

MILLION-DOLLAR MISTAKE - REPAIRS REQUIRED AT RIVERWALK REMOVING SUBMERGED TIMBERS DESTABILIZED THE RIVER BOTTOM

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Call it a million-dollar-plus "oops." The Savannah City Council in late August approved another \$1.2 million in contract work at the riverwalk extension at Savannah River Landing.

The council had little choice, some aldermen conceded as they discussed the project.

Design engineer Thomas and Hutton advised city officials that the bulkhead along the shore is not stable and likely would make the finished brick-paved riverwalk unstable, too.

The 2,000-foot riverwalk is part of the \$800 million Savannah River Landing, a public-private partnership that is expected to transform the east riverfront with a combination of commercial and residential development.

As construction crews were removing hundreds of old pilings along the shore at the project site, they pulled up an extensive network of timbers buried about 15 feet below the river bottom.

The piles were anchored to the timber, and removing the long-buried wood caused the river bottom to become unstable, something construction crews did not realize until they noticed that the newly built concrete bulkhead along the water's edge was shifting slightly as soil serving as backfill was added.

In some areas, the bulkhead, a concrete wall between the river and land, had moved half an inch, said Bob Scanlon, the city's director of facilities maintenance.

City officials say there was no way the construction company, TIC, could have anticipated the problem.

As is required in the permitting process, the company did archeological and historical studies, none of which suggested a wooden foundation structure would be buried beneath the old wharf, Scanlon said.

"They did not come up as a mat," Scanlon said of the timbers. "That's all theory. They were just expecting to pull out piles, but they were getting a lot of resistance and began pulling up significantly more timber.

"How they got there and what we think they were there for is all conjecture."

Scanlon also advised council members that TIC had a fixed-rate contract for their removal work, but crews ended up removing about four times more timber than they anticipated.

That added to their expenses, he said.

TIC, however, maintained the right to sell any wood it retrieved.

In May, Carl Kleeman, vice president of the company's Savannah operations, told the Savannah Morning News he was negotiating with two people to buy the timber. Antique wood pulled from river bottoms is highly prized for its fine grain.

Kleeman did not return a telephone message from the Morning News about the salvaged

lumber.

Scanlon did not know how much the lumber may have earned the contractors.

"It's a windfall for them, but they also had a lot more expense getting it out," he said.

The city's added expenses will push the cost of construction of the riverwalk to slightly more than \$10 million.

Of that, \$9 million is coming from state funding, including an additional \$1 million grant. Jennifer Payne, management services coordinator for the Management & Financial Services Bureau, secured it from the Department of Natural Resources, which offered the money to communities that would provide public marine access facilities.

As pleased as Alderman Tony Thomas was with Payne's initiative, he questioned how much marine access the riverwalk will provide when it does not have a boat ramp and will not allow fishing.

"My point is: We could have used that million for something else if we didn't have that problem," he said.

City Manager Michael Brown conceded Thomas was technically correct.

To better support the bulkhead, engineers plan to install 191 anchor rods and add additional rip rap. The work, Scanlon said, should take about two months.

The riverwalk should be finished in March or April.

UNDER WATER AND UNUSUAL

The presence of timber submerged offshore at the Savannah River Landing site perplexed the design and construction team, facilities maintenance director Bob Scanlon told the City Council on Aug. 28.

None of the engineers, who have extensive experience in marine construction along the Savannah River, had encountered anything similar, he said.

Shipping wharves in the area date back to the 1840s.

After reviewing historical records, the design team learned the shipping site was purchased in the 1870s by a railroad company. It more than doubled a shipping wharf's load capacity to 500 pounds per square foot.

The timber mat might have been put down on the existing river bottom as an additional foundation. Over the ensuing 138 years, it was covered with silt.

(1) Richard Burkhart/Savannah Morning News The bulkhead that will create the riverwalk extension along the Savannah River Landing has shifted a fraction due to settling after the removal of pilings and matting. City officials have approved another \$1.2 million to stabilize the riverwalk extension. (2) John Carrington/Savannah Morning News file photo A crane pulls up an old wood piling from the water along the Savannah River Landing development just east of the Riverfront Marriott. The pilings were removed to make way for the eastern extension of the city's riverwalk. (3) John Carrington/Savannah Morning News Old wood pilings pulled from the water along the Savannah River Landing development just east of the Riverfront Marriott are stacked up along the bank. The pilings were removed to make way for the eastern extension of the city's riverwalk. (4) Courtesy of the city of Savannah This 1891 map shows an aerial view of the Savannah riverfront. The portion in red shows the location for the Savannah River Landing project.

GRAPHIC: Savannah Morning News SITE OF DEVELOPMENT Development would be 68 percent residential. The first plan proposes common areas that could resemble downtown squares. (FOR COMPLETE GRAPHIC, SEE MICROFILM)

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