Hi Folks,

We hope this publication finds you doing well. Welcome to our new Good Deeds newsletter! It has been quite some time since a newsletter has been published from this office but I am happy to report that, with new leadership, we have revived this digital newsletter with the intent of keeping constituents and business partners up to date on evolving procedures and initiatives. Our goal is to generate a new issue of Good Deeds monthly, so if you have received this email from another source, please sign up on our website to receive future publications.

2020 has no doubt been a challenging year and an interesting time to start as the new Recorder of Deeds (ROD). I am extremely proud of our team of dedicated public servants who have worked diligently throughout this pandemic to successfully continue our mission with no resulting back-log. During the height of the COVID-19 shutdown, the ROD department continued processing and recording non-stop with combined efforts of some employees working remotely from home and others coming into the office every day on a rotating schedule to get the job done. The innovation and adaptability of these employees was phenomenal, including assurance that staff members could work from home securely while recording and that Notaries & Final Plan submitters could have their documents recorded without the need to come into the office. Special thanks to our fellow Chester County departments—DCIS, Prothonotary, and Planning—for their collaborative efforts to help bring about these fantastic solutions.

It is worth noting that the average workload remained surprisingly steady during the pandemic shutdown. All told, the ROD recorded 17,946 documents and collected approximately $19,457,971 in fees. Additionally, our office sent approximately $10,624,545 of much-needed revenue, without delay, to our municipalities, school districts and the Commonwealth, who rely on these funds to help pay for their first responders, municipal services, educational services and more. Although the County as a whole officially started their Green phase opening on June 26th, our staff began serving the public in-person on June 5th, providing the stellar service they are known for. I couldn’t be more proud of these folks. They have truly gone above and beyond the call of duty and exhibited a can-do attitude that only true public servants possess. It has been an honor and privilege to work with them during these challenging times. Our entire team looks forward to continue serving you with the same level of dedication and duty as we work through the current crisis. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy our newsletter.

Stay safe, stay strong, and keep an eye out for one another.

Chris Pielli, Esq.
Recorder of Deeds
A Modified Naturalization Oath Event

July 17, 2020, proved to be a special day in the lives of our country's newest citizens. Despite pandemic restraints, approximately three dozen citizens were granted citizenship during Naturalization proceedings in Courtroom 1 of the Historic Courthouse. Though the usual "bells and whistles"—such as live music performances and refreshments—could not be observed in the interest of public health, the entire County Naturalization team felt as though these individuals' right to a timely process should not be affected by the current challenges of our nation and, therefore, worked hard to restructure the event to adhere to restrictions caused by the coronavirus. The location veered from the norm as well, since groups of new citizens had to be restricted to five at a time and in 15-minute increments, but this allowed the rich history and beauty of the courthouse to cast extra significance on the ceremonies. Future events may be open to the public, depending on the fluidity of the pandemic. On behalf of our entire Recorder of Deeds department, we would like to welcome our fellow Americans to the United States!

A Warm Chester County Welcome

January 2020 brought some new leadership into the Recorder of Deeds Office. Please join us in welcoming the following staff members to the team.

Chris Pielli, Esq.  
 Recorder of Deeds

Erin VanRyn  
 First Deputy

Diane O'Dwyer  
 Second Deputy
The Recorder of Deeds office also welcomes additional staff members (from left) Kimberly Bydlon, Special Projects Coordinator; Elizabeth Sheahan and Stephanie Lu, Document Recorder Technician I.

Above & Beyond

Every single day of this Pandemic Emergency, our dedicated staff has gone above and beyond. Whether overcoming the challenges of eRecording from home, bravely coming into the office to record documents received by mail, or fielding numerous calls from a worried public, the staff continues to serve Chester County and stay on top of a surprisingly undiminished workload. Members of our staff came up with many creative ways to continue our mission during the temporary shutdown of our office.

For example, Francine Jenkins and Sue Gayser devised a temporary workaround during the shutdown to record notary bonds and commissions. We guided the notaries through a step-by-step process through means of mail, phone and email. In addition, we partnered with the Prothonotary’s office to create new signature cards that enabled the Prothonotary to lift the signature for registration purposes. This process was even replicated in other counties.

Staff and management devised another emergency process that allowed us to continue to accept both subdivision and final plans for recording during the shutdown. First Deputy Erin VanRyn, Francine Jenkins, Sue Gayser and others were instrumental in developing a checklist for filers to send as a cover sheet, along with the first two pages of the plan, so we could review and evaluate for recording in conjunction with the Planning Commission, who must endorse the plans initially.

Now that we are back to normal processes, we are proud that we were able to continue our mission and essential functions while also doing (and continuing to do) whatever possible to protect employees and the public as best possible during these unprecedented times.
Notary Notes

The ROD department continues to be open to the public and operate on a normal recording basis during this current Green Phase. Notaries, to ensure proper recording, please be sure to bring the following items with you to our office:

1. Official Photo I.D.
2. Your completed bond from a bonding company.
3. The Power of Attorney that is attached to your bond.
4. $50.50 in cash, business check or money order made out to "Recorder of Deeds." No personal checks are accepted. Credit Cards are accepted, but must match the Photo I.D card and a $2.00 service charge will be applied.
5. $4.00 for the Prothonotary to register your signature. Please call the Prothonotary’s office (610) 344-6300 to process this after you record your notary documents at the ROD.

Q: What happens if my document is recorded twice by mistake?

A: Ruh-roh! The ROD must record all properly submitted instruments in a timely manner (Title 21 P.S. Deeds and Mortgages § 325.1). Furthermore, Pennsylvania is a race/notice jurisdiction, meaning that any subsequent purchaser for value wins if, at the time of the conveyance, they had no actual or constructive notice of any conflicting prior conveyance and the subsequent purchaser records before the prior purchaser. Simply put, we are obligated by statute to record all properly and duly acknowledged instruments presented to the ROD as quickly and as efficiently as possible. And we get a lot of them! Our usual receipt of submissions ranges anywhere from 250 to over 500 instruments per business day.

It is important to keep in mind that, if a submitter presents two identical deeds at different times, “it is not the function of the ROD to review the instrument to determine what information is set forth therein or what is missing. Rather, it is to record the instrument as the parties have prepared and executed them.” (Penn Title Ins. Co. v. Deshler, 661 A.2d 481 (Commw. Ct. 1995)

The Commonwealth Court clearly stated in the aforementioned case that to require the ROD to do this type of additional checking would be unreasonable and impractical. End result, the submitter of identical deeds must contact the Municipality, School District and Department of Revenue to process a refund of the taxes submitted for the subsequent identical instrument. In addition, they unfortunately cannot get a refund of their recording fee for the subsequent identical instrument since it was their error and the document was, in fact, properly recorded. (Cont’d left)

Ask Bubbles

Bubbles the bulldog is the (unofficial) mascot of the Recorder of Deeds office and best fur friend to First Deputy Erin VanRyn. Bubbles has all the answers to common questions as well as helpful tips to expedite your recording process without any major issues. Woof-hoo!

Bubbles’ best advice: Please check your submissions carefully and promote clear avenues of communication between your fellow filers before recording – then you won’t end up in the dog house – that's ruff!