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FEMA again denies funds for ocean outfall pipe at Bay Park sewage plant

March 19, 2015 by EMILY C. DOOLEY / emily.dooley@newsday.com



The Federal Emergency Management Agency has again denied a request to fund a \$550 million ocean outfall pipe for Nassau County's Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant.

Local and state officials pledged to keep seeking money for the beleaguered plant, which was knocked offline during superstorm Sandy in 2012 and dumped nearly 2.2 billion gallons of partially treated sewage into Reynolds Channel through an outfall pipe.

"While we continue to disagree with FEMA's interpretation of the project's eligibility, we appreciate FEMA's commitment to work with

New York State and Nassau County to help identify federal funding for the project," said Emily DeSantis, the governor's deputy director of communications for the environment.

FEMA said it had agreed to use roughly \$729 million in Sandy recovery funds for upgrades and repairs to the plant. But it has denied requests for both an ocean outfall pipe and upgrades to remove nitrogen because neither existed at the time of the storm. Last month, New York State pledged \$150 million in storm recovery money for a nitrogen removal system at the plant.

"FEMA's position remains the same -- the rationale presented for funding of the proposed ocean outfall pipe . . . is ineligible," FEMA regional administrator Jerome Hatfield said in a March 16 letter to DEC and the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery.

The current outfall pipe sits about 2.3 miles from Bay Park in Reynolds Channel, an area with poor water quality due to nitrogen discharges mostly blamed on the sewage treatment plant. The county and other advocates say an outfall pipe in the ocean is the best option to restore water quality and upgrade wastewater treatment.

"They have to find the money," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment. "No is not acceptable."

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo did not ask for funds from a Housing and Urban Development disaster recovery program in the final round of funding requests, which is in the comment phase.

DeSantis did not respond to questions about the omission.

"To make this pipe a reality, the state and locals must step up to the plate," said Meredith Kelly,

spokeswoman for Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).

In 2010, the county agreed to pay a fine over illegal discharges and conduct a feasibility study examining options for relocating the outfall pipe. The estimates for building an ocean outfall pipe, in 2013 dollars, were between \$355 million and \$395 million, according to the study by the New York-based consulting company CH2M Hill.

Design and permitting costs would bring the total to \$550 million, Nassau communications director Brian Nevin said.

Last May, FEMA denied the initial outfall funding request and did so again in June. The agency repeated that last month and again in the letter, which prompted Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano to travel a day later to Washington to meet with FEMA. Joining were DEC Commissioner Joseph Martenscq and Rep. Kathleen Ricecq (D-Garden City).

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