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Sandy Alters 'Reality'

Bloomberg Calls for Updated Flood Maps, Better Coastal Protection After Storm

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By MICHAEL HOWARD SAUL

Two-thirds of all New York City homes damaged by superstorm Sandy were outside of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's existing 100-year flood zone, Mayor Michael Bloomberg said Thursday, calling for an immediate redrawing of the maps to reflect current conditions.

"The yardstick has changed, and so must we," Mr. Bloomberg said during a breakfast speech in Lower Manhattan. "FEMA is currently in the process of updating their maps, and those maps will guide us in setting new construction requirements."

The FEMA flood map designations play a crucial role in setting building and zoning codes. The designations are also used for insurance purposes, and homeowners seeking mortgages in high-risk zones may be forced to buy federal flood insurance.

Expanding the city's flood zone was among a host of measures the mayor proposed to protect the city from dangerous storms. He said the city would also change its evacuation maps, likely boosting the breadth of Zone A, the low-lying areas that are evacuated first. And he called for better protection for critical infrastructure such as the electricity network and changes to the building code.

But the mayor rejected big-ticket ideas such as building a sea wall as too expensive.

There are "no panaceas or magic bullets," Mr. Bloomberg said. "We have to live in the real world and make tough decisions...Saying we're going to spend whatever it takes just is not realistic."

The speech was an opportunity for Mr. Bloomberg to burnish his credentials as a voice on climate change. He spoke after an introduction by former Vice President Al Gore, an environmental activist, and the event included other speakers who lauded the mayor's efforts.

Mr. Bloomberg appointed two deputy mayors to conduct a comprehensive review of the city's preparedness measures and recovery operations and file a report that will be made public by the end of February. He also tapped Seth Pinsky, head of the city's Economic Development Corp., to develop a concrete recovery plan for the communities hardest hit by the storm.



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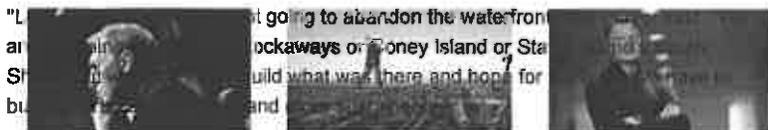
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Mr. Bloomberg described Sandy as the "biggest event" water levels at the Battery reached 14 feet, he said, noting that FEMA had estimated there was a less than 1% chance of that happening. In 1960, the water levels reached 11 feet, the record before Sandy.

Mr. Bloomberg pledged to redo New York City's evacuation maps to better "reflect the new reality we face."

Before Sandy struck, the mayor ordered a mandatory evacuation of the roughly 375,000 people living in Zone A. But as The Wall Street Journal reported last month, two of the city's 25 drowning victims died outside Zone A.

"Sandy surged beyond Zone A—into Gerritsen Beach, into Howard Beach and into East Williamsburg," Mr. Bloomberg said. "So, now we'll re-examine the evacuation zones and update them."

Zone A was expanded in 2011 after Tropical Storm Irene, growing to encompass all of the Rockaway Peninsula, City Island and the Hamilton Beach neighborhood of southeast Queens. "Thank God we did because it meant they were ordered to evacuate, which probably saved lives," the mayor said.

But even those revised maps weren't sufficient, the mayor said.

Mr. Bloomberg said a substantial portion of the city's critical infrastructure is situated in the 100-year flood plain, and he directed Mr. Pinsky to examine what it will take to make "every essential network that supports our city" capable of withstanding a Category 2 hurricane. During Sandy, the mayor said, "all of our major infrastructure" networks failed and took too long to be restored.

While Mr. Bloomberg reiterated his position that sea walls aren't viable—though they are a solution backed by his ally, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn—he said there may be some coastline protections that could be helpful, such as berms, dunes, jetties and levees.

The mayor said he is reaching out to executives at utilities and wireless phone companies to prod them to better prepare for extreme weather. Consolidated Edison Inc. [ED -0.07%] plans to invest \$250 million in the coming months, he said, and the mayor had a long conversation Wednesday night with the CEO of Verizon about service.

"We cannot, in the future, have cell towers that have only eight hours of backup battery power," Mr. Bloomberg said. "That is just not acceptable in the world that we live today."

In his introductory remarks, Mr. Gore, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts on climate change, said Sandy was related to global warming.

"What will it take for the national government to wake up?" said Mr. Gore, who lost his bid for president in 2000.

He praised the steps that President Barack Obama has taken, but said "we cannot have four more years of mentioning this occasionally and saying it's too bad that the Congress can't act."

Mr. Gore praised Mr. Bloomberg, who has been outspoken on climate change. The mayor cited climate change as a primary factor in his decision to endorse Obama in the days before the election.

On Thursday, the mayor said the challenges facing the city are enormous but he is



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