FLOOD VICTIMS...

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nounced Tuesday that Suffolk and Nassau renters, homeowners and business owners are eligible for the low-interest loans from the federal Small Business Administration for damages suffered in storms that hit between March 12 to March 30.

"While we did not meet the criteria for disaster assistance established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the extent of damage we found would qualify for SBA disaster relief programs," Mr. Paterson said.

The loans, up to \$40,000 to replace goods or cars and \$200,000 for repairs to pay for a primary residence, can be used for costs not covered by insurance. Business could borrow up to \$2 million for various damages.

Borrowers must have a credit history acceptable to the federal agency and have the means to pay

About 20 residents from Horton Avenue, Northville Turnpike and other parts of Riverhead attended Tuesday's Town Board meeting to speak about their plight and to ask what to do next.

"I don't want to take out a loan," Booker Drive resident Shirley Womack said tearfully after the meeting. Ms. Womack, who lives with her handicapped daughter, said she has been trying in vain to pump water out of her basement since the storm, and that her furnace is also ruined. She doubts she could afford monthly payments on a loan to fix the damage.

'I don't want to take out a loan.'

Booker Drive resident Shirley Womack

Riverhead Town Supervisor Sean Walter said that flood victims should start to look to the community for help, rather than rely on the federal government.

Mr. Walter said during

the board meeting that builder Gregg Rechler, who is developing a technology park in Calverton, has agreed to pay five construction workers to work on flood-damaged homes for fives days at no cost to residents. He said that some organizations might be able to donate sheetrock and spackle for reconstruction projects.

He noted that First Baptist Church of Riverhead is still also seeking donations.

And there has been talk of town and civic leaders hoping to arrange a large fundraiser featuring local entertainment, possibly downtown, officials said.

Horton Avenue resident Linda Hobson, whose home was badly damaged by flooding and who has been acting as a community advocate and government liaison, said she was disappointed that her neighbors will not be getting any FEMA aid, which could have meant grants and rental assistance that didn't have to be paid back.

"Horton Avenue and the surrounding area received the most severe damage in the northeast," Ms. Hobson said. "So the people who received the most amount of damage are not getting financially funded."

During the meeting, Chief David Hegermiller said that 100 homes throughout Suffolk County would have to be destroyed in order to receive individual financial assistance. He said that it was unlikely that the county would meet that number.

But locals and elected leaders here don't appear to be giving up.



BARBARAELLEN KOCH PHOTO

Linda Hobson, seen here in her flood-damaged Horton Avenue home Saturday, said she was disappointed that she and her neighbors will not be receiving FEMA aid. Still, she manages to smile.

Ms. Hobson implored all homeowners whose homes were damaged to report it to Suffolk County Emergency Management offices by calling 852-4900, as well as to Riverhead Town Hall.

County officials said last week that in order for the region to receive FEMA aid there must have been at least \$4 million worth of property damage countywide before Albany could compile a statewide report. Then the state report must find \$25 million worth of damage statewide before the governor could make a request to the president for FEMA aid, county officials said.

In his letter to FEMA, Mr. Levy said there was about \$6.6 million in damages in Suffolk County, but it was widely speculated that statewide damage would fall short of \$25 million.

"To penalize residents of our island — which is a small portion of a vast state — because sufficient damage was not incurred throughout the state is an injustice and runs contrary to the notion of 'disaster aid' in a flooding event such as this," Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy wrote in a letter to FEMA administrator W. Craig Fugate.

State Assemblyman Marc Alessi, whose district spans the North Fork, said he would ask the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) for the data they used to make the determination not to request FEMA money. He also wants to take a closer look at FEMA's parameters for distributing aid, he said.

"I want to see with my own eyes to make sure we do not qualify for FEMA aid," he said. "I am not going to take this decision by the governor's office as final word."

President Barack Obama last week declared six New York counties, including Suffolk, a disaster area from the March 13 through 15 nor'easter, making the region eligible for FEMA aid for the effects of that storm.

But Riverhead remained largely unscathed from the mid-March nor'easter, though Riverhead Supervisor Sean Walter said the town has put in \$300,000 in claims for damages to its beaches and waterways.

"It was mainly for beach erosion and things like that," he said, noting specifically that the area around Wading River Creek suffered severe erosion and flood damage. The creek just underwent an extensive dredging and beach restoration project in December, he said, but the storm reversed that progress.

As for the governor's balking at asking FEMA for help, Mr. Walter said he was "disappointed." "From the feedback we were getting from FEMA, it was something we were anticipating," he said.

The late-march rainstorm has cost the town upwards of \$400,000 to fix collapsed roads and pump water from flooded neighborhoods, town officials said. The town also spent money on mold remediation in several municipal buildings, including Town Hall, the Jamesport community center and the police and highway department building.

Gerry Petrella, the director of Senator Charles Schumer's Long Island office said the Senator and Congressman Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) are working to amend President Obama's disaster declaration to include storm damage incurred during the late March storm.

Complicating relief efforts is the fact that the water table remains high throughout the town, leaving many basements still wet and making attempts to clear still-flooded roads, such as at Osborn Avenue in Riverhead and Manor Lane in Jamesport futile.

Riverhead Town High Department Superintendent George "Gio" Woodson said crews have stopped pumping water out of still-flooded Osborn Avenue and Manor Lane in Jamesport because the groundwater is too high to make the effort effective.

"Everywhere we pump, within a day the water [comes] back up," he said.

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