

# 2012 Annual Report

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W E S T C H E S T E R   C O U N T Y   C L E R K



Timothy C. Idoni  
Westchester County Clerk



**Timothy C. Idoni**  
*Westchester County Clerk*

January, 2013

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to invite you to review our 2012 Annual Report, which brings you the highlights of a very successful year and projects a promising 2013. Our efforts to move this important office forward during trying economic times have resulted in one of the most progressive Clerk's offices in the state and nation. A combination of technology improvements and a keen eye on the needs of Westchester residents and businesses delivered results that have been recognized and appreciated.

The Annual Report breaks down our tax savings, achieved in large part through staffing reductions captured through attrition, and made possible by private sector partnerships which have achieved tremendous efficiencies. Staffing has been reduced by twenty-nine percent (29%) since 2006, resulting in a cumulative savings to our taxpayers of \$3.8 million. Budgeted expenses have been reduced by eighteen percent (18%) since I took office.

Our Property Records Electronic Portal (PREP), introduced in late 2009, continues to capture cost savings each year. And in 2012, PREP was enhanced to allow electronic recording (e-recording) of land documents, which commenced on September 24, 2012 after a dedicated and successful effort by our office to pass the state laws necessary for eRecording. We were the first office in state history to electronically record a land record and were ready to do so on the first day the law went into effect. Because the removal of paper from the recording process eliminates the cost of scanning, mail and storage, we are only beginning to capture savings which will increase in 2013 and beyond.

The report highlights a number of our ongoing priorities such as protecting our residents, and making commerce work better for all. We continue to work with our residents and warn them, especially vulnerable citizens in their golden years, about trade and deed scams, while supporting residents caught in the ongoing foreclosure crisis. Twenty-four (24) hour access to our services continues to be enhanced. The award-winning Westchester Records Online was enhanced in 2012 so that our partners in local government can access monthly reports on mortgage tax receipts and real estate professionals can access an expanding collection of online maps.

Overall, the Office of the County Clerk is managed with care and an emphasis on conscientious service in a friendly and professional manner. Our goal remains to make government easy for you and for all.

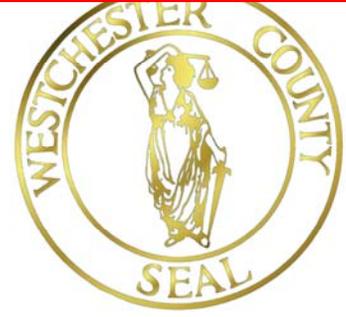
It remains a pleasure to serve you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy C. Idoni".

Timothy C. Idoni  
*Westchester County Clerk*

## The Office of the Westchester County Clerk



# 2012

### Professional Management Saves Tax Dollars

The Office of the Westchester County Clerk is proud of its management of a government agency where customers have come to expect efficient and effective service from our staff. Papers are filed and recorded more quickly than ever, while the cost to the taxpayers is reduced. Our hands-on managers work actively with staffers to provide exemplary customer service.

#### **Clerk's Office Continues to Reduce Overall Expenses:**

For the fifth straight year, total budgeted expenses were reduced, resulting in an eighteen percent (18%) reduction in budgeted expenses since 2006. In real dollars, the 2006 budget requested \$9,243,660 in appropriations, while only \$7,569,001 has been requested to operate in 2013. *When the 2006 budget is adjusted by the Consumer Price Index for urban costs, the savings total over \$3.2 million.*



**Streamlined Staff Results in Ongoing Savings:** The Office of the County Clerk is serving the public more quickly and efficiently with fewer staff members. In 2012, land records were reviewed within hours of arriving in our office by a staff which had been reduced by twenty-nine percent (29%), from one hundred and ten (110) to seventy-eight (78) staffers. All reductions of permanent staffing have been made through attrition and without layoffs. *The cumulative five-year savings resulting from fifteen full time position cuts totals over \$3.8 million.*

**Overtime and Hourly Costs:** The excessive use of both overtime pay and hourly workers to supplement the regular work force has driven up the cost of government nationally. Numerous efficiencies captured by the County Clerk's Office have reduced these costs by over ninety percent (90%) in the past five years, *saving over \$700,000 each year.* The Office of the Westchester County Clerk is especially proud that containing these costs took place alongside improvements in customer service.

## Improving Service through Technology



Technology remains the key to our providing better service at a lower cost. In 2012, we took a major step forward in our Land Records Division where we began accepting land records documents, such as deeds and mortgages, electronically. In addition, we expanded electronic filing of court records and continued to enhance our online library of images, Westchester Records Online, by scanning additional resource maps relied upon by surveyors.

