



HARRIS COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

RECORDS ARCHIVE PLAN

FY 2022-23

ARCHIVE PLAN FY2022-23

Introduction & Background

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office is committed to preserving Harris County's history through its records. The County Clerk's Office is the custodian of records dating back to the 1800s. The County Clerk understands our community's unique challenges due to the pandemic. As a result, we are committed to maintaining essential operations and services that we strive to provide while keeping everyone's health and safety at the forefront. We must continue to update technology and the level of services we provide today, as this reflects our vision for the future.

The County Clerk is dedicated to using progressive strategies to preserve records filed in the office as the official recorder of Real Property records and various Personal, Business, and Governmental records. The office also serves as the custodian of records for Commissioners Court, the County Civil Courts at Law, and the Probate Courts of Harris County. For this plan's purposes, the County Clerk's Office considers a public document as any previous or future electronic or paper filing of an instrument, document, or other record that the County Clerk is authorized to accept for filing, posting, or maintaining.

The range of duties for the County Clerk Records Archive Plan includes the application of records management techniques involved in the creation, use, maintenance, retention, preservation, and disposal of public records. The plan's intended purpose is to reduce the overall costs of maintaining those records while improving the record-keeping efficiency. This includes the development of records control schedules and filing and information retrieval systems. The plan also provides for the creation and distribution of forms and reports and the management of micrographic, electronic, and other records storage systems. The retention of many of these public documents is permanent; therefore, the plan encompasses all the methods necessary to effectively store, maintain, and protect both the active and historical records in a manner that will provide for long-term preservation.

Summary

- ☐ The Texas State Legislature has provided a means to raise revenue for the preservation of current and older county records. The Records Archive Fee is an alternative to raising taxes or spending general funds to accomplish projects. Approval and implementation of the plan will continue to ensure the preservation of historical and current records for future generations.

The Local Government Code, Section 118.011, states that a Records Archive Fee of not more than \$10.00 can be collected on each filing. The fee was increased from \$5.00 to \$6.00 on April 1, 2020. With this plan's adoption, we request that the Records Archive Fee remain at \$6.00 for the FY 2022-23. This fee shall be deposited into a separate records archive account and may be expended only for the preservation and restoration of the County Clerk's Records Archive.



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Purpose

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office has been forward-thinking in preserving current and historical records and will continue to be with these efforts in records preservation. The County Clerk is aggressively striving to preserve all records of priceless historical value by taking advantage of the revenue generated by the Archive Fee. This fee is being utilized for ongoing records preservation projects, such as converting all older media into an electronic format and importing the recently created enhanced images and data into existing software systems for public access.

Goals and Vision

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office's goal is to continue working towards complete digitization of all records, restoring and preserving the records as they have historical value to Harris County. The Records Archive Plan contains the County Clerk's Office records management and preservation projects and the County Clerk's overall goals and vision.
 - Continue to automate and upgrade office record systems as new technology is introduced.
 - Continue to eliminate or reduce searches of paper documents and expedite record searching by electronic retrieval.
 - Continue to make public information easily accessible on the Internet.
 - Protect original records by ensuring electronic retention.
 - Continue scanning and indexing all records as they are recorded.
 - Develop a comprehensive electronic records Emergency Management/Disaster Recovery Plan.
 - Continue to seek efficient and cost-effective solutions to meet records management objectives.

Microfilm to Electronic Image Conversion Project

- ☐ This project's scope includes the conversion of approximately 72,000 rolls of microfilm consisting of over 200M images to digital images. During this conversion process, the records will be reviewed, and necessary enhancements will be made to provide the best possible images. In January 2018, the project was awarded to U.S. Imaging. They kicked-off the project in February of 2018 and completed the initial phase of scanning all microfilm to digital images. They are currently working on the second & third phase's final stage, which entails running all of the digital images through an automated enhancement process. Real Property records were the first record type processed through this stage. Over 16 million of those images have been added to our image library and are now available for viewing through our website. In Phase Two all the converted images are being sent to the County Clerk's office for poor quality control review before moving the complete document to production. In a future phase three, those images that require



