



Annual
Report

2020

“Certainty in Uncertain Times”

MICHAEL P. KEARNS
Erie County Clerk

Your Business Office in Erie County



COUNTY OF ERIE

MICHAEL P. KEARNS

ERIE COUNTY CLERK

March 16, 2021

Honorable April N.M. Baskin
Chairwoman, Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street, 4th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Re: Erie County Clerk's Office – Annual Report 2020

Dear Chairwoman Baskin:

It's been a tough year due to COVID-19 and the unpredictable circumstances our community endured on a daily basis. Through it all, I am proud to say the Erie County Clerk's Office persevered as the business office for the County.

Although the year was a difficult one, I am proud to present this Honorable Body with the Erie County Clerk's Annual Report for 2020. Despite battling through the pandemic, this Office continued transforming and expanding the services offered to the public. My top priority was providing a safe and healthy environment for my staff and our customers while making the services of the County Clerk's Office accessible for all taxpayers of Erie County. Through the resourcefulness and dedication of all our employees, we have maintained certainty in uncertain times.

I am pleased to report to this Honorable Body that the Clerk's Office processed \$141 million dollars in transactions, almost the same amount as we had conducted the year prior. The Office still was able to generate a \$2.4 million surplus in added, unanticipated revenues, which is transferred directly to the general fund to support County services for taxpayers.

Among the most challenging and disruptive developments in 2020 was Governor's PauseNY orders, issued in March, which mandated the temporary closure of Erie County's Auto Bureau facilities. One of the biggest obstacles the need for essential workers to register their vehicles, surrender their license plates or obtain or renew a driver's license with New York State during this mandated closure.

My office was flooded with phone calls and emails from our mutual constituents begging us to "do something, anything". We have people throughout our community who rely on their vehicle to get to work, bring their children or parents to appointments or to grocery shop. Folks needed to get a vehicle on the road literally that day, it was an impossible situation for everyone, but we did what we needed to do, safely, in order to assist the motorists in Erie County.

In April, our Auto Bureau Division introduced emergency "curbside service" for first responders and frontline workers that needed to register a vehicle in order to get to work. Motorists submitted a request online, a motor vehicle representative would then contact them by phone, provide instructions on all the documents and forms

required to complete the transaction and schedule a date and time to arrive at an Auto Bureau branch to drop off their paperwork and wait in their car for the transaction to be completed in order to minimize contact. Not long after its initial rollout, the “curbside service” was available to all motorists at three Auto Bureau locations. In total, over 16,000 curbside transactions were conducted by Auto Bureau staff prior to re-opening the brick and mortar locations to the public in June of 2020 for transactions by appointments only.

The Erie County Supreme and County Courts remained operational throughout the pandemic to handle essential matters, such as emergency medical treatment proceedings, and our Actions and Proceedings Department maintained continuity of operations to ensure court documents were filed timely. Surprisingly, the real estate market and the associated banking transactions continued at its near-normal volume. During the critical months of the pandemic response, our Land Records department processed more than \$2 billion in Erie County real estate transactions. The Archive Records Department offered limited services; however, they were able to issue business certificates and provide support to title searchers to ensure mortgages could be issued.

Due to limited space in the Pistol Permit office, all in-person services were suspended. However, we continued to accept the following transactions by mail: new applications, replacement of lost/stolen permits, and registering, deleting and transfers of a firearm.

Looking forward, many challenges remain for 2021 and beyond. Due to COVID-19, the federal government has extended the REAL ID compliance deadline. Commencing October 1, 2021, driver’s licenses and non-driver identification cards will need to meet REAL ID federal standards for domestic air travel and to enter federal facilities. The additional year means that the increased customer volume at our Auto Bureaus will continue and that will bring much needed revenue for the County.

The NYSDMV has notably stepped up their technology efforts and introduced many online services that could potentially reduce transaction volume in our local offices in the years to come. Without changes to the revenue sharing between State and County, this would translate to less revenue in the Auto Bureau Division. This will not stop our staff from providing superior customer service and develop innovative service options that ensure vital revenues are retained here in Erie County.

In closing, the primary goal of the County Clerk is to continue to provide efficient, cost-effective services in a healthy manner to residents of Erie County while increasing and identifying new revenue streams.

I would be remiss if I did not mention how proud I am of my staff. In March of 2020, the way our office conducted business changed, potentially forever. By changing the mold of their past routines and day-to-day workflow, they went above and beyond and did everything imaginable to make sure our customers, the residents of Erie County, were able to complete their business transactions during unparalleled times. This report demonstrates the financial success of their efforts, but they should also be commended for their intangible devotion to their work and the County.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL P. KEARNS
Erie County Clerk

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COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

The Erie County Clerk is an independently elected official responsible for recording, filing and maintaining a central repository of legal documents and records affecting property titles (including land and real estate transactions), those related to corporate filings, assumed names, and, as Clerk of the Supreme and County Courts, all court pleadings and papers. Responsibility for maintaining all court records was transferred to the County Clerk from the State Court System in 1986. In 1987, the responsibility of processing pistol permits and maintenance of those records was transferred to the County Clerk from the State Court System. The above-described duties are carried out pursuant to the laws of the State of New York, the Erie County Charter and Administrative Code.

In addition, the Erie County Auto Bureaus (the "ECAB" or "Auto Bureau"), as agent for the State Department of Motor Vehicles, are managed by the County Clerk, staffed by Clerk Office personnel and budgeted separately from the Registrar Division. The County Clerk oversees the operations of two Auto Bureau branches, four satellite offices and one Mobile unit serving four locations on a weekly schedule. In 2020, due to COVID-19, the Mobile unit and two satellite offices were closed until further notice.

Fees are mandated by New York State and local law. The operations of the Erie County Clerk's Office (the "ECCO" or "Clerk's Office") garner revenue primarily from recording, filing or processing legal records and documents, and for services provided by the Clerk's Office, such as copying and certifying the records maintained as public records in the Clerk's Office. More specifically, the Clerk's Office, as an agent of the State, collects mortgage and real estate transfer taxes that are then apportioned between the State, State agencies, the County and cities, towns and villages located within Erie County. Recording fees, filing fees, licensing fees and fees such as criminal surcharges and fines paid to the County Clerk are divided between various State agencies, such as the New York State Department of Education, the Department of Finance, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA), the Unified Court System and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Agency (NFTA). The funds required for office expenses, administrative costs, and New York State document and record retention requirements are drawn from the County general fund, into which the balance of revenues collected by the Clerk's Office are deposited.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

FINANCIAL

- Generated \$5.4 million in revenue surplus, which is transferred directly to Erie County's general fund and used to support county services.
- Processed over \$141 million in transactions (just about equal to 2019 despite COVID-19).
- Generated \$14.4 million for the County Road fund.

AUTO BUREAU

- Began relocation efforts of our Eastern Hills Mall branch to a larger and more suitable location inside the mall to better meet the overcrowding and improve overall customer service.
- Implemented "appointment only" for all in-person transactions at all Auto Bureau locations in order to decrease both transaction and wait times as well as meet COVID-19 re-opening guidelines.
- Turnaround completion times for local auto dealer vehicle registration work is now completed in 7-10 days versus 3-4 weeks.
- Reduced scheduling of reservations at all branches from a 6 week wait to same or next day appointments.
- While closed to the public due to COVID-19 pandemic, auto bureau operations continued to service the residents in Erie County that required essential DMV transactions utilizing the following methods:
 1. "Curbside Services" were put into place in order to meet the demand to register vehicles for all frontline employees in Erie County. This amenity was soon rolled out to all Erie County residents who required vehicle registrations. This service allowed the Erie County Auto Bureau to complete over 16,000 transactions.
 2. License Plate Surrender "Drop Box" was made available at our downtown branch, allowing motorists to surrender their vehicle license plates for cars no longer owned or on the road. This amenity was also available at all Erie County residents who required such services.
 3. Continued to process any and all DMV transactions permitted by mail.
- By offering the above services through the Erie County Auto Bureau, this office was able to generate revenues that are vital to many services and programs that are important to residents across Erie County.

PISTOL PERMIT DEPARTMENT

- Continued with cross-training of staff on various aspects of pistol department duties & responsibilities; previously, functions were staff member specific.
- Continued digitizing of historic documents to eliminate decades of paper files in storage.
- Created a detailed process to accept new applications by mail; previously handled by appointment only.

VETERANS SERVICES

All special projects and public events that were in the planning phase between January – March of 2020 were put on pause at the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Erie County Clerk's top priority was to maintain the delivery of essential services to taxpayers in a safe environment for staff and constituents. However, the Clerk's Office is proud of the additional resources and programming it was able to maintain, adjust and expand, despite restrictions caused by the pandemic.

