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Evolution in Planning: Using Information Technology to Enhance the Process

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LEAMgroup, a spin off of University of Illinois research, has successfully created technology-based tools for land use and transportation planners. Using state-of-the-art computer models, GIS and web-based outreach tools, LEAMgroup has assisted numerous regional and local agencies with scenario planning, impact analysis, and public engagement. These tools offer planners the ability to view and distribute complex data, to determine potential outcomes of decisions, and to anticipate their implications. Central to this planning support system is the Land use Evolution and impact Assessment Model (LEAM), a regional urban simulation model that links to transportation demand models and is used to forecast and evaluate land use change over space and time. A regional econometric input-output model forecasts the regional demand for residential and commercial land uses as well as open space. A custom web-based GeoPortal utilizes GIS and Google Maps to host model results for each client and assist with outreach. The GeoPortal is an organizational and visualization tool that enables planners to manage large datasets of various formats and make that information available to a wide range of community voices. This technology enhances communication among dispersed stakeholders, facilitates the decision-making process, and brings transparency into the planning process.