



CENTRALIZED PROPERTY TAX ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM
CENTRALIZED COLLECTION DATABASE

FEASIBILITY STUDY

PREPARED BY

Frederick R. Lewis
Sr. Computer Systems Technician

08/19/2008

ON BEHALF OF

JAMES ORMAN, COUNTY TREASURER

WAYNE ALLEN, COUNTY MANAGER

ROGER MILLS, CHAIR, CAYUGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is a determination of the feasibility of creating a centralized tax information database for Cayuga County, New York, including its towns, villages, schools, and the City of Auburn.

The county already has an executed contract with Tyler Technologies, Inc. of Falmouth, Me. for Munis client-server software which has the capability for a centralized database at the county level, not only to provide the status and history of taxes on parcels, but also to actually collect taxes on a near real-time basis.

At present, the various jurisdictions within the county use a number of different softwares for tax collection, many of which are outdated; some are DOS-based products dating back to the mid-1990's. Data is scattered and acquiring information is difficult. School taxes in particular are not returned to the county until the end of the tax collection period, leading to difficulties in determining relevies for the county tax bills which is required for enforcement.

Using the capabilities of Munis, which include Internet web access, the county intends to move to a streamlined, central software system which can be used by collectors for all jurisdictions within the county. In addition, the general public will be able to view information about the status of taxes on parcels, and eventually pay bills on-line.

The county has a carefully designed, phased, four-year implementation plan which has already been discussed and met with favorably by town collectors. The county Treasurer is conducting talks with village and school officials to foster cooperation and anticipation. Most of the infrastructure for the project, in terms of hardware, system software, and staff, are already in place. However, the specific installation and implementation costs of Munis NY Tax module, tailored specifically for New York State municipalities and designed to interface with NYS RPS, are \$91,525.

II. EXISTING SYSTEMS

A. COUNTY TAX COLLECTION – TOWNS

The county tax collection for the 23 towns is presently done with a FourD database application known as The Office Manager TOM/kclient.

There are approximately 30,000 parcels.

The data resides on a Hewlett-Packard (HP) Windows 2003 server.

Each year, the initial data is loaded from the New York State Real Property System software Version 4 (NYS RPS V4); specifically, RPS160D1 file.

Data is entered and maintained by Real Property Clerks in the county Treasurer's office.

Cash, check, and credit card payments are accepted.

No bar coding or scanning is used.

The physical servers are maintained by the county's Information Technologies department. The software is maintained by Genesystems, Inc. of Rochester, N. Y.; however, there is one, and only one, support technician/programmer who understands the system and is capable of fixing it.

Backup is performed nightly by the Information Technologies department. The server resides in a locked server room requiring a programmed security key (laser recognition) for access. The server room has UPS electricity backup including a generator in the event of a blackout.

Individual tax bills and parcel status can be viewed on each Real Property Clerk's workstation in the Treasurer's Office. There is a public workstation with a limited access to information.

Access to the database is restricted by Microsoft Windows security and also by internal security within the FourD database.

Although some towns have high speed Internet access, no information is presently accessed via Internet.

The Treasurer's Office is responsible to ensuring data integrity.

The county Information Technologies department and the Treasurer's Data Processing division have little ability to support the current application because there is one, and only one, support technician in the world who understands this existing program.

B. COUNTY TAX COLLECTION – CITY OF AUBURN

The county tax collection for the City of Auburn presently done with a MS-DOS FoxPro application.

There are approximately 3,670 parcels.

The data resides on an HP Vectra personal computer (PC) acquired by NYS Dept of Health in 2001 and jettisoned in 2004.

Each year, the initial data is loaded from the New York State Real Property System software Version 4 (NYS RPS V4); specifically, RPS160D1 file.

Data is entered and maintained by Real Property Clerks in the county Treasurer's office.

Cash, check, and credit card payments are accepted.

No bar coding or scanning is used.

The HP PC is maintained by the county's Information Technologies department. The software is maintained by Williamson Law Book company of Rochester, N. Y.

Backup is performed daily by the Treasurer's Office. The data is backed up on diskette and also copied to a Windows 2003 server. The latter resides in a locked server room requiring a programmed security key (laser recognition) for access. The server room has UPS electricity backup including a generator in the event of a blackout.

By downloading the backup copy of the database, individual tax bills and parcel status can be viewed on each Real Property Clerk's workstation in the Treasurer's Office. There is no public workstation.

Access to the database is restricted only by Microsoft Windows security.

