

# DON'T ABANDON, BUILD SMARTER

Post-Sandy, NYC can't retreat from its waterfront, but must change its ways

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EDITORIAL  
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**F**rom Long Beach to the Rockaways to the skyscraper canyons of lower Manhattan, New Yorkers are wrestling with a basic question as they contemplate building back after superstorm Sandy: Does it make sense to rebuild in areas highly vulnerable to extreme weather and rising sea levels?

The question became all the more urgent late last week as President Barack Obama said he would ask Congress for \$60 billion in federal supplemental funds to help the region rebuild and mitigate risks presented by changing climate patterns. What restrictions do we need should Congress give us the green light for extensive reconstruction?

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg offered a commonsense answer last week.

Yes, the mayor said, it makes sense to rebuild – but with ample measures of forethought and caution. New Yorkers would never abandon the waterfront, Bloomberg noted: That's not who we are. In 1835, much of lower Manhattan burned to the ground, partly because firefighters lacked access to an adequate water supply. So the city and state dammed the Croton River and built an aqueduct system to supply water – the bones of a system the city still uses.

We've seen that spirit replicated time and again – on the shores of Long Island and after the terror attacks in Manhattan.

When disaster strikes we rebuild and move on.

But the city can't simply rebuild and hope for the best, either. It must find ways to build back smarter, stronger and more sustainably.

What does this mean?

It means redrawing the flood zone maps. After Tropical Storm Irene struck in 2011, the city expanded Zone A, where chances of a mandatory, pre-

storm evacuation are high. But Sandy surged well beyond low-lying Zone A and into places where major flooding wasn't expected.

It means figuring out why vital infrastructure networks failed during Sandy and determining what is needed to make them stronger. In an age of modern fiber optics, for example, why does so much of the city's communications system use copper wiring? Sandy took out 95 percent of lower Manhattan's copper-wire network, creating a huge problem for stores and offices that could last for many more months.

It means resisting the temptation to fight the last battle while missing the one straight ahead. Sandy shocked everyone. The storm came in with a full moon at high tide and was buffeted by a second weather front that slammed it directly into the most populous region of the United States. The surge in lower Manhattan was 14 feet – 3 feet higher than the previous record, set in 1960. But who knows what the next superstorm will look like?

It means worrying about other kinds of extreme weather as well. Record rainfalls in the city's Catskill watershed during the last three summers introduced large amounts of dissolved organic matter into the creeks and took the water system out of commission for months at a time. Meanwhile, record heat last year led to the highest energy use ever recorded in New York City.

"You don't have to be a believer in climate change to understand that the dangers from extreme weather are already here," Bloomberg said.

It's now clear that we must mitigate the risks whenever possible. But at the same time, we need to acknowledge that life must be lived – and that comes with certain risks we can't eliminate.



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