

RIVERWALK DEMOLITION BEGINS - CONSULTANT'S REPORT PENDING

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Demolition work is under way at the riverwalk extension to repair a 448-foot section that has been deemed structurally unsound.

The repairs, estimated to cost \$3.8 million, are being paid by the insurer for Thomas & Hutton, the design firm for the riverwalk. Thomas & Hutton has blamed the failed section on inaccurate soil condition reports that were provided by a geotechnical subcontractor. In the 448-foot section, some portions of the concrete walkway have moved vertically and horizontally by as much as 23 inches.

Another aspect of riverwalk repairs that was supposed to be done by next week is less clear. Savannah City Council members on May 20 directed city staff to find a structural engineer to provide an independent review of the entire 2,100-foot riverwalk. City staff told council they believed a firm could be hired and a report completed within 30 days. During questioning last month, council members sought repeated assurances that no other sections of the riverwalk were at risk and that Thomas & Hutton would step up financially if any other design issues were presented.

On Monday, Bob Scanlon, the city's director of public works and water resources, said through city spokesman Bret Bell that the study was under way. When asked for the name of the company, Scanlon and Bell declined to provide it. An update would be provided to City

Council in the next two days, Bell said. The council is scheduled to meet Thursday.

Alderman Larry Stuber, a retired engineer, has raised questions about the riverwalk's stability and, at the direction of the rest of council, sent Scanlon a list of questions about the riverwalk project and its design standards.

Based on Monday's response from city officials, Stuber said it is his hope that staff will be able to report in two days that a structural engineer is on board and working with a geotechnical consultant who is reviewing the project.

"He's got to be qualified or we won't accept it," Stuber said. "I told them that two months ago."

Aldermen Jeff Felser and Tony Thomas also are concerned that a directive issued to city staff is not being thoroughly pursued.

"In my opinion, there's no reason why they shouldn't identify the name of the company," Felser said. "This is not supposed to be done by Bob Scanlon or Thomas & Hutton. An official assessment is what we want. If it's not transparent and it's not accountable, we will ask for it again."

Alderman Van Johnson said the 30-day timeline was one imposed by council. He said he recognized outside factors could influence a deadline being met. Thoroughness, rather than timeliness, mattered.

"I want it as comprehensive and complete as possible as soon as possible," he said. "But if it's not comprehensive, I'm not interested."

Mayor Pro Tem Edna Jackson said public safety for citizens and tourists is important.

"I want us to meet the standards that we are known for meeting," she said. "Thomas & Hutton has made a commitment to us and I believe they will stand by that commitment."

While the repairs are being paid for by Thomas & Hutton's insurer, the consultant's reports are being paid for by the city. No cost estimates have been provided.

A section of the riverwalk began shifting toward land last year, and it was determined that the base of the sheet pilings in that section were not anchored in a solid enough foundation in the

subsurface of the riverbed. The new bulkhead will be built between the existing bulkhead and land. The new bulkhead sheets will be embedded about 25 feet deeper into the riverbed.

Repair work calls for pulling up concrete slabs that provide the base for a bricked walkway. Once they are up, the new bulkhead will be built. That approach was deemed less risky and more cost-effective than other options presented to Thomas & Hutton and the city.

The riverwalk begins just east of the Riverfront Marriott. A floating dock and the riverwalk were meant to be a prized public access area along the Savannah River Landing development. Initial construction cost about \$10 million, \$9 million of that coming from state grants. The Savannah River Landing project stalled during the recession and has yet to see construction begin.

Richard Burkhardt/Savannah Morning News Concrete along the land side of the riverwalk has begun to crack and collapse as the unstable support sheet piles move.

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