

2024 Report on the Information Management Branch

BACKGROUND

Information, like time and money, is a City asset that must be managed as such. Robust recordkeeping directly supports decisions and decision making, business efficiency, business continuity, “duty to document” obligations, access to information and privacy requests, litigation and audit responses, legislative compliance, risk management, and the Employee Code of Conduct key pillars of accountability and transparency. It also strengthens trust and confidence in the City.

The Information Management Branch (IM) is responsible for establishing and promoting an overall framework for the coordinated and cost-effective management of the Official Business Records and information holdings of the Corporation of the City of Ottawa, regardless of form (i.e., physical or electronic) and throughout their entire life cycle, to ensure:

- That all records and information holdings are managed as corporate assets to support effective decision making, meet operational requirements (such as supporting the achievement of corporate strategic and program/service delivery priorities), protect and enforce legal and other rights and obligations including the public’s right to access under the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA), and provide evidence of the City’s decisions, directives and actions essential for government transparency and accountability;
- That the widest possible use is made of information within the City by ensuring it is organized to facilitate access to those who require it, at the right time, in the right form, and at a reasonable cost, subject to legal, policy and other constraints;
- That records and information holdings in all formats are retained only as long as needed, stored in the most appropriate and cost-effective storage medium and securely disposed of when no longer required to control costs; and
- That records and information holdings that serve to reconstruct the evolution of policy and program decisions and directives, or that have historical or archival importance, are identified and preserved.

The overall framework includes policies, procedures, systems and standards that establish operating requirements. These give direction to management and staff, providing guidance and tools to facilitate the management of the entire life cycle of the City’s records and information, namely:

- Planning;
- Collection, creation and receipt;
- Organization, use and retrieval;

- Storage, protection, retention, and disposition through transfer to the City of Ottawa Archives or secure, authorized destruction; and
- Centralized records and information management resource support to program areas to enable them to meet their Information Management operating requirements.

More specifically, IM helps all City staff meet their current and evolving physical and electronic records management obligations by:

- Maintaining 13 records offices in five City buildings and supporting 218 decentralized records locations;
- Maintaining the corporate Records Management Policy and Procedures, the Corporate Records Classification Scheme, and the associated *Records Retention and Disposition By-law* (By-law No. 2021-183, as amended);
- Securely disposing of records in accordance with the *Records Retention and Disposition By-law* and applicable federal and provincial legislation;
- Providing guidance on the information architecture of client SharePoint sites to assist with records compliance, information organization and content aggregation, security, search, reporting and usability;
- Providing expertise in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of IM policies, procedures, information organization and best practices;
- Providing Tier 1 and 2 system support for three records management systems;
- Training staff on the RMS records management system, SharePoint, and IM fundamentals; and
- Assessing business-specific systems for records-related risk.

Three policy instruments

IM is responsible for three policy instruments that direct City staff on how to manage their records:

1. The **Records Management Policy and Procedures** identify requirements and expectations regarding the creation, identification, and management of City records.
2. The **Corporate Records Classification Scheme** is a tool that helps organize City records, as well as applies a schedule detailing how long records are kept and how they should be securely disposed.
3. The ***Records Retention and Disposition By-law*** provides the City with the legal authority to create, manage, and securely dispose of records. The City Archives is the disposition authority for the City of Ottawa and IM staff work in close collaboration with Archives staff.

Four recordkeeping systems

The City currently uses four information management systems to manage records:

1. **Records Management System (RMS)** is used to manage physical records. As described below, a technology renewal project will start in 2025 to replace this key IM tool.
2. **Business Information Management System (BIMS)** is used to manage electronic records. As described below, BIMS has reached end of life, and a technology renewal project started in 2019.
3. **Records365 (R365)** is being used to add recordkeeping functionality to SharePoint sites. The R365 application, applied to SharePoint sites, is intended to replace BIMS.
4. **MINISIS** controls certain records that have been archived. This system is managed by the City Archives.

