



## Deed Search Toolkit: How to research a property owner

While a title search by an attorney may be advised further into the process, you can do your own search in the deed books located in the County Clerk's office. Also try searching the Grantee/Grantor Index. It may be useful to search the information available through the Assessor's Office.

This tool includes:

- Information about deed searches
- How to go about a search
- A checklist for the search
- West Virginia regional resources to obtain property information
- A process flow diagram

### Deed Search: the Basics

#### *What is a title search?*

A title search is the retrieval of documents that correspond to the history of a piece of property. These documents help determine the relevant interests in the property as well as any encumbrances on the property.

#### *Why is a title search important?*

A title search is important to your deed research process because it is crucial to identify the relevant stakeholders associated with the property. We want to involve them in our process, and encourage their cooperation. Also, legally it is important for us to find any liens, multiple owners, or encumbrances on the property as early as possible.

#### *Mechanics of a Title Search*

A title examination determines what is included in a piece of property, and how many owners are associated with a specific tract of land. A title examination is essentially a look into the history of the property. When performed by certified title examiners or lawyers, a title is usually examined 60 years prior to the current date. However, we are asking you to find current information, not the entire historical ownership of the property. Pay special attention if there are documents that concern the mineral rights to a property, or an easement on the land, as these are common in West Virginia.

#### *What information do I need to have to find a deed?*

You can have a variety of pieces of information and still be able to locate the correct deed. What is important is determining the proper county official to contact, depending on the information you have on the property. If you have the parcel number of the property, the tax I.D. number, or physical address of

the property you should first contact the County Assessor, who will be able to provide you with the deed book and page based off the tax records for the property. If you already know the deed book and page number of the property, know a current owner, or past owner you should contact the County Clerk who can use the deed books, or grantor/grantee indices to locate the correct deed. If you don't have any of this information regarding the property, contact the County Clerk for more specific directions on the next steps in your search.

#### *Where do I find the deed?*

The deed can be found at your local County Courthouse. They are most commonly stored adjacent to the County Clerk's office, but occasionally is in the basement of the courthouse. Ask the secretary in the Clerk's office for the location in your county.

#### *What if there are additional documents accompanying the deed?*

If you happen to find additional documents accompanying the deed of the property you need only take note of what the documents are and the date they became effective. It may mean that we need to look further into the status of the property, or hire a lawyer to make sure the title is clear of encumbrances.

#### *Online Resources:*

<http://www.publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/WestVirginia.htm>

<http://www.wvpropertytaxes.com/>

WV Secretary of State's Office searchable database: [www.sos.wv.gov/Pages/online-services.aspx](http://www.sos.wv.gov/Pages/online-services.aspx)

Note: While online sources are quick and easy the only way to make sure the information is 100% accurate is to go to the county courthouse and do the research yourself!

# Volunteer Checklist for BAD Building's Deed Search

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTACH PHOTO

Vacant property address: \_\_\_\_\_

Survey completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Current Owner</b>	
<b>Current Owner Contact Info.</b>	
<b>Legal Discription</b>	
<b>Deed Book &amp; Page Number</b>	
<b>Parcel Number</b>	
<b>Tax ID Number</b>	
<b>Copy of Deed (yes/no if attached)</b>	
<b>Attachments to Deed (if yes, give detail)</b>	

**What do I have? What do I need?  
Where can I get it?**

