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# The New Municipal Lawyer's 10+ Essentials

Practical Aspects of  
Serving as a City  
Attorney



# Agenda

1. Navigation
2. Socks, Headlamp, Bug Spray, Shelter
3. First Aid Supplies
4. Cell Phone
5. Food & Water
6. Swiss Army Knife
7. Sunscreen & Hat
8. A Good Book

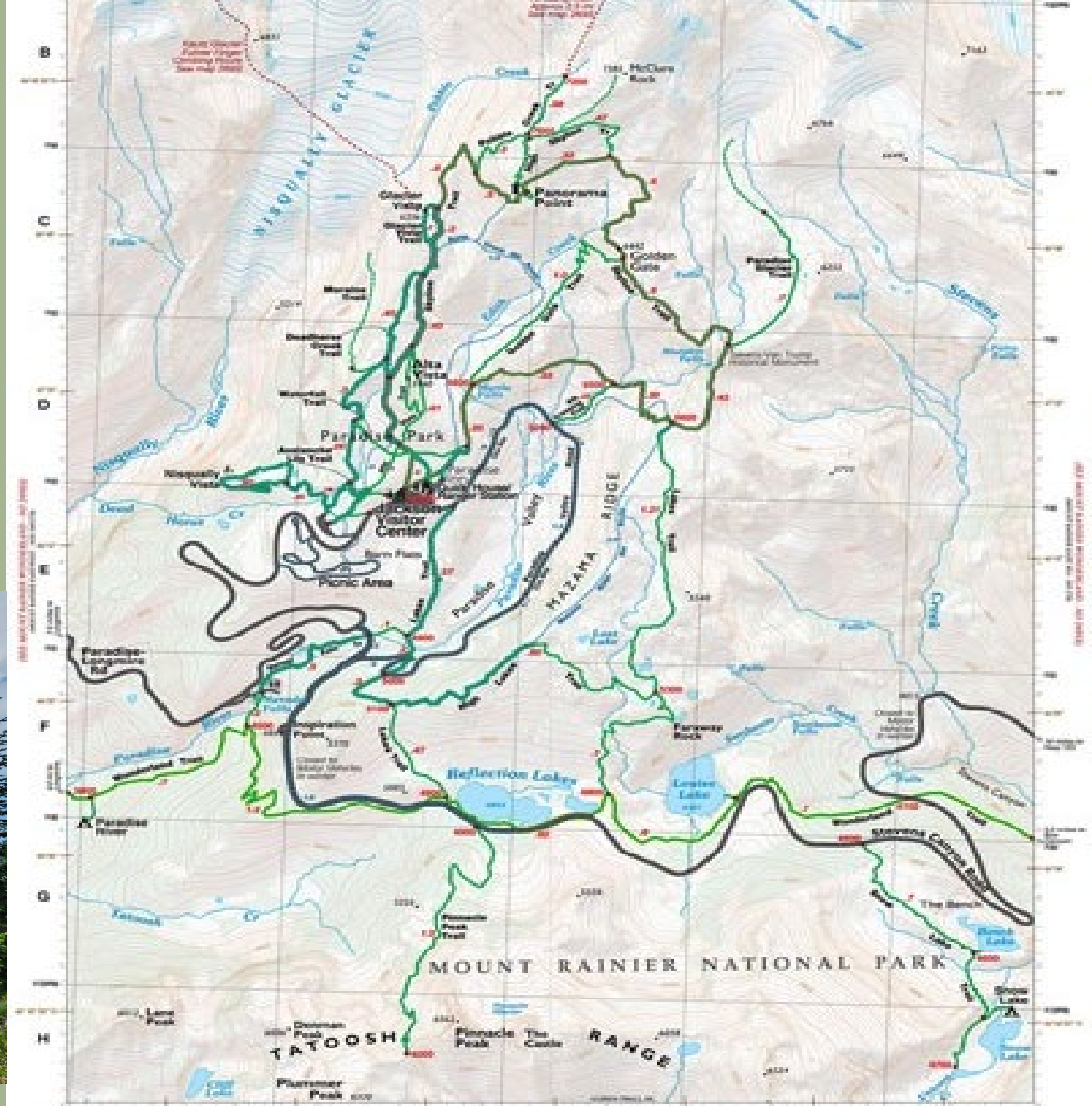


# Navigation

More than just navigating your way around being a new attorney or in a new field.

