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Bloomberg Seeks to Redo Building Code in Sandy's Wake

By MIREYA NAVARRO

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg on Thursday [proposed major changes](#) to New York City's building code, saying Hurricane Sandy showed that both commercial and residential properties needed additional safeguards against severe weather.

Mr. Bloomberg unveiled the work of a task force whose recommendations, once put in place, would make the city a leader in the national effort to overhaul codes so that buildings would be more resilient to natural disasters. He and the City Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, set up the task force after the October hurricane, which did billions of dollars in damage to property in the city.

"Sandy clearly underscored why we need to protect our buildings," Mr. Bloomberg said [at a news conference](#) in Long Island City, Queens, in the lobby of a 520-unit residential cooperative that had flooding from the East River during the hurricane. "We learned a lot, and we want to make sure we won't forget those lessons."

The costs of the new regulations are expected to vary widely but could reach into the millions of dollars for buildings like hospitals.

For now, at least, the city will not require extensive improvements to existing commercial and residential properties. Officials emphasized that the new rules would largely affect new construction and sizable renovations on existing buildings.

In his final months in office, Mr. Bloomberg is focusing intensely on ensuring that the city responds to the experience of Hurricane Sandy by better preparing for storms and other severe weather. This week, [he released a \\$20 billion plan](#) for infrastructure along the city's 520 miles of coast, including a network of flood walls, levees and bulkheads.

Revisions to the building code would have to be approved by the Council, and some of them could face opposition from real estate owners concerned about costs.

At the news conference, Ms. Quinn, who has made the code changes a priority, said legislation was already being drafted to adopt the recommendations of the task force.

“We plan to move as quickly as possible,” said Ms. Quinn, who is a Democratic candidate for mayor.

While most changes would apply to new construction, the task force is calling for some precautions in existing residential buildings, including co-ops, condominiums, rental apartments and public housing.

For example, emergency lights will be required in hallways and stairwells in case of extended blackouts. Existing buildings will have to add faucets to a common area on lower floors, like a laundry room. That is intended to allow people on upper floors, which lose water pressure from electric pumps during blackouts, to obtain water.

Officials and experts estimated that a 20-story co-op could spend \$16,000 for faucets in a laundry room, and more than \$100,000 for backup lighting that could last many days. The lighting would be far cheaper if owners deployed battery-powered lights with a shorter life.

The task force is not proposing new rules for existing single-family homes.

But owners of single-family homes who undertake renovations would face new requirements. They would have to use longer screw and nail fasteners when replacing windows and doors so that they resist high winds. For a single window, that could cost \$10, task force members said.

For a new sloped roof, homeowners would have to buy reflective shingles that reduce heat, raising the cost about \$300.

Hospital and other important facilities in high-wind zones would have to improve protection for windows, which could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per building.

Addressing a concern of poor communities on the industrial waterfront, the task force wants businesses that store toxic chemicals to place them in floodproof areas.

Vicki Arroyo, executive director of the [Georgetown Climate Center](#) in Washington, a group that assists cities in adapting to climate change, said that taken as a whole, the proposals were the most significant in the nation.

Ms. Arroyo said that other cities had strengthened building codes after major storms but that New York’s approach was more comprehensive, covering a wide range of things, like storm-water management and emergency power supplies. New York is also addressing a broader range of issues because of its unique stock of skyscrapers.

“This is more forward-looking than anything I’ve seen,” she said.

Officials with an influential trade group, the [Real Estate Board of New York](#), said they were generally supportive of the recommendations but cautioned that some could prove to be very expensive.

Still, they said many owners of buildings severely damaged in Hurricane Sandy were already incorporating many of the recommendations into reconstruction plans.

Steven Spinola, president of the trade group, said that events like Hurricane Sandy and Tropical Storm Irene demonstrated “how catastrophic it can be for residents and businesses when real estate is not operational.”

Russell Unger, chairman of the task force, which included more than 200 building experts, property owners and city officials, said the proposals reflected a fundamental change in thinking about how to deal with emergencies.

“We saw things during Sandy that we don’t want to see again,” like people shivering in blankets and sewage backups in basements, said Mr. Unger, executive director of the [Urban Green Council](#), a sustainable building organization.

“When it comes to where people live,” he added, “emergency preparedness also means ensuring that the places are habitable for long periods, even if they don’t have all the services. All of these things we’ve addressed.”