

CAHI MONTHLY NEWS



Presidents Corner

I hope everyone survived the July heat wave unscathed! It was a brutal stretch. I only schedule morning appointments when it's that hot. And now, being able to look at a house on line, I pass on houses without AC. As I write these presidents corner the weather has been much more bearable. Let's hope it stays that way.

We had a great turnout for the July membership meeting at Larry Janesky's place. Larry has always been very gracious to us as an organization, and I can say whole heartedly that it is greatly appreciated. The breath of his operation is staggering and for him to fit us in to his busy day to day operations has been nothing but helpful to us.

Regarding CAHI news, the CAHI board has voted to rebuild our website to make it current and relative. Construction has begun and the launch date target is sometime in September. It will be extremely valuable to us as a board as it will help us automate the business end of CAHI. We have a great concern about CAHI surviving as current board members fade off into the sunset. As of right now there is a lack of interest in membership to take part on the board. I hope that changes. The new website and its developer will allow the organization to continue operating with a minimal amount of CAHI board members if necessary. The website is going to make you use it. You will have to register for monthly meetings, special events, etc and the extra traffic will hopefully generate inspections for members. We will keep you posted on its progress.

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Meeting Dates!

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**August
No Meeting**

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Sept 28th

Bartlett Tree Experts

Presenter Rick Daniels

International Society of Arboriculture
Licensed Arborist, CT State Licensed
Arborist, Certified Tree Risk Assessor,
Manager of Bartlett Tree Experts
in Simsbury, CT.

Problematic Trees

Hazardous Trees, Insects & Diseases,
Root issues, Invasive Species, etc.

The goal of the discussion will be educate inspectors on common issues with trees that should raise concern and know when to call in an Arborist.

MONTHLY MEETINGS – Details & Info

CAHI's regular monthly meetings are held at the Best Western located at 201 Washington Ave (RT 5), North Haven. Meetings are also broadcast via Zoom.

Meetings are still free to members but RESERVATIONS are a MUST.

Reservations can be made at our CAHI website.

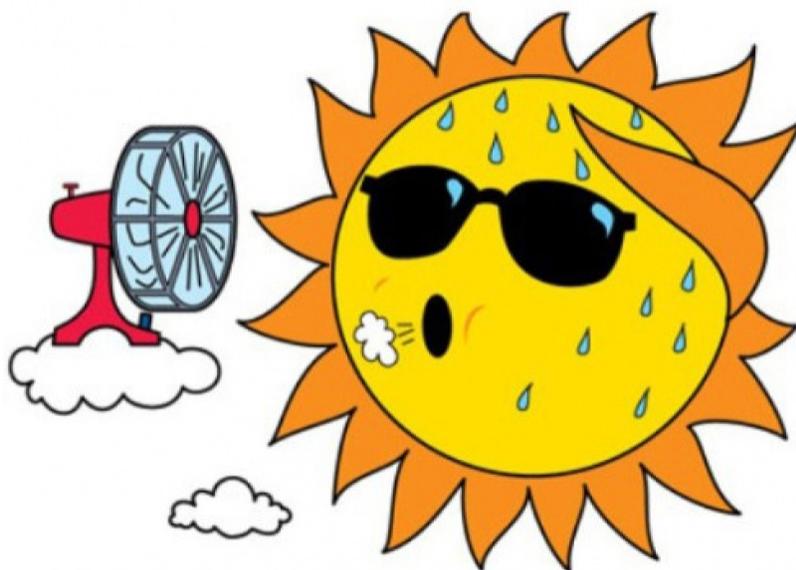
Most meetings are on the fourth Wednesday of the month from 7-9pm. Guests are always welcome! Guests may attend 2 free monthly meetings to experience our presentations, meet our members, and receive a CE attendance certificate. Joining CAHI may be done at anytime of the year through our Membership Page.

A few weeks back I had an interesting conversation with realtor turned motivational speaker, Jared James. We go way back to his early years in the profession. He hired me to inspect a home he was purchasing and we got to talking about the market as it was about a month ago. While everybody had been blaming low inventory for the current condition, he had a twist on the situation. He believed there was an overabundance of buyers. A buyer frenzy that scoops up houses before the for sale signs can be set, so inventory does not have a chance to accumulate. I guess you can spin it that way. Tomato tomaato to me! Whatever the case may be, the market has changed again since then. Increasing interest rates along with the rest of the things going on like recession, war, inflation and so on that can slow down buyers is going to affect how we earn a living for a while. Now houses are sitting on the market longer, forcing sellers to lower prices. There is WAY more wiggle room for negotiations which solidifies the need for a home inspection. In order to absorb rising costs rents have skyrocketed which eventually may push people back into the housing market.