Although the city has high speed Internet, no information is presently accessed via Internet.

The Treasurer's Office is responsible to ensuring data integrity.

The county Treasurer's Data Processing division have limited ability to support the current application. The source code is available. Minor enhancements have been made sporadically.

The database is unreliable. Data mysteriously disappears and must be painfully reconstructed. The trial balance amounts change without warning.

At the end of the collection period (May 1), the data is transferred to the City Treasurer who is responsible for enforcement of delinquencies.

C. SCHOOL TAX COLLECTION – 2ND INSTALLMENTS

During November, the county collects 2nd installments for school districts (Port Byron, Southern Cayuga, Union Springs, Weedsport) which allow multiple payments.

This is done using an MS-DOS FoxPro application which dates from 1996.

There are approximately 9000 parcels.

The data resides on an HP Vectra personal computer (PC) acquired by NYS Dept of Health in 2001 and jettisoned in 2004.

C. SCHOOL TAX COLLECTION – 2ND INSTALLMENTS (CONTINUED)

Each year, the data is imported from the New York State Real Property System software Version 4 (NYS RPS V4); specifically, RPS160D1 file.

Data is entered and maintained by Real Property Clerks in the county Treasurer's office.

Cash, check, and credit card payments are accepted.

No bar coding or scanning is used.

The HP PC servers is maintained the county's Information Technologies department. The software is maintained by Williamson Law Book company of Rochester, N. Y.

Backup is performed daily by the Treasurer's Office. The data is backed up on diskette and also copied to a Windows 2003 server. The latter resides in a locked server room requiring a programmed security key (laser recognition) for access. The server room has UPS electricity backup including a generator in the event of a blackout.

By downloading the backup copy of the database, individual tax bills and parcel status can be viewed on each Real Property Clerk's workstation in the Treasurer's Office. There is no public workstation.

Access to the database is restricted only by Microsoft Windows security.

The Treasurer's Office is responsible to ensuring data integrity.

The county Treasurer's Data Processing division have limited ability to support the current application. The source code is available. Minor enhancements have been made sporadically.

The database is unreliable. Data mysteriously disappears and must be painfully reconstructed. The trial balance amounts change without warning.

D. CITY TAX COLLECTION – CITY OF AUBURN

The city tax collection for the City of Auburn presently done with an RPG green-screen application.

There are approximately 9,000 parcels.

The data resides on an IBM iSeries model 9405-520 server acquired in 2005.

Each year, the initial data is loaded from the New York State Real Property System software Version 4 (NYS RPS V4); specifically, RPS160D1 file.

Data is entered and maintained by Real Property Clerks in the city Treasurer's office.

Cash, check, and credit card payments are accepted.

No bar coding or scanning is used.

The IBM server is maintained the city's Information Technologies department. The software is maintained by the consultant who wrote it.

Backup is automatically performed each day. Offsite backup is stored at a local bank. The server resides in a special server room locked after business hours. The server room has UPS electricity backup. The city has no generator.

D. CITY TAX COLLECTION – CITY OF AUBURN (CONTINUED)

Using IBM Client Access 5250 terminal emulation, individual tax bills and parcel status can be viewed on each Real Property Clerk's workstation in the Treasurer's Office. There is no public workstation.

Access to the database is restricted IBM security.

Although the city has high speed Internet, no information is available through via Internet.

The Treasurer's Office is responsible for ensuring data integrity.

E. VILLAGE TAX COLLECTION

Each of the nine villages (Aurora, Cato, Cayuga, Fair Haven, Meridian, Moravia, Port Byron, Union Springs, Weedsport) collects its town taxes. Most tax collectors use a MS-DOS FoxPro application.

There are approximately 3,500 parcels. Individual villages have between 136 and 783 records.

The data resides on a variety of personal computers (PC) of different vintages acquired by the towns.

Each year, the initial data is loaded from the New York State Real Property System software Version 4 (NYS RPS V4); specifically, RPS160D1 file.

Data is entered and maintained by tax collectors appointed by the villages.

Cash and check payments are accepted, but no credit card payments.

No bar coding or scanning is used.

The software is maintained by Williamson Law Book co. of Rochester, N. Y.

Backup to diskette is supposed to be performed daily by the village tax collector.

There is no public workstations. Public access is at the discretion of the villages.

Access to the database is restricted only by Microsoft Windows security.

Each village tax collector is responsible to ensuring data integrity.

