

Dear fellow Board of Trustee members, staff, residents and invited guests.

I want to thank you all for coming here tonight to discuss Port North's Emergency Preparedness and how it related to Superstorm Sandy. For a chilling 13 days the Village of Port Washington North, and many other communities in the tri-state area, recently went through what can only be categorized as utter hell due to what is known as Superstorm Sandy. As my role as Mayor, and as a concerned citizen, it was my duty and responsibility to prepare us for such an emergency, and along with staff, appointed officials and volunteers, get us through what turned out to be a very difficult time. I would like to give you a summary of what transpired before, during, and after Sandy so you may get a better sense of what happened, and at the same time put you in a position to evaluate and make suggestions to better prepare us in the future.

First, thank you to all the trustees, staff, commissioners and volunteers that helped us get through this nightmare. Special thanks to Trustee Cohen, Emergency Manager Steve Kaplan, Clerk Palma Torrisi, Deputy Clerk Linda Kropecek, PWMOEM Chairman Peter Forman, and especially Superintendent of Public Works Ron Novinski. They were with me from the first day and were there when we needed them most. Also special thanks to Dom's Tree Service and Cow Bay Contracting for cleaning us up after the storm.

Let me make a brief statement regarding our electric utility LIPA, who we as a community have entrusted to provide us with power, services their transmission lines, and most importantly, keep us informed when and how repairs will commence in the event of an outage. They have failed us in every aspect. Through my report of the events which occurred after the storm hit us in the evening of Monday, October 29th it will become clear that much is wrong with LIPA's management structure, leadership, and equally important, infrastructure. To put it simply, if LIPA had lived up to their moral and contractual obligations, we would not be here tonight rehashing the turmoil which occurred. While we all understand that Sandy was an unprecedented storm, LIPA must still be held accountable for the delays, lack of manpower, and lack of communication that permeated throughout the crisis, which finally ended for us on Nov 11<sup>th</sup>. Lessons should have been learned from Irene. Certainly we took notice. LIPA said they did also; by improving their communication and the way they dispatched crews and communicated with them. From my perspective, they learned nothing. If anything, they simply forgot what they promised us after Irene hit us barely a year before. What a shame.

In the days before the storm's anticipated day of arrival and severity, Port North Office of Emergency Management was directly involved with the Nassau County OEM, Town of North Hempstead OEM, and the Port Washington/Manhasset OEM. We held numerous meetings and conference calls, the purpose being to prepare for the worst scenarios of the storm's impact, inform our residents, and put into place both communication and personal. The concept was that the Town's 311 call center would be manned 24/7 for direct person to person contact, and that the PWMOEM would provide continuous local information and updates. The PWMOEM would serve as our main point of information to our residents until specific Village information became available. They were also tied into Town/County/FEMA representative who could provide all the essential safety and health information to our residents. As Sandy approached, reverse 311 calls were sent out to our residents initially thorough the County, Town and the PWMOEM. The message was to prepare for a severe storm with high winds and significant high tides. The PWMOEM message specifically mentioned registering with our peninsula alert system at [www.northshorealert.org](http://www.northshorealert.org). There, you would be able to receive not only the standard land line calls that all residents receive, even those who do not subscribe, but also calls to your cell/smart phones, alternate land-line phones. You also would receive texts and emails to the numbers and email addresses you provided. As the trajectory of the storm focused on our area, on Sunday, Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, the County issued a mandatory alert to evacuate all residents whose elevations were 15 feet or less. Given that many of our residents did not know their elevation, I received a few calls and knocks on my door inquiring. We sent a Village message from our OEM informing residents that only Shore Road, Mill Pond Road, Harbor Road, and Smull Place were affected by the mandatory evacuation, and reiterated that it was in their best interest for those streets to leave to areas of higher elevation. (You cannot force someone to leave their home, but they must understand that the village/town/county is

not responsible for providing first response emergency help if you are in an area that is not accessible) We posted a Village elevation map on our website. We also alerted our building dept. to stay close by in case their services were needed to inspect property damage if needed.

Sandy hit early evening on Monday, Oct 29<sup>th</sup>. I was at Town Hall that day, and eventually volunteered to man their 311 call center. Once the storm showed its destructive head, calls came pouring in about loss of power, downed lines, and felled trees. I manned the center until the storm subsided at 11:00 that evening. LIPA's specific instructions to us were to inform resident that they should call them directly at the 800 number given. We provide this number to thousands of callers who suffered loss of power and line/pole damage. However, within 4 hours of Sandy's impact, the LIPA lines overloaded and no longer took calls. The call center was forced to take and log every call and attempt to pass it on to LIPA. Their revamped communication plan from consumer to provider had failed.