Last but not least, the smoke detector language to be inserted into our standards has been written and passed up the corporate ladder for review and approval. That process could take a while so for now continue status quo.

Stan

“Don’t sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them happen.”
— **Madam C.J. Walker**



The CT Basement Systems Presentation

Our July meeting was held in person at The CT Basement Systems facility in Shelton. Our gracious host, Larry Janesky, provided a free pizza buffet, classroom and presenter with years of field experience to discuss basement repairs. Turn out was good with approximately 50 members present. Plan to attend our September gathering.



Our Presenter



Full House



Free Food



Sump Pump Line Up

Commercial Inspections: Big Projects, Big Risks

By **Tanner Weyland**

July 15, 2022

Last Updated June 8, 2022



If you are a home inspector, you may have considered commercial inspections as another source of revenue. The transition would seem simple: ensure you are compliant with state regulations, do a bit of marketing, maybe some classes, and you would be good to go—right?

At InspectorPro Insurance, we have seen that commercial inspections are anything but simple. While typical residential inspections may result in expensive claims on their own, commercial inspections dwarf them in comparison. Multi-million-dollar buildings rarely have cheap issues to fix. As lucrative as they may be to inspect, you should never approach them the same way as a residential structure.

“Every [residential] home has a bathroom, a kitchen, and essentially the same components. But commercial inspections are totally different,” said Mike Morgan of Morgan Inspection Services in Texas. “It could be a warehouse, an office building, or an apartment complex, but no two of them are the same. So, it is much more difficult to know what you’re getting into.”

If you are currently inspecting commercial properties, or if you are seriously planning to do so, be prepared. To help you with the big risks that come with big inspections, we will share some advice that we have learned from over 10 years of experience handling commercial inspection claims.

What is a Commercial Inspection?

There are a few different definitions for a commercial property. The International Association of Certified Home Inspectors' (InterNACHI) sister organization, the Certified Commercial Property Inspectors Association (CCPIA), defines a commercial property as “a building, structures, and improvements located on a parcel of commercial real estate intended to generate a profit.” That could include retail, multi-unit, or office spaces, to name a few.



The definition that affects your inspections and business the most, however, is the definition in your insurance policy. Some policies define commercial properties as anything larger than four residential units or a certain amount of square feet. Other policies may exclude restaurants, warehouses, retail spaces, or other typical commercial spaces, which would leave you without insurance coverage for these buildings in the case of a claim. When deciding whether to offer commercial inspections, ensure that your coverage matches the type of commercial buildings you are planning to inspect.

Basic Parts of a Commercial Inspection

A typical commercial inspection takes these three steps:

A Walk-Through Survey: This may be as extensive as a residential inspection, or it may be more limited, depending on the scope of the inspection listed in your pre-inspection agreement. You will identify the property's visual deficiencies and report any systems, components, and equipment specified in your standard of practice (SOP).

Research: Knowing that commercial buildings switch hands often and are repaired and remodeled during most transitions, it is incredibly important to review documentation. You may do this after your inspection, but you will be more prepared if you review them before performing your walk-through inspection. These documents may be previous reports, permits, or anything that would help you fulfill the scope of your inspection, as discussed with your client and written in your pre-inspection agreement. While reviewing these documents is not something that residential inspection SOPs usually require, you should plan to do so with most commercial inspections. Also be sure to ask your client what they intend to use the property for as it may inform your inspection.

Property Condition Report: For a report on commercial properties, continue to use the recommendations you have learned in the past for writing residential reports. (Many report writing tips are transferable to commercial inspections). You will include the information from the walk-through survey and research within your report.

Tips to Manage Risk for Commercial Inspections

While commercial inspections may seem similar to residential inspections, do not underestimate the differences. Expecting an easy transition is like owning a sedan and thinking you'll drive a semitruck comfortably on your first try. The electrical, the HVAC/AC, the roofing, and many other aspects of a commercial structure will be varied and complex. Expect a learning curve.

Commercial inspection claims can be significant due to the size and value of the properties inspected. In addition, commercial property inspections are more likely to result in claims from third parties. After interviewing many inspectors and our claims team, we have compiled a few tips to avoid commercial inspection claims.

Be Choosy and Cautious.

Commercial inspections have much greater consequences than residential inspections. For example, if you miss foundation damage in a single-family home, you could be endangering the single family that lives there. If it is a condo complex with many families living in it, as was the case in Florida last summer, many more peoples' lives are at stake. You need to be aware that the stakes are higher if you mess up. Or, as is more likely, you may get wrapped up in a previously existing condition.

