



WHAT IS A BUILDING OFFICIAL?



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WHAT IS A **BUILDING OFFICIAL**

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INTRODUCTION

Washington **Association** of Building Officials

Supported by WABO's Mission Statement "Leading the way to excellence in building and life safety," WABO's role is to promote excellence in the industry through education and creating a collaborative culture. We participate in conversations with other stakeholders in the construction industry, and support the membership by providing professional development to help them meet the challenges of our changing industry

About the Building Officials **Handbook**

WABO members created this guide to provide Building Officials, Plans Examiners, Building Inspectors, Permit Technicians, and other city staff an overview of the duties and responsibilities. We value our role and responsibility to help provide a safe built community in which Washingtonians live, work and play. The team that collaborated to create this document represents committed to supporting the development of safe structures that serve the communities and investments for the communities we serve.

The construction industry is evolving as each sector of the trades struggles with replacing and training the next generation of professionals. WABO leaders recognize the challenge as a call to collectively share wisdom while participating in conversations around this importantly vital reference. An idea shared with the membership was embraced by the chairperson of the Outreach Committee, Stacy Criswell. With Stacy's embrace of the potential value to the membership and with the support of others to his realize his vision, this reference tool was created.

Future of the Building Official Handbook

WABO envisions this guide as a living document to evolve proving a tool for Washington Building Code professionals throughout the State of Washington. Please get involved with WABO, and let's continue to share the vision by including your ideas and your knowledge to ensure the mission of WABO is continued and thrives with the next generation of Building Code Officials.

Chapter 1: **What** Is A Building Official?

The Building Official is the lead person when it comes to building, plumbing and mechanical permits. Jurisdiction size, location, political make up, and coverage area greatly alter the roles and responsibilities of the Building Official.

A Building Official for a smaller jurisdiction may be the only person to ensure things are permitted, built, and maintained in a safe manner. However, a larger jurisdiction may have dedicated staff to handle permit intake, plans examining, code interpretation and inspections, making the Building Official's role managerial.

In either jurisdiction, the Building Official is the lead person responsible for enforcing the state adopted building codes. This includes providing interpretations, setting policies, updating codes, handling questions or complaints from the public and working with different departments ensuring projects meet all requirements (not just building) prior to occupancy.

Chapter 2: **History** of Building Officials and Codes

Historically, the first known written building code was enacted by King Hammurabi of Babylon in 1758 B.C. Harsh penalties of this code, written in stone, established that people who designed and built for others were to be held accountable for the results of their work. Although this code provided no direction on how to build, it simply stated, "If a builder has built a house for a man and his work is not strong, and if the house he has built falls in and kills the householder, that builder shall be slain." Such penalties surely kept most builders honest without licensing, detailed codes, permits or Building Officials.

As a result of the great fires in London in 1666 and Chicago in 1871, building codes began to address risks any given building posed to neighboring buildings and the public in general. Hazards associated with densely developed cities including tall buildings, gave rise to regulations for the installation of protected common walls between buildings and outlawed dangerous practices such as wooden chimneys. Life and death problems experienced over time in existing buildings spawned codes for light and ventilation, fire escapes, water supply, toilets and sanitary drains, stairs and railings, all typically enforced by local Building Officials.

A United States insurance group, the National Board of Fire Underwriters, created the National Building Code in 1905 aimed to minimize risks to property and building occupants. The existence of this code ultimately led to the formation of three regional organizations of Building Officials, founded in 1915, 1922 and 1940 respectively, each with its own building code. In 1994, these organizations and their codes were consolidated into the International Code Council (ICC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing a single set of comprehensive and coordinated national model construction codes, and the first set of "I-Codes" was published in 2000.

Even though the I-Codes are becoming the most widely adopted building codes across the United States, some jurisdictions still enforce older codes, have their own unique codes, or have no code enforcement at all. In contrast, the State of Washington adopted and amended the Uniform Building Code as a Statewide building code for many years before transitioning to the model I-Codes as the primary codes in 2004. As part of this legislated transition, Washington State retained the Uniform Plumbing Code as an exception. As Washington is a “home rule” state, local jurisdictions are charged with the enforcement of these codes by their designated Building Official and have the authority to amend the State Building Code with some limitations. Typically, your local Building Official is also tasked with managing the adoption of local code amendments for and by local government elected officials.

