

THE TOWN CLERK'S GUIDE TO A CERTIFIED VAULT CHAMBER

A STEP-BY-STEP PLANNING PROCESS FOR THE TOWN CLERK VAULT

&

MEDIA VAULT CHAMBERS

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INTRODUCTION TO SPECIFIC PLANNING

Few realize the critical role that the Town Clerk has played in the development of our country. Nothing is so uniquely American as property rights. The earliest settlers had something so precious that they were willing to go to war with England to protect those rights. The right to own and develop their own property.

The Town Clerks, or City Clerks perform several administrative tasks, ranging from Protecting and maintaining council records, property records and birth & death records. They may also issue licenses and permits. A critical role is supervising elections within the municipality. This career is suitable for professionals with a background in records management or public administration.

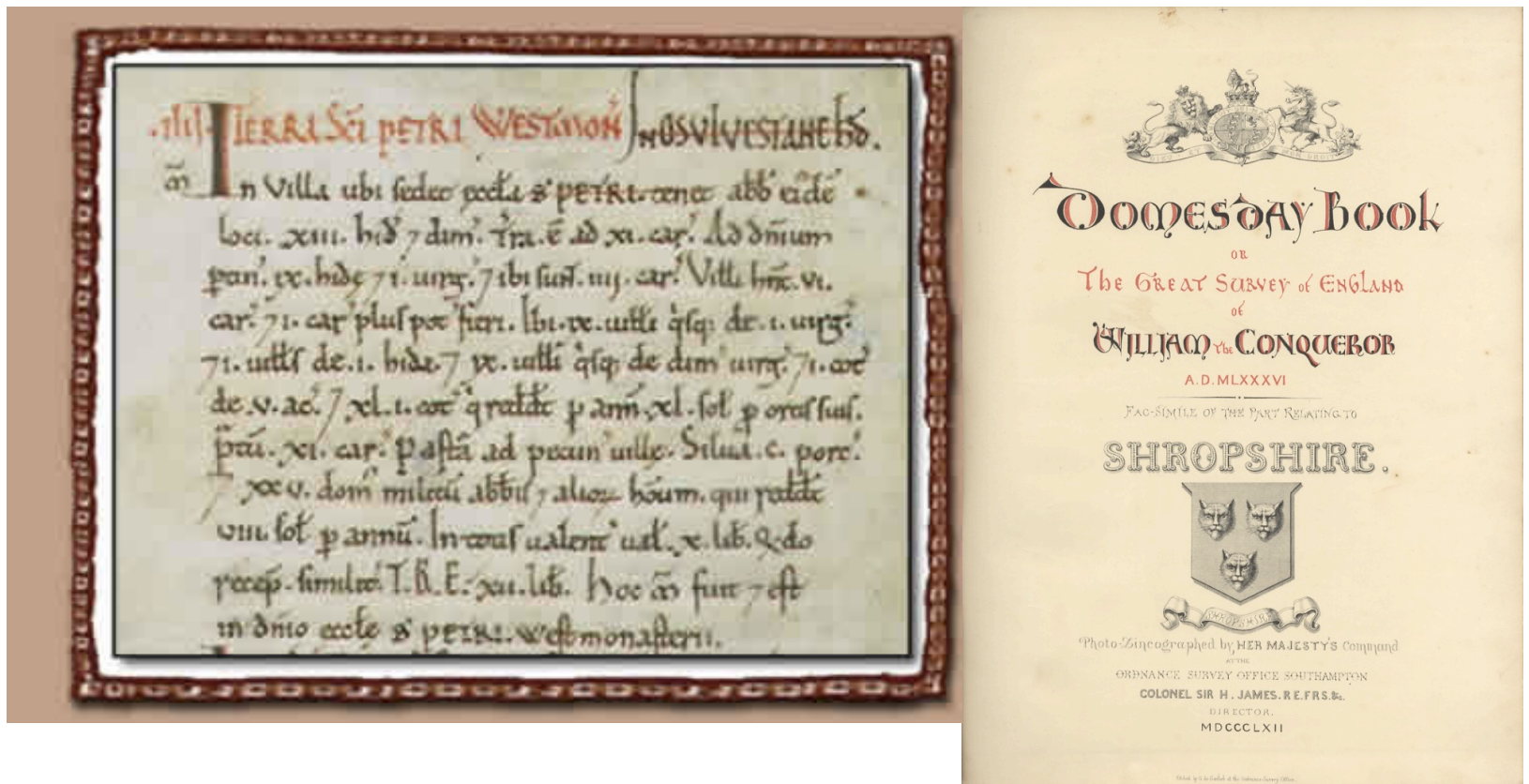
The loss of the Town's property records as well as the historical records is catastrophic to the well-being of the town. The role of this office dates back to Biblical times. Almost from the genesis of the town government the settlers put in place a Town Clerk. This clerk serves as the link between citizens and the government.

Many municipalities still maintain many of their records in paper files; and this puts records at risk of natural disasters such as floods and fires, hurricanes, tornados as well as damage due to issues such as mold vermin and insect infestation. The modern vault must be able to protect against all sorts of natural disasters as well as provide the appropriate environmental control to maintain the records in a pristine state.

The vault must also consider all formats for records, not just paper. Computer media, audio recordings of Town Hall meetings, computer disk drives, microfilm and even servers. The format of records will continue to evolve and so many State Archive have stepped in to provide guidance on long term and permanent protection of records.

In some Towns in New England the remnants of the English record keeping system can still be found. William the Conqueror established in 1085 the first census to assess the wealth of his subjects for the purpose of taxation. This Domesday Book established the foundation of taxation.

You might need to brush up on your Latin to understand this survey. The Grant Books in the early vaults are in the wording of the early settlers. Phrases like "hogshead cask and demijohn" have faded from our language but these Grant Books and early documents from Town Halls preserve an America that is fading from view.



It is exciting to visit a Town Hall Vault and find that the Colonial equivalent of this tax survey was established in the early communities. Called "Grant Books," they can be found in Town Halls or New England State Archives and Libraries.

