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2 YEARS LATER, SIGNS OF HOPE



NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

Construction could start as soon as next year on Harbor Road in Stony Brook thanks to a recent deal.

A raging summer storm upended lives and destroyed beloved Suffolk historic sites in August 2024.

Here's what's happened since.

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REBUILD MOVES AHEAD FROM STORM OF '24

Several signs of progress 2 years after devastating floods in Suffolk

This story was reported by **Amit Ben-Bassat, Robert Brodsky, Carl MacGowan, Jean-Paul Salamanca** and **Tracy Tullis**. It was written by MacGowan.

Two years after the flood, the waters for some may finally be receding.

Lives were upended and beloved historic sites destroyed on the night of Aug. 18-19, 2024, when a sudden, raging storm dumped about 10 inches of rain in a matter of hours across a swath of Suffolk County's North Shore.

The trail of destruction included a washed-out road in Stony Brook, a collapsed dam and drenched library basement in Smithtown, and a Rocky Point neighborhood where residents scrambled for safety in the middle of the night. Initial estimates pegged total damage at \$41 million or more.

Despite promises of quick reconstruction, progress was slow.

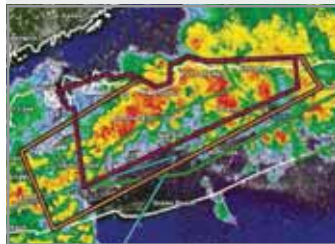
But in recent months, plans to rebuild Stony Brook's Harbor Road and the Stump Pond dam at Blydenburgh County Park in Smithtown have moved forward. The Stump Pond plan still faces opposition from environmentalists.

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

■ **The Aug. 18-19, 2024, storm** that dumped about 10 inches of rain across the North Shore destroyed dams, roads and a library basement, and sent five Rocky Point families scrambling for safety.

■ **Two years later, there are some signs of optimism** as efforts to rebuild dams in Stony Brook and Smithtown are moving forward.

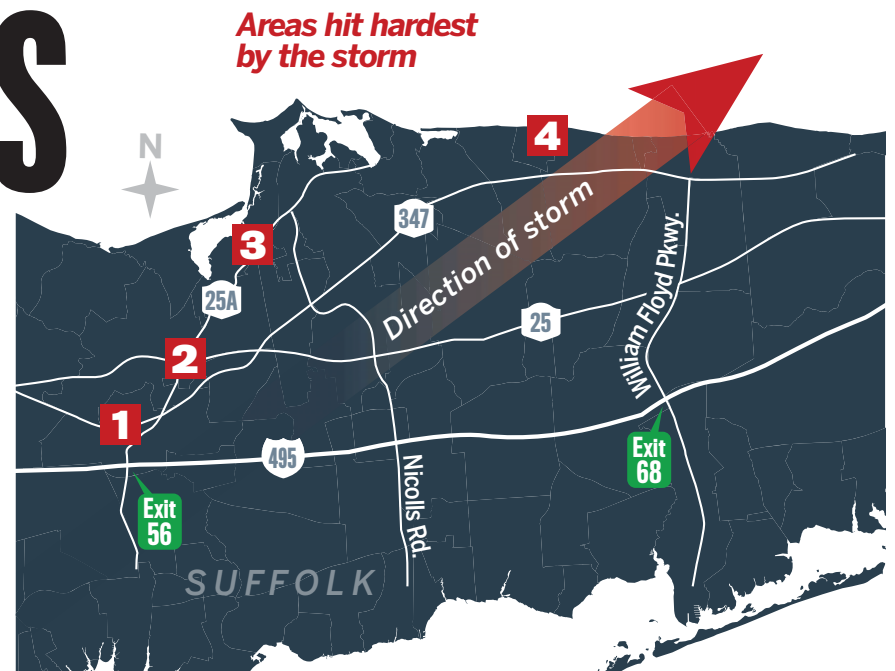
■ **But some Rocky Point residents** still are struggling to rebuild their lives after losing homes, cars and priceless personal possessions.



Radar image from Aug. 18-19, 2024, shows a large system overwhelming the North Shore with rain. ■ Video: newsday.tv

The Smithtown Library's lower level reopened last month with the help of a voter-approved \$16.5 million bond referendum. The library closed for nine months after the storm.

Rocky Point's Hagerman Landing Road, drenched by floods two years ago, has new storm drains. But residents who lived through the deluge won't soon forget it.



1 BLYDENBURGH COUNTY PARK. The park's 100-acre pond disappeared when a dam there broke. In its place now there is a slender river meandering through the muddy flood plain.

"You couldn't see the front lawn, you couldn't see the street, you couldn't see the stop sign at the corner of my block. Everything was under the water," said Constantine Giannakos, 59, who was awoken at 2 a.m. that day by his dog. "We think about it every time we go downstairs to the basement, because it's just a memory of what happened that night."

Here's a look at each effort aimed at rebuilding what was lost.

Harbor Road, Stony Brook

Reconstruction of Harbor Road, and the dam over which it spans, stalled for more than a year while officials debated

ownership of the property and who was responsible for repairs. A resolution was reached, and construction could start as soon as next year, officials said.

The storm collapsed a 100-to-200-foot section of the road, crushing the dam underneath and causing a virtual tidal wave that drained a centuries-old, human-made pond in T. Bayles Minuse Mill Pond Park. The remains of the road still lie scattered in broken pieces as the dispute has played out.

