

# Flood elevation audit possible

by John Draper

MOUNT VERNON — The 100-year flood elevations designated for Mount Vernon could be double-checked by a private engineering firm if the city can come up with "valid" complaints against them, Chuck Steele, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) official, reported recently.

But Steele added such a double-checking would not alter the July 1 deadline now facing the city.

FEMA officials have told city officials they have until this date to write an ordinance regulating floodplain construction or be kicked out of the federal flood insurance program.

The deadline came after FEMA of-

## Flood insurance hearing June 3

MOUNT VERNON — The City Council here will hold the second public hearing on the federal flood insurance program this Friday, June 3 at 7:30 p.m. at Hillcrest Lodge.

Ron Maynock, city building official, said he will present information on alternative insurance plans for the citizens of Mount Vernon.

officials determined Mount Vernon had not been enforcing such regulations as part of participation in the beginning phase of the federal flood insurance program.

Basically, the floodplain construction regulation required by FEMA is an elevation of all new or substantially-improved structures above the 100-year flood level.

At a public hearing last month, the Army Corps of Engineers figures used to estimate this level around the city came under fire. Of particular concern to some were the flood elevations on the west side, some as high as nine feet.

Steele said if these personal complaints were documented, FEMA could ask a private engineering firm to look over the Corps data.

A "valid" complaint, he said, would be an extraordinary 100-year flood depth.

For example, at the last public hearing several citizens stood up and complained that the Corps figures showed a 13-foot 100-year flood depth on parts of the west side. Steele said this concerned him so he called up City Engineer John Wiseman for verification. Wiseman told him claims of a 13-foot flood depth were exaggerated, he said.

If FEMA does send the Corps data to a private engineering firm, the results could conceivably be different, according to Don Nelson, county flood engineer.

"Hydrology is not a pure science," he said, adding that if an engineer starts his study with a different set of assumptions he could come to a different set of conclusions.

Even if such double-checking is done, however, the city will still have to adopt its floodplain construction ordinance by July 1, Steele said. He noted, however, that if the Corps data was in question the city would not have to go by its figures in requiring construction elevation.

FEMA rules require cities participating in the federal flood insurance program to use the "best available authoritative data," he said.

The Argus has learned that FEMA has asked a Washington, D.C. consulting firm to look over the Corps data, but Steele said the firm's study will not change the flood elevations.

He said the firm, Dames and Moore, will be using topographical maps obtained from the City of Mount Vernon and county maps obtained from the county Public Works Department to better determine the elevation of the land.

The topographical maps for the west side used by the Corps were done at large intervals, he said. As a result, the ground elevations designated for much of the west side are approximations.

He said having the Corps data checked like this is "routine."