



## Enumclaw council returns to full force, but without masks as city breaks COVID records

By RAY MILLER-STILL  
Editor

Even as Enumclaw is experiencing more daily COVID-19 cases than ever, city leaders have become increasingly lax in enforcing state-mandated mask rules during council meetings.

When the pandemic struck Washington in early 2020, the world of local politics was turned on its head as many city councils around the state clambered to figure out a way to continue various services and provide access to public meetings when Gov. Jay Inslee first prohibited in-person meetings and suspended various laws relating to the Open Public Meetings Act and the Public Records Act.

Changes came practically overnight, as Enumclaw went from a fully-present council during a March 16, 2020 meeting to a skeleton crew consisting of Mayor Jan Molinaro, city attorney Mike Reynolds, City Clerk Maureen Burwell, and just a couple of other city employees to operate the cameras and livestream on April 13. All other elected officials and city staff joined the meeting virtually.

Little by little, other council members began to appear in the flesh; Mayor Pro Tem Chance La Fleur started joining the council meetings in-person June 2020, and Councilman Anthony Wright started physically occupying his seat February 2021. Other council members sporadically attended meetings in-person during this time, and by March, the council was up to half its body meeting in its chambers.

By the time June rolled around, it appears all council members made the transition to in-person meetings. According to Mayor Molinaro, city staff continue to attend council meetings virtually, though there are essential staff members that need to be physically present.

All the while, though, masks were rarely donned by council members at these meetings, whether the chambers were sparse or crowded (in-person audiences were allowed starting in June). This was, and continues to be, in violation of both King County and Washington state mask mandates, which were instituted May 2020 and June 2020 respectively.

How the mandates were structured and who they affected changed over time, of course; for example, last May, both the county and the state issued new rules allowing people vaccinated against COVID-19 to gather in public without a mask - this means that, for a time, it was possible the Enumclaw council was not in violation of these mandates.

That reprieve only lasted so long, however, as on Aug. 23, the state Secretary of Health once again ordered all Washingtonians to wear

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## A weekend of hot saws, log rolling, and axe throwing



PHOTOS BY RAY MILLER-STILL

After having to cancel last year due to the pandemic, the annual Buckley Log Show came roaring back as competitors chopped, sawed, choked, and bucked all day Saturday and Sunday to earn the title of All Around Logger. Pictured below are the Buckley Clowns, who are a staple feature in the parade that kicks off the event by honoring local loggers and their various companies; to the right, local police officer Arthur Fetter competing with his father, Jeff, in the Double Bucking event; and above, Billy Clingingbeard, who was one again crowned this year's All Around Logger for the seventh year in a row. More photos and event results can be found on page 8.



## Plateau students head back to class

By ALEX BRUELL  
Reporter

Southwood Elementary teacher Jody Emerson hands each of her students a piece of paper. She tells them to write the numbers one through 26, each on a new line, for an assignment.

The kids catch on quick that morning. "It's a spelling thing," one student calls out confidently. "It's obviously that."

The warm summer air pours into the room that Thursday, and the bright-eyed third-graders are full of jokes and energy, only on their second week of school. Outside, other students walk out to or come back from recess.

Word-by-word, line-by-line, the kids dutifully write down each word Emerson calls out, from "fan" to "crawl" to "third."

At "third," one of her students lets out an exasperated sigh.

"Can we just write '3,'?" he asks.

"Nope," Emerson responds.

It's a reminder that even when the world looks different, a kid is still a kid.

Students across the Plateau returned to school the beginning of this month, starting a year defined by both hope and anxiety. School districts nationwide scrambled last

year to respond to the onslaught of the coronavirus, experimenting with online, in-person and hybrid-style classes.

This year, Washington schools forged ahead with all-in-person lessons, fortified by masking and social distancing rules set by the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. The State Health Department decided that school this year must open for full time in-person learning, along with a few rules:

- School personnel, students and visitors must wear masks indoors at K-12 facilities and on school busses.
- Three feet of space should be maintained between students in class whenever possible.
- Masking is universally required for spectators of indoor K-12 sport events, with family units separated into distanced groups.

In both districts, masks or other face coverings are required for everyone while indoors at K-12 facilities, but students have opportunities for relief. The districts say they can spread kids out enough during recess to not require masks during that time, and kids have opportunities for shorter mask breaks outside when they need them.

