

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
February 8, 2021**

Mayor John Davis called the meeting to order. Council Members present were Clyde Turner, Sara Bowles, George Conley, 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.

Mayor Davis gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Hearing

Mayor Davis opened the public hearing for an easement at 122 MacArthur Lane for Jason Tickle.

Buddy Kast said there had been no complaints or comments concerning the easement.

Mayor Davis declared the public hearing closed.

Approval of January 11th Meeting Minutes

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to approve the January 11th meeting minutes. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, Conley, Bowles and Turner

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Consent Agenda

Mayor Davis asked how the Narcotics Anonymous meetings were going?

Cindy Laws said they were going very well. They have had as many as 14 attend and as few as 3. They contribute \$20/month for the use of the library.

Mayor Davis asked how the building is opened for this use?

Cindy Laws said either she or Stephanie Gibson stay to open the building for Jared Lawson and then he is supposed to lock up. A Narrows police officer goes by the building after the meeting ends to make sure the library is locked. Would it be better if someone from the library stayed for the meetings?

Mayor Davis said no but if something happened would it be covered by our insurance?

Mike Bedsaul said they could check with VRSA but he suspects it would be covered by insurance.

Councilmember Bowles asked about the \$200 for the library grant? Could it be generated through a fundraiser?

Cindy Laws said it could. FNBP has donated to these grants in the past. She has not sent out any contribution letters in the last year because of the pandemic but she is going to very soon.

Councilman Goorskey said he would like to make sure the people that are attending the Narcotics Anonymous meetings keep their anonymity and not have their names revealed.

Mayor Davis said he would like to thank parks and rec for everything they are doing. The day after the first game was held he received several phone calls and had spoken to several people at work and they had nothing but praise and high regards on the way things were being handled. Everyone appreciates what they are doing.

Councilman Goorskey asked Dakota Shrader when they would be receiving the rest of the backstop pieces?

Dakota Shrader said they are trying to track pieces that were supposed to be on the truck but were not.

Councilman Goorskey asked when the pieces are received what is the timeframe for the project?

Dakota Shrader said it should have been done but they hope to be ready by summer.

Mayor Davis told Police Chief Ratcliffe that ProComm has sold out to another company. He was making sure he was aware.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said he was aware and has spoken to someone from the new company.

Mayor Davis said we need to be proactive and do some competitive pricing. He does not know if there is a big difference between ProComm and Two-Way Radio. He said we are over a bit on the police vehicle repair line item. What vehicle was that for?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said most of that was for Chad Stilley's police car. It is the oldest vehicle they have.

Councilman Conley asked Police Chief Ratcliffe how many vehicles he had in his department?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said six counting an old spare they have.

Councilman Conley said he would like to thank Police Chief Ratcliffe for inviting him to his office and spending time together. He would like to make himself available to the

other department heads. He can schedule time to meet with them and share his views on the town or if there is anything he can do to help he will.

Councilman Conley said on page 13 of the financial report there are line items for Marville and Stockpen water. Are those the 2 wells the town received back payment on?

Buddy Kast said that comes from the PSA.

Councilman Conley asked on page 16 the PSA Payment, which is \$19,739.20, is money going out to the PSA?

Debbie Thomas said yes.

Councilman Conley said the total the town has coming in from water bills and the 2 wells is \$39,515.18. Is that correct?

Buddy Kast said he believes Councilman Conley is looking at the prior-year revenue.

Debbie Thomas said the column marked "Curr Rev" is revenue for the current year.

Councilman Conley said the town is taking in \$33,692.72 and the payment to the PSA is \$19,739.20?

Susan Kidd said yes.

Councilman Conley said that is all he needs to know right now. He wants to make sure he is reading it right.

Councilman Conley said he had a couple more questions he needed to ask. He was in the front lobby in December and was standing behind a man that wanted to pay his taxes with a credit card. He realized the customer was going to give the town several hundred dollars so why should the town charge him to give them money? It did not make sense to him how the treasurer's office charges no fee but the town does.

