



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

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New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer

Sandy Oversight Hearing

Tuesday, June 17, 2014

Goldie Chu Community Room, 82 Rutgers Slip, 2nd Floor, New York, NY

7:00 PM

Good evening. I am Catherine McVay Hughes, Chair of Manhattan Community Board One (CB1). Comptroller Stringer, thank you for the opportunity to comment on continued Superstorm Sandy recovery and relief.

At a height of seven feet, Lower Manhattan experienced one of the highest inundation levels in Manhattan and unfortunately two people in CB1 drowned. While great strides have been made in Lower Manhattan in terms of recovery and relief, there is still much that must be done to rebuild and revitalize what was destroyed, and protecting the area in anticipation of future extreme weather events.

First of all, many small businesses are still struggling to get back on their feet. This is especially true for businesses in the South Street Seaport area, which bore the brunt of the storm and experienced the most extensive damage. For many small businesses, the only financial assistance immediately available after Superstorm Sandy was the Downtown Alliance Small Business Grant, initiated by former President Elizabeth Berger. With limited options for immediate aid, many business owners were forced to dig into their own pockets to finance rebuilding. Today, many of them are still waiting to get approval aid through the Small Business Services NYC Hurricane Sandy Business Loan & Grant Program. To our knowledge, not one application has been approved in the Seaport or Lower Manhattan affected areas. Additionally, the process has been non-transparent and confusing to business owners who have had difficulty following up on the status of their applications. Senator Squadron held a meeting a month ago to address these issues, but as of today, the problems have not been addressed. We urge all of our elected officials to work towards making this dedicated funding available to businesses affected by Superstorm Sandy as soon as possible.

Great efforts have been made to rebuild infrastructure in Lower Manhattan damaged by Superstorm Sandy. The conversion in Lower Manhattan to fiber optics makes data communications infrastructure more resilient in the event of future storms, and now makes Lower Manhattan one of the fastest areas in data communication in the City, if not the country. The fiber optics are only as effective as the individual building infrastructure, which also must be updated to maximize this innovation, in both mixed-use buildings in addition to those that are strictly residential. Similarly, ConEdison began hardening their electrical grid over a year ago, but they are not yet complete. It is critical that ConEdison also focus their resiliency efforts towards their steam and gas grids. In conjunction with these company-driven efforts, individual building owners must be proactive in updating their buildings to ensure that electrical equipment is placed above potential flood lines. The City should additionally take measures to address

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drainage, absorption and sewage backup, as storm surges are not the only danger we face. New York City will continue to experience a variety of extreme weather events in the future, including flash floods and intense winters as the one seen this year, and we should be proactively planning for all of these.

Transportation infrastructure, such as the MTA South Ferry Station and the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel, are still in the process of being rebuilt with a focus on resiliency. While we are pleased these critical needs are being addressed, these projects could take several years to complete, and little has been done to improve the immediate overall resiliency of Lower Manhattan.

Lower Manhattan is in desperate need of immediate resiliency and hardening measures. Existing plans for such measures, such as the Lower Manhattan Multi-Purpose Levee, are long-term projects that will not effectively protect Lower Manhattan for several decades. Resiliency plans for Lower Manhattan were included in the Rebuild by Design BIG U proposal, but \$335 million in funding awarded this month by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are only for the first phase of the project. This phase spans the coast of Manhattan from East 23rd Street to Montgomery Street, all north of the Brooklyn Bridge, and does not include any protection for Lower Manhattan.

The BIG U proposal contains plans for resiliency infrastructure in “Compartment 3”, from the Brooklyn Bridge to the Battery in Community District 1. This proposal includes “Berms in the Battery” at the southern tip of Manhattan, “strategically located so as to protect the ducts of the infrastructure below and create a continuous protective upland landscape” as well as flood protection in the Financial District which would help protect against massive potential damages, including critical infrastructure underneath (BIG U proposal). On June 24, 2014, Community Board 1 passed a resolution urging that “HUD to allocate dedicating funding for both study and implementation of the “Compartment 3” portion of the BIG U proposal, which would contribute to the overall hardening of Lower Manhattan and assist in bridging the gap between short-term measures such as rapidly deployable flood barriers, and long-term strategies like the Lower Manhattan Multi-Purpose Levee.”

Much can be done to additionally assist the South Street Seaport area in their efforts to rebuild and revitalize. The City should make efforts to fast-track construction in the area (such as the Brooklyn Bridge Rehabilitation Project), and ensure that future projects such as Peck Slip Park, are completed quickly with a focus on resiliency and reflecting the new needs of a community that is changing rapidly. Last August, \$8 million was allocated for the Brooklyn Bridge Park portion of the East River Blueway Plan. Since then, we have seen no efforts to move this project forward, and we urge that the park be completed as soon as possible.

One of the programs that will help improve the overall resiliency of Lower Manhattan is New York Rising. The State-funded New York Rising Lower Manhattan Planning Committee has released the Final Community Reconstruction Plan for Lower Manhattan. Originally bounded by Chambers Street to the north, the geographic boundary was expanded to 14th Street early in the process, but funding was not increased to reflect this change. Through the New York Rising Community Reconstruction Plan, the Lower Manhattan community aims to improve the capacity and readiness of all community members to prepare for, respond to, and quickly recover from

severe weather-related events; to address needs currently unmet by existing rebuilding and resiliency efforts; and to support the vital and diverse character and history of Lower Manhattan. It will be funded by \$25 million in HUD CDBG-DR to implement the NYRCR Plan. The components are a Community Emergency Preparedness Program, Community Resource Center, Residential Resiliency and Education Program, Small Business Resiliency and Education Program, Stormwater Capture and Retention Study, Wetland Creation and East River Park, Berming and Deployable Walls at Battery Park, Targeted Flood Protection for lower West Street, Coastal protection study for east and west side. The Governor's Office of Storm Recovery is responsible for implementation of these programs.

Hurricane Irene struck New York City in August of 2011 and Superstorm Sandy in October of 2012. Last year, we got lucky, but we cannot go on hoping that we will be lucky in the years to come. Studies have shown that extreme weather events will occur more frequently in the future, and we must invest in immediate resiliency measures now before it is too late.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.