Working the call center in itself was a traumatic event. I assisted a woman whose oxygen machine was without power, numerous people whose houses were damaged by the storm, and mostly people who wanted to report damage and outages. I left work that night exhausted to head home at 11:30pm. I was one of a few people on the road. Devastation was everywhere. No lights, no signals, downed trees, wires, and snapped and felled poles everywhere. It took me 45 minutes to get home. By that time, Shore Road/ Mill Pond Road, Mill Pond, was flooded all the way up to Valley Road.

The next day, Tuesday, I contacted our Superintendent of Public Works Ronny Novinski and asked about our personnel, community, and infrastructure. The Village sustained no injuries thank god, home damage was minimal, and we lost 32 street trees, 26 of them Bradford pear trees planted some 12 years ago. We also sustained some sidewalk damage from lifting root balls, some minimal plant damage to our Bay Walk Park gardens and lost a few street lights. The art and pier at the Bay Walk were untouched. Ronny already had a plan in place to remove the fallen trees and clear our roads using contractors Dom's Tree Service and Cow Bay Contractors. They were amazing. Ronny was also personally ready to remove debris from the road, chainsaw in hand. All this to allow our residents safe passage on our road, and equally important, to allow LIPA to come in to trim the trees and fix the lines to get our power back. I informed Ronny that each and every damaged tree, sidewalk, etc, must be documented, and photographed if possible. We learned from Irene that the more evidence you have, the easier it is to get reimbursed by FEMA. By Tuesday evening, all trees were removed from the road, and by Thursday, all street trees along homeowner's homes were removed. There were questions as to whether we could have our contracted crews remove trees and limbs on power lines. That was absolutely not allowed. These lines could contain stored energy and could electrocute any worker removing trees from the lines. Essentially the Village was secured; we were just waiting for LIPA to show up. Discussions with Clerk Palma determined that for the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 days, rising waters from Manhasset Bay made it virtually impossible to get to Village Hall. The shopping center had no power. Palma said that possible voicemails from Village Hall could be retrieved, and eventually she was able to do so. She manned Village Hall each day until it became too cold to stay.

Communications from the Village initially came in the form of reverse 311 calls to all residents by way of the Town's system and PWMOEM. Information was distributed at least twice a day. The contents of the recordings were about shelters, comfort stations, care of the sick and elderly through the Town's Dept. of Services for the Aging, PODS for disbursing of rations and water for those in need, and eventually a trickle of information from LIPA regarding substations. My feeling at the time was that given the Village was receiving valuable information from the Town and especially from PWMOEM, that we would not provide additional information until it became Village specific.

I was attending Town emergency meetings daily, spoke with LIPA reps daily, and initially was part of LIPA conference calls twice a day for elected officials. The subject of the calls was to hear when power was being restored to our communities. Eventually I gave this task to Trustee Cohen who already had a working relationship with various members of LIPA's management.

As the calls progressed, it was clear that we were not getting any valuable information from one day to the next. LIPA started telling us about additional crews coming in and how many were assigned to each substation. But they couldn't or wouldn't tell us if and how those crews were assigned to our community. So even though 30 men might be assigned to a substation, it was possible, and even likely that none of those men were assigned to our Village. We, no pun intended, were in the dark. We reached out to LIPA executives, State Senator Martins and Assemblywoman Schimel. The Town Supervisor in turn reached out to the Governor and on two occasions President Obama looking for answers as to when we would have our power back.

Observation: LIPA could not assist in telling us which homes are on what grid, nor could/would they tell us which issues (transformers, downed wires, trees on lines) once repaired, would restore power to what homes.

