

Gunstream looks to expedite Trust property process

**Tommy Mann Jr.
For The Record**

In an effort to get properties back onto Orange County tax rolls, a change is being made to streamline the process in which it is normally done.

Lynda Gunstream, Orange County Tax Assessor-Collector, is no stranger to the process of dealing with Trust properties the long, drawn-out process of getting those properties back onto the county tax roll once they have been purchased. However, Gunstream is actively working to reduce the amount of time it takes to return properties to tax roll.

This past week Gunstream visited the City of Bridge City to visit with City Councilmembers and inform them of her current effort, which is to obtain permission in advance from city council, through the form a resolution, to accept valid offers to purchase properties held in trust for tax resale pursuant to delinquent tax foreclosures.

"The main goal of this is to get these properties back on the tax roll," Gunstream said. "But, as it is, this process can take a long time."

When the county receives a valid offer for a foreclosed property, Gunstream will present the offer to Orange County Commissioners Court for approval to accept the offer. Once the offer is accepted by Commissioners Court, Gunstream must visit with the other taxing units involved and get their permission for approval.

"If we miss a board meeting, depending on when they hold their meetings, it could be another whole month before I can go to their next meeting," she explained. "Summertime can slow the process down too, especially with school districts."

According to its official website, the Orange County Tax Office collects property taxes for 21 taxing jurisdictions in Orange County. These include the county of Orange, a port district, a drainage district, eight cities, five school dis-



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tricts, four emergency service districts and a water district.

Although the governing body of each taxing unit sets its own budget and tax rate, the Orange County Tax Office is responsible for the consolidation and collection of those taxes.

The county and tax office occasionally have public property sales in hopes of being able to sell a property which the county has acquired somehow and is hoping a buyer will purchase the property and get it back on the tax roll.

"We will not just take anything they offer," Gunstream added. "We want to make sure the offer at least covers the court costs associated with the property, but we do want to sell it as quickly as possible. We've had some Trust properties sit for 10 years or longer before they sold. Some properties aren't as desirable as others."

Gunstream said the City of Orange has participated in this quicker approval process for a few years now. Recently, along with the City of Bridge City, the City of Pinehurst and City of West Orange have both agreed to the quicker approval process, as has the Orange County Drainage District and Orange County Emergency Services District 2.

Gunstream still has several tax unit groups to visit, but she is confident those tax units will participate as well because they all have the same objectives.

"We all want to get these properties back on the tax roll because that means more money for the county and each tax unit," Gunstream said. "We are talking about eliminating a lot of extra time through this process and that will just be to the benefit of everyone."