Debbie Thomas said the town does not receive any of that fee.

Councilman Conley said it does not matter.

Debbie Thomas said they can incorporate that fee into their utility bills.

Councilman Conley said when he pays his bill at the treasurer's office he is not charged a fee for using his credit card.

Susan Kidd said it all depends on what company the charge is through and the volume of transactions they have. Our volume is low so the fee has to be paid.

Mike Bedsaul asked if they were referring to the convenience fee?

Susan Kidd said yes.

Mike Bedsaul said there is a specific statute in the code that permits public bodies to charge a “convenience fee” for folks that are using alternative forms of payment. It is because localities are usually not in the same position to spread that cost. The statute limits the convenience fee to what the locality itself actually gets charged by the company for the use of the card. If the town did not charge these fees the town would be responsible for paying the convenience fee. The convenience fee is to help the public so they have the option of paying with a credit/debit card if they so choose. They have other options such as check, cash, or money order to avoid these fees.

Councilman Conley said this man did not have a check or cash and he had to go home to get the payment. He wanted to know why the man was being inconvenienced.

Mayor Davis said if the customer does not pay the convenience fee then the town has to eat those charges.

Councilman Conley said the town just received extra money for wells they did not know they had, which was around \$29,000. This came as backpay from the PSA. How much of those convenience fees are we collecting each year?

Susan Kidd said those fees go to the card processor.

Councilman Conley asked what the fees amount to per year. He cannot see inconveniencing the citizens of Narrows with a convenience fee.

Mayor Davis asked Councilman Conley if his suggestion is for the town to eat that cost?

Councilman Conley asked if that would be so terrible?

Councilman Goorskey said 3% of what we have collected so far in property tax would be almost \$11,000. We would have to come up with that somewhere in the budget but the citizens will pay it.

Mike Bedsaul said the company the card goes through charges the convenience fee.

Mayor Davis said the fee can be added to everyone’s bill across the board.

Councilman Conley said that would not be fair. Is it fair to charge a convenience fee when you do not get charged anywhere else?

Debbie Thomas said before they run someone’s card they are told there will be a fee charged. A few people will say they would rather pay with cash or check.

Councilman Goorskey said this fee does not go away. Any business that runs a credit card gets charged a percentage of the transaction. A business he helps run in Peterstown is charged for every electronic payment transaction that occurs. They do not charge per transaction; they simply mark up their inventory. At the gas pump there is a cash price and a credit price.

Councilman Conley asked if there was a way to partner with the county on theirs or get out of this convenience fee?

Councilmember Thwaites said she works in banking and card processors charge fees and there is no way to get away from those fees. It does not seem fair to her that someone that chooses to pay with cash or a check is charged a higher amount to help cover the convenience fees associated with customers that choose to pay with a credit card.

Councilman Goorskey said they have talked about this before and there is no easy way to get around electronic fees. If they wanted to get away from the convenience fee they would have to add another line item and budget for that amount, which would come from the taxpayer's money. He is open to any suggestions.

Mike Bedsaul said sometimes localities have to pay an amount to their software company for being able to accept credit card payments.

Debbie Thomas said this is bundled in with their software.

Councilman Conley asked Buddy Kast how many vehicles he had in his fleet?

Buddy Kast said around a total of 11. That does not include the backhoe.

Councilman Conley asked how many vehicles the rec department had?

Dakota Shrader said 2 but the Explorer is pretty much shared by all departments.

Councilman Conley asked if there were any vehicles for the office?

Susan Kidd said the grey car is for general use.

Councilman Conley said at the last council meeting he asked for salaries and benefits for all town employees and he would like to thank the person that got that together. He also asked for assigned vehicles that are taken home but he never received a response for that. Does anyone know who takes a vehicle home?

Buddy Kast said the water and sewer superintendents take theirs home for a quick response if something happens. The street supervisor takes his home. This allows for quicker/safer response time.

Councilman Conley said he received a call the other day about the ATV running up and down the streets and he assured the caller that Buddy Kast has provided the rider an ATV safety course and all necessary safety equipment.

