

**CENTRALIZED PROPERTY TAX
ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM
TAX COLLECTION DATATBASE STUDY
FOR
*YATES COUNTY***

**Submitted by Bonnie Percy, Yates County Treasurer
and Patricia Brede, Director of Real Property Tax Services**

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I. Executive Summary

New York State Office of Real Property Services, has issued grants for the purpose of studying improvements to local tax collection practices. The Centralized Property Tax Administration (CPTAP) program has provided this grant to study the current tax collection practices in the County and if feasible, to develop and maintain a centralized tax collection database for all of the tax collecting jurisdictions within the County. The County's goal is to examine any improvements to enhance the efficiency, promote equity and transparency, and offer a professional level of quality service to the taxpayers of Yates County.

A survey was sent to all tax collectors in the Towns, Villages, and School districts. The questions, responses and comments are included in the study. (see pg.10)

II. Summary of Existing systems

All of the Towns and the County use TSL Co. collection software. At the County the Treasurers office uses a PC network, with back-up to servers in the IT Dept. and offsite. The Village of Dundee uses TSL Co. software, the Villages of Rushville and Penn Yan use BAS collection software. All of the School districts use Allen-Tunnell collection software.

All of the municipalities have varying back-up procedures. At the end of the school collection period, unpaid information is given to the Treasurers office. This data may come in as a hard copy or on disk. Relevies can be loaded into the RPS database for the Town and County tax bills. Depending on the format, data can be converted to a format acceptable to RPSV4.

At the County:

(1) How many parcels are there?

There are 15,758 parcels in Yates County, on the 2008 assessment roll.

(2) What type of database is used?

The current software is provided by TSL Co. and is used on a PC network.

(3) Where is the data currently housed?

The data is housed at the County, utilizing TSL Co. software. Paper tax rolls are printed and housed at the County.

(4) What type of software is used for access, analysis, and reporting?

TSL Co. software. Multiple year history and payments on delinquent parcels can be maintained as well as reporting and analysis with this software.

(5) Who inputs and maintains the data?

The County Treasurer's office.

(6) What methods of payment are accepted?

Payment methods include cash, check, money order, or certified funds.

(7) Are bar coding or scanning options used?

There are no bar coding or scanning options.

(8) Who is responsible for system maintenance?

The system maintenance is shared by TSL Co., County IT staff-including contracted IT support with Extra Dev Co.

(9) What backup and security procedures are in place?

Individual user codes and passwords are used for security, and the system is backed up nightly, by the County IT office.

(10) Is there the ability presently to view individual parcel tax bills and status?

The Treasurer's office, public computers in Real Property, and County Clerk can view individual tax bills and status.

(11) Who has access to the database?

The staff in the Treasurer's office.

(12) Is information accessed via the internet?

Internet information access: There is no Town/County or village data available on the internet. School tax information is available on the internet through www.taxlookup.net a service offered through Allen Tunnell Corp.

(13) Do taxing jurisdictions have high speed internet?

Yes.

(14) Who is responsible for ensuring data integrity?

The County Treasurer's office with support from the software vendor.

(15) How is user support provided?

Support is provided by TSL Co. by phone or in person. The County IT dept. also assists as needed.

(16) What is the current cost in terms of software licensing, hardware requirements, data entry and database maintenance for the tax collection function?

The annual maintenance fee is \$1,000.00 for the tax collection software from TSL Co. The County has a capitol improvement plan to replace hardware. Extra Dev can provide additional software applications for a fee.

Note: The County collects delinquent taxes pursuant to RPT Law-Article 11.

In the Towns, Villages, and School Districts:

(1) How many parcels are there?

The Town, Village and School District parcel counts are as follows:

Town parcel counts:

Barrington	1231
Benton	1334
Italy	1147
Jerusalem	3400
Middlesex	1273
Milo	3482
Potter	991
Starkey	1912
Torrey	988

15,758

Village parcel counts:

Dresden	179
Rushville	311
Penn Yan	2241
Dundee	603
	3,334

School parcel counts:

Penn Yan	9196
Marcus Whitman	2474
Dundee	926
Naples	677
Prattsburgh	699
	13,972

Note: Yates County processes school and village bills for parcels out of the county.

(2) What type of database is used?

Towns: TSL Co. software.

