

Keeping an eye on Hurricane Sandy recovery dollars Weekly News Round-up: January 31 - February 7

With a high volume of media coverage in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Good Jobs New York is keeping the spotlight on how government money is proposed to be spent in the rebuilding process. For more information on transparency and opportunities for community involvement, follow us on Twitter @GoodJobsNewYork #EyeOnSandyMoney. Also, let us know how we can adjust this alert to make it better.

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We've updated our layout - scroll down for Advocacy News

Weekly news round-up

Disaster Relief

- The first installment of Federal grants were announced on Wednesday. A total of \$5.4 billion in Community Development Block Grants will be allocated, with \$1.7 billion going to New York City, \$1.7 billion to New York State, and \$1.8 billion to New Jersey. [The New York Times](#)
- The Congressional Budget Office reports that the entire \$51 billion appropriation of the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act could take as long as 10 years to spend, as projects must go through planning and approval processes. [Newsday](#)
- Mayor Bloomberg [outlined his plans](#) to distribute just over \$1 billion of the \$1.77 billion the City will receive in the first disbursement of CDBG funds (see [accompanying graphic](#)). Proposed plans focus on grants and low-interest loans to homeowners and businesses. The City still must propose plans for the remaining \$725 million of the initial disbursement. [Video of the press conference](#)

ALSO: The City will begin accepting grant and loan applications in late-April at the earliest. Advocates for the homeless are urging Section 8 vouchers that can help low-income families displaced by the storm with assistance in rent. [The New York Times](#)

ALSO: \$100 million is proposed to go to a Neighborhood Game-Changer Investment Competition to solicit new ideas to attract business investment in designated Business Recovery Zones, and \$40 million is proposed for repairing utilities. [Crain's New York Business](#)

- The New York State Senate bi-partisan Task Force on Hurricane Sandy Recovery may introduce legislation to eliminate sales tax on certain items, extend programs to help families rebuild homes, or lower federal flood insurance premiums. [Gotham Gazette](#)
- An interactive map shows how states voted for or against the Sandy aid bill in Congress and compares how Congress voted on Hurricane Katrina relief spending. [ProPublica](#)

ALSO: [ProPublica looks into](#)

why conservatives in Congress voted against the Sandy aid bill.

- The Federal Bureau of Economic Analysis released its estimate that Sandy caused about \$44 billion of direct damage on economic activity nationwide. This estimate does not consider physical damage to buildings and infrastructure as a result of the storm. [Crain's](#)

New York Business

- The New Jersey State Assembly is drafting legislation that would require oversight of Sandy recovery funds, including a website detailing distribution of funds and whether contracts went through a bidding process. The Assembly Budget Committee may consider oversight bill as early as Thursday. [Asbury Park Press](#)
- New Jersey will receive \$1.83 billion of the first round of disaster relief; Governor Christie said he hopes to begin allocating grants to homeowners and businesses by the end of February. [Bloomberg Business Week](#)
- Governor Christie is calling on FEMA to resolve flood insurance claims. One month after receiving nearly \$10 billion from Congress, the National Flood Insurance Program has resolved only 30% of Sandy-related claims. [Asbury Park Press](#)

Rebuilding Infrastructure

- The first \$2 billion of \$10.9 billion in aid designated for the Federal Transit Administration by the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act has been released. The money will be used to reimburse transit agencies in the northeast. [U.S. Department of Transportation Blog](#)
- [Ashbritt](#), a Florida-based contractor specializing in debris removal, which also has made large political contributions in New Jersey, has quickly won a contract with New Jersey. The firm sub-contracts its services and pays less than the state-contracted rate. [The Star-Ledger](#) and [WNYC](#)

ALSO: Ashbritt has dozens of lawsuits from subcontractors hired following Katrina. Governor Christie defends the firm and promises transparency. [The Record](#)

ALSO: Government watchdog groups claim a fund-raiser for Governor Christie, to be held later this month by a Washington lobbying firm that represents Ashbritt, violates the spirit of state pay-to-play laws. [The Star-Ledger](#)

- Plans to protect critical infrastructure in New York City hospitals would be paid for with federal emergency money and insurance. [The Wall Street Journal](#)
- As opposed to Governor Cuomo who has been outspoken on the effects of climate change, Governor Christie says he hasn't had time to dwell on the "esoteric question" of whether climate change was responsible for the effects of the hurricane. [The Record](#)
- The New York City Council voted unanimously to study the costs and impacts of burying vulnerable overhead power lines. [Gotham Gazette](#)

Housing

- Governor Cuomo proposed a government buy-out program that would use \$400 million of the newly appropriated New York State Community Development Block Grant funds to buy out homes at market rate in storm-damaged communities. Some additional incentives may be added for coastal properties and no future development would be permitted.

