Avoid identity theft by reviewing documents on the Clerk’s website

In an age when millions of identities are stolen daily, Clerk Kinzel would like to remind citizens that one way to hinder fraud is to search the Clerk’s website for documents with your name or other personal information on a regular basis.

You can search the Clerk’s website at www.collierclerk.com/records-search. “Records Search” will take you to the list of records maintained by the Clerk’s Office including a variety of legally recorded documents, such as civil and criminal court records, mortgages, marriage licenses, and much more.

In an attempt to thwart hackers and identity thieves, we urge everyone to conduct a regular review of public record information to validate that their name and other identifying information has not been compromised.

Estimated costs increasing for one-cent sales surtax projects

In the November 2018 general election, Collier County voters approved a ballot initiative to establish a temporary one-cent sales surtax to fund numerous capital projects related to safety, mobility, and hurricane preparedness. The tax will automatically expire at the end of the year 2025 or once $490 million has been collected.

The funds will be distributed annually based on the population count of the county and its 3 municipalities. According to Florida Department of Revenue fiscal year 2019 data, Collier County would collect 90.15 percent of the tax, Naples would receive 5.27 percent, Marco Island would receive 4.45 percent, and Everglades City would get 0.11 percent.

Prior to the vote, the county provided a list of the proposed projects and the estimated costs (seen in the attached spreadsheet). Following voters’ approval of the surtax, the county formed an Infrastructure Sales Tax Citizen Oversight Committee to review and determine whether the dozens of projects are a valid use of the tax funding.
Some of the plans up for debate by the committee include numerous bridge, road and sidewalk repairs or installations, hurricane resilience, a forensic/evidence building for the Collier County Sheriff's Office, a veterans nursing home, mental health facility, workforce housing, and a career and technical training center. One of the most discussed projects is the Big Corkscrew Island Regional Park, which would have multiple athletic fields, an aquatics center, community center, and more built on 49 acres east of the Collier County Fairgrounds property.

Three of the seven committee members were concerned about approving funds for the park, with member Scott Lepore questioning how the project met the requirements set forth in the ballot language. He asked whether a park met the safety and hurricane preparedness criteria. However, the committee approved the project with a 4-to-3 vote. All projects require final approval from the County Commission.
In addition to concerns raised by the committee, costs for projects have continued to grow. The county’s initial estimates for the Big Corkscrew park was $60 million. Since those preliminary projections, the potential costs have increased significantly, according to committee documents. The low estimate for the project now sits at $73.3 million, while the high estimate is $88.3 million.

Two other projects under review by the committee have also seen increased cost estimates. The Vanderbilt Beach Road extension was initially estimated at $100 million but now is expected to cost $120.8 million. Eleven bridge replacements in eastern Collier County originally were planned at $23 million but are now estimated to cost $35.4 million, creating additional funding shortfalls.

The “Current Shortfall” data in the attached spreadsheet shows that the county was $31 million over ($451 million) the amount of surtax funds it expects to receive ($420 million) over the life of the surtax. That is not counting the potential shortfall from higher project costs, like those listed above. The county would need to locate other funding sources to pay for the projects or alter planned projects.

County staff and the Clerk’s Office are regularly monitoring the projects and the projected costs, as there is a finite amount of surtax funding approved by the voters.

**Clerk found in full compliance of laws in FDLE triennial audit report**

The Clerk’s Office is proud to announce that the agency has successfully completed the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Audit, confirming compliance with security, training, policies, and practices for handling criminal history information. The audits are required once every three years for agencies that have access to state criminal information systems.

In this age of security consciousness, this is one of the many checks and balances on the Clerk’s operations and systems. The agency is audited routinely by the county’s external auditors, the Department of Revenue, and the Clerk of Courts Operations Corporation for security, budgeting, and operational compliance.
Clerk employees accept Internal Audit Awareness proclamation

Collier County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller representatives, Internal Audit Director Robin Sheley and Accountant Gabriela Molina, accepted a proclamation designating May 2019 as Internal Audit Awareness Month in Collier County.

The proclamation was presented by the Board of County Commissioners at their May 14 meeting.

The proclamation recognized the agency's internal auditors, who “help organizations meet their objectives by monitoring risks and verifying controls are adequate to mitigate those risks.”

The role of the Clerk’s Internal Audit Division is to conduct audits of the departments, functions, and activities under the purview of the Board of County Commissioners; Clerk's Office operations; and guardianships.

Audits of Board-related transactions are financial in nature, touching on the Clerk’s responsibilities to safeguard assets; serve as the custodian of county funds; duty as keeper of financial records; ensure that expenditures are valid, legal and meet a public purpose; and ensure the accuracy of financial reporting. Audits may also involve external entities that have received county money.

If you know anyone who would like to sign up to receive the Collier Clerk Newsletter, send their email address to jay.schlichter@collierclerk.com. If you wish to discontinue receiving our newsletter, please let us know. If you have any questions about the Clerk’s office, we will be happy to help. For more information, visit www.collierclerk.com.