

Narrows Town Council Meeting
Recessed from April 20, 2020
Budget Work Session #2
May 4, 2020

Mayor John Davis called the recessed meeting to order. Council Members present were: Clyde Turner, Jonathan Creger, Tom Garrett, and Joe Goorskey. Councilmember Sarah Thwaites was absent. (The meeting was held with Zoom. Councilman Turner, Councilman Creger, and Councilman Goorskey were in attendance from other locations. Councilman Garrett was present in council chambers).

Staff members present were Lindsey Caudill, Buddy Kast, Benji Ratcliffe, Susan Kidd, Dakota Shrader, and Debbie Thomas. Cindy Laws was in attendance through Zoom.

Councilman Creger gave the invocation.

Mayor Davis asked Susan Kidd to go over plans for the reopening of the town park.

Susan Kidd said council has a list in their packet that was put together by Dakota Shrader and Lindsey Caudill. It lists steps for reopening the town park. Robert Rucker is coming May 6th to clean and sanitize the park and the reopening is planned for May 8th.

Mayor Davis said the list looks good. He is excited about the park reopening.

Susan Kidd said the Community Center will not be opening for the time being.

Mayor Davis said he would like to send Robert Rucker a thank you for cleaning and sanitizing the town park. Does anyone have any questions about the Lurich Sports Complex?

Councilman Creger said he does not have any questions but it does look like a good plan. He does not know if they can afford it now and does not know how they get there.

Dakota Shrader said the price listed is for the entire project. There are some things that are not a necessity at this time. If they are going to turn the ballfields they need to fence the field because right now they have temporary fencing for the two smaller fields but no fencing for the big fields. They can then hold league playoffs and make money, including concessions. Bleachers are not a necessity because most people bring their own seats.

Councilman Creger said they could probably get someone to build bleachers.

Dakota Shrader said there is no need for a third field if you have adjustable base mounts.

Councilman Creger said this is an excellent plan and he would like to see it all come to fruition but we need to be physically responsible and be prudent and not jump into all of it at once. What they can afford to do now they ought to do.

Dakota Shrader said the first thing that absolutely needs to happen is the infield mix (you could reduce this price by using sand/clay mix).

Councilman Creger said Dakota Shrader needs to look at what needs to be done and prioritize it and try to reduce costs but not reduce quality.

Councilman Turner said he knows Celanese employees made the bleachers at the high school so he may want to contact them to donate the bleachers for the Lurich Sports Complex.

Dakota Shrader said he has contacted them and they said they would get back with him.

Councilman Goorskey said he appreciates the way Dakota Shrader laid out this proposal. He sees some costs that may be lowered and some things that may be able to be donated. The high school can get some use out of this complex as well.

Dakoda Shrader said there should be a 25% increase in concession sales as a whole.

Councilman Garrett asked if they should finance this and use the revenue to make the payments?

Dakoda Shrader said that is exactly what he was thinking.

Mayor Davis asked for Lindsey Caudill to discuss the splash pad.

Lindsey Caudill said Splash Pads USA sent another proposal. They usually do not do bids because they have competitive pricing. Their bid includes a non-slip surface coating and is more in-line with funds we have. One side of the splash pad will be for toddlers and the other side for older children. This company has a better warranty than Accord Pools. They will come and show them how to winterize the splash pad. This offer is \$800 over budget. There are also a list of references they provided. She believes this is the company they should use because they have a 30-year warranty.

Councilman Goorskey asked Lindsey Caudill if she had contacted any of the references?

Lindsey Caudill said she had and most of them said they were thrilled with the work and they were easy to work with. They are starting to work on a splash pad in Maryland and are hoping to start ours after that.

Councilman Creger said this proposal is much better than the other one they received.

Councilman Goorskey asked if they had provided a contract?

Lindsey Caudill said not yet but she was going to give them until today to get one. She has been speaking with Mike Bedsaul and he said he had a form contract that could be sent to Splash Pads USA. They can have it ready for the next council meeting.

Councilman Garrett said there is a price listed at the top of the page of \$130,800 and near the bottom of the page there is another amount listed at \$130,000.

Lindsey Caudill said she is not sure what that is. The lower price may be without certain fees, which the town said they could waive.

Buddy Kast said they can build the splash pad to Contractor A specifications but if we want they can provide engineered plans for \$6,500.

