

Good afternoon, everyone, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us for today's Administrative Board meeting. I want to start by expressing my gratitude to the staff – the call takers, dispatchers, and administrative professionals that keep What-Comm and Prospect running day in and day out.

The call statistics shared on my screen now give you a small glimpse into the work done in 2021.

This was a challenging year, on the heals of 2020 which we all know was full of its own unprecedented challenges. What-Comm began 2021 with protests, contentious camp cleanups, and extensive public discourse regarding law enforcement and social justice reform.

As we moved into the summer of 2021, What-Comm prepared for the implementation of several legislative changes which impact the work we do and presented obstacles for our user agencies, our staff, and the public we serve.

In July we saw the predictable influx of calls related to Independence Day, and an additional increase in call volume related to a prolonged heatwave.

We typically observe high call volume throughout the summer months and then anticipate a bit of reprieve in the fall. Unfortunately for Whatcom County, this fall and winter brought weeks of devastating, historic flooding – the first two days of which saw an increase in call volume by 118% over an average day - and then shortly thereafter a prolonged snow and ice event.

Overall, What-Comm experienced a 7% increase in calls in 2021.

Our staff was pushed to their limits this year, through weather events, societal upheaval, increased and ongoing uncertainty relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, and all the associated personal struggles for each of these factors, and performed admirably in the face of these ongoing challenges. We were forced to lower our minimum staffing numbers across the board. Even so, mandatory overtime became a regular occurrence. Less often, our team was forced to work under-minimums due to a lack of anyone available to mandate.

In spite of the challenges we could not have prevented or anticipated, the What-Comm team continued to meet the daily needs of our community while completing additional necessary projects.

In regard to our facility and systems – we replaced our fire suppression alarm panel, installed a new roof, updated our security system, and painted the exterior of the building. The radio shop and IT staff worked together on the installation of new radios and our replacement logging recorder.

On the training front – our staff collaborated with Prospect to revise our Joint Operations Manual – a critical document which had not been updated successfully since 2002. In June, What-Comm trained for and began receiving texts to 911. Overall, our training team ensured that all dispatchers received at least 24-hours of continuing education, even though off-site training opportunities were virtually non-existent due to the pandemic.

What-Comm is comprised of various specialty Teams – we saw an expansion of our CAD team to better prepare our staff for our next major system upgrade. Our public education coordinator has begun expanding her role by way of a public education committee to better meet the needs of our community. And our tactical dispatcher team selected new leadership and developed call out procedures for increased efficiency and consistency.

The state of staffing at What-Comm in 2021 was bittersweet - we celebrated the well-earned retirement of Coni Turner, our GIS Systems Analyst, and Greg Erickson, our Deputy Director. Four dispatchers began two sets of job-shares, allowing us to maintain staff who may otherwise have chosen to retire. One dispatcher was hired as a recruit with Bellingham Police, I was promoted to Deputy Director, and Justin Rasmussen was selected as our new training supervisor. We promoted two new dispatch supervisors in Midnightblue Danskine (dan-skin) and James Taylor. Mark Wright, our tech specialist, trained with Coni Turner prior to her retirement and successfully promoted into her role as GIS Systems Analyst.

I say the state of staffing was bittersweet because, while we enjoy celebrating the successes of our team members, the reality is that for the better part of 2021, our 7% higher call volume was processed by four less dispatchers. We hired three new dispatchers in late 2021 and a fourth in early January to fill these openings. We are eagerly anticipating filling the additional 3 positions this board approved in September.

What-Comm is on in a rebuilding phase, like many agencies across the county, and we look forward to building back stronger than ever in 2022.