



Comprehensive Property Information Website Enhancement

David J. Willer, Office of Information Technology
Article 2-2008, November, 2008



I am pleased to announce a new **Comprehensive Property Information (CPI)** website enhancement. The CPI has been developed by the Office of Information Technology through a grant from the New York State Office of Real Property Services. The main purpose of the CPI is to provide unprecedented access to property information in the Town of Amherst. Although property information has been available through the Town's website for nearly a decade, this improved system provides a more uniform and integrated user-interface. Additionally, improvements in data quality and availability enhance our new system. This results in faster and easier retrieval of up-to-date online data.

*You may enter the CPI system by entering the keyword "cpi"
(without the quotation marks) from anywhere on the site.*

The CPI is comprised of three (3) main modules:

1. Property Assessment information and Assessment Challenge module
2. Property Tax information
3. Online Mapping

Please refer to our **Comprehensive Property System Flowchart** (page 3) for a diagram of the system components and interconnectivity among the system's modules.

The system design focuses on an integrated approach. Our previous property information related to assessments, taxes and mapping were housed in separate systems using different interfaces. In other words, if you wanted to research property taxes for a property you could enter our online property tax area. From that point if you then wanted to review that property's assessment information, you would need to back all the way out and begin your process anew from that area of our website. Similarly, there was no direct connection from either the tax information or the assessment information to our online mapping system.

The focus of the new system is to provide seamless access to each of these areas. One major goal was to design a system that produces results quickly and transparently to the end user. Aside from extensive documentation, online forms and contact information there is a unified and consistent property search area that will allow website visitors to find a property(s) by street address, section, block & lot (SBL) number, or owner name. This will definitely result in building user expertise for those who may access the system regularly or intermittently.

For most users, a search begins with a specific property. The "Find a Property" option is the most convenient and simple to use method for achieving your desired results. The results of this search produce a uniform "Property Inventory" screen from the property assessments, taxes or online mapping modules. This inventory information contains basic information related to the property location, assessment, taxes, physical characteristics and additional location or district information. In many cases, this basic inventory information will satisfy a website visitor. Others will wish to continue their research for more detailed information.

Although many users will use the search capabilities built into the "Find a Property" area, some users may not know the address, SBL or owner name for a specific property. In this case, a user may choose

to enter the online mapping module to find the property using a digital map of the Town. This area of the site will allow a user to zoom in or out on a specific area until they find the property in question. They may know that the property is one or two properties from a known intersection, etc. Users will then be able to navigate to the assessment, property taxes or property inventory screen to continue their research.

Menu choices throughout the system are context sensitive. In other words, if you begin your property search from the "Property Assessments" area, then your resulting "Property Inventory" screen will contain menu choices specific to property assessments. Specifically, a user would be able to learn about the assessment challenge process, download forms for that activity, contact the Assessor's Office, etc. Similarly, context-sensitive specific menus and information are available from the "Property Taxes" and "Online Mapping" modules.

Once a user has located the "Subject Property" of interest, they may select "Challenge Assessment", "Property Taxes" or "Online Mapping" from the "Property Inventory" screen. This allows a user to investigate and retrieve specific information of interest. While a user may have a good idea about what information they are seeking, the system allows for transparent retrieval of property information from disparate departments and database systems.

I welcome your feedback and comments regarding the CPI or our website in general. Please feel free to email me at webmaster@amherst.ny.us.



**Comprehensive
Property Information
System**

Data Module Flowchart

Module Key

- ▣▣▣ Assessments
- ○ ○ Taxes
- ▲ ▲ ▲ Mapping

