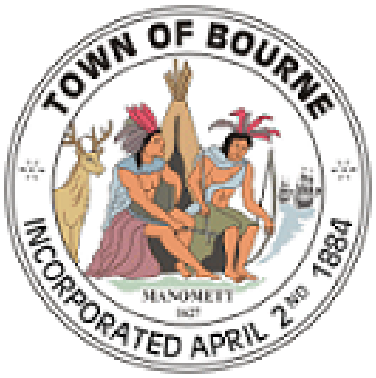

Town of Bourne

Transparency & Data Standards

Prepared By: The Office of Municipal & School Technology

EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security

Image: Bourne Town Hall[1]

Introduction

Originally incorporated in 1884, the Town of Bourne is located in Barnstable County at the gateway to Cape Cod. With a population of 19,754 and median household income of $70,304[2], Bourne is a quiet community for most of the year with a spike in activity during the Summer months. The Town is home to numerous harbors and inlets for boating, swimming, fishing and shell fishing. They also have a National Marine Life Center, which is an independent, non-profit, rehabilitation and release hospital for the treatment of stranded sea turtles, seals, and other sea animals. With active residents looking to better understand town government, Town officials made it a priority to establish transparency best practices and data standards to improve the process around public requests for information. In January of 2017, the Town signed a Community Compact agreement to implement IT best practices that would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this process as well as internal tracking of requests. This report provides an overview of the work Bourne did to complete their initiative.

[1] ToddC4176. *Wikimedia Commons*. Accessed on October 28, 2018. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bourne_MA_Town_Hall.jpg

[2] "Community Facts." United States Census Bureau. *American FactFinder*. Accessed on October 18, 2018. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

Process Overview

The Town of Bourne had two requests as part of the Community Compact Best Practice program, Transparency and Data Standards. In July 2017, Bourne deployed a public request portal through their website. This software portal allows them to track and deploy public requests in line with the new Freedom of Information Act standards that were enacted in January 2017. The Town has received approximately 55 inquiries for Public Information that have been tracked through the Next Request portal. These requests are visible online along with the results of the requests.

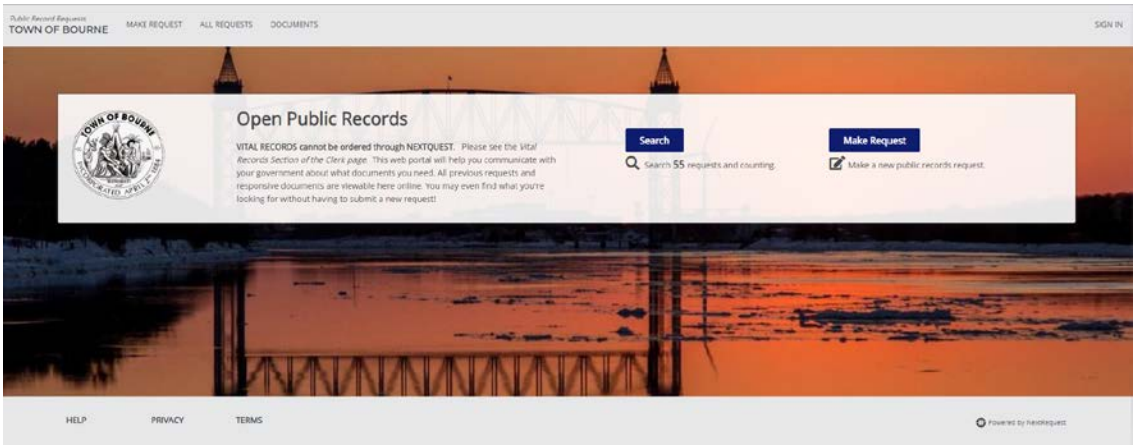

Image: https://townofbourne.nextrequest.com/

The other request was for the establishment of a Document Management Policy to help the departments within the town get a handle on the myriad of both paper and electronic documents. Guidance was requested from the Massachusetts Archives, a division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office. Due to the intersection between electronic records and records management best practices, the issue was forwarded to the Digital Records Archivist. The Digital Records Archivist provided suggestions for document tracking, regardless of format, as well as ideas to consider when exploring document management policies, workflows, and systems. These suggestions are outlined below:

For Document Management

- Map out the process you are trying to track
- List out all the documents involved, where they start, where they go and who needs to do what with them
- Be sure to indicate where the official "record copy" ends up and what its retention period is
- Who has "use copies" and what they can/should do with the use copies?

- Make sure everyone involved agrees on the workflow and that there aren't any duplicative steps
- This process should encompass both physical and digital records and be conducted without consideration of the final tool or solution that will be put in place.

Possible solutions to consider

One easy solution may involve prefacing each document that is going around with an old school tracking sheet. You list out the people/offices that the document goes to for approval and each person signs off on it and passes it along to the next person. This also works for both physical and digital records if you are working with both.

> *Depending on the IT structure/support in your community, another option might be a shared server space for digital files that is dedicated to a type of project/specific workflow. In a way, it's creating a document management system without the software layer attached. If IT will let you set up a shared space (either locally or in the Cloud) that has access limited to specific signatories, then the documents can live in one place and the appropriate people can access them when they need them. Potentially this could be tied to a tracking sheet that is passed along by email. Unfortunately, the steps wouldn't be automated, but at least duplicative files would be reduced. If you do go this route, be sure to set up an agreed upon folder structure within the directory and clearly define what types of records go there (and how long they need to be retained for).In terms of tools, it looks like there is a wide variety of options and many of them are a "Software as a Service" (SaaS) model where it is a cloud-based system with pricing based on a per user fee. That greatly reduces IT cost and support needs, but obviously you need to be very careful with licensing agreements and make sure that the provider isn't accessing or taking rights/ownership of documents that may be uploaded.*
>
> *Source: Veronica Martzahl, Digital Records Archivist*

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Town has turned to Next Request to track internal documents as well as requests from the public. The software allows for the sharing of information and internal document management. The work on a Document Policy is still in the discovery stage, however, the Town of Bourne has done their due diligence by exploring the technology and state resources available to them. They have completed their Community Compact best practice and will continue to refine their data standards and transparency practices going forward.

Appendix

Council of State Archivists:

Appendix I: Choosing an Electronic Management System

Appendix II: Dealing with Digital

Appendix III: Should you Digitize your Records

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Archives Division

Choosing an Electronic Records Management System

Some questions to consider . . .

How hard will it be to get your records out?
Systems, software products and vendors change, and chances you are going to need to get out everything you put in out.

Can you schedule your records for deletion in accordance with the Municipal Records Schedule?
And when it deletes a file, is it really deleted?

How does it track or index the records?
Once you put your records in, you want to be sure you can find them.

Does it monitor the files against data loss and corruption?
There are programs and checks that can be run to ensure the document you put in is the same authentic, reliable, and trustworthy record you are getting out.

How do you control access, particularly if the system will be storing files with protected or confidential information, (and does it meet all the legal safeguards for these types of data?)
The last thing you want is to be explaining a data breach on the nightly news!

What file formats does it support?
Does it monitor the file formats against obsolescence and allow you to migrate file formats?

Is it scalable?
Will it meet your needs going forward or is it geared to the situation right now? Would be hard to ramp up if you experience increased usage needs?

Does it document sufficient information to give you a complete, accurate, and reliable record that would stand up to audit or legal review?
What audit trails are produced and how do you access them?

The good news . . .

You don't have to wade through these questions alone. The Massachusetts Archives is here to help you tackle these issues and determine the best solutions for your records management and long term electronic records preservation challenges.