We do not share these facts to dissuade you from offering commercial inspections. Rather, we encourage you to do your research and be picky with what you inspect. If building records show serious issues, and if they may affect many people, you might not want to inspect it. Be aware of the area's history, and the building's history, and then make your decision.

Another reason to be cautious and careful when choosing a commercial inspection is because of third-party claims. Residential inspection clients are the primary source of claims for home inspectors—that is not the case with commercial inspections. Third-party individuals—like the residents of condos, the employees in office suites, and visitors—are not technically your clients. (The building owner or their representative was likely your client). And yet, in a commercial inspection claim, some of the people who are most likely to sue you are the families and individuals using those buildings who may have been hurt. If, from your preliminary research, the building seems worn out and has major issues, be cautious. Issue can escalate quickly with parties other than your client.



Stick to Your Standards.

If you use a generic residential pre-inspection agreement and SOP, but perform a commercial inspection, you may compromise your agreement's safeguarding power. Inspectors performing commercial inspections should utilize a commercial agreement and standard. Whether it's a standard that you put together yourself or one from a reputable organization, knowing and communicating your standard of practice (SOP) in your pre-inspection agreement and report can make your claims defense.

The following are some of the common commercial inspection standards:

- The American Society for Testing and Materials' (ASTM) [Standard Guide for Property Condition Assessments](#)
- The CCPIA's International Standards of Practice for Inspecting Commercial Properties ([ComSOP](#))

Specify Your Exclusions.

The commercial inspection standards above provide great foundations. However, we recommend that you specifically exclude anything from your scope that you were not contracted to inspect. Do this for every commercial inspection where your client has expectations that differ from your commercial SOP. Otherwise, claimant may drag you into issues with areas you did not inspect but forgot to exclude on your agreement. Just remember to get an attorney's help when preparing your pre-inspection agreement.

With commercial inspections, you may be considered liable for areas you were not hired to inspect in the same building if you are not specific enough

about your exclusions in your scope. For the best protection, you must specify where you will inspect (which your commercial SOP typically covers), and where you will not inspect (which an exclusion or an addendum that alters the scope of the typical commercial SOP will cover).

Failing to do so, your clients or third-parties might blame you for "obvious issues" that you "should have caught" while you went through the parking garage, lobby, or hallways on the way to your actual inspection location (an office suite or a condo, perhaps). Issues with commercial structures can avalanche and drag you along with them, especially if the building has major issues.



Seek Training.

“Get training. Get your certification because there’s more liability for commercial inspections than there is for home inspections,” said Richard Stockton of A Better Home Inspection Service, LLC in Virginia. “There’s a lot to commercial buildings that you have to know before you can get into them. You just can’t go into it and think you’re going to be able to [inspect] without getting slapped down.”

While your residential inspection training and experience is a solid foundation, commercial-specific training and certification is a must. The standards and scope of commercial inspections can differ in significant ways from those of residential inspections. Training and certification is often the most effective way to learn those nuances.

You might still be on the fence about offering commercial inspections in the first place, though. Training classes can help you decide if they are a good offering for your business. Matthew Cottenham of Trademark Home Inspection, LLC in Michigan suggests taking your training to the next level by shadowing another commercial inspector.

“First take the certification classes just to get a feel for it. Then reach out into your local market and shadow an experienced inspector, because [a commercial inspection] really is a different ballgame.”

Get Help.

Commercial inspections are large undertakings, so consider hiring additional inspectors or subcontractors and experts to assist.

Commercial properties often have unfamiliar commercial-sized electrical, HVACs, plumbing, or other systems that require specialists. In cases like these, you should consider hiring multiple subcontractors (plumbers, electricians, commercial roofers, etc.). They will primarily focus on those systems that are unfamiliar (and expensive when misdiagnosed).

If cost is an issue, know that commercial inspection clients often expect to pay more than a residential inspection client. Include the cost of the subcontractors in the bid. Paul Duffau of Safe@Home Inspections, LLC in Washington has seen how cost cutting and avoiding hiring subcontractors can have negative effects.

“I lost a bid [on a commercial inspection] for being too expensive. Six months later, in the paper, I’m reading that there was deferred maintenance that was unexpected, and lead pipes that were not observed during the inspection process,” Duffau said.



The inspector who performed the inspection seems to have been trying to save costs. They had a lower bid, and they did not hire a plumber, who likely would have caught the lead pipes. While they themselves should not have missed the lead pipes (plumber or no), these kinds of mistakes are common if someone is rushing to finish a large inspection without the appropriate help. Charge enough to perform a thorough inspection.

