In this issue:

- $6 Million NYRCR Funding for Idlewild Watershed Communities.
- Moving Forward…
- Why JFK Should have its own roundtable
- The importance of NY’s ban on Fracking
- Building environmentally resilient communities
- Airports: Bad Neighbors and an International Urban Planning Problem
- Upcoming Events

$6 Million NYRCR Funding for Idlewild Watershed Communities: Brookville, Rosedale, Springfield Gardens

By: Barbara E. Brown, Chairperson

In April of 2013, Governor Cuomo announced the New York Rising Community Reconstruction Program (NYRCR) to provide rebuilding and resiliency assistance to communities severely damaged by Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and Superstorm Sandy. As you are aware, many communities such as those in the Rockaways, Howard Beach, Broad Channel and the Five Towns area in Nassau County were truly devastated by these storms. The Governor realized many coastal communities were severely impacted by these storms and needed to mitigate against the risks of future extreme weather events by building increased resilience. For this reason, the NYRCR Program within the Governor’s Office of Storm Recovery was launched. The program was designed to “empower the State’s most impacted communities with the technical expertise and funding resources needed to develop thorough and implementable reconstruction plans to build physically, socially, and economically resilient and sustainable communities.”

The impact of Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy on the communities of Brookville, Rosedale, and Springfield Gardens proved that these communities were indeed also extremely vulnerable to such events and needed also to be much more resilient.

Continued on Page 2

About the Eastern Queens Alliance, Inc.

The Eastern Queens Alliance (EQA) is a coalition of civic associations that joined forces in 1989 to address problems, issues and concerns that defied boundaries and plagued all or most of our communities. We know that it is working together that we have the strength to confront the issues, negotiate viable solutions, and whenever necessary, agitate to bring pressure to bear to achieve our goals. We are a proactive organization, striving to be ever vigilant to prevent problems before they become entrenched. In doing so, we collectively enlist the aid of elected officials, as well as all of the government and private agencies who are charged with the responsibility and/or have the resources to assist us.
Eastern Queens Alliance, Inc.

Board of Directors
Chairperson
Barbara E. Brown
Vice Chairperson
Patrick Evans
Treasurer
Lonnie Glover
Recording Secretary
Gloria Boyce-Charles
Corresponding Secretary
Gloria Boyce-Charles
Financial Secretary
Louis Kilkenny

Civic Association Membership
Addisleigh Park Civic Association, Inc., Andrea Scarborough, President
Federated Blocks of Laurelton
Dwight Johnson, President
Rosedale Civic Association, Inc.
William Perkins, President
Spring-Gar Civic Association, Inc.
Lonnie Glover, President
Springfield Gardens Taxpayers
Association Inc., Patrick Evans, President
Springfield/Rosedale Community
Action Association, Inc., Barbara E. Brown, President
St. Albans Community Civic
Association, Inc., Bernard Harrigan, President
Wayanda Civic Association, Inc.
Cynthia Curtain, President

Associate Members
Concerned Citizens of Laurelton
Kim Francis, President
A Better Jamaica, Inc.
Gregory Mays, President
229th Block Association
Bonnie Huie, President

Professional Membership
Richard Belgrave,
Environmental Science
Gloria Boyce-Charles,
Business/Education
Annette Bradley
Business/Education
www.easternqueensalliance.org
Tel/Fax: 347 824-2301

Our Vision: A Healthy Southeast Queens

Health & Wellness
Prosperity/Economic Development
Housing & Land Use
Peace & Safety
Senior Advocacy
Going Green/Healthy Environment
Community Spirit/Engagement
Youth Engagement

Envisioning a Sustainable Southeastern

The EQA envisions resilient communities armed with proactive members and assertive voices that advocate against everything that threatens to compromise the livelihood of Southeast Queens.

$6 Million NYRCR Idlewild Watershed Communities

Continued

resilient. It is for this reason that what has become identified as the Idlewild Watershed Communities: Brookville, Rosedale, and Springfield Gardens were selected to receive a $6 Million allocation of Round II NYRCR funding. For six months, a Community Planning Committee consisting of community leaders from these communities worked closely together with each other and with the NYRCR Consultants, strategically planning implementable ways to make their communities within the Idlewild Watershed better able to withstand future storms. Committee Co-Chairs were Barbara E. Brown and William Perkins. Other committee members were John Besant, Gloria Boyce-Charles, Valencia Butler, Jackie Campbell, Patrick Evans, Lonnie Glover, Marcia O’Brien and Irnel Stephen. At least four Public Engagement Meetings were held to give the community real opportunity to weigh in on the planning--informing the team about issues, offering ideas, and critiquing that which was being planned. The plan was completed at the end of December 2014. A final Public meeting, rolling out the plan is planned for the second Thursday, in January. (The plan can be accessed at www.stormrecovery.ny.gov/nyrcr.)

