

## Floodplain construction debate continues

# City to use own flood figures

by John Draper

**MOUNT VERNON** — The City Council here is moving toward adoption of a floodplain construction ordinance, using elevation figures — the most controversial aspect of such an ordinance — of their own making.

Adopting such an ordinance will appease citizens in two ways.

First, the residents will remain in the federal flood insurance program and therefore still be eligible for home financing from federally-insured lending institutions and for federal disaster aid.

Secondly, city officials can use flood elevations, the figures used to determine how high new structures must be elevated, that are more acceptable to the public.

Usually, the depth of the 100-year flood

and, consequently, the elevation of new or substantially improved structures under the insurance program, is determined by Army Corps of Engineers data.

However, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is having a private firm doublecheck this data, as a result of a technical appeal by City Engineer John Wiseman.

Wiseman said FEMA has given the city the responsibility of coming up with "reasonable" depths for the 100-year flood, which is estimated to carry around 240,000 cubic feet of water per second. These "reasonable" depths will be used until the Corps' doublechecked data returns.

Wiseman said Chuck Steele, FEMA director of natural and technological hazards, told him the doublechecking could conceivably take up to two years.

"We can come up with something that is pretty easy to live with," Wiseman said.

According to Steele, just about the only thing that can't be used in figuring out these interim flood depths is word of mouth.

Wiseman explained that for land platted prior to 1966 the city will probably use the state's requirements, which for elevation of three feet below the 100-year flood for commercial structures and an elevation equal to the 100-year flood for residential structures.

Larry Moller, city attorney, said he will have an ordinance for council consideration at its July 28 meeting. If adopted, the city would beat the Aug. 2 deadline set by FEMA.

Wiseman said he will probably have the city's "reasonable" elevation figures a week after this meeting.

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