

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
August 9, 2021**

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

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

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Pastor Ricky Green with United We Stand Ministries gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Hearing

Mayor Spangler opened the public hearing to propose an amendment to the FY21-22 budget. This would be to add the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

Susan Kidd said they need an amendment to add the ARPA funds to the budget. The amount to amend is \$1,012,616.00. There have been no comments from the public.

Mayor Spangler closed the public hearing.

Councilmember Mills made a motion to approve the budget amendment for the ARPA funds in the amount of \$1,012,616.00. Councilman Conley seconded the motion:

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, and Mills

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Approval of June 12th and June 20th Meeting Minutes

Councilman Conley made a motion to approve the June 12th and June 20th meeting minutes. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, and Mills

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Consent Agenda

Councilman Conley said he would like to thank Police Chief Ratcliffe on his arrest dealing with Schedule II narcotics.

(Councilman Goorskey arrived)

Councilman Goorskey asked where they were at on addressing the issues with the splash pad?

Susan Kidd said Lindsey Caudill spoke with them, she is on vacation this week, and she is waiting on their reply. She will follow up with her.

Councilman Goorskey said he believes there are two buckets that are not working now. Has the parks and rec committee met since the last council meeting?

Councilmember Bowles said yes.

Councilman Goorskey asked if they had been discussing the fall festival?

Councilmember Bowles said yes. They are going to have a Green Wave Night at the park and have been discussing plans to do renovations at the park in the future. They are hoping to acquire an adaptive swing set.

Councilman Goorskey asked if Landon Patteson can be given some of the details concerning the money that was borrowed for the Lurich Ballfield and that fundraising should begin as soon as possible?

Councilmember Bowles said that Landon Patteson has a very creative idea for fundraising that has an extremely low overhead. It should be very profitable.

Councilman Goorskey said he is continually asked when they are going to have tournaments at the ballfield such as kick ball, flag football, and softball. We can generate revenue for this and sell concessions. This is how the loan was going to be paid for. Has anyone looked at how to open the window at the concession stand?

Susan Kidd said she is sure there is a way to do it, but they need to make sure no one can break into it. That is the way people go in.

Councilman Goorskey asked about the downtown revitalization and the work SimCon is doing.

Susan Kidd said SimCon did show up this afternoon. They are doing the site work in the back parking lot and the area around the dentist's office. No one bid on the façade work, but business owners can do the work themselves and the grant will pay for the materials. The others will be put out to bid with the outfitter building next week.

Councilman Goorskey asked if anyone had asked John Davis why they are at 39% water loss?

Susan Kidd said they had two more huge water leaks last week.

Councilman Mills said he spoke with John Davis, and they all have confidence in his knowledge and his ability. Money is always an issue with local government, but he believes it would be money well spent if they could set up some training for John Davis concerning the zoning ordinance. He has had training concerning the zoning ordinance and, for him, it was very helpful. This zoning business can get the town in big trouble, and it never goes away.

Councilmember Bowles made a motion to accept the consent agenda. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Presentation: New River Valley Housing Study (attached)

Jennifer Wilsie presented New River Valley Housing study. (A copy is attached to the back of these minutes).

While Jennifer Wilsie was presenting, there was some discussion with Councilman Mills and Councilman Goorskey.

Jennifer Wilsie said nearly 21% of households spend more than 30% of income on housing so that puts them in a category they call being "cost burdened". If a household is spending more than 30%, they are starting to make tradeoffs for other things in their life. If it is close to the 30%, they are not making huge sacrifices but when they start to get where they are severely cost burdened, around 50%, they may be bringing home a paycheck and ½ of it is immediately gone toward housing. That can bring on more severe sacrifices because they may be deciding between paying for housing and groceries, certain utilities, or paying for a car.

Councilman Mills asked how that 21% number stacks up with some counties they work with?

Jennifer Wilsie said she does not believe it is very off base. She believes it is in that range for different reasons.

Councilman Goorskey said he is looking at the maximum affordable house price and how that equates to why they have an older home base. Even at \$191,000 you cannot build a house for that.

Jennifer Wilsie said they will be discussing this later but some of it is demand and some of it is upkeep.

Jennifer Wilsie said a “healthy” market vacancy rate is between 2-7%. The lower the rate, the less housing is available. The higher the rate, there are too many vacant homes. The market vacancy is 3% region-wide and is as low as <1% in Giles County.

