

Narrows Town Council Meeting June 14, 2021

Mayor Tom Spangler called the meeting to order. Council Members present were Clyde Turner, Sara Bowles (arrived late), George Conley, and Joe Goorskey. Sarah Thwaites was absent.

Staff members present were Lindsey Caudill, John Davis, Susan Kidd, Cindy Laws, Jeff Perdue, Chris Reynolds, Dakota Shrader, Joe Spears, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Mayor Spangler gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Drawing for #shopped24124

This drawing will be held at the June 21st council meeting.

Public Hearing

Susan Kidd said the budget was advertised in the local paper and the budget total is \$3,970,335.55. There are no tax rate changes.

Mayor Spangler opened the public hearing for the FY21-22 budget. Are there any public comments?

Tom Garrett asked if the cigarette tax was going to be raised as was discussed in budget meetings?

Susan Kidd said the public hearing did not make it into the local newspaper as anticipated so that will be discussed at the June 21st council meeting.

Mayor Spangler closed the public hearing.

Council Recognition

Mayor Spangler said a recognition will now be presented for an employee that was with the Town of Narrows for many years and is a special guy.

Councilman Goorskey said he feels humbled and undeserving to present the plaque tonight. He understands that Buddy Kast is not in the room, and he still feels inadequate in presenting this. He said when he first came to work at Giles County, he learned very quickly that if he came down to ask Buddy Kast a question, he better have at least an hour on his hands. Buddy tried to fill in the gaps with such an immense amount of knowledge on so many topics and gave so freely of his time, his laughter, and gave many years of service to the town. It was an honor and a privilege to have met him and to have

worked with him. He wishes Buddy Kast were present so he could hand the plaque to him. The plaque states:

Presented to James "Buddy" Kast in appreciation for 20 years of dedication and service to the Town of Narrows and the citizens of Narrows, Virginia. His dates of service were 5/15/2001 to 3/31/2021. He will never be able to be replaced and he will always be missed.

Approval of May 10th Meeting Minutes

Councilman Goorskey said the minutes should be changed to say that "Vice Mayor Joe Goorskey called the meeting to order".

Debbie Thomas said she would make that correction.

Councilman Turner made a motion to approve the May 10th meeting minutes.

Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Consent Agenda

Councilman Goorskey told Cindy Laws he was glad to see the summer reading program at the library was fully funded.

Cindy Laws said 14 children signed up for the program the very first day.

Councilman Turner made a motion to accept the consent agenda. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

Susan Kidd said Howard and Karen Nippert with Hank Renovations have asked for a reduced water rate. They recently completed construction of a new home at 601 Williams Street and the home is now for sale. They are asking for a reduced water rate since they are not using water at that site. Tasha Riddle recommends that if a reduced rate is given it would be to charge them for water only up to 1,000 gallons and if it goes over that amount to activate a new sewer code and charge them a regular monthly billing for water and sewer.

John Davis said Howard and Karen Nippert have renovated around 15 houses in town. He would like to see them have the reduced water rate.

Councilman Conley said his concern is that during the pandemic churches and other organizations did not use a drop of water because they were shut down. No relief was given to them. How long do they want relief for?

John Davis said he is not asking for relief from now on. They want a discount on the water bill until the house is sold and they have it disconnected in their name.

Councilman Goorskey said he appreciated what the Nippert's have done in this town. They have pulled a lot of houses out of the gutter and boosted property value. He also wonders how many other houses are in a similar vacant state and council would have to explain why they could not offer the same reduced rate to them.

Councilman Turner made a motion to offer a reduced rate for water for Howard and Karen Nippert.

Mike Bedsaul said he does not know what the reduced rate would be but if council would like to move forward with this, part of the motion could state a certain period of time. There probably needs to be a specific rate.

Councilman Turner said council needs something in writing showing them what the reduced rate is the Nippert's are asking for. This could be voted on at that time.

Councilman Turner rescinded his motion.

Councilman Goorskey said he would also like to see something in writing concerning this and he would like to know how this would affect anyone that comes into town to do business. Would they be setting a precedence they would have to continually follow from here on out?

Mike Bedsaul said they may certainly be questioned as to why they did it for one and not for all.

Mayor Spangler said this discussion will be tabled until the next council meeting.

