

Massachusetts Deed Formatting Standards

January 1, 2007

The Massachusetts Deed Indexing Standards include a set of Document Formatting Standards. Under these Standards, documents recorded after January 1, 2007 must meet the following requirements:

- Documents must be on white 20-pound paper without watermarks.
- All document pages and attachments must be on paper with a minimum size of 8.5 by 11 inches and a maximum size of 8.5 by 14 inches.
- Printing must be on one side of the page only; no double-sided pages will be accepted.
- On the first page of a document, the top margin must be three inches; the side and bottom margins must be one inch. On second and subsequent pages of the same document, all margins must be one inch.
- All documents must have a font size no smaller than 10-point Times New Roman or its equivalent.
- Blanks in an instrument and corrections to an instrument may be made in pen.
- Signatures must be in either black or dark blue ink. Names must be typed, stamped or printed beneath all written signatures.
- All documents must display on the first line of print on the first page a single title identifying the recordable event that the instrument represents.
- Colored markers may not be used to highlight text.

The foundation for these standards is Massachusetts General Laws chapter 36, section 12A, which states: "A register of deeds may refuse to accept an instrument for recording if it cannot be properly duplicated or a proper record cannot be made thereof." Until now, this has been a subjective standard that varies from registry to registry. Because the trend in nationwide registry operations is toward greater standardization, the Massachusetts Registers and Assistant Registers of Deeds Association has sought to specify the minimum standards that will be allowed. In composing these standards, the Association used as a model a March 2000 White Paper of the Property Records Industry Joint Task Force called "Real Estate Document Formatting." Several other states have enacted similar formatting standards, including Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, Washington and Wisconsin.

The Massachusetts standards are grounded in the actual needs of the registry to produce legible, reliable and usable copies of all recorded documents. As the printed record book becomes an historic artifact, the quality of the electronic image becomes even more critical. Each of the new standards contributes to this goal.

Of all the standards, the most controversial seems to be the requirement of a three-inch top margin. While this may seem excessive, every document that is recorded must have considerable information imprinted on it, such as the date and time of recording, the instrument number, the book and page number, the number of pages in the document and the tax stamp. Few of today's documents leave sufficient space for this information. Consequently, recording information added by the registry either obscures some of the content of the document or is placed so close to the margin that it is lost when the document is scanned. The three-inch top margin gives us a standard location where we can safely and efficiently add recording information to each document.