



Scott Fitzpatrick

Missouri State Auditor

Vernon County

Report No. 2024-098

December 2024

auditor.mo.gov



Scott Fitzpatrick
Missouri State Auditor

CITIZENS SUMMARY

Findings in the audit of Vernon County

Sheriff's Compensation	The County Commission authorized a mid-term salary increase of \$25,434 to the Sheriff in September 2022, retroactive to January 1, 2022, in violation of constitutional provisions and state law.
County Collector-Treasurer's Controls and Procedures	The County Collector-Treasurer does not adequately perform bank reconciliations. Numerous unrecorded or incorrectly recorded deposits, bad checks, and other errors identified in the accounting system, totaling approximately \$13.5 million and dating back to July 2020, were unresolved and included as reconciling items on the February 28, 2023, bank reconciliation. The bank reconciliation also included outstanding deposits and an outstanding wire that were posted to the accounting system in error and had not been cleared. Supporting documentation for the book balance used in the reconciliation was not maintained. At our request, the County Collector-Treasurer prepared a list of liabilities for the account, totaling \$2,174,896, as of February 28, 2023; however, after adjusting the bank balance for the known deposit in transit and outstanding checks, the balance of the account was \$2,164,645, resulting in a shortage of \$10,251. Part of this problem is caused by the County Collector-Treasurer's failure to transfer tax collections timely from the general account to a County Treasurer's account when tax distributions were made. The liabilities being held as of February 28, 2023, included \$1,795,761 in railroad and utility taxes, as well as \$38,360 in County Employee Retirement Fund fees and \$12,580 in county fees, collected between July 2020 and February 2023. All of these taxes and fees were distributed from a County Treasurer's account, but the corresponding transfers from the County Collector-Treasurer's account were not made. The County Collector-Treasurer did not properly review the township's tax withholdings and Assessment Fund withholdings calculated by the property tax system, and as a result, during the 2 years ended February 29, 2024, the County Collector-Treasurer improperly withheld \$143,835 from 2 townships and withheld \$51,235 more from tax collections for the Assessment Fund than allowed by state law.
Questionable Disbursements	Several disbursements made from the Election Services Fund and the General Revenue Fund during the year ended December 31, 2022, were either inappropriate or inessential to the administration and operation of the County Clerk's office. The former County Clerk made disbursements from the Election Services Fund for \$611 for headphones as gifts for his employees, \$530 for a cell phone signal booster for his home, and \$90 for flowers for an election worker involved in a car wreck. Disbursements made by the former County Clerk from the General Revenue Fund included \$3,125 for \$25 gift cards for employee Christmas gifts, \$311 for retirement gifts for himself and the former Presiding Commissioner, \$457 for food for an employee Christmas party, and \$160 for a heated vest.

County Procedures	The County Clerk did not accurately calculate the property tax reduction in 2020 and 2021 for the difference between estimated and actual sales tax collected in the prior year. These errors resulted in collection of approximately \$71,000 and \$97,000, in excess property tax revenues in those years, respectively. After the reductions for 2022 and 2023 were made, the cumulative excess property tax revenue collections, as of December 31, 2023, totaled approximately \$123,000. In addition, county officials could not locate minutes for 2 closed meetings the County Commission held during 2022.
County Clerk's Controls and Procedures	The County Clerk does not issue receipt slips for all money received or restrictively endorse checks upon receipt. During a May 16, 2023, cash count the audit noted receipt slips were not issued for 8 notary fee payments, and 2 checks were not restrictively endorsed.
Electronic Communication Policy	The county has not developed a records management and retention policy that includes electronic communication in compliance with the Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division guidance, as approved by the Missouri Local Records Commission.
Additional Comments	Because counties are managed by several separately-elected individuals, an audit finding made with respect to one office does not necessarily apply to the operations in another office. The overall rating assigned to the county is intended to reflect the performance of the county as a whole. It does not indicate the performance of any one elected official or county office.