Villages: The Village of Dundee uses TSL Co. collection software. The Village of Rushville, and Penn Yan use BAS (Business Automated Systems) collection software, and the Village of Dresden is using Quick books to prepare cash receipts, and general reports.

Schools: The school districts in Yates County use Allen-Tunnell collection software.

(3) Where is the data currently housed?

Towns: At the municipality, and then can be uploaded to the County database.

Villages and Schools: At the municipality. Only relevies are given to the County.

(4) What type of software is used for access, analysis, and reporting?

Towns: All use TSL Co. software.

Villages: Dundee uses TSL software. Rushville and Penn Yan use BAS software, Dresden is using QuickBooks for cash receipts and general reports.

Schools: All use Allen-Tunnell collection software.

(5) Who inputs and maintains the data?

The local tax collector. A few have staff to assist, and a couple tax collectors also have an arrangement for collection with a bank.

(6) What methods of payment are accepted?

Cash, check, money order, or certified funds. One town accepts credit card payments.

(7) Are bar coding or scanning options used?

Bar coding and scanning are not used at this time, except for Penn Yan School, which prints their own bills and is using bar coding.

(8) Who is responsible for system maintenance?

Normally, the software vendor and the tax collector.

(9) What backup and security procedures are in place?

The collectors with a computer and software would have the ability to back up their data. The collectors use a variety of procedures, a daily backup to a server, saving data on a flash drive or external hard drive, and also the use of a safe for their records.

(10) Is there ability presently to view individual parcel tax bills and status?

Yes, for all the jurisdictions with collection software in the municipalities and schools. For the schools using Allen-Tunnell software, information is available on a website.

(11) Who has access to the database?

The local tax collectors, and their staff.

(12) Is information accessed via the internet?

The towns and villages do not have tax bill information on the internet. The school districts have tax bill information available on the internet.

(13) Do taxing jurisdictions have high speed internet?

Yes.

(14) Who is responsible for ensuring data integrity?

Each individual taxing jurisdiction with support from their software vendors.

(15) How is user support provided?

Normally by the software vendor, often by phone or visit if needed.

(16) What is the current cost in terms of software licensing, hardware requirements, data entry and database maintenance for the tax collection function?

TSL Co. \$1,000 per year. AllenTunnell Corp. 1,500 per year.

Current (existing) Collection System:

Yates County consists of 9 towns, 4 villages, and 5 school districts. Each municipality and school district has its own collector.

All but one village has computer software to assist them with receiving taxes and recording payments.

The tax bills not paid after the first collection period are assessed a penalty and interest, which increases monthly if not paid, in all municipalities and school districts. Installment payments are not an option in Yates County. None of the bills are bar-coded except for one school district, who prints their own bills.

The collectors provide the County Treasurer's office with their balanced tax rolls, and lists of unpaids, electronically and manually. The County makes the municipalities "whole" and it is now the County's responsibility to collect unpaid taxes.

Yates County currently prints all of the tax bills, and all of the tax rolls for the taxing jurisdictions in the County with the exception of two school districts who print their own bills. RPS extract files are provided for the software used by the collectors. There is no charge to the towns for the processing and printing of the Town/County bills. There is no charge for printing tax rolls, reports, or electronic copies of files. Fees are charged back to the Villages and School districts depending on their choice of products. There are two School districts who print their own bills, Penn Yan and Prattsburgh, but they still require electronic files, or disks. For certain School districts, and Villages, we bring in parcel data from other counties and process from Yates County.

III. Summary of Proposed Centralized Tax Collection System

A centralized database at the County would provide a uniform and efficient system for the tax collectors, and taxing jurisdictions to manage data and supply information. The system would need to be available in real time to better serve the taxpayers, attorneys, banks, insurance agents, escrow companies, abstractors, and any other end users of this system. It would greatly reduce or eliminate routine phone calls to all the municipal offices and school districts, and allow for employees to provide other services. The database would be managed at the County level with taxing jurisdiction access.

(1) How many parcels will there be on the centralized database?

Approximately 16,000 parcels.

(2) What type of database will be used?

Client server based. Relational database format.

(3) Where will the data be housed?

On a server at Yates County.

(4) What type of software will be used for access, analysis, and reporting?

