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DISASTER READY

Two years post-Sandy, developers Barbara Schoor and Christiana Foglio are prepared for the next storm

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THE PATH TO RESILIENCY

34 After Hurricane Sandy battered the East Coast in October 2012, affordable housing providers in the region took the lessons they learned from the superstorm to create more-resilient housing and preparedness plans to weather future natural disasters. At Lawrenceville, N.J.-based developer Community Investment Strategies, vice president Barbara Schoor and owner-CEO Christiana Foglio (above, from left) created a disaster recovery division to aid in the state’s rebuilding efforts.

COVER PHOTO AND PHOTO THIS PAGE: COLIN LENTON

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After Hurricane Sandy, Community Investment Strategies created its Disaster Recovery division to help municipalities in New Jersey with their rebuilding efforts. Pictured are vice president Barbara Schoor (left) and Christiana Foglio, owner and CEO.

COLIN LENTON

THE PATH TO RESILIENCY

Heeding lessons learned from Hurricane Sandy, affordable housing groups strengthen their buildings, organizations, and preparedness plans

BY CHRISTINE SERLIN

Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast almost two years ago, becoming the second-costliest such event in U.S. history, after Hurricane Katrina.

The price tag for the destruction was estimated at \$65 billion, with more than 600,000 housing units damaged or destroyed in New Jersey and New York alone.

The storm had a significant impact on low-income households as well as the organizations that provide affordable housing in the region.

For Enterprise Community Partners, helping to rebuild almost 10,000 homes in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina was a learning experience that it could draw on to aid in the Sandy recovery efforts.

To address the needs in the affected storm areas and help prepare for future disasters, Enterprise created the Hurricane Sandy Recovery and Rebuilding program to help housing providers create more resilient housing and organizations.

“What we are seeing in this resiliency-focused work is very consistent with what we see in affordable multifamily hous-

ing across the board,” says Bomee Jung, deputy director of Enterprise’s New York office. “[Affordable housing] is a piece of the social infrastructure. We have a tremendous asset, and we need to keep reinvesting in that.”

Plus, she adds, these investments to make affordable housing more resilient are necessary. “These extreme weather events are going to happen more frequently and be more intense.”

A big part of Enterprise’s Sandy efforts is its three-year Learning Collaborative for Multifamily Housing Resilience program.

Twelve affordable housing organizations, which collectively serve 14,000 low-income households, in New Jersey and New York were selected to take part in the program based on their Sandy impact and their capacity to obtain meaningful results (see “Learning Collaborative Partners,” page 36). The members can learn from one another, share their challenges and lessons, and gain key support in the recovery and rebuilding processes.

The resilience program looks at three key areas, says Jung. The first is helping organizations recover from Sandy in terms of capital needs, moving mechanical systems out of harm’s way, and storm-proofing for the future. The second concern is to



help organizations strengthen their preparedness plans through scenario development, staffing responses, and resident engagement. The final piece is taking the lessons of the 12 organizations and collating them into tools and guidelines for the affordable housing industry nationwide.

Midway through the program, Enterprise has provided funding to support staffing and other needs; assessed 55 affordable multifamily developments with 3,603 units for infrastructure vulnerability; and helped the partners leverage \$33.5 million in additional funding for recovery and repair.

“It’s definitely been a good resource and sounding board,” says Aaron Hoffman, a project manager for the nonprofit group Services for the UnderServed (SUS), one of the Learning Collaborative

Before (above left): Services for the UnderServed’s Beach 85th in Far Rockaway was hit hard by Hurricane Sandy.

After (above right): Residents started to move back less than a year later, with the final 14 units finished in May.

partners. “We’re definitely a community of nonprofits and housing providers, and it’s easier going through this together.”

He adds that it has been especially helpful to get advice and opinions on finding funding and navigating government bureaucracy, in addition to discussions on different resiliency measures and what works best for different populations.

Brian Loughlin, chief architect of the Jersey City Housing Authority, agrees. “It’s amazing how much of this stuff you learn as you go,” he says. “If we were working in a vacuum, it would be a lot harder.”

