

Superstorm Sandy Review Task Force

Residential/Commercial Recovery and Reconstruction Committee

March 1, 2018 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m

Conference Call Summary

A facilitated discussion took place and the following agenda items were addressed:

1. Roll Call and Introductions:

Members: Gwen O'Shea, Dorian Dale, Zach Tierney, Brendan Cunningham, James Andrews, Melissa Luckman, Beth Walters,
Support Staff: Josh Slaughter, Christina DeLisi
Note: Matthew Arachich had a conflict

2. Discussion around Priority Areas of Focus for: Recovery:-Optimizing Reconstruction
(suggestions put forward thus far include):

- a. Managing Expectations and Providing Guidance in Rebuilding
- b. Consumer Affairs-Vetting Contractors and Storm Mitigation Measures
- c. Reconstruction Advocates: processing paperwork with FEMA/NYS/OEM and insurance companies
- d. Inter-municipal conferring on buy-outs
- e. Small business recovery needs
- f. Program constraints and potential improvements-income eligibility, etc.

3. Are these the right priorities? What are We Missing?

Key points for the group to keep in mind throughout the committee process:

1. Think about not just what went wrong, but what went right after Sandy? We want to ensure things that worked are highlighted and maintained moving forward
2. The Tri-State area received the largest Congressional post-disaster appropriation in history. We can't assume that similar resources will be made available in the future

4. Determining Consensus around Priority Areas(3-5 Ideally)

James Andrews spoke about the two main areas that the Consumer Affairs Department had to tackle during the recovery period:

1. Temporary Licenses: Suffolk County requires all contractors to be licensed by the County. Large numbers of vendors came in from outside of the County, so the department developed and issued temporary licenses. The temporary licenses allowed the out of State and County workers to operate in a variety of critical areas. The employees in the department gathered all the necessary information on each contractor from small to large during the recovery period.
2. Consumer Complaints:
 - a. Price Gauging: The Department had to react; many complaints including price gauging at gas stations. James stated that endless hours were spent on these concerns.

- a. Contractor Fraud: there was a large amount of complaints from people that had been taken advantage of by unscrupulous contractors during their time of crisis and vulnerability.

The group discussed how this information was distributed and what was required for a temporary license.

There was a robust discussion about communication, accuracy of information and a lack of known sources to go to for current, updated resources and information.

Dorian Dale posed the questions: How best can agencies communicate the message to the public, and what agency gets the information out? How do we streamline information? Where were the areas of effectiveness? As a group, let's try to fill and work on the gaps so it can be approved for the next time.

Melissa Luckman discussed the ongoing challenges of multiple funding sources (public and private) and the lack of coordinated documentation collection and application processes. Affected homeowners had to consistently be burdened with providing duplicate applications, paperwork, etc. Synergy is key and having one centralized service to start a case is needed.

Zach Tierney stated that during a disaster there are three separate agencies Federal, State and Local Municipalities with various rules, regulations. Can they be coordinated from the top down? Locally how can we coordinate better? County can't change many of the Federal and State programs, but perhaps the task force can recommend policy/regulatory opinions to better enhance coordinated response through the final report.

Josh Slaughter spoke about his experience with the Third Legislative District residents that were affected during his time at Legislator Kate Browning's office. He found the turnover with caseworkers in various agencies caused repetitive paperwork to be filled out and resubmitted due to it being lost or misplaced with many cases. This could be addressed locally rather than just federally.

Beth Walters spoke of her own personal experience with Irene and Sandy. In the immediate aftermath the public needs to be educated (WE SHOULD EDUCATE THE PUBLIC PRE-DISASTER) about who shows up in disasters FEMA, grant programs, etc. Homeowners need to know there will be multiple inspections, insurance unknowns. Who is inspecting what? What and who to apply to for the rebuild? SBA Loans. Uniformed database, forms included, that describes all programs is needed. Need to develop a system, establish a set of rules and guidelines. Some residents and homeowners were scared to rebuild due to initial estimated cost, and then a year later a larger amount was provided or available for lifting homes. Many are income vulnerable, disabled, and mentally impaired, etc.

There was a discussion around vulnerable populations and the varying capacity of individuals to be their own advocate or even understand procedures for accessing supports.

Zach Tierney discussed that many of the resources made available come from different Federal funding sources with their own requirements and guidelines. For example, HUD and CDBG funding. As well, while there was a large allocation to New York State, it is ear-marked for different projects/supports (i.e. infrastructure vs. individual assistance).

There was a discussion around how quickly FEMA emergency assistance was able to roll-out in comparison to other sources of funding.

Dorian Dale reiterated that each disaster is unique and with it comes the possibility of different resources. We have no control over what the next disaster will look like, but we can make recommendations on how to improve for the next disaster.

Discussion was had about small business recovery needs, funding for immediate and long term recovery. The rebuild varied because major differences in capabilities from County to County, Town to Town, etc.

There was a discussion of a “YELP” for short and long term disaster response and recovery.

There was agreement around the need for local community advocates/case workers and a streamlined coordination system for coordination and application processing (if applicable). As well, around “managing expectations”, “consumer affairs” and “advocates and recovery”

5. Next Steps

The group concluded:

1. Digest the information discussed and regroup to finalize priority areas. An additional conference call will take place prior to the next full committee meeting.
2. Compile an additional paragraph or thoughts after reviewing the notes, if there are additional items that should be discussed. This will be included on the upcoming conference call so priority areas can be determined.