Town of Lincoln

Business Continuity Best Practice

Prepared By: The Office of Municipal & School Technology

EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security

Old Town Hall, Lincoln Massachusetts[1]

Executive Summary

In the winter of 2016, the Town of Lincoln signed a Community Compact agreement with the Baker-Polito administration. The Town selected Business Continuity best practice to implement a solution to improve operational efficiencies and responsiveness to the public. They elected to focus on improving document digitization and public records access related to their various permitting processes.

The Town of Lincoln is located in Middlesex County, Massachusetts. Settled by Europeans in 1654 as part of Concord, Lincoln incorporated as a separate town in 1754. It was named after Lincolnshire, England, the home of Russell Chambers, who was influential in the town's creation

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[1] Phelan, John. Old Town Hall, Lincoln Massachusetts. Wikimedia Commons.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_Town_Hall,_Lincoln_MA.jpg

and owner of the property which is known today as the Codman House.[2] Today, the Town has a population of 6,362, and a median household income is $134,211.[3]

Background

Like other communities, the Town of Lincoln has been curating a large volume of public records and recognizes that storing these records in paper form creates a significant administrative burden. Therefore, the Town sought a solution to digitize public records would streamline production, dissemination, and storage processes, thus providing better access to constituents.

In order to achieve this, the Town decided to move forward with records management involving multiple Town departments: building, planning, conservation, and zoning. Previously, those four departments had lacked a consistent permitting process, which resulted in miscommunication and conflicting permitting processes.

Before embarking on the project, it was necessary for all pertinent Town departments to be on the same page; previously there was no central procedure of keeping track of the permitting status, which led to a prolonged and convoluted application process for all parties involved. The Town sought to implement a workflow that would align the needs of four departments. So far, the planning, conservation, and building departments have updated their processes, and the zoning and health departments are actively working to update their processes.

While consistent workflows have streamlined operations and provided a better experience to the public, they also instill confidence and promote transparency. From an internal operations perspective, collaboration makes it easier to share information. For instance, if all departments agree on a workflow, information does not need to be re-submitted for each step, leading to a more efficient and effective process that promotes consistency and collaboration.

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[2] History of Lincoln, Massachusetts. Freedom's Way National Heritage Area. http://freedomsway.org/about-fwnha/our-communities/lincoln-ma/
[3] Lincoln town, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. American Fact Finder. U.S. Census Bureau. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

Document Digitization

Digitization Methods

In any document digitization effort, there are several factors to consider. There are three methods that are generally considered in a conversion: backfile, day-forward, and on-demand conversion. Backfile conversion refers to the conversion process of "digitizing legacy paper records to digital files."[4] In other words, this method goes backwards, putting emphasis on past documents over present documents. Day-forward conversion is "…the process of scanning, indexing and storing documents to an imaging system as they are produced or received in the normal course of business".[5] Finally, on-demand conversion refers to digitizing public records as they are requested. Determining an appropriate and realistic conversion timeline depends on how and which documents are prioritized for digitization.

Retention Schedules and Disposal Rules

The Town must adhere to all regulatory requirements for document retention and disposal, which applies to both physical and digital documents. The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth has published several resources that may be useful, including an updated retention schedule and guidance on electronic records. Refer to Appendix I for links to these resources.

Metadata

Establishing or collecting relevant archiving information is a vital process prior to or during the digitization. Metadata is defined as data that provides information about other data.[6] Utilizing proper metadata fields are necessary for consistency and regularity of information organization. Not only that, there are also legal implications to consider. According to the Electronic Records Management Guidelines, it is imperative to "maintain sufficient information to allow for

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[4] 5 Steps to Prep for Digitization. Iron Mountain. https://www.ironmountain.com/resources/best-practice-guides/1/5-steps-to-prep-for-digitization

[5] Day forward definition. Webopedia. Accessed March 4, 2019. https://www.webopedia.com/TERM/D/day_forward.html

[6] Metadata. Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Accessed April 17, 2019. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metadata

identification of each document within a given electronic information system. Refer to Appendix II for reference.

Records Management System

The implementation of a records management system is often part of a digitization initiative, which supports the creation and maintenance of a robust collection of municipal documents readily available to staff and constituents. Further, collection and storage of metadata for all digitized documents will support efforts to organize and access documents in the future.

The Town may consider the integration of their e-permitting solution with a records management system. For instance, the [City of Northampton](#) underwent this process, integrating their records management system and e-permitting software to ensure consistent management of records across municipal functions and processes. Integrations can however add additional cost and maintenance complexities, which must be considered. Ultimately, wherever these records reside, it is essential that the Town document the location and ensure that it is appropriately backed-up to ensure long-term data integrity and accessibility.

E-Permitting and Records Management

The Town proceeded with the implementation of electronic permitting software. Along with the best practice guidance, the Town also leveraged the [Community Compact IT Grant](#) funding to hire a vendor, Full Circle Technologies, to implement PermitEyes. Upon the e-permitting implementation, the Town was able to utilize a modern permitting system for the building department with input from other related departments. This reduced the amount of time it takes employees to manage permits and allowing the public to apply for and track the status of permits online.

With the new e-permitting system, the Town was able to focus on records management as well. With records from the building, planning, conservation, and zoning departments being consistently stored in a digital format. Furthermore, permit applicants can track progress on their permits, promoting transparency and reducing phone calls to the Town regarding the status of submitted applications.

Conclusion

The Town has taken advantage of the e-permitting initiative to improve document management and business process and store consistent digital records for the building department. In addition, the project allowed the Town to improve a number of business processes, which also led the Town to pursue additional e-permitting modules for other departments in the future. By pursuing an initiative that addresses a number of community goals, the town has positioned to better deliver consistent, sustainable and reliable services to residents.

Appendix I: Resources and Guidelines from the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Municipal Records Retention Schedule – Quick Guide

https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Municipal_Retention_Schedule_20190321.pdf

Massachusetts Records Retention Schedules

http://retweb.sec.state.ma.us/retweb/retention/schedules.asp

Electronic Records Management Guidelines

https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Electronic_Records_Guidelines.pdf

Frequently Asked Questions - Born-Digital/Electronic and Digitized Records

https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Frequently_Asked_Questions_Digital.pdf

Appendix II: Example Template for Compiling Document Information

Title	Creator	Subject	Date Created	Last Date Modified	Department Responsible (Contributor)	Format	Type	Notes

- Headers may change depending on the actual criteria of municipal documents
- Prioritize which metadata is looked up the most for access (reflecting on the business process)
- As a part of metadata, file directory location may be helpful for potential integration of records management system (e.g. C:\Users\John_Doe\Marblehead\ScannedImages)