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update and toughen B&P Section 17537.9. The Attorney General of California has issued a recent consumer alert concerning third-party assessment appeals vendors. In April, 2009, the San Diego County Assessor released a statement warning the public of the \$179 or more fee charged by third-party vendors who have recently mailed thousands of notices. The Assessors of Ventura, Orange and San Diego Counties display warnings of third-party vendor activity on their official web pages.

FINDINGS

1. Many appellants participating in the assessment appeals process are not fluent in the English language.
2. The Clerk of the Board does not take steps to control frivolous submittals of Applications for Changed Assessments
3. The Office of the Assessor does not adequately defend its assessment positions when challenged by companies and individuals that employ specialist attorneys.
4. The County of San Bernardino does apprise the public of third-party assessment appeals vendors' activities.
5. A time-line of important dates in the assessment process found on other county's websites was helpful to understanding the assessment appeals process. The Assessors of Ventura, San Diego and several other counties now display time-lines on their websites.
6. All the information a property owner needs to process his own assessment appeal, without third-party assistance, is on the County Assessor's website.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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| 09-06 | Provide language translation service to those appellants requesting such a service. (Finding 1) |
| 09-07 | Collect a filing fee for an Application for Changed Assessment and a fee for a Finding of Fact. (Finding 2) |
| 09-08 | Utilize a private legal firm, or County Council personnel, knowledgeable in the field of appraisals and assessment appeals, to represent the Office of the Assessor during major appeals. (Finding 3) |
| 09-09 | Take the necessary steps to regulate third-party assessment appeals vendors. (Finding 4) |
| 09-10 | Post a permanent and more detailed notice on Assessor's website, warning that third-party vendors are not necessary in the assessment appeals process. (Finding 5) |

09-11 Include on the Assessor's website a time-line of important dates to remember during the year in order to assist the public in keeping abreast of time limits and due-dates of the property assessment processes as the year progresses. (Finding 6)

AUDITOR/CONTROLLER-RECORDER (ACR)

HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

SUMMARY

In 2006, the San Bernardino County Historical Archives (Archives) was moved from its old facility on Rialto Avenue to its new home at 1806 Commercenter West. The facility houses the county's oldest and rarest information, plus the first 41 years of the County of Riverside's historical documents. The 2008-2009 Grand Jury checked on the progress and improvement of the preservation of these priceless and one-of-a-kind artifacts and found some interesting results. Those results are documented in the findings and recommendations sections at the end of this report.

BACKGROUND

The old facility on Rialto Avenue had not been adequately equipped to maintain the historical material, nor was it secure. The facility we inspected on Commercenter was secure but still lacked archival storage infrastructure common to similar operations of this kind. There was a need for environmental controls that would prolong the useful life of the materials. The storage area was air-conditioned, but the air conditioning was intended for common warehouse activities and was inadequate for archival storage. Rare documents need more sophisticated and accurate controls and alarms. Archivists agree that temperature and humidity be kept steady in the archive storage area. Humidity must be between 40 and 55 percent, while a temperature between 60 and 70 degrees must be established. If those environmental standards cannot be met, archivists agree that *at least* a storage facility be kept at a *steady* climate using the equipment at the facility's disposal. Upgrades to the current heating and cooling need not be expensive. Additions of dust filtering and secondary humidity and temperature monitoring and logging equipment are essential for long-term preservation of historical materials.

Most of the archives were stored on open shelves. If the fire sprinklers were activated, the Archives would be heavily damaged, if not destroyed outright. Acid-free storage boxes were in abundance and a primary means of protection of materials from light, dust and moisture. The ability of the proper storage box to preserve the material cannot be understated. However, there is not much that boxes can do to protect the valuables from a discharge from the standard-type sprinkler system now employed at the Archives. For archival use, the sprinkler systems are customarily the Victaulic or *dry* type. In a dry system the piping between the valve and sprinklers is filled with pressurized air or nitrogen rather than water. A sprinkler-head opening causes air pressure to drop. When the pressure deteriorates in the pipes sufficiently, the valve clapper is allowed to open, flooding the lines with water. This system prevents the entire collection from being soaked.