<https://www.firelock.com/deed-books.htm>

These Grant Books and the Deed Books housed in vaults provide unique insights into property ownership by the common citizen in Colonial America. A young couple embarking on their first venture in buying a home; and, then many years later paying off the mortgage could understand the pride that existed in these early settlers and their bond with the land. The resolve the early American Revolutionaries was vested in this linkage to their bond with the land.

The fundamental role of the Clerk is the safekeeping of the records and this is a legal responsibility. Failure to perform these functions can create risk. State statutes often have criminal penalties associated with the failure to honor this responsibility to preserve and protect; as well as consider new threats to the vital records. Our goal here is to create a centralized planning guide.

It is important to note; that in current time, the vault design team should consider the vault for the records that exist in the earliest formats, paper formats and also consider future formats. Records stored on computer media, audio recordings, disk drives and servers are all elements that should be considered in the long-term planning process.

The Town Clerk s Planning Guideline

The nature of planning for a new Town Hall and the commensurate Town Clerk Office presents a once in a life-time planning event that is often daunting and cumbersome for a Town Clerk who is still in the middle of running their current office. It is hoped these guidelines might streamline the process and help avoid gaps in the new project for both the Clerk and their architect.

STEP 1 :

The first step is to inventory the current records. This means developing the catalog of different types of records.

Type of Records -

- Deed Books
- Birth & Death Records
 - Burial Records
 - Baptismal Records
 - Adoption Records
- Marriage Records
- Tax Records
- Census Records (Grant Books)
 - Immigration, Emigration, Naturalization & Citizenship
 - Genealogy Records
- Military Records
- Vital Records
- Intrinsic Value and Historical Records

List volume by Category: 1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

STEP 2 :

The second step is to check with local churches as the early churches establish by the early Congregationalists and church administrators treasured their records and had a steadfast belief that later generations would also wish to retain and study the early American records. Some of the great historical records reside in the church rectories. And oftentimes in very poor archival collections.

Building a new and very well-known protective vault chamber may encourage the church membership to entrust the records in a historical section of the new Town Hall Vault. it is highly recommended that Town Halls design the vault with at least two compartments so the higher value and older records that cannot withstand constant handling can be protected for professional historians to view and catalog.

These secure compartments that allow limited access in a properly controlled temperature and humidity environment allow records to be viewed but while maintaining security. So many records and books have been lost through the years by allowing various parties to borrow books and documents and remove them from the premises. (These compartments should have CTV video coverage as well. (A look on eBay or Craigslist will show exactly how many of these records have been stolen and sold to collectors. Reports show that a single page from the Salem Witch Trials testimony sold for \$30,000.00.)

The Town Clerk and Selectman often fail to recognize the value of their collections until they see them being sold on internet web site. Oftentimes, the churches approach is to seal historical documents in bank safe deposit boxes where the environmental conditions are not designed for archival document. The various State Archives in the Northeast can guide Towns in proper environmental conditions but first the vault must be built so that the temperature and humidity requirements that preserve historical documents can be accurately achieved.

Local Resources for Historical Records to partner with? _____

What are the most valuable records in your collection? 1. _____
2. _____ 3. _____

STEP 3:

This may not occur to many Town Clerks but many valuable Records that could enhance the Town's collection of records reside in families of the earliest founders. A proper notification to the Town's people that the new Town Hall will include a vital records vault which can preserve and protect historical family records that might bring greater clarity to the Town's unique history. Families want these records to be preserved and protected. The local Historical society might participate in collecting records that could be added to this secure section of the vault.

Local historical societies and museums may also have collections that require protection and should be in the Town Archive.

Notifying families that the archives will be designed such that they can have access to their donated records and might along with other donated family records find a deeper understanding of their family's role in the community. The airwaves are filled with commercials for [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), DNA study firms and people pay for the right to determine their own family's history but in New England these histories are often right there in local collection.

STEP 4:

The next step is to inventory the shelving systems, cabinets, deed books, roller shelving units, map cases and determine how these records have been stored and the volume of shelving and storage components that must be planned for.

Oftentimes the inventory far exceeds the available old time storage vault. Basements, attics and closets all over the existing Town Hall must be searched to really contain an accurate understanding of the collection.

It is disappointing when the Town moves to find boxes from a basement that hold real treasures; and, the vault never considered these volumes. The call for church archives, donations of family archives and so on can swell the collection. The Town Clerk that invests time studying these planning details will serve their community best.

Are any of these storage cabinets useless in the new Plan?

What new storage shelving should be ordered for greater efficiency?

STEP 5:

Collaboration with other departments. A joint meeting with the Town’s Engineering Department, the Tax Assessor. In coastal communities the Harbour Master may all have records that should be considered. Some of the most famous of the early American sailing vessels docked in New England coastal communities. Will these departments have unique demands that should be considered? One larger vault is far less expensive than two smaller vaults.

Who should you meet with? 1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

STEP 6:

The next step will involve laying out a vault plan with the types of shelving listed and a diagram of current and future cabinets. Developing a plan for current records as well as future records storage types. Paper, parchment, deed books, microfilm, audio recordings and computer media. Massachusetts and Connecticut direct their towns to consider whether media is part of the storage plan and develop the vault model based on current and future demands.

The vault layout is not just developing a size but also the means for the Town Clerk and staff to monitor the vault interior. Citizens have a right to visit these vaults, although not all documents are open to all visitors, but there must be supervision.

Should you consider a viewing area, will the vault have video surveillance, will staff be required to be beside the patron at all times. The number of staff, the hours the collections are open to the public, a proper viewing counter and even selecting storage cabinetry with pull out shelves allow reference immediately at the point of storage to avoid moving documents all around the vault. Roller shelving should be utilized for large Deed Books. Remember that these books represent the valued land and title records for the community.

What about access for title companies, lawyers, storage of abstracts and so on.

Have you considered storage areas for voting records? These records are a part of the collection and are stored for a period of time as a Vital Record and thereafter the election results are assured by the courts, the documents might then move to less secure storage or to storage as electronic records this compressing the storage needs.

The Clerk and Selectman must take time to consider future growth needs as well as new technologies that might become part of the records archive planning model.

What size vault will accommodate the shelving plan? _____

What shelving and cabinets will move into the new vault?

Are records stored in other locations due to space constraints in the current location?