The perceived need for specific village information regarding when power would be restored would not be available until the substation providing the power to the village was first restored, followed by the main transmission line. We finally found out that our substation was the Bar Beach Substation, and it was not operational until Friday, Nov 2. Once they repaired the substation, and then the main transmission line, they were able to in essence flick a switch and see who came up. For about half of our Village, power was restored then. That included Mill Pond Acres and the Garden Apts. But it was also at this time that residents began to feel we as a village, and the Mayor, were not reaching out to them or providing them with information. Some also questioned if I in fact was doing anything. Some thought I had power and didn't care (I didn't and was in fact one of the last homes to have power restored. I also never left the village, weathering it out with the rest of the community). That was the furthest thing from the truth. But given that I received little or no direct inquiries or feedback, I was unaware that this was being perceived. It wasn't until Palma finally was able to retrieve messages from our answering machine, and I received a personal letter placed in my mailbox, that I started to understand what was going on. To make matters worse, homes that were already with power frustrated residents who didn't; wanting to know why their homes weren't up as well. My initial concern was that residents who did not sign up for northshorealerts.org were not getting any information whatsoever from either the PWMOEM or our village since the only message they would have received would go only to their land line phones, which were not operational.

Observation: Village residents can be broken up into a number of categories:

1. Those who did not subscribe to the Northshorealert.org notification system. They only get information if their land line phones are working. For these people, they were likely getting no information from Monday evening till Saturday, Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>.
2. Those who did subscribe to the Northshorealert.org notification system. They were getting 2-3 messages a day from the Town and or PWMOEM. But they did not perceive these calls as coming indirectly from the Village, therefore believed we were not reaching our residents.
3. Those who got all messages and were satisfied that the community was being kept informed.
4. Those who got all messages and were sick and tired of them. Perceived OVERKILL.

Side note regarding those who tried to call me at my home- those who tried to contact me at my home were greeted to a Verizon answering machine that apparently switched on when I lost power (we prefer a digital answering machine and turned off the Verizon answering service the moment we switched over from Cablevision) . They left message that not only could I not initially retrieve, but messages that I didn't know existed.

To resolve the information vacuum issue, I went around the village to those homes still without power, which was much of Soundview. I also immediately got in touch with our Emergency Manager of the Port North OEM Steve Kaplan. He

was in Albany and had power and the ability to send messages to the village. He initiated the first message on Sunday, Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, providing residents with a way to reach us via email to report outages/damage that we in turn, could report to LIPA. He returned from Albany with a generator that allowed him to access the internet and send additional messages. The very next day Nov, 5<sup>th</sup>, I personally sent out my own message. It was then that I provided the Village's phone number and my village email address. Upon doing so I received over 50 emails, and the mailbox at Village Hall was filled by the following morning. Daily messages were sent by the Village from that day on. It seems people just wanted to hear from us, even if we really had no new information.

Observation: It was apparent that many residents who wanted to reach out to me either didn't know the Village Hall phone number and did not know my village email address.

Once that personal contact was made, I was in the mode of addressing individual residents and commercial businesses needs. I responded immediately, as did the staff, in fielding the phone messages left at village hall. A few emails and messages were quite nasty and accusatory. But by and large the majority just wanted to report outages and tree/pole/line damage. Most specifically wanted to make sure LIPA was aware of their specific problem and were appreciative of the reach out. At that time LIPA was telling everyone that 90% of the homes would have their power restored by Wednesday Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>. On Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>, Trustee Cohen was on a call and specifically asked if they were sticking to their estimates of Wed and if in fact Port North was included in the 90%. They said yes to both. On subsequent calls, frustration by local elected officials was elevated. Most felt we were getting the same information from LIPA. There was no community specific information.

Wed Nov 6<sup>th</sup> came and went, and for the 40% of us still left with no power, frustration set in. Then the temperature dropped and gas became scarce. Tempers were rising even more and residents wanted answers. The problem was LIPA was not providing them. They continued to update their substation crew counts of lineman and tree trimmers. Again, that provided little help for us in the village. It was at this time that I decided we were asking LIPA the wrong question. I didn't care what their estimates were to restore power. Frankly, I didn't believe them and thought their estimates were meaningless. The question I wanted answered was when crews would be coming into our village to fix our problems. Up until now, a truck or two would show up, fix a few things, and leave. Nobody in the Village thought LIPA or any outside crew were in the Village at all. Once we saw the crews, it was only a matter of time before power came back. Assuming the crews would be staying. Steve Kaplan took all of the streets that were out, added the downed tree and pole information, and the problem lines, and put it in a map for LIPA to use. He sent them the map daily, updating it when we got power on, or received information of additional problem areas. (This continued till the last house was lit. LIPA said it was invaluable information and made a huge difference)

Then Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> arrived, along with the Nor'easter that dumped 3 inches of snow on us, just to rub it in. Another 8 trees down, mostly Bradford pears. And then we started running out of gas. That was the last straw.

