



CITY OF CHEHALIS
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MEMORANDUM

To: Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority

Re: Floodplain Management in the City of Chehalis

Date: April 30, 2012

The city of Chehalis has been requested to provide a narrative relating to how floodplain management is administered within the city and its Urban Growth Area.

Chehalis Participates in NFIP

Most cities and counties in the United States that contain development in or near floodplains, including members of the Flood Authority, participate in a federal program for flood insurance administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) known as the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). FEMA also administers a program within the NFIP known as the Community Rating System (CRS) that assigns credit points for local activities or programs that tend to reduce flood damage within the floodplain areas.

All local governments participating in the NFIP are required to comply with strict federal regulatory standards in managing development in the floodplain. In Washington State, additional floodplain management standards have been adopted beyond the federal standards. Participation in the NFIP means that Chehalis' rules are going to be exactly the same or nearly so, to those of Thurston county or other Flood Authority members regarding development or 'filling' in the floodplain.

Chehalis has participated in the NFIP since 1981 and currently has achieved a Class 5 CRS rating (a minimum standard rating is Class 10). Those programs and policies have resulted in a flood insurance premium reduction for our citizens of 25% from the standard rates. In order to maintain that rating, the city must continue to manage its floodplain according to the state and federal standards plus our own locally adopted and more restrictive standards.

The city has adopted a revised Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) that incorporates all of the Flood Authority's model floodplain ordinance recommended requirements into the city's regulatory format. The CAO has been reviewed by the US Army Corps of Engineers relative to wetland management, and the state Department of Ecology relative to wetland and floodplain management. **The Chehalis CAO exceeds all of the state and federal minimum standards for providing flood damage reduction in the Chehalis River floodplain.** All of the city's floodplain management standards are available for review on the city's website.

All of the federal, state and local regulations allow filling in the floodplain subject to regulatory restrictions as spelled out in the NFIP guidelines. The extent of filling is critically regulated so as to prevent that activity from creating measurable flood damage to existing development. Every permit application for filling in a floodplain goes through a review process to make sure that its location or configuration does not create a local significant impact to the floodplain or adjacent development. The vast majority of flood damage in Chehalis occurs in pre-FIRM development – those projects that occurred before the city adopted the NFIP standards.

Fill Since 2000 and Downstream Impact

Since 2000, the city has reviewed and issued permits for about 902,935 cubic yards of fill within the city's floodplain, including 766,000 within the area protected by the airport levee (136,269 yards are not protected by the airport levee).

The Chehalis-Centralia Airport and its levee were built by the federal government in 1943. The levee was built so that development could take place behind the levee protected from flooding. Because of the existence of the levee, development behind/inside the levee does not result in flood impact outside of the levee significant enough to affect permitting under federal, state or local regulations.

The Flood Authority was provided with hydraulic modeling showing that if the entire 400 acres of the airport basin were filled, the impact to the 2007 flood event at the Grand Mound gauging station would be just over one inch of additional floodplain elevation. While only about 70 acres of the airport are actually filled, and less than 150 acres of the airport and property to the north are available to be filled (wetlands, runways, safety zones, etc.), the actual impact of filling in Chehalis during the 2007 flood event was considerably less than one inch downstream.

Wetland Mitigation Bank

Chehalis is also developing a wetland mitigation bank along North National Avenue. While wetland banking is the primary purpose of the project, floodplain storage capacity is an important function of the design of the property. That project should be completed later this year. Chehalis also has property along the Chehalis River on SR-6 that has been made available for excavation for floodplain storage. One prior project was abandoned after artifacts were found making the excavation much too costly. That project could provide several hundred thousand cubic feet of additional floodplain storage capacity if permitted.

Information relating to floodplain management and specific projects is available from the Chehalis Community Development Department, 1321 S. Market Blvd. in Chehalis. The city has an extensive floodplain management library available for public review, and several publications regarding retrofitting existing floodprone structures.