“There is a reason why you want to spend extra on the inspection. You need to do your full due diligence,” Duffau said.

Safely Hiring Subcontractors

When hiring subcontractors, always have a solid subcontracting agreement in place. The agreement should detail the extent of their duties for the inspection. This will protect you from liability associated with any mistakes they make. You should have an attorney write up the subcontracting agreement. If you wish to further decrease your potential liability, have your subcontractor deliver a separate report of their findings with their company name listed.

Considering insurance, you will want to confirm that your subcontractors have both errors and omissions (E&O) and general liability (GL) coverage of their own. Have them confirm that their coverage works for the type of commercial inspections you need them for. After confirming their insurance, ask them to add you as an additional insured for that inspection. As subcontractors, they will be liable for their own inspection, of course. You, however, may be considered liable for your inspection and theirs since you organized and subcontracted them. When your subcontractors add you as an additional insured, it means you have coverage on their insurance for any claims dealing with the parts they inspected and their report. This should be simple and will provide you with additional peace of mind.

Obtain Legal Help.

While insurance is a large part of risk management (which is our next tip), having a lawyer help you with commercial inspections can make a huge difference. As we mentioned before, whenever the scope of a commercial inspection excludes something from your typical commercial inspection standards, you need to incorporate those exclusions into your inspection agreement. A lawyer can help you draft a binding and clear agreement with the discussed scope. Further, a lawyer can help you draft subcontracting agreements that further diminish liability for mistakes made by subcontractors.

Commercial-Sized Inspections Need Commercial-Sized Protection

If you worry about commercial inspections due to the level of risk associated with million-dollar properties, get insurance. While this should not be new advice to you, it can bring a lot of peace of mind. If you perform a mix of both residential and commercial inspections, you need coverage

that covers both. Some E&O and GL policies place restrictions on the type of buildings you can inspect —be it a unit cap, a square-footage cap, or other exceptions that exclude commercial inspections. The easiest way to find out if you are covered is to ask your insurer what types of commercial inspections (if any) are covered.

To protect your business from commercial inspection claims, we at InspectorPro created model commercial (and residential) inspection agreements. With over 10 years of experience handling home inspection claims, we've used our insight into the most recent claims, case law, and legislation to create up-to-date, state-specific pre-inspection agreements for inspectors like you.



However, always consult an attorney to review and craft your commercial pre-inspection agreement to the specific commercial jobs you perform.

If you're already a client of ours, you can get a copy of our commercial agreement for free. Request your own [here](#).

Not a client yet but want to be? If you are looking for new coverage, whether residential or commercial, let us help. [Fill out our application online](#).



This article appears on the Inspector Pro website. Click [HERE](#) to view in it's original format.

The Best Cars for Older Drivers and Retirees

For the practical, the frugal or the dreamer, these are some of the best cars for older drivers and retirees.

ANDREW SHELDON JULY 6, 2022

The Best Cars For Older Drivers And Retirees

At every age in life, drivers consider different components when looking for a new car. That is certainly the case for older drivers. Most in this demographic put a greater emphasis on factors such as visibility, safety features, easy-to-use systems and how comfortable it is to get in and out of the car. Or maybe, if they have recently retired, they decided it is time to finally splurge and get behind the wheel of their dream car. Whatever the situation, these are a few of the best cars for older drivers.



For The Practical Driver

Subaru Forester

MSRP: \$25,895

MPG: 26 city / 33 highway

Crash Test: 5 stars

The Subaru Forester makes getting behind the wheel a cinch for older drivers – literally. Large doors and elevated seating allow for easy entrance and exit to and from the car. Once set to drive, the chair-like seating position coupled with big windows and thin pillars supply excellent driver visibility. The Forester’s climate and infotainment systems are straightforward and easy to use.

The Forester comes with a five-star crash test rating. Even better, Subaru has worked to significantly cut down on crashes thanks to EyeSight, the manufacturer’s driver assist technology. EyeSight works by equipping the car with dual color cameras near the rearview mirror. These cameras can monitor traffic movement, optimize cruise control and warn drivers if they sway outside the lane. EyeSight has been found to reduce rear-end crashes with injuries by up to 85%.



For The Traveler

Kia Sorento

MSRP: \$29,590

MPG: 24 city / 29 highway

Crash Test: 4 stars

With your nine-to-five days behind them, retirees have much more free time – and much more free time to travel. Whether visiting the grandkids or checking off a destination on their bucket list, retirees need the right car for all their future adventures.

