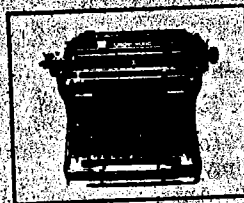


Byline, Argus

Comment & Opinion



Save front row for local officials at flood insurance meeting

The most critical observers of flood control efforts by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) contend the agency's construction restrictions will ultimately "turn the lights out in Skagit Valley."

FEMA defenders, on the other hand, argue that it would be irresponsible for local and federal officials to do anything less than imposing strict land-use policies in an area renowned for its periodic floods.

Regardless of which argument is more valid, the fact remains that the social, economic and political effects of FEMA officials' activities merit more than the nervous shuffle, hem and haw demonstrated by public officials representing this valley.

While pressure mounts with the approach of a flood regulation compliance deadline for Mount Vernon officials, a set of recommendations from a hard-working group of Skagit County volunteers gathers dust on a shelf somewhere.

Despite over a year of work on their report, members of the county commissioner-appointed Skagit Valley Flood Control Committee have never received the active endorsement their report deserves from the county commissioners.

Meanwhile, elected officials in Mount Vernon and Burlington have continued to stand in the shadows as FEMA insistence on the flood control issue intensifies.

As noted on the front page of this issue of The Argus, FEMA officials will visit Mount Vernon Thursday night for a public hearing to explain the federal flood insurance program.

The 7 p.m. hearing, which is open to the public, deserves a full house of local citizens.

Will Mount Vernon and Burlington someday become "cities on stilts?" Will strict flood control regulations on building renovation projects turn parts of Burlington and Mount Vernon into ghetto-like areas? Is any action short of full endorsement of FEMA's proposals irresponsible to citizens of this valley?

These are the types of questions that are rising to the surface as FEMA compliance deadlines approach.

These are the types of questions that should be addressed in the public forum Thursday night at Mount Vernon City Hall.

Front row seats should be reserved for elected officials who owe their constituents more answers than they have provided to date on the flood control issue. — S.H.B.

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