

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT

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January 29, 2025  
Start: 1:09 p.m.  
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Joann Ariola, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Carmen N. De La Rosa  
Oswald Feliz  
Kevin C. Riley  
Lynn C. Schulman

A P P E A R A N C E S

Heather Roiter, Deputy Commissioner of Planning  
and Resiliency at New York City Emergency  
Management

David Schmidt, Deputy Commissioner of External  
Affairs at New York City Emergency Management

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone  
3 check for the Committee on Fire Emergency Management.  
4 Today's date is January 29, 2025, located in the  
5 Chambers. Recording is done by Rocco Mesiti.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, and  
7 welcome to the New York City Council Committee on  
8 Fire and Emergency Management.

9 At this time, place your phone on vibrate  
10 or silent mode.

11 If you want to submit testimony, submit  
12 it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Once again, that's  
13 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

14 At any time during this hearing, please  
15 do not approach the dais.

16 Thank you for your cooperation.

17 Chair, we are ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: [GAVEL] Good  
19 afternoon. I'm Council Member Joann Ariola, and I'm  
20 Chairperson of the Committee on Fire and Emergency  
21 Management. I am joined today by my Colleague, Kevin  
22 Riley.

23 New York City's Emergency Management,  
24 also known as NYCEM, is responsible for coordinating  
25 New York City's emergency planning and response for

1 all types of scales of emergencies, including extreme  
2 weather events such as coastal storms and flash  
3 flooding. As seen during a number of heavy  
4 thunderstorms in recent years, the city faces ongoing  
5 issues of extreme flash flooding during periods of  
6 heavy rain. These events, which have proven deadly at  
7 times, present challenges to the city's aging  
8 infrastructure and the ability of our City to protect  
9 residents in need. Flash flooding from heavy rainfall  
10 is not a new phenomenon in New York City. However,  
11 the frequency and intensity of such events has  
12 increased in recent years. These incidents have  
13 created dangerous conditions, resulting in loss of  
14 life and significant damage to public and private  
15 property. Throughout the city, concrete surfaces, the  
16 relative lack of vegetation, and large areas of  
17 impermeable surfaces exacerbate the risk of flooding  
18 caused by heavy rainfall events. Substantial flooding  
19 on arterial roadways and local streets have trapped  
20 drivers throughout the city and placed civilians and  
21 first responders at significant risk. The New York  
22 City's subway system has also become increasingly  
23 vulnerable to flooding during heavy rainfalls during  
24 the system through the station entrances and  
25

2 ventilation systems, causing significant disruptions  
3 to transit service and dangerous conditions.

4 Additionally, in certain parts of the city, below-  
5 grade portions of buildings have faced significant  
6 damage due to flash flooding, which can cause  
7 significant property damage and threaten safety of  
8 individuals in basement-level apartments.

9           Since Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the City  
10 has invested significant resources to improving  
11 infrastructure and preparedness in areas of the  
12 City's vulnerable coastal flooding. These vital  
13 investments will provide much-needed support and  
14 resiliency to vulnerable communities on our  
15 shorelines. However, we need similar focus on  
16 investments to ensure the City is taking the  
17 necessary steps to protect communities that are known  
18 to be at high risk for flooding. Although the  
19 solutions will likely be different than those needed  
20 to combat coastal flooding, the seriousness of the  
21 threat of life and property warrants similar  
22 investment. To that end, the Committee is interested  
23 in how the City has prepared for and addressed severe  
24 weather emergencies that produce flash flooding,  
25 particularly in vulnerable areas. Additionally, the

2 Committee is hearing Intro. Number 807, sponsored by  
3 Council Member and Majority Whip Selvena Brooks-  
4 Powers. This legislation would require NYCEM to  
5 establish a pilot program for utilizing emergency  
6 shelter locations for the purpose of providing refuge  
7 prior to and during flash flooding events. We look  
8 forward to hearing the testimony from the  
9 Administration and examining the detailed planning  
10 that is required to guarantee that all New Yorkers  
11 remain safe when facing potential flash flood events.

12 I'd also like to note that we've been  
13 joined by my Colleague, Lynn Schulman.

14 Our Counsel will now swear you in. Please  
15 raise your right hand.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KINGSLEY: Do you affirm  
17 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but  
18 the truth in your testimony before the Council and to  
19 answer honestly to Council Member questions?

20 ADMINISTRATION: (INAUDIBLE)

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Seeing you affirm, you  
22 may go ahead. Thank you.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Good  
24 afternoon, Chairperson Ariola and the Members of the  
25 committee. I am Heather Roiter, Deputy Commissioner

2 of Planning and Resiliency at New York City Emergency  
3 Management. I'm joined today by our Deputy  
4 Commissioner of External Affairs, David Schmidt.

