

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: REAL PROPERTY TAX SERVICES

DATE: NOVEMBER 27, 2006

Committee Members Present:

Supervisors Monroe
Champagne
Bentley
F. Thomas
Geraghty

Others Present:

Michael Swan, Director, Real Property Tax Services
Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative &
Fiscal Services
Joan Sady, Clerk
Supervisor Sokol
Sheriff Cleveland

Committee Members Absent:

Supervisors Belden
Haskell

Maury Thompson, *The Post-Star*
Carlene A. Ramsey, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist

In the absence of Committee Chairman Belden, Vice-Chairman, Supervisor Monroe, called the meeting to order at 10:39 a.m.

Michael Swan, Director of Real Property Tax Services (RPTS), distributed an Agenda packet to each of the Committee members and a copy is on file with the minutes.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne, seconded by Mr. Geraghty, and carried unanimously to accept the minutes of the last meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk.

Mr. Swan began his report with Agenda Item 1, Corrections from the Treasurers Office. He briefly explained the majority of the corrections were mandated by Court Order, while the other adjustments were to correct minor accounting errors and had very little overall impact on the tax revenues.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley, seconded by Mr. F. Thomas and carried unanimously to authorize the Corrections to the Tax Rolls, as presented, and to authorize the necessary resolution be prepared for the December Board meeting. A copy of the proposed Corrections are on file with the minutes.

Mr. Swan continued the Agenda review at Item 2, Budget Summary Report. He acknowledged that the Committee had indicated their desire to review the report, monthly, prior to the Committee meeting. He explained that he attempted to e-mail the report, and discovered the limitations of the computer software made the e-mail option rather cumbersome. Due to the Thanksgiving Holiday, he explained there was insufficient time to use the conventional mail system.

A brief discussion ensued.

Mr. Swan commented that until the report was available for e-mail transmission, he would use the conventional mail system to send the report, one week prior to the

regular Committee meeting.

Mr. Swan reported that Agenda Item 3 related to a Staff vacancy for the position of a Tax Map Technician. He said, the person who held the position had been terminated for failure to perform the duties related to the job, as of Friday, November 24, 2006.

Mr. Swan observed that between last Friday and today's meeting (Monday morning) there was not adequate time for him to meet with the Commissioner of Administrative and Fiscal Services. Therefore, he said, the requirements of the new County policy (regarding the filling of vacant positions) had not been met and he could not present a Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position until the next regular Committee meeting which would be in January 2007.

In response to questions from various Supervisors, Mr. Swan said he anticipated the Tax Map Technician on staff could manage the normal work flow for a brief time. However, he said, he felt the position would need to be filled soon. He noted the tax map records would need to be up-to-date before March 1, 2007.

Returning to Agenda review at Item 4, 2007 Land Auction, Mr. Swan suggested it may be time for Warren County to make the switch to a Buyer's Premium Land Auction system for a number of reasons, which he listed as follows: 1) few auctioneers appear to be willing to run the auction for a flat fee, as in prior years; 2) the County Court Room may no longer be available for such use; and 3) the County may need to rent a facility, such as a school or firehouse.

Responding to Mr. Champagne's questions, Mr. Swan explained that with a Buyer's Premium type of auction, the auctioneer assumed the responsibilities for marking the properties, advertising, conducting "how to bid" seminars, as well as the auctioneer services.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne, and seconded by Mr. Bentley to authorize Mr. Swan to proceed with a RFP (request for proposal) for a Buyer's Premium Land Auction.

Mr. Swan clarified that the County Attorney's Office had developed a very efficient system of dealing with the preliminary foreclosure process which he felt should remain intact. However, he pointed out that the proposed Buyer's Premium format would release several members of his staff from at least two to three weeks worth of work. In addition, he said, it would also free up approximately \$8,000 of his Department's budget (previously spent on publishing the booklet of properties, postage, advertising and auctioneer fees).