In the areas audited, the overall performance of this entity was **Poor**.*

*The rating(s) cover only audited areas and do not reflect an opinion on the overall operation of the entity. Within that context, the rating scale indicates the following:

- Excellent:** The audit results indicate this entity is very well managed. The report contains no findings. In addition, if applicable, prior recommendations have been implemented.
- Good:** The audit results indicate this entity is well managed. The report contains few findings, and the entity has indicated most or all recommendations have already been, or will be, implemented. In addition, if applicable, many of the prior recommendations have been implemented.
- Fair:** The audit results indicate this entity needs to improve operations in several areas. The report contains several findings, or one or more findings that require management's immediate attention, and/or the entity has indicated several recommendations will not be implemented. In addition, if applicable, several prior recommendations have not been implemented.
- Poor:** The audit results indicate this entity needs to significantly improve operations. The report contains numerous findings that require management's immediate attention, and/or the entity has indicated most recommendations will not be implemented. In addition, if applicable, most prior recommendations have not been implemented.

Vernon County Table of Contents

State Auditor's Report	2
------------------------	---

Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings	1. Sheriff's Compensation.....4 2. County Collector-Treasurer's Controls and Procedures4 3. Questionable Disbursements9 4. County Procedures10 5. County Clerk's Controls and Procedures.....11 6. Electronic Communication Policy.....12
---	--

Organization and Statistical Information	13
---	----



SCOTT FITZPATRICK
MISSOURI STATE AUDITOR

County Commission
and
Officeholders of Vernon County

We have audited certain operations of Vernon County in fulfillment of our duties under Section 29.230, RSMo. The scope of our audit included, but was not necessarily limited to, the year ended December 31, 2022. The objectives of our audit were to:

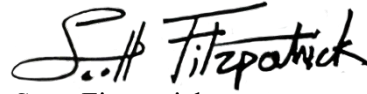
1. Evaluate the county's internal control over significant management and financial functions.
2. Evaluate the county's compliance with certain legal provisions.
3. Evaluate the economy and efficiency of certain management practices and procedures, including certain financial transactions.

Our methodology included reviewing minutes of meetings, written policies and procedures, financial records, and other pertinent documents; interviewing various personnel of the county; and performing sample testing using haphazard and judgmental selection, as appropriate. The results of our sample testing cannot be projected to the entire populations from which the test items were selected. We obtained an understanding of internal control that is significant to the audit objectives and planned and performed procedures to assess internal control to the extent necessary to address our audit objectives. We also obtained an understanding of legal provisions that are significant within the context of the audit objectives, and we assessed the risk that illegal acts, including fraud, and violations of applicable contract, grant agreement, or other legal provisions could occur. Based on that risk assessment, we designed and performed procedures to provide reasonable assurance of detecting instances of noncompliance significant to those provisions.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The accompanying Organization and Statistical Information is presented for informational purposes. This information was obtained from the county's management and was not subjected to the procedures applied in our audit of the county.

For the areas audited, we identified (1) deficiencies in internal control, (2) noncompliance with legal provisions, and (3) the need for improvement in management practices and procedures. The accompanying Management Advisory Report presents our findings arising from our audit of Vernon County.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Fitzpatrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" and "F".

Scott Fitzpatrick
State Auditor

Vernon County Management Advisory Report State Auditor's Findings

1. Sheriff's Compensation

The County Commission authorized a mid-term salary increase of \$25,434 to the Sheriff in September 2022, retroactive to January 1, 2022, in violation of constitutional provisions and state law. The Sheriff took office in 2021 at the salary level approved by the Vernon County Salary Commission.

