2021 began as a year of hope and optimism. With the welcome news of an effective coronavirus vaccine, businesses began to re-open in person, and we also began to welcome constituents back into our office.

As we move forward, we’ve learned that this “new normal” is always subject to change even as we approach an endemic phase. During the pandemic, we resembled anything but business as usual, and we’re proud to look back at how our office weathered 2021 with the resiliency and excellence you can expect from us.

We’ve not only been able to serve our constituents seamlessly, but we’ve handled an extraordinary volume of requests and unprecedented demand. We’ve broken many operational records this year, from a blockbuster marriage summer to unprecedented numbers of recorded documents, keeping these important life choices reliable on our end. We even changed state law, creating a new pilot for residents to obtain marriage licenses remotely and securely.

We rallied to defend our right to vote and held yet another successful odd-year election amid a climate of fiery and divisive rhetoric aimed at undermining our democracy.

We battled skepticism and misinformation with facts and transparency. Through it all, we have met each challenge with innovation, exceptional service, and a nimbleness that demonstrates our staff’s tenacious commitment to the city we serve. We come out of 2021 with yet another example of excellence. I am proud of our team of dedicated public servants. Denver, you should be too.
PUBLIC TRUSTEE: PREPARING OUR STAFF AND HOMEOWNERS FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

In 2021, our office partnered with the Denver Housing Authority and the Office of Financial Empowerment to host a series of virtual town hall events. Each event offered expert guidance from housing counselors, financial advisors, and foreclosure administrators for homeowners facing or hoping to avoid foreclosure.

By the end of the year, we reached more than 5,000 viewers through the series and the playlist of recorded sessions available on YouTube.

With only 112 foreclosures in 2021 (due to continued restrictions on foreclosure for federally-backed mortgages), the office took the opportunity to train new and existing staff on the intricacies of the foreclosure process, preparing our office for the increase in foreclosures anticipated in 2022.

Additional training and staff also empowered our office to handle a 60 percent increase in releases of deeds of trust in 2021. Despite the highest volume of releases since 2004, our staff processed the work within statutory deadlines and service level agreements.

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION: BUILDING SOLUTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

None of our office’s innovations in remote services and pandemic-proof processes are possible without the creativity and expertise of our technology services team.

Throughout the myriad challenges of 2021, our technology experts have used the tools on hand to facilitate new processes, like credit card payments and a virtual and in-person appointment calendaring system. To protect the health of our staff and accommodate shifts in COVID precautions, the technology team ensured that workers had the software and hardware needed to operationalize a hybrid remote/in-office work schedule.

In addition to technical adaptations and advancement, our office also began an effort in 2021 to work more closely with 311, the city’s frontline call center. With bi-weekly meetings and ongoing contact with our partners at 311, we were able to effectively and quickly respond to technical issues as soon as they were reported by the public.
ELECTIONS: NO SUCH THING AS AN “OFF YEAR”

Although only one election was held in Denver in 2021, it was still a whirlwind of a year in the Elections Division.

Our year began with the final meetings of our Charter Review Committee, which was tasked with reviewing the city charter to resolve timeline issues related to run-off elections. After months of deliberation and discussion, the committee chose to introduce a ballot measure to move the date of Denver’s municipal elections, giving our office more time to create ballots for run-off elections and ensure that overseas and military voters had enough time to participate in Denver municipal elections. The measure changing the date of the municipal election was approved by voters in November.

In the spring, we received news that the Major League Baseball All-Star game had been relocated from Atlanta to Denver in response to a Georgia bill that restricted voting rights in the state. During the July game, our brand-new voter coach made its debut at MacGregor Square, where our staff registered Denver voters and gave tours of the new mobile voting unit.

That same month, we welcomed a new Director of Elections, Dena Dawson. Dena’s background in elections administration in Oregon and Nevada brings a depth and breadth of experience to the office that is already apparent in her work to improve our internal processes and ensure accessibility for voters.

The Elections Division was also kept busy over the summer with the petition process, which determined which measures would appear on the coordinated election ballot. Between May 13 and August 2, the Voter Services team manually verified 117,235 petition signatures. Staff and elections judges worked long hours and late nights to complete these verification processes within the allotted 25-day statutory deadlines.

In November, we held our coordinated election, in which Denver voters were asked to choose school board directors as well as several ballot measures concerning state and local issues. Though the “off year” election decided only state and local issues, nearly 36 percent of Denver’s voters turned out to cast a ballot. Less than two percent of voters cast their vote in-person, indicating that the mail ballot model remains an overwhelming favorite voting method in Denver. And it’s little wonder — with the addition of two new ballot drop boxes in Denver, there are now 42 locations for Denver voters to drop their mail ballots off securely and conveniently.
On January 6, 2021, protesters stormed the nation’s Capitol Building, claiming the 2020 election was fraudulent. Thus began a year in which elections administrators at all levels would be called to defend the legitimacy and security of the democratic process.

In response to divisive rhetoric, our public affairs department doubled down on efforts to combat misinformation, disinformation and malinformation with the truth. In addition to our social media campaigns emphasizing the security and credibility of our elections, we continued to welcome tour groups into our ballot processing rooms, provided detailed voting information in print ads for community newspapers, and brought the public into our process virtually with video content throughout the year.

While our communications team was busy fighting misinformation, our engagement team worked to inform voters across Denver’s neighborhoods through innovative youth programs and numerous local events.

In 2021, the engagement team piloted the Mile High Youth Vote, a program aimed at engaging the next generation of Denver voters with the democratic process and encouraging registration (and pre-registration) among high school students. Students from two Denver Schools of Science and Technology participated in the program, in which students designed and deployed an elections administration model and held a mock election. 250 students cast votes, with the winning school reaching a turnout of 65 percent.