Councilman Goorskey asked what happens when the availability of homes is that low? What is the negative side of that?

Jennifer Wilsie said there are a lot of times where it is strangling some of your economic development growth. You cannot expand a business; companies cannot thrive and flourish when they recruit talent because they cannot feel confident that the new employee would find a house.

Councilman Mills said the comment was made that a house cannot be built for \$191,000. With the escalation of building materials, even if someone is holding their profit margin flat people cannot afford it and that is why all these people are buying existing stock. It is the better value right now and he does not know how you fix that. Hopefully the prices will come down some day. He knows Covid is to blame for some of this but there are some greedy short-sighted people in this country.

Jennifer Wilsie said they were wrapping this study up at around the time Covid was at its peak so they do not speak to it as heavily as data researchers will in the future. The cost of materials and a labor shortage were already items builders were bringing to the table in 2018 and 2019 to say why they could not sell homes for some of the prices people wanted.

Councilman Goorskey said that is one of the things he is seeing. Today \$191,000 will roughly buy him enough materials to build a 1,300 square foot home and he has not paid anyone to build it yet. It was harder to borrow money to build a new home than it was to renovate an existing home and that may be why there are not as many homes on the market.

Jennifer Wilsie said she feels that sometimes the effects of things takes years to materialize so in that bubble burst of the 2007-2009 timeframe it was not just the buyers that were getting foreclosed on but also the contractors going out of business because the demand plummeted so the trajectory they were on with development took a shortage. This meant they were not putting homes on the ground at the pace they were before.

Councilman Goorskey asked how the county can encourage development?

Jennifer Wilsie said the county would work with consultants to put together visuals for developers so they could have examples to look at. The town/county could populate that pattern book with things they would like to see in the town/county.

Councilman Mills said PUD’s (Planned Unit Developments) are extremely flexible. You take your normal subdivision and zoning regulations, and they have requirements for right-of-way widths, lot sizes, and setbacks. The PUD, in one way, has extreme flexibility and in another way it is a well defined plan that you cannot deviate away from. You may receive some real breaks up front but on the back end if you decide you want to build a certain house you may have to get it reworked. That is where the real definition comes in.

Councilman Goorskey said they would set up their own zoning guidelines within that development.

Jennifer Wilsie said it still must be approved by the governing body.

Councilman Mills said there are a huge number of blighted properties in this town, and this may be something for a later discussion, but one of his strategies will require resolve and tenacity. If they could take care of some of these blighted areas, it would make it nicer for the neighbors. On the flipside, there may be someone that wants to build a spec house so you can give them a place to build one.

Mayor Spangler said there are a lot of blighted properties in town, and most were built back around 1949. What would the interest be for a builder to build in an area where the blighted homes were torn down and there are still some properties left that are not in the best shape?

Jennifer Wilsie said she is only speculating but she feels like a smaller contractor who does not need a lot of work would love places like that. Once a new home is built it may help the homeowner that has a property that is not in the best shape to do some upkeep.

Councilman Mills said we need to let everyone know Narrows is open for business. Narrows could be the next Boone or Blowing Rock if we take initiative and move forward.

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

None.

Communications from Mayor and Council

Councilman Goorskey said he spoke with Kevin Belcher after their last council meeting and expressed his desire to have Thompson and Litton come and speak at a council meeting to explain some details on the connection to our tank for the Clendenin water project. He was told that Celanese will never connect to any town water source, and that could be subject to change, but he does not believe that line would be big enough to feed Celanese. Tom Garrett had a good point because Narrows suffers water loss anyway and this would cause more water to run through our lines so the water loss could potentially be greater. An option for the town could be monetary compensation for water they pull from the well so would it be possible that the PSA help the town maintain a defined level of water loss. If the town hits a water loss of 20% could the PSA use their manpower to help us find the water loss? That could equate to more money in the long run than a certain amount of money every year.

Councilman Mills said that is a tremendous suggestion. Whatever number they assign us is finite but if they would help us fix things that is infinite. It is a gift that keeps on giving.

Councilman Goorskey said partnering with the PSA takes some stress off town employees and our system. He has not heard anything else about the PER for the new water source at Pembroke Springs.

Councilman Conley said Celanese has their own water source so they will never connect to another water source.

