

Kalamazoo County Government



Department of the Clerk and Register of Deeds

Operational Review and 2002 Annual Report

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Executive Summary

County Administration requested this operational review of the Clerk/Register of Deeds Department's performance with respect to workload and staffing levels. A secondary purpose of this report is to inform County Commissioners and the public on what the Department does, how it operates, and how management may improve customer service and efficiency. Finally, the review functions as the Clerk/Register's Annual Report for 2002.

Overall Efficient Operations. This review did not find areas that warrant major concerns. In fact, as the year 2002 evolved into a record year for both the Clerk and the Register Division, the Department was operating efficiently in many aspects. The 1999 implementation of a computerized recording system significantly contributes to the current levels of efficiency and comparatively low levels of backlog.

Staff are to be commended for their sincere effort in providing excellent customer service while searching for efficiencies, reducing waste, and enhancing the Department's revenue stream. A recent customer service survey is a noticeable example of their service improvement effort. The following table lists some key performance indicators; their significance is established in the body of the report.

Performance Indicators as of December 31, 2002

General fund contribution	\$1,793,175 (record year)
Certified copies sold	29,363 (record year)
Concealed weapon applications	597
Birth records back-indexed to.....	1986
Death records back-indexed to	1982

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Performance Indicators as of December 31, 2002 – continued

Real estate filings	72,123 documents (record year)
Real estate backlog	15 business days
Land records indexed to	March 1, 1999
Customer satisfaction rating	98.6%
Cost of overtime and temp staff	\$42,383 ¹⁾

¹⁾ 2002 cost of Deputy Clerk: \$30,311; T 12, A step, including 32% benefits

Mandated Services. The Department is constrained in its freedom to pursue improvement and innovation because its services and work processes are to a large degree mandated by law. In addition, the Department cannot control the volume of vital and land record filings and the requests for certified copies. The demand for these services are driven by seasonal factors, such as school year cycles, and by economic conditions, such as mortgage rates.

Opportunities for Improvement. Although the Department tracks work load measures such as daily filings, sales, and timeliness, management is not using these data to proactively drive performance improvement. However, it is recommended that the elected Clerk/Register provide staff with the information, tools, resources, recognition, and training needed to sustain high-levels of performance.

With respect to technology improvement, it is anticipated that a new Register of Deeds fee structure recently approved by the State legislature may boost general fund revenue by an additional \$300,000 (based on 2002 work load). This legislation also created an automation fund which may generate similar amounts to be applied toward technology improvements and innovations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations. The increasing workload for both Divisions, and the prospect of continued high filing volumes through at least 2003 prompted us to recommend the addition of one full-time staff person to serve both Divisions (“floater”) and to assist management with administrative duties. That position would initially supporting the Register Division in reducing backlog so that currently neglected areas of the Division’s operations can be brought up to date.

Other recommendations are outlined throughout the report. They focus on the areas of

- Customer service,
- Efficiency,
- Revenue, and
- Management.

A summary of all 24 recommendations and an implementation schedule can be found in section V.

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Operational Review

The purpose of this review is to provide a description of current operations of the Department of the Clerk/Register of Deeds as requested by Kalamazoo County administration. This report is also intended to inform the County Board of Commissioners and the general public with respect to the type of work that is conducted daily in the Department. Other uses of this report can include process improvement, staff training, and the development of a performance measurement and management system.

Overview. This report provides detailed descriptions of work load and staffing for both the Clerk and the Register Divisions. It identifies opportunities for improvement in the areas of customer service including revenue enhancement, efficiency, and management practices.

This review drew heavily from archival data, such as workload, staffing, and financial indicators; in the process, many previously isolated indicators were connected in a systemic view, such as workload per staff day. In addition, we conducted interviews with all staff and developed two detailed process maps to describe complex processes. Information gathered from outside the County include historic lending rates published by the State Tax Commission and a benchmarking survey of combined and separate Clerk/Register Departments in four comparable Michigan Counties. This report is partitioned into the following six sections:

- I. Introduction
- II. Clerk Division
- III. Register Division
- IV. Department Review
- V. Summary
- VI. Appendices

Overview of the Clerk/Register Department

The Offices of the County Clerk and the Register of Deeds are mandated by the Michigan Constitution in accordance with Michigan Law. The Clerk/Register is elected for four year terms during presidential election years. Thirty Michigan counties (36%) have combined the office of Clerk/Register while 53 counties (64%) have elected Clerks and Registers who manage independent organizations.

The Department receives original vital and land records, applications for permits, and requests for certified copies of these permits. Staff record these documents, sell certified copies, and transfer funds to the State and to the County's general fund. In addition, the Department supervises all national, state, local, and special elections. The main output consists of publicly accessible and searchable records (including election results) that are provided to the public. Key customers include the recording parties as they have an immediate personal and economic interest in the timely and accurate recording of their documents; the public and media who search for records; the State of Michigan with respect to both accurate and timely recording as well as the forwarding of revenue generated from this recording; and, finally, the County Board of Commissioners who receive revenue from, and appropriate funds to, the Clerk/Register Department.

The Department as a Performance System

When trying to find out how an organization operates and how it performs it is often convenient to view the organization as a system with interacting internal and external elements. A system view provides the basis for determining critical process and outcome measures. A simplified system view of the Clerk/Register Department is offered in Figure 1 below. It does not show generic internal elements, such as resources, management, and internal support processes or linkages to other county departments, such as Treasurer, Finance, and Human Resources.

Without doubt, this bird's eye view of the Department does not do justice to the complexities involved in dealing with over 150 different record types, supervising elections, and providing quality customer service. The systems view, however, shows

I. INTRODUCTION

what types of indicators are needed for effectively and efficiently managing the Department.

Clerk/Register Department as a Performance System

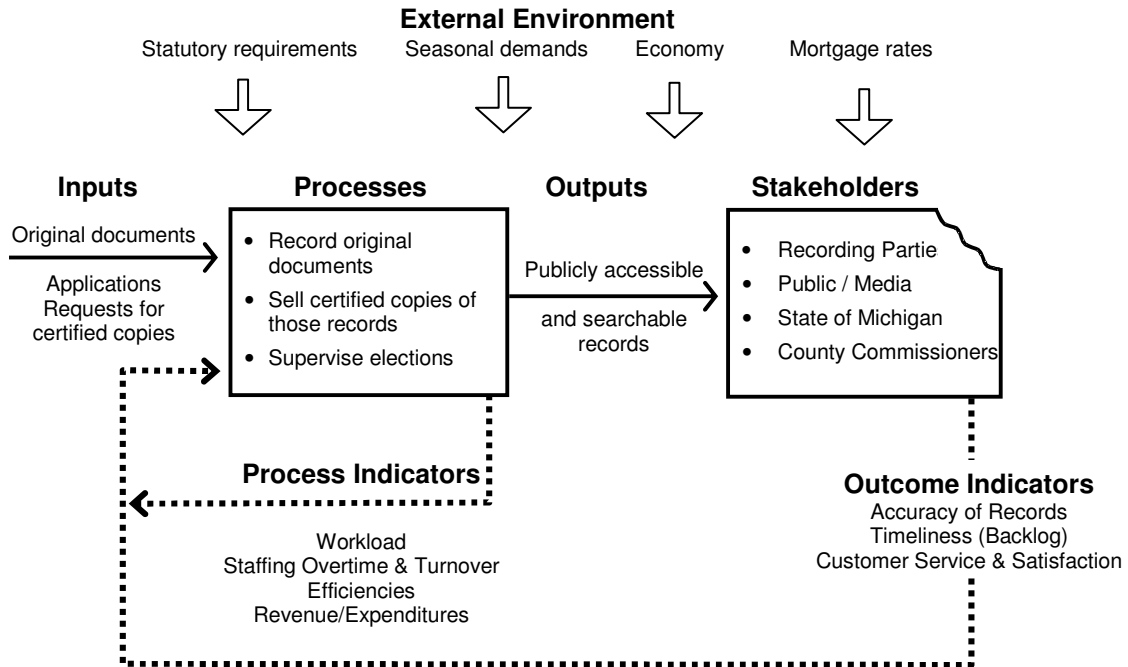


Figure 1.

Key Performance Measures. Based on this systems view of the Department the following key performance indicators can be identified. **Process indicators** provide information on the internal operation of the department, such as workload, staffing, efficiencies, and revenue and expenses. **Outcome indicators** provide information on the performance as it relates to key stakeholders. They include the accuracy of records, timeliness of recording (e.g., backlog), and overall customer satisfaction. This systems diagram was used to develop the key indicators for this operational review.

II. CLERK DIVISION

Functions

The County Clerk serves in the following capacities with authority mandated by either Michigan Law or the Michigan Constitution:

- Clerk of the Board of Commissioners
- Clerk of the County Board of Canvassers
- Clerk of the County Concealed Weapons Licensing Board
- Clerk of the County Road Commission
- Clerk of the Jury Board
- Clerk of the Ninth Circuit Court
- Registrar of Vital Records
- Member of the Apportionment Commission
- Member of the County Plat Board

The Clerk is the official for oaths of office for county officials and their deputies. The Clerk is also the keeper of the official Circuit Court seal and the County Seal.

As the County's chief election official, the Clerk supervises all national, state, and local elections. Administration of the Michigan Campaign Finance Reporting Act is also the responsibility of the Clerk. The Clerk serves as a member of the Election Commission and as Chair of the Special Election Committee.

This section describes the processes and workloads for vital records, concealed weapons permitting, and elections. The following section concludes with a performance assessment and identifies opportunities for improvement.

Vital Records

Services Provided

The Clerk processes records and issues marriage licenses, birth and death certificates, concealed weapons permits, military discharge orders, assumed name and co-partnership certificates, notary public commissions, and numerous other filings.

Vital Records. The Division receives birth certificates from Bronson Methodist and Borgess Hospitals. On the average, over 350 birth certificates are submitted in any given month. Area funeral homes provide the Clerk Division with an average of 186 death certificates per month. Citizens apply, on the average, for 158 marriage licenses per month (more detailed data are provided below).

Permits and Licenses. Besides issuing and recording vital records, the Clerk Division also issues permit applications and permits, and licenses. For example, citizens apply for CCW permits (described in the next section), DBAs, and co-partnerships, and register assumed names.

Historic Records. The Clerk Division has undertaken the effort to index historic birth and death certificates into its electronic database. Currently, birth certificates dating back to 1986 and death certificates dating back to 1982 have been scanned and indexed. This means that these records and their images can be located via the Clerk/Register Information System (CRIS). Indexing historic records not only improves efficiency and customer service; it is also an important step toward developing online search and order capabilities.

Genealogy Services. The Clerk staff used to provide free search assistance and typing of historic records. However, the increase in genealogy activities took time away from paying customers and had to be discontinued. In 1995 the Clerk Division revived this service by using volunteers. Today, volunteers are on duty Monday through Thursday afternoons and all day Friday. When volunteers are not on duty Clerk Division staff help out-of-town customers with their searches and by recreating old records on a typewriter for issuing certified copies.

Certified Copies. Certified copies of vital records are the major revenue source for the Clerk Division. In 1992, the Board of Commissioners set the present

II. CLERK DIVISION

fees of \$13.00 for first copies and \$4.00 for subsequent copies of the same document (the statutory limit in 1992). Since then, the State raised limits to \$15.00 and \$5.00, respectively.

Despite this ten-year old fee structure, Kalamazoo is among the top eight counties that charge \$13.00 or more for first certified copies and among the top 20 counties that charge \$4.00 or more for subsequent copies. As a recent customer service survey showed, few customers complain about the current fees. Staff indicate that occasionally customers comment about the high cost. At this time, the Clerk/Register is not considering to raise the fees for certified copies.

Court Records. In most counties, County Clerks also maintain court records. In Kalamazoo County Government, this function has been transferred to the Courts; however, the Clerk/Register is ultimately responsible for the proper filing and maintenance of those records. The Circuit Court Administrator of Records Services functions as the Chief Court Clerk and acts as the liaison between the Courts Records staff and the Clerk/Register.

Process Description

Vital records received in the Clerk Division are checked for accuracy and then scanned and indexed into the Clerk/Register Information System's database. Original records are submitted to the State on a monthly basis; the Division stores copies the Office's vault. (The recording and certification process for land records is generally similar and is described in detail in section III.)

The Clerk/Register Information System (CRIS), implemented in 1999, significantly reduced processing time for issuing certified copies and eliminated the handling of the Division's archived paper copies of vital records. To provide certified copies, staff retrieve the document on the computer, feed the correct certified paper stock into the printer, and print the form directly off the computer without having to handle original documents. Staff then sign and seal the copy, receipt the payment in CRIS, and hand or mail the certified copy to the customer. At the end of each day, Clerk staff transfer the collected funds via transmittals to the County Treasurer's Office.

