



LOOKING BACKWARDS

The severe storms of the sixties and the seventies snapped us to attention. Because there was no dune everyone had a good look at the ocean. We started building dunes, installing snow fencing and planting beach grass. I went to a meeting and they just about tarred and feathered me. Hurricane Gloria showed up and completely wiped out the west end of Long Beach. Their TV's and furniture were floating down Ohio Avenue. The City Manager's phone line lit up and people asked for the dune. We had it done in a month and a half.

TOM DOHENY, TOWN OF HEMPSTEAD, COMMISSIONER OF CONSERVATION AND WATERWAYS

Hurricanes, tropical storms, and other significant weather events have cast a long shadow of devastation across our region's history. The "Great September Gale" of 1815 was the worst hurricane to strike Long Island in the early 19th century. The "Long Island Express" slammed into this area on September 21, 1938, with the eye passing over Westhampton Beach. Local groups, individuals, and government agencies responded by planting grass on beaches and building groins and jetties to stabilize the beach and to prevent erosion. They set up emergency communication systems and the Red Cross provided shelter to local residents. These approaches continue to the present, in order to prevent the kind of devastation that occurred that fateful day.

After World War II more people moved to Long Island's coastal communities, living in vacation or permanent homes built on former marshlands or barrier beaches that flooded regularly. For many the storms felt unique, not to be replicated. But as the years went by, more storms came to Long Island. By 1968 hurricanes and other severe storms were so common, that Congress established the National Flood Insurance Program to help homeowners rebuild.



SANDY IRENE AND LEE

The last few years before the storm we caught plenty of fish. After the storm it was a living nightmare. Besides the waters being closed for clamming, you couldn't even drive through town; there were boats in the road everywhere. It was devastation everywhere.

JOEY SCAVONE, COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN, FREEPORT

The years 2011-12 will figure prominently as the era when traumatic weather events, connected in part to climate change, hit home with abundant ferocity. During Hurricanes Irene and Lee in 2011, upstate residents in Schoharie County found themselves flooded out of their homes, and cut off from neighboring villages and town as rivers overflowed and roads and bridges collapsed. Houses floated away, farms went underwater, and communications collapsed. The same storm struck Long Island with fewer consequences, leading residents to believe the warnings were inflated.

In 2012 Superstorm Sandy devastated the region. The six-foot storm surge was accompanied by 29 foot waves along the south shore near Freeport. As Todd Kaminsky recalled:

My grandmother had moved to Long Beach in 1949 and never had water. The morning after Sandy, Grandma's house had four feet of water, and the water went from the ocean, crossed Lido Boulevard, went through my parent's house in Lido Beach, and out to Reynold's Channel.

Whole communities a mile away from the ocean and bay were struck by the storm surge. Like generations before them, first responders and volunteer groups rescued stranded families, providing shelter and nourishment to all in need.

Miraculously, 14 bay houses survived in the Town of Hempstead, as did modest bungalows in Far Rockaway. Although many houses across the region escaped relatively unscathed, others in Island Park and East Rockaway are uninhabitable five years later. Sometimes the disparity in impact could be witnessed even within the same block. Boats that stayed in the water were left intact, while others floated down the street. In this section we explore what worked and why, based on traditional knowledge and public policy.



LOOKING FORWARDS

I think Sandy was a big eye-opening event. But maybe not to the extent that people are ready to leave our shores. Is that an idea we can wrap our heads around? For some it comes very easily because they've lived through several storms and lost their life possessions. And for others, who may have gone through something like that, they simply don't want to leave.

DAVID SABATINO, REGIONAL PLANNER

The likelihood of more storms and hurricanes on Long Island is high. Planners and architects are developing approaches using traditional knowledge and new technologies. Home elevations are widespread, required by FEMA and other agencies. Streetscapes change, as some owners elevate their homes while others choose not to. Bungalows are dwarfed by 3-story homes with steep entrances. Where communities once opposed dune building and groin construction, they are now welcome.

As the landscape changes, so do the cultural activities and norms. Fishermen find fewer marine habitats, as the bays and waterways become warmer or polluted from debris. The next generation of builders and planners are designing new structures, transportation options and infrastructure to cope with the new climate. In this section we ask you to design a new coastal village, using the knowledge that you possess and that you have learned from this exhibit. There are no wrong ways to do this, since we believe that all of us have learned something about our landscapes and communities during storms and hurricanes. We hope this section will bring new ideas and visions to Long Island's coastal communities, ones that will endure in the years ahead.