Erie County Clerk's S.A.L.U.T.E.S. Program.

"Showing Appreciation, Loyalty and Unity Towards Erie County Service Members"

Thank A Vet Discount Program

- Continuation and expansion of Thank A Vet Discount Program.
- Offered S.A.L.U.T.E.S. services up until COVID-19 shut down.
- Offered S.A.L.U.T.E.S services through Erie County Clerk's Outreach Center.
- Offered a "Take Away Pen" Donation Opportunity to Thank A Vet Businesses as a way to slow the spread of viruses, save taxpayer dollars, and promote local businesses.
- Hosted a "Suits for Troops" Event offering 200 free new suits to veterans, donated by Tuxedo Junction. Suit sizes were coordinated on the phone/email and set aside for pick up to limit personal contact. Remaining suits were donated to the Salvation Army.
- Planned the second annual "Thank A Vet Day" at the Buffalo Bisons Ballpark. The event was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

William J. Donovan Purple Heart Book of Merit

- Collected 2020 Book of Merit applications for the William J. Donovan Purple Heart Book of Merit to include over 700 Erie County Purple Heart Veterans.
- Coordinated "Purple Heart Week" (instead of the annual Purple Heart Day Ceremony due to COVID-19 restrictions). Throughout Purple Heart Week, Clerk Kearns personally visited the front lawns of each of the Purple Heart Recipients (or their surviving relatives). Accompanied by the Local Chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Clerk Kearns delivered Purple Heart lawn signs, certificates and a commemorative coin in honor of their service and sacrifice.

- The kickoff to Purple Heart Week began with a small outdoor event at the Charles DeGlopper Memorial, Medal of Honor Recipient in Grand Island.
- On Wednesday of Purple Heart Week, Clerk Kearns unveiled a new “Wounded Warriors” Parking Space at the Orchard Park Town Hall with the Town Supervisor.
- On Friday, to conclude “Purple Heart Week”, Clerk Kearns and the Military Order of the Purple Heart honored the final Purple Heart veteran added in the 2020 section of the Book of Merit in Lackawanna with the Lackawanna Mayor and Lackawanna Councilmen. At this small outdoor event, taking place on national Purple Heart Day, August 7, each of the members of the Military Order of the Purple Heart also brought a photo and short message to honor a friend that did not make it back from the war with them. This was to honor all Purple Heart Veterans living and deceased.

Operation Appreciation (Collaboration with Veterans Post Restoration of Erie County, NY Inc.)

- Planned a luncheon with guest speaker and Medal of Honor Recipient, David Bellavia, in collaboration with Bank on Buffalo, Russell’s Steaks Chops and More and the Veterans Post Restoration. This event was intended to bring together the local business community and raise awareness for the needs of Veterans posts in dire need of accessibility improvements. The event was canceled one week before the COVID-19 shut down.

TECHNOLOGY

- Server upgrade continuation.
- Began development on a Pistol Permit Dealer Portal.
- Installed Remote Control Software to better manage all offsite devices.
- Phone upgrades at Northtown Auto Bureau.
- Centralized Queuing System with live dashboards, customer flow integration and detailed reporting for Auto Bureaus and Land Records.
- Upgraded appointment system to handle the increased volume in our Auto Bureaus due to COVID-19.
- New public computer area and self-help kiosk to promote social distancing and better customer service in the Land Records department.
- Implemented work from home procedures for staff due to COVID-19 shutdowns.
- Created a work schedule system to manage all Auto Bureau locations and staffing.
- Created an auto dealer database to monitor and log all our large dealer drop off transactions.
- Developed statistical reports to help stream line processes and make calculated business decisions.

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S ZOMBIES INITIATIVE

- Since it began in June 2019 and through December 2020, the Erie County ZOMBIES Task Force has met with nearly every municipality in Erie County and advised supervisors, mayors, code enforcement officers, clerks, municipal attorneys, town and village boards regarding NY's Zombie Property and Foreclosure laws.
- Thus far, approximately 175 vacant and abandoned properties have been researched. At least one quarter of these properties have been brought into compliance and/or the deed has transferred to a new owner since the initial complaint.
- The task force has fielded over a hundred calls and reported over 30 addresses to the Department of Financial Services (DFS). Several of those properties have since been brought into compliance.
- The number of active DFS investigations in each municipality is as follows: Akron 1, Angola 1, Buffalo 1, Clarence 3, Colden 4, Elma 2, Evans 3, Gowanda 1, and Sloan 1. For each of these cases, the team has been corresponding with DFS as well as the mortgage servicer and/or property maintenance company to ensure the health and safety violations are remedied.
- The task force was successful in pushing HSBC to maintain the property at 93 Erie Avenue in Gowanda. HSBC demolished and rebuilt the back and front porch and plans to demolish the garage. In addition, the bank is looking to donate the property to the Land Bank or ensure the Land Bank obtains title through the tax foreclosure auction.
- The task force worked with the Mayor of Kenmore to ensure the property at 18 Euclid Avenue was safely demolished and paid for by the mortgage servicer, Ocwen. The total cost of the demolition and asbestos abatement was just under \$50,000.
- The task force filed suit on behalf of the Town of Clarence against Nationstar d/b/a Mr. Cooper and U.S. Bank regarding the property at 4765 Shisler Road in Clarence. In the complaint, the Town is seeking just under \$75,000 in fees for failure to maintain the property. Nationstar has filed an answer and the case will now move to discovery if necessary. The ultimate goal is to have the property demolished and the lot sold to a new family.
- Since the initiative launched, there have been numerous print and broadcast media stories. There is a website and an active Facebook page for the public to report on vacant and abandoned properties in their neighborhoods.
- On February 21, 2020, we held a press conference in front of a problem property on Shisler Road in Clarence. We were joined by Erie County Legislator Ed Rath and Clarence Town Supervisor Patrick Casillo in placing the first "ZOMBIE Watch" sign on the front lawn. This event was covered by WGRZ (Channel 2 News), WKBW (Channel 7 News), WBEN, Buffalo Rising, and the Clarence Bee, among other outlets. Over the past few months, we have reached over 2,800 people on the Erie County Clerk's ZOMBIES Initiative Facebook page.
- In addition to working with municipalities, and community outreach the Erie County ZOMBIES Task Force, has worked with individual homeowners like Norman D. He was forced to leave his South Wales, NY property several years earlier because he could no longer maintain the property due to kidney failure and heart failure. Norman tried for years to work with the bank on a deed-in-lieu, which allows a borrower to satisfy a defaulted loan by deeding the property to the bank.

After he reached out to our office, we worked vigorously to help him obtain a deed-in-lieu. Norman now has a final resolution that allows him to put all of this behind him. The deed has transferred to the bank and Norman can move on with the next chapter of his life.

- At the end of the year, the task force focused its efforts on partnering with Habitat for Humanity and the Land Bank in order to more effectively address vacant properties. The discussions are ongoing on how to combine our skill sets to come up with creative solutions. Meanwhile task force members have supported legislative efforts to increase compliance with zombie properties.

Erie County ZOMBIES Task Force

- On February 11th, May 12th, September 15th, and January 12th of this year, we held our quarterly Erie County ZOMBIES Foreclosure Task Force meeting. At each meeting, we had over 35 people in attendance from municipalities, legislator's offices, nonprofits, real estate agencies, businesses, and bank representatives from across the country. We had in-depth conversations about enforcement of the zombie laws, legislation, policy, and code enforcement, among other matters, and we held breakout committee meetings.
- In April, we released a Code Enforcement survey report. The final results were distributed to all Task Force members and Erie County municipalities. The goal of the survey was to determine what was needed to support Code Enforcement in the fight against zombie properties in Erie County. The largest need was for additional code enforcement staff, court personnel dedicated to this issue, and servicer points of contact.
- The Task Force held Code Enforcement Officer roundtable discussions on April 14th and August 25. In the fall, the Task Force launched the "Stay in Your Home" campaign. The "Stay in Your Home" campaign was created in response to the inevitable foreclosure crisis due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the Erie County ZOMBIES Foreclosure Task Force became concerned about the number of homeowners in default on their mortgages. With many forbearances expiring in 2021, Task Force members are compiling materials for homeowners who are facing challenges in keeping up with their mortgage payments so they can become current, stay in their homes, and prevent issues from snowballing, as well as become educated about their rights and options.

