



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

Ellen R. Schleicher
Register of Deeds

March 1, 2024

Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board and County Administrator Alayne Krause,

I am pleased to present you with the 2023 Register of Deeds Annual Report.

In 2023 the Register of Deeds Department recorded 4,225 less documents than in 2022. The Department revenue did not achieve our budgeted expectations by \$57,434, roughly 6% less than projected. While the recordings were down, the Department saw large transfer fees in December that helped offset the deficit. The real estate market remains very volatile, and it is difficult to forecast what will happen in the future.

The anticipated revenues for 2024 of \$936,177 is an aggressive projection. We will strive to achieve this target; however, it depends on the current real estate prices and inventory. The Register of Deeds Department will continue to keep expenses low and encourage electronic records whenever possible.

I would like to commend the staff for the work accomplished in 2023. They continue to provide excellent customer services and meet department goals despite staff turnover. We have a great team, working together towards the greater goal of making things better for the customer and our community. I wish to thank them for their support, enthusiasm, and hard work. Their dedication to their positions, the Department, and Sheboygan County make our accomplishments possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen R. Schleicher
Register of Deeds

Mission Statement and 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 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 Department executes the final acceptance and filing of new subdivisions, condominium plats, Transportation Plats, and Certified Survey Maps. The Register of Deeds also administers the Vital Records Registration system, which includes registration of all births, marriages, deaths, and divorces of county residents, probate instruments, and business documents such as corporate filings.

Other duties include registration, preparation, and issuance of copies of military records, alternative informal probate procedures, and registration of US Treasury Federal Tax IRS Liens. Other statutory responsibilities include the collection of real estate 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), the Wisconsin Department of Administration (plat review and the Wisconsin Land Information Program), and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (Vital Records).

Sheboygan County departments that depend upon us for information and services include Veteran Services, Planning & Conservation, Clerk of Courts, Treasurer/Real Property, County Clerk, 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 department represent \$14.3 billion dollars in real estate lying within the borders of Sheboygan County which is an 16% increase in real estate value from 2022 per Department of Revenue reports.

Goals and Objectives Achieved in 2023

- Processed 16,497 real estate documents
- Filed 3,034 vital records
- Filed 6 Military Discharges
- Issued 21,098 legal document
- Served 275 genealogist searchers
- Copied 69 documents to County Departments
- Recorded 30 new condominium units
- Recorded 102 subdivision lots

- Indexed 40,243 documents
- Offered online training to the staff to help them learn new processes, procedures, and self-improvement strategies
- Worked with local legislators to help them understand legislation that the Register of Deeds Association submits
- Updated training manuals and office procedures
- Maintained electronic recordings between 49-50% of all recordings
- Trained on the new the billing system Connect
- Commenced new project grouping the Contract and Miscellaneous books
- Completed the clean-up project on the missing numbers on micro-fiche
- Updated the quick reference guide on how to search our records online
- Provided excellent customer service by promptly greeting customers, recording and returning documents in a timely manner, explaining any problem as it arises, and providing remote access so customers can view their recorded documents almost immediately after processing, usually within 24 hours.

Budget

	2023 Budget	2023 Results	Variance
Revenues	\$929,431	\$871,967	-\$57,434
Expenses	\$756,265	\$719,156	\$37,109
Transfers In/Out	\$58,180	\$54,038	-\$4,142
Total	\$0	-\$24,497	-\$24,497

In 2023 our operating budget was \$929,431 with \$231,346 designated to the general fund to reduce tax levy. We achieved this goal, but were short of our estimated revenue by \$57,434 or 6%. However, our Department expenses were less than anticipated so the shortfall was \$24,497 or approximately 2.5%. Total revenues were \$871,967. The State received \$1,737,102. The Land Records account received \$104,752. We will continue to contain our expenses while still providing quality services. It is our goal to ensure that the Register of Deeds Department does not utilize any property tax levy and continue to support the general fund, when possible.

The 2024 budget is \$936,177 with a contribution to the levy of \$207,882.

Issues and Challenges Ahead

The Register of Deeds Department completed their goal of back indexing records to year 1947 in 2023 and will continue to back index as time allows. The Department is always striving to improve the ease of access and quality of the records available.

The Register of Deeds Department experienced staffing turnover in the fall due to retirements. It is a challenge to find qualified candidates that will accept the salary that we offer at the entry

level position. Another challenge we face is the inability to fully predict how the economy or housing market will be in 2024; factors that directly impact our workload and budget.

Goals and Objectives for 2024

- Continue to keep our focus on the turn-around time of real estate documents to less than one week. The needs of banks and lenders must be met in order to keep the local financial market and economy healthy.
- The State Vital Records Office (SVRO) will be closing their office to counter customers. Additionally, SVRO are potentially changing vendors, which can cause issues with changes in procedure. We look forward to working with them to ensure a smooth transition.
- Continue to work with the marriage officiants, funeral directors, nursing homes, hospices, hospitals and doctors with questions they have regarding the state's vital-record system.
- Continue to work with legislators to help them understand legislation that our association submits.
- Assist and inform Sheboygan County residents about Property Fraud Alert, a free product the Department offers to protect their real estate property.
- Continue to work on updating and improving our written procedures.
- Continue to encourage residents to record their land records electronically.
- Continue to work with our software vendor to update and improve programs.
- Work with our software vendor to further secure our documents and create a workable disaster recovery process.
- Offer staff opportunities for online training and encourage staff to look for ways to improve themselves.
- Focus on getting all scanned deeds available for viewing via online contracts.
- Resume indexing our vital records.
- Work on completing the Volume and Page clean-up project.
- Continue to work on compiling pages in the Miscellaneous and Contract Books
- Work on cleaning up the documents in the ISCAN system

We are continuously looking for technology to help improve our Department productivity and efficiency, without compromising 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.