



Testimony on Examining the City's Enhanced Emergency Response Plans post Superstorm Sandy before the New York City Council Committee on Recovery and Resiliency and the Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services

February 9, 2015

Good morning, Chair Treyger, Chair Crowley, and members of the City Council Committee on Recovery and Resiliency and Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice Services. My name is Illya Azaroff, AIA, and I am the founding co-chair of the AIANY Design for Risk and Reconstruction (DfRR) committee and a member of the board of directors of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY). I am here to offer testimony on several laws found in Title 30, Chapter 1, related to emergency planning.

AIANY is the largest AIA component in the country with more than 5,000 members. AIANY and its members are dedicated to a sustainable and resilient city today and in the future. We can protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public through in-depth planning and achieve the goals set forth by PlaNYC, Vision 2020, and the SIRR report. We believe that the comprehensive Sandy response legislation that we are examining today can help advance resilience efforts and safeguard the city's public welfare and economic vitality on which we are so dependent.

Since Superstorm Sandy, we have recognized a series of vulnerabilities and potential risks. NYC needs to improve its evacuation planning, sheltering capacity, and access to food, fuel, and medical services for vulnerable populations. This package of laws passed after Sandy aims to better prepare the city for future storms and emergencies and bring further structure and resources to the city in the event of emergencies. These laws offer a foundation for a complex system of emergency response.

As this system has developed, AIANY has made the following observations:

- 1) In relation to Sections 30-104 (food and water access plan) and 30-111 (plan for outreach and recovery to vulnerable and homebound individuals), resilience in communities is an essential component to rebuilding after disasters. A program of replacement and reallocation of food and a system for tracking disabled persons and those in need of medications can identify needs in real time and assist long-term.
- 2) Section 30-105 (sheltering plan) can be improved with a review of shelter capacity in New York City, including designated shelters and temporary facilities. Emergency shelters should try not to displace people or interrupt commerce. There are also existing shelters in flood zones and areas of risk that should be reexamined.
- 3) Conversations with community and professional groups, such as those mandated under Section 30-106 (community recovery plan), must continue to achieve comprehensive planning and implementation. The NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has already begun this approach. Public education through programming and communication, is necessary in order to achieve effective implementation. Public outreach to related professionals and the public must remain a priority.

- 4) Additional laws that allow design professionals to work in the field alongside city and federal agencies immediately following a disaster should exist. In the first 48 hours after Superstorm Sandy, 300 architects offered to volunteer in assessing buildings for safety; however, laws do not yet exist in New York State to allow for this. We continue to advocate for such legislation in Albany. By providing assistance after a disaster in this way, architects can be an asset to the region as a whole.
- 5) The City should make a commitment to adequate, long term resources and ongoing reassessment. As the city changes, so must comprehensive planning. These plans, and others that follow, should be seen as “living” documents. Subsequent administrations and agencies will need to continue efforts in perpetuity.

Architects believe that the most resilient cities are those with successful communities. By promoting dense, walkable neighborhoods that engender diversity in people and economies, we can create a system of resilience.

AIANY stands at the ready to work with governing bodies and communities to identify weaknesses in resilient systems, plan for solutions, seek out best practices, and work toward rapid implementation.

Respectfully submitted,

Illya Azaroff, AIA
Co-Chair, AIANY Design for Rick and Reconstruction Committee