Contact:
Veronica Martzahl, Electronic Records Archivist
617-727-2816
veronica.martzahl@sec.state.ma.us

Appendix II

Dealing with Digital

Incorporating digital content into your records management program

Veronica Martzahl
Digital Records Archivist
Massachusetts Archives
North Shore City and Town Clerks Association
March 2, 2017

Agenda

- Why Records Management?
- Physical vs Digital records
- Tools, Systems and Strategies for dealing with Digital
- Digitization?

Why Records Management?

Why Records Management?

- Legal requirements

Why Records Management?

- Legal requirements
- Business requirements

Why Records Management?

- Legal requirements
- Business requirements
- Historical or Evidentiary requirements

Why Records Management?

- Legal requirements
- Business requirements
- Historical or Evidentiary requirements

Records Management helps us know what we need to keep, and more importantly, what we can get rid of

Why Records Management?

- Good records management
  - Helps us get rid of clutter – physical and virtual

Why Records Management?

- Good records management
  - Helps us get rid of clutter – physical and virtual
  - Gives us more time to spend on the important records

Why Records Management?

- Good records management
  - Helps us get rid of clutter – physical and virtual
  - Gives us more time to spend on the important records
  - Makes finding what we need easier

Why Records Management?

- Good records management
  - Helps us get rid of clutter – physical and virtual
  - Gives us more time to spend on the important records
  - Makes finding what we need easier
  - Allows us to provide the right document to the right person at the right time

Physical vs. Digital Records

Physical vs. Digital Records

- What do we look for in a record (physical or digital)?

Physical vs. Digital Records

- What do we look for in a record (physical or digital)?
  - Authentic

Physical vs. Digital Records

- What do we look for in a record (physical or digital)?
  - Authentic
  - Reliable or Trustworthy

Physical vs. Digital Records

- What do we look for in a record (physical or digital)?
  - Authentic
  - Reliable or Trustworthy
  - Accessible

Physical vs. Digital Records

- How are digital records different?

Physical vs. Digital Records

- Need intervening technology to access digital content
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Complexity of the material

Physical vs. Digital Records

- Need intervening technology to access digital content
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Complexity of the material
- Risk of loss or corruption

Physical vs. Digital Records

- Need intervening technology to access digital content
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Complexity of the material
- Risk of loss or corruption
- Versioning, deletion, and copies

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- Need intervening technology to access digital content
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Complexity of the material
- Risk of loss or corruption
- Versioning, deletion, and copies
- Security can be more complicated

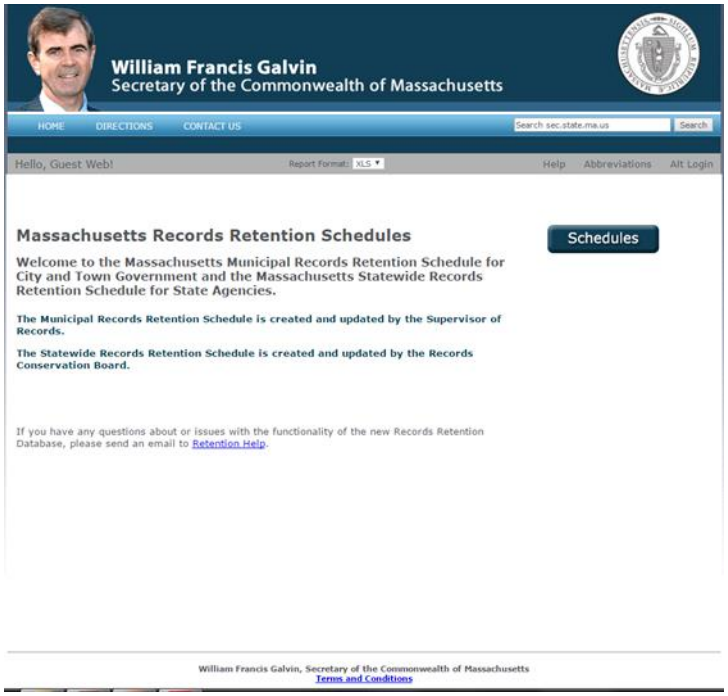
Physical vs. Digital Records

- Need intervening technology to access digital content
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Complexity of the material
- Risk of loss or corruption
- Versioning, deletion, and copies
- Security can be more complicated
- Volume of material increasing