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additional zonal will be re-directed back to US Imaging for manual or zonal enhancement. We expect that the first two images stages and the indexing of documents 1955-1959 will be completed by the end of FY 2022-23. Approximately 10.2 million has been spent on the project, and an estimated \$1 million will be needed to complete the indexing of the project. Any further enhancements will be completed at a later date. This project will provide electronic images that match up with the electronic index we maintain of the records filed in our office from approximately 1930's to present. Completing this project will significantly improve the ease of retrieving these records both in-house and over the internet. Upon completing this project, our office will no longer need to maintain multiple duplicate working copies of our records' microfilm. This will free up valuable space in our offices now used to store the microfilm. Our office will still maintain the master copy of the microfilm in a climate-controlled fire-locked vault at the Todd Street warehouse.

County Clerk's Records Center

- ☐ All of the historical records that the County Clerk's Office maintains are located in our warehouse at 11525 Todd Street. This climate-controlled facility enhances the long-term preservation of our records. It includes a fire-locked vault to preserve the master copy of our microfilm. Additionally, the recent complete digitization of all film media has provided an electronic means of long-term preservation of our records. The warehouse's public area is equipped with large screen personal computers for viewing the images of the historical records. As part of the digitization project above, all pre-1961 record books at the warehouse were scanned into grayscale tiffs. The resulting images will be evaluated and enhanced where needed. Our office will either pursue the in-house development of an electronic index of the records from 1836 to 1955 or seek proposals from vendors for software that will automate the document images' retrieval process from this time period.

Electronic Real Property Index

- ☐ The current Real Property Index starts in January of 1961. The records prior to that have to be searched using indexes from microfilm or books. The time period of 1955 thru 1960 is particularly difficult to search due to the format by which the records were indexed during that time. During this five year time period, approximately 950,000 records were recorded in the Deed, Mortgage, and Contract records. In May of 2017, we began an in-house project to create an electronic index of those real property records. To date, we have processed approximately 300,000 of the pre-1961 records. We will review the costs and benefits of outsourcing to a vendor the remainder of this electronic indexing project, with the possibility of expanding the electronic index project back to 1836.



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Document Management System

- ☐ The majority of the records filed with the County Clerk's Office are of permanent retention. With an existing document repository approaching 300 million documents and an estimated 1.3 million added annually, our office needs a centralized electronic document management system to maintain and manage these records. We currently use several different systems to manage all the records, which is an inefficient and difficult process to manage. Given the matter's complexity, we will likely purchase a software application rather than spend years developing one in-house. Early estimates for a system that would fit our needs are in the range of \$3.5 million.

Redaction of Personal Information

- ☐ Once the microfilm to digital image conversion project is completed and we have a new document management system in place, our office will look to redact social security numbers and other sensitive information from these public documents. We will perform redaction of a document if it contains sensitive, private, or confidential information and the redaction does not distort the meaning of the record. We will redact or truncate the first five digits of a social security number. The redaction process used to truncate the social security numbers requires the complete removal of the text from the document to become the Public Record, not just an overlay of the information. We will review the costs and benefits of purchasing the most effective OCR/Redaction software on the market and performing the task in-house versus contracting with a vendor to perform this service. This project aims to redact the social security numbers and other sensitive personal information from the records, such as driver's license numbers, when viewed by the public. This redaction process will be applied to our existing image repository (Backfile Redaction) and any future documents (Day Forward) filed in our office. Once completed, we will make document types previously restricted (due to the likelihood that they contained social security numbers) available to the public. Early estimates for a software solution and services for backfile and day forward redaction that would fit our needs are in the range of \$2.4 million with an annual maintenance cost of \$30K per year.

