

# CODE WORD



Washington Association of Code Enforcement Newsletter

July 2020

President's Message July 2020

Dear WACE Members,

I hope this issue of the Code Word finds you well.

In consultation with the Icicle Village Resort management and after careful consideration with the board, it is with great regret I announce the cancellation of the in person 2020 WACE Fall Educational Conference due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

This extremely difficult decision was reached with the well-being and safety of our members as our top priority. Members of the WACE board have been talking with code officers across the state in an effort to get a sense of their jurisdictions challenges and in our discussions, most expressed concerns for their health/safety and agency financial restrictions. Many municipalities have travel bans with no clear date of when travel would resume, due to the increase in reported virus cases. Because of the uncertainties of the virus spread, your board determined this decision was in the best interest of our members.

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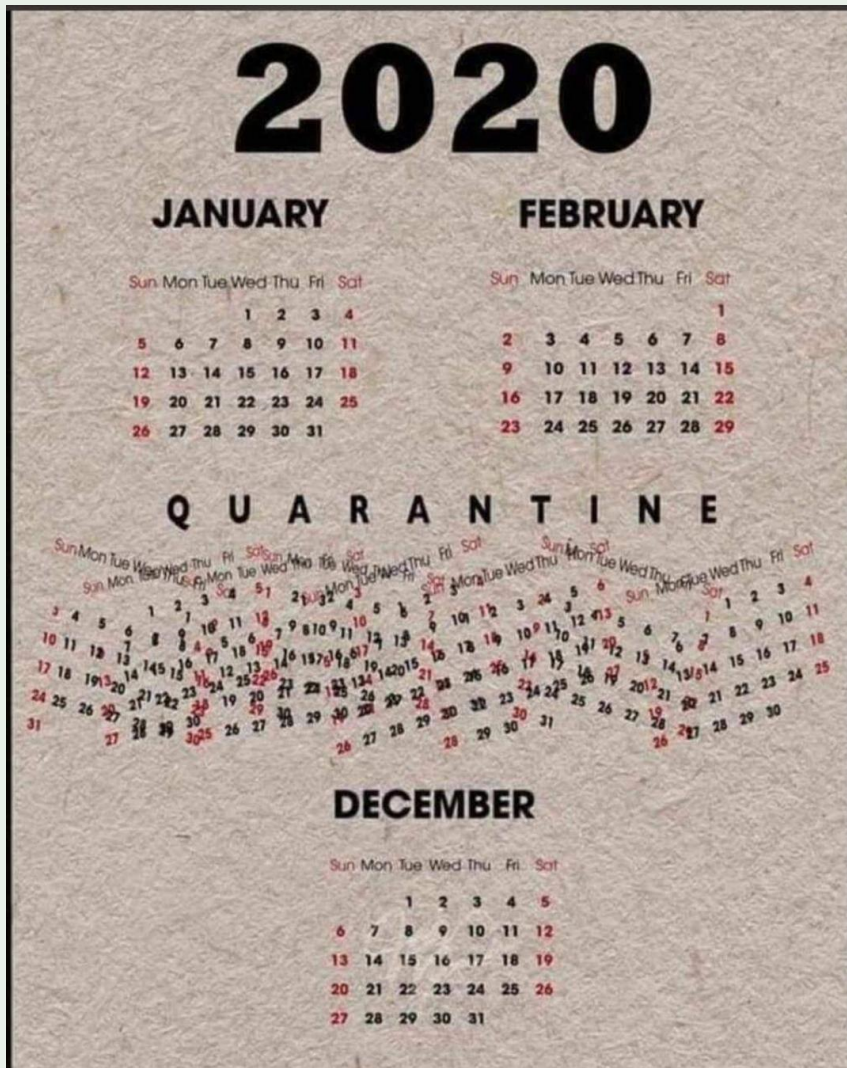


## Message from the President - continued

Your WACE Board is currently investigating educational opportunities as an alternative to the in person conference.

Please stay safe and healthy during this unprecedented time and do not hesitate to contact a board member with any questions you may have.

