

107-52 166<sup>th</sup> Street  
Jamaica, NY 11434  
January 28, 2013

Re: Southeast Queens Flooding due to high water table

I present this testimony on behalf of myself and my neighbors of 166<sup>th</sup> Street between 107<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> Avenues located in Jamaica, Queens.

In January of 2007, we purchased new homes that were built under the New York City Housing Partnership Program. On June 27, 2007, approximately six months later, during a moderate rain fall, the first floor of the three attached houses including mine suffered five feet of water intrusion. There is no basement in these homes. The first floor is built partially under ground. The first floor had to be completely gutted out. Furniture, appliances, new wood floors, all kitchen cabinets, walls, all electrical sockets, refrigerators and personal belongings were destroyed. All clothing, furniture, pictures and personal mementos were water soaked and destroyed. I am attaching some pictures, one showing the refrigerator floating in the home. Due to the swift movements of Assembly member Vivian Cooke, our homes were toured by many elected officials including City Comptroller at that time, William Thompson, most of southeast Queens elected officials and DEP. Due to the diligence of Assembly person Vivian Cook, a special project was initiated to install catch basins and expand sewers on my block.

Two months later on August 8, 2007, before the project had begun, another heavy rain storm resulted in 5 feet of rain water in my first floor that was now gutted out. This time the houses between Hendrickson Place and 107<sup>th</sup> Ave were also severely damaged and the entire basement of the Allen Senior Citizen home was flooded to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, leaving seniors without access to an elevator or use of the laundry room for months.

The special project was expanded to include the entire 166<sup>th</sup> Street from 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 107<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The sewer and catch basins were installed in early November of 2007. I am thankful to the City of NY, DEP and will forever be grateful to my elected officials, particularly Assembly member Cook.

The damage to my home was estimated at \$42,000 by three independent licensed contractors and a FEMA representative. My insurance claim was denied because I did not have flood insurance. The response I received from FEMA was an offer of a 4% \$36,000 loan, which I am currently repaying and will continue to repay for the next 15 years.

As a result of the installation of sewer and catch basins, 166<sup>th</sup> Street did not experience the major flooding that had plagued the street even before my home was built in 2007. According to neighbors, many who have lived on the block for over forty years, flooding has been a major concern since 1996 when NYC purchased Jamaica Water Supply and it's wells. Station #6 well is located on the corner of 166<sup>th</sup> Street and 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a few

feet from my home. Prior to 1996, Jamaica Water Supply pumped millions of gallons of water per day out of the ground which had an effect on keeping the water table low. Now, because the water table remains high, we often experience water accumulation in the street, sidewalks and often to the house entrance door during rain. We always remain ready with electrical pumps that are often used to pump water from the doorway entrance to the street. Allen Senior Homes are located directly across from my home and I have witnessed the pumping daily of water accumulation from their basement. I use a humidifier daily because I have been told by a contractor that the water level at times is right below my floor which causes the floor to be damp and could cause mold over time.

In August of 2011, NYC suffered Hurricane Irene. Although we experienced the usual street flooding, we felt safe as a result of the sewer installation project. One week after Hurricane Irene, due to a heavy rain fall, several homes suffered three to four feet water intrusion, causing extensive damage to the same areas. I have been given the explanation that the table was so high after Hurricane Irene that the additional rain fall the week later caused the flooding in my home.

This time I had flood insurance which reimbursed for a fraction of the damage. The response from the flood insurance company was that the first floor is partially built under ground therefore it is counted as a basement. Furniture, kitchen appliances, kitchen or bath fixtures, clothing, personal belonging, etc are not and can not be covered by insurance. Only walls, electrical and anything that is attached to the house is covered.

In summation, since moving into my home 5 years ago, I have suffered two major floods the first year and one major flood in 2011. I have a pump that I prepare at the first forecast of rain. When it rains at night, I am up all night at the window, watching for water accumulation, often setting up to pump water to the street. If I am away from home, I either return or depend on neighbors to check on the status of the water accumulation. If I go out of town, someone must be left behind to watch out.

The first floor of my home is a one bedroom rental apartment. To qualify for the NYC Housing Partnership Program, buyers were required to be middle income, municipal employees. I worked for over twenty five years as a social worker for the NYC Human Resources Administration. The income generated from the first floor apartment was calculated into the approval from the bank to meet the mortgage commitment. I now can not in clear conscious rent the first floor apartment. This causes an economic loss to me. The first floor is currently occupied by my daughter. We keep all personal belongings up high. During a rain forecast, we carry some furniture and personal items upstairs. We live in constant fear of the rain.

Because the ground water level has been increasingly rising and is causing a major quality of life issue to myself personally and my community, I am requesting state funding to help alleviate flooding in southeast Queens.

In the past two years I have attended many meetings in our neighborhood, spearheaded my Assemblyman Scarborough and attended by most southeast

Queens elected officials. It was my understanding that DEP was in agreement of the need to address this serious issue thru the opening of wells and a pilot program for installation of reverse seepage basins, as a start. At the last meeting, I was informed that this has all been put on hold. I am therefore requesting that the Department of Environmental Conservation use their oversight authority to ensure that DEP resolve the problem of ground water flooding in Southeast Queens.

I thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter.

Bobbie Zimmerman  
917-968-5600



