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## EDITORIALS

# Grab this chance for ocean pipe

### Officials must not miss opportunity to build \$1.5B conduit from Bay Park

Rising from the devastation of superstorm Sandy is an unparalleled opportunity not only to repair the wrecked Bay Park sewage treatment plant, but also to finally restore the ecosystem of the western bays contaminated by the plant's waste for more than 50 years.

The East Rockaway facility was built in the 1950s without an outfall pipe to carry its treated effluence far into the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, the salt marshes that are a key natural barrier against water and wind surges in major storms have steadily degenerated. Fish and shellfish populations are almost destroyed, and the fouled waters are too toxic for swimming.

No options existed to reverse this course. The federal government stopped funding outfall pipes, and Nassau County was barely managing to keep the plant, which serves 500,000 Nassau residents, in good repair. The much-needed pipe was doomed to be a pipe dream.

Then Sandy walloped the decrepit plant, knocking it offline and sending 65 million gallons of sludge into Reynolds Channel and 100 million gallons of raw sewage into Hewlett Bay. Sewage also backed

up into many homes. The environmental disaster would have been avoided if an ocean outfall pipe were in place. Now, with massive federal disaster relief flowing our way, a pipe is possible.

But its costs, combined with the repairs to the Bay Park plant, are enormous — well north of \$1.5 billion. Bay Park repairs are estimated to cost \$810 million, with the Federal Emergency Management Agency picking up \$730 million of that tab — the largest amount it ever will have paid for a sewage project.

A 2.5-mile outfall pipe would cost an estimated \$600 million to \$700 million extra. The money to construct it would come from a different pot of Sandy relief aid, one controlled by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Earlier this month, HUD deposited \$2.7 billion into that pot for a round of downstate suburban funding that is considered Nassau County's best shot at getting the ocean pipe. Such a critical infrastructure need is clearly within HUD guidelines for mitigation projects and was specifically written into the law by Sen. Charles Schumer. The state must file a request by late March, and aides to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo told us last week that they intend to do so, even though the state seemed to be hedging in the preliminary action plan it filed with HUD.

The pipe would solve problems beyond the Bay Park plant. The \$50 million slotted to repair the wrecked Long Beach sewage treatment plant could be cut in half by making it a pump station that could pass the waste along to Bay Park. Beyond the savings, that would stop the flow of 5 million gallons daily of treated sewage in Reynolds Channel.

Engineering studies are underway. To be determined: the pipe's exact length and whether a separate expensive system to remove harmful nitrogen is part of the Bay Park overhaul. Environmentalists support that, but state officials are not yet convinced. The nitrogen dispute must not undermine the effort to get the funding for the pipe.

Both Schumer and Cuomo extensively and effectively lobbied FEMA to approve the Bay Park project. We need the same full-court press on this, too.

We don't want to endure another Sandy to get this opportunity again. **N**



DOUG KUNTZ

The Bay Park sewage plant has fouled nearby bays on Nassau's South Shore.

OPINION