



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

Ellen R Schleicher
Register of Deeds

Nila Born
Office Supervisor

February 26, 2016

TO: Adam Payne, County Administrator
Roger Te Stroete, County Board Chair
Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board of Supervisors

Greetings:

I am pleased to present you with the 2015 Register of Deeds Annual Report. In it, you will find a mission statement for the Register of Deeds office that summarizes our goals and responsibilities.

Property sales were a bit higher in 2015, however, our customers are telling us sales looked to be slower going into 2016. There is no guarantee for the upcoming year. Very hard to predict what the housing market will be.

I would like to commend the staff for the work accomplished in 2015; they once again exceeded expectations in the back indexing project along with working on other needed projects. The cross training is on-going and most can fill in for each other at any given time. They make a great team working together towards the greater goal; to make things better for the customer. I wish to thank them for their help, support, enthusiasm and hard work. Their dedication to their positions, the office and Sheboygan County make our accomplishments possible.

Respectively submitted,

Ellen R. Schleicher, Register of Deeds

ELLEN R. SCHLEICHER - REGISTER OF DEEDS

SUMMARY OF ANNUAL REPORT

2015

Mission Statement/Summary of Responsibility

To be fiscally responsible while serving the public in a courteous and friendly manner, following and enforcing the state statutes that dictate our office along with preserving and protecting real estate records, vital records and miscellaneous documents.

The Register of Deeds office is the primary source of legal documents, which affect virtually every individual living in Sheboygan County. This includes personal and real estate ownership and encumbrance records in addition to financing instruments that are the basis of individual and business credit ratings. This office executes the final acceptance and filing of new subdivision plats and Certified Survey Maps, administers the Vital Records Registration system, which includes registration of all births, marriages and deaths of county residents, probate instruments, and business documents such as corporate filings.

Other duties include registration, preparation, and issuance of copies of military records, administration of the Wisconsin Rental Weatherization Program, alternative informal probate procedures (HT-110; Termination of Interest in Property), and registration of US Treasury Federal Tax IRS Liens. Other statutory responsibilities include the collection of transfer fees and recording fees, currently divided between Sheboygan County and the State of Wisconsin.

Required reports are given to the following governmental agencies: US Treasury (Federal IRS Tax Liens), Wisconsin Department of Revenue (transfer fee tax collection and property valuation for tax equalization), and the Wisconsin Department of Administration (plat review and the Wisconsin Land Information Program), the Wisconsin Department of Safety & Professional Services (Rental Weatherization) and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (Vital Records).

Sheboygan County Departments that depend upon us for information and services include Veteran's Services Office, Planning & Conservation, Clerk of Courts, Treasurer/Real Property and Transportation.

Recorded land records are the basis of the real estate property tax. Translated into monetary terms the land records in the Register of Deeds office represent \$8.6 billion dollars in real estate lying within the borders of Sheboygan County. There was minimal change in real estate value from 2014.

Goals and Objectives Achieved in 2015

This year we continued to focus on the ongoing back indexing project. Our goal was to index at least 12,000 documents for the year, and the staff was able to back index 13,610 documents, exceeding our anticipated goal. Currently we are offering images dating back to February 18, 1977. Our main goal is to offer images back to 1962. The timeline on completing this project is unpredictable as it is worked on as time allows.

During 2015, two special projects were begun. Reviewing and purging the Uniform Commercial Code Financing documents and scanning and back indexing all Corporate Boundary Maps and Water Pollution Agreements. In 2014 we converted all of the microfilmed veterans' records to scanned images. Our goal was to start back indexing in 2015. When IT Department staff tried to install the images into the program, we ran into a glitch and had to find a different program for all of our vital records. So our projects, back indexing the veteran's records and the older birth, death and marriage certificates, were put on hold until fall of 2015. We will continue this project in 2016.

Electronic recordings have kept a steady pace. In 2014 30.6% of the documents we received came in electronically, in 2015 that increased to 32.9%. This helps cut down our handling of paper documents and helps us get closer to a paperless environment.

I did keep in contact with our legislators, working with them to introduce and pass some bills that were important to the WI Register of Deeds Association.

Our office worked with the County Clerk's office when the State implemented their Marriage Module for State Vitals Records Integrated System (SVRIS) in May of last year. We had very few glitches and for the most part the changes went well.

In 2014 we discovered that some of our records were overwritten by other records, it was then discovered that our back up records (off-site records) could not be retrieved. Fortunately, we were able to procure lost records from a Title Company who had the information on CD's, they were willing to let us have them. To help insure that we do not lose that information again and protect our records, our software vendor and our IT Department have developed a replication/retention plan.