Liz Krzyminski, WACE President





**Held Captive; Cruising in a Pandemic** by Elizabeth Krzyminski WACE President

Like many of my colleagues across the State of Washington, my work life changed dramatically in mid-March, however, I did not even know it!

While the world was descending the uncharted, dark path of the Covid-19 Pandemic, I was happily cruising, with my parents and my husband, on what was to be the “trip of a lifetime!”

The cruise was booked as a 14-day cruise through the historic Panama Canal, four ports of sun, fun and way too much food and beverage. Due to the pandemic the cruise was cut short by a day when the government of Mexico denied entry to the Port of Cabo San Lucas. Our ship was then denied entry to the Port of San Francisco. Imagine being held captive on a ship with limited internet access and nothing except Andrew Cuomo to update you on the condition in the United States.

While this was not near the nightmare it could have been, the anxiety of the passengers was palpable. The staff on board could not have been more accommodating and concerned for the safety and welfare of each passenger. It seemed as if there was a member of the crew, walking six feet behind passengers, sanitizing every surface and a staff person at every entry aboard the ship’s interior with a squirt of hand sanitizer. This story has a relatively happy ending, **NO ONE ON BOARD THE SHIP WAS ILL OR BECAME ILL.**

The City of Los Angeles allowed our ship into port, we disembarked and boarded a plane back to Seattle, where I learned Kirkland was the epicenter of the pandemic. Like many of you, I began my new remote work arrangements and on March 23, 2020, I opened my new “office” pictured below.



Currently Seattle Code Compliance is fully staffed and working remotely, through January. After that I honestly do not know what the future holds.





**Held Captive; Cruising in a Pandemic** - cont

For now, we have meaningfully work that is designed to ensure all rental housing units are appropriately maintained and meet the standards of the City of Seattle Rental Registration In-spection Ordinance. While in person inspections may be suspended; my colleagues and I are working on im-provements to the program that will enhance the rental inspection processes. We are exploring a variety of methods to gain compliance, including expanding the use of advisory letters to property owners regarding reported complaints, virtual inspections for limited housing code violations, as well as other code enforcement inspec-tions. In the face of the pandemic, Seattle Code Compliance continues to ensure the safety of tenants in rental housing.

The silver lining of working remotely has been embracing technology and becoming proficient at the many online meeting platforms. While portions of the U.S. and Seattle, are in turmoil, we have been down this path before, although not during a pandemic, I have faith that we will get through these challenges and be strong-er for the experience.

Please share your story on the WACE website, we all benefit when we share our experience. Stay safe and healthy, and let your WACE board know how we can support you in your current working conditions

Liz Krzyminski, WACE President.

