



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

Ellen R Schleicher
Register of Deeds

Debbie Huberty
Office Supervisor

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The Honorable County Board of Supervisors and
County Administrator Adam Payne
508 New York Avenue
Sheboygan WI 53081

Dear Supervisors and Mr. Payne,

I am pleased to present you with the 2016 Register of Deeds Annual Report.

I am happy to report that we exceeded our projected revenue from \$1.9 million in 2015 to \$2.1 million in 2016. However, there is no guarantee for the upcoming year as projections are not always accurate and it is very hard to predict what the housing market will be like in 2017.

I would like to commend the staff for the work accomplished in 2016. While projects such as back indexing vital records and converted microfilm cards had to be set aside due to increased recordings of sales and shortage of staff, they continued to ensure that the customer needs came first. On-going cross training was essential during absences due to health issues and one retirement.

The staff makes a great team and they always work together towards the greater goal of excellent customer service. I would like to thank them for their help, support, enthusiasm and hard work. Their dedication to their positions, the Register of Deed's Office and Sheboygan County make our accomplishments possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen R. Schleicher,
Register of Deeds

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 \$8.7 billion dollars in real estate lying within the borders of Sheboygan County. A one (1) percent increase in real estate value from 2015.

Goals and Objectives Achieved in 2016

In 2016, we processed 22,399 real estate documents, filed 3,269 vital records documents and 42 Military discharge records. Legal documents issued totaled 23,210 and that does not include copies issued to county departments, which were 371. We had a total of 363 genealogical searches.

According to the Department of Revenue, Sheboygan County's Growth in Equalized Value in 2015/2016 showed a one percent increase. In 2014/2015 Sheboygan County real estate values had no change. We recorded eight new condominium plats in 2016 and one subdivision plat this also is an increase from previous years.

We continued to focus on the ongoing back indexing project. Due to medical issues and a retirement we were unable to meet our goal of back indexing 12,000 documents this year. Currently we are offering images from July 2, 1976, forward. 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.

Reviewing and purging the Uniform Commercial Code Financing documents and scanning and back indexing all Corporate Boundary Maps and Water Pollution Agreements began in 2015 and was completed in 2016.

Our indexing project concerning the veteran's records and the older birth, death and marriage certificates, has been started but once again put on hold due to shortage of staff. Electronic recordings have kept a steady pace. In 2015 32.9 percent of the documents we received came in electronically, in 2016 that increased to 33 percent. A slight increase however I anticipate this trend will continue to increase over the next few years. This helps reduce the handling of paper documents and helps us move towards a paperless environment.

This year, as a member of the Wisconsin Register of Deeds Association's Vital Records Committee, I worked with the State Vitals office to update statutes concerning Vital Records. We set up procedures and processes to ensure a smooth transition when initiating statewide issuance of vital records. This was a huge project that has been in the works for many years. Beginning January 3, 2017, Wisconsin residents can go to any ROD office and request and receive their birth certificate(s) instead of traveling to their resident county.

The entire department was involved in webinars given by Fidar (our land record software) and the State Vital Records office. This was a refresher course by our software vendor and training for the new state wide issuance of Vital Records.

We will 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 32 question survey regarding future plans for the State Land Information Modernization Plan.

Our goal to update and improve written procedures within the office is going well, we have some procedures complete and will continue to work on that project. We were also able to update some of the work stations by adding slip printers, readers and scanners to them.

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 2016 exceeded \$2.1 million dollars. This is an increase from last years collected revenue of \$1.9 million. Of the \$ 2,149,309 revenue collected in the Register of Deeds office, \$1,254,309 was appropriated to the State of Wisconsin, and \$894,861 was retained as county revenue. On the county side in 2016, the Register of Deeds office dispersed \$146,384 to the Land Records Modernization fund(s).

This office returned \$167,557 to the General Fund which helps offset property taxes. An increase in Real Estate Transfer fees and remote imaging fees were above projected revenues. The real estate market was more robust in 2016 versus 2015. Our 2017 budget reflects a total budget of \$675,385, returning \$79,782 dollars to the Property tax levy. With additional funds of \$87,775 added to the General Fund. Some of these additional dollars were allocated for our scanning project but we had to put that project on hold for now.

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, one of the ways we achieve this is by recording and returning 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.

Our frequent customers rely on the efficiency of this office and we are constantly working on ways to improve our procedures. 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.

In 2016, we faced a retirement of a long time employee; this created an entirely new challenge for our office. We have not had a change in personal for over 12 years and realized we needed to update our written procedures. Although some procedures were recently updated, we found many that had to be refreshed do to new processes; this will be a project for 2017. The challenge to train employees for new positions, and replace a staff member was enlightening, frustrating and exciting. We struggled to keep up to the day to day working with a reduced staff; the entire staff stepped up to maintain service to our customers. Unfortunately any extra planned projects were put on hold until we are fully staffed.

Another challenge is the loss of revenue from copy request; with more records available via the internet our Laredo customers can print copies at a significantly reduced price. This has affected our current revenues and will affect future revenues. Thankfully, the transfer fees have been enough to cover these losses, we hope this trend continues.

Goals and Objectives for 2017

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 one 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 as we work on this only as time permits. Back indexing 12,000 documents per year is our continuing 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 continue to work with our legislatures to help them understand legislation that our association supports.

Work with our software vendor to update and improve programs.

We will continue to work on updating and improving our written procedures. Due to the constant changing technologies, updating procedures will be a on-going project as we move forward.

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

In an effort to reduce maintenance costs we will look at outdated equipment in the office and attempt to reduce older under-utilized equipment. This may result in working with other county offices to share costly equipment.

By late 2017 we will be starting another scanning project that will entail digitizing the rest of our land record books. This was a project slated for late 2016 but was moved to 2017 due to budgeting issues.

In an effort to help the staff in the office would like to introduce work stations that will include stand up capability. According to some studies these work stations show that employees are healthier after utilizing this new technology, they decrease health issues.

Introduce a confidentiality form for internal users of our Laredo software.

Continue to encourage people to record their land records electronically.

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.