

## **Lean Government**

### **Real Estate Departments**

#### **Marshall County offices of Assessor, Auditor, GIS, IS, Recorder and Treasurer**

The intent of this communication is to describe the changes that have occurred throughout the various county real estate departments. These changes have evolved from 1976 to the present.

For a number of years the offices of the Assessor, Auditor, GIS, IS, Recorder and Treasurer have held monthly meetings to discuss the development of the Marshall County real estate system.

In the late seventies before the City and County Assessor offices were combined, there were nine employees including two Assessors. Since those two offices combined, there are four employees which include one Assessor. In the late seventies, the Auditor's Accounting, Election and Real Estate Departments had twelve employees including the Auditor. Today there are seven employees including the Auditor. There are a number of reasons for the reduction in number of staff.

1. Computers – manual processes that could take from a week to a month are now accomplished in a matter of seconds to a couple of days.
2. Computer programmer – Marshall County has retained the same computer programmer for more than 25 years. Computer programs have resulted in more efficiencies than any other single change. Examples:
  - a. Treasurer's office developed a Payee number which allows them to enter several parcels of tax collections in one entry. If a bank pays taxes on 1,000 parcels, instead of making a 1,000 entries, the Treasurer's office makes one entry.
  - b. When a new TIF area is created the Auditor's office used to apply the TIF boundaries to our maps and write down all the parcels involved. Now GIS draws the TIF boundaries and by computer program pulls all the parcels lying within the TIF. Auditor then verifies that all parcels are included.
  - c. We are in the process of developing an electronic land transfer book (ETB). Instead of hand writing in 50 pound books, as we update the various real estate files in the computer we also update the electronic transfer books. Land transfers are a daily function. Eliminating hand writing in the transfer books saves anywhere from a few hours to several hours a day.
  - d. Several computer programs have been written to edit real estate files for all offices. These programs save time and help assure we have accurate records.
  - e. We have several programs to replace printed reports with electronic reports. For instance, when property taxes are calculated the Auditor used to print a tax list that included approximately 20 books. We no longer print this information. It is available in electronic format online. This makes the

information more readily available and we are not wasting tax dollars and resources by using a large volume of paper.

- f. Part of the real estate cycle involves year changes for the Assessor, Auditor and Treasurer. For example the Assessor changes from 2009 to 2010; the Auditor changes from 2008 to 2009, and the Treasurer changes from 2007 to 2008. A lot of data is being moved around in various computer files. It is critical that this process be done correctly. In the past this process took a full day to complete all steps. Our computer programmer has streamlined this so that all steps are accomplished with a few key strokes, which takes about 5 minutes.
  - g. The Iowa Department of Management (DOM) requires that all Auditors use computer software developed by DOM to prepare valuation reports. The software is provided to the counties free of charge. The report formats are now uniform throughout the state and all information is available on the DOM website.
  - h. Search tools – In the past we manually searched for real estate information in our land transfer books. We have developed computer software to do computer searches which is not only faster but you have access to more information.
3. Changes in the law – Property tax credits such as Family Farm, Homestead and Military Exemptions used to be signed by the claimant annually. The law was changed requiring the claimant to only sign one time. For instance for a Homestead Credit the claimant signs once, and as long as they continue living in the home they receive the credit. There are over 10,000 homestead credits. This change in the law has been a great time saver.
  4. County website – the traffic through the offices decreased when real estate information became available on the web. Prior to this change a lot of staff time was spent searching records of real estate information for people. We now have more time to devote to keeping the records up-to-date and accurate and to develop and implement other new efficiencies.
  5. Redistribution of work –
    - a. The Board of Supervisor's secretary has taken on the duty of preparing agendas, minutes and publications incidental to Board proceedings. Prior to this change someone in the Auditor's office filled this function.
    - b. All real estate changes involving splitting or combining land were done in the Auditor's office. This included maintaining plat maps. This is now being done in our GIS office.
    - c. In the past, several offices provided a person to perform computer backups, trouble shooting and other computer functions. This is all done by our IS Department today.
  6. The closing of the County Care Facility reduced the workload for payroll and claims.

As we are listing all the changes that have been made to make things more efficient as far as time and resources while at the same time offering better services, we should also mention the changes that have added more to our workload.

1. We have had tax increment financing (TIF) in Marshall County for a little over twenty years. The procedures for TIF's are very time consuming. Most are performed by the Auditor's real estate department.
2. Law changes relating to the calculation of property taxes have resulted in a very complex and time consuming process. This process was much simpler in the 1970's and early 1980's. Some of these changes are equalizing values, rolling back values, and tax increment financing.
3. In the 1970's local governments received federal funds referred to as Revenue Sharing Funds. This program has not been available for several years. Instead federal funds are distributed through grants. The application for and administration of grants is very time consuming.
4. Within the past couple of years documents filed in the Recorder's office were available on the internet. This was a great efficiency for county offices, law firms, abstractors, surveyors, lending institutions, realtors, and the general public. Some documents contain social security numbers. Until this problem is resolved, these documents are no longer available online resulting in inefficiencies for everyone.