The Kia Sorento is a mid-sized SUV with all the prerequisites needed for older drivers: comfortable seating, simple controls and available safety technology. What makes it perfect for long trips is the large, quiet cabin, comfortable ride, ample storage space and, most importantly, above-average highway gas mileage for a SUV.

Also, the Sorrento's third row of seating can be folded down if you need more storage space or up to hold passengers, in case they do happen to visit the grandchildren.



For The Frugal Consumer

Nissan Versa

MSRP: \$15,380

MPG: 32 city / 40 highway

Crash Test: 5 stars

The Versa was completely redesigned for 2021 (goodbye manually operated crank windows!) The makeover gave the subcompact sedan more legroom than one would expect, up to 15 cubic space of cargo room and a 122-horsepower four-cylinder engine.

Safety is addressed with the Nissan Safety Shield® 360, a package of features including automatic emergency braking, lane-departure warning, and automatic high-beams. The entry-level Versa S sedan retains Bluetooth functionality, but lacks the Android Auto and Apple CarPlay integration you can find in higher trims.

But above all, what makes the Nissan Versa one of the best cars for older drivers — or any driver? The price. With a base price of under \$15,000, you will be hard-pressed to find a better value.



For The Dreamer

Ford Mustang Convertible

MSRP: \$32,705

MPG: 20 city / 28 highway

Crash Test: N/A

Those recent retirees who waited to reach social security's full benefit age (66) most likely started their driving career in the 1960s or early 70s. This era in automotive history was marked by the rise of muscle cars and there was no such car more popular than the Ford Mustang. Assuredly, many current retirees dreamed of getting behind the wheel of a Mustang. And if they weren't able to then, now is the time. Finding a vintage Mustang may be challenging. Fortunately, the model is still going strong. In fact, it's nearing its 60th anniversary.

While there are several model types to choose from, you can't go wrong with a convertible. The Mustang Convertible EcoBoost models delivers 310 horsepower and gets 20/28 miles per gallon. And the powerful car still has a five-star safety rating thanks to features such as a Blind Spot Information System with Cross-Traffic Alert. The Mustang also comes standard with modern amenities like LED headlamps and lighting, active noise cancelation, six-speaker sound system, and leather wrapped steering wheel.

This article appears on the Northeast AAA website. Click [HERE](#) to visit the website.

BUILDING CODES



Inspecting the Inspectors

A survey examining the building code enforcement process

BY JLC STAFF

The results of a survey we sent out through the *JLC* newsletter give a mixed report of the performance of municipal, county, and state building code agencies. The survey is neither a comprehensive nor a quantitative assessment. Rather, it provides a broad look at how building professionals feel about the building code process and examines any changes to it due to the pandemic. Among the 130 respondents, 16 code officials weighed in to give a self-rating and provide a contrasting point of view.

BUILDING DEPARTMENT RATINGS

To get an impression of how builders felt about their experiences with the building departments they worked with, we asked re-

spondents to rate their experience on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “poor” and 5 “excellent.” The results shown (see “Rated Experience With Building Departments” on the next page) reflect the responses from building professionals, but exclude those from building officials (which were all 5s, except a couple of 4s from officials who recognized there is room for improvement—but nothing lower).

For almost 40% (those building professionals who provided ratings of 4 and 5), the experience has been mostly positive. Explanations of each rating choice included words like “cooperation,” “ally,” “team,” and “respect.” These are some examples:

“They are available for same day inspections, and answer our calls even after hours.” [5]

Adobe Stock

“I typically only work in my hometown and I have a good relationship with the building department as a whole. I treat the inspectors with respect and [in turn] they do the same for me.” [5]

“For the most part we have good relationships with the building departments we work with. The struggle is when they don’t get what they want from the project engineers or architects.” [4]

“The building commissioner (with whom I’ve had other good interactions in other towns where he also serves) was helpful with questions, responsive to requests for inspections, and generally acted as an ally in getting the project done to code specs.” [5]

The most common rating, 3, could be interpreted as “OK,” but the explanations for the rating often express something more nuanced. Many selected 3 because of a mixed experience: Either the respondent described working in different jurisdictions or expressed varied experiences with different officials within the same jurisdiction. A number of building professionals who selected 3 also included constructive critiques. For example, several suggested that inspectors were capricious, enforcing their interpretation of the code because they had the prerogative to do so, even on details that passed muster with plan reviewers and often were felt to have little significance to the safety or performance of the building.

Other examples of responses associated with a 3 rating included: “They keep moving the goal posts. What would fly a month ago won’t last week.”