Section 57.317.1(2), RSMo, enacted in 2021, states the sheriff shall receive an annual salary computed based on a percentage of the compensation of an associate circuit judge of the county, with the percentage determined by a statutory schedule using the county's current assessed valuation level. The law indicates if the increase to the Sheriff's salary is less than \$10,000, the increase shall take effect January 1, 2022, but if the salary increase is more than \$10,000, the increase shall be paid equally over a 5-year period. However, Article VII, Section 13 of the Missouri Constitution prohibits an increase in compensation for state, county, and municipal officers during the term of office. Court cases have concluded that to receive additional compensation during a term of office there must be: (1) no existing compensation for the office; (2) new or additional duties extrinsic or not germane to the office; or (3) the mid-term increase must result from the application of a statutory formula for calculating compensation that was in place prior to the individual being elected or taking office. None of those circumstances exist; therefore, the increase to the Sheriff's salary should be effective only for any Sheriff elected and sworn into office after the new salary schedule was authorized.

The County Commission indicated it was aware of the constitutional provision preventing mid-term salary increases, but felt required to increase the Sheriff's salary due to the change in state law. The County Commission did not seek a written legal opinion and authorized a salary increase for the Sheriff in September 2022, to be effective retroactively to January 1, 2022. The increase in the Sheriff's salary was \$25,434, which included an increase of \$1,816 due to an increase in pay for associate circuit judges during 2022. Further, the County Commission indicated it was unaware the provision calling for the increase to be spread out over 5 years was mandatory.

Recommendation

The County Commission discontinue the mid-term salary increase and consider various methods for possible recoupment of money already paid.

Auditee's Response

We will discuss this recommendation with the Sheriff and our legal counsel and determine the appropriate action to take.

2. County Collector- Treasurer's Controls and Procedures

Controls and procedures in the County Collector-Treasurer's office need improvement. The County Collector-Treasurer collected approximately \$19 million in property taxes and other receipts during the year ended February 28, 2023.



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

2.1 Bank reconciliations and liabilities

The County Collector-Treasurer does not adequately perform bank reconciliations. Supporting documentation for the book balance used in the reconciliation for the general account is not maintained and the adjusted bank balance calculated in the reconciliation does not represent the available cash balance of the account. In addition, a liabilities list is not prepared and reconciled to the available cash balance in the general account.

Numerous unrecorded or incorrectly recorded deposits, bad checks, and other errors identified in the accounting system, dating back to July 2020, were unresolved and included as reconciling items on the February 28, 2023, bank reconciliation. Rather than making adjustments to only the bank balance for the items that have not cleared the bank as of the statement date, adjustments were made to both the bank and book balance. While the adjusted balances for bank and book records agreed on the reconciliation, this balance does not represent the available cash balance of the account. The reconciliation prepared in the County Collector-Treasurer's accounting system for February 28, 2023, for the general account is shown below:

	Bank	Book
Balance, February 28, 2023	\$ 2,142,932	\$ 8,245,597 ¹
Uncorrected Errors	13,524,074	0
Outstanding checks/wires	0	11,261,881
Deposits in transit	0	(3,840,472)
Adjusted balance, February 28, 2023	\$ 15,667,006	\$ 15,667,006

¹ No support for this amount was provided.

The \$13.5 million in uncorrected errors represents transactions that were processed by the bank for different amounts than recorded in book records, or were transactions that did not clear the bank but are still recorded in the book records. We discussed the various reconciling items with the County Collector-Treasurer. He indicated he needed additional training on operating the accounting system and was unsure how to resolve the reconciling items within the accounting system. We verified the largest item, a wire transfer to a County Treasurer's account totaling \$11,260,812, cleared the bank in February 2023, but had not been marked as cleared in the system. This item was included in the adjustments to the bank and book balances shown above in the amount of outstanding checks/wires. Additionally, 2 deposits making up a majority of the amount of the deposits in transit shown above, one for \$250,000 and one for \$3,567,156, both dated December 8, 2022, were wired to a County Treasurer's account, but were recorded as deposits in this account. The County Collector-Treasurer indicated he believed several other reconciling items had not been cleared in the system, but also indicated some reconciling items would require further review to resolve. He also indicated he would need to determine how the book balance is tracked within the



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

accounting system as he is unsure where the system is pulling the book balance from or how to access it and make corrections.

