

## **FEMA demands Stamford certify hurricane barrier**

FEMA says Stamford must prove system works

By Magdalene Perez

STAMFORD -- The federal government is requiring Stamford and other municipalities with flood protection barriers to certify their effectiveness by July 2010, a city official said.

To gain certification under Federal Emergency Management Agency rules, Stamford must prove its hurricane barrier can withstand a 100-year flood, said Jeannette Brown, executive director of the Water Pollution Control Authority. It hired GEI Consultants, an ecological and engineering firm, to evaluate the barrier at a cost of \$498,000.

If the city fails to certify the barrier by the deadline, many homes and businesses in the South End and other neighborhoods would be added to the federal government's flood zone, meaning owners in many cases would have to buy flood insurance, said Ben Barnes, director of the Office of Operations.

"Being in the flood zone is not a good thing," Barnes said. "Without this, we would be adding a lot of Stamford real estate to the flood zone needlessly, including the WPCA's treatment plant."

If the report identifies problems that require maintenance, the WPCA would ask the city to pay for them, Brown said. To maintain certification, the city must make any repairs before July 1, 2010.

Barnes said the barrier, built in 1966, is in good condition. The Army Corps of Engineers usually checks it annually but did not last year because of cost constraints, Brown said.

"I don't anticipate that there will be any significant concerns," Barnes said.

The WPCA is responsible for three stormwater pumping stations, the berm -- or levy -- and the barrier's concrete walls. The Army Corps is responsible for an underwater gate that closes during tidal surges, Brown said.

Anything that needs fixing that is within the Harbor Point project would be the responsibility of the developer, Building and Land Technology, Barnes said. Harbor Point is the city's largest development, encompassing 80 acres with retail, residential and office buildings, a grocery store, a hotel and parkland.

The city hired GEI Consultants in December after the Army Corps raised concerns that the extensive work being done on Harbor Point could undermine the hurricane barrier, Barnes said. Construction began in the fall, and much of the work affects the barrier from the Dyke Lane pumping station to the end of the hurricane barrier south of Pulaski Street, he said.

The city agreed to pay \$220,000 for GEI Consultants to monitor how work on the project affects the barrier, with the understanding that the developer will reimburse the city "on demand," Barnes said. At the time, the city made it clear it expected to contract GEI for the FEMA certification as well, Brown said.

In April, the company is scheduled to present a plan to the Army Corps for approval that would specify how the project may affect the barrier.

During a meeting this month, a WPCA board member asked whether Building and Land Technology knew about the 2010 deadline for certification. Barnes said all of Harbor Point's waterfront construction should be complete this year.

John Freeman, general counsel for the Harbor Point project, did not return a call.