

2014 Annual Report

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



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April 2015

Dear Friends,

I am proud to invite you to read our 2014 Annual Report which highlights our recent achievements. In 2014, the Office of the Westchester County Clerk worked collaboratively with our partners in government to provide better services at a lower cost. By harnessing new technology, our staffers gained an improved ability to serve customers more quickly and efficiently. And residents in every corner of our county were able to access services and information more conveniently.

Saving tax dollars remains a hallmark of my administration. A declining real estate market has brought with it declining revenue in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. However, operating expenses dropped for the seventh year in a row, staffing remains lean, and drastic cuts to overtime and hourly staffing have been maintained.

Taking advantage of technology remains a key to our success in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. Voluntary participation in electronic recording of land records such as deeds and mortgages has hit record highs, while electronic filing in our courts had become more established. Our digital records collection continues to expand while access to online records has been improved for our partners in the courthouse.

Protecting county residents remains a priority. In 2014, our office worked with the Office of Court Administration to quickly and effectively implement rules designed to protect individuals who have been sued for non-payment of credit card debt. In addition, we continued to provide foreclosure data to our partners who assist Westchester residents in foreclosure.

“Making Government Easy” remains the pledge of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. Whether a customer is visiting our White Plains office, accessing records through Westchester Records Online, electronically submitting documents through our Property Records Electronic Portal system, or applying for a passport at our mobile office, we want their experience to be as easy and pleasant as possible.

It remains a pleasure to serve you.

Sincerely,

Timothy C. Idoni
Westchester County Clerk

The Office of the Westchester County Clerk

2014



Improving Service Through Technology

Electronic Recording's Popularity Saves Tax Dollars: Electronic recording allows customers to submit land records such as deeds and mortgages to the Office of



the Westchester County Clerk electronically by scanning and uploading an image of each document rather than sending in the hard copy document. Electronic recording has been a tremendous success in Westchester County, shortening recording times from days to hours. Errors are corrected more quickly, often in 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 who

choose to electronically record no longer pay the cost of postage, overnight mail or courier charges. The County Clerk's Office has eliminated the cost of mailing back rejected and recorded documents, as well as the costs associated with scanning documents. By the end of 2014, over forty percent of our documents were submitted electronically through this voluntary alternative to submitting paper documents.

Digital Maps Collection Expanded to Include Resource Maps: Eleven new collections of resource maps were added to the County Clerk's digital collection available in Westchester Records Online (WRO) in the fall of 2014. The resource maps are unofficial maps that were not filed with the County Clerk, but have come into the possession of this office over the years. They consist of indexes of the County's block numbering system, ten different atlases from 1867 through 1930, maps of areas of interest, including the proposed Croton Aqueduct (1836), the neighborhoods of Yonkers Park and Crestwood Heights, and historical tax maps for the City of Yonkers (1960). While these maps are not official maps which would have been filed with this office, they have been retained as a resource for professionals in the Land Title industry

to assist in tracking the historical ownership of land, as well as for all who are interested in viewing or researching the historical development of Westchester County. These maps are easily accessed by visiting WRO at <http://wro.WestchesterClerk.com>, clicking on the Maps tab and then clicking on the Resource Maps tab.

Partnering with the Court System to Improve Access to Case Files: In 2014, our office worked with our partners in the court system to provide tailored online access to images of case files. Specifically our office created a new administrative program, the Court Personnel Access Module, which will allow the Chief Clerk to provide an assigned judge and other appropriate staffers with online access to sealed images in matrimonial actions and guardianship actions assigned to them so that paper files no longer need to be requisitioned from the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. In addition, this functionality supports our office's effort to store only images rather than hardcopy papers in court actions. In recent years our office has worked with the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to develop a process through which we review the scanned images of paper court files, receive authorization from OCA to designate the scanned images as the record copies, and then have the paper documents securely shredded. Accessing scanned images is much more efficient and eliminating the hard copy versions reduces our offsite storage costs significantly.

Professional Management Saves Tax Dollars

Trades Licensing Unit Restored to the Consumer Protection Office: In a move requested by the County Clerk that will save county taxpayers \$160,000 in 2015 and \$225,000 in each year beginning in 2016, the Trades Licensing Unit of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk was restored to the Consumer Protection Office where it was originally assigned. Beginning January 1, 2015, one office will handle the licensing and oversight of electricians, plumbers and home contractors throughout Westchester County instead of having these functions divided between two offices. The Westchester County Electrical Licensing Board and the Westchester County Plumbing Examining Board will continue to oversee the licensing of electricians and plumbers in the County of Westchester.



Smart Budgeting Contributes to Reduction in County Tax Levy: A declining real estate market has brought with it declining revenue in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. However, the office continues to collect revenue in excess of expenses due to continuing efforts to reduce the cost of the office. For the seventh straight year, the office has been able to reduce total budgeted expenses, contributing to a 23% reduction in budgeted expenses since 2006 (from \$9,243,660 adopted in 2006 down to \$7,087,004 requested for 2015). Our staffing remains lean and our cumulative seven-year savings resulting from fifteen position cuts totals over \$5 million.

