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The Impact of a Centralized Spatial Easement Inventory at the City of Greater Sudbury

An Easement Identification and Mapping Case Study

Introduction

At 3,627 square kilometres in area, the City of Greater Sudbury in Northeastern Ontario is geographically the largest municipality in the province and the second largest in Canada. The City is an important Northern centre for growth comprised of a burgeoning mix of urban, suburban, and rural properties, alongside wilderness environments. With such growth, many city departments were increasingly challenged to better serve its residents and businesses while managing municipal assets, infrastructure, and development.

The City spent years trying to scan historical records in order to centralize easement data into a GIS format to improve staff access to easement information. After barely making a dent with only 10% of 25,000 records completed, it became clear that the City did not have the in-house resources to dedicate to such an enormous project. Lack of easy access to critical easement data was slowing down the City's departments that required this information on a daily basis.

The time was right to engage Teranet – the leading expert on land and property easement solutions.

Teranet's Solution

As the leader in easement solutions, we connect Government and Utility companies to land registry records to build spatial easement inventories. The project for the City of Greater Sudbury involved a full suite of easement reports, registered easement instrument images, registered plan images, and easement mapping – all delivered via Teranet Xchange for easy digital access. To ensure we captured all possible easements, our team also did a deep dive into the City's data of 174 municipal names—the result of many amalgamated municipalities and historical legal documents dating back to the early 1900s—and discovered missing or incorrect names that otherwise could have caused gaps in the easement data.

The City maintains its own parcel fabric in-house, creating a unique challenge for our team at Teranet, requiring them to build the easement layer on top of the City's existing GIS layers (Figure 1). Through a great deal of cooperation, our innovative approach and quick response to issues, we managed this special requirement smoothly.

Through validating easements, we were able to provide a centralized inventory where the City's Legal team can now conduct a gap analysis to secure and register necessary easements in the future.

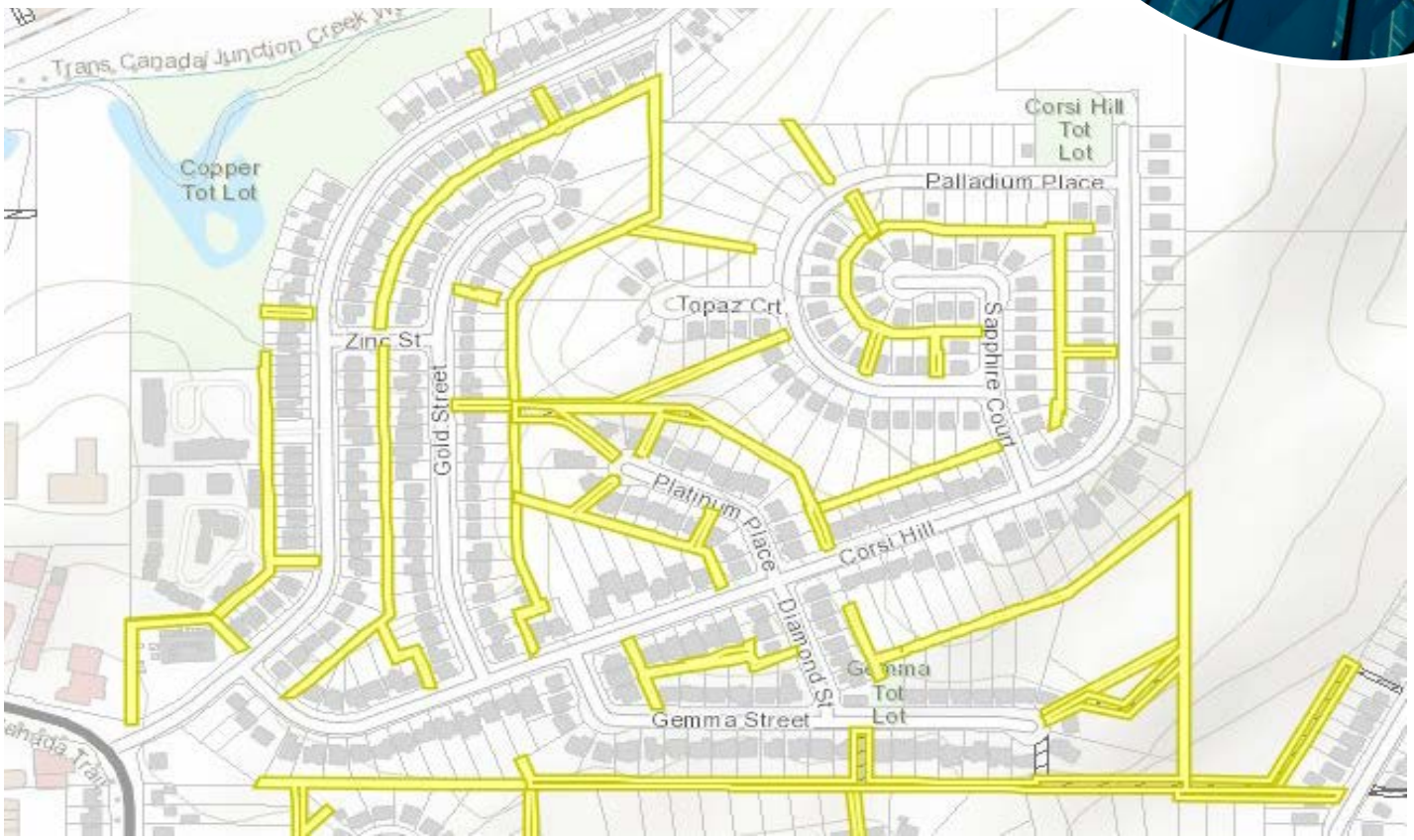

Figure 1. City of Greater Sudbury Municipal Easements layer

The Results

City staff can now easily access centralized easement information, drawings, and historical documents (Figure 2), with a few clicks of a mouse. While the positive impact has been felt throughout the entire municipality, Building Services has enjoyed the greatest benefit.