We requested the County Collector-Treasurer prepare a list of liabilities for the general account as of February 28, 2023. The bank balance at that date was \$2,142,932, but identified liabilities were \$2,174,896, for a difference of \$31,964. The bank reconciliation included a deposit in transit of \$22,782 and \$1,069 in outstanding checks. After adjusting the bank balance for those reconciling items, the balance would have been \$2,164,645, resulting in a shortage of \$10,251. Part of this problem is caused by the County Collector-Treasurer's failure to transfer tax collections timely from the general account to a County Treasurer's account when tax distributions were made, as further explained in section 2.2.

Adequate and accurate bank reconciliations are necessary to ensure all receipts and disbursements are accounted for properly. Without a regular comparison of liabilities to the reconciled cash balance, there is less likelihood errors will be identified and the ability to resolve errors is diminished. Differences must be adequately investigated and explained to provide assurance that bank and book amounts have been properly reconciled, and that book balances are accurately stated.

2.2 Transfers

The County Collector-Treasurer does not have procedures to ensure all tax money received is transferred to his Treasurer's account prior to distribution. The County Collector-Treasurer distributed railroad and utility (RR&U) taxes, totaling \$1,795,761, from a County Treasurer's account in February 2022, but this money had not been transferred from the general tax account to a County Treasurer's account and was still in the general tax account as of February 28, 2023. The County Collector-Treasurer indicated not transferring the RR&U money to a Treasurer's account was an oversight. In addition, \$38,360 in County Employee Retirement Fund (CERF) fees and \$12,580 in county fees, collected between July 2020 and February 2023, were also still in the general tax account as of February 28, 2023. Both of these were distributed or transferred from a County Treasurer's account to the appropriate taxing entity or county fund, but the fees collected had not been transferred to that account from his general tax account. The County Collector-Treasurer indicated he is unsure why the full amount distributed was not transferred, but thought it may have been caused by reviewing the wrong report from the accounting system when making the transfer.

We reviewed tax collections deposited into the general tax account and distribution reports from the tax system for a haphazardly selected month. Collections for June 2022, totaling \$211,324, were distributed to taxing entities on July 12, 2022. However, the County Collector-Treasurer only transferred \$209,718 from the general tax account to the County Treasurer's account making the distributions. The difference of \$1,606, consisted of



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

\$1,080 in CERF fees and \$526 in other county fees. These amounts were part of the total amount of CERF and county fees accumulated in the general tax account of the County Collector-Treasurer.

To reduce the risk of loss, theft, or misuse of money received going undetected, all tax money collected should be transferred timely to the appropriate County Treasurer's account for distribution.

2.3 Withholdings

The County Collector-Treasurer did not properly review the township's tax withholdings and Assessment Fund withholdings calculated by the property tax system to ensure accuracy, and as a result, during the 2 years ended February 29, 2024, the County Collector-Treasurer improperly withheld \$143,835 from 2 townships and withheld \$51,235 more from tax collections for the Assessment Fund than allowed by state law.

Township withholdings

Withholdings were improperly taken from 2 townships' Administrative and Road and Bridge Fund levies in 2022 and 2023, although these townships did not have a Special Road and Bridge levy. Each township is authorized to levy an additional property tax for road and bridge purposes (Special Road and Bridge levy), which is in addition to the townships' Administrative and Road and Bridge levies. The County Collector-Treasurer is authorized to withhold up to 5 cents per \$100 in assessed valuation, at the discretion of the County Commission, in December of each year for any township levying the additional Special Road and Bridge levy. The amount withheld is deposited to the county's Special Road and Bridge Fund.

In December 2022, the County Collector-Treasurer calculated the withholding from each township based on the township's RR&U assessed valuation, rather than the township's total assessed valuation, and withheld \$16,616 from the townships' tax distribution made in January 2023. This error was discovered by the County Collector-Treasurer in April 2023, after his annual settlement had been submitted. In January 2024, the County Collector-Treasurer then recalculated the withholding for 2022 using the 2022 total assessed valuation for each township. This required an additional \$138,553 to be withheld from townships for 2022, along with the \$158,010 withholding for 2023. However, the calculations for both years included withholding amounts from the Center Township and also the Virgil Township that were not assessing a Special Road and Bridge levy. State law authorizes the withholding to be taken only if the additional tax is assessed. As a result, for 2022 and 2023, improper withholdings were taken from the Center and Virgil Townships' Administrative and Road and Bridge levies, totaling \$137,501 and \$6,334, respectively.

