



REBECCA OTTO
STATE AUDITOR

STATE OF MINNESOTA

OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

SUITE 500
525 PARK STREET
SAINT PAUL, MN 55103-2139

(651) 296-2551 (Voice)
(651) 296-4755 (Fax)
state.auditor@osa.state.mn.us (E-mail)
1-800-627-3529 (Relay Service)

September-October 2013

Article for *Minnesota Township News*

CTAS Update

By Rebecca Otto, State Auditor

I wanted to update everyone on the status of the Small City and Town Accounting System (CTAS) rewrite. The need to rewrite CTAS arose out of its age (over 20 years old!) and the platform it was written on. A more modern platform is needed for CTAS to continue to function on the new operating systems on our computers today. The rewrite is also an opportunity to make the software more user-friendly and function more smoothly for years to come.

CTAS Survey Conducted

The Office of the State Auditor recently conducted an online survey of current CTAS users and also of officials from small cities and towns who are not currently using CTAS. The level of participation in the survey was excellent: 525 responses were received. Of those who responded, 86% currently use CTAS. Of those that are not currently CTAS users, 18 responded that they would consider using it in the future.

The survey provided useful information regarding both the good things about CTAS and also areas that could be improved as well as wish list items for possible enhancements to the software. We want to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the survey, and who provided such useful feedback.

Working Group Meets

The CTAS Rewrite Working Group met on August 19, 2013 at our office in St. Paul. The group's membership represented small cities and towns throughout the state with many members attending in person and others attending by phone. The CTAS survey results were reviewed by the Working Group.

It was a very constructive meeting that covered many topics. The group spent 2.75 hours discussing survey results, prioritizing needs for the rewrite, and determining minimum computer operating system requirements for the next version of CTAS. Generally, the group agreed that the new version should be user-friendly, have increased functionality

(i.e., be able to have more than one window open at a time), be designed to last at least 10 years, and allow users to create customized reports.

The Group had to decide the minimum computer operating system that will run CTAS Version 8 because the vendor who is chosen to rewrite it will need to know this information. After reviewing the options and discussing the topic at length, the Group decided to require Windows 7 as the minimum operating system. Windows XP was not selected as the minimum system because Microsoft has announced that they will stop supporting Windows XP on April 8, 2014. The lack of support will cause Windows XP to be insecure to use after that date. This will make users' computers vulnerable to newly-emerging cyber-attacks that will be unleashed after that date.

Besides the security issues related to Windows XP, requiring the next version of CTAS to be compatible with Windows XP would increase the programming costs for the CTAS rewrite and shorten Version 8's functioning life to less than 10 years. The Group felt strongly that the rewrite of CTAS needs to last more than 10 years, and agreed to require Windows 7 as the minimum operating system.

CTAS Page on OSA Website

The page on the OSA website dedicated to CTAS has been updated with information on the CTAS Version 8 rewrite. There is a new heading on the page titled CTAS Version 8 Rewrite which contains links to the latest news on the rewrite, a fact sheet, lists of volunteers for the rewrite working group, user-testing group, and vendor interview group, and more. The page also includes links to the order form for the rewrite.

To view the CTAS page with additional information on the CTAS Version 8 rewrite, please go to the "For Local Officials" menu item, and click on the "Small City and Town Accounting System (CTAS) tab".

Update on Pre-Orders of CTAS Rewrite

The actual rewrite of the software cannot happen unless we have enough interest from current CTAS users and new users. In order to contract with a vendor to rewrite the software, we will need about 1,000 current/future CTAS users to pre-order and pay the \$300 onetime fee for the software update by December 15, 2013. As of September 18, there were 310 entities that had pre-ordered CTAS Version 8. We are about 1/3 of the way to the 1,000 needed.

To download the order form, please go to the CTAS webpage referenced above. We are also mailing out a letter to our current CTAS users who have not preordered yet, explaining the rewrite and a preorder form. For those of you who have not preordered yet, these documents may be useful for your next town board meeting to present the issue.

If you have any questions about the rewrite, please contact Jim Levi at 651-297-3683 or Jim.Levi@osa.state.mn.us.