STEP 7:

What risk factors must the Town Clerk consider? Certainly, the State Archives Staff will direct you to build a fireproof vault and offer some guidance. But depending on the region of the country and whether you are located in certain area, the vault should consider:

- Hurricane prone areas such as coastal areas.
- Flood prone areas.
- Earthquake zones.
- Tornado area
- Civil unrest in urban communities. (Antifa, riots)
- High Value Collections that encourage theft.
- Active shooter concerns. (the vault is a safety zone)
- Environmental concerns. (air pollution diminishes assets, high humidity risk)
- Internal threats. (card access, video surveillance, locking cabinets, security screens)
- Should the building be zone with card access to limit access to higher security areas.
- Building a vault with a complete vapor barrier. (Magnetic Shielding)

Risk factors can be defined as improper storage. Maps should be in flat files or hanging map cases depending on the collection.

Some artifacts and documents should be stored in closed and low light compartments.

Microfilm can suffer from redox blemishing and “Vinegar Syndrome” and these defects can contaminate new media. Off-gassing from one type of media should be considered.

Proper environmental control is never given the attention that it should in Town Hall Vaults. Environmental control with temperature and humidity control, proper rotation of the air within the vault with a rotation of the air volume on multiple factors per day. Typically, three full rotations per day with the air being filtered with HEPA filters for mold and mildew control, dust control and concern for insect and rodent control.

Any times the Town makes a change from one the of media to another, there should be a considerable time where both formats are maintained as instances where electronic records suffer issues such as poor coding, software errors, the hardware and software capable of reading the media develop problems. Sometimes, the rotation or death of a staff member can create problems.

Software become obsolete, developers stop supporting the older versions, the equipment becomes obsolete. Microfilm is an excellent long term storage media. It has stood the test of time.

Describe the concerns for your region? _____

(Vault consultants can show you other Town’s design plans for ideas.)

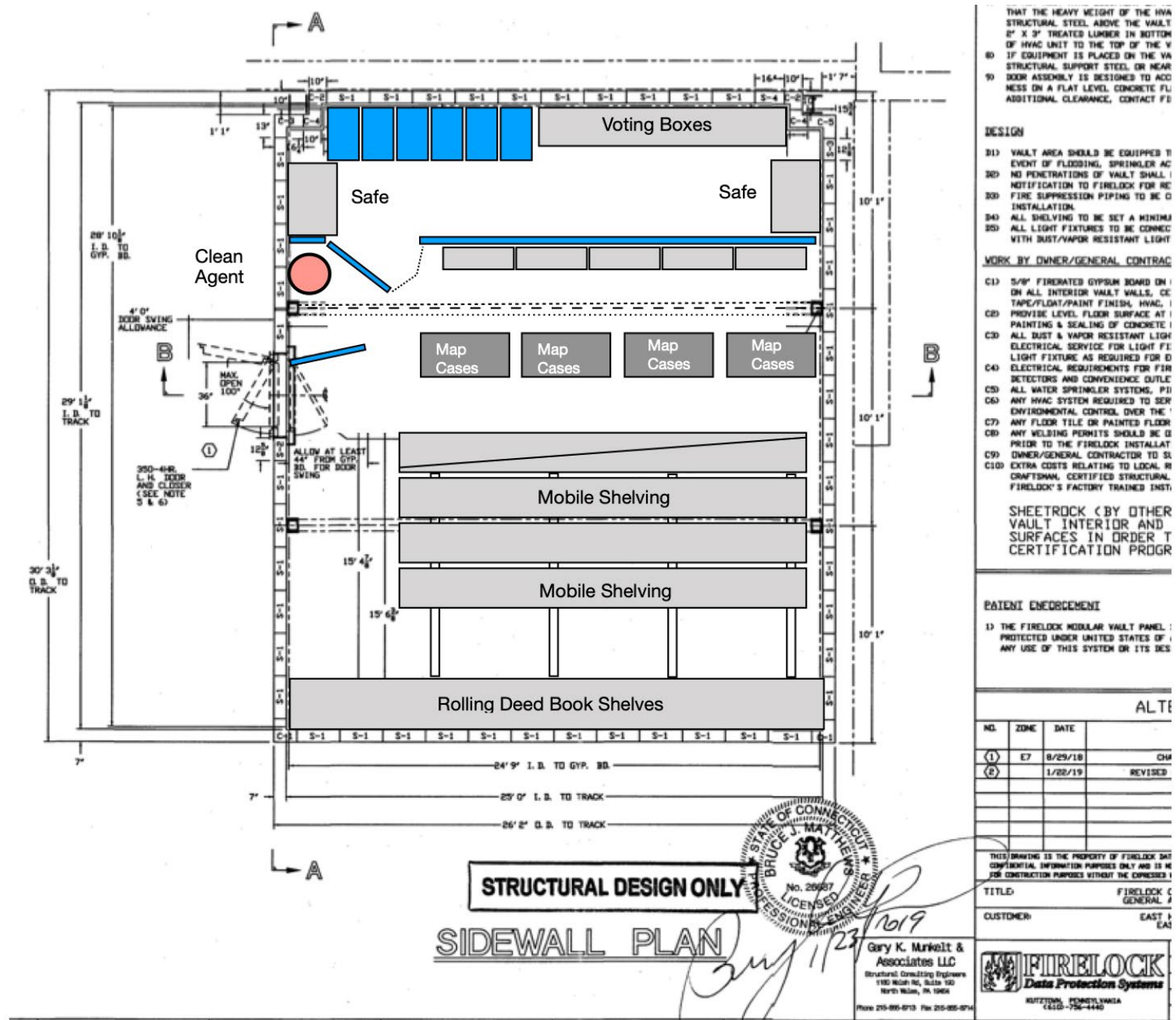
STEP 8: PLANNING FOR THE ACTUAL VAULT

The folder of preliminary planning materials is now complete. Working with the Vault Design Team you can determine what is the idea size for the vault. Discuss each item with the Architect.

Keep in mind that when you layout the plan for the space you now have to introduce the structural support for the vault. This is different for building that is not rated as fire resistant (built with insulated columns and beams and a fully sprinklered building) versus a historic building that may not include any sprinkler or fire suppression systems.

