

Crowley Urges Board 2 To File Storm Damage Claims

BY THOMAS COGAN

Congressmember Joseph Crowley brought a flooding update to the October meeting of Community Board 2, alerting those who hadn't yet heard about it of the damage the August 8 rainstorm did to the Winfield section of Woodside. He promised it would be explained at length at a meeting in Winfield in the week after Thanksgiving. He spoke about that other section of Woodside, too, especially in response to questioning, and he urged those victimized by the flooding to fill out forms from the city comptroller's office because the deadline for filing claims is rapidly approaching. Another preliminary explanation promising fuller exposition later concerned Hunters Point South, the housing project proposed for the East River-Newtown Creek area, where once an Olympic village was supposed to rise. Also, it was the night for the board to review the capital and expense budgets.

Many of the August flood victims who came to the September meeting had returned in October. This month a FEMA spokesman clarified what had been left rather unclear last month: that FEMA is an "other needs" program for those who might not qualify for Small Business Administration loans. The spokesman said that in Queens and Brooklyn, 2,600 claims had been filed and \$3 million in FEMA grants had been issued. One woman complained that while she got \$3,000, she needed \$13,000. The FEMA man said she must re-file, and he offered to hear more about her case after his presentation. George Tomov, the man who in September told the meeting how his collection of Balkan folk costumes and related paraphernalia were ruined when his house was flooded, said he would need a huge amount of grant or loan money to even begin to compensate for his loss. He was told that FEMA's maximum grant was slightly in excess of \$28,000, which would be quite inadequate for him.

Crowley said that in the aftermath of the August rain and flooding he had had meetings with city officials that managed to counter Mayor Michael Bloomberg's observation that such an "act of God" as this was something the city could do little to respond to. City Comptroller William Thompson said he would make compensation claim forms available, and Crowley brought many with him. He warned all possible claimants that they should work on them immediately, since their validity would expire in a few weeks. In response to a question about houses beside the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway that were flooded, allegedly as a result of pumping water off the surface of the BQE and thus flooding the sewers that consequently flooded the homes, Crowley said that officials from the Department of Environmental Protection told him that such a sequence of events is not possible. The affected homeowners believe an urban myth, they said. Some homeowners countered with anecdotes that reaffirmed their belief, and Crowley, recalling that on the morning of the rainfall he looked out the window of his 65th Street home to see flooding a good two feet deep in his yard, seemed inclined toward that belief,

too. On that rainy August day, he commented wryly, "All the attention was on the subways being out and the tornado in Brooklyn, when the real problem was here," and in Winfield. After a lengthy discussion with an inquirer about the land on which homes have been built since about 1920 (ranging from parts of Queens to the part of The Bronx his district also includes) he concluded by again urging flood-affected parties to file claims promptly with the city comptroller's office and encouraging attendance at the Winfield meeting on Tuesday, November 27.

The Hunters Point South presentation was made by a team from the city Economic Development Corporation, the Housing Preservation and Development Department and the Department of City Planning, and was billed as a run-through of a fuller presentation, to be made at a meeting on Thursday, October 18 at Citibank on Jackson Avenue. Opening the presentation was Penny Lee of City Planning, who immediately described the plan for the housing site as pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly and aimed at the middle class. Ruth Ann Visnauskas of HPD said that most of the units would be rental, with 60 percent classified as affordable, 40 percent market rate. The former comprise a family earning range from \$50,000 to \$145,000 annually, with families at the upper end paying about \$3,000 per month. Questioned later by Jimmy Van Bramer of the board, who asked if she could describe \$3,000 monthly as a middle-class rate, she said it should be well within the range of a family earning \$145,000. "It's below market rate," she concluded. "We realize there's a dearth of community facilities in



the design," Lee said. She added that with the terminus of the Long Island Rail Road forming a barrier (not to speak of the Queens-Midtown Tunnel toll plaza), the streetscape is "not the best". Not part of Hunters Point South but under consideration is Site B, a 7.5-acre site north of Vernon Boulevard and also bordering on Newtown Creek. The mixed building plan would have some buildings at 120 feet in height and others ranging from 260 to 400 feet high. An EDC spokesman said the buildings would be arranged more imaginatively than the row of "slab towers" that are City Lights and Queens West; and between these new buildings and the East River, 10 acres of parkland would be laid out. These and other features of the plan would be covered in a series of meetings, the first of which is the one on October 18.