Chapter 3: **Duties** of the Building Official

The International Code Council (ICC) defines the **Building Official** as:

“The officer or other designated authority charged with administration and enforcement of this code or a duly authorized representative.”

The Building Official is charged with the interpretation and application of the legally adopted building codes and regulations within their jurisdiction. Codes typically include building, plumbing, mechanical, energy conservation, and electrical systems*.¹

The Building Official’s primary duties include overseeing the day-to-day operations of the building department from where, the processing of permit applications, plan reviews, and building inspections are coordinated and conducted. Some Building Officials also conduct plan review or inspections depending on staffing levels.

Additionally, the Building Official’s duties include creating supporting documentation and supplemental code requirements to better suit the conditions of their jurisdiction. This can vary from preparing departmental operating policies and writing code interpretations to developing code amendments for adoption by the jurisdiction’s elected officials.

The Building Official drafts ordinances for the updating and adoption of the model building codes, which occurs on a 3-year cycle in accordance with the laws of Washington state. Developing ordinances for the adoption of the local amendments and/or state building codes typically requires the Building Official to present their proposals at public hearings for the City or County Council and members of the public before those codes may can be adopted.

¹ *City and town [municipal jurisdictions may opt to preform electrical inspections in accordance with Washington State Department of Labor & Industries regulate electrical installations](#) in RCW 19.28.010.

Many of the life-safety requirements of building and fire codes overlap with one another, requiring the Building Official to collaborate with the Fire Code Official to coordinate oversight and approvals of new and existing building construction. It is important that the Building Official coordinate with the Fire Code Official to maintain a successful working relationship. Building Officials participate in local outreach and educational programs often in partnership with other agencies or private business. The goal of these programs is to increase awareness of the importance of building and fire codes, educate the public on permit requirements for construction or alterations, and to further highlight services that building departments provide. This outreach is typically done at local events, schools, job fairs, and through online programs within their jurisdiction.

These are just a few of the primary duties that most Building Officials perform daily and all with the same objective; To ensure the safety and enjoyment of homes, buildings, businesses, recreational facilities, and much more.

Chapter 4: Legal Responsibilities of the Building Official

Laws and Regulations

The state of Washington is a Home Rule form of government, granting local jurisdictions authority for building code enforcement. The Building Official must abide by the laws and regulations enacted by Legislature or signed by the Governor, which include the RCWs and WAC codes. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) is the compilation of all permanent laws now in force. It is a collection of Session Laws (enacted by the Legislature, and signed by the Governor, or enacted via the initiative process), arranged by topic, with amendments added and repealed laws removed. The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) codifies the regulations from the RCWs and arranges them by subject or agency. The State of Washington develops a state building code and local jurisdictions must adopt and enforce the code but are allowed to adopt local provisions provided they are not less restrictive than the state code.

Ethics, Open government, and Fairness for the Building Official

As an officer enforcing the laws of the state, the Building Official must show equal treatment and fairness in performance of their duties. Their decisions must always be ethical without granting any special privileges, accepting gifts/rewards, or threatening to withhold services for their performance of duties. An obligation of the Building Official is recusal or disclosure related to decisions on matters which they may have a financial interest. This could apply to home ownership, business interests, and local associations. Although there is open government and all documents are subject to public disclosure, the Building Official must not disclose confidential information in their capacity or threaten to disclose such information.