DISCUSSION

IM Branch pressures

Increased market costs

In May 2024, the successful proponent for materials and supplies (TAB) increased their annual fees by \$40,000 due to inflation in supply costs. In August, through an open and competitive procurement process, the successful proponent for commercial offsite records storage (Iron Mountain) increased their annual fees by \$282,000. As a result of these increases, IM will work with Financial Services to address an expected shortfall.

Staffing challenges

As noted in previous annual reports, new applications and technology are constantly appearing across the organization. Council has also directed staff to develop additional measures to improve information management and routine disclosure on major City projects, as identified through the process of responding to the Ottawa Light Rail Transit Public Inquiry. In the [Office of the City Clerk 2022 Annual Report](#), staff recommended Council approve the addition of two temporary Full-Time Equivalent positions (FTEs) for the IM Branch to address the ongoing challenges and other work required to meet recordkeeping requirements. These two FTEs were not included in the 2024 Budget, but the positions were extended on a temporary basis for 2024. Due to the increased expenses noted above for commercial offsite records storage, this staffing adjustment has been discontinued. As a result, there are now fewer staffing resources available to meet Council's directive to enhance information management and routine disclosure on major City projects.

Key projects

1. Records Management System (RMS) is used to manage physical records. The platform software version was updated, and a new version was released in early 2023. The new version brought stability while appearing identical to RMS clients and met the goal of minimizing change management, staff training and end-user disruption. In Q4 2023, Information Technology Services advised that RMS is again at risk. A technology renewal project will start in 2025 to replace this key business tool.
2. BIMS is used to manage electronic records and is being replaced with SharePoint and an additional recordkeeping add-on called Records365 (R365). This technology renewal project requires the remediation of SharePoint information architecture to improve usability and search functionality, and to make sites 'records ready' by assigning retention and disposition rules. SharePoint sites are currently being brought under record management compliance by R365, one site at a time. The project includes:
 - Evaluating and documenting each SharePoint site, making changes and updates to the information architecture;
 - Classifying the content of each library and building retention rules using R365;
 - Migrating BIMS records, associated metadata and security controls to the relevant client SharePoint sites;
 - Coaching and training staff, to enable long-term SharePoint adoption and ensure appropriate use; and
 - Providing ongoing support and guidance as changing operational needs result in required adjustments to SharePoint sites.
3. Implementing recommendations from the staff report titled, "[Update on the Ottawa Light Rail Transit Public Inquiry and Recommended Next Steps](#)":
 - The City Clerk consulted with the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPC) regarding establishing clear guidelines and processes with respect to temporary records, including transitory records created on instant messaging and social media platforms related to City business, for both staff and elected officials and on both personal and corporate devices and accounts. The IPC responded with a letter that provided publicly available resources and orders issued by the IPC.
 - IM amended the Records Management Policy and Procedures to include recordkeeping requirements for large-scale infrastructure projects. The update included two policy appendices titled, "Recordkeeping Requirements for Large-Scale Infrastructure Projects," and "Records Management Checklist for Departing Employees and Contracted Staff from a Large-Scale Infrastructure Project."

- Developed guidance for temporary records created on instant messaging applications and messaging on social media platforms.
 - Continued to identify and communicate the value of recordkeeping by embedding recordkeeping in City foundational documents and business processes. The following documents were updated:
 - Department-led Working Groups Policy;
 - Responsible Use of Technology Policy;
 - Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace Procedures and Fitness for Work Policy; and
 - The Employee Conflict of Interest Disclosure Procedures, and Gifts, Hospitality, and Entertainment Guideline.
4. Improving information management training for employees to enhance risk management, accountability, transparency, and documentation protocols across the City. In Q1 2023, an environmental scan of the Canadian municipalities, universities, school boards and hospitals (MUSH) sector was completed to identify best practices in online information management training. Learning objectives have been defined and staff have been working with the City's Learning Centre. In Q1 2024, the Learning Centre identified the need to update IM Fundamentals Online for accessibility and currency. The course content was developed by IM in Q2/Q3 2024, and the storyboard was developed by the Learning Centre in Q4 2024. Feedback is to be provided in Q1/Q2 2025, with course content and storyboard to be finalized in Q2/Q3 2025 and user testing and accessibility testing in Q3/Q4 2025. IM will collaborate with Information Technology Services and Human Resources Services to secure course approval and distribute communications to the Senior Leadership Team and City employees.

