



Property Online - New and Improved

On September 30, 2005, a new release of Property Online containing many changes and enhancements was put into production. These changes come from requests and suggestions made by our users over the past year and from our commitment to make the system more user-friendly.

In some cases, the changes were implemented to re-organize, in a more intuitive and logical way, how data is entered by the submitter. This is particularly true in the changes made to adding interests relating to benefits and burdens. As a result, the process to enter these types of interests has been simplified significantly.

In addition, several minor improvements were made to rename existing fields, reformat reports and to make it easier for our submitters to track their system notifications and AFRs. Additional information is viewable in the parcel register.

The following are the AFR and Property Online changes recently implemented:

- Streamlining of entry of benefits, burdens and their associated PIDs on the AFR;
- Ability to add names and addresses of Nova Scotia Farm Loan occupiers to AFRs and revision documents. These appear in the parcel register and on Statements of Registered and Recorded Interests (SRIs);
- Bundle numbers and parcel relationships are viewable in the parcel register;

- Textual qualifications have been moved to a separate section of the AFR and the expiry date has been removed;
- The term “Enterprise” has been replaced by “Company/Entity” throughout the system;
- A “User Supplied Reference” field was added to the AFR, all associated system notices, as well as the AFR View Notification screen;
- A “View All Related PIDs History” button was added to show all traditional documents coded against **all** parcels related to the parcel of interest;
- System generated SRIs have been reformatted to be easier to read;
- The AFR worksheet is now sorted by status with IN PROCESS AFRs listed first; and
- If a PDCA is approved pending a correcting description, only one notice will be sent to the authorized user.

An e-mail notice describing more details of these changes was sent out to all users. The e-mail provided the access link to a new online tutorial which we have developed to help users understand the process to be followed when adding benefits and burdens.

Please call our Help Desk at 1-866-518-4540 for additional information.

Paper or Electronic? Pilot Users Prefer E-Submission

The E-submission Pilot Project was launched on June 13, 2005 for a small group of law firms in the Halifax area. The rate of e-submissions picked up in July – one of the busiest months ever for the Halifax Land Registration Office (LRO) – and as of October 12, 2005 more than 611 documents have been electronically submitted. Pilot users have now begun to realize some benefits of the e-submission process.

After using the new system for just one month, a busy legal assistant in one of the pilot law firms noted that even with the extra step of scanning documents, “My preference would be e-submission. There is more control over your work and the ability to complete it.” Law firms can better control their work because:

- Once an e-submitted document is registered, the required documentation can be sent to the bank/lender and the file closed within days of the submission. Paper documents must go through additional steps of scanning and quality control at the LRO before being mailed back to the submitter (a delay of up to two months in Halifax).
- There is no more reliance on couriers to deliver documents and wait for a receipt to ensure that the document is indexed. As soon as a document is e-submitted, it is indexed. Courier costs are therefore virtually eliminated with e-submission.
- The gap in sub-searching is eliminated. A real time sub-search can be done seconds before the document is e-submitted.

After some refinements to the new e-submission procedures (and some adjustments to the paper-free process), Halifax LRO staff members are also seeing the positive effects of e-submission. Kim MacKay Jollimore, Assistant Deputy Registrar, says, “Because the lawyer’s e-form is pre-populated with the parcel register information, there are far fewer rejections, which speeds things up for us.” Other process streamlining for the LRO due to e-submission include:

- Elimination of duplicate keying from the prescribed form;
- Reduction of paper and funds handling at the front counter; and
- Decrease of scanning, quality control and document mail-back.

As the volume of e-submissions increases and front counter document indexing decreases, staff can focus on reducing delays in the back counter verification

process, as well as back scanning of documents in the vault and other process improvements.

Feedback from the pilot group will now be used to enhance the e-submission system prior to provincial roll-out in spring 2006. Initially, e-submission will not be mandatory, however, once more users are familiar with the e-submission process and more forms are available for electronic submission, the process will become mandatory.

You are Cordially Invited ... to Participate in our E-Submission Pilot

After fine-tuning the e-submission process with our early pilot users, we would now like to extend an invitation to other law firms to participate in the ongoing pilot in HRM. If you are an authorized lawyer who submits deeds, mortgages or releases of mortgage to the Halifax LRO and would like to become an e-submission user, we’d like to hear from you by October 30, 2005. Electronic submissions will still be limited to land registration parcels in Halifax County (until provincial rollout in early 2006), but lawyers from any county who perform real property transactions in Halifax are welcome to participate.

