

## **Final Report, presented to the Select Board October 16, 2019.**

In June 2017, the Select Board charged the Record Storage Advisory Committee, (RSAC) to, ” ...study and recommend to the Select Board short and long term measures that will improve the Town’s ability to preserve and protect all the town’s records as required by state statute.” The Select Board appointed six members: Linda Avis Scott - town employee, Susan Millinger - community member, Leslie Bracebridge - former Town Clerk and current town employee, Savanna Ouellette - Library Trustee, Susie Mosher - Town Clerk, and a member from the Town Buildings Committee who did not attend. Becky Torres, Town Administrator, attended as an ad hoc member of the committee. The committee met monthly for nearly two years to locate, identify, and quantify the Town’s records. We worked to familiarize ourselves with the state record retention guidelines, determine the condition of the records we have, and evaluate the extent to which current storage locations meet the necessary environmental conditions and other state criteria.

The task of inventorying, evaluating, and managing town records has been a concern of town clerks and select boards for some years. Bracebridge brought her experience and insights to our work. We studied the Community Documentation Plan (2001) and the Long-Range Historical Records Strategic Plan (2000 - 01). We read the Environmental Monitoring Report from 2016 - 17. We consulted with the Roving Archivist, Rachel Onuf, from the State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB) to get some guidance about concerns, resources, and next steps. All this information made clear that currently, Shutesbury’s stored materials need more space and the storage environment needs to be better controlled to safeguard the condition of these records and improve access to them.

We took field trips to Wendell, Templeton, Barre, and Monson to see how other towns take care of and store their records. We learned that the practice of Record Storage varies widely and is influenced by physical and financial resources, advocacy, and random happenstance such as a microburst or a tornado. No town had all their records centralized. In most cases minutes were not archived in the record storage spaces maintained by the town clerks. Shutesbury has a relatively remarkable archive of minutes, which facilitates public record requests and occupies a lot of shelf space. All towns had some department and board files stored in separate spaces as we do in Shutesbury. We observed some good categorization and organizational systems we might want to implement here. We saw that other towns have records that are not well preserved or very organized. Clearly, record storage is a work in progress everywhere.

### **Actions**

Our town obtained three State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB) grants. The first grant preceded formation of the RSAC. This grant enabled Rachel Onuf, the state’s Roving Archivist, to evaluate and consult with our town about our current record storage. Based on the Environmental Monitoring Report from 2016 -17 and following Onuf’s recommendation, the RSAC used town funds to purchase a data logger to track the temperature and relative humidity in the main downstairs room of Town Hall. We wanted to know if archival materials could be stored safely in this building.

The Environmental Monitoring Report from 2016-2017 provided humidity and temperature data from Old Town Hall that led us to take some actions there:

- Torres and Mosher hooked up the dehumidifier in the vault to drain automatically, resulting in more stable humidity readings that are in the appropriate range for archiving records.
- The main room dehumidifier was hooked up to a drain, thereby reducing the work of constantly monitoring and draining it in the summer.

- The discovery of mice in the vault, the main room, and the historical closet led Mosher and Bracebridge to detect how the mice were getting into the vault and multiple traps were set to address this annual problem, which requires ongoing monitoring.
- The Building Committee had the outside surface of the bricks in the Old Vault sealed to lower moisture infiltration. The Building Committee recommended a mini-split unit to manage the temperature range in the vault; however, that project has languished.
- We used a second SHRAB grant to monitor the Old Town Hall vault with another datalogger.

The 2016-17 data collected on humidity and temperature led us to conclude that the main room of the Old Town Hall is not suitable for storage of permanent records because the environmental conditions are not adequately controlled. With the actions taken as described earlier in this report, the data collected from the second data logger shows the humidity in the vault of the Old Town Hall has improved and those readings are within acceptable range for record storage. Temperature fluctuations in the vault persist.

The data from the logger in the Town Hall's downstairs main room shows some improvement in temperature and humidity conditions. Anecdotally, people using the room feel the air quality has improved in Town Hall; it is likely that the 2017 addition of the commercial-grade dehumidifier, the air exchange system and the cover of the sump pump in the electronics room are helping. However, the data analysis indicates there is a risk for "Mechanical Damage," which means the environmental conditions are fluctuating outside the appropriate range for record storage, i.e. paper fibers are subject to breaking. We speculate that use of the room by various groups contributes to these fluctuations. Given that the data shows that the environment of Town Hall main room is relatively well-controlled when not in use, it may be a better location for some of the records currently in the Old Town Hall main room. If it is decided that these records should be brought to Town Hall, we recommend they be evaluated for mold and cleaned if necessary.

From our study we learned the importance of archival practice. This led the RSAC to pursue a third SHRAB grant to secure a flat file cabinet designed to store large maps and plans. Scott, Shutesbury's Land Use Clerk, learned how to properly store these permanent records by starting with current plans from the Planning Board and Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission purchased large archival folders. Scott labeled the flat files, created an inventory list with case cross-references, and began to re-box files in archival-quality folders and boxes. Mosher began to store agendas and minutes in archival folders instead of binders. Starting with the present records has been a good model for how to approach the task of applying a system of good storage practices to the older records which have not already been archived. We hope to develop a system future town officials and volunteers can implement.

Short-term storage measures are necessary to declutter our working spaces and move some records out of moldy conditions. One step we took was to instigate the shredding of 15 boxes of old warrants. To free up more office space, we discussed using three spaces in Town Hall: the walk-in hallway storage closet, a space up over the bathroom in the copier room, and possibly using space in the downstairs main room. We talked with departments about what records they have stored, separation of permanent from non-permanent records, and using the record retention guidelines. We learned that some departments are required to keep their records under confidential and secure storage. In the process of talking with department heads, we realized that, except for the records that are stored in the Old Town Hall vault and in two small filing cabinets in the town clerk's office, most of Shutesbury's records are not stored under fireproof conditions. We recognize that all towns

have at least some decentralized storage and keep most town records under conditions that are not fireproof and are subject to other risks.

From our research and observations, the RSAC created a chart listing 13 criteria for record storage, seven of which are identified by the state. Then we brainstormed a broad list of fourteen location possibilities. By filling in the chart, we processed our observations and clarified what is necessary for good record storage.

We came up with a list of concepts:

- Any space should be used for that which it is best suited.
- A good solution should solve multiple problems
- Occupied spaces are easier to monitor. Unoccupied spaces can lead to unobserved problems
- Town government is a team effort. Staff should be kept together in the same facility.
- The record storage design is meant to improve our stewardship of the records and evolve forward.
- Multiple participants use our town spaces. Communication, cooperation, and consideration of multiple needs and future needs are important.

We are providing the chart and report without advocating for a specific solution. We see the chart and observations as a record of our effort and a starting place for informed discussion. The Committee's basic learning is that the Town of Shutesbury urgently needs more space to store its records under improved conditions. Any discussion of facility development in town needs to include record storage criteria.