

Issue Summary and Request from the Flood Policy Advisory Conference
To the
Mount Vernon School Board
August 22, 2007

Summary

New base flood elevation maps for the Skagit Valley are pending. Release of the preliminary maps is expected within the next two months. As we all know, the Skagit flood risk is serious; however, the current flood risk analysis is biased high due to overestimation of the magnitude of the historic, unrecorded floods of 1897, 1909, 1917, and 1921. The estimates being used are just plain wrong.

Base flood elevations resulting from this incorrect analysis will increase significantly and cause growth to slow substantially. But that is just one part of an insidious administrative burden that will affect the community for decades. The other part of the problem is that this analysis will make any future attempt to bring urban areas out of the flood plain, difficult and expensive in the extreme, if not downright impossible. So the result will be less property tax base growth (probably much less), as well as significantly higher expense associated with fixing the problem.

Even with the correct analysis, base flood elevations will still go up in general, and still go up significantly in some areas. This will still need to be overcome through levee certification projects and other flood measures which will take many years – probably 10 to 20 – at a minimum.

So the situation is already bad. What we are trying to correct is an externally-generated administrative inequity that would put our local communities in the penalty box for decades. Much lower property tax base increase, combined with hugely expensive projects needed to bring the urban areas out of the flood plain, will squeeze taxpayers. Property tax rates will go up and people will feel more financially burdened. This could (and likely, will) translate into an electorate less willing to support school operating and capital levies.

We want to get the new flood elevations right. We want to move ahead and ensure we take every action needed to address the Skagit flood risk, and pay the price to do it right. But the current analysis is wrong and if the new flood elevations (based on this faulty analysis) are implemented, the result will be decades of additional financial burden to our community, increased competition for property taxes, reduced levels of service, reduced funding levels for schools, and decreased quality of life for our residents.

Should the Board decide to join the Flood Policy Advisory Conference, no money would be needed from the school district. But what would be valuable to us would be occasional participation from Board members or the Superintendent in meetings with local, state and federal legislators, and sometimes with technical working groups or citizen groups. We think this participation will be pivotal in conveying the message that this issue affects the long term quality of life in the Skagit Valley, including and especially, the financial ability of our schools to provide quality education.

Request

Motion for the Mount Vernon School District to join the Flood Policy Advisory Conference.

encl