



Report on the County Clerk and Assessor's Office

SUMMARY

As part of its obligation to conduct periodic reviews of County agencies, the Grand Jury performed an oversight of the Office of the County Clerk and Assessor.

BACKGROUND

According to the mission statement of the Clerk and Assessor, "The combined offices are responsible for a wide range of services. Our mission is to carry out the legal requirements in a manner resulting in equitable and fair treatment of all County Taxpayers, to maintain and preserve the public's records in a secure and easily accessible environment for retrieval by the public and to promote public confidence in the administration of fair and impartial elections." The office performs an extensive and varied number of functions on behalf of the County and its residents, including maintenance of property and voter rolls, assessment of real and personal property, issuing of licenses, recording of births and deaths, and the conduct and tallying of local, state, and national elections.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury visited the Clerk/Assessor's Office and conducted interviews of office personnel. It reviewed documents pertaining to the organization and performance of the duties of the office.

FINDINGS

1. The office of the Clerk has a total permanent staff of nine.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

2. Staff turnover is higher at the lower paid, entry level positions than among more senior personnel.



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Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors) The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

3. To the fullest extent possible, functions of the Clerk's Office are computerized in a very technology-intensive environment.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

4. A portion of the document processing fees goes to pay for up-to-date technology.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

5. The remainder of revenues from the Office goes into the County General Fund.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

6. Requests for information and documents are met in a timely fashion.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.



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7. Despite a considerable increase in recent years in the volume of work, the Clerk's Office has functioned without an increase in staffing for the last 20 years.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

8. The conduct of County elections by the Clerk's Office has gone smoothly despite the increasing complexity of the process.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

9. The conduct of elections depends heavily on a well-organized group of temporary hires.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

10. Election results, sent by modem from the polling places, are now available almost immediately after the closing of the polls at the Clerk's Office and the Mendocino County website.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

11. Safeguards for a fair election process appear to be both adequate and appropriate.



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Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

12. Between elections voting machines are warehoused in two separate facilities, one of which has a leaky roof.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (General Services): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the responses of both departments.

13. The Assessor's Office has an authorized staff of 24 permanent workers and supervisors.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

14. The Assessor's Office is increasingly computerized, enabling it to handle the workload much more efficiently.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

15. Shortage of staff in the Assessor's Office, particularly those with specific skills, is a serious problem, leading to a grievous overburdening of existing personnel.

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): The Department agrees with this finding.



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Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding and the County Clerk/Assessor response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors require the Department of Human Resources to perform desk audits for workers in the Clerk/Assessor's office to determine the appropriateness of current salaries for those jobs. (Finding 2)

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): This recommendation requires further analysis. I have met with the Human Resources Director regarding the shortage of adequately skilled employees in the Assessor's office as well as desk audits for workers in the Clerk/Assessor's office to determine the appropriateness of current salaries of these jobs. I believe it is appropriate for Human Resources to perform desk audits and determine the appropriateness of current salaries of these jobs.

Response (Human Resources): **Response (Human Resources):** The Human Resources Department is prepared to review the job classes which are voted as high turnover (Staff Assistant I) and shortage of skilled staff (Auditor Appraiser) to determine if the positions are properly classified and compensated. The Human Resources Department has a backlog of over 30 positions requiring classification review, but these positions will be given a higher priority.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this recommendation. The Human Resources Department will perform desk audits for the classifications unique to the County Clerk/Assessors Office and will research salary levels for those positions. This work will be completed by January 1, 2006 and the results will be presented to the County Clerk/Assessor, as well as the Board of Supervisors for their consideration.

2. The Grand Jury recommends that election machines be stored in one secure, structurally sound facility. (Finding 12)

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): This recommendation requires further analysis. I have met with the General Services Director regarding the storage election machines in one secure, structurally sound facility. Currently, the Accu-vote optical scan ballot counters are stored in the County Clerk-Recorder-Elections designated section of the storage facility adjacent to



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the County Administration Center at 501 Low Gap Road while the voting booths and optical scan ballot boxes are maintained in a storage shed with a leaky roof in back of the General Services Department. The optimum solution would be to have all of our election equipment stored in the storage facility adjacent to the County Administration Center. However I recognize that this storage facility has already been partitioned out to other departments and there is now not room to expand our space. The General Services Director has therefore agreed to make space available in the General Services warehouse to store election voting booths and ballot boxes. The General Services warehouse is secure and structurally sound.

Response (General Services): This recommendation requires further analysis. General Services has met with County Clerk-Recorder/Assessor Marsha Wharff to review the situation and discuss alternatives. We agree that the current storage location at General Services for the ballot boxes and portable voting booths is inadequate in that the ballot boxes are required to be stacked three high and that the metal roof over the storage area needs to be repaired. To resolve that situation, we have agreed to create an adequate and secure storage area for this equipment within the General Services warehouse.

The electronic ballot tabulators are currently stored in the Clerk-Recorder/Elections' designated portion of the new storage facility adjacent to the County Administration Center at 501 Low Gap Road. This area is adequate and secure and convenient to the Elections office, and therefore preferable to the General Services warehouse. There is not additional space available in the new storage facility for all of the elections equipment, and therefore General Services is not able to implement the Grand Jury's recommendation that all "elections machines" be stored in one secure, structurally sound facility. Instead, as noted above, pursuant to our understanding with the Clerk-Recorder, the equipment will be housed in two separate but secure and structurally sound facilities.

The Clerk-Recorder anticipates the delivery of some number of computerized, touch-screen voting "booths" in the near future. Prior to such delivery, General Services and the Clerk-Recorder will collaborate on a plan to ensure that this equipment is adequately and securely warehoused in a location convenient and acceptable to the Clerk-Recorder.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this recommendation in part. The County Clerk/Assessor and Department of



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General Services have developed a viable proposal for improved storage of election equipment. This proposal would address the issue of protection of equipment from the elements, but would utilize two locations rather than one. This solution is acceptable to the Board.

3. The Grand Jury recommends that further efforts to address the shortage of adequately skilled employees in the Assessor's office be undertaken. (Finding 15)

Response (County Clerk/Assessor): This recommendation requires further analysis. I have met with the Human Resources Director regarding the shortage of adequately skilled employees in the Assessor's office as well as desk audits for workers in the Clerk/Assessor's office to determine the appropriateness of current salaries of these jobs. I believe it is appropriate for Human Resources to perform desk audits and determine the appropriateness of current salaries of these jobs.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this recommendation. The Board notes that the County Clerk/Assessor is currently working with the Human Resource Department on addressing the shortage of adequately skilled employees in the Assessor's Office.

COMMENTS

The astute use of technology by the office of the Clerk/Assessor has mitigated the effect of budget cuts that have had such a negative impact on many County agencies. The Grand Jury commends the administration of the office for both the overall efficiency and helpfulness demonstrated in the workplace.

RESPONSES REQUIRED

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
Mendocino County Clerk/Assessor

RESPONSES REQUESTED

Director of Human Resources
Director of General Services