Code Administration and Enforcement

The Building Official is responsible for many tasks related to a building permit and the proper performance of these tasks is essential for when there are legal implications from investigations and enforcement of code violations. Specifically, the tasks are:

- Permit Application – It is important to define the specific requirements of a permit application, including whether plans, structural calculations, etc. are required. The Building Official should also perform screening to reject an application if it does not meet the requirements of the application.
- Plans Examination – This is an important function of the Building Official. To perform the function of plan review, staff must be a qualified in the area, or contract for a qualified firm. It is essential that the Building Official do a quality plan review and require revisions if the construction documents do not conform to the building code requirements.
- Plans Examination – When it is determined that plan review is required based on the scope of work, a qualified plan reviewer will go through the plans to ensure they meet Federal, State and local requirements. This process may take several attempts.
- Permit Issuance – The issuance of a permit is an important step in the enforcement and administration of the building codes. Owner information and contractor licensure numbers should be required for permit issuance. Once a permit is granted and construction has begun on a building site, it becomes difficult to revoke the issued permit, even if there is a mistake on the permit. A builder may establish legal rights to build once the permit has been issued. Revocation of a permit should rarely be considered when all other efforts to address the issue have been exhausted..
- Inspection – Inspections are the most important part of the Building Officials duties. Inspections are the connection to the permit issuance, plan review, code compliance and construction projects. Once construction starts on a building, the building code requires that it be inspected and approved by the Building Official. The construction or work shall remain accessible and exposed for inspection purposes until approved. Detailed inspection records are an essential part of the records that must be documented during inspections and kept in the permit record. Building inspector work under the authority of the Building Official, this is considered a ministerial act; in other words, it is performed under the authority, policies, and procedures of a supervisor, and it does not involve discretion.
- Handling Complaints – Handling complaints are a necessary function of the Building Official. It is important to establish a standard procedure for handling complaints, and document as much information as possible, as the complaint may end up with legal action if the owner does not resolve the complaint.
- Enforcement of Violations – Once a violation has been found, some action must be taken to enforce the code. Once the construction has been completed, prosecution of the city courts becomes the final method of enforcement. Notice of violation is the first step in the process and must include name of person/entity being charged, section number and name of violation(s), description of the violation, date/time of the offense, and signature of the inspector. Injunctive relief such as temporary restraining order, temporary injunction, or permanent injunction may be required if

legal remedies are required to prevent significant harm to the public before the violation could be remedied by the owner.

Ministerial vs. Discretionary Duties

Decisions made by the building official are either ministerial or discretionary acts. A ministerial act is a decision performed in a prescribed manner and in obedience to a legal authority, without regard to one's own judgment or discretion. Decisions made by the Building Official that follow the prescriptive requirements in the building codes are considered ministerial acts. Discretionary acts are decisions where judgment or deliberation is required when Building Official approves or disapproves a particular activity. This is different from ministerial functions, in which the Building Official merely has to determine whether there has been conformity with applicable statutes, ordinances, or regulations. The distinction between ministerial acts and discretionary acts is often important to determine whether a public official is shielded by [qualified immunity](#). Generally, discretionary acts are immune from liability, while ministerial acts are not.

Expert Witness Testimony

The Building Official may be required to service as a witness at some point in either their official capacity as a Building Official or as an expert witness. The jurisdictional attorney will help to prepare the Building Official as a witness for trial.

As a "Fact Witness", they will be asked to describe the circumstances that they have observed firsthand. Generally, cases that involve the Building Official will either be those that are brought to enforce a particular code section or those brought as a defense to actions for damages against the Building Official. In either case, the fact witness has been called in order to relate to the judge and/or jury the substance of what the Building Official observed in the course of enforcing the code. In the majority of enforcement actions, the Building Official initiates the legal action.

The Building Official may also be called as an expert witness. An expert witness is different from a fact witness, and the Building Official testifying as a fact witness may not have any connection with the facts of the case until requested to review and comment on them. Instead, they have some high level of expertise, knowledge or specialized training in a particular field beyond that held by an ordinary person.

Chapter 5: **Where is the Building Official's place in the jurisdiction's organization?**

The Building Official's role is a dynamic one and is easily adapted to most jurisdictional and county structures. Sometimes the jurisdiction's or county's code or charter dictates where the Building Official resides within an organization. Most of the time however, the placement of the Building Official within an organization is a matter of the jurisdiction's best judgement in

response to the character of the community it serves. Some departments are strictly dedicated to building or construction. In other places, the Building Official and supporting staff have been organized in the same department with Planning staff, Engineering or Code Enforcement. In many smaller jurisdictions, it is common for the Building Official to have multiple roles including planner, city engineer and code enforcement officer.