The New York Times

ALSO: *The Governor's proposal to buy back storm-damaged homes would include upstate homeowners impacted by storms Irene and Lee.* [Times-Union](#)

ALSO: *It is unclear whether Governor Cuomo's newly proposed program will require local municipalities' approval.* [Capital New York](#)

ALSO: *A New York Post editorial [praises](#) Cuomo's plan to use federal relief money to buy out homes in flood-prone areas. The New York Times also [affirms](#) the Governor's plan to buy damaged waterfront properties and allow the land to return to a natural state.*

- New York City Homeless Services Commissioner Seth Diamond has not provided answers to questions about how or when displaced families currently staying in hotels will be placed in permanent housing. [New York Daily News](#)
- In the suburbs on Long Island and in New Jersey, renters uprooted by the hurricane are struggling to find available affordable housing. [The Wall Street Journal](#) [subscription required]
- U.S. Senators from New Jersey are calling on FEMA to allow homeowners along the Jersey Shore to challenge the new flood maps. Many claim the maps would make re-building along the shore too expensive for middle-class families. [Asbury Park Press](#)
- City Council Members Ignizio and Oddo of Staten Island are considering proposing a Land Trust as an alternative to Governor Cuomo's government buy-out proposal. The idea, based on the Louisiana Land Trust adopted in New Orleans after Katrina, enables the government to purchase lots, maintain them in a land trust and sell to developers. [Capital New York](#)
- Communities in Minot, North Dakota and other areas affected by disasters occurring in 2011, 2012, and 2013 will be eligible for some of the \$16 billion in CDBG funds. [Press release](#)

Advocacy News

List your upcoming event here! Email elizabeth@goodjobsfirst.org

[Community groups respond to Bloomberg's announcement of proposed use of federal grants.](#)

Friday, February 8: "Rebuilding the Public Realm after Sandy" featuring NYCEDC President, Seth Pinsky who is leading the Bloomberg administration's Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency (SIRR). This lecture is part of the [Democracy, Equity and the Public Realm](#) lecture series hosted by Pratt and moderated by Ron Shiffman, Pratt Institute, and Eddie Bautista, Environmental Justice Alliance. RSVP required.

Thursday, February 28: City & State annual forum State of Our City will feature a panel "Land-Use, Post Sandy." [Register online](#)

Friday, March 1: New Jersey Future Redevelopment Forum with breakfast keynote speaker Shaun Donovan, Secretary of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. New Brunswick, NJ. [Register online](#)

The Museum of the City of New York is requesting submissions of photographs by amateur and

professional photographers of Sandy damage and recovery for an upcoming exhibit. The deadline to submit photographs is March 3. For details, see www.mcny.org

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York is posting upcoming application deadlines, recovery resources, events, and key agency contacts on their [Sandy Information Center](#) page. *FEMA has extended deadlines for programs in New York. Applicants for federal disaster assistance have until February 27 to apply, and for those participating in the Temporary Sheltering Assistance Program the deadline is February 10.*

The [New York City Council](#) and [New York State Assembly](#) will hold hearings over the next several weeks to evaluate emergency response and disaster planning efforts.

This week's upcoming hearings include:

2/14: 10:00 am City Council Hearing Oversight on Emergency Planning During and After Storm: MTA's Response and Long-Term Impact on the City's Public Transportation System (Emergency Planning and Management During and After the Storm: Shelter Management)

These hearings are subject to change, check the online calendars for details.

New York State health and safety inspectors from the Department of Labor will provide inspections and assessments to businesses effected by Sandy to help firms reopen as soon as possible. Call 1-888-4-NYSDOL (1-888-469-7365) or visit their [website](#) for more information.

Several non-profit organizations have endorsed [Post-Sandy Rebuilding Principles: Building a sustainable region and economy, creating jobs for all](#). We encourage you to sign on, too. Contact bettina@goodjobsfirst.org for more information.

We'd love to hear from you!

Check out our resources on Hurricane Sandy money at our [website](#). Or follow us on Twitter: @GoodJobsNewYork #EyeOnSandyMoney. Please forward your suggestions on how we can make this round-up more useful to you in your work.