

## More grants being approved to raise Sandy-damaged homes

By WALLACE McKELVEY Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, September 2, 2014 5:27 pm

More Sandy-affected homes are being raised and rehabilitated two years after the storm as more grants are made available to homeowners.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency recently approved 236 elevation grants statewide, bringing the total to 696 grants worth a combined \$21 million. In all, an estimated 2,700 homes may be elevated through the \$100 million the state has set aside through the program.

Meanwhile, state officials are preparing a program similar to Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Elevation and Mitigation (RREM) that specifically targets low- and middle-income households.

“I think a lot of people fixed up their homes thinking, ‘I’ll weather this out, I’m 65 years old, what do I have to worry about?’” said the Rev. John Scotland, chairman of Brigantine’s long-term recovery group BrigStrong. “Now they’re getting their flood insurance bills and realizing there’s no way it’s sustainable.”

Between the elevation grants through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the forthcoming program, Scotland said a lot more homeowners who did temporary fixes will be able to complete the job.

Brigantine residents received nine grants in the most recent round of HMGP awards, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection. The majority were awarded to residents of Ocean County, with 165, followed by Monmouth County, with 51. Atlantic and Cape May counties received 15 and 3, respectively.

The HMGP elevation grants provide homeowners \$30,000 to cover most costs associated with raising their homes, from engineering and permitting to construction. The homes must first be deemed structurally sound, however.

“In addition to moving people and property out of harm’s way, elevating homes can lower flood insurance premiums for homeowners by helping them comply with FEMA flood maps,” DEP Commissioner Bob Martin said in a statement.

The HMGP is no longer accepting new applications. Recipients will receive detailed instruction about how to be reimbursed for their costs at community meetings planned statewide.

Lisa Ryan, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Community Affairs, said the state will soon launch the new program, the LMI Homeowners Rebuilding Program.