



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

SARASOTA COUNTY

KAREN E. RUSHING

Clerk of the Circuit Court
and County Comptroller

To the Citizens of Sarasota County...

I am pleased to present the 2024 Annual Report of the Sarasota County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller. This report underscores our commitment to serving the community and safeguarding public interests through transparency, accountability, and efficiency in our operations. I hope this report provides you with a sense of our obligations to the citizens of Sarasota County and the strength of our community.

The Office of the Clerk and Comptroller fulfills many essential functions that benefit our residents. We ensure the integrity of the judicial process by maintaining accurate records of court proceedings, overseeing jury selection, and processing all civil and criminal court cases. Our office is the repository for public records, safeguarding vital documents such as marriage licenses, deeds, and mortgages. We keep citizens informed about county decisions by documenting and providing transparent access to the proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners. We uphold fiscal responsibility through the prudent management of public funds, oversight of financial reporting, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Our office is a vigilant guardian of taxpayer interests, routinely conducting internal audits to verify that expenditures serve lawful and public purposes.

This past Fall, we supported our community during a critical time: In the span of just over 60 days, tropical storm Debby and Hurricanes Milton and Helene wrecked Sarasota's coast and upended the lives of our citizens. The unity and resilience shown among neighbors, colleagues, businesses, and organizations resulted in a coordinated effort to recover and rebuild, a process we will continue supporting in 2025.

Safeguarding our community against fraud is a top priority. Through the Office of the Inspector General, we employ rigorous audit and investigative strategies to identify potential risks to your resources. Our participation in a statewide alliance enhances our ability to detect and address fraud, waste, and abuse throughout local government and to protect our most vulnerable residents under guardianship programs. These measures help ensure the security and integrity of our community's resources.

We offer a free Property Fraud Alert Service that notifies residents via email whenever a document is recorded in Sarasota County using their personal or business name, empowering property owners to initiate action against suspicious activity. We also inform citizens about prevalent scams, such as jury duty fraud. In collaboration with banking partners, we maintain advanced measures to detect and prevent the cashing of forged checks, thereby protecting your resources. Additionally, our office works closely with the Sheriff's Office to monitor and address suspicious activity, further enhancing public safety.

Working alongside the Florida Courts Technology Commission (FCTC), our office is engaged in initiatives that leverage technology to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of our court system. We have helped to establish case reporting protocols to ensure consistency and accuracy in judicial data across the state. Our office played a vital role in standardizing meaningful data, supporting case management processes, and improving the clarity of court records. We are engaged in the development of a new Court Content Management System (CMS) designed to expedite document processing from filing to disposition, thereby enhancing the efficiency of court operations.

We plan to modernize our phone system to align our communication services with technological advancements. This planned enhancement will provide callers with a more user-friendly and responsive experience, employing intuitive prompts to guide customers to the information or services they require. Sarasota continues to prosper because of strong collaboration among citizens and our unwavering dedication to overcoming challenges. I am optimistic about the great things this community can accomplish as we navigate 2025 together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karen E. Rushing". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Karen E. Rushing

Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller





SARASOTA COUNTY
COURTHOUSE

THE SARASOTA COUNTY COURTHOUSE WAS DESIGNED BY THE FIRM OF HENRY J. HARRIS AND ASSOCIATES, INC. OF SARASOTA, FLORIDA. THE COURTHOUSE WAS BUILT IN 1991 AND IS A FINE EXAMPLE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN REVIVAL STYLE. THE BUILDING IS MADE OF STONE AND STUCCO AND FEATURES A TOWER THAT IS 100 FEET TALL. THE COURTHOUSE IS A HISTORIC LANDMARK AND IS A MUST-SEE FOR VISITORS TO SARASOTA.



FCCC FLORIDA COURT CLERKS AND COMPTROLLERS

2011 Special Recognition Award
2010 Excellence in Leadership Award
2009-2018, Chair, Legislative Committee
2008-2009 Chair, Strategic Planning Committee
2007-2008 President
2005, 2009, 2012 and 2013 Clerk of the Year
2022-2024 Excellence in Best Practices
2024 Statesperson of the Year

