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Archive before the first wave, somewhere that outlives the farm

SharePoint Migration Field Guide · Chapter 27

pH7x Systems

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27. Archive before the first wave, somewhere that outlives the farm

> An archive is kept for a question nobody has asked yet. It has to outlive the farm, the project and everyone who remembers where it went.

Chapter 26 gave every site collection a disposition and compared the states that keep content without migrating it. This chapter starts where it wrote "archive": a site nobody works in and no wave carries, whose content somebody must still find, get back and keep until its obligation ends, after Chapter 9 has decommissioned the source and Chapter 38 the farm.

> **Once a site is to be archived, where does it live, who can still find and recover it, and which obligation keeps it there until when?**

The decision this chapter leads to is a row for every site collection Chapter 26 sent to the archive: its archive location, its recovery route, its retention end and its owner, recorded before the first wave.

Which sites this chapter is for

Every site collection on a SharePoint Server 2016 or 2019 farm with Chapter 26's archive disposition, whether the estate is copied into SharePoint Online (Chapters 8 and 9) or attached to Subscription Edition (Chapter 23). Each arrives with its evidence of use from Chapter 14 and its obligation, owner and end from Chapter 26. A site kept read-only until a date joins this chapter only if that date falls after the farm goes.

The farm cannot be the archive

Chapter 9 keeps the read-only source "on whatever retention the organisation owes it", and that retention has a ceiling. SharePoint Server 2016 and 2019 reached the end of support on 14 July 2026, after which "there will be no new security updates" and no assisted support (ending support in 2026, checked on 7 November 2026). A farm kept as an archive runs without them for as long as its longest obligation.

It also has to stay findable. The eDiscovery Center reaches "any content that's indexed by the Search service application" (eDiscovery and in-place holds, checked on 7 November 2026), and "the Search service application does not function when its databases are set as read-only" (read-only databases, checked on 7 November 2026). Lock the archived sites ReadOnly, as Chapters 9 and 26 do, but leave the search databases writable, or the farm keeps content nobody can find.

So the old farm holds an archive until its decommissioning date and no longer. A site whose obligation ends before that date can stay; any other needs a place that does not depend on the farm, chosen now. **An archive is not judged on the day it is made. It is judged on the day somebody asks for something in it, and by then the farm and the project team are gone.**

What Microsoft 365 Archive needs first

Microsoft 365 Archive moves inactive content "into a cold storage tier within SharePoint" (archive overview, checked on 7 November 2026). An administrator archives a site from the admin centre's active sites, or with `Set-SPOSiteArchiveState` (manage the archive, checked on 7 November 2026), so farm content reaches it after a copy, as Chapter 26 found. Four things come first:

- **The service and the role.** The archive is turned on for the tenant in the Microsoft 365 admin centre (setup, checked on 7 November 2026). SharePoint Administrators or Global Administrators archive and reactivate sites, and Microsoft recommends the role with the fewest permissions (overview, above): the SharePoint Administrator.
- **A supported template.** Microsoft's list includes team sites (STS#0, STS#3), communication sites, group-connected sites, the Document Center and the Records Center, but not publishing sites, channel sites or "some legacy site template types"; a hub site is unregistered first (overview and management, above). SPMT "decides the destination site template" itself (SPMT FAQ, checked on 7 November 2026), so read the template after the copy.
- **A verified copy.** Archiving keeps a site's lists, libraries, permissions and metadata (overview, above) and every version (archive FAQ, checked on 7 November 2026), but only what arrived. Chapter 8 verifies it like any copy, and we would compare created and modified dates beside authorship: Purview counts retention from creation by default, or from the last modification (learn about retention, checked on 7 November 2026), so rewritten dates move the retention end. Map the people it names, departed ones included, as Chapter 24 does.
- **Labels, while the site is active.** Retention policies cover archived sites, but "users can't view and interact with items in archived sites": nobody labels by hand or unlocks a record there, and disposition review cannot display the item (retention for SharePoint, checked on 7 November 2026). Label first, archive second; auto-applied labels still reach archived sites (same source).

Once archived, a site is still within reach of the online lifecycle policies and group expiration, as Chapter 26 sets out: take it out of their scope, or agree what they do with its records owner.

Who finds it, and how it comes back

While a site is archived, "end users cannot directly access archived content" (end-user experience, checked on 7 November 2026). They can find it: SharePoint and OneDrive web search return it under the Archived option, trimmed to what each user may open, and opening a result "requires a SharePoint administrator to reactivate" the site (archive search, checked on 7 November 2026). Purview eDiscovery "still finds all content even if archived", and holds apply without reactivating (archive compliance, checked on 7 November 2026).

So recovery is a request, a person and a delay. Reactivation is instantaneous for seven days after archiving and takes "up to 24 hours" afterwards (archive states, checked on 7 November 2026). Users meet a Request to reactivate button only if the tenant sets `Set-SPOTenant -ArchiveRedirectUrl`, per geo location in a multi-geo tenant (end-user experience, above): point it at a queue somebody answers, and publish how long an answer takes, those 24 hours included.