Buddy Kast said all of that had been provided.

Councilman Conley said Buddy Kast had told council if they had a problem with any of the town vehicles to get him a tag number and contact him. He was out the other day and had a problem with one but the only thing is when he caught up with the vehicle he could

not read the back tag because it was torn up so bad. If he had passed the vehicle he would have risked a speeding ticket.

Buddy Kast said he must be talking about the crew-cab truck.

Councilman Conley said it was a crew cab with a damaged right-rear fender.

Buddy Kast said that vehicle is assigned to buildings and grounds.

Councilman Conley said the tag is hard to read if it is not there.

Buddy Kast said they beat it to death all the time because that vehicle is used constantly to pull trailers and they have changed that tag out several times.

Councilman Conley said his truck is used to pull trailers too. He has pulled boats, campers, jet skis, and other things but his tag is not torn up. It just takes some extra steps or someone at the back guiding you. He hopes and prays that the town police force is not turning a blind eye to any violations being had by town employees.

Councilmember Thwaites asked Councilman Conley why he would think they are?

Councilman Conley said because an unreadable tag is a violation.

Councilmember Thwaites said that does not draw the conclusion that they are not doing their job.

Councilman Conley said he just hopes they are not.

Buddy Kast said he would tell them to get the tag changed and advise them to be more careful. If nothing else they will mount the tag to the top of the tailgate so it does not get torn up.

Councilman Conley said fleet vehicles bring more at auction the better shape they are in.

Councilman Turner said a lot of these vehicles are also used off road.

Mayor Davis asked about water loss.

Buddy Kast said he could not report water loss for January because of the issue with a few meters, especially the one at the campground. He should have these numbers by the next council meeting.

Councilmember Bowles told Buddy Kast she appreciates his crew keeping the streets and sidewalks clear during the recent snowstorms.

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

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, Thwaites, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

Mayor Davis said an email was received from former councilman Tom Garrett. He stated that due to the potential increase in minimum wage by the federal government (to \$15/hour) it would cause taxes to go up. He would like to request that letters be sent on the town's behalf to Senator Kaine and Senator Warner to ask they oppose this increase. Mayor Davis is asking for letters to be sent to all representatives concerning this. He would like council's approval for this.

Councilman Conley said on May 1st the town will have to adjust the salaries of 5 employees over the Virginia minimum wage law because it is going up to \$9.50/hour. On January 1st, 2022, the minimum wage will increase to \$11.00/hour. In 2023 it is going up to \$12.00/hour.

All council members agreed with this.

Councilman Goorskey said he does not know if larger entities can handle these increases.

Communication from Mayor and Council

Councilman Goorskey said he attended his first PSA meeting. The garbage rates will be going up soon (\$1.00/ton) and this will affect the town to a degree. They discussed locating a water source for the eastern end of the county. The county will be getting their hands on some portable treatment plants, which are extremely expensive. The county will be getting them at a lower cost. The springs at Pembroke are potentially tapping into a mine, there is a tremendous amount of water there. All of that does not affect us directly but in the unforeseen event of low water we do have other water sources on this side of the county. No one should be fighting for water down the road. The PSA is also asking the town to use different forms when someone signs up for water. They want each entity to use the same form. When someone signs up for water in Narrows their information is sent to the county and the PSA. He believes the only change they want is for a box to be placed on the form that the customer will check to signify they are aware they are also signing up for trash service. They would also like for this to be a three-part carbon copy form and we keep one part and pass on the other two. In today's time he does not know why they cannot scan a document and email it. This will probably be talked about at the next PSA meeting.

Susan Kidd said she would like for Councilman Goorskey to suggest they not use the three-part form because those are expensive to get printed.

Councilman Conley asked if the PSA discussed anything on the river-withdrawal project?

Councilman Goorskey said no. He can ask about it at the next meeting.

Councilman Conley said he would like to know where they are at on it.

Mayor Davis asked if that was still an issue? He thought they were not even looking at that any longer.