VPN connection from the municipalities and school districts to the County. All tax collectors would have the ability to update information on a daily basis, and have varied options for reports, analysis tools, receipts, and duplicate bills.

(5) Who will input and maintain the data?

The tax collectors and the County Treasurers office would both input information. The Treasurer's office with support from the County IT Dept. would maintain the data.

(6) What methods of payment will be accepted?

Cash, check, money order, or certified funds, credit cards/ACH/wire transfer, including the ability to make installment or partial payments.

(7) Will bar coding or scanning options be used?

Bar coding and scanning options should be available.

(8) Who will be responsible for system maintenance?

Yates County.

(9) What backup and security procedures will be in place?

Daily, weekly and monthly automatic backup procedures, with at least one year available. On and off site storage.

(10) Will there be the ability to view individual parcel tax bills and status?

The County, and the local tax collectors would have the ability to view bills and see the status of any parcel. This information should be made available to the public, through the County website, or public computer terminals where available.

(11) Who will have access to the database?

County Treasurer's office and tax collectors.

(12) Will the information be available on the internet?

Yes, through the County website.

(13) Who will be responsible for ensuring data integrity?

All of those who have the ability to update the data. Ultimately, the County Treasurer's office would set policy and be responsible for the data integrity.

(14) How will user support be provided?

County IT Dept. and vendor support.

(15) What will be the estimated cost in terms of software licensing, hardware requirements, data entry and database maintenance for the tax collection function?

The purchase of a comprehensive computer application would be in excess of \$100,000. An RFP would need to be done to include a detailed description of a real property tax collection system which would provide tax collection, delinquent collections, all tax sale and foreclosure processing, reporting, and transaction security, and public inquiry. Additional costs could include licensing fees, new hardware, website updates, data storage fees, and training costs if not included with the purchase.

(16) How will owner information be updated on the tax bills after the tax roll is finalized?

Prior to Sept. 1 (for School taxes) and Jan. 1 (for Town and County taxes) the new owner information changes are updated from data provided by the local Assessors. After the bills are printed there are not too many options. After the Assessors provide their most current data, until the bills are printed, a list is kept for the tax collectors of any more changes that may come in. The tax collectors can update their records, and continue to receive updated information from the Assessor to correct any returned bills.

(17) How will unpaid County/Town tax and school bills be processed?

Much like they are now, with the relevies downloaded into the new system.

(18) Do you plan to provide web services delivery for tax roll information and tax paid bill information to the taxpayers on-line?

Yes, this would be our goal with a new system.

(19) What suggestions or changes do you anticipate are needed for RPS or another system to accommodate you tax collection process?

Any new system would have to integrate easily with RPS. Attention should be given to program development that allows easy and accurate transfer of data from a variety of different systems.

It should be noted that currently Yates County Real Property does not have assessment information on the website. We would expect that our website would have coordinated links to both programs.

(20) How will you process bank code information? Any plans for improving the current process?

We would continue to process bank code information through the RPS system. The current process provides outdated information by the time the bank codes are added to the assessment roll. The lists in whatever format as provided by the escrow companies and the banks to the collectors, is always the most current. Possibly with a new centralized system this data could be given to the tax bill processors electronically, as close to the time of printing as possible, for a better end result for all.

(21) Are you planning one universal tax bill for all towns/counties, villages and school districts, or are you continuing with diversified bills for each?

It is unlikely that a universal tax bill would be done at this time. For the near future, separate bills would be done for each taxing jurisdiction.

(22) For the actual bill paying, are you anticipating using one bank to process everyone?

No, but this could be explored in the future.

IV. Summary of Implementation Plan

Yates County has just hired its first IT Director. He has been on the job for approximately five months. In the past, the County contracted with Extra Dev in Rochester N.Y. who has one employee on site at the County office building. This person would install, replace, and troubleshoot for our computer systems. The County could contract separately for customized programs.

It is very important to those using this system to involve our new IT Director. The new Director is still in the process of learning our systems, and addressing many basic issues before taking on any new projects.

The County would need to secure the necessary funds, in a way that the Legislature and the taxpayers could support.

The project would be phased in over at least two or three years. The Treasurer would prefer that the Towns and the County proceed first, and if necessary, test the project until all quality assurances are addressed before bringing in the Schools and Villages.

