

Debra L Mason
Residential Appraiser
Spokane County Assessors Office

Kathy Malzahn
Director of Human Resources
Spokane County

Ms Malzahn,

I am filing this documentation under the Whistleblower policy 450 of Spokane County.

My concern is the fact that [REDACTED] once a residential appraiser [REDACTED] may have committed fraud.

I request Ralph Baker or Byron Hodgson not view this opening letter due to the sensitive content. I do fear the retribution if Ralph in particular were to read it. As a matter of record I do believe the entire appraisal staff will be affected by the actions of one individual when and if Ralph becomes aware of this investigation.

I have made an effort to be as concise as possibly although this is a compilation of data spanning back to 1996 when [REDACTED] became employed with Spokane County [REDACTED] with the Assessors office.

On October 23, 2008, I, by myself with no one else's knowledge, made the decision to take this information to Commissioner Richards. My supervisor, Barb Kent and I have approached Byron Hodgson on several occasions with missed property information overlooked by the former appraiser [REDACTED] had this schedule from 1996-2005 and it is pretty much the same schedule now as it was when [REDACTED] had it. Since November 1, 2005 when I was hired and took over the schedule, I have discovered a chronic problem with the integrity of the data such as, homes and other improvements not on tax rolls, no photos, no sketches, incorrect photos on properties, inaccurate sketches, and permits not entered or completed on the property record. An example of this is a stack of old permits mysteriously showed up in my file cabinet (other appraisers experienced this as well). These permits were all from [REDACTED] old schedule. The stack I went through contained thousands of dollars of central air conditioning permits that I added to properties. Due to time constraints I didn't save all of these permits I added but I was directed by my supervisor to make copies of the most critical data, which is the bulk of what I'm turning over to you. It is my understanding that on Aug. 28, 2007 Barbara Kent met with Byron (3 hr meeting) in the Monroe Court conference room and went over the information all the information we had gathered up until that time. It is also my understanding Byron did discuss this with Ralph although to what degree I'm not certain. No action has been taken to date and that is what prompted me to go outside the chain of command. I consider this information to be indisputable proof of a poorly managed schedule bordering on, if not blatant fraud.

On May 31, 2007, most of the residential appraisal staff had a meeting with Byron. Those present were;

North Team appraisers:

Randy Myrhe, no longer employed, Kathryn Stroyan, Jerry Boorman (now a commercial appraiser), & Larry Splater.

South Team appraisers:

Bill Pierce, Rey Ammunson, Paula Larkin, Jon Spens, David Chambers -no longer employed, Bob Ball, and myself.

The main focus of this meeting centered on [REDACTED] & our concern with her work practices. Byron took no notes at this meeting and at the end suggested we bring him "proof" which we had all brought with us. I would encourage you to speak with any of the appraisal staff for their view. The only appraisers not present were Valerie McMillan, Jenelle Grossman, and Vicki Horton who are considered close friends of [REDACTED]

It is my opinion that the reason Mr. Baker has not been make aware of this, if in fact he hasn't, is the fear of retribution on the entire assessor staff. I lost confidence in Mr. Baker when he made the statement to the Spokesman Review that he felt the appraisal staff was attempting to sabotage his election by not putting properties on the tax rolls!! I have enclosed a copy of this article. After his re-election he rescinded the flextime option for the entire assessors office. I have also attached a few letters from the appraisal staff to Mr. Baker regarding the loss of the field books in the Fall of 2006. After repeated urgings from the staff to keep the books at least until we had finished transferring all the data they contained, the appraisal staff was ignored and the field books were moved to the Cheney Archives. This move ultimately led to thousands of taxpayer dollars being spent sending appraisers out to Cheney in order to copy all the sketches from the field books, to comply with Mr. Bakers directive that all the sketches be on the website by the end of 2007. My schedule was missing over 1300 sketches and after exhausting the field books I still have 352 properties I will have to visit in order to re-sketch. This translates into weeks of additional work added to an already full schedule.

The following is my account of what I have learned over the past three years and why I consider it important for the administrators of Spokane County to review it.

It is my understanding that [REDACTED] came to the County in [REDACTED] with [REDACTED] background. [REDACTED] was [REDACTED]

I have spent the past three years, since the time of my employment (11/01/05) when I took over [REDACTED] vacated schedule, making corrections & picking up missed improvements. I am now starting my fourth inspection cycle since being hired & continue to find missed improvements. I have two more inspection cycles after this & believe this pattern will continue until I've inspected all six cycles in my schedule.

