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Schumer and City Break Ground on Construction of Staten Island’s First Mid-island Bluebelt

\$22 Million Project in Midland Beach Will Build New Wetlands to Filter Stormwater and Reduce Neighborhood Flooding; Schumer Secures \$11 Million Federal Grant for Project

Replacing Large Swaths of Phragmites with Native and Diverse Wetland Plantings Will Reduce the Risk of Brush Fires

Photos, Diagrams and a Map of the Work Area are Available on [DEP’s Flickr Page](#)

U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer today joined New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Emily Lloyd and Department of Design and Construction (DDC) Commissioner Dr. Feniosky Peña-Mora to break ground on the construction of Staten Island’s first mid-Island Bluebelt in the Midland Beach neighborhood. Currently, very few streets in the area are equipped with catch basins or storm sewers and roadway flooding often occurs during heavy rain storms. The \$22 million project will build the first two, of what will eventually be 19, Bluebelt wetlands that will receive and naturally filter the stormwater that falls in the area. In addition, a new west branch of New Creek will be built to convey the stormwater from the wetlands to the main channel of New Creek. Once the Bluebelts are constructed and ready to receive

More Information

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stormwater, future phases of the project will include the installation of catch basins and storm sewers under neighborhood streets to collect and convey the stormwater to the Bluebelts. The project is being funded jointly by DEP and an \$11 million U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant secured by Senator Schumer. DDC will manage the construction of the Bluebelts, which are expected to be completed by the end of 2017. Also joining in the groundbreaking were Staten Island Borough President James Oddo, Congressman Dan Donovan, Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis and Council Minority Leader Steven Matteo.

“We are very excited to begin construction on the first mid-Island Bluebelt system, which will significantly improve the area’s drainage system, help to reduce flooding and provide some relief to Midland Beach residents,” said **DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd**. “The 62 Bluebelt wetlands we have built and maintain on the Island’s south shore have proven effective at managing stormwater and have even helped to raise nearby property values. We thank Senator Schumer for his assistance in obtaining the funding necessary to get this expansion of the program off the ground.”

“Staten Island’s Bluebelt system is a smart, innovative way to help make communities more resilient through an environmentally beneficial approach and that’s why I fought so hard to secure millions in USDA funding to expand the Bluebelt to Midland Beach,” said **Senator Schumer**. “The Bluebelt offers two layers of vital protections to at-risk Staten Islanders: it helps prevent flooding and it helps prevent brush fires. Flooding is a widespread issue in the Midland Beach area of Staten Island and the groundbreaking of the mid-island Bluebelt means that these communities are one step closer to being better protected during heavy rain storms. Once construction is underway, this project will preserve open space and reduce flood threats that plague these communities far too often. Thank you to DEP Commissioner Lloyd, DDC Commissioner Dr. Peña-Mora, and all those who have been so supportive of this important project.”

“We are proud to partner with DEP, our elected officials and community stakeholders to begin construction of the Staten Island Bluebelt in the Midland Beach neighborhood,” said **DDC Commissioner Dr. Feniosky Peña-Mora**. “This stormwater management system will preserve natural drainage to prevent chronic overflow. DDC is committed to Mayor de Blasio’s vision for a healthy and sustainable city and to building resilient projects that will protect New York City against severe weather conditions.”

Borough President James Oddo said, “About a decade and a half ago I stood on a street in Midland Beach with Civic Association president Yasmin Ammirato and representatives of DEP trying to address long standing flooding and ponding problems. Former DEP Deputy Commissioner Doug Greeley looked down the street and, thinking out loud, said ‘too bad I couldn’t run a pipe and take water straight into the wetlands.’ I asked, ‘Why can’t you?’ We all looked at each other, and this moment formed the genesis of the Mid-Island Bluebelt. It’s been a long haul ever since with many Commissioners and Mayors who have come and gone, many meetings, rainstorms and much angst, but the start of construction on the New Creek phase this week means the Mid-Island Bluebelt is real and within reach. The proven success of the Bluebelts on the South Shore demonstrates that Bluebelts will help control flooding and restore our watershed in low-lying areas of our borough.

“I applaud the New York City Department of Environmental Protection for its ingenuity in creating and expanding on the Bluebelt approach. This is among the most common sense approaches to problem-solving I have ever witnessed in my time in government, to use our natural creeks and wetlands to control periodic flooding in low-lying areas where sewer construction is difficult or impossible.