Make sure you don't get lost.

If you do get lost, make sure you can find your way back.



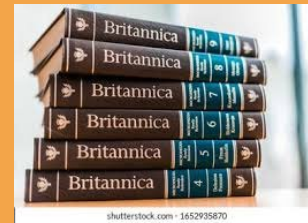
# You are not all-knowing.

(AND THEY KNOW IT)

A great thing about being a city attorney is that there is a ton of variety in your job. But that means that you are also going to be asked questions that you do not know the answers to (often). You can't know everything off the top of your head—and your city staff and city council do not expect you to immediately know every answer to every question posed. Use your resources—MRSC, WSAMA, WAPA, AWC, and other groups are great sources of knowledge. You probably are not the only person dealing with a particular issue. Reach out!



Municipal law is complex and there is a wide range of issues and practice areas that are covered.



It's impossible to answer every question immediately—you can't know all the things off of the top of your head.



It's ok to tell staff and council that you will need time to research the answer to a question.



During council meetings it's ok to tell council you need time, but give them a date on which you will have an answer.



# Be brave! Be strong! Be you!

YOU CAN DO HARD THINGS

It's hard to walk into a room of senior staff members, a meeting with the City Manager and developers, or in a City Council meeting, especially for new city attorneys. You might not always know the answers, but there are some things you can do to make less intimidating. Remember, you earned this job through hard work, dedication, and skills (and that law degree and bar exam).



Preparation is key. I cannot stress this enough—be prepared.

Always have your sources and the law close by.



Know your audience and tailor your comments or presentation appropriately.

**“Be yourself;  
everyone else is  
already taken.”**

—OSCAR WILDE

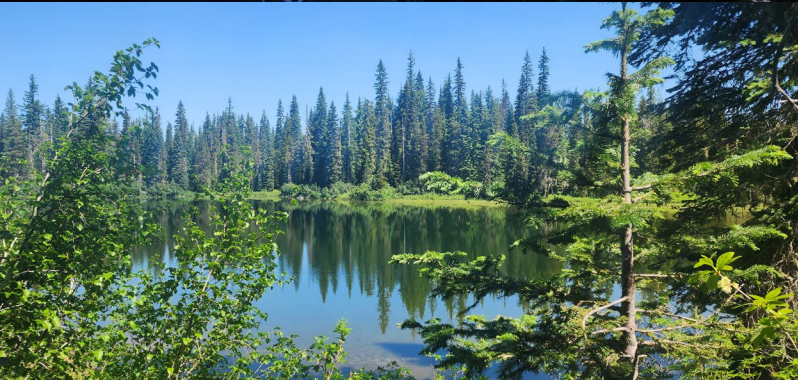
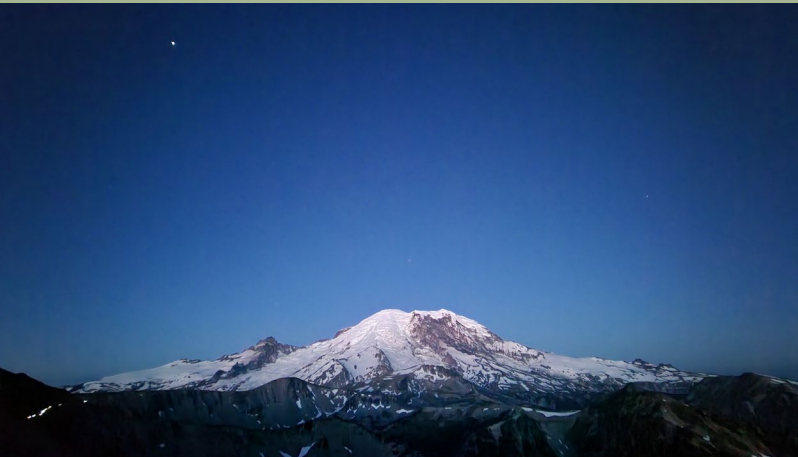


# Socks, Headlamp, Bug Spray, Shelter

Be prepared for any situation.