There was another appraiser, Tracy Bell, in this schedule for a short period from 8/22/05-10/10/05. When I arrived at the County I spent the first few weeks organizing the neighborhood files & permits. Tracy's permits were in order and understandable, I simply filed them in either new construction files or new construction that was visited by him but not yet complete.

In approximately April of 2006, the appraisers were moved from the County Courthouse to the Monroe Court office bldg. [REDACTED] approached me in our office at the courthouse showing me a file cabinet drawer (41"X18"X12") filled to brimming with permits [REDACTED] 'found'. I was dumbstruck & told [REDACTED] to make sure I get that drawer when we got to the new office. When we got moved in I asked [REDACTED] about the contents of the drawer & [REDACTED] said [REDACTED] didn't know where exactly it was. I proceeded to look in every file cabinet in the office never finding the drawer or it's contents. I did recently take another look

around & found a drawer that I believe contains [REDACTED] old permits & neighborhood sign-off sheets, although I did not disturb the contents so am not certain exactly what specific records it contains.

On Sept. 13, 2006 I received an e-mail that prompted the media investigation into missed properties. There were only twelve properties in question by the media. Since that time I have discovered countless properties as you will see in the documentation. The properties enclosed are what I considered the most critical although this is not the complete list. It is so time consuming to document everything that I just couldn't afford to take time to account for it all. Even with the compromised condition of my schedule I have never been allowed any additional time in which to complete it. It's been a difficult situation & one that I don't expect to end until spring of 2012 when I've completed all six inspection cycles. I want to note that I've used my own time, not county time, to put this information together that I'm turning over to you.

On Oct. 15, 2008, I learned that [REDACTED] was still working for [REDACTED] as [REDACTED] Samantha Jordan claims [REDACTED] had [REDACTED] out in the field training on or about Sept. 4th or 5th of 2006. At approximately 2:30pm [REDACTED] told Sam [REDACTED] needed to leave her to go to another job and asked her to "not say anything". I have noticed a pattern to the times [REDACTED] leaves work during the week and the most frequent days are Monday & Wednesday at 2:30 in the afternoon. In May and June of 2003 Paula Larkin, an appraiser for the south team, was investigated for working at [REDACTED]. Paula states that [REDACTED] was calling her constantly wanting to know the status of the investigation. It's my understanding Paula was helping [REDACTED] with [REDACTED] custodial job. I suggest speaking with Paula. I realize it's not against policy to have a second job although my concern is if [REDACTED] has worked on county time. [REDACTED] May 5th pay period may be of interest as [REDACTED] was able to charge the county 81.5 hours of overtime. [REDACTED] has accounted for the time on Timesoft back to July since we started using it, although recently there has been concern whether Ralph is having appraisers followed in the field. If Timesoft records have been altered after the fact Joyce Mendoza, who does our timesheets, would have that information as well as past records.

I would encourage you to speak with the following employees to get their input; Paula Larkin; could give you more information on [REDACTED] work history.

Joe Hollenback; appeals specialist, has had numerous problems with [REDACTED]

Kathryn Stroyan; has been discredited with both Ralph & Byron by [REDACTED]

Barbara Kent; has documentation on meetings with Byron and counseling with [REDACTED] about her schedule.

Connie Stolz & Nichole Whitcomb, GIS; countless times attempted to notify [REDACTED] about missed properties they had found & were ignored.

In closing I would like to convey to you this is not a personal vendetta, but a desire to keep our office honest. As appraisers we work on an honor system due to the nature of our work & I firmly believe most of us are honest with how we conduct our business. One person could ruin public trust and opinion in our entire staff as well as the county in general. I am paid by the taxpayers of Spokane County and do not take that responsibility lightly.

Please keep in mind as well that one person and one person only is responsible for the condition of what is now my current schedule. There may be many excuses offered such as; we didn't have the tools or resources back then; we were starting up Proval and

it was a difficult time; we didn't get permits; or even, [REDACTED]
The truth of the matter is that no other schedule had a fraction of the problems mine does, even when we were actively looking for missed properties. Other appraisers have managed to take photos, pick up new construction permits & sketch dwellings within a tight schedule. On occasion appraisers are going to make errors but no one else has anywhere near the volume I have experienced.

I'm concerned that the actions of one may have consequences on others and I don't want to see that happen. I don't believe either Barb Kent or Byron Hodgson is in any way responsible for this situation, as it has taken actual inspection to find this information. If I were to say I inspected properties and didn't, no one would know. Like I said, this is an honor system.

I have made every attempt to make the following documentation as clear and organized as possible although if you have any questions please ask me.

Thank you for your time.

Debra L Mason

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worked

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