**Westchester County Records the First Electronic Land Record in New York State:** Since 1684 land records have arrived in paper form in the Westchester County Clerk's Office. On Monday September 24, 2012 the office welcomed a new way of doing business and became the first recording office in New York State to record a document submitted electronically. Instead of delivering paper documents, the paper is converted to an electronic image and sent electronically to the office. Land records could not previously be electronically submitted due to a specific prohibition in the New York State Technology Law which was lifted as a result of legislation enacted last year. Electronic recording will shorten recording times from days to hours. Errors can be corrected more quickly as the document can be returned and resubmitted electronically, often in the course of the same day. Document control is improved as original documents are retained by the submitter and cannot be lost or misplaced during transit to and from a recording office. Customers eliminate the cost of postage, overnight mail or courier charges. The County Clerk's Office eliminates the cost of mailing back rejected and recorded documents, as well as the substantial costs associated with scanning documents. The implementation of electronic recording is a win for the office and the industry.

**Electronic Filing of Court Records Expands:** The Legal Division, which handles hundreds of court filings a day, is now receiving over seventy percent of its new cases electronically, saving time and money for taxpayers. The challenge was to smoothly transition the legal profession to this new way of doing business. While the office is proud of the number of electronic filings received, the number of customers trained is a source of pride for the County Clerk's e-filing team too. Over one thousand two hundred (1,200) customers were trained by the Office of the Westchester County Clerk in the use of the New York State Courts Electronic Filing (NYSCEF) system, through which filings are submitted to the Clerk's office. Attorneys and pro se litigants can access the system twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and no longer have to travel to White Plains to file papers in electronically filed cases.

**Westchester Records Online adds Yonkers Park and Crestwood Heights:** Westchester County is so rich in history. Have you ever wondered what your neighborhood looked like in the early 20th century? Now you can visit Westchester Records Online at [wro.westchesterclerk.com](http://wro.westchesterclerk.com) to view historic Yonkers Park and Crestwood Heights maps which join a growing collection of online resource maps. This small collection of maps, which was scanned as part of a continuing effort to make Westchester County Clerk records available online, joins thousands of filed maps and hundreds of resource maps currently available online.

## Facilitating Commerce in Westchester County

Westchester County is the home to a significant and diverse commercial base. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk's management of land and legal records allows us to serve a varied group of professionals ranging from brokers to lawyers to title industry members. By providing online portals which expand the accessibility of our records and services, we are able to access and process filings more quickly and easily for this customer base. Our 2012 efforts contributed to the growth and stability of commerce in Westchester in the following ways:

### **WestchesterClerk.com Provides Twenty Four Hour Access to Services and Information:**

Wondering what documents are required when applying for your child's passport? Need to obtain a copy of your deed? Considering whether the plumber you want to hire has a license? Twenty four hour access to these answers and more can be found on the Westchester County Clerk website, [www.WestchesterClerk.com](http://www.WestchesterClerk.com), which serves the residents of Westchester County every day and around the clock. Visitors to the website will find user-friendly access to services, information, forms and links. Users can find the answers to frequently asked questions, the latest county clerk news, download forms and passport applications, and view the latest community outreach calendar. The website also serves as a gateway to the Westchester County Clerk's online applications such as Westchester Records Online, home to indexing information and images of hundreds of thousands of records. The Property Records Electronic Portal (PREP) System, which can be accessed through the website, allows customers to electronically record land records such as deeds and mortgages. WestchesterClerk.com also serves as a gateway to the New York State Courts Electronic Filing (NYSCEF) System for filing Supreme Court documents, as well as Uniform Commercial Code electronic filing.

**Forecasting Tool Provided to Local Finance Commissioners:** Mortgage tax is an important revenue source for the County of Westchester and its municipalities. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk is responsible for collecting these taxes which are a key economic indicator. Mortgage tax revenue has been hovering recently at about thirty percent of the historic highs seen at the peak of the real estate boom in 2005. Because mortgage tax is paid to municipalities every six months, municipal finance officers are often anxious to know what they can expect. As a result, the Office of the Westchester County Clerk has provided municipalities with the ability to generate mortgage tax reports with much more current data so that they can forecast the revenue they will receive.