The Building Official and supporting staff have natural synergistic relationships with other staff and departments. Most departments have a vested interest in fire and life safety in the built environment for its citizens and visitors. Use issues naturally require coordination with Planning Departments regarding the type of occupancy. Fire flow, access, right-of-way, sanitation, water supply and erosion and sediment control issues require coordination with Public Works/Engineering and Fire Departments. Unpermitted construction, dangerous buildings and nuisances often require the collaboration with Code Enforcement staff, Fire Department, Police and Legal staff.

Chapter 6: **Qualities** of a Good Building Official

Robert E O'Bannon author of "Building Department Administration" revised version in 1989, dedicated an entire chapter to the Building Official covering at length the role, duties, functions, and responsibilities of the Building Official. He also outlines some qualities and skills required to function effectively in this role. The following are key characteristics of an effective and responsible Building Official.

- Circumspection – Ability to consider all sides and consequences.
- Objectivity – Considering the facts without preconceived judgment or opinion.
- Patience - Demonstrating forbearance over provocation.
- Veracity – Sticking to the truth.
- Empathy – Understanding the other side when your position hurts/harms them.
- Integrity – Doing what is right, even if no one is watching.
- Candor – Being forthright, telling it like it is.

No person will likely possess all the above traits at the beginning of their tenure as a building official, nor are they comprehensive. Many need to be developed over time. Equally important as the above traits are "knowing one's own shortcomings". If a Building Official is lacking in areas, it is important for them to recognize where they are lacking and to desire to develop and expand those abilities in which they are deficient.

Administrative and managerial skills are vital as department size increases. The "many hats" scenario is very real when it comes to department management and administration. Planning, organizing, supervision, coordination, and reporting are primary functions for the Building Official. Although the duties of building department administrator are similar to other jurisdiction's departments, the responsibilities and knowledge required are very different. The effective administration and enforcement of the jurisdiction's building, and life safety codes require a constant effort of study, research, training, code development, and teaching. All this is

accomplished while the Building Official is conducting or managing plan reviews and inspections. The Building Official must be a highly motivated individual and possess/acquire the skills and aptitude to function independently within their department especially when it comes to the technical side of code administration.

The following are additional personal attributes that are beneficial for a Building Official to possess.

- Industrious – Personal energy, drive, solid work habits and productive.
- Good Judgment – Identify problems when they do exist, foresee upcoming problems, and head them off, be ready with solutions and control any impulsiveness. Good judgment also involves knowing when to be flexible, when to hold the line.
- Even Temperament – maintain a calm demeanor when under pressure (one of the toughest for a lot of people).
- Ability to communicate – express yourself and ideas verbally and in written format in a clear, concise and a persuasive manner

Finally.... A Building Official should always look and act professional.

Chapter 7: When do you need a Building Official?

For the purposes of this chapter, the Building Official is described not as an individual but as a team of specialists, including the building code official, permit technicians, plan reviewers, inspectors and in some cases code compliance enforcement officers. All these personnel, who are managed by the Building Official, are acting with the authority of the building official.

[Construction and Building Inspectors: Occupational Outlook Handbook: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(bls.gov\)](https://www.bls.gov/publications/occupational-outlook-handbook/)

When the public needs a building official.

The community needs the Building Official to administer the building codes in the most efficient and strategic manner possible cooperating with contractors, design professionals and other authorities within the jurisdiction to protect the overall community. You need the Building Official to partner with all and be aligned to none.

When you need a permit.

The Building Official administers the process of a building permit. Building permits are an integral part of the construction process. The obligation of the Building Official is to review plans for code compliance, inspect the projects for compliance with the construction documents and monitor the stages of construction at key points for code compliance.

When you didn't get a permit.