> **It has definitely saved time searching for the easement location, type of easement, legal description of easements and other miscellaneous information, which is so helpful when main or accessory structures are proposed to be constructed. We can provide immediate updates to the applicant when the proposed structure is going to be located on an easement and help them revise the location accordingly.**
>
> - Permit Processing Clerk, Building Services

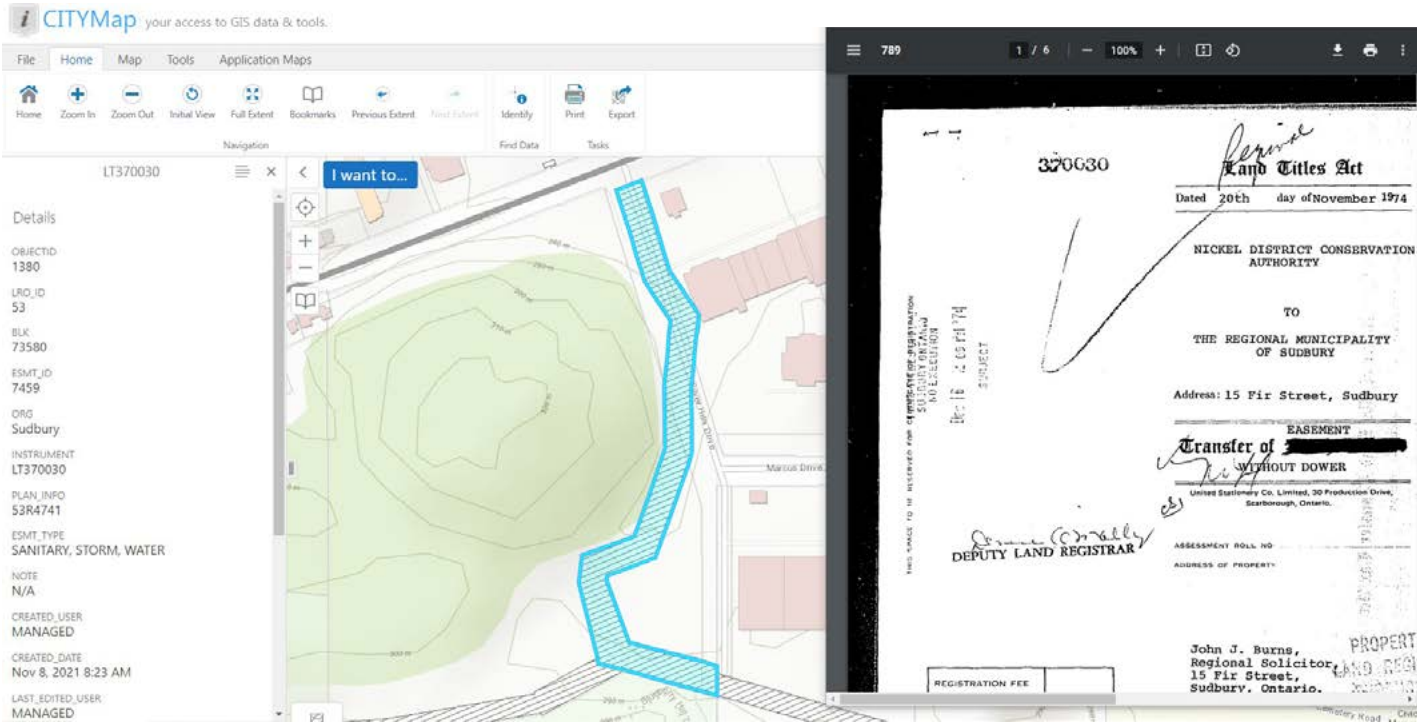

Figure 2. City of Greater Sudbury CityMap Online Mapping: Municipal Easement and Historical Documents

Clerks can quickly see an easement on a property and advise residents promptly – shaving significant time off processing every building permit and creating further value for the community. Residents also benefit from reduced wait times for permit approvals and inquiries.

> **I also use the easement layer ALL the time. In fact, I have this layer permanently turned on so that I am always aware of the easements when answering general inquiries or if I am diving into more substantial research on a property.**
>
> – Plans Examiner, Building Services

The Engineering Services team saves significant time using the easement data from Teranet, especially for as-built drawing and capital project work, where they can now check for easements for their infrastructure within seconds instead of days. (Figure 3)

> **I use it all the time, for me it is super helpful and a huge timesaver when investigating drainage complaints and future capital works projects. How did we live without it?**
>
> – Paul, Drainage Engineer

Figure 3. City of Greater Sudbury Municipal Easements

Teranet was tasked with completing the entire easement project, which included identifying, validating, and mapping easement data related to the City's infrastructure, within a tight timeframe. Teranet not only met this deadline, but we also delivered everything a month early, much to the delight of City staff.

Many municipalities are recognizing the importance of easement identification and mapping in a centralized system. For the City of Greater Sudbury, the return-on-investment was not only immediate, it was also enormous.

Teranet is committed to connecting customers to valuable data and modernization solutions that help them analyze and map easements and other land-related data. All with the end goal of helping municipalities and utility companies deliver greater value to the residents of their communities.

> **The easement layer has made our review of building permits infinitely easier. We used to have to work through a slow process of finding the R-plan associated with the lot requesting the permit to review their proposal vs. City easements as part of our review. With the easement layer now embedded in CityMap, the hunting for this information is now gone. This is much appreciated.**
>
> – Rob, Supervisor of Development Engineering

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