

# Phone app may help city with maintenance

■ Hillsborough testing method that lets residents send photos, GPS data on needed fixes

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Hillsborough has been leading other San Mateo County municipalities with its utilization of inexpensive technology to connect citizens and government.

It was the first to get law enforcement dispatches on Twitter and the first to stream police radio through an iPhone application. Now it's trying out a new Web site that lets people report nonemergency issues such as potholes and graffiti simply by taking a picture with their cell phone.

The Hillsborough Public Works Department began a testing phase with SeeClickFix.com earlier this month. It's monitoring a watch area where people can report problems using a downloadable iPhone application or a regular computer. If someone uploads a photo of a problem using the application, the town will receive an alert with GPS data telling them exactly where it is.

"This is a technology that's coming," said Public Works Director Martha Debry. "My 83-year-old father just bought an iPhone."

Hillsborough hasn't officially signed up for the service, which costs \$38 a month for an account that would

allow them to communicate fixes to citizens online. But if SeeClickFix lives up to its promise, the town will be paying for its subscription in the next month or two, Debry said.

Hillsborough would be the first local government with such an account on the West Coast, according to SeeClickFix Chief Executive Ben Berkowitz. The company, which is based in New Haven, Conn., established its popularity in cities such as Philadelphia and Boston and is regularly used by newspapers to track readers' complaints.

"A story like Hillsborough is great," Berkowitz said. "You're seeing them being really proactive and going out there."

The goal of SeeClickFix is to get people involved and promote transparency, according to Berkowitz. If a pothole is reported and it immediately becomes public record, there is more pressure for officials to follow through with repairs. Sometimes, however, he sees that citizens take matters into their own hands and fix things themselves.

Debry, who heard about SeeClickFix from the police department, is looking at it as a way to do a little more outreach.

Soon the application will have wider availability when beta versions come out for BlackBerry and Android platforms, Berkowitz said.

Hillsborough police Lt.

## Fix

From Page 3

Caroline Serrato was the person who urged Public Works officials to give the Web site a try. She learned about it while searching for free iPhone applications that could be useful to the town.

"We're trying to do more with less," she said. "That's basically what we're always trying to do."

Hillsborough residents with iPhones can download a SeeClickFix application to submit photos from their phones. Residents can also upload photos at [www.seeclickfix.com](http://www.seeclickfix.com).

See **FIX**, Page 4