

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
November 9, 2020**

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

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

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Councilman Creger gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Audit Report (FY20)

Corbin Stone from Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates was present to give the FY20 audit report. He said the town received an unqualified (unmodified) opinion on the financial statements, which means they believe the numbers are correct. They ran into no problems with the audit and were very pleased by the organization by staff in preparing for the audit. If staff was asked for something they provided it right away. The fund balance for the general fund at the end of FY20 was \$161,228. It was a little drop from last year which was probably because of taxes and other things not being collected due to Covid-19. Long-term debt for governmental funds was \$377,659 and that includes any capital lease obligations (leave, vacation pay, debt, etc.). Pension liabilities are not included in this figure because they go up and down with the market. Water/sewer net position was \$1,568,759 and that is basically what the system is worth. Long-term debt for enterprise funds was \$896,308. Total debt for all funds was \$1,273,967 which is around the same as last year. General fund balances would ideally be larger than long-term debt but the town seems to manage. It has not been where he would like to see it in forever. Water-sewer net position is more than long-term debt. When you look at revenue sources you can see the impact of the virus. Revenues have declined some from 2019-2020. These declines should be temporary. Original tax assessments by year show that real estate has stayed about the same, personal property has gone up, public service has declined some, and machinery and tools and mobile homes have stayed about the same. There were no significant findings in the audit. The only thing is they would like for fund balances to be higher.

Councilman Goorskey thanked staff for handling the audit so well.

Mayor Davis thanked Corbin Stone for presenting the audit.

Public Hearing

Mayor Davis opened the public hearing for an easement at 615 Hopkins Street.

Buddy Kast said he has received no complaints against the easement.

Mayor Davis asked if there were any other comments? Hearing none he declared the public hearing closed.

Approval of October 12th Meeting Minutes

**Councilman Garrett made a motion to approve the September 14th meeting minutes.
Councilman Turner seconded the motion.**

Ayes: Thwaites, Garrett, and Turner

Abstain: Goorskey and Creger

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Consent Agenda

Councilman Creger said he is excited about all that is happening at the library and Cindy Laws has done a great job. The parks and rec department seems to be running better as well. There are more programs going on and the splash pad will be an asset to the park.

Councilmember Thwaites said with most parks and rec programs being taken away they could have taken a back seat but she is glad to see they have stepped up and created ways to pitch in and help out. They have shown how resilient they are.

Dakoda Shrader said the sports season was cut down and they would like to have boys' basketball and have begun registration. They have thought about having coed volleyball but there may be a downside to that. The parks and rec committee have decided to not have pre-k – third grade boys' basketball and girls' basketball and do volleyball instead.

Mayor Davis said he is not a big fan of combining boys and girls. They have hired a rec director to run the rec department and he has a committee that he has joined forces with and it should be up to the rec director to take care of the situation and do what is best for each child.

Councilman Creger said he believes they are on the right track.

Mayor Davis asked what the spectatorship would look like?

Dakoda Shrader said one parent per child.

Councilman Garrett said the expenses to pay people to work the games will be there but revenues will not. Before January 2021 they need to figure the opening day of the splash pad and work backwards. How many people will be needed to man it, how will they be hired, how many hours will it be, and how much will tickets cost? These things need to be done in the winter if they are going to open the splash pad in early spring.

Councilmember Thwaites asked Police Chief Ratcliffe about traffic court?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said fees are down this year but tickets are not. Judges are allowing anyone to take driver training and that has cut into town funds.

Councilman Creger asked Police Chief Ratcliffe if he had received any relief from TDO's (temporary detention orders)?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said that had gotten out of control. They are changing a lot of things because of Covid and Marion now has a problem with Covid so transports will have to be taken to Petersburg and several other places outside of Southwest Virginia.

Councilman Creger said he is glad to see the grant moving forward. What will be the first real action we see?

Susan Kidd said the facades will be the first thing. They will receive bids on those.

Councilman Garrett said the cigarette tax revenue seems high but he sees an expense which he guesses is for another order of stamps.

Debbie Thomas said a business in Wyoming County went out of business so she had to refund \$1,500 for a roll of stamps they sent back.

Councilman Garrett said there was a balance of -\$29,000 for water deposits.

Debbie Thomas said she would check on that.

Councilman Garrett said we are at 31% on water service charges and 29% on sewer service charges. Those are both based off of water we sell so he would expect them to be the same percentage.

Susan Kidd said when they do leak adjustments they do not charge for sewer.

Councilman Garrett said the water loss is at 45%.

Buddy Kast said the guys found 2-6” mains that had busted and there was a large leak in the fire sprinkler system at MacArthur Inn. They do not know how much water was lost.

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to accept the consent agenda. Councilman Garrett seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

Susan Kidd said the property the town purchased with the ARC grant (outfitter property) has taxes owed to the town. She would like council to abate those taxes.