Both Enumclaw and White River are back to school five days a week

for all grades, though White River switched back to full-time in Spring last year. That doesn't mean there's no excitement in the air for the new year though, said White River Assistant Superintendent Scott Harrison.

"Those kick-off events, freshman first day, sixth grader first day, where they come in and learn about the school ... all the games and the sports, all of those things have been really important for our students," Harrison said. "So many of them are really connected to school for their social-emotional well being. What students get from being in those sports, activities and clubs is really critical."

So far, both districts have recorded positive COVID cases among students and staff since the school year began, but very few of them have been shown through contact tracing to have spread within the schools, according to officials and the districts' online COVID dashboards.

"Schools are not islands, of course," Harrison said, and so it should not be surprising that positive cases show up.

Over the pandemic's course, "our positive cases have really mirrored the case counts in the community to a pretty general degree," Harrison

said.

As of Aug. 15, 24 cases had been confirmed at Enumclaw schools (2 among staff, 22 among students.) All but two were determined to have started outside of school, and the other two were considered "inconclusive," meaning contact tracing couldn't determine where the cases originated.

In that same time frame, 81 cases have been confirmed at White River schools, though only one has originated at school, specifically at Foothills Elementary. The local health department, not the school district, makes the determination that a case originated inside or outside the school, Harrison said.

Several years ago, the district installed microphones and speakers in the classrooms to help students hear teachers better. The timing was fortuitous - Emerson, wearing a sturdy KN95 mask, is able to enunciate to her classroom without having to compromise her mask.

White River has those features in most classrooms as well, thanks to a voter-approved \$98 million bond passed in 2016. A technology levy passed in 2014 helped the district duck and weave with the punches

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## Social media trend leading to local students damaging school property

By RAY MILLER-STILL  
Editor

A new "challenge" on a popular social media platform is encouraging local students to vandalize their schools.

Known as the "Devious Lick" TikTok challenge, the Enumclaw School District has noted several incidents in recent days at all three secondary schools where students have caused minor property damage, mostly by emptying (or straight up stealing) soap

dispensers.

"For the past few days we have seen an increase in vandalism in student bathrooms at the high school," Public Information Officer Jessica McCartney wrote in a Sept. 13 email to parents. "As a result, we are closing some bathrooms and the high school and directing students to bathrooms adjacent to the commons as a means to better monitor our bathrooms. We apologize for the inconvenience and hope that this 'challenge' will quiet down soon."

TikTok is a platform where users can upload short videos to share with friends and strangers online. It's not unusual to come across various "challenges" posed by users of the app; many are simply meant to be silly and harmless, coming in the form of lip-syncing or dance challenges.

The "Devious Lick" challenge, though, is objectively not one of those. Though McCartney confirmed that most of the local mischief has been related to soap dispensers, other schools around

the country have reported classroom phones, fire exit signs, and even urinals have gone missing.

The challenge looks to have begun in early September when one user apparently stole (or "licked") a box of disposable masks for public use. According to NJ.com, the short video garnered close to 346,000 views before it was removed from the platform, along with banning the user; TikTok has also said that it will remove all videos and related hashtags (like #devious) associated with the challenge.

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# Courier-Herald will host candidate forum for King County Council District 9

Kim-Khanh Van, Reagan Dunn will pitch their cases and answer questions from the community.

The Courier-Herald is proud to invite the Plateau community to a candidate forum on Oct. 6 between Kim-Khanh Van and Reagan Dunn, candidates for the King County Council, at the Enumclaw Expo Center Fieldhouse.

Attendance is free, and seats will be available first-come, first-serve. The fieldhouse is located at 1456

Roosevelt Avenue. Courier-Herald editor Ray Miller-Still will emcee the evening, and moderating the forum will be Federal Way Mirror Editorial Director Andy Hobbs.

The event will also be available through a livestream on the Courier-Herald's Facebook page. We may include questions from Facebook users during our questions from the audience period.

King County Council seats are divided up geographically. District 9 covers a cross-section of urban, suburban and rural voters, spanning Enumclaw in the southwest to the southern tip of

Bellevue in the north. Kim-Khanh Van is a Renton City Council member, attorney, and first-generation Vietnamese immigrant and former refugee.

Reagan Dunn, the incumbent, has experience as a federal prosecutor in Seattle, Miami, and our nation's capitol as well as being an aide in former president George W. Bush's Justice Department.

