



## **FLOOD & NATURAL HAZARD REDUCTION PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN #3 I**

**Spring 2008**



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

***With the snow still visible on Cultus Mountain at the end of April, many are hoping for a slow melt with no spring flooding, and others are wondering when to plant the vegetable garden! Not only is the weather uncertain and unseasonably cold, but so is the future of the floodplain.***

Burlington has relied on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps issued in 1985 for all new construction and there is a grave concern that changes are going to be made without adequate justification. The City must have predictable federal standards that are not changed in order to serve the public fairly.

Following identification of computer software problems, the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) are in revision once again and the release date is tentatively set for late summer, 2008. There may be a significant adverse impact on Burlington from increases in Base Flood Elevations. An appeal will probably be filed because it is the position of Burlington and Mount Vernon that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is using incorrect assumptions about how much water will actually reach Burlington in a 100-year flood. The City of Burlington and Mount Vernon are preparing an independent proposal utilizing newly acquired technical data and will request this independent analysis be considered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It is the position of the Federal Emergency Management Agency that the cities proposal will only be considered through a request for a Letter of Map Revision or a formal appeal that provides data that show the proposed base flood elevations to be scientifically or technically incorrect.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's position on establishing a regulatory floodway in the Skagit River delta area is that the issue is significant and that efforts at least comparable to the actions taken with adoption of the Flood Insurance Rate Maps in the mid-1980's are needed. With this in mind, Burlington would keep Gages Slough as a Special Flood Risk Zone and keep an area of 300 feet behind the levees designated as Special Flood Risk Zone. Burlington will also take action to protect overbank flow paths across farmland around the city through supporting farmland preservation efforts. The existing floodway path for the River is through the Nookachamps and Sterling area, and once the railroad is overtopped, the water moves north to the farmland.

In order to protect the long term public interest, the City is proceeding to amend the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan to add the goal and implementation strategy of upgrading the levees and adding components as needed to certify the levees for one hundred year flood protection so that the levees will count in the computer modeling for determining the Base Flood Elevations in the Burlington urban area. This is expected to take a number of years to accomplish. Only 100-year Certified Levees qualify for credit in the mapping process.

## 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 and first aid supplies. For the emergency kit in the car, add flares, jumper cables and seasonal supplies.

There is an excellent FEMA publication available entitled **“Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness”**. 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!***

## Property Protection Measures

No time like the present to get started on improving flood protection in your home. Take a few minutes to look over the possible areas where you may need to floodproof important parts of your home. Electrical panel boxes, furnaces, water heaters, and washers/dryers should be elevated or relocated to a location less likely to be flooded. If you heat with propane, pour a slab and anchor the tanks to the ground with straps or bolts or they will become floating bombs. Basement floor drains and interior and exterior backwater valves can be installed, and interior floodwalls can be placed around utilities. 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.

If you would like information on ways to floodproof your home or parts of it, the Building Department and the Library have lots of resource materials.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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 the new base flood elevation maps are unveiled 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 make enough room for the Skagit River to accommodate a 100-year flood event within the banks.

## 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. 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. 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.

Several hundred students from Lucille Umbarger School actively participated in adding the layer of plants that cleans the storm water runoff, as well as trees for habitat, in the wetland buffer along Gages Slough at Jack Doyle Memorial Park on Arbor Day 2008, one more step to a healthy environment!

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 to the mouth of the Skagit River, carefully coordinating and managing the hydroelectric power dams in the river system during a flood event (a goal not yet achieved), 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.

## 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 DKLKI 1340 AM DKAPS 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. We will be contacting every group and meeting this fall to get prepared for flood season; now is the perfect time to identify your block captains and work together to **BE PREPARED.**

**DO NOT DRIVE THROUGH  
FLOODED AREAS!**

## 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 catalogue reference that will direct you to the information you need. Spring is a great time for upgrading your home to meet flood standards, even on a small scale, and the latest techniques are on file in the library.

Every land use newsletter includes a flood and natural hazard mitigation topic. There is also a series of special meetings this year to discuss the 5 year update of the Skagit County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, on the third Thursday of every month, May 15, June 19, July 17, and August 21 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers at 833 South Spruce 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.

## 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, unless you are located in the Gages Slough Special Flood Risk Zone where "breakaway walls" are required below the 100 year flood elevation.

## Drainage System Maintenance

This is the fifth year of water quality studies in Gages Slough and wetland restoration projects to improve water quality are in the works this year. The commitment to long term maintenance, monitoring and habitat improvement is beginning to show, with the upgrading of the very first wetland buffer planting, and now the removal of the ropes over the Goldenrod Bridge project, letting the ducks fly in for the first time. 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.

**CITY OF BURLINGTON**  
**Planning Department**

**833 S. Spruce Street**  
**Burlington WA 98233**

**Phone: (360) 755-9717**  
**[bplanning@ci.burlington.wa.us](mailto:bplanning@ci.burlington.wa.us)**