Dakoda Shrader said he will be leaving employment with the Town of Narrows August 1st, 2021. He would like to thank council and the town for giving him the opportunity to work for the town. Susan Kidd has been a great boss: they will never find anyone else like her. Debbie Thomas is also great to work with, as well as the rest of the employees. He has enjoyed every minute working for the town. The town has a great group of employees, and they should be appreciated while they have them. They will never find a group of employees as good as the ones they have now.

Councilman Goorskey thanked Dakoda Shrader for his service to the town. He has given 100% every time. He came to the town at a rough time and encountered an even rougher time when COVID struck. He continued to find ways to move forward with the rec. dept. and it was much needed and appreciated.

Councilman Conley told Dakoda Shrader that he will be missed.

John Davis thanked Dakota Shrader for his service to the town. He did an excellent job in a tough situation.

John Davis said he would like to speak to mayor and council about some things that are being said about town employees by Councilman George Conley. He has made it known that his agenda is to get rid of all the town employees, he does now know which ones he is talking about, but all of the town employees. He has called the town employees crooks and thieves. He has told these things to people outside of the town office, some live in town and some do not, and it is not right. It is not right for a public figure to be talking about town employees. These are false accusations. He said he started out in construction years ago in Narrows. He has worked for the late Jerry Frazier, the late Ray Neely, and Joe Muncy. He worked for the rec. dept. in Narrows and for 3 sheriffs and not once has he been accused of stealing anything, being a thief, and has never been investigated for anything. Susan Kidd has worked in public service for over 20 years and has never been investigated for being a thief. Debbie Thomas has worked in public service for 15 years with 4 of those being at the Town of Glen Lyn and has never been investigated for being a thief. Jeff Perdue has worked for the town since 1995 and has never been investigated for being a thief. Police Chief Benji Ratcliffe has worked for the town for over 20 years and has never been investigated for being a thief. It is not right that Councilman George Conley is talking to the public about town employees like he is, especially since he is an elected official. There have been things said about father/son working as supervisor/employee. If you make Jeff Perdue mad and he leaves, this town is in trouble. This man knows everything about every valve, every water line, every sewer line, everything that goes on in this town and he is fed up. Employees are scared to go to the store and get a bottle of pop because Councilman George Conley said he saw them at Burger King or they do not need to be at the store in a backhoe and various other things. Adults are coming to John Davis to ask him if they can stop and get a bottle of pop after they have used a weed eater for the last 3 hours. Employees are scared to death because they are being accused of things. It has been said that Councilman George Conley has stated that when something is ordered 2 of them are ordered and 1 of them is going home with someone. Employees do a purchase order on everything they purchase, and council can be assured that no one is taking 1 home. Our employees are not perfect but until there is something to go on there will not be an investigation on these employees. He would like for Councilman George Conley to be removed from his seat on council, but he cannot do that.

Councilman Conley asked John Davis if he had any dates, times, and witnesses that said these things?

John Davis said yes, he does.

Councilman Conley asked John Davis if he could get those things together for him?

John Davis said no he will not. The people concerned have asked not to be brought up.

Councilman Conley said he would like to read something from the April 21st, 2021 budget work session. This is verbatim and is public record:

Councilman Conley said he understands the increase but he also understands the need for some accountability.

Vice Mayor Goorskey asked Councilman Conley if he was suggesting some of the items at the town shop are leaving?

Councilman Conley said yes he is, he saw one leave the other day. An item was placed in a man's personal truck. It came out of a town truck and was thrown into his own truck. Whether it was stolen or borrowed he does not know. He does not know the town's policy on loaning tools.

Vice Mayor Goorskey said before we make accusations he would like to see a process done. Those are pretty serious accusations.

Councilman Conley said he is not accusing anyone.

Vice Mayor Goorskey said Councilman Conley did just accuse someone.

Councilmember Thwaites said they also had someone accuse a town employee of driving a backhoe to get a biscuit and in the end they found out it was not our equipment.

Susan Kidd said when things happen it is hard to follow up on them a week or two later. If someone could be called when it happens then it can be investigated. It is difficult to go back three weeks later and reconstruct something.

Vice Mayor Goorskey said they also had a report of a town truck with bad lights on it and it turned out it was not a town truck. They are hearing a lot of accusations that need to be investigated as soon as possible, as quickly as possible, and as thoroughly as possible before they say it is definitely something the town is doing wrong.

