



LANE COUNTY GOVERNMENT NEWS

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Lane County's Floodplain Rules are Undergoing Review

Revised Regulations May Lead to Lower Flood Insurance Premiums for Residents

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Lane County is considering making changes to its floodplain regulations that may make future development within flood hazard areas more difficult. As part of the County's involvement in the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System (CRS), the County is evaluating its current floodplain ordinances to determine if changes to the rules are needed to help promote life safety and prevent property damage.

"Flooding is a very serious concern in Lane County," said Keir Miller an Associate Planner in the in the Land Management Division. "Even though we are currently moving into our dry season, now is the time to evaluate our floodplain management program and make sure we are doing as much as possible to protect people and property during the next flood event."

Some of the possible rule changes being considered by the County include:

- Prohibiting critical structures such as hospitals and fire stations from being built within the floodplain.
- A requirement that new structures built within the floodplain be constructed to a higher elevation than is currently required.
- Further restrictions on land divisions or other development within the "floodway" portion of the floodplain.

The Land Management Division, which is charged with administering the County's floodplain program, recognizes that enforcing responsible floodplain practices can be unpopular.

"We're sensitive to the fact that any limitations on private property rights can be contentious, even when proposed regulations are designed to protect public safety and welfare," said Miller.

County staff is currently working with an advisory committee to develop proposed code changes. Any proposed changes would need to be reviewed by the Lane County Planning Commission and approved by the Board of Commissioners after a public hearing process sometime in the fall of 2010.

Approximately 200 square miles of land falls within the regulated floodplain in Lane County and more than 11,000 individual parcels are partially or entirely located within the floodplain. Statewide, Lane County has more river miles of floodplain than any other county and ongoing development along these rivers continues to displace natural areas that have historically functioned to store and transport flood waters.

“In addition to mitigating flood hazards, floodplain regulations can also limit development near rivers and streams, which can help protect critical drinking water source areas from contamination and benefit fish and wildlife habitat,” said Nancy Toth, Environmental Associate with Eugene Water & Electric Board and member of the County’s flood ordinance advisory committee.

Background

Last August, Lane County was admitted into the CRS, which is a voluntary federal program that recognizes and awards communities for taking on floodplain mitigation activities that exceed the minimum standards required by the National Flood Insurance Program. Under the CRS, insurance premium rates are lowered to reflect the reduced flood risks resulting from actions that communities take to meet the objectives of the CRS. Those objectives are:

- (1) Reduce flood losses, i.e.
 - protect public health and safety,
 - reduce damage to buildings and contents,
 - prevent increases in flood damage from new construction,
 - reduce the risk of erosion damage, and
 - protect natural and beneficial floodplain functions.
- (2) Facilitate accurate insurance rating; and
- (3) Promote the awareness of flood insurance.

County residents currently receive a 15 percent discount on flood insurance because of the County’s involvement in the CRS and amendments that strengthen the County’s floodplain regulations could help lower insurance rates even more.

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