



## FLOOD & NATURAL HAZARD REDUCTION PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN #33

**Spring 2009**



***This Bulletin is being sent to you because your property has been determined to be in the floodplain.***

Burlington is in partnership with Dike District #12 and moving ahead with flood hazard mitigation planning. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement was published and comments continue to be collected on the range of available alternatives for the future to protect the City. This is a public disclosure process that begins early on before final decisions are made about the best approach, so that comments are able to be genuinely incorporated into the decision-making process. As the process continues, the proposed action will be refined to reflect the concerns and issues raised and a detailed plan of action will emerge that is designed to provide the optimum protection feasible for Burlington without having a significant adverse impact on the neighbors.

Success depends on gaining the support of our neighbors, and the key is to have the least impact possible. Burlington's neighbors include United General Hospital, Sedro-Woolley's Wastewater Treatment Plant, Farmers and Drainage Districts, Mount Vernon and areas downstream including other diking districts. Regional transportation systems are also significant including Interstate and State highways and the railroad.

There are two major projects in process and the first is setting the levees back in the three-bridge corridor along the south side of Burlington. This is a joint project with Mount Vernon, Dike District #17, Dike District #12, Burlington and Skagit County and the first phase is to build setback levees designed to be certified for a 100-year flood event. The second phase will be to widen the three bridges, starting with the Railroad Bridge. A major goal of the project is to protect Interstate 5.

The second major project is to complete the engineering and geotechnical analysis of the levee system that extends from the Railroad Bridge north to Lafayette Road, so that plans can be developed to result in certification of that levee segment.

The Levee Certification process through FEMA is the only way Burlington can receive credit for the existence of the levees in the preparation of the Flood Insurance Rate Maps. The goal is simple, protect Burlington and keep the Base Flood Elevations about where they are today. The key issue is the hydrology, and there are three major studies that are now being analyzed by FEMA's expert consultant. The ability to put effective flood hazard mitigation projects in place for this region will be greatly improved if the most accurate information available is used to determine how much water gets here.

### PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Property Protection Measures

Let's get started on improving flood protection in your home! Staff is available to provide site specific flood and flood-related data, make site visits to review flood, drainage and sewer problems and to advise and assist on retrofitting techniques.

Stop by the Permit Center or give the Building Department a call at 755-0077 and let the city provide you with technical assistance on improving flood protection in your home. A site visit will be scheduled at your convenience to put a checklist together for home flood protection improvements. Staff is also available from the Public Works Department if additional assistance is needed to assist with drainage and sewer problems.

If you want to do your own research, here are some of the recommended FEMA technical bulletins that you will find at the Burlington Public Library and the Building Department for your use:

- Homeowner's Guide to Retrofitting, FEMA-312
- Design Manual for Retrofitting Flood-prone Residential Structures, FEMA-114
- Protecting Building Utilities from Flood Damage, FEMA-348

Take a few minutes to look over the possible areas where you may need to floodproof important parts of your home. A good example is protecting utility systems. This is one of the easiest and least expensive retrofitting methods to accomplish. Whether it is elevating, relocating, or anchoring; items such as electrical panel boxes, furnaces, water heaters, washers/dryers and heating fuel tanks are typically very cost effective items to upgrade. There are also recommendations for drainage and crawl space improvements.

If you have a newer (post 1985) home, check to be sure these items have been taken care of when the home was constructed. Identify the potential for moving essential items and furniture to upper floors or the attic of your home. Materials like sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting, and lumber handy for emergency waterproofing can already be on hand. This action will help minimize the amount of damage caused by floodwaters and requires minimal storage space.

## Flood Safety & Disaster Preparedness

**Every home needs to be prepared and STAY PREPARED!** Review your Flood procedure at home with your household and take the time to put your Emergency Preparedness Kit together, or check your flashlight batteries in your existing kit. Remember, a supply of drinking water, emergency food and first aid kit are the bare minimums, along with flashlights. In addition to the basic three day supply of food and water, consider having supplies for sheltering for up to two weeks. Keep a small "grab and go" kit for your place of work with food, water, first aid supplies. For the emergency kit in the car, add flares, jumper cables and seasonal supplies.

