

**A PROPERTY RECORDS INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
POLICY FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA**

**Prepared by the Land Information Systems Advisory Committee
NS Land Use Committee**

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Note:

"A Property Records Information Management Policy for the Province of Nova Scotia" was approved and recommended to the Department of Municipal Affairs for implementation by the Nova Scotia Land Use Committee (Deputy Ministers) at its meeting of April 22nd, 1993.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The **Property Records Information Management Policy for the Province of Nova Scotia**, prepared by the Property Mapping Sub-Committee, is intended as a set of recommendations to guide completion of property mapping and parcel indexing for the Province of Nova Scotia, and to implement a Property Records Information Database. It also recommends converting the graphic (map) database to digital form: the textual/attribute database already exists in digital form. A more detailed workplan will be required to implement these recommendations.

The following is a summary of the recommendations contained in the Policy together with a reference to the page numbers where the recommendations are discussed.

1. Establish and maintain an automated Property Records Information Database for the Province of Nova Scotia (page 3).
2. Complete property mapping and parcel indexing for the western one third of the Province as soon as possible (page 3).
3. Establish provincial standards for the automated Property Records Information Database (page 3).
4. Convert all new and existing property mapping in Nova Scotia to digital format (page 4).
5. Maintain (revise and update) the Property Records Information Database on a current basis (page 5).
6. Distribute property records information to users as required (page 5).
7. The generic property information needs of all users should be met by a standard database (Property Records Information Database), collected once, as close to source as possible; organized from a Corporate rather than Departmental perspective, and shared by all users. Automated interfaces among major systems: OASIS, DORIS, LORIS and the Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre System should be developed, and closer working relationships developed among sponsoring departments or agencies (page 5).
8. All government land transactions should be registered with the Registrar of Deeds (page 5).

9. The Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre and the Registry of Deeds office should be advised of all transfers of administrative control between government departments (page 5).
10. A unique Parcel Identification Number (PID) should be assigned to each land parcel in the Province of Nova Scotia, and should appear on documents related to land parcels prior to their registration in the Registry of Deeds offices, in areas of the Province where PID's have been assigned (page 6).
11. Departments should be required to refer to (to cross-reference) the PID in all parcel related databases to facilitate data exchange (page 6).
12. Innovative cost sharing programs should be investigated and implemented to help realize the objective of creating and maintaining a Property Records Information Database (page 6).
13. In the process of implementing this policy, Acts of the Government of Nova Scotia, related to land parcels, should be revised to support the objective of creating a current Property Records Information Database. At the same time, conflicts in existing legislation should be reconciled in support of the same objective (footnote 4 and Appendix B).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Policy was prepared through the efforts of the former Property Mapping Sub-Committee, Land Information Committee, which preceded the Land Information Systems Advisory Committee as the committee responsible for recommending on matters related to property records information management. The policy document has been updated to reflect changes in departmental names and responsibilities since that time.

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A PROPERTY RECORDS INFORMATION MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA

1. **BACKGROUND**

For the purpose of this document, property records information includes property mapping and parcel indexing consisting of identifying and representing land parcels¹ on an accurate base map, assigning unique parcel identification numbers (PID's) and creating a file containing descriptive information about land parcels.

1.1 **Property Mapping**

The property mapping process produces a graphic representation (map) of each land parcel on a common accurate base map. Each land parcel is identified by a unique parcel identification number (referred to as PID) assigned to it on the property map. The primary source of the property boundary information is the Registry of Deeds Offices of the Department of Attorney General. Deeds, plans and other documents describing land parcels, their owners, transfer of ownership, etc. are registered with the Registrar of Deeds. The deed provides a textual description of the land parcel and may or may not be accompanied by a location plan. At present, there is not a complete graphical representation of all land parcels, their location and their relationship to surrounding land parcels for the Province of Nova Scotia. The property mapping program for Nova Scotia, when completed, will provide a comprehensive and uniform set of maps displaying the physical location of all land parcels in the Province.

