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Building Codes Save Two Sea Bright Homes

On October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy blew across the Jersey shore and downgraded to a tropical cyclone. It weakened in strength, but still devastated many small boroughs like Sea Bright. Many of the quaint homes that made the township unique were reduced to rubble. For homeowner Bernard Bertino and builder Ray Guzman, building above the code standards saved their adjoining townhomes from the massive flooding.

Both Bertino and Guzman were happy to see their homes were high and dry after their neighborhood was flooded. The structures sustained no flood damage because they installed flood vents in the garage. The vents allowed floodwaters to flow easily through the structure by minimizing the pressure from the force of water during impact.

Sea Bright is bordered by water on two sides and some property owners experience frequent flooding during especially high tides. When Guzman and his architect, Paul Damiano, constructed the two townhomes a year ago, they were adamant about building flood-resistant properties and wanted to build exactly to local code.

Prior to construction, they did a quick change to the design plans and added the extra foot of freeboard. The homes are elevated to the Base Flood Elevation (BFE) plus two feet of freeboard as required by the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance within the local building regulation. The first floor has extra reinforcement around the cement block to add support during flooding as an added mitigation measure.

Freeboard is an increase in the elevation of a structure above the BFE. The State of New Jersey requires newly constructed structures to be elevated with freeboard. Building to the BFE requirement does not automatically guarantee that a structure will not flood during a flood event and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) encourages property owners to add freeboard during construction.



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“If you look across the street, those garage doors were devastated,” Guzman said. “If we didn’t have those flood vents, the homes would not have been able to take the pressure from the water. They really saved us. We’re like a rose in the middle of a disaster.”

To find out more information on Flood Damage Prevention Ordinances, building regulations, freeboard, and Base Flood Elevations, contact your local officials. To find more information on building codes, visit <http://www.fema.gov/building-science/building-code-resources>. To find more information about flood vents, garage door reinforcing techniques, wind-resistant building, and other coastal construction design information, visit <http://www.fema.gov/residential-coastal-construction> and <http://www.region2coastal.com/Sandy>.