



## Officials tour Cumberland County bayshore to assess Hurricane Sandy damage

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**DOWNE TWP.** — The township has suffered \$30 million in public and private property damage, 20 houses were completely destroyed and many more suffered extensive ruin as a result of Hurricane Sandy.

That was the report Thursday as U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, accompanied by Downe Township Mayor Bob Campbell and several Cumberland County freeholders, met with local residents and business owners desperate for answers.

“When I say I’m going to do something, I do it,” LoBiondo said. “So I don’t want to promise you anything that I can’t live up to. What I can tell you is, the red tape will be eliminated and we will do what we can to get members of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and the DEP (state Department of Environmental Protection) together so we can see if we can get some straight talk from them and get a plan together.”

In Fortescue, the owner of the Charlesworth Hotel, Shirley Fonash, is trying to remain optimistic despite the damage seen on her property.

“This is the way it is,” Fonash said. “We have no immediate plan and we are going to have to wait and see. But things could be worse and we are trying to all pull together.”

Officials with Surfside Products Inc., a business located in Port Norris, said they want to know what is being done to help storm victims.

### Scenes from Downe Township in Hurricane Sandy

Scenes from Downe Township (Fortesque, Money Island and Gandy's Beach) during Hurricane Sandy.

“We have been trying to get some help for a long time, but it has taken too long,” said Veronica

Sergiacomi, environmental manager at Surfside Products. “The last storm caused about \$250,000 in damages. We

want to take care of the problem and find a permanent solution. Otherwise this might not be the place to live.”

LoBiondo pledged to communicate to FEMA and other parties involved to see what can be done, but doesn't want to make any promises he can't keep.

The Port Norris Marina was devastated by the storm, with floodwaters several feet deep.

However, there were apparently issues at the marina prior to the storm.

LoBiondo noted that businesses with damage prior to the storm could complicate efforts to secure funding for Hurricane Sandy damage.

“There are some real problems and we are going to do what we can,” LoBiondo said. “But I am not sure if FEMA is going to handle this due to there being serious problems with the property before the storm. You need to be able to show that the damage directly resulted from the storm”

LoBiondo explained.

He suggested grant money as a potential option, but Commercial Township Mayor Donna Moore was not convinced.

“In the two years it could take waiting for grant money, this place could go out of business,” Moore said.

For businesses and private property owners that are able to make their case to FEMA, local government will provide funding and receive a 75 percent reimbursement from FEMA.

Whatever the case may be, Freeholder Tom Sheppard expects a challenging endeavor ahead and that it is going to take some time before things return to the way they were.

“This is going to take time,” Sheppard said. “Insurance companies, permits, all this needs to be dealt with along with the actual rebuilding. But we will do what we can to help people. Through bonding, we will support emergency management with the proper funding so they will be able to make repairs and get things back to normal.”

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