



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

Department of Buildings Announces Program to Offer Free Consultations for Property Owners and Design Professionals Reconstructing Sandy-Affected Buildings

ANDREW J LANZA March 11, 2013

Free Design Consultations Will Accelerate Project Approval Process for Affected Homeowners

Meetings Will Ensure New Flood Recommendations Are Properly Incorporated So Newly Constructed Buildings Are More Resistant to Flooding in the Hardest-Hit Areas

The NYC Department of Buildings today announced a new program to offer free design consultations to property owners and design professionals who are planning to reconstruct buildings damaged by Hurricane Sandy.

During these consultations, the Department's senior officials, technical experts and plan examiners will work closely with homeowners who plan on submitting applications and construction plans for properties in a special flood hazard area as shown on the effective flood insurance rate maps or the advisory maps recently issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This program is designed to accelerate the approval process for these projects, assist homeowners with their decisions on reconstruction and better ensure that new flood recommendations and standards are incorporated into the design and construction of these affected buildings.

Before plans are submitted, Department officials will outline the Building Code and Zoning requirements that apply to the location and offer guidance on submitting drawings that comply with the latest regulations. Last month, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg signed an emergency executive order to suspend height and other restrictions so that these reconstructed buildings can meet new flood elevation standards.

The Department of Buildings also adopted a new rule to increase the required minimum flood-proofing elevation so substantially damaged buildings and other new construction are built to withstand greater flood risk.

Free design consultations for any construction project related to Hurricane Sandy will be offered starting on Monday, March 4, 2013. To ensure that property owners understand the construction and zoning requirements involved, they must attend a consultation along with their New York State-licensed architect or engineer. These preliminary reviews will be held in the borough office in which the application will be filed or the Department's NYC Development Hub. Located at 80 Centre St. in Manhattan, the Development Hub is a state-of-the-art project review center which accepts digital construction plans for new buildings and major projects.

To attend a consultation, participants must bring a package of documents in an electronic format, including a set of preliminary plans that depict the proposed scope of work, a site plan, a survey, a zoning analysis and the applicable FIRM or advisory map. At the end of each consultation, the Department will provide applicants with a list of recommendations to be incorporated into the final construction plans submitted to the Department. To request a consultation, please e-mail sandyconsultation@buildings.nyc.gov with the property's address in the subject line.

A questionnaire will be emailed to the sender and should be completed prior to the consultation. Appointments will be held between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Department members met with more than 650 property owners whose homes were seriously damaged by the storm.

The agency's senior officials outlined the demolition process for these homeowners, discussed the need for demolition and worked closely with their private architects and engineers, the City's Housing and Preservation Department, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA to take down these structures in the safest manner possible. These free design consultations are an extension of that continuing effort to help New Yorkers rebuild their properties following Hurricane Sandy.

Since 1983, New York City's Building Code has contained flood-proofing requirements for buildings in FEMA-designated flood hazard areas. A key provision of these requirements is that new or substantially altered buildings must elevate their lowest finished floor or flood proof up to the 'Base Flood Elevation' indicated on the FEMA flood map.

During the storm, buildings constructed to meet code standards fared significantly better than buildings that were built before they were in place, demonstrating the importance of these standards. Following the recent release of FEMA's Advisory Base Flood Elevation (ABFE) maps for New York City, the Department's new rule mandates an increase of the minimum elevation requirements for buildings located in at-risk areas.

New construction or buildings with substantial damage in need of repair must protect these structures by building at least one foot above the flood elevation currently required in the Building Code. The executive order also allows these buildings to be reconstructed in compliance with the FEMA-recommended elevations without creating conflicts with current zoning height limits and other requirements.