E-submission is so simple to use that the Online E-submission Tutorial, coming to our website in late October, will be all users need to become familiar with the system and processes. However, new pilot members will be offered training sessions on the mechanics of the e-submission process, providing an opportunity to see what the screens look like, how to navigate them, and how to use the features on the Pure Edge forms. Notification of available sessions will be sent to new pilot users in late October or early November.

Please send an expression of interest to Marie-Louise Vieira via email at vieiraml@gov.ns.ca or phone (902) 424-4084 and include your phone number, the name of your firm and names of all authorized lawyers who would like to participate. While we hope to accommodate as many new e-submitters as possible, for practical support purposes during the pilot, we may need to limit the number of new users. All those who submit an expression of interest will be contacted within a few weeks.

Coming to an Office Near You – 60 Years of Documents!

As part of the Registry 2000 vision to provide electronic access to land registration information, we have launched a project to scan 60 years of legacy papers province-wide and make them available through Property Online. Mike Jacklyn of the Halifax Land Registration Office is leading this initiative, selecting and working with a team of more than 10 casual workers who will be employed in scanning teams across the province.

Over the past several months, we have developed and tested new scanning software that allows bulk scanning of registry vault books and creates the link between the scanned images and Property Online's Registration Search Index (the online version of the GGI). In early August, the first of these scanned images (Halifax Registry Vault Books 6236 to 6255) was launched into production. These scanned images look identical to the scanned images created today for new documents and will be accessible in the same manner.

The first five casuals are now set up and hard at work in Halifax LRO boardroom. They are able to scan approximately 12 to 15 books per day and load them into Property Online. The team has started by scanning the documents recorded between 1997 and the start of daily scanning in March 2005. Once these books are online, the team will start scanning backwards from 1983 to 1945. This covers almost all of the books currently located in the registry vault.

The Registry 2000 team is also working to convert the 15 years of scanned documents registered between late 1983 and 1997 in Halifax that are now only accessible in person at the LRO via the Optex system and make them available through Property Online. When this phase is completed later this year, Halifax documents from late 1983 to present will be available through Property Online in the same manner that scanned images are accessed online today.

Once the Halifax scanning initiative has developed a smooth process and worked out all of the necessary routines for ensuring the work progresses smoothly, Mike will be setting up scanning teams in other LROs. Software enhancements have been implemented to simplify the legacy scanning process for staff in smaller LROs. This allows them to call up the GGI index for an entire book, making it easier to scan entire document books using their regular scanning equipment. This means that in addition to the casual scanning team performing high volume scanning, local LRO staff have started to scan legacy documents and load them into Property Online. The work will continue through the fall and winter, as time permits.

The Registry 2000 team is also investigating what would be involved in scanning all of the plans that are on file in the registries and also in determining whether it would be possible to accept plans electronically. Look for further updates in the next issue of this newsletter.

The Nova Scotia Civic Address File

A New Addition to Property Online

The Nova Scotia Civic Address File (NSCAF) is one of the five primary geographic databases that Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations (SNSMR) is responsible for building, maintaining and disseminating on behalf of Nova Scotians. The NSCAF consists of a common map representation of all roads (road network) and associated building (civic) location information for the province.

Participation and assistance in building the NSCAF has been widespread, involving partnerships across three levels of government. These partnerships, particularly with municipalities who play a key maintenance role, will be critical to the successful maintenance and improvement of civic address information over time. They are responsible to review existing community boundaries, supply existing civic

addressing data, and develop a NSCAF maintenance process. SNSMR is responsible for overall management and technical organization. Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) and Transportation and Public Works (TPW) are also key stakeholders, along with the federal government, native bands and other departments.

The development of the NSCAF began in earnest in fiscal 2000-2001. Much preparatory work had been done previous to that time, including the development of a concept and subsequent pilot project between 1997 and 1999 to prove the concept. The initial building of the NSCAF was completed in the fall of 2004. The Department's current focus is to establish maintenance processes with all municipal partners and to improve the quality and integrity of the NSCAF data over time.

Continued

One of the major utilizations of the completed NSCAF is to support emergency service delivery throughout the province. The file is being used to support 911 call-taker facilities as well as fire, ambulance and police services and facilities. Other uses for the NSCAF include the improvement of civic address information in various department applications, such as Property Online. Until recently, Property Online did not get its parcel civic addresses from the NSCAF database. This changed on October 2, 2005 when the HRM civic address data was loaded into Property Online.

Other municipal units that will be loaded this fall include Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Guysborough County, Inverness County, Richmond County, and Victoria County. This is the first step in the important process of synchronizing parcel addresses in Property Online with those in the NSCAF database.