Plan to stay the night, in the rain.

Make sure the bugs don't get you.





# Manage expectations

AND EXCEED THEM

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Ask whether a project has a specific deadline or timeframe.

When you need time to research provide a date on which you will be able to provide your advice.

If you have other attorneys in your office delegate (and let staff know who they will be working with).

Set yourself up for success—be realistic about your capacity.

When possible, provide advice earlier than expected or turn around projects quickly.



# First Aid Supplies

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You never know when you might have to triage a situation.

A scenic view of a calm lake surrounded by dense evergreen forests. In the background, a mountain peak with patches of snow or light-colored rock is visible under a blue sky with wispy clouds. A small, mossy log floats in the foreground water.







## Emergency? Probably not.

Staff may come to you with something that they say is an emergency. Very few things are an actual emergency where advice must be given immediately.

Take a breath, evaluate the situation, and determine how fast your advice must be given. Taking that breath also will help with perspective and clarity on an issue that is urgent.

Don't jump to conclusions or decisions—but prioritize work, if possible, to support staff who may be under pressure to provide information.

# Cell Phone and Camera

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Observe your surroundings with an eye for details.

Get all the angles.

You almost always have a chance to take another photo if your thumb ends up in the first one.





# Stay neutral

POLITICS IS NOT YOUR FRIEND

A lot goes on behind the scenes at a city. Divisions might have different ideas about how to provide a service to the community. There may be differences in opinion on how to interpret a code section. Departments might disagree as to who is supposed to enforce a particular ordinance. A neutral legal department is a successful and respected legal department.



Use your ordinances to guide your decisions.



Don't get stuck in internal battles or choose sides—your side is with the law.



Actively listen to all sides—be engaged to understand the issues.



Policy is for the politicians—let the Council make policy.

# Mistakes will be made

HONESTY, AS ALWAYS, IS THE  
BEST POLICY

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**IT'S NOT HOW  
WE MAKE  
MISTAKES, BUT  
HOW WE  
CORRECT THEM  
THAT  
DEFINES US.**

RACHEL WOLCHIN  
THEGOODVIBE.CO

Everyone makes mistakes! You are not a terrible attorney if you do.

Mistakes are almost always fixable.

Admit the mistake, and have a solution to fix it.

Own it and tell all affected parties--and sooner rather than later.

Give grace to other staff who make mistakes that come to the legal department for solutions.



# Food and Water

Always have extra for sharing, both with your hiking buddies, rangers, or strangers you meet along the way. Others might need your extra supplies.



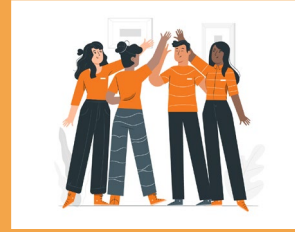


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# Connections are key.

## RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

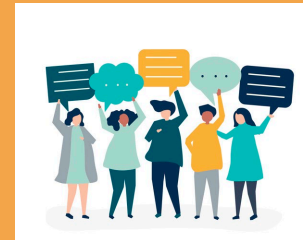
Municipal lawyers work closely with people every day. Your ability to create and maintain relationships is important to your success. Relationships also build trust within your department, with city staff, with the council, and with the community. Trust builds credibility. When the legal department is credible, there is a high likelihood that the Council will follow your advice and make decisions that are legally defensible, keeping your client out of court.



Treat your staff and City personnel as teammates.



City staff, including your paralegals and legal assistants are a wealth of knowledge—listen and learn.



The public deserves respect, regardless of whether it is reciprocated.



Same with the media, even if they misquoted you last week.

