

TOP STORIES

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SEWAGE PLANT'S \$730M BOOST

- **Cuomo: Nassau's Bay Park** to get federal money
- **Grants amount to** largest Sandy aid package

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The federal government has approved at least \$730 million in grants to help rebuild the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant in Nassau County, the largest aid package awarded to date for superstorm Sandy recovery, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said yesterday.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has approved \$657 million and the Cuomo administration has earmarked another \$73 million in federal community development grants for the project, bringing the total aid approved for the project to \$730 million.

Nassau officials said yesterday that while repair cost estimates have fluctuated, the current projection is around \$850 million. The county might be eligible for further aid to cover the difference. Republican County Executive Edward Mangano has said rebuilding the plant is his No. 1 priority.

The plant in East Rockaway is the largest wastewater treatment facility in Nassau, treating 58 million gallons each day, and serves more than 550,000 residents. The facility also was the largest wastewater treatment plant on Long Island damaged by the October 2012 storm.

"This will be the largest Sandy infrastructure award and a major victory for the more than 550,000 residents of

Nassau County who depend on this critical piece of infrastructure every day," Cuomo, a Democrat, said in a statement. "This funding will cover repairs to the Bay Park Wastewater Treatment Plant that was destroyed during Sandy and strengthen the facility against future storms, including building a state-of-the-art dike to protect against future flooding. The Bay Park Plant project has been a priority in our rebuilding process."

A FEMA official confirmed the \$730 million figure yesterday, but said the process of obligating the funds to Nassau has yet to begin.

During the storm, Bay Park's pumping system was flooded under 9 feet of water. Sewage backed up and overflowed into low-lying homes and streets, officials said. The plant shut down for two days and about 200 million gallons of raw sewage poured into channels and waterways. The plant's electrical system was destroyed.

"This is probably the biggest public works project that needs to be done," U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said yesterday. "It's vital for Nassau County."

Schumer and Mangano will meet with FEMA officials Wednesday in Washington to discuss further aid.

Under previous disaster rules, Nassau would have to obtain loans to fund the Bay Park project, then seek FEMA reim-



A tidal surge at the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant during superstorm Sandy flooded the pumping system under 9 feet of water and destroyed its electrical system.

PHOTO BY CHARLES ECKERT, 2013

bursment. Schumer said new rules allow localities to get money upfront, as long as projects meet aid criteria. Waiting causes municipalities hardships, he said.

"They often don't have the money. They have to bond for it. They spend the wrong amounts," Schumer said. "Getting the money upfront is a huge, huge benefit. Construction will be quicker and they won't be hassled about reimbursements."

In November, the county legislature approved a Mangano plan to secure a \$455 million, no-interest loan from the state to begin rebuilding the Bay Park plant. Officials would prefer to use FEMA grants rather than take the loan, although Nassau still could.

The Bay Park project is supposed to include building a dike around the plant to prevent flooding, elevating and hardening the electrical distribution system, and building a larger sewage collection line to accommodate increased flow levels during storm surges.

"The federal, state and county partnership formed to rebuild Nassau County in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy will succeed in strengthening our local infrastructure against future acts of Mother Nature," Mangano said in a statement.