Councilman Creger made a motion to abate the 2020 real estate taxes at 128 Monroe Street and 132 Monroe Street, which total \$564.94. Councilman Garrett seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Communication from Mayor and Council

Councilman Garrett said there has been no PSA meeting since the last council meeting. Since he will no longer be on council after December this will create a vacancy on the PSA Board and the Regional Commission Board. This council needs to identify and name replacements no later than the December meeting. He will attend the PSA meetings through the end of the year.

Councilmember Thwaites said she would be willing to serve on the Regional Commission but does not feel comfortable or qualified enough to be on the PSA Board.

Councilman Creger said he has a new job and has been working second shift so he may not attend the December council meeting. He has enjoyed working with everyone. A lot of things have been accomplished and the town is moving in the right direction. He spoke with several people during the election and they had some concerns that need to be addressed. One was the high-water rates in town. What can be done to lower the water rates?

Councilman Garrett said this is the reason he keeps asking about the leak loss. The town is paying almost double to the PSA every month for the water they sell. He does not expect the water loss to ever be zero. About ¼ of our payment to the PSA is for leak loss. Other than that, he does not have an answer on how to lower water rates. He believes they could double the size of the water crew and keep them busy on water and sewer in town. The audit report that was just presented showed the deteriorating value of water and sewer. Within 3-4 years that amount is going to go way up when we either get a large amount of grant money or we borrow \$2 million to fix the sewer system. The payment for that is going to have to go on customer’s bills so he sees many things that will drive the water and sewer bills up but almost nothing that will decrease them. When we spend money for the sewer repairs we have to do we will get some savings in sewer operating costs. Because of Covid he believes grant funding will be limited.

Councilman Creger said people have mentioned making meetings being more accessible online. He believes people should be hearing what Councilman Garrett just stated so they understand what the town is dealing with.

Councilman Garrett said they can make the meetings more accessible but there would be no way for the public to give them feedback and feedback is what council needs.

Councilmember Thwaites said she is in favor of having meetings being more accessible to citizens. The school board is live streaming some of their meetings on Facebook.

George Conley said he does not have Facebook and has a flip phone. A lot of senior citizens in town are not computer savvy. His son told him by December he needs to get a smart phone. A lot of people that grew up in this town and graduated from Narrows High School want to see this town move ahead. He wants to elaborate a little on the water. The water rates were increased and his water bill doubled. He is on a fixed income and social security has seen few if any raises in prior years. If you work somewhere that gives raises and bonuses every year that is fantastic.

Councilmember Thwaites said not everyone gets a raise or a bonus every year.

George Conley said the senior citizens do not.

Councilmember Thwaites said the people working are paying into social security.

George Conley said there are a lot of smart heads sitting on council and there are going to be some smarter ones. Surely some problems can be solved.

Councilman Goorskey said we are living in a day and age where people receive information in a lot of different ways. The questions people have can be answered by phone calls, letters, and gotten first hand. This would not be a substitute but an additional way to provide information for people that want to receive it that way.

Councilmember Thwaites said it is not to prevent people from attending meetings.

Councilman Goorskey said he has people contact him to find out what is going on with the town. Council and the town are trying to do the best with what they have.

Councilmember Thwaites said she has worked in banking for 25 years and has worked with people on fixed incomes. The PSA rates are not ideal but if they look at the expense of things that need to be done it is not feasible to be able to think they can slash water rates when they are getting ready to take on a massive debt.

Buddy Kast said the system is going to have to be replaced and grant funding may or may not be there.

Councilman Creger made a motion that by the end of the year the town be able to stream live meetings on YouTube, Facebook, or some other electronic platform.

Councilmember Thwaites seconded the motion.

Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, and Creger

Nays: Garrett and Turner

Motion Carried 3-2

Mayor Davis asked Buddy Kast to make sure the storm drains are cleared since there is going to be quite a bit of rain in the next few days.

Mayor Davis asked if there was going to be a Christmas tree lighting?

Lindsey Caudill said December 19th.

Sara Bowles said last year some of the community members got together and got money and bought garland and wreaths to hang. This year she contacted some businesses to add to that and have garland and wreaths placed on all of the ones that do not have them.

Burman Clark is adding \$300 to that.

Councilmember Thwaites said FNBP has been contacted to donate for this.

Councilman Creger said some residents also believe there are some exorbitant salaries of top town employees. While he does not believe department heads are being overpaid some of these jobs may have a top-end salary. That does happen in organizations. The public has also asked why so many of the same people serve on council so in the future they may want to set term limits.

Mayor Davis said they have elections every year.

Councilmember Thwaites said pay increases were not given this fiscal year.

Councilman Creger said only because of a \$53,000 oversight.

Councilmember Thwaites said it is still good to let people know they did not give pay increases this fiscal year.

Councilman Creger said it is good for people to know that but it was because of a \$53,000 oversight.

New Business

None.

