

Nassau, Suffolk plan would help homeowners rebuild

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Photo credit: Newsday / Thomas A. Ferrara | Greg Snow attempts to clear debris from superstorm Sandy from his yard on Atlantic Street in Lindenhurst. (Nov. 1, 2012)

Homeowners on [Long Island](#) with electrical systems fouled by superstorm Sandy could soon get expedited repairs -- paid for by Nassau and Suffolk counties, officials said Tuesday.

"Instead of spending money on apartments out of the community, these people would be able to stay in their homes," said Brian Nevin, spokesman for Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano.

The [Long Island](#) Builders Institute, a home builders' industry group, is negotiating with the counties to send in three-person teams that will assess short-term repairs needed for homes FEMA inspectors consider habitable.

After an assessment, the teams would be available to do the work.

Each team would have a builder, an electrician and a plumber who are from Long Island, said institute chief executive Mitch Pally.

"These would be salvageable homes needing relatively minor repairs, with the goal of getting families back into them as soon as possible," he said.

The deal is still being negotiated in both counties, which would be reimbursed for repair costs by the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#).

"We are deeply involved in discussions with FEMA and [New York](#) State, and the details are still being worked out," said Suffolk County spokeswoman Vanessa Baird-Streeter.

Meanwhile, local officials tasked with solving the post-Sandy housing crisis Tuesday estimated that at least 1,000 homes so far on Long Island have been rendered uninhabitable by the storm.

In Nassau, power can't be restored to about 900 homes, but as more FEMA assessments are made, "that number grows each day," Nevin said.

In Suffolk, 96 homes in the Town of [Babylon](#) and three in [Smithtown](#) have been deemed uninhabitable, but badly affected areas in [West Islip](#) and [Brookhaven](#) have yet to report, Baird-Streeter said.

The estimates came a day after both county executives announced that they have embraced a plan to have homeowners who need long-term housing obtain a mobile home from a private provider. The mobile homes would be placed on the homeowner's property so that children could remain in the same school district and owners could oversee repairs.

Nassau and Suffolk officials are in discussions with FEMA officials to determine if residents can use federal rental assistance money to rent the mobile units.

Baird-Streeter said Suffolk will announce later this week it has secured a 200-bed vacant educational facility capable of housing families in dormitory-style accommodations, with kitchens and bathrooms. Further details weren't immediately available.

The home-repair initiative would target homes with minor to moderate flood damage. Ideal candidates would be homes where an electrical box was under water after the storm, or a hot water system or roof was damaged, Pally and officials said.

First, a FEMA-certified housing inspector would view the home, as would an inspector from the [Long Island Power Authority](#). If LIPA deems the electrical system too severely damaged to restore power, the repair team would swoop in and do the necessary work at a pre-negotiated rate, Nevin said.

Homeowners wouldn't have to pay any of those costs.

"This would be innovative for FEMA," Nevin said. "Part of that is they've never faced a situation like this before -- an urban community that doesn't have a great stock of rental units and hotels and motels."

Pally said he hoped teams, employing up to 200 local tradespeople, could begin making on-site assessments in Nassau as soon as Friday.

"This is a great example of the residential real estate industry, local unions and government working together to try to keep people in their own homes and communities while repairs are made by local labor," he said.