

River widening needed in parts, report reveals

By JOHN MITCHAM

Mount Vernon Mayor Herman I. Hanson today released to the Skagit Valley Herald a copy of a six-page letter to State Department of Water Resources outlining the findings, facts and conclusions of a 19-cross section engineering study of the Skagit River in a 10-mile course through the city.

The survey was conducted by Gwynne D. LeGro, city engineer. The survey was made at a cost of \$3,955 to the city. The report is signed by LeGro.

The letter consists mostly of technical explanations of how the survey was conducted, methods used, findings and conclusions of the study's hydraulic requirements along the face of Blumberg Island.

At four points on the west bank of the river south of the West Division Street bridge, excavations of river bank are recommended. Excavations would vary from 57 feet, 60 feet, 70 feet to 98 feet. Some 5,396,000 cubic feet of dirt, rocks and gravel would be excavated totally if the project is undertaken. The survey was conducted using a flood volume of 120,000 cubic foot seconds as a design basis. LeGro points out a 10-foot river should average 500 feet in width in order to carry the flood stage volumes in a dike-free flood plain. West bank excavations are based on that assumption.

LeGro also points out the 500-foot width, which flairs to 800 feet downstream from the face of Blumberg Island, should provide an additional carrying capacity at flood stage to allow for landfill operations in the area west of Blumberg Island on land purchased by the city (the Johnson property and the Ray Ropes estate) for the purpose of future sanitary landfill for garbage disposal.

In order to the study the State Department of Water Resources had indicated a reluctance to issue further landfill permits on the flood plain area.

LeGro, in the June 20 letter, maintains that the survey-recommended alterations to the west bank, the landfills when completed would mean merely 109 seconds of volume at a 20,000 cubic foot second flood stage, a trifling amount in a major flood situation.

The state and the Army Corps of Engineers concur with LeGro's findings and will issue the sanitary landfill permits to the city, a major problem is solved. If not,

the city must begin soon to search for a sanitary landfill site out of the flood plain area as the end of use of the present garbage dump at Edgewater Park is imminent.

To find such a site at an acceptable cost and without lengthy litigation to overcome objections of nearby residents is proving to be an almost impossible task for many municipalities faced with the problem of finding new dump sites.

Accelerating the need to acquire future landfill sites is the recent ruling of the Northwest Air Pollution Authority banning burning at dumps. Mount Vernon and other area municipalities are operating on a limited-time variance from the NWAPA. When burning ceases early next year, it is expected landfill sites will fill up about twice as fast as they have with burning permitted.

The city fathers of Mount Vernon, with the purchase of the Johnson property and the Ray Ropes estate, had thought they had the problem solved. It had appeared they were farsighted.

The problem arose last year when the state complained the city had not complied with terms of an agreement in cutting back the river bank as outlined when a permit was issued for landfill at the present dump. The state went so far as hinting the present permit might be cancelled.

The city could have apologized and gone ahead with a moderate cutback of the river bank. Mayor Hanson and Engineer LeGro, however, argued a survey of the hydraulic requirements of the river at flood stage should be made. It was hoped such a survey would prove the cutbacks weren't needed. City council members authorized the study.

LeGro, in his letter, said, "In summary, it is our opinion that the hydraulic needs of a satisfactory floodway through the City of Mount Vernon do indeed suggest that the face of Blumberg Island be excavated to the depths indicated."

LeGro has argued repeatedly a cutback without benefit of knowledge gained in a survey could be a waste of time and money. "If we're going to do the job, let's do it right," he said.

It has also been argued the extra money spent in making the larger cutback will still represent a saving if the flood plain landfill sites can be salvaged for their intended use rather than abandon them and be forced to purchase landfill sites out of the flood plain area.