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## LONG ISLAND NASSAU

# Meadowmere Park bridge to be fortified to handle emergency traffic



Hempstead Councilman Bruce Blakeman and Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) discuss plans to renovate Meadowmere Park's wooden bridge on Feb. 9, 2018. (Credit: Newsday / John Asbury)

A wider bridge for the enclave, which was hit hard during superstorm Sandy, will act as another evacuation route in case of disasters.

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The isolated enclave of Meadowmere Park, separated by a wooden footbridge between Queens and the Town of Hempstead, may soon have that connection as a second evacuation route if another disaster such as superstorm Sandy strikes.

The 110-year-old, 75-foot bridge over Hook Creek, separating Meadowmere Park in Hempstead and Meadowmere, Queens, cannot safely accommodate emergency vehicles in its current form.

The community near Lawrence was inundated during Sandy after the storm ravaged homes in the bay between Meadowmere and Kennedy Airport.

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Town officials announced plans in 2016 to use \$2.4 million in grants to widen and secure the bridge, but not open it to regular vehicle traffic, as the only alternate access point to a small peninsula that can only otherwise be reached by the narrow meandering road of East Avenue.

“The Town of Hempstead is taking proactive steps to protect our residents before the next catastrophe strikes,” Hempstead Supervisor Laura Gillen said. “This bridge will serve as a critical access point for first-responders, as well as an essential emergency evacuation route for the local community. Residents can feel more at ease knowing that we are building a more resilient and reliable rescue route.”

Board members approved a \$243,615 contract Feb. 6 to have the bridge designed by Woodbury-based Cameron Engineering. Hempstead officials have vowed to maintain the character of the wooden bridge by using wooden planking, railings and supports, while improving its structural integrity. It is funded through NY Rising and the Governor’s Office of Storm Recovery.

The bridge was previously damaged by Sandy and Tropical Storm Irene. The bridge is being outfitted to accommodate an ambulance. The town is also stabilizing the shoreline on the opposite sides of the bridge and improving drainage on Meyers Avenue.

“This is a continuing effort to help the community devastated by Sandy to get back on its feet,” Hempstead Councilman Bruce Blakeman said. “In an isolated community, this is the lifeblood of our community.”

Board members also approved using \$428,000 in state storm funding to add a new elevated generator for the Meadowmere Park Fire Department, which served as a shelter for residents after Sandy.

Second Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Carrero said the department’s previous generator was not strong enough to last through the days after Sandy.

“We need the generator. It will serve as a hub in the community to ensure everyone has a place to stay or eat,” Carrero said.

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Town officials announced the improvements as they met with residents earlier this month with Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) and Assemb. Missy Miller (R-Atlantic Beach).

Residents said they want to keep the small community intact and not open streets to traffic. Some residents praised emergency officials for their help sheltering them during the storm.

Irena Galati, who has lived in her husband's childhood home since 2010, said she lived at the firehouse for five weeks.

"Sandy was hell on earth," Galati said. "If not for them, I would have died."