

Williston Gives Preliminary Okay to Federal Flood Insurance Ordinance

By Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

An ordinance that will bring Williston into the National Flood Insurance Program for the first time was approved on first reading Tuesday by a vote of 4-1 with Councilman Charles Goodman opposed.

Goodman said he received his agenda for the meeting on Monday morning with the 29-page flood plain ordinance included and there wasn't time to absorb all the details of the proposed law.

"I'm still not comfortable with this," Goodman said.

Goodman will have more time to study the ordinance because the council must discuss the proposed ordinance a second time before adoption can take place.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2012 created a flood hazard map for Williston for the first time. Up until that point, the city had no need to be involved in the National Flood Insurance Program.

FEMA has sent the city notice that it is currently designated as a "sanctioned community" and would not be eligible for federal disaster assistance if there was a flooding disaster in the city.

The FEMA map designates 163 acres in the city as having the potential for a flood, but not a single existing home within the city would be impacted by the new ordinance. One city sewer lift station would be impacted.

Of the 163 acres identified on flood hazard areas in the city, 49 acres are drainage retention ponds constructed as a requirement of governments and 56 acres are old rock quarries. Much of the remaining acreage is in the Williston Airport.

Council President Jason Cason noted that the entrance to the new Williston Middle High School is designated as an area that can flood.

Goodman was concerned about adopting such an ordinance without notifying people who own property in a flood hazard areas that they could be required to meet different building requirements if they constructed a building in the flood zone. He was concerned that there might be additional costs to the property owner.

Cason and City Manager Scott Lippman responded that the federal flood hazard map already exists and property owners in flood prone zones would face higher insurance premiums in the private market if they built in those zones.

They said the federal flood insurance program would actually offer them insurance at a reduced rate. They said the city would also be eligible for federal disaster assistance under the FEMA insurance program.

The ordinance appoints city Building and Zoning Director Walter Brown as the floodplain manager. The ordinance would apply to any development or rehabilitation work on any structure identified on flood plain maps as a flood hazard area.

The ordinance would also attempt to reduce or eliminate damage from flooding. In flood zones, the bottom floor of buildings would have to be constructed above the level of projected flooding as determined by FEMA.

Since there are no existing buildings in flood hazard areas, the ordinance would be applied to future construction.

Adopting the ordinance will cost the city nothing. Brown is a certified flood plain manager.