E-Commerce

- ☐ In October 2014, the County Clerk's website began providing the public with access to the images of land, court, and personal records recorded in our office. The public can view and print images (with a watermark) free of charge. This significantly reduced the need for the public to visit our office. Starting in August 2020, our office now offers customers the option of purchasing both certified and non-certified copies (without the watermark). This is a great accomplishment for the County Clerk's Office as we continue to increase and improve online and in-person services. Through September 2022, we've had an estimated 35,000 web sales transactions and increasing by the month. This year we have averaged approximately 2000 transactions per month. The eCommerce feature was designed with input from the legal community, title searchers, and public users from across the county to ensure the interfaces



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used to access indexes, perform searches, view images, and print documents are intuitive and user friendly. In addition, the eCommerce feature is mobile-ready, allowing users to access documents from a variety of mobile devices. We currently restrict access to certain records containing sensitive, private, or confidential information, such as social security numbers. This technology continues to be a primary focus for the Clerk to continue improving and enhancing as the technology landscape evolves.

Land and Personal Records, Cashiering - eRecording System

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office currently uses a land records product called County Fusion to process the real property and personal records filed in our office. The system provides a flexible and configurable approach to meet our constituents' unique needs by automating the way we process large volumes (estimated over 700,000 annually) of land and personal records filed with our office. Over 560,000 of the land records were filed electronically in 2020. The County Fusion application is seamlessly integrated through configurable workflows allowing the documents to flow through the entire filing, cashiering, scanning, and indexing process. This efficiency ensures that documents are available to the public, as well as the title industry, the very next day after filing. The solution includes a robust cashiering module that tracks all monies and allows our office to accept and process multiple payment types including cash, check and credit card transactions. The system provides customer receipts and monitors all activity through detailed audit trails. Once a document has been filed electronically or, converted to an electronic format, the configurable workflows automate the imaging and indexing processes. Utilizing optical character recognition (OCR) technologies allows us to streamline the data entry and verification process with advanced indexing capabilities. In December of 2019, Commissioners Court approved a new four-year contract for the County Fusion application.

Harris County Clerk will be exploring the options of upgrading to a new Cloud Based technology for our existing Land and Personal Records, Cashiering - eRecording System solutions and service. This type of upgrade will provide the latest security features, systems and data management, data backups and disaster recovery support and services. Each of the functions that would be migrated to a new Cloud Based solution would not only meet but exceed the current capabilities of the County Clerk's existing system. The Cloud solution that will replace the existing on-premises solution will provide a more scalable, high speed performance, flexible, redundant service and solution to the Constituents of Harris County.

Electronic Recording of Land Records

- ☐ Of the 650,000 real property records filed in our office last year, 79.57% were submitted electronically. This is a 1.84% increase from the previous year in the number of real property documents filed electronically in our office. This dramatically reduces the number of paper documents processed through our office. It also reduces the postage needed to return the



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original documents to the filers. Our office will continue to explore options to encourage land records filing at the PRIA II standard level.

Current Commissioners Court Records

- ☐ As clerk of Commissioners Court, our office is responsible for creating the official Minutes of the Court and for serving as the custodian of all documents presented to the court. Since January 2013, we have been scanning the documents after each court meeting. In June of 2017, our office made post-court documents from January 2013 forward available online to other county departments. This has dramatically reduced the number of paper copies we make for other county departments. Starting in November of 2017, we have also made audio files of each court meeting available. In FY 2021-22, the County will begin using a new automated agenda and court minutes software solution. Training for the new application started in January 2021. The new application will automate the agenda process, record all votes and notes through an interface and automatically transfer everything creating the official minutes.

