

For May 5, 2022

Manager's Message

Aaron Frank, Town Manager

In honor of National Municipal Clerk's Week, read the interview below to learn about the Colchester Town Clerk's Office staff and services!

Town News Interviews

Services Available Online Now More Than Ever!

An interview with Julie Graeter, Colchester Town Clerk & Treasurer

by Alicia Tebeau-Sherry, Communications Coordinator, Town Manager's Office



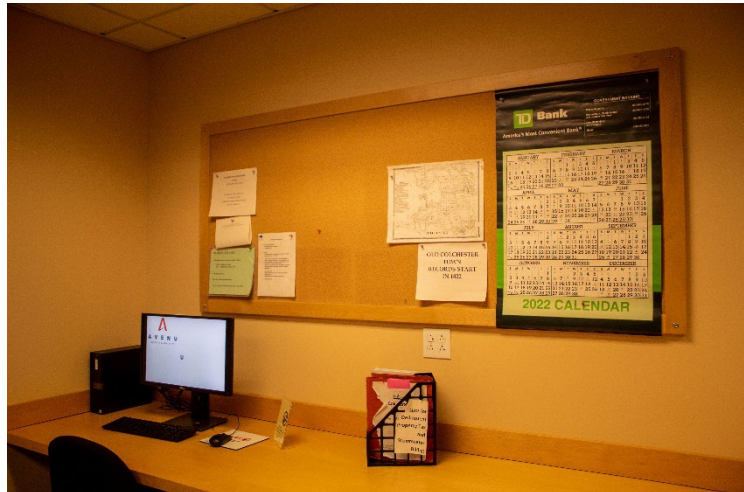
Julie Graeter, Town Clerk & Treasurer

I met with Colchester Town Clerk & Treasurer, Julie Graeter to learn about the Clerk's Office and the many essential services they offer regarding records, taxes, elections and much more!

ATS: To familiarize others about you and the Town Clerk's Office, can you tell me what services your Department offers to the Town of Colchester?

JG: There are five of us in the Town Clerk's Office providing customers with needed information and offering services related to our three major duties of maintaining and running elections, permanent records, or land records, and property tax billing and collecting. I am the Town Clerk and Treasurer, Erin Hogan is our Assistant Town Clerk and Treasurer and Election Specialist, Betsy Peacock is our Assistant Town Clerk and Property Tax Specialist, Krissy Jenkins is another Assistant Clerk and Land Records Specialist, and Alyssa Colby is our newest Assistant Clerk. Other services we provide are access to vital records (marriage, birth, and death records), licensing dogs, licensing marriages, and land records research and documentation. I am particularly proud of the records we have—they date all the way back to the 1800s, and we have them digitized back to 1922. The majority of them are also online, and the digitized surveys we have date back to the 1960s. These are all available to customers needing to complete research online, and they can search and print the documents. We have a research area in the Town Hall that has portals to search these records as well.

Elections are another large portion of what we do. Many people think of elections as being a one-day thing; however, our elections are often 45 to 50 days long because State and Federal elections require ballots be mailed to people, especially overseas community members, so we are processing, sending, and receiving ballots 45 days from Federal elections. For Town elections, the processing is usually closer to 20 days; however, either case includes months of preparation, whether that is having our data bases ready to be pulled September 1st for a November election or arranging the voting area. As our Election Specialist, Erin has access to the State-run election software to track, enter into, and maintain the database with our Town’s information and results. She also maintains all of our incoming voters and those voters who have left Town and enters the participation for every election—March was her first election in this position and she did very well as she is very organized and you have to be in that position.



Research area on the first floor of Town Hall.

Town Municipal Service and State of Vermont Education Taxes are also billed out of our office after Bob Vickery, the Town Assessor, has set all the values of all the properties in Town. After he provides the values to us, we reconcile and confirm the data or information is correct and begin the process of preparing the bills to be sent to an outside printer that prints and sends them for us. Once those bills are out, we collect three times a year. Betsy and I work together to get those combined Town and State tax bills out the door, and then she documents all the revenues received into the system, puts checks in, adjusts errors, manages peoples’ payment plans, and finally transfers the majority of the property tax funds to the Colchester School District, on behalf of the State of Vermont.