Section 137.585.2, RSMo, authorizes the County Collector-Treasurer to retain an amount not to exceed 5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation from each township levying an additional tax for road and bridge purposes. The



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

Assessment withholding
errors

County Collector-Treasurer indicated he was unaware the withholding was limited to townships levying the additional tax.

The County Collector-Treasurer does not use the correct percentages or subsequently reduce the percentage used to calculate amounts withheld from tax collections for the Assessment Fund, and as a result during the 2 years ended February 29, 2024, he withheld \$34,285 more from tax collections for the Assessment Fund than allowed by state law.

The County Collector-Treasurer withheld one and one-quarter percent when the withholding should have been one percent, and withheld one-quarter of one percent when the withholding should have been one-half percent. The County Collector-Treasurer indicated the percentages used were not entered into the property tax system correctly when they began using the current property tax system.

Section 137.720.1, RSMo, requires a one percent commission on ad valorem property tax collections allocable to each taxing authority be deducted from the collections of taxes each year and deposited into the assessment fund of the county. Section 137.720.3, RSMo, requires an additional one-half percent commission. However, Section 137.720.3, RSMo, limits the one-half percent deduction to \$75,000. After this limit is reached, the total percentage used should be reduced. Adequate monitoring and proper calculation of Assessment Fund withholdings is necessary to ensure compliance with statutory provisions.

Recommendations

The County Collector-Treasurer:

- 2.1 Prepare bank reconciliations and lists of liabilities monthly and reconcile the lists to the available cash balances. Any differences, and any old reconciling items, should be promptly investigated and resolved.
- 2.2 Transfer all tax collections from the general tax account to the county treasury timely and transfer amounts currently held in the general tax account that were not previously distributed to the county.
- 2.3 Work with the property tax system vendor to ensure calculations are correct and review the calculations periodically to ensure they are in accordance with state statute. The County Collector-Treasurer should correct distributions to the affected townships, the Special Road and Bridge Fund, and the Assessment Fund.

Auditee's Response

- 2.1 *I agree and will implement this recommendation. I am preparing bank reconciliations and have begun preparing a list of liabilities monthly. I have been working diligently, along with my staff, to*



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

resolve all reconciling items contained in the bank reconciliations and I am working with the system vendor to receive additional training and knowledge of various reports within the system. I am continuing to work towards resolving the old reconciling items within the system. In the future I plan to review bank reconciliations more closely and will investigate any discrepancies more timely. The majority of the old reconciling items have now been resolved and corrected.

2.2 *I determined what caused the previous errors and am now utilizing the correct reports from the system to ensure amounts transferred agree to amounts distributed to taxing entities. The amounts being held within the County Collector-Treasurer general account as of February 28, 2023, have now been distributed to the county.*

2.3 *I agree and will work with the system vendor to ensure system calculation of withholdings are corrected and will review them periodically in the future to ensure compliance with state law. I will discuss the best way to correct the distributions previously made with the County Commission.*

3. Questionable Disbursements

Several disbursements made from the Election Services Fund and the General Revenue Fund during the year ended December 31, 2022, were either inappropriate or inessential to the administration and operation of the County Clerk's office.

The former County Clerk made disbursements from the Election Services Fund for \$611 for headphones as gifts for his employees, \$530 for a cell phone signal booster for his home, and \$90 for flowers for an election worker involved in a car wreck. The current County Clerk indicated the cell phone booster was necessary so the former County Clerk could be reached regarding election issues after hours. She also indicated the county was currently not in possession of the phone booster.

