

Opinions

Office of the Vermont Secretary of State



Vol. 5, # 6

June 2003



A Message from the Secretary

This month, after holding public hearings and receiving public comment we will be finalizing Vermont's State Plan to implement the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

The Help America Vote Act is far reaching national legislation that will make a tremendous difference in the way elections are run across the nation. Most notably HAVA provides resources for states with old technology to replace their unreliable voting machines with new ones. It requires uniform statewide election procedures and standards so that a voter has the same rights no matter where they live in a state.

For Vermont's voters the effects of election reform will be less visible. We have no old or unreliable machines that require replacement and our election procedures and standards are already uniform across the state. People who vote in towns that use paper ballots and hand-count results will continue to do so. Communities that use optical scan machines to count their votes will continue to do so.

The biggest changes will be for Vermont's visually impaired voters, for our election workers and for Vermont's first time voters.

Under HAVA and Vermont's state plan voters with visual disabilities must be given an opportunity to vote privately and independently. Right now these voters vote with the assistance of a person of their choice – or

with the help of election workers. For the 2006 election, using federal funds, we will be purchasing technology for every town to enable visually impaired voters who wish to vote privately the ability to cast an independent vote.

Federal law also requires our town clerks to get on line to manage the voter checklist. Under HAVA, states, by 2006, must develop a uniform statewide voter checklist to which every town must have instant computer access. This will require extensive training for town clerks and their assistants who must add and, with the approval of the BCA, remove names from their town's portion of the checklist.

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Reflecting on an Information Age

By Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

We accept as a truism that we live in the “information age,” though we rarely define what we mean. Arguably we have lived in an information age since Johannes Gutenberg built his printing press in the 15th century. What we sense as different is the expanding volume of records and information associated with computer and communication technologies. It is not just that we are in an information age, it is that we are drowning in information.

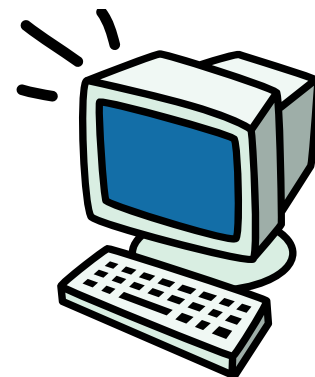


One observer has calculated that we have been collecting codified information (records) for some 2500 years. As of 1930 this base of information was doubling every thirty years. In 1970 it was doubling every seven years and, by his calculation, in 2010 it will be doubling every eleven hours.

Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley estimated that the world’s yearly production of print, film, optical and magnetic content would require approximately 1.5 billion gigabytes of storage, which equals 250 megabytes for every person on earth. Magnetic storage which includes servers and personal computers is by far the largest and fastest growing record medium. While the global growth of paper-based information is growing at a rate of 2%, that of magnetic storage is growing at 50%.

Part of that growth is attributed to what the researchers called the democratization of information. With computers and the Internet, anyone can create and transmit vast amounts of information.

How we create information changes how we receive it. Looking at 1999 data, the researchers calculated yearly media use by U.S. households. Several traditional information sources experienced declining use against other media: radio by -8% per year, magazines by -6% and books by -4%. Conversely, Internet use was growing at a rate of 2,050%.

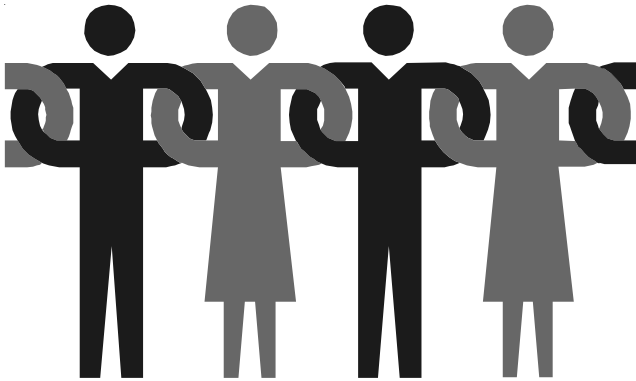


All of which has profound consequences for those of us charged with recordkeeping. In the face of information overload it is increasingly important that we establish sufficient intellectual control over our records so citizens can find what they need (and we must better determine what those needs are). Given the growth in Internet use, we have to re-think how we deliver our services and information. Recognizing the growing volume of records born digitally, we have to balance digitizing existing paper records against managing and preserving digital records. And we have to find better ways to persuade our institutional leadership and the legislature to provide the necessary support so we can effectively manage our electronic records. None of that will be easy, but by working together it can be done.

