

Water Main Break Leaves A Flood of Problems

By Craig McGuire

Local legislators are drawing a line to Carroll Gardens residents struggling to rebuild after last month's water main break.

At the February meeting of the First Place Tri-Block Association, City Councilman Stephen DiBrienza updated homeowners wading through oceans of paper-

work and drowning under a wave of repair costs.

At 1:43 a.m. on Friday, January 21, residents were awakened by a loud explosion from beneath Clinton Street between Third and Fourth places. A 135-year-old 30-inch water main had broken, flooding dozens of homes and cutting off utilities for hundreds of Carroll

Gardens residents.

"Obviously this was a terrible disaster for the Carroll Gardens community," said DiBrienza. "The only pleasant surprise, if it can be called that, is the way things came together in the aftermath."

DiBrienza commented that municipal recovery efforts "fortunately did not

add insult to injury."

Following the break, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, joined by Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden, DiBrienza, and a host of municipal agency representatives, held an open forum at Stranahan Middle School, 610 Henry Street.

At the Tri-Block meeting, DiBrienza re-outlined a list of priorities for affected residents to follow.

"First, everyone who had any sort of damage to their homes should file a damage claim form with the City of New York, required to be submitted within 90 days of the break," said DiBrienza.

The councilman explained, "Somewhere along the line you may have to sue the city, even if you aren't planning to now, and you need to have filed a notice of claim."

Responding to countless reports he received concerning uncooperative insurance companies, DiBrienza replied, "If they say you are not covered, don't believe them."

"By their nature they don't want to pay," said DiBrienza. "The bottom line is, don't take no for an answer."

"The issue here is not who is at fault," com-

mented the councilman. "You buy insurance to protect yourself in the event that something happens."

DiBrienza advised residents having difficulties with their insurance companies to file with the New York State Insurance Department.

To register a complaint, call (212) 602-0203.

In late January, the Borough President announced the allocation from his office of \$250,000 in capital budget funds for a city-sponsored home improvement loan program for the area.

Homeowners who meet income-eligibility requirements can borrow up to \$20,000 from participating banks at low interest rates.

Also available to affected homeowners is a small emergency loan program sponsored by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The maximum amount of this loan is \$5,500 at three to six percent interest over five years, for residents who qualify.

For more information on these loans, contact New York City Neighborhood Services at (212) 645-9673.

DiBrienza said he understands there are still unanswered questions and advises residents with additional service queries to contact either the Borough President's Action Center at (718) 802-3777, or DiBrienza's office at (718) 858-5110.

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