

Flood control: FEMA required county revisions by June 20

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Management Agency has required that the county adopt updated flood-hazard maps and make revisions to its land use rules.

As a result, roughly 700 property owners in unincorporated areas of the county may be required to, among other things, pay for a permit when developing their land or seek approval before altering structures.

FEMA has required the county to make the revisions by June 20. The agency first released the updated maps and flood-insurance requirements in 2016.

The county Planning Commission voted 4-1 on Tuesday — with Commissioner Thomas Merrell the sole opposing vote — to recommend the changes to county commissioners, who will have the final say. Prior to the vote, several people spoke in opposition to the changes during a packed public hearing at the Judge Guy Boyington Building. In addition, county staff have fielded more than 200 complaints from residents since notices of the changes were mailed out in February.

Throughout the hearing, Bruce Francis, the Planning Commission's chairman, reiterated that he sympathized with the residents but felt it was necessary to maintain access to the flood-insurance program.

"We're confronted with a problem that has been placed upon us to make a decision for the overall good of the majority, hopefully, to obtain flood insurance," Francis said while addressing the crowd's disapproval. "Maybe it is that we need to be attacking the political angles of this, rather than making that request here at this hearing."

A few of the residents suggested the county break away from the national insurance program altogether.

"They've got you by the throat on the insurance aspect, but I would suggest that

you think about altering an approach on insurance," said Henry Willener, who owns property south of Seaside. "Maybe get Washington and Idaho — forget California — and form a consortium to have your own insurance group."

Along with the recommendation for county commissioners to approve the rule changes, the Planning Commission advised that county legal experts explain the changes and work with the federal agency to roll back some of the regulations.

The most unpopular change discussed at the meeting would be an expansion of the definition of developments that would require property owners to pay an \$85 permit fee. Previously exempt activities — including minor repairs to a structure that don't alter its size, new driveways that don't change the topography of the land or signs placed by local public agencies — would require the permit once the rules go into effect.

"They come up with these ideas. They force it on the little guy," said Edwin Owen, a farm owner. "I'm just afraid that you start changing the rules, not only do I have to go beg for a permit, but then you start talking about, 'Oh, you can and can't do this,' you know, on a farm. It just bothers me."

But it's unlikely FEMA will buckle on the expanded permit requirements, Community Development Director Gail Henrikson said. She called the permit requirements "non-negotiable," along with mandates to seek permission for structure updates in certain areas.

"Frankly, staff isn't any more enthused about having to go through this process and working language changes into the code any more than you want to see them there," Henrikson said.

She said staff has worked with FEMA to determine how much latitude the county has in reworking the changes, cit-



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Some residents are unhappy about potential county land use changes to comply with federal flood insurance demands.

ing an email the agency sent to the county earlier this month.

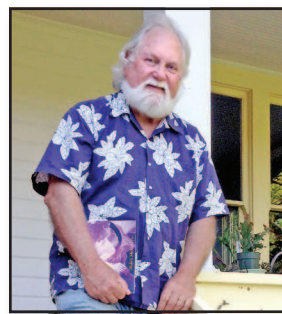
"FEMA's stand is that the exclusions that Clatsop County has offered in their definition of development makes their definition of development noncompliant with the National Flood Insurance Program," wrote Roxanne Pilkenton, a flood plain management specialist for the agency. "FEMA takes the definition of development seriously and, currently, push back from the state of Idaho has them facing suspension if they continue to allow exemptions that are expressly included in the definition of development."

County commissioners are tentatively scheduled to hold a public hearing on the subject in April. If that hearing is continued, commissioners would hold another hearing in May, when they would potentially adopt the changes.

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A graduate of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Pyle's 1987 book, "Wintergreen" won the John Burroughs Medal for its insights about how industrial forestry damaged the land, waters and people of the Willapa Hills of Southwest Washington. He and his Wahkiakum County neighbor Krist Novoselic, co-founder of the legendary rock group Nirvana, are currently collaborating on a mélange of acoustic guitar music and poetry.

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For Members: Dinner & Lecture: \$25 each; Lecture only: no charge
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Appetizers will be available at 6 p.m. • Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.

The speaker will begin after the dinner service is complete and non-dinner members and guests of the audience take their seats.

Forum to be held at the CMH Community Center at 2021 Exchange St., Astoria.



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