

All sides to meet on flood zone

CAPITOLA — The city's flood zone controversy will be discussed at a joint meeting Friday with the regional director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta, D-Monterey, and the City Council.

The meeting will be held at 3 p.m. in the council chamber in Capitola. It is open to the public.

The meeting is seen as a last-ditch effort, of sorts, to resolve the dispute between the city and the federal agency. That dispute centers on the agency's suspension of Capitola from its National Flood Insurance Program six weeks ago.

The suspension has left the city on its own in case of a natural disaster. Federal emergency aid would be withheld because of the city's failure to modify zoning and building codes to meet federal flood-zone

standards.

Property owners within the zone are also prohibited from receiving loans from federally-insured banks, savings and loans, and other lenders with federal insurance.

Panetta called the special meeting with FEMA Regional Director Robert Vickers of San Francisco after the city turned to him for help. Panetta is hoping for a compromise before appealing to Washington, D.C., or trying to introduce legislation that would exempt the city from the federal agency's demands.

The specific clause preventing the city from complying with the new flood-zone standards calls for building owners within the zone to follow FEMA building restrictions if their buildings are more than 50 percent damaged "regardless of cause."

Council members are willing to comply with the restrictions if buildings are damaged by flooding or storms, which the National Flood Insurance Program covers. They do not, however, want the restrictions to become effective in case of fire, for instance.

The building restrictions, which would pertain to any new buildings or substantial remodels, calls for living quarters to be above flood levels in Capitola Village and along Soquel Creek. This could mean a future village built on stilts.

The new flood-zone marks the boundaries of an area that would be affected by a major flood. The federal agency believes the new building restrictions would stop it from having to pay out repair costs after future disasters.