CCOC FLORIDA CLERKS OF COURT OPERATIONS CORPORATION

2014 Legislative Committee
2014 Florida Courts E-Filing Committee
2011 Co-Chair, Revenue Stabilization Workgroup

REPUBLICAN PARTY OF SARASOTA, FLORIDA

2007 Statesman of the Year

UNITED WAY OF SARASOTA COUNTY

Past Member, Board of Directors

29TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

2013 Women of Light Award

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

2000 Distinguished Alumni Award

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT – FLORIDA COURTS TECHNOLOGY COMMISSION (FCTC)

2010-present, Florida Courts Technology Commission
2003-present, Committee for Electronic Filing

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

2002-2007 Advisor, Commercial Law Department

ACHIEVEMENTS

GOVERNMENT FINANCE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

2020, 2021 Triple Crown Medallion Award
2012-present, Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting
1984-present, Excellence in Financial Reporting Award

ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC TREASURERS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

2014, 2018 Certificate of Excellence for Sarasota County's Investment Policy

UNITED WAY SUNCOAST

2017, 2018 Top 25 Most Generous Workplaces, Sarasota Area

FLORIDA GOVERNMENT

COMMUNICATORS ASSOCIATION

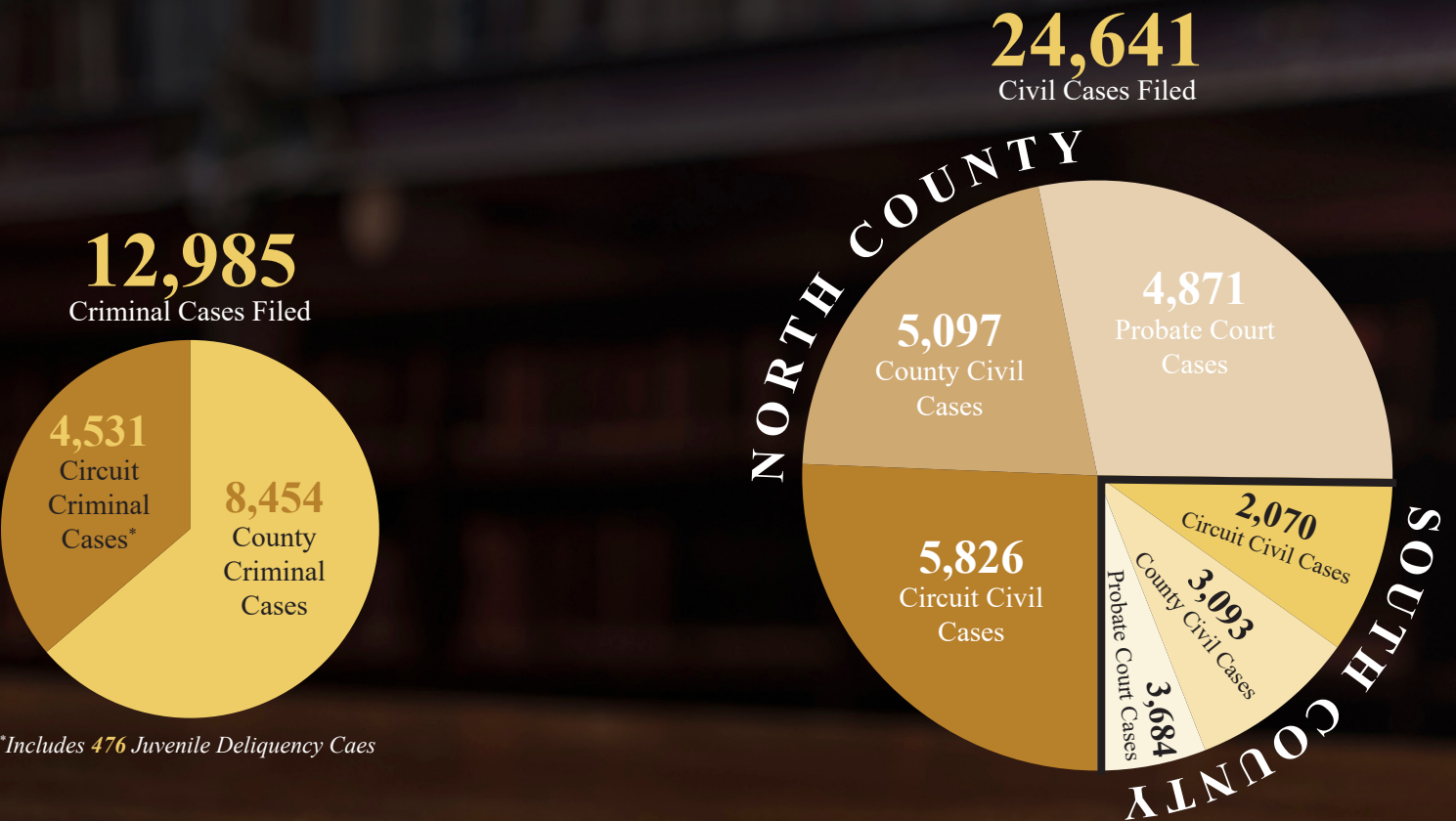
2009-Crystal Award, Online Foreclosures
2008 Second Place Crystal, Annual Report
2007-2009 Special Judges Awards

