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High-tech mapping program will assist in record keeping

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Oct. 23--City officials will be getting an equipment upgrade that will allow all Los Banos government departments to do more thorough record keeping.

Steve Batz of Digital Map Products has been meeting with city staff for the past year to gather knowledge about needed capabilities for a customized Geographic Information System for Los Banos. Batz collected a list of issues where his software company could help city officials. He specifically referenced each concern to council members last week.

"The first one is the ability to find correct data. It's been very hard to find correct property data, especially within the city when it's needed. The second one is maps and data tend to be incomplete, inaccurate, out of date or in a lot of cases nonexistent...," he said...

...With the program government officials and authorized city staff can store up-to-the-minute property, street mapping, general plan and zoning information. The program also can keep track of specific lots through aerial photography similar to Google Maps while, at the same time, viewing property records. "I'm thinking with the amount of time that the city has to take to provide these maps to us to give us a clear view of the project we're looking at, we can now do the advanced research by logging on to this system," Councilman Mike Villalta said. "We can actually log on and look at the area... that we'll be approving or reviewing way before a vote. I think this is a great system"

In the past city officials have relied on the Merced County Association of Governments to maintain general plan, parcel and zoning map information. Police Chief Chris Gallagher said MCAG's records are only about 38 percent consistent when compared with state 9-1-1 system information. Gallagher said in the association of governments' database some roadways do not connect properly and some block numbers are listed incorrectly. He said the new GIS program will fix the problem by keeping more up-to-date information.

Batz said the aerial view portion of the software is helpful for law enforcement, but property can also be looked at from a 45 degree angle.

"If Chief Gallagher is going to go do a takedown on a house, sometimes it's hard to tell what's around the house from an overhead view," Batz said. "But if I can look from a 45-degree angle I can see that there's maybe a fence or a gate. That will be included in the system."

He said Gallagher can also use the system to track crime in the city so he could more easily keep track of problem neighborhoods. The police chief is fond of the idea.

"Often times we get the calls from people moving into town saying, 'where do I move? Where can we avoid the crime,'" Gallagher said.

Councilman Joe Sousa called the software an "invaluable tool" for public safety and the Public Works Department.

Batz said the GIS system already has the city's settings built in and is ready for use.

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