Key statistics

Some key statistics for 2024 are:

- Over 4.5 million physical records were managed in RMS, the physical records system, with 56,565 new records created.
- 1.8 million records were onboarded to R365 for a total of 3.2 million records under policy compliance.
- 319,400 electronic records were checked into BIMS, with 7.2 million electronic records in total.
- 736 staff took IM training courses on SharePoint Basics, records management systems, and the fundamentals of records classification.
- 53 amendments were made to the *Records Retention and Disposition By-law*. IM made 48 changes to align with changes in business process, federal and

provincial legislation or industry best practice. The Archives made five changes to its Continuous Disposition Authorities appraisals.

- Approximately 21,725 physical records and 2,048 records boxes were ordered back from commercial off-site storage for staff to consult.
- In accordance with the *Records Retention and Disposition By-law* and with departmental approval, 48,450 physical records were authorized to be securely destroyed.
- 867 technical support calls for metadata and security access control updates and organization change were processed.

Initiatives for 2025 and beyond

The projects and activities outlined below will be worked on throughout 2025.

New RMS

As noted above, a technology renewal project will start in 2025 to replace this key business tool. The application is integrated into most lines of business and manages a total of 4.5 million physical records in more than 230 locations across the City, with over 600 users. Examples of records managed include Employment and Financial Assistance case files, Sexual Health Clinic records, building permits, Fire Services inspections and investigations, etc.

Ongoing R365 rollout and decommissioning of BIMS

Bringing SharePoint sites under R365 records policy compliance continues. This includes an additional sub-project to migrate the entire BIMS repository, including Official Business Records, associated metadata and security controls to the relevant client SharePoint sites.

Citywide Data Strategy

The Office of the City Clerk has been working with colleagues from other departments to develop a Citywide Data Strategy. IM is expected to take the lead and otherwise support several of the initiatives that will be rolled out through this multi-year project.

Data governance

IM is supporting data governance through the Recordkeeping Requirements for Large-Scale Infrastructure Projects. Current work on the Ādisōke project includes the development of a records management plan and an information governance plan, as well as the ongoing implementation of 'records ready' SharePoint hubs and sites. The upcoming Lansdowne 2.0 project will require similar plans and implementations if approved by Council.

Continuing to address challenges posed by technology outpacing information governance

As noted in previous annual reports, new applications and modern technology are constantly appearing across the organization. This poses challenges with respect to recordkeeping, the “duty to document,” and access to information. One example from 2023 was self-serve automations (power automate workflows and approvals). IM is developing recordkeeping guidance for these decision-making workflows that are often stored in the cloud. The City Clerk continues to monitor this situation in partnership with various stakeholders.

Continuing to implement recordkeeping and information governance recommendations from the staff report titled, “[Update on the Ottawa Light Rail Transit Public Inquiry and Recommended Next Steps](#)”

- Issue policy guidance on temporary records created on instant messaging applications and on social media platforms in the Records Management Policy and the Responsible Use of Technology Policy, in partnership with the Finance and Corporate Services Department.
- Continue to identify and communicate the value of recordkeeping by embedding requirements in City foundational documents and business processes.
- Develop mandatory IM training for staff working in large-scale infrastructure projects.
- Ensure that IM is considered at the start of, during and at the close of all large-scale infrastructure projects and includes a comprehensive Records Management Plan and Information Governance Plan for each project.

Capstone Approach – Automated capture of senior leaders’ decision records

The volume, variety and velocity of emails sent and received by Senior Leadership Team offices are overwhelming, making the manual task of properly registering emails as records difficult. The Capstone Approach from the [National Archives and Records Administration](#) provides for the automated capture of senior leaders’ decision records. IM is to conduct a feasibility review on leveraging automation to capture and preserve emails from identified Senior Leadership Team members to support:

- Strengthening trust and confidence in the City;
- Employee Code of Conduct key pillars of accountability and transparency; and
- The IPC obligation of “duty to document” that focuses on key decisions and decision making, based on role and delegated authority.

The City Clerk will pilot this solution in 2025.