

DAILY NEWS

Face-Lift on Tap for Storm-Torn Beach 116th St. in Rockaway

Blue Bungalow owner Liz Smith-Breslin and other merchants on Beach 116th St. have complained about empty storefronts and other blighted areas on the vital commercial strip. The city is helping storeowners fix up their storefronts, hoping more will look like the beachy home decor store.

BY LISA COLANGELO/NY DAILY NEWS



The city plans to pump \$500,000 into a vital shopping strip in Rockaway in an effort to overhaul blighted and storm-torn storefronts.

Merchants along Beach 116th St. — a gateway to the beach — will have access to grants for new awnings, signs and other improvements, officials said.

Deputy Mayor Robert Steel is expected to make the announcement Wednesday during a visit to Rockaway.

City Small Business Services [Commissioner Robert Walsh](#) said various city agencies are pitching in with planters, benches and better lighting to freshen up the strip.

“People are starting to come back, but it’s going to take time,” said Claudette Flatow, owner of Cuisine by Claudette, a gourmet eatery badly damaged during Sandy. “We already lost a lot and if we didn’t have this, we would be closing.”

Beach 116th St. has long struggled with shuttered shops and panhandlers from nearby halfway houses.

Many of the small business owners were hit doubly hard during Superstorm Sandy, suffering damage to their shops and homes.

“Perception counts,” said Walsh, who has worked with local merchants to push for additional sanitation clean-up crews and police presence in the area.

Walsh said the \$500,000 is coming from Citibank and the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York.

An architect has been working with local businesses to come up with a uniform beach theme for the areas. But Walsh emphasized storeowners will not be forced to accept any designs.

Each shop owner will be able to use roughly \$20,000 for new signs, paint touch-ups and damaged cornices. The grants can also be used for window displays and lighting.

“I’m hoping we can really spread out that money,” Walsh said.

Blue Bungalow owner Liz Smith-Breslin, who has lobbied the city to fix up the area, said she is encouraged by the progress.

“Things are moving in the right direction fairly quickly,” said Smith-Breslin, whose store specializes in home decor. “A nice group of merchants are coming together.”

Smith-Breslin is also working on cross promotions with other shops to lure in more customers to the area.

“More and more people are moving back to Rockaway,” she said. “Now they might be up to the point where they want to buy some art and photography.”

Walsh said his agency is also providing the fledgling local merchants association with a \$75,000 grant to keep the momentum going.