
Coates' Canons Blog: Preserving Minutes and Other Permanent Records

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The clerk to a local governing board writes that her board, like most boards these days, is interested in finding ways to save money. Two of their ideas deal with maintaining minutes of board meetings.... One of the board's suggestions is to use the audio recordings that the board chooses to make of its meetings as its permanent minutes, instead of having the clerk actually type the minutes. The other idea is to have the board's actions (motions and decisions made by consensus only) written down as the minutes, and then to incorporate the audio recording of the meeting as part of the minutes. While what the board wishes to do may result in savings, their plans are legally insufficient where permanent government records are involved. North Carolina's Office of Archives and History, part of the Department of Cultural Resources, makes the rules that cities, counties, and other governmental units must follow concerning records retention. That office specifies that *only* paper documents and microfilm copies that meet certain high quality standards can be used as permanent records, also called "human-readable preservation duplicates." While recordings or DVDs may be useful as back-ups, they cannot take the place of paper or microfilm. Click [here](#) for the policy. The minutes of local governing boards and most other local government boards are among the records that must be maintained permanently in paper or microfilm form. For a full listing of the retention periods for these and other city and county records, please see the **county and municipal records retention schedules**. The clerk and the board should also have practical concerns about how minutes and other permanent records are maintained. Magnetic records have not been proven to have the permanency of acid-free paper and microfilm. In addition, recording technology changes, often rapidly, making it more difficult or even impossible to access older records. For example, do you remember eight-track tapes and floppy disks? More recently, audio cassettes and conventional videotapes, which were once ubiquitous, are fast disappearing. On request, the Imaging Unit of the Government Records Branch of the Office of Archives and History will prepare microfilm security copies of local government records such as minutes that must be permanently maintained. Please click [here](#) for more information about microfilming procedures. These microfilm security copies are safely housed in an underground vault in Raleigh. There is an upfront charge of \$20 per reel for the filming to recover the cost of the film (there is no charge for labor or storage). Each roll can hold approximately 2,500 images, and the local government will not be charged again until a new roll is begun. The imaging unit also has the ability to convert some types of digital copies to microfilm. It works individually with government agencies to ensure that particular records can be converted. The clerk and the board will find that the Government Records Branch also offers a variety of other useful records-related services to local governments. Its programs are described [here](#). Contact information for Local Records Management Analysts and other helpful persons may be found there as well. Finally, the board should keep in mind that "full and accurate minutes" need only include a record of actions and of the existence of the conditions needed to take action, such as the presence of a quorum or the fact that a legally required public hearing was held. A detailed record of discussion is not generally required unless the board is meeting in a quasi-judicial capacity—for example, to discuss issuance of special use permits.

Links

- archives.ncdcr.gov/Portals/3/PDF/guidelines/Humreadabledupspolicy.pdf
- archives.ncdcr.gov/For-Government/Retention-Schedules
- archives.ncdcr.gov/For-Government/Imaging
- archives.ncdcr.gov/For-Government/Services-and-Training