

## Case Study

# Preserving Plat Books

## How Kittitas County, WA ensured the legacy of its county maps



### Jerry Pettit

Former County Auditor, Kittitas County, WA

Jerry Pettit is the former County Auditor for Kittitas County, WA. Over the last seven years, he's overseen a massive initiative for the county: working with Kofile to digitize and preserve thousands of county records, some dating back to the 1800s. As he shares in this interview, so much more than just documents have now been preserved for years to come.

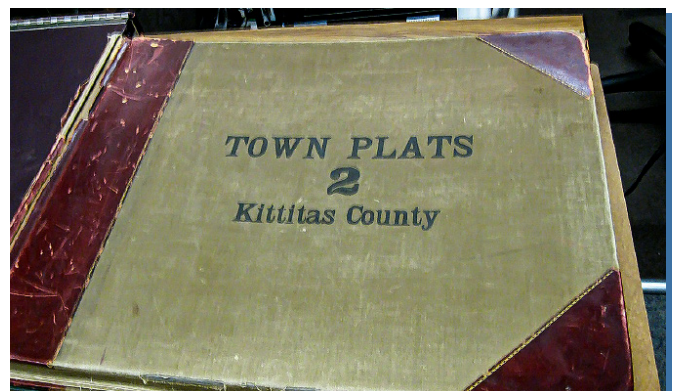


## What kicked off this project?

A few years after I became County Auditor, I found a bunch of old books on shelving in a tucked away corner of the basement in our county office. Admittedly, the recording side of the Auditors job was what I was least familiar with, so I wasn't sure what was in every book—not to mention some of them were nearly illegible they were so old—but I thought we should probably do something with them.

Fast forward to 2014, which is the year I first began working with Kofile. I showed one of their team members these books, and they offered to preserve just one book for me to show how the process works and see if we might like to do the same for the rest of them. We started with Plat Book 1, which dates back to 1882.

When that first book came back, I was very impressed. I had seen pictures of what can be done through preservation, but this far exceeded my expectations. The beautiful cover, and the remarkable clarity of the contents. I knew immediately that we had to finish the other 7 Plat Books.



## What happened next to move the project forward?

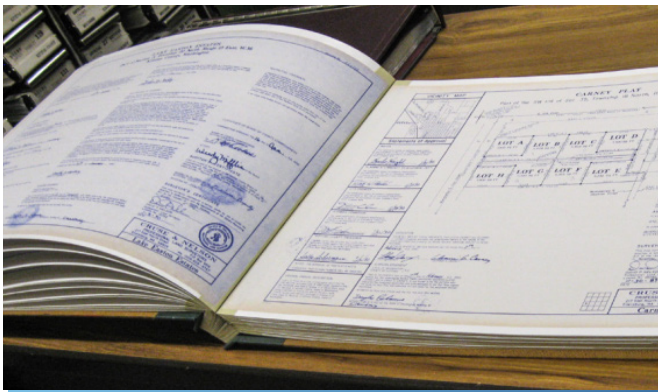
In 2020 Kittitas received federal funding to improve our elections process, and to do that, we needed to make more space in our office. The space currently occupied by our old books was the obvious choice of space to use, so we decided to expedite the preservation process for the books, remove their shelving to make room for our new election equipment.