Building officials are tasked with the enforcement of situations created by property owners who proceed with work without the minimum pre-emptive review, issuance, and inspections for projects, by skipping the permit process. Building Officials have an obligation to enforce the building code. The obligation for code compliance is with the building owner and technical professionals hired to design, supply, and construct buildings and structures. It is imperative that Building Officials are able to enforce codes within the community.

What you may not have thought of when needing a Building Official.

When you think of Building Officials, do you think beyond the codes?

Building officials are the front line of key issues related to the built environment, working to set a level playing field for all. The minimum construction standards, mechanical systems, energy conservation, and ventilation air quality code all contribute to the health, welfare, and investment within the community.

The science and impact of indoor air quality is a fundamental and essential need in our built environment. Equating the minimum standards of indoor air quality to improvement in public health is a foundation of these prescriptive code standards. Inspection of the adequate structural support for housing, business, community centers and the rest of the built environment is an essential need of the community to be provided both a minimum standard of safety but also preservation of the investment. The Building Official is needed to work as a partner with the community to ensure the fundamental needs of the community are met by enforcing the minimum code standards.

What you may not know when needing a Building Official.

The community needs the building official to work preemptively in all aspects of public life safety elements. While many of those in community service such as police and fire spend most of the time working reactively to the needs of the community, most of the Building Official's work is preemptive.

The Building Official also responds to community disasters, hazards, and building construction conditions created by the lack of maintenance, disrepair and/or unsafe occupancy. The Building Official is obligated to act to secure the public safety, notify the property owner, and require restoration to applicable codes. The Building Official is required to keep records of permits and provide them as stated by the building codes and state laws for public review.

In thinking of permits, often not considered is the autonomy that the Building Official brings to the project construction process. The Building Official is free from contracts, financial incentive, financial risk; their only duty is to community. The construction industry has many well indented competent contractors and design professionals; the industry also has contractors/design professionals that provide substandard or fraudulent work that is mitigated by the Building Official through the permitting process.

When you don't need a Building Official.

Most of the time Building Officials, permit technicians and inspectors work in unison with other jurisdiction's employees. Citizens often aren't aware of the distinction between the Building Official, engineering, and planning. Management of storm water is likely not a Building Official task unless a structural hazard is created. Building Officials must avoid involvement in civil disputes including property lines and similar non-building code issues. Work that does not require permits is generally not under the authority of the building official unless a public safety danger is created. Another example is workmanship. Building Officials need to avoid being involved in workmanship issues unless the issue is code related. An example of workmanship issues is concrete finishing that may look bad but does not create a code compliance issue.

When jurisdiction's staff needs a Building Official.

The Building Official is a resource to staff, providing the tone and experience to direct and inspire staff to both meet the customer services standards and the code enforcement duties. All relevant tasks completed by the Building Official rest in the visual inspection of the work in progress with a foundation in plan review. The support of staff is needed to provide thorough and responsive services. Staff need the support of the Building Official to navigate and evolve along with the cultural and workplace changes some of which are related to social environments.

Chapter 8: What are the Challenges of the Building Official?**Time Management.**

Building Officials deal with many deadlines, imposed by Department Heads to City Council or Board of County Commissioners. Producing reports and final documents for meetings are a priority.

Staff have questions, other managers need the Building Official's input and there are always challenging inspections to follow-up on. The use of electronic calendars with meeting reminders is essential in the managing of the Building Official's time.

Defusing Problems with the Public

Many types of issues may arise from the public that need resolution by the Building Official. Enforcing the codes creates opportunities requiring the Building Official to make administrative determinations. Common issues relate to substantiating a correction Notice, evaluating permit status for a permit has expired without a Final Inspection, an angry Contractor is at the counter regarding a permit issuance delay, or someone is threatening a lawsuit about a structural deficiency.

Public Relations: Board, Council, or Newspaper

Whether in a Wildland-Urban Interface zone and where wildfires could threaten structures in the jurisdiction, or that the code has raised the earthquake hazard to a more hazardous designation, there are always code issues that the public should be made aware of.

