

June 3, 2015

Arkansas Society of Professional Surveyors (ASPS)
Board of Directors
835 Central Ave, Suite 423
Hot Springs AR 71901
(VIA EMAIL)

Dear ASPS Board,

Last week I attended a meeting of the Division of Land Survey, Advisory Board. During the meeting James Montgomery suggested that I might write a letter to the ASPS Board about the recent legislation. This is my effort to share some insight on the passage of House Bill 1001 of the First Special Session of the 90th General Assembly. The Bill was the first substantial effort in many years to find efficiencies in state government. The Bill merged several agencies including the Department of Rural Services and Arkansas Science and Technology Authority into the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Arkansas Building Authority into the Department of Finance and Administration and the Division of Land Survey into the Geographic Information Systems Office. The Bill had overwhelming support with 33 Senators and 95 Representatives voting for efficiency.

Under the law, the Division of Land Surveys is transferred to the GIS Office, and the Land Survey Advisory Board becomes advisory to the GIS Board. I have spoken with several Professional Surveyors of late and all raised concerns. I will address some of those concerns.

- Foremost, this was not an adversarial step to damage the profession. This was a small part of a larger effort by the Governor to deliver on his campaign promise to make state operations more efficient. The GIS Board and staff of the GIS Office have a deep respect for the profession of surveying and together we should do everything we can to strengthen the profession.
- Under the new structure the GIS Board might change minimum standards to the detriment of the profession. It is difficult for me to imagine why the GIS Board would take a stance on minimum standards that was not already researched, debated, agreed on and recommended by the Land Survey Advisory Board. Over the years, as I have watched the GIS Board work, they have maintained a culture of decision making by consensus. I cannot recall, in their history, taking a position or issuing a decision that was surrounded by controversy or objection based on facts.
- ASPS was taken by surprise and did not have an opportunity to provide input to the language of the legislation. This is true; and while the GIS Office had notice before the Special Session, we did not see the Bill until it was filed on the first day of the Special Session. In a meeting before the session I attending a meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Deputy Secretary and Everett Rowland. The Secretary informed Everett about the change that was planned. He said there would be no push back from the Department of Agriculture. It is our understanding the Governor's staff wrote the legislation.
- The Division of Land Surveys will be dismantled or harmed. This is not true.

Going forward, it is my expectation that we will work closely with the staff over the next several months to get up to speed on all the various issues and challenges facing the Division as it carries out its mission. We need to find out all those details and gain a commanding knowledge of the Division's budget. Please understand that all state agencies were forced to implement a 1% budget cut that was recommended by the Governor and passed by the legislature. We need to understand where the Division planned for that cut and what that means. That should be our number one concern for the short-term.

I set a personal goal that no constituent of the Division will see any difference in the quality of service, and that we may be able to improve these services. The State GIS Board's role should be to assist and not to overshadow the legislative mandate of the Division and Advisory Board. Doing otherwise would be a political end to the GIS Board and bad public policy for surveying consumers. One short-term idea we can deliver fairly quickly is to establish a permanent website for the Division. The goal would be for the Division to have it's own identity and online presence. This would allow constituents and consumers easier access to the Division's information and staff.

My second goal is that a transition takes place as smoothly as possible. I want you to know that I will be glad to visit with any of you as a group or individually as needed. If you have a good idea for an improvement to the Division I want to hear it. My desire is to see the way ahead and make progress. I look forward to meeting with the ASPS Board and if I can be of assistance before then, contact me at shelby.johnson@arkansas.gov or 501-682-2943.

Sincerely,

Shelby D Johnson - Geographic Information Officer
Arkansas GIS Office
1 Capitol Mall Ste 6D
Little Rock, AR 72201
501.682.2943 Tel
501.682.6077 Fax
shelby.johnson@arkansas.gov Email
<http://www.gis.arkansas.gov> Web