

SKAGIT COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of County Commissioners
FROM: Dave Brookings, Flood Control Engineer
RE: Highway 20 Flood Fight Policy
DATE: December 23, 1991

On December 12, 1991, I called a meeting at the Burlington Fire Hall to discuss our Flood Fight Policy along Highway 20, East of Burlington. Those who were in attendance were as follows:

Ted Banta - Burlington Fire Chief
Tom Sheahan - Director Emergency Services
Pete Walker - Dike District #12
Charles Bennett - Dike District #12
Tom Brown - State Department of Transportation
Wayne Starck - State Department of Transportation
Gary Flatt - Burlington Northern Rail
Larry Kunzler - Concerned Citizen

The minutes for this meeting were as follows:

BROOKINGS: Purpose of this meeting was to pull all the players in and find out what happened along Highway 20 during the flood fighting efforts of 1990.

Envisions several of these type of meetings in the future in order that flood fight policies can be developed.

Regretted making statement at Clear Lake Fire Hall meeting (November 19, 1991) to the effect that landfill and sandbags would not occur along Highway 20 in the future. Felt that this was an uninformed statement. After the November 19, 1991, meeting, Dave Brookings and Tom Sheahan met with Skagit County Chief Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, John Moffat, to discuss the County's authority to perform such flood fight activities along Highway 20. John Moffat made it clear at this meeting that there are two statutes that allows us to flood

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fight as we did in November, 1990.

KUNZLER: Felt that John Moffat should look more closely at the statutes regarding flood fighting. Also, felt that the existing statutes are quite vague and could be interpreted in many different ways.

SHEAHAN: Once the flood events were established as being on their way, all jurisdictions were asked to play. Phone calls came in from property owners north of Highway 20 stating they were about to take on water. Agency folks were told, "We want to stop the water."

Highway 20 was chosen as the place to fight the flood because it is a better highway than Cook Road. In fact, when traffic was diverted to Cook Road there were several accidents.

Agency then asked itself what can we do to stop the water? "We went up on top of the tracks and put up sandbags. We wanted to put more water back into the basin."

Another player that we not mentioned in the press was the high tides at Conway. Feels this high tide contributed to the breaks in the Fir Island dike.

Feels the flood fight effort put no more than 4 to 6 inches of water in the Nookachamps.

Water came across the highway at the culvert at Lafayette Road.

"Gages Slough is where the water should be."

CHIEF BANTA: In 1951 we had a bad flood. After the flood, BNR raised its tracks 16 to 24 inches.

BNR: Probably threw those records away.

BENNETT: The water came over the top of the sandbags around District Line Road. District Line Road is a low spot. The tracks just slow down the water. It doesn't stop the water.

SHEAHAN: One of the things he would like to do is to go out into the Sterling Hill, Lafayette Road, Nookachamps Clear Lake area and fix some permanent markers as to where the flood levels were during the last two floods. Feels we need a better understanding of why the river flows where it does and we can do that if we all work together. Maybe the resolution is on this (Burlington) side of the river or maybe it is a combination of things from both sides.

Feels one of the biggest problems is that the bottom of the river is coming up and the channel cannot handle as much as it did in 1951.

Felt that some flood fighting effort along Highway 20 could take place for a period of time. Related story about farmer in Bow placing sandbags in road to protect his grain bins. Adjacent store owner felt sandbags were forcing water back towards and possibly into his store. Told farmer he could stack sandbags until water was about to go into store then he would have to start taking some bags off temporary dike. Same principle could apply along Highway 20. Needed height information from property owners in order that flood fighting effort could be determined. "Better communications between property owners and county is key to flood fighting effort."

BROOKINGS: It appeared at the time that the fill and sandbags along Highway 20 was the best solution. His major concern is to minimize flood damage.

CHIEF BANTA: Feels flood effects were not felt mostly from Concrete but rather from lower hills such as Cultus Mountain. Also felt that Dike District 12 moving the dikes in the 50's were a contributing factor to the increased water levels in the Sterling Hill, Lafayette Road area.

WALKER: Feels that water in Nookachamps basin (including Sterling Hill, Lafayette Road) is being artificially stored by the BNR bridge. One of the solutions is to clean out under the bridge.

SHEAHAN: Feels that cleaning out Gages Slough is also a long term solution.

BROWN: DOT doesn't want to close Highway 20. Would consider installing "Jersey barrier" in order that the water could be moved to Gages Slough. DOT will also pursue culverts under highway by Gages Slough.

SHEAHAN: Gages Slough needs to be opened up. Plugged in several areas such as Peacock Lane.

BROOKINGS: County currently has ordinance that protects a buffer along Gages Slough although major blockages do exist. City of Burlington has recently developed a study of Gages Slough to improve its existing capacity. County will begin County wide Drainage Plan probably in February.

KUNZLER: Urged the Committee to invite Margaret Fleek, Burlington City Planner, to attend future meetings. Felt that land use planning was a crucial element in developing future

solutions to the Skagit River flooding issue ie. set-back levees.

CANNON: Moved to Burlington in 1957. "Seen it all". Farmed in District Line Road area (Halverson property). Felt that bull dozer action by local farmer contributed to where flood flows go and sloughing of rip-rap.

SHEAHAN: Feels that opening up Gages Slough is most important step.

BROOKINGS: Feels that answers are in two categories, short term and long term. Requested suggestions from players at the table.

Short term include:

Improved flood early warning system;

New gages on the river, specifically the Sedro Woolley Bridge;

Establish "sector people" in the Nookachamps area. Liaison should be set up with Clear Lake Fire Department much the same as it is with the Burlington Fire Department.

Attain flood elevations of property owners in Sterling Hill, Lafayette Road, Nookachamps, Clear Lake communities;

Removing land fill beneath BNR bridge;

Placing culverts under Highway 20 in order to get water into Gages Slough;

Long term include:

Updating and improving the Skagit County Flood Control Management Plan;

Improving Gages Slough as a floodway;

Better land use controls on development;

Setback levees;

Overflow levees and floodway designations for setaside areas to carry flood flows.

DOT: Will not provide hydraulic studies. If the County needs culverts DOT will provide. Just say how large and where.

WALKER: One of the problems the District is faced with, is that

the District's boundaries run all the way up to the hospital. Those people have been paying into the District for several years. They must be provided some kind of protection.

SHEAHAN: Feels that each flood fighting effort in each area must be evaluated on a case by case basis.

BROOKINGS: Suggested players meet again after the first of the year. Will prepare minutes of meeting and contact all for next meeting.

A second meeting will be held in the second week of January.

DB/kb

cc: Rich Medved

Noel Gilbrough, Army Corps of Engineers

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