Buddy Kast said they put it aside and are looking at alternate sites. He believes they did purchase the permit in case they have to go to river withdrawal.

Mayor Davis said he wanted to thank the town for the snow removal. They have been out night and day. He would like to thank all town employees for their hard work, especially during the pandemic.

Mayor Davis asked Buddy Kast how the town was on supplies for snow removal?

Buddy Kast said New River Equipment Rental has the salt they need so they are good on supplies.

Councilmember Bowles said she has been looking for sponsors for hanging baskets that would go up on Main Street. She knows brackets would be an up-front cost.

Buddy Kast said they have brackets for each of the poles for the hanging baskets and when they had them they only put baskets on every other pole. At that time, it got to where no one wanted to sponsor them so they did away with them. It took about 2 hours every other day to water them and when they died they had to be replaced.

Councilmember Bowles asked if the town still had any of the baskets?

Buddy Kast said no.

Councilmember Bowles said if they could get sponsorship for them it would make a great statement for the town.

Councilmember Bowles said she has spoken with Jennifer Clark and they would like to come up with a competition, post COVID, such as each restaurant coming up with their own taco. There would probably have to be some street closure for this.

Buddy Kast said the only entity they would have to worry about would be the state for Route 100 and Monroe Street. The internal streets belong to the town and they can advertise their closures on Facebook.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said he has to apply for the permits to close Route 100 and/or Monroe Street and that usually takes 2-3 weeks to get back.

Dakota Shrader said they could do this on the first day of park season to draw people to the park.

Councilmember Bowles said she has been talking to some community members, and to Susan Kidd, regarding kids that are not in extra-curricular sports or academia so there is nothing for them to do. She has been trying to get in touch with Giles Little Theater and trying to bring some of that down here. She would like to have a group of parents to talk to and find out something to offer the kids that they would be interested in. She would

like for council to think about that and she will hopefully have some more information at the next meeting.

New Business

Dakoda Shrader said he received Councilman Conley's email concerning DWR wildlife viewing at Mill Creek. He asked Councilman Conley to elaborate on that.

Councilman Conley said this past year the Department of Wildlife Resources underwent some changes and they publish a brochure and he thought they could be contacted to add Mill Creek to the brochure. He could contact them if Dakoda Shrader wants him to.

Councilmember Bowles said council has a flyer in their packets advertising #shopped24124. This is to market local businesses. The way it will work is if you purchase items at a business in town you would take a picture of the item(s) you purchased, along with the receipt, and post it to social media with the hashtag #shopped24124. You will be entered into a drawing and the winners will be announced at council meetings. This is free advertising for our town businesses.

Lindsey Caudill said she is going to advertise this on the town's Facebook page and there is a letter in council packets that was sent to town businesses.

Councilman Goorskey asked if someone that did not have social media could come by the rec dept and have their picture taken?

Lindsey Caudill said yes.

Councilmember Bowles said she would like to give a shout out to Kelcie Lowe and Anna Frazier for coming up with the hashtag for this.

Councilmember Thwaites asked about businesses that do not have a storefront, such as Brittany Cook Photography?

Lindsey Caudill said they can participate as well.

Susan Kidd said the Compensation Survey System is the first step in working toward a salary scale. The cost is based on population so our cost would be \$100-\$150/year for a subscription. She and Debbie Thomas would have to enter all of the salary and benefit information but once it is in there they can query based on size, position, and various other topics. Once the information is entered it would have to be updated every year. There is also a person that can possibly help us come up with a salary scale. She would like to know if council is interested in doing this.

Councilman Goorskey said he thinks this would be great.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the cost for joining the Compensation Survey System. Councilmember Thwaites seconded the motion.
Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, Conley, Bowles, and Turner
Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Unfinished Business

Buddy Kast said Roger Browning has contacted him and wants to know if the old Christmas decorations can be rebuilt. He told him this would be difficult and they should be sold at surplus. They need someone to give some general direction for this and he would like to see a committee formed.

