



CLAUDE PARRISH
ORANGE COUNTY ASSESSOR

July 12, 2024

Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Response to 2023-24 Grand Jury Report, "Review of the Assessor's Office"

Dear Presiding Judge Hernandez:

This is in response to the 2023-24 Orange County Grand Jury report entitled Review of the Assessor's Office (Report). The Report outlined Commendations, Findings and Recommendations for my office. In accordance with the California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury has requested that the Assessor respond to the Finding and Recommendations made in the Report.

The Assessor's Office is committed to providing fair and accurate assessments of all taxable properties in Orange County. We appreciate the Report's Commendation regarding my office having the only full-time Taxpayer Advocate in the assessor's office in the state. The Taxpayer Advocate provides important service of answering questions and assisting over a thousand taxpayers each year with property valuation issues.

Our response to each Finding is listed below:

F1. Instead of being able to submit forms to the Assessor electronically and accessing relevant information online as available in a number of other California counties, Orange County residents and businesses are inconvenienced by inadequate online services.

Finding Response: **The respondent agrees with the finding.**

F2. Orange County residents who need to visit the Assessor's Office in person are not provided parking validation or free 30-minute parking and are forced to pay higher parking rates than visitors to the Orange County Civic Center.

Finding Response: **The respondent agrees with the finding.**

F3. Assessor's Office staff use work processes that are not organized as efficiently as those at the Orange County Service Center, hindering the efficient delivery of Assessor services to the public.

Finding Response: **The respondent disagrees with the finding in part.**

The Assessor Public Service Counter and the County Service Center are very differently situated, and served different customers with different needs. The Assessor Public Service Counter serves an average of 37 customers a day, which equates to four customers an hour. The County Service Center serves approximately 400 visitors a day and provides services related to four separate County Departments.

In light of these distinctions, the Assessor does not agree that the County Service Center is organized more efficiently, to the extent such a characterization implies that the Assessor Public Service Counter should adopt policies that are similar to the County Service Center and operate in a manner that is more similar to the County Service Center.

Again, the County Service Center serves a much larger number of customers, and customers with very different needs. The Assessor does not believe it would be an efficient use of County resources to operate the Assessor Public Service Counter in the same manner as the County Service Center, and does not believe that doing so would improve Assessor customer experiences.

That said, the Assessor agrees that the Assessor Public Service Counter is not organized as efficiently as it could be, and that steps can, should, and will be taken to improve the efficient delivery of Assessor services to the public, as is described in response to Recommendation Number 3.

F4. The Assessor's Office uses computers to prepare "OC Expediter" requisition forms and then manually routes hard copies for processing, creating extra work for staff and negatively impacting overall efficiency.

Finding Response: **The respondent agrees with the finding.**

F5. Not all employees in the Assessor's Office have access to County email, necessitating the wasteful and inefficient manual distribution of printed resources. Additionally, the inability of these employees to communicate online impedes the flow of information within the Assessor's Office and with other County agencies.

Finding Response: **The respondent agrees with the finding.**

F6. Employees of the Assessor's Office do not have the onsite access to a Human Resources representative that is available to many other County employees. As a result, they are unable to quickly receive assistance with personnel matters.

Finding Response: **The respondent agrees with the finding.**

F7. The Assessor has returned significant amounts of money to the general fund in the last seven years, yet the technologies used to provide online and in-person services to Orange County residents are outdated.

Finding Response: **The respondent agrees with the finding.**

Our response to each Recommendation is listed below:

R1. The Assessor's Office should implement the necessary IT upgrades and policy changes to allow customers online access to submit and/or acquire forms, parcel information, and maps by June 30, 2025.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

We are in talks with the vendor ParcelQuest to provide their online services for our county property details and parcel maps. We anticipate that this process will be completed by September 30, 2024.

We plan to implement the assessment value search on our website. Assessments can then be searched by Parcel Number or Street Address. We have requested the County's Information Technology Department to assist with this project and it should be implemented by June 30, 2025.

With respect to online filing of forms, we will allow for online submission of commonly used forms by June 30, 2025.

R2. The Assessor's Office should provide 30 minutes of parking validation to Orange County residents/visitors by September 30, 2024.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has been implemented.**

Beginning July 1, 2024, visitors to our public service counter receive parking validation for the first 30 minutes.

R3. The computer system in the Assessor's service center should be upgraded, and clear, straightforward procedures for service provision to walk-in clients should be implemented by June 30, 2025.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

We will install a ticketing system by September 30, 2024, so that customers visiting our Public Service Counter (PSC) can be served in order of the ticket pulled by them. We serve an average of 37 customers a day, which equates to four customers an hour. We could not justify an expensive and complicated system like the one at the County Service Center that serves some 400 visitors a day and is serviced by four County Departments. We believe that a simple ticketing system will make the process much easier for the visitors to our PSC at a fraction of the cost. In addition, we will place a chime at the entrance to alert our staff when a visitor enters the PSC.

With regards to improving the search capability at our PSC self-help terminals, we believe that the member(s) of the Grand Jury who had trouble searching for parcel numbers may have been a result of a specific site address look up that was not functioning. We have corrected this issue and visitors at the PSC should be able to search using the address of the property.

R4. The Assessor's Office should abandon the use of manual processing of requisition requests and instead utilize the County's "OC Expediter" program to be consistent with other County departments by September 30, 2024.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

Prior to the release of the Report, the County Procurement Office staff was training select members of my office with details of operating the OC Expediter program for information technology (IT) related purchases, which represent the largest dollar value of purchases. We have begun using the OC Expediter software effective July 1, 2024, for IT related purchases and the rest of the Assessor office purchases will be made using OC Expediter by September 30, 2024.

R5. The Assessor's Office should provide County email accounts to all its employees, and the ability to access email from their regular workstations by September 30, 2024.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

Currently, 187 Assessor employees have County e-mail accounts, and 10 Assessor employees have temporary e-mail as they are new employees that are being trained. The remaining 49 employees will be provided with County e-mail accounts by September 30, 2024. Upon completion of their training, all remaining employees will be provided with County e-mail accounts.

R6. The Assessor's Office should have its Central Human Resources representative return to being onsite to provide more direct interaction with Assessor employees and observe daily operations to better meet the needs of the office by September 30, 2024.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

We have asked the Human Resources (HR) Shared Services to provide onsite support for our office. Onsite HR representative will be in place by September 30, 2024.

R7. Instead of returning unspent funds to the County's general fund, the Assessor's Office should ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to upgrade and maintain modern technologies to better assist Orange County residents and/or business customers seeking services, both remotely and in-person, by June 30, 2025.

Recommendation Response: **The recommendation has been implemented.**

I have always been a good steward of the county's funds and will continue to spend it wisely. With respect to hiring additional staff for my office, we are well on our way to hiring several auditor-appraiser trainees and have commenced the recruitment process for hiring a new group of appraiser trainees. Regarding spending on technology, we will continue to evaluate new products that are on the market that will enhance our taxpayers' online and in-office experience.

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Please accept the information provided above as the Assessor Office's response to the Orange County Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations in the Report. We respect the effort the Grand Jury devoted in review of my office.

Sincerely,


Claude Parrish
Orange County Assessor

cc: Orange County Grand Jury