F. SCHOOL TAX COLLECTION

Each of the school districts (Auburn, Cato-Meridian, Groton, Hannibal, Homer, Jordan-Elbridge, Moravia, Oswego, Port Byron, Red Creek, Skaneateles, Southern Cayuga, Union Springs, Weedsport) collects its own taxes. Most school tax collectors presently use a MS-DOS FoxPro product from Williamson Law Book. This year (2008), some are moving to a Windows application of Business Automation Systems (BAS).

There are approximately 31,000 parcels.

The data resides on a variety of personal computers (PC) of different vintages acquired by the schools.

F. SCHOOL TAX COLLECTION (CONTINUED)

Each year, the initial data is loaded from the New York State Real Property System software Version 4 (NYS RPS V4); specifically, RPS160D1 file.

Data is entered and maintained by tax collectors appointed by the schools. Some schools now contract with banks which provide the service.

Cash, check and credit card payments are accepted.

No bar coding or scanning is used.

Backup to diskette is supposed to be performed daily by the school tax collector.

There are no public workstations. Public access is at the discretion of the schools.

Access to the database is restricted only by Microsoft Windows security.

Although the schools may have high speed Internet, no information is presently accessed through it.

Each school tax collector is responsible for ensuring data integrity.

The Treasurer's Data Processing division have limited ability to support the current application. The source code is available. Minor fixes have been made in emergency situations.

At the end of the collection period (about Nov 30), the data is transferred to the County Treasurer who is responsible for enforcement of delinquencies.

III. PROPOSED CENTRALIZED SYSTEM

There will be approximately 86,000 tax records for each year of tax data, for an unduplicated count of approximately 40,000 parcels.

The database will be Microsoft SQL.

The database will reside on a Hewlett Packard Windows2003 server.

Data access, analysis and reporting will be accomplished using Tyler Technologies Munis tax collection software. This software includes features specifically designed to interface with NYS RPS V4.

The data will be entered and maintained as follows:

1. County and town taxes will be initially collected by town tax collectors who will access the county server via the Internet. They will enter data directly into batches (files) on the server. Each town collector will deposit the town's tax receipts into the town's bank account.
2. County and town taxes will be collected by Real Property Clerks in the County Treasurer's Office after the towns cease collecting on March 31.
3. County taxes for the City of Auburn will be collected by Real Property Clerks in the County Treasurer's Office until May 1 when they are returned to the City of Auburn for enforcement.
4. Village taxes will be collected by village tax collectors who will access the county server via Internet. They will enter data directly into batches on the server. Each village collector will deposit the village's money in village's own bank accounts.
5. School taxes will be collected by school tax collectors who will access the county county server via Internet. They will enter data directly into batches on the server. Each school collector will deposit the school's money in the school's own bank account.
6. School districts which allow installment payments (1st and 2nd) will collect the first installment; then the county will collect the 2nd installment after the 1st installment period is complete.
7. NOTE: "Access is restricted by location, ensuring that each jurisdiction can only report/maintain for its own parcels."

The method of payment will vary depending on the policy of the taxing jurisdiction; however, the county will accept cash, check, or credit card payments.

At the present time, there is no plan to use bar coding or scanning options.

Maintenance of the server and the server software (operating system and database; that is, Microsoft Windows and Microsoft SQL) will be performed by the staff of the Cayuga County Information Technologies (IT) department. The county has a support contract with Tyler for ongoing maintenance of the Munis software. Annual upgrades and periodic patches will be installed on the county server by members of the Cayuga County Treasurer's Office Data Processing (DP) Division.

The Munis database is backed up each evening to an off-site location, in accordance with procedures originally set up for the County Health Department under provisions of a Bio-Terrorism grant. Physical access to the server is limited to county IT and DP staff who must have an encrypted, programmed electronic key fob to enter the server room. The county maintains a firewall to prevent malicious outside access to all county servers.

The information will be accessible not only by town, village, and school collectors, but also by the general public, subject to security controls defined on the server and within Munis itself. (Tyler Technologies supports Internet Explorer, Mozilla, Firefox, and Netscape.) This feature is known as Munis Self-Service. Citizen self-service includes ability to "apply payments for tax bills" and inquiries of "bills and parcels."

The county Treasurer's Real Property clerks will learn the Munis software first, from professional trainers employed by Tyler Technologies. After they are thoroughly familiar with it, they will then train the town and other collectors. The county has created a training room in the County Office Building for its staff, and this could also be used on a limited basis for other jurisdictions.

