

DIGITIZING RECORDS COULD TAKE 'YEARS'

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by Jim Herrin

Putnam County Circuit Court Clerk Jennifer Wilkerson knows that she has a sizable job ahead of her.

"If you look at the basement (of the Justice Center) in the room where the files are stored, it's a massive amount of paper files," she said.



(Pictured: District 1 Commissioner Jonathan A.D. Williams talks to students from a Cookeville High School government class after Monday's county commission meeting).

Following approval Monday by the Putnam County Commission to spend \$11,000 on a software upgrade, Wilkerson plans to take the next step toward converting all of those files to a digital format.

"This is the final phase, hopefully, of actually purchasing (software)," she said. "The next thing will be to implement all the documents coming in being scanned. That may take a number of years."

She said digitizing makes more sense.

"All criminal procedures, by statute, are permanent records. You can't get rid of them," Wilkerson said. "If we didn't do something, eventually we were going to get to a point where we couldn't build a room big enough to maintain files."

Even with the update, Wilkerson said it could take "years" to get decades worth of records converted.

"The first thing will be to start on new files, new cases that are coming through," she said. "After we get a good handle on that, we'll start working our back through the old files. I still have records from the 1890s."

She has not yet requested additional staffing to address the backlog.

"As of right now, we're going to do what we can with the people we have on staff," she said. "We've sort of talked about what do we do moving forward. How fast is that going to go? How fast can one or two people in the office actually scan?"

She doesn't yet have an answer to that question.

"It's an extremely busy office, so we'll have to see how fast we can go," she said. "This helps us become more efficient and keeps us from having to go downstairs, pulling out old files and searching for those records. In the end, they'll all be held electronically. That's the idea."

Also Monday, the county commission approved a 45 mph speed limit on Cherry Creek Road from Highway 70 to the White County line.

In other action, the commission recognized students from a government class at Cookeville High School, taking time to explain some of the votes being taken. Commissioners also heard from representatives of the U.S. Census Bureau about the importance of next year's count.

- Ratified the appointment of Bob Duncan, Jerry Abston and Ben Rodgers to four-year terms on the E-911 Board;
- Recognized the appointment of Richard Norton to a four-year term on the Bangham Utility District Board of Commissioners.
- Recognized the Highway Department inventory as of June 30, 2019.
- Approved budget amendments for the County General and General Purpose School funds.
- Approved requests from the sheriff's office and the fire department to sell surplus property by internet/public auction.

*Read more about Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>