

# FEMA flood figures please local city officials

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MOUNT VERNON — City officials in Mount Vernon and Burlington seem at least somewhat pleased with recent flood figures released by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Elevations mandated for new construction in Mount Vernon are much lower than the controversial figure released last year and Burlington is no longer in a regulated floodway.

Chuck Steele, regional director of FEMA, clarified figures and assessments of the federal government's final flood analysis to a group of municipal officials in Skagit County late Monday.

The figures pertain to instructions to cities allowing for construction in potential flood areas.

Cities along the Skagit River must now revise their flood management ordinances to reflect the new figures in order for residents to remain in the federal flood insurance program.

Since Mount Vernon City Engineer John Wiseman requested a re-examination of FEMA's flood elevation figures last year, the agency has cooperated with the Army Corps of Engineers in "refining" those figures.

"We had sent up a trial balloon — something the committee ended up with and the Corps felt was reasona-

ble," Steele said. "But in discussions with officials (in Skagit County) and a further examination, we felt the product could be better."

"We did additional studies and computer runs and came up with refined information which resulted in several changes for Mount Vernon and Burlington."

The major change regarding Burlington is that the city is no longer a floodway to be regulated by FEMA. However, the natural floodway remains and city officials must work with FEMA in revising Burlington's flood management ordinance to accommodate potential flooding conditions.

The ability for water to pass through the city must not be hindered, Steele said. But FEMA will not dictate that nothing can be built in the natural floodway areas of Burlington, he said.

Along with the absence of an official floodway designation, no density requirements will be mandated by FEMA and building elevations have decreased since the original figures were released.

"This helps Burlington, but it doesn't solve all of our problems. We still have to figure out how to deal with potential flooding," City Supervisor Stan Kersey said.

Kersey said the city would be revis-

ing its flood management ordinance within the year.

"We will want to see the official report on this before we take any action," he said.

Steele's comments are contrary to the information FEMA Engineer Larry Basich delivered to the Skagit Council of Governments last week.

In his presentation, Basich essentially had dealt a blow to the proposed Cascade Mall when he said the area

around Gages Slough would have to be free of encroachments.

Steele said "miscommunication" had occurred and that Basich was referring to the "unofficial" floodway.

"It was never our intent to say that no building could take place. However, the city will need to look at their low spots — such as Gages Slough — in order to preserve existing (natural)

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