

Summary: Post-Sandy Funder Briefing--Series II

Funder Briefing: #6

Date: October 21, 2013

Topic: Post-Sandy Housing, Planning & Resiliency Initiatives

Speakers: **Staci Berger**, Executive Director - Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey;
Adam Gordon, Esq., Staff Attorney - Fair Share Housing Center;
Peter Kasabach, Executive Director - New Jersey Future;
Randy Solomon, Co-Director - Sustainable Jersey

HIGHLIGHTS

Announcements:

- [NJ Future Conference](#) on Oct. 29th at Monmouth University: Panels will focus on what is the new normal. How do we assess the new risks, how do we plan differently going forward, what part does design play in this?
- Also on Oct 29th - NJ Performing Arts Center (Newark) hosts "[Arts Take Action: Sandy One Year Later](#)"

Fair Share Housing Center – *Adam Gordon, Esq.*

- As an advocacy organization for homeowner rights and ending exclusionary and discriminatory housing patterns in NJ, we are focused on transparency for housing / rebuilding programs to make sure that dollars are distributed in a way that matches up with basic data needs, impact, and fair distribution.
- One year after Sandy 40,000 people still displaced, disproportionate number of those people are lower-income
- We work to ensure the application process is fair for those with issues including - access, literacy, language barriers, etc.
- 45% of people have a household income less than \$30,000, includes 67% of all renters in NJ, of those affected by Sandy
- Rebuilding - we are working to ensure that lower-income people have an opportunity to return to affordable housing in the communities they came from.
- We were able to push for FEMA to publish data on storm impact by income level, race/ethnicity, geography, etc., BEFORE initial funds were allocated, to ensure transparency.
 - That baseline allowed us to take the initial action plan and measure it against an objective benchmark
 - 43% of impact was to renters, but most of the funding from the initial action plan didn't target renters. Through meetings and advocacy, got an extra \$75 million of Federal funds allocated to highly impacted lower-income renters, including \$15 million for public housing.
 - This renter-focused effort was one of the best administered Sandy programs, leading to commitments for over 2,000 new or rebuilt affordable homes all over the state, focusing on the most impacted communities

- Focused on making sure Resources for homeowners are also fairly distributed - Fair Share Housing Center started a [complaint website](#) for people who were having difficulty receiving federal assistance for rebuilding.
 - State Open public records request for criteria for grant distribution (\$800 million Federal funding)
 - Hearing a lot of stories about people who received a letter that they weren't eligible because didn't make the \$8,000 damage benchmark, when they actually had tens of thousands of dollars of damage
 - There wasn't a consistent set of transparent criteria for who could apply for what.
- Additional \$2 billion (second tranche) of [CDBG-DR](#) money coming in the next few weeks, and there may not be a third tranche because it could go to Colorado or be stuck because of the Federal government sequester.

[Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey](#) – Staci Berger

- Concerned about how some of the community development programs have been set up, which are lacking in robustness with how they are being distributed (can't secure the actual money allocations and the rate of dispersal or application). One application was 85 pages long - at a time when we need quick, flexible, responsive dollars the money isn't getting out. We're asking legislators & decision makers to help make those funds easier to access. The programs of concern are:
 - Neighborhood enhancement program
 - Landlord incentive program
 - Small rental properties program
 - Special needs housing fund
- Media coverage - working to keep the balanced approach to Sandy stories - trying to direct coverage to Ironbound neighborhood of Newark, for example.
- Homeowner resettlement program has \$10,000 grant with a 2-year residency requirement: that may be impossible for lower-income people to commit to if they are unsure if they can afford to keep their homes, so there may be a huge disparity in terms of who is receiving grants
- Next CDBG-DR - housing counseling is desperately missing from funding allocations - state should be asking for this and utilizing HUD certified counselors
- [Blue Acres Program](#) has funds for buyouts, but [DEP](#) hasn't moved forward - we're working to try and move those efforts forward.
- We need to be resilient about what we're asking for, documenting when things aren't being addressed, would like to hold some public hearings so we can hear what worked well or needs to be changed so that community members can diversify the voices represented
- [Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Elevation and Mitigation Program](#) (RREM) - 8,100 on the waiting list - many people didn't even know that they had to apply. Spanish language guidelines on FEMA website were not updated to reflect the deadline of June 30th, so there is a lot of conflicting information out there. The rejection letters were general, so it was confusing for people to appeal, further complicated by enormous intake problems.

