

Walla Walla County Community Development Department

www.co.walla-walla.wa.us



From the Director's Desk by Tom Glover

Spring has sprung! And the sun-rain-sun-rain cycle has begun.

For newcomers to our newsletter, we publish a departmental newsletter once each quarter. The purpose is to help us provide you with helpful information (we hope it's helpful) about our department's activities, upcoming events, and application processes.

In this issue we have included an announcement for the next tire collection event. This is made possible through a grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology. Pull out those old tires from the back of the garage and let us recycle them for you.

We receive a lot of questions about SEPA – the State Environmental Policy Act. This law has been on the books since 1971, and after all these years it has grown to be quite complex. To help you understand when a SEPA checklist is required for your project, we've included a synopsis on page 3 that we hope will be helpful to you.

Finally, we are working toward getting staffing levels back to what they were prior to 2010 when the local economy tanked, and we combined our department with the City of Walla Walla's Development Services Department to cut costs. Prior to the closure of this department we had 12 positions funded. Now we stand at nine. We welcome our newest member to the team: Alex Edison, Building Inspector.

Stats for the month of March 2019:

- Building Permits issued: 37 – compared to 46 in March 2018
- Burn/Fire Permits issued: 119 – compared to 135 in March 2018
- Land Use applications approved: 17 – compared to 12 in 2018

We welcome your comments and feedback regarding our newsletters, as well as any of the activities we manage. Please contact us any time during regular business hours: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Wednesdays we close at 3:30 for staff meetings). Our main phone line is: (509) 524-2610. We can also receive inquiries by e-mail at: commdev@co-walla-walla.wa.us

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Ron's Road Report – Springtime in Walla Walla

This winter has yielded a pitifully small volume of roadkill. The wildlife in Walla Walla County has managed to find better places to go rather than on our County Roads. Of note is the increase in pheasant spots. (This bodes well for our local hunters.) I assume that since the pheasants I see are all male, spring must be in the air.

I have spotted numerous turkeys, but it seems that many of our local turkeys have infiltrated the suburbs. They have given up the country life to live close to houses, living off handouts and gazing at their reflection in windows. Hopefully our native coyotes will thin out this poor imitation of "wild" turkeys.

I can't help but wonder when the skunks and the possums will start migrating down our creeks. Our many bridges and culverts have become kill zones for these creatures, looking to expand their ranges. Remember to watch carefully over a creek to avoid "stinky bumper" or proving that the term "playing possum" is just a fable. I have noticed that possums on the road are not acting... and that if it smells like a dead skunk, it IS a dead skunk.

A few cats have been road victims this quarter. Thankfully there have been no dogs. Maybe this means dogs are winning the war?

One strange unexplained roadkill incident involved a pelican on the road by Boise Cascade. What would motivate a pelican to fly into a roadkill zone? I don't know but the next day I saw one another one a mile further down the highway. Was this caused by a fish run that overloaded these two or a mated suicide pact? I would say watch out for pelicans but what are the odds that they would be in the road?

Remember, if you see a doe run across the road, slow down. Odds are there is a buck in hot pursuit. Ah, Mother Nature, mild weather and the joys of Walla Walla County in the springtime!

Congratulations and Bon Voyage

Todd Blevins, our Building Official and Fire Marshal is leaving our team as of April 30, 2019.

He has accepted a position as the Building Official for Chelan County. Todd has worked for Walla Walla County since January 2006, when he was hired as an intern. He was hired on full time a few months later. He moved through the ranks and became a treasured member of our management staff. He has 14 years of service to the citizens of Walla Walla County. Thank you, Todd, for your service. Although we will miss you and your wonderful family, we wish you all the best as you follow a new path.

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the tire events scheduled for May 2019 will now be postponed until September 2019. Should you have questions, or would like to be added to our

mailing list for the September event, please call:

509-524-2616 or email nbaston@co.walla-walla.wa.us

Thank you, as always, for your support of community events.

Planner's Corner - Demystifying SEPA Review

by Don Sims, Associate Planner

What is SEPA and why is it important? We get a lot of questions about the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). SEPA is Washington's fundamental environmental law, enacted in 1971. It is intended to maintain or improve environmental quality across the state. It requires that governmental agencies consider the environment when making decisions and taking actions.