CONSTITUENT COMMUNICATION

- Continued “Catching Up with the Clerk” episodes on a City of Buffalo cable station.
- Continued new podcast: “Conversations with the Clerk”.
- Created “Constant Contact” account allowing the Clerk to communicate with approximately 10,000 constituents via email.
- Continued to connect with constituents through social media platforms including: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and new YouTube platform.
 - Instagram @mickey.kearns
 - Twitter @ErieCountyClerk
 - Facebook @ErieCountyClerkMickeyKearns
 - YouTube: Erie County Clerk Michael P. Kearns

CLERK ON THE GO 2020

Prior to COVID-19 closure:

- Attended six Naturalization Ceremonies and spoke, offered assistance and free passport pictures for newly sworn US Citizens. Promoted the Outreach Center and began to see an increase in Passport Applications.
- In February, County Clerk Michael Kearns accepted one of only two awards out of 7,700 passport acceptance facilities nationwide for “The Most Innovative Passport Acceptance Facility of 2019” on behalf of the Clerk’s Office.
- The office was recognized with a “Leadership Award” from the Bureau of Consular Affairs for expanding Passport services in Erie County in a time of increasing demand.
- Clerk On The Go visited several senior centers and businesses (five in total) during the months of January and February. Unfortunately, 27 already on schedule for 2020 had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.
- Clerk On The Go participated in Brides World at the Buffalo Convention Center where we spoke with over 5,000 brides and grooms regarding Passports and REAL ID for honeymoon travel.
- The Federal government extended the REAL ID deadline until October 2021. LAMAR Advertising updated the date on the 2 billboards and have extended the advertising for the REAL ID public awareness campaign. The billboards are located by the airport and off the 190 South near Seneca Street. Impression amounts are still running as they did last year with 20,000 per week estimated.
- Corrected and updated the REAL ID banner with the new 2021 deadline.

CLERK'S OUTREACH CENTER 2020

Prior to COVID-19 Closure 2020

- February 3, 2020 was the Grand Opening of the Outreach Center. We began to assist people with all services of the Clerk's Office and were on our way to a busy year.
- We averaged over dozen passports each month.
- Began offering evening hours and operated on a "no appointment necessary" format.
- COVID-19 forced the closure of the Outreach Center on March 16, 2020 and remained closed until the end of May.

CLERK'S OUTREACH CENTER

Post COVID-19 Closure 2020

- Upon reopening, the center picked up with "no appointment necessary" service and served people having questions on how to do business with the Clerk's Office.
- Transitioned into a call center to make required appointments for the Auto Bureau.
- Provided additional assistance and support to the Auto Bureau with "RENEW LOCAL" envelope requests, researched registration renewal fees and offered appointment assistance.
- Continued to provide passport and pistol permit application assistance.

HEALTH

Erie County Clerk's Wellness Collaborative.

Healthiest Districts Initiative (HDI)

- Continued monthly meetings (virtually) with five HDI School Districts, introducing numerous health partners and resources each month in partnership with the Wellness Institute of Buffalo.

Partnership with Catholic Health System

- Continued "Heart Healthy Blood Pressure Screenings" at the Erie County Auto Bureaus during American Heart Month in February.
- Multiple patients called to say the screening alerted them of problems of which they were previously unaware. "This saved my life, I was just a heart attack away from a stroke" – Mr. Robert Henry (constituent served at 2019 October health screening who shared his story at the February 2020 kickoff event).

BUDGET VS. ACTUAL

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE 2020 Budget Summary

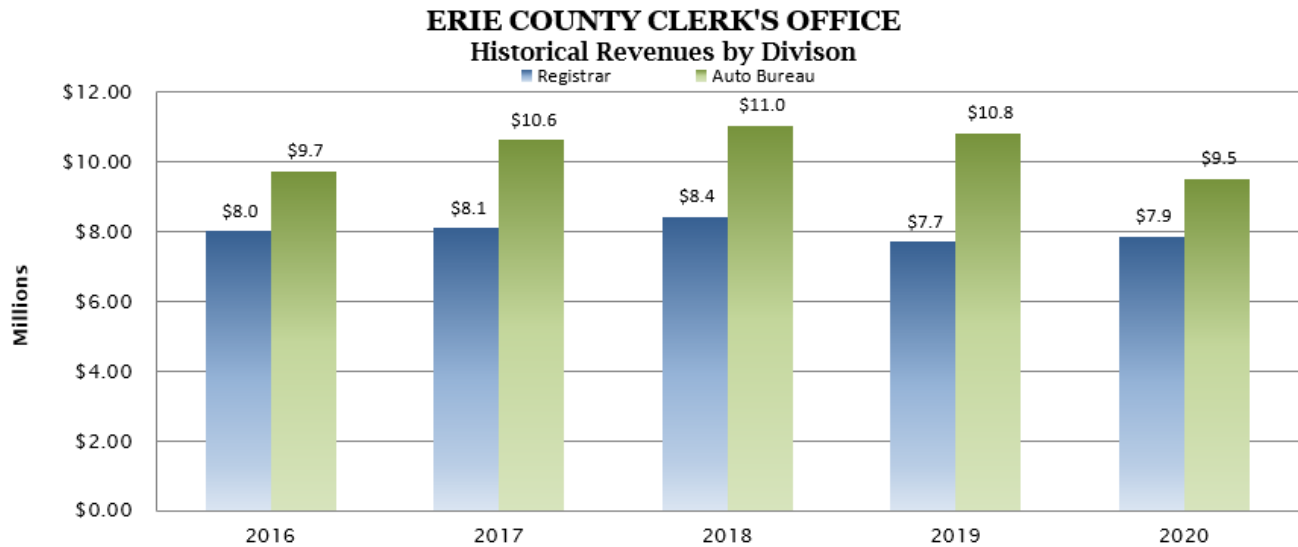
	2020		
	Budget	Actuals	Variance
Registrar			
Revenues	\$ 6,568,545	\$ 7,872,326	\$ 1,303,781
Expenses	5,002,987	4,820,456	\$ (182,532)
Commitment	<u>\$ 1,565,558</u>	<u>\$ 3,051,871</u>	<u>\$ 1,486,313</u>
Auto Bureau			
Revenues	\$ 8,477,628	\$ 9,524,136	\$ 1,046,508
Expenses	7,153,337	7,196,621	\$ 43,284
Commitment	<u>\$ 1,324,291</u>	<u>\$ 2,327,515</u>	<u>\$ 1,003,224</u>
Clerk's Office Total			
Revenues	\$15,046,173	\$17,396,462	\$2,350,289
Expenses	\$12,156,325	\$12,017,077	\$ (139,248)
Commitment	<u>\$ 2,889,848</u>	<u>\$ 5,379,385</u>	<u>\$ 2,489,537</u>

The Clerk's Office generated \$17 million in revenues between the Registrar Division and the Auto Bureau, exceeding budget projections by \$2.4 million or 15.6%. Expenses for the year were \$12.0 million, coming in under budget by \$139,248 or 1.1% lower than estimated. Overall, the Clerk's Office spent under its budgeted allocation and generated \$2.5 million in revenue greater than was anticipated. This resulted in \$5.4 million dollars being provided to the County general fund to offset the need of taxpayer contributions.