II. CLERK DIVISION

Workload – Clerk Division

The workload for the Clerk Division can be measured in sales of certified copies, permits, and licenses. Figure 2 shows that sales increased from 27,283 in 2000, the first year with complete annual data, to 29,363 in 2002 (+ 7.6%).

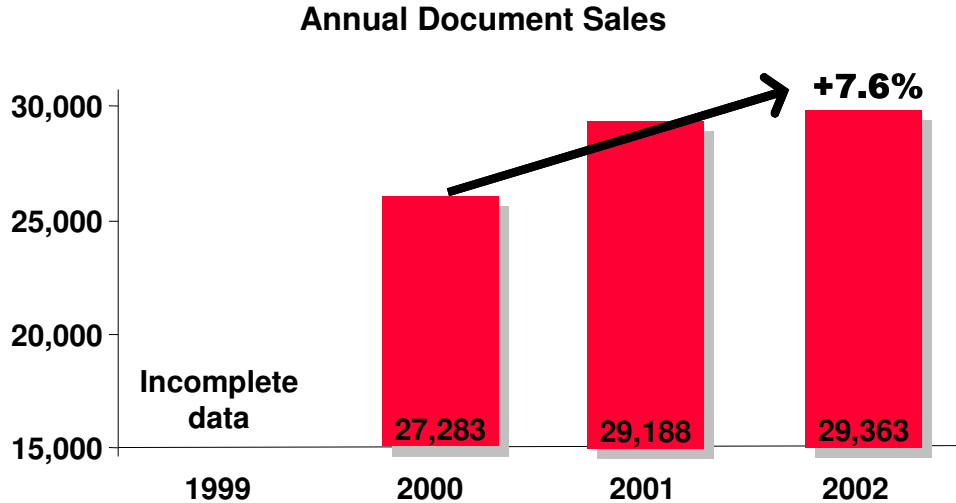


Figure 2

Seasonal Pattern. Sales of documents typically peak in August and trail off during Fall (Figure 3). August demands are driven certified copies of birth certificates needed prior to the beginning of school years and sports seasons.

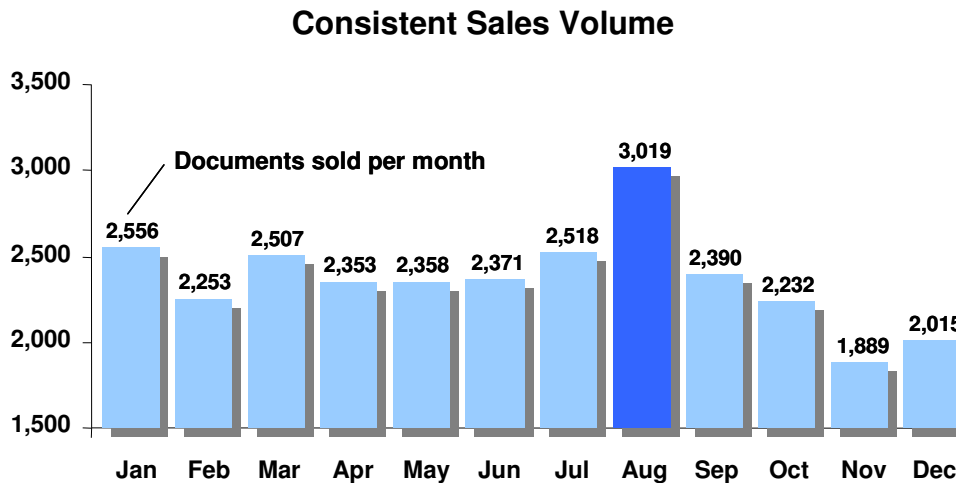


Figure 3.

II. CLERK DIVISION

The issuance of marriage licenses typically peaks during summer months. In fact, the number of marriage licenses doubles between May to September (Figure 4).

Marriage Licenses Issued by Month (1992 through 2002)

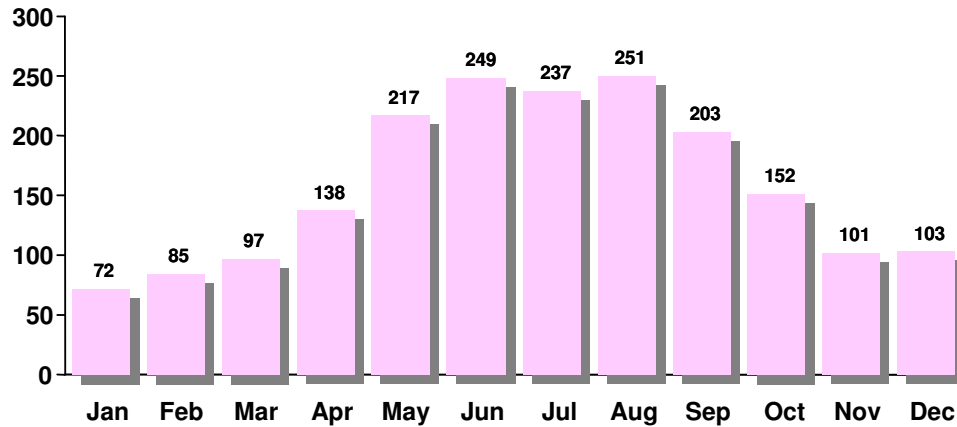


Figure 4.

Concealed Weapons Permits

The Lead Deputy Clerk prepares applications and issues permits to carry concealed weapons (CCW). The current procedure for obtaining a concealed weapons permit has been established by the 2001 CCW law. Appendix A shows a step-by-step map of this process.

Process Description

Citizens provide applications and pistol safety training certificates to the Clerk Division where applications are sworn to, signed, and filed. Deputy Clerks check the application to verify that applicants comply with the provisions in the new CCW law and assess an application fee of \$60 (\$35 for renewals). The Sheriff Department submits fingerprints to the State Police and FBI for background checks and forwards criminal history reports to the Clerk Division.

II. CLERK DIVISION

The Clerk/Register provides completed applications, including the background check, to the Concealed Weapon Licensing Board. The CCW Board is allowed 30 days to review applications following the receipt of the final application document. The Lead Deputy Clerk notifies applicants of the review outcome and completes permits so they are available the same day.

CCW Workload

Prior to July 1, 2001, the Clerk Division received from 12 to 21 per month (Figure 5). The new CCW law became effect on July 1, 2001, and immediately impacted the number of monthly CCW applications. That month, Clerk staff received 314 CCW applications, a twenty-fold increase over the monthly average of 15.5. Since then, the number of application has declined but is still exceeding historic totals.

CCW Applications per Month

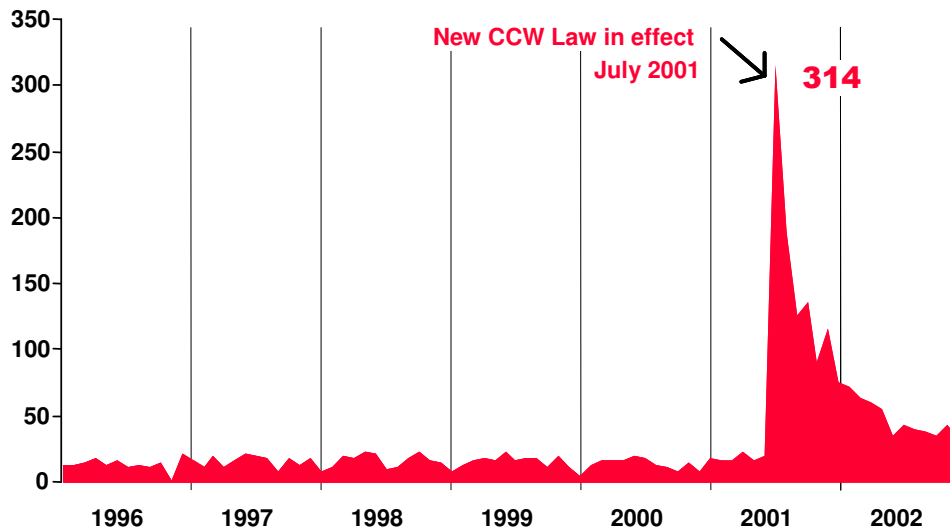


Figure 5.

The annual average prior to 2001 was 184 CCW applications. In 2001, the Clerk Division received 1,084 applications, and in 2002 597 applications.

Elections

The County Clerk administers all primary, general, and special elections held in Kalamazoo County. He also oversees school, city, and village elections.

Process Description

Election work begins long before Election Day and includes a number of distinct processes. Typically, the County Clerk conducts most election work himself with assistance from staff. Major election cycle deliverables include the following processes:

- Generate lists with candidates and ballot proposals.
- Create ballots with office and candidate information for all 110 precincts.
- Order election supplies for all governmental units.
- Coordinate campaign finance reporting.
- Train election inspectors for all units except the Cities of Kalamazoo and Portage and Kalamazoo Township. Most election training occurs in July; some additional workers are trained in October.
- Update election manual.

Election Workload

Election work load increased in 1998 as the State shifted some voter registration responsibilities to the counties. The County Clerk now maintains the County's Qualified Voter File (QVF) using dedicated computer equipment provided by the State. Ten local units with more than 5,000 residents maintain their own QVFs; seven units access the County Clerk's system through a dial-in modem, and two units use the system in the Clerk/Register Department.

Election Staffing. In the past, the Lead Deputy Clerk assisted with some election duties, such as the coordination of campaign finance reporting and assisting local clerks, candidates, and the general public with the Qualified Voter File. During the days immediately preceding an election, the County Clerk is assisted by *Michigan Election Resources*, a for-profit election coordinator. On election nights over 25 additional workers are brought to assist with counting and tallying votes.

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From June 2002 through November 9, 2002, the Clerk/Register hired a part-time election assistant to help with this year's primary and general elections. The decision to add temporary staff was based on a number of factors, such as the increased CCW work load for the Lead Deputy Clerk and the Clerk/Register's desire to spend more time on administration and management issues, including land records and Court records operations. It should be noted that the Clerk/Register Department does not have an administrative assistant; incoming and outgoing communication is handled by the Clerk/Register and Deputy Clerks. However, the Clerk/Register should shift more of this work to line staff. During peak counter times, the Clerk/Register also serves at the counter.

Cost of Election. The 2002 primary election cost to the County's general fund was \$79,395.63; the general election cost the County \$82,296.07. Local units have been billed \$3,448.75 and \$2,916.96, respectively, for supplies, notices and training. School districts and villages pay for their own elections.

Historically, the Clerk provided election training at not cost to participating election inspectors. In preparation for the 2002 primary election he began to assess a \$1 material fee to partially cover the election manual's duplication cost.

Election Technology

Technology is playing an increasing role in streamlining election processes and ensuring accurate and timely tallying and publishing of votes. Some of the election technologies that are on the horizon for Kalamazoo County include the automatic publishing of results to the Internet, the use of optical scanners in lieu of punch cards, and electronic ballot preparation.

Internet Publication of Election Results. During the November 2001 city election, the County used election management software *Election Magic* to update the County's web site with election results. Staff entered precinct results into a database as they were brought in; the program automatically uploaded results in real time to the Department's web site. At that time Kalamazoo County was the largest Michigan County to use this system.

Optical Scanners. In 1988 Kalamazoo County converted from levers to punch cards and is today one of only thirty – mostly smaller – Michigan counties still utilizing

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this system. It is expected that within the next couple of years all units of government in Kalamazoo County will convert to optical scanners as federal legislation requiring this technology was recently passed and signed. This legislation provides for more than \$3 billion in appropriations to assist with the conversion; however, detailed information with respect to the impact on the local level is still to come. What is known is that the equipment will be costly and require specific ballots for *each* election precinct.

On the other hand, optical scanners will improve the ease of the voting process as voters will deal with only a single scantron sheet and not multiple pages and punch cards. The scanning process will also increase the speed of precincts' reporting and the timeliness and accuracy of published county-wide election results. For example, during the general election on November 5, 2002, the Saginaw Clerk Division posted final election results on the Internet by 11:00 p.m. while the City of Saginaw's results were not received until 4:00 a.m. the next morning – the City was still using a punch card system.

The Clerk/Register intends to prioritize purchasing optical scanners. It is planned that equipment will be programmed under the Clerk's supervision.

Ballot Creation Software. Currently, ballot preparation is completely managed by *Michigan Election Resources*. Electronic ballot creation options has been implemented at other counties (e.g., Washtenaw); but they are expensive. Efficiencies can be gained as jurisdiction, precinct, office, and candidate information can be maintained from one election to the next, thereby eliminating a large amount of data re-entry. Ballot proofing can be completed in fewer steps because the ballot printing company prints directly from electronic files submitted by election staff.

In combination with ballot scanners the ballot creation software allows staff to create the tabulation programs for counting the ballot which enables electronic uploading of results on election night without manual data entry. Benefits include increased accuracy of published results and a reduction in temporary election staffing. For example, the Washtenaw County Clerk/Register's Election Division reported a two-third reduction in election night staffing. However, it is not clear at this point how the use of ballot creation software would shift workload from *Michigan Election Resources* to the Clerk Division and exactly how much money could be saved.

