

***Thirty-two V.S.A. § 1671 provides authority for the legislative body of a municipality to create a “restoration reserve fund ... which shall be used solely for restoration, preservation, and conservation of records.” What do these terms mean? Can they include purchase of a copier or computer software to copy or store records? Could they mean only safekeeping of records in their original form?***

There are no easy statutory or legal definitions of the terms used in the statute. Using definitions from the general dictionary, the intent of the statute seems to be to prevent damage or harm to original records and to repair or undo damage that has already occurred.

Proceeding from the premise that “a stitch in time saves nine,” prevention of damage should be a priority. Prevention may include a better vault (fireproofed, temperature and humidity controlled), hanging files for maps, or improved shelving. Prevention would not include copiers since photocopying actually accelerates deterioration of records through increased handling which causes stress on pages and bindings and increased heat and light exposure from the copier itself.

Software to be used for the storage of records, while it may ultimately decrease handling of the original paper copies, should not be a priority at this time because of the somewhat iffy legal status of electronic records. Resources should be put into taking care of the original records rather than creating electronic copies that may not be adequate for legal purposes. This advice, of course, may change as definitions of what is a legal record change.

Restoration of the original records by a vendor who can do deacidification and repairs is vitally important. Although the cost of such work seems high, when that cost is compared to the millions of dollars invested in the land listed in the records, restoration costs are well worth it. Likewise, genealogy records are priceless and irreplaceable.

Each town should develop a plan or list of priorities for its use of the funds based on the condition of its records and storage facilities and the money available.

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