



## THE COUNCIL *of* THE CITY OF NEW YORK

September 22, 2022

Mayor Eric Adams and Commissioner Rohit Aggarwala,

We write to express our very serious concerns regarding the exclusion of North Brooklyn in any of the immediate hurricane emergency planning initiatives announced by the Mayor's Office and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on September 1st. While we were pleased to see the thoughtful and impactful resiliency strategies and investments that are planned or in progress across our city, we cannot ignore the blatant exclusion of North Brooklyn neighborhoods, primarily Greenpoint, Williamsburg, and Bushwick. North Brooklyn urgently needs new investments in our stormwater management systems, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions to make our community more resilient to the escalating climate crisis.

It has been a year since Hurricane Ida, and almost ten years since Superstorm Sandy, yet it is clear to all of us that live here that little climate and environmental investment has been made in the North Brooklyn area. This is part of a pattern of disinvestment into our communities – from our green spaces and parks to waste management, to support for businesses and infrastructure improvements. The horrific rain and flooding conditions in Puerto Rico this past week are only an omen of what a lack of thoughtful resiliency investment will leave us. This is a very long letter, but this is a very big problem.

Hurricanes, flash flooding, and cloudbursts are growing climate risks that continue to devastate our communities. The issues that our districts face every hurricane season are very real for our residents, schools, businesses, nightlife venues, and critical infrastructure. Greenpoint and Williamsburg are extremely vulnerable to coastal flooding and storm surge according to projections by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Additionally, the NYC Stormwater Flood Maps demonstrate that these areas are all projected to face growing rainfall-based flooding risk.

In Bushwick, a perfect storm of disinvestment across agencies resulted in a three-foot-deep river on Knickerbocker Ave during Hurricane Ida. Knickerbocker stretches for almost 2 miles and is a key commercial artery for the neighborhood. The next morning, there were multiple tons of trash in the streets, dead rats, cars floating in the middle of the street, and every single small business on Knickerbocker Ave had serious damage in their basements – resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars lost. Greenpoint experienced similar flooding and damage.

In the Southside of Williamsburg, decks in basements of multi-unit buildings collapsed because of the flooding, forcing residents to make do without hot water until their boiler was replaced. We also understand that some of our larger housing development corporations had extensive damage to their buildings including the need for elevator and electrical work. The Mayor came to District 34 and saw the damage firsthand – it was clear the community felt the impacts of this storm.

Homeowners and tenants are not safe. Community Boards 1 and 4 in Brooklyn are home to 15 NYCHA developments and they consistently and regularly experience significant flooding of up to two feet of water, as well as loss of power – even without significant rainstorms. Additionally, our businesses of all kinds are in danger. Your administration has championed supporting nightlife in our city, but we are left to wonder what the plan is for when over 100 nightlife venues and bars – including some of the largest in the entire city – will be decimated by an inevitable, now-annual hundred-year storm.

Overall, there were 484 complaints to 311 coming from these Community Boards after Hurricane Ida, and those only represent the tip of the iceberg. The majority of those complaints were sewer backups, water leaks, mold, traffic signal issues, clogged catch basins, and related to homes being damaged.

These communities are also home to critical infrastructure, such as National Grid's Depot, DEP's Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, Waste Management's organics collection and processing facility, and various other industrial uses. Thanks to the commitment of community advocates, the federal government has made meaningful investments to clean up Newtown Creek over the past decade. However, we are nowhere near remediating the Superfund site that represents the notorious legacy of the fossil fuel industry in Brooklyn, as well as addressing the ongoing combined sewage overflows (CSOs) that allow raw sewage to flow into our waterways every time it rains. Flooding and storm surge in and around industrial areas, a Superfund site, and CSOs outfalls further compounds climate and environmental health risks for residents and workers in our communities.

Through DEP's Green Infrastructure Program, the Newtown Creek Watershed has received green infrastructure investments to address CSOs, primarily in Bushwick. While Williamsburg and Greenpoint, that are within the East River/Open Water Watershed have not received the necessary investment. We ask that the DEP assess and build additional green infrastructure assets that provide multiple resiliency and environmental co-benefits across all of North Brooklyn. This is acutely needed in the streets and areas that experience significant flooding during heavy rainfall events. The NYC Stormwater Flood Maps indicate that particularly vulnerable areas

include Knickerbocker Avenue, Wilson Avenue, White Street, Grand Street, up and down the Brooklyn Queens Expressway, Union Avenue, Roebling Street, and others.

Water, stormwater, and sewage pipelines in much of our district have not been updated in over a century, and it is a valid concern that this lack of investment in updating our systems could result in catastrophic consequences. We have requested a response here from DEP throughout the year, and have yet to hear if there are any plans to survey or update the areas.

The Mayor's recent announcement included funding commitments for Sewer Infrastructure, Curbside Rain Gardens, FloodNet Sensors, Cloudburst Management, Citywide Bluebelt Program Expansion, Daylighting, Porous Pavement, Onsite Retention, Flood Insurance, and Financial Counseling, Post-Ida Recovery and Mitigation, and other investments. Our communities would greatly benefit from these infrastructure investments, resiliency programs, and more innovative adaptation strategies. While parts of North Brooklyn have previously received some investments, there is a clear need and opportunity to pilot porous pavement in our industrial areas, update antiquated stormwater management infrastructure, build nature-based solutions in our streets and business corridors for cloudburst management, and more.

Given that North Brooklyn is one of New York City's epicenters of growth, business, culture, and unfortunately, the climate crisis, we implore you to act on immediate plans to bring resiliency and adaptation investments to our communities and we request a meeting with the DEP Commissioner and representatives from the administration before the year is over.

Sincerely,



**Jennifer Gutierrez**  
Council Member  
District 34



**Sandy Nurse**  
Council Member  
District 37



**Lincoln Restler**  
Council Member  
District 33