An estimate of a time table is shown below (see ques. 2) but this would have to be flexible to address any technical or accuracy issues, and one complete tax cycle may be necessary before implementation continues for all the taxing jurisdictions.

(1) How do you propose to implement, RFP, or internal resources?

It is difficult to say at this time in detail how the County would implement this program. It is likely the County would have to request proposals from commercial contractors, but there may be a significant cost savings if all or part of the new system was done in-house. As noted in the summary, Yates County has just hired our first IT Director, and the input from this department would be vital to develop and implement a centralized county-wide database.

This would be a phased in project, implemented over two or three years. The County would have to be able to set aside the funds necessary over time to keep the impact to the taxpayers to a minimum.

(a) If using a contractor, what would the RFP contain? A request for proposal would contain the **Intent**-a description of the County Tax Collection System parameters, **Submission guidelines** or format, **Period of Contract**-with any additional terms or conditions, the **Scope of the Project**-with specific details of expected modules, including any back-up, security and storage specifications.

(b) When will it be published? If a feasible project, by the 2nd or 3rd Qtr. of 2011.

(2) When would a centralized county-wide database be created?

If this becomes a project that the County can afford to take on, the process would have to be phased in over a number of years. The time table would be estimated to be:

2012-Communicate and establish a willingness to participate with all the taxing jurisdictions.

2013- 2nd Qtr.- Implement Town and County

2013- 3rd Qtr.or later if needed- Implement Villages

2013- 4th Qtr.or later if needed- Implement School Districts

(3)When would the local collection offices be given access?

After implementation and satisfactory results with testing, and training, each jurisdiction would be given access.

(4)What number of staff would be required?

Two to three IT staff, vendor staff support, the Treasurer's office staff.

(5)What will be the cost(s) of implementation?

It would be difficult to determine these with complete accuracy at this date. As stated in ques. #15 in the proposed centralized system, we do know with very preliminary estimates that our costs will be in excess of \$100,000.

(6) What is your communication plan?

It would hopefully begin with the support of the Yates County Legislature. This would be necessary to raise public awareness, and determine if there is support for a project like this in the community. There would then need to be communication with the municipal boards, and tax collectors to be part of this project from the early stages.

(7)How do you intend to get buy in from all tax collectors and taxing jurisdictions?

Through effective and clear communication with all the parties involved in the tax collection process. It will be extremely important that all those disseminating information are educated and informed on the current system, and the proposed centralized system. It will be difficult to expect any buy-in if they do not understand what the system can do for the users, and for the public.

A new collection system must also be affordable, and have as little impact as possible on the taxpayer. The objectives relative to improving the tax system must be considered every step of the way, **equity, transparency, quality, and efficiency.**

Other information to be considered:

Courtesy of the New York State Office of Real Property Services:

Can all tax collection functions be consolidated at the county?

In order for the county to take over all responsibility for town and school tax collection, a countywide referendum is required. In counties with no cities, a simple majority vote would be required. Otherwise, a "split referendum" would be held. Passage would require majorities in all of the towns (jointly considered), as well as all of the cities (jointly considered). For villages to transfer the tax collection function to the counties, as well, such a referendum would consider: 1) the villages jointly, 2) the town residents outside of the villages jointly, and 3) any cities jointly.

Alternatively, there is an option for the town to appoint an official to act as the deputy collector/ receiver. By agreement among the towns, they could each appoint the same county official to act as deputy. Under this scenario, taxes would be payable both at the town level and the county level. (Interested officials may wish to review the relevant Opinions of the State Comptroller Nos. 75-1067 and 80-774, as well as Opinions of the Attorney General (Inf.) Nos. 95-5 and 97-11).

Benefits of Centralized Tax Collection Software

1. By using one system countywide, fiscal savings can be realized and cooperation among local officials can expand.
2. The system is fully integrated from point of collection through management of delinquencies.
3. The user-friendly system has common functionality and is accessed by collectors and staff throughout the county.
4. Data collection is simplified and data is automatically accessible by municipalities, schools and the county. All of the charges on a given parcel are viewable by any user.
5. Through countywide error checking and balancing, inconsistencies are eliminated.
6. Online access can greatly reduce taxpayer confusion and inquiries.
7. The unified system results in reduced management requirements.
8. The software is installed by the same vendor countywide and requires less support, since the system can be used and understood in multiple jurisdictions.
9. Training needs are coordinated countywide.
10. Collection of installment payments is simplified for collectors and taxpayers, yielding greater collections. An improved rate of collection can impact county budgets and lead to fewer foreclosures.

