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MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES CONTINUED PROGRESS ON SANDY RECOVERY, EXCEEDING LABOR DAY GOALS WITH 535 CONSTRUCTION STARTS AND 543 REIMBURSEMENT CHECKS

There were no construction starts or checks as of January 1; progress follows de Blasio administration's Build it Back overhaul, which kick-started program

Administration also announces significant contract changes that secure nearly 45 percent in savings, while expanding Build it Back's capacity

NEW YORK—Today, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the City has approved the start of construction for 535 homes and sent 543 reimbursement checks through the Build it Back program, exceeding the Mayor's goals that were set as part of the Sandy recovery overhaul earlier this year.

Homeowners had been stalled in the intake process when the de Blasio administration came into office, with not a single one having started design or construction or received reimbursement. This spring, Mayor de Blasio overhauled Build it Back and appointed Amy Peterson as its new director, while specifically committing to 500 construction starts and 500 reimbursement checks by Labor Day.

Today's 535 construction starts include 68 homes that are fully complete, and reflect significant progress on all program pathways, including full rebuilds, elevations and repairs. The 543 checks reflect over \$9 million in reimbursements that has gone out to homeowners who completed repairs themselves.

"It was simply unacceptable that not a single homeowner had gotten relief as of the beginning of this year," said **Mayor de Blasio**. "We committed to putting Build it Back back on track, and that's exactly what we've done, exceeding our Labor Day goals with 535 construction starts and 543 reimbursement checks. But we know there's much more work ahead—and we're committed to continuing to speed up recovery so that every homeowner gets the relief they need."

This progress follows many other improvements that have streamlined Build it Back and expedited relief for homeowners, including:

- Expanded eligibility and options, and the elimination of priority levels, so that every homeowner, regardless of income, can move forward.
- Increased Build it Back staff, including a Deputy Director for Homeowner Services, Borough Directors, and 44 new dedicated Department of Buildings (DOB) inspectors and staff.
- Direct day-to-day management of the Build it Back centers by senior Build it Back staff, allowing for a faster and more effective case management process for homeowners. Build it Back has also placed design and construction staff in the centers to create a one-stop-shop for homeowners. Additionally, staff is now embedded in impacted communities, such as at elected officials' offices, to create additional access points for homeowners and troubleshoot.
- Financial relief for homeowners, including water bill relief that was recently credited for homes that were vacant post-Sandy, property tax relief, DOB fee waivers, expanded rental assistance for undocumented New Yorkers who were displaced by Sandy, and allowing the use of "transfer amounts" for temporary relocation expenses during construction.
- The launch of a new web portal that allows homeowners to track their status in real time, including by submitting paperwork.
- A focus on supporting a high-quality, local workforce, including by hiring New Yorkers impacted by Sandy and involving community-based organizations in providing direct aid to homeowners.

As a result of these changes, Build it Back has not only exceeded its Labor Day goals, but will continue to expand capacity and move more and more homeowners into construction and reimbursement. Approximately 3,000 homeowners have signed Option Selection Agreements, and over 1,200 homeowners have started design since January.

"The over 500 construction starts and reimbursement checks sent to homeowners shows that Mayor de Blasio has done exactly what he should: prioritize Sandy housing rebuilding. This is precisely what the federal Sandy recovery bill intended, and I look forward to continued work with the City on smart, efficient Sandy recovery," said **Senator Charles E. Schumer**.

"Thanks to improvements in the Build it Back program, New Yorkers impacted by Sandy are receiving assistance more quickly. I am pleased to see these resources are reaching New York homeowners, helping restore our communities," said **Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez**.

"Impacted homeowners want and deserve to close the chapter of their lives that was Superstorm Sandy, now almost two years removed from the initial devastation. Where the previous leadership at City Hall had been seemingly tone-deaf on this issue, the de Blasio administration has been on key thus far in meeting their stated commitments to Brooklyn's shorefront communities, from Red Hook to Canarsie. Still, none of us can be truly satisfied until every New Yorker in need has recovered and is prepared for whatever future challenge may be in store," said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams**.

“I am deeply committed as Chair of the Council’s Committee on Recovery and Resiliency to ensuring that every Sandy victim and impacted community is made whole again. Reaching this benchmark is a sign of progress that was not seen last year and shows that we have an administration that is committed to getting this recovery right. While we appreciate hitting this milestone, we must not lose sight of the thousands of New Yorkers still needing vital assistance. I plan to continue working with the Mayor to ensure that the recovery effort continues to move forward and that no Sandy victim or neighborhood is left behind,” said **Council Member Mark Treyger**.

“Build it Back is finally starting to produce real results for homeowners. This progress is long-overdue, but good news nonetheless. As I’ve said since the very beginning of this program; the day when every family affected by the storm can be restored and made whole again cannot come soon enough!” said **Council Member Eric Ulrich**.

“The Mayor has far exceeded his pledge to start work on at least 500 damaged homes and issue 500 reimbursement checks by Labor Day. Build it Back continues to expand capacity each day with more shovels in the dirt and more reimbursement checks arriving in the mail. We are all dedicated to helping New Yorkers rebuild their homes and get their lives back to normal, and I commend Mayor de Blasio and his team for prioritizing Hurricane Sandy rebuilding efforts while detailing reforms to speed recovery and expedite relief for homeowners,” said **Council Member Vincent J. Gentile**.

“Today marks a significant step in the right direction by the de Blasio administration in helping homeowners rebuild their lives post-Sandy,” said **Council Member Donovan Richards**. “I applaud Mayor de Blasio and Build-It-Back staff for keeping their promise to the people of the Rockaways and Rosedale. I look forward to continuing our partnership in the years to come.”

“This is very significant progress in the Build it Back program and a real turning point for Sandy rebuilding in our city. It’s a huge improvement from what we saw under Bloomberg. The de Blasio administration is actively responding to the unmet needs of homeowners and renters in Sandy-affected neighborhoods, and is clearly working to address the concerns of vulnerable residents. Meeting these targets represents an incredible amount of work by the administration, and there continues to be work to ensure all Sandy impacted persons are able to recover,” said **Susannah Dyen, coordinator of the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding**.

“This is an incredible turning point in the work to rebuild our city after Sandy. Mayor de Blasio and his dedicated team inherited an entanglement of problems in the Hurricane Sandy response and rebuilding; and today’s announcement shows that they are making impressive progress in many critical areas. We look forward to continued work together to ensure a rebuilding that works for all New Yorkers,” said **Deborah Axt, Co-Executive Director, Make the Road New York**.

“We are excited to see that the de Blasio administration’s efforts to re-tool and speed up the Build it Back program are resulting in real concrete gains for members of our congregations and communities. There is still much work to be done to meet both the short and long-term needs of

impacted communities, but we applaud the administration for streamlining the process to make sure families are getting the aid they deserve and so desperately need,” said **Rev. Arthur Davenport, First Church of God, Far Rockaway, member of Faith in New York.**

In addition to this continued progress, the de Blasio administration announced today significant changes to its case management and inspection contracts that will result in nearly 45 percent savings, while expanding Build it Back’s capacity to deliver relief.

The administration recently renegotiated its case management contracts, held by URS, Solix, and the Center for New York City Neighborhoods. The contract changes being submitted by the de Blasio administration will result in \$61 million in savings that can now go back into relief efforts, with the renegotiated contracts valued at approximately \$77 million, compared to the \$138 million that had been negotiated by the prior administration.

The contractual services provided by URS, which covers Customer Operations, Project Management, and Facility Management, were renegotiated to provide the City flexibility to further ramp up case management capacity to meet applicants’ needs, while ensuring that dedicated senior City staff will continue to manage day-to-day operations at the Centers (a significant improvement made by the administration earlier this year). The services performed by Solix, which covers Eligibility Review, were negotiated to secure additional field and project management staff—allowing the City to increase capacity in the Centers, while expediting the review process for homeowners. The services provided by the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, which covers counseling, were renegotiated to ensure continued counseling opportunities directly in Centers, while adding outreach capacity, such as for low-income populations.

Additionally, the administration is amending its contract with Dewberry, which covers damage assessments, environmental reviews, and appraisals, to remove the cap on damage assessments established under the prior administration. To date, Build it Back has completed nearly 10,400 damage assessments, the vast majority of which were done since January; this contract amendment will allow the program to finish the remaining assessments.

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