

Maps being drawn that may aid laguna

Sonoma County officials are re-drawing flood zone maps to coincide with new federal documents and the result may be greater

protections for the Laguna de Santa Rosa and more development potential for a small number of isolated parcels along the Russian River.

At the same time, however, Sebastopol and county officials confirmed last week that they are contemplating requests for exemptions to the new, tighter regulations for certain parcels in the laguna.

Bill Stillman, chief engineer of the Sonoma County Water Agency, said his association will do hydrological studies on the possible exemptions when Sebastopol and the county provide detailed proposals.

The possible exemptions involve both developed and undeveloped commercial and industrial property east of Sebastopol, including a parcel planned for the city's new police station.

The property being contemplated for exemption is only a small portion of the total land affected by the map changes, however.

The exact implications of the changes may not be clear for a year or more, but Stillman said a small number of isolated parcels along the Russian River may have increased development potential because the lower flood line will place them above the predicted level of the worst flood in a 100-year period. Land in Dry Creek Valley also could shed a layer of land-use restriction because the valley will no longer be considered as flood-prone under the new maps.

But in geographic terms, the largest change will take place with designation of the 7,000-acre Laguna de Santa Rosa as a "floodway." The designation carries with it the federal requirement that nothing may be built within the area that would raise the flood level.

In practical terms, that means that any structures built in the floodway must be constructed on fill, above the flood level, and that any fill must be taken from the laguna itself or compensated for by equivalent amounts of excavation.

The federal regulation is the same as one that has been applied by the county Planning Department to the few construction projects allowed in unincorporated portions of the laguna in recent years. In that sense it would be no change from existing requirements.

Richard Lehtinen, a chief planner for the county, confirmed that some exemptions are being contemplated, but said the new federal maps also could suggest that

"If there's a change in the mapping we might want to do a change in zoning."

RICHARD LEHTINEN

changes to more restrictive zoning in some areas are necessary.

"If there's a change in the mapping we might want to do a change in zoning, but that would require a full hearing and presumably the implications of it would be drawn out at that time," said Lehtinen.

The official said changes in the county maps should be done some time this year and that any property owners who would be directly affected by associated zoning changes would be individually notified prior to hearings on the issue.

Stillman said changes in the 100-year flood level along the Russian River are the product of new data acquired during the 1986 flood and incorporation of flood protections afforded by Warm Springs Dam.

The water agency official said Army Corps of Engineers officials had calculated a three-foot drop in the flood level as a result of Warm Springs Dam, but revised the figures upward after the record-breaking Russian River flood of 1986.

Stillman said the elimination of flood designation in Dry Creek Valley also is the result of Warm Springs Dam.

Officials said other flood map changes will be made in the Windsor area, where the Corps of Engineers study was aided by research conducted by the water agency.

The changes in the federal maps were made by the Federal Emergency Management Administration based on a study conducted by the Corps of Engineers.

88-51