Be kind to others—there are a lot of staff members with different levels of knowledge doing their best. Your help and support can mean a lot.



# Swiss Army Knife

Your trusty Swiss Army Knife has all kinds of tools you might need. Some you might not even know you needed!

Know the tools at your disposal.





## Find a trusted peer.

Find another municipal attorney that you can call to talk through issues and bounce ideas off of. This person need not be a “mentor” but rather a trusted peer.

WSAMA is a great place to meet other municipal attorneys with a wide range of experience. Use this time to meet new people and make connections.

All lawyers were new lawyers at one time in their career—we are here to help, so even if you don’t have a personal connection, don’t hesitate to reach out!

Be a trusted peer to someone else down the road.



# Baseball Hat and Sunscreen

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Enjoy the sunny days safely.

Rep your favorite team or organization.

Make shade, don't throw it.





# Be a champion of your client.

SHOW SOME LOVE TO YOUR  
CITY



Be proud of your City!

Attend City sponsored events  
when you can.

Take care in posting on social  
media

Support City initiatives when  
in public.

Join a community service  
organization or get involved in  
some other way.



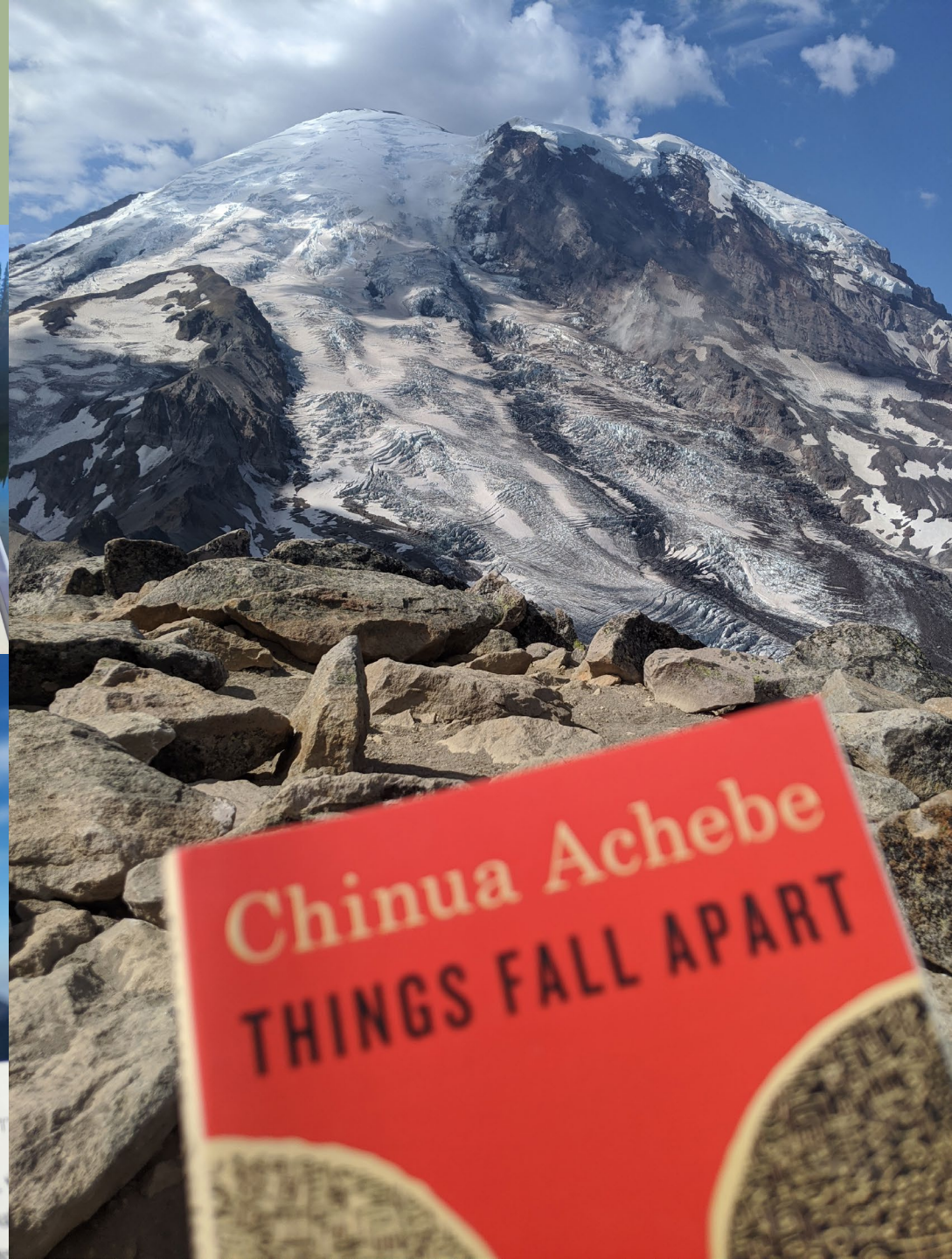
# Your Current Read

Choose how you want to enjoy  
your hike.

Enjoy the views.

Take time for yourself.

Leave no trace.

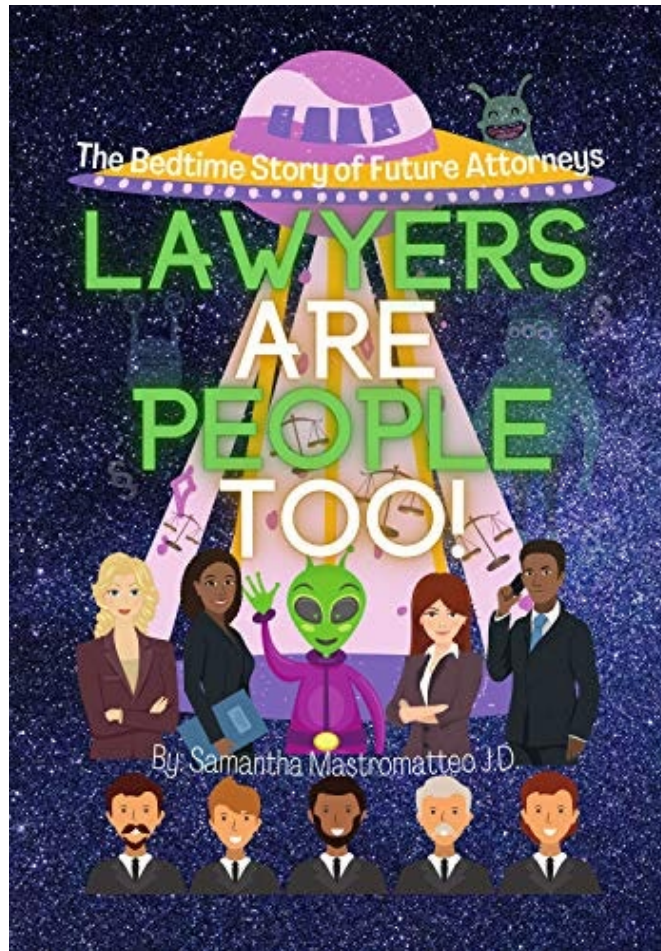




# Be all you can be.

YOU ARE MORE THAN  
JUST A LAWYER!

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People will see you as the person who says “no” a lot, or the person who sends back documents with a lot of redlining. Don’t always just be that person.

If you are comfortable doing so, share some of your life with your colleagues. Travel, music, food, books, and hobbies are good topics to find connections.

Remember you are also a counselor at law, so will be called on to also express opinions on projects, policies and other non-legal matters. But use caution!

Participate in office social activities when you feel comfortable doing so. These activities help build camaraderie and a sense of teamwork.



