

Schumer: Additional FEMA funds could go toward Bay Park ocean-outfall pipe

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Millions of additional federal dollars coming to the state could be used to partially fund a new outfall pipe at Nassau's Bay Park sewage-treatment plant that would send damaging effluent into the ocean instead of the beleaguered Western Bays, Sen. Charles Schumer said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency late last month approved an additional \$210 million in Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds for New York, which Schumer (D-N.Y.) said could be directed to fund part of the outfall pipe.

"It's mitigation money and it can be used very flexibly," he said.

FEMA repeatedly has rejected state and federal requests for public-assistance funding for the ocean-outfall pipe on the grounds the pipe hadn't existed when superstorm Sandy hit.

But money from the hazard-mitigation program can be used for projects that weren't damaged by Sandy, FEMA spokesman Ray Perez said.

"It can be used for mitigation against future damage," Perez said.

Despite Schumer's call for the money to go to the pipe, it is the state -- not the federal government -- that will decide how the money is spent, Perez said.

"We're just alerting them to the fact there is this extra money," Schumer said of the state.

Representatives from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's Office of Storm Recovery did not comment Sunday, and Cuomo's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

While the Sandy-damaged plant, which serves half a million people, will be rebuilt using \$810 million in FEMA funds and \$101 million in state-directed storm-recovery money, at issue has been the source of the estimated \$550 million it will take to build a new outfall pipe to direct the plant's average daily 50 million gallons of treated effluent into the Atlantic Ocean instead of Reynolds Channel.

High levels of nitrogen in the effluent weaken the area's coastal marshlands, which experts believe serve to protect the area from harsh waves and flooding during severe storms such as Sandy.

The new hazard-mitigation money the state received was the result of a formula that triggers the extra money based on the total amount of disaster funds New York is awarded, Perez said.

Schumer said it had been unclear how much grant money the state would receive under the formula. His spokesman, Angelo Roefaro, said Schumer had been in contact with FEMA and pushed for the recalculation for New York under the formula.

"We never knew how much money would be available, if any," Schumer said. "The pieces of the formula were filled in recently."

The move brings the total amount of money New York will receive under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to \$1.38 billion.

Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano issued a statement Sunday thanking Schumer for his efforts.

"These hazard-mitigation funds are a potential game-changer in making an ocean-outfall pipe a reality," Mangano said.

Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, called the potential funding for the outfall pipe "a gigantic leap forward" and joined in calling for the state to dedicate the money to it.

Cuomo, while declining to include the project in the state budget, in January had vowed to continue to press the federal government to fund the pipe.

In February, the state committed to spending \$150 million in storm-recovery money for a nitrogen-removal system at the plant, but that system would not be able to remove enough nitrogen from the effluent to meet water-quality standards if the plant's outfall remained in the Western Bays.

The rest of the money for the outfall pipe could come from a \$1 billion competition on disaster resiliency run by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has set aside \$300 million of that for Sandy-related projects, Schumer said.

It also could come from a combination of grants and low-interest loans from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"We've been scouring for ways to figure out how to do this," Schumer said of the outfall pipe. "This is the number one demand of Long Island."

Project price tags

Other costs associated with the Bay Park sewage treatment plant being funded by federal agencies:

\$911 million to rebuild the plant.

\$35 million to cover the design, engineering and permitting of the ocean outfall pipe.

\$150 million to upgrade the plant's nitrogen removal system.

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