ASSOCIATION OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS

2009 Gold Winner, MarCom Award, Annual Report
2009 Honorable Mention, MarCom Award, Photography

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT AND COUNTY COURTS

The Clerk of the Circuit and County Courts is an independent elected official responsible for many court related activities. The Florida court system consists of the Florida Supreme Court, six District Courts of Appeal, 20 Circuit Courts, and 67 County Courts. Sarasota is one of three counties in the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, which also includes Manatee and DeSoto counties. Serving as Clerk to both the circuit and county courts, trial court records are maintained in an electronic manner and data sharing of important judicial decisions are reported in accordance with law to many different agencies, including the Florida Department of Revenue, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Department of Children and Families, and Bureau of Vital Statistics, to name a few. It has been said that the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit and County Courts touches the lives in its community from cradle to grave; cases range from adoptions, estate matters, family law, domestic violence, mental illness, small claims, evictions, mortgage foreclosures, and more, which affect every community. Services provided by this office are available to all in need of assistance.



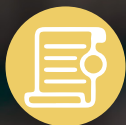


THE COURT

12 Circuit Judges **5** County Judges

7 Senior Circuit Judges

6 Magistrates/Hearing Officers



52,373

Civil Citations

47,348 Traffic Infractions

2,875 Parking Tickets

2,150 Civil Infractions



\$10,746,793

Fines & Forfeitures

Total fines, forfeitures, court costs,
and service charges

CRIMINAL LAW

CRIMINAL LAW CASES are governed by the Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure. The Florida Constitution provides that Circuit and County Courts may hold criminal trials within the jurisdiction of the Court as designated by the Circuit's Chief Judge. There are two distinct courts—County and Circuit. County court includes misdemeanors, county ordinance violations, and criminal traffic. Circuit court includes felony and juvenile delinquency cases.

CIRCUIT COURT

CIVIL LAW CASES are governed by the Florida Rules of Civil, Family, Probate, and Small Claim Rules of Court. There are two distinct courts—County and Circuit. County court includes small claims and law sittings under \$30,000, while Circuit court includes civil matters exceeding \$30,000 as well as 1,933 family cases, 117 juvenile delinquency cases, as well as, 2,250 probate, 376 guardianship, and 3,052 mental health cases.

COUNTY RECORDER

In Florida, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller also serves as the County Recorder, sometimes known as the Registrar of Deeds, and is responsible for creating the permanent record of all mortgages, liens, deeds and other documents having an effect on real property. Known as recording, this includes collection of state taxes such as documentary stamp and intangible taxes, assignment of a unique instrument number to every document, which establishes priority over recorded documents, and creation of a verified index for each record. The Official Records of the county date back to 1921, when Sarasota was divided from Manatee County. There are four municipalities in Sarasota County, and the Official Records include filings from agencies and residents within these municipalities. In addition to these duties, the office issues marriage licenses, performs weddings, conducts Tax Deed sales, and serves as an application acceptance agent for the U.S. Department of State for the issuance of passports.





172,823

Documents Recorded

Documents recorded include 14,435 mortgages, 32,254 deeds, 2,321 liens, as well as 22,720 court documents.



\$124 Million

Fees Collected

Fees collected include \$119.1 million in DOC stamps and Intangible Taxes, as well as \$3.0 million in other fees.



3,391

Marriage Licenses Issued

2,529 North County
862 South County



9,312

Passport Applications Accepted

6,387 North County
2,925 South County

1,321

Marriage Ceremonies Held

1,077 North County
244 South County

8,998

Passport Photos Taken

6,548 North County
2,450 South County



212

Tax Deed Sales Conducted

GETTING MARRIED AT THE COURTHOUSE

Thousands of wedding ceremonies take place each year at the 1927 Historic Courthouse in downtown Sarasota, FL.

