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Merging County Offices: Efficiency and Fiscal Responsibility

Voters in Douglas and Hall County will have the unique opportunity to downsize government this November as their ballots will include the option to merge the offices of county assessors and registers of deeds.[\[1\]](#)

The duties of these offices both deal with property: the register of deeds maintains and preserves all county property records and title transfers while the county assessor establishes property values for tax purposes.[\[2\]](#)

A merger makes fiscal and organizational sense. The duties of each office would still be fulfilled but they will be under one elected official instead of two. It is estimated that a merger in Douglas County would save taxpayers approximately \$180,000 annually.[\[3\]](#)

Douglas and Hall are not the first to consider merging these offices; Buffalo, Cass, and Saunders County have all considered similar proposals recently, and Cass County discussed merging the county assessor with the county clerk's office.[\[4\]](#)

While these other counties have not yet enacted the proposal, Douglas and Hall do have a model to emulate. In 2000 Lancaster County voters approved the merger of the county assessor and register of deeds by a margin of more than four to one. Lancaster County has been able to save taxpayer money with no disruption of services; one Lancaster official even called the merger "seamless."[\[5\]](#) The Lancaster operation was also able to improve its efficiency, cross-training its employees to be able to handle additional duties, allowing for a reduction in staff following the 2003 merger.

Both Douglas and Hall would have to structure a merger in the way as to meet the needs of their county - but it is clear that merging county offices saves taxpayer money and enables government services to be more efficient. Just as importantly, voters have a local example that has been a great success. The choice to merge these offices lies with the voters, but hopefully they will choose to shrink government in the name of efficiency and fiscal responsibility.

[1]George Ayoub, "Consolidated vote, inspector general, long time snoopers," *Grand Island Independent*, June 20, 2012. Available at <http://www.theindependent.com/opinion/georgeayoub/consolidated->