¹ The following is the current definition of a freehold land parcel as used by the Province:

A parcel is defined as an area of land that is described in a single description in a deed or as one of a number of lots on a registered plan of subdivision; or a plan of amalgamation where applicable, separately owned, either publicly or privately; and capable of being separately conveyed.

1.2 **Parcel Indexing**

The Parcel Index File, which has been automated, is a file of attributes describing each land parcel. Descriptive attributes such as owner's name, civic address, parcel size, land use, and others, are linked to the land parcel using the unique PID. There are many sources of the information contained in the parcel index file; the primary source is again the Registry of Deeds Offices of the Department of Attorney General. Other information sources include: Assessment Division, Department of Municipal Affairs; Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, Department of Natural Resources; federal government agencies; municipalities; local land surveyors; private land owners; and the public.

- 1.3** Since 1973 property mapping and parcel indexing has been undertaken on behalf of the Province of Nova Scotia by the Land Registration and Information Service² (LRIS). LRIS systematically mapped areas of the Province, completing two thirds of the program by 1986; however, budget limitations prevented completion of mapping for the western one third of the Province. Since 1986, most available resources have been devoted to maintaining (revising and updating) and distributing the property records information already completed for the eastern portion of the Province. In the absence of an LRIS program in southwestern Nova Scotia, local and provincial initiatives have been taken to help fill this void (Appendix A).
- 1.4** Property records information, a major component of the basic land information infrastructure, is used extensively in planning, operations, and decision making by many disciplines: municipal administrators, tax assessors, land surveyors, economists, land developers, planners, resource managers, and others. A Property Records Information Management Database; therefore, must be designed as a multi-user system: it cannot be tied to a single user's requirement. It is imperative that the product satisfies the requirements of its major users. A Property Records Information Management Database also provides the infrastructure through which a Land Titles System or Reformed Registry System can be implemented.
- 1.5** A primary objective for creating a Property Records Information Management Database, in addition to facilitating the use of the data, must be to improve and upgrade the data within the database on an ongoing basis. This process must continue until all parcel index information is complete, accurate and current, and all parcel boundaries can be described by calculated or surveyed co-ordinates tied into the Provincial Control Survey Network.
- 1.6** It is essential to note that unless property records information is maintained, its value deteriorates rapidly to the point where, after several years of neglect, it is of limited use.
- 1.7** Over the past several years, there has been a growing demand for digital information for use by the rapidly increasing number of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) installed throughout the Province. This identifies the requirement for property records information in digital form. Some conversion of property records information to digital form has already been completed; however, much remains to be done. Of the approximately 500,000 land parcels in the Province, 380,000 have been mapped, and over 160,000 land parcels are now available in digital form. There is a requirement

²

Any reference to LRIS in this document recognizes that LRIS is in the process of undergoing change. On January 9th, 1993 the functions of the Property Mapping and Records Division, Land Registration and Information Service were transferred to the Land Information Management Services Division, Department of Municipal Affairs.

for an ongoing program to complete property mapping for the Province and to convert it to digital form.

2. POLICY GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 GOAL

TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A CURRENT, CORPORATE³, DIGITAL PROPERTY RECORDS INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DATABASE CONTAINING PROPERTY BOUNDARIES (GRAPHICS) AND A PARCEL INDEX FILE OF DESCRIPTIVE ATTRIBUTES (TEXT), TO COMMON STANDARDS AND ACCURACIES, FOR ALL LAND PARCELS IN THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

OBJECTIVES

2.2 TO COMPLETE CONVENTIONAL PROPERTY MAPPING AND PARCEL INDEXING, TO ESTABLISHED PROVINCIAL STANDARDS, FOR THE WESTERN PORTION OF THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

This can be accomplished by building on work already undertaken by several local municipal governments; the Assessment Division, Department of Municipal Affairs; the Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, and by continuing and expanding LRIS property mapping activity that was initiated in the area in 1990 (See Appendix A).

The three established Land Information Centres in Halifax, New Glasgow, and Sydney, serving the eastern portion of the Province, and the new centre being established in Lawrencetown to serve the western portion of the Province, must continue to maintain and distribute property records information collected for these areas of the Province.