[Sustainable Jersey](#) - Randy Solomon

- Municipalities are suffering from the disparate impacts of funding resources - but some municipalities with low capacity have issues even identifying the resources available to them; staffs are overwhelmed
- Sustainable Jersey is working with municipalities to help with connect with the resources available, and to start to shift their thinking to include long term resilience
 - E.g. - some municipalities receive lots of requests for urban studio planning support, and some municipalities don't get contacted at all

- Creating Resiliency Network (launch in two weeks) - partnership of nonprofit, public and private, aid and resource organizations to link municipalities through technical assistance and grants to coordinate and do matchmaking. 3 regions for Resiliency Network Coordinators: Urbanized Coast, Monmouth & Ocean, and all the other southern coastline including Delaware Bayshore.
 - Helping to coordinate between aid organizations as well, to ensure that they are efficiently, effectively and fairly applying their resources
 - Asking municipalities what they need and communicating that out to help source new resources
 - Advisory board includes practitioners, municipal representatives, research organizations, etc.
 - Creating database of vetted resources available to municipalities
- Networks could provide assistance such as:
 - Sample ordinances (floodplain, design standards for elevated homes, etc.), risk assessments (ecosystem vulnerability, wildlife, etc.), better understanding buyout opportunities or transfer development rights (alternative to a buyout), providers could give free technical assistance
- Funders could help get involved with supporting organizations who are working to determine decision support tools, models and programs to help communities become more resilient

NJ Future – Peter Kasabach

- A lot of collaborations have come out of Sandy work, and funders have really stepped up to help foster that.
- NJ Future worked with HUD about language about planning and sustainability in first tranche and with FEMA on how planning was incorporated in their roll out different programs.
- State Government - state did put \$5 million out for planning, Hazard Mitigation - now trying to make sure there are more robust requirements that incorporate, local participation, land use discussions, etc.
- Tools that will help municipalities understand how vulnerable they are:
 - Rutgers has created a great tool called [Flood Mapper](#) which offers a way to look at your town years down the road in terms of flooding and storm scenarios
- 3 [Local Recovery Managers](#) (LRM) working in 7 communities - work hand in hand with towns for long term.
 - Funding is in place for 18 months currently, hoping to extend to 3 years. LRMs wear two hats - as assistant business administrators to help meet immediate needs (help to apply for grants or implement projects), and as planners to help meet long-term resiliency needs. David Kutner is manager of Local Recovery process.
 - Zoning officers and grants writers are in high demand
- Planning assistance grants from DCA will allow for hazard mitigation grants:
 - Example: In Highlands, the sewer system was perforated after Sandy, which created at 50% growth in the sewage flows that was being sent to the municipal utility authority. Since that puts them over the “cap” of sewage they are allowed to send, they are not legally allowed to issue any new building permits, which of course slows the rate of rebuilding. Working with them to figure out how to grapple with that.
 - Seabright - 50% of residential structures were destroyed. Most houses are still stripped to the studs and empty. How to reach the homeowners - where are they?
 - **Keansburg - 1,200-1,500 people per day still being fed by soup kitchen. These people have no ability to rebuild, many are sleeping in the park.**
- Blight issues - tied to gentrification issues, as well because tax base in municipalities will have to attract wealthier individuals
- Policy issues:
 - Urban areas - there isn't as much attention being paid to challenging issues about how adaptation will happen to climate change

- Water infrastructure - leaky pipes, sewage problems - magnified with storms like Sandy

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Kessler Foundation](#) - \$150,000 in small grants for those with disabilities. Getting ready to help a [Community Health Law Project](#) - coordinate rebuilding with ADA standards, and accessibility, so that technical assistance can be provided to organizations that are focusing on rebuilding efforts.
- HUD launching [Restart the Shore Program](#) with [NJ Community Capital](#) - providing financing to buy hundreds of troubled mortgages. Allows homeowners to resize their mortgages to help them try to avoid foreclosure. RFP for housing counsellors will be put out shortly.

Beginning on the first Monday after Hurricane Sandy struck New Jersey, The Council of New Jersey Grantmakers began hosting weekly conference calls for grantmakers in-state and nationwide, facilitated by CNJG President Nina Stack, to discuss their response to Sandy and strategies facing NJ as a result of the storm. Each conference call briefing offered expert guest speakers who represented government agencies (FEMA, HUD, HHS, etc.), national philanthropic leaders, expert psychologists with experience in PTSD, planners and community redevelopment leaders, and representatives from NJ's Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, among others. The twenty-five audio files and written summaries are available at: <http://cnjg.org/hurricane-sandy>