



**Dixie L. Edge**

President  
222 N Iowa St  
Dodgeville, WI 53533  
☎ (608) 935-0396  
[dixie.edge@iowacounty.org](mailto:dixie.edge@iowacounty.org)

**Lisa M. Walker**

1st Vice President  
☎ (608) 742-9677  
[lisa.walker@co.columbia.wi.us](mailto:lisa.walker@co.columbia.wi.us)

**Mike Mazemke**

2nd Vice President  
(715)258-6250  
[mmazem@co.waupaca.wi.us](mailto:mmazem@co.waupaca.wi.us)

**Cheryl McBride**

3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President  
(608)785-9647  
[Mcbride.cheryl@co.la-crosse.wi.us](mailto:Mcbride.cheryl@co.la-crosse.wi.us)

**Christine Planasch**

Secretary  
☎ (920) 386-3720  
[cplanasch@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:cplanasch@co.dodge.wi.us)

**Preston F. Jones**

Treasurer  
☎ (920) 683-4012  
[prestonjones@co.manitowoc.wi.us](mailto:prestonjones@co.manitowoc.wi.us)

**Rose Ottum**

Past President  
☎ (715) 538-2311 Ext 244  
[roseo@tremplocounty.com](mailto:roseo@tremplocounty.com)

November 18, 2010

Representative Josh Zepnick, Chair  
Special Committee on Local Service Consolidation  
State Capitol, 219 N  
PO Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Zepnick:

This letter is in regards to the recent proposal of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to consolidate the Register of Deeds office and the County Treasurers office into the County Clerk's office. The Wisconsin Register of Deeds Association (WRDA) would like to go on record supporting the attached Wisconsin Counties Constitutional Officers (WCCO) letter, as well as opposing the consolidation of the Register of Deeds and County Treasurers office into the County Clerk's office.

Our founding fathers understood the importance of maintaining accurate land records; therefore, the 1848 Wisconsin Constitution established the office of Register of Deeds as a permanent element of county government.

The Register of Deeds performs essential functions which include but are not limited to filing, recording, and issuing instruments and documents of significance both to the community as a whole and to its individual citizens. The documents recorded in the Register of Deeds office are permanent records which put the world on notice that something important has or will happen. Vital records which include birth, death, marriage and domestic partnerships, document the span of our lives from birth to death, land records document status of ownership, and military discharges provide essential services to our military service men and women.

Milwaukee County Board Chairman Holloway suggests that by consolidating these offices, it provides a "one-stop shop" for customers, and could potentially achieve tax levy savings. Additionally, he indicates that both offices are administrative in nature and it would streamline County administrative and customer service functions that are currently performed by separate constitutional offices. The WRDA disagrees.

As custodians of the record, it is our responsibility to ensure the integrity of the record, as well as protect and archive them accurately.

"Few things have to last as long as county records."



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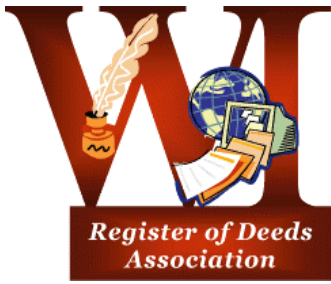
This attention to detail is essential to our business partners, as well as the general public. Consolidation reduces the accountability of the positions and puts constituents and the records at risk.

The WRDA through the years has strived to promote fiscal responsibility. Register of Deeds offices throughout the state have seen a reduction in office staff due to the current economic climate. It is important to note that after surveying all 72 Register of Deeds, 98% perform daily job functions. As a result, Register of Deeds have had the foresight to take advantage of the benefits of technology, and have provided services that save county dollars, such as intra county computer integration, electronic recording and 24/7 access to real estate records. By utilizing these efficiencies and streamlining business practices, offices are still able to maintain and produce up-to-date information to attorneys, title companies and financial institutions without adding staff. These business partners heavily rely on timely recorded documents available upon demand, which enables them to provide invaluable services to the public.

The WRDA's willingness to successfully work collaboratively with state agencies such as the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) and the Wisconsin State Vital Records Department (SVRO) indicates our commitment to efficient and effective government. With diligence and cooperation, we have successfully implemented the Wisconsin Real Estate Electronic Transfer Return, along with the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. This project allows customers the ability to complete the Wisconsin Real Estate Transfer return electronically. In addition, we currently are involved with the Statewide Vital Records Information System (SVRIS) which will provide a statewide database for vital records.

The WRDA is proud of the accomplishments we have attained in the legislature. Some recent examples include seeking legislation to establish electronic recording in Wisconsin to streamline and secure methods of recording, and working with Senator Jon Erpenbach to pass legislation requiring redaction of social security numbers from recorded online real estate documents recorded in the Register of Deeds office.

While the dedicated permanent government employees are often as interested in the same outcomes for our customers, the electoral process ensures elected Constitutional Officers ultimate responsibility is to our constituents. Additionally, the electoral process brings forth



[www.wrdaonline.org](http://www.wrdaonline.org)

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individuals interested in public service, which in today's political arena is essential. Our government was created by the people and for the people. By eliminating these essential positions, you eliminate the people's voice.

The WRDA would like to go on record strongly opposing the consolidation of the Register of Deeds office and the County Treasurers office into the County Clerk's office. It is our hope that you will follow our suggestion.

Thank you for your consideration, and please know that the WRDA would welcome the ability to meet with you and your committee to discuss the consolidation issue.

Sincerely,

*Dixie Edge*

Dixie Edge, President

Wisconsin Register of Deeds Association