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David A. Vaudt, CPA
Auditor of State

November 1, 2005

Margaret A. Thomson
Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives
State Capitol Building
LOCAL

Dear Chief Clerk Thomson:

On behalf of the County Real Estate Electronic Government Advisory Committee and in accordance with House File 882, 2005 General Assembly, the following Committee report is transmitted to you. An electronic copy is also being e-mailed to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Warren Jenkins".

Warren G. Jenkins, CPA
Chief Deputy Auditor of State

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Report of the County Real Estate Electronic Government Advisory Committee

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The initial meeting of the Iowa County Real Estate Electronic Government Advisory Committee created by House File 882 was held on Monday, September 26, 2005. The committee was directed by statute to develop a plan to integrate county real estate data. Members consisted of persons listed at the end of this report, and the committee met on three subsequent dates, October 5, 2005, October 13, 2005, and October 25, 2005. Pursuant to House File 882, the committee herein submits its report to the honorable members of the Iowa legislature and to the honorable Governor Tom Vilsack.

Goals

It is in the public interest for Iowa county recorders, county treasurers, county/city assessors, and county auditors to work together to establish a system that integrates electronic real estate data from each of these offices and that facilitates public access to that data, which system should include the following qualities/features:

- 1) use of one or more statewide unique identifiers to link data sources
- 2) integration of data sources such that the use of multiple linked websites and/or data sources is seamless and transparent to the user so that once a parcel is selected, the user can view data from different county offices and data sources without reentering the parcel number, and inclusion of a link to county GIS data, inasmuch as the existence and nature of that data permits
- 3) daily update of data including the following: tax parcel ownership, tax payments, and recorded documents of transfer
- 4) standardized data formats and downloadable and fill-able forms
- 5) search capabilities by owner name, tax year, tax receipt number, site address, document reference number of a recorded document of transfer, county GIS map drill down, county parcel identification number, and legal description inasmuch as the nature and limits of each of these data permits
- 6) responsibility for the maintenance of data by the county office that is the legal custodian of that data
- 7) assurance of the integrity and security of data, hardware, and software
- 8) reduction of duplication of effort
- 9) confidentiality of individuals' credit card numbers and Social Security numbers
- 10) links to individual county websites for more detailed data

Findings

Iowa county recorders, county treasurers, county/city assessors, and county auditors should work together to establish a joint web portal that links multiple websites and/or databases housing county real estate data, and that further implements the qualities and features of the Goals above, for the following reasons:

- 1) That the county treasurers and county recorders have each established collective Internet websites with their respective real estate data, which websites are fundamentally different in functionality and purpose
- 2) That the most efficient integration of these two established websites is through one or more unique identifiers linking the data
- 3) That the county/city assessors have a web portal with links to individual county websites in about two-thirds of assessor jurisdictions
- 4) That the county auditors have neither a collective Internet website nor a web portal for electronic real estate data, but that the compilation of this data into a collective website could be done relatively easily, and that such collective data could offer improved search capabilities
- 5) That such a joint web portal designed to integrate the above systems could be established relatively easily
- 6) That the use of a joint web portal can efficiently concentrate responsibility for data conversion into one place and can implement features such as statewide unique identifiers for data without requiring changes at the county level, while providing an incentive to county offices to post their data in such a way as to make operation of the joint web portal more efficient
- 7) That use of the Internet has made it unnecessary – and even undesirable – to house data under one roof or on one server
- 8) That linkages can be made between different data sources so that a single point of entry to the joint web portal can be used to access different websites for additional information on a parcel, without requiring the user to reenter the unique identifier, or even to be aware that the data is being accessed from a different source
- 9) That the committee investigations have a) discovered ways to start improving public access to county real estate data, b) already stimulated improved methods of access in the existing systems, and c) identified that additional investigation will yield additional ideas
- 10) That the integration of some county real estate data, such as GIS maps and assessors' CAMA (computer assisted mass appraisal) data, is currently too problematic and expensive, but that access to this data could be largely accomplished through links from a joint web portal to individual county websites

