



Data Migration

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](http://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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If you still think computer records are safe and reliable for long-term use, consider this: Even if you have your magnetic tapes and computer disks and CD-ROMs in 10 or 20 years time and they have been perfectly preserved in pristine condition, will you still be running the same computer? This is a problem that may prove to be the most serious technological issue of this century. Imagine the difficulty of finding a way to access computer records that are 30, 40 or — in the not too distant future — 100 years old.

To avoid falling victim to rapid changes in technology, you must have a system of data migration. Whether you use a computer for keeping the current financial records of your office or you use an imaging system to capture information from old records, you must anticipate and plan on being able to transfer that information from one computer system to the next as you upgrade your equipment and software. Failing to recognize this need will lead to disaster.

For long-term retention, permanent-value municipal records must be in a durable format such as paper or microfilm. Scanned or digitized records do not meet national archival standards for viability after 15 to 20 years, much less for permanent storage. T.C.A. § 10-7-121 does, in fact, authorize keeping permanent-value records on “computer or removable computer storage media, including CD-ROMs, instead of bound books or paper records” if the records are available for public inspection, can be reproduced in paper form, and are backed up in off-site storage. See also T.C.A. § 47-10-112.

These laws, in our view, leave officials vulnerable to losses of vitally important records for whose long-term safekeeping these same officials are legally responsible. Despite what these laws allow, records cannot be safely maintained solely in digital form for long periods of time.

Consider these issues seriously, seek technical assistance for working with technology, and question vendors thoroughly about these problems when considering any technology purchase.

DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.

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