Staffing

The Clerk Division consists of three full-time staff. The Clerk/Register and the Chief Deputy Clerk/Register share the management of both divisions. They are listed in Table 1 merely because they are physically located within the Clerk Division.

Table 1:
Clerk Division Staffing

Position	Time at Clerk	Pay Grade
Clerk/Register	6 years	M 496
Chief Deputy Clerk/Register	18 years	P 266
Lead Deputy Clerk	6 years	T 17
Deputy Clerk	10 years	T 12
Deputy Clerk	5 years	T 12

Turnover at the Clerk Division has been moderate; the County Clerk does not perceive Clerk Division turnover as a problem. Since 1997, three staff retired or resigned and two staff transferred to Probate Court; no staff were terminated.

Outcome Indicators

As noted in the introductory systems diagram (see Figure 1), the following three key outcome indicators were used to assess the Division's performance:

- Accuracy of Records
- Timeliness (Backlog)
- Customer Service & Satisfaction

These three performance indicators are discussed next.

Accuracy of Records

Vital records, unlike real estate filings, have a standard format and typically consist of a single page. This standardization reduces the possibility of missing document errors during the checking, receipting, and labeling phases or of committing errors while indexing scanned images. Staff verify information as they index; records are also reviewed by the State.

Anecdotal staff reports indicated that errors in recorded documents are not an issue and that only a few records are returned by the State for clerical errors. However, the Clerk Division does not track the frequency and type of errors. Reportedly, most corrections regard circumstances out of the control of the Clerk staff, such as a revised cause of death, or additions to a birth certificate.

Timeliness of Recording and State Filing

Timely recording allows citizens to complete applications and filings with other agencies. For example, citizens need death certificates to file for insurance claims and social security benefits. Timely notification of deaths allows local clerks to take the deceased off their voter lists; this is particularly critical right before elections.

Currently, the Clerk Division is not experiencing a backlog and is meeting mandated filing deadlines. Per statute, death certificates have to be filed the same day they received by the Division, marriage licenses must be available no later than three days after application, and birth certificates must be filed within ten business days following receipt.

All vital record filings are sent to the state no later than the fourth of the next months. The state reviews these filings and returns incorrect records for re-scanning.

Customer Service and Satisfaction

Service quality is one of the most critical performance indicators because low service quality in a high-traffic government agency may erode the public's confidence in government operations, result in negative media coverage, and spark complaints to the County Board. Over the past years, Clerk Division staff have implemented a number of service improvements that also enhanced operational efficiency.

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First Responder System. In order to provide prompt service and to eliminate constant considerations of who should go to the counter or answer the telephone, the Clerk staff developed the first-responder system shown in Table 2.

Table 2:
Customer Service First Responder System

Activity	Deputy 1	Deputy 2	Lead Deputy	Chief Deputy
Go to counter	#1	#2	#3	#4
Answer phone	#2	#1	#3	#4

Telephone-Based Information. An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system allows customers to listen to specific information about obtaining or viewing documents without having to speak to the Deputies. This system reduced the number of calls staff had to answer by approximately 50%.

However, staff reported that customers tend to opt out of the system to ask question that were (or would have been) answered by the voice response system. Staff indicated that they could save time by avoiding lengthy procedural explanations if they had the ability to transfer customers back to the appropriate section in the IVR; this option is currently not available.

Staff also created a voice mailbox for out-of-state individuals who request information on obtaining marriage licenses. The mailbox provides the opportunity to leave their address so staff can mail information packets during off-peak hours.

Forms Rack. Staff created a forms rack with numbered bins from which citizens pull required forms without having to wait in line just to ask for a specific form. The rack could be made more visible by moving it to the south wall next to the entrance where customers can see it without having to ask staff for forms.

Online Forms. The Clerk Division's web site offers online forms that citizens can print and fill out at home to request certified copies of vital records via mail. Staff reported that they receive increasing numbers of these forms.

Customer Satisfaction. Staff report that few customers have complaints about the Division's service. In fact, a recent customer satisfaction survey indicated high levels of customer satisfaction. (This survey is described in section IV.)

Opportunities for Improvement

Clerk Division staff have implemented some new services and fees to combine customer service with increased efficiency and revenue. In addition to these current efforts, the Division and its customers may benefit from additional changes outlined at the end of this section.

Recent Revenue Enhancements. Based on practices in other counties, staff began to laminate CCW permits to prevent tampering with the photograph or other information and as a service to permit holders. Since October 2001, this service generated approximately \$2,600 in additional revenue.

In 2001 staff began charging a \$10 convenience fee for issuing letters stating that the County does not have a marriage license for a particular individual on file. This service is most often requested by non-U.S. citizens and generates approximately \$200 per year.

Recommendations. The following recommendations are targeted to improve customer service, optimize the revenue stream, and increase the Division’s efficiency.

Table 3:

Recommendations for Performance Improvement - Clerk Division

Customer Service	
Move forms rack closer to door	Move rack near entrance so that customers can see it as they walk into the office without having to wait for staff before being directed to the forms. (Priority 1)
Accept passport applications	<p>Staff reported that a number of customers have come to the Clerk Division for passport applications and renewal but have to be referred to the Westwood and the Kalamazoo Township post offices. As of August 2002, each application will generate \$30.00 for the County’s general fund. The start-up cost for this service, including the taking of passport photos, should be investigated and a one-year trial period implemented, together with appropriate marketing.</p> <p>Providing passport application services will increase the Clerk Division’s service portfolio and revenue stream. For example, Ottawa, Saginaw, and Washtenaw Counties provide passport services and in 2001 generated \$55,890, \$26,910, and \$54,075, respectively (when only a \$15.00 fee was assessed). (Priority 2)</p>

II. CLERK DIVISION

Table 3 – continued

Recommendations for Performance Improvement - Clerk Division

Efficiency	
Enable renewal letter printing of active DBAs only	When printing renewal letters for DBAs that are about to expire, CRIS prints also letters for already dissolved DBAs. This feature cannot be turned off and requires staff to compare all printed letters against the list of dissolved DBAs and to remove notices for them. This software change can save time currently spent going through DBA archives. (Priority 1)
Improve printing of different certified stock	<p>Add trays to main printer or install low-cost low-volume printers at each work station.</p> <p>The current printer has only one paper tray. However, different certificates require different stock; therefore, staff have to check prior to printing whether the correct stock is loaded or, if necessary, load it, then return to the counter's computer or their workstation, and print the copy (or copies). Staff coordinate print jobs by calling out who is printing on what paper. When large batches are printed (e.g., new birth certificates), customers and staff must wait before a different certificate can be printed. (Priority 1)</p>
Explore election technology updates	Explore purchase and implementation of ballot creation software and optical scanner voting machines. Estimate purchase and maintenance cost and potential benefits and cost saving, including staffing needs, ballot quality (i.e., spoiled ballots), and speed of obtaining election results. (Priority 1)
Revenue	
Charge convenience fees for notarizations and mailings	Based on the benchmarking survey, consider charging \$ 1 convenience fee for notarizations and mailings. (Priority 1)

Please see section VI for additional department-wide recommendations.

III. REGISTER DIVISION

Functions

The Register of Deeds Division records, maintains, and makes public land records for all real estate located in Kalamazoo County. Creditors, purchasers, and others with an interest in the property can locate these instruments and notices concerning ownership of, and encumbrances against, real property. Thus it is of paramount importance to ensure the accuracy of these records and their index and to record them in a timely fashion.

Archived Images. In lieu of paper originals, the Register Division maintains scanned images of original real estate-related documents required to be recorded in secure, non-alterable form. Images of records from the beginning of land records in the early 1800s through February 28, 1999, are available on microfilm. As of March 1, 1999, the Division maintains scanned images in an indexed computer database, the Clerk/Register Information System (CRIS).

Customers and Records. The Register Division receives the majority of real estate transactions from over 200 title companies, banks, credit unions, and other units of local, state, and federal government. Staff accept over 150 different documents, including the following:

- Court Action Deeds
- Government Land Patents
- Land Contracts
- Master Deeds
- Mortgages
- Quit Claim Deeds
- Sheriff's Deeds
- Tax Deeds
- Trust and Action Deeds
- Warranty Deeds

It should be noted that no standard forms exist for any of the documents accepted by the Register Division. That is, a land record can be drawn up in any format as long as the required information is provided anywhere in the document. This freedom places the burden of accuracy on staff as they cannot just merely check off items on a list. Instead, staff have to read and interpret the document to ascertain its legal purpose in order to apply the appropriate filing requirements.

Recording Process

The recording of land records is characterized by a number of checks and balances to ensure accuracy of submitted and archived records. The major steps in the recording process are listed below (see Appendix B for a detailed process map.) Each transaction may consist of several documents (e.g., mortgage and deeds) which, in turn, may consist of several pages (Figure 6).

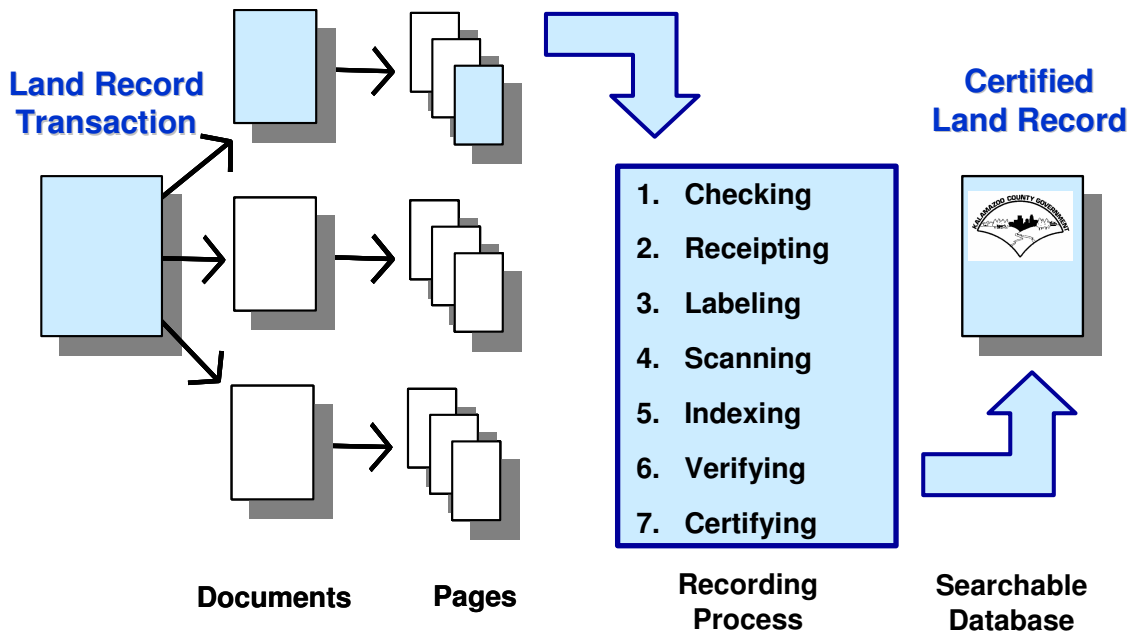


Figure 6.

Three steps are conducted for all transactions received on a given day: (1) checking submitted documents, (2) receipting and (3) labeling each page contained in that transaction. After all transactions are receipted, staff go through three additional

steps to index all transactions: (4) scanning, (5) indexing, (6) verifying, and (7) certifying. Depending on the number of transactions to be recorded, steps 4 through 7 may take longer than one day, thus creating a backlog. The following section describes this recording and certification process.

Daily Recordings of all Submitted Documents

1. Checking. After receiving a transaction staff check each document for completeness and accuracy per MCLA 565 filing requirements (see Appendix C). For example, staff look for matches between signatures and printed names, dates, and marital status. Only error-free documents are advanced to the next step. An experienced staff person can check up to 500 pages per hour (typically one title company's stack) if errors are minimal. When staff detect errors in a document prior to receipting, they return the entire transaction to the recording party; staff are not permitted to make corrections to these documents.

Staff also review payment checks included with transactions for accuracy by comparing check amounts against fee and tax tables. Transaction with inaccurate checks may be returned to the recording party; however, customers who file transactions daily are called and asked to bring a correct check to the office so that filings will not be delayed.

2. Receipting. Staff enter document types, number of pages, check amounts, and check numbers into CRIS. CRIS then calculates filing fees and applicable taxes for each transaction. When checks are inaccurate, staff return the transaction.

3. Labeling. After receipting staff print and affix bar code labels that uniquely identify *each* page. While printing labels, staff may check, index, or verify other transactions. At the end of each day, Register staff transfer collected funds via transmittals to the County Treasurer's Office.

Indexing and Certifying Land Records

The following steps of the recording process are often not completed the same day transactions are received. Instead, staff scan, index, and verify transactions in the order they were received (on a per-day basis).

