

**Minutes of a Public Hearing of the Arenac County Board of Commissioners
scheduled to take comments regarding the possible County Clerk-Register of
Deed Offices Combination January 28, 2020 at 10 AM.**

Present: Commissioners: Bobbe Burke, Harold Woolhiser, Lisa Salgat, and Sally Mrozinski.
Absent: Commissioner Adam Kroczaleski.

Chair Harold Woolhiser called the Public Hearing to order at 10 AM per Public Notice and the Michigan Open Meetings Act explaining that all who desired to speak should identify themselves, any position and they could have up to 5 minutes for comments:

Amy Bissell, Benzie County Register of Deeds: a thirty year employee in the County Office and a former President of the Michigan Association of Register of Deeds noting that 5 counties discussed the issue in 2016. She also noted that she was instrumental in getting fee structure changed that has increased revenues to all 83 counties, noting a \$30 base fee for document filing. She noted that the majority of the office fees are deposited to the respective County General Fund.

Katie Kelly, Saginaw County Register of Deeds: noted that the job itself is overwhelming and has a 5 inch thick manual further noting that there are over 200 Register of Deeds Statutes and Clerks have over 600 duties. She noted Saginaw County did a study and found no savings with an office combination.

Mike Hanley, Saginaw County Clerk: noted that he feels this is a bad idea and the respective Clerk has enough other duties including elections, vital records, Circuit Court Clerk and 600 other duties. He feels that respective officers need to deal with perfection and separate offices more wisely conduct said. He noted that it takes a year to train a Circuit Court Clerk. No one supported the combination in Saginaw when he was a County Commissioner.

Lori Martin, Clare County Clerk-Register: noted that with required time in elections, vital records, the Court and financial, she spent no time in the Register of Deeds division. She did however note that is of critical importance to make sure filings, which give title to ownership of property are complete and accurate and as these are critical to allow people to own and mortgage property. She further noted that her office is beginning the process of installing software for new technology in the Register of Deeds division. She further noted that there are hundreds of Michigan Statutes, which are involved with both divisions of her office. She urged the Board not to combine the offices.

Ann Manning, Gladwin County Register of Deeds: Opposes any combination and noted that she is carrying a letter from Gladwin County Clerk, Laura Brandon-Maveal, President of the Michigan Association of County Clerks, likewise suggesting non-combination. She further noted that Gladwin County did a study and found no financial gain even without remodel costs and, she feels that any combination would stretch a Clerk-Register and suggested that it would be prudent to have the offices remain separate.

Stewart Sanders, Newaygo County Register of Deeds: noted that whomever accepts documents for filing needs complete oversight to guard, protect, and maintain" records and that with new electronic media arriving as well as remote notarization of documents and related electronic recording of such, we will need to increase oversight of all recorded instruments. Within 8 to 10 months, there will be more electronic recordings via the internet and worries about security. He therefore opposes any combination of offices and asks the Board to consider not taking the option.

Laurie Lisk, Owner of Lisk Title: notes that she does research in 31 Michigan Counties and she noted that documents need to be exact. One should look, listen & learn. She feels that in counties with combined offices, the Register of Deeds Division usually falls short and further, that the functions of the office are totally different. She supports the maintenance of the status quo and offered to send more relevant letters regarding issues with combined offices. Higher litigation rates seem to occur in the Counties with combined offices..

Mary J. Magnus, former Arenac County Register of Deeds: Submitted a written letter to the Board regarding her opposition to combining of the office and noted that she worked in a combined office in Macomb County after leaving Arenac County. She opposes any combination of offices. Each Commissioner was furnished with a copy of the letter presented.

Dennis Stanley, Owner of Arenac Realty: he noted that he has conducted business with the Register of Deeds Office since 1973 personally as well as business with the County Clerk's Office and notes that their duties are not related. He further remembers the former combination of offices and feels that the offices should remain separate.

Ronald M. Bergeron, Attorney and Former Arenac County Probate and Circuit Court Judge: commented that in his 45 years as an attorney and judge, he feels that the Board is attempting to repeat a mistake that was rectified in 1976. He noted that he feels that Real Estate ownership is most often the most valuable asset a person owns and handling of legal title is of the utmost importance when dealing with land issues. He opposes any combination.

Kelly Bodrie, Arenac Title Company: noted that she worked for 6 years in and noted that any employee must be knowledgeable to do the best job. She also expressed concern regarding real estate related scams do exist and it is getting worse all the time. She opposes any combination of offices.

Darlene Mikkola, Arenac County Register of Deeds: commented that she has expressed her opinion to the Board on many occasions and they certainly are aware that she opposes any combination of offices.

Teresa Walker, Montmorency County Register of Deeds: noted that the office is integrated with several other county departments including the County Treasurer, Equalization, and local assessing officers and treasurers. She further noted that the same issue is on the Montmorency County Commissioners agenda for a hearing. She opposes any combination as she feels "citizens are being better served" by the separate offices and customers get better service.

Brett Dodge, Michigan Society of Land Surveyors: noted that he is also in private business and he uses the products of the various Register of Deeds Offices. He feels that the most efficient offices are the separate ones and further notes that said offices deal with data that is 100 to 150 years or more old and it is of utmost importance to have someone in the office protecting the documents as well as administering access to them. He opposes any combination of offices.

There were no further public comments. Chair thanked all in attendance, closed the hearing and noted that the Board will take testimonies received under advisement and will act upon the issue at their February 11, 2020 Board Meeting. He declared the Public Hearing Closed at 11:15 AM.