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# Remember your Why

## PUBLIC SERVICE IS A CALLING

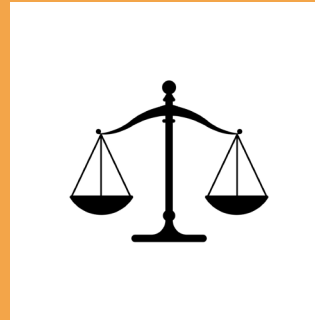
Being a municipal attorney can be overwhelming sometimes—especially if you are the sole city attorney for a community. Issues are difficult, the public can be critical, council members can be demanding, and it can get frustrating. But this work is a calling—public service is a calling. We get to help shape policy, make systemic changes, and be leaders in our communities.

“Public service is a noble calling, and we need [people] of character to believe in their communities, in their states, and in their country.” President George H.W. Bush, 41<sup>st</sup> President of the United States



All aspects of our jobs are beneficial to the community in one way or another.

Municipal attorneys often are consulted on important community issues such as equity, addressing homelessness, crime prevention and economic development.



Prosecutors work with victims of crimes to refer them to supportive services, get them justice, make them safe, and obtain restitution. They also seek justice for community members and keep the community safe.

**Happiness comes  
from **WHAT** we do.**

**Fulfillment comes  
from **WHY** we do it.**

*-Simon*

We all can help build a better future for our communities and residents as part of city staff.



# Take Time for You

Self care is not selfish

Stress, anxiety, frustration—these are all real emotions you are going to feel during your time as a municipal lawyer

Find something fun or relaxing in your life to balance the emotions that come with our jobs

Give yourself grace—you aren't going to be your best self everyday and neither is anyone else

Municipal law is amazing, and interesting, and fun, and challenging, but it can also be hard, and exhausting, and no fun at all. Find balance where you can.



# Questions?

Contact information

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**“To me, a lawyer is basically the person that knows the rules of the country. We’re all throwing the dice, playing the game, moving our pieces around the board, but if there is a problem the lawyer is the only person who has read the inside of the top of the box.”  
—Jerry Seinfeld**

The views expressed herein are solely my own and not the views of the City of Yakima.



# Sara's 10+ Essentials

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Here's what is in my pack for every hike

1. Paper topo map and compass (Green Trails Maps are amazing)
2. First Aid Kit (include Ibuprofen, ACE bandage, Neosporin with band-aids, gauze, disposable gloves and hand sanitizer, etc.)
3. Matches and fire starter.
4. Gloves (winter gloves or leather gloves depending on the season)
5. Fleece Jacket and extra socks
6. Lots of Food (granola bars, grapes, nuts, cheese, m&ms, apple, crackers)
7. Water and Purifying Straw for emergencies (I usually pack about 3L but you can also pack less depending on length or if you want to purify along the way)
8. Sunscreen
9. Bug Spray (I use Deep Woods Off wipes)
10. Fully charged Cell Phone (which is also my camera) and Back up Cell with SOS (you could also use a Garmin InReach)
11. Book
12. Survival Bracelet, Whistle, and Multiple carabiners.





# Favorite Hikes

Hikes featured in this Presentation (see [wta.org](http://wta.org) for more info)

1. Dege Peak, Mt. Rainier National Park
2. Shriner Lookout, Mt. Rainier National Park
3. Mt. Fremont Lookout, Mt. Rainier National Park
4. Myrtle Falls, Mt. Rainier National Park
5. High Lakes, Gifford Pinchot National Forest
6. Blue Lake, Gifford Pinchot National Forest
7. Frenchman Coulee, Quincy
8. White Bluffs North, Hanford Reach National Monument
9. Berkeley Park, Mt. Rainier National Park
10. Snow Lake, Snoqualmie Pass Summit (Alpental)
11. Wildflower Trail/Snow Mountain Ranch, Yakima
12. Otter Falls, Middle Fork Snoqualmie
13. Tieton River Nature Trail, Naches
14. Sheep Lake, PCT Chinook Pass North
15. Crystal Mountain Ski Area
16. Third Burroughs, Mt. Rainier National Park
17. Naches Peak Loop Trail, Chinook Pass
18. Skyline Loop, Mt. Rainier National Park
19. Covel Creek and Angel Falls, Gifford Pinchot National Forest
20. Bumping Lake Snow Park, Wenatchee National Forest