Mayor Spangler asked if it was possible to put a flow meter on a section of water line to determine how much water ran through the line and what the town pays for? It should tell if there is significant water loss in a certain area.

Councilman Goorskey said some of what Peed & Bortz will be speaking to council about will be where to install flow meters and how to monitor our system because we need to get into the 21st century to see where our water is going.

Susan Kidd said Jeff Perdue has said we are losing water because he watches the tank levels every day. Part of the problem is when there is a leak it runs into the ground for a certain amount of time and then it finally comes to the top.

Councilman Mills said all our stuff is antiquated and needs to be replaced.

Councilman Goorskey said they need to determine what sections of town need to be fixed first and go from there.

Mayor Spangler said he has had several people ask why they did not have bingo at the town park this year.

Susan Kidd said she believes they did not have it because they did not have enough people to work it.

Debbie Thomas said she heard they did not have it because they let their license lapse and the American Legion may be selling their building.

Mayor Spangler said he noticed on the last revenue and expense report that revenues from camping at Camp Success are up over last year. He believes more people are camping there but the debris that is there needs to be cleaned up.

Susan Kidd said ReNew the New should be able to help with that.

New Business

Susan Kidd said at the last meeting council asked staff to get a quote on flags so they can determine how much to put in the Town Beautification line item.

Councilman Goorskey said he remembered them talking about an estimated lifespan for the flags.

Mike Bedsaul said he believed it was 2-3 years.

Sara Bowles said they want to leave the flags out from Memorial Day to the Fourth of July.

Councilman Mills said he is 1000% in favor of displaying the American Flag and what it stands for.

Sara Bowles said they will have to have more than \$2,000 in this line item to be able to purchase flowers and flags.

Councilman Goorskey said he is in full support of doing this.

Councilman Mills made a motion to add a line item to the town budget under the Buildings & Grounds department for “Town Beautification” in an amount up to \$4,000. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Susan Kidd said she would like to have the New River Valley Regional Commission be administrator of the ARPA funding the town has received. They would be able to keep up with what the funds can and cannot be spent for and that the spending is legal so that the monies will not have to be paid back. They would also oversee reporting the funds to the federal government. She nor Debbie Thomas have time to do this, and the first report is due October 31, 2021. She spoke with Kevin Byrd and he said there are 5 or 6 communities asking them to do this and he is working on a proposal. She is not asking council to decide on this tonight but just wanted them to be aware of it.

Councilman Goorskey said this could stop the rumor mill of people saying the town is spending these funds on anything they want. A whole separate entity could oversee this.

Mike Bedsaul said they should be asked if the ARPA funds could be used to pay the New River Valley Regional Commission's fees.

Unfinished Business

Mike Bedsaul said at the last meeting council took action to publish a list of delinquent real estate taxes. It was also discussed that there were a few businesses that had not purchased/renewed a 2021 business license and the question was asked as to whether that list should also be listed in the newspaper. There is a statute that lists what items can be published in the local paper and those items include taxes but not really services.

Councilman Mills said someone from the town could approach the business owner and let them know they need to purchase/renew their business license.

Mike Bedsaul said in the town code it is a misdemeanor to operate a business without a license. They could look at other means to collect this fee.

Councilman Mills said Police Chief Ratcliffe could approach these businesses to try to get them to pay.

Matters for Consideration by Council

Susan Kidd said there are a few changes the town would like to make to the brush disposal policy. The three changes are: limbs that have been cut by a contractor will not be picked up, the 30-minute limit will go by a calendar year, and the notification time will change to Thursday by 4:30 p.m.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the proposed changes to the brush disposal policy. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Susan Kidd said Landon Patteson would like to change the hours for the Splash Pad/concession stand since there are not that many people coming this time of year. They are going to only be open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Councilmember Goorskey said he wants the Splash Pad to run at its full potential and not to lose any water or be anymore expense. He believes they need to promote the concession stand as much as they can.

Susan Kidd said the town is being asked to remove the rose bushes along Main Street.

Sara Bowles said she called John Davis about them and all of them are about dead. They are located between the social service building and the parking lot in front of the law office.

It was the consensus of council to take them out.

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

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Councilman Conley made a motion to return to open session. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, 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 Mills made a motion to accept the certification. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

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

Ayes: Bowles, Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler