

# The Times-Picayune

## Piece of Harvey Canal wall plan done

**Blanco may order land expropriation**

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**By Meghan Gordon**

Designs for the first section of the Harvey Canal floodwall are expected to reach Gov. Kathleen Blanco's desk today, along with a request to commandeer the strip of land east of the industrial waterway needed for the long-awaited storm barrier.

The Army Corps of Engineers delivered designs for the floodwall section to the West Jefferson Levee District and state Department of Transportation this weekend. Monday, the local sponsors reviewed the drawings and prepared a letter formally asking Blanco to expropriate land along Peters Road.

"The governor's ready to do what she needs to do," Blanco's spokeswoman Marie Centanni said Monday.

Jerry Spohrer, executive director of the West Jefferson Levee District, said he doesn't anticipate any hang-ups that would dissuade Blanco from approving the request or from stalling it past this week.

The commandeering request covers the first of five sections of the floodwall project designed to protect Harvey, Gretna and Algiers from storm surges barreling up the Harvey Canal. In the initial phase, Cajun Constructors will erect a piece of the wall from a spot south of Boomtown Casino along Peters Road to Jefferson Parish's Hero pumping station.

Spohrer said the maps require the state to acquire land from three property owners, but no structures would have to be torn down. The land owners include Bollinger Shipyards, M-I Drilling Fluids and Golden Industries, which leases the property to Mississippi Recycling.

In September, Blanco acted quickly on the levee district's expropriation request for the widening of a levee that protects the West Bank from surges traveling across Lake Cataouatche.

Spohrer said he hopes the same happens with the Harvey Canal project.

"Commandeering took place almost immediately, because the governor's office had been on board and ready to roll," he said.

Because a state of emergency she declared for the 2005 storms is still in effect, Blanco may expropriate the land and give the local sponsors right of entry in much shorter order than under normal circumstances. The state must pay fair market value for the land, but the method allows construction to begin immediately even if land owners dispute the state's compensation.

The corps' latest announced goals have the entire project wrapping up by June 2008, long after the September 2007 deadline officials touted for most of this year. Neighborhoods east of the Harvey Canal rely on a series of private levees plagued by so many weak spots that parish and levee district workers spent days plugging leaks in September 2005, when Hurricane Rita filled the canal to its banks.

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