



County of Hamilton

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THE RECORD OF A COMMON SENSE AUDITOR

Following is a review of my record of service as County Auditor since 1991. I believe it worthy of review and recording on this page. Thanks to Hamilton County voters for their continuing confidence.

Having spent a majority of my working life in the private sector and financial services industry, I was well grounded in the principles of fiscal responsibility when I was elected to this important office.

My first task was to restore confidence in property valuations after the "Friends of Joe" scandal. I removed political considerations from appraisals, set training and certification goals for our appraisal staff and notified property owners of their tentative new values so they could informally review and provide a check on our work.

Then I established our Finance Department as an independent check and balance on every county department for which we make payments. By writing the County's checks, we see questionable vouchers. In one case, our refusal to pay for a reported 650 mile round trip to Cleveland (which is about 225 miles from here) brought significant, lasting changes in county travel policies that we helped write.

Ours was one of the first metropolitan areas in the country to have a property search website. By making property records available 24/7 we have reduced the opportunity for corruption and saved countless trips to our office by professionals who use our information every day. The website allows us to communicate with citizens and even provides estimates of individual costs of proposed new tax levies.

We were the first to post our expenditures on line, pre-dating Ohio's Open Checkbook by a decade. Over the past few years, we added a mobile app to our website and set up an E-filing program for property transfers.

I founded the Auditor's Computer Center, saving over \$1 million a year in fees to the old Regional Computer Center right from the start. Our IT Department is one of the best in the region,

constantly updating our service. We are often called for rescue type services, most recently from the Coroner's office and the County Commissioners.

I led the way in efficiency and cost savings by cutting our staff from 173 to today's 78 through attrition and cross-training. By planning ahead we were able to avoid cutbacks and layoffs that other County departments suffered when the economy and County resources tanked in 2008.

My commitment to respecting taxpayer's money made me the very first Hamilton County Auditor to return unspent funds to local communities, school districts and other taxing entities. The Real Estate Assessment Fund comes from a small portion of every levy. I could have legally spent every penny. This year I returned \$14 million bringing the total I have given back to \$49.7 million.

\$49.7 million. It could have disappeared into the bureaucracy. It did not.

County government is a limited government, an agent of the state. I respect that role and my place in it. Over the years I have never heard a citizen say, "Dusty, what we need is bigger government and more of it" nor an independent elected official say, "Dusty, I need you to make my office's decisions for me."

I have blown the whistle and sounded the alarm for years on misplaced priorities when it comes to county spending. The County, contrary to the belief of some, is not the economic development engine for Hamilton County. The private sector is – when government gets out of the way.

County Commissions are the appropriating authority for the County. They are the ones who spend the money. It is the State of Ohio and previous County Commissions that are responsible for the county's financial position today. These are the facts. If someone has a hitherto undiscovered solution, without raising taxes, I am sure the Commissioners would be happy to hear it.

Meanwhile, the County Auditor's office will assuredly be on the field and in the game every day doing the heavy lifting for every county office and providing the information and service they must have to fulfill their responsibilities.

Dusty Rhodes