A reactivated site returns with "the same access rights" as before (management, above), so one request reopens it to everyone with access. We would have the archive's owner approve each request, and archive the site again afterwards. On the old farm, recovery is an unlock, as Chapter 26 shows, while the farm runs.

Obligations move before the content

A copy moves content, not the obligations on it, and those belong to their owners, as Chapter 6 said. The project owns the order in which they move.

Retention first. A site in a retention policy stays in it once archived (retention for SharePoint, above), and Microsoft keeps eDiscovery holds for investigations, sending long-term retention to policies and labels (create holds, checked on 7 November 2026). Put each destination site under the retention its owner chose before the copy, so content is covered as it lands.

Then the online hold. The farm's hold lives in a case in its eDiscovery Center, which reaches only what the farm's search indexes, as Chapter 11 found. SPMT's list of what it migrates names no hold (SPMT features, checked on 7 November 2026), and we do not know of a Microsoft route that carries one. The case owner, with eDiscovery permissions, places a Purview hold on the destination site before the copy; it "might take up to 24 hours for the hold to take effect", and a hold chosen for a subsite lands on its parent (create holds, above).

The farm's hold last. A copy carries the site as it is; the hold kept it as it was. The farm copied each held item's original to a preservation hold library on its first change or deletion, and removing the hold deletes that library's files "within seven days" (holds in the eDiscovery Center, checked on 7 November 2026). So the case owner first exports what the case needs from the farm's eDiscovery Center, whose crawler reads that library; it exports documents with their versions, lists and pages (eDiscovery and in-place holds, above). Only then, with the online hold showing on hold, does the case owner release the farm's.

Two sequences, and what each costs

Both sequences keep the archive out of the waves, so the waves carry only what people use. They differ in when the effort falls, and in who is still there to spend it.

SEQUENCE	BEFORE THE FIRST WAVE	EFFORT	RISK	IT FITS WHEN
Copy, then archive	Lock ReadOnly; retention and hold online; copy into a supported template; verify, label, archive	One pass with no deltas, since nothing changes; a full Chapter 8 verification	Early: a wrong template or a late hold shows while the farm and its people are still there	An obligation outlives the farm, and a tenant exists
Archive in place, on the old farm	Lock ReadOnly; leave it out of every wave; keep search running	A lock now; a deletion at the end, or the whole copy later	Late: on a farm out of support, after the team has gone; a new hold keeps the farm running	Every obligation ends before decommissioning
Archive in place, carried by the attach	Lock ReadOnly; attach its database to Subscription Edition with the rest	The planned attach, plus checking the lock and every hold on the new farm	The archive lasts while that farm stays current; we do not know whether a farm hold survives an attach	The destination is Subscription Edition

We would copy, then archive, whenever an obligation outlives the farm and the estate has a tenant: the effort is a copy the project can already make, spent where nobody waits, and its failures surface while somebody can still fix them. Archiving in place is cheapest only when the end comes first; otherwise it moves the same copy to the worst moment. When the attach carries the archive, read each source's In-Place Hold Status in the new farm's eDiscovery Center before the old farm goes (holds in the eDiscovery Center, above), and keep the farm current as Chapter 42 describes.

The record, before the first wave

Each archived site collection gets one row, beside Chapter 26's deletion record and Chapter 9's verification record, with Chapter 14's evidence attached.

FIELD	WHAT IT HOLDS
Archive location	Its address in Microsoft 365 Archive, the old farm until a named date, or the Subscription Edition farm
Recovery route	Where a request goes, who approves it, who reactivates or unlocks, and how long it takes
Retention end	A date or an event, the obligation that sets it, and the hold status read at the destination
Owner	The named person who answers for the archive until its end, usually the obligation's owner

At the end, the owner decides as Chapter 26 decides any deletion; deleting an archived site needs no reactivation, and a hold stops it (archive FAQ, above). **A site with no row joins no wave, and holds the decommissioning gate shut.**

Out of scope

Deciding what is archived was Chapter 26; retention schedules and Purview policy design belong to their owners (Chapter 6). Moving the sites people use is Chapter 33, choosing the route Chapter 29, and decommissioning the farm Chapter 38. Keeping old formats readable, file-level archiving, Teams, OneDrive, pricing and licensing are not covered.

Before you continue

- [ ] Every archived site has a location that does not depend on the old farm after its decommissioning date
- [ ] Every archive left on the old farm ends before that date, and the farm's search still runs
- [ ] Each destination site was under its retention and any Purview hold before the copy, and the hold shows on hold
- [ ] Each copy is in a supported template, passed Chapter 8's verification with dates and authorship, and was labelled before archiving
- [ ] The reactivation request URL is set, and a named SharePoint Administrator answers it in a published time that allows for 24 hours
- [ ] No farm hold was released before its case owner exported what the case needs and saw the online hold in place
- [ ] Every archived site has its row (location, recovery route, retention end, owner), recorded before the first wave