

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

----- X

March 15, 2017
Start: 2:09 p.m.
Recess: 2:17 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,
14th Fl.

B E F O R E: Costa Constantinides
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Donavan Richards
Eric Ulrich
Rory Lancman

2 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Good

3 afternoon, I am Costa Constantinides, Chair of the
4 Environmental Protection Committee and today the
5 Committee will hold a hearing a vote on proposed
6 Intro 1198-A, a local law in relation to flood
7 mitigation in southeast Queens. The prime sponsor of
8 the bill is Council Member Donovan Richards who is
9 also a member of this Committee. I would like to
10 recognize also that Council Member Eric Ulrich from
11 Queens is here as well. The Committee previously
12 held a hearing on this bill on January 23, 2017.
13 There is a chronic long-standing flooding problem in
14 southeast Queens dating back more than 40 years and
15 affecting over 400,000 city residents. The area has
16 more 311 flooding and confirmed sewer back-up
17 complaints that any other area of the city in certain
18 neighborhoods including Rosedale, Springfield
19 Gardens, St. Albans, Jamaica, Queens Village and the
20 Rockaways experience recurring flooding conditions.
21 In these neighborhoods when it rains, the water
22 floods streets, buildings, businesses and homes. The
23 factors contributing to the extraordinary flooding
24 problem in southeast Queens include a post World War
25 II commercial and residential development that

2 outpace the extension of the city's sewer system and
3 left many neighborhoods without storm sewers or catch
4 basins to manage and drain precipitation from
5 roadways. In addition to this, the distance from the
6 ground water table in southeast Queens is shallow and
7 the water table is rising. Prior to 1996, the old
8 Jamaica water supply company pumped millions of
9 gallons of water every day out of 68 wells to supply
10 drinking water to southeast Queens. In 1996, this
11 ground water pumping ended due to a high cost
12 associated with operating the wells and treating the
13 water to make it potable. The City bought the
14 company and its wells and gradually began shutting
15 them down transitioning southeast Queens to drinking
16 water from upstate reservoirs but since the pumping
17 ended the ground water table has risen significantly.
18 In April 2015, Mayor de Blasio's administration
19 released One New York: The Plan For a Strong and Just
20 City, OneNYC, and the plan includes an initiative to
21 alleviate flooding in southeast Queens. The
22 initiative will consist of intensive and accelerated
23 long-term sewer build-out complemented with
24 innovative, sight specific solutions such as blue
25 belts and green infrastructure. In March of 016,

2 during a preliminary budget held by this Committee,
3 the Department committed to spend \$1.5 billion on
4 measures to reduce flooding in southeast Queens by
5 pairing traditional sewer construction with green
6 infrastructure throughout the region. Southeast
7 Queens communities have struggled with flooding and
8 sewer back-ups in homes and businesses for decades
9 with little relief. The Mayor's plan is designed to
10 finally bring some relief to these flood burdened
11 communities and I would like to recommend a yes vote
12 on this legislation. At this moment I would like to
13 also recognize Council Member Rory Lancman, also from
14 Queens, has joined us. I will turn it over to our
15 Committee Member Donovan Richards for his statement.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you, Mr.
17 Chairman, and I want to thank you for your steadfast
18 leadership and continuing the work that we started
19 many years ago it seems like now but I really, truly
20 appreciate your partnership in ensuring that this is
21 moving forward and that many of the infrastructure
22 projects that we are seeing in southeast Queens are
23 still happening. I am proud to be here today to cast
24 a vote, of course, in favor of Bill Intro 1198. For
25 decades, residents of southeast Queens have lived

2 with the fact that a slight rain could end in their
3 home being flooded but in 2015 a historic ten-year
4 plan by Mayor de Blasio committed \$1.5 billion,
5 actually it is looking like closer to 1.7 billion
6 now, to build-out a sewer system that never caught up
7 with the population growth in the area. Let me be
8 clear. In certain parts of our neighborhoods, I
9 don't understand how homes were built and how
10 buildings were built without any infrastructure being
11 put in place at the time of these buildings in the
12 first place. It seems to me that when you build
13 things you should put storm sewers. It should just
14 be a natural thing that comes with any growth in the
15 community. Homeowners have been forced to swallow
16 flooded lawns and streets and basements because
17 proper drainage was never built-out for our
18 communities. With the administration's help, finally
19 we are starting to address many of these ignored
20 areas. Thankfully, this administration has answered
21 the call and come up with some tangible solutions.
22 However, even though we trust, we believe in
23 verifying and we believe that transparency and
24 accountability is a key in ensuring that this plan is
25 even more a success. Now, no plan will provide

2 immediate solutions for decades of systematic neglect
3 but several projects in the plan have already been
4 completed such as the Twin Ponds Project, which we
5 are moving close to completion on, in Rosedale and
6 actually they just started work on one of my block,
7 on my block literally I just moved on so I am seeing
8 progress even as I walk outside the door now. Can't
9 park outside anymore on the city street but -- so we
10 see many more projects actually in the process
11 happening. We do need to address DUSTO (SP) and that
12 is another story for another day. That is why we are
13 here today. This bill will ensure that the plan that
14 is being implemented is done in a timely fashion and
15 the community can be updated on the progress of
16 projects on a regular basis. I have held several
17 meetings in my district with the Department of
18 Environmental Protection and every resident is
19 understandably concerned with on when they will see
20 specific blocks and infrastructure work being done.
21 Having a publically available plan with a specific
22 timeline for implementation and annual performance
23 milestones will allow the city to be more transparent
24 with its residents and allow homeowners to check
25 their status whenever they like instead of calling

1 our office day in and day out. Now we have a place
2 to send you. Even though we will gladly take your
3 call, I just want to say that. I would like to send
4 a special thank you to Former DEP Commissioner Emily
5 Lloyd who really came back and got this ball rolling.
6 She said Donovan, she said Costa, we are really are
7 gonna see this through and she really helped us to
8 reach this moment. Also want to thank, of course,
9 Mayor de Blasio. Also would like to thank our
10 counsel, Samara Swanson and Bill Murray, who have
11 really done a lot of work to make sure that we --
12 this work continues. My colleagues, Council Members
13 Miller, Ulrich and Wills who have also introduced and
14 cosponsored this legislation with me. I just want to
15 say after 15 years this bill will sunset so I will be
16 around 49. God willing, whoever the council member
17 is at the time, will not have to deal with this but
18 certainly we hope that they will make sure that after
19 15 years that all of this work is done and if not
20 this bill should certainly be looked at again and
21 amended. With that being said, I want to thank
22 everybody, all my colleagues, Council Member Lancman,
23 everyone who has really been supportive of these
24 efforts and once again, thank you Mr. Chair for your
25

2 leadership. With that, I proudly am ready to cast a
3 vote.

4 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you
5 Council Member Richards and of course thank you for
6 your steadfast leadership. This bill would not be
7 moving as quickly and the projects will not be funded
8 as quickly had it not been for your great advocacy.
9 Thank you. Will the Clerk call the roll?

10 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk,
11 roll call vote Committee on Environmental Protection
12 Introduction 1198-A. Chair Constantinides?

13 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Proudly vote
14 aye.

15 CLERK: Richards?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Aye.

17 CLERK: Lancman?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANCMAN: Aye.

19 CLERK: Ulrich?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Yes.

21 CLERK: By a vote of 4 in the
22 affirmative, 0 in the negative and no abstentions,
23 Item has been adopted by the Committee.

24 CHAIRPERSON CONSTANTINIDES: Thank you
25 again to all our staff, staff attorney Samara Swanson

1 COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION 9
2 and policy analyst Bill Murray for all of your
3 advocacy and work and with that we will gavel this
4 Committee of the Environmental Protection Committee
5 closed.

6 [gavel]

7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 22, 2017