HISTORICAL BUDGET PERFORMANCE

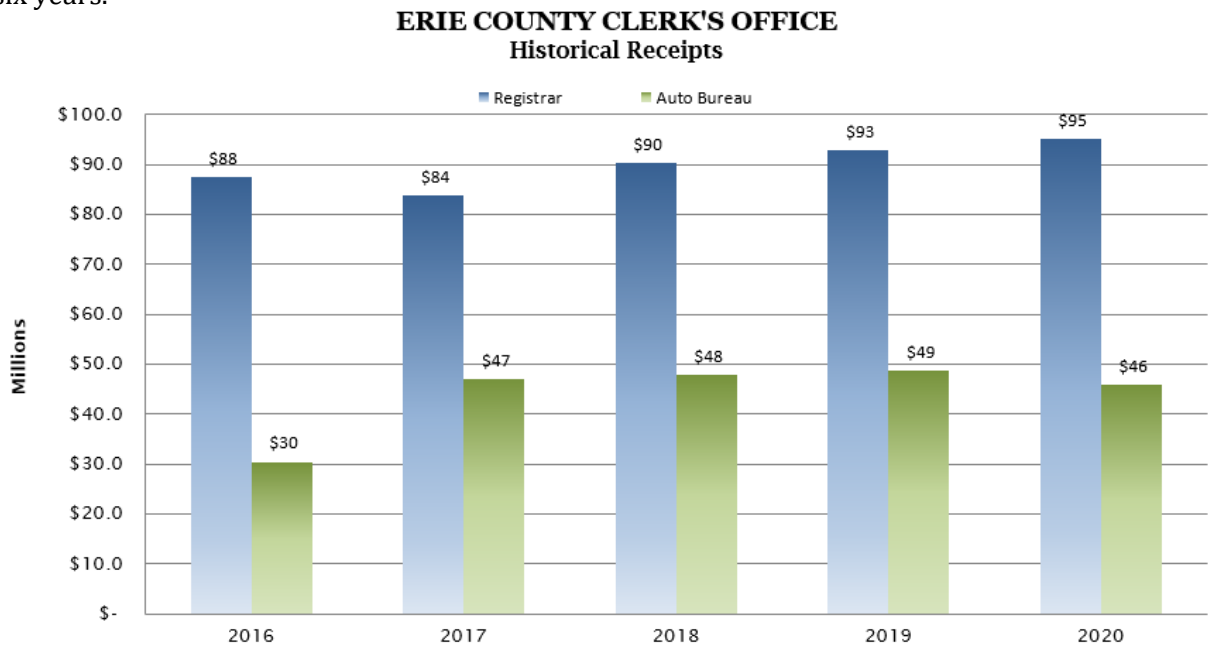
Since 2016 but prior to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, revenues remained steady due to the renewal cycle of New York State driver's licenses. While expenses have increased YoY, the percentage increase YoY has slowed to 1.5% in 2020. Revenues have exceeded expenses at an average of 71%, resulting in a revenue surplus. The County Clerk's Office has generated \$92 million in operating revenues and expenses totaling \$54 million over the past five years, resulting in a **surplus of \$37 million**. The significance of \$37 million in surplus is that it is used to directly offset tax increases for the residents of Erie County, support local cultural activities, and provide public services.

The graph below shows historical revenues by division. The Registrar's Division experienced a slight increase over 2019, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The Auto Bureaus experienced a decrease as a result of the pandemic with branch closures as well as changing from walk-in transactional activity to scheduling by appointment only.



RECEIPTS

While the Clerk's Office generated \$19 million in revenues for the County this does not reflect the total receipts collected through the Clerk's Office. In 2020, the Clerk's Office processed over \$141 million in transactions, \$93 million in the Registrar's Division and \$49 million through the Auto Bureaus. These receipts are then distributed on a monthly basis to various agencies including the State DMV, State Tax Department, NFTA, and various local towns and villages. Over the past six years the Clerk's office has generated over \$745 million. The graph below is a historical summary of total receipts collected over the past six years.



EMPLOYEES PRODUCTION

There are a total of 145 fulltime equivalent employees (FTE) staffed in the Clerk's Office, 60 FTEs within the Registrar Division and 85 working at the Auto Bureau. During 2020, the 145 FTEs completed over **544,000** transactions, averaging 3,753 transactions per FTE. Further, each FTE processed \$939,356 in receipts or \$119,976 in revenue for the Clerk's Office.

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE *2020 Employee Production*

	2020		
	Registrar	Auto Bureau	Office
Full Time Equivalents (FTE)	60	85	145
Transactions	145,045	399,197	544,242
<i>Transactions per FTE</i>	<i>2,417</i>	<i>4,696</i>	<i>3,753</i>
Receipts	\$ 90,283,637	\$ 45,923,009	\$ 136,206,645
<i>Receipts per FTE</i>	<i>\$ 1,504,727</i>	<i>\$ 540,271</i>	<i>\$ 939,356</i>
Revenues	\$ 7,872,326	\$ 9,524,136	\$ 17,396,462
<i>Revenues per FTE</i>	<i>\$ 131,205</i>	<i>\$ 112,049</i>	<i>\$ 119,976</i>

REGISTRAR DIVISION

The Registrar Division is responsible for recording, filing and maintaining records related to land transactions or affecting title to real estate, corporations, assumed name certificates, court papers and the Uniform Commercial Code filings affecting title to real property. It provides a central repository for legal documents which require recording or filing. It also serves as a repository for documents requested, but not necessarily required, to be filed by customers of the office. Responsibility for maintaining the records is required by State and local law once the document or record is accepted by the Registrar's Office.

As Clerk of the Supreme and County Courts in Erie County, the County Clerk is responsible for filing and maintaining all court records of the New York State Supreme and County Courts, in accordance with State law and regulations of the Administrative Office of the Unified Court System. This obligation was transferred to the County from the State Court System in 1986. In addition, the Clerk is responsible for those duties set forth in the New York Civil Procedure Law and Rules, which include the granting of default judgments.

Responsibility for the processing of pistol permits and administration of the application files was transferred to the County Clerk from the State Court System in 1987. Accordingly, the Division accepts and processes pistol permits in addition to hunting and fishing licenses in the Pistol Permit Department.

All revenues attributed to the operation of the Division of the Registrar are derived from mandatory fees collected for the recording, processing and filing of legal documents and records and the issuance of licenses and permits. Mortgage and Real Property Transfer Taxes are collected by the Registrar and distributed to the appropriate state and local agencies.

PROGRAM AND SERVICE OBJECTIVES

The Erie County Clerk's Office is responsible for the following procedures:

- To record and file documents required or entitled to be filed under New York State law including deeds, mortgages, powers of attorney, certificates of incorporation, certificates of partnership, doing business under an assumed name, liens, real estate brokers entitlements to commissions, bail bond liens, local laws, wage assignments and pistol permits.
- To provide efficient, effective customer service to taxpayers and residents of Erie County.
- To provide access and assistance to the public for inspection of all filings and recordings.
- To record all judgments entered in Erie County and the New York State Supreme Court as well as maintain current status of judgment records.
- To process all court papers submitted for civil actions and proceedings, and criminal cases on appeal.
- To administer the processing of pistol permit applications, the issuance of pistol permits upon the direction of an Erie County Court Judge and maintain existing permit files.
- To issue certificates, exemplifications, certified copies, executions, against real and personal property and notary public commissions.
- To serve as an agent of the state government with the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, the collection of mortgage, real property transfer taxes, capital gains taxes and the collection of court fees.
- To serve as an agent of the federal government by administering declarations of intent for individuals seeking U.S. citizenship.
- To accept United States Passport Applications for the U.S. Department of State.
- To administer and file oaths of public officials, notaries public and commissioner of deeds.
- To properly collect, record, deposit and monitor all fees and taxes collected, and to assure required distribution as prescribed by law, regulation or agreement.

CORPORATION AND DBA FILINGS

There were just shy of 5,000 Corporate and DBA filings in the County Clerk's Office in 2020, down 20.2 percent from 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, business filings had taken a slight downward trend compared to the previous two years which were higher due to Erie County's resurgences. Over the last five years there have been just over 30,000 business filings in Erie County.

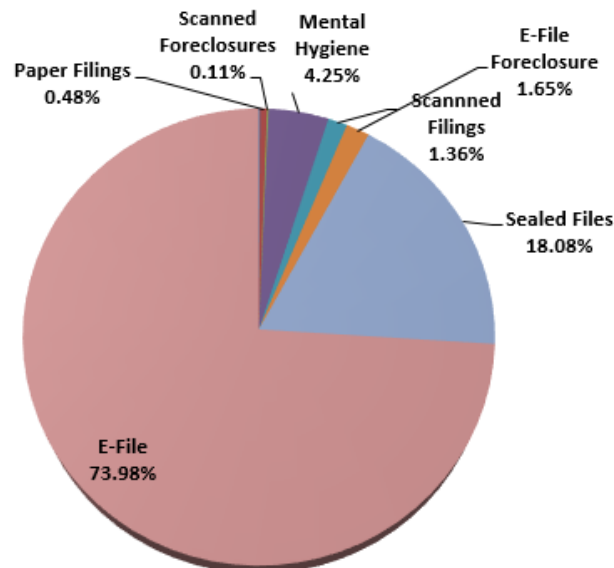
ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE DBA & Corporation Filings

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Corporations	2,271	2,637	2,773	2,631	2,011
DBA	3,365	3,478	3,409	3,335	2,760
DBA Discontinuance	367	298	344	277	210
Total	6,003	6,413	6,526	6,243	4,981
<i>Annual Growth</i>		6.8%	1.8%	-4.3%	-20.2%

INDEX NUMBERS AND COURT FILINGS

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE Actions & Proceedings

	Annual Case Filings				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Small Claims	64	73	70	36	17
Paper Filings	188	58	141	167	87
Scanned Foreclosures	248	291	245	155	20
Mental Hygiene	305	300	339	334	775
Scanned Filings	390	386	424	458	249
E-File Foreclosure	1,120	921	962	787	301
Sealed Files	3,181	2,826	2,827	2,706	3,298
E-File	8,979	10,941	12,639	13,137	13,498
Total	14,475	15,796	17,647	17,780	18,245
<i>Annual Growth</i>		9.1%	11.7%	0.8%	2.6%



