



Town of Cohasset

Document Digitization Best Practice

Prepared By: The Office of Municipal & School Technology

EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security



Image: Cohasset Town Hall¹

Overview

The Town of Cohasset is in Norfolk County, Massachusetts. The Town was incorporated in 1770 after breaking away from Hingham². While the Town was known for its shipbuilding and fishing industries in the past, and it is now known for scenery and recreational activities. Today, the Town has a population of 7,542 and a median household income of \$140,000³.

In May of 2017, the Town of Cohasset signed a Community Compact agreement with the Baker-Polito administration. The Town adopted the Document Digitization Best Practice to develop a preliminary strategy for digitizing Town records. The town wanted to implement a solution to digitize its voluminous hard copy records, to improve operational efficiencies and responsiveness

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

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

² History. Cohasset Chamber of Commerce. Accessed February 1, 2019.

<http://www.cohassetchamber.org/about/history.html>

³ "Community Facts". United States Census Bureau. American Fact Finder.

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

to public requests for information. As a result of this project, the Town would retain a credentialed vendor to assess their needs and provide a solution.

Document Digitization – Strategy Development

Successful document digitization initiatives require a strategy, defined processes, and associated technology. Cohasset began to develop their document digitization strategy by gaining a better understanding of their business processes. While a document digitization strategy should address the needs of the entire organization, and not solely focus on a specific department or process, this approach can create complexity. This complexity can often lead to difficulties in starting digitization projects. In order to begin the strategy development process Cohasset did the following:

- Inventoried town business processes and associated forms
- Defined business objectives
- Reviewed available document management solutions to better understand available technology
- Reviewed existing municipal technology infrastructure inventory to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Examined existing lines of business applications to determine feasibility of integrations with potential document management solutions

Understanding the business objectives of the town are critical to developing a strategy. The town explored the following questions while examining their business processes:

- What are the critical business processes and associated documents?
- What types of documents are created, stored and managed?
- Which of these documents are the most valuable to the organization?
- How and where are those documents currently created, stored, and managed?
- Who is responsible and accountable for these documents?
- What potential risks are associated with these documents?
- What are the statutory requirements for each of these documents?

These questions assist in developing an understanding of the business processes and documents in use and their value to the town and its operations. This information can be critical in helping to realize business objectives.

As stated, in part, in Cohasset's Community Compact Cabinet application the stated objectives include:

- Improve internal business processes
- Improve operational efficiencies
- Improve responsiveness to constituents
- The elimination of paper records where applicable
- Integration with existing municipal systems via API's
- Compliance with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Public Records Law⁴
- Compliance with published "Municipal Records Retention Schedule"⁵
- Adherence, where practical, with the "Electronic Records Management Guidelines"⁶ jointly issued by the Supervisor of Records, the Records Conservation Board and the Information Technology Division under the authority of G. L. c. 66, § 1; G. L. c. 30, § 42; and G. L. c. 110G, § 17.

The town developed a list of features and requirements that were desirable in a document management solution:

- Public-facing web portal – this feature allows for constituent self-service of document retrieval
- Workflow management
- Enterprise Content Management
- Support for web-based forms
- Data backup and recovery
- Records Retention Schedule

⁴ <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/A-Guide-to-Massachusetts-Public-Records-Law-2017-Edition.pdf>

⁵ http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Municipal_Retention_Schedule_20190321.pdf

⁶ http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Electronic_Records_Guidelines.pdf

The town reviewed the following document management solutions:

- Laserfiche
- Docuscan
- Docuware
- KYOCERA
- Ricoh
- Xerox

Cohasset, along with several other municipalities, formed the Electronic Document Management Working Group and held several meetings to discuss their document digitization initiatives, challenges and best practices. The goal was to refine an approach for each community to develop an actionable digitization strategy. One of the findings of the group was that establishing smaller, more manageable projects may help in developing a document digitization strategy, reducing the complexity of an organization wide implementation. This approach to “chunking projects” was emphasized by other Massachusetts municipalities, such as North Andover and Lexington, that have implemented document digitization projects.

