

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
March 23, 2020**

Mayor John Davis called the meeting to order. Council members present were Clyde Turner, Jonathan Creger, Tom Garrett, Sarah Thwaites (attended electronically), and Joe Goorskey.

Staff members present were Susan Kidd, Benji Ratcliffe, and Debbie Thomas.

The attorney present was Mike Bedsaul.

Councilman Jonathan Creger gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Declaration of Local Emergency

Mike Bedsaul stated the town needed to approve the resolution to declare a local emergency and to appoint a coordinator of emergency management. It may make sense for Mayor Davis to serve in this capacity.

Mayor Davis said he does not mind doing that at all. He connects with Chris McKlarney on a daily basis so he is in constant contact with him.

Councilman Creger said if Mayor Davis is appointed for this he can still report back to Susan Kidd.

Councilman Garrett said he believes it only makes sense for Mayor Davis to serve in this capacity.

Councilman Creger made a motion to approve the resolution to declare a local emergency and to appoint John Davis as the emergency management coordinator. Councilman Garrett seconded the motion.

Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, Garrett, Creger, and Turner

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Mayor Davis said council is being asked to approve an ordinance instituting emergency procedure to ensure continuity of town government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to add the ordinance of continuity of town government to the agenda for consideration and possible action tonight after review of said ordinance. Councilman Garrett seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Creger, Garrett, Thwaites, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Mike Bedsaul said there is a statute in the Freedom of Information Act that already provides that a governing body can meet as a whole through electronic means when a government has declared a state of emergency. The topics the governing body can discuss during those meetings is limited to those that pertain to the emergency. A classic example is the meeting that is being held tonight. Because of that limitation and because of the unique circumstances posed by COVID-19 there has to be some way for council to be able to meet and discuss essential business items, not just the emergency. Council may wish, in the future, to no longer meet in person but by electronic means. Another statute provides that notwithstanding any other provision that when there is a disaster in that locality the governing body, by ordinance, can pass rules and procedures that are emergency in nature. They can then depart from the customary ways in which they hold their meetings. The purpose of this ordinance on the continuity of government is to provide a way for council to continue to meet by some means, which may be limited for the public to participate, and to conduct public hearings and to consider matters on more regular business. An example is that a budget and tax rates will have to be approved by July 1. That is the big thing with this ordinance. He would suggest that council provide a way for the public to attend meetings electronically. The public can submit questions/concerns to the town office and they can be presented to council during the council meeting. We want to make these meetings as open and accessible to the public as we possibly can. Council needs to try to limit their agendas to what is essential.

(Sarah Thwaites arrived to the meeting)

Mike Bedsaul said staff can change how things are done on a day-to-day basis.

Councilman Creger said he believes the ordinance is a necessity. We need to make arrangements to live stream the meeting.

Mayor Davis said he does not want to go with that option until we absolutely have to.

Councilman Garrett said he is willing to limit one administrative representative, draw straws to decide which councilmembers attend so there is a 4-person meeting instead of a 6 person meeting, or move the meetings to the annex so you can put 6 rows between people. There are a lot of things they could do.

Councilman Creger said they would simply be meeting any way possible, whether in person or electronically.

Councilman Garrett said if he could not meet in person he will probably not be involved.

Councilman Goorskey said he wants to meet in person as long as he possibly can.

Mike Bedsaul said council may want to make a trial run of this at their next meeting.

Councilman Creger made a motion to adopt the ordinance of the Town Council of the Town of Narrows, Virginia, instituting emergency procedures to ensure continuity of Town Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councilman Garrett seconded the motion.

Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, Garrett, Creger, and Turner

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Report of Actions Taken

Susan Kidd stated she has given council a copy of what has already been done. She does need some guidance on some other things and she thought this was the appropriate time to ask. At our next meeting there was to be a joint public hearing, do we go ahead and schedule that? It was for a special exception for an electronic sign at Reece's Building Supply.

Councilman Garrett asked if there was a real time constraint on that?

Susan Kidd said Mr. Reece wanted to move forward with it but she does not believe it would shut the business down.

Mayor Davis asked if they had to have a joint public hearing?

Mike Bedsaul said they did not have to have a joint public hearing but the continuity of government ordinance extends this flexibility to commissions and other lobbies with the town to land use matters such as this. They need to use their common sense on what they move forward with. They need to stick with essential things.