The team also welcomed local high school students into the office with the Clerk and Recorder’s Summer Scholars program, a six-course pilot designed to immerse students in the voting process and civic engagement. In partnership again with the Denver Schools of Science and Technology, students were provided with a curriculum focused on voter engagement, elections administration, and the office’s public trustee, records, and clerk functions as well. In addition to youth programs, the engagement team also presented at events throughout 2021. Although the team set a goal of registering 300 voters last year, they succeeded in registering more than 1,000. The team had a presence at 104 Denver neighborhood association meetings, block parties, cultural events, and local celebrations.
PUBLIC RECORDS: ENSURING THE FUTURE OF OUR CITY’S PAST

In 2021, our office requested an audit of our historic record keeping processes. The Auditor’s Office delivered a report of its findings and recommendations, and results were as expected: Our vital historic records required better storage facilities, more current technology, and more preservation resources.

While the work to ensure the future of Denver’s historic records will be a years-long endeavor, the office has already made significant progress to ensure that the records in our care are accessible and readable for future generations.

Per the Auditor’s suggestion, we developed and formalized several records policies and procedures for the first time. These codified processes and policies will ensure the continuity and consistency of our recordkeeping practices in the years to come.

The office completed a full, centralized index of every Denver ordinance for the first time since the Great Depression. The records team will also index all city council records in a centralized, searchable format by mid-2022.

Finally, to comply with both privacy and accessibility requirements, our office contracted with a vendor to review our records database and redact any protected personal information that may appear in public documents. Our work continues in 2022 to guarantee both resident privacy and public transparency in our records database.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE: SHEDDING LIGHT ON LOCAL POLITICS

Throughout 2021, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder worked in partnership with MapLight, a technology nonprofit, to create a tool that brings a new dimension of searchability, access, and transparency to local campaign finance.

Debuting in early 2022, SearchLight Denver brings to light the way that local campaign funds are raised and spent. Providing simple data visualization and basic searchability, SearchLight Denver is the first database of its kind for a city of Denver’s size.

In 2022, we will expand the database to provide public access to lobbyist data and city official financial disclosures. This ethics portal will consolidate and centralize public records pertaining to city employees and officials into one searchable, transparent tool.

The SearchLight Denver tool also provides our campaign finance unit with the tools they need to administer the Fair Elections Fund, which was created by the voter-approved Fair Elections Fund Act in 2018. The fund provides matching dollars to candidates who agree to certain fundraising limits and auditing requirements. The Fair Elections Fund will be implemented for the first time for the 2023 Municipal Election.
BUDGET AND REVENUE: MINDFUL STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC FUNDS

Extraordinary demand from the public for our office’s services kept revenues high in 2021, providing a stable cash flow for the city’s general fund. Our revenues also demonstrate our ability to keep up with demand despite pandemic-related limits on in-person transactions.

The office generated more than $9 million in revenue in 2021 from services like recording and marriage license fees. Subsequent increases in our operating budget allowed leadership to invest in our staff through training programs, technology upgrades and market-based pay increases to help offset the impact of 2020’s budget furlough days.

A RECORD YEAR FOR MILE-HIGH MARRIAGES AND RECORDED DOCUMENTS

Following a slow start in the early months of the year, Denver couples came into our office for marriage and civil union licenses at unprecedented rates when the weather warmed. In July, the office broke its all-time record for licenses issued in a month. This record only stood until September, when we shattered it again by more than 80 licenses.

Our office was able to safely offer couples a variety of marriage and civil union license service options during the pandemic, including remote options and in-person services by appointment.

Though marriage licenses tapered in the fall, the office issued more licenses than the previous year in every month from May through December.

2021 saw record volume for document recording as well. Our office recorded more than 10,000 more documents than in 2020, setting a new all-time annual record.

*Statistics are unaudited*
POLICY, COMPLIANCE AND LEGISLATION: STANDING UP FOR CITIZENS

The right to vote freely, easily, and without intimidation may seem like a cornerstone of American democracy, but in 2021, our office fought state-level efforts to create barriers to the ballot box.

In 2021, Clerk López, with the support of the Policy, Compliance and Legislation team, testified against several proposed state bills that would restrict access to the ballot or impose added burdens on voters. He also testified in favor of bills that expanded access to the ballot, including those that improve services for voters with disabilities and those who speak languages other than English.

In partnership with Boulder County Clerk and Recorder Molly Fitzpatrick, and with the sponsorship of State Senator Julie Gonzales and Representatives Matt Soper and Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez, we also advocated for the passage of House Bill 21-1287 in June. The bill enshrines into law our office’s pioneering process of issuing marriage license services safely and remotely. This innovation was crucial to maintaining the health and safety of the public while providing a vital service to residents during the pandemic.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: BEGINNING A CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

As public servants, it is our responsibility to ensure that our work is done fairly and equitably. To confirm our commitment to equity and justice in the delivery of our office’s services, our entire staff participated in the Race and Social Justice Academy, a training program offered by the Mayor’s Office of Social Equity and Innovation.

The four-day training gave our team the time and space to reflect on how our daily work can be improved by looking at it through a race and social justice lens.

Following the academy, the office formed the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee (JEDI) with the goal of developing a strategic plan to address diversity and inclusion in our interactions with each other, other agencies, and the public.

The work continues in 2022 to boldly center equity, diversity and inclusion in our mission.
229,804
Documents Recorded

60,110
Releases of Deeds of Trust

7,866
Marriage & Civil Union Licenses

$9,269,549*
Revenue from recording and other services

*Statistics are unaudited