- What is the Building Department doing because of these code changes, or will permit submittals be increasing?
- What is being done to get ahead of these events?
- What preparation is being done for any changes, and are handouts being created, or websites being updated to keep people abreast?
- Does a presentation need to be made to the Advisory Board, or the Council/Commissioners to convey upcoming changes?
- Can the budget handle the increased demand for Plan Reviewers?
- Has staff been made aware, and has everyone discussed expectations?

Fairness and Clarity

Examples of problems where solutions need to be documented are:

- A contractor has argued that they were charged Incorrect Permit Fees.
- An Architect has plans that were not approved by staff, because their engineering was delayed, and the new Code went into effect with their plans referencing the previous code edition (permit submittals were incomplete).
- A contractor was in a hurry and poured their concrete without their Building Permit Issued being issued, but their Engineer of Record did see the rebar and witnessed the pour.

Staff needs to understand the decision-making process, to feel supported and understand policies resulting from the Building Official's decision. Applicants need to know they are being treated fairly, too--that their concerns have been listened to, even if they don't get the answer they wanted. Goes back to the level playing field, and balancing consistency with flexibility.

Documenting, Reprimands and Personnel Issues

Personnel issues are time consuming and important issues that a manager must address. The records are cumbersome, there can be an emotional nightmare ahead for the employee and their family. Personnel issues will happen during a Building Official's career. All personnel issues can be unpleasant, difficult, and ugly. The Building Official needs to know the policy and laws that affect personnel and Union contracts.

Building Department staff are public employees, in the field and in the office. When it comes to addressing the use vulgar language, inappropriate jokes, and other offensive behaviors the Building Official need to be proactive in addressing these issues. Reviewing City policy would be a good best practice.

Unions, bargaining unit members in the office, and after-hour meetings on Cost-of-Living adjustments, may all affect morale the next day. A respected Building Official will ask how things went and will leave on a positive note, changing the subject if necessary.

Human Resources Policies

There may be a binder, or an online version of the HR policy. Effort in proactively seeking current versions of policy may be required. Bargaining unit/Union contracts may conflict with some HR policies, so it is important to review both.

Family Medical Leave Act will be listed in the HR rules, but the Union contract, or yet another version at the Federal level may supersede all of the local regulations. Medical Leave, Maternity Leave, Drug (Substance) Use and others are protected, and there may be forms to sign. It will be important to network with HR staff to coordinate these differences.

Networking

A Building Official should develop and foster relationships with Department Heads. If for example the Fire Department relationship may have been strained, the Building Official should reach out to the Fire Chief in a face-to-face meeting *in their office*. Make the effort to hear their concerns. Strive to work to mend fences with them, or keep the same people in place if everything is running smoothly.

- How are the day-to-day operations working?
- Is the communication adequate?
- Do we need additional coordination?

Budget Preparation and Revenue Estimates

The Building Official oversees their department's budget projecting estimates for revenue and finalizing all expenses. Other department heads should be consulted to find out how they *successfully* made requests for additional positions.

Politics and Outside Pressures

Elected officials all answer to the public, so inquiries about permit progress, or rumors of a future Home Depot expansion, are all a part of being transparent. It isn't because they are a Democrat or a Republican, it is because they are getting emails or phone calls, and they are simply wanting answers. A Building Official should be clear and concise in conveying information in these scenarios.

Chapter 9: The **Future** of Building Officials

The Building Official plays a vital role in the safety of our communities by enforcing the provisions of the latest adopted National, State, and local codes. These codes are constantly being updated or revised based on new information that comes in from users of the codes. Building Officials from around the country vote on proposed changes. The Building Official must quickly get up to speed with new requirements and be adaptable to changing technology in the permitting, plan review and inspection environment.

Why Codes Change

Changing codes can sometimes be daunting to the building community. For designers, they may need to update many design details and programs used for calculations. Builders may need to

change the techniques and/or materials they use to build and there may be increased costs that affect profitability. Nonetheless, Building Officials are required by State law to enforce the new provisions of the code.

