

PROPOSED PLAN FOR CONSOLIDATION, COMBINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF OFFICES OF FOSTER COUNTY AUDITOR AND FOSTER COUNTY TREASURER

As part of the obligation of the Board of County Commissioners of Foster County to oversee the operations of Foster County and to maximize the resources and minimize the expenses of the operation of Foster County, the Board of County Commissioners for Foster County have analyzed the functions of the Treasurer's Office and examined the benefits and detriments of consolidating and combining the Treasurer's Office for Foster County with the Foster County Auditor's Office.

This consolidation/combination is authorized by NDCC Chapter 11.10.2.

ANALYSIS OF TREASURER'S OFFICE

The duties ascribed to the Treasurer's Office are contained in the North Dakota Century Code generally, in NDCC Chapter 11-14, and specifically in NDCC §11-14-08. Essentially, the Treasurer is responsible for keeping accurate accounts of all receipts and expenditures for tax monies and other revenues that come into the Treasurer's hands. The Treasurer prepares daily statements of all receipts and disbursements and files a copy with the Auditor's Office together with copies of all receipts written. The Treasurer also invests the county funds and pays all just and proper county obligations. The Treasurer maintains adequate accounting records of all investments. The Treasurer apportions the funds collected on behalf of political subdivisions within the county for remittance to the appropriate districts. The Treasurer works with the Auditor's Office and the Recorder's Office on the transfer of real estate and the maintenance of real estate records.

EXISTING ORGANIZATION

The existing organization of the County Treasurer's Office includes the Treasurer. The Treasurer has the overall responsibility for the operation of the office, supervision of the employees of the office and fulfillment of all statutory duties. The Treasurer can be assisted by a Deputy Treasurer in clerical and accounting functions including the day-to-day handling of money, preparing, balancing and making daily bank deposits, and reconciling periodic statements of the County's bank statements. Clerical duties include the receipt of property taxes, posting payments in the computer, issuing both property tax receipts and miscellaneous collection receipts and making entries on the tax roll.

FUNCTION

The County Treasurer has the primary functions of collection of taxes, issuing receipts, apportioning collections, acting as the custodian of funds and monitoring county investments. The Treasurer maintains a filing system of all taxpayers in Foster County. Secondary functions include counter service to the public and providing tax related information to banking institutions, realtors, attorneys, and others involved in real property activities.

PROCEDURES

In order to meet the required governmental services in the Treasurer's Office, the Treasurer and staff undertake daily monitoring of investments and receipts by office personnel, use of telephone, computers, calculators, copy machines, file cabinets and other essential office equipment. The Treasurer and staff also answer questions from the public and government agencies or staff. The procedures followed by the Treasurer's Office have been established from the collective experience of previous Treasurers and employees enhanced by training and education provided by the Association of Counties and others in a continuing effort to improve efficiency when possible.

ANALYSIS OF AUDITOR'S OFFICE

The duties of the County Auditor are contained in the North Dakota Century Code generally, in NDCC Chapter 11-13, and specifically in NDCC §11-13-02. The County Auditor is the chief financial officer of the county, responsible for keeping complete and detailed records of all financial transactions of the county, including preparation of the County Budget, monthly business transactions including management of claims against the county and preparation of financial statements. The Auditor calculates mill levies for all taxing districts, prepares the tax lists, maintains outstanding tax lists, administers tax title actions, and conducts tax sales. The Auditor is the Secretary of the Board of County Commissioners and related county boards and committees and serves as the Election Administrator with responsibility for all phases of federal, state and local elections.