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4. Scanning. Staff scan labeled pages into the database and file the originals for later return to the recording party. Labeling errors are usually corrected by the receipting staff person and then re-scanned. At this point, scanned images cannot yet be located in the database.

5. Indexing. Staff index each scanned page on the computer screen by adding pertinent information, such as names, addresses, and brief legal descriptions. They also check each page's bar code label against the actual page. When staff detect errors they have the option to correct internal errors, return the documents to the recording party, or flag these pages as "recorded as submitted."

Indexing a land record requires staff to interpret the intent of legal documents. Because no standard land record forms exist, staff must ascertain what the document is designed to accomplish, as well as, the recording relationships between the parties named on the records. In essence, they go through the same steps required for checking a document (Step 1).

6. Verifying. Next, staff sight-verify (double-check) the indexed information against the scanned image (CRIS does not permit staff to verify their own indexing work). Although the most accurate verification method is to re-key index information, current staffing levels do not permit its use.

Staff frequently rotate these tasks to avoid burn-out. This also allows them to maintain the skills needed for the different recording steps.

7. Certifying. Once all transactions submitted on a particular day are verified, the Lead Deputy Register runs four computer reports for a final check and reviews them for error flags (e.g., mismatch in numbers of receipted and scanned pages). If possible, errors are corrected before certification.

Transactions received on a specific date are then closed out in the computer and the Division's "proof date" is advanced to the day the transactions were initially received. Original documents and transactions are then collated, stapled, *certified* by imprinting with the county seal, and returned to the recording party.

The time lag between receiving transactions and certifying them is considered the Division's *backlog*. For example, on December 31, 2002, the Register Division was certified to December 06, 2002 – a backlog of 18 business days. Factors contributing to the backlog are discussed below.

Other Services

Four title companies subscribe to dial-in access to the CRIS database for a \$2,000 monthly fee. This fee includes CDs with images of the most recently certified transactions. Upon request, the Register Division sells these CDs for \$0.15 per image.

The Division also provides different certified copies and searches of land records ranging in fee from \$1.00 to \$3.00. Short record searches are typically done by staff, while customers with multiple or repeated searches are trained to use CRIS.

In addition to recording documents, staff answer telephone calls, serve walk-in customers, conduct searches, and train customers on the microfilm reader and the CRIS work station. Helping customers with a wide range of needs requires an extensive verbal repertoire as staff must be able to communicate effectively with citizens unencumbered by knowledge of the filing process, as well as, professionals highly familiar with land records, including attorneys, contractors, and surveyors.

Work Load

The workload of the Register Division has fluctuated over the past five years (Figure 7). The year 2002 marked a new annual record as staff recorded 72,123 documents. This represents a 52% increase over 1997, the year Mr. Snow began his first term as Clerk/Registerer.

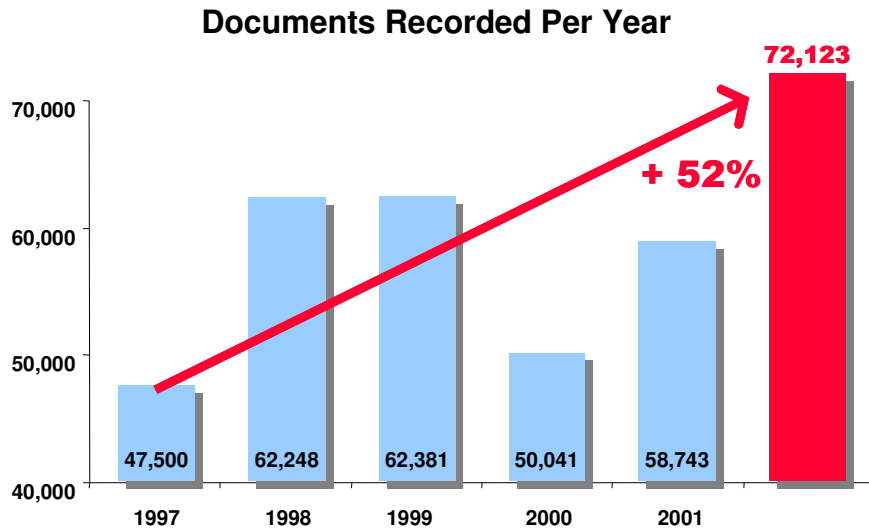


Figure 7.

Factors Influencing Work Load

A number of external and internal variables affect the Register Division's workload. For example, the number of pages per document, prevailing mortgage rates, and staffing levels all contribute to each staff's workload and affect the size of the backlog.

Number of Pages per Document. Since March 1999, the average number of pages filed per document has risen from 3.3 to 5.1 in December 2002 (Figure 8). This represents a 58% increase per document. More pages per document result in more work since staff have to touch or review each page six times during checking, receipting, labeling, scanning, indexing, and verifying.

It should be noted that actual recording time did not increase by 58% since some of the additional pages contain boilerplate language such as legal disclaimers for which checking and indexing is less time-consuming.

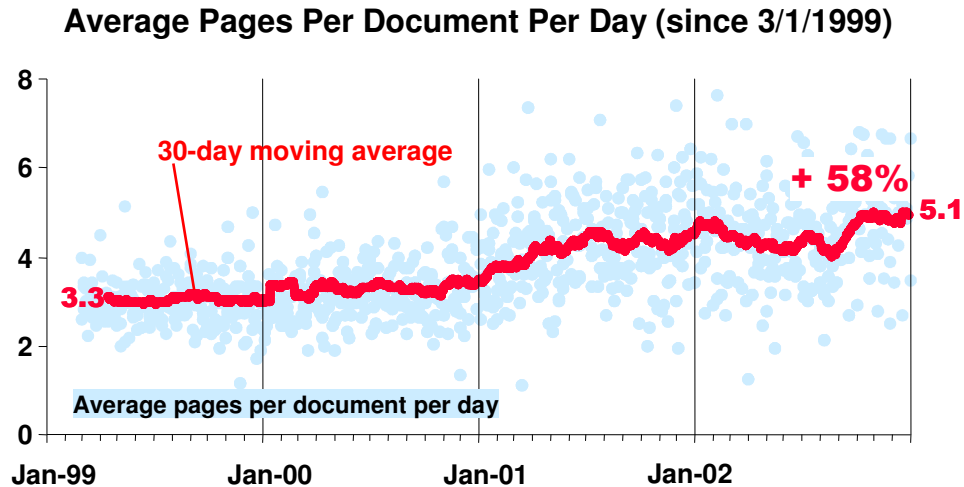


Figure 8.

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Figure 9 details how daily page-related workload for each staff *increased* since March 1999 by 40% while the document-related workload decreased by 6%. This analysis of over 1,400 days of filing and staffing data between January 1999 and October 2002 include all County and temporary staff. Absences such as vacation or sick time are not taken into account because these data are cumbersome to obtain and would not significantly affect this analysis.

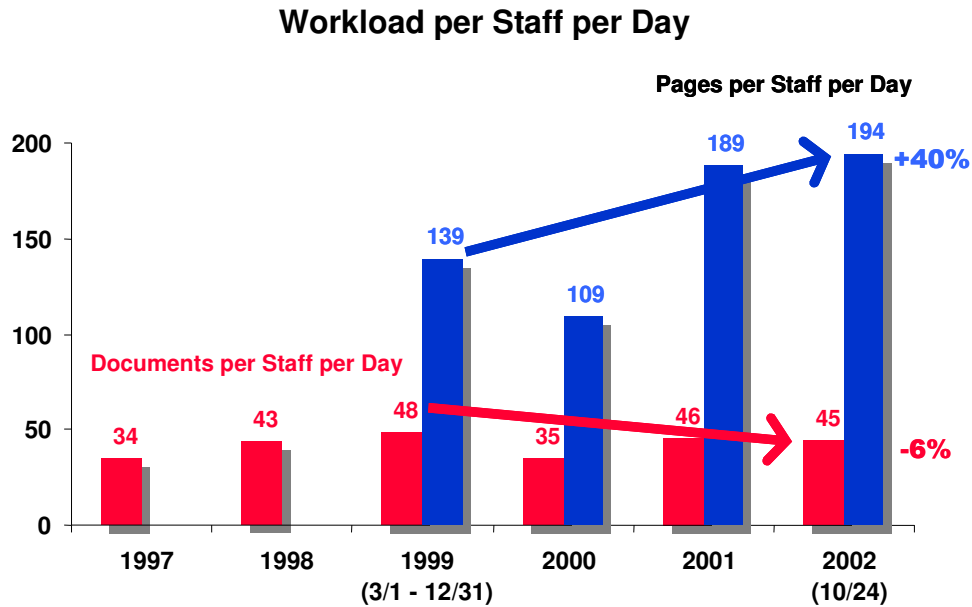


Figure 9.

This daily workload analysis shows that documents filed, the output measure used by most Register of Deeds offices, may not be the optimal workload indicator. Instead, Registers may use page-related data to develop workload and performance measures.

Mortgage Rates. Register Division staff reported anecdotally that filings correlate to some extent with mortgage rates. Figure 10 shows this relationship based on residential lending rates reported by the State Tax Commission. Current low mortgage rates encourage first-time home buyers to enter the market and existing home owners to refinance, take out home equity loans, or buy a second or third home. Also, money otherwise invested in the disappointing stock market was increasingly diverted to real estate investments.

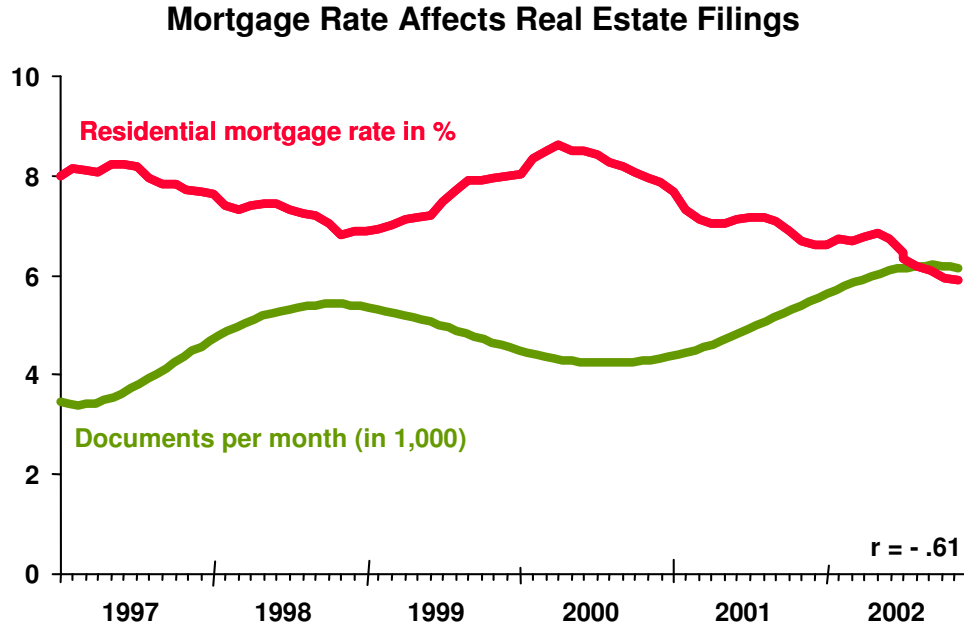


Figure 10.

Seasonal Fluctuations. Unlike the County Clerk, the Register Division experiences seasonal fluctuations at the beginning and end of a calendar year (Figure 11). Since 1997, the months of January and February had the lowest filing activity while December had the highest.

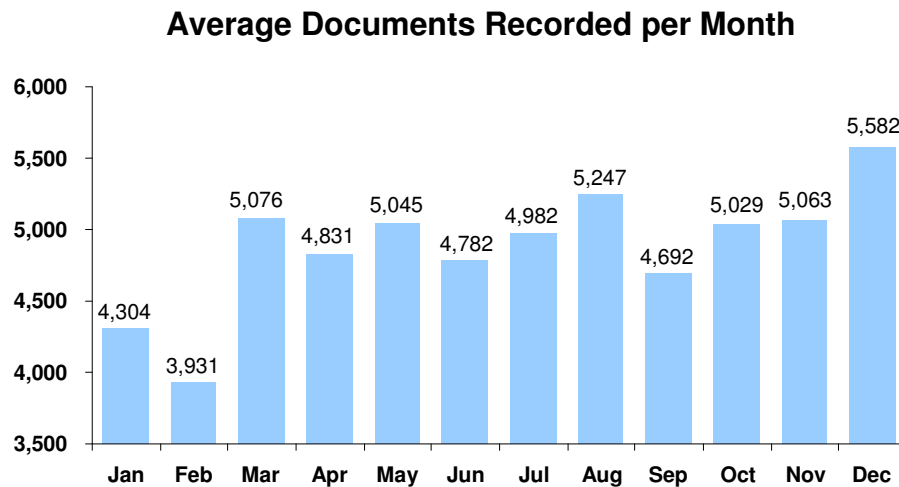


Figure 11.

