

Contractors begin rebuilding

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LIBI CEO Mitchell Pally

Local municipalities and members of Long Island's largest home-building trade organizations are banding together to rebuild thousands of storm-ravaged homes and create temporary housing for hundreds of displaced families.

With some homebuilders and renovators already at work on houses that bore the brunt of Hurricane Sandy, the [Long Island Builders Institute](#) is making its roughly 150 home-building members more accessible to those who suffered storm damage.

LIBI Executive Director Mitch Pally said homes on the Island need significant renovations, and the goal of his group is to facilitate the work.

LIBI will do that by helping fast-track building permits and putting homeowners in touch with contractors that will charge a fair rate.

Pally said in cases in which a house's foundation and basic structure is intact, and when a roof or side walls need repair, homeowners shouldn't need a permit from the town.

"They're restoring it the way it was and it's going to be on the same plot. But there are other places where there is no longer a plot," Pally said. "Those homes have to be started from scratch, and our hope is that the towns will move very quickly to allow that work to proceed without having to go through the site plan process to do so."

Many Long Island towns and villages have already waived fees associated with building permit applications if the repairs are for storm-related damage, saving applicants hundreds of dollars. And most are ready to approve permit requests quickly.

In the Village of Patchogue, all building fees for repairs to storm-damaged homes have been suspended, according to Mayor Paul Pontieri.

"Put the money into your home," he said. "We don't need it."

Pontieri said permits for renovating homes would be approved within a couple of days.

Westbury Mayor Peter Cavallaro said his village has also waived permit fees related to storm repairs and will issue permits quickly.

"We'll do what we can to speed it up," Cavallaro said. "It's the right thing to do."

Tom Datre, of Daytree Custom Builders in Ronkonkoma and a member of LIBI's executive board, said the group has been organizing its members to advance the effort to rebuild.

He said LIBI plans to create a coalition of homebuilders accessible through a single phone number for homeowners in need of repairs.

"We can send members out to price out the jobs at a minimum rate," Datre said. "This way, people won't get gouged by outsiders that might try to come in or unscrupulous contractors who try and stick it to people in this time."

Pally said the cooperation of unions and local government is essential in getting homes repaired and rebuilt, and after the streets are cleared and power is restored, the work can begin in earnest.

"The first thing you have to do is get rid of the trees," Pally said. "You can't renovate the house until the tree that fell on it is gone."

He said a homeowner's first call should be to the insurance company, the second call to the tree removal company and the third call to the contractor, which Pally said are already coming in.

Datre said he's had discussions with elected officials about creating temporary housing on the [New York Institute of Technology](#) property in Central Islip.

"They have all those empty buildings there, one-story buildings with plenty of parking," Datre said. "I don't know how much work would be needed to get them up and running, but maybe you can get people that need housing in there."

To assist in the effort, [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) has put out the word on its website that the "scale of post-Sandy relief efforts may mean some new contractors are needed."

The agency is urging contractors to register with its Industry Liaison program, and applications are available online. The program maintains a registry of contractors willing to provide debris removal, distribution of supplies, reconstruction and other disaster and emergency response activities.

Pally said any help FEMA can give will speed up of the rebuilding effort, helping homeowners and providing needed jobs.

"We're helping people get back in their homes, which is a good thing, and we're putting people to work, which is also a good thing," he said. "The hope is that combining the two, we can make Long Island even a better place than it was before, and take care of people who obviously need assistance."



Patchogue Mayor Paul Pontieri