There is an excellent FEMA publication entitled "Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness" available. This publication offers disaster information for natural hazards, technological hazards and terrorism. It will guide you for preparation in advance and recovery from a disaster. If you want to order a free copy for your home, call 1-800-480-2520. On the internet, <http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/> is the website link. A copy is available in the Burlington Public Library. **THIS COVERS THE BASIC DISASTER SUPPLIES KIT IN DETAIL.**

**Earthquakes are an example of a disaster that cannot be predicted and that is not seasonal. Be prepared at all times!**

## Flood Insurance

Any property owner in the City of Burlington is eligible to obtain Flood Hazard Insurance, since the city participates in the National Flood Insurance Program. Purchasing or refinancing a home will trigger a requirement for flood insurance by the lender. Coverage in the event of flooding is not included in typical homeowner's insurance policies. Flood insurance is available through your own agency or broker and includes flooding from ponding/drainage problems, snowmelt flooding, runoff on hillsides, or any flooding involving surface water. Contents of the building are a separate addition to the policy. There is limited coverage available for flood-related erosion and mudslide. Replacement cost coverage is available for principal residences. *Concerned about high Flood Insurance Rates?* You may qualify for a substantial reduction if you have an Elevation Certificate that shows your home or business is located at or above the 100 year flood elevation. You will have to retain the services of a Licensed Engineer to complete the paperwork, unless an Elevation Certificate is on file already with the Building Department, so please check here first.

Flood insurance rates are higher for buildings with crawl spaces that are two feet or more below the lowest adjacent exterior grade, which is a common construction practice in the northwest. *A number of local homeowners may be paying too much for flood insurance. There are a lot of details that may be misinterpreted or overlooked, so look carefully at your flood insurance policy when it comes up for renewal this year.* If you are concerned, contact the Building Department and review your Elevation Certificate to make sure that all the information is correct. *In addition, there are ways to retrofit your vents and crawlspace if needed to lower your flood insurance rates.*

## Flood Warning System

Each and every citizen has a role to play in the event of a flood. **BE PREPARED!!!** The Burlington Flood Emergency Team prepares and coordinates activities needed to be ready for any flood event with the involvement of all the responsible agencies. A new siren system is in the works that will have several locations for better coverage; meanwhile the existing siren is ready if needed.

The procedure for warning the public is coordinated through the Skagit County Department of Emergency Management. The Emergency Alert System is activated when necessary and includes the following local radio stations:

**KBRC 1430 AM ▪ KWLE 1340 AM ▪  
KAPS 660 AM**

If evacuation is necessary, there will also be door-to-door notification and loudspeakers broadcasting from public safety vehicles in the neighborhood. Flaggers will be stationed at key intersections along the Evacuation Route to direct traffic.

Today, there are three neighborhoods in the Neighbor-to-Neighbor notification plan for very early warning. Contact your neighbors to ask if they want to be part of taking responsibility for each other and call the Planning Department to get on the list. Now is the perfect time to identify your block captains and work together to **BE PREPARED.**

## Natural & Beneficial Functions of Floodplains

Filling property to increase elevation in the floodplain is allowed today, but the long term goal is to minimize fill to protect fish and wildlife habitat. Burlington supports habitat improvements in the floodplain, and the Gages Slough restoration projects are a major effort in the city. Storm water quality monitoring in Burlington clearly shows that better water quality treatment systems are needed and this is a major focus of the surface water utility. The focus on the environment will continue to grow as FEMA implements a response to a Biological Opinion about the harm being done to Endangered Species because of the FEMA floodplain regulations, including Chinook Salmon and Orca Whales.

The Gages Slough habitat management plan has identified locations for restoration and water quality improvement projects, so mitigation projects will be ready to build when the opportunity arises. Wetland buffer restoration and maintenance projects are in process to improve habitat and several more are in the planning stages. Improving public access to habitat areas is another important goal for the program.

Protecting agricultural lands is part of protecting the Natural and Beneficial Functions of Floodplains. The city is working towards implementing the Burlington Agricultural Heritage Credit program which will raise funds for farmland preservation in exchange for increased residential density in Downtown and the Retail Core. An area of 5,628 acres has been identified as the target area for purchase of development rights.

Key elements of the Skagit County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan include giving the Skagit River more room by setting the dikes back in Burlington and looking at a variety of measures through the delta area to the mouth of the Skagit River, carefully coordinating and managing the hydroelectric power dams in the river system during a flood event and improving , permanently moving homes and development rights out of the floodway, improving the environment for wildlife, and creating new public access opportunities to improve everyone's quality of life.

## Local Flood Hazard Areas

There are three flood zones in the City Limits of Burlington, the Floodway (river side of the dike), the 100 Year Flood Zone and the Special Flood Risk Zone. Most of Burlington is in the 100 Year Flood Zone.