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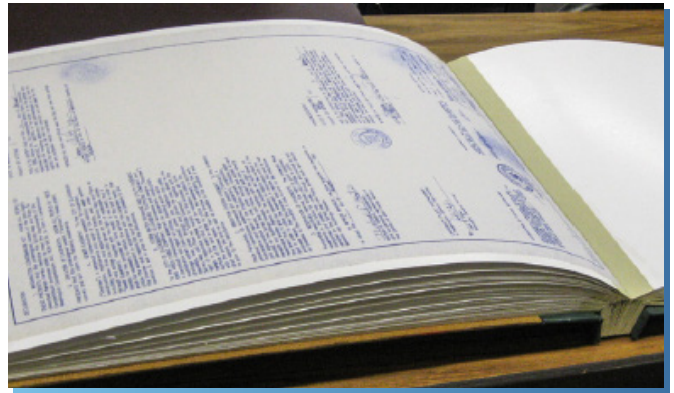
Some of these books were in such bad shape I decided to hand deliver them to Kofile facility in Carson City, NV. In the end I was glad I did, not only because I knew the books had arrived at the facility safely, but because I was able to see firsthand the care, attention, and innovative technology that is applied to preserving our documents. There was an entire team dedicated to time-consuming activities like removing scotch tape, meticulously smoothing out each page, applying the custom solution of magnesium oxide, and then re-applying new page protectors and hard covers.

It's one thing to get back the finished product. But to see the process from start to finish, you really get a clear understanding of where the money you invest in this process goes.



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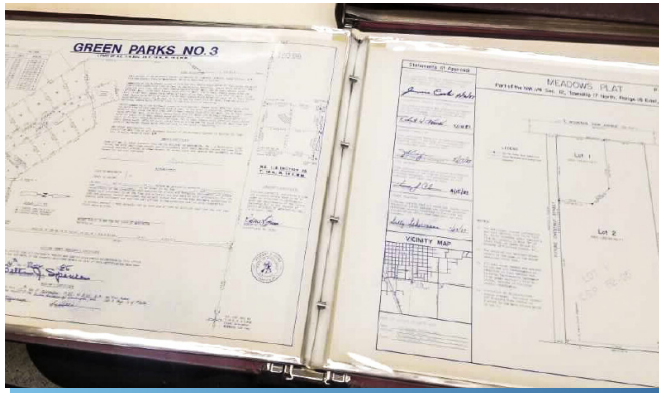
## Did you find anything surprising in your books?

It's really amazing the incredible history that counties have in their record books. Our binders contained the county seals, the dedication to the public of the county, names of county officials and citizens who have passed through here. These things are just so cool and so rare now—it's the legacy of Kittitas!

One thing I discovered: these books contained a lot of the original maps for the county. When we were looking through these books, we found a number of historical maps for the City of Wenatchee, WA, which was originally part of Kittitas but is now part of Chelan County. This is essential information for Chelan to have on file, so I will be transferring digital copies of the maps to their auditor.







### Did you face any pushback on the project?

I truly believe that the public doesn't know the FULL scope of what my job as Auditor entails, and that when we're presented with an opportunity to educate them, it builds trust and transparency between the local government and the citizens it serves.

So, I had one person who questioned why we didn't just scan the documents to the cloud. And this person and I had a lengthy dialogue about my responsibilities to the county, and how the preservation of records is essential and tangential to a number of my other responsibilities as Auditor.

I realize in this digital world we live in it might be easier and cheaper to simply scan to the cloud. But these county records are true artifacts that should probably live in a museum. They also must remain in legal binding form, which most governments recognize only microfilm or microfiche as legal copies of documents, outside of the originals.

### What does this mean for the legacy of Kittitas?

The books that Kofile preserved for us are now guaranteed to last at least 300 more years. Documents like these are truly priceless, and it's so important to ensure that they don't fade away.

In addition to preserving the legacy of Kittitas, I take a certain amount of pride in knowing that I helped spearhead this initiative, that this is a part of my legacy. I've helped save the history of our county and our citizens, and hopefully have made life easier for the staff that will follow in my footsteps.

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Schedule a consultation to address your critical records challenges and obligations

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Kofile is the leader in Critical Records Management working closely with county, local, and state government organizations and their leaders. Our commitment to preserving, safeguarding, and modernizing access to history and the public record drives everything we do. Trusted by over 3,000 government organizations and officials earned from decades of service and innovation, we apply the right mix of expertise, technology, and processes to empower leaders to increase the impact of government services more efficiently.

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