**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE
County Courthouse
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Bellingham, WA 98225**

**Jack Louws
County Executive**

Bellingham Herald Op Ed, submitted by Perry Rice, Information Technology Manager, on behalf of Jack Louws, County Executive

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Whatcom County government depends on information technology to efficiently provide its broad set of citizen services. We have information systems supporting law enforcement, emergency management, corrections, courts, criminal prosecution, public health, property records, building permits, critical areas protection, water quality, food safety, flood protection, real estate transactions, elections, marriage licenses, finances, roads, facilities, parks and more. It is essential that our information systems are kept current and reliable which takes tremendous commitment and effort from County Information Technology staff, subject matter experts in our departments and our valued vendors and business partners.

Whatcom County government has an ambitious technology modernization effort underway. Below are a few of our significant accomplishments over the past 4 years and key projects that we will be working on over the next 4 years:

E-Mail – In 2013, Whatcom County replaced our e-mail system with the Microsoft Outlook and Exchange Online system. Whatcom County was one of the first counties in the United States to transition our e-mail system to the Microsoft Cloud. Cloud computing provides increased redundancy and will allow us to keep our e-mail platform on the latest version in the future without costly and time consuming upgrades. Being on a contemporary e-mail system provides more features to employees and easier integration to other systems.

Sheriff's Office Records Management System – In 2013, Whatcom County replaced a 20-year old system supporting key Sheriff's Office functions such as law enforcement patrol and corrections. The new system by Spillman Technologies is used by over 150 law enforcement agencies in Washington State and over 1,500 agencies across the United States. We are proud to be providing our law enforcement professionals with this modern and fully supported system to help keep citizens safe.

Data Network – In 2014, we completed a redesign and replacement of our County data network to industry standard equipment by Cisco Systems. Our county data network is essential for all of the information technologies to properly function. Our new data network has increased reliability, performance and security and is able to support a modern phone system.

Web – In early 2015, Whatcom County replaced our 15-year old public website to one hosted by CivicPlus. CivicPlus provides a government web content management system used by 2,000 local governments across the United States. Our new website (http://whatcomcounty.us) has a contemporary look and feel and it is responsive to mobile devices. We have over 50 staff in various

county departments quickly and easily adding new content for citizens. We are committed to providing citizens with increased access to government information and services.

Desktop Computing – In 2015, Whatcom County completed a multi-year replacement of over 800 desktop and laptop computers. With fewer employees in post-recession County government, it is essential to keep basic equipment such as desktop computers modernized to efficiently support citizen services.

Telecommunications – This month we will be completing a major project to replace our 25-year old phone system with a new system by ShoreTel. ShoreTel systems are also used locally by the City of Bellingham and Skagit County government. Using common technologies will allow us to share technical knowledge and to more effectively scale our phone systems in the event of a regional disaster.

Auditor Recording System – This fall a new system will be going live in our Auditor's Office to support document recording, imaging and indexing. The new system by Helion Software will replace a system that has become difficult to enhance and support. Popular services for citizens and business partners such as access to documents, electronic recording and submission of marriage licenses will continue to be available online.

Integrated Criminal Justice – Our criminal justice system is the largest function of County government. Funding has been provided and planning is underway to replace case management systems in our Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Juvenile Court and District Court Probation. At the same time, Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts has embarked upon the replacement of the statewide court software system that our Superior Court uses. Tremendous government efficiencies can be captured by smartly implementing new systems in these departments that effectively share information between our local, state and federal criminal justice partners.

Integrated Land and Infrastructure – Funding has been provided for a number of information technology projects across County departments that support land and infrastructure management activities. We've started a project to assist our Assessor's Office use of geographic information systems (GIS) to manage land records. An improved and easy to maintain countywide parcel map will benefit county departments and regional partners. We also have started the process to replace our permit system. A modern permit system integrated with GIS and our website will allow citizens to more easily navigate the permitting process. In addition, we plan to implement new software in Public Works to help track stormwater assets to comply with national pollution discharge standards.

Assessor Treasurer System – We are actively working on many projects to maintain and add new functionality to our Assessor Treasurer System. A complete replacement of the computer servers is underway to keep this large system healthy and secure. In early 2016 we plan to provide our Assessor's Office appraisers with mobile devices to optimize entering and processing information while in the field. Our Treasurer's Office plans to implement an electronic Real Estate Excise Tax (E-REET) module to provide efficiencies to our community business partners.

Council Audio Video –We plan to make recorded video of the evening County Council meetings available on the Whatcom County government YouTube channel via our website. In 2016 we plan to live stream County Council meetings to YouTube to increase citizen access.

In a few short years, Whatcom County government has come a long way in modernizing our information technologies. The primary focus for the last few years has been on our core information technologies such as e-mail, website, network and telecommunications that are essential to all functions of County

government. Our goal continues to be providing high technology tools to our employees so that they can maximize their efficiency and productivity to citizens. Over the next few years our focus will be on integrated criminal justice systems, land records and a new permit system. Thanks to the strong support of our County leadership, the hard work of County staff and our vendors, our technology revolution will continue into the foreseeable future to improve our service delivery to citizens.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding information technology in Whatcom County Government. You can reach me at 778-5230 or price@co.whatcom.wa.us.