

Storage Options for the Government Records of Knox County, Indiana

Indiana Commission on Public Records - June 15, 2011

The information contained herein is the result of an assessment of Knox County records conducted by staff from the Indiana Commission on Public Records (ICPR) on May 17, 2011, and with additional contacts made before and after that date. It is provided as a brief analysis of options to assist Knox County to preserve, secure and provide access to its significant and historic government records, many of which tell the story of the founding of Indiana.

Knox County has four repositories holding government records: the County Courthouse, County Records Library, Knox County Public Library, and the closed jail. County officials are to be commended for investigating options to obtain greater security and efficiency in their records management practices. Elected officials involved in this assessment are: the Auditor, Clerk, Recorder, and Treasurer. At the request of the Knox County Public Library, and representatives from the County Commissioners and County Council, the Commission on Public Records conducted this assessment.

Current Status:

Each of the involved elected offices keeps official records both within the Courthouse and at the County Records Library. Records of historical significance for any office may currently be held by the McGrady-Brockman Annex, an archival repository and a division of the Knox County Public Library. Other inactive or less frequently used records are maintained at the Records Library. Lastly, a large volume of Court Case and Estate Files (650 cubic feet) are kept in the attic of the former jail. Estimated cubic feet counts for each office are listed below, separated by location:

Auditor:	Records Library:	878 (694 permanent)
	Courthouse:	20
Clerk:	Records Library:	305 (225 permanent)
	Courthouse:	25 (3 permanent)
Recorder:	Records Library:	80 (77 permanent)
	Courthouse:	150 (150 permanent)
Treasurer:	Records Library:	151 (16 permanent)
	Courthouse:	40



Knox County records are overwhelmingly held within the Records Library which was built as a warehouse in the 1970s or earlier. Concern has been raised that the Records Library may provide inadequate storage conditions for the county's records of historical significance. The Knox County Public Library staff wishes to accession about 100 cubic feet of historically significant Civil, Criminal, and Probate Court files currently housed at the Records Library over an extended period of time; these belong almost exclusively to the County Clerk. The records of interest to the library constitute about 5% of the total held by the county.

Three Options Proposed:

There are several options and variations that may alleviate concerns should McGrady-Brockman assume management of certain County records or should the Records Library be deemed insufficient for future record storage. They are as follows:

- **Upgrade Existing Facility:** No structural additions, investment in climate control, security, and structural improvements to existing Records Library:
 - This option calls for McGrady-Brockman to house roughly 100 cubic feet of early court case files (consistent with its accession policy) in existing available space at the library.
 - The current Records Library should be retrofitted with enhanced climate control (humidity and



- temperature), security, and fire protection systems. Records should be properly shelved.
 - Security protocols should require that a county employee be present whenever access is provided to the Records Library. The County should invest in appropriate security technology to monitor the facility both during and after regular hours.
 - Permanent records can be microfilmed (and scanned if desired), and the original paper documents then destroyed creating additional space for the storage of records.
 - This option provides limited access to records which may be confidential as there is no open access to the records repository.
- New Records Library on adjacent property, which would call for the construction of a records repository designed to properly maintain the county's records and possibly serve additional county needs. (No structural addition to McGrady-Brockman)

- The existing Records Library's contents would be transferred to the new facility and the current Records Library could be re-purposed.
- McGrady-Brockman would accept the estimated 100 cubic feet of early court case files (consistent with its accession policy) in existing available space at the library.
- Permanent records can be microfilmed (and scanned if desired), and the original paper documents then destroyed creating additional space for the storage of records.
- A new facility should have secure space to limit access to confidential and partially confidential records. A new facility should also provide for protection from the threat of fire and climate issues.
- Security protocols should require that a county employee be present whenever access is provided to the Records Library. The County should invest in appropriate security technology to monitor the facility both during and after regular hours.