Staffing

The Register Division consists of six full-time staff, many of them hired recently. Table 4 shows staffing levels as of December 2002.

**Table 4:
Register Division Staffing**

Position	Time at Deeds	Pay Grade
Lead Deputy Register	16 years	T 17
Deputy Clerk	18 years	T 12
Deputy Clerk	2 years 7 months	T 12
Deputy Clerk	2 years 5 months	T 12
Deputy Clerk	1 year 1 month	T 12
Deputy Clerk	9 months	T 12

During interviews, staff reported that one of the major factors in helping them get their work done is the team structure. They also remarked that their colleagues are knowledgeable, helpful, and fun to work with. The job rotation allows them to detect errors that other staff have missed and to prevent burnout. The rotation also avoids backlog that would inevitably occur if staff with specific duties were out sick or on vacation.

Turnover

For several years, the Register Division has been experiencing high turnover (Figure 12). Between June 1997 and June 2002 the Division hired ten temporary and 13 regular personnel for a total of 23 staff. Only 4 of the 13 regular staff (31%) are still with the Division. (The Department's overall turnover rate is described in section IV.)

The shaded area in Figure 12 shows the number of county and temporary staff that worked during any given month at the Register Division since 1997, including temporary and regular staff on the payroll for less than one month. The stair-stepped

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black line shows the cumulative number of regular and temporary staff who resigned, transferred to other County departments, or were dismissed.

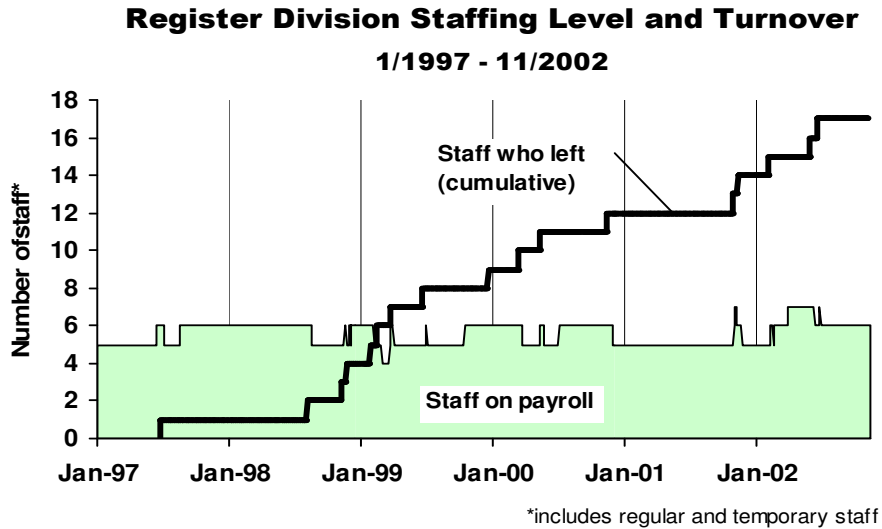


Figure 12.

Although monthly staffing levels ranged consistently between five and six, the Division staff could not perform optimally given this high turnover rate. This is because experienced staff had to take time to train new staff and new/temporary staff had to learn the job before becoming efficient.

Volume-Related Labor Cost

As 2002 developed into a new record year, the Clerk/Register hired temporary staff and approved increasing overtime hours. Table 5 shows that the cost for temporary staff and overtime exceeded the cost for a full-time staff.

Overtime. Overtime cost in 2002 was \$20,703. Because overtime hours are paid a 1.5 times the regular hourly rate the overtime cost bought only 2/3rd the staff power that were purchased at regular pay. That is, the \$20,703 bought 1,144 hours of overtime; the same amount could have purchased over 1,600 hours at the regular hourly rate (excluding benefits).

Temporary Staff. In addition to the 2002 overtime cost, the Register Division paid for two temporary staff at a total cost of \$16,084. The Clerk/Register had to add 1.5 temporary staff in the middle of December to reduce the backlog that had

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increased to 18 business days by December 31, 2002. The half-time temp resigned after two weeks.

Table 5:
Register Division Overtime and Temporary Staffing Cost

	2000	2001	2002
Overtime Register Div.	\$322	\$5,473	\$ 20,703
Temporary staff (Agency)	\$ 0.00	\$1,784	\$ 8,027
Temporary staff (County)	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 8,057
TOTAL	\$322	\$ 7,257	\$ 36,787
Cost of Deputy (T 12, Step A)			\$30,311 ¹⁾

¹⁾ As of December 2002, includes benefits at 32%

Total Additional Labor Cost. Total 2002 cost for both overtime and temporary help totaled \$36,787. The cost of a full-time entry level deputy clerk at the 2002 rate, including benefits, was \$30,311. The amount of these additional labor costs suggest that alternatives to increasing overtime hiring and temporary staff should be explored. A recommendation to hire additional staff (“floater staff”) is described in section IV.

Workload and Staffing Changes Since 1997

It is important to view workload and staffing patters in context since they their interaction contributes directly to the Register Division’s backlog. Figure 13 shows the changes in the number of documents filed and in staffing levels, both since 1997. The change in pages filed is based on the year 2000, the first year with complete page information. The changes are in relation to those baseline years.

Workload and Staffing Changes from Previous Years

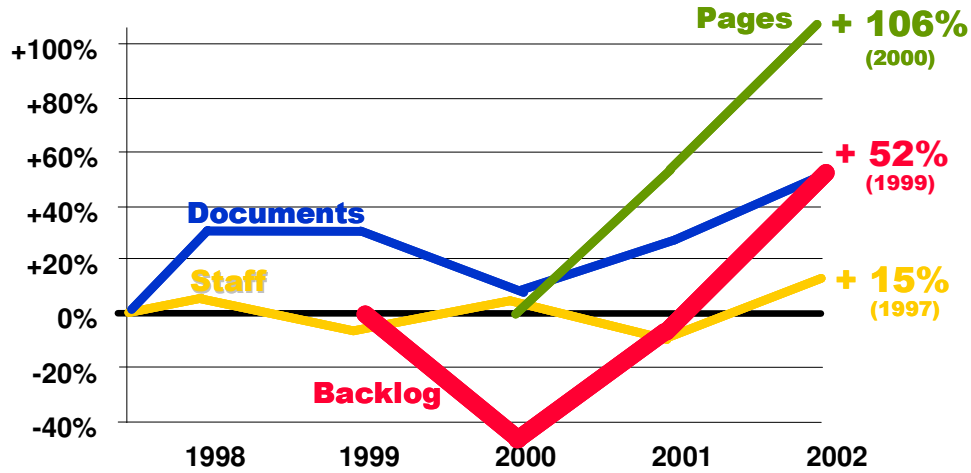


Figure 13.

Comparing 2002 workload and staffing level changes against baseline years reflects more accurately subsequent increases and decreases in filing load than merely reporting *annual* percentage changes. The following example shows how annual percentage changes would distort the size of the change's impact.

For example, assume that the number of documents filed in 1997 were 10,000 and that this number increased by 1,000 to 11,000 in 1998. We could report this as a 10% increase. Were filings to drop back to 10,000 in 1999, then we would report a decrease of only 9% since 1,000 documents of 11,000 is only 9%. On the other hand, a 10% reduction would reduce the volume by 1,100 documents to 9,900 which is below the baseline level.

Thus, reporting the annual changes in percent would mislead the unsuspecting reader that different (or the same) quantities were involved when in fact the workload increased and decreased by the same (or a different) number of documents.

With this background, it becomes obvious that the Register Division is woefully understaffed. It should be no surprise, then, that the annual average backlog increased from 7.62 days in 1999 to 11.56 days in 2002, a 52% change. In fact, on December 31, 1999, the backlog was 6 business days compared to 18 days on December 31, 2002. These last numbers represent an increase in backlog days of 200%.

Outcome Indicators

As was the case for the Clerk Division, the outcome measures shown in the systems diagram (see Figure 1) apply also to the Register Division:

- Accuracy of Records
- Timeliness (Backlog)
- Customer Service & Satisfaction

Accuracy of Records

Register staff ensure that land records are of the highest accuracy possible by using the system of checks and balances described earlier and summarized here:

1. Checklists to review filings per statutory requirements
2. Staff who check incoming filings cannot receipt/label the same filings
3. The staff person who scans documents into CRIS quickly reviews each document for obvious errors, such as incorrect barcode label information
4. While indexing pages staff look for errors on both pages and labels
5. Indexed information is verified against the image
6. Staff cannot verify their own indexing work
7. Prior to certifying a transaction day, staff run reconciliation reports

Currently, the Register Division does not track the accuracy of certified records and the indexed database information. Staff report that they have not received complaints from customers regarding record accuracy.

In addition, the Division does not track individual staff's performance with respect to indexing quality. However, such a system is desired by the Lead Deputy Register to be able to better monitor and support staff performance.

Timeliness of Recording

Timeliness is the most visible performance indicator for the Register Division. It affects service quality and impacts customers economically. Title companies and lending institutions are interested in a short turn-around because they are required to carry insurance on real-estate transactions until the records are certified by the County.

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Short (or no) backlog translates into shorter insurance periods, and therefore, lower expenses.

Individual citizens are interested in quick filings since these are the only paper records of their real estate ownership. As a free service, staff provide individual filers with uncertified copies of a document's first page as proof of filing.

In 1999 staff met with title companies to establish a backlog that was acceptable to the Division's largest clients. Customers and staff agreed that a five business day turnaround was acceptable as part of doing business.

Backlog. The Register Division used to have a *recording* backlog; that is, submitted documents would not be recorded (i.e., receipted) until several days following their submission. Today, this backlog has been eliminated as staff record all error-free documents the same day they are received.

The backlog considered here is called an *indexing* backlog. That is, recorded documents are not indexed (and cannot therefore not be found in the database) until some time after the initial recording.

Figure 14 shows the daily indexing backlog since March 1, 1999, when the Register Division began to manually track indexing backlog with the implementation of CRIS.

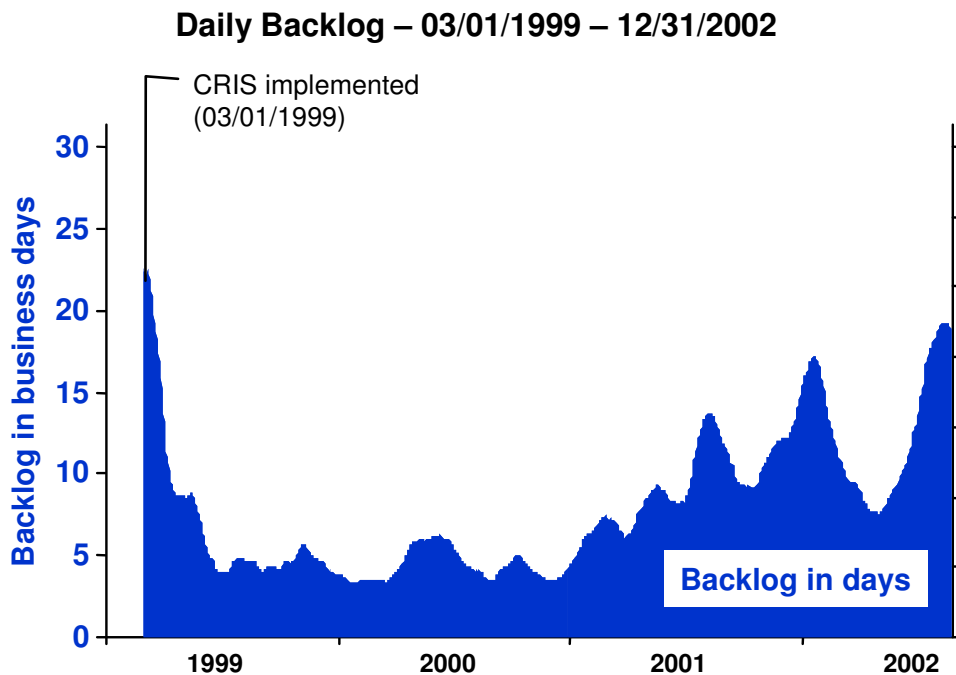


Figure 14.

On March 1, 1999, the Register Division’s backlog was 23 business days. That means that documents received on March 1, 1999, were not certified until March 31, 2002. The CRIS implementation helped staff to significantly reduce this backlog to ten business days in April and two business days in September of 1999 (Figure 14). On December 31, 2002, the Register Division was back up to 18 business days.

Backlog and Workload. The backlog measure is not meaningful in isolation and must be discussed against the Division’s workload. Figure 15 is similar to Figure 14 but adds the number of daily filings (thick black line).

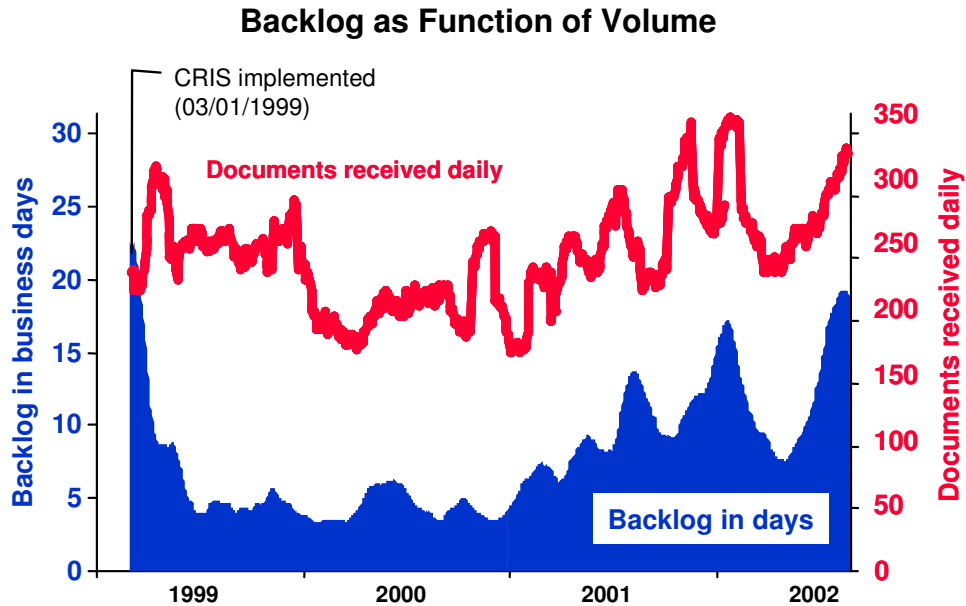


Figure 15.

Combining these process and outcome indicators clearly shows how the daily backlog closely tracks the number of documents received daily ($r = .61$).

Backlog Benchmarks. As discussed previously, volume is a function of a number of external factors, such as mortgage rates and local and national economy. In other words, it is very difficult for any Register of Deeds office to proactively anticipate future filing volumes. Table 6 shows how Kalamazoo County’s backlog compares with the backlog of Register of Deeds Departments in similar-sized counties.

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**Table 6:
Staffing, Volume, and Backlog Comparison with Similar Counties**

	Combined Clerk/Register Department			Separate Register Dept.	
	Kalamazoo	Calhoun	Washtenaw	Ottawa	Saginaw
Population	238,603	137,985	322,895	238,314	210,039
Staff ¹⁾	6	7 ²⁾	13	9	9
Documents (2001)	58,743	32,509	95,291	76,903	45,500
Backlog (10/07/2002)	9 days (09/24)	4 days (10/01)	24 days (09/03)	13 days (09/19)	21 days (09/06)

¹⁾ Not including Elected Officials and Chief Deputies

²⁾ Staff are fully cross-trained and perform both Clerk and Register functions.

Backlog Usurps Other Division Functions. Although recording land records is the Register Division's most visible function, it is not the Division's only function. In their effort to keep the indexing backlog at a minimum, staff must neglect other service areas. This leads to inefficiencies and inconveniences for both customers and staff:

- The Lead Deputy Register assists her staff in indexing and verifying instead of developing and implementing procedures for improving record quality
- Staff do not have time to create a searchable archive of plat maps and condominium maps used by surveyors
- Land corners and surveys recorded prior to March 1999 are not being scanned into a searchable database.

Manual searches are time-consuming because they involve card index searches. A computer-based index could reduce search time from approximately ten minutes to about one minute.

Customer Service and Satisfaction

Although Register Division staff receive the bulk of their workload via mail they do not work in isolation from individual customers. Because no data existed on the extent of personal customer interactions, we created a tracking system to get a feel for the extent of daily phone calls and on-site customers. Between January 6 and January 31, 2003, staff recorded the number of customer interactions and estimated their duration in five-minute intervals. Four Deputy Registers and the Lead Deputy Register participated. Due to resource limitations we could not use independent observers to verify the accuracy of these logs. However, informal observations suggested that staff under-recorded rather than over-recorded the number of phone calls and visitors.

Interactions per Day. On the average, the five staff interacted with a total of over 66 customers per day (Figure 16). This translates into an average of about 13 interactions per staff; however, based on job type and experience, some staff deal more with customers than others.

The majority of these interactions (85%) lasted between one and five minutes. Fifty-six percent of these interactions occurred on the telephone; 88 percent of calls last less than five minutes. Forty-four percent of interactions involved on-site customers; 78 percent of these interactions lasted less than five minutes.

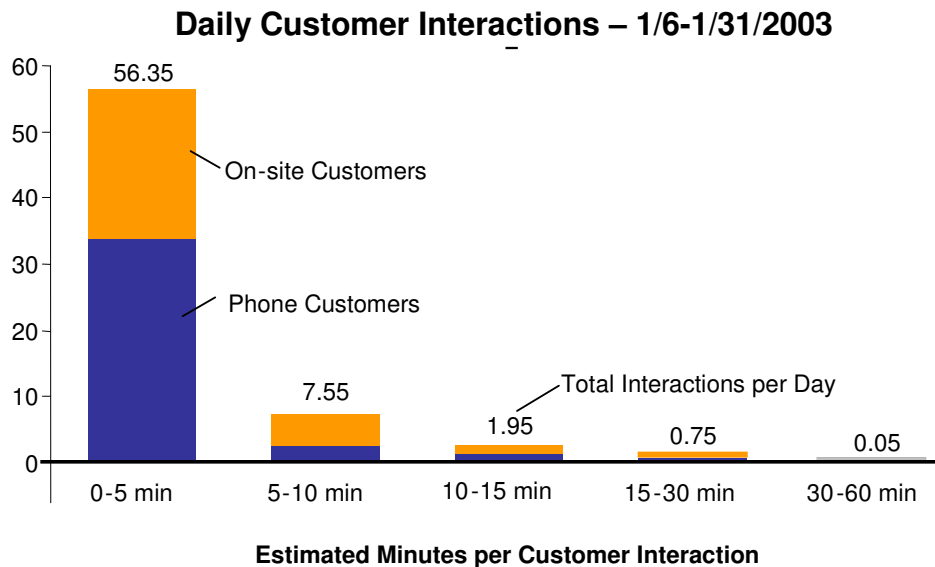


Figure 16.

Wrong Office. Staff also tracked customers and callers who were looking for a different office. Despite staff concern that the frequency of these calls takes away time for their recording duties, the logs indicated that requests for different offices made up only a small percent of total interactions. During the four weeks of tracking customer interactions, staff recorded a total of 156 visitors or callers who were looking for a different office. This translates into a total of 7.8 customers per day, about one of whom is a walk-in customer looking for a different office. The majority of customers and callers looking for a different office were trying to reach the City Tax Assessor, the County Clerk, or the County Treasurer.

Customer Satisfaction. Staff report that few customers have complaints about the Division's service. In fact, a recent customer satisfaction survey indicted high customer satisfaction. (This survey is described in section IV.)

Opportunities for Improvement

Staff in the Register Division have developed a smooth-running system based on highly integrated team work. They have developed a number of proactive procedures to eliminate wasteful steps from the recording process and to prevent backlog from building up in the first place.

Recent Improvements. Staff use rejection notification sheets that contain statute numbers for all recording requirements; this information is also available on the Clerk/Register's web site (www.kalcounty.com/clerk/deeds.htm). This reduces the demand on staff to explain why certain information has to be provided and expedites the review process as individual filers can check their own work against the checklist prior to submitting the final transaction.

When rejecting transactions with multiple documents, staff make a personalized check mark on all correct documents. When customers return corrected transactions staff have to recheck only the unmarked documents.

When staff noticed an increase in error rates of submitted documents early 2002 they successfully implemented the following procedure. If the first two or three

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transactions for a title company's packet of 30 to 100 transactions contained many errors, then they returned the *entire* stack to the title company. In the past, staff reviewed all documents in the stack which wasted time since most transactions contained errors. The new process predicted overall error rate and avoided that staff check transactions packets with a high error probability. The Lead Deputy Register also met with title company managers to explain this procedure which has proven very effective in improving the quality of submitted land records.

Several microfilm viewers and a CRIS work station are available to the public at no cost. This saves staff time as customers – after some initial training – can perform searches on their own.

Staff reported that these improvements reduced the amount of time spent on inefficient processes. Staff can now utilize this time on recording documents to reduce the indexing backlog.

Inefficient Payment Methods. One of the major inefficiencies that remains is the different types of payment methods used by title companies and banks. The Register Division accepts payments in many form. However, some payment methods require less staff time than others to accomplish the same goal: to check and accept payments for land record filings. Current methods include:

1. **One blank check** accompanies a daily transaction packet submitted by an agency. Staff enter the total correct amount for fees and taxes. This is the most efficient process because transactions with errors can be returned without affecting already completed checks. However, staff must take care not to fill in the total transaction amount until after all pages have been labeled since too few or too many printed labels indicate an error in the checking and receipting process.
2. Agencies submit **individual checks for each transaction** which makes it easier to return transactions for correction. Seemingly convenient, this method requires staff to check the amount on *each* check against the fees and taxes calculated by CRIS. Major customers submit packets of 30 to over 100 transactions per day which means that staff have to verify and record each check which involves entering each check's amount and check number. This process uses much more staff time than procedure 1.

- 3. Several checks accompany a single transaction.** For example, one check is written for each document within a transaction. This method requires staff to verify the accuracy of each check. If one of those checks is not showing the correct amount, then the entire transaction must be returned even if the documents themselves are correct. Although this procedure has the advantage that staff do not have to compare check amounts against total transaction amounts, this process is the least efficient as it further increases the number of checks to be handled.

Register Division staff should work with key customers to review this process and explain that time spent now working with hundreds of check could be applied to the actual recording process. An improvement in this area should improve staff throughput and increase the number of documents indexed per day.

Mandated Revenue Increases and Potential Impact. On December 10, 2002, the Michigan House of Representatives passed Senate Bill 63 which includes language to raise land record filings fees from \$9.00 to \$12.00 for the first page of each document and from \$2.00 to \$3.00 for subsequent pages of the same document. This change will become effective March 31, 2003. The County's general fund will receive \$1 from each recorded page; \$5 for each document will flow to a new Automation Fund set aside for the Clerk/Register Department's technology updates. A revision of the Remonumentation Act will raise the fee from \$2.00 to \$4.00 per document. The County retains approximately 1.5% of that fee, the remainder will flow to the State for disbursement via grants for counties' remonumentation programs.

The Clerk/Register anticipates that the 2003 filing volume will be similar to 2002. If that is the case, the County's general fund can expect additional contributions of more than \$300,000 while the Clerk/Register Department can expect over \$350,000 for the Automation Fund.

Recommendations. Table 7 lists recommendations for improvement and their rationale. It should be noted that customer service, revenue, and efficiency are all related. For example, revenue can only be generated when the public is receiving, or will receive, a service they are willing to pay for.

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**Table 7:
Recommendations for Performance Improvement - Register Division**

Customer Service	
Provide written job aids for microfilm and CRIS users	Consider the development of job aids for customers so they can learn and use the microfilm reader and CRIS with less staff involvement. (Priority 1)
Help customer improve filing quality	Track rejected transactions per customer to determine possible patterns and involve customers in improving transaction quality. (Priority 1)
Conduct customer focus groups	Convene focus groups with major customers to find out which processes are working well for customers and where customers would like to see improvements. (Priority 2)
Efficiency	
Standardize payment practices	Develop a uniform payment process for all major customers, possibly blank checks or credit cards (waiting for County implementation of credit card machines). Staff should work with key customers to describe the current situation and outline the benefits of a streamlined payment method. (Priority 2)

Please see section VI for additional department-wide recommendations.

IV. ENTIRE DEPARTMENT

Revenue

The Clerk/Register generates revenue by charging mandated and locally-determined fees for recording documents, by selling certified copies, and for a number of additional services, such as DBA licenses and CCW permits. The majority of collected fees are passed on to other agencies. For example, the State Police receives part of CCW fees, and a portion of marriage licenses fees are passed on to the Human Services Department's Family Counseling Services.

Annual Revenues and Expenditures. Annual revenues depend on the volume of document filings and sales of certified copies, permits, and licenses. In 2002, the Clerk/Register generated \$2,378,875 in revenues (Table 8). \$585,700 (24.6%) of this revenue were used to operate the Department, the remaining \$1,793,175 (75.4%) flowed into the County's general fund, making 2002 a record year for both revenue and general fund contributions. Note that not all financial data can be tracked per Division; therefore, this section will only report combined figures for the entire Department.