In response to a variety of questions, Mr. Swan explained the new format would have no impact on the County's traditional "last chance" meeting. He verified that the RFP would clearly outline the County's standard operations and state the County's desire to maintain the status quo.

Mr. Monroe called the question and the motion was carried unanimously to authorize Mr. Swan to proceed with the development of a RFP for a Buyers' Premium Land Auction.

Returning to Agenda review at Item 5, Mr. Swan reported he recently learned one of his Department's projects may qualify for a New York State grant program through the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund. He stated the County Clerk, Pam Vogel, had offered to assist with the grant application process. He noted the history for each of the County's 45,000+/- tax map parcels had always been maintained on a conventional index card system. In an effort to modernize the system, he said, the staff had been working to convert the index card data to an electronic record system, whenever there was a "quiet time" in the work flow. Over the past five years, he said, there had been very little progress made.

Mr. Swan pointed out the grant application could be submitted for as much as \$75,000, which would provide the necessary funds to hire a temporary person who would be dedicated solely to this project. He further indicated the grant program did not require matching funds from the County.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne, seconded by Mr. F. Thomas and carried unanimously to authorize a grant application to be submitted to the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund, for an amount not to exceed \$75,000, and to authorize the necessary resolution be prepared for the December Board meeting. A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Swan reported Agenda Item 6, Tax Bill Information, was related to the January 2007 County Tax Bills. He reminded the Committee members that the 2006 County Tax Bills had carried a brief statement (at the top of the form) which declared what percentage of County Tax was used to provide Social Services to the County residents.

Following a short discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to authorize Mr. Swan to include a similar message on the 2007 County Tax Bills. He confirmed that he would review the exact language with the Commissioner of Administrative and Fiscal Services.

Mr. Swan reminded the Committee members that the County's website provided the general public with limited, free-of-charge access to the County's GIS (geographic information system). He also noted that users could obtain more detailed information via a paid subscription service (\$500 annual fee), managed by the County's Planning and Community Development Department. Once the subscription sales grew enough to yield a revenue for the County, he said the revenue was to be split between Planning and Real Property. He also noted the yearly subscriptions had not yet produced enough revenue to cover the yearly expenses.

Mr. Swan said he felt the Committee members should be aware that the Warren

County Realtors' Association had recently offered to pay a blanket fee of \$4,000 which would allow their membership full access to the site.

In response to questions from various Supervisors, Mr. Swan said he understood the County's expense for the software maintenance was \$10,000 each year, for three years.

Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, said she understood the Realtors had decided not to subscribe because the service lacked a certain feature they had wanted. She asked if Mr. Swan could comment on what the missing feature was.

Mr. Swan explained that the software had a comparative sales analysis tool that the Town Assessors found to be quite useful to them. However, he said, the Town Assessors had also felt the feature should not be included in the subscription service, and was therefore omitted. He acknowledged that most of the Realtors consequently chose not to subscribe to the site.

Mr. Champagne said he felt the comparative sales analysis tool would be a valuable feature for the Realtors to have. Mrs. Parsons mentioned that if the sales information was public information, she wondered why it was not available to the public.

Mr. Swan confirmed that the data was public information and was available to the public, although it was not available at "the click of a button." He said it was his understanding the Assessors' position had been that such availability would result in a huge increase in challenges to tax assessments.

Mr. Monroe said he felt that the County should make the information as easy to access as possible, and he suggested an increase in tax grievances would keep the assessments fair and equitable.

Mrs. Parsons suggested that if the feature were made available to the subscribers, perhaps more Realtors would pay the annual fee, and the County might actually realize the site's predicted revenue.

Mr. Swan pointed out the decision to amend the subscription plan would be something for the Planning and Community Development Committee to discuss at its next meeting (scheduled for later today). [*Please see the minutes of the Planning and Community Development Committee meeting of November 27, 2006 for further information.*]

There being no further business to come before the Committee, on motion by Mr. Champagne and seconded by Mr. Bentley, Mr. Monroe adjourned the meeting at 11:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carlene A. Ramsey, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist