

Village of Head-of-the-Harbor



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DEAR HEAD OF THE HARBOR RESIDENTS:

It's been a little over two months since Hurricane Ernesto deluged our Village with more than 10 inches of rain in a brief, two-hour period. The most dramatic and newsworthy damages caused by the flooding were the washouts of Harbor Road at the entrance to Main Street in Stony Brook, and of Mill Creek Road behind the Grist Mill. These events resulted in the loss of Mill Pond on Main Street in Stony Brook and the stranding of seven families in our Village who had depended for access on the privately-owned Mill Creek Road.

Fortunately, our Village was able to obtain an easement over two private properties to build a temporary access road that connects the seven stranded families to Emmet Drive. They now have access to emergency services, mail and fuel deliveries and other necessary uses. We are grateful to homeowners Hubert Poole and Tom Rubio for agreeing to the temporary easement, and to the Town of Smithtown for building the road within a week after the legal agreements were signed.

As I write this letter, the Ward Melville Heritage Organization, which is the owner of the private Mill Creek Road, is moving ahead quickly to restore the bluff that had been eroded by the flood and to rebuild the road on the bluff. We are hopeful that the road will be completed within a year. At the same time, the Town of Brookhaven is moving ahead with plans to stabilize the bluff under Harbor Road, below the portion that had been wiped out. This is a preliminary step before Harbor Road can be rebuilt by Brookhaven and a dam can be reconstructed to allow Mill Pond to be restored.

Less dramatic, but equally significant, was the damage to many of our Village roads. Our Village Engineer Dan Falasco and our Highway Department, led by Frank Prinzevalli, worked tirelessly to repair dangerous conditions caused by the flooding. You will notice large, irregular stones called "riprap" by the sides of many Village roads. They have been used to fill in the deep gullies that were created by floodwaters rushing downhill towards the Harbor. The dangerous conditions have been eliminated, but more work is needed. Our initial estimate of the cost of road repairs amounts to almost \$1,000,000.

In addition, we have had to change our plans for repaving Harbor Road. We had previously planned to repave all of Harbor Road from Bacon Road to the Grist Mill, but due to the loss of access to Main Street beyond the Grist Mill, trucks cannot pave to the end. Instead, this year we will pave Harbor Road from Bacon Road to Shep Jones Lane, and we will also pave Bacon Road. We intend to complete the repaving of Harbor Road once the bridge has been restored.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, as I drove around the Village with Chuck Lohmann, who is our Chief of Police and Director of Emergency Management, we discussed the need for a more permanent solution to the problems of flooding and inadequate drainage. Among other things, additional storm drains, new curbs, regrading of some roads, and other long-term solutions may be needed. To this end, I have appointed a committee of three residents to propose a long-term plan for a more resilient infrastructure—to help identify solutions, priorities and funding sources. We hope that a plan will be presented to the Trustees within a year.

Many of you experienced damage to your homes, including flooding of your basements and washouts of driveways. Traffic was also disrupted, as a result of the flooding of Route 25A for a few days and the longer-term damage to Harbor Road. New traffic patterns have been established, including the use of Rhododendron Drive for access to Main Street, and we have tried to mitigate the resulting traffic problems by adding Stop signs and enforcing speed limits.

These extraordinary events—flood damage, changes to traffic patterns and many other disruptions of our daily lives—brought our Village residents together to help each other. I am proud of the way we all worked together and showed patience where needed.

The events also gave us an opportunity to strengthen working partnerships with the Town of Smithtown and with all of the elected officials who visited the site of the flooding or worked behind the scenes to assist us. Governor Hochul inspected Mill Creek Road with us, along with Congressman Nick LaLota, State Senator Mario Mattera, State Assemblyman Michael Fitzpatrick, County Executive Ed Romaine, Smithtown Supervisor Ed Werheim, Town Councilman Tom Lohmann, and many others. Our two US Senators, Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, worked behind the scenes to help us obtain FEMA assistance. As a result, in late October President Biden issued a disaster declaration that allowed our repair costs, as well as costs of new work for hazard mitigation, to be eligible for partial reimbursement from FEMA funds. Governor Hochul has arranged for grants to eligible homeowners of up to \$50,000 for repairs of the flood damage.

I hope that our Village will emerge from this catastrophic event stronger and more resilient than ever.

With all good wishes,

MICHAEL UTEVSKY

Mayor