2.3 TO ESTABLISH PROVINCIAL STANDARDS FOR THE PROPERTY RECORDS INFORMATION DATABASE

Within an automated information system, there is a requirement to standardize data so that information can be processed easily and a variety of standard or customized output products can be produced as required.

Provincial standards⁴ established for data input into the Property Records Information Management Database should include items, such as: a common definition for a land parcel, a common base map

³ Corporate land information, as used in this context, is described as land related information or data that is or could be utilized by two or more public sector organizations.

⁴ The Nova Scotia Land Information Standards Study completed in 1992 and presently being reviewed for implementation recommends on many of these standards including: definition of land parcel, a common base map, standard content for land parcel descriptors and the use of the unique parcel identification number (PID).

on which parcel boundaries are plotted, standard content for the parcel index file, and the requirement that topology be built into the graphics file so that it can be used in a GIS.

The following is an accepted definition of a land parcel which the participating departments are willing to adopt upon implementation of this policy:⁵

A parcel is defined as an area of land that is described in a single description in a deed or as one of a number of lots on a registered plan of subdivision; or a plan of amalgamation where applicable, separately owned, either publicly or privately; and capable of being separately conveyed.

Users may have to aggregate or disaggregate land parcels for their management purposes and use different land parcel numbering systems; however, the accepted definition, the one used by the custodian of the Property Records Information Management Database, should be a common reference point for all users.

Descriptive attributes within the Property Records Information Management Database (owner's name, address, parcel area, land use and others) must be standard, accurate, consistent and complete for each land parcel throughout the Province; with the use of automated technology this carries more importance than was the case with conventional use of information. At present, descriptive attribute information for completed property records is automated, and where the LRIS program has been operating, standard content exists for all completed mapping.

2.4 TO CONVERT ALL NEW AND EXISTING PROPERTY MAPPING IN NOVA SCOTIA TO DIGITAL FORMAT WITHIN FIVE YEARS.

GIS technology is fast becoming the standard information management and manipulation tool of land information users. Presently, thematic layers of information, such as forestry, agriculture, geology, and soils, are being converted to digital format. Property records information is an essential component of the land information infrastructure; therefore, it is imperative that this information, together with standard base maps, be available in digital form as soon as possible.

Priorities must be established for the conversion of property mapping to digital form as soon as possible. Some guidelines in establishing priorities might include:

- a) cost sharing agreements reached with potential users;
- b) availability of digital base mapping;
- c) ability of a local land information office to maintain the database; and
- d) user capability to utilize digital data.

2.5 TO MAINTAIN (REVISE AND UPDATE) THE PROPERTY RECORDS INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DATABASE (PROPERTY MAP FILES AND THE PARCEL INDEX FILES), ON A CURRENT BASIS, AND TO DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION TO USERS AS

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It should be noted that at least twenty-four Acts of the Province of Nova Scotia are affected by this Policy. In some instances present legislation relating to property is in conflict. Such conflicts must be resolved before the full benefit of recommendations under this Policy can be realized (See Appendix B).

REQUIRED

Unless property information is maintained on a current basis, its value rapidly deteriorates to the point where, after several years of neglect, it is of limited use. It is essential, therefore, that property information be maintained as current as resources and technology will permit. In instances where a property mapper is resident in the Registry of Deeds Office, information should be current to the previous day. In other instances, information should be current to within one to four weeks of the registration of a document.

There are many users of property records information; there are also many sources of data to update property records information. For this reason, a single agency should be responsible for collection, maintenance and distribution of information for the official Property Records Information Management Database; however, distribution can and should be encouraged through a network of accessible outlets within the regions. The collection and maintenance of property records information should not be duplicated; this is not to say that the same information is not to be held by more than one agency. Users should, however, obtain the information from the designated source. Coordination of information collection must be established among all major users, particularly: Land Information Management Services Division, DMA (formerly LRIS Property Mapping and Records Division), Registry of Deeds, Assessment Division, and Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre.