- Construction of addition to McGrady-Brockman, acceptance of all county records. This assumes the following:

- The archival repository will accept all county records not currently used in offices or at the courthouse.
- The library's accession and collection development policies currently conflict with accepting all the counties permanent records.
- The library's existing staff is unlikely to be able to properly maintain, catalog, and provide access to the more than 2,000 cubic feet of records. Additional staffing resources may be necessary.
- County employees would regularly travel to the library to access materials formerly in the courthouse or in the neighboring Records Library which would reduce employee productivity.
- An addition should have secure space to limit access to confidential and partially confidential records with access only provided by County employees. ICPR discourages the transfer of confidential records from the originating governmental agency to a third party to safeguard privacy concerns.
- A new facility should also provide for protection from the threat of fire and climate issues.
- The Library should invest in appropriate security technology to monitor the addition both during and after regular hours.



Conclusions:

The Commission on Public Records has reviewed the information made available to it from the County, library, architects, and others. ICPR would offer the following recommendations to the government of Knox County and the Knox County Public Library:

ICPR sees value in a partnership between the county and public library in managing government records. However, ICPR believes other options may provide better access, accountability, and cost savings other options might better provide.

- The Public Library is not well positioned geographically to assume the County's entire Records Library collection. Travel between the courthouse and library would decrease staff efficiency, costs, and staff time.
- The Library's mission and policies do not envision retaining confidential or partially confidential records as they are outside the library's normal collecting area. The State has concerns when a third-party (other than the governmental unit owning the records) makes public access decisions for records containing confidential information. This would require considerable coordination between the library and courthouse regarding public access. Officeholders could potentially retain confidential records at the courthouse to mitigate access issues.
- The Library is willing to collect and maintain a limited set of government records which does reduce the number of requests fielded by County employees. However, these records, while commonly accessed by citizens, constitute a small portion of the county's permanent record holdings, about five percent.
- The Public Library can aid the County by providing preservation consulting for records in disrepair and assist the county by continuing to provide an avenue for public access to some of the county's more popular historical records.

ICPR would suggest that the County consider either upgrading the existing Records Library or building a new facility. To reduce the space demands required by records storage, a review of microfilming options and procedures could significantly reduce records storage needs. The county should identify an officeholder or county employee to oversee the records facility and providing access to it. The State Historic Records Advisory Board offers free archival and records training programs which the county should utilize.

The Commission on Public Records is neither in a position to determine the additional benefits new construction might provide to the County (i.e. meeting and office space) nor the financial cost benefit analysis of a proposed new county records facility or an upgrade to the existing records library. If a new County facility should be deemed necessary and financially feasible, the Commission on Public Records would recommend:

- A secure area should be established to house confidential and partially confidential records to reduce the possibility of inappropriate or unintentional access to restricted information.
- Security protocols and appropriate technology should be put in place to minimize theft of records caused by patrons, staff, or intruders.
- Appropriate climate controls should be included to provide a steady environment regulating both temperature and humidity in the records facility.
- The records portion of a new facility should include adequate fire suppression systems and be built to reduce the potential for water damage from leaks or flooding.

If upgrading the existing Knox County Records Library is preferred, ICPR would recommend the following items which are listed in order of priority:

- An architectural assessment of the existing facility should be undertaken to determine vulnerabilities to severe weather conditions, structural soundness, and the capacity to accommodate effective climate controls.
- Security protocols and appropriate technology should be put in place to minimize theft of records caused by patrons, staff, or intruders.
- Appropriate climate controls should be added to provide a steady environment regulating both temperature and humidity in the records facility.
- To reduce the potential for water damage from leaks or flooding, all records should be stored at least three inches from the floor to reduce the potential for water damage.
- Adequate fire suppression systems should be added to the facility.

The Indiana Commission on Public Records thanks the leadership of Knox County for its efforts to preserve the community's history and special place in Indiana's formation. You are to be commended for honoring and conserving the rich heritage of the County. ICPR will continue to be available to the Knox County Commissioners, County Council, and Public Library should you seek additional input or guidance. Thanks to ICPR staff members Ted Cotterill, Wes Carmony and Casey Schuster for compiling much of the information for this report.

Sincerely,

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