5           To understand how the City responds to  
6 flash flood emergencies, it's important to understand  
7 the science behind it and the challenges with respect  
8 to flash flood prediction. It is difficult to predict  
9 flash floods far in advance as they're inherently  
10 uncertain with respect to heavy rainfall predictions.  
11 There's very little lead time, perhaps only an hour  
12 or so, to accurately identify the precise location  
13 and intensity of rainfall. This means that the  
14 National Weather Service might be able to identify  
15 flash flood threats for the tri-state area or for the  
16 city as a whole with enough lead time to activate our  
17 flash flood plan and warn the public, but predicting  
18 rainfall at smaller scales, such as a borough,  
19 neighborhood, or street level, is not possible until  
20 the storm is barreling down on the city. The high  
21 variability of where rain falls means flood  
22 advisories and flash flood warnings are issued only  
23 an hour or so in advance, or in some cases, as the  
24 storm is ongoing. This is compounded by the fact that  
25 small changes in the intensity, movement, and

2 development of the storm result can have large  
3 changes in the forecast. A shift of only a few miles  
4 can be the difference between minimal or major or  
5 potentially a catastrophic impact. No two storms will  
6 ever be the same. Each will leave its own unique  
7 impact on the city, even if the weather patterns  
8 between storms are similar. This is to say that  
9 future storms will produce flooding in areas that  
10 perhaps haven't seen significant flooding in the  
11 past.

12           When we consider these factors and layer  
13 them into our vast and varied landscape of New York  
14 City, in addition to the forecast challenges and  
15 variability of heavy rainfall, you begin to  
16 understand all that we take into account as we plan  
17 and respond to storms. The City first released its  
18 flash flood emergency plan in 2009, which is the most  
19 activated of our emergency plans. Throughout the  
20 years, Emergency Management's made improvements in  
21 our response strategies in addressing flood risk,  
22 especially following the catastrophic events of post-  
23 Tropical Storm Ida in 2021 and the September 2023  
24 flash flood event. This includes an embedded  
25 meteorologist within our agency, the hiring of a



1 third-party weather vendor to supplement our  
2 coordination with the National Weather Service, and  
3 revamping the flash flood emergency plan to have a  
4 risk-based and skilled approach. The flash flood  
5 emergency plan has expanded its risk-based strategies  
6 by incorporating the city's stormwater resiliency  
7 maps for targeted catch basin cleaning, monitoring  
8 chronic flood locations, dewatering operations,  
9 disseminating public information and travel  
10 advisories, augmenting executive decision-making  
11 through City leadership coordination calls, and  
12 utilizing and supporting the advancement of the  
13 City's flood sensor network, FloodNet, to give us  
14 real-time flood information. This risk-based approach  
15 allows the City to adjust its response to address  
16 common events that can cause nuisance flooding to  
17 scaling our operations for the more severe events.  
18 Emergency Management has also enhanced public warning  
19 capabilities via the NotifyNYC program, including the  
20 creation of new message types encouraging rain  
21 preparedness, such as notifications asking New  
22 Yorkers to help clear catch basins. In addition to  
23 these messages, we've also increased our focus on  
24 basement apartment notifications and risk, including  
25

1 the development of a NotifyNYC subscription group  
2 that offers targeted messaging regarding flooding in  
3 basement apartments. New Yorkers interested in this  
4 information can enroll in this group and, unlike  
5 other groups, will receive phone calls all times of  
6 day, including during the overnight hours, to alert  
7 them of risk in basement flooding. All of these  
8 enhancements to NotifyNYC, including the new basement  
9 notifications, are offered in multiple languages. As  
10 always, we would appreciate support from the Council  
11 in getting the word out about these capabilities and  
12 encouraging enrollment in NotifyNYC, especially for  
13 our basement alerts group, as increased enrollment  
14 will assist us in reaching even more vulnerable New  
15 Yorkers.  
16

17 Our approach to communication also  
18 leverages a multitude of other platforms as well,  
19 activated by Emergency Management as well as our  
20 partners, to relay crucial information promptly and  
21 efficiently. These platforms range from social media  
22 outlets like Twitter and Instagram, additional  
23 systems like our advanced warning system, which  
24 disseminates information to people with disabilities  
25 and other access and functional needs, and to

2 partners in the private and non-profit sector and all  
3 elected throughout the city. This ensures a  
4 comprehensive and effective public response to  
5 address immediate life safety needs.

6           We've also added flood alarms as a low-  
7 cost response tool, similar to smoke alarms and  
8 backed up by our FEMA-led post-item mitigation study.  
9 City agencies, led by DEPs and supplemented by  
10 Emergency Management, have distributed alarms to New  
11 Yorkers, which they can place in their basement to  
12 alert them when flooding is occurring in their  
13 residence, so they know when to move to higher ground  
14 and a space they pre-identify as part of their  
15 household's emergency plan.

