Case Study: Building Permit Files

According to the Assistant Building Inspector, the primary responsibilities of the town's Building Division include issuing permits, performing inspections, enforcing codes and providing information that regulates the construction of new buildings, alterations of or additions to existing structures, and the installation of swimming pools.

Building Permit Files include the permit application, building plans (which are oversize architectural drawings), photographs, and inspection records (of electrical and plumbing systems, for example), and certificates of occupancy. The town began issuing permits in 1945. Since 2002, Building Permit Files are either created electronically or converted to electronic format. The electronic files are then maintained electronically in a module of the Sunguard NaviLine system (http://www.sungardps.com/solutions/naviline/) .

Building permit application forms are available on the town's website but, together with the initial building plans, can only be submitted in hardcopy. NaviLine files do not cross reference hardcopy plans, which are retained only in hardcopy and must be accessed separately. Some modifications to original plans are accepted in AutoCad or PDF formats. More recent paper copies of permits (approximately 56 cubic feet) are retained in the office, while older, closed files are housed in the town's records center in the basement of town hall.

The town considers the paper copy to be the official copy for retention purposes. According to the Records Retention and Disposition Schedule, building permits and supporting plans must be retained for six years after the building no longer exists. Corresponding data files contained in the NaviLine system are scheduled to be retained "0 after no longer needed," although the Records Retention and Disposition Schedule also advises permanent retention because the system allows for longitudinal analysis of and access to building data. For the years 2002-present, the electronic files essentially duplicate the information contained in the hardcopy files.

The town's Building Permit Files exist only in the town.

Data Fields for Case Study: Building Permit Files

Complete the following e-records inventory data fields using the information in the Case Study. Refer to the E-records Inventory Data Fields information on the next page for more information regarding each field.

System Title:

System Owner:

Dates Covered:

Relationship to Other Records:

Retention Requirements:

Vital Records Status:

E-records Inventory Data Fields

It's important to focus on aggregates of records rather than individual records or files. E-records inventories are conducted at the records system level, with a system generally encompassing one or more records series.   An e-records system may be a database, a software application, a document management system (or a module of an enterprise management system), or a file directory.

Examples of e-records systems include:

- Database of information about current and former employees
- Computer-aided design files for specific projects
- Digital repository of county proceedings
- EDMS module of social services case files
- Time and attendance programs (e.g., PeopleSoft)
- Pistol permit program

The inventory data fields to compete for each electronic records system follow:

System title: Name by which the e-records system is known to those who maintain and use it. The title should be as descriptive as possible, including subject, function, and, if necessary, form of the records. Examples include Accounts Payable Data File, Pistol Permit Database, and Construction Cost Estimates.

System analyst: Name of the person who provides technical support for the records system; usually a member of the IT staff or a vendor. The Systems Analyst will provide or clarify information on file type and format, quantity and estimated growth, hardware, software, supporting files, backup procedures, and provisions for migration.

System owner: Name of the primary user of the records; the person most likely to understand the business purpose of the e-records system and its relationship to other records. Will usually be able to provide dates covered, system description, backup procedures, reference and retrieval, restrictions on use, and vital records status.

Dates covered: Beginning and ending dates of the record system. The beginning date can be the date of system implementation, records migration or conversion from another system, or a new function or module was added to an existing system. If the records are still actively used, you may want to indicate the end date as "9999," "ongoing," or "current." For unstructured data, dates covered would be the first and last dates the file or files were created.   Use "ca." for circa (approximately) if the exact dates cannot be determined.

System description: A summary of the records system's business purpose, scope and contents. A useful strategy for describing a system is to list the data fields in that system. Indicate the electronic records' relationship to the department's mission or business operations. For example:

New York State Archives. (2011). *Electronic Records Inventory*.
http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/workshops/workshops_handouts_erecords_inventory.pdf

The ACS 20/20 system documents transactions in the county clerk's office from cashiering to recordation. Micrographic and bound paper (from microfilm) copies of the records are still available, but the indexing function and search capability of the ACS 20/20 are uniquely electronic.

The system consists of four modules that represent steps in the process for recording, filing, and making available records in the County Clerk's Office. The records document transactions, which do not necessarily involve the payment of fees to Warren County (e.g., oaths of office, resignations). The modules are Cashiering, Scanning, Indexing, and Searching.

Records are accessed via a top level menu that has broad categories, or "Offices," representing records groups: Notary, Officials, Consolidated Liens, Maps, Lis Pendens, Business Names, Miscellaneous, Real Property, Judgments, Courts, Civil Office Book Page, Separation Agreements, Military Discharges. Within the record groups are specific document types (parallel to records series in a paper environment). Some record groups have only one document type; the largest number of document types are filed under Real Property, which includes deeds, mortgages, and other records documenting the exchange of land in Warren County. The range of dates in the system vary, depending on the number of hardcopy records that county staff have converted and entered into the system.

