

Bennett Creek Entrance Channel - Dredge Project Update: July 1, 2012

Compiled by Pat Hillard, Bennett's Creek Landing Marina Association Representative

August 2011: Suffolk City Council approved a funding package which included an allocation of \$757,000 for a full "bucket dredge" of the Bennett Creek entrance channel.

September 2011: Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) project manager developed a tentative schedule culminating in the dredge being completed by November of 2012.

June 2012: The proposed dredge project is delayed by unspecified bureaucratic glitches within the ACOE. The new dredge schedule will result in a completed dredge by April of 2013 unless "time of year" spawning restrictions are applicable. Federal project review may determine that Bennett Creek, as a tributary of the James river, is a protected area for the Atlantic Sturgeon, an endangered species. Dredging would then be delayed until after spawning season. The ACOE projects that the probable dredge date would be moved to August, 2013 if "time of year" restrictions are deemed applicable.

July 2012: The Memorandum of Agreement, which serves as the contract between the city and the ACOE, is in its second draft and is being negotiated between the two parties. Once the MOA is executed, the first set of funds can be paid to the ACOE to begin obtaining permits and approvals. We will learn about the time of year restrictions after the MOA is signed and the first round of funds are drawn.

Kudos to the city staffers: Our city manager recommended to Council that this dredge should be done. The Director of Public Works (Mr. Nielsen) and his staff have been diligent in their efforts to move the process along, including the MOA. The delay has been within the ACOE. The good news is that the ACOE has cleared their internal logjam and is now ready to get the job moving along.

Our concern: City Council was wise to allocate enough funds for a full "bucket dredge" this year. This is a large sum of money for a city the size of Suffolk. Proponents of the dredge project are becoming increasingly concerned about the possibility of reallocation of these funds due to project delays, especially if the dredge occurs in August of 2013, after the end of another fiscal year. Over the course of time other funding priorities tend to surface, and these dredge funds are a very tempting target. Additionally, some council members may be worried that the

city will be responsible for any cost overruns in this project. Of course, that can happen with any city funded project.

Continued support is needed: Friends of Bennett Creek are encouraged to continue to express support for this dredge project and for ongoing channel maintenance. Our elected officials, particularly the ones who represent other boroughs, need to know that many citizens are aware of the need for a dredge, and fully support the wise actions taken by our City Council so far – and it is important to us that Council follow through with this project completely.