Disbursements made by the former County Clerk from the General Revenue Fund included \$3,125 for \$25 gift cards for employee Christmas gifts, \$311 for retirement gifts for himself and the former Presiding Commissioner, \$457 for food for an employee Christmas party, and \$160 for a heated vest. The gift cards were purchased from a local grocery store. Adequate records were not maintained to support the distribution of gift cards to employees. The current County Clerk indicated the county originally purchased 95 gift cards, but after distributing them, numerous county employees indicated they did not receive one, so another 30 gift cards were purchased. She was unsure of the circumstances surrounding the purchase of the other items.

Public funds should be spent only on items necessary and beneficial to the county. County residents have placed a fiduciary trust in their public officials



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

to spend county revenues in a prudent and necessary manner. In addition, Article VI, Sections 23 and 25 of the Missouri Constitution, prohibits the granting of public funds to benefit private individuals.

Recommendation

The County Clerk and County Commission ensure all disbursements are legal, necessary and prudent uses of public funds. In addition, ensure county property is accounted for and retained in the county's possession.

Auditee's Response

We agree and will ensure all disbursements are appropriate and necessary for the conduct of county business. The County Clerk indicated she will ensure any future purchases are considered county property and will be accounted for and retained in the county's possession.

4. County Procedures

Property tax reductions were not sufficient to offset 50 percent of sales tax money received and controls and procedures for maintaining closed minutes of County Commission meetings need improvement.

4.1 Sales tax rollback

The County Clerk did not accurately calculate the property tax reduction in 2020 and 2021 for the difference between estimated and actual sales tax collected in the prior year. Actual sales tax collections exceeded estimated sales tax collections in 2019 and 2020. Rather than increasing the reduction requirement in 2020 and 2021 by the excess sales tax collections in the prior year, the County Clerk decreased the reduction requirement in both years. As a result, the general revenue property tax levies were incorrectly calculated for 2020 and 2021. These errors resulted in collection of approximately \$71,000 and \$97,000, in excess property tax revenues in those years, respectively. This adjustment was done correctly when setting levies for 2022 and 2023, and the property tax reductions in both those years were more than required by a total of approximately \$45,000, resulting in decreases in the accumulated excess property tax revenue. As of December 31, 2023, cumulative excess property tax revenue collections totaled approximately \$123,000. The County Commission indicated the calculation of the prior years' difference was inadvertently shown as a negative number, which caused the reduction requirement to be decreased, rather than increased.

Section 67.505, RSMo, requires the county to reduce property taxes for a percentage of sales taxes collected. Vernon County voters enacted a one-half cent sales tax with a provision to reduce property taxes by 50 percent of sales taxes collected. The county is required to estimate the annual property tax levies to meet the 50 percent reduction requirement and provide for an adjustment for actual sales tax collections of the preceding year that are more or less than the estimate for the preceding year. Decreasing instead of increasing the current year reduction requirement when the prior year sales tax collections exceeded estimates results in an insufficient reduction in the general revenue property tax levy. By properly adjusting the current year calculations for prior year differences in sales tax collections, the County



Vernon County
Management Advisory Report - State Auditor's Findings

Commission and County Clerk can ensure property tax reductions are accurately calculated.

4.2 Closed session minutes

County officials could not locate minutes for 2 of the 6 closed meetings the County Commission held between January 1, 2022 and May 31, 2023. The County Clerk indicated that upon taking office in January 2023 she attempted to locate all minutes but was unsuccessful for 2 of the closed meetings held in 2022. Section 610.020.7, RSMo, requires minutes of open and closed meetings be maintained as a record of business conducted and to provide an official record of actions and decisions taken, and that minutes be retained.

Recommendations

The County Commission:

4.1 Work with the County Clerk to properly calculate property tax reductions and correct the accumulation of prior years' insufficient property tax levy reductions.

