

Group Calls For Fix To Flooding Problem

BY VERONICA LEWIN

Every time it rains, property owners in the borough brace themselves for the likely flooding that will occur. Due to the lack of absorption points in Queens, just an inch or two of rain is enough to dampen basements and flood roadways.

More than 300 people from

across the borough came to the First Presbyterian Church of Jamaica on July 12 to address flooding concerns. Members of Empowered Queens United in Action and Leadership gathered to call on the Dept. of Environmental Protection to take swift action to end the flooding problem that has plagued the borough for decades.



Homeowner Keisha Phillips-Kong speaks about the problems flooding has caused in her home at last week's meeting.

EQUAL was founded more than 20 years ago and is dedicated to building citizen power for working families and immigrants throughout Queens. The group fights for public policies that will improve the lives of low- and middle-income residents. Spokesman Michael Stanley said that two of its organizations - Bethany Baptist Church and Sunnyside Reformed Church - experience basement flooding whenever there is heavy rainfall in the borough.

Due to the many hills and valleys Southeast Queens has, parts of the area flood nearly every time it rains. When John F. Kennedy Airport was constructed in the 1940s, it took away many of Southeast Queens' permeable areas to soak up excess water. Stanley suggested that more storm sewers and permeable pavement could be installed as well as green roofs to soak up rainwater.

Until 1996, Jamaica Water Supply would pump millions of gallons of water out of the ground daily. When the City Dept. of Environmental Protection took over, the agency started bringing water from upstate, leaving the excess water underground with no place to go. Over the past 16 years, the standing ground water level in Southeast Queens has risen to 30 feet, leaving many



Photos by Clifford Mason

People filled the First Presbyterian Church of Jamaica to call on the City to find a flooding solution.

homeowners to deal with saturated basements each time there is heavy rainfall.

EQUAL leader Keisha Phillips-Kong spoke about the problems flooding has caused her while living in St. Albans. She moved to her home on 119th Avenue in September 2010 and was not aware how prone it was to flooding because she visited on a dry day. About a month after moving in, she soon discovered what many homeowners in the area face - saturated basements. In addition to puddles in her basement, Phillips-Kong said she experiences problems outside of her home as well.

"As soon as it rains, you cannot walk into my driveway," she said.

On days when the driveway is flooded, Phillips-Kong will drive her truck to the bus stop on the corner, pick up her son and nephews, and then back into the driveway. While she enjoys living in St. Albans, she said she may have to move if there is not a flooding solution.

"It's not what I want to do," Phillips-Kong said. "I go to church around the corner, it is a community that I like, but obviously if it is an inconvenience, then no."

For more information about EQUAL's efforts in Queens, visit www.equal-iaf.org.

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Word

"The LORD then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.'"

-Genesis 7:1