Document Digitization - Processes

The town partnered with Norwell Technology Group to conduct a review of town business processes and related forms. This review found 131 distinct processes across 17 municipal departments. Examples of departmental process included:

- Selectmen Office
 - Liquor license application/renewal
- Public Works
 - Street opening permit
 - Burial plot deed/certificate
 - Grave opening request
- Facilities
 - Work order requests

- Annual or quarterly inspections
- Harbormaster
 - Mooring application/renewal
 - Town dredging document
- Fire Department
 - Weekly equipment inspection logs
- Police Department
 - Detail request and sign-in sheets
 - Turnover documents

The town estimated that the cost to migrate their paper-based processes to fully digitized processes would be approximately \$4,000 to \$15,000 per process. The variability in cost is driven by the overall complexity of the process. For example, some of the documented town processes consisted of a few steps with little or no coordination with other departments and were classified as simple processes. Other town processes, classified as complex, required multiple steps to complete, coordination with other departments, public hearings and board approvals.

In order to comply with public records requests, the Town also designated Records Access Officers, divided into three Town departments: Town Hall, Police, and School District. Records Access Officers, or RAOs, are the persons “responsible for responding to requests for public records.”⁷ These are their duties:⁸

- 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 request

⁷ 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>

⁸ 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>

Document Digitization - Technology

The town's goal was to implement a solution that would aid in digitizing documents, create electronic forms and act as the central repository to store town documents. Also, given the statutory requirement to adhere to the "Municipal Records Retention Schedule", the management of retention schedules and documents in accordance with those retention schedules was another important component to the solution. The town also required the ability to provide overall audit and control of documents over their lifecycle. This helps ensure that documents are trustworthy by monitoring and controlling who can access, change, or delete documents.

Four important categories to consider when evaluating document digitization solution:

- Access control and authentication – does the solution provide controls over who can access the information and provide a way to verify the identity of the person accessing the system
- Availability and access – does the solution provide the ability to search and retrieve documents, does the solution provide a retention schedule functionality, does the solution provide version control of documents

A variety of stakeholders should be included and encouraged to collaborate on the design of a document digitization program. This may include process owners and end users, department heads, legal counsel, and IT personnel. Collaboration between stakeholders can improve the design of the program and improve the adoption and satisfaction with the final product.

An effective program includes a variety of technical and nontechnical elements, including:

- Technology infrastructure and tools
- Governance structure
- Existing policies and procedures
- Guidelines for process standardization
- Records retention management
- Inventories of information assets
- Training, monitoring, and reporting

Document digitization can improve an organization's ability to realize operational efficiencies and deliver improved and more transparent services to constituents. It can also improve or develop collaboration opportunities between departments.

New technology will play an important role, but technology alone is just one component. In order to succeed, organizations need to think differently about how they create and use enterprise content and records and every person's role in its management.

Document Digitization Technology

ECRM requires IT applications that support information life cycle management, content creation and verification, content searching and retrieval, business process management, collaboration, and integration with current applications and tools. ECRM solutions address core content and records management functions, which include:

- Capture (paper and electronic), including scanning solutions, optical character recognition solutions, as well as tools for capturing electronic content from desktop applications, e-mail, internal and external information systems, and other sources.
- Repository, including the ability to store and retrieve documents, content, and records. Repository functions are facilitated by information organization and access tools such as classification systems, taxonomies, metadata capture, information browsing/search, as well as information presentation solutions.
- Life cycle. All information has a life—it is created or received, reviewed and revised, stored and retrieved, and ultimately preserved or destroyed. The life cycle addresses information management from creation through disposition. Information life cycle management is a structured process that considers how information is classified, searched, and managed to meet operational, legal, and regulatory requirements.

ECRM solutions also address more advanced content and records management functions, which may include integration, collaboration, enterprise search, and decision support and modeling.

Additionally, ECRM will enable the Town to adhere to Electronic Records Management Guidelines, better understanding the creation, consumption, and retention of electronic records from the Office of Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Conclusion

Working with Laserfiche, the Town started utilizing sixteen user licenses, one for each department and several modules to enhance the phase I goals. Additional funding was sought from Capital Budget which would include utilizing a consultant to identify all town processes and internal application mappings to vet where opportunity existed to identify costs associated with migrating those processes to the EDM.

At the same time, stakeholders within the Town started several dialogues including topics tied to approaches they would adopt in building out the Electronic Document Management. These included prioritizing either Backfile Scanning of paper records or converting processes to eliminate the next generation of new paper records. With document management system established, the Town is planning on building a public portal to aid constituents in use of a self-service solution for certain documents.