Councilmember Thwaites said perhaps it would be prudent to not wait until a council meeting if she saw something that she wanted to have addressed.

Councilman Conley asked if there was a loaner program for town tools?

Susan Kidd said employees can borrow town tools and then return them.

Councilman Conley said the employee may have simply been borrowing them.

Councilman Conley said he does not know where these accusations come from. He is not resigning from council, and he will not be silenced: that is his right. Anyone including a council member or a citizen in this town that sees something and has a reason to believe it is not right has the right to come to him, any council member, or mayor and report it at any time. It may not be what it seems. That is what he said in the minutes.

John Davis said he was not talking about what he said in the minutes.

Councilman Conley said he did not accuse anybody of anything. He does not know how much plainer he could have been. With that being said he believes they know his position.

Councilman Goorskey asked Councilman Conley if it was true that he would rather not have Susan Kidd be employed by the town and several other employees. Does he have intentions of seeing that some town employees are no longer employed by the town?

Councilman Conley said no, they need the employees of the town. He would rather have a town manager that lives in town according to the charter. He has always said that. He believes the town manager should live within the town limits as is written in the town charter. He has never said anything about firing all town employees.

Councilman Goorskey asked Councilman Conley if he believed there was criminal activity going on within the town involving town employees that needs to be investigated?

Councilman Conley said he had no idea.

Councilman Goorskey said there are some very good pointers in the VMLA handbook for mayors and council members on how they should act and speak individually. The council body is the only body that can make decisions. His words can create an environment that is toxic for people to work in and that is a detriment to the town. If he receives feedback that something he is doing or saying is causing the employees of this town to not want to come to work and to not want to be sitting in this room and to not want to be doing their jobs he should probably check what he is doing and see if there is another way to ask this question or get this information. He knows that when he says something and he has an insinuation behind it that it needs to be looked into then it is taken with a heavier grain of salt. If he were to call John Davis and tell him he believes more weed eating needs to be done in a certain area of town he cannot do that on his own. That would have to be an action of council. If John Davis takes that action and someone gets hurt, he could possibly have some liability there because he did not act as a council body. John Davis may wonder if there are 2 other council members wanting him to do this or 3 other council members not wanting him to do this. The same thing would go for asking John Davis or Susan Kidd for certain reports, these would need to be asked for as a council body. They should be very careful with their words and the people they speak to.

John Mills said he has been in the public eye for 27 years of his career in Giles County. The relationship between the governing body and their staff is sacred. He has been the recipient of "rogue" board members and it is ugly. As staff, the only protection that he ever had was working for Chris McKlarney, who is one of the finest men he has ever known. Mr. McKlarney stood between John Mills and the people like Councilman Goorskey was speaking of who tried to get him to break the law. That relationship has to be solid. There is a right way and an improper way to seek information, to deliver information, and to act on information. He has been a supervisor his whole career and has dealt with things concerning tools and their garage and each situation is different. He would not allow employees to take tools home but if that is town policy that is all right. Communication, or the lack of it, is where most of our problems arise. What he has heard

tonight troubles him as a citizen and a taxpayer of this town. They must, as council and staff, find a means to come together. During his career he never assumed his employees were guilty. He always assumed they were innocent and always defended them until proven otherwise. There is always more to the story in Giles County. There were 2 unpardonable sins in his supervisory agenda: you did not steal from him, and you did not lie to him. If you did either of those things you would lose your job. Council holds great influence over the employees of the town. He thanked council for their time and their attention.

Councilman Turner said he wanted to commend John Davis on his job so far with the town. The town has not looked any better than it does right now. If there are any issues with any employee of this town it should be brought up in council chambers, not discussed with the public. He asked John Davis to thank all of his employees for the work they have done and are doing.

Councilmember Bowles said she is from the belief that if you want to get something done you put some grit into it. She said from the time she moved here she loves this town and it is filled with wonderful people. She feels like if there is a problem it should be approached through support. That will always be her first approach. She enjoys having her hands in the dirt and doing things here and she would encourage people to also do this and give back. If anyone has free time come with her to the park and help water flowers. She thanked the town employees for everything they do.

