

Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council

Parcel Data Standard

Frequently Asked Questions



Introduction. Digital parcel data is a core geospatial infrastructure dataset containing a wealth of valuable information about land division, land value and numerous other locational and descriptive attributes related to land parcels. It is a foundational building block of spatial data for government services at all levels. Additionally, the work of private sector interests (e.g., utilities, real estate, engineering), non-profits and academia are greatly enhanced and more efficient with the availability of standardized parcel data.

Digital parcel data originates from the work of **county governments** who approve and record land division which supports the work flow of tax collection and tax administration. County governments are therefore the **authoritative source** of the digital parcel data in Minnesota. All parcel data consumers are dependent upon the work of counties for this important data resource.



The Parcel Data Standard is a common resource for the geospatial community. This FAQ document seeks to answer many common questions about what the standard is and how it can be used to the benefit of geospatial work in Minnesota.



What is the GAC Parcel Data Standard?

The Parcel Data Standard is a **stakeholder-defined** method for the sharing, aggregation, and integration of digital parcel data in among organizations in Minnesota. It establishes a common set of attributes and field definitions to encourage the efficient transfer, use and aggregation of geospatial parcel (cadastral) data. The standard is primarily intended for use as a transfer standard; however, the wide range of attributes it contains facilitates its use for a variety of purposes. The standard does **not** mandate how data producers should capture or store their parcel data internally or how data is used to meet their internal business needs.

The standard simply includes and describes parcel data attributes. It does not direct which GIS format or projection system is to be used.



What are the benefits of using this standard?

The standard provides benefit to anyone using parcel data from more than one data producer in Minnesota. When datasets have standardized attribute names, types, field widths, and order, they can be combined and used more efficiently. Examples of interests who would use data from more than one producer include:

- *County staff needing to see valuations of parcels in adjoining counties*
- *State and regional agencies using parcel data for projects which cross county boundaries or encompass numerous jurisdictions*
- *Real estate interests and economic development staff researching parcel availability in a region*

Additionally, parcel attribute data (such as owner and value) can change frequently. Streamlining the process of sharing and merging data means that aggregated datasets can more easily be kept up-to-date. Anyone creating a new parcel dataset, for example in a county that does not currently have digital parcel data, could have a ready-made standard to follow without having to research or create one on their own.



Where did this standard come from?

This statewide effort originates from the work of the Parcels and Land Records Committee, and prior committees working on a parcel standard under the Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council. The standard can trace its origin even earlier to the [MetroGIS Parcel Data Standard](#). The survey departments and GIS staff of the seven Twin Cities metropolitan counties (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington) led the development of the original [MetroGIS Parcel Data Standard](#) beginning in September 1999. Much of the structure of the GAC [Parcel Data Standard](#) is retained from the work of the original county-led, metro-level effort. In response to input from the statewide stakeholder community, existing attributes were re-ordered and additional attributes were included.



Who advocated for this standard?

The standard was advanced by the Parcels and Land Records Committee of the Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council. The Parcels and Land Records Committee, in partnership with the GAC Standards Committee, published draft versions of the standard as it was developed and matured for public review. In response to this input the draft standard was revised and modified accordingly.



Were counties involved in creating this standard?

Yes, the input of county governments was vital to the development of the standard. The Parcels and Land Records Committee actively solicited input from county-level GIS professionals, surveyors and other parcel data stakeholders throughout the development of this standard.

Input was solicited and received from the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), MN GIS/LIS Consortium membership, the Minnesota Society of Professional Surveyors, regional collaborative groups around the state, and numerous other organizations and individuals.

The Parcel Data Standard is built upon the core attributes first used in the MetroGIS Regional Parcel Dataset specifications with new fields added and modifications to field widths, names and content as needed. Additionally, the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) and the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) parcel guidelines and recommendations were referenced and incorporated as appropriate.



Does adoption of this standard by the Geospatial Advisory Council represent a mandate to parcel data producers?

No. The GAC does not mandate or enforce standards. It offers the standards as a resource to the community. Organizations are encouraged to adopt the standard for data transfer purposes.



Our county has its own set of attributes it uses to meet our internal needs. Is our county required to change how it captures and stores its data?

No. This standard does not seek to define how any county captures or stores its parcel data. Many methods and formats of capture and storage will work with this standard, which focusses on an output data transfer format. As such, it defines a consistent order, name, type, and width for each attribute to streamline the transfer and aggregation of digital parcel data.



My agency may not have all the attribute data listed in the standard. Are we required to complete or populate all fields?

No, there are only a handful of attributes which are identified as mandatory. The 'mandatory' designation for compliance is intended to establish a baseline or critical-minimum criteria for inclusion in the standard. It is understood that counties create their data in a variety of ways using a variety of sources such as tax and CAMA (computer assisted mass appraisal) systems, and that not all the attributes can be populated. The attribute fields in the standard simply

provide a place to put data that your county may already collect. If your agency does not collect data for a specific field, or it cannot be extracted from your tax or CAMA system, it can simply be left blank.



Why is there only one field for containing the Legal Description? Abbreviated Legal Description (ABB_LEGAL)

Legal descriptions are stored in numerous ways by data producers. This field is included in the Parcel Data Transfer Standard because many data users have expressed a need for this information. To keep the standard manageable, it is limited to one field of 254 characters in length. It is understood that longer legal descriptions will be truncated.

If a data user needs more space for maintaining the full legal description of a parcel, they may need to link to a separate dataset for the remainder of the data content. It is important to note that geospatial data is *not a legal document*; it is a *digital representation* of a legal document. Geospatial parcel data is not intended to contain all information related to a parcel for legal work or survey usage. Users who require the full formal legal descriptions of a parcel may still need to seek out the formal documents representing that parcel which are on file at the county courthouse or government center.

In the context of the Parcel Data Transfer Standard, the Abbreviated Legal Description attribute simply provides a landing place for as much of the legal description that can fit within 254 characters.



How might my agency translate our data to this format?

A possible next step would be to create standard translation queries and make them available to counties and vendors who wish to use them. Most of Minnesota's parcel attribute data is maintained by several CAMA vendors. Standard extraction queries may be developed that are tailored to the limited number of data storage formats used by these vendors. These queries could potentially be used to translate the CAMA attribute data into the standard field names, types, widths and order.



What is the difference between CTU Name (CTU_NAME) and Postal Community Name (POSTCOMM)?

CTU_NAME references the name of the *city, township or unorganized territory* in which a given parcel is located. **POSTCOMM** is for the name the US Postal Service uses for the zip code. These two fields may be different since the USPS allows the use of more than one city name for

some ZIP codes. For example, within ZIP code 55127, both Golden Valley or Minneapolis are valid postal communities. Either would be valid values in this standard.



How does this parcel standard relate to the PRISM project of the MN Dept of Revenue?

At one point, the Parcels and Land Records Committee and Standards Committee were examining the potential to align the parcel standard with the work of the PRISM effort at the Minnesota Department of Revenue. PRISM was conceived as a means for counties to send their information directly to the State’s Property Tax Division. Department of Revenue staff use this data to calculate aid for local governments, track how the property tax system is working and analyze the impact of anticipated changes. Differences in business needs and project timing led to returning to a separate parcel data standard effort.



Who can I contact if I have other questions or concerns?

Contact the [Standards Committee](#) of the Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council