The primary purpose of the system description is to help you identify the system in the future (based on how you describe the system now) and assess the value of the e-records for retention and research purposes.

File Type and Format: Basic character of the electronic file, which can include word processed files, databases, spreadsheets, geographic information system (GIS) records, computer-aided design (CAD) records, and email, among others. Format identifies the specific program that created the file type. For example:

Word processed files in MS Word, Access database, Excel Spreadsheet, PDF reports.

The purpose is to collect data to plan preservation and migration needs.

Quantity and estimated growth: Sized of records system in number of media, bytes, records, or a combination of these, and growth over a specified time period by an increase in that number of media, bytes, records, or combination. For example:

Total number of permits issued has been declining from a high of 1572 permits in 2011 to 1264 in 2012. With the new permit requirements now in place for roofs and fence construction, the number of permits issued is expected to remain in the 1200-1300 per year range for the foreseeable future.

The purpose of collecting data on size and growth is to plan storage and migration needs, after factoring in the number of e-records you can legally destroy during a given time period.

New York State Archives. (2011). *Electronic Records Inventory*.
http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/workshops/workshops_handouts_erecords_inventory.pdf

Hardware: Equipment required to retrieve or process the e-records system. Hardware may include mainframe computers, midrange computers, servers and PCs. Example:

> The database is on an IBM mainframe.

The purpose of collecting data on hardware is to plan for hardware upgrades and data migration as needed to ensure the e-records are accessible for their full retention periods.

 Software: Software program used to create and/or access the records. Provide any information useful for understanding the nature of the software. For example, is it open source or proprietary? If proprietary, what is the name of the vendor that provides support? For example,

> The system is a Microsoft Access database wit a Visual Basic for Applications interface developed by the ITS PC Applications group.

The purpose of collecting this data during the inventory is to plan for software upgrades, software migration, and data migration as needed to ensure access to the records for their full retention periods.

Media characteristics: If applicable, the type or types of storage media involved (magnetic tapes, optical discs, other), storage requirements for the media in linear feet, location or locations of the media, and the media's date of manufacture. This data is necessary to plan for refreshing media (copying from old to new version of the same media) or migration to new media (when one type of media becomes obsolete).

Relationship to other records: Records in another format (microfilm or paper) that the e-records may duplicate either wholly or partially. For example, the state and the town both keep official copies of birth, death, and marriage records (a dual system). The town keeps paper and microfilmed copies of all vital records.

Retention requirements: The minimum amount of time you must retain the records according to a records retention and disposition schedule. If the series is not on the schedule, note that and propose a reasonable retention period. For example:

> Building permits and supporting pans must be retained for six years after the building no longer exists. As these files essentially duplicate information contained in the hard copy files, the town could apply the retention period for duplicate records to the electronic records ("0 after no longer needed").

The point of noting the retention period is to ensure records are destroyed or preserved as legally required.

Supporting files: Records that support the creation, maintenance, or use of the electronic records or records systems, which can include indexes, data entry manuals, data dictionaries, system documentation, and others. For example:

> Supporting files for the clerk's birth, death, and marriage records include an index in paper format and copies of application and correction/amendment forms.

New York State Archives. (2011). *Electronic Records Inventory*.
http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/workshops/workshops_handouts_erecords_inventory.pdf

Collecting data on supporting files ensures consistent creation of, access to, and full use of records for at least as long as their retention periods.

Backup procedures: Frequency of backups, media used, and other backup procedures. For example:

> This system is backed up daily with a full system tape back up monthly. The tapes are stored approximately two miles away at Elm Park.

Data on backups will ensure vital records protection; for example, the inventory can help you identify when you don't back up often enough or when your backups are stored too close to the system itself.

Provisions for migration: Any information relevant to the migration or other maintenance needs of the records. For example:

> System was upgraded in 2010. The vendor, Yardi, has not announced plans for future migrations.

Collecting data on migration ensures ongoing access to and use of records. It also helps you schedule migration at a frequency that ensures access but minimizes data loss.

Reference and retrieval: How and how often the records are used over a given period of time. For example:

> Staff consult the database about 2,000 a month through a web portal to determine the shelf location of items requested or to update information. Frequency is not expected to decrease.

The purpose for collecting this data is to ensure or enhance access as needed. The inventory will highlight records to be provided to the public via the Internet because they are used frequently for research. It might also highlight records subject to frequent FOI requests, audits, and legal inquiries.

Restrictions on use: Who has access to the records and the reasons for restrictions, if any. For example:

> Access is limited to members of the public who visit the Warren County Clerk; there is currently no provision for remote access. Viewing access to the indexes is open, but there is a per-page charge for printing from the system. Some records are closed to the public because they contain personal information (records filed under Notary, Courts, Civil Office Book Page, Separation Agreements, and Military Discharges).

The purpose for this data on use restrictions is to ensure appropriate security for records that are restricted and adequate access to those that aren't.