In 2006/2007, all participating municipalities will update civic address data into Property Online through an automated interface between Property Online and NSCAF. All civic address data for participating municipalities will be automatically loaded into Property Online on a regularly scheduled basis. Also, changes will be made to the Property Online application to clearly indicate when a parcel's address has been assigned by the municipality.

Many municipal units are actively re-naming existing streets to give uniqueness to street names. The main reason is to avoid ambiguity and confusion when Emergency Services are responding to a 911 call. POL users should note that the former street names will not be searchable in Property Online after the above updating process begins.

Stay tuned for future updates as we proceed with our phased implementation: visit the project web site at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/land/projects/civic/>.

Cleaning Out the Clutter



Throughout the implementation of the new land registration system across Nova Scotia, the Registry 2000 web site has served as a town crier, describing the objectives of the project, announcing various stages as they developed and apprising the stakeholders of its progress as each goal was realized.

This year marks a turning point for the land registration system, as it transforms from a project to an operational reality. In the past, information has been available on four primary sites:

- **Property Registration** contains information about the Registry of Deeds system, the Personal Property Registry and a link to the Geographic Information site (where you can find details about aerial photos, map products and other geographic information);
- **Registry 2000** has been the primary source of information about the project;
- **Land Registration** was established after the new system was first rolled out in Colchester County and provides information on training, procedures, Registrar General directives, forms, and other vital information for users; and
- **Property Online** provides a gateway to Property Online, information for new users on how to subscribe, and details on the benefits and features of the new system.

Upcoming Web Site Changes

These four sites were interlinked so that users could jump from one site to another as needed. As the system rolled out across the province, the amount of information on the sites grew by leaps and bounds; users sometimes needed to bounce from site to site to find just the right bit of information.

With the completion of the final rollout on March 1, 2005, some of those web pages no longer have an important role to play. Others have become a daily resource for users. A review by project team members of hits made on all parts of our website and feedback on what information users find most useful determined which web pages are least effective and which are essential and need to be enhanced.

Over the summer, project team members re-designed the sites to make them relevant for users today. Some web pages have already been updated, but the major re-vamp will happen this fall, with the end result being a simplified, streamlined web source of land registration system information. When that happens, users may find that some of their favourite pages have been moved and will have to be re-bookmarked.

The changes to our website will ensure that it continues to be a valuable resource for users of the land registration system. Rest assured that the most utilized pages will remain in place. If you cannot find information where it once was posted, or you have a well-used link that seems to have disappeared, please call the Property Online Help Line at 1-866-518-4640.

Business Continuity Planning: All Systems Are Go!

“Property Online is not currently available. We are working to correct the problem.” This is a message no user wants to receive and no SNSMR staff member likes to send. Unfortunately, as the government and users rely more and more on the proper and continuous functioning of our complex technology systems to complete business transactions, these messages become a part of our life. With this increased dependence on technology, the focus of business continuity is shifting away from manual processes toward a greater investment in system continuity, efficient recovery, and communication plans.

It takes many experts to keep complex systems like the land registration system and Property Online up and running and to ensure optimum performance, data integrity and security at all times. Information Management Services (IMS), Corporate Information Technology Operations (CITO) and the land registration technology team work closely together to reduce the risk of a land registration system outage and to recover quickly when an outage does occur.

Safe Storage

The land registration support system is robust and the probability of failure within an individual hardware component is very low. The servers used for the database and application services each have four processors and if an individual processor fails, the other three will continue to operate. As well, each server has dual power supplies, allowing the server to function normally if an individual power unit fails. The web services are provided by two machines, eliminating a single point of failure at that level of the application. Similarly, the Property Online application runs on two servers in parallel, again eliminating a single failure point. All land registration servers are housed in the Provincial Data Centre. Designed to ensure the continued operation of servers supporting business critical applications, this facility contains a backup generator, fire detection and suppression systems, and physical security to limit building access.

Protecting the Data

In the case of a significant failure, the greatest recovery focus is on ensuring data is not lost. Data is continuously duplicated through backup and recovery processes which were tested as part of preparation for implementing the new technology. In addition to this, data is written to two locations on mirrored data disks.

If a data disk cannot be read, the system will access information from the second location, with no impact on service. If a critical server failure occurs, and a replacement is required, a server can be taken from the test environment and be ready in production in one day. A system actively monitors all land registration servers and pages technical team members when servers are not performing as expected. This allows early diagnosis of any event that may require attention and, when dealt with promptly, resolves the event prior to its impacting users.