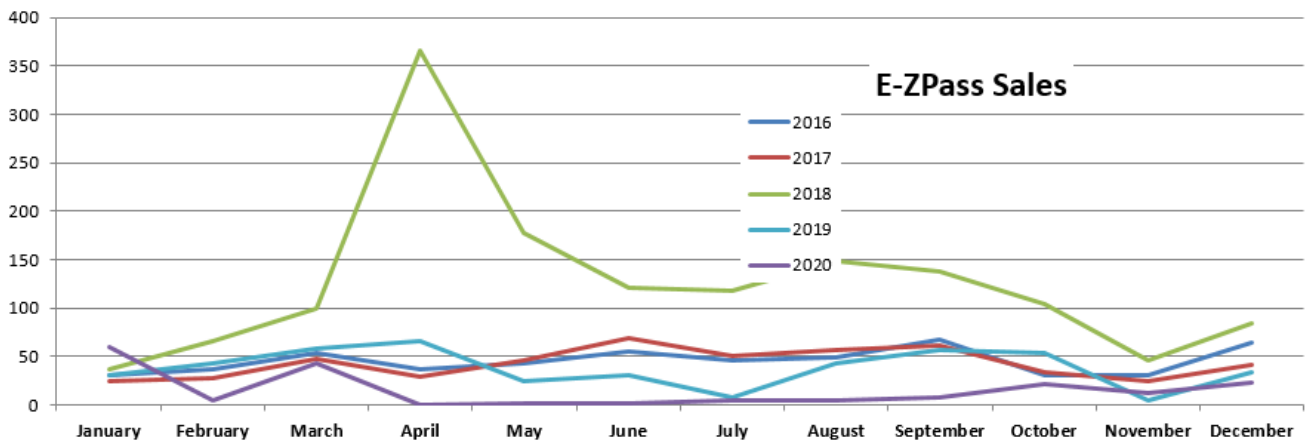
JUDGMENTS AND LIENS

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE Judgements & Liens

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Judgments	37,137	41,061	41,017	35,243	17,327
Liens	4,369	3,753	3,194	2,965	2,084
Satisfaction of Judgments	28,436	27,378	30,937	57,724	28,381
Total	69,942	72,192	75,148	95,932	47,792
<i>Annual Growth</i>		3.2%	4.1%	27.7%	-50.2%

E-ZPASS

The Clerk's Office sells New York State E-ZPasses for passenger and commercial vehicles for use on New York toll roads and other state toll roads. The cost of the E-ZPass is \$25, in which the County Clerk's Office receives \$4.00 for each unit or 16% of the total cost. The County Clerk's office sold 181 E-ZPasses in 2020, down 59.6 percent from the 2019 sales of 448 units. The sharp decrease is mainly due temporary office closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



NOTARY PUBLIC & COMMISSIONER OF DEEDS

The County Clerk's Office is responsible for processing notary public applications and commissioner of deeds for the State, along with annual renewals. The commissioner of deeds are valid for two years depending on when the applicant first applies, regardless all applications expire on December 31st of an odd year. Notary public certifications are valid for four years, expiring four years from the certification date.

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE Notary Public & Commissioner of Deeds

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Notary	632	544	609	577	420
Notary Renewals	1,056	2,995	4,456	3,217	1,274
Commissioner of Deeds	1,376	448	1,356	347	1,078
Total	3,064	3,987	6,421	4,141	2,772
<i>Annual Growth</i>		30.1%	61.0%	-35.5%	-33.1%

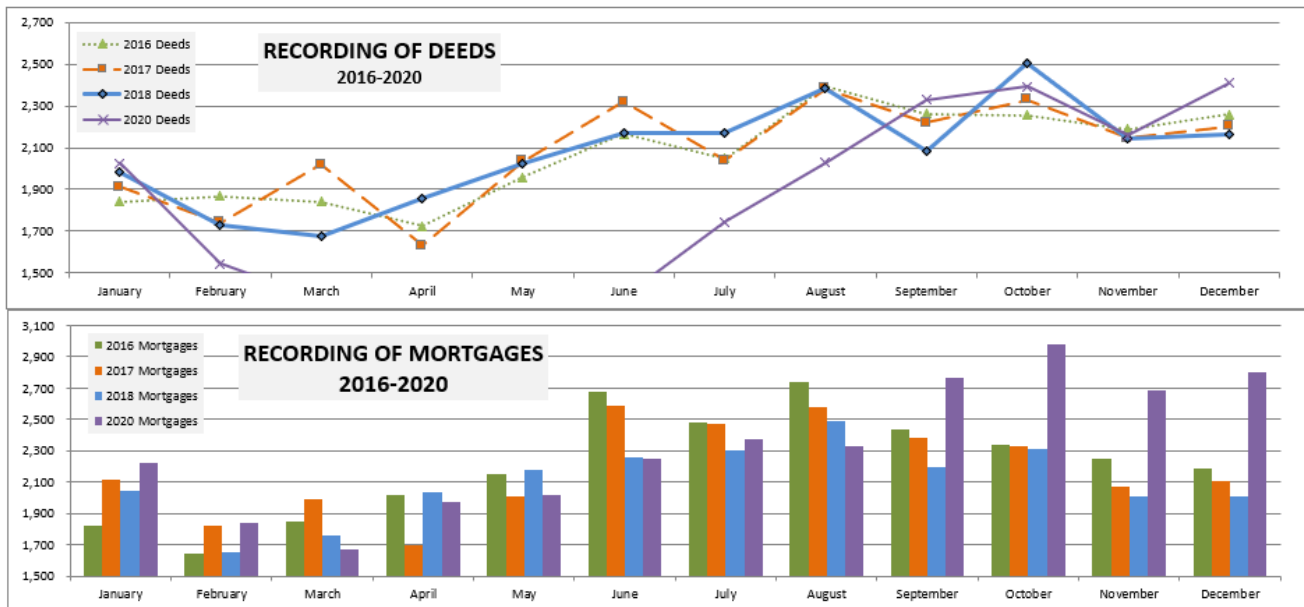
DEEDS & MORTGAGE FILINGS

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE Deeds & Mortgage Filings

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Deeds	24,801	24,971	24,886	24,290	21,673
Mortgages	26,577	26,145	25,220	24,676	27,889
Mortgage Release & Discharge	27,395	29,551	27,527	25,809	29,499
Other Mortgage Filings	10,006	1,721	5,661	5,433	6,022
Total	88,779	82,388	83,294	80,208	85,083
<i>Annual Growth</i>		-7.2%	1.1%	-3.7%	6.1%

All real estate transactions such as deed and mortgage filings are processed through the County Clerk's office. There were over 85,000 real estate transactions recorded in the County Clerk's office during 2020, a 6.1% increase over 2019, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The year to year increase gives an indication of the real estate market in Erie County.

The graph below shows a comparison of the last five years of new mortgages recorded and the exchange of properties.

