

Mayor's Column

On May 3rd, President Bush signed a federal disaster declaration so that local governments, schools and certain non profit organizations affected by the April 15 Nor'easter can now apply for aid in Westchester County.

The aid, so named Public Assistance, would reimburse eligible emergency work such as overtime and debris removal and the repair of damaged public facilities not covered by insurance. FEMA will fund up to 75 percent of eligible costs. We have worked very hard to bring Bronxville's particular situation and the magnitude of the loss to the attention of all our lawmakers.

I want to thank all our federal, state and local officials who were extremely responsive to the Bronxville School's needs and lobbied and wrote to the President specifically on our behalf.

County Executive Andy Spano mentioned the Bronxville School in particular on Thursday when announcing the expanded eligibility for aid. "Local governments incurred huge costs on extra staffing during the storm, and some school districts, like Bronxville, suffered significant damage." "This public assistance will allow schools and municipalities to recoup their losses, so these extra expenses are not passed on to taxpayers."

The Westchester County Department of Emergency Services, in conjunction with FEMA and the State Emergency Management Office (SEMO), will hold briefings this week to inform applicants of available assistance and eligibility requirements and educate them on the claim filing process.

On the individual level, many residents have applied for FEMA assistance available for uninsured losses of up to \$28,200 for both structural repairs and personal property.

At first blush, the application is confusing. The first page resembles an application for a Small Business Loan and must be filled out even if only applying for the grant money. The form, however imperfect, is the gateway into the entire FEMA assistance system. Without this page, an application will be rejected as incomplete.

The FEMA mobile office, adjacent to the Eastchester Public Library, has representatives available to assist in navigating the process. It is open from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. seven days a week.

The School and Village are working together to address the flood problem both locally and regionally. We are in constant contact with our elected officials urging them to study the condition of the entire Bronx River basin, no small task given its size. The river flows 23 miles with an area of 56.4 square miles and encompasses three Congressional districts.

In the interim, the Village and School are collaborating to evaluate possible short term solutions to help avoid confronting this level of flood damage in the future.