EXISTING ORGANIZATION

The existing organization of the Auditor's Office consists of the County Auditor and one Chief Deputy Auditor. The Auditor has the principal responsibility for the operation of the offices, supervision of employees and fulfillment of all statutory duties. The Auditor maintains the property tax assessment rolls and certifies the property tax status for real estate transactions. The Auditor also serves as the Risk Manager, IT Director and fulfills all Human Resource duties. The Deputy Auditors perform detailed technical work in fulfilling several annual functions including foreclosing on tax delinquent properties and the preparation and execution of payroll. Together, the Auditor and Deputy Auditor perform a wide range of complex accounting functions, with responsibility for revenue accounts and distribution of political subdivision and district taxes to respective treasurers. The office maintains the accounts payable and payroll records. The Auditor and Deputy Auditor maintain voter records, conduct the election training as provided by statute, and assist with all elections.

FUNCTIONS

The County Auditor has several primary functions performed by no other agency or department, including property tax levy calculations, county-wide elections, preparation of the county budget, financial management and record keeping. The secondary functions of the office

include serving as Secretary to the Board of County Commissioners as well as other boards and commissions. The office also serves as a central management department, manages permits and service contracts with other entities. The Auditor carries out the directives of the Board of County Commissioners.

PROCEDURES

The procedures established for providing the governmental service are carried about daily by the Auditor and Chief Deputy Auditor using an assortment of procedures established over the years. Routine office procedures are accomplished with the use of telephones, computers, calculators, copy machine, file cabinets and other essential office equipment as provided by the County. Training and education are provided through the Association of Counties and other entities to improve efficiency whenever possible.

THE PLAN

The Board of County Commissioners for Foster County propose to combine, consolidate, and appoint the offices of the Foster County Treasurer and Foster County Auditor into one office called the Foster County Auditor/Treasurer, effective September 1, 2023, unless any officials affected by the combination or consolidation agree to an earlier combination. The plan would involve the following changes:

1. All of the statutory duties of a County Treasurer will be assigned to the County Auditor.
2. The position formerly held by the Treasurer will be replaced by a part-time Deputy Treasurer.
3. Overall management and supervisory responsibility of the employees working to fulfill the duties of the Treasurer and Auditor will be assigned to the County Auditor.
4. The term of "Treasurer" shall be changed to coincide with that of the Auditor.
5. The office of County Auditor/Treasurer shall move from being an elected position to an appointed position to broaden the county's option in fulfilling the county's responsibilities in this area. Because the position of the Foster County Auditor and Foster County Treasurer is now elective, not requiring training, qualifications, or experience in accepted accounting practices, the Board of Commissioner desire to have the Foster County Auditor/Treasurer office position to have qualifications, prior accounting experience and training prior to holding the position of Auditor/Treasurer to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of county government and it's responsiveness and accountability to local citizens.
6. The citizens of Foster County have the right of referral of this plan as described in NDCC §11-10.2-02.

PROPOSED OFFICE ORGANIZATION

The consolidation and combination of the County Auditor's and County Treasurer's offices are intended to increase efficiency and reduce costs for providing services required of

both offices, without reducing the quality of service of either. The physical offices are adjacent, which provides easy access between the two offices. The staff has worked together in the past during peak times in the offices (Tax Season) as well as in the preparation of tax rolls. With the resignation of the County Treasurer, it appears to be an opportune time to combine the offices so that future employees can be further trained in the duties common to both offices' requirements. The Auditor will be assigned all statutory duties of the Treasurer, to be performed in addition to the duties of the Auditor. The Commissioners will continue to provide necessary staff, office space and equipment necessary to perform the functions of both offices.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

The effectiveness of the consolidated and combined offices will be improved through centralized management. The duties assigned both offices will be carried out in a manner consistent with law and without duplication between two independently appointed officials. The efficiency will be improved by:

1. Centralized management that will ensure consistent policies and procedures among the two major financial offices in Foster County
2. Cross training of personnel to provide improved service to the public. Cross-training would also provide the necessary 'checks and balances' that is an integral part of the system.

With the increased automation of county government, it is the belief of the Board of County Commissioners for Foster County that now is the opportune time to combine and appoint the offices to improve efficiency and reduce duplication.

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