

FLOODPLAIN *from page 1A*

Unfortunately, the Siuslaw has no flood control devices installed anywhere along its length, so controlling the rise of the river is impossible. There have also been unusually serious floods in low-lying areas of the river over the past few years due to heavy spring rains.

Seasonal flooding here and upriver has been observed since Florence was established in 1893 and serious floods have been recorded and archived for almost two centuries. As a result, the uncertainty and the disruptive impact of flooding is a familiar part of many local residents' lives.

This outreach effort by planning staff is officially titled the Lane County Floodplain Code Modernization Project, and the presentation was led by Rachel Serslev, project manager for the update.

Serslev addressed the small group of fewer than a dozen residents as she reviewed proposed changes to the floodplain code regulations, stressing that the Lane County Board of Commissioners have directed planners to solicit community input on the planning department's proposed changes.

"First and foremost, we are going through the process to modernize Lane codes. We've updated a couple of our zoning chapters in order to make the code a little easier to read and more accessible to the public. So, this floodplain code update fits into that modernization process," Serslev said.

There are more than 12,000 properties located within the flood plain in Lane County, all of which can be reviewed at www.lanecounty.org/floodplaincode.

More than 140,000 acres of land in the floodplain and the future development of these areas will be influenced by the final results of the public hearings. All comments, concerns and questions received from the public will be shared with commissioners for inclusion in their deliberations.

Serslev stated she and county staff were in the initial stages of providing the public with the planning department's proposed changes to the code, but the process was also focused on receiving feedback and suggestions on

how to improve the wording to be used in the updated code.

"We also got some input from Lane County Commissioners directing us to do these floodplain updates. They have shown a large interest in making sure that our rules and regulations address the natural hazards that are actually happening in this area," she said.

Florence, the Siuslaw River and the adjoining estuary have also been included in revisions underway to update the region's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Floodplain maps.

The FEMA project and the Lane County project are not directly related, although the data requirements that guide the county planners are set by FEMA. In this instance the update is primarily to allow for a more accurate data base for the insurance companies and residents involved in the NFIP.

FEMA administrators and senior staff were in town earlier this year to describe the methodology used to better assess the locations that are considered to be flood prone. Improved measurement techniques using LIDAR and higher resolution satellite imagery allow officials to compile significantly more accurate Flood Plain and Floodway maps now than in the past.

FEMA representatives held a public forum to review their reasoning with the public at the FEC and shared the impact a new floodplain map would mean to local residents. The FEMA project and the Lane County project are not directly related, although the data requirements that guide the county planners are set by FEMA.

The FEMA changes will mostly affect the insurance rates available to property owners within the Floodplain, according to Serslev.

"Lane County participates in the National Flood Insurance Program that provides us with a set of minimum regulations that we have to follow if we want to get discounted flood insurance from FEMA and we recently had our community assistance visit," Serslev said. "That is a visit done by FEMA where they come to the local community and audit our process for floodplain management. So, they take a look at our Floodplain

Code and the permits we are issuing, and they tell us if we are doing it correctly and in alignment with their requirements."

Monday's forum was primarily geared towards the explanation and clarification of terminology and concepts that underlie future changes to be considered by County Commissioners as they continue updating the county floodplain code.

For example, the difference between "Fill and Balanced Cut" and "Fill," in regards the floodplain and adjacent floodways, was one main point of discussion.

The current regulations require a Lane County Floodplain Fill/Removal Permit to document the type and amount of material that is being placed or removed. The updated code would require that any fill placed in the floodplain be mitigated by the removal of material in the same floodplain, the intent being to minimize floodwaters displaced by fill material.

Another area of discussion will potentially impact a greater number of residents. The applicable lines of code have to do with development of any of the 140,000 acres of land that fall within the boundaries of the Lane County Floodplain.

The concern is the impact flood waters would have on what is termed the floodway, the path that waters which have overrun the primary river system are forced into due to flooding. The speed and turgid nature of these waters can wreak destruction on buildings and property located in the floodway.

Serslev reviewed some other specifics like the need for certain design requirements if a property owner wants to build in a floodplain or even in a floodway. Most of these requirements are straight forward and designed to protect the property and structures on the lot.

"The most common requirement is elevation. So, if you're building a structure or house in a floodplain, you would be required to elevate that structure. Enclosed area requirements and roads also have specific design requirements for building in the floodplain," said Serslev, who also wanted to make sure that the information presented as a possible change to the code could still be modified once the public information part

of the process was completed. "Nothing that we have presented to the Board of Commissioners is set in stone. These are things that were identified by staff research or are things the Board of County Commissioners identified as possible areas of change," she said.

One especially important aspect of the presentation was a request from county staff that residents help to shape the changes in the code by filling out a Community Response Survey, which asks basic questions related to past experiences with floods, the location of property and flood insurance ownership. The responses will be collated and passed on to commissioners.

"The over-arching point of this effort is to better protect life and property in Lane County from flood hazard," Serslev said.

To find out if your property is located in the county floodplain or floodway, or to take the informational survey regarding flooding, go to www.lanecounty.org/floodplaincode.

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