



County of Kent, 300 Monroe Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-2206

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Craig Paull**  
**Director, Kent County Department of Information Technology**  
**(616) 632-6501**

### **KENT COUNTY ANNOUNCES GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM NOW AVAILABLE FOR EXPANDED FREE PUBLIC ACCESS**

*Access Kent website offers free public downloads of maps previously only available by appointment*

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*Grand Rapids, Michigan (Aug. 19, 2013)* – Craig Paull, director of Information Technology for Kent County, announces newly expanded public access to the Geographic Information System, or GIS. The GIS spatial data collection for Kent County is now available through the AccessKent website at: <https://www.accesskent.com/GISLibrary/>

Paull said the GIS data sets were previously made available only by special request, and typically to engineering firms and utility companies which sought access.

Two local “geo-mapping” experts, Michelle Lazar, GIS Manager at engineering firm Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr and Huber, and Jeroen Wagendorp, Ph.D. department chair of Geography and Planning at Grand Valley State University, applauded the announcement and called it a breakthrough for Kent County residents, likely unprecedented in any other Michigan county.

Craig Paull of Kent County said, “We have seen increasing interest in this information from the public and since taxpayers fund it, we thought it made sense to make the GIS data available. It is the right thing to do. We’re thrilled to make this more readily available. We are satisfied that we have worked the bugs out and we want the public to know they have access.”

The newly-available data sets include boundaries of cities, towns, school and court districts and parks in the county. The hydrography section includes mapping of lakes, ponds,

rivers and streams. The PLSS, or Public Land Survey System features mappings of township boundaries and sections.

Paull believes the parcel data sets will draw the most interest from the public. “This information is more accurate than Google or Mapquest right down to the parcel level.” Paull said.

GIS manager and engineer, Michelle Lazar has been using the newly-accessible GIS data base and found “it works very well. Kent County is the first county that I work with in Michigan to make this data readily available on-line, especially at the parcel level. They have definitely streamlined the process.”

Professor Wagendorp said that in an “academic context, it is great to see this data being given its widest possible use. It provides our geography students up-to-date relevant information. For the taxpayers who funded this data base it is important for them to know this is freely available.”

Wagendorp explained that the 1996 “Enhanced Access Michigan” Act of 1996 established access to certain public records and established fees for its use. He called Kent County’s decision to make the GIS readily available to the public on its website, “a bold step, a leap of faith. It is an element of the times, of making powerful digital data more accessible. I am not aware of any other county doing something like this to the same degree.”

A video link to an interview with Kent County IT Director, Craig Paull, can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcf0ou-KMqw>

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