

## Courthouse Mysteries Solved

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Let's say you want to get into REI (Real Estate Investing). Maybe you want to be the next Donald Trump. Maybe you only want to buy a rental property every year or two in order to supplement your retirement income.

In the beginning, our advice is always the same. As soon as possible – *before* you spend lots of money on REI books and seminars - meet with someone who has his property for sale, and find out why he wants to sell. That's it. No written offers, no creative REI deal structuring, just find out why he is selling. If you can and will do this *on a regular basis*, you'll be a very successful investor.

Here is a good question: What if, even before you meet with a seller, you know when the house was built; when the seller bought the property; her purchase price; how much she borrowed; whether there are any liens against the property; whether the property's taxes are current; how many bedrooms and bathrooms are in the house; the heated and total square footage of the house? Do you think knowing this information will be of help to you?

Did you know that all of this information – *plus a lot more* – is just sitting in your county's courthouse for all the world to see? Yes, even the information on *your* property is there, and so is your neighbor's. Little bit unnerving, don't you think?

It is so very important for Real Estate Investors to know how to find and use all of the public information in the courthouse. This information is a very important part of an investor's toolbox.

Let's look at an example of how we use the courthouse: Let's say a homeowner in Bartow County wants to sell her house. She calls asking whether I would be interested in looking at her house. We set a time to meet. Before the meeting, I run by the Bartow County Courthouse to look up the seller's property information.

First stop is the Tax Assessor's office. Walking in, I say hey to Ms. Helen, Carolyn, and Judy. Using their computer allows me to find the property's parcel number, legal description, homeowner's name, purchase price, Deed book references, etc.

The second stop is the Tax Commissioner's office. I wave to Valenda Bailey, Bartow's Tax Commissioner as Amanda asks if she can help. I give Amanda the property's parcel number and she tells me the amount of taxes owed, and whether the property's taxes are current.

Next stop is the Deeds room. For Real Estate Investors, the Deeds room is the center of the universe. This is where we find out who owns the property, what mortgages and liens are on the property, etc. A word of warning, it is hard to learn how to use the Deeds room. Heck, I'm *still* learning. So know that learning the Deeds room will take time and effort.

As I walk in, I say hey to Susan (The Deed Queen), Jerri (The Deed Goddess), George (The Gentle Bear), Art (The Motorcycle Man), Wes Frye, The Senator, and the others.

After looking through the Grantor, Grantee and Lien indexes, I research the Deeds books. Finally it's time to meet with the homeowner.

While driving through the seller's neighborhood, I stop at each house I find for sale and pull a sales information flier in order to know the asking price. This information helps me determine the FMV (Fair Market Value) of the house on which I'm about to make an offer.

As I knock on the seller's door for the first time, I already know the approximate FMV of the property, her purchase price, and approximately what she owes. When it is time to make an offer, these three pieces of information, plus the other information I have gathered at the courthouse, help me determine my offer.

As you learn about REI, don't neglect learning how to use your county's courthouse.