Historical Commissioners Court Records

- ☐ Starting in the mid-1980s, all documents presented to the court, along with their backup materials, were maintained in paper form only. In order to provide a more efficient form of long-term storage, our office began a back scanning project, and to date, we have scanned all court documents for the years 2007 thru 2008 and 2010 thru 2018. Prior to 2010, the records are filed by subject matter and county department. Of those records, we have scanned the Lease Agreements records, Elected Officials Oath and Bond records, Constable and Sheriff Deputies Oaths and Rosters, County Regulations, Protective Services for Children and Adults records, Miscellaneous Personnel files, and Subdivision records. We have also completed various dates of records from the Hospital District, the Harris County Toll Road Authority, various MUD, WCID, FWSD and ESDs, Audited Claims, Tort Claims and the Water Rates of Private Water Companies, Abandonments, various Directors Agendas, Building Permits, Building Lines, various State Highway Department files, State Approved Values on ROW Parcels, Corrections, Deletions, or Designations of Bridges and Roads, Miscellaneous Deeds-Sale of Harris County Property-Tax Resale of Property, Tax Abatements, and Transcripts. However, there remains a lot to do; therefore, we added an additional position and equipment to the department whose primary focus is to scan this large volume of backup documents. We also purchased new scanning software to manage this process. The conversion of all of these paper documents would free up valuable space now used to store these documents and eliminate the maintenance cost associated with the equipment they are stored in. Additionally, scanning and storing these records electronically will allow for easier retrieval, saving man-hours.



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Electronic Process of Bids

- ☐ In conjunction with the Harris County Purchasing Department, we now receive bids on construction jobs electronically. Our office electronically receives the bid packages from the Purchasing Agent's Office, and then they are electronically processed by our office using an in-house developed program. At this time, only the bids submitted on the construction jobs are being processed electronically. The long term goal is to have all Harris County job bids processed electronically.

Toll Road Adjudication Records

- ☐ Our office is the designated custodian of the records associated with the adjudication of toll road violation cases. Starting in May 2015, our office electronically received the pre-judgment documents and case index information from the law firm that represented the county. As of November 2019, we now accept both the pre-judgment and post-judgment files electronically from the County Attorney and the Harris County Toll Road Authority. Our office verifies the document images and index information that is received, and electronically applies all necessary signatures and stamps to the images. With the exception of the printing and mailing of the post-judgment notices, the entire process is now electronic.

This project is being expanded to include fully automated processes such as virtual/remote hearings. No longer will there be a need for lengthy time consuming processes of physical paper flow which require more resources and time. This ultimately will save the County in terms of resource time and overall costs.

County Archivist Projects

- ☐ The mission of the Harris County Archives Department's is to preserve, protect and provide access to permanent county records and records of historic value that document the government and citizens of Harris County. During FY 2019-20, the Archives Department emphasized making more records available through processing and expanding online access to the public through an Information Management System. The public can access the archives finding aids, as well as information about the collections, through our website. In January 2019, the County Archives were selected to participate in a grant-funded program to have finding aids marked up by a vendor and placed online through TARO (Texas Archives Resources Online). Twenty-two finding aids of the Harris County Archives are now available thru the TARO website. An additional 40 finding aids will be marked up for TARO in 2020. The Archives also provides images online through the Harris County Digital Archives site. An additional 155 images were added in 2019, and as digital images become available, they too will be uploaded. In 2019, the Harris County Archives began a collaboration with the Harris County Public Library for their 100-year anniversary in 2021. A librarian from HCPL has been assigned to the archives to process the HCPL records in addition to digitizing materials for the website they will be creating. The team leader for the project also uses the archives extensively to



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research the library's history. The collaboration will continue through 2022. In April 2019, the Harris County Pollution Control Records were transferred to the Archives. The large and complex collection was comprised of approximately 400 cubic feet of records, 32 scrapbooks (1952 – 2007), books, maps, and audiovisual materials. The collection has been 90% processed and was completed in 2021. In addition to expanding our online presence, the Archives fielded 465 reference queries, accessing 1,062 materials. During the FY 2021-22, the Harris County Archives will continue the processing of over 500 cubic feet of records from the Precinct 3 Commissioner's Office and County Attorney files. In January 2020, over 300 cubic feet of Justice of the Peace Civil Case files were transferred to the Harris County Archives from the Harris County Records Center. These highly fragile records will be rehoused and inventoried this year.