Extensively restored in 2018, the Courthouse is an icon of Sarasota County's rich history, exemplifying the Mediterranean Revival architecture of the 1920's. Originally designed by architect Dwight James Baum, the courthouse has been included in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places since 1984.

The Historic Courtroom, located in Sarasota, creates a stunning backdrop for your wedding ceremony.

**MARRIAGE
PARLOR**
PLEASE NO FOOD
OR DRINK IN THIS AREA

The Marriage Parlor's vintage décor offers an intimate setting to say I Do.



At the South County Courthouse in Venice, the Garden Courtyard with Trellis and seasonal tropical foliage is a perfect setting for a ceremony. The Romantic Mural (not shown) is another lovely option at this location.



COUNTY COMPTROLLER AND TREASURER

While serving as the County Comptroller, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller is custodian of all county funds. Vendors and others who provide services to county government receive payments for their goods and services through this office. We pride ourselves on having a prompt payment process. Although state law establishes 45 days as the threshold for payments, this office has set a goal of seven days after receiving a valid invoice. Rating agencies, Internal Revenue Service, Securities Exchange Commission and financial institutions rely on the records prepared by this office, and the county Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) is prepared and published along with other reports designed to support the community’s interest. As Treasurer, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller manages the overall banking relationships for county government and invests Sarasota County’s public funds to maximize investment earnings while minimizing risk for an average investment portfolio of \$1.7 billion.



75,887

Invoices pre-audited and paid on behalf of
Sarasota County Government

14,440

Deposits verified and entered into the financial
accounting system



75,326

Payroll direct deposits processed on
behalf of the Clerk and Comptroller, Tax Collector,
Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections, and
Board of County Commissioners

5,123

Approximate number of employees paid bi-weekly



\$67.1 Million

Interest earned in treasury performance

\$1.7 Billion

Average investment portfolio

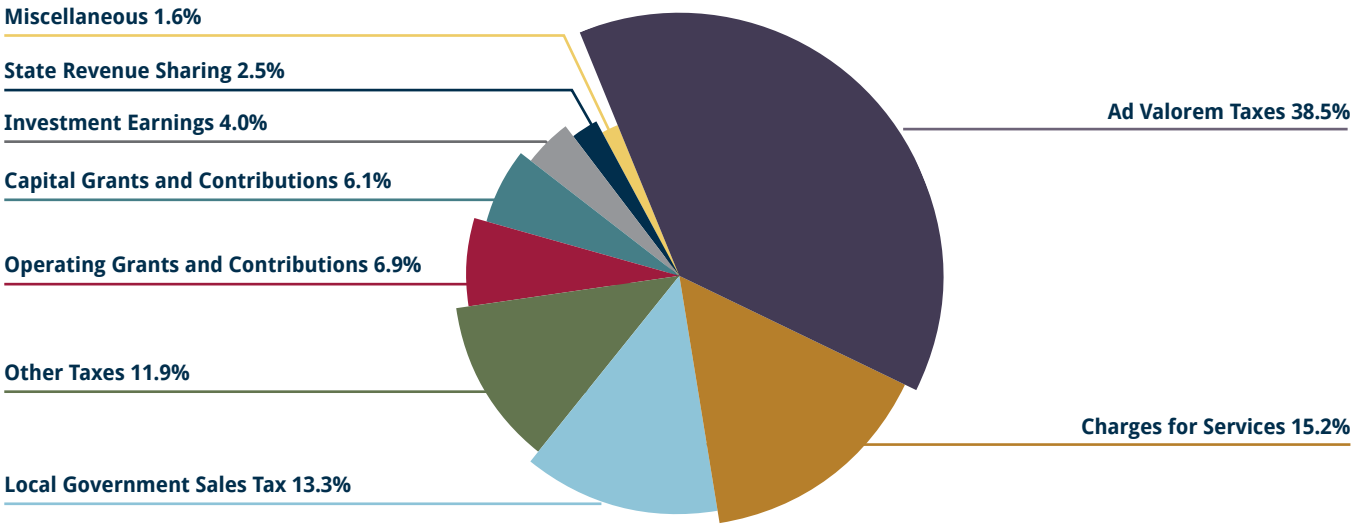


PREVIOUS FY2023 REVENUE

Sarasota County has multiple sources of revenue. This information is presented on the government-wide financial statements in separate columns referred to as Governmental and Business-Type activities which totaled \$1.147 billion.