**Table 8:
Clerk/Register Revenues and Expenditures since 1997**

	Revenues	Expenditures (%)	General Fund Contribution (%)	Revenue/ Expense Ratio
1997	\$1,474,245	\$443,547(30.1%)	\$1,030,698 (69.9%)	3.32
1998	\$1,882,452	\$557,310 (29.6%)	\$1,325,142 (70.4%)	3.38
1999	\$2,083,751	\$526,584 (25.3%)	\$1,557,167 (74.7%)	3.96
2000	\$1,710,776	\$475,622 (27.8%)	\$1,235,154 (72.2%)	3.60
2001	\$2,054,311	\$552,812 (26.9%)	\$1,501,499 (73.1%)	3.72
2002	\$2,378,875	\$585,700 (24.6%)	\$1,793,175 (75.4%)	4.06

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Table 8 shows also that the revenue/expense ratio became more favorable during high-volume years (1999 and 2002). The 2002 ratio of 4.06 means that for every tax dollar spent on the operations of the Clerk/Register Department, the County created \$4.06 in revenue. Three-fourth of that revenue flowed into the general fund.

General Fund Contributions. Figure 17 below shows the actual amount of revenue the Clerk/Register Department contributed to the County's general fund since 1997. Note that these figures reflect the Register Division's filing volume (see Figure 7). The 2002 contribution of \$1,793,175 constituted a 74% increase over 1997, the year the current Clerk/Register took office.

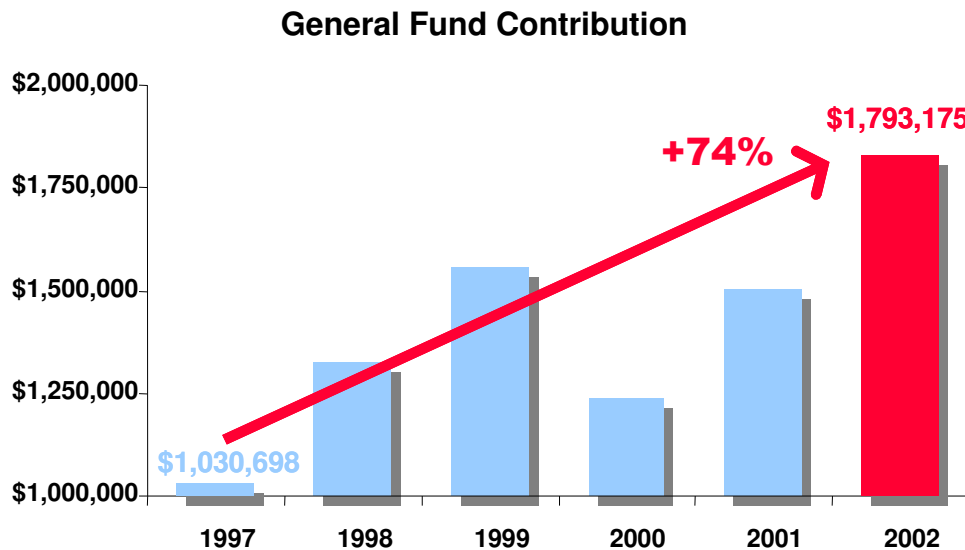


Figure 17.

Staffing

The entire Department consists of 11 staff: the elected Clerk/Register, one Chief Deputy Clerk/Register, one Lead Deputy Clerk and one Lead Deputy Register, two Deputy Clerks for the Clerk Division and five Deputy Clerks for the Register Division.

Cross-Training

Staff are cross-trained in each division's *basic* functions. When customer volume is low, the Chief Deputy Clerk/Register and, at times, the Lead Deputy Clerk label and index land records. The other Clerk staff help out occasionally with indexing, but at his point would not be able to independently complete all six steps of the real estate recording process.

Register staff typically do not have time to assist Clerk staff. An exception is the individual operating the Register Division's scanner; she answers phones and assists at the Counter when Clerk Division staff are busy.

Staff Turnover

Turnover for the Clerk/Register Department has been above County average, with the exception of 1997 (Figure 18). Note that in a small office like this, a one-person turnover shows up as a 10% turnover statistic.

Full-Time Staff. Of the 18 full-time staff hired since 1/1997, four stayed 2-3 years, two stayed 1-2 years, and five staff stayed less than one year. This overall turnover was mainly a function of the Register Division's turnover discussed earlier.

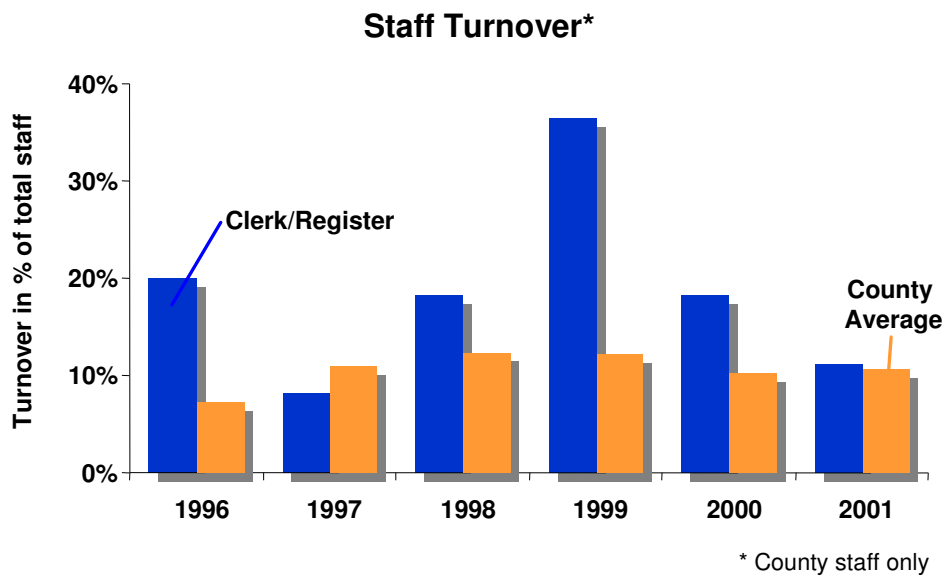


Figure 18.

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Team Hiring. In an effort to reduce turnover, the Department implemented a team-hiring approach that involves team interviews. The interview team conduct initial interviews and consists of the Chief Deputy and both Lead Deputies. The Chief Deputy and the final candidate meet with the Clerk/Register for a second interview. This approached was first used in June of 2002 and again in January 2003. Staff expressed satisfaction with this approach and plan to continue it.

This type of interviewing approach has also been successfully implemented in other County departments. For an organization such as the Clerk/Register Department, this interview type is important since staff must be able to work as a highly-coordinated team in close personal proximity.

Overtime and Temporary Staff

As can be expected for a record year, overtime expenses and cost for temporary staff increased over previous years. The 2002 total overtime cost for the Department was \$27,644, or 7.6% of total payroll (Figure 19). This exceeds the total overtime for 2001 by 132% and the 2000 overtime by 963%. (Data prior to 2000 are not available in the County's electronic payroll database.)

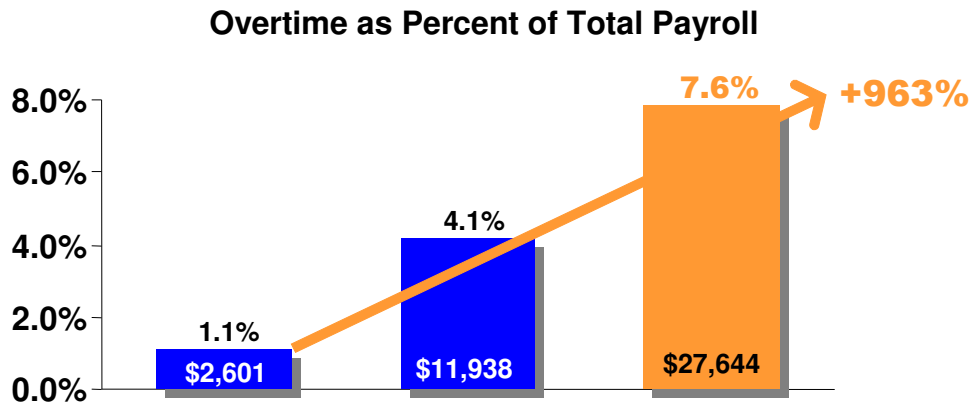


Figure 19.

Temporary Staff. In addition to increasing overtime, the Register Division hired temporary staff to assist with the workload; one of whom was ultimately hired. The total cost for temporary staff was \$16,081.

Overtime and temporary staffing cost combined were \$42,383. The Register Division's overtime and temporary staff account for \$36,787 (86.8%) of that amount. The fact that frequent hiring of temporary staff interrupts work flow and in each case requires on-the-job training suggests that hiring additional staff may be a more efficient alternative.

Customer Service

The Department conducted a customer service survey to track how customers perceived service quality. In addition, many customers continue to provide informal feedback to staff.

Customer Service Survey

From January 2000 to June 2001 the Department conducted an informal "Customer Service Survey." This survey was developed as a result of the Chief Deputy's participation in the County's Continuous Quality Improvement Steering Team.

Format. Staff displayed survey forms on the counter and customers filled them out while staff completed their order. This self-selection likely biased the results as it is highly probable that customers who viewed service quality positively were more inclined to participate in this survey than other customers.

The survey form asked counter customers if the (strongly) agreed or (strongly) disagreed with the following statements:

- I was greeted promptly and courteously
- My request was handled promptly and to my satisfaction
- The clerk who waited on me was knowledgeable
- I was offered additional information on services outside the function of this office

Customer were also invited to write-in additional concerns and suggestions.

Findings. The Chief Deputy tallied the results frequently and shared them with staff. A total of 878 surveys were returned to the Department. Table 9 shows that 98.6% of customers for both offices were satisfied with the services provided by the staff.

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**Table 9:
Customer Service Survey Results**

	Clerk	Register	TOTAL
Surveys received	537	341	878
(Strongly) Disagree With Statements	8 (1.5%)	4 (1.2%)	12 (1.4%)
(Strongly) Agree With Statements	529 (98.5%)	337 (98.8%)	866 (98.6%)

Informal Customer Comments

Staff receive informal conversational feedback from their customers on a daily basis. The most frequent complaints regard the fact that non-authorized individuals are not allowed to view or obtain birth certificates, that staff cannot accept documents that do not meet statutory requirements, and that fees are high. Many customers, however, commend staff for their friendly and timely service.

Management

The Department is managed by the elected Clerk/Register and the Chief Deputy Clerk/Register. This section reviews current management practices.

Communication. The Clerk/Register communicates most statutory changes to his Chief Deputy; in addition, the Chief Deputy and the Lead Deputies inform staff of changes as they become aware of them through state publications, staff from other counties, or through their customers.

Some staff expressed concern that the Clerk/Register does not answer questions in a timely manner. In some cases, staff proceeded on their own and developed more efficient processes or set up new fees, such as the \$3.00 CCW laminating fee; these changes were accepted post-hoc by the Elected Official. On the other hand, the Clerk/Register indicated that he is not always asked for input by staff.

IV. DEPARTMENT

These inconsistent perspectives indicate an ineffective communication processes. See Table 11 for recommendations regarding departmental communications.

Policies and Procedures. While the Clerk/Register recognizes a need, the Department has not developed written policies and procedures, mainly due to time constraints. Instead, the Elected Official relies on state statues to govern many aspects of his operations. However, it may be in the best interest of the Department to develop local policies or standard operating procedures that outline internal processes, such as information sharing, responding and following-up to customer complaints, hiring, etc.

Strategic Plan. The Clerk/Register Department does not have a strategic plan or any of its elements, such as a mission, vision, and long-term goals. To a large extent, this is due to the reactive nature of the organization's business: (1) State laws govern outputs, set fees, and provide exact filing requirements, and (2) the number of filings depend on seasonal demands and economic conditions. In addition, there is no monetary incentive for this Department to set revenue-related goals because any gain is "lost" to the County's general fund.

However, this does not imply that staff are not concerned about improving customer service and increasing efficiency as described throughout this review. A strategic plan is necessary to provide a more focused approach to outcome-based management, to improve communications, and to guide performance measurement.

Performance Measurement. Staff track a number of performance indicators; many of them were used for this study. For example, the Lead Deputy Register publicly posts the current proof dates and thus provides staff with daily feedback on their collective performance. However, as discussed above, workload is not entirely under staff's control, and, therefore, is only a limited reflection of staff's effort. What should also be tracked and communicated are outcome indicators such as the type and number of errors and customer satisfaction.

Staff Recognition and Feedback. In the absence of departmental goals, staff in both divisions set individual goals to gauge their daily accomplishments. For example, Clerk Division staff reported that they feel a sense of accomplishment when all incoming birth and death certificates are scanned and indexed on time, when CCW permits are provided the same day they are approved by the CCW Board, when

monthly vital records mailings are sent to the State before their deadline, and when no more than two or three of the 700+ records submitted each month are returned by the State for clerical errors. Register Division staff's goal is to close out at least two days during one work day to reduce backlog since closing out just one day merely maintains backlog at current levels.

This informal use of performance measures by staff is a commendable first step. Research has shown that informal performance feedback obtain by staff on their own can enhance performance. However, individual recognition and feedback could be more effective if linked to a comprehensive performance measurement system.

