

CASE STUDY: NORTH ANDOVER

Municipality Saves Time By Preserving History

The Town of North Andover is in its second decade of using Laserfiche. The first implementation was as a repository to house scanned records dating back to the Town's incorporation in 1855. The benefits of that initial investment continues to grow as an Electronic Content Management (ECM) system that reduces the time to fulfill a request for a copy of a vital record from as much as two hours or more to as little as two minutes.

A Public Servant With A Long Checklist

Town Clerk Joyce Bradshaw has worn many hats since taking office in 1994, including oath administrator, election manager, license issuer and keeper of North Andover's official record. In that last capacity, she's also presided over an ongoing migration of Town records to Laserfiche. This initiative began soon after Massachusetts enacted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which provides for the "preservation of historic resources."

Rescuing The Past? Check.

North Andover's "historic resources" included a neglected treasure trove of Town documents dating back to the 19th century. As Bradshaw recalls, "We had no archivist, no formal preservation strategy. Inactive records were housed in a storage facility where it was difficult to access them." Bradshaw proposed and won a multi-year CPA grant to establish a Records Management Program for scanning, records retention, restoration and preservation of antique records.

The program included funding for a Laserfiche system to house the scanned documents and provide 21st Century access. Since then, the Town has addressed a host of contemporary records management challenges with Laserfiche.

Open Meeting Law? Check.

Bradshaw started putting Meeting records in Laserfiche and before long the practice spread. "Once other departments saw that it worked so well, they wanted it too," she said. "Today, just about all departments use Laserfiche – for agendas and minutes in particular." Indeed, Massachusetts Open Meeting reforms enacted in 2009 require Towns to make the records of



Photo: ToddC4176 [tps://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17973881](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17973881)

meetings available in a timely fashion. At last count, you could find 18 committee, commission and board subfolders in the Town's public-facing Laserfiche WebLink folder of Minutes and Agendas ranging from the Affordable Housing Trust to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Public Records Law? Check.

The Town's Laserfiche WebLink portal makes citizen access a quick and easy proposition. It also meets the requirements of 2016 updates to the Public Records Law, which includes language to the effect that "Every agency shall provide on a searchable website electronic copies, accessible in a commonly available electronic format, of the following types of records," including minutes, budgets and a variety of reports.

This just makes sense to Bradshaw, who said, "You can get to our bylaws on the Web in *eCode360*[®] [also provided by General Code]. I want people to have the records at their fingertips on the Web, too. Laserfiche makes it a simple task so people can find answers with minimal cost and time. Now, for instance, a resident can uncover a prior ruling from the Zoning Board of Appeals that never got registered and potentially save thousands of dollars."

Faster, More Efficient Service? Check.

Record requests continue to be a big part of the Town Clerk's duties. Bradshaw said that with Laserfiche, "I can do a search and 30 seconds later, I can find, print and email the record or certify and mail a vital record.

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It's all about people and time. We live in the information age. People want answers instantly. Laserfiche helps me provide a high level of customer service. Nobody has to come back later because we're too busy to help them or wait 20 minutes while we look in a storeroom." In fact, during a multi-month renovation of Town Hall, Bradshaw was able to set up shop in temporary quarters and use her network to access records in Laserfiche without skipping a beat.

Property Record Access? Check For Day-Forward Filing. Check For BackFile Conversion.

And the work continues. Property subfolders to the level of street addresses are already created and active in the Town's Laserfiche repository. Further, in a May 2017 statement, Town Manager Andrew Maylor announced the award of a \$50,000 grant through the Commonwealth's Community Compact Information Technology Grant program. The grant will be used to digitize land use records and make them available electronically to employees and residents.

An Inclusive Repository? Check.

Over the years, Bradshaw has managed to migrate many diverse document types. Search her WebLink folders and you'll find Andover North Parish Church records dating back to 1686 transferred from 1960s microfiche into Laserfiche. At the other end of the scale are contemporary records. "General Code's Don Brewer found a way to preserve our electronic documents that existed as Word and Excel files," said Bradshaw. "It was a huge job. Don got them indexed and put everything where it belongs. Now we can search and find Town Meeting notes and certificates from that time period."

Bradshaw noted, "It's a mind-boggling amount of information. You name it, DBAs, vital records. More is being added as produced, via desktop scanners. When I'm finished with a resident at the counter, I can go to my copy machine and scan to Laserfiche. To me, Laserfiche represents infinite storage."

Confidence in the future? Check.

Maintaining the permanence of the records in her care continues to be central to Bradshaw's mission. When asked about technology's role, she responded,

"It's less about Laserfiche and more about our vendor, General Code and the personal service we've receive from them from people like Don Brewer, our installer and trainer. Their Help Desk is awesome. I say you can have the best car in the universe, but where will you be without a good dealer who stands behind it? We want a solid repository that's going to keep up with technology. I'm comfortable that General Code will take care of our records – will be there 10 to 15 years later to help with transitions down the road."

IT Department Buy In? Check.

"It also helps that the Town has added high-level local assets, who can ensure that our network and other resources accommodate what we're trying to do with Laserfiche," adds Bradshaw. She's referring to Christopher McClure, North Andover's IT Director, who commented "It's been a challenge getting people to think about the lifecycle of documents. I see Laserfiche as where things go to be a permanent record of what's been done. Laserfiche's focus on the document side yields strong security profiles and proper record formatting."

McClure is working toward consistent use across department and implementing workflows to help. "Individuals can scan their documents to an incoming folder at a copier, perform indexing at their desks and then the system adds the images to the correct folders. Board minutes automatically flow to Laserfiche after approval." He also recently developed a Property Records Dashboard, which pulls related information from a variety of data stores, including Laserfiche. "My vision is to build intelligent systems, store information where it makes sense and then make it available where it's needed at the push of a dashboard button," he said.

A Permanent Record? Check.

It all leaves little doubt that Town Clerk Bradshaw will leave a wonderful legacy behind her – both in terms of her service to the residents of North Andover and the irreplaceable history she's preserved in Laserfiche.

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