

# Agency turns down city flood ordinance

**MOUNT VERNON** — The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has rejected Mount Vernon's floodplain construction ordinance because it didn't include 10 "minor" procedural points, Chuck Steele, FEMA official, told The Argus Monday.

Steele said that if the City Council amends the ordinance to include these minor points, FEMA will accept it and the city will once again be taken into the federal flood insurance program.

"I see these as small things," Steele said, adding "The Council may see differently."

City attorney Larry Moller said the City Council purposely left out these 10 items, choosing only those items "the city could live with."

FEMA sent a letter dated Oct. 4 to Mayor Ruth Gidlund detailing the reasons for the denial.

One of the missing points noted by Steele was that the ordinance didn't require city officials to ensure all structures were "reasonably safe from flooding" before issuing a building permit.

The Mount Vernon ordinance, unlike

any other ordinance in the state, requires those seeking a building permit in a flood hazard area to get professional certification of the ground elevation at their building site.

This elevation would be compared to FEMA's 100-year flood level elevations and the applicant would have to sign an affidavit saying he saw this comparison.

He suggested the City Council could have avoided this problem by sending FEMA a draft ordinance before passing it.

The City has to enforce a floodplain ordinance to be in the federal flood insurance program. Usually, such an ordinance demands residents build all new or substantially improved structures above the 100-year flood level.

However, the Army Corps of Engineer data used to determine this level for Skagit County was successfully appealed by City Engineer John Wiseman.

Without reliable elevations to go by, the city devised its rejected ordinance, which essentially leaves the determination of structure elevation up to the building permit applicant.