Mayor Davis asked Cindy Laws if she had anything to report from the library?

Cindy Laws said she is following the Pearisburg Public Library on the reopening plan. She has been doing story time online and has received over 400 views, which is amazing. She has been doing curbside pickup for books. Someone just calls and says what book they want and she takes it out to the vehicle. The little libraries with the free books are doing great. At the next council meeting she wants to present some ideas she has for the library for the upcoming year to better meet the community needs.

Mayor Davis asked if everything has been put in the computer program?

Cindy Laws said she has the majority of that done and is working on it daily. She has had several complements on the library.

Mayor Davis asked Police Chief Ratcliffe how the police department was doing?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said it is going well. They are trying to be as safe as they can be.

Mayor Davis asked Buddy Kast if he had anything to report?

Buddy Kast said he would like to let council see the iamGIS system. (Buddy Kast gave an online presentation of the iamGIS system) Smoke testing, manhole covers, and drains are just of a few of the things that can be seen with this system. The system also has an

overlay for zoning. The system is only about 50% complete but should be finished by next year.

Mayor Davis said he would like to thank everyone for the work they have done.

Discussion of FY21 Fiscal Budget

Mayor Davis said there is a sheet that says “2020-21 Budget Draft 2”. Does anyone have any questions about that? Do they need to go over that sheet before they get into the budget?

Councilman Garrett asked if they had checked on locating a fuel tank on this end of the county.

Susan Kidd said she has not gotten to that part yet but she will.

Councilman Creger said he read where Susan Kidd had spoken to Kevin Belcher and he said he did not feel they would be approving a water rate increase for this year. He spoke to Kevin Belcher a couple of days ago and asked the same question. He was told that they did not have that information now because they were waiting to get all of the estimates for their capital projects before they decide on a rate increase.

Susan Kidd said that is not the same answer he gave her but she is not surprised.

Mayor Davis said he was not surprised either. He asked if they want to go through the budget line by line while department heads are in attendance? There have been several changes to the budget since the last meeting.

Susan Kidd said the revenue line item for Real Property Taxes includes a 1% increase, which will be a .02¢ decrease in the real estate tax rate. This keeps the town from having the separate public hearing to raise taxes.

Councilman Creger said he knows they have always estimated their revenues low but have then gone lower because of the current economic situation?

Susan Kidd said on some things. They talked about most of them last month. She has included 100% of the real estate tax.

Councilman Garrett asked if they had received any word on funding from the state?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said he has not heard about state funding for the police department but from what he has read he believes they will receive more money.

Councilman Garrett said based on the level of detail they were presented last time and the adjustments that have been made he has no questions.

Mayor Davis asked if anyone else had any questions on revenues? They will now move on to expenditures. He is looking at the packet based on a 3% pay increase.

Councilman Creger said he believes they really need to take a hard look at cutting around \$30,000 out of the revenues. He does not know where this would come from, possibly from training budgets (not the ones that have to have certification for their jobs). They can cut out travel and training for council and may even consider backing the council out of the email accounts if they are so expensive and just have a Gmail account. He believes they should cut out any increases for now and try to cut out the \$30,000. He is not saying in any way that the town does not do a good job or that employees do not deserve an increase but he does not see at this point with the instability and numerous unknown factors how they can really give increases.

Councilman Garrett said he disagrees.

Mayor Davis said he also disagrees.

Councilman Garrett said they are within less than 1% of being balanced which is where they have been at in the budget process for the last 5 years. They put a line item in to transfer from the general fund to balance the budget numerically and have never had to transfer. He would say leave the 3% increase in and assume they are going to transfer the \$32,666 from general fund as a line item to balance the budget and move forward. The past several years they have had a line item to transfer money and it has never been required.

Mayor Davis said he agrees with that wholeheartedly. The town is in a better position today than they have been in recent years and they owe it to the employees to give them a raise and let them know how much council appreciates them and how much they need them.

Councilman Creger said he agrees that the employees need to know they are needed and he believes they do that in many ways. Their total compensation package is quite good overall when you consider their holidays and insurance and everything. He believes there are a lot of unknowns right now the town cannot plan on and they have received raises in the last several years. They have been giving raises that are equal or surpass what the country's military has received. There are a lot of projects (i.e. the sewer project, splash pad, etc.) that need to be done. He is not ready to vote on a budget that includes that much of a pay increase, if at all.

