

ASSESSOR DIVISION

Public Hours: 8am – 5pm
675 Texas Street, Suite 2700
Fairfield, CA 94533-6338

Real Property (707) 784-6210
Fax (707) 784-7046

Personal Property (707) 784-6210
Fax (707) 784-2475

Exemptions (707) 784-6210
Fax (707) 784-2475

Mapping Services (707) 784-6240
Fax (707) 784-2475

Administration (707) 784-6201
Fax (707) 784-6209



ASSESSOR / RECORDER
SKIP THOMSON

RECORDER DIVISION

Public Hours: 8am – 4pm
675 Texas Street, Suite 2700
Fairfield, CA 94533-6338

Recorder (707) 784-6290
Fax (707) 784-6911

Vital Statistics (707) 784-6294
Fax (707) 784-9002

24 hr Recorded Info (707) 784-6293

August 12, 2005

The Honorable Peter B. Foor
Presiding Judge, Solano County Superior Court
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield CA 94533

Response to the Annual Report of the 2004-2005 Grand Jury

Dear Judge Foor:

The Assessor/Recorder department is in receipt of the 2004-2005 Grand Jury Report entitled "Assessing the Assessor" dated June 14, 2005. The following is submitted in response to the findings and recommendations of the report.

Findings and Recommendations:

Finding #1 – Not filling full-time positions that review, record and eventually provide records for re-appraisal, may have a negative tax revenue impact.

Recommendation #1 – The County Administrator should consider the consequences of not filling full-time positions in the Assessor/Recorder office during the preparation, review and recommendation of the county budget.

Response to Findings and Recommendations – The Assessor/Recorder disagrees with this finding. The Assessor/Recorder is fully aware of the consequences that position vacancies have on the Department's workload and begins working with Human Resources to fill regular positions as soon as the Department learns of an upcoming vacancy. The Department also has the ability to use temporary help to back-fill for unanticipated vacancies and for peak periods. Not filling permanent positions in a timely manner would create a huge backlog in each of the recording processes, delaying recordation of time-sensitive documents, which in turn, could be a major liability to the County.

Finding #2 – Prior to November 2002, the computer system used to review, record and document records was antiquated. A new system called Exigent has streamlined the process. It has eliminated the backlog and at the time of this report, the average process time is 18 days. The Assessor/Recorder has set a goal of 5-7 business days to complete the entire process.

Recommendation #2 – Continue to work towards the 5 - 7 business day goal.

Response to Findings and Recommendations – The Assessor/Recorder agrees with the finding. While the finding reports an 18-day process, the office currently maintains an average 5 – 7 day turn around time for imaging and recording documents.

Finding #3 – The priority of recording documents depends on how the request is received. First priority is given to documents received by express or overnight mail and by walk in. All other requests are set aside until first priorities are processed.

Recommendation #3 – The Assessor/Recorder’s office should provide priority procedure information on the department webpage and any other informational material.

Response to Findings and Recommendations -- The Assessor/Recorder agrees with the finding. The recommendation will be implemented. The public can visit www.solanocounty.com and select the link titled “Assessor Recorder” which will have a link titled “Recording Priorities” to review information on recording priorities in the Department.

Finding #4 – Pursuant to Civil Code Section 3115, the original contractor must record a mechanic lien before expiration of 90 days after completion if no notice of completion or cessation has been recorded; or 60 days after recordation of a notice of completion or cessation. It is the contractors’ responsibility when to record. It appears only those individuals who record documents on a regular basis would know the priority procedures. Therefore, individuals who are not familiar with recording procedures may see a delay in the recording of their document.

Recommendation #4 – The Assessor/Recorder should ensure that mechanic liens are recorded within the proper time frame from the time they are received at the Recorder’s office.

Response to Findings and Recommendations – The Assessor/Recorder agrees with the finding. Those documents provided by law that meet the legal requirements are recorded within the set two-day standard from date received. The Recorder is aware of time constraints in recording certain documents including Mechanics Liens and makes every effort to record all documents in a timely manner.

Finding #5 – There are mistakes in the database because the Recorder’s Office does not proofread the database.

Recommendation #5 – The Assessor/Recorder should make proofreading and quality control a priority as entries are made to the property database.

Response to Findings and Recommendations -- The Assessor/Recorder disagrees with the finding. Quality control is a crucial part in our data entry process and staff are tasked with implementing checks and balances to ensure the integrity of the Assessor and Recorder’s

databases within the bounds of the State mandates governing departmental activities. Management staff require that Recorder and Assessor data be very accurate because it is relied on by the public. During every step information is checked and re-checked. In those infrequent occasions when data is inconsistent it is reviewed and modified if necessary.

Finding #6 - There is frequently a delay between the time when a property is sold and when the reassessment is completed. This causes problems for property owners and the tax collector, particularly if the property is resold within the same tax year. The situation in Solano County has improved somewhat as supplemental bills are now being sent out monthly rather than quarterly as was done in the past.

Recommendation #6 – The Assessor should continue efforts to expedite assessments.

Response to Findings and Recommendations -- The Assessor/Recorder agrees with this finding. The Department's goal is to streamline the supplemental billing process whenever possible to provide accurate and timely statements to the public.

Finding #7 – The County Assessor's webpage contains useful information, including the ability to search the Solano County Integrated Property System (SCIPS) for basic information on real estate properties of interest. It does not explain many of the basic functions of the Assessor, including how and when assessments are done or discussing the supplemental assessment process. Supplemental assessments are explained on the Tax Collector's website and mentioned on the County Auditor's webpage.

Recommendation #7 – The Assessor should take steps to inform property owners and buyers about the supplemental assessment process, including adding an explanation to the Assessor's webpage or a link to the Tax Collector's webpage.

Response to Findings and Recommendations -- The Assessor/Recorder agrees with this finding. The Department is evaluating its Webpage content to provide the public with information on the supplemental assessment process in coordination with the Auditor-Controller and the Tax Collector. In response to this recommendation the Assessor will expand its Website to include the additional information suggested by the Grand Jury.

Sincerely,


for: SKIP THOMSON
Assessor/Recorder

Cc: Michael D. Johnson, County Administrator
Marc Tonnesen, Assistant Assessor/Recorder
Lance Houser, Chief Appraiser
Micki Wright, Recording Operations Manager