**State Grant Helps Clerk Increase Access to Land Records:** As the real estate market in Westchester County gains momentum, it is critically important that real estate professionals have timely access to the resources they need. And while hundreds of thousands of documents are already available online, title professionals have asked that we increase online accessibility to mortgages from the 1950s. A grant from the New York State Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) awarded in 2012 provides partial funding for this project. The scanning of over 600,000 pages of mortgages is being completed by White Plains based eDocNY, a subsidiary of Westchester Arc. The grant award allows the Office of the Westchester County Clerk to strengthen its longstanding relationship with Westchester Arc, which provides employment opportunities to individuals with developmental disabilities.

## Protecting Our Residents and Businesses

The Office of the County Clerk recognizes its role as a governmental agency does not begin and end with the filing of land, legal and business records. The papers presented to our office for so many different reasons often touch the lives of Westchester residents. In fact, one of our major priorities is protecting residents from fraud and schemes associated with the documents presented to our office. We are proud of the following 2012 initiatives:

**Hurricane Sandy Leads to Warning about Trades Scams:** The County Clerk is responsible for the licensing of plumbers and electricians in Westchester. With Hurricane Sandy hitting the county in 2012 causing millions of dollars in damages, the County Clerk issued consumer alerts warning homeowners to be aware of non-reputable and unlicensed trades people. In addition, the County Clerk offered assistance in replacing records recorded or filed with the office.



**As “Legal” Deed Scams Become More Sophisticated, County Clerk Steps Up Alerts:** 2012 brought with it a new twist on an old scam. Upstate residents began receiving invoices that look like bills being sent to homeowners for a copy of their deed. Westchester County Clerk Timothy C. Itoni immediately issued consumer alerts cautioning residents to ignore these “invoices” should they begin to appear in the mailboxes of Westchester homeowners. In recent years, companies have made a business out of writing to residents and leading them to believe they need to secure a certified copy of a deed that has been on record in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk for years. Unless homeowners have a specific reason for securing a certified copy of their deed, they may not need one. And, if a homeowner does need their deed, it can be obtained directly from the Office of the Westchester County Clerk at a small fraction of the cost charged by these companies.



**Monitoring and Assistance with Foreclosures:** While the foreclosure crisis nationally is beginning to subside and Westchester foreclosure rates have fallen from historic highs seen between 2007 and 2010, filings and judgments over the last two years have remained steady. The County Clerk raises awareness among those at risk of foreclosure by providing first a warning and then information regarding assistance available throughout Westchester. Residents are directed to not-for-profits and the Federal Housing and Urban Development office for assistance with keeping their homes during these uncertain economic times. As Clerk of the New York Supreme Court, an important role of the Clerk is the handling of foreclosure papers filed with that court.

## Meeting the Needs of County Residents

“Making Government Easy” remains the pledge of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. Our staffers work hard to make your experience with our office as easy as possible in so many different ways. We provide many forms and records online so you do not have to travel to our office in White Plains to get started. Further, we use our mobile office to bring our services, such as passport applications, directly to your community as we understand that traveling to White Plains during regular business hours is not convenient for all of our county residents. In 2012, we were particularly proud to meet the needs of our county residents in the following ways:



**Our Mobile Office Visits Cities, Towns and Villages throughout Westchester:** In 2012, hundreds of residents took advantage of the opportunity to apply for a passport on the weekend or during the evening from our mobile office which made stops in villages, towns and cities throughout Westchester County. Our knowledgeable outreach staff also fielded questions about other County Clerk services when local residents stopped by with inquiries.

**County Clerk Classroom:** Throughout 2012, the Westchester County Clerk and staff members spent time in the classroom teaching our customers how to best utilize the various tools our office provides. Often classes were taught in our White Plains training room where customers received hands-on computer training to help them submit court records through the New York State Courts Electronic Filing (NYSCEF) System or submit land records such as deeds and mortgages through the Property Records Electronic Portal (PREP) System. Other classes were taught offsite for local professional organizations as well. In addition, the County Clerk hosted colleagues from a number of other County Clerk’s offices throughout the state who wished to learn more about our successful programs.

**County Clerk “Green” Initiatives Help to Make Government Easy:** Upon entering office, the County Clerk navigated through hallways and rooms lined with stacks of boxes filled to the brim with documents waiting to be processed or filed. As a result, he immediately committed to reducing the amount of paper in the office by leveraging technology and identifying green government solutions. The result has been to make government easier for our customers while reducing the cost of our office to Westchester taxpayers. The following electronic initiatives have each helped to reduce the office’s reliance on paper: Westchester Records Online ([wro.WestchesterClerk.com](http://wro.WestchesterClerk.com)) provides online access to imaged land and legal records, including maps, from any location with an internet connection, reducing travel to our office and the need to photocopy filings and recordings. We accept paperless filing of corporate records (eCorps), New York State Tax Warrants and Satisfactions (eWarrants) and Uniform Commercial Code Statements ([ucc.WestchesterClerk.com](http://ucc.WestchesterClerk.com)). Electronic filing in our Legal Division via the New York State Courts Electronic Filing (NYSCEF) System is now required for over seventy percent of new cases filed. Our most recent green initiative, electronic recording of land records such as deeds and mortgages, will help make government more efficient, provide greater transparency for consumers, reduces costs, and is good for the environment.