The infrastructure is already in place, in that almost all jurisdictions affected already have computers (PC's) and Internet access. A handful of towns do not use computers. Also, all jurisdictions may require a VPN connection to the county server. Therefore the cost of implementing the plan would be less than \$1000 per jurisdiction, and in most cases will be \$0.

Each jurisdiction will be responsible for the integrity of its own data. For county taxes, the county Treasurer's staff will ensure all batches entered by towns are balanced before any posting is done.

Corrections to owner names and addresses are made by town assessors and/or by county Real Property staff between the filing of the final roll and the preparation of tax bills. The corrections are brought into Munis when the data is loaded from the laser bill extract file (RPS160D1) used to print the tax bills.

Unpaid county, town, village, and school taxes are enforced by the county. Delinquent village and school taxes are relieved on the subsequent county tax bill. Failure to pay the county tax bill results in a lien being placed on the property, followed by foreclosure.

Bills for escrow (mortgaged) parcels are separated during the RPS tax process, based on the bank codes which exist in RPS and are defined by the county and the city. Beginning in 2007, the county has been obtaining a database from First American tax service, which processes taxes for many, many holding companies. This database is used to mass update the bank codes in the RPS database. This eliminates time-consuming manual entry of data by town assessors and county Real Property department staff. However, the quality of the results so far have been mixed.

A long-term goal of the County Manager is a single tax bill issued annually to include the county, town, village (if applicable), and school taxes due on each parcel, including any relievis.

The county's investment policy, which is approved annually by the county Legislature, requires county funds be held by several banks, backed by federal securities. Therefore one bank would not contain all tax collections, even for the county, let alone towns, villages, or schools.

IV. COST FACTORS

The staff levels at the county, town, villages, and schools are expected to remain the same when the new system is in place. Salaries and fringe benefits are a function of labor contracts and other negotiated agreements and local laws. They will not be affected by migration to the new software.

The old county tax collection software is a module of a financial accounting software package nearly 20 years old. The package is antiquated and no longer performs adequately in any function. It is not possible to effectively continue county business using the old software. The old software originally cost \$8250.

The county’s cost for the Munis software itself (the NY Tax module and its related installation and training costs) is \$91525. The table below is an excerpt from the contract between Tyler Technologies, Inc, Falmouth, Me., and Cayuga County, dated 12/18/2007. The tax collection module is one part of a comprehensive financial accounting system.

EXECUTED AGREEMENT OF 12/18/2007

TYLER TECHNOLOGIES CONTRACT

MUNIS SOFTWARE VERSION 7.1

MODEL #	DESCRIPTION	BASE PRICE	NYS CONTRACT
RB-TXNY-SW-E	NY TAX - SOFTWARE -E	\$60,500	\$51,425
TF-ST-IASTF-B	TYLER FORMS INDIVIDUAL STATE TAX FORM	\$4,000	\$4,000
RB-TXNY-CS-E	NY TAX - CONSULTING -E	\$7,500	\$7,500
TB-TXNY-TR-E	NY TAX - TRAINING -E	\$12,100	\$12,100
CV-REPT-STD-E	DATA CONVERSION - REAL ESTATE - STD	\$16,500	\$16,500
	TOTAL	\$100,600	\$91,525

V. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In March 2007, the county issued an RFP for a new Financial and Human Resources software solution, **including tax collections**. After a vendor conference, responses to the RFP were received. A series of demonstrations by vendors was followed by a check of references and visit to other users. In July 2007, a core team of key senior county staff recommended Tyler Technologies' Munis package. This was approved by the County Legislature in November 2007. **The contract was signed December 15, 2007 (refer to attachment).**

The new tax collection software will be used starting in January 2009. It will be phased in as follows:

1. County staff: January 2009
2. Town collectors: January 2010
3. Village collectors (tentative): May 2010
4. School collectors (tentative): Fall 2011
5. City of Auburn collectors (tentative): 2012

Through a gradual build-up, all taxes would be included in the one central database in 2012.

Each town, village, and school would have one tax collector, which they presently do have. County staff in the Treasurer's Office will consist of five full-time and two part-time Real Property Clerks, one Deputy Treasurer, and two DP staff for the Munis itself. The City's taxes are collected by the City Comptroller's Office which has a staff of four. All positions in all these jurisdictions presently exist and no additional staff are anticipated.

Town collectors were informed of the county's long-range plan in December 2007. The County Treasurer will be speaking during the summer of 2008 with village and school officials to achieve their cooperation.

The implementation cost of the plan, which is essentially the cost of Munis, will be \$91,525.

*** END ***