Councilman Goorskey said he cannot act on what other people have heard or seen. He appreciates the work that is done in town by its employees, and he appreciates the willingness to answer questions even when they are hard or not hard. If he had the question as to why there are not more businesses in town or why a flag is not up, he will find out from town employees because there is a wealth of knowledge in this room. He knows he has received an answer to every question he has asked so far. He will not sit idle and if he hears that the town is being degraded and town employees are being demeaned, he must stand up and say something. He has heard comments from voting members in this town that they would like for Councilman Conley to resign. He is not asking that he is simply reporting that. He spoke to Councilman Conley earlier and asked him the same questions he has tonight and has received the same answers he has tonight. He would like to say he appreciates all town employees and appreciates the work they do. He would like to suggest that town employees patronize the stores in town to grab a bottle of pop after they have ran a weed eater or anything else they may have done. It is the supervisor's job to tell the employee if they are abusing that privilege. That is their job, and he is going to let them do their job.

Debbie Thomas said she is not only treasurer but also a town resident and a taxpayer. She worked at Celanese for 20 years as a laborer. During those 20 years she came to realize employees there were berated for what they did wrong but never commended for what they did right. There are some council members that have stated an employee was doing something wrong but in the next instance they were commending them for a job they did correctly. There are some council members that have only berated employees. While employees do need to hear when they do wrong, they also need to hear a thank you when something is done correctly. She has a habit of thanking someone for doing something for her. When she first came to work for the town, she thanked one of the employees for

helping her and was told “you do not have to thank them, that is what they get paid for”. She does not believe that, and she hopes no one on council thinks that. Just a simple “thank you” can go a long way. Our pay and benefits are important to us, but a morale boost is also important.

Mayor Spangler said there are differences of opinion and miscommunication but as adults we need to find a way to address those concerns, regardless of who it is, without making people aware of a situation that does not need to be made aware of it. He would like to see everyone work together, come up with viable solutions, and everyone be friends. There will be events in the future that may need some kind of intervention and when that happens it will be dealt with. He appreciates all of the concerns and comments that everyone has made tonight. These issues need to be dealt with in a professional manner.

Communications from Mayor and Council

Councilman Goorskey said the PSA is very well managed and very well handled. The biggest item being discussed this month is concerning an eastern-end water source, which is Pembroke Springs. They have a mobile water filtration system (water treatment plant). They may potentially tap into the water in the lost mine if that is a possibility. It is very expensive, and they would have to buy property next to the mine property and drill down. Pembroke Springs is easier to get to. The Town of Pembroke holds the rights to that water and would like to receive substantial compensation for that. The question he has not received an answer to yet is what the initial setup would cost at Pembroke, initial payments if any, what are the yearly payments to Pembroke for the use of that water, and at what point does that outgrow the initial setup cost at the lost mine site. There may also be some claim to the water at the lost mine site. He still has a lot of questions. He knows they need a backup plan for water on that end of the county, but they do not need to pay more for it than they have to because it is a secondary source.

Mayor Spangler said he would like to commend Councilmember Bowles on the work that was done for the flowers in town.

Councilmember Bowles said Lindsey Caudill and town employees help with the watering of the flowers.

Carolyn Kirby said growing up in Narrows was filled with memories for her. (The letter she read is attached to these minutes) She created a Facebook fundraiser to raise money to replace the Christmas lights on the bridge. The total she collected is \$3,065.13 and she is presenting it to council tonight. She looks forward to seeing the lights in November.

John Davis said the buildings and grounds supervisor has the quote for the bridge lights. There was one strand on the bridge that did not work because of something that AEP had to fix. It is still not fixed and may not be fixed by the time the lights are put up this year. He has contacted them numerous times to have the switch fixed. They are also having an issue with AEP not replacing streetlights that have burned out in town.

Mayor Spangler said the town is very grateful for the money given to the town and the Christmas lights have always been a big part of town. The town needs to make a diligent effort to come up with the funds to replace the lights.

Councilmember Bowles said she would like to propose that the first 45 minutes of the July council meeting be held at the town park so that kids that have played in Narrows sports programs can be recognized.

Mayor Spangler asked John Davis if this created a problem for him?

John Davis said no but he does not know about having part of the meeting there.

Mike Bedsaul said a council meeting can be held anywhere they want to; it just has to be advertised. They could give notice and hold part of the meeting at the park, adjourn the meeting to 15 minutes later to let everyone get back to council chambers, and finish the rest of the meeting. They could potentially hold the entire meeting at the park. The meeting could also begin at 6:00 p.m. instead of 7:00 p.m.