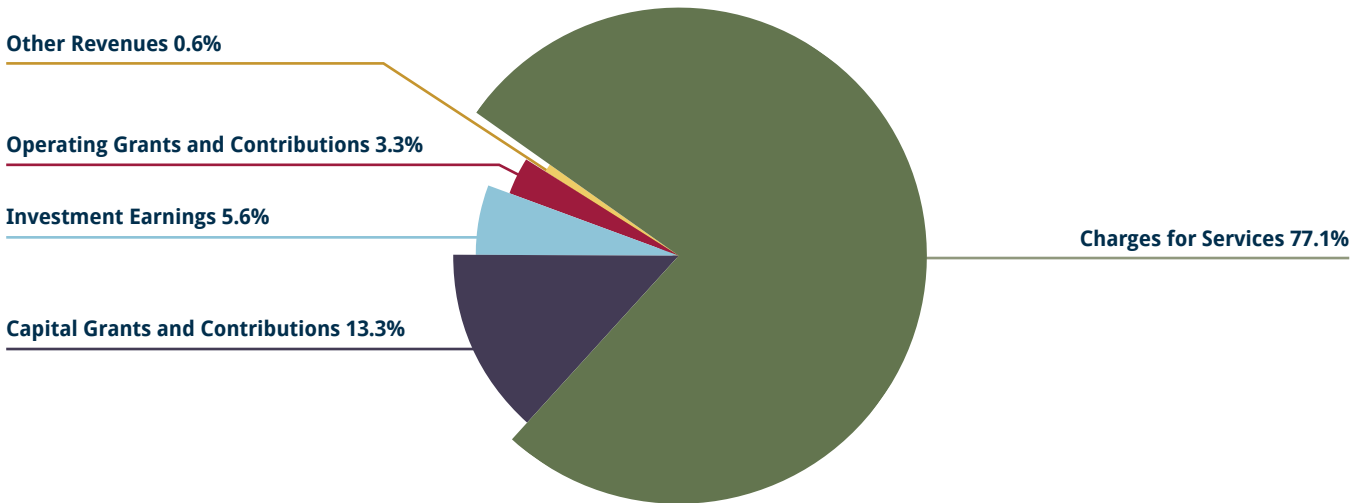
GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Revenues for governmental activities totaled \$824.9 million which primarily includes taxes and charges for services. The largest revenue is Ad Valorem taxes which in fiscal year 2023 totaled \$317.1 million.



BUSINESS-TYPE ACTIVITIES

Revenues for business-type activities totaled \$321.6 million for Sarasota County’s Enterprise funds which consists of Public Utilities, Stomwater Utility, Solid Waste System, and Breeze Transit. The largest revenue is charges for services which totaled \$247.9 million.

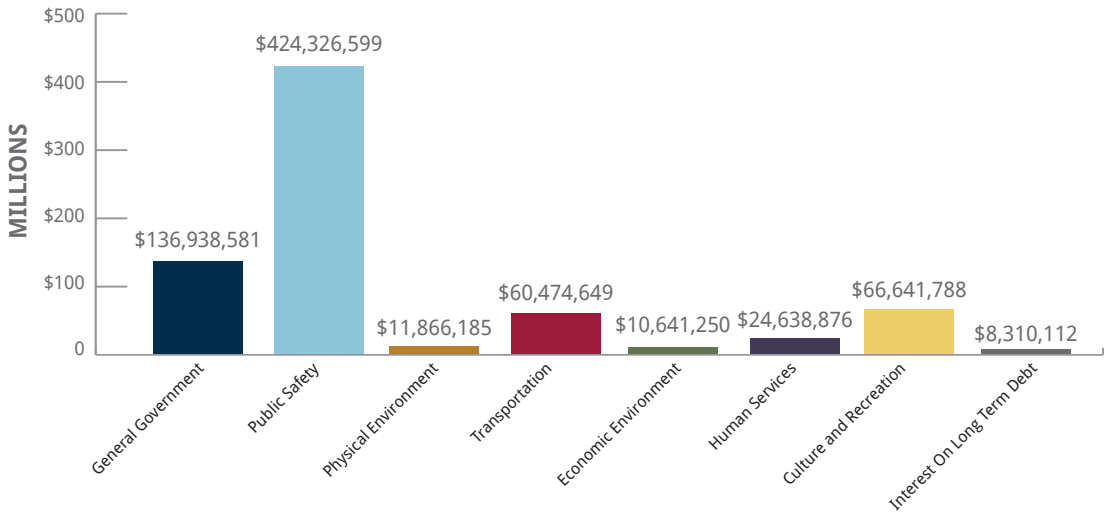


PREVIOUS FY2023 EXPENSES

Sarasota County presents expenditures on the government-wide financial statement for government funds in functional categories. Each function includes related activities aimed at accomplishing a major service or regulatory responsibility.