New Website for Citizen Planners and Regulators: www.vpic.info

by Faith Ingulsrud, Department of Housing and Community Affairs

Volunteering for your local planning commission, zoning board or development review board can be immensely rewarding. But it can also be overwhelming, especially when you're faced with complex land use issues and the need to master sometimes confusing procedural requirements. There's now a new website, www.vpic.info, intended to help make your work less daunting by providing the essential information you need to make well informed decisions for your community.



The Vermont Planning Information Center (VPIC) website aims to provide clear and simple access to the most helpful resources available for local land use officials, including links to great websites, available publications, and a calendar of training and informational events. VPIC will be continuing to improve its features to better serve Vermont's local planners and regulators. You can help make these improvements by checking out the site and commenting through the on-line user survey. Be sure to visit VPIC


regularly so you can learn about new events, publications and programs.

One of the features currently highlighted on VPIC is the "Welcome Packet" for new board and commission members. It provides a short, easy to read overview of the local planning and regulatory processes and the roles and responsibilities of the various players — just what you need before you step into your first board or commission meeting. Long-time members may also enjoy reading it as short refresher course.

VPIC and the "Welcome Packet" are products of the Vermont Land Use Education and Training Collaborative, consisting of all the organizations that provide training for local land use officials. These include a number of state agencies such as the Secretary of State's Office, organizations like the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), the regional planning commissions, and a number of educational and non-profit organizations. You can find a complete list of the Collaborative organizations in the "About Us" section of the website. The website is maintained by the University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies together with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.




Opinions of Opinions

- 1. Selectboard can create temporary rights of way to remove lumber.** The law gives the selectboard the authority to order a landowner to permit a neighbor to cross his or her lands in order to remove lumber, wood or other materials. 19 V.S.A. § 958. The right of way must be restored to its original condition after the removal of the lumber and the board may set the length of time and conditions for the use of the right of way, and can order it to be closed or discontinued when, in the judgment of the board, it is necessary. 19 V.S.A. § 959.
- 2. Selectboard must hold hearing before granting a temporary right of way.** Before it grants a right of way over a person's property the board must give 30 days written notice to the property owner or any interested person (like a person who might be leasing the property) of when the board will inspect the property and take testimony. In order to grant a temporary right of way the board must decide on the necessity, and establish conditions, including requiring a payment to the landowner for any damages to the property. It must file its decision with the clerk within ten days and send it to all interested parties. Note that the board can deny the request for a temporary right of way, even if by denying the request the landowner cannot remove his or her lumber. 19 V.S.A. § 923.
- 3. Coin drops must be approved by selectboard.** Vermont law makes it illegal for people to stand in the roadway to solicit from passing vehicles. However, if the selectboard approves, a not-for-profit or municipal organization can conduct coin drops or other solicitations (except on limited access highways). Before it grants a request to conduct a coin drop the board must be sure that the proposed activities or location would not create a safety hazard or cause undue traffic congestion. The board must also be sure that organization has adequate liability insurance. Note that the law prohibits children who are under 16 to participate in coin drop solicitations. 23 V.S.A. § 1056.
- 4. Board must warn public before sale of municipal property.** Unless a municipal charter provides otherwise, if the legislative body of a town or village wants to sell municipal real estate, the board must post a notice of the terms of the proposed sale in at least three public places within the municipality, including the clerk's office, and publish the notice in a local paper at least 30 days prior to the date of the proposed sale. The sale may go through unless a petition signed by five percent of the legal voters of the municipality objecting to the proposed conveyance is presented to the municipal clerk within 30 days of the date of posting and publication of the notice. If a petition is received the board must put the question of the sale to a vote. If the board wishes it may circumvent the notice and petition process and simply put to public vote the issue of whether the community should sell a particular municipal property. If a majority of the voters of the municipality present and voting vote to approve the proposed conveyance, the real estate may be conveyed. 24 V.S.A. § 1061.

5. **Board may convey certain property without public input.** The legislative body of a town or village may authorize the sale of municipal real estate if the sale is related to the control, maintenance, operation, construction, relocation or abandonment of highways or public water, sewer or electric system, or involves real estate used for housing or urban renewal projects. 24 V.S.A. § 1061.
6. **Municipal property is conveyed by agent to sell real estate.** Although the decision about whether to sell municipal property is made by the legislative body of the town or village or the voters of the municipality, the papers that effectuate that sale are signed by an agent elected or appointed to sell property. The certificate of election (if elected) or appointment (if appointed) must be recorded by the clerk. 24 V.S.A. § 1061.
7. **E-Mail addresses are not exempt from public disclosure.** All records that are produced or acquired in the course of town or school business are public records unless an exception in the law permits them to be kept confidential. Because the law does not include an exemption for e-mail addresses that are collected by the town (except insofar as an employee's home e-mail address might be considered personal personnel information, or a student's e-mail address might be considered private under school privacy laws) this information will be available to the public. 1 V.S.A. § 317.
8. **Any voter in town may work at polls, except candidates in contested races.** Any person who lives in the town who is on the voter checklist may be appointed as an assistant election worker by the BCA. (Note that pending legislation will permit the BCA to appoint 16 and 17 year olds to work at the polls as well.) However, the law prevents an individual from serving as an election official in any election in which his or her name appears on a ballot as a candidate for any office unless he or she is the only candidate for that office, or unless he or she is running for moderator, justice of the peace, town clerk, clerk-treasurer, ward clerk, or inspector of elections. 17 V.S.A. § 2456.
9. **Zoning Administrator may staff Zoning Board during most deliberations.** Except for appeals from decisions of the zoning administrator, the zoning administrator may staff the deliberative sessions of the zoning board of adjustment or development review board. The zoning administrator may produce copies of bylaws, past decisions of the board, etc. upon request, but the zoning administrator should not participate in making the decision.
10. **Minutes of all public bodies including committees and subcommittees of public boards must be available for inspection and copying within five days of the meeting.** Although some towns or boards post minutes on the bulletin board or on a website, this is done as a courtesy only—the law does not require posting of minutes. 17 V.S.A. § 312 requires that minutes be made available for inspection and copying within five days of the meeting. The minutes can be marked or stamped DRAFT until the board approves them, but they must be made available upon request.
11. **Selectboard is not required to approve minutes.** If a selectboard fails to review and approve of minutes of a prior meeting there is no legal consequence. That is because all the law requires is that minutes of a meeting be available for public inspection at least five working days following the meeting. The minutes are once piece of evidence of what decisions were made at a meeting. And, while approved minutes will have greater weight in the event that they are needed as evidence in court, unapproved minutes will be considered as well. In no event will the failure to approve minutes call into question the legality of what occurred at a meeting. 1 V.S.A. § 312(b).

- 12. Town should not generally use public funds to maintain private roads.** The Vermont constitution prohibits use of public funds for private benefit. For this reason we believe it is bad practice for towns to use public money to maintain private roads. However, in some circumstances it is acceptable - for instance where there is a public health or safety reason. (e.g. If there is a low-income disabled individual on the road who has frequent or possible serious need of emergency services . . .) Note that some towns will grade private roads and fix culverts at the request of the landowners who will pay the town for the work.
- 13. Clerks can reject incomplete PTR.** The law requires town clerks to accept a PTR only if it is “complete and regular on its face.” 32 V.S.A. § 9607. The department of Property Valuation and Review has taken the position that what this means is that the PTR must include all “information that the commissioner of taxes may reasonably require for the proper administration of [the transfer tax],” along with the flood, subdivision and Act 250 disclosure certificates. 32 V.S.A. § 9606 (b)(c). (This includes PTR form sections A; B; L or M through P; the section entitled “Flood and Subdivision Regulations and Act 250 certificates”; the parties must sign the form; and, if the property is enrolled in current use, the parties are obligated to fill in section K, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 3757(e).) A town clerk can require more than this minimal information and may return forms that are not so complete.
- 14. Delinquent Tax Collector may not put tax money in a personal account.** The law requires the delinquent tax collector to pay over to the town treasurer all money collected every two months and when requested in writing by the selectboard. 32 V.S.A. § 4646. The collector of delinquent taxes must never put the collected money into a personal account, but should instead set up a delinquent tax account (if it is interest-bearing all interest on principal and interest in the account goes to the town) for holding the receipts in between the times the money is paid over to the town. When the money is paid over to the town it should include the delinquent tax collector’s fee. The treasurer must take out the proper withholding then issue a town check in the amount due the delinquent tax collector.
- 15. Selectboard fills School Board vacancy with the advice of the school board.** 16 V.S.A. § 424 provides that when there is a vacancy on the school board, the selectboard “with the advice of the remaining school board members, within 30 days of the creation of the vacancy, appoint a qualified person to fill a vacancy in the town school board, until an election at a special or annual meeting is held.” As a practical matter this means that the school board considers applicants for the open position (if any) and then makes a recommendation of one or more individuals to the selectboard. If the selectboard is not satisfied with the recommendations it may ask the school board to send them new names.
- 16. Petition may be withdrawn by withdrawing signatures.** A petition to consider an article at a special meeting cannot simply be withdrawn by those who submitted it. Rather, a petition can be withdrawn (or made invalid) when those who signed the petition call and remove their names from the petition in sufficient number to make the petition no longer valid.
- 17. Polling places must be accessible to people with disabilities.** Each polling place must be in an accessible public place in the voting district (unless all districts in your town vote at one polling place) as designated by the Board of Civil Authority; unless the voters, at an annual or special meeting, designate a different place. 17 V.S.A. §§2501, 2502. Boards of Civil Authority and/or town voters must choose polling places that are ADA accessible. It is also a best practice to have all polling places in a nonsectarian building whenever possible. Although rulings in court cases in other states have upheld the use of a church all-purpose room when absolutely no other public place is available, it is a best practice to take this time between elections to find and designate a truly public place.

- 18. By 2006, when we must meet all of the requirements of the new federal law (Help America Vote Act), we are strongly suggesting that towns combine polling places wherever possible.** Although your town may have more than one voting district (due to legislative apportionment), you can have all of your voting districts at one polling place if there is sufficient room for parking and subdividing the gym or auditorium into voting districts. If your town is all in one voting district, there is no need to have more than one polling place, and the BCA needs to designate only one polling place for the town.
- 19. Special town or special school district meetings may be held on any day chosen by the legislative body, so long as appropriately warned.** If other town or school boards happen to be meeting on the same day, the meeting places need to be separated, but no law prevents several meetings from being scheduled simultaneously. Voters may not appreciate it if they are interested in attending all of the meetings, so we do suggest coordinating with a “master calendar” before scheduling, but law does not require it.
- 20. It's best not to schedule special meetings on Mondays.** When voting on articles by Australian ballot, it is best practice NOT to schedule special town or special school district meeting on Mondays or the day after a holiday. Voters are accustomed to being able to pick up an absentee ballot on the day before the election, so select a day when the Town Clerk’s office will be open on the day before the election. Voters are also accustomed to having the Public Informational Hearing on the night before the election, and you don’t want that to fall on a Sunday or Holiday.
- 21. Reserve fund can be spent without vote if established for a particular purpose.** If a town has established a reserve fund for a special purpose, such as a reserve fund for highway equipment, the statute provides that the reserve fund is to be under the control and direction of the legislative body (Selectboard or School Board). 17 V.S.A. §2804. Once a reserve fund is established and funded by town vote, the Board may expend the funds for such purposes for which the fund was established without another town vote. If the legislative body wants to spend those reserve funds for any other purpose, then the spending must be authorized by a majority of voters at an annual or special meeting.
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- 22. Only those JPs residing in the Village can be on the Village BCA.** The Board of Civil Authority of a village consists of the Justices of the town who reside in the village, the trustees of the village, and the village clerk. Other Justices of the Peace who reside in the town but not in the village cannot be involved in administering village elections. 17 V.S.A. §2103(5).
- 23. Village checklist includes those votes on the town checklist who live in the village.** A village clerk shall automatically include all voters living within the village who are on the town checklist. 17 V.S.A. §2126. There is no need for the voter to apply separately to the village clerk.
- 24. BCA should purge checklist on a regular basis.** We recommend that Board of Civil Authority meet at regular intervals to maintain the checklist, including sending the required notices to remove or purge names. The statute requires that by September 20 of each odd-numbered year, you must send a letter to the Office of the Secretary of State certifying that your checklist has been updated and that detailed records have been maintained 17 V.S.A. §2150(d)(7).

In our monthly Opinions we provide what we believe the law requires based upon our legal judgment, years of observing Vermont’s local government practices, and Vermont Court decisions. This information is intended as a reference guide only and should not replace the advice of legal counsel.

... A Message from the Secretary continued from page 1

Election workers must also be trained to give voters an opportunity to correct their ballot where there is an over-vote (more than one name marked in a single race for a single seat) and to offer a provisional ballot to a person whose name is not on the checklist, but who believes he or she is entitled to vote. The provision ballot will cover only the federal races, and will be counted if the voters are determined after the polls close to have been eligible to vote.

Finally, HAVA requires changes that will affect first time voters. First, under HAVA those who wish to register to vote must provide their driver's license number, or if they have none, the last four digits of their social security number. These numbers are required to assist our office in managing the checklist by letting us coordinate our list with the Department of Motor Vehicles. When a first time voter has registered by mail, the law requires those voters to show some form of identification (including a driver's license or a copy of a bill) before they are allowed to vote in an election.

Despite the fact that HAVA will have only a minor impact on most voter's voting experience, implementing HAVA in Vermont will take a lot of work. We will be conducting extensive election worker and voter education campaigns to help ease the transition. Vermont's election reform efforts will be bolstered by federal appropriations of as much as 9 million dollars. This money will be used to help offset state and local costs related to implementing the mandates of HAVA.

I urge all of you to review and comment on Vermont's State Implementation Plan before June 16, 2003. It can be found in the Elections section of our website, www.sec.state.vt.us, or can be obtained by calling our office at 1-800-439-8683. Together, we can ensure that election reform helps Vermonters vote!



Deborah L. Markowitz, Secretary of State

DHCA Announces Second Edition of the Zoning Administrator's Handbook

The State of Vermont, Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) is pleased to announce the publication and availability of the **ZONING ADMINISTRATOR'S HANDBOOK, SECOND EDITION**. The second edition re-write was a collaborative effort on behalf of the DHCA, the Addison County Regional Planning Commission, Secretary of State Deb Markowitz, attorney Paul Gillies and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission.



Last published in 1988, the second edition of the handbook contains up-to-date information for practicing Zoning Administrators and/or municipalities on topics ranging from a Zoning Administrator's required duties to zoning enforcement. The handbook also contains valuable sample forms and checklists which municipalities can use to strengthen their administrative efforts.

The **ZONING ADMINISTRATOR'S HANDBOOK, SECOND EDITION** is available for downloading from the DHCA's website at: www.dhca.state.vt.us/Planning/
Towns may also contact their Regional Planning Commissions for copies.

Vermont's Child Labor Laws

Working Papers:

In Vermont, employment certificates are not required for the employment of minors unless the minor is under 16 years of age, and employed during school hours in other than a duly approved educational or vocational course of study.

Time and Hour Restrictions:

Fourteen and fifteen year-old minors may not be employed:

1. **During school hours.** (Exceptions are provided for minors employed through a work experience or career exploration [wecep] program and for performers and actors in motion pictures, theatrical productions, radio and television.)
2. **Before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m.**
3. **More than three hours per day,** on school days.
4. **More than eight hours per day,** on non-school days.
5. **More than 18 hours per week,** in school weeks.
6. **More than 40 hours per week,** in non-school weeks.
7. **More than six days in a week.**

Sixteen and Seventeen year old minors may not be employed: In a manufacturing or mechanical establishment more than nine hours in any one day or more than fifty hours in any one week.

Limitations on type of work:

Prohibited work for 14 and 15 year old minors includes:

1. Use of power-driven mowers or cutters.
2. Garage or automotive work involving the use of pits, racks, or lifting apparatus, or involving the inflation of any tire mounted on a rim equipped with a removable retaining ring.
3. Operation or tending of hoisting apparatus or of any power-driven machinery (other than office machines and machines in retail, food service, and gasoline service establishments which are specified in the foregoing list as machines which such minors may operate in such establishments).
4. Work performed in or about boiler or engine rooms.
5. Work in connection with maintenance or repair of the establishment, machines, or equipment.
6. Outside window washing that involves working from windowsills.
7. All work requiring the use of ladders, scaffolds, or their substitutes.
8. Occupations which involve operating, setting up, adjusting, cleaning, oiling or repairing power-driven food slicers and grinders, food choppers and cutters, and bakery-type mixers.
9. Loading and unloading goods to and from trucks, railroad cars, or conveyors.

Prohibited work for minors under the age of 18 includes:

1. Manufacturing and storing explosives
2. Motor vehicle driving and outside helper.
3. Logging and sawmilling.
4. Power-driven woodworking machines.
5. Power-driven hoisting apparatus.
6. Power-driven circular saws, band saws, and guillotine shears.
7. Wrecking or demolition.
8. Roofing operations.
9. Excavation operations.

***For a complete list of prohibited work activities contact the Department of Labor and Industry Wage and Hour Division Drawer 20, Montpelier VT 05620-3401 tel: (802) 828-2157**

Penalty: Under federal law, employers who violate the child labor provisions or any regulation issued under them may be subject to a civil money penalty of up to \$10,000 for each violation.

Tip of the Month from the VMCTA



This month's tip is from Bobbie Brimblecombe, Marshfield Town Clerk & Treasurer



This sounds trivial, but I have found it to be a great time saver (and money saver). I buy pre-stamped postcards from the post office and use them for warnings to Board members and reminders for dog licenses. I have a word document set up to print directly onto the cards. This saves stuffing, stamping and addressing envelopes, and it saves postage. For Board members, I run them through the printer again to put the addresses on. For dog reminders I have to put labels on them, but I would have to do that anyway with envelopes, and this is so much faster.



If you have a good tip that you would like to share with our readers please email it to Dencie Mitchell at mdmusa@msn.com or mail them to:

Dencie L. Mitchell, CMC/CVC/CVT - VMCTA President
Williston Assistant Town Clerk
7900 Williston Road
Williston, VT 05495

Opinions Now Available Online in Printer Friendly Format!

Opinions can now be downloaded to your desktop in one concise and **easily printable** document! Please visit our *Opinions* page online to download and print out your newsletter in Portable Document Format (PDF). This type of document requires Adobe Acrobat® Reader™ which is a **free** download and is available at the following website:

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As always, if there is an error in your address or you are receiving multiple copies please let us know!



June 2003

June 1: Deadline for Listers to lodge personal property inventories with Town Clerk. V.S.A.32 § 4007

June 2: (*Within 60 days of petition*) If a petition for reconsideration or rescission of a question considered or voted at Town Meeting has been filed, this is the last day on which a municipal vote may be held at a duly-warned meeting. V.S.A 17 § 2661(b)

June 3: (*90 days after Town Meeting election*) In towns using Australian Ballot, Town Clerk may open and destroy used Town Meeting ballots and tally sheets, except as otherwise provided by law. V.S.A 17 § 2590(d)

June 30: End of fiscal year for all school districts, charter provisions not withstanding, and for municipalities that have adopted July 1 through June 30 fiscal year calendar. V.S.A 32 § 1, 24 § 1683(b)(c)

July 2003



July 1: Last day for Town Clerk to submit name of Town Treasurer to State Treasurer. 24:1166

July 4: Independence Day. 1:371

July 15: Last day for School, Fire District and Village Clerks to deliver to Town Clerk statement of taxes assessed during year ending June 30th. 32:3461

July 15: Last day for Town Clerk and Appraiser in unorganized towns and gores to file statement of taxes assessed with the Director of Property Valuation and Review. 32:3462

July 25: State Withholding Tax Return is due (actual date by which return must be postmarked is shown on the printed form) if reporting less than \$2500 per quarter; more than \$2500 requires monthly report. 32:5842

July 30: Last day for Town Clerk in municipality with fiscal year ending June 30 to publicly disclose fees kept as compensation for that fiscal year. 24:1179

July 31: Last day to file Form 941 (Quarterly Withholding Return) with Internal Revenue Service.

HAVA Update: Draft State Plan Published and Public Hearings Scheduled

The Vermont Secretary of State has published the Draft Vermont State Plan as required by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 (PL108-7).

The Draft Vermont State Plan to implement HAVA can be read and/or downloaded on the Secretary of State's website at www.sec.state.vt.us/hava/hava.htm.

The purpose of HAVA and the Vermont State Plan is to improve the administration of elections in Vermont. Federal funds are available to implement the requirements of the Vermont State Plan.

Two hearings have been scheduled to receive public comment:

Tuesday, May 27, 2003, 5:30 p.m., Sharon Elementary School Gym, Sharon, Vt.

Monday, June 2, 2003, 7:00 p.m., Williston Town Offices, Williston, Vt.

To obtain a printed copy of the draft plan, to make comments on the draft plan, or to make special arrangements for individuals with disabilities or special needs, please contact: Melanie Jacobs, Vermont Secretary of State's Office, 26 Terrace Street, Montpelier, VT 05609-1101, 800-439-8683, mjacobs@sec.state.vt.us.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

www.sec.state.vt.us
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Office of the Vermont Secretary of State
June 2003

Opinions

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