

## US Senate Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee Hearing Testimony

### Opening Remarks

- I'm honored to have this opportunity to participate in today's panel on behalf of Long Beach & other affected coastal communities concerning storm preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.
- Thanks all around to New York State, Department of Homeland Security, OEM, Nassau County, as well as Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano, Assemblyman Weisenberg, State Senator Skelos, Congressman King, Congresswoman McCarthy, Senator Gillibrand, and, of course, Senator Schumer.
  - So many visits to us met with real immediate aid and assistance.
- Sandy was a one-of-a-kind Super Storm
  - Thorough preparation efforts began several days prior to the storm. We provided advanced notice to our residents to evacuate (robocalls, texts, emails, radio, television, newspapers, website, and social media).
  - The Ocean met the Bay, resulting in catastrophic flooding.
  - Our recovery effort began immediately, securing assistance from all levels of government.
  - Sandy brought about many obstacles.
    - There was a complete Communications cutoff.
      - In a world where so many rely so much on their cell phone, TV, and computer for communication, we had to resort to extremely alternate forms of communication (e.g., flyers, bullhorns, large signs).
    - We were still a "new" administration (together only 10 months prior to the storm).
      - City personnel united quickly and all stepped up.
        - Without the heroic efforts of our city personnel, our City would not be standing.
- Long Beach is a unique community.
  - We are the only City in New York State located entirely on a barrier island.
  - Our emergency response was successful – good coordination under unified Long Beach command, a disciplined battle rhythm, and marshaling tremendous resources and assets.

- And now, as we address recovery, we have identified six recommendations for this committee to assist Long Beach and other affected communities. These recommendations address our long-term needs, mitigation, and preparation for future storms.

### Recommendations

- I have the following three recommendations.

#### **1. Establishing the FEMA Match – this is especially critical right now**

- We are calling on FEMA to provide at least 90% reimbursement as opposed to the standard 75%. This has been done during other major storms – in fact, according to a Congressional Research Service report (FEMA Disaster Cost-Shares: Evolution and Analysis) FEMA has provided reimbursements over the minimum 75% for 222 events in 24 years (from 1985 to 2009).
  - If we receive a combined 87.5 percent reimbursement from the government, the remaining 12.5 percent of repair costs could do catastrophic financial damage to the City. Our annual budget is approximately \$87M, and we are estimating damages in the multiple hundreds of millions. Being on the hook for the additional 12.5 percent, which would equate to tens of millions of dollars, is not something we can afford. By comparison, we only estimated \$2M in damages due to Irene in 2011 – 12.5 percent in a storm of that magnitude is something that was manageable; Sandy is not.
  - While, we are still hopeful for a 100 percent reimbursement between federal and state government, we have established a City of Long Beach Relief fund to help rebuild stronger, smarter, and safer. To date, we have received approximately \$360,000. All donations will be allocated to specific projects (e.g., boardwalk, rec center, senior center, parks) via city council resolution.

#### **2. Focus on Mitigation, protecting and hardening critical infrastructure**

- Must protect our barrier islands if we want to protect the south shore of Long Island.
- Aging Infrastructure needs to be addressed as we build a Smarter, Stronger and Safer Long Beach.
  - One of the City of Long Beach's major issues before, during, and after the storm is the aging infrastructure of the city.
    - The Sewer Plant went down.

- The Water Plant went down.
- Essential City Buildings sustained substantial damage.
- Up and running now in makeshift and masses. We need a long-term real fix, hardening.

### **3. Cutting through the Red Tape Cutting through the Red Tape**

- It is imperative that there is a quick pass through of FEMA funds to those who are most in need.
  - We cannot have red tape holding up the process - there is simply no time. Senator Schumer and Governor Cuomo set a fantastic precedent for this.
- Community Development Block Grant and Economic Development Funds will assist in our rebuild – flexible and necessary for business and city assets.
- Our businesses need help to be up and running and residents need expedited funds to get back on their feet.
- We need to have a successful summer season. The beach and boardwalk are synonymous with our City, and we absolutely must generate revenue during the summer months. It is our hope that we will be able to inject adrenaline into our local economy in June, July, and August.
- Coordinated Planning & Emergency Training among government entities is essential.

Our City administration is one of the only to have a plan ready to go to provide immediate assistance to homeowners and businesses. Here is a brief overview of some of the assistance programs that's are residents sorely need, and they need it now.

Our homeowners need assistance with raising homes, demolition, mitigation, and mold remediation.

Our businesses need direct storm damage grants, business retention/loss of revenue grants, and business startup grants.

#### Damage & Costs

- I have submitted supplemental materials, which includes a detailed spreadsheet that was completed shortly after the storm hit, it itemizes our infrastructure funding needs and estimates the total cost at just under \$336M. Our water and sewer plants, our roads, our beaches, our vehicles, our boardwalk, our recreation center, and many other City facilities all sustained substantial damage.

- There is also a spreadsheet in my supplemental materials that breaks down the nearly \$292M request we made to New York State for community development block grant funding. The plan includes programs to raise homes, perform mold remediation, provide small business assistance, rebuild infrastructure, and strength the City's emergency response.

### Rebuilding Approach

Our first steps were naturally to restore critical infrastructure and services (e.g., water, sewer, power). Once those facilities returned, our focus shifted to essential quality of life services and issues such as debris removal and City facilities. We have initiated a thorough and thoughtful process every step of the way, based on the "recovery support functions model." One major project we are currently in the midst of working on is our boardwalk reconstruction. 88 percent of our residents have said that they're priority is to rebuild the boardwalk stronger, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

### Currently

- The City has been actively assisting residents to the best of our ability.
  - We have worked together with various entities to establish a Disaster Recovery Center that has become a "One Stop Shop" for our residents in regards to all of their disasters needs.
- The City has addressed many of the Building and Zoning issues brought forward from this storm.
  - We have reduced red tape in our Building Department Permit Process.
  - Various Zoning Changes have made it easier for residents to mitigate for future storms and to assist them in complying with FEMA standards.
- We have begun dialogues with the Army Corps of Engineers as well as other stakeholders to rebuild our beach in such a way to protect future storms.
- Temporary sand barriers have been built on the beach to protect against the rising winter tides and have been successful thus far.
  - These barriers will not withstand a large storm.
  - We must mitigate and protect our City for the future.

### Federal Fund Appropriations

- To date, we have only received \$24M which has been fully allocated for debris removal costs. This was a helpful start, but we still require significantly more money.

### Closing

- We were prepared for a hurricane, but Sandy was beyond imagination-330 year storm.
- We sought and received help at every level but we are still in dire need of assistance.
- With help from all levels of government, Long Beach will rebuild stronger, smarter, and safer.
- Thank you again.