#Sandy Roundup: Rockaway Peninsula Residents Still Reeling

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Some residents in the Rockaway penninsula of Queens remain literally disconnected after Hurricane Sandy.

The 1,800-unit housing project Ocean Bay Apartments was one of the last two New York City Housing Authority buildings to regain power in late December, but local Councilman Donovan Richards says hundreds of his constituents are still waiting for phone service to return.

Despite the lack of landline service, Richards said that many of the residents have told him they are still receiving bills from Verizon. What they're not getting, he added, is any notice about when they can expect their phone lines to work again.

"This is a communication company," he said. "They should be able to communicate."

Richards said that a few of his constituents have continued to pay for the last five months of nonexistent phone service, including elderly residents who don't have access to wireless technology.

A Verizon spokesman told The New York Daily News that any customer can reach out to the company for a full refund. The company added that it has already started working on the units between 51st and 53rd streets, and hopes to begin restoring power between 54th to 59th streets before April.

Revitalization of Rockaway Beach Rail

Leaders from federal and state government want to infuse the Queens neighborhood with some renewed economic energy.

Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder has joined forces with U.S. Congressmen Gregory Meeks and Hakeem Jeffries to bring the three-and-a-half-mile Rockaway Beach rail line back to life.

The three representatives sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood requesting that a portion of the federal aid for Sandy recovery be designated to restore the abandoned rail line .

"It became evident after Sandy that we need to increase public transit options and improve our infrastructure for our neighborhoods in Southern Queens and Rockaway," Goldfeder wrote in a statement on Sunday. "Restoring the rail line will help prepare our communities to become more resilient for our future and allow our local economy to thrive for many years to come."

Goldfeder has also delivered a petition about the rail line, with almost 3,000 signatures to Governor Andrew Cuomo, the Port Authority and MTA.

However, Goldfeder's proposal is only one idea being floated around as an option for the rail line. Closed in 1962, the railroad could turn into Queen's answer to Manhattan's High Line park. Nicknamed the QueensWay , the project is being promoted by national parks group the Trust for Public Land and the recently established local group Friends of the QueensWay.

Questions About Bloomberg's Post-Sandy Buyouts

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plans to buy out Sandy-damaged homes may have came out last week, but there are questions about its differences from Governor Cuomo's proposal.

WNYC reported last week that Bloomberg's program, unlike Cuomo's, allows for

redevelopment on the properties in question. In terms of immediate effects, that means homeowners can only receive the post-Sandy value under the city's plan.

Long term, some critics argue that the Bloomberg proposal is too short-sighted and doesn't take climate change into account. Capital New York interviewed Columbia University professor Klaus Jacob, who warned against ignoring rising sea levels and increased storm surges .

"You don't want to, in the long run at least, invest new assets into areas that ultimately will be doomed," Jacob said. For more on Jacob's views on the matter, see our extensive interview with the expert .

Bloomberg himself has previously linked the spike in severe weather to climate change. The mayor raised eyebrows last year when he endorsed President Barack Obama specifically acknowledging climate change as a national issue.

"Our climate is changing," Bloomberg wrote days before the presidential election . "And while the increase in extreme weather we have experienced in New York City and around the world may or may not be the result of it, the risk that it may be — given the devastation it is wreaking — should be enough to compel all elected leaders to take immediate action."

Image of Rockaway Rail Line courtesy of Sean Eric Carlson .

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hurricane sandy

Rockaway