Changes to the code can occur for a variety of reasons, from deaths attributable to a building condition, a need to adapt to changing environment, more detailed data to support a change, or perhaps to reverse a previous code change that caused unintended consequences. An example of changes to the code to prevent future deaths due to a building condition allowed in the code is the tragedy of the Station nightclub fire in Rhode Island that resulted in the death of 100 people and injuring more than 200. Overcrowding in a night club music event caused the accidental deaths due to inadequate fire safety measures for the occupant load. This event prompted specific code language to address nightclubs (A-2 occupancy) to be protected with automatic sprinkler systems. Modern building codes are also changing to allow new and innovative building materials and technology such as mass timber construction, recycled materials, or technology that reduces the carbon footprint. This is in response to both depletion of natural resources, changing climate conditions, and the need to be more sustainable in the future.

The Building Official's Other Players

In the built environment, there are other officials and departments that the Building Official must work with. This may include the local Fire Marshal, Planning Department, Public Works, Health Department, Electrical, Natural Gas, local clean air agency, and telecommunications departments. When a permit application has been submitted for review to their local jurisdiction these departments typically work concurrently as they perform their reviews of the submitted construction documents. The goal of the review process is to verifying substantial compliance code compliance which includes the safest built environment possible, accessible routes for pedestrians, energy resilient features are in place, fire and life safety measures are in place, carefully planned streets and sidewalks for the community to enjoy, and environmentally friendly community planning.

The future Building Official will likely interact other departments in the permitting and plan review process, including those looking at alternative energy options like wind and solar, sustainable construction like LEED or Built Right, etc., or other future technologies and materials that haven't yet been invented. In addition, with the depletion of natural resources, there are new materials and techniques for building that the Building Official will encounter. The Building Official will need to learn about the new technologies and, where necessary, bring in additional resources and expertise to ensure that the new methods and materials are constructed in conformance with the new code requirements.

Adapting to New Technologies for Permitting and Plan Review

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown, many jurisdictions were forced to convert permitting operations online to still serve the needs of the public. For jurisdictions that were previously a paper-based in-person operation, they had to quickly find a way to allow electronic submittals and move office staff into a home-based operation. This was an easy transition for

the jurisdictions that had already converted to a paperless permit process, but more difficult for the smaller jurisdictions that were still using paper. Electronic plan review and paperless permitting processes greatly benefited both the applicants and jurisdictions despite the difficulty some may have had quickly adapting to the completely paperless process. For instance, with an electronic submittal, jurisdictions can use plan review software that allow all Departments to review and see the mark ups from other Departments in real time, thus speeding up the review process compared to a tandem paper-based routing system. Electronic submittals also allow review staff to work in the office or remotely if circumstances require. This makes the departmental review a much quicker process by allowing the applicants to be working on their projects much sooner, and the review comments (or redline comments) are clearly typewritten (this makes it much easier to read and follow for the people conducting the work in the field).

Adapting to New Inspection Processes and Technologies

The Covid-19 pandemic also impacted how jurisdictions inspect projects. When it was unsafe for inspectors to visit jobsites, regulating agencies were required to reinvent their inspection processes. For simple inspections or re-inspections, some jurisdictions allowed submittal of a photo or photos for inspection review. One of the most widely accepted and implemented form of inspection used during the pandemic was performing virtual inspection. Inspectors can use their computer or smartphone to perform a video inspection with the applicant (or applicant's representative), thereby allowing the inspector on a video call to verbally direct the applicant (who is on-site) to the areas of interest. As requested by the inspector, the applicant can hold up a tape measure to clearly indicate the measurement of sensitive installations.

Challenges to the future of the Building Official

With so many advances in technology, our built environment may change drastically in the future, and the Building Official will need to quickly adapt. With advancements in robotics and related fields, there may be different considerations with regards to building occupants and ability to egress a building. Future climate change may also significantly affect the way we construct our buildings and how natural resources like water, natural gas, and building materials are allowed to be used. Some change will be slow and gradual, but other changes will be rapid, and the Building Official must quickly get up to speed and adapt the jurisdictions response to those changes. It is important for the Building Official to be involved in organizations that promote updates to the building codes and provide support like technical literature and training to support the smooth transition to the new requirements. The Building Official represents an important role in the future of the building codes and should be at the forefront of promoting a building department that not only adapts to but celebrates a changing future.