The Planning Committee Members are extremely enthusiastic about the final plan which includes specific Strategies to: A—Alleviate Localized Flooding Conditions; B—Strengthen the Emergency Response Capacity of the Community; C—Support Environmental Stewardship of the Community’s Natural and Manmade Resources; and D—Provide Safe and Reliable Access to Critical Goods and Services. These strategies were a direct outgrowth of the Planning Team’s Vision for the program. All of the projects selected are those that can be completed within a two-year period and that do not supplant already critical projects funded by other agencies. We are also eagerly awaiting the announcement of winners of the NY Rising to the Top Award, a $1 Million additional award for Green Infrastructure projects.
Moving Forward…
Steps to Moving Forward and Succeeding Against Environmental Injustice

By Tamara J. Mitchell

Unfortunately, as many of you may have heard by now, the EQA’s petition to the courts requesting that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)/Port Authority (PA) perform a more in-depth environmental study before conducting JFK Runway 4L/22R runway extension has been denied. While this seems a bitter moment for our community, it is not the end. In fact losing our appeal was only a quick insight into the beginning phases of greater problems: the problems of governmental oversight, accountability and lack of smart urban planning in order to effectively address and implement preventative planning.

Perhaps the greatest paradoxical challenge that we are facing is that the government (and its entities) are the biggest polluters yet they are the ones armed with protecting us. As Dr. W.E. Du Bois once powerfully said “A system cannot fail those that it was never built to protect”. So we move forward by rebuilding the system to effectively bring about change and face the problems of environmental injustice through legislation. Especially in regards to noise, local governments have a lot of power when determining the amount of noise they allow to impact public health and welfare (although they don't utilize it).

As communities we must commence by lobbying our local entities to:
- Hold hearings/set platform for the public to voice concerns regarding JFK and other environmental issues.
- Lower the permissible airport noise to 55dB and draft/adopt our own Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL).
- Install their own “non-biased” noise monitors to actively capture the amount of noise pollution in our communities.
- Install permanent air monitors to actively monitor our air quality while tracking daily/seasonal changes to better protect our health and welfare.
- Conduct a full environmental impact study of JFK airport and its impacts on members of surrounding communities, wildlife and other entities.
- Request JFK expansion plans and prevent further expansion without proper studies

The Eastern Queens Alliance and other New York based groups, along with Congressional representatives, are aware of the problem, and are making efforts to get federal legislation passed that would lower the acceptable noise threshold for airports. This would mean that airports would be forced to either provide mitigation for the community, decrease noise, or risk paying heavy fines.

While residents no longer have legal options (besides appealing to the Supreme Court), there are still political avenues to explore. You can do your part right now by going online and signing the EQA’s petition on the Obama Administration’s Website “We the People”, by simply accessing the link here: http://wh.gov/ig5J5 , asking that congress reassess the outdated 65 DNL surrounding airports. (Don’t forget to verify your signature by clicking the link emailed to you.) You can further get involved by calling or writing to your local political representatives and leaders, asking them to reassess noise standards in communities surrounding airports. We also encourage you to continue to report planes that fly too low over the community to the designated hotline run by the Port Authority. If there is another opportunity to comment on a proposed work, take the opportunity to ask questions. If you think that someone else has asked that sort of question, ask anyway, because they may not have, or they may not have asked it in a way that will get the same response as yours.
Why JFK Airport Should Have Its Own Roundtable

By Tamara J. Mitchell

Over the past few months there has been a lot of debate surrounding the roundtables. Perhaps, the real question is “Why are we even having this discussion anyways?” The Port Authority has gone on record on various occasions stating its intention to create separate roundtables for John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport and LaGuardia airports. A separate roundtable for Newark International Airport, which is also under the auspices of the Port Authority, has already been established. However, there is a contingent that is insisting upon the establishment of a single roundtable to represent both the JFK and LaGuardia airports. To this day, every airport nationwide has had its own roundtable, so why should this case be any different? Is it logical to have only one roundtable, where residents in the north are making decisions for those in the South? Who will be the members of the roundtable? Since JFK is a larger airport, would members of its community have more seats on the board of the roundtable? These are some of the questions that need to seriously be addressed.

