

TESTIMONY OF
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF HOUSING RECOVERY OPERATIONS
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY

October 11, 2017

Good Afternoon Chairperson Treyger and members of the Committee on Recovery and Resiliency. I am Amy Peterson, Director of the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations. Thank you for inviting me to testify today on Intro 1720A, a bill to create a Hurricane Sandy Recovery Task Force. Thank you to Borough President James Oddo for highlighting the need for a formal task force to review and learn from the lessons of Hurricane Sandy recovery. The creation of a task force is something the City has supported for close to a year now.

Mayor de Blasio called out the need to begin this discussion last October in our Build It Back Progress Update report. As Mayor de Blasio stated in his opening letter of this report, "Hurricane Sandy confronted our city with unprecedented challenges. We faced damage to homes and neighborhoods on an enormous scale." "The City also made a critical choice in those first few months after the storm that has shaped all our efforts since. The City decided to prioritize keeping families in their homes and neighborhoods, and to prioritize homeowner choice in the process. That strategy, far different from those made by the State or by other

localities in past disasters, put us on the path we are still pursuing.... We have already begun a comprehensive evaluation of the successes and shortcomings of Build It Back and the associated recovery programs. We must, and we will, develop a better model that can serve our city in future crises. We remain committed to seeing this through. And we will learn the lessons necessary to help our city, and others facing similar crises in the future, to rebuild stronger. “

This task force can build on what we have learned to date through our efforts to expand the offerings of Build It Back including adding a City acquisition and buy-out program with incentives and a direct grant program, accelerating recovery through zoning and other regulatory changes, and trying to provide additional relief to homeowners impacted by the complicated federal disaster duplication of benefits requirements. As a result of these efforts, as of today 99 percent of active homeowners have been served through a construction start, reimbursement check, or acquisition of their home. Eighty-seven percent of homeowners are fully complete including construction, reimbursement and acquisition. These numbers have improved dramatically in the last year, with the completion of almost 1,700 construction projects.

The report went on further to discuss what we have learned to date and how we can take those lessons to prepare for future disasters, including how we can:

- Strategize on the best way to identify who is impacted and gather and share data on damage assessments and beneficiaries. How do we integrate case management and damage assessments from initial response directly into recovery efforts? This could dramatically shorten the case management and damage assessment process used for Build It Back.
- Before the next disaster, evaluate what types of benefits we would offer to what types of homes and communities, including immediate housing recovery options, acquisition, reimbursement, construction, and alternative mitigation. Use knowledge gained from determining unbuildable sites and City Planning Resilient Neighborhood efforts. How do we replicate what worked and improve upon what did not work?
- Figure out how to help communities navigate all benefits more rationally (NFIP, insurance, SBA, HUD funded programs, nonprofit benefits); make recommendations to federal government; and determine if there are other ways to help homeowners access funds to complete work on their own.
- Rationalize the design and construction process – learn from minimum program standards, regulatory requirements, Federal environmental requirements, and site conditions. Will homeowners elevate their homes on their own? Have we established an industry of architects and contractors that will continue to do this work? Are there loan options?

Homeowners face hard decisions about losing space in their homes versus elevating, reducing risk, and decreasing flood insurance rates. Even in situations where full value of construction and management of design and construction was funded by Build It Back, some homeowners elected not to do the work. For many homeowners abandonment of ground floor and underground space is not a viable alternative to actual elevation due to the loss of rental income and the loss of valuable space that impacts future sale value. The City can continue to evaluate viable alternative mitigation measures and work to have these measures recognized in the setting of flood insurance rates.

As the de Blasio Administration continues to invest in building a more resilient city, we look for new ways and tools to promote the long-term resilience of New York's most vulnerable neighborhoods. It is our hope that the new task force will help the City and our residents better understand how we can utilize land use strategies to creatively and responsibly enhance coastal resilience.

This new task force can learn from and expand on the extensive efforts already undertaken by the Council, city agencies, and others to glean lessons learned from Hurricane Sandy recovery.

For example:

- The final report of Hurricane Sandy Houses of Worship & Charitable Organizations Recovery Task Force, established by Local Law 18 and supported by Councilmember Treyger

- The Department of City Planning's "Resilient Neighborhood Studies"
- "The Multi-Family Flood Insurance Affordability Study," commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency
- The Hurricane Sandy After Action Report: Report and Recommendations
- "Rebuild the Plane Now: Recommendations for Improving Government's Approach to Disaster Recovery and Preparedness," written by Holly Leicht, former HUD Regional Administrator for New York and New Jersey.

Although not an exhaustive list, these efforts cover some of the topic areas mentioned in Intro 1720A and would be useful starting points as the task force begins to consider recommendations.

At this point, I am available to take any questions. Thank you.