**TEAMWORK**

**“Coming together is a beginning**

**Keeping together is progress**

**Working together is success”**

**- Henry Ford**

**“To be able to work at home successfully takes all of the**

**following: Motivation,**

**Perseverance,**

**Work,**

**Good habits,**

**No excuses,**

**Balance,**

**Accountability and Action”**

**- Byron Pulsifer**

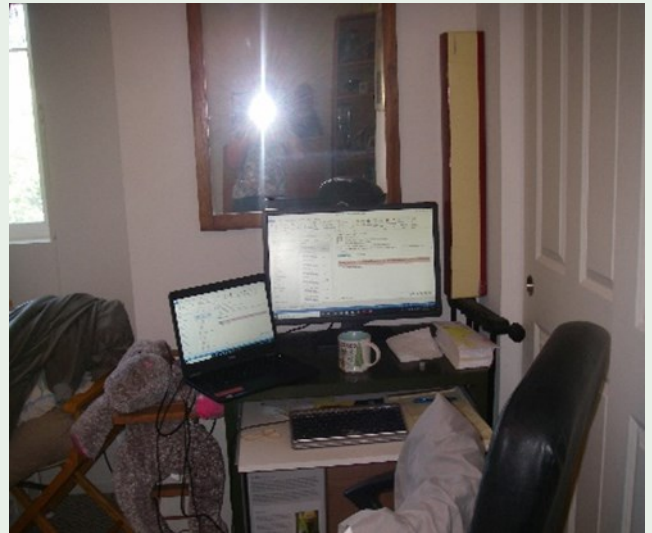




**Code Enforcement during COVID-19** by Jeri Breazeal WACE 2nd Vice President

In my little corner of the world, things are humming along. King County Permitting, along with Code Enforcement has been considered essential staff from the beginning. Our office shut down in the middle of March and will remain closed until at least after Labor Day. Management are working on reimagining reopening. We are taking turns going into the office to process mail, make copies, scan documents etc. We are very limited as to how much time we can spend at the office. Fortunately, we already had laptops and were doing some telecommuting already. At the beginning, we were focusing on complaints related to life safety and eminent environmental issues. We did not issue any civil penalties or notice and orders. No abatements were completed. We are just now starting to gear up to move forward with those functions. I feel like we will never catch up. Our complaints have remained consistent, and we are at the same numbers as last year. My thoughts are that people thought we were not working and more people were home to see issues and file complaints.

Personally, I feel like all processes take longer. All meetings, including Hearings are conducted via Zoom or Skype. I do feel the stress of being perpetually behind. I miss my coworkers and others that I usually engage with in person, including WACE. I am also a union rep and am on the negotiating team for the layoffs in our agency that are looming. On a more personal note, most of you know I had cancer treatment and am taking medications that reduce my resistance, so that brings all of this to a whole different level for me. My 96-year-old mother is in a care facility. They have been doing a great job of keeping them Covid free, but I have not been able to visit her and it is hard for her to understand what is going on. My son is 17 and has had to adjust to online learning. My husband is also telecommuting and has taken over the dining room table, while I am upstairs in a bedroom. My dog is ecstatic that we are home most of the time; my cat not so much.



All and all I do feel blessed and thankful. I still have a job that I enjoy (most of the time). No one in my family has been infected or has had any serious issues. I have wonderful friends that I try to stay in-touch with. I wish all of you safe journeys and wellbeing.





The official flag of 2020!





## **Code Enforcement During COVID-19** by Luis Garica - WACE Secretary

If there has been one thing I have learned during my career as a civil servant, it is that the ability to adjust to change is the single most important skill to obtain. Change is inevitable, whether it be due to an election, budget shortfall or a global pandemic. The goal should be to continue to show public value, while adjusting to the times.

What is public value? Unlike a private entity, public value in local government isn't necessarily gauged by financial measures such as profit and loss. Public value must not only be realized throughout the city, but also in the reports to elected officials. The ability to show that objectives have been met in the most efficient manner possible is public value.

Due to COVID-19, many programs have dealt with decreased ability to be out in the public and are even further limited by budget constraints. While I have not found a time when the responsibilities have slowed to the point where we feel we actually have time, this work change must be used for the review and improvement of existing programs. Can we do things differently and still meet our objectives? I say absolutely, but we must first accept that there will be change.

If any of you know me, I crave the face to face interactions and adore the people side of this business. If we can shift our focus to people instead of property, I completely believe we can improve customer service and substantially add public value. Now we are faced with the prohibition of working with people in a more personable manner and have to find ways to still serve without as much interactions. This is where technology can bridge these gaps. While there are concerns with relying completely on video or digital information, I can tell you that I have had success in showing attention to citizen concerns with using video and photographs to observe deficiencies. This has afforded me the ability to have conversations with responsible parties on the path to compliance remotely, away from the site and place of work. Many times, these interactions have resulted in mediation rather than enforcement efforts. This is where the person focus rather than the property has been vital.

The suspension of municipal court services has been another challenging impact of the pandemic, but has provided an opportunity to rethink some of our approaches to Code Enforcement. We instituted a door tag into the process ahead of the any notice of violation (NOV). The intent of this change is to spark a dialogue without making direct, in-person contact. We've found that this approach allows staff to maintain social distancing, while also avoiding the cold and sterile first touch of a mailed Notice of Violation. While still in a pilot form at my current jurisdiction, door tags are a proven method to provide notice and make an initial contact. If your jurisdiction does not have this tool, I strongly encourage you to explore it as well as other less aggressive methods of educating the public.

