



## New Records Schedule Approved for Municipalities

Andrew Baraniak, Local Government Records Archivist, Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Municipal Records Schedule (WMRS) is an adoptable general records schedule that can be used by Wisconsin municipalities for the administration and disposition of public records. This new schedule was recently approved by the Wisconsin Public Records Board (PRB) during their August quarterly meeting and is an updated version of the old Wisconsin Municipal Records Manual. The manual, which some local government records keepers may know by its nickname “the Little Orange Book,” was first published in 1980 and basically remained unaltered until its replacement this year. For those who are familiar with the old manual, you will notice some similarities in the general organization and arrangement of the WMRS. All record schedules have been grouped under specific headings such as administration or revenue, which is similar to how they were arranged in the previous version. However, the layout has been updated to reflect other general records schedules in an effort to make it more navigable and user-friendly.

The biggest change is the inclusion of columns that provide quick reference to specific record series, unlike the old version that listed everything in paragraph format. Each record series is identified by title, a brief description of the type of information typically recorded in the record, the required retention time and what starts the retention period, and if there may be any confidentiality restrictions. The final field includes information regarding the notification of the destruction of the records once they have passed their retention period. This new column is intended to simplify the required notification process as stated in Wis. Stat. § 19.21(4)(a) by identifying whether or not the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) would like to receive notification prior to the destruction of the records. The new notification column identifies all records series as either Waive or Notify, meaning that if you see a record listed as Waive, you do not have to go through the notification process once that particular record is out of retention.

Another change is the ability for municipalities to adopt the entire schedule to use for their records management. Adopting the schedule gives municipalities the ability to opt into a pre-approved retention schedule rather than having to draft

their own schedule and possibly submit it for PRB approval. This is different from the old manual, which could only be used as a reference guide for municipalities when drafting their own ordinances for records management. To adopt the schedule, municipalities need to fill out the standard Notification of General Records Schedule Adoption form (PRB-002) and follow the instructions for submitting it for approval. Once you submit the form, it is just a matter of having a few signatures on the approval, so no need to worry about waiting until the next quarterly PRB meeting until you hear if you’ve been approved. A signed copy of the form will be returned to you as soon as everything has been signed. After you receive this signed copy, you are free to use the WMRS for your records management. Wis. Stat. § 19.21(4)(a) states that municipalities may provide by ordinance for the destruction of public records. Because of this statute, the PRB is recommending that municipalities update or pass ordinances approving the use of the WMRS once the form is returned.

Municipalities should not expect to find every single record they create listed with a specific schedule. Because of the variety of municipalities throughout the state, the document was drafted to cover the most common types of records created by cities, villages, towns, and other forms of local government. What should you do if you look in the WMRS and do not find a schedule for a particular record series that your municipality creates? There are a few options you can take in that scenario. One is to look at other general records schedules available for use on the PRB website. These additional schedules cover topics such as human resources and facilities management, and are available for municipalities to adopt as well. All general records schedules have been approved for use, so the only course of action you have to take is to fill out the adoption form and submit it for each schedule you wish to adopt. You may also create your own schedule through ordinances, but remember that you must get approval from the PRB before you schedule a record series for less than seven years. This is because statutes specifically state minimum retention for all public records is seven years, unless other statutes or the PRB specifically state otherwise.

It should be noted that adopting the WMRS is not mandatory. Nothing in the statutes has changed, meaning municipalities still have the option of drafting their own schedules through ordinance. But municipalities that do adopt their own schedules should know that if you plan on scheduling records for any period of time below what is specified in the statutes, then you will need to submit the schedule for PRB approval before it can be adopted for use. And adopting the WMRS does not automatically mean you must start creating all of the records listed. The records series that are listed in the WMRS are there because they are commonly produced by local governments and are there for guidance in case your municipality creates those particular records. You are free to adopt the entire schedule and use it to apply to only the records you create.

The WMRS can be accessed from either the PRB website here [http://publicrecordsboard.wi.gov/Docs\\_by\\_cat\\_type.asp?doccatid=678&locid=165](http://publicrecordsboard.wi.gov/Docs_by_cat_type.asp?doccatid=678&locid=165) or on the WHS State Archives webpage here <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3806>. The access portal on the WHS website also includes a brief overview of the schedule, along with options to download the entire document or just specific sections.

The WHS State Archives webpage also includes additional information for local governments, so please explore to see what additional helpful information may be available. Local governments are also encouraged to provide feedback about the new schedule. This version will sunset in 10 years, so keeping track of any recommendations will help in making the schedule even more refined and easier to use. Hopefully the adjustments that were made for this version will make records management easier for all local governments throughout the state.

### Public Records 151

#### About the Author:

Andrew Baraniak has served as the local government records archivist for the Wisconsin Historical Society since 2015. His work is generally divided between providing assistance regarding retention periods and scheduling of public records, and working with local governments in determining which records have high historical value and should be transferred to the WHS archives for long-term preservation. Contact Andrew at [andrew.baraniak@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:andrew.baraniak@wisconsinhistory.org)

## Model Ordinance for Adopting the Wisconsin Municipal Records Schedule (Drafted by League Attorneys)

The [ governing body ] of the [ municipality ], Wisconsin, do ordain as follows:

#### Section \_\_ - Retention of Public Records

- (a) *General Records Schedule Adopted.* The [Village/City] hereby adopts, by reference, the Wisconsin Municipal Records Schedule (hereinafter, "Records Schedule"), pertaining to the retention and destruction of public records, and approved by the State of Wisconsin Public Records Board (hereinafter, "Records Board") on August 27, 2018. A copy of the Records Schedule will be kept on file in the [Village/City] Clerk's office located at [address] and made available for public viewing during [viewing days/hours].
- (b) *Other Records.* In the event the [Village/City] creates a record not contemplated by the Records Schedule, the [Village/City] may, subject to the Records Board's prior approval, either adopt an applicable records retention schedule set forth by the Records Board, if available, or create its own retention schedule pertaining to the record.
- (c) *Repeal.* All ordinances, or portions thereof, and resolutions, or portions thereof, in conflict with any portion of the Records Schedule are hereby repealed. Any approved [Village/City] retention schedule, or portion thereof, for any record not contemplated by the Records Schedule shall remain in full force and effect.
- (d) *Effective Date.* This ordinance is effective as of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.

**Ordinances 510**