Office Layout. The space currently occupied by the Clerk/Register Department initially housed two different offices (Clerk and Equalization) when the Clerk and Register Departments were headed by two elected officials. Following the consolidation of the Clerk/Register function, this physical separation of the Clerk and Register division has been viewed as impractical. In 1998, the Department asked an interior design firm to develop a "one-office" scheme, specifically with regards to a single counter at which citizens can obtain both Clerk and Register services. However, due to spatial limitations due to the location of the stairwell, the redesign was abandoned after the preliminary design stage.

Observations of office flow did not indicate that customer service or efficiency were greatly impeded by the current layout. In addition, the Clerk/Register noted that with the exception of Calhoun County no other medium-to-large combined Michigan Clerk/Register operation has a single entrance or a single counter.

Benchmarking Survey

A benchmarking survey was conducted with similar-sized counties to compare their operations with the Kalamazoo County Clerk/Register Department. The following counties participated: Calhoun and Washtenaw counties who have *combined* Clerk/Register functions and Ottawa and Saginaw counties who have *separate* Clerk and Register operations. Ingham County did not respond to the survey.

Three different survey forms were faxed to the respective elected officials: Clerk only, Register of Deeds only, and a Clerk/Register combined form. Telephone and e-

IV. DEPARTMENT

mail follow-ups were conducted as needed. Table 10 shows some of the results of this survey (refer to Table 6 for results pertaining to the Register Division).

Note that benchmarking surveys like this one can be of a relative nature only: Operations differ in each office and even similar results may be related to different factors. A benefit of benchmarking, however, is to identify models that may be worth investigating. For example, Calhoun County’s vital records and land records staff are *completely* cross-trained and conduct both functions. Such a seamless integration is one of the Clerk/Register’s long-term goals.

**Table 10:
Clerk/Register Benchmarking Survey Results**

	Combined Clerk/Register Department			Separate Register Dept	
	Kalamazoo County	Calhoun County	Washtenaw County	Ottawa County	Saginaw County
Population	238,603	137,985	322,895	238,314	210,039
Staffing					
Elected Officials	1	1	1	2	2
Chief Deputies	1	1	3	2	2
Vital Records	3	7 (cross-trained)	7	4.6	8
Land Records	6		13	9	9
Adm. Assist.	0	0	2	2	0
Other	0	1 Election	3 Temps 2 Election	1 Election	0
Total Staff (without Court)	11	10	31	20.6	21
Court Records Staff	0	11	22.5	12 + 2 PT	8
2001 General Fund Revenue	\$2,054,311	\$622,811	\$ 4,657,834	\$2,422,872 incl. Court	\$2,992,247 incl. Court

Opportunities for Improvement

The recommendations shown in Table 11 are based on the analysis of work load and staffing patterns and apply to the entire Department. They complement the recommendations made above for each individual divisions.

Table 11:
Recommendations for Performance Improvement – Entire Department

Customer Service	
Accept credit cards	<p>Credit card acceptance will enhance customer service and its implementation.</p> <p>On November 5, 2002, the County Board of Commissioners authorized the County Administrator and Finance Director to create and administer procedures for the acceptance of credit cards as payments for County taxes, assessments, and fees.</p> <p>(Priority: waiting on County)</p>
Offer Internet payment options	<p>It is recommended that online order and payment processes will be established as soon as credit card acceptance is implemented. (See Washtenaw County's online order form for vital records at https://www.ewashtenawco.com/servlet/VitalRec.) Calhoun County also offers this service (http://co.calhoun.mi.us/docs/birthform.html).</p> <p>(Priority 2)</p>
Implement back-indexing and back-scanning schedule	<p>Currently, vital records are back indexed through April 1985; computerized images of vital and land records are only available after March 1999 (CRIS implementation).</p> <p>Making these images available in CRIS would reduce search times for customers and staff. Indexed databases and electronic images would enable and enhance online services.</p> <p>The Department should develop a schedule for this process and set specific goals that take into account workload. (Priority: 2)</p>
Offer online search and order options	<p>In addition to ordering their vital records, citizens should be able to search and order marriage and death certificates online to conduct genealogy research without coming to the County Administration Building (see Washtenaw County's above web site). (Priority 3)</p>

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Table 11 – continued
Recommendations for Performance Improvement – Entire Department

Efficiency	
Enable multi-tasking on CRIS	<p>Currently, CRIS does not allow multi-tasking. That means that staff have to stop what they are currently doing on CRIS (e.g., indexing) and restart the same program to do a different task, such as running a report or serving a customer.</p> <p>This problem has been addressed by the vendor and Kalamazoo County Information System since 1999 but has not yet been resolved. (Priority 1)</p>
Add non-departmental numbers to phone system	<p>Add telephone numbers for other agencies to interactive voice response system to reduce the time staff spent on wrong calls. (Priority 2)</p>
Add floater staff	<p>As described earlier, the Clerk/Register incurred over \$42,000 in overtime and temporary staffing cost for 2002. The cost of the Register Division alone exceeded \$36,000. The 2002 salary and fringe for a first-year Deputy Clerk were \$30,311.</p> <p>Additional staff is needed particularly for the Register Division so that backlog can be reduced and other necessary non-recording services be provided to citizens.</p> <p>During slow times, floater staff may work on administrative duties, collect and analyze customer feedback, back index or scan vital and land records, and collect performance data. (Priority 2)</p>
Management	
Develop internal communication system	<p>Management should communicate with staff on a regular basis to review monthly performance, address customer concerns, discuss staff's improvement suggestions, conduct problem solving, and to prepare for upcoming changes in laws governing the operation of the Department.</p> <p>Management could implement all-staff meetings at regular intervals – at least monthly. These meetings may be scheduled between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. while the department is still closed to the public. Good agenda preparation and strong facilitation are required to optimally use the short time frame to cover necessary topics.</p> <p>Customer concerns or improvement projects can be addressed in small work teams that report on progress and outcomes at all-staff meetings. (Priority 1)</p>

IV. DEPARTMENT

Table 11 – continued

Recommendations for Performance Improvement – Entire Department

Management	
Implement staff recognition and feedback system	<p>When the Register Division's filings approached new record year, the Clerk/Register provided Register Staff with frequent feedback on the number of year-to-date filings; staff posted that information on their Division's office door. Per Clerk Division staff request the Clerk/Register provided output measures for Clerk operations.</p> <p>The Clerk/Register should develop a performance feedback system and provide staff with frequent meaningful recognition and performance. This will help both staff and the Department to grow. (Priority 1)</p>
Complete current PDQ review	<p>The Clerk/Register has been in the process of reviewing staff Position Documentation Questionnaires (PDQs). This process should be expedited and brought to a conclusion. (Priority 1)</p>
Develop strategic plan and set performance goals	<p>A basic strategic plan with a clear mission, inspiring vision, and overall performance goals and indicators is needed for continuous and consistent improvement toward service excellence. (Priority 2)</p>
Implement performance measurement system	<p>A performance measurement system should track key performance indicators balanced across the Department's multiple functions. Ideally, measures align with the Department's strategic plan; however, indicators can be developed before a strategic plan is adopted. (Priority 2)</p> <p>The performance metrics developed for this report may serve as a foundation for such a departmental performance measurement system.</p> <p>A performance measurement system may require that financial measures for the Clerk and Register operations will be tracked separately.</p>
Develop policies and procedures	<p>Management already identified a need for internal policies and procedures. Their development should be pursued; a floater staff may assist the Clerk/Register in this effort. (Priority 3)</p>

SUMMARY

This operational review described the important functions the Clerk/Register of Deeds staff provide to County residents. Recent service and revenue enhancements speak to management's and staff's effort to improve the Department's performance along the key outcome indicators accuracy, timeliness, and customer service.

It is up to the elected Clerk/Register to go beyond putting out fires and to strategically plan for the Department's future. The proposed recommendations provide a foundation for the Clerk/Register and his staff for systemically improving customer service while increasing staff utilization and enhancing the Department's revenue stream. It is incumbent upon the Clerk/Register to seek the collaboration of other departments as he pursues these recommendations.

The new statutory Automation Fund will greatly support the development and implementation of these improvement efforts along technological dimensions of the Department's operations.

V. SUMMARY

Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Schedule

Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority		
		1	2	3
Customer Service				
1. Move forms rack to front door (1)	Clerk Division	●		
2. Provide written job aids for microfilm & CRIS users (1)	Register Division	●		
3. Accept credit cards (waiting on County)	Department-Wide		n/a	
4. Accept passport applications (2)	Clerk Division		●	
5. Offer Internet payment options (2)	Department-Wide		●	
6. Help customers improve filing quality (2)	Register Division		●	
7. Conduct customer focus groups (2)	Register Division		●	
8. Implement back-indexing/back-scanning schedule (2)	Department-Wide		●	
9. Offer online search and order options (3)	Department-Wide			●
Revenue				
10. Charge convenience fees for notarizations (1)	Clerk Division	●		
11. Charge convenience fees for mailings (1)	Clerk Division	●		
Efficiency				
12. Enable renewal letter printing of active DBAs only (1)	Clerk Division	●		
13. Improve printing of different certified stock (1)	Clerk Division	●		
14. Explore election technology updates (1)	Clerk Division	●		
15. Enable multi-tasking on CRIS (1)	Department-Wide	●		
16. Standardize payment practices (2)	Register Division		●	
17. Add non-departmental numbers to phone system (2)	Department-Wide		●	
18. Add floater staff (2)	Department-Wide		●	

Priority Key: Implement (1) within 3 months (2) within 6 months (3) within one year

V. SUMMARY

Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority		
		1	2	3
Management				
19. Develop internal communication system (1)	Department-Wide	●		
20. Implement staff recognition and feedback system (1)	Department-Wide	●		
21. Complete current PDQ review (1)	Department-Wide	●		
22. Develop strategic plan and set performance goals (2)	Department-Wide		●	
23. Implement performance measurement system (2)	Department-Wide		●	
24. Develop policies and procedures (3)	Department-Wide			●

Priority Key: Implement (1) within 3 months (2) within 6 months (3) within one year

Appendix A

Clerk Division

CCW Application and Permit Process

Appendix B

Register Division

Recording and Certification Process

Appendix C

Checklist / Reject Sheet

VI. APPENDICES

I am returning this instrument to call your attention to the following errors:

___ Belongs in _____ County MCL 565.8 ___ Missing drafting date MCL 565.151, 565.154, 565.267

___ Signature of two witnesses required MCL 565.8 ___ Indicate marital status of first party MCL 565.221

___ Legal description or exhibit(s) not attached ___ Indicate mailing address for: _____

___ Names must be typed or printed below ALL signatures MCL 565.201(1)(c)

___ Name (including individual's name) and address of drafter must be stated MCL 565.201a

___ Certificate of Death for _____ must be recorded MCL 565.48

___ There should be no discrepancy between signatures and names as they are typed in the body of the document. _____ signed incorrectly. MCL 565.201(l)(b)

___ Must have the a/k/a through out the document

___ Reason for re-recording must be stated on the first page of the document

___ The liber/page OR Docket # of the mortgage being assigned/discharged must be reflected MCL 565.43

___ Not properly notarized. MCL 565.8 ___ Expiration date of notary's commission

 Please indicate County ___ State ___ where the document was executed

 Please indicate County ___ State ___ where the notary is commissioned

 The acknowledgment is not signed ___ dated ___

 All parties signing the document are not acknowledged: _____

 Please state "Acting in _____ County" below the notary's stamp or signature

 ___ Notary must sign as she/he took commission MCL 565.8

___ Recording Fee: MCL 600.2567 \$ _____ County Tax Clearance: \$ _____ City Tax Clearance: \$ _____

 Transfer Tax: \$ _____ Total Recording Fee: \$ _____

 Your fees are \$ _____ over / short Please return exact amount of: \$ _____

___ Check is not signed

___ County tax exemption statute must be stated or completed MCL 207.525 and 207.526

___ State tax exemption statute must be stated or completed MCL 207.504 and 207.505

___ Please make check payable to: KALAMAZOO COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

___ According to this document, _____ is not stated as being the holder, owner, personal representative, successor, nominee or assignee of the Mortgage indicated.

MCL 565.43

___ Delinquent County taxes _____ MCL 211.135

___ Delinquent City of Kalamazoo taxes _____ MCL 211.135

___ Document does not comply with P.A. 459 of 1996 MCL 565.201(i)(g):

 ___ Must be 10 point type

 ___ Must state on the first line of print ONE identifying recordable event

 ___ 2 ½ inch margin of unprinted space at the top of the first page

 ___ ½ inch margin on all sides of each page

 ___ Paper is not less that 8½ inches by 11 inches or more that 8½ inches by 14 inches or

contains an

 attachment no smaller or larger than said paper size

 ___ Must be in black ink on white paper that is not less that 20lb weight

OTHER: _____

After the necessary correction(s) has been made, please return for recording.