What funding is available for a centralized tax collection software system?

The Centralized Property Tax Administration Program is available from the State Office of Real Property Services (ORPS). This program provides \$25,000 to develop a study for implementation of a county level database for tax collection purposes. The study must include a plan for managing the collection data at the county level. An additional payment of up to \$25,000 will be available to defray the cost of the implementing the county-level database. Additional information is available from the website.

The Department of State administers the Shared Municipal Services Incentive (SMSI) Program. Awards are available on a competitive basis to two or more municipalities to cover the costs associated with shared services and consolidations. Such costs include, but are not limited to, legal and consultant services, feasibility studies, capital improvements and other necessary expenses. More information is available online.

Tax Collectors Survey

**Total of 18 surveys e-mailed / 12 returned: 5- towns, 4-school dist., 3-villages.
Questions, followed by a summary of the responses.**

1. Are you using software for your tax collection? If yes, what software?
6-TSL software, 3-Allen Tunnell, 1-in house BOCES program, 1-BAS, 1-Quickbooks

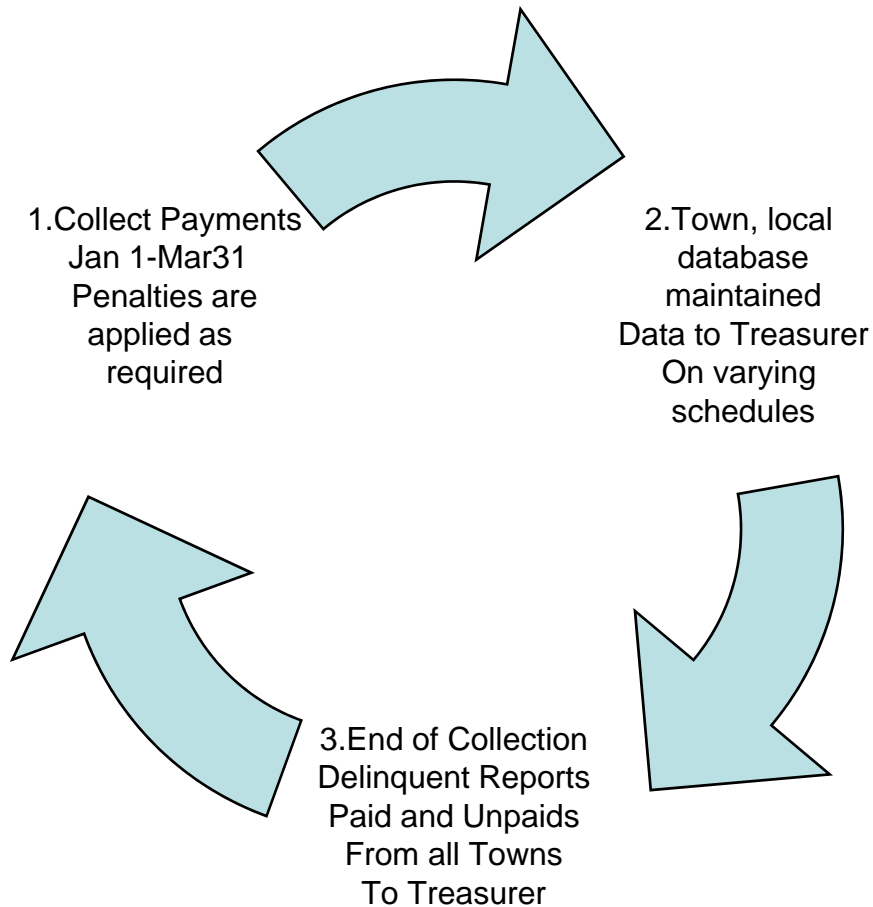
2. Who does the data maintenance, and any reports or analysis?
All responses, vendor, or vendor and tax collector.
3. Does your software provide some of these tools for reports and analysis? (or for balancing and cash receipts?)
All responses, yes.
4. Who collects the taxes for your municipality? (Staff, bank, both?)
1- bank only, 2-staff & bank, remaining responses- tax collector, or tax collector & Staff.
5. Do you currently post your paid and unpaid taxes on a website? If yes, who provides the service? How often do you update? And what is your annual cost?
All school districts-yes. All municipalities-no. No response as to the cost.
6. Briefly describe your back-up and security procedures.
1-External hard drive, Allen Tunnell-to their server daily, 1-paper in safe, all others- to a server, flash drive, combinations of on and off site.
7. If you do not use software for tax collection, how do you collect?
All use software, one using Quickbooks to keep track of receipts.
8. What operating system are you currently using on your computer? (Windows XP, Vista etc.)
All Windows XP, except for one response using Vista.
9. What is the size of your monitor, and your screen resolution?
2-15 inch monitors, 1-16 inch. 1-20 inch. All others 17-inch with 1024x768 pixels.
10. Do you have high speed internet access? If yes, what type (DSL, Broadband), and who is your provider? (Frontiernet, Roadrunner,)
Answers split between DSL and Broadband.
11. Would you share your tax information with Yates County to display on our website?
All responded yes.
12. Would you be willing to upload the paid information nightly so the website would have the most current information?
One-nightly seems too much, one-only works three days, all others yes.

