



TOWN OF BARRE, VERMONT

Donna Kelty, Town Clerk-Treasurer
P.O. Box 124, 149 Websterville Road
Websterville, VT 05678-0124

April 17, 2018

RE: H.899 – Bill relating to the fees for recording of documents.

To the Senate Government Operations Committee:

Please accept this letter as testimony for the support of House Bill 899 relating to the fees associated with the recording/filing of documents.

For those of you not familiar with Barre Town I would like to provide some basic information. We are a mid-sized full-service community. This means we provide residents with full-time Police and Ambulance Services, a Department of Public Works, Volunteer Fire Department, Town water system, and have a Town Manager form of government which includes Administration (Town Clerk-Treasurer, Manager/Bookkeeping, Assessing, Zoning/Planning, and Engineer's offices). Residential taxpayers contribute the majority of tax dollars collected as there is not a lot of "businesses revenue" in Town.

Barre Town does not have a record restoration fund. All revenue from the recording/filing of documents is deposited into the General Fund. I am fortunate, in that the forefathers recognized the importance of preserving a portion of the land records. This has resulted in our land record volumes only being digitized and microfilmed. This digitized process is funded annually. However, there are still many other extremely important supporting documents which are in dire need of restoration and/or preservation. Unfortunately, they come with a very large price tag. Given the other municipal funding priorities these supporting items are placed on the "wish list."

Some of the municipalities major projects are:

- De-acidifying of old maps (1895 to present), microfilming, and encapsulating.
- De-acidifying Selectboard meeting minutes (on onion skin paper or yellow tablets with red ink), encapsulating and binding,
- Scanning of land record volumes prior to 1986 and placing them on the digital system.
- Placing all Board and Committee minutes of the town onto archival paper and storing them in archival books. (There are 7 Committee/Boards.)
- Scan and index all Board and Committee meeting minutes into a digital system to assist with the public record requests and research. (This is a search by word system.)
- Improve lighting and shelving within the two vaults which house documents for all departments.

To ensure some of these projects happen I have to be extremely creative. An example is my downstairs vault. It is in desperate need of adequate shelving for books, boxes, materials, maps, etc. With the help of storage experts I have a plan to increase the vault storage capacity for another 10 –

15 years. Again it has come with a big price tag – an estimated cost of \$22,000 (obtained 2 years ago). To pay for this project, without an impact to the tax rate I came up with an “acceptable” financing plan - \$5,000 a year, for a period of five years, will be taken from the recording of documents fee to pay for the vault shelving project. The problem is during the 5-year waiting period more and more items need/must be stored in the vault with no space creating a multitude of restoration and safety issues.

In accordance with the Vermont Constitution, Section 62 Record of deeds, I as Town Clerk, have been charged with being the “keeper” of deeds and conveyances for my Town. Since I am to keep these documents then should it not be logical that in this age of technological advancement there should be funding to maintain them, just like the roads or other infrastructure of the Town? Many Vermont towns do not have the tax base to “afford” the technology necessary to sustain the land record recording/filings. The majority of space consumed in my vaults relate to land records. Therefore, it would be logical that the “users” assist with the repair/maintenance/operation of “keeping the deeds and conveyances of a Town.”

Therefore, I respectfully request you support the provision for the preservation, restoration, and digitization by including language for a mandatory preservation fee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna J. Kelty". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Donna J. Kelty, CVC, CVT
Barre Town Clerk-Treasurer