Before the County undertakes a non-exempt action (like issuing a building permit or approving a project), SEPA requires the County to conduct review and consider probable environmental impacts and prepare documentation. The County must consider the climate, the built environment and cultural resources in addition to the elements of the natural environment. Information learned through the review process can be used to modify a proposal to reduce likely impacts or apply conditions to or deny a proposal when probable adverse environmental impacts are identified.

Does the County have to conduct SEPA review for all permit applications, or are there exemptions? Some proposals are exempt from SEPA review, like single-family residential projects. We have to start by defining what the "total proposal" is. This includes all related or interdependent pieces of the proposal, and all phases. If we're not provided with detailed information about the project, this may mean that we must ask a lot of questions of applicants before we can determine whether SEPA is required. Once we've defined the proposal, we can determine whether the proposal falls into one of the exemption categories. Here are some examples of exempt projects:

- 1) Maintenance activities of existing roads, bridges, utilities and other facilities.
- 2) Minor construction projects such as: construction of four or fewer single-family residential units, certain types of agricultural structures up to 30,000 square feet.
- 3) Some land use decisions such as: boundary line adjustments and Type 1 Winery permits.
- 4) Fish and wildlife habitat enhancement projects.
- 5) Improvements to structurally deficient bridges.

What types of projects require SEPA review? Proposals that require SEPA review include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Short plat applications involving lands covered by water and long plat applications of any size.
- 2) Commercial/industrial facilities with a cumulative floor area greater than 12,000 square feet, as well as any additions to these facilities.
- 3) Grading or excavation projects with more than 500 cubic yards of fill being graded or excavated.
- 4) Development regulations or Comprehensive Plan amendments, whether County initiated or requested by a private citizen or other agency.

What is an Environmental Checklist? The County and other agencies use environmental checklists to conduct SEPA review. The checklist serves as a vehicle for the applicant and agencies to identify and disclose what the proposal is and how it might impact the environment, or how it has been designed so that impacts will be avoided.

Where do I learn more about SEPA requirements? You can contact the planning staff to discuss SEPA requirements. There is also a lot of guidance for proponents on the Department of Ecology website at <https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/SEPA/Environmental-review/SEPA-at-Ecology>.

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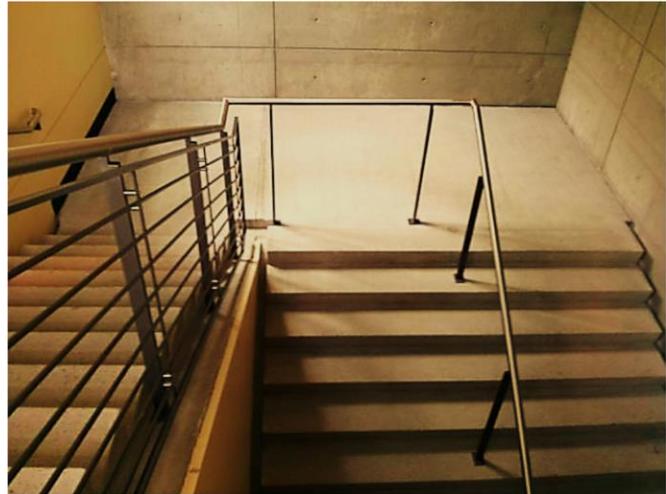
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“OOPS”

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Please welcome Alex Edison to our team. Alex is the new Building Inspector for the Community Development Department. Alex has been in construction for around 6 years and decided to move into the more steady position of an inspector. His passions include spending time with his lovely wife of 2 years, traveling, playing Ultimate Frisbee, and riding back roads on his motorcycle. Welcome to the team Alex! You can reach him at 509-524-2624 or aedison@co.walla-walla.wa.us



Inspection Hours: 7 AM – 4 PM (M, T, Th & F) & 7 AM – 3 PM (W)
Office Hours: 8 AM – 4 PM (M, T, Th & F) & 8 AM – 3 PM (W)
OPEN DURING THE LUNCH HOUR