16           In the aftermath of a large-scale flash  
17 flood event, we will transition into the recovery  
18 phase, rigorously working to ensure services are  
19 restored where needed and evaluating the full scope  
20 of damage to infrastructure and buildings. We will  
21 concurrently activate other key operations, such as  
22 sheltering, reception centers, damage assessment, or  
23 community outreach while tracking restoration. The  
24 report damage tool was newly launched last hurricane  
25 season, along with revamping the 3-1-1 severe weather

2 question tool. These link callers to direct services  
3 when reporting damage from the event. These tools  
4 collect information, such as building damage that  
5 could be used to request state and federal recovery  
6 aid or 3-1-1 service requests related to the storm,  
7 such as backup sewers, structural damage to  
8 buildings, and heat and hot water complaints. Both  
9 tools can be activated in anticipation of incoming  
10 weather and amplified through all our social media  
11 channels, NotifyNYC, Strengthening Communities  
12 Network, elected officials and community boards, and  
13 further amplified by City Hall and other agency  
14 partners. The numbers received from this tool, along  
15 with the report to the EOC, aid in triggering  
16 recovery operations, such as activating our damage  
17 assessment working group, muck out support,  
18 sheltering, or debris cleanup. If impacts are severe  
19 enough, they can meet the threshold to have New York  
20 State request FEMA's individual assistance for  
21 residents or a Small Business Administration  
22 declaration, which provides low-interest loans to  
23 renters, homeowners, and non-profits and business  
24 owners to help with the recovery, repair, and other  
25 losses. In both instances, state and federal

2 representatives and/or SBA will then send  
3 representatives to assess damage and determine if the  
4 event meets the threshold for the declaration.

5           We have deep concern regarding  
6 Introduction 807 related to the scientific  
7 limitations as well as the potential for scope and  
8 danger to New Yorkers as it's currently written. All  
9 of the scientific and operational concerns we  
10 detailed through this testimony highlight the low  
11 predictability and highly localized but not  
12 predictable to geotarget the nature of flash  
13 flooding. This underlines the impracticality of  
14 developing and operating flash flood shelters in New  
15 York City pre-flash flood. The concept of opening a  
16 shelter before the flash flooding occurs is fraught  
17 with scientific and operational efficiencies relating  
18 to the timing, location, and resource allocation. The  
19 entire city can be at flash flood risk. We cannot  
20 safely advise people to leave their home and go to a  
21 predetermined location that we cannot guarantee will  
22 have the safe path, given the short notice of  
23 localized impacts, which are almost in real time.  
24 That's not how flash floods work, and we have laid

2 this out in the testimony today in terms of the  
3 forecast capabilities for flash floods.

4           Additionally, piloting flash flood  
5 shelters in 10 neighborhoods pre-emergency would  
6 consume resources to limit areas at the tradeoff of a  
7 flexible response to serve the whole community. As  
8 the entire city can be under a flash flood risk, and  
9 the impacts are only known as they are happening, the  
10 legislation would force the City to open pre-  
11 designated sites as well as at a distance from an  
12 impacted person's home, and the journey to that site  
13 could be significantly more dangerous than moving to  
14 higher ground or going to a known safe location close  
15 by to them that they can see is not impacted. The  
16 power of water is tremendous and extremely dangerous.

17           Therefore, Emergency Management is  
18 adamantly opposed to the proposed legislation. We  
19 would like to continue the discussions with the  
20 sponsor to further explain the nuances of emergency  
21 planning as well as work deeper on education and  
22 partnerships in communities.

23           As discussed through this testimony,  
24 there is significant outreach and community  
25 engagement that's already being done and will

1 continue to be strongly pushed throughout all  
2 communities in the city. Through the Ready New York  
3 program, we educate New Yorkers about hazards that  
4 they may face in New York City and prepare for all  
5 types of emergency by writing an emergency plan,  
6 choosing a meeting place, and gathering supplies for  
7 your home, and to prepare a go-bag in case they need  
8 to leave their home in a hurry. Emergency Management  
9 goes out to meet communities in various locations  
10 every day of the year, schools, houses of worship,  
11 town halls, community meetings, and more, and we  
12 always stress the necessity for everyone to have an  
13 emergency plan, including two meeting places, one  
14 which should be a 24/7 location of awareness and  
15 comfort to them. This is especially important for  
16 people who live in basement apartments or low-lying  
17 areas. In addition to being registered for NotifyNYC,  
18 they should have a plan on where they will go during  
19 a flooding emergency. Taking measures such as  
20 understanding one's personal risk, investing in flood  
21 alarms, and protecting your home or buildings can  
22 help with immediate safety during these events. As we  
23 have seen with other aspects of severe weather,  
24 climate change and its impacts continue to pose new  
25

2 challenges to New York City, and City agencies are  
3 working to adjust our plans and outreach to New  
4 Yorkers to address these hazards. We continue to  
5 pursue giving New Yorkers the most up-to-date  
6 information on the potential dangers from flash  
7 flooding so they can make any adjustments to their  
8 activities as needed. Thank you for this opportunity  
9 to testify today. We will now take your questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you so much. I  
11 would like to address the Bill 807, which I'm  
12 currently signing on to because I think it is  
13 necessary. I live in an area and I also represent an  
14 area that is prone to flash flooding, coastal  
15 flooding, climate flooding, any type of flooding  
16 possible. We get flooded. Council Member Selvena  
17 Brooks-Powers, who is the prime sponsor of this bill,  
18 is my adjacent Council Member. I just don't  
19 understand, in your testimony and your resistance to  
20 this bill, where you can identify any place, for any  
21 other reason, that you can't identify any place in  
22 advance to put people where they can be safe or give  
23 them advance notice and that you don't have the  
24 geometric ability to do so when I know that that's  
25 not true. I know the operation that you have so