After introducing themselves, the candidates will answer questions prepared by the Courier-Herald covering the most important issues of the race, including but not limited to housing affordability, race and equity, crime

and public safety, managing the COVID pandemic, and transportation concerns.

The forum will have a back-and-forth, conversational style, with each candidate having the opportunity to expand on their vision while responding to their opponent's.

Near the end, questions from the audience will be selected for the candidates as well, taken from both the in-person and online audience.

In the unfortunate event that the in-person event must be cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, the livestream will be how all viewers tune

in and submit questions, and the candidates will discuss the issues over Zoom.

Assuming the event continues in-person, there will be time after the forum for candidates to talk one-on-one with the public. We encourage those attending to spread out or, weather-permitting, take those conversations outside. Every bit of COVID mitigation helps.

The forum falls about a week before October 15, when the the 18-day November election voting period begins. The Courier-Herald will publish an article about the forum before ballots

go out, ensuring voters are armed with as much information as possible before ballots arrive in their mailboxes. (Military and overseas ballots are mailed in September.)

Election day is November 2.

**Schedule of events:**

6:00 p.m.: Doors open at the Fieldhouse.  
6:30 p.m.: The forum begins.  
8:00 p.m. (or earlier): The forum ends, and the candidates will have time to talk one-on-one with the public.  
8:30 p.m.: The event is concluded.

## COVID

From Page 1

masks in public, regardless of vaccination status. This was due in large part to the highly-contagious Delta variant of virus spreading around the state.

This means the full council was out-of-compliance during their Aug. 23 and Sept. 13 meetings.

A handful of council members, as well as Mayor Molinaro, offered their thoughts on the newer mask mandate when asked.

"I do believe there is scientific evidence to support that masks, to some degree, can help in reducing the risk of COVID-19," Councilman Tom Savageau wrote in an email. "Similarly, I believe that the COVID-19 vaccine can do the same. What I don't believe in is government mandating circumstances that require masks or vaccines. I think by doing so, you actually cause a reaction whereas people who might have otherwise chosen to wear a mask or get vaccinated now chose to 'dig their feet in' and not."

Savageau added that even though he chooses to not wear a mask, he continues to bring one to council meetings in case someone requests he do so.

"As much as we might agree with or disagree with what our government is doing, that doesn't take away from the necessity from each of us

to be kind to others around them, regardless of whether we agree with the stance they take," he continued.

Councilman Beau Chevassus said his mind has somewhat changed on masks in general since the beginning of the pandemic, but that he staunchly trusts science and encourages others to protect the vulnerable.

"Initially I was staunchly pro-mask, even procuring and distributing 10,000 masks for local hospitals when there was a mask shortage," he said. "However as I look in the rearview mirror and note the efficacy and transparency of our state and county, I cannot help but question the alleged life-saving power of a paper mask that protects myself and others from" the coronavirus.

"We have experienced countless other false directives, poorly implemented communication efforts, inconsistency without acknowledgment (i.e. hypocrisy), and troubling draconian mandates that challenge the very Constitution I have sworn to uphold," Chevassus continued. "Based upon this track record, it is extremely difficult for me to continue to trust further restrictions and encourage others to submit as well."

Chevassus was the only council member to volunteer that he's been vaccinated against the virus — though he was one of the rare cases (between two and five people per million people, according to the CDC) that had to be admitted to the emergency department for a bad

reaction.

"I know these amazing, breakthrough vaccines have successfully worked to keep thousands out of the hospitals and save many, many lives. But I guess my point is the manipulative, absolutist messaging should give us pause," he added. "Certainly preventive efforts may work for some people—and that's okay. Yet if it doesn't work for others, that is okay too. I believe this teachable mindset makes for good leadership and good science—changing our minds based off of empirical evidence and not shaming others when an absolutist opinion is not trusted."

Molinaro also commented on the poor communication he's experienced from the county and state.

"With continued mixed messages (that directly affect family income) and no exit message it is apparent why there is exhaustion and polarization. As a society we need to 'live in the sunshine, not the shadows,'" he said. "Instead I take the position that one should have an uplifting attitude when interacting with people. Find the grace to be positive and be encouraging, even when you disagree with someone. It is not always easy as this issue continues to be all around us, but with practice you could see negative situations become diffused."