Comparatively, JFK Airport is five times larger than LaGuardia Airport and is continually expanding. Apart from its sizable dimension, there is a distinct difference in their operational enormity; JFK is an international airport which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Surrounding communities are subject to the noise of arriving and departing aircraft at all hours of the day, including late-night and early-morning hours.

It is important to note that many of the people who most oppose a separate JFK airport roundtable currently live in an area outside of the five-mile radius of the JFK airport. They do not experience the same level of noise and safety concerns presented by low-flying departing and arriving planes as do the residents of Southeast Queens, who literally live at the “mouth of JFK airport”. Nor do they experience the fumes, noise and congestion posed by the ground traffic generated by the nearby airport-related industries. Their concerns center largely on airplane noise and flight patterns, and they do not have first-hand knowledge of the distinct issues facing communities living closest to JFK, the sixth busiest airport in the nation.

No one would deny that residents who live near JFK and La Guardia share some common interests. But the fact the JFK and LaGuardia are in the same borough of the same city should not be the determining factor regarding the roundtable structure. Further, it would be a particular disservice to the residents of Southeast Queens not the address the unique issues and additional burdens that are placed upon them because of their close proximity to JFK airport. These concerns might get compromised in a single LaGuardia/JFK roundtable structure. Opportunities for La Guardia and JFK airport roundtables, and even Newark and Teeterboro to collaborate as needed can be built into the structure through, for example, a Roundtable Coordinating Committee; but each airport should have a separate roundtable with a distinct mandate.

It is important that residents of our Southeastern Queens community speak up and advocate for separate roundtables, otherwise the issues we care about can be easily drowned out and that will only lead to further suffering.
The Importance of New York’s Ban on Hydraulic Fracking

By Jessica Downes, Environmental Law Intern

New York State has made history yet again, this time we’re the first state with significant natural gas deposits to ban Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Fracking is a highly controversial process which involves drilling deep into the earth and filling natural gas filled pockets with a mixture of water, sand, and chemicals. A great deal of the controversy surrounding fracking stems from the fact that until very recently, fracking companies refused to disclose what chemicals they were pouring into the ground, making it impossible for environmentalists to judge what effects it could have on human health. There have been many controversial reports about the chemicals causing birth defects and drilling being linked to geological instability/earthquakes. When they finally were forced to reveal what chemicals they were using, it was found that many were toxic to humans, plants, and animals. Then there were the viral videos of homeowners near fracking sites whose water supply was contaminated with escaped natural gas to such an extent that they were able to light their tap water on fire as it left the tap. In the midst of all that, there was yet another problem, but one that was both unseen and unforeseen: radiation.

Naturally occurring radiation falls into two categories: NORM (naturally occurring radioactive material), which exists naturally in soil and rocks deep, deep below the earth, and in very small, safe levels above ground, and TENORM (technologically enhanced naturally occurring radioactive material), which is so called because without human intervention it would not be present above ground, and which is usually much more dangerous. In most cases NORM poses no threat to human health because it is buried so deeply or because it is so minimal, but fracking requires digging to such depths that much of the soil and rock dug up, and much of the water that leaks from the projects, contain radioactive material, including uranium, strontium, radium, thorium, and other such elements. The question, then, is what do we do with all this radioactive material?

Many states have taken on this daunting question of what to do with TENORM, and few have come up with an acceptable answer. States like Ohio allow fracking on state owned park land, and allow water with a radioactivity below a certain level to be dispersed into waterways. Pennsylvania, on the other hand, has much more stringent regulatory guidelines, but still allow for the disposal of solid radioactive waste in public landfills, as long as the waste is mixed with a set amount of “cold” or non-radioactive waste. This does not reduce the amount of radioactivity in the landfill, but instead disperses it. That is, adding one ton of dispersed radioactive material this month, and one ton of dispersed radioactive material next month still results in two tons of dispersed radioactive material in that site. Additionally, there is a question of how long it will take the radioactivity to decay to a level that is safe for human exposure as materials found in TENORM tend to have very long decay times. This is to say nothing of the confusion associated with the shipping of the waste via unshielded trucks.

Although Pennsylvania arguably has the best regulatory practices of any state that allows fracking, there are still regulatory gaps that can cause unnecessary and potentially harmful human exposure to radioactive material. Even the standards and methods prescribed by law as the best available standard are inadequate. Radiation alarms are triggered with an unacceptable regularity at Pennsylvania waste disposal sites, warning of unsafe radiation levels, and procedure requires that the waste be retested multiple times until something closer to the acceptable limit is found, despite the fact that the readings are usually inconsistent. Pennsylvania law requires that drivers of trucks carrying TENORM be isolated and tested for exposure if a certain level of radiation is found in the cab of the truck, but is silent on methods to prevent exposure in the first place.