- 11) That real estate data in the offices of assessor, auditor, and treasurer is by nature parcel-based, whereas recorders' data is by nature document-based
- 12) That the natural link for most county real estate data is a parcel identification number, as defined in Iowa Code Section 441.29, and that an additional link for county recorder data is the document reference number of a recorded document of transfer
- 13) That the format and use of parcel identification numbers (PIN numbers) varies widely from county to county, and that imposition of statewide standardization of such PIN numbers would be prohibitively expensive, and that the goal of integrating county real estate data from various websites and databases can be achieved without such statewide standardization
- 14) That encouraging initiative, innovation, ingenuity, and diversity among counties and county offices is not only in the public interest, but the best method of adapting to continuously changing technology issues and of developing and sharing "best practice" methodology
- 15) That counties and county offices have different policies as to what public records should be accessible from Internet websites
- 16) That most Iowa counties have individual websites offering Internet access to electronic county real estate data, including many with GIS (geographical information system) maps
- 17) That some counties do not have the financial and/or technological resources to convert some data to an electronic format, to create and maintain Internet websites, and to integrate various data sources
- 18) That one system or model of data management cannot be best in all ways, and that imposing a single system means delaying and/or missing the discovery of some of the best ways to work toward the Goal
- 19) That recorders, treasurers, assessors, and auditors are most knowledgeable about the real estate data for which they serve as legal custodians
- 20) That each of the above groups should establish a website or web portal that best provides public access to their real estate data, so long as each website or web portal promotes open communications standards enabling the exchange and use of data
- 21) That the joint web portal should have a shared governance by each of the above county offices over such issues as design, policies, contracts, fees, and data update and maintenance procedures
- 22) That there be a collective ownership or escrow of software code of the joint web portal to ensure its continuation
- 23) That improving public access to county real estate data should be viewed as a continuing quest, rather than a final goal

Recommendations

The county real estate electronic government advisory committee created pursuant to Iowa House File 882 respectfully recommends to the honorable members of the Iowa legislature and to the honorable Governor Tom Vilsack the following:

- 1) That the committee explore options to establish and maintain a joint web portal in general accordance with the Goals and Findings, as described above
- 2) That the committee explore funding options for such a joint web portal, including one or more of the following: the use of a self-funded model financed by user fees or subscription fees; grants; and legislative appropriation
- 3) That counties in general and the above county offices in particular be encouraged to pursue the collection and formatting of electronic data, and to promote awareness and to exchange knowledge of and experiences with software, hardware, and infrastructure
- 4) That the various county offices be encouraged to promote a) open communication standards that enable multiple systems to exchange and use data, b) the use of one or more unique identifiers, and c) cooperation and collaboration
- 5) That the committee explore whether uniform minimum standards for the accessibility of certain public records from the Internet should be developed
- 6) That the committee continue to work to address how to improve public access to county real estate data in all ninety-nine Iowa counties
- 7) That the committee shall submit a supplemental report to the legislature and governor on or before February 15, 2006 and a final report on or before November 1, 2006.

Member Name

Dwight Reiland
Kim Painter
David Ellis
LaRayne Fenton
Mike Grandon
Mary Maloney
Marsha Carter
Ken Kline
Bob Hartwig
Martin Lee
David Dettmann
Tim Reilly
Justin Hupfer
Charles Rieken

Representing

Iowa County Recorders Association (Wright County)
Iowa County Recorders Association (Johnson County)
Iowa State Association of Assessors (Warren County)
Iowa State Association of Assessors (Polk County)
Iowa State County Treasurers Association (Cerro Gordo)
Iowa State County Treasurers Association (Polk County)
Iowa State Association of County Auditors (Shelby County)
Iowa State Association of County Auditors (Cerro Gordo)
Iowa Bankers Association
Iowa Association of Realtors
Iowa State Bar Association
Iowa Land Title Association
Iowa Credit Union League
Iowa State Association of Counties (Cass Supervisor)

Staff Name

Warren Jenkins

Representing

Office of Auditor of State