

Town of Manchester, Connecticut

Town Clerk's Office

Public Vault Access Policy

Purpose

This policy establishes procedures and guidelines for public access to the Town Clerk's vault and secure record storage areas to ensure the security, preservation, and appropriate use of vital records and historical documents while maintaining compliance with Connecticut State Statutes and freedom of information requirements.

Scope

This policy applies to all members of the public, researchers, town employees, and other individuals requesting access to records stored in the Town Clerk's vault or secure storage areas.

Definitions

Vault: The secure storage area(s) maintained by the Town Clerk's Office for the preservation of vital records, land records, and other documents of permanent value.

Vital Records: Birth certificates, death certificates, marriage licenses and certificates, and civil union certificates as defined by CGS §7-36.

Land Records: Property deeds, mortgages, liens, maps, and other documents recorded pursuant to CGS §7-31a.

Historical Records: Documents of historical significance retained for research and archival purposes.

General Policy

Public Access Rights

- The public has the right to inspect and copy public records in accordance with Connecticut Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) CGS§1-210 (2019) and applicable statutes.
- Access to certain records may be restricted by law, including sealed records, restricted vital records, and documents containing confidential information.

Vault Security

- The vital records area within the vault is a restricted access area and may only be entered by authorized Town Clerk's Office personnel.
 - The vault is available for public access to land records with prior authorization from Town Clerk's Office staff.
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Access Procedures

Regular Business Hours Access

- Public access to vault records is available during regular Town Clerk's Office business hours: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM; Tuesday 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM; Friday 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM.
- Requests for vital records should be submitted to the staff.
- Staff will retrieve requested vital records from the vault. Land records are available for public access with authorization by staff.
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Supervised Access

- When records are retrieved from the vault, they must remain in the designated public viewing area.
 - Documents may not be removed from the Town Clerk's Office without proper authorization.
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Restrictions and Limitations

Restricted Records

- Birth records less than 100 years old are restricted to authorized individuals per CGS §7-51.
- Death records less than 50 years old require proof of direct and tangible interest per CGS §7-51a.
- Marriage and civil union records may have restrictions based on statutory requirements.
- Sealed court records and documents are not available for public inspection.

Volume Limitations

- To ensure efficient service and vault security, the number of volumes or files provided at one time may be limited (typically 2-3 volumes).
 - For extensive research projects, appointments may be scheduled to ensure adequate staff availability.
 - Genealogists are permitted with limited access.
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Copying and Reproduction

Copying Services

- Certified copies of vital records are available for authorized requestors upon payment of statutory fees.
- Photocopies of land records and other public documents are available at the current fee schedule.
- Digital copies or scanned documents may be available where technology permits.

Fee Schedule

- All fees are established in accordance with CGS §7-34a and Town ordinances.
- Current fee schedules are posted at the Town Clerk's Office and on the Town website.
- Payment must be received before copies are released.

Photography and Personal Scanning

- Use of personal cameras or scanners for vault records must be approved by the Town Clerk or designee.
 - Flash photography is prohibited to protect documents.
 - Documents must remain flat and undamaged during any photography.
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Handling and Preservation

Document Care

All persons handling original vault records must:

- Have clean, dry hands
- Use pencils only (no pens or markers)
- No eating, drinking, smoking, or vaping near documents
- Support documents properly when turning pages
- Avoid folding, marking, or damaging documents

Fragile or Damaged Records

- Extremely fragile or damaged documents may be provided as copies only.
 - Staff reserves the right to deny handling of original documents if risk of damage exists.
 - Conservation and preservation needs take precedence over immediate access.
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Researcher Responsibilities

General Conduct

- Researchers must conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner.
- Disruptive behavior may result in termination of vault access privileges.
- Researchers must comply with all staff instructions regarding document handling.
- Outerwear (including coats, gloves, and umbrellas) and large bags (including backpacks and totes) are not permitted in the vault area.

Citation and Use

- Researchers are encouraged to properly cite the Manchester Town Clerk's Office in any publications.
 - Commercial use of records may require additional permissions or fees.
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Staff Responsibilities

Vault Access Authorization

- Only designated Town Clerk's Office employees have access to the vital records area in the vault.
- Land records are available for public access with approval.
- Vault access authorization is granted by the Town Clerk.

Customer Service

- Staff shall assist the public in locating and accessing appropriate records.
- Staff should provide guidance on proper document handling and care.
- Staff shall protect the integrity and security of vault materials while facilitating public access.

Security Protocols

- Vault doors must be secured when not actively in use.
 - Records removed from the vault must be tracked and accounted for.
 - All vault materials must be returned to proper storage locations promptly.
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Special Circumstances

After-Hours Access

- Access to vault records outside regular business hours requires advance approval from the Town Clerk.
- After-hours access may be granted for municipal business or emergency situations.
- Two staff members must be present for any after-hours vault access.

Large Research Projects

- Researchers planning extensive vault research should schedule appointments in advance.
- The Town Clerk may establish special arrangements for academic or professional research projects.

Emergency Access

- In emergency situations requiring immediate access to vault records, the Town Clerk or designee may authorize expedited procedures.
 - Emergency access must be documented and reported to the Town Clerk.
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Denial of Access

Grounds for Denial

Access to vault materials may be denied if:

- Records are restricted by statute or court order
- Requestor refuses to comply with security or handling procedures
- Prior incidents of document damage or policy violations
- Request is overly broad or would substantially interfere with office operations
- Insufficient staff resources are available to safely supervise access

Appeal Process

- Denials of access may be appealed to the Town Clerk.
 - FOIA-related denials may be appealed to the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission.
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Violations and Enforcement

Policy Violations

Violations of this policy may result in:

- Immediate termination of vault access privileges
- Restriction or prohibition of future access
- Referral to law enforcement if criminal conduct is suspected
- Civil liability for damaged or missing records

Criminal Penalties

Theft, destruction, or unauthorized alteration of public records may result in criminal prosecution under Connecticut State Statutes.

Policy Review and Amendments

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Town Clerk and updated as necessary to reflect changes in law, technology, or operational needs.

Effective Date and Approval

This policy is effective 4.6.2026

Town Clerk: As. Maria W. C...