4.2 Ensure minutes are prepared and retained for all closed meetings.

Auditee's Response

4.1 *We agree and will work with the County Clerk to ensure property tax reductions are calculated correctly in the future. We will determine the accumulated deficiency in the rollback when calculating the 2025 levy reduction and will adjust the calculations to correct for the prior years' errors.*

4.2 *We will ensure this does not happen in the future and are now retaining minutes for all closed meetings.*

5. County Clerk's Controls and Procedures

The County Clerk does not issue receipt slips for all money received or restrictively endorse checks upon receipt. Receipts for notary fees and liquor licenses totaled approximately \$14,000 during the year ended December 31, 2022.

During a May 16, 2023, cash count we noted receipt slips were not issued for 8 notary fee payments, and 2 checks were not restrictively endorsed. The County Clerk indicated receipts slips are only issued if requested and that she was not aware a restrictive endorsement was required since receipts are transmitted to the County Collector-Treasurer.

Failure to implement adequate receipting procedures increases the risk that loss, theft, or misuse of money received will occur and go undetected.

Recommendation

The County Clerk issue prenumbered receipt slips immediately for all money received, and restrictively endorse all checks upon receipt.

Auditee's Response

This has been implemented. We are issuing prenumbered receipt slips for all money received and are endorsing all checks and money orders upon receipt.



6. Electronic Communication Policy

The county has not developed a records management and retention policy that includes electronic communication in compliance with the Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division guidance, as approved by the Missouri Local Records Commission. This guidance recommends government entities have a policy on electronic messaging, including text messages, email, and other third party platforms.

Section 109.270, RSMo, provides that all records made or received by an official in the course of his/her public duties are public property and are not to be disposed of except as provided by law. Section 109.255, RSMo, provides that the Local Records Board issue directives for the destruction of records. The guidelines for managing electronic communications records can be found on the Secretary of State's website.¹

Development of a written policy to address the use of electronic communications is necessary to ensure all documentation of official business of the county is retained as required by state law. The Commission indicated it was unaware of the record retention requirements and the electronic communications guidelines.

Recommendation

The County Commission work with other county officials to develop a written records management and retention policy to address electronic communications management and retention to comply with Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division electronic communications guidelines.

Auditee's Response

We will work with the County Clerk and other officials to create an appropriate records management and retention policy which addresses retention of election communications, in accordance with the Secretary of State guidelines.

¹ Missouri Secretary of State Records Services Division, *Electronic Communications Records Guidelines for Missouri Government*, May 14, 2019, is available at <<https://www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/LocalRecords/CommunicationsGuidelines.pdf>>, accessed April 25, 2024.

Vernon County

Organization and Statistical Information

Vernon County is a township-organized, third-class county. The county seat is Nevada. The county's population was 19,707 in 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Vernon County's government is composed of a three-member county commission and separate elected officials performing various tasks. All elected officials serve 4-year terms. The county commission has mainly administrative duties in setting tax levies, appropriating county funds, appointing board members and trustees of special services, accounting for county property, maintaining county bridges, and performing miscellaneous duties not handled by other county officials. Principal functions of these other officials relate to law enforcement, property assessment, property tax collections, conduct of elections, and maintenance of financial and other records important to the county's citizens. In addition to elected officials, the county employed 105 full-time employees on December 31, 2022. The 20 townships within the county maintain county roads.

Elected Officials

The elected officials and their compensation paid for the year ended December 31 (except as noted) are indicated below:

Officeholder	2023	2022
Joe Hardin, Presiding Commissioner	\$	38,696
Everette Wolfe, Associate Commissioner		36,140
Cindy Thompson, Associate Commissioner		36,140
Shelly Baldwin, Recorder of Deeds		54,757
Sean M. Buehler, County Clerk		54,757
Brandi McInroy, Prosecuting Attorney		150,035
Jason M. Mosher, Sheriff		82,519
David L. Ferry, County Coroner		19,038
Kelsey Westerhold, Public Administrator		54,757
Brent Banes, County Collector-Treasurer, year ended March 31, (1)	82,854	
Lena Kleeman, County Assessor, year ended August 31, (2)		57,157

(1) Includes \$28,097 of commissions earned for collecting city property taxes.

(2) Includes \$2,400 received from the City of Nevada for assessment of property within the city.