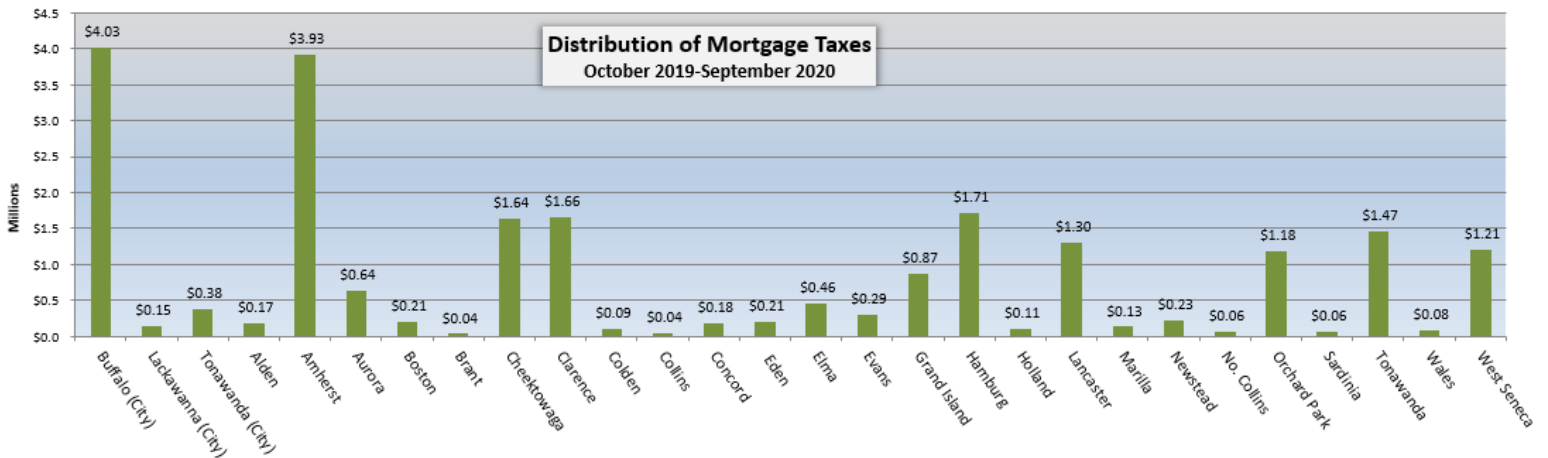
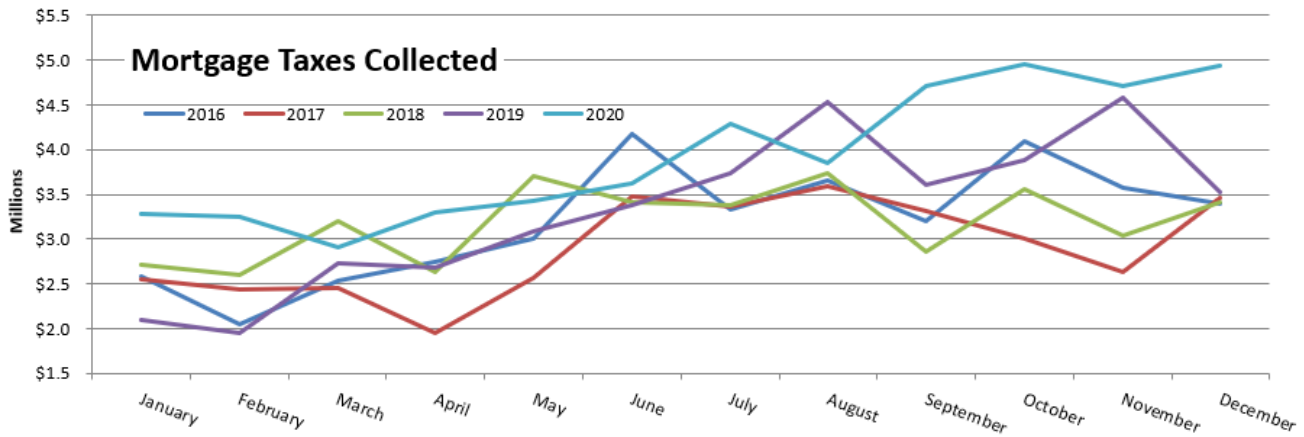


MORTGAGE TAX

Erie County Clerk's Office Mortgage Tax Distribution

	Annual				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Basic Tax	\$ 19,444,000	\$ 17,616,000	\$ 19,311,000	\$ 20,506,000	\$ 24,063,000
NFTA	\$ 15,416,000	\$ 14,717,000	\$ 15,652,000	\$ 16,733,000	\$ 20,921,000
SONYMA	\$ 2,969,000	\$ 1,986,000	\$ 2,723,000	\$ 2,560,000	\$ 2,243,000
Total	\$ 37,829,000	\$ 34,319,000	\$ 37,686,000	\$ 39,799,000	\$ 47,227,000
		-9%	10%	6%	19%

\$47.2 million in mortgage taxes was collected in 2020, up 19 percent from 2019. Of the \$47.2 million, \$24.1 million is distributed to local cities and towns, \$20.9 million to the Niagara Frontier Transit Authority (NFTA) and \$2.2 million to the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA). The charts below are a summary of the mortgage taxes distributed to the local cities and towns and a comparison of the mortgage taxes collected over the past five years.



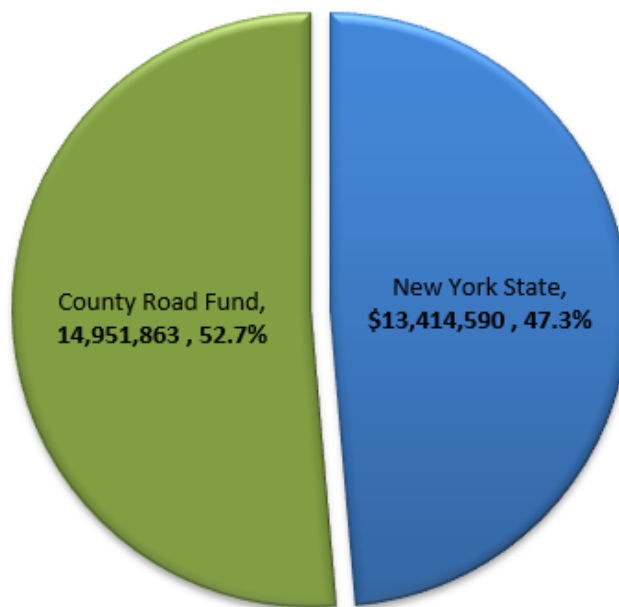
TRANSFER TAX

For every \$500 of the property's recorded deed's sale price the County Clerk's Office collects \$4.50 of which \$2.00 is transferred to New York State and \$2.50 is collected for Erie County's Road Fund. In 2020, transfer taxes collected were down 5 percent over 2019. During the last four years, the County Clerk's Office has collected over **\$57 million** for the County's Road Fund.

Erie County Clerk's Office Transfer Taxes

	Annual			
	2017	2018	2019	2020
New York State	\$ 12,430,656	\$ 13,414,590	\$ 14,217,116	\$ 13,666,473
County Road Fund	13,147,052	14,951,863	15,344,460	14,427,229
Total	\$ 25,578,000	\$ 28,366,000	\$ 29,562,000	\$ 28,094,000
		11%	4%	-5%

Transfer Taxes 2020 Collections



PISTOL PERMIT DEPARTMENT

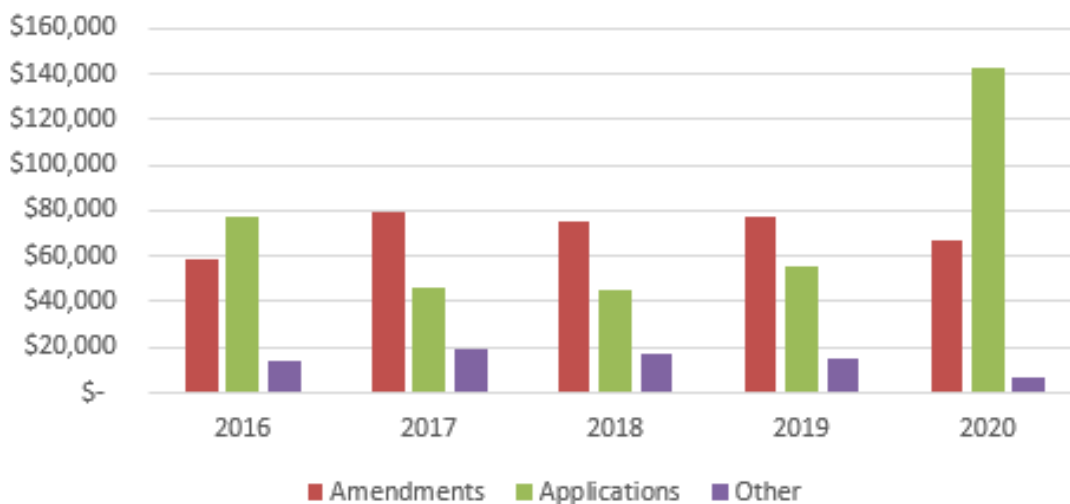
The Pistol Permit Department issues new pistol permits and dealer permits. This department also registers new gun purchases, transfers ownership and processes permits that are transferred in or out of Erie County.

In addition to the issuance of pistol permits and other related matters, the department also issues hunting and fishing licenses. Due to the department being closed to the public as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the department only issued 17 hunting and fishing licenses during 2020, a decrease of 65 percent from 2019.

- **Pistol Permit Application Appointments:** Prior to COVID-19, all applications were accepted in-person by appointment only. Since COVID-19, the direction was changed to accept applications by mail only. This has resulted in a 161% increase in application intake over 2019.
- **Scanning & Digitizing Archived Pistol Permit Applications:** With 81,000+ pistol permit files in storage, the process to scan and digitize was implemented to reduce paper and needed real estate for storage. The process has begun with archived files and continues with new incoming applications beginning in 2020.

