

Christie says 3,000 homeowners will soon be off Sandy waiting list

By **DONNA WEAVER**, Staff Writer | **Posted: Thursday, May 29, 2014 12:30 pm**

STAFFORD TOWNSHIP — A second round of federal Hurricane Sandy funding will push 3,000 homeowners off a waiting list and that much closer to rebuilding, Gov. Chris Christie announced during his 121st town hall meeting Wednesday.

Christie told a crowd of more than 400 Wednesday at Saint Mary of the Pines that he expects approval from the Department of Housing and Urban Development in its second round of recovery funding. The state then plans to earmark \$390 million in aid for the Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Elevation and Mitigation program, or RREM.

“It’s not about getting back to normal. It’s about getting to a new normal,” Christie said.

Very soon letters will be mailed to about 3,000 families who are on the rebuilding waiting list, Christie said. The state has also decided to begin environmental reviews of storm-damaged properties immediately, he said.

On Friday officials announced that in the third and final round of federal Hurricane Sandy funding New Jersey will receive an additional \$882 million under the community development block grant program. That will bring the total Sandy aid New Jersey has received to about \$4.2 billion.

Bob Stern, of Beach Haven, said Wednesday he will not receive RREM funding to elevate his home on Fourth Street because he didn’t meet the qualifications. Stern said he hopes to receive funding of up to \$30,000 through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) Elevation Program.

“My house had about 3 feet of water after the storm and I want to raise it for future storms. I started working with the application for the program. If I get it great, if not then when it happens again the same thing will happen,” Stern said.

Christie touted the recovery accomplishments in Stafford Township where he said 130 homeowners have signed up for RREM grants to rebuild and \$12.5 million in federal assistance has been distributed here.

“The main reason I ran for re-election was because I didn’t want to leave while this was unfinished. It happened on my watch. And I want it to be concluded on my watch,” Christie said of Hurricane Sandy recovery.

On hand Wednesday was Christie's mobile cabinet, which included representatives from: the state Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Community Affairs, Economic Development Authority and the Department of Banking and Insurance.

Staff from the departments remained onsite to meet with homeowners who were affected by Hurricane Sandy.

Christie told the crowd that not one official in state government has had to run a recovery program for \$37 billion in damage, which is what New Jersey faced in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

The governor reminded the crowd of homeowners and officials that it will still take years to rebuild.

"We still have work to do, but the fact is, hundreds of thousands of people are home now," Christie said.

But Kenneth and Diana Prickett of the Tuckerton Beach section in Tuckerton Borough have not yet returned home.

The couple, who attended Wednesday's town hall, continues to wait for funding from the RREM program to come through so they can rebuild their home Marlin Road that was flooded and all but destroyed when Sandy hit the small lagoon community.

The Pricketts said Wednesday that they just want to go home, but for now they will live in a trailer near their home for the summer.

Despite the frustration and living situation almost two years after the storm, the Pricketts said they are grateful for the rental assistance and funding for a new vehicle from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"They say we're on the list and we're close, so in two months we should be hearing something.

We're waiting because the RREM thing says don't make any move on your house or else you're knocking yourself out of the ball park," said Kenneth Prickett.

The tight-knit fishing and boating community of Tuckerton Beach saw seven homes disappear after they were thrown from their foundations during Hurricane Sandy.

In the days after the October 2012 storm, the flooded area was closed to residents as crews worked to clean up downed power lines and address gas leaks.

This is the second town hall Christie has held in Stafford Township at Saint Mary of the Pines over the last year. Kenneth Prickett said it was nice of the governor to come south, but he needs to come a bit farther.

The last time Christie visited near Tuckerton was on the one-year anniversary of the storm when he came to the reopening of the storm-damaged Little Egg Harbor Community Center.

“The people would love for him to come to Tuckerton he hasn’t had a town meeting down there. This area feels neglected-- the businesses as well as the homeowners,” said Kenneth Prickett.

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