Tools, Systems and Strategies

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Records Retention Schedule



Retweb.sec.state.ma.us

Comments, concerns or suggestions?
RetentionHelp@sec.state.ma.us

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Unstructured Data
  - Word processing documents
  - Powerpoints
  - Photographs and videos
  - Information that you can not easily map into the fields of a database

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Structured Data
  - Spreadsheets
  - Relational databases
  - Information that follows a data model

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Managing short-term digital records
  - Need to determine official record copy

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Managing short-term digital records
  - File formats are less important
    - .doc/.xsl/.pdf – software is likely to still be available
  - Hardware obsolescence is less of an issue – especially if saved to a networked environment
    - Storage

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Storage - Best Practice vs. Reality

Ideal	Okay
Six copies	Two copies
3 identical copies	1 copy on a network
3 full back-ups	1 back-up
1 set in a geographically Distributed area	Back-up hopefully not in the same building

Watch out – one copy saved to your hard drive or portable media and not backed up at all

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Managing long-term digital records
  - File formats obsolescence is more of an issue
    - Need to consider migrating to new formats
  - Hardware obsolescence is more of an issue
    - Refreshing of hardware every 3-5 years
  - Greater risk of unintended loss or corruption of data
    - Consider additional tools to prove reliability and authenticity

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Arrangement and Description
  - Create a filing structure

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Arrangement and Description
  - Create a filing structure
  - Naming conventions

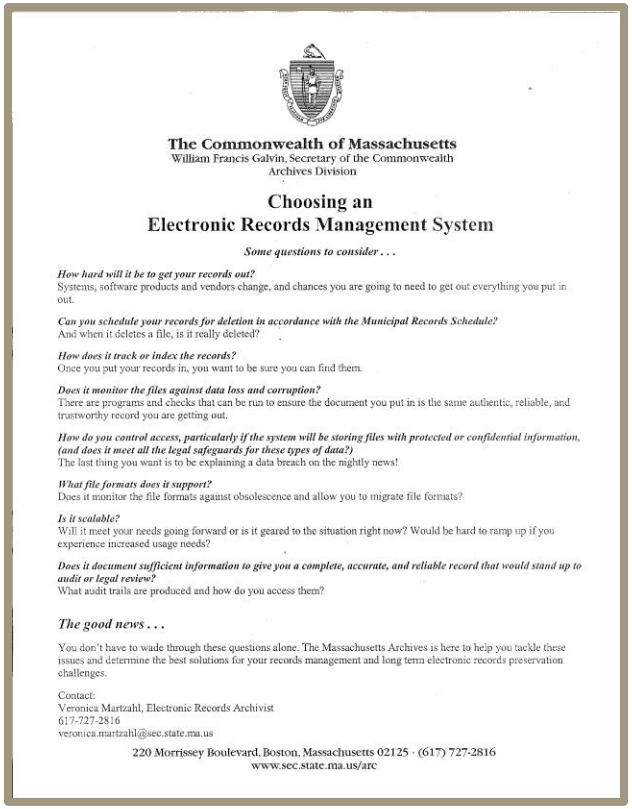
Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Arrangement and Description
  - Create a filing structure
  - Naming conventions
  - Include information about disposition

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Electronic Records Management Systems
  - Databases that allows you to associate metadata with documents

Tools, Systems and Strategies



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Archives Division

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www.sec.state.ma.us/arc

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Email and Social Media
  - Content, not the Container, for determining the disposition

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Email and Social Media
  - Is this the only form that the information exists in?
  - Is the site a document unto itself?