Financial Reporting Enhancements Implemented: The Office of the Westchester County Clerk is charged with collecting and disbursing money to federal, state and county entities. Passport revenue is disbursed to the United States Department of State. Transfer tax revenue is disbursed to the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. All County revenue is disbursed to the Westchester County Department of Finance. With thousands of transactions conducted in our office or online each month, our Finance Unit must take care in properly accounting for funds collected by our office. In 2014, we worked with our cashiering system vendor to create improved reports which provide the descriptive and financial detail we need to more quickly and efficiently meet financial reporting requirements.

Protecting Our County Residents

Additional Protection for Consumer Credit Defendants Implemented: In



late 2014, the Administrative Judge of New York State Courts implemented a new set of rules designed to protect individual defendants who have been sued for non-payment of credit card debt. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk worked alongside our partners in the courts to be sure these new rules were quickly and effectively implemented. Now

defendants in consumer credit actions will receive an additional written notice, mailed by the courts, before a judgment is entered by the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. And if that notice is returned to the court as undeliverable, plaintiffs will be required to submit proof that the defendant's address is valid. Our office will continue to work with the Office of Court Administration to improve this new notification procedure in actions which have been electronically filed.



Foreclosure Data Captured and Shared to Assist Homeowners in Need:

The Office of the Westchester County Clerk continues to capture information from foreclosure cases aimed at providing Westchester County with the data they need to secure funds to assist residents impacted by the

foreclosure crisis. While 2014 saw a reduction in the number of new foreclosure filings, the number of judgments entered soared. The Westchester County Clerk is the Clerk of the Westchester County Supreme Court where foreclosure cases are heard.

Spreading the Word Regarding Scams: In past years our office has taken an active role in warning residents about scams ranging from the overcharging of residents for a certified copy of their deed to the education of residents to look for a license card when hiring a tradesperson. In 2014, a new scam came to our attention and prompted outreach to warn our residents. Victims receive a call from someone impersonating a law enforcement official. The caller warns that because the resident failed to show up for jury duty, a warrant will go out for the resident's arrest if they fail to make payment by the end of the business day. These calls should be immediately reported to the local police department.

Meeting the Needs of County Residents

Legal Division Phone System Upgrade

Improves Customer Service: The Office of the County Clerk implemented a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system for employees in our Legal Division who handle direct customer telephone calls. This system provides modern call features to better handle call volume and provide customer service. A new hold message



answers common questions and directs customers to our website for additional information. Supervisors are able to better manage call volumes by seeing customer wait times and having the ability to route calls accordingly. Reporting and analysis can now be conducted on customer calls allowing supervisors to work with staffers to improve response time. This phone system upgrade was the final project funded by capital funds allocated to upgrade the systems which support our Legal Division.

Mobile Passport Office Tours the County: In 2014, our mobile office visited each city and town in Westchester County so that residents were able to apply for a United States Passport close to home. Our mobile office is staffed by a passport agent who is authorized to accept applications and can answer questions about applications and renewals. In addition, our mobile office driver is available to take passport photos. Our staffers enjoy helping families who often find it more convenient to travel to our mobile office than to downtown White Plains. Weekend and evening hours are popular with residents whose work schedules make it hard to visit our office during regular business hours.

Facilitating Commerce in Westchester County



Partnership with eDocNY Expanded:

With the help of a \$74,985 Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund Grant awarded to the Office of the Westchester County Clerk in 2014, our office was able to expand its relationship with eDocNY, a document imaging company located just minutes from our White Plains office. eDocNY was created by Westchester Arc to provide

employment opportunities to Westchester County residents with developmental disabilities, supporting Westchester Arc's mission. One hundred percent of the grant funds have been used to scan pistol license files, allowing these files to be stored securely and moved electronically among the Westchester County Department of Public Safety, the Westchester County Courts, and our office.

eSolutions Bring Efficiency for Westchester Customers: The Office of the Westchester County Clerk continues to be a leader in capturing the benefits that technology has to offer. In our Land Records Division, documents such as deeds and mortgages can be recorded and paid for electronically, allowing interests to be secured more quickly and efficiently. By the end of 2014, over forty percent of the documents submitted to the Land Records Division were submitted electronically as part of a voluntary eRecording program. In our Legal Division, over eighty percent of our 2014 civil cases were commenced electronically through the New York State Courts Electronic Filing (NYSCEF) System. The NYSCEF System also helps our office process documents and transmit them to our partners in the New York State Supreme Court. Finally, our online library of documents available via Westchester Records Online continues to grow, allowing people who want to do business in the county to have quick and easy access to public documents and information.



2014 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:

- \$ 80,472,878.63 in Mortgage Tax collected
- \$ 56,835,650.69 in New York State Transfer Tax collected
- \$ 8,204,754.50 in Westchester County Recording Fees collected

Our Legal Division by the Numbers:

- 20,990 index numbers issued to begin Supreme Court actions
- 14,801 court documents certified
- 8,175 transcripts of judgment filed, 347 issued
- 6,524 judgments entered and lis pendens filed in Westchester County
- 6,915 notary authentications issued
- 2,438 business certificates registered
- 2,090,273 pages scanned for improved public access

Our Licensing Division by the Numbers:

- 5,587 passport applications processed
- 2,880 plumbing and electrical licenses issued or renewed
- 2,757 new citizens sworn in by the Westchester County Clerk
- 411 pistol license applications
- 7,492 pistol license recertifications

Serving Our Community:

- 43 community appearances in Westchester municipalities
- 740 passport applications processed out in the community

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 maintains and recertifies pistol permit applications.