

# REPAIR — AND PREPARE

Let the legacy of Sandy be a Long Island ready to handle future disasters

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EDITORIAL  
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**T**wo months ago today Sandy was dying down and the extent of the damage was becoming clear. Millions of lives were disrupted, some devastated. On the South Shore and in New York City, people died, homes were uninhabitable, workplaces disappeared, schools were battered.

Much normalcy is restored. For most the impact — no power, no school, no gas — is over. But the public-policy questions Sandy raised remain unanswered.

We risk losing the moment and the momentum. Eventually the fears, the frustrations and the promises to do more, to do better, will fade.

Sandy threw everything about our island existence into question. We are uncertain about how to go forward, and

how much we can trust our institutions to prepare for extreme weather and respond to its aftermath. To regain confidence, we must chart a path that will make our hurricane-vulnerable region safer and more secure.

The challenges are clear, but time is trotting on and the big issues have not been tackled. A few commissions have been formed but nothing we have seen or heard so far convinces us their conclusions will be thorough, or lead to action. If a comprehensive and convincing plan isn't available soon, we'll construct shoddy buildings in the wrong places, and fail to fix our institutions, by default.

Do we rebuild as if Sandy was an exception, or the introduction to an era when such storms are common and high-



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er oceans make them more destructive? The water in New York Harbor, up a foot in the last century, rises still. The climate is changing. We must plan accordingly.

What can we allow to be built, where, and according to what standards? Construction near the water that doesn't heed the dangers can't be encouraged any longer.

How do we insure risky properties, and who bears the risk? It has to fall on the property owners, which was the intent when the National Flood Insurance Program was established. Now it's about \$20 billion in debt and politicians have kept the rates low to keep flood-threatened voters happy. This can't continue.

How do we turn the Long Island Power Authority into an agency we can rely on? The weeks without power after Sandy were bad, but the lack of information was a travesty. LIPA's structure, too political and not accountable enough, must go. The most likely solution is a form of privatization that allows its \$7 billion in debt to stay in tax-free bonds. But just as crucial is modernizing LIPA's technology, so that it can tell when customers have power, and improving its organization, so it can better deploy out-of-town crews in emergencies.

How do we improve the reliability of our gasoline supply? More local storage, an additional terminal to receive fuel on Island, and incentives to gas stations to purchase generators would help a lot. And the same attitude must be taken toward other staples the Island needs to survive catastrophes: food, equipment, water, medicine. When a storm is coming, the materials needed to survive must be on hand.

How can an island of fiefdoms unite during disasters, working with state and federal resources to protect and rebuild? There was no shortage of Sandy response, but there was a lack of coordi-

nation. The answer is planning, practice and cooperation. Police departments, municipal governments and emergency service providers need to draw up and rehearse scenarios that will enable a more organized response next time.

How do we harden our sewage plants against catastrophe, so they can keep functioning or can be brought back online quickly after storms, and not dump millions of gallons of waste into our waters, as several of our plants did? This is a question of will, management and money. East Rockaway's Bay Park, the worst example, is a leaking, foul-smelling plant in the best of times. Suffolk, largely unsewered, also has problems with waste runoff during harsh weather. Sewage treatment needs to be brought up to date and hardened against future storms that could again send waste into our water.

How do we improve our mass transit to stand up to inclement weather? The Long Island Rail Road recovered fairly well from Sandy, but the days it was down reinforced our vulnerability as an island. Putting it on a separate, more secure power grid should be considered, as should ways to keep the tunnels that connect us to the larger world dry.

Will our elected officials get us the help we need? Washington must pitch in to repair this region, which for so long has paid the federal taxes used to help other places in times of trouble. The \$60 billion requested is facing opposition in Congress. Our representatives must overcome that opposition.

These are answerable questions and surmountable challenges. We are a tough region, one that can adapt and rebuild, but the lack of progress thus far is disturbing. We must improve before we forget.

If we don't, the next storm may bring waves of damage that never recede.