Lessons Learned

Since the start of land registration operations in March 2003, three events have occurred that stopped land registration users from accessing the applications for all, or a significant portion, of a day. From these events, lessons were learned and changes made in backup and recovery, internal escalation processes and server maintenance that reduces the chance of a system outage and lessens recovery times when an outage occurs. Other options for reducing the risk of a system outage and decreasing recovery times are being investigated. One option is a second set of servers located at a separate site that can be used if the servers at the data centre fail. Decisions on system continuity improvements are dependent on the cost benefit of the change.

Business Continuity

As part of the transition from project to operations, the system continuity and recovery processes currently in place for the land registration system are being reviewed to determine if changes or additions are required. Using the knowledge of actual work flows and volumes, and considering the features available in new technology, SNSMR is looking at whether current plans should be adjusted to reduce risks of a system outage. Plans will also be included for events that are not systems related, such as localized power outages, building malfunctions, and natural disasters.

Part of this business continuity and recovery review will include plans for events that are not systems related. Each office's plan for site specific issues (a localized power outage or building malfunctions) and province-wide plans for natural disasters are to be compiled as well and will be included in the overall Business Continuance Plan.

Continued

Communication is Key

One of the most crucial parts of any system outage or disaster recovery plan is the communications plan for notifying key people – staff, clients, and those who will be involved in the recovery – of system problems and expected down time. Once the diagnosis has been made, the cause of the problem and any abilities to reduce the risk of future interruptions is communicated. To date, our communications plans and processes have worked very well and continue to be our primary focus when the system fails.

Are Manual Processes Practical?

When the new technology used to support the new land registration system was implemented, it was recognized that maintaining manual contingency processes would require a large effort. Budget and resources are better used to continually improve the technology infrastructure, thus reducing the risks of a system outage and decreasing recovery times, than to keep manual processes in place in an attempt to continue business when a system outage occurs.

Electronic processes such as Traditional Document Searching, Viewing of Scanned Images, Submitting PDCAs and AFRs, Searching for Land Registration Documents in Process, and Reviewing the Parcel Register would require a huge effort to replace the systems with manual or paper processes. Paper processes would also leave lawyers and other users exposed to liabilities because proper searching would be incomplete or not possible.

Thankfully, we have not experienced a prolonged system outage and our efforts will continue to be placed on reducing the risks of system failure. However, in the event of a prolonged system outage, many decisions need to be made such as:

- Is it more practical to close the LRO?
- What standards for practising lawyers need to be in place?
- How do we prepare for “catch up” when the system is back up?

Ongoing discussions will be held with the NSBS and other stakeholders to finalize the business continuance plans for the land registration system over the next few months.

Reducing the PDCA Queue

Land Registration Office staff province-wide have done a tremendous job this summer of meeting the three-day PDCA and 24-hour AFR turnaround times.

In Halifax, staff (with the assistance of mappers from other regions) kept on top of a PDCA queue that exceeded 600 applications per day several times this summer. Registrar General Mark Coffin plus Jan McNenly and Kevin Blades (head office staff responsible for policy and procedures) were also pressed into service to process correcting PDCAs in Halifax.

This opportunity showed them that most correcting descriptions were able to be processed without delays or hitches. Submitters generally corrected the issues that were raised by the mappers on initial application and noted the corrections in the comments field of the PDCA. Even so, a portion of the correcting descriptions had to be rejected for a variety of reasons:

- Re-submission of the original description without any corrections;
- Submission of the corrected description without noting what was changed;
- Making a new error while correcting the initial error;
- Repeating a derivative of the initial error by mistyping the correction.

Errors on correcting PDCAs are frustrating for the submitters and SNSMR staff alike. They also serve to make the PDCA queue longer than necessary. All PDCA submitters should carefully review their correcting descriptions to ensure no new errors have been made. This allows the PDCAs to be processed quickly and the turnaround time to be minimized.

Nova Scotia Barristers' Society LRA Education

The next Nova Scotia Barristers' Society Land Registration Act Education Program is scheduled for November 1 and 2, 2005 in the NSBS classroom at 1660 Hollis Street, Halifax, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. Modules 1 to 4 are mandatory for lawyers who wish to become eligible to work in the land registration system. Legal assistants, title searchers and surveyors are encouraged to attend Modules 1 to 3. The registration fee for lawyers is \$750 plus HST and for all others it is \$150 plus HST.

To register, please visit the NSBS web site at www.nsbs.ns.ca and link to LRA Education Program Info. Space is limited. Please visit this site often for information on upcoming refresher sessions for those already working in the new system.

For more information, contact Dianne E. Paquet, Professional Development Instructor, by email at dpaquet@nsbs.org or by phone at 422-1491.