

Mapping the way

Aerial views of Black Hawk County land, buildings available in CD-ROM



DAN NIERLING / Courier Photo Editor

Black Hawk County Engineer Harold Jensen and staff member Lynn Kloberdanz view an aerial map of downtown Waterloo on a computer screen. Computer discs containing maps of the entire county are available for purchase through Jensen's office.

By **TIM JAMISON**
Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO

The best vantage point for viewing Black Hawk County's rolling cornfields, rivers, roads and homes may be from a computer screen in the county engineer's office.

Familiar landmarks — the Five Sullivan Brother's Convention Center, Highway 218 and Homeland Bank — are easily discernable as the computer provides a bird's eye digital image of downtown Waterloo.

Aerial maps of the county, previously stored as photographs, are now available on CD-ROM and can be retrieved from computer disc with the stroke of a key.

"These will be a valuable planning tool for our office and other cities in Black Hawk County," said County Engineer Harold Jensen, who oversaw the conversion to digital ortho photos. "It's really exciting to see just how many ways this technology can be used."

Jensen received permission from the Board of Supervisors last week

to begin selling copies of the CD-ROM maps at cost to interested consumers. The discs — eight for the entire county — may be purchased individually for \$50 or as a set for \$400.

Jensen is targeting government agencies, utility providers and other organizations, which could use the maps as a planning tool. But any member of the general public — perhaps someone interested in how a specific farm looks from an airplane — can place an order.

"The more they're used, the more valuable they are," Jensen said. "If we put them in a drawer and didn't use them ... we would be wasting our money."

Prices for the discs are based on cost of production.

"This is not a money-making project for the county," said Assistant County Attorney Pete Burk, who gave his blessing to the sale.

"All we're doing is passing through our legitimate reproduction and sales costs with respect to this matter."

Digital maps have a decided advantage over their bulky predecessors, because they can be updated easily and will serve as a base for a new Geographic Information System being implemented locally.

Midwest Power, for example, could purchase the photographs and overlay a map of utility lines. That new overlay disc could be shared with a city, which can quickly locate gas mains when designing a street or sewer improvement.

Jensen is asking agencies that buy the information to sign a memorandum of understanding, asking they freely share any information added to the base maps.

Future information also could benefit public safety agencies, Jensen said.

For example, it may someday be possible for firefighters to call up an aerial image of a burning warehouse, and dial up information about dangerous chemicals stored at the business, he said.

The current maps are scaled to 1 inch equals 400 feet, but allow users to zoom in on specific areas before the image breaks up. Maps of the cities will be rephotographed later, at a scale of 1 inch equals 100 feet, to provide a clearer image.

People wanting to buy the discs should contact the county engineer's office, on the second floor of the courthouse, to place an order. For engineering applications, special programs may be needed to run the software.

Orders must be placed by next Monday. A second order may be placed in about six months, Jensen said.

"The more they're used, the more valuable they are."

Harold Jensen
county engineer