The structural steel requirements increase dramatically in a building lacking fire resistance as part of the original design. These columns and I Beams will reduce useful volume. The vault may need to increase in size to accommodate these added structural elements.

The lighting plan must be designed to align properly with the shelving. (Remember that



lighting must be perpendicular to the direction of the rolling shelving.)

Lighting must be chosen so that the UV is filtered to avoid damaging rare and historical documents. Filter diffusers are available. _____

Lighting must be dust and vapor resistant and the new type of LED fixtures can accomplish this. Lights should be equipped with dimmers to avoid harsh light for a better work environment. Electrical service within the vault should be on arc breaker or Ground Fault Service. The vault and the fire suppression tanks should be grounded. _____

Adding work surfaces or counter tops to low storage units (like map cases) can improve efficiency. Yet provide open visibility to the secure areas of the vault. Pull out shelves can be added to any type of shelving to make viewing the document easier right where they are housed. _____

The Inner door to the vault can be equipped with card access or biometric sensors so the vault can be accessed easily but while maintaining security. The Inner Door provides an environmental seal around the frame to hold in the gaseous clean agent should a fire detection or alarm occur within the vault.

The Vault Door and the Inner Door should each be equipped with automatic hydraulic closers which are activated by a proprietary smoke/heat detector. These same doors can then be activated through an interior alarm, an activation by the Fire Marshal or the clean agent alarm panel activating. _____

Remember that in any fire event, the building's power will be cut off. The vault should be equipped with Emergency Lighting. (Trickle charge fixtures or stand-alone battery backup lights.) _____

Once the shelving plan is developed; then the lighting plan can be finalized. This then determines where the Fire Damper locations for the vault will be located. Remember that the vault must be cooled/heated to precise temperatures ($68^{\circ}\text{F} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{F}$) and the Relative Humidity should be controlled within a precise range as well. (35% -40% with no more than 5% deviation in a 24-hour cycle. The complete air volume of the vault should be rotated on average three times per 24-hour time period, 7 days a week. Vaults can no longer be temperature controlled by leaving the vault door open. Media and historical records require more precise control. _____

(Certain collections may require different temperature and humidity requirements.)

Clean Agent Systems are typically utilized in modern vaults. In addition, certain Fire Marshals and certain states require sprinkler systems as well. Current clean agent systems that provide the optimum conditions for the complete archive are 3M's NOVEC #1230 or another option is ECARO 25. The local suppliers can discuss advantages and costs. These are inner agents that will not damage the collection and will not leave a residue. _____

The modern vaults are equipped with the vapor barrier that ensures the clean agent is trapped within the vault to achieve the required concentration levels to extinguish a fire within the vault. The location of the abort switch within the vault, and near the door is critical. The tank itself should be located safely within the vault. And annunciator display on the stage of alarm should be located just next to the exterior vault door. This displays the status on alarm to the Clerk and staff. _____

STEP 9: PLANNING FOR THE VAULT - UPPER FLOORS

Vaults located on upper floors present challenges. While current day Modular Media Rated are more lightweight than old style poured concrete vaults, 50 to 55 pounds per square foot loads compared to 300-pound weight loads which assists the design team in finding a location for the vault. But the Town Clerk must consider the weight of the records and shelving and cabinets and provide that information to the architect.

(Vaults on upper floor should not have water sprinkler systems within the vault as the wet weight of the records can be an extreme load for the building structural.)

The lightweight modern vault with its vapor barrier is paired with a clean agent system with an unblemished performance record that allows the Clerk and Architect to design with confidence.

Standards recommend not locating vaults in basements as water from the firefighting event will all collect in the basement; therefore, a Level One Vault location is ideal..., but an upper floor location is superior to basement location.

The Clerk must also consider traffic from citizens. The Town Clerk should be able to be reached by all citizens and the vault door equipped with an ADA accessible width door and the counters that clients might use should allow patrons in wheel chairs equal access.

Certain shelving and vault door might be better served by locating them on top of the building structures main beams. This should be discussed with the architect and their structural consultants.



STEP 10: LABORATORY TESTING LABEL ON A VAULT

Modular Media Vault Chambers offer an **Underwriters Laboratory Testing Procedure** and a **Laboratory Listing and Label**. This allows the Selectman and the Town Clerk to have a known rating for the vault.

Many vaults built with traditional brick and mortar failed when subjected to catastrophic fire. Oftentimes; the architect or contractor would provide ventilation ports that carried no fire rating and this led to failure.

But the primary disadvantage of the concrete or CMU brick type vault is that the vault walls and ceiling will send steam into the vault chamber when exposed to a fire. When vaults were only required to protect paper and no other options existed, the Town Clerk was stuck with a vault that was guaranteed to fill with steam and super-saturate the vital records with steam. This requires an expensive and laborious freeze-drying remediation process. The Town is without records for months and the original condition is never the same.

The older documents with iron gall ink will bleed and transfuse page to page making the documents almost unreadable. These records are also most likely to be affected by mold and mildew.

The design in the modern vaults requires the wall and ceiling to be equipped with a steel vapor barrier. By maintaining the vapor barrier, no steam can transmit to the inside of the vault.

also, the new vaults can protect not only paper but media, Microfilm and computer media are protected in the new style vaults. These vaults have performed perfectly over the last 40 years with no losses for even the most fragile of media.

These vaults also provide protection from a myriad of catastrophic event. The vaults are hurricane and earthquake rated by structural engineers. The vaults can withstand 185 mph winds forces to make them tornado resistant. The vapor barrier not only protects from smoke and steam but this same steel barrier provides magnetic shielding against stray magnetic fields, fields from nearby electrical transformers and electrical storms that can damage computer hardware and media.

