

Rud Browne

360-820-9494

Rud@RudBrowne.com

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To: Whatcom County Council

Re: BERK consulting report

Dear Honorable Councilmembers,

At the July 12th Public Works & Health Committee meeting some interesting comments were made that deserve a response. As several Councilmembers rightly asked to see data supporting statements made, I have provided exhibits where practical.

I want to begin by reinforcing my belief that Director Lautenbach, the Health Department and our emergency community partners all deserve high praise for their hard work and dedication during difficult times. While our response was not perfect, the focus of any criticism is intended to be on the flaws that emerged in our policies and procedures, not in the human beings that filled their respective roles. If an individual's response was wanting, I believe it was primarily due to weaknesses in our emergency response system, not the character of the people we asked to do their best in unprecedented times.

For clarity, while I believe my first-hand experience of working full time within WUC during the first few months of the crisis gave me a good insight into much of the organizations strengths and weaknesses during this period, I make no claim to knowing the internal workings of the organization or its leadership after May 2020.

The first item applies to the entire County Council / Health Board. The statement by some "*emergency community partners*" that a fully engaged, duly elected County Council / Health Board member who served during the Pandemic was considered to have been a "*small participant*", a "*minor player*" who had "*very little involvement in the response*" provides insight as to how existing policies have led this group to misunderstand the role, authority, and work of all seven members who served on the Council / Health Board during the Pandemic – not just one.

The second item is a fair question: what was my *participation* and *involvement* during the first few months of the Pandemic, what are my qualifications to speak to you on this topic? The only way I can answer is by going over what I did during the early days of the COVID emergency. Not to seek credit, but to respond the claims by some I had "*very little involvement in the response*" and therefore should be disqualified from commenting:

1. To begin, in addition to the long hours, we all devoted to fulfilling our Council responsibilities to our constituents during COVID I officially logged almost 400 volunteer hours with the WUC (Exhibit A), I did many more but stopped submitting timesheets after the state bureaucracy required one per day.
2. I have always believed in preparedness and trained on how NIMS/ICS system is supposed to work while serving with the USCG Auxiliary. I completed the key ICS training modules required for tactical level managers (100, 200, 300, 700 and 800), just one module short (ICS 400) of the requirements to serve as command staff (Exhibit B). By comparison many of those I would later serve with within WUC appeared to have little if any training or knowledge of NIMS/ICS.

3. Like yourselves, during the Pandemic, I was a fully engaged and dedicated County Council / Health Board member. By February 2020 I think we were all deeply concerned about the lack of our nation's preparedness, and at the March 12, 2020, Health Board meeting (1:06 PM in minutes) the Health Board debated and approved 6-0 purchasing medical supplies and PPE. However, nothing was purchased and within days our First Responders were running out of PPE and expressing legitimate concerns for their personal safety and the risk they could bring this new unknown disease home to their families.
4. Seeking to do more to help, on March 16th I registered as an Emergency Worker and wore that badge (rather than my Councilmember badge) while serving as a volunteer within the WUC Logistics section focusing on securing supplies and resources
 - A. First, I donated 3,500 N95 masks I had personally stockpiled years earlier to protect my former employees/families against SARS. The first boxes went to the Sherriff's department (Exhibit C).
 - B. I saw firsthand how little PPE WUC had in the early days. As First Responders began running out of PPE Councilmember Byrd, and I drove around Bellingham buying up every item of PPE available and brought it back to the WUC. Once local sources were exhausted, I bought every item of PPE I could get online, and when that was exhausted, bought substitutes like disposable plastic ponchos that St. Joes would later use in place of protective clothing. In total I purchased about 78,000 items of PPE using my personal credit card until every source I could find was exhausted. Every item was documented as it was delivered to WUC (see examples in Exhibit D).
 - C. When I shifted to focusing on acquiring PPE from online sources, Councilmember Byrd shifted his focus to setting up two key databases the WUC urgently needed to function effectively. I believe other Councilmembers contributed in other ways.
5. My primary responsibility at the WUC would become serving as the Director of the Donations Branch, which I had up and running, with trained staff, at an offsite location, at no cost to the County in less than a day. I promoted it by running very effective paid ads on Facebook at my expense. The last report I have (Exhibit E) showed the Donations branch collected about 82,000 items of PPE. It could have been 2X or 3X this amount had we continued running paid ads on social media, however others within WUC opposed this, insisting a single press release was enough (the result was as expected, donations of PPE dried up).
6. Senior staff at St. Joes also asked WUC to manage the collection of Hand Made masks, however, Public Information staff who have no authority within the NIMS structure to give direct orders to Logistics personnel (Exhibit F) demanded we stop assisting our only hospital (a policy decision that rightfully belonged to the Health Board). I requested a meeting with Command, but a new supervisor (whom I had never met before, or since the meeting) sternly told me with the tone of a drill sergeant, I was not allowed to speak at the meeting unless first called upon by her to do so. I use this example to illustrate the lack of respect and understanding of how to work with volunteers and within the NIMS/ICS chain of command, that I observed frequently while serving within the WUC.
7. I stopped volunteering at WUC and went on to spend several weeks assisting St. Joes by working with others to gather and professionally sanitize Hand Made masks. Soliciting donations of sewing machines, personally paying for them to be repaired (because the WUC would not) and redistributing them to fresh volunteers who wished to participate making masks that would go to St. Joes, and other health care providers.
8. As a Councilmember I also worked to establish a team consisting of Port personnel and private sector volunteers with IT experience to secure funding and equipment to help the schools to provide laptops and connectivity options to kids who did not have the technology at home to participate in remote learning.

