

Bennetts Creek to get regular dredgings to water's depth

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SUFFOLK — Bennetts Creek will be dredged regularly.

The City Council on Wednesday voted to support a resolution that would again clear the clogged creek that feeds the Nansemond River.

The resolution calls for the Army Corps of Engineers and the city to split the cost of a maintenance project.

The agreement would keep the creek deep enough for businesses, recreational use and boating by regularly dredging a troublesome sand bar on the eastern side where the creek meets the Nansemond.

The creek naturally winds to the northwest, but a dredging in 1992 cut a channel through this natural sand bar, forming a shortcut between the river and the creek.

"Initially we thought it would last about seven years, depending on boating traffic," Cynthia D. Rohlf, assistant to the city manager, said of the dredged shortcut.

Mother Nature, however, refilled the sand bar more quickly than officials expected.

Tom O'Grady, director of economic development for the city, said the water level is dropping as the channel is refilled with sand. His concern is that the water levels may become too shallow to use. Bennetts Creek is surrounded by private homes, undeveloped land mostly zoned for housing, and a park with a public boat ramp.

The city intended to re-dredge the waterway in a decade. That would have cost about \$225,000, and O'Grady said it is now time to consider a more regular plan that may be more economical.

Since these would be maintenance clearings, instead of completely digging the sand bar, the cost would be less.

The Army Corps of Engineers would foot about 60 percent of bill for dredging approximately every three years, and the city would handle the rest.

In other business, the City Council also rezoned 27 acres of woodland and field along Nansemond Parkway to the north of Portsmouth Boulevard to public use. In an ef-