Yates County Tax collection

Current/existing system data flow
and
Proposed centralized system
data flow

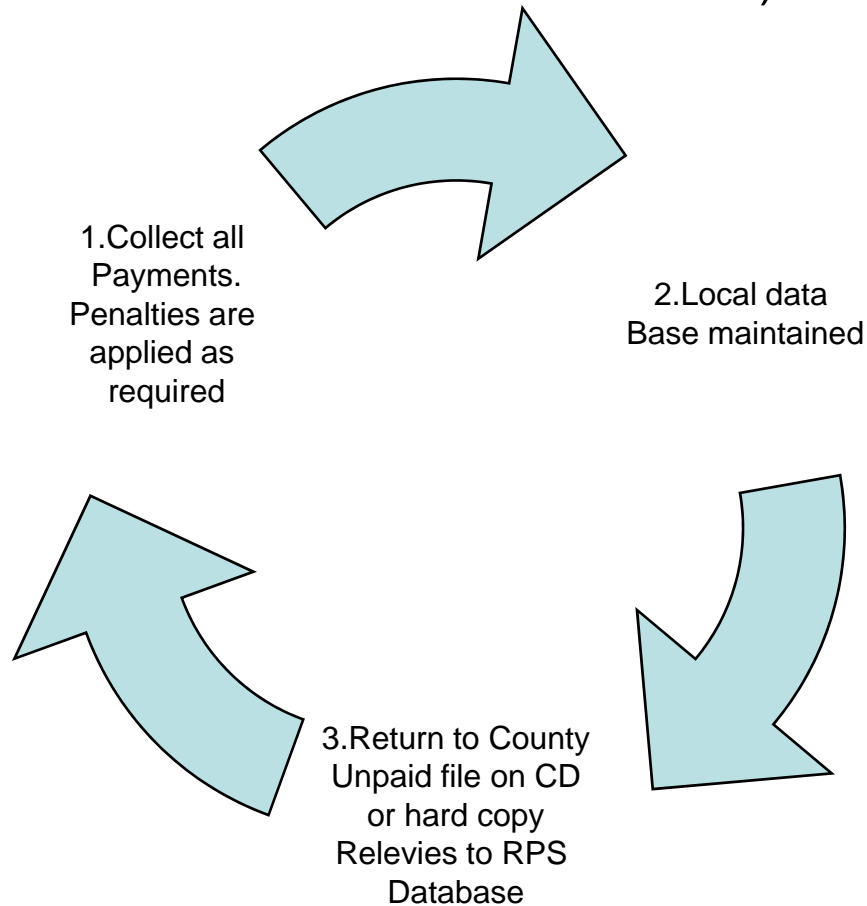
Appendix 1

Data flow for collection at Town



Data flow for collection at School or Village

(the county does not collect school or village payments in November or December)



Example of Centralized system

Transmission of data to the County Centralized database using terminal services or a program such as Microsoft™ sharepoint. Daily downloads could also be considered.

Data flow