Councilman Goorskey said watching the budget process last year he learned a lot through most of it. He has a lot of trust with the staff at the town and how the numbers were generated. He does not see anything jumping out on the expense end and likes how the department heads are presenting them with some real numbers. He believes it speaks volumes that they have been able to balance the budget on paper with the transfer of funds from the general fund and that it has not had to happen yet. He is not opposed to anything that he is seeing and it looks like they are going to be able to maintain the way they have been doing things. He believes they have compensated plenty for the unknown circumstances they may face with the ongoing pandemic issues. He likes what he sees right now.

Mayor Davis asked Susan Kidd to clarify the total cost for the PAR for the fire department and how the town could help out with that, which is around \$38,000? Has that been looked at or added to the budget?

Susan Kidd said no. They had talked about starting a pumper fund for the fire department but she thought they may look at the PAR instead of that.

Mayor Davis said he spoke with Fire Chief Jon Butler and they have been spending most of their time on a new building and are kind of in a bind because they have outgrown the space. When he talked to Jon Butler about the pumper truck he said they have not discussed it a whole lot but he is hoping within the next five years they can get an assistance to firefighters grant for a pumper truck. They are applying for it every year and they are hoping that will come through. Their oldest truck right now is a 1989 model and it still benefits them but it will need to be replaced. He would like to see the town do something with the fire department and not be caught off guard. He would like to either see a fund started for a pumper truck or go ahead and secure the total cost of the PAR.

Susan Kidd said she spoke with Jon Butler and he said the PAR is more pressing because he does believe they will receive a grant at some point for the pumper truck.

Councilman Garrett said he would have no problem taking half of the money from the contingency line item and placing it in a fund for the fire department.

Councilman Goorskey asked what the idea was for the ballfield?

Dakota Shrader said he is leaving it up to council to give him some ideas on that but now would be a great time to get it done. If they wait until next year it will be harder to get it done with games being played.

Councilman Goorskey asked if they could look at some financing that would cover this?

Councilman Garrett said if they think the revenue numbers are real then they can get financing and do it and pay it back from increased revenues from ads, concessions, and fees.

Dakoda Shrader said if they can find 40 small businesses that will donate \$100 to put a sign up like they do at the high schools that would be great. He would say Councilman Garrett's idea would be the best.

Councilman Garrett said with the changes Dakoda Shrader mentioned they may be able to lower the amount they need to the \$70,000-\$75,000 range. They can borrow that amount for ten years.

Dakoda Shrader said Giles County Soccer League does have quite a few soccer goals and the high school may want to help purchase soccer goals if the town would let them use the field to practice.

Councilman Goorskey said he may be mistaken but he believes GC United would love to have another place to put soccer goals.

Councilman Garrett said it seems the cost to do this may be around \$50,000 so they could do a ten-year loan for that.

Councilman Creger said he agrees with Councilman Garrett in that there are a few things they could do that would bring the price down a little bit but they want to do as much as they can to make it what they want. They could likely finance it and the payments may be less than the revenue. It is a great idea.

Dakoda Shrader said he would work on lowering the price and finding the options for a loan before the next council meeting.

Susan Kidd asked if everyone was all right with moving the two ballfields?

Mayor Davis said he likes that idea. Is there anything else in the expenditure report they need to look at?

Susan Kidd said they are going to purchase the boiler control for the community center out of this year's budget.

Mayor Davis asked if they needed to go ahead and set up a public hearing?

Susan Kidd said they could do the public hearing at the regular meeting in June. The tax rate will have to be lowered to .47¢/\$100. They can also vote on changes to the utility fees at that time.

Councilman Garret said they can also approve a loan for the ballfields at that time.

Mayor Davis asked if council could be present in council chambers for next week's meeting?

Council said they would be present at the council meeting on Monday, May 11th.

Councilman Creger said someone needs to contact Councilmember Thwaites to see if she wants to attend the meeting in person or electronically. How did we offer the meetings they have been having electronically to the town?

Susan Kidd said the regular notice was placed out on the front of the office building. It was also sent to the newspaper.

Councilman Garrett said these have been continued meetings not called meetings.

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

Ayes: Goorskey, Garrett, Creger, and Turner
Nays: None
Motion Carried 4-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, John G. Davis