

Southampton Starts to Tally Costs of Sandy

As Southampton Town continues to tally the millions of dollars in costs from Hurricane Sandy's left hook to the East Coast, the town is already putting together a \$50 million federal aid wish list of projects and equipment needed to ensure that the area will not be as hard hit the next time a hurricane lashes the East End with destructive winds and storm surge.

From mountains of sand to generators, the town is submitting a laundry list of changes it would like to make before the proverbial "next time" comes. The wish list will be given to Governor Andrew Cuomo's office, to be incorporated into the approximately \$30 billion in federal aid the governor has said he will be appealing to Washington lawmakers for, to help the region pick itself up from the destructive storm.

Along with economic development assistance for the whole region, billions in compensation to homeowners and small-business owners for the damage or destruction of their property, the governor will make a case that, amid the rebuilding, there is room for making improvements that will steel the region against the sort of devastation seen during Sandy.

In Southampton, that would mean, according to Supervisor Anna Throne-Holst, funding for things like a massive bolstering of beaches across the entire town oceanfront, the burying of utility lines below ground, the raising of Dune Road, and the installation of generator systems in all town facilities. Ms. Throne-Holst said that town officials have estimated the total cost of the proposed improvements at \$50 million.

"I don't expect this will be fully funded, but the governor and the county asked what our ask would be, in a perfect world, everything that could be done to prevent the kind of damage we saw should this come along again," Ms. Throne-Holst said. "This can be an opportunity to make some important changes that will protect our communities in future events."

Southampton was relatively low on the list of communities hardest hit by Sandy in New York and New Jersey. But the storm's devastation has brought attention to the vulnerability of the region to the effects of strong storms, much of it forgotten in the decades since a major hurricane last landed a direct hit. As a result, it is seen as an opportunity for communities throughout the region to learn from the destruction and near-misses and make adjustments that might protect them from a similar fate when they do find themselves in the bull's-eye.

As it was, the town suffered approximately \$2 million in damages to its assets, primarily miles of roadway along the oceanfront and town beach pavilions that were leveled by the storm. Millions more in costs for repairs, contractors and overtime pay for town highway, police and parks workers before, during and after the storm continue to mount. Add to that the millions of dollars in damage to private homes along the waterfront in Sagaponack, East Quogue, Flanders and Hampton Bays, and even the glancing blow from Sandy was not an insignificant hit.

The most costly proposals in the town's wish list would be the burying of power lines, in hopes of preventing the widespread power outages experienced after Sandy and last year's passing of Hurricane Irene, and the re-nourishing of ocean beaches with millions of tons of sand to bolster the region's natural barriers against the most destructive and deadly elements of hurricanes: storm surge and wind-driven waves.

Burying power lines can cost anywhere from \$100,000 to \$4 million per linear mile, and after Hurricane Irene, officials from the Long Island Power Authority estimated that it would cost more than \$30 billion to bury power lines on all of Long Island—a cost they said was simply not justified by the relatively rare incidence of hurricanes. But with concerns about global warming increasing the frequency and severity of hurricanes, there are many who say that getting started on a program that will chip away at the task of getting all lines below ground should be a priority.

The town has already proposed spending some \$3 million for its portion of a \$24 million project to renourish beaches along just six miles of oceanfront from Water Mill to the East Hampton Town border. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a renourishment project slated for this winter that will dump nearly a half-million tons of sand on the beaches just west of Shinnecock Inlet.

Some of the work the town is proposing be included in federally funded recovery and protection work are projects already on the town's radar. The raising of Dune Road has been a priority goal of the town's highway department for some time, but an expense—estimated at \$7 to \$9 million—the town has been struggling to budget for.

One part of the recovery that the town will not have to worry about the bill for is the reconstruction of the beach pavilions at Scott Cameron Beach and Mecox Beach in Bridgehampton, which were leveled by storm waves during Sandy. Prolific Bridgehampton house-builder Joe Farrell has pledged to rebuild both beach pavilions for the town, free of charge. Mr. Farrell has already helped fund, along with excavation contractor Steve Mezynieski, the reconstruction of the roadway at the end of Ocean Road nearby and Ms. Throne-Holst said he asked what more he could do.

"He came into my office and said he wanted to be helpful and do what he could for the town," Ms. Throne-Holst said. "He was willing to put his guys and equipment to work."