



First District News

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August 2026

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Western Planners Conference

Get ready for a one-of-a-kind planning conference experience! Planners, practitioners, and community leaders from across the region will gather in Sioux Falls from August 26–28 for a joint conference hosted by the South Dakota Planners Association, Western Planning Association, and the American Planning Association's Tribal & Indigenous Division. Centered around the theme, Urban Vibe, Rural Charm, the conference celebrates the communities we plan for—from thriving urban centers to small towns and Tribal communities—while addressing the real-world challenges shaping the future of the Western United States. Representatives from more than 13 states will come together, bringing diverse perspectives and expertise at a pivotal time for community planning. The conversations, connections, and innovative ideas sparked during this event will help shape how our communities grow, adapt, and thrive for years to come. For more information and to register for the conference, visit <https://sdplanners.org/Events>



First District Assisting with Pre-Disaster Plans

Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plans (PDM) serves as a strategic planning tool for use by counties and communities in efforts to mitigate future natural disaster events.

In order to be the recipient of certain FEMA funding, counties are required to develop the PDM, review it annually, and complete a comprehensive review every five years.

The District is pleased to announce that it was successful in assisting Deuel County and Lake County in acquiring grant funds to assist those entities with the development of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation plans. The planning process for those two counties starts in September.

MY THOUGHTS...

By: Todd A. Kays



First District Leads Regional Innovation with Expanded GIS Services and Online Permitting Solutions

For more than three decades, the First District Association of Local Governments has been a regional leader in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), helping communities and counties throughout northeastern South Dakota improve planning, infrastructure management, and public service delivery. We continue building on that legacy through the expansion of our GIS utility mapping services and the Online GIS Building and Zoning Permit System for counties and municipalities.

As local governments face increasing demands to modernize operations while maintaining efficiency, First District continues to provide innovative tools that help communities manage critical infrastructure and streamline development processes.

Expanding GIS Utility/Infrastructure Mapping Services

GIS UTILITY/INFRASTRUCTURE MAPPING SERVICES

ACCURATE DATA. SMARTER DECISIONS. STRONGER COMMUNITIES.



First District partners with counties, municipalities, and utility providers across the region to develop and maintain comprehensive utility and infrastructure mapping datasets. These efforts include the digitization and management of roads, signs, sidewalks, trails, water mains, sanitary sewer systems, storm sewer networks, electrical utilities, natural gas lines, and other essential public infrastructure assets.

Through our long-standing partnership with ESRI, the global leader in GIS software, First District can convert historical paper records, digitize legacy maps, and transform engineering files from AutoCAD into GIS-compatible layers. The result is a centralized and accurate inventory of community infrastructure that can be easily accessed and updated. These utility datasets can be integrated with additional GIS information such as street networks, property parcels, zoning districts, aerial imagery, and address points, creating a powerful platform for asset management and informed decision-making.

One of the greatest advantages of First District's GIS services is accessibility. Through its secure web-hosted GIS portal, county, municipal, and utility staff can

access the latest infrastructure information directly from smartphones, tablets, or computers while in the field. GPS-enabled devices, including smartphones and Trimble units, allow employees to collect and update infrastructure data in real time, ensuring communities maintain a living record of their utility systems.

Having reliable utility data is essential for communities of all sizes. Whether locating a curb stop during an emergency, documenting a newly installed water main, or identifying stormwater infrastructure, GIS technology provides local governments with the information they need—when and where they need it.

By providing affordable GIS services, First District is helping local governments and utility providers improve efficiency, preserve institutional knowledge, and make more informed decisions about their infrastructure investments.

Modernizing the Permitting Process

In addition to expanding GIS utility and infrastructure services, First District has launched its Online GIS Building and Zoning Permit System—an innovative cloud-based platform designed to simplify permit applications and improve transparency for counties and municipalities. The new system combines advanced GIS technology with an intuitive online interface which enables property owners, contractors, and developers to submit permit applications from anywhere while allowing local officials to review, approve, and manage applications in real time.