As the pandemic continues to impact our work environments, I would urge you to use this time wisely. Nobody knows what the future of this pandemic holds, and further budget and staffing impacts may be looming. As long as we can adapt and stay creative to consistently demonstrate public value, there may be a chance to protect our departments from some of the harsh cuts we are seeing throughout the country in the Code Enforcement industry.





**My favorite 2020 purchase has to be my social distancing service animal.**



**If you see a beach, the ocean sky and stars, you either have the mind of an artist or you need a vacation...**



**It is actually the bottom of a car door that needs fixing!**





**In the Face of Adversity** by Lance Merz - WACE Sergeant At Arms

This year has been interesting, to say the least. We are all learning, adapting, educating, and affected by the “Corona Virus”, also known as COVID-19. I am hoping by all to those who read this newsletter is healthy and that extension reaches out to family and friends as well. What have we learned? How have we adapted? What is in our future? COVID-19 has not only changed how we operate, but it changes how we think; it creates adaptation in every facet of our jobs. Some of it is for the better, others, not so much.

Since the start of COVID-19, the Mayor, City Council, and Directors have made some very critical and timely decisions that help the city during these trying times. From what I have seen, their number one priority has been to us employees, which is beyond amazing. Many people with other jobs other than the city were worried about being laid off, or how they were going to support their families. Many were laid off. The Mayor (who is also an accountant) made it a priority to take care of his staff by not laying off any employee who works at the City of Wenatchee. I can go on and on about how well our Mayor has taken care of his employee’s, but there are other things to discuss.

When we found out that the Governor wanted to shut things down, we all wondered how we were going to be able to effectively do our jobs. How was it all going to work? Our Director of Community Development and Building Official made the determination to reduce the workforce in both the office and in the field. The City of Wenatchee only has two Code Compliance Officers and a Code Compliance Coordinator. The doors were closed to the public at all City facilities.



That being said, it was determined that for one week, one Officer would work from home, and the other would work from their city vehicle, without stepping foot into the office. We decided collectively to continue with investigating complaints with the emphasis of life, health, and safety. Our pro-active approach would be reduced and our level of sympathy sharply increased!

During this time, I had a bout of Pancreatitis, which landed me in the hospital ICU for almost a week. The same ICU as people who tested positive for the virus! I could not move from my hospital bed as I had five different bags of fluids flowing into my body. To say that I was nervous about being infected was an understatement!





## *In the Face of Adversity* - cont

Our interactions with the public continues to be from afar. We practice social distancing with every visit that we have. During the first onslaught of the virus, we decided to send letters to property owners who had violations on the property with follow up phone calls to discuss the violations and educating them on the Wenatchee City Code. Progressively and after a period of time, we began attempts to make contact with tenants or property owners. When these attempts met with negative results, we started posting door hangers on the front door. For those of you who do not have door hangers, these are “Courtesy Notices” that describe what type of violation they have on the property. On the back of the door hanger, the Officer can explain in detail how to correct the violation with a date of re-inspection. I feel that door hangers are extremely effective. We would also take a photo of the door hanger posted on the door as well for our records. If you would like a copy of the Door Hanger, please send an email to [lmerz@wenatcheewa.gov](mailto:lmerz@wenatcheewa.gov).

Our Code Enforcement Board (CEB) was delayed for several months. We actually gave the property owners more time to correct the violations that may or may not have had a direct impact of compliance due to the Corona Virus. Therefore, we would re-post our Notice of Code Violations with a new CEB date. As of July, we will be caught up on all cases going to the board. Nevertheless, when do we say enough is enough?

Social distancing and wearing a mask seems like a new social norm. Here in Central Washington, it has begun to heat up, which means that the weeds have sprouted throughout the community. We decided that there were violations that could be corrected while still practicing social distancing and if needed, wearing a mask. One of these violations is weeds. Every person who has been impacted has either continued to work, or has stayed at home. Therefore, there was never a valid reason of not correcting these violations. You could still stay at home, be outside in the fresh air, and practice social distancing.