Mayor Davis said a couple of years ago Judy Moulder and Emily Clem volunteered to go through the lights to check them and see what worked and what did not.

Councilman Turner said he would like to start doing that again.

Mayor Davis said council needs to act on the easement at 122 MacArthur Lane.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the easement at 122 MacArthur Lane and designate Mayor Davis or Susan Kidd to sign the agreement. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, Thwaites, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Matters for Consideration by Council

Debbie Thomas said council is being asked to retain Mary K. Earhart, CPA for our pre-audit.

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to approve retaining Mary K. Earhart, CPA for the town's pre-audit services. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, Thwaites, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Buddy Kast said Peed & Bortz, LLC have sent an agreement to be between themselves and the Town of Narrows. This would help alleviate some of the technicalities under the state code pertaining to the procurement act. An engineer would have to be procured to use their services so this agreement states they would be our engineer if we should have a technical question and we would not have to go through the procurement process. This will not cost anything unless we call them and ask for their help.

Mike Bedsaul said under the procurement act there is an exception for the provision for localities with a population of less than 3,500. He has never run into anything like this before and it is almost like they are trying to keep an ongoing relationship with the town. It states it is "non-exclusive", which means the town can submit a request for proposal in lieu of using their services.

Buddy Kast said most localities have already done this. This will be great to have if we have a technical question.

Councilmember Thwaites asked Mike Bedsaul if he had any issues with the document?

Mike Bedsaul said it seems to contemplate a non-exclusive relationship and he does not believe the town will be bound to use them. The portion that discusses items owned by Peed & Bortz, LLC probably also needs to include the town.

Buddy Kast said he does not need a motion for this tonight but this could save us some money down the road.

Councilmember Thwaites said Mike Bedsaul can look the agreement over and suggest changes.

Susan Kidd said it is time to update the town's comprehensive plan. The last time it was adopted was March 2016. This is the same agreement we had last time with New River Valley Regional Commission. They charge us about half the cost and the other half is paid by the Appalachian Regional Commission through a grant they have. She did talk to them about spreading it over 3 years and the town has \$2,500 in this year's budget to start it. The cost for the main part of it would be in the FY22 budget (\$7,000) and the final \$2,500 would be in the FY23 budget. These usually take from 1 ½ to 2 years to complete.

Councilman Conley asked if they are actually doing what they say in this agreement? Are they actually having all of the meetings?

Susan Kidd said they will if we agree to it.

Councilman Conley asked if they did it under the past agreement?

Susan Kidd said yes. The town is required to update this plan every 5 years. This is in conjunction with the planning commission.

Councilman Conley said he must be new to this because he wonders if the benefits outweigh the cost.

Susan Kidd said as far as the update they have no choice; it has to be updated. Any grants we use and any money we go after will have to refer to this comprehensive plan. The last time this was done they had to recreate the whole thing. This update should not take as long.

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to approve the task order between the Town of Narrows and the New River Valley Regional Commission pertaining to the comprehensive plan update. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, Conley, Bowles, and Turner

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Police Chief Ratcliffe said budget season is coming up and Susan Kidd had directed all department heads to begin working on their budgets. He called the gentleman he orders his vehicles through and he advised him that with COVID-19 the cutoff date for ordering

2021 Dodge fleet vehicles will be April 8th. If a vehicle is not ordered by then the next time they could order would be a 2022 vehicle and they do not know when production will begin for those. It could be October 2021 or later. He really needs to replace this vehicle and they try to replace a vehicle every year. Dodge Durango's are cheaper than Ford Explorer's and the Charger is no longer made with an engine that would suffice.

Councilman Conley asked Police Chief Ratcliffe if they have mileage limits on the police vehicles or do they replace them when they wear out?

Police Chief Ratcliffe said they replace them when they wear out. This will be paid out of the FY22 budget.

Councilmember Thwaites made a motion to approve the order of a town police car to be paid out of the FY22 budget. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, Thwaites, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

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

Ayes: Goorskey, Thwaites, Conley, Bowles, and Turner

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, John G. Davis