## 2012 Facts and Figures

*The following facts and figures below are provided to show the volume and diversity of the services our staff members perform as employees of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk:*

### **Our Land Records Division Revenue:**

- \$75,551,930.39 in Mortgage Tax collected
- \$40,114,230.76 in New York State Transfer Tax collected
- \$11,539,084 in Westchester County Recording Fees collected

### **Our Legal Division by the Numbers:**

- 25,155 NYSCEF index numbers issued to begin Supreme Court actions
- 17,634 court documents certified
- 9,055 transcripts of judgment filed, 690 issued
- 9,110 judgments entered in Westchester County
- 7,337 notary authentications issued
- 2,908 business certificates registered
- 2,149,364 pages scanned for improved public access

### **Our Licensing Division by the Numbers:**

- 4,788 passport applications processed
- 2,453 plumbing and electrical licenses issued or renewed
- 2,958 new citizens sworn in by the Westchester County Clerk
- 344 conservation licenses issued

### **Serving Our Community:**

- 38 community appearances in Westchester municipalities
- 846 passport applications processed out in the community
- 33 NYSCEF Training classes conducted and 338 CLE and Non-CLE trained

## **Services Provided By the Office of the Westchester County Clerk**

Recording Land Records including deeds, mortgages, assignments, satisfactions and filing of subdivision maps

Collection and Processing of New York State Mortgage Tax

Uniform Commercial Code, Federal Tax Lien, Other Federal Lien and Notice of Common Charges Filings

Filing of Legal Records for Supreme Court and Westchester County Court

Licensing of Notaries and Commissioner of Deeds

Issuance of Domestic Partnership Certificates

Acceptance of Business Certificates

Filing of Small Claims Assessment Review Petitions

Filing of Veterans' Military Discharge Papers

Subscription Service Online Access to land records, legal records, foreclosure lists, judgments, liens, and other business records

Processing of United States Passport Applications

Licensing of Plumbers and Electricians

Conservation Licensing for Fishing, Hunting and Trapping

Processing of Pistol Permit Applications and Amendments

Issuance of Westchester County Identification Cards

Administering of Oath of Allegiance to newly naturalized United States citizens

# Overview of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk

## The Office of the Westchester County Clerk

The County Clerk is the oldest elected office in Westchester County, having been established in 1683. For over 300 years, the County Clerk has served the people of our county by maintaining and preserving the official documents and records of its rich history. The Westchester County Clerk is the Registrar of county land transactions and liens as well as the Clerk of the Supreme and County Courts. The position is both a County Official and a New York State Constitutional Officer. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk is located at 110 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in White Plains and is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays.

## Legal Division

The Westchester County Clerk is the Clerk for the Supreme and County Courts. All records for these courts are recorded and filed with the Legal Division. This division is also responsible for non-court related county legal functions such as registering a business, filing a lien, applying to serve as a Notary Public, registering a domestic partnership, filing veterans' military discharge papers, and accepting Small Claims Assessment Review petitions. The public can visit the Legal Division to look up legal records, judgments, liens, lis pendens, and other business records.

## Land Records Division

The Land Records Division of the County Clerk's office records all documents pertaining to real property transactions occurring in the County of Westchester. This division also processes New York State Mortgage Tax, New York State Transfer Gains Tax, Federal Tax liens, Uniform Commercial Code filings, and is home to our Map Division. The public can visit the Land Records Division to look up a current mortgage or deed, and even research documents dating back to the colonial days of Westchester.

## Naturalization, Passport and Licensing Division

The Naturalization, Passport and Licensing Division handles a series of varied tasks. The Westchester County Clerk has the privilege of administering the Oath of Allegiance to the United States to newly naturalized citizens. In addition, this division acts as an agent of the United States Department of State to process passport applications. Finally, this division oversees trades licensing for electricians and plumbers, acts as an agent of the New York State Conservation Department to issue fishing, hunting and trapping licenses, and maintains and recertifies pistol permit applications.