I will say however, I honestly thought that the community would rally with each other and help their neighbors as best as they could. That did not happen. It almost seemed that people had too much time on their hands and complained about things that were not violations in the first place. To date, Chelan County is only at a Phase 2 opening. I honestly feel that people are tired of Corona and the number one question they all have is “When is this going to end?” I feel that the virus is not going to go away anytime soon and we must all remain fluid in these trying times. Adaptation is our new normal. So if you have a great idea of how we as Code Enforcement Officers can accomplish our tasks more efficiently and effectively, please visit our website at [www.WACE1.com](http://www.WACE1.com) and let us know.





**Now I understand  
why Laura Ingalls  
would get so excited  
when she'd get to go  
into town with Pa.**

**“SO, I STEPPED  
AWAY FOR, LIKE,  
TWO SECONDS...”**

THE BEGINNING OF  
EVERY PARENTING  
HORROR STORY, EVER.



# My COVID-19 “Code Enforcement” by John Fairbanks WACE Treasurer

While the effect on all of us during the current situation has been different, I would like to share how I have been dealing with the ordeal in my professional and personal life. As you know, our professional life has a huge impact on our personal life and vice-versa.

Working for the City of Edgewood was a change for me in May 2019. During my time I have spent the last year writing and replacing much if not all the enforcement code in all Title of our code. Council adopted these changes in January/February 2020. The process that I established involves a Code Enforcement Board of citizens within our City. Citizens were appointed to the Board and we scheduled our first Code Enforcement Board in May 2020. No one expected what we all were about to face. Needless to say, the meeting was cancelled. I am happy to say we were able to conduct our first hearings on June 11<sup>th</sup>, albeit via Zoom.

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, due to COVID-19, our City Hall was one of the first in the area to close. Staff began working from home and their vehicles with minimal staff coming into city hall. It was difficult as we ramped up everyone to have the ability to work remotely. As the days turn into weeks and then months everyone adapted to the changes and our work continued seamlessly.

In my City, we never had a stoppage of work. The situation accelerated our City into the already planned move to a paperless environment. Plans are now submitted digitally and customers are directed to submit applications online. As I said, the work never stopped and all saw an uptick in their workload. The population of Edgewood is growing at a fast rate and this past year we saw an increase in population of about 6%. Code Enforcement before my arrival was essentially non-existent, so as you can imagine there is a tremendous amount of backlog.

The home/office dynamics. Working from home took some adjustments because of the dogs barking in the background. The governor’s orders also closed my spouses business, so she was home every day. With the lockdown, it was tough to discern weekdays from weekends as we joked about moving from one side of the couch for work to the other side of the couch for weekends. A wonderful person possibly from Nigeria decided to file unemployment with my social security number. While financially, the fraudulent claims did not hurt me I feel bad for those that had their benefits delayed or rejected.

Finally Phase II. Pierce County was approved for phase II. This meant my wife could reopen her store. I am able to spend more time in the office. We have consistently remained busy and we have even added a few more positions, which were advertised prior to the pandemic. Staff space was hemorrhaging so in January, a permit center/lobby remodel had begun. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, offers made and accepted. So began the office shuffle. This week my physical office was moved into the police department and many others have shuffled or will be switching from temporary locations into the new remodeled space.

Time for a break. 13 months in with my new city I haven’t taken time off so off I go to Florida to see my brother and do some remodeling at his place. I wish all of you the best this summer and sounds like it may be next year before we see a bit of normalcy in our careers and personal life.