Hope finally arrived on Friday, Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>. Tree trimming crews from Asplundh arrived from Ok. I counted 8 trucks lined up in front of Roslyn Saving Bank. With them were Bill and Martha Langley from Storm Services out of Miss. His job was to guide the Asphundh crew around Port North to cut trees and make way for the line crews to repair the lines and restore power. The crew worked from 9:00am to about 11:30am and just stopped. They said they were waiting for orders to proceed. Those orders were to be given by Bill Langley. I searched the Village for Bill and finally caught up with him. He is an older man with over 50 years of electrical experience. He and I spoke for some time before he confessed that he was in a bind. He told me he could not send his workers behind homes to remove trees from lines until the lines were doubled grounded and free of electricity. To do this he needed to know where the electric was coming from and where it was going. The maps LIPA gave him didn't tell him that information. He was wandering endlessly in and out of backyards, only to become more confused. I took him around to various areas, as did residents, including the worst hit, 10 Cove Lane. It wasn't even on his list from LIPA, even though it certainly was on ours. He stated that the problem was

that upper management didn't have enough people authorized to make decisions at the local level, and that they did not give decision making to the middle management to move things along. He also stated our lines were 50 years old, outdated, and not properly maintained, and without a LIPA representative with him, he would be wasting his time trying to ground these lines. That was at 4:30pm. His men sat around doing nothing for over 5 hours waiting for instructions, hours that could have been spent removing trees. What a waste of time. He left with his men at 5:00pm promising to return early Sat. morning. I said I would meet them at Cove Lane at 7:00am. That night another crew showed up. Aerial Contractors LTD from British Columbia. I spoke to a few crewmen who said it took them almost 4 days of constant driving to get there. They started looking around upper Soundview Drive and Radcliff, and then left, also promising to return the next day.

Saturday morning was a sight for sore eyes. 15 trucks from AC and Asphundh arrived. It was then that I met AC owner Bill Dawson and his wife Shelly. Nicest people in the world. (As a side note their company maintains the electric towers for Whistler Mountain, real pros)

**Human interest story**-Bill and Shelly drove down with his company to assist us! He told me his boys were sleeping in their trucks on the way down and last night they were sleeping in tents without heat. This was a tent city set up by FEMA. No heat and latrines that were not emptied. Are you kidding me? I couldn't believe it. I was sick to my stomach. How could LIPA/FEMA treat these workers that way? They started working on 10 Cove, which had 2 downed poles, 1 dead transformer, and a ton of lines down. I left the site knowing I had to do something for these guys. Within an hour, I spoke with one of our community businesses, Safavieh. Owners Arash and Michael Yaraghi agreed to allow all 15 of AC's crew stay at their facility on Channel Drive. They gave them mattresses, blankets, and access to 2 bathrooms. Even better, they could keep their equipment in the Village, saving them hours in mobilization time. Needless to say, they were thrilled and so was I. Better yet, I had Safavieh agree to keep them there for as long as AC was on the Island working.

I was with the crews for most of Saturday and Sunday. I emailed residents when they inquired about timing and if their homes were powered. I continued to inform all who emailed me until every home was up.

By the end of the day, one day, AC fixed 10 Cove, hit a switch and over 100 homes came back on. The LIPA representative assigned, also named Bill, said it would have taken a normal crew 4 days to do the work. While AC was attending to Cove, Asphundh was working behind other resident's homes to remove trees. Once done, AC came in and turned on the juice there as well. By 3:00pm Sunday, all power was restored to Port North.

We instructed Superintendent Ronny to finish removing debris and then the tree stumps before Thanksgiving. Then he could attend to replacing all damaged sidewalks. All tree removal, debris removal, and sidewalk repair work should be covered by FEMA reimbursement.

Final note. While the storm and its aftermath tested our patience and resourcefulness, it also showed us how wonderful our community is and how many wonderful people populate it. There are stories of pet sitting, electric sharing, home relocations, etc. For some, they even got to meet neighbors they didn't know and made new friends. So with the bad came some good after all. A sincere thanks to all of our residents who gave their homes, heat, and hearts to those left without power. It was your kind deeds that helped many of us get through these difficult times.

So here we are reflecting on what took place before, during, and after Superstorm Sandy. My intentions going forward are to make sure we continue to practice what we did right, and certainly improve where it is necessary. There is no doubt that with all of your help, we will be a better prepared Village, and will face these emergencies with even better processes, resources and resolve.

Thank you.