The platform provides applicants with instant access to property information through integrated GIS mapping tools. Before submitting an application, users can review zoning districts, land-use classifications, setbacks, floodplain information, environmental constraints, and other regulatory requirements, helping identify potential issues early and reducing approval delays.

Applicants can upload plans, submit supporting documentation electronically, track permit status, and receive notifications regarding approvals, comments, and required revisions—all from the comfort of their home or office.

For local officials, the system offers a centralized dashboard for permit management, collaboration among departments, and secure digital recordkeeping. Automated workflows reduce administrative burdens, improve consistency, and provide a complete audit trail of permitting activities.

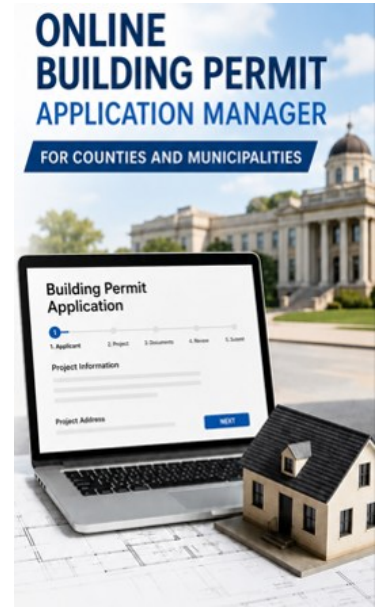
Local governments are continually looking for ways to improve customer service while maximizing staff resources. First District's Online GIS Building and Zoning Permit System gives counties and municipalities the tools they need to process permits more efficiently, improve communication with applicants, and ensure projects comply with local regulations before construction even begins.

Investing in Local Governments

As technology continues to transform local government operations, First District remains committed to ensuring the communities and counties it serves have access to the tools and the expertise needed to thrive in the decades ahead.

Communities across our region are embracing digital tools to improve operations and prepare for future growth. By integrating GIS with utility management and online permitting, First District is helping local governments build smarter, work more efficiently, all while creating a more predictable development process for everyone involved.

First District is proud to offer both GIS Utility Mapping services and the Online GIS Building and Zoning Permit System to communities, counties, and utility providers. Those interested in learning more or scheduling a demonstration are encouraged to contact Kelli at kelli@1stdistrict.org or Carla at carla@1stdistrict.org.



Governing Body/Annual Picnic Date

The next First District Governing Body meeting/annual picnic will be on Thursday, September 24th at our office located at 418 18th Ave NE, Watertown. Invitations will be mailed at a later date. We hope to see you there!



First District
Governing Body Officers

Mike Bartley.....Chairperson
Brookings County At-Large
Gary Jaeger.....Vice Chairperson
Deuel County At-Large
Myron Johnson.....Secretary
Codington County Commissioner
Todd A. Kays.....Executive Director



Funds Awarded

- ARPA—Shared Resources \$206,749
- GOED LIPP—Madison \$500,000
- HMGP—Deuel County \$15,000; Lake County \$15,000
- SDDANR—Toronto \$770,000 SRF Loan with \$425,000 principal forgiveness

Upcoming Events

- September 7**—Labor Day, Office Closed
- September 24**—Governing Body/Picnic
- October 12**—Columbus Day, Office Closed
- November 11**—Veterans Day, Office Closed
- November 26-27**—Thanksgiving, Office Closed
- DEADLINES FOR SUBMITTING DOCUMENTS TO THIS OFFICE MAY BE PRIOR TO DEADLINES LISTED HERE. PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE.**
- October 15**—Bridge Improvement Plan Deadline
- April 30, July 31, Oct. 31, & Jan. 31**—Deadlines for Local Infrastructure Improvement Program
- April 1, July 1, Oct. 1, & Jan. 1**—Deadlines for State Revolving Fund (SRF) Applications
- April 1 & Oct. 1**—Deadlines for CDBG Applications
- May 1, Aug. 1, Oct. 1, & Feb. 1**—Deadlines for State Water Plan (SWP) Applications