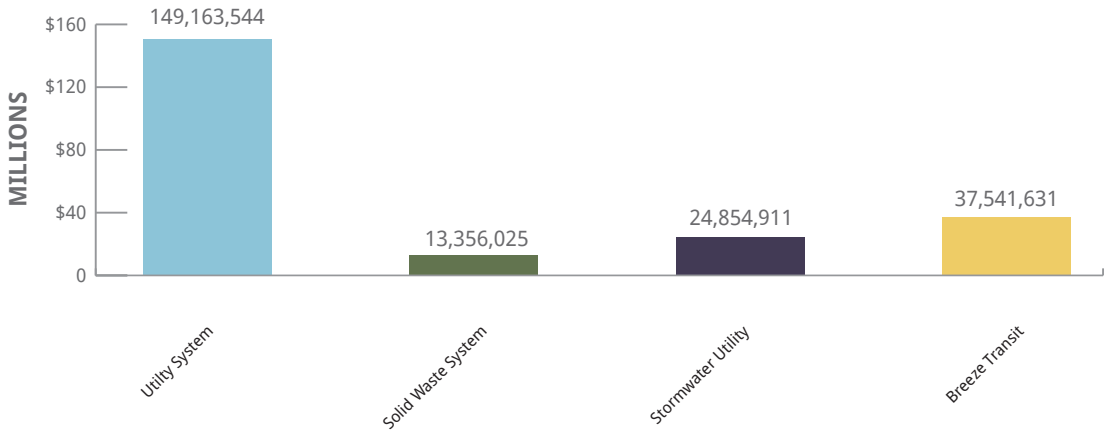
GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES

The total governmental activities expense for fiscal year 2023 increased by \$178.4 million from fiscal year 2022 and totaled \$743.8 million. The largest functional category is Public Safety which includes the Sheriff and Fire Departments.



BUSINESS-TYPE ACTIVITIES

The business-type activities expense which consists of Public Utilities, Stormwater Utility, Solid Waste System, and Breeze Transit totaled \$224.9 million in fiscal year 2023.



INTERNAL AUDITOR AND OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG)

The Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller serves as the Internal Auditor and Office of Inspector General for Sarasota County and establishes compliance testing with internal controls, prioritized with the use of a risk assessment tool. Fraud complaints are received through various means, including a fraud hotline. Investigations are conducted as a priority over audits.

Standard and Follow-Up Audits

The OIG provide independent, objective audits, designed to add value and obtain a reasonable level of assurance that management processes and controls enable reliable financial reporting and resources are safeguarded.

Continuous Audits and Attestations

The Internal Audit department performs audits on a continuous or requested basis. These include Unannounced Cash Audits, Purchasing Card (P-Card) Audits and Driver and Vehicle Information Database System Audits (DAVID). These audits produce recommendations and opportunities for improvement and relate to evaluating the counties ability to follow proper internal controls as well as compliance with contract requirements.

Guardianship Audits

The OIG provide audits related to accountings and guardianship plans identified through a Court Order the Clerk and Comptroller’s Office. The information is evaluated as it relates to the Guardianship and the related disbursements.

Guardianships through the SIA (Statewide Investigation Alliance)

The program consists of Six (6) Clerk and Comptroller offices around

Florida. They each represent a region of the state and agree to accept Guardianship cases referred by the OPPG (Office of Public and Professional Guardians) to the SIA. These cases are investigated to advise the Court and OPPG on duties of monitoring, educating and if necessary disciplining state-registered professional guardians.

Investigations and Hotline

The OIG receives complaints through letters, emails, walk-ins and Hotline calls related to potential fraud, waste and abuse of County resources. In FY2024, the County received 71 Hotline Calls and numerous tips from the community and other sources. The latest survey from the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 2024, determined that 43% of fraud is detected by tips, which is 3 times the frequency of any other source and are received from other employees the majority of the time.

Certifications

The staff in the Internal Audit department maintain a total of 11 designations between them. These include Certified Inspector General Auditor, Certified Inspector General Investigator, Certified Guardianship Investigator, Certified Fraud Examiner, Certified Inspector General and Certified Public Accountant.

Audits & Investigations



25

Recommendations and Opportunities for Improvement Identified in County and Guardianship Audits Performed

28

Standard County, Continuous and Guardianship Audits/ Investigations/Inquiries Completed

Training



410

Employees Trained in Fraud Awareness and Prevention techniques

REPORT

FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE
OF SARASOTA COUNTY RESOURCES



CALL TOLL FREE

(855) 506-0304

SARASOTA COUNTY FRAUD HOTLINE

YOU MAY REMAIN ANONYMOUS

(when following proper reporting protocol)

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE



EX-OFFICIO CLERK OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller also serves as Ex-Officio Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners (the Board). The term Ex-Officio means a position held by virtue of holding another office. In this capacity, the Clerk and Comptroller serves as the custodian exercising control over the official records of the Board's records to ensure they are not changed, tampered with or destroyed outside of established legal authority. These records include contracts, Ordinances land use decisions, etc and the official minutes are taken by this office and protected and preserved in accordance with law. The official seal of the county is always affixed by this office in accordance with legal requirements.





53

Public Meetings Attended
(Board of Commissioners,
Charter Review, Planning
Commission)

32

Code Enforcement
Hearings Attended



1,132

Value Adjustment Board Petitions Filed

3

Value Adjustment Board Public Meetings
Attended And Official Minutes Produced

644

Value Adjustment Board Hearings
Coordinated, Scheduled And Attended



254

Resolutions Processed

69

Ordinances Processed

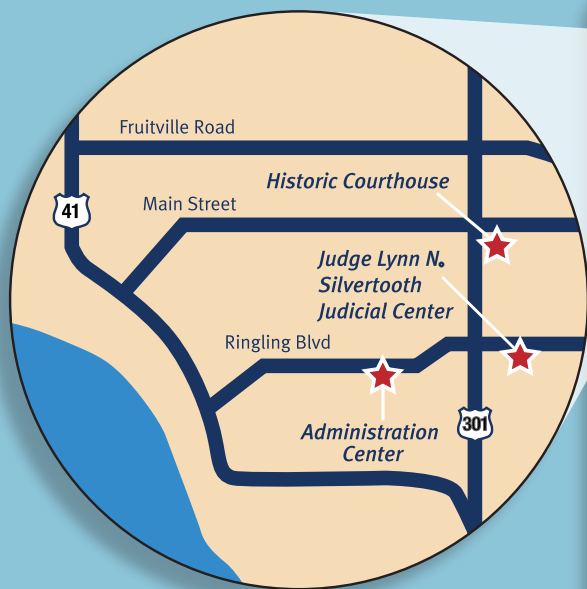
159

Contracts Processed

348

County Administration
Signed Contracts Processed





MAIN OFFICE

Historic Courthouse
2000 Main Street
Sarasota, FL 34237-6022

From I-75, take the FL-780/Fruitville Rd. (Exit 210) toward Sarasota/St. Armands. Turn onto FL-780/Fruitville Rd.; left onto S. Washington Blvd./US-301, left onto Main St.

FINANCE, INTERNAL AUDIT/OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, AND BOARD RECORDS

Sarasota County Administration Center
1660 Ringling Blvd
Sarasota, FL 34236-6808

From I-75, take the FL-780/Fruitville Rd. (Exit 210) toward Sarasota/St. Armands. Turn onto FL-780/Fruitville Rd.; left onto N. Orange Ave., left onto Ringling Blvd.

JURY OFFICE

Judge Lynn N. Silvertooth Judicial Center
2002 Ringling Blvd.
Sarasota, FL 34236

From I-75, take the FL-780/Fruitville Rd. (Exit 210) toward Sarasota/St. Armands. Turn onto FL-780/Fruitville Rd.; left onto S. Washington Blvd./US-301, left onto Ringling Blvd.

SOUTH COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Venice Branch
4004 S. Tamiami Trail
Venice, FL 34293

From I-75, take the Jacaranda Blvd./County Hwy-765 (Exit 193) toward Englewood/Venice. Travel south on Jacaranda Blvd.; turn right onto Tamiami Trail S./US-41 N./FL-45, left onto Annex Road.

941-861-7400 | Monday-Friday • 8:30am-5:00pm | www.SarasotaClerk.com