	Annual Transactions					Annual Revenue				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pistol Permits										
Amendments	18,794	24,866	24,262	24,498	22,500	\$ 58,769	\$ 79,021	\$ 75,344	\$ 77,334	\$ 67,000
Applications	3,837	2,335	2,241	2,750	7,177	\$ 77,740	\$ 46,700	\$ 45,130	\$ 55,420	\$143,000
Other	1,213	1,497	1,570	1,318	591	\$ 14,468	\$ 19,226	\$ 17,668	\$ 14,688	\$ 6,666
Total	23,844	28,698	28,073	28,566	30,268	\$150,977	\$144,947	\$138,142	\$147,442	\$216,666
<i>Annual Growth</i>		20.4%	-2.2%	1.8%	6.0%		-4.0%	-4.7%	6.7%	46.9%

**Pistol Permit Dept Transactions
2016 - 2020 Revenue**



ERIE COUNTY AUTO BUREAU

The Auto Bureau is an agent for the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles. The Auto Bureau receives and processes motor vehicle applications, issues vehicle registrations and driver's licenses (including Enhanced Driver's Licenses), handles financial security transactions, and enforces DWI sanctions in accordance with the Vehicle and Traffic Laws of New York State. Additionally, boats, motorcycles, snowmobiles and trailers are registered and non-driver photo identifications are issued by the Auto Bureaus. Responsibilities include the collection and monitoring of all fees related to the issuance of auto registrations and driver's licenses, along with sales taxes collected on the private sale of automobiles.

Prior to COVID-19, the Auto Bureau had full-service offices in Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Tonawanda, Clarence, West Seneca, and Evans. Additionally, the Auto Bureau's Mobile Unit offered services in the following towns one day a week - Grand Island, Elma, Concord and West Seneca / Hamburg. In 2020, due to COVID-19, the Mobile unit and two satellite offices were closed and remain until further notice.

REVENUES & RETENTIONS

ERIE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

2020 Budget Summary

	2020		
	Budget	Actuals	Variance
Revenues			
Vehicle Use Tax	\$ 4,895,825	\$ 5,052,327	\$ 156,502
Auto Fees	3,581,803	4,046,693	464,890
Total Revenues	\$ 8,477,628	\$ 9,099,020	\$ 621,392
Expenses	7,020,975	7,022,156	\$ 1,180
Commitment	\$ 1,456,653	\$ 2,076,864	\$ 620,212

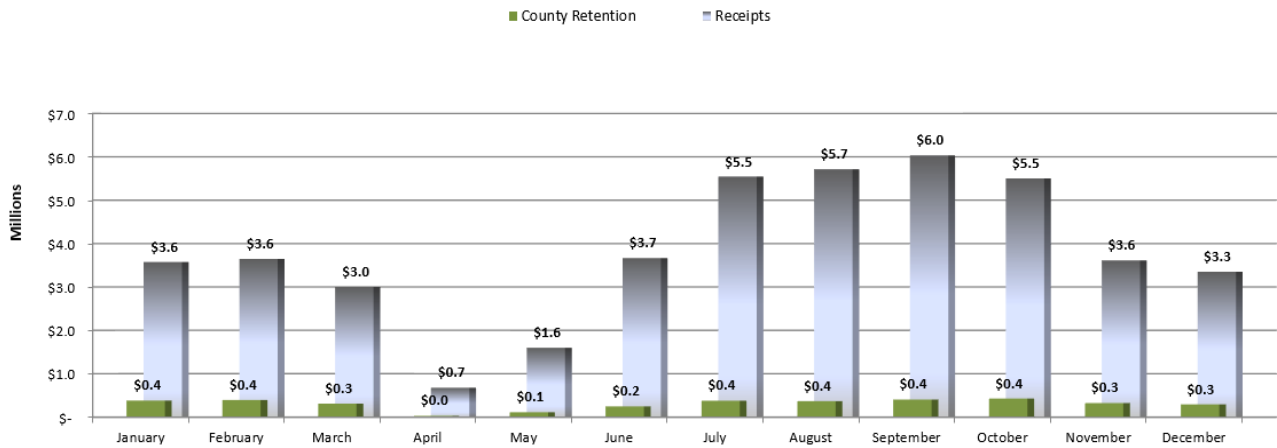
The Auto Bureau retains a portion of its transaction fees from registering vehicles, issuing permits, driver's licenses, non-driver identification and other miscellaneous transactions. The fees collected for these transactions is 12.7 percent, including the collection of sales taxes on vehicles, which equates to less than 1 percent of total sales tax receipts.

The first bar chart below is a comparison of the total receipts collected from transactions processed at the various Erie County Auto Bureau locations. The second bar chart is a summary of transactions done online through the State's DMV website. The smaller green bars on both bar charts show the County's revenue share of the transactions. For 2020 the County kept \$3.7 million or 8.0 percent of the \$46 million in receipts processed at the Auto Bureaus, including sales taxes collected.

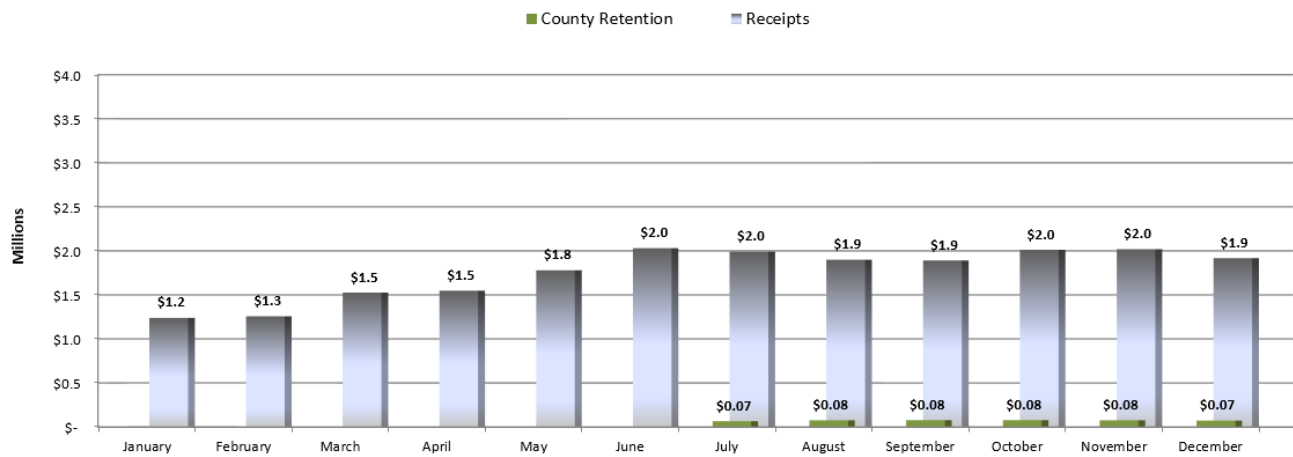
The Auto Bureau generated \$9.1 million in revenues for the County, processing over 399,197 transactions at the various Auto Bureau locations. The Auto Fee revenues also include revenue sharing from the State for transactions completed online through the State's DMV website. The County retains 3.25 percent of all online revenues *exceeding* a \$12 million threshold. The County's online revenue sharing totaled \$448 thousand for 2020 or 1.7% of the \$25.8 million in online revenues.

The Clerk's Office retains 3.25 percent of all online receipts that exceed a threshold of \$11,999,580. Simply put, the first \$12 million in online transactions completed by Erie County residents *all* goes to New York State. From 2015 through 2019, County residents have completed over \$96 million in online transactions: ***the County's share is \$1.5 million or 1.4% of \$106 million.***

**Erie County Auto Bureau
2020 Receipts & County Retention**



**Erie County Auto Bureau
2020 Online Receipts & County Retention**

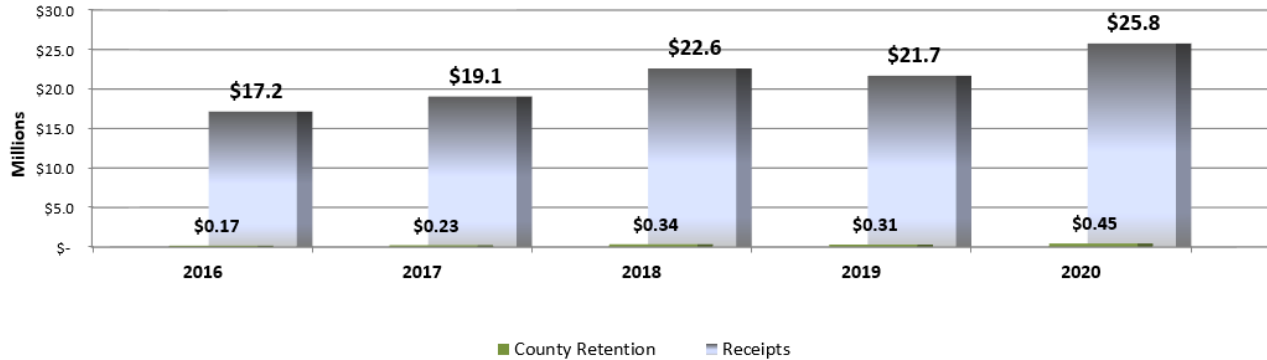


Except for a dip in 2019, the number of transactions made online through the State’s website from 2016 to 2020 has steadily year over year resulting in less revenues for Erie County. The table below is a summary of the lost revenues or “lost opportunity” when Erie County residents completed transactions online through the State’s website instead of completing their transactions at one of our County Auto Bureaus. Erie County residents have completed \$106 million in online transactions over the past five years, resulting in \$12 million in lost revenues to the County.

