



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Sanders Hosts Far Rockaway Flood Meeting; City, State Agencies Provide Updates

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 3, 2016



State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale) held a community meeting on Thursday regarding flooding issues in Far Rockaway. Representatives from city and state agencies provided updates on flood mitigation and related issues, and fielded questions from attendees which included concerns about clogged catch basins, increasing home insurance rates and water filled streets. Some 60 people attended the meeting, which was held at the Peninsula Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Far Rockaway.

"We have seen some significant changes when it comes to flooding in the Rockaways," Sanders said. "It seems to be getting worse. It seems to be becoming more and more apparent, and under those conditions, we need to start taking it seriously."

The Rockaways got slammed by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and residents had a terrible reminder of that experience in recent weeks as water filled streets and homes primarily due to an astronomical high tide during the new moon. On top of that there were off shore weather events and a low pressure zone that was pushing water into the city, according to Steve Zahn, Deputy Director of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

"The water just piled up," Zahn said, "and that is something that is relatively difficult to predict."

DEC is working with the Army Corps of Engineers to tackle the larger problem of flooding in Far Rockaway by providing coastal protection along the beach side of the community as well as flood protection for the interior of the bay. Some residents were concerned that the latter was not receiving as much attention as it should. Zahn said the Army Corp of Engineers has been working on a solution for the bay side and has proposed two alternatives – either putting a big gate at the inlet to prevent water from coming in, or raising the elevation of the entire perimeter of the bay with walls or berms, so that when water rises it doesn't overflow onto the land.

Residents at the meeting also voiced complaints regarding clogged catch basins and slow repair response times by the city despite repeated calls to 311. Mario Bruno, the Assistant Commissioner for the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, said that starting this year the agency has adopted a new policy where catch basins will be inspected

and cleaned once a year, in addition to repairs and cleaning requests that arise from 311 complaints. Under the old policy the city's 148,000 catch basins were inspected on a three-year rotation.

The New York City Department of Design and Construction has 25 projects slated for the Rockaways and some may help to alleviate flooding, according to Maria Centeno, Director of the DDC's Office of Community Outreach and Notification. Many of the projects are sewer and water main work while others are full reconstruction projects that include street and subsurface work. Thirteen of the projects are in construction, another three are in compliance, meaning they will begin before the end of the fiscal year, and the remainder are in various stages of design and compliance.

The New York City Department of Transportation also has many street reconstruction and sewer projects planned across the peninsula, according to Nicole Garcia, the Queens Borough Commissioner for the DOT, who provided an update on the agency's progress in infrastructure improvements.

During the current fiscal year, DOT has resurfaced about 20 lane miles throughout Community Board 14. In June and July it will be doing 20 more. The agency has been working closely with the community board and elected officials to prioritize its future work. Due to large financial investments under the de Blasio administration, the DOT has been able to increase its resurfacing for the upcoming fiscal year to 300 lane miles, Garcia said. In regard to potholes, DOT has been able to respond to 311 complaints in about three and a half days, and over the past year has filled about 130,000 potholes in the borough of Queens alone.

Many residents had questions about the rising costs of flood insurance and how it would

affect the Rockaways. Margaret Becker, Director of Disaster Recovery with the Flood Division of Legal Services NYC said part of the reason for the high rates is that Congress has decided to phase out most subsidies that currently exist for flood insurance premium costs. The other reason is that when FEMA's new flood maps take affect virtually the entire peninsula will be classified as a "special flood hazard zone," with some pockets of exceptions.

Homeowners who live in a special hazard zone and are still paying off their mortgage will be required to have flood insurance. Those who do not comply will see the premium automatically added to their monthly payments by their lender.

"If you can't afford it, you will be in default on your mortgage," Becker said. "Some form of a relocation program is going to have to happen."

In line with the discussion of flooding and home ownership, David Louis, the Borough Director of the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, gave an update on the progress of Build it Back, a program created to help residents impacted by Hurricane Sandy by either repairing, elevating or rebuilding their homes, or providing a reimbursement. Thus far, in Senatorial District 10, Build it Back has served over 64% of homeowners and distributed 2,243 re-imbusement checks, which equates to about \$49.5 million.

Attendees also had questions about flooding at specific homes, businesses and streets. The representatives from the various agencies at the meeting said they would have to do some research before they could provide answers to the community regarding those issues. Senator Sanders' office will be following up to make sure that information is forthcoming and will be tracking the progress on resolving those complaints.

"My friends, this is not a quick trip," Sanders said, "This is a struggle for the life of the

Rockaways.”