“The employees in the field worked very hard and after the initial shock of the shut down (or lack of one for them) they were fantastic under the situation. I would give them a 5. The staff downtown have been a complete cluster \$&&@!. City hall shut down completely, then went to ‘by appointment only.’ What a joke.”

“In the end, an inspector has no financial or legal responsibility to anyone involved in the project, while the contractors, architects and engineers have their licenses, livelihood, and reputation at stake every time.”

PANDEMIC EFFECTS

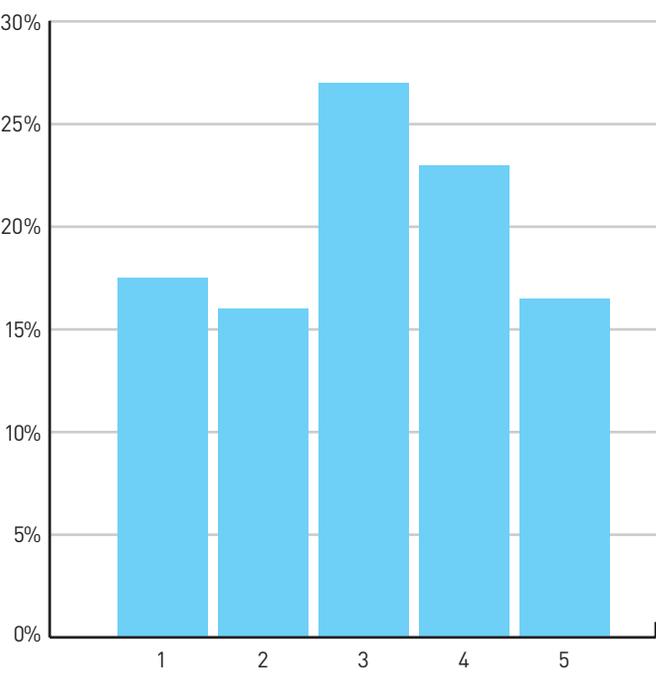
What initially prompted our survey were rumblings we had heard from readers that, of all the challenges facing building professionals today—more than labor shortages, high material prices, and extended lead times—complying with local regulations was the problem they now found the hardest to solve. In our survey, this problem manifested in responses as long delays, higher fees, and difficulty communicating with building departments (largely owing to staff shortages and reduced access to officials).

Even though the pandemic has changed how almost every jurisdiction conducts business, not all are experiencing lingering effects. For about a quarter, things are simply “back to normal.”

When asked “Did the processes for pulling a permit, conducting a plan review, or having a project inspected change during the coronavirus pandemic?,” about a third reported positive changes resulting from moving more of the process online. These are some responses in this cohort:

“Transitioned to online inspection requests saving much time for our staff.”

Rated Experiences With Building Departments



On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 excellent), respondents rated their overall experience with the building departments they work with. The results shown in the bar graph above are those of building professionals only, with the responses from code officials left off.

“Most departments have done a decent job keeping their processes working or improved. I would say they are on par with managing pandemic-related issues as good as any other business.”

But for the majority, the responses to the “what changed” question, were dubious or negative. For example:

“Less face to face, more ‘leave application in the box.’”

“Changed significantly. The time period has changed from the legal 30 days to 60+ days to get a permit. To boot, some building departments have added fees to expedite the process. This is on top of the \$15 to \$22 per \$1,000 building fee. So [the cost of the permit on] my job at \$1,450,000 is \$21,750.”

“You call the county code hot line [but you’re] lucky if you even get a call back. The phone number online is no longer working and has been changed.”

For some jurisdictions, there has clearly been a learning curve. As jurisdictions adapted to policies initiated during the pandemic, practices that were at first shaky have improved and even resulted in efficiencies baked into a new way of conducting business. As one respondent explained: “Initially after the first lockdown, everything was a mess. A lot of things were moved online eventually and the processes were made better. The building department has



2 Building Permit Application Requirements

- Fill out the permit application completely and verify that all information, including the full address, is accurate. Incomplete applications or application packages shall not be accepted.
- The scope and total cost of all proposed construction is required to be documented on the application.
- The application must include the correct parcel control number (PCN) for the location address. *The parcel control number can be obtained by accessing the Property Appraiser Public Access website .*
- A copy of the recorded Warranty Deed must be submitted with the application package if the Property Owner is a new owner.
- All relevant contractors must be registered and in good standing with the City of Westlake prior to permit issuance.
- A digital (.pdf) copy of the completed application, plans, surveys, and all supporting documents must be submitted **via email** to building@gov.com prior to hard copy submittal. See following page for a list of required documents.