The public speakers included Joel Brooks of Teamsters Local 805, on hand to continue the pitched battle between the union and Fresh Direct, the Borden Avenue food service supplier that Brooks called "viciously

anti-union". No one from Fresh Direct was there to reply. Jessica Douglas, director of the Sunnyside and Long Island City Greenmarkets, reported that the Sunnyside market, opened Saturday, July 7, has been doing well and will continue until Saturday, November 10. When Joe Conley, the board chairman, commented that the Long Island City market, which has been in operation for three seasons, is not doing nearly so well, Douglas had to agree.

The Sunnyside Gardens landmark issue was to go to the City Council October 9 and the borough president's office after that, but the meeting about City Planning's text amendment, related to its 1974 designation of Sunnyside Gardens as a planned community, had no set date at the time of the October community board meeting. Conley and Penny Lee of City Planning said that it had to be held before November, saying also that the meeting depended on the results of the City Council and borough president's decisions. Conley wanted a re-statement by John Young of the Queens office of the City Planning Department that would close the loophole created by an ambiguous definition of landmark status. He said that when one was made, a date for the meeting could be set up.

The lists for the capital and expense budgets were gone over carefully, and certain items maintained their priorities, or had them decline or disappear altogether. For example, an item about building a youth center in the district was dropped by the budget committee after being in place for years. When asked why by a few nettled board members, Conley said the committee decided there was no hope the youth center would ever become a reality, so the item was eliminated. Remaining as the leading item in the expense budget is an air quality study for the district.

Despite Brooklyn Tornado, August Storm Damaged Queens Most

BY RICHARD GENTILVISO

A month after President George W. Bush declared Queens a major disaster area because of severe flood damage from an August 8 storm that brought a tornado touchdown in Brooklyn and Staten Island, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is taking over Disaster Assistance Service Centers set up by the city Office of Emergency Management (OEM) right after the storm.

The DASC in Flushing, as well as one in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, are now Small Business Administration (SBA)-FEMA Recovery Centers. As of October 1, SBA and FEMA representatives will focus on helping people fill out applications for low-interest disaster loans from the SBA and provide information on their FEMA applications.

"October 30 is the deadline [for applying]" said Kim Anderson, a FEMA public information officer, at the October meeting of Community Board 4 in Corona. "We do not want any New Yorker that sustained damage to miss this opportunity."

Anderson said to register to be considered for disaster assistance, call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). The number operates seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Registration is mandatory.

FEMA can provide assistance to homeowners and renters for basements damaged by flood, sewer backup or ground saturation and/or seepage. Foundations, furnaces, water heaters, main panels and other basement components are considered on a case-by-case basis. Personal property damages are assessed by an inspector and eligibility is determined on a case-by-case basis as well.

SBA disaster loans provide funds to homeowners and renters to repair or replace eligible personal, real and business property damaged by flooding or rising water and can provide additional funds for mitigation to protect property against future damages.

"SBA is not just for businesses," a representative told board members.

SBA loans for homeowners or renters go up to a maximum \$200,000 for property damages and \$40,000 for personal property. Interest rates for homeowners and renters are 3.125 percent up to a maximum of 30 years. Business owners are charged at 4 percent.

"We are basically concerned with the habitability of the home, some things won't be covered," said a FEMA representative. The federal declaration is specifically for damage caused by the August 8 storm.

Board Member Clara Salas said there has been confusion about calling 311 to report

damages.

"311 is the city [of New York]—that's how the process started," said Anderson. "But it is totally separate from registering with FEMA. If you called 311 but haven't called and registered with FEMA, then you have not registered."

After the August 8 storm, the OEM set up a center in Flushing at the Tzu Chi Foundation, located at 137-22 Northern Blvd., modeled after FEMA Recovery Centers, to help with disaster assistance.

Then on August 20, New York Governor Eliot Spitzer asked FEMA to declare Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island disaster areas because of the August 8 storm. But on August 31, FEMA administrator David Paulson announced disaster assistance would be authorized in Queens only.

An estimated 1,356 homes in Queens required repairs because of the storms compared to 189 homes in Brooklyn and 21 in Staten Island, according to a September 4 report in the *New York Times* online City Room. There were also 460 households needing temporary housing in Queens, compared with 76 in Brooklyn and one in Staten Island, according to the *Times* report.

"We are working jointly with OEM and we have the support of New York City and New York state," Anderson said.