With the disagreement settled, Gloria Rocchio, president of the nonprofit Ward Melville Heritage Organization, which

owns the park, the dam and the pond, said plans for the new road and dam have been submitted to Brookhaven Town and the Village of Head of the Harbor for review.

"The appearance will be pretty much the same," Rocchio said.

Officials said the new road may be similar to the old one, built more than a century ago, when road construction rules were less strict. But modern construction standards will require the use of stronger building materials, such as steel.

"The existing structure was just timber bulkheading with synthetic sheeting," Brookhaven Highway Superin-



RICK KOPSTEIN



BRYAN BERNIER

2 SMITHTOWN LIBRARY. Water burst through a window of the library's lower level. Equipment and historical documents were damaged, and the library closed for nine months.

4 HAGERMAN LANDING ROAD, ROCKY POINT. Storm drains and pipes that carry rainwater were overwhelmed. Several families lost homes, vehicles and personal effects.



NEWSDAY / STEVE PROST

3 HARBOR ROAD, STONY BROOK. The storm collapsed a section of the road, crushing the dam underneath it. That collapse drained a pond in T. Bayles Minuse Mill Pond Park.

tendent Dan Losquadro, who will lead reconstruction, said in a phone interview.

The new road and dam will be "far more robust," he said.

Beth Zweig, of Head of the Harbor, said she was cautiously optimistic after a long wait to see Harbor Road rebuilt. The road's collapse had cut off a crucial conduit between the village and Stony Brook, she said.

"I hope there is a sense of urgency," Zweig said. "Nothing that's happening now takes away from the fact that there was a yearlong delay that was inexcusable . . . [but] I'm very happy that things will be moving along,

and I do believe this project will be completed."

Rocky Point

Hagerman Landing Road — a quiet dead-end street that ends at the shoreline of Long Island Sound — was transformed into an Olympic-sized swimming pool in the early morning hours of Aug. 19 two years ago.

Storm drains and pipes that typically carry rainwater to the Sound were overwhelmed by a deluge of dirt and debris. Five families lost homes, vehicles and priceless personal effects.

Yvonne Montesantos said she lost everything that night. The 75-year-old retired teacher said she and her husband, along

with their dog, were rushed out of their completely flooded home barefoot and were hoisted, in a basket over a fence, by first responders.

"I felt like a totally lost 72-year-old" whose life had ended, Montesantos said.

Giannakos, her neighbor, said his family lost over \$300,000, with the flood causing complete or partial damage to his three cars, a fully furnished basement, a backyard, his home's foundation and cherished family mementos.

Brookhaven Town officials said they've addressed the source of the flooding, installing two new recharge

basins in the Rocky Point watershed to collect storm runoff and to allow it to naturally recharge into the groundwater while also expanding capacity at existing drainage ditches.

The type of flooding that occurred in 2024 is "far, far less likely to happen again" because of the improvements, Losquadro said.

But Miller Place attorney John Ray said the changes are too little, too late. Ray is representing three Hagerman Landing Road families — Jerry and Yvonne Montesantos, Karen Sinda, and Constantine and Despina Giannakos, who each sustained tens of thousands of dollars in damages — in lawsuits against the town.

"The town was perfectly aware of these defects for many years, and they did nothing about it," Ray said.

Brookhaven spokesperson Drew Scott declined to comment on the lawsuit.

Smithtown Library

The reopened library on North Country Road includes six flood-proof windows and three flood-proof emergency doors.

But perhaps just as important as the renovations is a renewed emphasis on emergency planning, said library director Robert Lusak.

The library's Richard H. Handley Collection of Long Island Americana — an archive of historical books, documents and maps, also known as the Long Island Room — was relocated from the basement to the upper level to protect it from future storms.

"We didn't want to take anything for chance again," Lusak said. Recovering from such a devastating storm, he added, "takes much, much longer

than people expect."

Renovations to the lower level have been done to create more space for library patrons to study and read.

"We didn't just rebuild what was damaged. We used the opportunity to create something better for the community," Lusak said.

Stump Pond, Smithtown

The collapsed dam at Blydenburgh County Park left a dramatically altered landscape.

The park's 100-acre pond disappeared when the dam broke. In its place: a slender river meandering through the muddy flood plain.

Immediately, a debate erupted about the river's future. County Executive Edward P. Romaine vowed to rebuild the dam and refill the pond, and in March, the Suffolk Legislature voted to build the new, larger dam the county proposed could proceed without an environmental impact statement.

But local environmental groups argued that the drained pond provided a natural experiment in rewilding.

"An amazing natural restoration of the former Stump Pond site is underway in Blydenburgh County Park," Enrico Nardone, executive director of Seatuck Environmental Association in Islip, said in an email. Seatuck last month was one of six environmental groups that sued to block the county plan.

But dam supporters say Stump Pond — so named for the stumps left behind when a forest was cut down for a grist mill in 1798 — should be restored to its pre-storm state.

"The money's been approved, and it's at a dead end now and I'm very upset about it," said Gary D'Amaro, 65, of Smithtown. His wife, Gina, called the ongoing debate "tremendously frustrating."

The couple says the river that has emerged cuts off access to parts of the park.

"We walked that park all our lives, and now we can't get to the other side," Gary D'Amaro said.

Barbara Abraham, 83, of Hauppauge, used to feel the same way. She supported rebuilding the dam — until she saw the former pond "evolve."

"It looked like a meadow and there were some of these birds. I said, 'Wow!'" Abraham said.

Now she thinks nature should take its course without human interference.

"Nothing stays the same," she said. "Things change."