

# Online and Digital for Land Records

## New Fairfax County Initiative Brings Land Records into the 21st Century

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Fairfax County is a nationwide leader in land records technology, and is among the first in the nation to digitize records and make them available online via secure remote access. However, this wasn't always the case.

Just 15 years ago, Fairfax County's land records division resembled something from another century. Land records were housed in dusty books and on microfilm, rapidly deteriorating under constant exposure to light and air.

A courthouse fire in neighboring Arlington county was a wake up call for Fairfax officials. At that time, a similar incident at the Fairfax courthouse would have destroyed millions of land records and brought the real estate industry to a halt.

Clerk of the Court John Frey, then newly elected, brought the fragile records before the NVAR Government Affairs committee to show the perilous state of the county's record-keeping. Working together with Frey, the Fairfax Board of Supervisors and the Virginia General Assembly, NVAR lead the effort to establish a court technology fee that would fund the effort to modernize the

county's land records.

The revenues from that fund were used to build the modern record system in place today. Said Frey, "without the automated system, the county would not have been able to keep pace with the frenzied real estate market of the past few years. We were processing 524,000 real estate documents at the peak of the market."

Frey again appeared before the Government Affairs Committee this May to discuss a new initiative in records technology. The county is currently testing a system to allow electronic filing of settlement documents.

Rather than physically running documents for recordation to the Clerk's office, banks and settlement companies would be allowed to scan those documents and submit them to the Clerk electronically. Those companies would retain the original documents, making it much easier for them to correct any errors and re-submit them to the county.

The effort will streamline the Clerk's office operations, saving them from having to scan three million pages of information. This will allow them to record documents

and disperse funds the same day they are received.

There will be no additional fees charged for electronic filing, which is expected to be available in fall 2007.

Other Northern Virginia jurisdictions are studying the system for their use. Frey said that it is possible that in a few years, localities may collaborate on a single Northern Virginia Web portal that will allow subscribers to send electronic recordings to all jurisdictions from a single site.