Unfortunately, there are no readily available fixes for these gaps. Because fracking is relatively new, and the dangers associated with it are often discovered only as the industry progresses, law makers are forced to play a dangerous game of “catch up”. Often, lawyers, scientists, and bureaucrats are forced to make decisions on the spot, which leaves room for human error and opens the door to inconsistent standards and poor rule making, and still does not answer the important questions with any certainty.

By refusing to allow fracking in the state of New York, Governor Cuomo has neatly avoided these issues without putting the health and wellbeing of New Yorkers and our award winning water supplies in jeopardy. Proponents of fracking have criticized this ban by claiming that the science is murky and that there are no clear answers, or that Governor Cuomo is robbing New Yorkers of jobs and lower energy prices. On the other hand, opponents of fracking have praised the move as not only wise, but also bold, as no state has yet refused to bow to industry. It is not surprising that New York is the first, though. We have always been a state of bold decisions and strong ideas; and, after all, if there comes a time when these questions are answered, then we have the resources to take advantage of our natural gas deposits in a manner that is safest and most beneficial to us.
Many times, political power outweighs scientific power. Hurricane Sandy was a wake-up call that in order to survive and evolve, some major changes must be made. Sandy brought several major facts to life: 1) we were unprepared 2) we need to adapt the precautionary principles and 3) science needs to play a larger role in the development of new laws. Now that it’s becoming clearer to lawmakers that science is the future path to law making, there have been several environmental infrastructures that are gaining attention. These structures will modify the coastal zone communities of New York City and are all theoretically efficient.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo stated that climate change is upon us and that it is foolish not to take into account the damaging effects of it, as well as preventing such destruction and disorganization from ever happening again. Though the governor hinted towards a seawall, many of the proposals seems to take on a softer, more elastic infrastructures or simply a natural approach. Two rhetorical questions were thrown in for discussion: 1) should we build studier and higher sea walls? 2) Should we make local infrastructures more elastic?

We already live in a concrete jungle, so it is unfair to imagine a huge seawall further confining us. Also, if larger seawalls were in place and the city still got flooded, there will be no place for the water to drain out; therefore more damage would be incurred. Sturdier processes will overtime deteriorate and are often less effective than more natural approaches. The most prevalent proposals either implement a natural approach to mitigation of the problem, or result in some form of green energy.

Many of these plans are looking at the past for inspiration when planning for the future; taking the natural approach to combating the problem of climate change: sea level rise and the frequency of strong hurricanes. Many of these plans are a combination of urbanization and ecology which makes them even more viable because they take into account the infinite powers of nature. All sites incorporate public access which helps with funding and awareness of issues.

The most supported plans are the restoring of the natural marshlands that were present pre-industrial/urbanization of New York City and re-engineering the streets to be less permeable and more absorptive. The marshlands will be planted with moss-like flora organisms. Since climate change is upon us and sea level is rising quickly, the re-engineering of the plan must be an intricate combination of anthropogenic structures as well as naturally growing marshlands. This verdant network of land-based parks, along with soggy patches of wetlands and tidal lands, theoretically will help prevent incursions by water.

In case water still manages to get far inland as the newly reconstructed inward city (ex-tsunami), specially designed streets will be able to handle surging waves. They have three different designs for the streets each design designating a certain level. “Level 1 streets” are designed to be saturated with excess water which would water the plants in the street bed. Instead of being composed of asphalt, these streets will be made off porous concrete. “Level 2 streets” are designed so that water would easily backwash back into the marshes and constructed ponds meant to collect water in times of drought. They are specially made to combat stronger surges. “Level 3 streets” are proposed to drain surging waters into New York Harbor and would run parallel to the shoreline. These streets will be more complex and harder construct (compare to levels 1 &2) because they are the only ones to require a movement of the current city grid.

When building environmentally resilient communities, cost will always be a great factor, but when the marshlands existed before urbanization, it was free of charge and we destroyed it. That destruction came at a great cost, but when factoring the future damage it will prevent, the cost becomes miniscule. There are several other negatives to some proposals (Ex.-further environmental modifications and more construction debris), but the positives outweigh the negatives and will result in a higher yield of benefits for decades to come.