Whether the council will decide to wear masks or not in the near future, it seems likely that a discussion will be had; Councilman Anthony Wright said he plans to remind the

council of the mask mandate during the Sept. 27 meeting.

"We will likely need to have a discussion about council members choosing whether they will attend meetings in person with masking related to the county and state policies, as well as remind council members they always have the option to attend the meeting via Microsoft Teams," he wrote. "As far as leading by example goes, I think we can do better in regards to the council meetings... leadership isn't just the two times you appear on television during the month. Leadership by example is a sum of everything you do all the time. How you conduct yourself online, how you conduct yourself in public, and how you conduct yourself with other entities, private or public."

No other council members responded to questions from the Courier-Herald.

Mike Faulk, deputy communications director for Inslee, said that penalties for the council not wearing masks in meetings could result in anything from "a warning to fines to potential misdemeanor charges" from the state Department of Labor and Industries.

However, he also stressed that "when there has been a lack of compliance the priority has been encouraging people to come into adherence before taking enforcement action."

### THE STATE OF COVID IN ENUMCLAW

As of Sept. 17, Enumclaw has experienced 1,554 cases of COVID-19, meaning more than 10 percent of the city has been infected, according to King County data.

Numbers were relatively low last June and July, but any gains made against the virus were eradicated in August, when the city saw multiple days that broke last winter's daily COVID case record. Up until now, the city's highest daily COVID count was 20, which was recorded on Dec. 12, 2020. That record was eclipsed first on Aug. 9, which saw 25 cases in a single day. That record was again broken Aug. 16, which saw 27 cases.

Hospitalizations were also down during last June, but started ticking up again in July and August; in total, the city has seen 90 hospitalizations.

There has been one new death since the beginning of the summer, recorded on Sept. 3. This brings Enumclaw's total death count to 32.

The city's COVID-19 metrics remain higher than King County in general. Overall, the county sees a 4.2 percent of all tests come back positive, while Enumclaw's rate is at 8.4 percent.

The hospitalization rates and death rates are closer together — Enumclaw's hospitalization rate is 5.8 percent, while the county's hovers at 5.4; the city's death rate is 2.1 percent, while King County's is down at 1.3.

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NATURAL GAS SAFETY REMINDERS



If you smell natural gas please notify City of Enumclaw Police Department at (360) 825-3505

FALL IS HERE!



Know what's below. Call before you dig.

number: 1-800-424-5555 or 811

Now that fall is here and the last days of warm weather are upon us, we will be cleaning up our yards, repairing fences and getting our property ready for the winter. While you are doing these things, your City of Enumclaw Natural Gas Department would like to remind you to be aware of the buried gas lines running across your yard. A lot of these lines are plastic and can be cut with a shovel. Remember, before you dig, call this toll-free number: 1-800-424-5555 or 811 and the gas lines will be located, at no charge.

What Am I Responsible For As Gas Customer?

Please remember all gas customers are responsible for gas line maintenance of piping past the meter. This includes all piping after the gas meter servicing the business, residence and/or additional buildings associated with each property. This maintenance requirement is in reference to the Code of Federal Regulation Title 49, Part 192, which includes the following:

- If piping is not maintained, it may be subject to the potential hazards of corrosion and leakage.
- Buried gas piping should be:
  - Periodically inspected for corrosion if piping is metallic.
  - Repaired if any unsafe condition is discovered.
  - When excavating near buried pipe, must be located in advance.

Natural Gas Safety In The Event Of An Earthquake

Fires and explosions are often more damaging than the earthquake itself. Fire statistics from previous earthquakes in the United States over the past four decades indicate gas related fires contribute 20% to 50% of all earthquake related fires.

City of Enumclaw gas utility recommends you shut off your gas immediately after an earthquake if you smell gas. If you are at work or away when an earthquake hits, then you may not be able to get home in time. An earthquake valve will take care of this instantly for you.

An Earthquake valve or seismic valve is an automatic way to shut off the gas supply to your home or business in the event of an earthquake. These are applicable not only to your Enumclaw supplied gas but propane (LPG) as well. These devices should be installed by a licensed contractor and can cost between \$300 and \$500 per meter which should include parts and labor. With the use of these shut off valves, and their subsequent prevention of after earthquake fires, the fire dept. can better use their personnel in the rescue efforts that are sure to follow.

If you have any questions contact: Nick Peelo, Gas Utility Manager at (360) 615-5787