## **Code Enforcement during the COVID-19 Pandemic** by Rosanna Johnson – Board of Directors

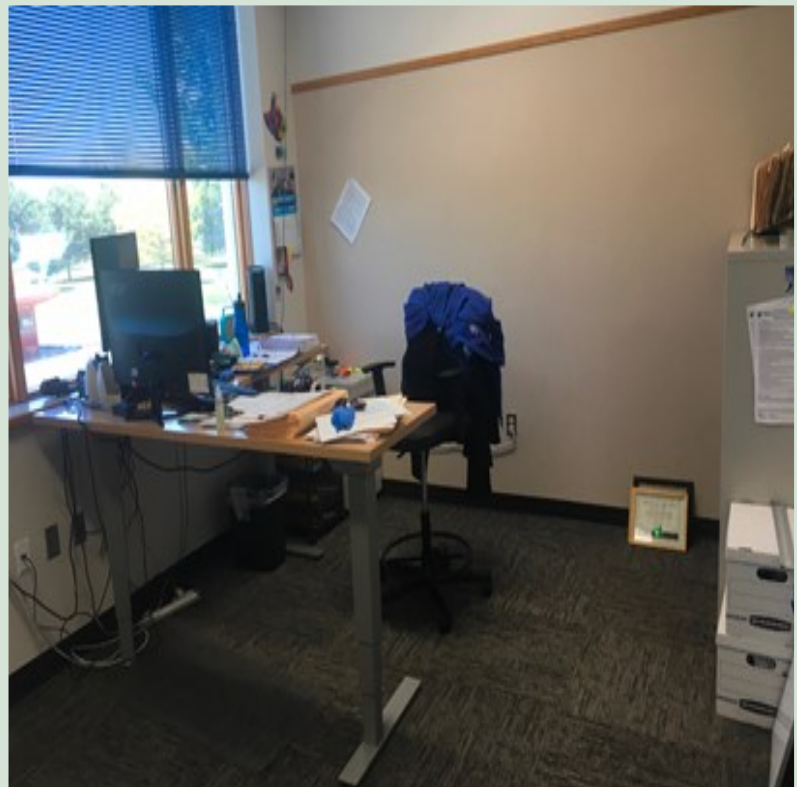
Throughout the pandemic our department has been open, accepting calls and trying to resolve issues to the best of our ability, without face to face interaction. The building department, which includes code enforcement, has continued to operate out of City Hall. Co-workers have been wearing masks where not separated, sanitizing surfaces and our hands and monitoring ourselves. We stopped riding in vehicles together, discontinued regular rental housing inspections and made every effort to only contact the public, in person, when an imminent hazard was present. While doing complaint housing inspections masks and gloves are worn; iPads, keys, cameras, pens etc. are all sanitized once out of the structure, before returning to the vehicle. This takes extra time and forethought before leaving the office. I have garnered many extra steps in my workweek hustle Fitbit challenges just from forgetting items at my desk.

Notices are still issued for various code violations, a door tag is left if it is minor or a Courtesy notice is sent to start dialogue. We take into consideration the severity of the violations, obstacles presented by the responding party and any limitations they face in resolving the issues, when determining a compliance deadline. Several of the local transfer stations were closed for weeks, preventing public access, tow companies limited responses and our own parks and neighborhood planting areas went without maintenance for over a month due to Stay Home orders.

We held our first ever virtual Code Enforcement Board Hearing on June 4, 2020 with 8 cases scheduled, many of which had been pending since February. The meeting, running from 7:00-10:15pm, didn't come without technological hiccups but was an overall success.

In the midst of all this, the City Hall remodel has been wrapping up. Last week, code enforcement moved to a new office space. While trying to unpack, get equipment up and running and complete documents for our latest hearing, we have found ourselves taking just as many calls as we would on any normal summer day.

Tri-Cities is seeing increased numbers of cases, along with increased testing. At this point, no one is sure as to when we will be able to enter Phase II, thus no date in mind for re-opening City Hall to the public.



## Code Enforcement during the COVID-19 Pandemic - cont

I have found the changes in my personal life to be more of a struggle than those in the workplace. Two parents continuing to work full time (my husband, thankfully, working from home) while trying to homeschool a 10 year old, occupy a 3 year old, swat away the neighborhood kids who try to get in the house and no access to grooming for our curly haired geriatric bichons has definitely been challenging.

