

City of Lodi offering new mapping software on its website

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Need to report a burnt out street light? Want to see what permits the city has issued for your home or for one you are thinking about buying? Ever wonder what type of utility pipes are around your property?

Sitting in front of your own computer, you now have access to all of this information through the city's new mapping system.

This week, the city relaunched the geographic information system on its website. The mapping software allows both city employees and members of the public to search for an address. Then the program scans data and overlays maps to provide a variety of information.

The city first created the GIS system in the mid-1990s, but as they have added additional items to track, it became antiquated, city engineer Charlie Swimley said.

In March, the Lodi City Council hired Interwest Consulting Group to design, install and configure a new system. On Aug. 28, the council received an update on the progress.

"This is a much simpler tool to use than our (previous) one, which is a bit convoluted," city manager Rad Bartlam said.

The mapping software includes 120 layers of information, including the location of fire hydrants, water valves, bus routes, wastewater pipes and manhole covers.

The technology is especially useful for people looking to buy a house in Lodi, city staff said. One of the main additions to the map is that it now includes any city permit information so brokers, real estate agents and potential homebuyers will be able to see what work has been done on the house, Interwest employee Steve Gay said.

The map also includes photos of landmarks, like the arch in Downtown. It also lets people connect to Google Street View to see the front of a property or Bing Maps to see aerial images.

Bartlam said the new system has broad uses for the public.

"In Community Development, we are visited routinely by people interested in buying a property (and) wanting to know what's the size of the parcel and what's the permit history," he said.

The system will also reduce staff time for more complicated requests, Bartlam said. For example, a broker might want to see if a property has access to storm drains or nearby water mains. Now they will be able to use their own computer, Bartlam said, and can even access the data when the city is closed on most Fridays or on the weekends.

"It's another way in which customers can access data or do business with the city that does not require them to come down to City Hall," Bartlam said.

City staff is hoping the new, improved mapping system will encourage the public to use the city website to report a variety of infrastructure issues, like a busted street light.

Employees will also be able to use the information when out making repairs in the city's cars, Gay said.

"It has a variety of information to support the work crews as they perform a work order to maintain any of those assets," he said.

Councilman Alan Nakanishi did voice concerns about whether the system could cause harm to the city. Since Sept. 11, 2001, Nakanishi said there has been a continuous conversation about homeland security. He worried that the maps could make city infrastructure vulnerable.

Bartlam said if someone wanted to damage city infrastructure they could just look for a manhole cover or search the Internet.

"The reality is that in today's world with the ability to access information, it's there anyway," Bartlam said. "You can bring up Bing and Google and look up locations of businesses and owners. If you want to do a burglary, the information is there."

Not all of the city's available public information is tied into the mapping system.

There is no permit history or other information available for city law enforcement personnel, Bartlam said.

Property ownership for all residents is not available online through the mapping software, even though people can get it through the San Joaquin County Assessor's Office or at the City Hall counter.

Councilman Bob Johnson questioned whether the city should offer property ownership information.

"Are we dialing this thing down so tightly we are not getting the biggest bang for our buck?" he asked.

But even without the information, Johnson said the resource is an exciting opportunity.

"This can be a tremendous asset to the public," Johnson said.