

Cayuga County has DREAMS of moving into the 21st Century!

“DREAMS” is an acronym for a proposed *Digital Records Electronic Access Management System*. The project’s vision is to migrate Cayuga County’s legacy records to a digital, cloud-based solution. The proposed project makes sense in a time when the public and the staff need easy and quick access to public records.

Realizing that the County needed to make a significant change in Records Management, County Clerk Sue Dwyer put together a “DREAM Team” two years ago.

Cayuga County presently manages a Records Center which houses over 12,000 cubic square feet of records primarily stored on paper, microfilm, and historical books. More than 50 County departments depend on the storage of their respective records within this center.

The problem is these records are presently housed in what used to be the old Cayuga County Jail. Presently the Center is 97% full. The building is aging. It has a leaky roof, an old electrical system, asbestos, and poor plumbing. It is not climate controlled and experiences extreme summer and winter temperatures, thereby accelerating records deterioration. It has no [dry] fire suppression system designed to protect these delicate and permanent records. It has no disaster recovery or backup capabilities in case of a catastrophic event. And, given all these issues, it still costs the County \$22,168 annually just to turn the lights on.

The situation is timely and the County had a few options: The County could have built or found a new location for the Records Center; or, as they did in Tompkins County 11 years ago when faced with the same predicament, they could approve a digital solution-DREAMS, which would allow the Records Center and Historian’s Office to move into the same office as the County Clerk’s Office, and the County could sell or utilize that building for another purpose. The County wisely chose the latter.

Change was required. It was not a question of “*if*”, it was a question of “*when.*”

What are the benefits of going digital? Records will be preserved, protected, and disseminated efficiently by the public and county personnel. The County will be able to vacate a deteriorating building. It will improve county operations and eliminate paper. It will save office space and will allow for several complimentary departments to work together in one space. Records can be available 24/7--possibly via a public portal. Amplified public usage could increase county revenues. The list goes on.

A cloud-based solution, known in the tech industry as “SaaS” (Software as a Service), will be strategic and simplified. There is minimal investment. Internal County IT labor is minimized. Cost is limited to software licensing and renewals. Support, cybersecurity, maintenance,

etc., are included within the licensing framework. The solution will provide the County sustainability and scalability.

There are additional factors involved. Once the County Records are digitized, DREAMS could assist in this capacity by leveraging a **shared service** methodology and enveloping other interested County municipalities into the model, requiring minimal resources.

So, how long will such an endeavor take to complete? From our research, we estimate it will involve a multi-phase, multi-year commitment of roughly 4-5 years. Partnerships with experienced industry vendors and subcontractors will be crucial since the County does not have the internal resources to adequately address a project of this magnitude in such a brief timeframe.

What level and channels of funding will be required and/or available? The County preliminarily estimates the initial implementation cost to be in the \$4 million-dollar range. This will address the core Records Center and not initially include any municipalities.

The New York State Archives (NSYA) offers annual grants. We plan to partner with a local township and qualify for a **Shared Services** grant, involving higher funding levels (up to \$150,000). These grants are limited and competitive--67% of the 2020-21 grant recipients focused on records digitization, a NYS trend. Documented fiscal County support is a requirement for the grant. However, this individual level of funding would insufficiently fund the project.

Enter the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This pandemic-era resource will be a significant financial source for DREAMS. The County has received ARPA funding of \$14.9 million. Sooner than later this change will have to take place and the taxpayers shouldn't have to bear the cost to get this done.