

Town of Southold, NY

Officials of one of the oldest towns in the United States have voted to entrust Laserfiche with electronically archiving and retrieving its records, including historic documents over 350 years old.

Southold is the oldest English settlement in New York, established in 1640. Early town records date back to just years after the original settlers migrated from the Colony of New Haven (later Connecticut). The initial town incorporation documents, birth and death certificates and land ownership records are just part of a treasure-trove of historic archives that have been frequently studied by New York state historians.

Southold, whose population of over 20,000 nearly triples during the summer tourist season, covers a 20-mile stretch of 34,000 acres along the north shore of Long Island. The town is in the midst of rapid redevelopment as homes previously used only in the summer are now being winterized for year-round occupancy.

Southold Town Clerk Elizabeth Neville's immediate priorities were to scan and index the town's Building Department's records, which are in daily use by property owners, contractors and realtors. Ms. Neville said Laserfiche has greatly improved service to residents and ended the frustrating job of looking for misfiled and lost records when processing Freedom of Information Law requests for the Building Department, as well as other town departments.

"We installed our system late last year, then tended to those Building Records immediately," Ms. Neville said. "After that, we started using Laserfiche from that day forward to store the records needed to conduct the town's business. As time permits, we'll also enter our historic documents, some of which go back to 1650 and are frequently requested by scholars."

Ms. Neville credited Southold Board members Councilman John Romanelli (who chairs the computer committee), Supervisor Jean Cochran, Justice Louisa Evans, Councilmen William Moore, Brian Murphy, and Craig Richter with recognizing the need for an advanced document imaging system. Southold Town IT Technicians John Sepenoski and Lloyd Reisenberg were also instrumental in selecting Laserfiche as they will be in implementing it.

"We have a special interest here in a long relationship with Southold, and their incorporation of Laserfiche is the next step in municipal efficiency," said Wacker. "We have worked with Elizabeth for many years as she moved from Deputy Clerk to Clerk"

In addition to the basic Laserfiche document management package, Southold also selected its WebLink product, which allows stored documents to be easily published on the Internet.

The purchase of Laserfiche has already allowed city officials to issue building permits more quickly. This aids local contractors, who are able to work more efficiently, knowing that permit turnaround time is now predictable. It also cuts down on the number of jobs undertaken without permits, since contractors and do-it-yourselfers know the city process of issuance and inspection has become more reliable.

Given New York State's relatively short building season, having an assured permitting process aids builders, city officials and property owners alike by keeping bureaucratic delays from slowing work unreasonably. In turn, this helps projects be completed on time and on budget.

The application of technology such as Laserfiche in Southold is typical of the way municipal governments around the United States and Canada are providing additional services to residents without increasing budgets. City clerks routinely publish agendas, minutes and resolutions on city websites without expensive photocopying and mailing. Departments route correspondence and collaborate on joint products electronically, without so many time-wasting meetings. And police and fire departments have access to blueprints, utility drawings and investigation files online at the scene of action via wireless laptop computers.

“Technology helps city officials serve residents faster and more thoroughly,” Wacker said. “This enables governments to do more and actually provide better service with the same levels of staffing and budgets.”