The requirements of all users of land information (data) within the Province should be identified using a Corporate rather than Departmental perspective. All users should accept the philosophy "data should be captured once, as close to source as possible and shared by all authorized departments and agencies involved". Standards involving the definition and the access to the land based data should be developed and applied to all Departmental systems such as Deeds On-Line Registry Information System (DORIS), Land Ownership Registry Information System (LORIS), On-Line Appraisal and Statistical Information System (OASIS) and the Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre System, maintained by the Registry of Deeds; Land Information Management Services Division; Assessment Division; Department of Municipal Affairs and the Provincial Crown Lands Record Centre, respectively. Automated interfaces should be developed between major systems in order to eliminate duplicate data entry. Major enhancements to any of the systems should be undertaken in such a fashion as to foster closer working relationships. Policies must be established regarding the distribution, use and pricing of property records information. Products must be made available to departments in a form that can be used and at a cost that does not prohibit use.

To ensure that the Property Records Information Management Database is maintained as complete as possible, it is recommended that: a single provincial government agency should be responsible for recording the acquisition and sale of all provincially owned or crown land; and that the Province of Nova Scotia should ensure that all land transactions involving the Crown, including transfers of ownership between provincial agencies, are registered with the Registrar of Deeds. The Crown Lands Record Centre should be advised of all ministerial orders transferring land ownership between government departments.

2.6 TO ASSIGN A UNIQUE PROVINCIAL STANDARD PARCEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER TO EACH LAND PARCEL IN THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

The unique parcel identification number should be assigned to each new land parcel prior to the time the deed or other land related document is registered in the Registry of Deeds Offices. At present,

the unique PID is being assigned by the Land Information Management Services Division, DMA at the time of property mapping and parcel indexing.

The acceptance of a unique parcel identification number to which all land information can be related, does not necessarily mean replacement of departmental parcel numbering systems with the PID; however, all parcel related data bases should, at minimum, include the PID as a cross-reference to facilitate the exchange of parcel related data.

A unique parcel identification number avoids ambiguity and provides a number through which the lineage of a land parcel can easily be traced.

2.7 TO IMPLEMENT COST SHARING (PARTNERSHIP) PROGRAMS WITH MAJOR USERS FOR THE COLLECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF PROPERTY RECORDS INFORMATION.

Major property records information users, other than the provincial government, include: municipalities (urban and rural), utility companies, land surveyors, real estate professionals, and others. The collection and maintenance of property records information is an ongoing and costly undertaking; therefore, major users can and should be encouraged to share in the cost of collecting and maintaining this information. Innovative, cost sharing (partnership) agreements can be developed that will mutually benefit all participants.

Examples of such cost sharing initiatives include:

- 50% municipality/LRIS cost sharing to convert property mapping for selected municipalities;
- initiatives by the Cape Breton Metropolitan Planning Commission to cooperatively convert municipal property maps to digital form;
- project by Department of Natural Resources to convert property mapping for Guysborough County to digital form;
- Municipality of Queens agreement to map land parcels on maps supplied by LIMS Division;
- Municipality of Lunenburg's agreement to develop public domain software useful to other municipalities in exchange for a modest financial contribution and agreement to use the PID numbers in the project.

The Land Information Systems Advisory Committee and others are continuing to negotiate creative co-operative arrangements to accelerate this program.

Acts of The Province of Nova Scotia Affecting Property Issues

The following list of Acts of the Province of Nova Scotia, which would affect a Property Records Information Management Database, results from preliminary research conducted by a member of the Property Mapping Sub-Committee. It is noteworthy that there are two additional complications:

- some of the Acts are in conflict
- the Crown is exempt from most of the Acts and regulations thereunder.

The Assessment Act

The Beaches Act

The Condominium Act

Conveyancing Act

The Crown Lands Act

The Expropriation Act

The Heritage Property Act

The Housing Act

The Housing Development Corporation Act

The Land Surveyors Act

The Parks Development Act

The Planning Act

The Power Corporation Act

The Provincial Parks Act

The Public Highways Act

The Rural Electrification Act

The Quieting Titles Act

The Railways Act

The Special Places Protection Act

The Trails Act

The Registry Act

The Water Act

The Wildlife Act

The Wills Act

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