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Municipalities could use geographic tool, engineer says

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A Geographic Information System (GIS) could be a useful tool to any municipality with things such as finding utility lines.

Alan Wufus, of the Hazleton City Engineer's Office, told members of the Mountain Council of Governments (M-COG) this week that a GIS system could be advantageous to a municipality in many ways.

"He told us it can be useful with zoning, infrastructure management, like knowing where water and gas lines are, and floodplain mapping," said Dan Guydish, the M-COG's executive director.

"With the GIS system, you can pinpoint any of the utility lines at a moment's notice. It can help with mapping."

Guydish said Wufus told M-COG members the system is more beneficial when more municipalities use it.

"There is funding available," he said. "If it were used by 10 municipalities, it would cost about \$60,000. There is federal funding available from Homeland Security and state funding from DCED (the state Department of Community and Economic Development)."

As with all other M-COG projects, if enough area municipalities are interested in going in together, a grant would be easier to come by,

Guydish said.

He said the GIS would be useful in keeping track of where utility lines are – just like the new Illegal Immigration Relief Act can keep track of people moving into and out of the City of Hazleton.

Guydish said Mayor Louis Barletta – architect of the landmark legislation – told M-COG members the laws are meant to impact illegal aliens, regardless of their ethnic background.

"The mayor told us illegal aliens were draining city services and causing problems for the city," Guydish said. "He wanted to attack the problem from the proper angle.

"The methods he used were

strictly within federal law. The law didn't regulate immigrants, it regulated landlords and businesses. But no stress was put on landlords. Anyone who rents has to get a permit from the city to make everyone be within the law."

But the mayor told the M-COG many immigrants misinterpreted his actions.

"Many opposition groups said the laws were racist against Hispanics, but the law was meant to impact all illegal immigrants and the drain they were putting on city resources."

Guydish said the mayor talked for about 40 minutes and "was very informative. There were a lot of questions from COG members."