gathering data with a project in mind and placing it in a folder on your desktop. The real power of a GIS comes when that data

is analyzed, interpreted, or understood more thoroughly. This process of interpreting evidence creates Knowledge. Knowledge is different from information or evidence in three specific ways:

There are two main categories of



Knowledge, that of Codified Knowledge and that of Tacit Knowledge. Codified Knowledge are insights into information that can easily be shared. For example, after reviewing U.S. Census data one could

share that a specific neighborhood is X% White and has an area median income of Y. Tacit Knowledge is very difficult transfer and comes from a more fundamental understanding of the information. Examples would be that after many a years a planner has a deep understanding of how the economic market works in a specific community. This information is very difficult to put in a single email and comes from a comprehensive understanding of the market through extensive interpretation of information.

The final tier in the DIKW model is Wisdom. Wisdom is the final tier in the model because it is the process of transferring that knowledge to the decision making process. After compiling data into information to create evidence that data is analyzed and interpreted to ultimately aid in the decision making process. An example in the planning profession would be that after a thorough analysis of an intersection, including combining traffic accidents, road attributes, and signal timing, an analysis is performed showing that specific alterations to the intersection could potentially decrease the number of pedestrian vehicle collisions. This knowledge is shared with decision makers and is considered one of the tools in the decision making process. Having a basic model of how a GIS works is a useful way of understanding how GIS can work for you and your community.

Longley, P. (2005). *Geographical information systems and science*. Chichester: Wiley.

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