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# Holding Back the Moving Earth

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"I got a call at work and they said, 'We had to move some stuff around, so you don't have a driveway right at the moment,'" Paula said. She came home to find mounds and mounds of detritus filling up her front yard. It has since been removed, or put back – and her property is now protected for a hundred years or so – but the whole project was a mind-bending experience of working with neighbors about their swimming pools, their soil drift, their lack of vegetation to hold soil in place so that it doesn't flow right into the creek or into her yard.

"I had no idea that we would have such a problem when we moved in," she said.

Once homeowners find out they need to replace or put in a retaining wall, dealing with city officials to obtain permits can be as frustrating as watching the slopes slip. In Lafayette, for instance, four separate agencies or offices have to sign off on the plans before construction (or reconstruction) even starts. Until all the offices sign off, construction cannot even begin without the possibility of a neighbor phoning in to complain about work being done without permits.

"We make sure all the paperwork is in place before we start," said Ward. "There are setbacks and variances that have to be met to get permits. It's a process that takes a while, sometimes, but we get it done."



*The homeowner of this house in Orinda got a call from her retaining wall contractor who said, "Um, you won't have a driveway for a while."*

*Photos Chris Lavin*