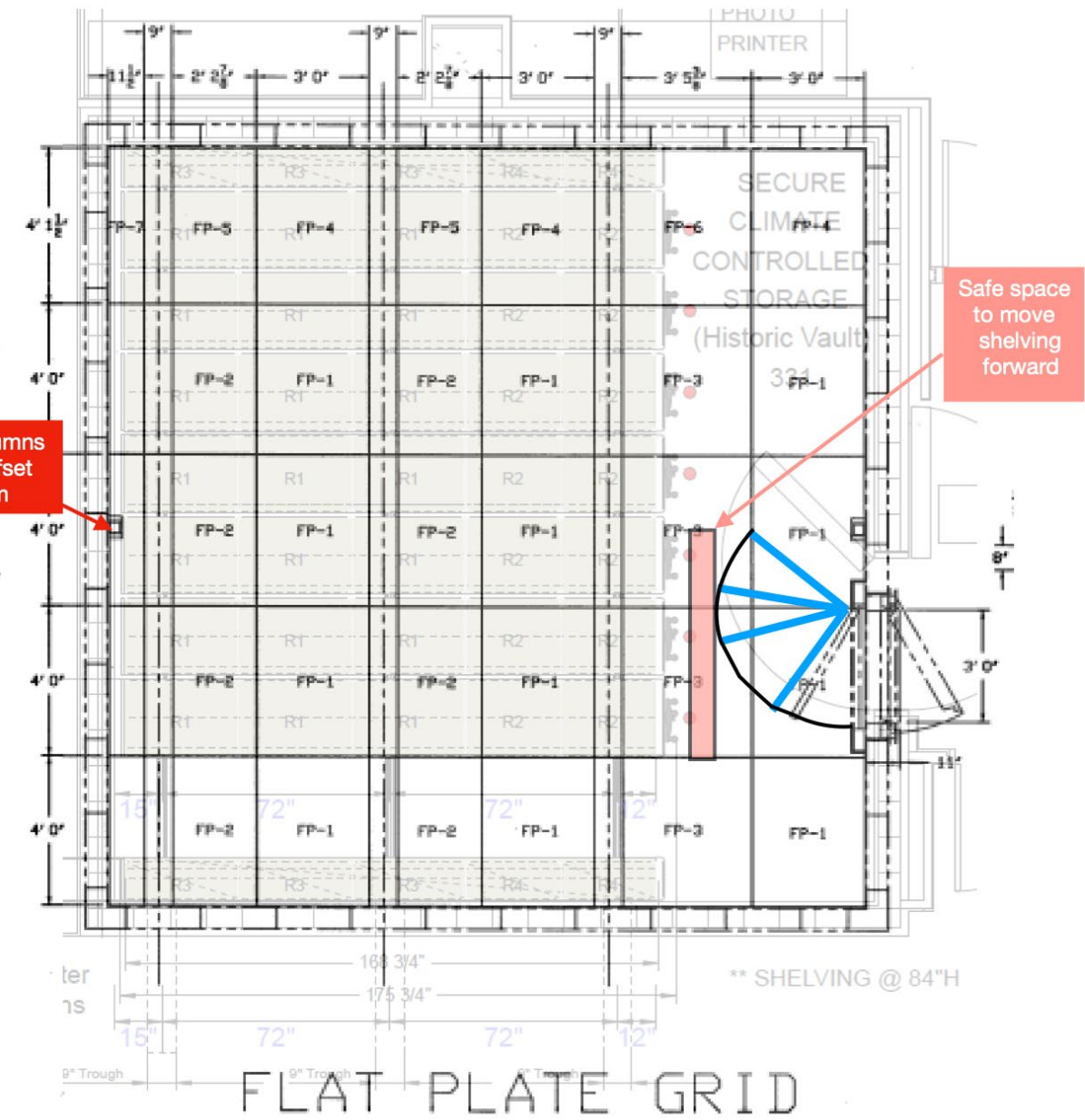
An upper floor vault must be designed to be **six-sided** and this requires coordination with the structural foundation on the upper levels. There must also be coordination with the mobile track shelving rail. Failure to address these issues may result in a vault that is poorly designed to integrate with the overall structural design.

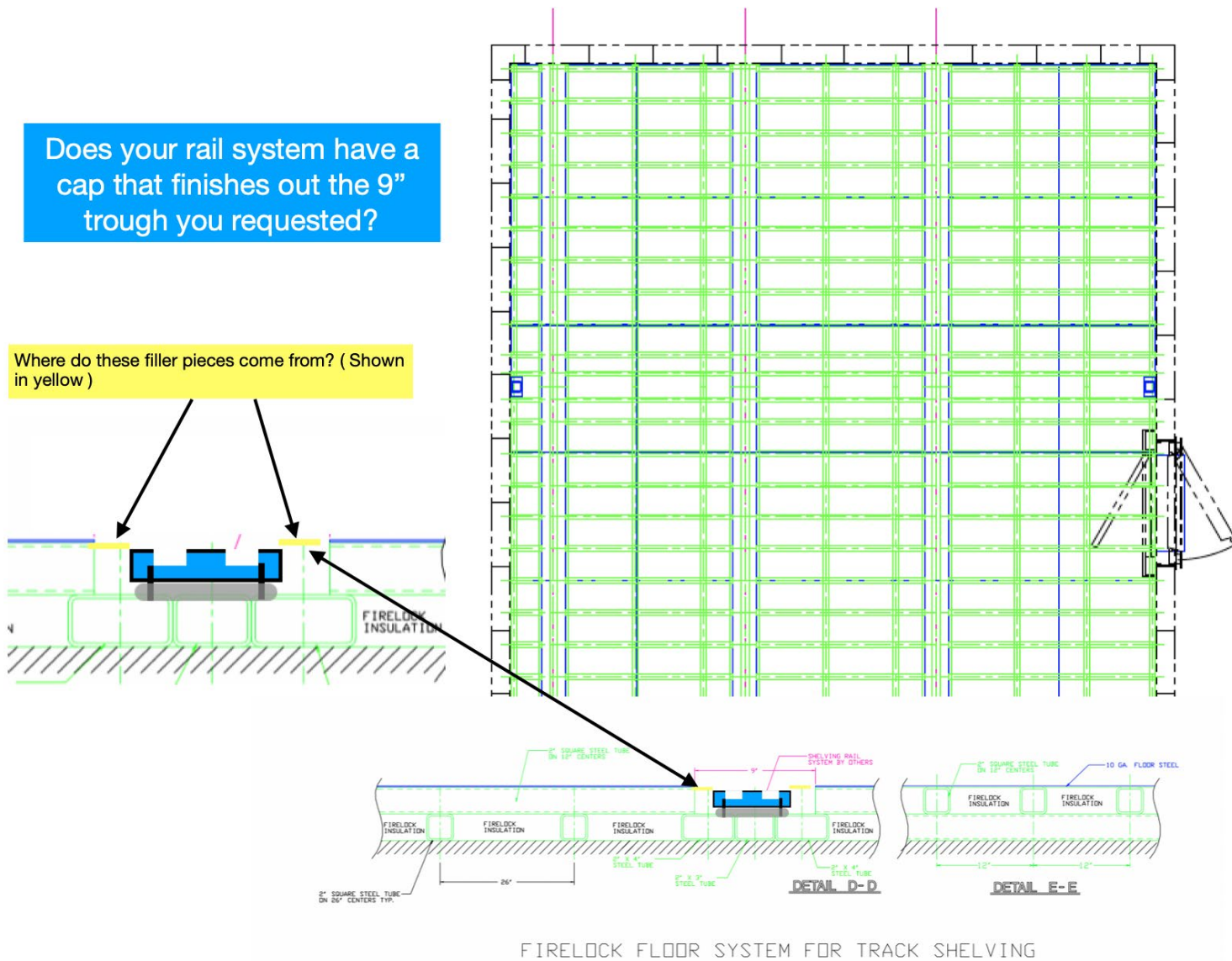
The desire to incorporate mobile track shelving needs to be considered and planned for in the earliest stages. Not only does the concentrated loading that high-density shelving provides, but this high-density load is delivered to embedded rails. These narrow rails carry a concentrated load and the structural team must know this early on in the process.