Case Management System (CMS)

- ☐ This system records, maintains and preserves all the documents filed in the four County Civil Courts at Law and the four Probate Courts of Harris County. In September of 2016, we successfully went live with the Tyler Technology– Integrated Odyssey Court Management System (CMS) in all eight courts. Odyssey CMS automates the clerk and court operations, including case management, integrations with eFiling, scheduling, receipting, reporting, document management, and automated workflow. Odyssey vastly improved staff productivity, offers auditing capabilities, and streamlines office workflow by sharing information throughout the Clerk's and Court's Offices. The project scope included electronic filing integrations which in turn greatly reduced the data entry workload as well as improving the speed in which the public can search our indexes and view images. As mentioned with the Odyssey system, we have configured and implemented the use of workflow queues to automate electronic tasks between clerks and courts, allowing electronic documents to flow through each processing stage.

In order to achieve the paperless court environment, specific technology has been implemented to eliminate and substantially reduce paper influx into the court. Throughout this project, new features and tools within Odyssey have been implemented. We have configured and developed new processes within each of the Court divisions (County Civil and Probate) to provide the courts and clerks a working environment that does not require paper but instead uses electronic forms and digital images accessed through electronic means. This project's success required the cooperation of the Courts and Clerk's staffs, as they are directly benefiting from the new technologies as an alternative method of access to paper case files. The County Clerk's technical department, Office of Court Management, and various subject matter experts have all worked diligently to institute these electronic methods. These include an electronic signature (eSignature) process for the courts, automated electronic workflows, and tasks. Electronic case files are now utilized regularly over paper case files.

The "Justice Partners" - County Clerk's technical department, Office of Court Management, and numerous subject matter experts will continue to partner and institute additional automated processes that benefit the Courts, Clerks, the Legal Community, and ultimately the Constituents of Harris County.



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Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery

- ☐ To protect and preserve the vital records maintained by the County Clerk's Office, and to provide for quick recovery from a disaster, our office contracts with a vendor to offer off-site electronic storage of our image repository and other critical components of our operating system. This off-site storage system is updated hourly to provide a complete backup of our system that could be brought online in the event of a natural disaster that temporarily prevents access to our primary data center. The County Clerk's Office now stores all of its records off-site at the Fiber Town location.

Document Image Repository

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office currently images all the documents that are filed in our office. Most of the records that our office maintains have permanent retention. We will continue to maintain our current film library as a secondary backup medium. Our office supports both single and multi-page tiff images and single and multi-page-tiff images in pdf format. While single-page images have been the standard, we have moved towards multi-page-tiff images, which allow for more efficient storage and retrieval from our ever-expanding image repository. To accommodate the conversion of 72,000 rolls of microfilm to digital images, we have added 1.5 petabytes in storage space. Now that all microfilm has been converted to digital imagery, the complete image repository will be backed up to tape and stored offsite.

Application Development

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office will continue to develop and maintain in-house applications, sites and databases designed to automate the workflow of documents in our office. Our IT Department looks for ways to improve the office's business processes by using efficient applications and new hardware technology that process, store, and retrieve filed documents. These applications are tailor-made to the office's needs and drive the automation of document workflows and other repetitive office tasks to increase user efficiency and filing accuracy.

Records Archives Preservation Project

- ☐ The County Clerk's Office will explore solutions to restore, if necessary, and preserve, digitize, capture index data and automate workflow making archived records retrievable through internal systems. The Harris County Clerk is looking to make the investment with these various records series such as Vitals, Surveyor Books, and Commissioners Court records as a part of the overarching project to restore and preserve archived records. The collections include approximately 750 pages of Index Book, 7,700 pages of Surveyor Records and 212 pages of



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Commissioners Court Records. Additionally, archived Vital Records collection includes over 15,000 volumes of material representing approximately 2.2 million recorded instruments.

The preservation of these collections includes the ability to ensure long-term digital management while making them fully accessible, upon request.

Upon completion of this project, The County Clerk will have accomplished objectives such as enabling accessibility, optimization for better business in the community as well as ultimately preserving the history and heritage of Harris County.

APPROVAL

Approved and authorized by:

Name	Title	Date
Shane Holman	Chief Deputy of Courts	9.2.2022
Danny Sumrall	Administrator of Budget & Financial Services	
Michael Winn	Chief Deputy of Administration	

Approved By: Teneshia Hudspeth,
Harris County Clerk

Date: