

# FEMA spurns Mallard Lakes Sandy grant bid

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The News Journal

Oct. 25, 2014, 7:24 p.m. ET

There will be no Federal Emergency Management Agency grant this year for Mallard Lakes, a Sussex community damaged by Superstorm Sandy that is still under instructions to raise some of its buildings four feet higher off the ground.

The funding application to benefit Mallard Lakes “was not selected for further review” by FEMA, according to an email to county staff from Michael S. Powell, a Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control. He said he had spoken with a FEMA official directly about the matter.

Powell said he wished there was “a reason to be hopeful this decision would be reversed,” but advised he’d been told the choice was final. A copy of the correspondence was provided by Sussex County government.

Mallard Lakes residents had enlisted help from the county and FEMA after Sandy floodwaters seriously damaged four six-unit buildings that sit on “the island,” a spit of land enveloped by marshes.

The condo association at Mallard Lakes held a flood insurance policy, and it successfully filed a claim to offset the cost of repairing the water damage. But filing that claim triggered a FEMA review of Mallard

Lakes, since it was among several claims on the federally-backed policy in recent years.

FEMA and Sussex County knew all along that modern flooding codes had passed the Mallard Lakes buildings by since their construction in the 1980s. But in nearly every case, existing buildings don't have to be reconfigured to meet new code requirements every time the standards change.

This time, though, FEMA revoked the buildings' grandfathered status – demanding that buildings be raised an additional four feet, or the county as a whole could lose the chance to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. That would put thousands of homes' flood insurance policies on the chopping block.

“In order for Sussex County to remain eligible under the NFIP, the county is required to have the buildings brought into compliance,” a county housing official, Brad Whaley, wrote in a memo.

In June, County Council voted to seek a federal grant administered by FEMA that can help “repetitive loss” properties with up to 90 percent of construction costs.

Powell, though, reported Wednesday that all of this year's FEMA funding for flood mitigation would go to “severe repetitive loss” properties – places deemed even more flood-prone than Mallard Lakes.

Sussex was competing with parts of the country that Sandy hit even harder, including coastlines in New Jersey and New York. Still,

DNREC officials have said the buildings in Mallard Lakes were among the state's most-affected structures by the 2012 storm.

“Despite this setback, solving this problem remains a critical need,” Powell wrote.

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