We continue to receive training from our software vendor as they make changes and improvements to their product.

In partnership with the Land Information Committee, we compiled and submitted a 3 Year Land Information Modernization Plan for the State.

Our office strives to get pertinent information to all the staff in our office via email or short meetings. We feel it is important to keep the communication lines open.

Budget

Revenue collections in 2015 exceeded \$1.9 million dollars. This is an increase from last year's collected revenue of \$1.7 million. Of the \$1,994,722 revenue collected in the Register of Deeds office, \$1,164,855 was appropriated to the State of Wisconsin, and \$829,866 was retained as county revenue. On the county side in 2015, the Register of Deeds office dispersed \$140,096 to the Land Records Modernization fund(s).

This office returned \$151,398 to the General Fund which helps offset property taxes. Revenues were slightly above project revenues. The real estate market was a bit more robust in 2015 versus 2014. Our 2015 budget reflects a total budget of \$674,221, returning \$139,522 dollars to the Property tax levy. With additional funds of \$11,876 added to the General Fund. Some of these additional dollars were allocated for computer replacement but we never got that equipment ordered. Our 2016 budget of \$650,000 includes returning \$101,780 to the property tax levy.

We will continue to contain our expenses while still giving quality service. It is our goal to ensure that the Register of Deeds Office will not utilize any property tax levy but continue to add to the tax levy and general fund, when possible.

Issues and Challenges Ahead

Excellent Customer Service is always our focus and one of the ways we achieve this is by recording documents in a timely manner. Counter customers are greeted in a friendly way and helped within minutes of walking through the door. If there is a problem with their requests, we promptly explain the problem and give them an estimated time when we can get an answer for them. Remote Access customers can view their recorded documents almost immediately after processing, usually within 24 hours. We strive to return paper documents within days of recording. In 2015, we processed 21,030 real estate documents, filed 3,329 vital records documents and 83 Military discharge records. Legal documents issued totaled 22,413 and that does not include copies issued to county departments, which were 718. We had a total of 326 genealogical searches.

According to the Department of Revenue, Sheboygan County's Growth in Equalized Value in 2014/2015 did not increase. In 2013/2014 Sheboygan County real estate values had a slight increase.

Our frequent customers rely on the efficiency of this office and we are constantly working on ways to improve our procedures. We look for better ways to process requests and documents in our office. By scanning and indexing documents into a database, we are helping customers find the information they need faster than having to pull books and copy them on a copy machine. The more documents we can access via computer the faster we can help customers find their records. This is a time consuming project because we cannot dedicate one person for just that purpose. We can only work on this project as time dictates. In 2015, we were able to back index 13,610 documents, slightly above the projected numbers. In 2015 we had to find a new way to view our older vital records and DD-214's as the old system we had could not handle the volume of records we had. Our software vendor had a program available so we integrated our records with that and now we can move forward with the project of back indexing older vital records and DD-214's. We also decided in order to protect all of our records, to replicate them and have them secured in an off-site location.

Goals and Objectives for 2016

We will continue to keep our focus on the turn-around time of real estate documents. The needs of banks and lenders must be met in order to keep the local financial market and economy healthy. This is an ongoing objective for our office. We will attempt to keep that turn-around to less than a week.

Back indexing of the converted microfilm cards and the scanned documents from our books will continue to be a priority for the next few years. This ongoing project will take years to complete as we work on this only as time permits. Back indexing 12,000 documents per year is our goal.

Back indexing our vital records and DD-214's is also an important goal. The need to make our records safe and easy to find is very important.

We will continue to work with the funeral directors, nursing homes, hospices, hospitals and doctors with questions they have regarding the state's vital record system.

We will continue to market an electronic billing process; although so far there is little interest in it from our remote access customers.

I will work with our legislatures to help them understand legislation that our association supports.

I would like to get a computer placed in the vitals vault for the genealogists to use for viewing indexed records for their research. This was a goal for last year but we haven't been able to figure out how we can get the restricted data segregated.

Work with our software vendor to update and improve programs.

We will be looking at updating and improving our written procedures.

I have set goals for the office that everyone will have written procedures for their specific duties and they will be responsible for keeping the procedures updated.

We will be upgrading some work stations with new computers, slip printers, readers and scanners.

Will work with the State Vital Records Office to update and improve service.

By late 2016 we will be starting another scanning project that will entail digitizing the rest of our books.

Ensure that employees are utilizing their time to improve the productivity within the office.

We are constantly striving to find the proper technology to help improve our productivity and efficiency, without compromising our customer service. In order to maintain and improve our customer service I will continue to empower the staff by communicating the information they need to meet our customers' questions and concerns.