



Proposed Fee

Preservation and Restoration of Archived Records

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Preservation and Restoration Record Plan

Executive Summary

The County Clerk's Office will continue to utilize legislation that is designed to preserving archived records by introducing an archive fee for each filed or recorded document. This fee will be specifically allocated for preservation efforts. The majority of permanent records in the County Clerk's Office are either paper-based or stored on 16mm microfilm. Additionally, map and plat films are available in 35mm roll film or aperture card formats. These records are accessed daily by the public and are at risk of being lost due to theft and wear and tear. Many of these records are in such poor condition that they are falling apart.

By introducing an archive fee to cover the costs of preserving these paper-based documents, the County will not face any additional financial burden. A fee of \$10.00 will be applied to any instrument, document, paper, or record that the County Clerk is authorized to accept for filing or recording, such as deeds, official public records, assumed names, and marriage licenses. In addition to preserving the documents, the archival process may also involve creating digital images that can be integrated into our existing imaging system, ultimately improving customer service.

Assessment of the Fee

County Clerks are authorized to collect a records management fee to maintain and preserve current documents. However, in most cases, this fee is insufficient to cover the preservation and restoration of archived records. In 2003, legislation was passed to address the preservation of these archived records, which took effect on September 1, 2003. The expiration date for this legislation was removed by SB 526 during the 79th Legislature.

Initially, this legislation applied only to counties adjacent to international borders, allowing them to charge a Records Archive Fee of up to \$10.00 for recording or filing public documents in County Clerk's Offices. The County Clerk's Records Archive Fee under Sections 118.025 and 118.011(e) of the Texas Local Government Code has since removed the "adjacent to international borders" restriction, making the fee applicable to all Texas counties. Recent amendments permit the County Clerk to use this fee for records management purposes without regard to when the records were filed, effectively removing the 2008 cutoff date for fee collection.

These statutes empower County Commissioners' Courts to adopt a Records Archive Fee as part of the County's annual budget. If these provisions are implemented, the County will see an increase in revenue, which will enable the County Clerk to focus on preserving older records.

The County Clerk's Office plans to continue assessing a Records Archive Fee of \$10.00 for each "public document" filed. A "public document" is defined as any instrument, document, paper, or record that the County Clerk is authorized to accept for filing or maintenance. This fee will be used to engage an external vendor to preserve and enhance public access to these documents.

Steps to Implement

1. Prepare an Archive Plan
2. Obtain Commissioner's Court Approval
3. Publish Notice
4. Hold Public Hearing
5. Post Notice of the Fee in a conspicuous location

Current Project Goal

The goal is to obtain a records facility with climate control to reduce humidity and protect the records from mold. We aim to capture and archive all documents efficiently to minimize or halt the deterioration of public records while improving public access in a way that reduces the risk of further decay.

Scope

- Modernize and upgrade record systems in the office.
- Continue to scan and digitize Official Public Records-bound books and integrate them into the existing computer system.
- Reduce or eliminate manual lookups and searches.
- Expedite record searches by making more records available for electronic retrieval.
- Provide more information to the citizens of Galveston County via the Internet.
- Continue to minimize reliance on paper records.
- Preserve original records by reducing daily usage.
- Ensure adequate staffing to scan, convert, digitize, import, and make archived data available online.
- Provide office supplies and equipment necessary to achieve project goals.
- Establish a County Clerk library for public access to historical documents.

- Maintain annual and recurring upkeep of the records facility.

This document specifically addresses the restoration and preservation needs of the County Clerk's Records Archive and does not cover the needs of other departments.

Future Plans

We plan to integrate all existing paper and 16mm microfilm records from the County Clerk's Office into our current document management and imaging system, while preserving the original documents for historical purposes. This process will also include the de-acidification of many older books containing Real Property Records. We will address the Civil, Probate, Misdemeanor, and Commissioner's Court Records as part of this initiative.

Currently, we are converting and scanning Marriage Record Books dating from 1838 to 1990 and integrating them into our document management and imaging system. Additionally, we are converting and scanning Delayed Birth and Delayed Death Records and incorporating them into the same system.

Summary

The Legislature has established a method to generate revenue for the management and preservation of the County Clerk's property records, court records, and vital statistics. This "user fee" serves as an alternative to raising taxes or using general fund resources for these projects. The plan will be implemented as funds are accumulated and deposited into a special revenue account. Any outsourcing or equipment purchases will follow standard procurement processes.

Completing these projects will expand storage space in the archives and protect vital county property records from potential hazards—such as water damage from sprinkler systems, storm impacts, and other risks—by ensuring they are adequately preserved.

Projected Revenue

Document Type	Documents Subject to Fee	Revenue at \$10.00
Official Public Records	63,601	\$636,010
Marriage License	3,067	\$30,670
Assumed Names (Business Names)	1,028	\$10,280
TOTAL	67,696	\$676,960

Archive Plan for Fiscal Year 2025

The current conversion project for the County Clerk's Office is nearing completion for images from 1965 through 1981. These records have been converted to digital format and integrated into the system. Due to incomplete indexing information (currently limited to only name and date), we are in the process of indexing and verifying the imported images. The images are presently available to the public while we finalize the indexing. Searches for official records, including images, can be conducted from 1965 to the present.

Maps and plats are also being digitized and will soon be imported into the system, with records being reviewed back to 1836. Users can view the images and indexes for specific documents side-by-side at public research stations in the Clerk's office and over the Internet, providing additional convenience for citizens and researchers.

For records filed between 1836 and 1964, indexes are available in the office only. While they have been digitized, they are not yet indexed. The verification and indexing process is ongoing; as each year is completed, access to these records will expand for the public. Index books will remain in physical format, but the images will be accessible from office workstations.

Currently, the County Clerk's office is also digitizing all court records, utilizing office staff to process various bound volumes. Resources are being pooled to scan 8 ½" X 11" bound books, creating digital images in-house, verifying them, and attaching them to an index, gradually bringing more research resources into the system.

We are collaborating with a vendor to implement a workflow solution and Advanced Back File Utility Software, which will enhance the efficiency of integrating these digital records into our system in the future.

As funds become available from the Archive Fee collection, the County Clerk's office plans to initiate the next phase of the conversion and preservation project. This phase will focus on properly indexing all records and verifying the images. The estimated volume of documents across various categories is approximately 3.5 million pages, contained in books of varying sizes, from 8 ½" X 11" to 14" X 18". All larger format books will need to be rebound in a manner that allows for the pages to be removed for scanning. We have approximately 110 historically significant books that have already been preserved, and we will continue this preservation effort until all historical books are complete.

A new goal for the upcoming fiscal year is to utilize collected funds to assist the courts by implementing available modules that enhance the Odyssey system. Since July 1, 2014, we have encouraged the courts to adopt digital records, given the growing number of court filings submitted electronically.

Any revenue collected and not expended within the fiscal year will be carried forward into the Records Archive Fund and allocated for future archive projects in the County Clerk's office.