Compared to so many others out there, I have it easy. I am grateful to have time with my family, for health, employment and that we are all able to continue serving our communities.

## QUOTES

“In Germany they are preparing for the crisis by stocking up with sausage and cheese. That’s the Wurst Kase scenario” *O Laparoto* - via Instagram

“Without great solitude, no serious work is possible.” - *Pablo Picasso*

“One moment of patience may ward off great disaster. One moment of impatience may ruin a whole life.” - *Chinese Proverb*

“Don’t worry about the world coming to an end today. It’s already tomorrow in Australia.” - *Charles Schulz*

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.” *Theodore Roosevelt*

“Nothing is impossible: The word itself says “I’m possible!” - *Audrey Hepburn*



## Code Enforcement in a Covid World - Stephen Mauer - Board of Directors

I am a person who enjoys going out and about in Pierce County and contacting people. While the reasons for the contacts are not always pleasant, I do my best to make the experience a friendly one with education and information for the citizen. The primary goal being voluntary compliance and bringing a property back within the codes that are not being followed.

That aspect of this job changed dramatically with COVID 19. In Pierce County, we have not been able to make site visits since mid-March. We are also working from home. I am still able to contact people, but now it is by phone and or email. Not quite the same and no travel time.

While I must admit, I do very much enjoy the view from my makeshift work space at home, I would rather leave home at home and work at work. I make my phone calls, send my emails and even do junk vehicle affidavits remotely. I now rely on the requester to send me the photos I need to verify the location of the vehicle and its condition. Working to figure out how to still get the job done effectively and as timely as we can is now part of the fun of the job.



It does come down to flexibility. That is always true, but more so in the current environment. What can I do differently, how can I do it differently and why should I do it differently? Once you answer those questions, you find that this job can be done almost as effectively as if you were able to be there. For those cases where we do need to see it and touch it, they will still be there when I am turned loose again hopefully in the near future.

Be safe and flexible.



## Committed to Community - Zachary Miles - Board of Directors

In a world that operates with the most innovative technology at its fingertips, I have always been a little more analog. Whenever I have been told that the process will be simplified with some new app, new device, new “version 13.5.2.0”, I have usually stood deadpanned with arms crossed responding with the most cynic, monotone “uh-huh” as I turn and walk away returning to my archaic method of work. This approach has worked for me. Successfully. Until now. In the pandemic year of 2020.

Ok, to be honest, I am not the proverbial caveman chiseling a wheel out of stone. I have evolved with technology as it has woven itself into the fabric of the modern world. But there is one area that I have continuously thrived in that does not require a phone, a computer, or some latest-n-greatest app. That is communicating with people face to face. I have always enjoyed the opportunity to converse with people whether at work, out in the field with the public, or around a campfire with family and friends. Engaging with people exchanging thoughts, ideas, opinions, or stories is where I am most comfortable. It is one of the aspects of the code enforcement profession that I like the most. Oh sure, not every encounter with the citizens of Bellingham is positive from start to finish (those dang municipal code violation scenarios); however, I am usually able to educate and/or mediate with just about any-one to a resolution with minimal confrontation. That changed March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 when my once customary and preferred ex-troverted world was transformed into the isolated space seen here.



This is not the “corner office” I remember seeing in the brochure. Lol! But it now serves as my personal HQ. It is the space where I am settling into a new, unfamiliar (and hopefully temporary) normal. This has become a space to expand my strategic thinking and educate myself on the variety of technology mediums to connect and communicate with the public from a stationary base. Virtual inspections, zoom/skype calls, face time, etc. are probably familiar to most. For me, it has been a “wow, what will they think of next?” revelation. I am sure it is safe to say that in one way or another most of us have probably had to reevaluate how we do life personally and professionally during this crisis.

The Bellingham Police Department mission statement is “Committed to Community”. The focus in my office is health and safety first. Together, these two viewpoints highlight what our profession is striving to preserve through this pandemic. Hopefully you are taking on new, possibly uncomfortable challenges that could lead to an effective alternative approach to continued success in your work-space. Stay safe!

