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Becky McLaughlin and her sister Sarah Houck climb the damaged stairs of a neighbor's home on Chic's Beach after looking over the damage to their mother's home next door. At the home of Hazel Lawson, 99, a portion of the patio was washed away by the nor'easter.

nor'easter cleanup

Storm Fans Effort to Replenish Sand

Homes on Chic's Beach are in peril, property owners say

By Kathy Adams

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VIRGINIA BEACH

When Hazel Lawson and her husband built a tin-covered cottage in Chic's Beach 57 years ago, sprawling, grasstopped dunes and a canopy of oak trees separated their summer home from the ocean.

Now, her stone patio teeters on the edge of the beach, less than 50 feet from the water.

Hurricanes Floyd (1999) and Isabel (2003) each stole more than 30 feet of sand, and last week's nor'easter took away at least 25 additional feet, said Lawson's daughter and next-door neighbor, Sarah Houck. One more storm, and Houck fears her childhood home will also be lost.

If another storm comes, she'll also face the heartbreaking decision of whether to move Lawson, who's now 99, a widow and blind, from the cottage. She lives by herself in the Lauderdale Avenue home, which is now covered in pale-yellow siding instead of tin.

“We don’t want to take her out of the house,” Houck said. “She knows where everything is in the house, and to put her in a different environment would be very difficult for her at her age.”

The solution: beach replenishment, she said. For more than 10 years, some residents of Chic’s Beach have wanted more sand brought in to buffer their homes from the ocean, but property easements, funding and other hurdles have stood in the way.

But now the need is dire, Houck said. “If we don’t get beach replenishment, then the cottage is going to go with the next storm.”

She’s working with Stephen Michaels, who owns the property occupied by Alexander’s on the Bay, to move beach replenishment forward. They met with the city’s water resources engineer, Phill Roehrs, on Monday. Now they’re trying to obtain easements from the community’s roughly 85 beachfront property owners. So far, they said, about 25 have agreed to sign the documents, which would guarantee public access to the beach and allow the city to consider using public funds to place sand there.

Once they get easements from at least 60 percent of property owners, they’ll present a proposal to the City Council, Michaels said. Part of Alexander’s restaurant collapsed in the storm, along with most of the parking lot.

“If we had 50 feet of sand out here, we wouldn’t have had the damage,” he said. “This will really open people’s eyes that sand replenishment is an ongoing thing if you live on the water.”

But a beach replenishment project could be several years away, Roehrs said. It took 10 years to start the project currently dumping sand on Cape Henry’s beaches, he said.

On Wednesday, Roehrs surveyed Chic’s Beach and the beaches at Cape Henry and Ocean Park alongside officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It doesn’t appear that they’ll qualify for federal help, he said, although the city believes they should.

Roehrs said it’s difficult to measure how much sand the beaches lost but called the dune erosion significant.

New dunes could come sooner for Chic’s Beach if the City Council orders an emergency replenishment project, Roehrs said. But he said it’s more likely that things will progress more slowly, like they did for Cape Henry.

That’s not soon enough, Houck said. Her mother has terminal cancer and macular degeneration, an eye disorder. She began hospice care from her Chic’s Beach cottage Wednesday.

For now, two watercolors on Lawson’s entryway wall preserve her backyard the way it used to look, when there were still dunes and a rock garden outside her back door.

When last week’s storm rolled away, it took the rock garden with it. Her husband built it before he died 20 years ago. Now instead of stone ledges, magnolia trees and a canopy of oaks, there’s mostly just sand.

Houck hasn’t had the heart to tell her mother her favorite place is gone.

“It’s all gone,” Houck said. “That was sad to see Dad’s work go away. It was just a really sad day.”



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This is what's left of a stairway that led across a sand dune to a home on Lauderdale Avenue before the storm.

Dredging Project Takes Hit from Storm

By Deirdre Fernandes

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VIRGINIA BEACH

Federal officials are trying to determine how much recently dredged sand the nor'easter swept back into Lynnhaven Inlet.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project to clear the navigation channel between the Lynnhaven River and the Chesapeake Bay was nearly 70 percent complete when the storm hit last week.

As part of the project, crews are pumping the dredged sand on the Cape Henry beaches, providing many of the residents there needed protection against the weather.

"At this time, it appears the storm has caused additional shoaling in the channel," Kristin McCord Mazur, who is managing the dredging project for the Corps of Engineers, said in an e-mail.

Mazur said she expects to know the extent of the re-shoaling by the end of the week. If additional sand has to be dredged, it will probably cost more money, she said. The dredging and replenishment is about a \$1.5 million project.

For some residents who live along the Chesapeake Bay, the necessity of the sand from this dredging project recently became more apparent.

R.J. McGinnis, who lives in the Ships Watch Condominiums, said there are exposed bulkheads near his home.

“Generally, it’s a wreck over there,” McGinnis said.

He and other residents were concerned that there wouldn’t be enough sand to expand the beach all the way to First Landing State Park, as initially planned.

For now, the Corps of Engineers expects to have enough sand to fill up to a block east of the Lynnhaven Fishing Pier, said Phill Roehrs, the city’s water resources engineer.

City officials have asked the corps to consider creating a narrower beach with the rest of the dredged material.

That would allow crews to extend the dredged sand a few more blocks and provide some of the property owners to the east a wider beach, Roehrs said.

The replenishment of this beach has been a point of contention.

Virginia Beach officials asked Bay-front property owners to sign over public easements to their property in exchange for the sand.

Some landowners, mostly near the Lesner Bridge, unsuccessfully argued in court that the city was infringing on their property rights.

But property owners to their east wanted the sand for protection against storms.

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