Councilman Garrett said for them to have just said it is an emergency and then to meet to discuss whether to put a sign up or not seems to be inconsistent.

Councilman Goorskey said he is a bit uncomfortable with it too. They need to be proactive.

Councilman Garrett said if they can postpone it that would be great but if they cannot then they will hold it.

Susan Kidd said small business support is through the county. There is a list of locally owned independent restaurants on the county's website. They are offering a gift card where you purchase a gift card for \$20 and you receive a gift card with a face value of \$30. The county is giving the other \$20 to the restaurants. The county is subsidizing ½ of the purchase value. The county is contributing money and have asked each town to contribute if they can.

Councilman Garrett made a motion to donate \$2,000 to Giles County in support of local businesses and reevaluate it in the future to see if additional funding is appropriate. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Creger, Garrett, Thwaites, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Susan Kidd said they have stopped disconnects on water for 60 days but at the end of that time the amounts will still be owed. They will not be adding penalty to utility bills or interest to real estate and personal property taxes for 60 days.

Councilman Goorskey said he is in favor of not adding penalty, interest, or fees for 60 days.

Mayor Davis said a note needs to be put on water bills saying they still have to pay the bill.

Susan Kidd said they can check on something like a rebate on the meals and transient occupancy tax. The fund balance looks fine now and they probably will not know the repercussions from this pandemic until about a month from now. She listed the revenues she thinks it will affect and they will keep an eye on those. They may want to put a limit on spending at some time but she does not see that happening at this time.

Councilman Garrett asked if the police officers should continue writing tickets for what they have been writing tickets for or do they let people go through town and not have the interaction?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said they are going to be a little more selective but will still give out tickets if need be and will still handle criminal charges the way they have done in the past.

Mayor Davis said you do not know what you will encounter when you pull a car over but it will still need to be done. There may be some revenue loss from this.

Councilman Goorskey said revenue loss is a small price to pay for officers being able to limit the amount of exposure they have to have.

Mayor Davis said the county also discussed PPE concerning the county and towns.

Susan Kidd said as of now everyone is still working but she does not know how long they will need everyone. They may look at working 2 per team per department and work them on alternate days so that if one group gets sick it does not wipe the whole group out. They can do this for buildings and grounds, public works, water and sewer, waste treatment plant, and even the front office. They are just not sure about the pay.

Councilmember Thwaites said she is in favor of working in groups. They need to disinfect if they are working inside for the next group that comes in.

Councilman Garrett said he would like to suggest that they go to a 12-hour workday so employees work 3 12-hour days and are paid for 40 hours.

Mayor Davis said he would suggest one group working Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and another group working Thursday, Friday, Saturday and then switch days the next week.

Susan Kidd said the rec department is helping with the feeding program.

Councilmember Thwaites asked about the front office?

Councilman Garrett said he would prefer to keep the front office workers working 8-hour days and keep them busy. He is concerned about people coming out of this with no job. That is what will destroy the economy.

Councilman Garrett asked if we have any at-risk individuals that we need to treat a little differently?

Susan Kidd asked what we do if an employee states they are not comfortable working and do not want to be here?

Mayor Davis said there have been some issues like that and the employee is told they will either have to use their leave time or not get paid. The girls in the front office can do other jobs to keep themselves busy.

Councilman Goorskey said if we are locked down for very much longer people are going to go crazy. We cannot have person-to-person interaction but we can have some types of communication such as calling someone on the phone.

Mayor Davis said the county is starting a program for senior citizens where they can be called every day if they would like. The girls in the front office can do that if need be.

Councilman Goorskey said he talked to Dakoda Shrader about a virtual scavenger hunt that will keep people busy and take their minds off of what is happening.

Councilman Creger said calling people is a nice idea.

Mike Bedsaul said the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is being expanded to cover yourself as well as a loved one that is sick or has been quarantined. This would also cover an employee that has a child under the age of 18 that has no one like a day care to care for them.

Councilman Goorskey said FMLA only applies to certain sized companies.

Mike Bedsaul said normally it applies to employers that employ 50 or more and now it is 500 or less.

Mayor Davis said the next council meeting will be April 13th. Council would still like to receive reports from each department but each department does not have to have a representative at the meeting.

Councilman Turner made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Garrett seconded the motion.

Ayes: Goorksey, Thwaites, Garrett, Creger, and Turner

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, John G. Davis