Tools, Systems and Strategies

- Email and Social Media
  - Filing structure
  - Tagging
  - Don’t forget your “Sent” mail

Digitization

Digitization?

- Should I digitize my records?

Digitization?

- Should I digitize my records?

It depends . . .

Digitization

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
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Should you digitize your records?

A common comment is that "digital storage is cheap." As a result, many offices and departments may be feeling a lot of pressure to scan their old paper records to digital files. While digital files can offer many advantages, such as space savings and increased accessibility, they also come with increased monitoring and maintenance needs. Before you start digitizing, it is important to take a thoughtful look at the costs and benefits, and consider the following questions:

What is the actual cost of digitizing records?

Many people think the cost of digitized records ends with the scanning process. However, there are a lot of other factors over time that influence the total cost. There is the cost of storage and back-ups, yes, but also the cost of tracking and monitoring the records. There is quality control at the time of scanning – can you state definitely that you have an authentic and reliable record? You need to factor in the cost of any indexing you need to do to make sure you can find the records when you need them. You need to regularly inspect the files to make sure they will still open and provide you with the evidential documentation they are supposed to hold. And you have to maintain these files over time, making sure that they haven't degraded, been corrupted, or become inaccessible through obsolete file formats. You can put a record in a box and go back to it in 30 years with a fair amount of certainty that it will be readable – you can't leave a file on a server or portable media unmonitored for 30 years and feel confident that you will be able to access it.

What is the retention period for the type of record you will be digitizing?

If it has a short retention period, like 3 years, is it worth the time, effort and cost to digitize something that you can dispose of fairly soon? Does the system you are using allow you to automate the disposal schedule of the record when it hits the end of the retention period or will you just be adding more and more digital records that you may end up managing indefinitely?

If it has a longer retention period, such as 5+ years, is there a workflow in place to watch out for data loss and bit rot so you can reliably produce an authentic, trustworthy record? Do you know the file formats you are managing and their level of sustainability and accessibility over time? Do you have a plan for migrating to new file formats if your current one's become obsolete?

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How often do you need to access the records?

If you find yourself constantly utilizing a set of records, digitization may be a good choice. If you create a record and only need it on the off-chance of an audit in 3 years and then you can dispose of it, it might not be worth the cost of scanning and managing the record electronically compared to the cost of storing the paper record.

Is there any confidential, private, or personally identifiable information in the records?

It's a lot harder to hack a box than it is a file server. If you are considering digitizing records that contain a person's name in conjunction with his/her social security number, driver's license number, state ID number or financial account numbers (including credit and debit cards), be very mindful of what you are doing. The same goes for health and educational records. Can you ensure that this information is protected from unauthorized, illegal access? You don't want to be on the nightly news explaining how a data breach occurred.

Do you have an index or filing system that will allow you to locate the record when you need it?

A scanned file doesn't do you any good if you can't find it or if you have to open and visually inspect hundreds of files to find the one you are looking for. Make sure that you have a way to index your files and carefully consider your naming conventions to ensure continued access. Also, how do these digital records relate to other physical records you may still have? Does your indexing and filing account for ALL the records?

Can you digitize to the appropriate standards?

How you looked into the file types that are most appropriate for your digitization project? File types can become obsolete and inaccessible and you want to be sure that you are creating files that you will be able to open and access though the whole retention period of the record. In addition to the file type, can you scan to a sufficiently high quality for the record to be useful? Detailed maps or images may require higher quality scanning (and scanning equipment) than documents.

Resources

- Texas State Library and Archives Commission webinars https://www.tsl.texas.gov/slrm/training
- North Carolina State Archives online tutorials http://archives.ncdcr.gov/For-Government/Services-and-Training/Online-Tutorials
- Illinois State and Local Government Records Management instructional documents https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/records_management/home.html
- Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives http://kdla.ky.gov/records/recmgmtguidance/pages/elecrecmgmt.aspx

Questions

Thank you!

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