Modular vaults are design to include the rail within their floor design and they spread this load out over a wide area.

The load for this entire vault is delivered to the three rails below. In the modular design the vault floor is designed to offer multiple layers of support steel. The rail system is design into the top level and then transmitted to the lower level which spread the weight load from concentrated to a diverse load. This load is then delivered into the concrete floor.

Planned discussion with structural? _____





Step 12:

The vault being six sided, means that the building floor on the upper level must be designed with an indention or pit for the modular vault. Otherwise ever trip into the vault will require a 4" step up or building a ramp. Due to ADA requirements these ramps end up

being extremely long to provide a safe travel ramp. Therefore, planning for the indentation or pit within the foundation is the prudent course.

STEP 11: COMMUNICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS “VAULT PERFORMANCE” TO THE DESIGN TEAM

There are few areas within a typical construction project that develop the risk that a faulty vault design can create for the Town Clerk, the Selectmen or Town Council. For example; the Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has published a Technical Bulletin #1 which outlines these requirements. This not a helpful list, this is a statement of physical requirements that carry the force of law.

Chapter 66 Legal s.11 MGL requires town clerks, officers, selectmen, town councils to provide vaults for safekeeping of the public records. (*2 Op. Attorney General 1899, p.48*)

Technical Bulletin 1 Performance Standards of Safes and Vaults is the document that defines vault construction requirements. This Standard require Class 350 Six Hour Document Protection and also a minimum of Class 125 Two Hour Protection for Computer Media.

The State of Connecticut under their regulations for State Agencies has published the *Standard for Fire-Resistive Vaults and Safes*. The official version is published in the Connecticut Law Journal and administered by the Department of Public Records for the State of Connecticut. The Architect is required to include these specifications in their preliminary and final design drawings and submit their drawings to the Department of Public Records prior to completing the final design and also just prior to initiating building construction. Upon completion of the new facility the Department of Public Records will require a Certification from the Architect and the perform an onsite inspection. The Town must complete these requirements prior to relocating records into the new vault facility.

The statutes change and architects are cautioned to visit with state public records archivists and staff to ensure their design is compliant. Each state has their own requirements but in general the states follow the National Fire Protection Association ***NFPA 232 Protection of Records Standard***.

STEP 12: ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL - MISSION CRITICAL

The major flaw found in so many vaults designed by design professionals unfamiliar with the Code Requirements, the State Standards and the rigorous demands of historical and fragile media is within the environmental design.

The design for a vault is unique. The vault system is a closed loop design. Outside air is not desirable in general. The make-up air is to be limited. Outside air delivers pollutants, chemicals and mold, mildew and other contaminants to the vault.

Within the closed loop there is a rigorous requirement for controlling the temperature to a precise degree and then the relative humidity must be specifically designed for the specific requirements of the archival collection.

As previously discussed, the air within the vault must be rotated fully on a 3 to 4 time per 24-hour cycle. The purpose of this circulation is not to deliver outside air into the vault but to drag the air volume from within the vault through a series of dust and particulate filtration. In addition, the off-gassing of the vault should be run through filters or charcoal scrubbing in more extreme value collections.

As the air exits the vault it is filtered, then modified to the proper humidity level and then the temperature will be modified to meet the design standard. The very first step in this design is to establish what the needs of the archival collection will be.

In more modern vaults, the temperature range of 68° F. (plus or minus 2° F.) is sufficient along with a 35% to 45% RH.

In vaults with decaying paper records, (slow burn due to acid content in the paper itself) iron gall on parchment, and other fragile media, microfiche, microfilm, digital records, the vault may require more precise conditions; where the temperature is kept at a lower level and the Relative Humidity is to be held at 30% RH. A professional archivist should be consulted in many cases. The minute the lower humidity and the rigid holding of this limit enters the design paradigm, the **Munter's CargoCaire Dessicant Dehumidifiers** enter the discussion. Many if not all of the great archives employ these desiccant type dehumidifiers.

These systems allow the humidity to be regulated without the need to heat or cool the vault in general. The moisture is withdrawn from the vault via a desiccant wheel. These vault systems not only more precisely control the environment they also lower energy costs.

Vaults are basically giant coolers with highly insulated walls and ceilings. There is little heat or cold loading on the air volume of the vault interior; but the traffic in and out of the vault constantly effects the humidity levels. It is the need to precisely control this humidity to a fixed level (30%) on a 24-hour cycle that is nearly impossible on a standard mechanical system. If the temperature drops below 50° F. then the mechanical system then moves into the realm of a refrigerant system.

As the more precise measures are required, the vault should be equipped with a foyer to create buffer zone and allow for the exchange of a small amount of air into the vault with each passage in and out of the vault.

