

Mayor Michael Bloomberg

One of the greatest natural calamities that could wreak havoc in New York City would be flooding due to the surge from a “100 year storm”. This storm could appear at any time- and even many times- within the next 100 years. New York City is particularly vulnerable to storm surges because of the New York Bight, which funnels water and increases the speed of a storm surge moving through the Verrazano Narrows. Storm surges have been known to be as high as 20 feet. As much of Manhattan Community Board 4 lies within the 100 Year Flood Plain, we request that the City petition Congress to appropriate necessary funds to enable the Army Corps of Engineers to begin studying the feasibility of installing sea gates and barriers for protection from the sea.

Indeed, Joshua Friedman of New York City’s Office of Emergency Management offered sobering statistics about the region’s vulnerability to coastal flooding. At a 2009 American Society of Civil Engineers conference, he told scientists, engineers, government officials and environmental advocates that a catastrophic storm surge will affect two million New Yorkers, 740,000 households, 272,000 buildings and 461 miles of roadways. Recognized experts have suggested that sea gates at the Narrows, the mile wide entry to New York Harbor, and lesser gates near Arthur Kill and where the east River meets Long Island Sound (Throgs Neck) would protect much of Manhattan. Gates could also help address issues related to sea level rise due to global warming: even without storm surges, sea level rise in 20-40 years will cause potential flooding at certain times of the year having nothing to do with storms.

Other cities have already built sea gates (Rotterdam and London) or are currently building them (Venice). In the case of London, the barrier’s purpose is to prevent the city from being flooded by exceptionally high tides moving up from the sea, often exacerbated by a storm surge. It is deployed on average four times a year. In Rotterdam, the Maeslantkering is expected to be closed once every ten years to once every five years. The situation in New York City will depend on the expected frequency of storm surges.

Manhattan Community Board 4 urges you to reach out to our Federal representatives to request funding for a feasibility study to protect our city from potentially life threatening storm surges. The total cost of design and construction for gates at Verrazano Narrows, Arthur Kill and Throgs Neck is estimated at \$10 billion. There is no time to waste; whole communities may suffer irreparable damage if we don’t act now.

Cc Christine Quinn
Scott Stringer