Vital records status: Whether the e-records are vital. Vital records are t hose that, if destroyed, must be recreated to resume essential business operations. They provide

New York State Archives. (2011). *Electronic Records Inventory*.
http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/workshops/workshops_handouts_erecords_inventory.pdf

evidence of your assets and the rights of your constituency. Vital records tend to be active, documenting the status of ongoing, current transactions and relationship.

The purpose of identifying vital records as part of an e-records inventor is to identify records that require additional protection. For example, you may decide to increase the frequency and number of backups for a particular system or back up a system to a site in another state.

New York State Archives. (2011). *Electronic Records Inventory*.
http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/workshops/workshops_handouts_erecords_inventory.pdf

Impact of Emerging Technologies

Up to this point, we have been looking at a case study used by the New York State Archives titled Electronic Records Inventory. Just spend a few minutes reflecting upon the impact on electronic recordkeeping practices that may be the result of using Emerging Technologies.

First – look at the records retention schedule published by the State of Florida, currently online at http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/recordsmgmt/gen_records_schedules.cfm   Note the "Building Department Schedule G56 has been incorporated into the first schedule, GS1-SL.

General Records Schedules

These General Records Schedules established by the Department of State are intended for use by state, county, city and special district public records custodians.

Schedule No.	Agency	Last Revised	PDF	Word	Excel
GS1-SL	State and Local Government Agencies	November 2006 *Revised Items - 08/01/2010 (14KB PDF)*	PDF 471KB	WORD 505KB	Excel 322KB
GS2	Law Enforcement, Correctional Facilities, and District Medical Examiners	May 2008 *With December 1, 2010 Revisions*	PDF 267KB	WORD 380KB	Excel 224KB
GS3	Election Records	September 2010 *with February 1, 2011 and September 1, 2012 Updates*	PDF 618KB	WORD 311KB	Excel 132KB
GS4	Public Health Care Facilities and Providers	December 1997 *New/Revised Items - 05/14/2007*	PDF 89KB	WORD 170KB	
GS5	Public Universities and Colleges	June 2012	PDF 69KB	WORD 232KB	Excel 62KB
GS6	Building Departments	This schedule has been incorporated into the GS1-SL			

Services for Records Managers
About Records Management / Home
General Records Schedules
Records Retention Scheduling & Disposition
Records Management Liaison Officers
Publications & Forms
Statutes & Rules
Training
Records Storage Center
Total Recall Web Module
Disaster Recovery
Frequently Asked Questions

Note also that GS1-SL was published in November 2006 and revised August 1, 2010.   Read the revised statement copied on the next page and then discuss how it affects the electronic records inventory you created based on the original case study.

http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/recordsmgmt/gen_records_schedules.cfm

Effective August 1, 2010, the following changes were made to the *General Records Schedule GS1-SL* for State and Local Government Agencies.

The title and descriptive language were revised on the following item (previous title: *Electronic Mail*) to account for public records created and transmitted using emerging communications technologies.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

There is no single retention period that applies to all electronic messages or communications, whether they are sent by e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging (such as SMS, Blackberry PIN, etc), multimedia messaging (such as MMS), chat messaging, social networking (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.), or any other current or future electronic messaging technology or device. **Retention periods are determined by the content, nature, and purpose of records, and are set based on their legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical values, regardless of the format in which they reside or the method by which they are transmitted.** Electronic communications, as with records in other formats, can have a variety of purposes and relate to a variety of program functions and activities. The retention of any particular electronic message will generally be the same as the retention for records in any other format that document the same program function or activity. For instance, electronic communications might fall under a CORRESPONDENCE series, a BUDGET RECORDS series, or one of numerous other series, depending on the content, nature, and purpose of each message. Electronic communications that are created primarily to communicate information of short-term value, such as messages reminding employees about scheduled meetings or appointments, might fall under the "TRANSITORY MESSAGES" series.

Descriptive language was revised on the following item to clarify the meaning and intent of "transitory."

TRANSITORY MESSAGES   Item #146

This record series consists of records that are created primarily to communicate information of short-term value. **"Transitory"** refers to short-term *value* based upon the content and purpose of the message, *not* the format or technology used to transmit it. Examples of transitory messages include, but are not limited to, reminders to employees about scheduled meetings or appointments; most telephone messages (whether in paper, voice mail, or other electronic form); announcements of office events such as holiday parties or group lunches; and recipient copies of announcements of agency-sponsored events such as exhibits, lectures, workshops, etc. Transitory messages are not intended to formalize or perpetuate knowledge and do not set policy, establish guidelines or procedures, certify a transaction, or become a receipt.

RETENTION:
a) Record copy. Retain until obsolete, superseded, or administrative value is lost.
b) Duplicates. Retain until obsolete, superseded, or administrative value is lost.

http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/barm/genschedules/GS1-SL-2006_2010_Changes_08-01.pdf