MANAGING THE UNMANAGEABLE

All of this seems so simple, and truly being organized in advance is the best asset for achieving a project that will meet the Town's long-term needs.

But we all know this planning work is not done in a vacuum. The Town's managing network must be enlisted as an ally or at least not an active opponent to the needs of the records collection. It is important that the Town and City Clerk remember their functions are often defined by law and those who interfere in the proper functioning of the Clerk can be in violation of the law.

The Clerk's records are the lifeblood of the Town. The loss of records can create chaos as the records include the Land Records & Deeds, Birth and Death Records, "Identification" records are mission critical for our protection against those who use "Identity" as a weapon or act of criminal behavior. More and more, citizens recognize the value of protecting our voting records and the actual ballots. There is no more important function in a Town or City than the Clerk of the Records.

But the Town or City Manager, the elected Selectman or Supervisors may not realize the importance of your function. The elected officials may come and go, the actual form of organization the Town is based on could change; but the records still maintain their value and importance. Oftentimes the State defines these records in such a manner as to protect the role of the clerk. Record-keeping requirements often carry the force of law. Destroying a public record or being negligent with these records is oftentimes a criminal offense.

Understanding how your records are governed, regulated and defined should be part of the planning process. Enlist the State Archive staff, the Public Records Division of the State and visit with the Town Solicitor and determine what the laws and rules are in advance of the project. This definition will be pulled out of your planning folder again and again as you meet opposition from officials, the architects, and contractors on building a proper Town Clerk's office and Town Hall Vault.

TEAM BUILDING

The first people to seek out when starting your planning are the Town and City clerks from your state that recently completed a new Town Hall project. It is important to talk with multiple Town Hall Clerks during this pre-planning phase.

From one Town Clerk you will hear how simple and easy it was. But the next Clerk you talk with will how difficult the process was. This is a function of how the environment in their Town was during the process and how involved they chose to be.

If one is content to move into whatever space the Architect designs; based on the input this architect received from his/her space planning team, then it could be a carefree process.

But it is important to note your Town will build one Town Hall and it will be in place for decades with no near-term options to upgrade or change anything. You are not designing for your tenure as clerk but the next 5 to 10 Town Clerks. Recognize the real responsibility that is manifest in this planning process. The records of your fellow citizens, their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and on beyond this all reply on the Town Clerk to get it right.

Visiting other town Halls, interviewing other clerks and meeting with the proper staff at your states public records division will educate you on doing this right. The Town Clerk office and Vault you design will last for generations so it is an important responsibility.

DEFINE THE CONTROLLING LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Visiting Typically, the Town Clerk is aware of the rules governing the design and construction of the Town Hall Vault. But; the architect may not know the regulations that define how the vault is to be built. Oftentimes, the Town Manager or the head of the Selectmen will control the new Town Hall Design Project. It is critical that you educate all those involved in the design with the requirements.

Submit the controlling design criteria in writing to all involved so this information cannot be overlooked. Here are examples of the controlling standards for two states; Connecticut and Massachusetts. These two states have spent years working to define standards that provide the most up to date protection and these standards have proven effective in controlling the construction methods for the vault.

Each of these design standards have as a foundation the National Fire Protection Standard NFPA **232 - *Protection of Records*** and then they develop the specific language to ensure the vital records are protected from all risks.

CONNECTICUT Statutes:

The Connecticut municipal vault approval procedures and requirements; Pursuant to CGS §7-27, §45a-10(c), and §11-8, municipal and probate court vaults must be constructed and maintained in accordance with the ***Standard for Fire Resistive Vaults and Safes***, Connecticut Agencies Regulations §11-8-1 through §11-8-12, and must be approved by the Public Records Administrator.

Public records require a copy of the plans and a signed certification letter from the architect/engineer stating that the plans "meet or exceed the requirements of the Standard for Fire-Resistive Vaults and Safes, Connecticut Agencies Regulations §11-8-1 through §11-8-12." This letter must include information regarding the vault plans; and must also address the protection of the vault records during the project if applicable.

If the town will need to relocate the records to a temporary location during the construction project, those plans will need to be reviewed separately.

After completing the project and before moving into the completed vault the architect/engineer must provide a signed certification stating that "the completed vault meets or exceeds the requirements of the Standard for Fire-Resistive Vaults and Safes, Connecticut Agencies Regulations §11-8-1 through §11-8-12."

MASSACHUSETTS Statutes:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has issued a Technical Bulletin 1 that defines the Performance Standards of Safes and Vaults. These Standards were issued by the Supervisor of Public Records in May of 1995 and modified in 1996. The Authority for these requirements is included in the publication of the Chapter 66. s.11 MGL requires the officers in charge of state departments, county commissioners, city councils or selectmen to provide fire-resistant rooms, safes or vaults for the safekeeping of the public records of their governmental unit (2 Op. Atty. Gen. 1899, p. 48). Pursuant to s. 1 of this statute, the Supervisor of Public Records is authorized to promulgate standards for the construction and use of these vaults, rooms and safes (8 Op. Atty. Gen. 1929, p. 594).

All vaults for the storage of public records shall provide the minimum level of protection specified hereunder. The Supervisor of Public Records does not specify any particular materials or technique for the construction of public records vaults. The Supervisor will approve vaults for the storage of public records upon receipt of the certification of licensed or registered fire protection and structural engineers that the proposed construction will have a fire resistance and structural integrity equivalent to or greater than that specified in the following performance criteria.

All vaults intended for the storage of paper records shall be so constructed that, when fitted with the 6-hour required hereunder shall, in the event of fire in the surrounding structure, maintain an internal temperature of 350 or below for a period of not less than 6 hours. These standards provide the maximum available level of fire protection for paper records, but cannot safeguard film or magnetic media against either heat or humidity.

If magnetic media have not been copied and dispersed or otherwise duplicated for protection, vaults or portions thereof used for the storage of this media must be designed to minimize temperature rise and moisture intrusion. These vaults shall be so constructed or equipped that, in the event of a fire in the surrounding structure, the internal temperature and relative humidity shall remain below 125 Degrees Fahrenheit and 80% Relative Humidity, respectively for a period of at least 2 hours. It is the responsibility of the records custodian to provide all media with the level of protection specified above and to provide the Supervisor with the engineer's certification to that effect.

