

## "SPANISH FORT BLUFF PROJECT LIKENED TO 'HOOVER DAM,' MAYOR SAYS"

The former property of Larry and Linda Kessler on Patrician Drive in Spanish Fort, Ala., is shown on Sept. 17, 2014. As part of a court-forced settlement between the city and the Kesslers and their adjacent neighbors Mark Sutherland and Stacy Booth, Spanish Fort agreed to purchase the two homes and repair the eroding bluff behind the homes at a total cost of nearly \$2.5 million, which includes attorney and engineering fees.



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### Spanish Fort, Alabama

Nearly three months into a \$2.5 million bluff stabilization project, a home has been razed and a roughly 30-foot concrete wall has replaced the top of the eroding slope.

"It looks like the Hoover Dam is what I've been told, from the interstate," Mayor Mike McMillan said, adding that he hasn't see it for himself from the I-10 Bayway.

In coming weeks, a second home will be removed and more concrete will be poured to form a two-stepped slope on the roughly 100-foot bluff next to the bypass connecting U.S. 98 with the Mobile Bay Causeway.

The work is part of a settlement the city reached with two Patrician Drive homeowners who originally sued Spanish Fort backed in 2009 over the eroding bluff that threatened their homes. As part of the agreement, finalized in July, the city purchased the two homes, and that property will soon become a water detention area.

The project began in early July and McMillan said there have been no major delays but rain dictates progress on the muddy slope.

"With the weather situation we're probably about six weeks away from completion," McMillan said on Tuesday. "Probably in the next week or so we will start the demolition of the second house up there and then start shaping up the ground up there to move forward to complete the project."

In August 2013, a Baldwin County Circuit Court jury determined the city failed to maintain the Patrician Drive drainage system at Spanish Fort Estates that led to the eventual collapse of the system, which was fed by a concrete

swale running between the two homes.

The jury's award of \$1,335,800 to Larry and Linda Kessler, and Mark Sutherland and Stacy Booth was reduced to \$500,000 due to a municipal liability cap. Bay Minette attorney Mark Ryan represented the couples.

Failed appeals by the city in the lower court and Alabama Supreme Court had the city on the ropes to begin emergency bluff repairs by April 21. A council-approved \$815,000 contract awarded to Ammons & Blackmon Construction Inc. barely got off the ground when the record-breaking rainstorms hit the area on April 29-30 causing an extremely critical situation at the Kesslers' home, which they no longer resided in over fears of the bluff.

The bluff had come within three feet of the south corner of the home and eroded additional chunks from the adjacent Sutherland-Booth backyard.



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# SPANISH FORT BLUFF

Article from Marc Anderson with AL.com

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With the severe erosion, the city was faced with skyrocketing emergency repair costs. On May 16, the council approved a new emergency contract with Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood for design services and Ammons and Blackmon Construction in addition to Geostabilization International, a company specializing in bluff stabilization.

Following the approval of the emergency contracts, the city negotiated the settlement that included the purchase of the two homes. "Costs are running about what we thought it was going to be," McMillan said. "It's going to be right at \$2.5 million when it's all finished -- between engineering costs and everything added into it, including all the attorneys and everything that we've had to fight with all the way through.

"As it stands right now, I'm pleased with the progress. We're right on schedule. It is a work in progress because it can change with any rain event."

The next step of the project is for Geostabilization International to start building the second concrete shelf.

"It will be pretty much like the top shelf," McMillan said. "You'll see another layer. It'll be like a step down effect."

So far the plan is to have two steps, unless weather dictates otherwise, the mayor said.

Drainage will be handled by a 36-inch iron ductile pipe that will take runoff from the top of the bluff to a catch basin at the base of the slope and disperse it from there.

Once the project is complete, green space at the top of the bluff will serve a detention area only.

"It's not going to be a park there on top," McMillan said. "The engineers made a decision that it would be better to take that area in and make a detention pond situation out of it to help with the water coming down the side of the hill from the whole neighborhood. ... It all goes right there so we have to make sure we handle it.

"This is just another piece of added insurance is the way I look at it."

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