Ballot Dropbox signage

Three of our staff are passport agents and two process requests for vital records as well. People can obtain their passports, whether it’s a new application or a renewal that has expired more than 5 years ago. They can also receive certified copies for birth, death or marriage records. Other services we provide are dog licenses, assistance with VT

homestead declarations and property tax bills, and collection payments of fees from other Town Departments. We're always providing lots of general customer service as well, as we get a lot of calls and requests with unique questions or concerns, so we try our best to point them in the right direction.

ATS: What might the community not know about your Department and what it offers?

JG: Another of our myriad duties is cemetery management. Between our office and the Parks and Recreation department, we manage the six Colchester cemeteries together. The majority of the cemeteries are full, but we have lots in some and including newly acquired lots available around our oldest, the Munson Cemetery. We like to share this information because it can be relieving for community members to be able to find a final resting place for themselves and their families.



Munson Cemetery

ATS: How do the employees of your department work together to complete your department's projects and services?

JG: We are often collaborating with each other, but especially when one of us enters a busier time of year. For example,



Some of your Clerk's Office staff!

when property taxes are happening, Betsy has to do a particular part of the tax collection process, mainly entering information into the software, so someone else needs to collect it, address any issues that may come up with the checks or payment, take payment at the counter, and add up checks to make sure they look appropriate—that's when all of us are jumping in and doing these other pieces and parts to help Betsy get through those busy weeks.

ATS: What types of projects has your department been working on and what can the community look forward to from them?

JG: One of the things we started in the late fall, early winter was updating our current dog registration software. We were approached by our provider to test this new software and we were all for it because the new online platform would eventually provide access for

customers and other users other than just in-house. We spent November and December learning the software, testing it, and giving our provider feedback for improvements as far as our usage goes. We went live on January 1st and we've been using it since. The overall goal is to make it available to our customer to renew their own dog licenses online, to pay,

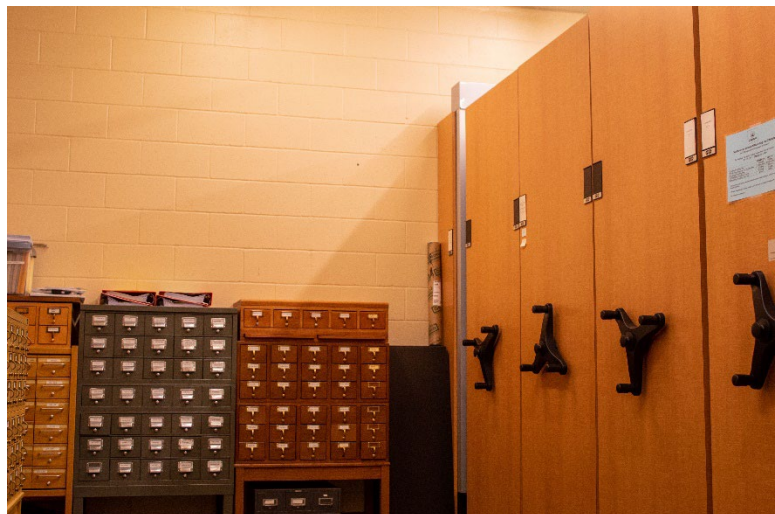


Colchester Land Record Books

upload their rabies paperwork, and then print out their own dog license whenever they'd like using the portal when we make it available. It will be exciting to give them an additional way for them to do this because one of my goals is for people to not have to come into this building if they don't want or feel comfortable coming in, whether because of schedule conflicts, COVID concerns, or anything else.

ATS: What are you proud of that your department has completed?