**Erie County Auto Bureau
Historical Internet Shared Revenues**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	5 Year Total
Threshold	\$ 11,998,583	\$ 11,998,583	\$ 11,998,583	\$ 11,998,583	11,998,583	
Annual Receipts	17,151,985	19,057,522	22,613,766	21,687,667	25,779,534	106,290,474
Shared Revenues	167,486	229,416	344,993	314,895	447,881	1,504,670
Lost Opportunity	\$ 2,010,817	\$ 2,190,890	\$ 2,526,955	\$ 2,439,438	\$ 2,826,120	11,994,219
		11.1%	18.7%	-4.1%	18.9%	

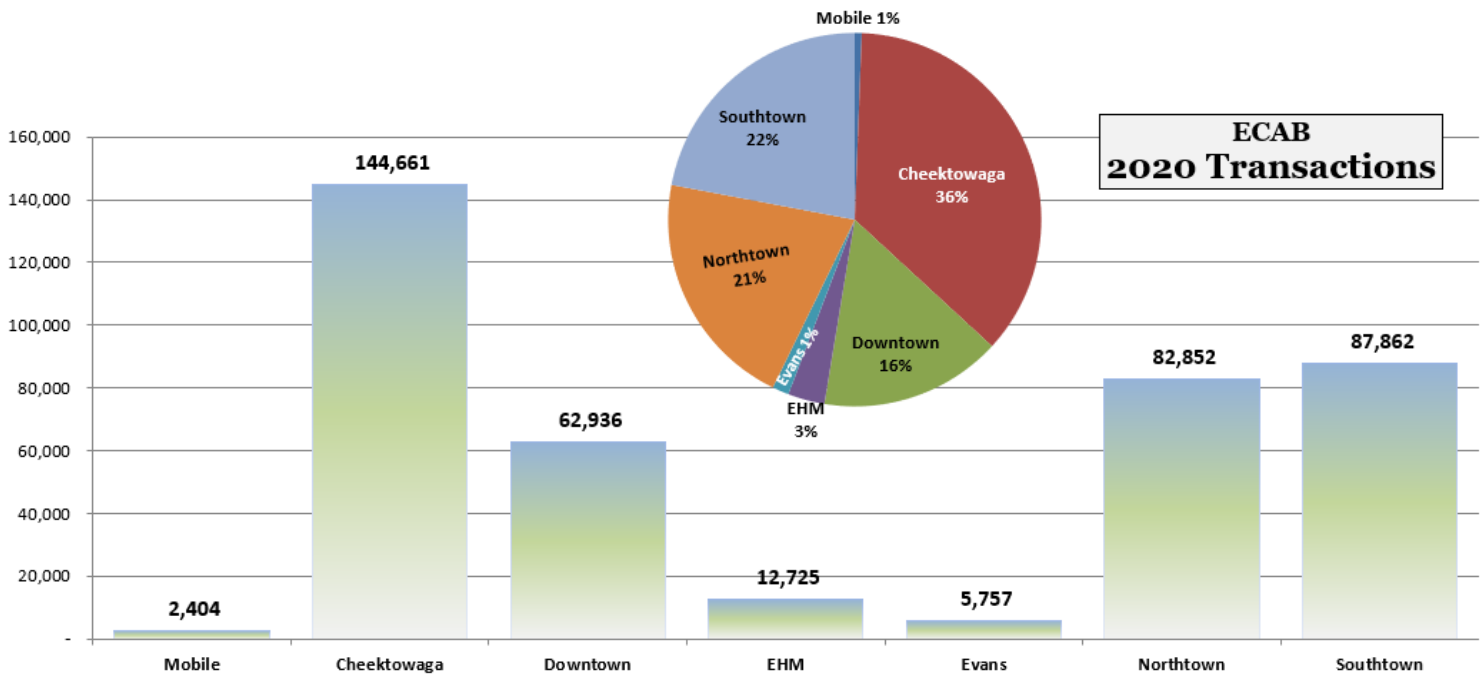
Erie County Auto Bureau
Historical Online Receipts & County Retention

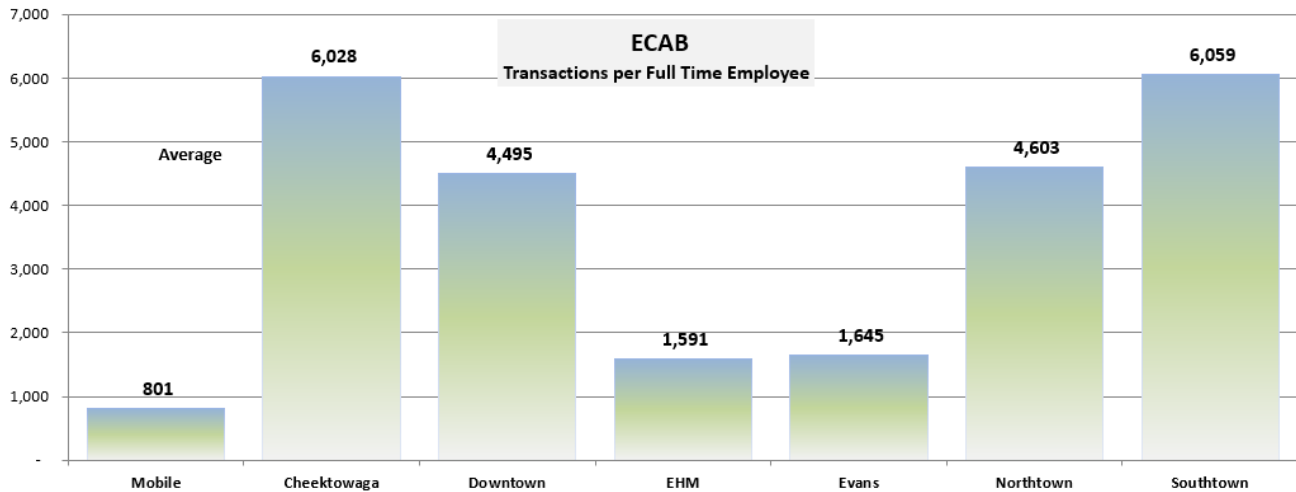


TRANSACTIONS

At the end of 2020, the Erie County Auto Bureaus processed over 399 thousand driver and non-driver identifications, vehicle registrations and other DMV related transactions. The annual transactions are down 31.8 percent over 2019. The chart below is a breakdown of the number of transactions processed at each of the Auto Bureau locations. The Cheektowaga location processed 36 percent of the total number of transactions completed at the Auto Bureau, in part due to the vehicle registrations processed for the local Erie County dealerships.

There are 85 full-time equivalent (“FTE”) employees, including management who staff the auto bureau locations and mobile units. Based on the total number of 85 FTEs, on average each FTE processed 4,696 transactions in 2020.





INCOMING CUSTOMERS

The Auto Bureaus use a queuing system called NEMO-Q that issues a ticket to incoming customers based on service type. The queuing system is beneficial for management in that it appropriately staffs the Auto Bureaus based on customer traffic. The system tracks; the number of customers served, average wait times, average service times and other metrics. The biggest benefit of the NEMO-Q system is that it allows customers visiting the auto bureaus to make a reservation online beforehand, minimizing the customer’s wait time.

In 2020 due to COVID-19, and in an effort to begin the process of reopening the Erie County Auto Bureau to the public, all in-person transactions required an appointment using the “*Make a Reservation*” system found on our website. If one did not have computer or internet access, dedicated staff were in place to help facilitate the setting of appointments.

Our primary goal is to provide our customers with the finest and safest service experience possible.