

# Town of Hamilton may be moved

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HAMILTON — The feasibility of physically moving the Town of Hamilton to a location safe from flooding will be the subject of a preliminary study and a town meeting next month, conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The meeting, scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 13, 1982 in the Hamilton Gymnasium, will provide residents of the Hamilton area with information pertaining to preliminary studies presently underway by the Corps, according to Walter Farrar, chief of the Regional Planning Section of the Seattle District Office.

The week prior to the public meeting, an opinion survey will be conducted for the Corps, to gather opinions and comment on the proposal. The meeting itself will feature an informational session and responses to questions by officials from the Corps and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), "to find out what people really think," Farrar said.

The idea of moving the Town of Hamilton is being considered as an alternative flood protection measure and as a means of keeping the town together as a unit, he said.

"If the town is in agreement that they would like to remain as a town together, I think that relocation would be a good alternative," he said.

Hamilton Mayor Tom Hooper said the present feeling he gets among the town population of some 280 people is "50-50."

"The way the town council feels, it is kind of leaning toward it," he said of the idea. "Without knowing the particulars or the cost it makes it kind of difficult to say. If we have some more high water, the trend may change."

Hooper agreed that something must be done in the town to protect property from regular flood waters, citing that Hamilton was "hit pretty hard" in 1979 and 1980.

A key to getting a feeling for the opinions of the town will be the survey, Hooper said, adding that he hopes to reach each resident of the town for their input on the proposal.

The alternative of relocation may have advantages over other proposals including a levee system and other

flood protection measures, Farrar said.

In reference to a levee system, Farrar said the levee would have an adverse impact on the water surface elevation, raising it by as much as ten feet causing problems upriver and across the river from the present town location. The levee could also create a "sense of security that may not be well founded" he said, citing that should the levee fail, the results would be "catastrophic."

Another flood protection measure, raising houses up above the flood level to minimize flood damage, could create problems due to the depth and velocity of the water resulting in people isolated in their homes and accompanying access problems to those homes as well as the possibility of debris lodging against the raised homes, causing movement or further damage problems.

Concerns have also been voiced to the Corps by town officials, Farrar said, over the potential that the FEMA buy out program could gradually eliminate the town.

The FEMA buy out program offers to purchase homes in a floodplain area that have been damaged repeatedly by flood waters, at a market value with the stipulation that the acreage be returned to its natural state and it never be used for structural purposes, according to FEMA official Carl Cook.

The offer to buy out was made to residents in Hamilton, with some six homeowners taking up the option and selling their homes to FEMA, Cook said. Four such homes were sold at a public auction last Saturday, for the structures to be removed from the site and the property returned to a natural state.

"Concerns have been raised that as people sell their homes to FEMA, people will just leave the area and there will be no town of Hamilton any longer," Farrar said. "I feel there is a good, strong community spirit there and that they would desire to keep the town together."

Farrar stressed that the present situation involves a "very, very preliminary study being made," he said.

"This is not something that is going to happen overnight. Nothing will happen within the next several years, it is



This file photo of Hamilton was taken during the floods of late December in 1980.

years away," Farrar said. "This just is an alternative that looks like it has promise if the town people are interested."

Hamilton Town Councilman John Smith also stressed the time factor that would be involved in implementing such a plan which may have been misunderstood by some residents, he said.

"The impression that has been left in the town is that it will happen this summer," Smith said, citing that he is "pessimistic" as to whether or not the

move could ever actually happen or the funds be found to finance it.

Should the town ultimately be interested in such an alternative, some 80 percent of the cost of relocation would be assumed by the Corps with the remaining 20 percent paid by the Town of Hamilton, Farrar said. The end result could be "that the cost may be so high that it would not be cost effective," he said.

Congressman Al Swift, D-Everett, echoed the time factor involved and

said he would support the decision of the residents of Hamilton.

"The Corps moves at a glacial pace at its fastest," Swift said. "Even if the people of Hamilton decided they were interested, we're probably talking years, not months."

"I don't think any outside group should tell the people of Hamilton what to do," he said. "What my view would be is whatever the people of Hamilton want and I would help them every step of the way."

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