The Special Flood Risk Zone includes all land within 300 feet of the landward toe of the Dike. All structures must be designed so that floodwaters can pass underneath and there is no occupied space below one foot above the 100 year flood elevation, unless the site is within 100 feet of the Dike where nothing can be built. All property in Gages Slough that is three feet or more below the 100 year flood elevation was designated as Special Flood Risk in the mid-1980's as part of a negotiating process over the uniquely complex Skagit River delta area when the Flood Insurance Rate Maps were finalized. The status of Gages Slough will be revisited when new base flood elevation maps are released by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

YES, work is happening! Burlington and Dike District #12 have signed an Interlocal Agreement to move ahead with plans for Levee Certification, to get 100-year flood protection for Burlington. Engineering analysis will be done systematically to document the levee design. The levee enlargement work started in 1990 and earthwork is still underway. Land acquisition and environmental review are also moving ahead for setting the levees back through the three-bridge corridor (Railroad bridge, Old 99 bridge, and Interstate 5 bridge) to protect the urban areas of Burlington and Mount Vernon in a 100-year flood event.

## Map Determination & Library Information

A map determination is figuring out where the 100 year flood elevation is located relative to the first occupied floor of your home or business. This information is used to prepare an Elevation Certificate. A citywide system of elevation benchmarks is maintained in the Building Department. An average of an additional \$200 in savings is possible on your flood insurance policy if you have an elevation certificate, in addition to the 20% rate reduction already available in Burlington, as a result of community participation in the federal Community Rating System program. There are issues with flood insurance providers, and if you feel that you are not getting good information, please contact the city and we will try to help.

Information on other flood improvements, such as elevating your building, filling the crawl space, or floodproofing the lower portion, is available from the City and in the Burlington Public Library. There is a flood reference area in the library and staff will assist in directing you to the information you need.

Every land use newsletter includes a flood and natural hazard mitigation topic. Call the Planning Department at 755-9717 to get on the mailing list! Take the time to participate because your ideas will be taken seriously and you will have a say in the future of your community. There is a Community Meeting scheduled for May 5, 2009 at 6:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers at 833 South Spruce Street.

## Substantial Improvement/Damage Requirements

The National Flood Insurance Program requires that if the cost of reconstruction, rehabilitation, addition, or other improvements to a building equals or exceeds 50% of the building's market value, then the building must meet the construction requirements for a new building. Substantially damaged buildings must also be brought up to the same standard. The major issue is elevating the structure one foot above the 100 year flood elevation, along with all mechanical equipment, ductwork and electrical equipment, and installing properly located and sized vents. However, if you are located in the Gages Slough Special Flood Risk Zone, "breakaway walls" are required below the 100 year flood elevation, and they must be designed by a licensed structural engineer.

## Drainage System Maintenance

This is the sixth year of water quality studies in Gages Slough and wetland restoration projects to improve water quality are a high priority. The commitment to long term maintenance, monitoring and habitat improvement is beginning to show, with the success of the first two wetland restoration projects that are beginning to mature. Clean water, efficient flow of water when needed, and a quality environment are the goals. Gages Slough and the Skagit River are important amenities for the community.

The drainage maintenance and inspection program is part of flood hazard mitigation. Every year, all detention ponds, pipes, catch basins and other drainage control structures are inspected and corrections required as needed to ensure that the capacity of the ponds is maintained and that the ability of the system to clean the storm water is retained, in addition to inspection and maintenance of the city street system. The public drainage system, including culverts, pipes and ditches is well maintained. Gages Slough is maintained at each street intersection and culvert location. A well maintained drainage system that functions in small storms will provide the best assistance possible in large storms and floods, by quickly and efficiently carrying the excess water out of town.

Thank you for respecting the signs that state "**No Dumping – thank you**" at public access points to Gages Slough! Each property owner along the Slough is responsible for cleaning up any litter or trash that is on their property. The problem of illegal dumping of yard waste in Gages Slough and the problem of trash dumped at points of public access to the River can only be solved if everyone helps out. It is illegal to dump or to fill along Gages Slough or the Skagit River. You may report illegal dumping (this includes yard waste) in the Slough, by calling the Code Enforcement Officer at either 755-9717 or 755-2307, or in writing.

## Floodplain Development Permit Requirements

Before you build, add fill, or make changes to your property and structures, be sure to contact the Planning and Building Departments to determine if any permits or approvals are necessary. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Insurance Industry make frequent changes in the interpretation of floodplain standards, and you need to be sure you are using the most current information for any construction project.

**DO NOT DRIVE THROUGH FLOODED AREAS!**