



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Dozens Attend Sanders Emergency Community Meeting Regarding 7-Alarm Blaze

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 9, 2017



State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway) held an emergency meeting last night in Richmond Hill at the Tulsi Mandir, bringing together relevant agencies to provide up-to-date information and much needed services to help the victims of a recent fire.

“We are going to get passed this,” Sanders said. “We are not going to forget what happened, nor should we. This is a time when we are going to turn to each other, and not on each other.

This is a time when you will see the beauty of your neighbors all around you. This is a time when we can show the love we have for one another in material ways and other ways. We should be greater than this fire. We should not let this fire define our community.”

On Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup> around 11:00 p.m., a 7-alarm blaze ripped through seven buildings on Liberty Avenue. The fire left many families homeless and it took over 200 firefighters four hours to put it out. The cause is still under investigation, according to Edward Baggott, the FDNY's Queens Borough Commander, who offered attendees some words of encouragement.

“You will recover with the help of government and your community,” Baggott said. “There is a lot of support out there. I don’t diminish what happened to you. Many of the people here probably suffered from one of the most difficult things you’ll experience in your life, but remember, we are fortunate that no one lost their life and no one was seriously injured. That is absolutely the most important thing.”

Five of the fire damaged buildings are scheduled to begin being demolished today, March, 10, 2017 - a process that is expected to take two months, according to the NYC Department of Buildings. The rebuild time depends on the architects and the implementation of their plans. Sanitation and air quality of the construction area will be closely monitored, the DOB said, to ensure the safety of the remaining residents.

There was some concern from attendees regarding how valuables would be retrieved from the burnt out buildings. Commander Baggott said that if any such items are recovered during the sifting and debris removal process they would be turned over to the NYPD and then matched to their rightful owner. With regard to ID and passport replacement, the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs recommended that new identification be obtained through the IDNYC program.

In order to assist the community with the recovery process, Pandit Lakhram R. Maharaj, founder of the Tulsi Mandir, has been collecting clothes, food and other items for the victims. He also raised \$1,000 in cash. He has allowed the house of worship to be used as a drop in site following the blaze and continues to permit residents to use the bathrooms and showers there.

Though the meeting was spurred by loss, on the positive side, it did allow the community to come together and show support for their fellow residents, including one – Savitri Gebodh – who helped alert her neighbors to the fire and assisted at least one person, who would have otherwise been trapped, escape. Many at the meeting called her a hero, but she remained humble concerning her actions.

Senator Sanders' Office is available to help the victims of the Richmond Hill fire and can be reached at 718-523-3069.