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FEMA cancels flood map deadlines after towns scrambled to meet upcoming deadline

By Wheeler Cowperthwaite The Patriot Ledger

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The flood map revisions will not affect many people, especially compared to revisions in 2013

ROCKLAND — After months of planning by South Shore towns to make sure annual town meetings happened by June 30 to meet Federal Emergency Management Agency deadlines to approve new flood maps, the agency rescinded its requirement.

“We’re really upset,” Rockland Town Administrator Doug Lapp said. “They were insistent there was no flexibility and the July deadline had to be met or you were no longer part of the program.”

The letter sent to Rockland is dated June 8, but was not received until June 15.

“As you may be aware, some communities in the Cape Cod Watershed study are experiencing difficulties during the adoption and compliance period resulting in the inability to adopt the July 22, 2020, FIS (Flood Insurance Plan) and FIRM (Flood Insurance Rate Map) and thereby comply with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) regulations,” Deputy Associate Administrator David Maurstad said in the letter.

Towns, including Rockland, “bent over backwards” to make sure town meetings were held by the July 22 deadline so voters could approve the new flood maps and other regulations, so they can participate in the National Flood Insurance

Program, Lapp said.

“At the last minute, for some reason, they changed their minds,” he said.

Rockland’s town meeting is set for 7 p.m., Monday at the Rockland High School. The flood maps constituted four items on the town meeting warrant, Lapp said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s letter goes even a step further.

“Communities that have adopted ordinances to reflect the FIS report and FIRM dated July 22, 2020, should revise their ordinances to revert to the previously adopted FIS Report and FIRM dated July 17, 2012,” Maurstad said.

Maurstadt said the federal agency will “continue to work with communities” in the Cape Cod Watershed to work out a new due date.

“Once that is established, a new Letter of Final Determination will be issued, and communities will have another 6-month adoption and compliance period,” he said.

The flood insurance program, started in 1956, became a hot-button issue on the South Shore in 2013 when FEMA released new flood maps for Marshfield, Scituate and Duxbury that help set the rates and determine which owners must buy flood insurance. Later maps for other South Shore communities, including Quincy, also caused an uproar.

Massachusetts Coastal Coalition Chairman Joe Rossi said the federal agency stopped issuing the letters of final determination during the coronavirus pandemic over concerns that towns would either not be able to pass them or appeal them. The new maps affect a handful of properties in each South Shore town, unlike the wide-spread changes seen in 2013.

The hold on new flood maps will also have no affect on the 15-percent rate cut Marshfield will see for its federal flood insurance premiums, Rossi said.

Much of the mapping changes involve moving from county-based groupings to groupings based on watershed, which for Rockland and other towns, means the Cape Cod watershed, he said.

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