Prior to storage of public records in a newly constructed or renovated vault, the contracting agency shall provide the Supervisor of Public Records with signed and sealed certifications from all relevant engineers that the foregoing standards have been met or exceeded. No vaults which are not so certified may be used for the storage of public records.

WHAT DEFINES THE MODERN-DAY VAULT?

The current requirements of vaults have to consider different types of media that are now considered "Vital Records." Many Town Halls record the minutes of Town Hall meetings and require these meeting minutes to be protected within the vault.

Also, over time Towns have started storing microfilm and microfiche of various maps, wastewater plans, EPA requirements and many types of engineering documents that are more easily maintain in film formats.

The Town's records are now often stored as electronic records on various formats such as disk drives, DVD and CD, back up computer tapes and actual servers. These records require a more rigid control of the internal temperature and humidity.

Historical records on certain papers and parchment also demand this same rigid control of temperature and humidity. The modern vault now includes:

- Automatic, Hydraulic Vault Door Closers actuated by smoke and heat detectors
- Clean Agent Systems such as NOVEC 1230 or ECARO 25 to provide faster activation of the fire suppression system and prevent water damage
- Environmental control dampers which close on heat, smoke or activation of the clean agent alarm system
- Fire Rated Cable trays for power and communication wiring
- Vapor barriers and in some cases magnetic shielding
- Special lighting fixtures which provide dust and vapor resistant housings and, in some cases, special light fixtures which eliminate UV light which can damage the records and increase fading. LED Lighting and battery backup lighting are now standard.
- The modern vault will provide a Laboratory Listing and Label to certify performance. This vault will also deliver the Certification that is often required by the Public Records Division of each state.
- Security should consider biometric or card access control for entry into the vault. This allows the inner door to be used for dual control of the vault chamber as well as safe room in the event of an active shooter event. (The inner door has a key lock and this also can be used to prevent access to the vault interior if the Town Staff remove the key and use the vault as a safe room.)
- Due to Identification Theft, closed circuit television should be utilized to record who is accessing these most vital of records as these cameras may help deter Identity Theft and Title and Property Theft.

NEW THREATS

It is important to realize that there are new threats to Town Hall Records Collections. While many visitors to the Town Hall Vault see a collection of dusty historical records; there is a new visitor to the Town Hall and that visitor is intent on stealing the Deed and Title information housed within the Town Vault.

Title document monitoring may be a new requirement for Clerks as the initial deed is the true best and first evidence for a legal defense. The Clerk is the line of defense in many communities. To perpetuate a fraud, the owner's signature has to be forged, and there has to be a fraudulent notarization. A visitor with a smart phone can capture a great of information on one simple visit to the Clerk's Vault, if not properly monitored. A pattern of fraudulent transactions may occur in certain communities where the vault is not supervised.

Criminal activity would be directed to properties that are newly vacated, areas with vacation homes or a home of a newly deceased person. These fraudulent agents would focus on properties where the deed owner is not in possession. In some counties and towns, the title holder can request from the town a notification if any change is attempted to the title.

The Deeds in the Town Hall vault are actually the legal documents that transfer title from one person to another. It must be a written document, according to the Statute of Frauds. Oftentimes; the Deed is referred to as the vehicle of the property interest transfer. The process of recording a deed is becoming more at risk in a time of ID theft. The Clerk is a first defense in protecting property rights.

The Title company is a frequent visitor to the Vault and if a fraudulent deed is recorded, the real owner is now required to defend their ownership. The Clerk needs to be aware of these new types of Identity Theft. Property and Title Theft is a discussion that should be reviewed with the Town Attorney. This problem is expected to be a growing threat as more criminals learn how to take advantage of the combined records of birth, marriage, military and deed information all in one environment.

The use of higher security compartments within the vault can protect high value intrinsic value records from theft and also move certain Identification Records out of public access. (Military Identification, Social Security Numbers, date of birth, etc.) Deed forgery is made easier if the parties to the deed, the property address, Tax Identification Number and legal description are easily compiled in one location.

Access control, video surveillance and redaction of highly sensitive information should be considered by the Town Managers and Town Clerk to protect the rights of the citizens.

Previously notaries and recorders were viewed as effective gatekeepers but forgers can create a false notary seal so there must be a higher bar when transferring ownership of such valuable real estate and the Town Clerk and Town Attorney must develop security protocols and fraud detection to protect the community. Being aware of counterfeit notary seal or "Island Notary Page" as a warning signal to provide more oversight to the transfer.

VOTING RECORDS

Voting Records are taking on greater importance with all of the concerns for the sanctity of our voting rights and the accuracy of the ballots. How has the Town addressed this in planning for the new vault?

How long must ballots be preserved?

What is the necessary storage space?

How will access be controlled?

FUNDING THE EXPANDED OPERATIONS

There are greater stresses and costs placed on the Town clerk office than ever before. Just reviewing the above discussion will expose some pending and future costs that will be part of the Town Clerk office's functions.

Oftentimes, the transition to electronic records is viewed as a cost saving action, but that is not true in the long run. System and software, constant upgrades, storage costs at remote Cloud sites and so on inflate these costs again and again.

Providing the necessary security for access control, video surveillance and compartmentalizing the vault add costs.

In addition, over time certain records must be remediated by outside firms that can clean, sanitize and refurbish the historical records and these costs are significant.

The efficient Town Clerk will establish a fee schedule for providing copies of documents (birth, death and other certificates), recording deeds after proper verification of authenticity, providing abstracts and so on.

Passing fees on to the Title Company and Law Firms is appropriate way to offset the time and money that preparing these documents creates.

In some case, overzealous activists place heavy burdens on the Clerk's Office through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Setting a fee schedule can protect against heavy demands. Proper fees can keep the office running smooth while avoiding one or two individuals placing an enormous burden on staff. Establishing fees in concert with above to a new facility can make for a smooth transition and offset some of the costs of new equipment, cabinetry and security devices.

Such fees must be approved by the Town Council or Selectman or Supervisors depending on the jurisdiction.

[If there are questions on any section of the design guideline, please contact FIRELOCK at (610) 756-4440.]