JG: COVID-19 brought on a lot of changes and stress, so one of the things that I am most proud of is how our department was able to provide safe and impartial elections during 2020 and 2021. It was very challenging to make sure everyone had the ease to receive, vote and return ballots to us in the way that they felt most comfortable, but we did give those options to them and we think it helped with the participation in those elections and their comfort levels around voting during a pandemic. Some other things that came out of that whole process has to do with our land records. We had to close the building down for some time and then operated for half a day, but due to requirements from the Federal and State levels, we had to make our records available to customers as they needed them. We had many records already digitized by the previous Town Clerk, but we recognized there were certain land records that people requested often that still weren't available online, so we completed two large digitization projects that made these available to the public by the end of 2020. Now we have the majority of the information people need to sell or refinance available online. We struggled making sure people had the opportunity to pay their property taxes in the most



Colchester Land and Vital Record and Survey Vault

comfortable way for them as well, so we added a new e-check option to our services and people can pay with their banking information with a flat rate. This really helped provide the public with the security of taxes getting paid without having to come in or put it in a post office box. We've seen an increased use of this option and we are glad we are now able to offer it.

ATS: You also coordinate the Cemetery Advisory—what does this committee do for the Town? Are there open member positions, volunteer opportunities, or other possibilities for the community to become involved?

JG: This advisory committee advises staff and the Selectboard on the operation and maintenance of the Town's cemeteries. We haven't been able to function because we haven't had enough members. We are currently looking to gain at least one new member to join so it can begin meeting again and assisting in long-range planning regarding the Town's cemeteries. If community members are interested, they can call me at 802-264-5520 or email TownClerk@colchestervt.gov for more information, as there is a process to be interviewed and appointed by the Selectboard.

ATS: How can the community keep up with your department?

JG: We do put a lot of information on our website and keep it current, and deadlines are posted there and on the Town's Facebook page as well.

Upcoming Town Meetings

Selectboard: Tuesday, May 10th, 6:30 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 3rd Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road. Residents are welcome to attend the meeting or alternatively send a note, up to 1,000 words, to TownManager@colchestervt.gov with "Citizens to be Heard" in the Subject and their name and address in the body of the email. The email will be shared with the entire Selectboard prior to the meeting and included in the information packet at the next meeting (as the information packet for the current meeting is sent out along with the agenda).

- Watch the Meeting Online via Live Stream: <http://lcatv.org/live-stream-2>
- Agenda: www.bit.ly/Colchester-SB-Agendas

Development Review Board: Wednesday, May 11th, 7:00 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 3rd Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road. The Development Review Board will likely be participating remotely. Members of the public will have the option to choose either remote or in-person attendance. Masks are required for in-person attendance. Public comments can be submitted prior to the hearing by email to zmaia@colchestervt.gov or by mail to Town of Colchester, c/o Development Review Board, 781 Blakely Road, Colchester, VT 05446. Alternatively, participate in the public comment periods during the hybrid meeting.

- Participate by Phone: 1-929-205-6099
- Meeting ID: 871 3561 5437 (US – New York)



Colchester Town News

VERMONT

Colchester - What do you want to do today?

- Link to meeting: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87135615437>
- Watch Meeting Online via Live Stream: <http://lcatv.org/live-stream-2>
- Agenda: [https://clerkshq.com/Colchester-vt?docId=DRBAgenda&path=DRB%2CDRB Agendas%2CDRBAgenda%2C](https://clerkshq.com/Colchester-vt?docId=DRBAgenda&path=DRB%2CDRB%20Agendas%2CDRBAgenda%2C)

Recreation Advisory Board: Wednesday, May 11th, 7:00 am at the Town Offices.

Planning Commission: Tuesday, May 17th, 7:00 pm, at the Colchester Town Offices, 3rd Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road

Library Board of Trustees: Thursday, May 19th, 4:30 pm in the Burnham Room of the Burnham Memorial Library.

Subscribe to the Town Newsletter: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/jkMAO2v>

For more information or to comment, call 802-264-5509 or email townmanager@colchestervt.gov