Councilman Goorskey asked if anyone had anything against having the entire council meeting at the park? These kids need to be recognized.

Tom Garrett asked for someone to contact the school board and see if it could be held in the auditorium. That could be an alternative.

Councilmember Bowles said she would check on that.

Susan Kidd said they can check with the high school and then take a vote at the June 21st council meeting.

New Business

Susan Kidd said council had asked for information on developing a hiring panel/policy. The current policy, which is in the town's personnel handbook, has been given to council. She also checked with other localities on their hiring panel/policy and the only one that has one is the Town of Pearisburg. Their policy gives authorization to appoint/employee, dismiss, etc. to the Town Manager and their charter grants authority to the town manager by consent of council. She has included the portion of the town code and town charter that deal with hiring. The Weldon Cooper handbook states "...council is responsible for hiring a limited number of staff, with the remainder under the 'hire and fire' control of the chief administrative officer...". "One of the most important duties of the manager is to hire and supervise municipal employees (the organization's most valuable resource)."

Councilman Conley said he would like to thank Susan Kidd for the information she provided. He believes it will help them to go forth with a policy now they can hopefully all agree on.

Susan Kidd said she emailed council information on the ARPA funds to be received by the town, which will be a little over \$1 million now and \$1 million a year later. Debbie Thomas said in some of the webinars she has taken that amount could change. They have to send in information, and they can readjust that amount but so far it has been adjusted.

If they approve this, she would also ask that they approve her signing on behalf of the town. This has to be sent in by tomorrow.

Councilman Goorskey asked where the money will go, how will it be shown, does it go into the general fund? How do they keep track of it and what can it be spent for?

Mike Bedsaul said it will go into the budget and if it increases the budget by more than 1% they will have to hold a public hearing. Once the money is received council can determine what it will be spent for.

Mayor Spangler said in reading some of the FAQ's concerning the ARPA funds there was a question as to what water/sewer projects it could be spent on. If the water/sewer projects they are speaking of do not qualify does that raise any concerns?

Susan Kidd said they need to make sure whatever they use the funds for qualifies for what it can be used for or they have to pay the money back.

Mayor Spangler said this is a fantastic thing for the town.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to accept the ARPA funds and authorize Susan Kidd to sign on the town's behalf. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Susan Kidd said Giles County has sent a variance request for 463 Poplar Street, which is in the county but adjoins town property. John Davis has taken a look at it and they want to have a shorter setback for their property line in order to build a bathroom.

Mike Bedsaul said this is just information for the town. The county will be hold a public hearing for this and council can have some feedback on it if they so desire.

Councilman Goorskey said he has no problem with this type of variance. The building code takes care of the property-line distance and allows you to be within 5 feet of your property line as long as you are building with certain materials. Setbacks help mitigate the possible risk of fire.

Unfinished Business

None.

Matters for Consideration by Council

Susan Kidd said the Twin Depot Parkway began in 2017 and council approved a resolution supporting a designated route between the train station building in Tazewell and the one in Narrows. They were built in 1927 and 1928 and are exact duplicates of each other. This was a coordinated effort with the counties of Bland, Tazewell, Giles, and the towns of Narrows and Tazewell and was submitted to the general assembly for approval. It was postponed in 2018 by the general assembly and then in 2019 VDOT took

it up as a request for a scenic byway designation. A year and a half later they denied that request, feeling it was not scenic enough to be a byway. VDOT in Tazewell has taken it up again and now it is deemed commemorative, such as a highway or a bridge. They would like to have Route 61 designated as the Twin Depot Parkway. Tazewell County, the Town of Tazewell, and Bland County have approved it and Giles County has it on their agenda to approve this week. The Town of Narrows would agree to pay for any signage, and it is estimated to be less than \$500.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the Twin Depot Parkway resolution. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to go into executive session to discuss Personnel Matters (Sec. 2.2-3711.A.1) and Real Property (Sec. 2.2-3711-A.3).

Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to return to open session. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

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 Goorskey made a motion to accept the certification. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to set a meeting for June 21st, 2021 to approve the FY22 budget. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Bowles, Conley, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Mayor Spangler adjourned the meeting.

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler