

Comments submitted to the **NYC Charter Revision Commission 2019**

2-May-2019

We are writing to express our support of amendments to Chapter 48 (DOITT) of the Charter, submitted by Alan Leidner, President of the NYC Geospatial Information Systems and Mapping Organization (GISMO). A copy of the proposed **Geospatial Information System (GIS) Charter Amendment** is appended to this document.

We are Applied Geographics, Inc (AppGeo), a Boston-based GIS consulting company with a 28-year history of providing services primarily to state and local government clients across the US, including both New York State and New York City. A particular strength of AppGeo is in conducting studies and developing strategies to improve GIS coordination across large government organizations, usually states and large cities. We developed the GIS strategic planning template for the Federal Geographic Data Committee and prepared strategic plans following that template for many states (including New York) over the past decade. The best practice recommendations that are common to nearly all of our plans mirror very closely the proposed GIS Charter Amendment, and for this reason, we are pleased to add our voice in support.

In particular, we find that having an empowered leader with authority and clear responsibilities to coordinate GIS across the agencies is a critical requirement for success. The role is typically defined for a Geospatial Information Officer (GIO) and is a signature element in successful GIS coordination programs. The state of New York has a GIO at the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS), the state's counterpart to DOITT. William Johnson, the state's first GIO (from 2013-2016), is a senior member of the AppGeo team. Mr Johnson affirms that the presence of a NYC GIO, as proposed, would be highly beneficial to strengthen the level of coordination and collaboration between the city and the state, for mutual benefits.

We also strongly endorse the proposals to establish a GIS Steering Committee, the development and maintenance of a GIS Strategic Plan, and the focus on spatially-enabled open data. All are hallmarks of successful government GIS organizations.

We would be pleased to address any questions or concerns you might have on these issues.

Thank you,



Richard K. Grady, President
AppGeo

APPENDIX

The Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) Charter Amendment

This amendment proposes the incorporation of the following elements into the DOITT section of the Charter (Chapter 48).

- **Recommendation: The appointment of a Deputy Commissioner for Geospatial Information Systems who would serve as the City's Chief Geospatial Information Officer**

Current Law: Calls for 4 Deputy Commissioners one of whom is to be designated as 1st Deputy Commissioner

Justification for Proposed Change: *A City Geospatial Information Officer (CGIO) at the Assistant Commissioner level existed from 2002 – 2004, but that position was abolished. Currently, the City does not have a CGIO or anyone else designated as the Citywide GIS leader. Yet many major cities across the US and Europe, and almost all U.S. States have CGIO's. The lack of GIS leadership in NYC has resulted in a serious lag in NYC's GIS efforts, poor collaboration between agencies and the absence of a GIS strategic plan to guide citywide efforts.*

- **Recommendation: The formation of a GIS steering committee composed of City agency GIS managers and outside experts.**

Current Law: The Charter currently provides for DOITT to engage in interagency coordination activities (1072h)

Justification for Proposed Change: *The power of GIS depends upon collaboration and sharing. Agencies need to meet regularly to coordinate activities, develop policy and share data. City agency GIS Directors want a GIS Steering Committee but this has been lacking for more than a decade. A Citywide GIS Steering Committee existed from 1995 to 2004 first headed by the Mayor's Office and then by the DOITT Citywide GIS Director. The Committee ceased to function after 2005.*

- **Recommendation: A requirement for the development and maintenance of a GIS strategic plan**

Current Law: The current Charter provides for long range telecommunication planning (1072b), and computer systems and data communications strategic plans (1072g).

Justification for Proposed Change: *The GIS field is very dynamic with new applications, data types and technologies regularly being rolled out by developers. Without a strategic plan it is impossible to properly plan for best use of existing and new GIS resources and capabilities. NYC cannot remain a "Smart City" without a strategic plan for GIS as a guide. Washington D.C. has recently completed its GIS Strategic Plan which could serve as a model for NYC.*

- **Recommendation: Specifically state that DOITT should act to ensure that spatially enabled open data is interoperable and easy to use**

Current Law: The current Charter provides for the simplified access to shared information (1072L)

Justification for Proposed Change: *Thousands of open datasets, available on the City's Open Data Portal, are an enormous resource for government and for all sectors of the City including businesses, non-profit organizations, community organizations and individual citizens. The City's open data is a driver for more efficient government, more jobs and improved economic development. Most open data sets have a location attribute. Common spatial attributes make it possible for any combination of datasets to be interoperable, breaking down data silos and multiplying their value. DOITT must work to ensure that the City's open data meets rigorous spatial standards for interoperability. DOITT must also work to ensure that access and use of open data is made as easy as possible for all users.*

- **Recommendation: The formation of an underground utility data interoperability steering committee composed of representatives of public and private utility companies and agencies**

Current Law: The current Charter makes extensive reference to telecommunications, appropriately identifying it as a critical component of IT.

Justification for Proposed Change: *Telecommunications exists to transmit data – the most important component of information technology. Interoperable and analyzable spatial data exists for almost every City feature from the street surface upward. However, data describing the underground including infrastructure networks, basements, foundations and soils is flawed, incomplete and incompatible. Yet the City depends on underground utilities for survival. The City needs to standardize underground data and enable it to be brought together to support effective utility management, capital planning, and emergency planning and response. Underground infrastructure data is in the hands of City agencies, State organizations like the MTA and the Port Authority, and private utilities like Con Edison. These organizations have shown a strong reluctance to both standardize and share their data. Creating an underground utility steering committee will facilitate the development and implementation of strategies to improve data interoperability and sharing.*