2 people shouldn't have to say, well, maybe I can go to  
3 Far Rockaway High School because it's on higher  
4 ground, and I'm just making that up, but Far Rockaway  
5 High School doesn't know that they have to have a  
6 super there to open it up. People in our communities  
7 are at risk every time there is a flood. We need to  
8 have places identified. We need places that we can  
9 hand out to our constituents that say this is the  
10 place that you can go because this is at higher  
11 ground, not at the time when you are leaving to flee  
12 because your life is in danger, but you can make an  
13 intelligent decision to go prior to with your family  
14 and your belongings and be there to weather the storm  
15 so I think that you can do this. I think that your  
16 argument is not compelling, and I think that instead  
17 of us having to retool the bill, I think you have to  
18 rethink what the community needs. Council Member and  
19 Majority Whip Powers gave a few questions that she'd  
20 like asked, and I will ask them for her. The first  
21 one is inadequate draining and significant  
22 contributing factors to localized inland flooding.  
23 It's on that topic. Does the City work to improve  
24 drainage, mitigate flood risk in areas that are  
25 historically prone to flash floods? So, do you work

2 with DEP and other agencies to make sure that that is  
3 taking place?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Yes, and  
5 thank you for that response. I'll answer that  
6 specific question. How do we take drainage into  
7 account? So, as I mentioned, our flash flood  
8 emergency plan, our most active plan, has gone  
9 through a large revamp to be risk-based, and so one  
10 of the core strategies, which it's always been, is  
11 the catch basin cleaning so that's really the  
12 targeted drainage areas that are known to be areas  
13 that need to remain open during these flash flood  
14 events. So, DEP is a critical partner in our plan. We  
15 work very closely with them, and we're committed to  
16 updating our plan annually, and the main thing we  
17 look at is the catch basin cleaning targeted areas so  
18 there's quite a lot of information that goes into  
19 helping create that assessment so our plan is fresh  
20 with that information.

21 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. How does NYCEM  
22 conduct targeted outreach to individuals living or  
23 working in areas that are prone to significant  
24 flooding?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So, as  
3 mentioned, there are areas of prone flooding. So,  
4 when the forecast is happening, people need to know  
5 their risk, and we will say people in basement  
6 apartments or below-grade spaces are really going to  
7 be at the greatest risk of flood, especially if they  
8 know they're in a low-lying area, so signing up for  
9 the Notify program in the basement group is really  
10 our key way of making sure we can do 24/7 messaging  
11 when a real storm is coming down. In, anyone can sign  
12 up for these messages. You don't have to be in that  
13 area. But also signing up for the Notify program will  
14 ensure that you get our weather alerts, and so you're  
15 always up-to-date on the information, remembering  
16 that local information is really not going to be  
17 available of expected greatest impact until we're  
18 within hours or in the storm so it's going to be  
19 broad areas at risk.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: And if you don't have  
21 Twitter or X?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So Notify can  
23 go through email. You can call 3-1-1, and then you  
24 can sign up for Notify and receive it through email,

2 text, or a phone call so it does not have to be  
3 social media only.

4 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You mentioned  
5 basement apartments. And, you know, with the City of  
6 Yes Now, there'll be a push to legalize basement  
7 apartments. Do you feel that this is safe with the  
8 type of flooding that we're seeing in basements and  
9 the lack of outreach to people who live in basement  
10 apartments and the lack of notification and the lack  
11 of places for them to go during a flood incident?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: What I can  
13 say is that we're working with the groups of City of  
14 Yes on the legislation that was just passed to make  
15 sure the Emergency Management's a connected partner  
16 through the programming of the legislation.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. Would NYCEM  
18 ever advise individuals living or working in below-  
19 grade spaces or in otherwise flood-prone areas to  
20 seek higher ground or shelter outside of their homes  
21 due to an anticipated rainfall or flood?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Yes. So, if  
23 you are in a below-grade space, work, home, staying  
24 alert on the weather through all the different  
25 mechanisms, when we say that there's a threat,

2 especially below-grade spaces, that's the time to go  
3 to a pre-identified location that's higher ground and  
4 is comfortable for that individual and business.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: But they're learning  
6 that, what, on television? If they don't have any  
7 other means, they don't have social media, they don't  
8 have email, and there are people that are like this,  
9 they don't have this so they're learning this from  
10 channel whatever news.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Right. So,  
12 for all emergencies, we really try to focus on having  
13 a network to stay informed, and that does mean  
14 something different for different individuals so  
15 whether it's your neighbors, it's your community  
16 group, it's your house of worship, if you have  
17 service providers, we work really closely. We have  
18 something called the Advanced Warning System, that's  
19 our AWS program, and that's really targeted to work  
20 with all the umbrella organizations that service the  
21 most vulnerable New Yorkers so they can reach their  
22 clients as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Does that include a  
24 door-to-door in those areas where the low-lying areas  
25 are? I mean, they're definitely identified. And in