3 SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

- Initial Submittal**
- For **Rapid Online Service Intake (ROSI)** users - Immediately after scheduling a timepoint, please upload your files at the [ROSI FTP webpage](#).
 - For all other users - Within two business days of your intake appointment, upload your files in a single folder at the [Uploading Your Project Files](#) webpage. Place all files on the root folder; do not use subfolders.
- Resubmittal/Revisions** - Follow the instructions at the [Resubmittal/Revision Service](#) webpage.
- FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS**
1. **PDF or PDF/A** - Export documents as PDF or PDF/A, compatible with Adobe Acrobat Version 9.0 or higher.
 - **Exported PDFs are required for most projects** - A PDF exported from the native file (not a scan saved as a PDF) is required for most projects. Scans are accepted only for supporting documents and for single-family additions or alterations; in these cases, scan at 150dpi minimum and 300dpi maximum for acceptable legibility and file size.
 - **Text-searchable** - For scanned or non-searchable PDFs, apply Optical Character Recognition to the document.
 - **Separate sub-trades** - Create a separate PDF for each sub-trade or plan review item; see page 2.
 - **Supporting documents** - Save calculations, forms, cut sheets, etc. as separate files from the plan sheets.
 - **Drawings** - All layer information must be removed and flattened into a single layer.

While changes have not been implemented in all jurisdictions, many are saying goodbye to submitting applications in person and conducting over-the-counter plan reviews (1). For better or worse, many jurisdictions have switched over to a digital permit application and plan review process. Examples of the requirements for each are shown (2, 3). While this is perceived by many as an improvement that’s supposed to save driving, wait times, and parking hassles to visit the building department, there is a steep learning curve for others, and the new processes don’t always save time. Builders say the document submission requirements can be overly complex and claim some building departments are hiring staff with more computer skills than building knowledge.

become much more responsive to email communication and that continues to this day. It used to be that I would never communicate with the building staff in any way but in person. But now I trust that they will respond to my email and they consistently do.”

Comments went beyond reflections on bringing communications with building departments into the 21st century. Almost 70% of responses to the question about what changed during the pandemic mentioned a significant digital transformation to the code enforcement process, affecting applications for building permits, plan review, and building inspections, in particular.

Permit applications that must now be submitted online were mentioned most often when specific process changes were described. These are some examples:

“A little more online presence and no physical applications

accepted. With a little learning curve I believe the changes are faster and permanent.”

“We couldn’t go into the building at first, just leave and pick up paperwork in drop box outside. Then after 5-6 months they let us go into lobby for same. Now we do all the permitting with PDFs online. They still do drop offs, but it’s much easier to do online.”

“Most all applications and reviews are handled in an electronic format (no more walk-in paper applications w/ over the counter reviews).”

“Permits are significantly harder to pull, demand more requirements with online submissions only and time delays are outrageous.”

Plan review seemed to garner the most negative reviews when specific process changes were described. The biggest complaints

4 3.0 Remote Virtual Inspection Process

Remote Virtual Inspections (RVI) may provide benefits to AHJs and customers alike. In certain circumstances, an RVI may provide a better quality inspection with an increase in efficiency and cost savings. It will increase the efficiency of the inspection process utilizing modern technology. Depending on the loca-



Recommended Practices for Remote Virtual Inspections (RVI)

1.0 Introduction

Protocols for conducting “remote virtual inspections” had been defined by the International Code Council prior to the pandemic. This helped jurisdictions respond quickly at the height of the pandemic to keep officials and workers safe.

concerned overly complex file naming and formatting procedures. Several mentioned jurisdictions not being able to accommodate Apple platforms. But added office time was the most cited issue:

“Plan submission in digital format was required. Like me, reviewing digital plans takes the departments longer than paper plans.”

“No interaction with plan checkers, so they could request items that the code allowed to be changed without recourse.”

“Most of the plan checkers are new hires that [know] little about building. It’s frustrating to have to jump through a lot of hoops and have some kid push back something, delay the process, and take time before you can point out that they are misapplying the code.”

Less onerous than delays, but adding unexpected complexity to the job, at least one instance of this digital transformation has led to a new level of transparency and new challenges in client management: “Electronic submittals, rather than in-person submittals, might be institutionalized. We’ve had a couple of Zoom conferences with plan checkers that the client heard about and wanted to be included on. We never had clients asking to come along to over-the-counter plan checks.”

Inspections. Changes to the inspection process during the pandemic garnered the most favorable feedback from building professionals. Remarkably, this phase of the code enforcement process was cited most often as the one returning to an in-person process, though not in every case.

“Most inspections were conducted remotely, using photographs and videos submitted by contractor.”

“Photo inspection was more widely accepted and seems to be staying that way.”

“Everything became electronic—pulling permits, scheduling inspections, inspectors did not go into projects so we would take photos, all paperwork was electronic. The City put a lot of money into the new system so electronic means continues. Saves time actually.”

The rapid operational shift by some building departments owes enormous credit to the International Code Council, which was quick to pull together and distribute protocols for “remote virtual inspection” that the organization had been working on for some time before the pandemic. (These protocols are available from the ICC in “Recommended Practices for Remote Virtual Inspections” as a free download at iccsafe.org; see excerpt, above.)

Timeline. Digital changes have not necessarily made the process quicker. Among responses that mentioned the timeline of the code process, more said that it has become longer than celebrated the process being shorter. These examples give some idea of the range:

“Inspections could take up to 10 days to be conducted and pushed back on the day of the inspection.”

“Extended time a lot. Over the counter permits now take 2-3 weeks.”

“Time of permitting 60 to 90 days and inspections some times 10-days out and things fail for no code violations [but] things the inspector [didn’t] like.”

“Longer review times allowed for the plan review (from submission of permit for new construction to the issuance of a building permit) was and still is excessive, about 3 to 4 weeks.”

“It went all online. Which in some ways was nice, no more waiting in line downtown. But sometimes it took a lot longer with emails to get simple details on the same page, which [when in person] used to take 5 seconds.”

CODE-OFFICIAL RESPONSE

While the responses from building professionals tended to be critical of recent changes in the code-enforcement process, the responses from building officials deserve attention, too. They were balanced, and while self-ratings were at the high end of the scale, the comments reflected the pressure officials have had to endure.



As government entities, they have been subject to pandemic protocols that few in the building community have had to abide by. Village, town, county, and state offices have been under a microscope by politicians, the media, and the public much more intensively than the building community (though no one who was “essential” escaped scrutiny from some critical corners). While it can be argued (as many respondents suggested) that some code officials seem to savor the role of petty official, many others embrace their role as educators and public safety advocates.

One deputy building official and plans examiner’s response merits reporting, we think, because the level of detail reveals the complexity in accommodating a wide range of demands and setting a high bar on what the building code enforcement process could be:

“For several years I had been trying to shift my department to a digital plan review system, but the organizational inertia was difficult to deal with. With the onset of COVID and the sudden desire to shift to a contactless permitting system, I was able to implement a digital plan review system in a matter of days. We no longer accept paper plans except in extreme circumstances (e.g., applicant has no computer access and plans are hand drawn). Switching away from paper has cut the time spent on individual reviews almost in half in markup time and freed our permit coordinator from digitizing final plan sets. Now applicants email us the application and plan sets and we do our reviews and email the plans and permit card back for the applicant to have printed. Fire sprinkler permits still have to be paper copies, because my Fire Marshal won’t upgrade

While there were a lot of complaints about it, there were just as many acknowledgments that the building code process is important to ensure the safety of occupants and the structural integrity of buildings. Respondents especially praised inspectors who were more interested in education than in enforcement.

his screen size. We briefly tried video inspections, but our cell coverage is dreadful and it was easy enough to put limits on contact that still allowed for in-person inspections. These changes will not revert. We are upgrading our 20-plus-year-old permitting software to a system that includes a permitting portal to smooth intake and issuance of permit documents.

“Our goal is that a person should be able to sit down in their backyard, imagine a new deck, draw it up on some third-party free deck software, submit it, and receive the approved plans, all from their phone. No trips to city hall required, and for the paper plan set on site, they can send the documents to a print store and have only the hard copies they need printed.”

GENERAL CODE ISSUES

Shifting away from changes in process, we also asked respondents about their overall impression of the building codes and what they felt needed to be improved. About 63% of respondents used positive terms, mostly recognizing the need for “safety” and “public health” (stairs, guardrails, and sewer were mentioned most frequently here), or cited simply “no issues.”

Around 16% of respondents remarked that building codes were “minimal standards,” which they tried to exceed. Words related to “inconsistent” were the ones used the most frequently to criticize the building code in general.

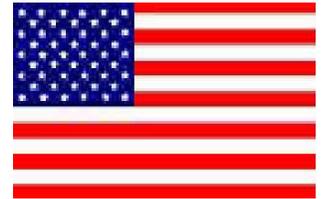
Only 6% responded “no comment” or ranted. Few of our survey participants seemed to object to the intent, only the means.

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		They have served as our primary leaders and in other capacities since 1992.		
		Please thank them for their service when you have a chance.		

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