Unfinished Business

Susan Kidd said she wants council to be aware of what is coming up. Minimum wage was supposed to go up in July but they have put it off until May. On May 1, 2021 (the budget we are in now) minimum wage will go up to \$9.50/hour. There are about 1/5th of town employees that are at minimum wage (\$9.50/hour or below). When employees are hired they are trying to start them out at \$9.50/hour since it will be going up. January 1, 2022 minimum wage will go up to \$11.00/hour. The last increase will be on January 1, 2020 to \$12.00/hour.

Councilman Garrett asked if this was definite?

Susan Kidd said yes, this is law. When this amount goes up there will be a lot of employees below that. The wages can be increased for those employees and that may put them within \$1.00/hour of what their supervisors make and supervisors have said they will not take on that responsibility for \$1.00 more on the hour and she would not either.

Councilman Garrett said when this happens it trickles all the way up.

Susan Kidd said she just wanted to make council aware of what is going to happen. This will have to be discussed during budget talks.

Councilman Garrett said salaries are 50-70% of our budget. Raising rates from \$7.25/hour to \$12.00/hour is a 66% increase which says they would only be paying salaries with the money they have available. He does not believe he is exaggerating.

Susan Kidd said there is no easy answer for this. She does not see a way around this. The town does need a new salary scale so she will contact VML to see if they have someone to help with this. The salary scale the town has now is obsolete.

Susan Kidd said employees for the town have been working through the Covid pandemic and have not had the option of working at home. It is time for the annual bonus and they will receive a small amount but she would like for council to consider giving them more. The budgeted amount is \$150 so if they would want to increase that to \$300, \$400, or \$500 she can let council know what the total would be. If council raises the bonus to \$500 that would be an additional \$10,000 plus taxes, \$400 would be \$7,200 plus taxes, and \$300 would be \$4,400 plus taxes.

Councilman Creger said while bonuses are very well deserved he believes with things that have been presented tonight our general fund has been affected.

Susan Kidd said the general fund is the lowest it will be this year because taxes are going out and money will be received for those. We are pretty much in line to what we had last year. Fund 10 is running about \$150,000 over last year and Fund 20 is running about \$25,000 below last year.

Councilman Creger said we are not in a bad financial situation and he agrees that bonuses are due and should be given but why they should be increased he is not completely sure. Maybe they determine what that increase would be now and giving bonuses at the end of the fiscal year.

Susan Kidd said the bonus amount is \$150/employee and it is already in the budget.

Councilman Garrett said we have \$700,000 cash on hand so he believes they can afford \$15,000 out of that. He does not believe town employees are overpaid to the point that it will make a difference during Christmas.

Councilman Creger said we have millions of dollars in sewer repairs and there will be budget talks next year and they will probably look at giving raises then.

Susan Kidd said they will not get the sewer repairs done if they do not have the employees to do it.

Councilman Creger said there are people that will work and that is a fair job.

Susan Kidd said there may be people that are willing to argue that with him.

Councilman Goorskey said he will argue it with him because he has had job-seeking ads on every platform out there and he cannot find an employee, and they are starting at \$15 and \$20 per hour. He wants to retain the employees the town has that they have trained. We are severely handicapped right now by Covid but he is 100% behind the rec department and that revenue generator is going to eventually kick into gear. There will be some men's leagues, church leagues, and softball tournaments. This group of people will make something happen and it will more than offset this bonus.

Debbie Thomas said they have submitted twice to the county for Cares Act reimbursements and have received a total of around \$14,000.

Susan Kidd said we will continue to do that. Employees that have to quarantine because of Covid still have to be paid by the town and that is some of the reimbursement.

Councilman Creger said he would have to agree with Councilman Goorskey that employees are hard to find. He believes there may be an amount between \$150 and \$750 that can be given as bonuses.

Councilman Garrett made a motion to increase employee bonuses to \$750/employee for this year. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Matters for Consideration by Council

Dakota Shrader said there is a grant through Mountain Valley Pipeline that is up to \$100,000 with a cap they can match. If they get the grant they will use it to purchase restrooms, drainage, signage, and repairs at Mill Creek. They have to agree to protect the area.

Councilman Garrett said as long as they can still use the area he believes this will be fine.

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to approve the easement at 615 Hopkins Street. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Garrett made a motion to go into executive session to discuss real property (Sec. 2.2-3711.A.3) concerning the Neely property and for consultation with legal counsel (Sec. 2.2-3711.A.8) concerning the Neely property. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to return to open session. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Certification

WHEREAS, the Town of Narrows, has convened an executive meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative-recorded vote and in accordance with the provision of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act: and

WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia requires a certification of the Town Council that such executive meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia Law:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE Town of Narrows hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia Law were discussed in the executive meeting to which this certification resolution applies: and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the executive meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the Town Council.

ATTEST: _____

Councilman Garrett made a motion to accept the certification. Councilmember Thwaites seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

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

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, John G. Davis