

# Supervisor Romaine is Cautiously Optimistic About FEMA and Army Corps Plan to Remove Storm Debris from Fire Island Communities

posted on 12/11/2012 12:32:57 PM

*December 11, 2012*

**Farmingville, NY** - On Wednesday, December 5, Supervisor Ed Romaine, Councilman Dan Panico and other Town officials met at the Holbrook Fire Department with members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Army Corps of Engineers to initiate plans to remove Sandy related debris from Fire Island.

This is the first time that FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers have taken over a disaster clean-up operation of this magnitude and Supervisor Romaine was cautiously optimistic about the plan. At the meeting, he said he was "all ears when it comes to helping my constituents," but voiced concerns about the scheduling of the effort, logistical difficulties, debris disposal methods and locations, and how the clean-up will impact the Town's finances.

The project, which is planned to begin in January 2013, is reimbursable by FEMA and the Army Corps up to 75% of approved expenses, with the State and Brookhaven Town funding 12.5% each. In order for this plan to move forward, Supervisor Romaine has scheduled an Emergency Town Board Meeting on Thursday, December 13 at 12:00 pm, so resolutions can be adopted by the board giving FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers the authority to proceed.

A key element to completing the clean-up in a reasonable amount of time is securing signed and notarized Right Of Entry (ROE) forms from at least 75% of Fire Island homeowners. The forms will allow contractors hired by the Army Corps to enter private property with personnel and equipment to remove debris. Without a completed form, homeowners will be responsible for debris removal from the island and they will have to bear the expense.

Supervisor Romaine said that homeowners will be notified by mail and e-mail using data from the Town Assessor's office. He stated that "one of our biggest concerns is getting the ROEs filed and posted before the start of the clean-up. We would like to see 100% compliance, which would hasten the debris removal and keep the cost down." He stressed that the Town's fiscal position has already been impacted severely by the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy since the Town Board did not anticipate the cost of storm related damage.

Where the debris will go once it leaves Fire Island is also a concern for Supervisor Romaine. "There was some talk about barging it up the Hudson River to upstate New York, or even bringing it to our landfill, which creates some environmental issues about continued burning to dispose of the vegetative debris. We will have to think long and hard about this and discuss it with the DEC, my Waste Management staff and the local civics that border the landfill." Supervisor Romaine also indicated that the Town will establish debris collection points in each Fire Island community so homeowners can bring debris to a central location for later pick-up by the contractors hired for the clean-up.

At the meeting, FEMA officials indicated that one local general contractor will be vetted out to oversee the operation. The company that is selected will then hire out smaller, local companies to remove the debris, including barge services. "I intend to keep an eye on the vetting process to ensure that local Brookhaven contractors have the opportunity to bid on the project and are chosen to participate," said Supervisor Romaine. He also stressed that local companies are familiar with Fire Island and the challenges that they will need to overcome in order to complete the job.

Supervisor Romaine will hold a meeting on Monday, December 17th with the Fire Island Association and other Fire Island organizations, residents, Homeowner's Associations, FEMA, Suffolk County Fire Rescue and Emergency Services (FRES) and Town officials to firm up the plan and establish the guidelines and procedures for debris removal. "This is a massive undertaking in communities that have no roads, only boardwalks and sidewalks," Romaine said, "and a large number of those have been damaged or destroyed." He noted that he will take a trip to Fire Island on Wednesday, December 12 at 9:00 am to survey the damage caused by Sandy, which affected hundreds of homes and businesses across every community.

"After attending numerous meetings, it is clear that the key to this coordinated effort is going to be the Right of Entry forms which need to be properly filled out by Fire Island homeowners who are in need of assistance," commented Brookhaven Town Councilman Dan Panico. "Property owners must understand that this is a cooperative effort between many jurisdictions and levels of government to act in an efficient manner, and the window of opportunity is not infinite. Therefore, I encourage these owners to return the signed consent forms in an expeditious manner, if they

so chose to avail themselves of the help that is being offered."

"Fire Island was our first line of defense during Superstorm Sandy and now homeowners have to pick up the pieces, clean-up and rebuild their communities," said Councilman Tim Mazzei, whose district includes all portions of Fire Island located in Brookhaven Town. "I look forward to working with officials from FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers to help get our residents safely back into their homes in time for the summer season."

"My first priority is to take care of the needs of the Fire Island residents so they can safely return to their homes and get them ready for next summer," said Supervisor Romaine, "I will cooperate fully with FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers and ask that all Town Departments do the same in order to get this operation moving forward in a timely manner while keeping a close eye on the fiscal impact to all the taxpayers of Brookhaven Town."

**Division of Public Information \* Office of the Supervisor**

One Independence Hill • Farmingville • NY 11738 • Phone (631) 451-6595 • Fax (631) 451-6258