Chapter 10: What is WABO?

Mission Statement: Leading the way to excellence in building and life safety.

The Washington Association of Building Officials is a nonprofit, professional association of state,

county, city, and town officials in Washington State engaged in the development, enforcement and administration of building construction codes and ordinances. Members (both governmental and associate) are building officials and inspectors, plans examiners, architects, structural engineers, and others interested in providing safe buildings for our communities. The vision of the Association is for WABO to help lead Washington State to be known as the best place for citizens to live and businesses to thrive in a built environment that is safe and resilient.

WABO was incorporated in 1977, and according to the Articles of Incorporation, for the purposes of:

1. Development of uniform performance standards and requirements for construction and construction materials, consistent with nationally recognized standards of engineering, fire, health, and life safety throughout the state.
2. To promote and conduct regional workshops and educational seminars on construction related codes, enforcement of said codes and all other areas of building and construction-related codes.
3. To review and act as advisor to the state legislature and the State Building Code Council on proposed changes to construction related codes.
4. To assist and advise local building officials in the applicability of construction-related codes, including but not limited to, plans examination, departmental procedures, inspection programs and methods.

Management of the Association is conducted by a Board of Directors and Officers of WABO working closely with the association's management firm. In addition, a professional lobbyist is employed to keep the membership apprised of legislative activities, and technical consultants are employed as independent contractors to provide advice and services to the technical code development committee and the certification and registration programs.

WABO provides a variety of services to its members and the public. Those services include a welder certification, special inspector certification, educational seminars, code official accreditation program, emergency responder network, a retail store selling code books, and quarterly business meetings for networking and training. In addition, the Association's service menu includes providing a technical code development program; advisory services to the State Building Code Council and legislature; and outreach services bringing building officials, the public and building industry professionals together to promote safety in the built environment.

Chapter 11: WABO's Legislative Positions

Why is WABO involved in politics? It may seem strange at first that WABO spends a significant amount of time and resources to influence legislation; however, if WABO chooses to not get involved then no one is there to offer a Building Officials perspective on proposed legislation. Below are a few legislative positions that WABO has and examples of how WABO has used that position to determine if WABO will support, seek to modify or oppose proposed legislation.

- **Protect Local Authority:** WABO supports protecting local authority to amend, adopt and administer construction codes.

SSB 5380, Building permit approval, was submitted in the 2021 Legislative cycle. The bill sought to require a building department to automatically approve a permit upon three submittals or three requests for additional information. With WABO's position being that local authorities should have the ability to administer construction codes as they deem appropriate for their communities WABO opposed the bill and the bill never made it out of committee.

- **Unfunded Mandates:** WABO recognizes that jurisdictions have limited fiscal capacity and opposes unfunded and under-funded mandates.

SB 5280, Concerning smoke detection devices, was submitted in the 2019 legislative cycle. The bill's intent was to make sure every home sold in Washington had at least one smoke detector. While WABO did not disagree with the importance of having smoke detectors in a home, the bill had placed the responsibility of who verifies the smoke detector on the local Fire Department / Fire District. This resulted in an unfunded mandate. WABO worked with the Bill sponsor to see the bill amended to place the sole responsibility on the seller of the home to provide the smoke detector.

- **Funding for State Building Code Council:** The Washington State Building Code Council (SBCC) is mandated by state law to develop the construction codes used in Washington and that effort requires adequate funding to accomplish their mission. WABO supports continued adequate funding for the SBCC and clarification for consistent fee application by local jurisdictions.

HB 1622, modifying the fees for the State Building Code Council, was submitted in the 2018 legislative cycle. With the State Building Code Council being funded through fees collected at the time of permit issuance the SBCC hadn't seen an increase since 1989. WABO supported this increase to see the SBCC successful in their mission to adopt and maintain the codes.

These are just a few examples of the importance of WABO to be involved in the legislative process. WABO will continue to provide a voice for the building officials across the State of Washington and serve as a vehicle to educate law makers on the impacts of their choices on the local building departments across the state.

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