In Southeast Queens, the Idlewild Park Preserve System serves as our natural buffer and resiliency composite. It is important that we advocate for its restoration and protection. We cannot truly have a resilient community without it.
Airports: Bad Neighbors and an International Urban Planning Problem

By Tamara J. Mitchell & Jessica Downes

“Expansion means more jobs for the community!” is the usual propaganda used by industrial bodies to trick communities into supporting their projects. But what is the point of providing jobs when you’re killing off the community members? As we look around, our southeast Queens community, our environment is vastly changing. Perhaps the most visible and causal effect is from our not-so-friendly neighbor, JFK International Airport. Let’s not forget that JFK is OWNED by the City of New York, and is only OPERATED by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey by means of a “long-term lease”! JFK Airport used to be known as New York International Airport in 1948 and was later known as Idlewild Airport until 1963, when it was changed to John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport after the late president.

The Eastern Queens Alliance called for a complete environmental impact study (EIS) to determine the full environmental effects of the runway extension project on our health and overall quality of life. The FAA and the PANYNJ maintained that they were just following standards and regulations approved by the FAA and by Congress. By there denial of our appeal, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ignored all of our arguments--the people's arguments--and agreed. If we cannot get them to voluntarily consider the health and safety of our communities, we need to go over their heads and change the standards or come up with more innovative ways to bring about change.

San Francisco’s Innovative Claim To Fame

In the 1980’s more than 100 individuals brought similar claims against an airport in San Francisco and won many small, individual judgments for things like nuisance complaints. Each small judgment was more than they would have received from a lump settlement from a class action lawsuit. Termed “mass actions”, this strategy allowed citizens to treat the airport as an inconsiderate neighbor. The airport subsequently sued the city, attempting to force them into consolidating all the cases into one case that could be settled once and for all. The court rejected their action, and allowed the citizens not only to keep suing, but to continue to come back if the nuisance continued.

The genius of this strategy is that small nuisance claims are easy to bring and easy to prove. You need no expert witnesses to prove that the noise is upsetting and loud. You need no complex legal theory to prove that they should not be disturbing you in your own home, because these are well-established rights that you have. More importantly, while a complicated and lengthy class action suit settles the matter in the eyes of the court and prevents future litigation, nuisance suits address actions against you that have already happened. If they happen again, you can go back and sue again.

Unfortunately, it can be time consuming and costly to fight these battles. While you gain more than you would from a class action, you also have to find an attorney each time you want to litigate and pay them for their time and their court fees every time you head into court. It can become exhausting.

However, with careful strategizing between neighbors and between communities, this can be a powerful tool. If every community surrounding an airport sues regarding noise or air pollution, it notifies not only airports, but individual airlines that there is a need for change, and that if they do not change their behavior, they will be subject to more community enforced fines. If their behavior becomes too costly, it must change.

Power in our Civic Groups

This is why civic groups, and perhaps more importantly, national and international communication between civic groups is so important. For example, the US-Citizens Aviation Watch (USCAW) keeps track of every member organization and their activities to help them better organize civic groups and make them more effective community advocates. USCAW works not only in all 50 states, but also in three countries because this is a global problem.

Airports are our neighbors for better or worse. Nobody wants a neighbor who is loud and inconsiderate. Please consider contacting not only local community groups, but groups across the nation and internationally as well. Individually we are too small to stop, and together, we are too big to fail.

A Global Urban Planning Problem

The runway extension was only the introduction to a larger problem. The problem of oversight, accountability and lack of smart urban planning. JFK was built on almost 5000 acres of filled in wetlands. Our community believes that JFK has become too large and significant a problem of oversight, accountability and lack of smart urban planning. The introduction to a larger problem. The problem of oversight, accountability and lack of smart urban planning. JFK was built on almost 5000 acres of filled in wetlands. Our community believes that JFK has become too large and significant a problem.
UPCOMING EVENTS:

MLK VOLUNTEER DAY
Monday, January 19, 2015
Help us Clean up Idlewild Park Preserve in Jamaica Bay!
The Eastern Queens Alliance (EQA), stewards for the Preserve encourages you to volunteer with the NYC Parks Department Natural Areas Volunteers (NAV)!
Monday, January 19, 2015
10:00 a.m. -1:00 p.m.
Meet at 230th Place and 149th Avenue
(Soccer-field of the Brookfield School--P.S. 181)
Springfield Gardens, NY 11413

COMMUNITY CAFÉ
Saturday, January 24, 2015
A Neighborhood Conversation about Environment and Health in Southeast Queens/JFK Airshed Stakeholders Forum
9am- 12:00 Noon
St. Clare’s Catholic Academy
Annex Building:
241st Street & 138 Avenue
137-35 Brookville Boulevard
Rosedale, NY 11422

Eastern Queens Alliance, Inc.
PO Box 300818
Jamaica, NY 11430
Tel/Fax: 347 824-2301
www.easternqueensalliance.org

Recipient Address