

Beware of the “Official” Looking Notices

Recently I worked with a couple of clients in transactions that, for various reasons, required them to transfer their real estate from a trust to themselves, or from themselves to a trust. In all instances the mailing address of the old and new owners of the property were the same. These were ordinary people that were doing simple transactions often recommended to our clients.

Not too long after the transfers occurred and the deeds were filed with the County, those individuals received very official looking notices in the mail. Those notices were in a plain black and white envelope containing a generic looking barcode with the words “DEED PROCESSING NOTICE” in very large and bold type. The notice outlined the importance of obtaining a copy of their deed and provided that a copy could be obtained for a fee of \$83. The notice also restated much of the key assessment data that is available on various county assessment websites.

The notice was issued by a third party business, with the hope that the layout of their form would fool people into paying the \$83. Of course, the notice has legal disclaimers that state it is not associated with any governmental entity, but it also has due dates listed and the layout makes it appear “official”.

Luckily, my clients came to the office or called in with questions about the notice. Some clients asked why I did not tell them about the county fee for their deed. I informed the client that we provide them their original deed once it is indexed with the county. Further, as a matter of public record certified copies are available for a few dollars at the county courthouse should they inadvertently lose the original.

A similar issue has arisen for those who start new businesses and file for an incorporation. A company called Corporate Record Services sends out a notice to prepare minutes or records of an annual meeting. Again, this form looks like a government notice charging a fee of \$125 with a due date.

The moral of the story is to closely read any type of official looking notices when one has recently executed a common transaction such as a deed transfer or filing of incorporation. These records are kept in public databases and businesses pull your information and try to sell you services you do not need hidden in paperwork that makes it appear that you need to pay some type of government fee. Remember to carefully read any documentation and ask questions before you write that check!

This article was authored by Keith W. Strohl, an associate Attorney of the Steckel & Stopp Law Firm with offices at Main Street and Walnut Street, Slatington; Schnecksville and Northampton which has been serving the needs of the Lehigh Valley areas for over sixty-five years.