2 fairness, I've done that with your Commissioner and  
3 Deputy Commissioner. We've gone door-to-door, the  
4 three of us together, in low-lying areas, but do you  
5 have a team that goes out and goes door-to-door in  
6 those areas, knocking on doors, and really urging  
7 people in advance to go to higher ground? I don't  
8 want to see people being pulled out of basement  
9 windows. I'd like to see people already safe when the  
10 floods hit so what's your capability for that?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So, we're  
12 trying to work on all capabilities, and we can talk  
13 through how to reach New Yorkers before an event, but  
14 I can't speak to that specific one.

15 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: So, you don't have a  
16 team that goes out. That would be the answer if you  
17 can't speak to it.

18 How would using precincts, firehouses, or  
19 shelter locations mitigate the concerns about safety  
20 during flash floods, and would the proposed pilot  
21 program align with that approach? So, we have  
22 precincts, we have firehouses. Would it align with  
23 the approach of this bill? That's the first question.  
24 And how many precincts and firehouses are currently  
25 designated as potential emergency shelters for flash

2 floods, and do these facilities have the capacity to  
3 serve the vulnerable population in the flood zone  
4 areas?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So, maybe  
6 just to also step back and talk about flood risk. So  
7 it's also, I think, really important to understand  
8 coastal flood risk versus flash flood risk. We have  
9 done quite a lot, obviously, over many years to  
10 communicate our evacuation zones in areas predicted  
11 to have coastal flood risk, which also come with  
12 forecasts that can be days out and give us ample  
13 opportunity to stand up the operations in  
14 anticipation of the response.

15 Flash flooding, it's a different animal  
16 in terms of the weather and the variability and the  
17 meteorological tools. So, I just want to preface that  
18 ability to say we have done an extreme amount of work  
19 on our coastal storm planning to have pre-identified  
20 sites and socialize and communicate and make that  
21 information available for knowing your risk and your  
22 zone. With low-lying coastal areas vulnerable to  
23 inland flooding, it can affect citywide. It has a  
24 much broader scale, and the forecast is also going to  
25 be much larger scale in anticipation. So, knowing in

2 that storm where the area of greatest impact will be,  
3 will be in it or right at the heels of the storm when  
4 that's happening. So, I just, you know, in terms of  
5 just thinking through or kind of relaying the  
6 challenges, I just wanted to clear that.

7 So, in terms, but we do work with all of  
8 our public safety partners and making sure that we  
9 can utilize and work with them in an emergency and,  
10 if it's also communicating sites that are, we know  
11 that are going to be open to the public for a safe  
12 place or a safe haven during an emergency, we will do  
13 that as well.

14 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: But the communication  
15 of those places, to get to those places, I mean, I'm  
16 an elected official and I don't have a list of those  
17 places and I could not communicate that to my  
18 constituents, and I don't know if my Colleagues, I've  
19 been joined by Council Member Oswald Feliz, but I  
20 don't know if my Colleagues get a list of those  
21 places. What are the precincts and firehouses that  
22 are being used currently during floods as safe havens  
23 for people who need to be relocated?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So, we will  
25 work with Police and Fire in catastrophic events and



2 scenarios to coordinate with them during a flash  
3 flood event and how their facilities could be part of  
4 a suite of options of where high ground is and a safe  
5 place, but you shouldn't wait for the storm. We can  
6 also communicate that today where any place in your  
7 community might be a resource for you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: No, but what  
9 precincts and firehouses are already identified?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: I'm happy to  
11 work on providing a list of fire and police stations  
12 that are throughout the city and in your  
13 jurisdiction, and we can talk further about how to  
14 work through that for some of our hazard planning.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: I think that  
16 your answers prove how important that Intro. 807 is,  
17 because there really isn't a plan.

18 And I will now yield to my Colleagues if  
19 they have any questions. Council Member Riley.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair.  
21 The Chair asked pretty much a lot and share the same  
22 sentiments, and I just want to work in collaboration.  
23 I represent the Northeast Bronx, which is adjacent to  
24 Council Member Marmorato, which the Chair is asking  
25 questions about her District as well. We're built

1 around lakes, rivers, and ponds. Usually, when I got  
2 elected in 2021, there were a lot of rainfall,  
3 waterfalls that were happening, and I had people that  
4 resided in homes that were flooded out, and the  
5 response that they received, they didn't really get a  
6 lot of assistance because they weren't in a specific  
7 catchment area that the City focuses on so I would  
8 just ask, you know, moving forward, that we could  
9 kind of focus on different areas and work in  
10 collaboration to kind of get the message out there to  
11 apply for programs like NotifyNYC. We have a great  
12 CBO in my District called Bronx Neighborhood Housing  
13 Services. I'm pretty sure that should be like an  
14 avenue that you guys could collaborate with. Any time  
15 homeowners are going through any kind of traumatic  
16 situations, they usually go to Neighborhood Housing  
17 Services within the District, so that would be a  
18 great avenue to partner with, collaborating with our  
19 office so we could collaborate with neighbors to let  
20 them know about these programs. The issue within our  
21 city is that we have a lot of good programs. It's  
22 just that a lot of people in the city just don't know  
23 about it. They're not cognizant about it. So, I guess  
24 the question I have is, what other forms of outreach  
25

2 has the City done with other CBOs within New York  
3 City to make sure that they are getting the message  
4 out there about NotifyNYC?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Yeah, and we  
6 would love to work with you and your community and  
7 work on how we can help bring our message to increase  
8 enrollment awareness and emergency planning for all  
9 your constituents.

10 In terms of working with CBOs, we have a  
11 suite of different programs. So, we have our  
12 Strengthening Communities, I'd say is our flagship  
13 one, where we've been working with selected community  
14 groups to help build community-based plans, and then  
15 we can use that group in emergencies to help amplify  
16 messaging and outreach.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Do you do any  
18 partnership with HPD to do placement of anyone who's  
19 being displaced because of flooding?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: We work with  
21 HPD on an ongoing basis whenever there's displacement  
22 and emergency need so we will work with all the  
23 agencies to come up to work on the response  
24 operations.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you. I just  
3 want to state on the record, I think as a City, we do  
4 need to do a better job with emergency responses. I  
5 know it's not speaking about fires here today, but I  
6 had a ridiculous fire in the Wallace Avenue in my  
7 District where we have tons of residents who were  
8 displaced. They went into a hotel system, and then  
9 they were told that they had to leave the hotel after  
10 a certain while. We have been doing, you know, great  
11 partnership with City agencies, but a lot of them  
12 feel like they've been forgotten about. They're  
13 taxpaying citizens, and they feel like, you know,  
14 telling them to leave a hotel when we provide so much  
15 shelter for other people is something that's not  
16 really, you know, adequate for them so I just feel  
17 like moving forward, we need to have more of an  
18 adequate plan for our everyday New Yorkers who are  
19 going through emergency responses, right? Thank you  
20 so much, Chair, for this opportunity.

21 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Council Member  
22 Schulman and then De La Rosa, who has joined us for  
23 the Committee hearing. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very  
25 much, Chair. I represent a District in Central Queens

2 that is... no, no, no. I just want to make sure you're  
3 paying attention.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: I'm sorry.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: That's okay. So,  
6 I represent Central Queens. My District is 29. It's  
7 Forest Hills, Kew Gardens, Richmond Hill, and it's  
8 not known as a flood zone. But in 2020, there was a  
9 major storm, and there was so much flooding. I mean,  
10 people were flooding out of their houses. It was  
11 major damage. Somebody actually died in my District  
12 who was in a basement apartment in a large high-rise  
13 building so I want to make sure, and by the way, it  
14 was the previous Administration, so it wasn't this  
15 one, but resources, I mean, I was on staff. I wasn't  
16 a Council Member at the time. I was on staff in the  
17 Speaker's office, and I had to go to the  
18 Administration and beg for resources because they  
19 said, oh, well, that area is not known as a flood  
20 zone, and, you know, so we want to make sure, and I  
21 don't happen to have civic associations in my  
22 District, as it turns out, for the most part so we  
23 need to really have a plan for areas like that, and  
24 there was another storm subsequent to that where  
25 there was a lot of flooding, not as much as that

2 time, so I want to make sure that that happens, and  
3 we have, you know, I'd like for you, if you could  
4 supply us, I know you don't have it now, with a list  
5 of the civic organizations and other organizations  
6 that you work with, because then what we could do is  
7 we could take a look and see if we want to make  
8 additions to it, because I think that that's very  
9 important, and especially with climate change,  
10 there's all kinds of things that could happen, so we  
11 want to be on top of it and be prepared.

12 I will make a comment that on February  
13 19th, I am having a hearing. It was originally on a  
14 bill about cooling centers. It's going to be a much  
15 bigger hearing now. It's going to be about the public  
16 emergency response in general with DOHMH and  
17 everything that's going on in the federal government  
18 and everything else of what we're going to do moving  
19 forward with a number of things so I just want to let  
20 you know that so that you're prepared to answer some  
21 of those questions, but thank you.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Thank you,  
23 and we'll make sure to take back that request for the  
24 list of CBOs.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Council Member De La  
3 Rosa.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you,  
5 Chair, and thank you all for being here. I represent  
6 Northern Manhattan, Washington Heights, Inwood in the  
7 northern part of the Borough, and one of the things  
8 about my District, you know, the Heights, is that  
9 there's a lot of the topography is such that there's  
10 a lot of hills, but then that means there's also a  
11 lot of valleys. One of the things that we've seen,  
12 and we've worked with DEP closely on some of the  
13 major capital repairs that are needed for our street  
14 infrastructure, but what we've seen is a lot of  
15 ponding that happens at the bottom of the hills due  
16 to how quickly these floods are happening most  
17 recently. We've had a lot of flooding damage. A lot  
18 of it is also impacting small businesses because a  
19 lot of our businesses are either ground level or  
20 below. We have a lot of businesses that are that have  
21 two floors. We're seeing a lot of damage. So, my  
22 first question is does the agency work with Small  
23 Business Services and other sister agencies to do  
24 some proactive outreach in areas that are more prone  
25 to flash flooding? That's the first question.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Yeah, so  
3 we've worked with DEP to do targeted outreach in  
4 flood-risk communities and really work to advance  
5 some of the strategies that I mentioned around flood  
6 alarms and deployables that also residents can take  
7 to help protect their properties too so that's also  
8 something that we would appreciate the Council to  
9 help us is help promoting those strategies and also  
10 ways to partner and getting those into community  
11 members too.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: One of the  
13 other issues that I'm concerned about and I've been  
14 talking to other agencies about including Sanitation  
15 and the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection  
16 is the way that our streets are being utilized right  
17 now. In my District, we have the proliferation of  
18 street car washers and, although they're not supposed  
19 to, they tap into the local hydrants and wash cars  
20 and it's something that is proliferating. On one  
21 block in my District, you can find five of them, no  
22 matter how cold it is, no matter what the weather is.  
23 One of the things that this is causing is that the  
24 capacity in our catch basins is impacted. I'm  
25 wondering if within the plan to deal with flash



2 flooding, your agency or DEP is taking a look at the  
3 way that streets are being used because it does  
4 impact the amount of water that our catch basins can  
5 take on when there is a flash flood.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: I think  
7 that's something we'll have to go back with DEP to  
8 get back to you on that one.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: And I'm having  
10 conversations right now on that specific issue with  
11 both Department of Consumer Worker Protection,  
12 Sanitation. DEP knows about some of the issues, and  
13 I'd love for you all to also join some of the  
14 conversations we're having. Thank you. Thank you,  
15 Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Let's get back to  
17 chronic flooding. How are chronic flooding locations  
18 identified and monitored by the City during a flash  
19 flood event and does NYCEM or DCAS maintain a list of  
20 City-managed buildings that are located in chronic  
21 flood locations?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So, for catch  
23 basin cleaning, we work with DEP to come up with the  
24 targeted areas, and there's different information  
25 that feeds into it but it's historic known impact or

2 overflow so all that is how we do targeted catch  
3 basin cleaning before a storm and then they do have  
4 crews that are out as well during the event for  
5 respond.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: How many times during  
7 the year when it's not a climate event do you go out  
8 with DEP to check those catch basins?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: You'd have to  
10 speak to DEP about their maintenance program.

11 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Well, you do it  
12 together, right? You're doing it in tandem?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: No, we are  
14 not the ones physically going out and doing the  
15 cleaning. They're the ones going out and doing the  
16 cleaning.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: So, in your  
18 conversations with them and working with that agency,  
19 how many times a year are they telling you that  
20 they're going out, because we're always asking DEP to  
21 go out. They're very responsive. But if you're  
22 telling me that you're working with DEP for catch  
23 basins that are not being cleaned in high flood risk  
24 areas and you have a list of these, I just want to  
25

2 know how often you check in with DEP regarding those  
3 catch basins.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: You'd have to  
5 speak to DEP about the maintenance, the ongoing  
6 maintenance of their catch basins.

7 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I'm asking how often  
8 do you check, does NYCEM check with DEP, call DEP,  
9 hello, DEP. Have you gone out into X area, which is a  
10 known flood zone, and checked those catch basins?  
11 Does NYCEM do that? Because that's what you're  
12 implying.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: NYCEM  
14 coordinates with the agency. So it's also Sanitation,  
15 the Parks Department, and Transportation that go out  
16 and clean catch basins in advance of when we activate  
17 the flash flood plan.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Do you maintain a  
19 list of those City-managed buildings that are located  
20 in chronic flood areas? Do you maintain a list of  
21 buildings that are in chronic flood areas? Well, I'll  
22 be parochial. Let's talk about Shorefront Parkway on  
23 the Rockaway Peninsula. Do you have a list somewhere  
24 that has the Dayton Tower, Surfside, and all the  
25

2 different buildings that are there that are prone to  
3 flooding?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: We are able  
5 to provide that information to our partners as  
6 needed, and we can follow up with you about the  
7 status of that list.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: So then you have a  
9 list?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: I can follow  
11 up with you on the status.

12 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You don't have a  
13 list. Okay, so then if you don't have a list, and you  
14 have to follow up with me, and that means that you  
15 cannot do public outreach, and you work with DEP, but  
16 you don't know how many times a year they go out.  
17 That means that there's not real collaboration here.  
18 That's what I'm hearing, and I need more  
19 collaboration between NYCEM and all the different  
20 agencies. Why? Because people's lives are being lost,  
21 and we're very reactionary, and I want to be pro-  
22 action. That's how we have to do things. I live in an  
23 area that is plagued by all different flooding.  
24 Council Member Brooks-Powers, same story. Many of the  
25 other Members who are in this Body, same story. So,

2 either you're working together or you're not, and I  
3 don't want people being pulled out of basement  
4 apartments or having to leave their high-rise  
5 apartments or leave their apartment buildings or  
6 homes while there's floods, when there's no real  
7 evacuation plan, and there's no real evacuation  
8 signage, and we've been asking for this for a long  
9 time, and yet it's not there.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: So, I do want  
11 to say that flood risk is something that we're  
12 actively and always communicating. That information  
13 is provided by the City. There's different, again,  
14 the type of flood risk we're talking about, whether  
15 it's tidal, inland, coastal, that's all provided on  
16 the City Flood Hazard Mapper. We also do have it on  
17 our website through our hazard mitigation plan, and  
18 we do provide an abundance of information on  
19 overlaying mapping and flood risk. The specific list  
20 you're asking for is the one thing I think I'd have  
21 to follow up on, but we do provide quite a lot of the  
22 information that is available for your constituents,  
23 your office, and partners to also take and use.

24 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I would love to see  
25 it. I'd love to see it shared. I'm just going to give

1 you a scenario, and I'd just like to know if you were  
2 involved in this. In my District, we have track work  
3 being done on the A-Train. We've worked with MTA and  
4 all different agencies to make sure that people can  
5 get to and from work, but this is a major flood zone.  
6 It goes through Council Member Brooks-Power's  
7 District and my own. How involved was NYCEM in  
8 creating an evacuation plan for the people of the  
9 Rockaway Peninsula and Broad Channel because of the  
10 lack of a train to get off that peninsula for the  
11 next 17 weeks? Was there any interaction with your  
12 agency at all?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: I can't speak  
15 today. I'll have to get back to you after I consult  
16 with my colleagues.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. I'm done. Any  
18 other questions?

19 Josh, you can relieve the panel, and we  
20 can go to anyone who wants to ask questions from the  
21 public. I'd like you to remain if you can just to  
22 hear what the public has to say. It's not that many  
23 people.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KINGSLEY: We'll now  
25 turn to public testimony. If any individuals are in

2 Chambers that would like to testify, please go to the  
3 Sergeant-at-Arms and fill out a witness slip.

4 Okay. We will now turn to Zoom testimony.  
5 Christopher Leon-Johnson.

6 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello. Can you  
7 hear me?

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes. Starting time.

9 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello. My  
10 name is Christopher Leon-Johnson. Thank you, Chair  
11 Ariola, for hosting this hearing this afternoon. I'm  
12 showing my opposition to Intro. 807 that was  
13 introduced by Selvena Brooks-Powers because just like  
14 I heard the lady who was part of the NYCEM, she just  
15 said that, like, you can't control, like, what a  
16 flash flood could do. Like, nobody can control when a  
17 flash flood is going to happen. No one can control  
18 that. The only person that can control what goes on  
19 is God. I mean, I hope that... I don't know why people  
20 got to start bringing that up. Look, a flash flood is  
21 a flood that is sent by God. No one in the world,  
22 nobody in the City Council, Selvena Brooks-Powers,  
23 nobody can ever predict what God is going to do next.  
24 I'm in Queens right now, in South Ozone Park, Queens,  
25 and it's a flood-prone district, but we don't know in

2 that in two minutes that the sky's going to turn  
3 black and it's going to flood right now. Nobody can  
4 control that. So it's something that God has the plan  
5 with a flood, and no one, nothing can never stop what  
6 God has stored for anybody here. And let's make that  
7 clear that, of course, we need shelter, just in case  
8 that a flash flood ever happens or a chronic flood  
9 ever happens, but everybody know that the shelters  
10 won't do anything but just keep people under safety  
11 because we got... it's lack of bathrooms, lack of  
12 showers, lack of proper resources. None of that's  
13 going to be there. So the City Council need to really  
14 go back with the NYCEM and really design a real plan  
15 of what you guys are going to do when anything  
16 happens, when a flash flood happens, but just saying  
17 that the only way we're going to solve this by  
18 providing shelters is not going to do anything. Like  
19 I said, flash floods are all sent by God. That's a  
20 divine thing. That's a divine plan. (TIMER CHIME)

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.  
22 Thank you.

23 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.  
24 Thank you. Enjoy your day.



2 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you for your  
3 testimony.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL KINGSLEY: If anyone  
5 else online or present would like to testify, please  
6 speak up now.

7 Seeing no one, I will turn back to the  
8 Chair to close out the hearing.

9 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: At this time, I'd  
10 like to thank our Committee Counsel, Josh Kingsley;  
11 our Senior Analyst, Will Hongach; and my formidable  
12 Chief-of-Staff, Phyllis Inzerillo, and, of course,  
13 both of you who came here to testify today.

14 I will say that this is a Committee, and  
15 I know you're new, but this is a Committee and I am a  
16 Chair that doesn't like I'll get back to you as an  
17 answer so let's just try and do better next time.  
18 Thank you.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROITER: Thank you for  
20 having us.

21 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: [GAVEL]

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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 January 31, 2025