9. An additional qualification is my three decades experience at building and managing large teams (several times during a significant crisis). One of the lessons I learned is to treat employees as volunteers and to treat volunteers like friends and guests. One of the root problems I saw with WUC was a serious lack of subject matter experts with leadership experience. This resulted in people often being assigned to areas they had limited knowledge and/or leadership skills. As the crisis dragged on many well-intentioned people quickly reached their personal limits. Not surprisingly as stress levels rose many tried to cope by increasingly relying on their own counsel, micromanaging their subordinates and/or adopting an authoritarian leadership style.

An authoritarian style may suffice in the military, but it does not work for long with public/private employees and causes volunteers to simply walk away. It likely contributed to the WUC's later difficulties at retaining and finding new volunteers. (In contrast I found the full time EOC employees calm and professional throughout my time working at the WUC).

10. My experiences above were why I, would later lead the drafting of the Council's proposal for the contract that was awarded to Berk. This was a fully public process which everyone was invited to provide input. Nothing prevented the "*emergency community partners*" who now query my right to comment, from participating in the drafting process, or adding their own comments now. Unlike many, I have a very clear understanding of what the legislative intent was and am well positioned to evaluate the reports responsiveness to its stated purpose.

The narrative above also provides a good example of the missing depth of discovery within the draft Berk report. For example, Berk gives WUC credit for the "*set up an effective donations process. Interviewees noted no concerns with meeting their PPE needs.*" But then goes onto say it "*was detrimental for elected officials to insert themselves into operational matters. Interviewees found these actions a hindrance to the functioning of WUC.*"

All told by "*insert[ing] themselves into operational matters*" two "*Councilmembers*" personally secured about 78,000 pieces of PPE to provide immediate protection to our first responders and medical personnel while others within WUC were still trying to get it from traditional sources. Furthermore, if there was anyone else within WUC responsible for the "*set up [of] an effective [PPE] donations process*" I never met them.

Berk found space in their report to acknowledge the 11,000 items of PPE donated by BP (thank you BP). But did little to acknowledge the many others who were very generous in other ways. But implies Councilmember's collection of an additional 82,000 items of donated PPE was somehow a "*hindrance to the functioning of WUC*".

How many of the same "*Interviewees [who] noted no concerns with meeting their PPE needs*" would have been without PPE if two Councilmembers had not gotten involved in operational matters and had not obtained 160,000 pieces of PPE to provide protection before the supply chain could begin to catch up?

Why fight to have this discussion?

Why do I keep fighting what is an unpopular battle, it's not for political advantage, the proof is I won my last election by 81% but still chose not to run again. Nor is it for financial gain, and clearly it is not a great strategy for increasing the number of friends I have.

The reason is simple; I believe our community, like most of America is woefully underprepared for future disasters. We owe it to ourselves and our children to be better. The first step is taking a long, hard, objective look at how our policies and systems fared during the Pandemic so we can learn how to improve them.

I believe everyone who served within the WUC, the Health Department, St. Joes, the City and County governments and elsewhere in the community – all tried to do their very best. There is little value in dwelling on individual shortcomings, mine, or anyone else's – if for no other reason than the next major disaster will likely be met with a response from a different group of people. We can't predict or control who those people will be, but we can make sure they are better prepared and better supported through the policies and procedures we can establish now.

I don't claim to be an expert in disaster management, far from it.

But the biggest thing I saw during my several hundred hours within the WUC that is broken – is one I believe we can fix. It is the system, training, and resources we build into emergency preparedness, starting with significantly expanding our pool of skilled, trained volunteers.

Leadership positions must be filled by people with prior experience managing and motivating teams. Expecting people accustomed to being individual contributors to assume first time leadership roles under high stress conditions is not a recipe for success nor volunteer retention.

We must engage all our mid to large employers and community groups. It is not fair or smart to continue relying only on staff from our cities, county and the companies in Cherry Point – all of whom have the same responsibilities to their employers and families as the rest of us.

It is not sustainable to expect as we do, for County employees to make up the shortfall when emergency service shifts need to be filled. Especially in the last two years when we have had COVID and two major floods. Furthermore, one of the ways to convince community members we truly are in a real crisis and “*are all in this together*” is to ask them, dare I say expect them, to step up and serve, as an active, integral part of the response.

We must proactively build a deep bench of community volunteers with specialized skills in logistics, telecommunications, social media, manufacturing etc. Pay for them to be trained in the NIMS/ICS system and encourage them to build experience and enthusiasm by supporting them to serve a week or more each year as disaster response staff at other locations around the country. Then bring back what they learn to our community.

Relying on table-top exercises and simulations won't be enough to build the crisis leadership skills we need or motivate volunteers to step up and become long term committed participants.

All of the above will take more money, my best estimate is \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 or more per annum. But it will be money well spent, that save us significantly more in lost productivity, disruption to our community and human suffering. Climate change alone is going to bring us more frequent and violent disasters we need to prepare for.

We also need to address the non-productive belief that appears to be held by some that elected officials, the communities' representatives, should have very little involvement in the response. Because, in a major disaster like COVID, we need people with diverse management experience, non-traditional skills, and resources. We need everyone, entrepreneurs, business leaders, other leaders, including ALL our elected officials to be engaged.

Elected officials in particular often have the resources, established networks, personal relationships, and the people's trust (all prerequisites to getting elected) that regular government employees typically don't have. Many Elected's can call constituents at home after hours; people will take their calls and make resources available – simply because “their elected representative” asked. Few other members of a traditional Emergency Response team can do that.

These are just a few ideas; I am sure there are lots more out there we should gather and evaluate that could contribute to a much stronger more resilient countywide emergency response team.

Finally, as Berk says” we were 7th best in the State in our response to COVID. Which raises the question... is 7th best going to remain our target next time, or are we planning to do better?

Thank you for your time I remain committed to seeing the review of Whatcom County's response to the recent emergency, result in recommendations that lead to better outcomes in the future.

Be well.

Rud

Exhibit B.

