



Meeting Notes

Gravesend and Bensonhurst Public Engagement Meeting #2

September 16, 2014, 7:00pm – 9:00pm
Sephardic Home, 2266 Cropsey Avenue, Brooklyn, NY

Attendance:

Community Reconstruction (CR) Planning Committee Members: Marnee Elias-Pavia, District Manager, Community Board 11 (Co-chair); Ligia Gualpa, Executive Director, Worker's Justice Project (Co-chair); Scott Barkin, Executive Director, Block Institute; Rocco Brescia, President, Friends of Kaiser Park & Alliance of Calvert Vaux Park; Peter Consolo, Homeowner; Dr. Tim Law, Community Board 11; Butch Moran, District Manager, Community Board 13; Pamela Pettyjohn, Coney Island Beautification Project; Mel Wolfson, Homeowner.

NY State Representatives: Alex Zablocki, NYC Regional Lead, Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR); Christopher Gorman, GOSR; Xavier Williams, GOSR.

Firm Representatives: Eric Fang, Perkins Eastman Architects (PEA); Ayo Yusuf, PEA; Frank Fish, BFJ Planning (BFJ). Noah Levine, BFJ; Niek Veraart, Louis Berger Group (LBG); Jennifer Gonzalez, LBG; Amy Pivak, 4Ward; Guillermo Calle, PACO Group.

Guests: NYS Council Member, Vincent Gentile (43rd District); Sheila Boyd, Representative for NYS Senator Diane Savino (23rd District); Elijah Hutchinson, NYC EDC.

The 2nd Community Reconstruction Plan Public Engagement Event was at the Sephardic Home meeting room on Tuesday, September 16th. 37 guests attended this meeting. The workshop began with an introduction by the co-chairs of the Committee and then a brief overview of the program from Alex Zablocki from the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery. The Planning Team then continued with an explanation of the analysis done to date along with an explanation of the five reconstruction strategies developed with the Planning Committee. After a short break, roundtable working groups were formed around the five strategies. The intent for each roundtable discussion was to discuss potential project ideas for each of the strategies. The discussions were facilitated by the Planning Team with the support of Committee members. At the end of the Workshop, a summary of each group's discussion was reported back to all attendees.

Agenda Item: **Presentation of the Program Overview, Initial Findings and Reconstruction Strategies**

Summary of Presentation:

- 1. Introduction and Welcome:** NYRCR Committee Co-chairs Marnee Elias-Pavia and Ligia Gualpa
- 2. Introduction to NYRCR Program:** Alex Zablocki, Governor's Office of Storm Recovery
- 3. Brief Presentation:** Eric Fang, PEA
 - NYRCR Program Overview (continued)
 - Initial Analysis: What happened during Superstorm Sandy, existing projects, work completed to date, and community vision
 - Reconstruction Strategies overview
- 4. Coffee Break**
- 5. Roundtable Discussions**
 - Input on Reconstruction Strategies and Project Ideas

Agenda Item **Reconstruction Strategy Roundtable Discussions**

After a brief coffee break, participants convened into 5 different roundtable discussions that were focused around the identified reconstruction strategies. Because there was a group of Spanish-speaking attendees, a separate roundtable was created with Spanish speaking translators/facilitators. Strategies A and B were consolidated into one table. The roundtable group discussions were thus organized around the following topics:

Roundtable Discussion Groups:

- Strategies A & B: Waterfront Resiliency and Flooding Issues
- Strategy C: Homeowner Education and Assistance
- Strategy D: Coordinated Community Response
- Strategy E: Upgrade community infrastructure.
- Spanish-speaking Roundtable

Facilitators, presentation boards and handouts with the identified needs and opportunities for each strategy were available at each table to help guide the discussion. One person at each table was assigned to take notes on a note pad. Scans of these notes are provided at the end of this report. When the discussions concluded, the meeting reconvened for a report back session. One member from each group then presented the important ideas and themes discussed at the table. A summary of each of the roundtable groups is provided below.

Strategies A & B: Waterfront Resiliency and Flooding Issues

- Shoreline
 - Look into the possibility of softening the shoreline (soft strategies versus hard strategies)
 - Need to investigate how infrastructure integrates with the shoreline
- Belt Parkway - fairness to the community is required when dealing with the Belt Parkway. Protection should not just be for the big stores and businesses south of the Belt Parkway.
- Need a comprehensive plan
 - Concern raised about a plan to develop a “plan”
 - Plan should identify the most inexpensive projects that accomplish the most for the community
 - Plan could identify pilot projects in the following areas:
 - Belt Parkway
 - Cropsey Avenue
 - Intersection of Bay Parkway and Shore Parkway
 - Should the plan contribute to a regional study?
- Big box stores have a responsibility to the community
- Storm sewers
 - Need check valves in sewers, so people don’t have to buy them individually for their homes
 - Some people can’t afford individual backflow preventer retrofits
 - Maintenance of sewers/backflow preventers is needed
- Opportunity for bioswales along Cropsey Avenue (potentially along median)

