

Clerks Corner November 2015
Job of a clerk

Although the daily responsibilities of a clerk may vary from town to town, state to state, and even country to country, in Massachusetts there are several jobs that must, by Massachusetts General Law, be accomplished by this office. In addition to being the chief election officer who is responsible for all documents, events and happenings relating to any and all federal, state and town elections and town meetings, the clerk has many other day to day legislated duties.

According to Massachusetts General Law Chapter (MGL) Ch46, clerks are responsible for registering, safeguarding and making available all vital statistics for all its residents. In Massachusetts, births and deaths are now centrally recorded and must be retrieved and registered locally by the clerks through the State's online registry on a daily basis. Marriages are not yet computerized so the clerks need to send original documents to the state on a monthly basis. Each municipality retains these records for the convenience of its residents as well as to maintain the historical annals. Maintaining this information includes adding to the indexes each year, whether that is by hand or data entry as well as providing the best archival storage for these and other town documents as stated in MGL Ch66. This law also stipulates numerous other town documents to be maintained by the clerk, including bylaws, cemetery deeds, utility pole locations, etc.

Business certificates must be issued as per MGL Ch110. All dogs must be vaccinated for rabies and licensed each year according to MGL Ch145b. There is also an MGL Ch51 that states what census information must be collected and made into a street listing annually.

Clerks are held responsible for posting all town board and committee meetings and notices in compliance with the open meeting law, MGL Ch30a. Keeping records on all elected and appointed officials as far as their compliance with the open meeting law and the state ethics law is also the responsibility of the clerk. All officials, elected and appointed must be sworn into office at the start of their term by the clerk. The clerk also adds a section to the annual town report as described in MGL 25. Throughout the year, as official keeper of the town seal, the clerk is called on to certify planning and zoning decisions, flammable licenses, the appointments of the fire marshal, building inspector, fire and police chief, paperwork related to the tax rate, and notes for the borrowing of money.

Lastly, and most enjoyable for me, the clerk is often the first contact for residents walking in or calling Town Hall. Responding to resident inquiries about anything from trash questions to election timelines keeps the clerk's office constantly bustling with activity.

As we are approaching a very busy election year, many town offices will be looking for volunteers of all ages. Any interested parties should contact the clerk, 978-468-5520 x1. Interested seniors should look into the tax work off program by contacting Jim at the COA 978-468-5529. Have a very happy and healthy Thanksgiving.

Dianne Kaplan Bucco was elected the Wenham Town Clerk April 11, 2014. For more information on the clerk's office, please go to www.wenhamma.gov or to www.facebook.com/WenhamTownClerk or follow the Wenham Town Clerk on Twitter.