

# HUNKERING DOWN

BY JOSIE FAASS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It seems like we live in a different world than we did when I wrote to you all just last month. The markets have been fluctuating wildly, leaving even the professionals unsure of what comes next. We've all become (perhaps overly) familiar with the term "social distancing." And toilet paper is now one of the nation's hottest commodities. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered life as we know it in fundamental, and in all likelihood, lasting ways. As you can imagine, RSF's tiny corner of the world has felt the effects, although so far in a blessedly mild fashion.

For many, the onset of this pandemic has translated into immediate economic hardship, in addition to all of the health-related concerns and effects. Service industry workers and businesses like restaurants and hair salons are already feeling the financial squeeze acutely, and significant actions must be taken by all levels of government to alleviate the strain. At RSF, in contrast, we are fortunate to be able to provide a stable employment situation for our staff, and are fully committed to doing so. As a member of staff, I can say that we all feel incredibly lucky to be in this position.

The RSF office began working remotely on March 13th and there is no end in sight for that arrangement. In fact, workers throughout the city of New York (and many other places as well) find themselves suddenly asked to keep their productivity up while confined to their homes and apartments. That confinement is, of course, necessary and the benefits far outweigh the

costs, but there certainly are some costs.

For my city dwelling staff, confinement means limited access to the outdoor and community amenities that make places like Manhattan so appealing to begin with, and without those amenities, the Lilliputian size of the average apartment becomes hard to ignore. I live in a rural part of New Jersey, so I am fortunate that I have a yard and access to virtually empty neighborhood streets, both of which mean that getting outside for fresh air and exercise are still possible. But I also have kids - a two year old and a ten year old - and like many, many parents, am struggling to find a balance that allows me to provide them with the care and entertainment they need while still getting my work done. It is not easy, and anyone who's had a Zoom call with me recently has probably had to endure unsolicited monologues from my toddler or caught snippets of whatever episode of SpongeBob my older son is watching.

RSF's move to Princeton is also on hold until such time as it is safe to proceed. While there is no way around this, and in the scheme of things it is little more than an inconvenience, the logistics



My boys, making the most of social distancing

involved have been, and are continuing to be, pretty daunting. C'est la vie.

Kevin Frech, our Full Stack Geospatial Analyst, is making lemonade from lemons and working extra hours on the GIS map we're building that will allow users to manipulate the property tax ratios on land versus buildings.

On our most recent planning call we talked about things like the classes and transparency of the color ramps, which basically means we're past the fundamentals and are now concentrating on how to make the finished project as visually appealing and intuitive for end users as possible.

And as an organization, RSF is doing some serious thinking about how our ideals and knowledge could help stem the economic toll of the pandemic and speed the eventual recovery. This issue contains a policy statement we circulated recently. Please be on the lookout for an emailed call to action in the coming days - we certainly hope you'll join us in urging our elected officials to finance the economic stimulus by taxing bads, not goods.

I hope this note finds you all safe and healthy, if a bit bored in your homes. I hope that our elected officials heed the advice of experts and take the steps necessary to guide our nation through this difficult time. And like many, I feel a profound gratitude and respect for our healthcare workers, on whose expertise and selflessness we are reliant everyday, but most especially in this time of crisis.

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