



Town of Pelham

Document Digitization Best Practice

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EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security



Image: Old Pelham Town Hall¹

Executive Summary

The Town of Pelham is located in Hampshire County, Massachusetts. The Town was first settled in 1739 by Scottish immigrants, and later incorporated as a town in 1743.² Laced with large forestland, Pelham provides grounds for research and recreation. Today, the Town has a population of 1,321 and a median household income of \$92,250.³ The Town of Pelham adopted the document digitization best practice as part of a Community Compact agreement with the Baker-Polito Administration in February of 2017.

Background

Like other communities, the Town of Pelham is responsible for the curation of a large volume of public records and recognizes that storing these records in paper form creates a significant

¹ Pelham Town Hall. Wikimedia. Accessed February 1, 2019.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_Pelham_Town_Hall_Pelham_MA.jpg

² About Pelham. The Town of Pelham. Accessed July 12, 2019. <https://www.townofpelham.org/about-pelham>

³ “Community Facts”. United States Census Bureau. American Fact Finder.

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

administrative burden. This challenge is compounded by the fact that these records are stored in multiple locations, which make it difficult to respond to requests in a timely manner. In an effort to address this challenge, the Town has requested guidance on document digitization best practice.

To successfully support the needs of Town departments, committees and residents with this digitalization effort, the Town had to make a capital investment in technology. They successfully applied for the [Community Compact IT Grant Program](#), which is a competitive grant program that proves funds for one-time capital improvements that drive innovation and transformation.

Implementation Process

Document Digitization and Management

Leveraging the Community Compact grant funding, the Town hired General Code to implement a records management system and provide staff training which was completed in December of 2017. Beginning in 2018, records were partially scanned and are now mostly available on CD's and flash drives. A few factors have slowed progress for full implementation. General Code was unable to add all of Pelham's scanned records into the Laserfiche system due to the Town's limited funding and the Town Clerk, who was designated as the single user for the system, was out on an extended medical leave.

The goal is to have all Vital Records and Town Meeting Records added by the Fall then continue on with other records. Pelham now has a position for an Assistant Records Access Officer who will be designated and trained to help with records being transferred into Laserfiche.

In addition to the software implementation, the Town also undertook an effort to develop a sustainable strategy to implement a records management program with policies and practices identified to ensure success with limited resources.

Public Records Law and Access

In parallel with the Laserfiche implementation, the Town named the Town Clerk the Records Access Officer, the Police Chief as Records Access Officer for Police records, and the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Department as Records Access Officer for payroll. As per

directive from the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, agencies or municipalities are required to designate or hire one or more Records Access Officers based on new provisions added to Public Records Law.⁴

Records Access Officers are the persons “responsible for responding to requests for public records.”⁵ These are their following duties:⁴

- Coordinate the agency’s or municipality’s response to request for access to public records;
- Assist individuals seeking public records in identifying the records requested;
- Assist the custodian of records in preserving public records; and
- Prepare guidelines that enable requestors to make informed requests

With this requirement in mind, the Town published the guidelines for public records access, which includes the details of how to handle public records requests and contact information of designated Records Access Officers. On top of the designations, the Town also created a new position focused on public records. A Records Information Clerk was appointed to help with these duties on April 3, 2019.

Business continuity was a major consideration for the Town. To ensure that the Town has the ability to respond in the event of unforeseen circumstances or staff availability, multiple Records Access Officers were identified, in addition to hiring a Records Information Clerk.

Conclusion

By implementing a records management solution and related processes, and by leveraging the programs available through the Community Compact Cabinet, the Town of Pelham is now in a much better position to effectively manage public records and leverage their limited resources.

⁴ New Provisions. Updated Public Records Law. The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Accessed July 12, 2019. <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prenotice.htm>

⁵ A Guide to Massachusetts Public Records Law. The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Accessed July 23, 2019. <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf>

References

A Guide to Massachusetts Public Records Law. The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Accessed July 23, 2019. <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf>

Public Records Access Guidelines. Town of Pelham. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.townofpelham.org/sites/pelhamma/files/uploads/townofpelhampublicrecordsguidelines2.pdf>

Updated Public Records Law. The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prenotice.htm>