Strategy C: Homeowner Education and Assistance

- Education about changes to FEMA maps and flood insurance
 - Need to help public understand different types of insurance (flooding, sewer backup, etc.)
 - People don’t know where to go to get insurance; they don’t know they can’t go directly through FEMA, they have to go through a broker.
 - What are the most useful education tools? Multiple strategies are needed:
 - Door-to-door flyers
 - Advertising/local papers (in multiple languages)
 - Houses of worship
 - Homes that need insurance need to be in compliance sooner rather than later (to be in compliance for 2016)
 - People should sign up now so they can be grandfathered in and avoid higher insurance rates
 - There may be reticence/fear dealing with government workers and agencies
 - Need to speak to communities in a “better” way (consider jurisdictional boundaries, immigrant communities, etc.)
 - People without mortgages who previously did not need insurance should be targeted, they might now need insurance and it could be very expensive.
 - People should check FEMA’s website and do an address search to find a building’s Base Flood Elevation (BFE)
 - Elevation studies/certificates will be required for each building
 - Could the NYRCR Program fund these elevation studies for property owners? (Estimated cost could be about \$800 per property.)
- Funds for retrofits: What is needed?
 - Target populations: income based, vulnerable populations
 - Partner with Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)
 - Grants, loans (revolving loans/low-interest loans)
 - Requirements for spending on low-income residents (HUD & lenders)

- Issues with high-rise buildings: electricity, water (no running water) because pumps went out. Backup generators or other redundant sources of electricity are needed.
- Two different groups of buildings: high-rise and smaller 1-4 family homes which may need different funding mechanisms

Strategy D: Coordinated Community Response

- Need to focus on elderly, people with limited English proficiency and the disabled
- Outreach – need to have flyers, meetings, discussions with homeowners
- Need a shelter/emergency headquarters
 - Multi-lingual volunteers
 - Should be located within Gravesend or Bensonhurst. Macdonald Avenue (out of high flood risk area) is central location.
 - There are a lot of vacant buildings that could be utilized
 - Estimated cost: \$1 million (depends on size/function)
 - Shelter would have back-up power, basic supplies, blankets, water, food, first aid supplies and showers (shelters used after Sandy didn't have showers)
 - Shelter can also serve as a community center for town hall style meetings. Could be flexible space with exercise room, recreation, and case management
- Emergency Volunteers
 - CERT Team and OEM did not engage community during/after Sandy. Some community members have started their own volunteer network instead of relying on CERT.
 - Asian Community United Society has begun to train their volunteers. They are in close contact with other community based organizations (CBOs)
 - Need to work with OEM and CERT to get better service and outreach in Community
- Education
 - Need to educate people how to apply for government subsidies and let them understand the Gov't rules and regulations concerning FEMA regulations and other building regulations.
 - Need to communicate with residents about FEMA's updated Flood Insurance Rate Maps.
- Communication
 - Need plan to reach out to seniors, community members that don't speak proficient English
 - Need to teach people evacuation techniques (first responders) and evacuation protocols
 - Work with news media and ask them to provide information during a disaster event (e.g. location of shelter, assistance and evacuation information). Some CBOs such as Asian Community United Society are already working with news media.

Strategy E: Upgrade community infrastructure.

- Identified Project Ideas
 - Solar-powered Charging stations (locations TBD)
 - Study to protect the Belt Parkway from flooding and surge
 - Street lights/traffic lights that are more resilient (backup generators)
 - DEP related infrastructure upgrades in community in targeted areas
 - Green infrastructure in targeted areas. Could be permeable surfaces and bioswales along medians and at intersections.
 - Improve road conditions (e.g. sink holes and paving) and mitigate flooding
 - Provide backup generators at critical facilities
 - Maintain trees (trim, prune and remove leaves so they don't clog catch basins)

Spanish-speaking Roundtable

- Waterfront along Shore Parkway Greenway
 - Need more rocks, taller seawall and/or raised walkway
- Warning System
 - Residents need to know what to do for evacuation
- Training
 - Need better training for response
 - Residents need training to know what to do for evacuation
 - Workers need to know what to do with contaminated water
 - Health issue:
 - Workers got sick because they didn't know what to do with water
 - Workers were electrocuted because of flooded basements with utility systems
 - Need training in how to clean-up and get rid of mold
 - Also need training in electrical systems, cleaning and construction
 - Training should be provided in Spanish
 - Saturday afternoon is a good time for community for free public education seminars
 - Training could lead to local jobs (which would lead to permanent jobs) in the Community
- Issues
 - During the storm, some of the community was out of work with no money to pay bills and such
 - Workers did a lot of work (cleaning & rebuilding)
 - Bad transportation service (long lines and frequency of trains)
 - Workers were doing recovery work in many places (in Community, Coney Island Peninsula, Rockaways)
 - Power outages lasted up to 3 weeks, the weather was cold and people got sick
 - Hospital was out of service
 - Ocean Ave lost power
 - 5th Ave, Bay Parkway, Shore Parkway, Pathmark all flooded
 - Supermarkets were empty
 - Other significant issues:
 - Pollution
 - Flooding
 - Lead
 - Mosquitos
 - Drinking water contaminated (Bay 17th St)
 - Business owners out of week (2 weeks to 3 months)
 - TD Bank closed

Agenda Item: **Wrap-up**

After the report back session, participants were invited to participate at future meetings and provide feedback in the following ways. The NYRCR Mapping Tool, available on the website was also briefly explained and postcards with instructions were handed out which explained how to use the tool to provide feedback.

- Fill out a Comment Form
- Visit the Community Reconstruction Program website for more information: stormrecovery.ny.gov/nyrcr
- Provide comments on the Community's website using the NYRCR Mapping Tool:
<http://stormrecovery.ny.gov/nyrcr/community/gravesend-and-bensonhurst>
- Email comments to: info@stormrecovery.ny.gov
- Attend future Public Engagement Events (date and location TBD)