

Testimony of Eric Landau
Deputy Commissioner, New York City Department of Environmental Protection
before the
New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection
concerning
Mitigation of Flooding in Southeast Queens and Introduction 1198
250 Broadway
January 23, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Constantinides and Members of the Committee. I am Eric Landau, Deputy Commissioner of Public Affairs and Communications at the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). With me are Angela DeLillo, Director of Capital Program Management in the Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations, Deputy Commissioner Eric Macfarlane of the Department of Design and Construction (DDC), as well as other DEP and DDC staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on mitigation of flooding in Southeast Queens and Introduction 1198.

As the Committee well knows, for many decades, the commercial and residential development of Southeast Queens outpaced the buildout of critical support infrastructure, including catch basins and storm sewers. As a result, many parts of the neighborhood suffer chronic roadway flooding and ponding during rain storms. In 2015, Mayor de Blasio announced the OneNYC plan, which among others, included the goal to reduce the risks of flooding in the most affected communities. As part of the FY 16 10-year capital budget, Mayor de Blasio allocated \$1.5 billion specifically to address flooding in Southeast Queens, which has been subsequently increased to a total of \$1.7 billion.

Last month, DEP Acting Commissioner Vincent Sapienza joined Council Member Richards to provide an update to local community residents and civic association leaders on our comprehensive plan, which includes a significant amount of green infrastructure, bluebelts, trunk sewers, and early-action sewer connections. In addition, the Department continues to engage the community on steps that members of the public can also take to mitigate flooding and better protect their property.

Green Infrastructure

As the Committee knows, Green Infrastructure (GI) uses natural techniques to detain, retain and absorb rainwater before it becomes a flooding problem in the street or on someone's property. The most notable type of GI is a curbside rain garden, also known as a bioswale, which looks like an enlarged and densely planted tree pit, but is designed with specific plant species known to soak up a significant amount of water, and engineered below-grade to retain and infiltrate stormwater. Rain gardens "intercept" storm water coming down the street, preventing it from going into the sewer system. In addition, they provide other hugely important environmental benefits, including improved air quality and greening of the street. DEP is partnering with the Department of Transportation, the Parks Department, the School Construction Authority, NYCHA, and DDC on GI in Southeast Queens. We estimate that this work will result in the

buildout of 200 curbside rain gardens, as well as other GI improvements at four City parks, two public schools, and two NYCHA developments. In addition, we are building Bluebelts to help manage stormwater at Springfield Lake, Baisley Pond, Twin Ponds and Brookville Triangle.

Trunk Sewers & Early-Action Sewer Connections

The bulk of the current funding, over \$900 million, will go toward the construction of large trunk sewer spines on 150th Street, Guy Brewer Boulevard, Farmers Boulevard and Springfield Boulevard. This work will take place through 18 separate projects, the first breaking ground as early as next year. These projects will install and replace over 16 miles of storm sewers, 5 miles of combined sewers, 7 miles of sanitary sewers, and 21 miles of water mains. In addition, over \$500 million of current funding is dedicated to early-action sewers. Early-action sewers comprise neighborhood sewer construction projects, as well as short sewer-extension projects, both of which will provide relief. We have broken ground on some of these projects already, with more to begin construction this year and next.

Public Engagement

In addition to the new infrastructure, DEP has been working closely with elected officials, community boards, civic associations, and local schools to discuss specific ways that homeowners can help alleviate flooding conditions. Attached to my testimony today is a copy of our *Homeowner's Guide to Rain Event Preparedness*, which includes six specific things that property owners can consider (e.g., check valves, softening their property, clearing catch basins). In addition, we have done extensive outreach and education both in public schools and door to door in over 50,000 homes in Southeast Queens about the proper disposal of grease, which is by far the leading cause of confirmed sewer back-ups across the city. We have provided you all with some examples of the grease materials we distribute broadly.

Intro. 1198

Turning now to the specifics of Intro. 1198, which requires DEP to publicly publish our plan to address chronic flooding conditions in Southeast Queens, what we commonly call the "Southeast Queens Plan," and to report on our progress annually. While we do not object to the requirements in the legislation as currently drafted, we have a couple of key comments for the Committee's awareness.

First, it is worth mentioning that DEP reports out on this (and all capital work) regularly. Even prior to the announcement of the \$1.7 billion in funding, we have been meeting regularly with all Southeast Queens elected officials and Community Boards 12 and 13 to provide an update on the plan and our progress. In addition, we regularly provide community briefings, similar to the one Acting Commissioner Sapienza provided last month to community leaders. DEP (as well as DDC, which oversees the design and construction of this work) submits progress information through the Mayor's Management Report, and both report on projects at the Borough Budget Consultations, as well as at Borough Board and Community District Service Cabinet meetings. Finally, we report annually on the progress of all of our capital work in both our Preliminary Budget testimony in March and our Executive Budget testimony in May.

Second, the legislation currently includes Community District (CD) 14 in the reporting requirements. While we are very aware of flooding conditions in CD 14 – often made more

severe by the low-lying nature of the Rockaways and Broad Channel – the Southeast Queens Plan, and the \$1.7 billion in associated funding has been specific to CDs 12 and 13. All of this is not to say that CD 14 does not need capital infrastructure investment. Nor is it to say that DEP is not doing work there. In fact, included in our 10-year capital budget is another \$188 million for sewer projects in CD 14. We just want to continue to be clear that these projects are separate from what we refer to as the Southeast Queens Plan.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My colleagues and I would be happy to answer any questions.