“The Bluebelt projects are time consuming and encounter a lot of red tape, but the result is worth the wait. The Mid-Island Bluebelt will positively affect hundreds of acres and thousands of residents. In addition to flood control, residents will benefit from the creation of over a dozen highly engineered ponds

that will not only contain flood waters but also provide habitat for wildlife and opportunities for recreation.”

“Three years ago, Hurricane Sandy devastated Staten Island and other parts of the city, highlighting a growing vulnerability across our coastline to storms and the impacts of climate change,” said **Daniel Zarrilli, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Resiliency**. “That’s why we are continuing to aggressively implement our \$20 billion resiliency program to make Staten Island safer, including investments in our coastal defenses, our infrastructure, and our neighborhoods. Today’s groundbreaking represents a critical next step in that plan to better manage stormwater in Midland Beach, a community dealing with regular flooding. Congratulations to DEP on achieving this critical milestone that will help us to withstand and emerge stronger from the impacts of climate change and other 21st century threats.”

“Flooding has plagued the mid-Island for generations,” said **Congressman Dan Donovan**. “The full build-out of the Bluebelt is many years away, but it’s promising that we’re taking this first step here today. I look forward to collaborating with DEP, Sen. Schumer, and Minority Leader Matteo for years to come on this truly transformative project.”

“This is a critical component of Staten Island’s plan to protect the East Shore from the chronic flooding it has experienced for years that has stressed our homeowners and hurt property values,” said **Assemblywoman Malliotakis**. “This creative solution will increase storm drainage, reduce the risk of brushfires by replacing troublesome phragmites and, at the same time, serve as a habitat for diverse wildlife. It’s a winning project all around.”

“The Bluebelt system is crucial to preserving Staten Island’s environment and provides relief from the flooding that plagues our east shore communities – flooding which often occurs during even a moderate rain,” said **Council Minority Leader Steven Matteo**. “The Bluebelt incorporates the best of what government can do: smart planning, adapting programs to local conditions, and an efficient use of resources, both natural and fiscal. It is a great and much needed investment for this borough, and I am extremely pleased that our local and federal partners have committed funds to expand on the success of this program.”

The award winning Bluebelt program preserves natural drainage corridors such as streams and ponds, and optimizes them to help control and filter stormwater. During this first phase of the project, two new wetlands will be built along with a new, west branch of New Creek. This includes a new 4.7 acre freshwater wetland between Nugent Avenue and Freeborn Street, and another .7 acre freshwater wetland between Freeborn Street and Olympia Boulevard. These wetlands will slow the stormwater down after it empties from the sewer system and detain it, allowing it to be naturally filtered. The water will then slowly flow over weirs and into the new west branch of New Creek. The stream will be built to a width of 32 feet and will run southeast through City-owned property that, in later phases of the project, will be developed into freshwater wetlands. Culverts will also be built to allow the stream to pass under existing streets. Moving from upstream to downstream, the new water management system will include culverts under Freeborn Street, Olympia Boulevard, and Graham Boulevard, before meeting the main channel of New Creek near Slater Boulevard. Eventually, the system empties into lower New York Harbor. Much of this property is now covered with Phragmites, or common reed grass, which is prone to brush fires. By removing the Phragmites and adding more diverse wetland plantings, the threat of brush fires will be reduced and the area will likely attract more wildlife. The work will include the installation of 31,550 herbaceous plants, including wildflowers, 1,572 woody shrubs and 195 trees.

Over the last ten years, DEP has built Bluebelts for approximately one third of Staten Island’s land area. In the South Richmond and mid-Island areas, the City has purchased approximately 400 acres of wetland property for Bluebelts that provide drainage for 19 watersheds, covering about 14,000 acres. The Bluebelts

also provide important open spaces and serve as a habitat for diverse wildlife.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$14 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. This capital program is responsible for critical projects like City Water Tunnel No. 3; the Staten Island Bluebelt program, an ecologically sound and cost-effective stormwater management system; the city's Watershed Protection Program, which protects sensitive lands upstate near the city's reservoirs in order to maintain their high water quality; and the installation of more than 820,000 Automated Meter Reading devices, which will allow customers to track their daily water use, more easily manage their accounts and be alerted to potential leaks on their properties. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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