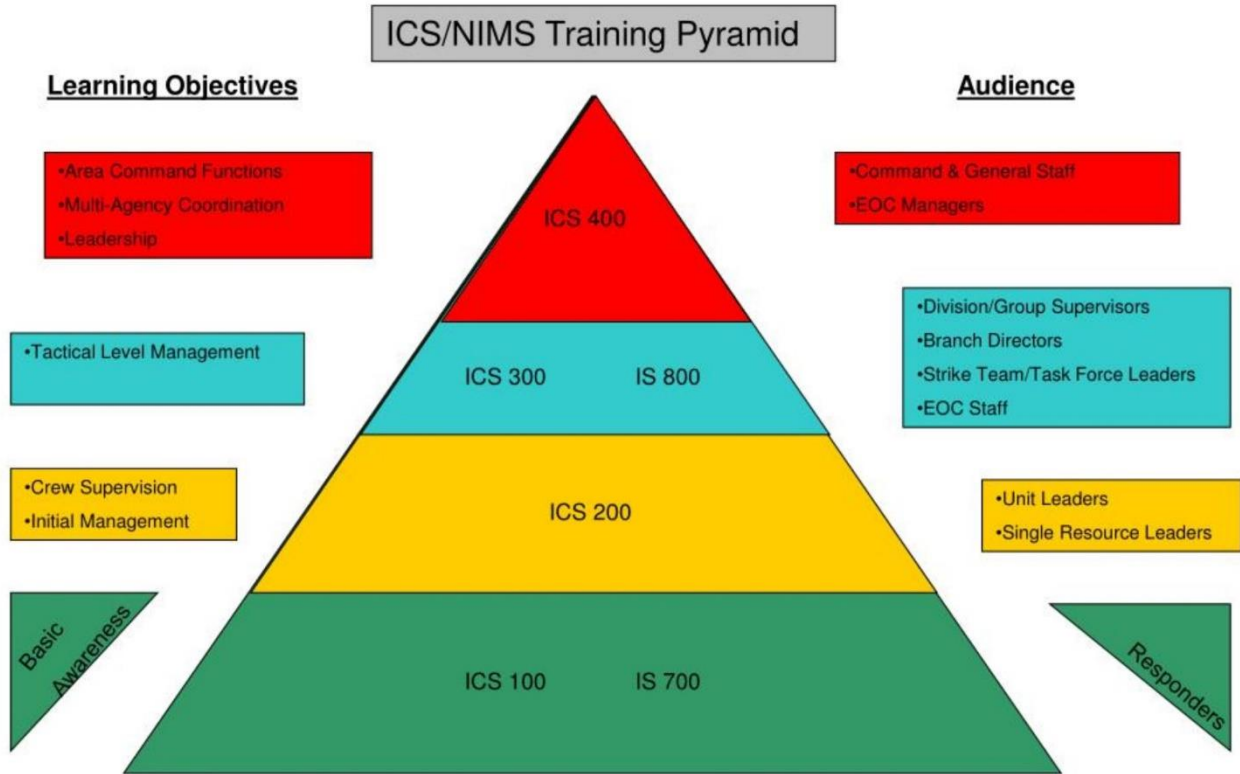


Exhibit C. - N95 Masks Donated to EOC

880 Delivered to Sheriff's Department



1,920 Delivered to EOC



700 Delivered to WUC Donations center



Exhibit D. – examples of PPE purchased online

15 cases Tyvek/coveralls Purchased by Rud Browne on his Amazon account

14 Received at Whatcom EOC March 25th @ 11:55 am



1 Received at Whatcom EOC March 21st @ 10:10 am



22 Cases Tyvek Purchased by Rud Browne on his Amazon account

20 cases delivered to WUC March 22nd @ 2:50PM



2 cases Tyvek Proshield delivered to WUC March 22nd @ 2:51PM



30,000 vinyl gloves Purchased by Rud Browne on his Amazon account



Received at Whatcom EOC March 20th @ 2:16 pm

16 case Ponchos Purchased by Rud Browne on his Amazon account

4 Received at St Joes Loading dock at March 26th @ 4:50 PM



12 Received at Whatcom EOC April 6th @ 3:44 PM



Received at Whatcom EOC March 21st @ 10:11 am



Exhibit E. – Donations branch receipts

DONATED ITEMS	
Bio Sol 1 gallon bottles	120
Coveralls w/hood 4XL	2
Coveralls w/o hood 2XL	1
Coveralls w/o hood 4XL	4
Disinfectant Hard Surface	15
Emergency Kits PSE	16
Fungicide Cleaner	1
Gauze Pads 4x4	200
Gloves Exam - One Size Fits All	1750
Gloves Exam LG	1000
Gloves Latex LG	19830
Gloves Latex MED	4200
Gloves Latex SM	7000
Gloves Latex XL	3100
Gloves Multi-purpose LG	200
Gloves NDEX Chemo Safe	50
Gloves Nitrile LG	3760
Gloves Nitrile Long Sleeve	1
Gloves Nitrile MED	4840
Gloves Nitrile SM	2000
Gloves Nitrile SZ?	680
Gloves Nitrile XL	900
Gloves Nitrile XXL	1000
Gloves Vinyl	400
Goggles Pair Safety	63
Gowns Surgical SZ ?	39
Gowns Yellow SZ ?	21
Head/Beard Covers	100
Mask "Civil "	8640
Mask Dust	93
Mask half 3M respirator	9
Mask Half respirators	5
Mask Procedure w/ eye shield	5
Mask Surgical	2108
Masks Blue	290
Masks Face Disp.	384
Masks Half 3M MED	7
Masks, Full Face	10
Masks N95	2871
Masks N95 Cool Flow	19
Masks N95 Dust	6658
Masks Paper Exam	734
Masks Procedure	25
Masks Surgical Fluid Shield PFR85	140
Nurse Caps	100
P100 Filter Cartridge	78
Purell Hand Santitizer	35
Respirator ear plugs-goggles KIT	1
Sani-Cloth	2
Shield Fog Free Surgical	75
Shields Face w/gear	1
Shields Vinyl Face	112
Shoe Covers / Booties	1900
Snorkel kit for 1/2 mask respirator	6
Surgical Hair Covers	400
Thermometer	3
Tyvek Labcoat	360
Tyvek Sleeves	600
Tyvek Suits 2XL	898
Tyvek Suits 3XL	1426
Tyvek Suits 4XL	571
Tyvek Suits 5XL	905
Tyvek Suits 6XL	175
Tyvek Suits Blue SZ?	18
Tyvek Suits M	50
Tyvek Suits L	372
Tyvek Suits XL	343
Wipes Bamboo Baby	80
Wipes Clorox	211
	82013

Exhibit F.