The partners are making significant headway in terms of doing renovations, future-proofing old and new developments, strengthening their emergency plans and resident engagement, and sharing the challenges they’ve faced and lessons they’ve learned.

LEARNING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The 12 organizations participating in Enterprise’s Learning Collaborative for Multifamily Housing Resilience:

- Asian Americans for Equality
- Bailey House
- CAMBA Housing Ventures
- Carroll Gardens Association
- Community Investment Strategies
- Fifth Avenue Committee
- Jersey City Housing Authority
- Jewish Association Serving the Aging
- Lott Community Development Corp.
- Lower East Side Peoples Mutual Housing Association
- Services for the UnderServed
- Triple C Housing

Rethinking new construction and rehabs

Hurricane Sandy changed the way developer Community Investment Strategies (CIS), based in Lawrenceville, N.J., thinks about building and renovating affordable housing.

“We are a different company post-Sandy,” says Christiana Foglio, owner and CEO of CIS. “We are now very diligent in terms of thinking about what and where we’re building and being concerned with addressing that kind of weather impact.”

The power outages experienced by many of the developer’s affordable housing communities in New Jersey, including several seniors projects, shone a light on what worked and what could be done differently.

It turned out that the fireplaces in the community rooms of the seniors buildings, which were added from a design perspec-

“The nomenclature of looking at new construction or rehab now is how can it withstand an event like Sandy.”

—Christiana Foglio, owner and CEO, Community Investment Strategies

tive, came in handy to warm the residents and will continue to be added in future projects.

The power outage also inspired a design change that will enable residents to bathe during an emergency. Usually the developer includes two general restrooms as part of the community room. In new designs, there will be a locked door in those restrooms that will open to showers with their own hot-water systems connected to generators so residents can rotate through.

The company is looking at ways buildings can better weather future storms, from a gutter standpoint to getting water away from the buildings as quickly as possible. “The nomenclature of looking at new construction or rehab now is how can it withstand an event like Sandy,” Foglio adds.

The developer just started construction this summer on Connecticut and Carolina Crescent, an 89-unit townhouse project in Atlantic City, which suffered severe flooding during Sandy.

Enterprise provided technical expertise through a team of consultants to guide CIS, one of the Learning Collaborative partners, through the process of future-proofing the new buildings.

Barbara Schoor, vice president at CIS, says because the buildings are in the floodplain, they will be elevated approximately 7 feet above street level, which is more than the new codes require. The elevation of the buildings would create accessibility issues, but individual lifts will be added to make them handicap accessible. Careful attention also was paid to wind- and water-penetration-resistant details.

The \$20.3 million, modular development is expected to be completed in the fall of 2015. The project is being financed with a construction loan from JPMorgan Chase; a permanent loan and Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery funds from the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA); and low-income housing tax credit equity from Hudson Housing Capital.

The firm also created the CIS–Disaster Recovery (CIS–DR) division to help municipalities in the state with their rebuilding efforts. In some of the hardest-hit areas, residents lost smaller, modest homes that they couldn’t afford to rebuild. Exacerbating the problem is the dramatic decline in rental housing opportunities.

Foglio says she doesn’t want to see the character of these towns disappear.

“[The displaced residents’] churches, their health care, their families, their whole lives have been spent in these communities,” she says.

To help house some of the displaced residents, CIS–DR is trying to secure three properties in two coastal counties to provide approximately 30 single-family homes.

Fighting back against future flooding

For the Jersey City Housing Authority, the only housing authority in the Collaborative, Sandy continues to be a learning experience.

“No one expected the effects of the storm to last as long as they did,” says acting executive director Patricia Madison. “We had flooding in areas that never were flooded before. We suffered not just flooding, but wind damage and roof damage.”

Five of the housing authority’s conventional public housing sites were hit hard, with the 300-unit Booker T. Washington community suffering the worst damage.

Hurricane Irene had damaged the site the prior year, and the housing authority had just gone down the road of making repairs before Sandy hit. It replaced boilers in the basements, and they were placed in concrete bathtubs to keep water out. But, unfortunately, those precautions didn’t stop Sandy’s floodwaters from destroying the mechanical systems. “It was a very hard, but very good, lesson. You can’t just put back what you got,” says Loughlin. “We have to restructure the way we’re thinking about this.”

The housing authority is doing several things to deal with future floodwaters.

“We can’t just think about what will keep floodwaters at bay as it stands now, but we have to plan forward,” he adds.

First, the authority is relying on the city’s long-term flood management planning. Jersey City received a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to do flood modeling, with the Hoboken, N.J.-based Stevens Institute of Technology playing out a number of disaster scenarios to see where the flood risks will be down the road as sea levels continue to rise.

The housing authority applied to the NJHMFA for funding to move the boiler systems to the first floors, which were safe from Sandy’s flooding and remain dry in future worst-case scenarios.

The housing authority also is working with Enterprise to create a resilient stormwater master plan for the Booker T.



Washington site. Below-surface shifting has occurred, playgrounds are starting to heave, basketball hoops are tilting, and some buildings are showing other long-term effects from Sandy.

The Enterprise-funded request for proposal (RFP) seeks proposals from architecture, landscape design, and engineering firms to develop a master plan that would integrate stormwater management solutions and increase the overall resilience of the site. At press time, the RFP applicants had been narrowed down to three finalists, and the housing authority planned to apply for additional Sandy funds for the proposed work.

Even as the housing authority makes strides in protecting vital equipment and creating a more resilient site, it continues to face new challenges.

“You would think by now we would have experienced everything that is going to happen, but we keep finding new problems,” says Madison.

Mold has appeared in some units, and the housing authority has used bleach as well as water- and mold-resistant paint to get it under control. But in a few units, the mold continues to come back, and the residents have had to be relocated.

Electrical conduits also are beginning to corrode and fail because of the exposure to saltwater. The housing authority plans to meet with the utility company and might have to put its electrical lines overhead as opposed to belowground.

“When you have your wiring overhead, you worry about wind in the same kind of storm,” says Madison, adding that the team is working with experts to find the best solution.

Storm-proofing for the future

Hurricane Sandy delivered a punch to nonprofit SUS’s Beach 85th, which provides 71 studio apartments for some of the city’s neediest residents in Far Rockaway, Queens.

Developer Community Investment Strategies is building storm-proofed affordable housing in Atlantic City, N.J. The 89-unit townhouse project Connecticut and Carolina Crescent

(above) will include an office and a community room. Lifts will be added to the development’s elevated buildings to make them handicap accessible.

Water from the Long Island Sound and the Atlantic Ocean; sand; and sewage filled the ground floor and part of the first floor, destroying 14 units, common space, offices, and a commercial kitchen. Sprinkler pumps, boilers, hot-water heaters, and other electrical systems on the ground floor also were destroyed. The building sat without power for about two months, and a hard freeze soon after Sandy exacerbated problems with broken pipes.

Residents were temporarily relocated to hotels in Brooklyn for a month and then into a rented building in the Bronx on the other side of the city.

The development team had to balance getting residents, most of whom suffered from mental illnesses or had been previously homeless, back into their homes and routines with keeping an eye open to renovations that would protect the building from future hazards.

“We are a resource-constrained nonprofit, and a lot of these measures are very expensive,” says SUS’s Hoffman. “We had to make sure we had funding before we could move forward.”

The team came in and removed water, sand, drywall, and beams to quickly control the damage and prevent mold and rot. The New York City Rapid Repairs program replaced electrical panels, boilers, and hot-water heaters quickly but placed them in the same vulnerable positions on the ground floor.

The nonprofit would have rather moved the mechanical systems to the roof or an upper floor, but the city’s program would only replace the equipment where it originally stood.

The general contractor, which started construction in June

2013, sealed the slab in the ground floor to prevent water from coming in through the cracks and added resilient drywall that is mold resistant and semi-water resistant. A roof-mounted generator was to be installed this summer to allow the nonprofit to run sump pumps during future storms.

Residents started to move back in during the fall of 2013, with the final 14 ground-floor units finished in May.

The \$4.5 million relocation of tenants and renovations was paid out of pocket by the nonprofit. It received a \$300,000 grant and a \$1.1 million interest-free loan from the city, as well as funding from Enterprise to continue services and pay for some staffing

expenses. The rest of the funding is slated to come from FEMA.

“Moving forward, we’re looking at different funding sources as they come up, to do more intensive measures,” says project manager Evan Bennett. “But so far, we have had to limit our scope to what can easily be accomplished and will make an impact.”

After going through a number of channels for potential funding, the development team this summer was moving forward with the installation of steel submarine-style doors that would protect the mechanical systems on the ground floor as well as floodgates on doors that are at grade or slightly above grade level that would be covered through FEMA mitigation funding. **AHF**

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A DISASTER?

Hurricane Sandy has prompted many affordable housing providers to analyze and revise their emergency plans and engage residents so they are better prepared when disaster strikes.

“Most of the work is in preparedness,” says Bomee Jung, deputy director of Enterprise’s New York office. “The ability to respond effectively during the crisis time is [based on] how well the organization has positioned itself to be prepared.”

The Jersey City Housing Authority is taking several steps to be more prepared than it was for Sandy.

Acting executive director Patricia Madison says first and foremost, it’s important to partner with other agencies and companies that have been through a disaster, to learn best practices.

“It’s always a learning experience, and the hope is that we can be better prepared in the future for whatever happens,” she says.

The first change the authority made after Sandy was to get a seat on the city’s Office of Emergency Management Incident Command Center to better coordinate with local efforts.

In addition, the housing

authority is finalizing a disaster plan that details what staff should do and where alternate communication centers should be set up when a crisis happens. And it will be doing resident engagement training this fall to put more processes in place, such as creating resident liaisons for each building during a disaster.

Based on Community Investment Strategies’ (CIS’s) experience during Sandy, its big initiative outside of physical improvements is preparing and educating residents for a disaster.

“What we found, which was very interesting from a developer standpoint, is that we became a social service provider in the aftermath,” says owner and CEO Christiana Foglio. “There was an enormous dependence on us as landlords during the emergency.”

Barbara Schoor, vice president at CIS, adds that one thing property managers saw during Sandy was that multifamily residents weren’t as prepared as homeowners.

Foglio says the firm is making residents think about if they have the resources to take care of themselves during a disaster.

“There has been a tremendous amount of education in terms of what we need residents to

understand and how our managers and maintenance people need to respond,” Foglio says.

CIS is also equipping each apartment with an emergency kit with a flashlight and backup batteries so residents are more prepared.

Learning Collaborative for Multifamily Housing Resilience partner Lower East Side Peoples Mutual Housing Association (LESPMHA) had several older apartment buildings near the Franklin D. Roosevelt East River Drive in Manhattan that were affected by flooding.

“We were significantly impacted by the storm,” says Richard Ramirez, LESPMHA property manager.

The nonprofit is setting up an incident command system, which provides a detailed chain of command and guidelines for responses to different emergencies. Incident command systems are commonly used by government agencies, the military, and commercial sectors but are fairly new for residential organizations.

“It helps you communicate with federal government and city and state authorities,” says Ramirez. “If you’re operating the same

way they’re operating, it makes communication a lot easier.”

None of LESPMHA’s affordable housing units were damaged, but many of the buildings’ basement areas were submerged in water, damaging elevator equipment, electrical panels, hot-water heaters, and boilers.

Ramirez says it’s important to analyze your buildings prior to a storm and stock up on replacement parts for mechanical systems that might be most impacted.

Other practical pre- and post-disaster tools that developers recommend:

- Have emergency staffing lists and resident call lists off site, in paper form, in case of power outages or fires;
- Have residents include emergency contact information on leases;
- Make cash cards available to building operators so they can quickly access funds for supplies and equipment for repairs;
- Have a plan in place to save receipts for repairs that are completed; and
- Make sure you have photos of properties in good times, and then take photos of all damage for insurance purposes.