

Narrows Council Retreat
March 8, 2022

Mayor Spangler called the meeting to order. Council members present were Conley, Goorskey, and Mills. Council members absent were Turner and Bowles.

Staff members present were John Davis, Susan Kidd, and Debbie Thomas.

Susan Kidd said they will begin by discussing infrastructure in the town and they will let council make any decisions they deem necessary.

Councilmember Goorskey gave the invocation.

Mayor Spangler thanked everyone for coming.

Councilman Mills said he heard that the town could make a “standard allowance” of up to \$10 million to spend on government services throughout the period of performance.

Debbie Thomas said that is true. Joy Rumley with the New River Valley Planning District Commission recommended creating a spreadsheet listing expenditures in order by importance and listing the cost.

Susan Kidd said they could create this list for the first budget meeting.

John Davis said one of the first things they are going to do concerning the sewer project is to install manhole inserts in all the manholes. Some of them take on a lot of water and this water runs through the sewer plant. They have too much water coming into the plant almost every day and the permit only allows for a certain amount of water. Sewer lines either need to be lined or replaced because there are a lot of old sewer lines in town. The manhole inserts cost anywhere from \$42 to \$75. Most of the lids will be \$42. The town will install all of those. It will not solve the entire problem of infiltration but will be a start. Pearisburg has asked to borrow our monitoring wells and we will come up with a quote for them to be rented. The utility crew is very valuable in finding leaks and keeping things running in the town.

Councilman Mills asked if they could take maps they have of sewer/water lines and add any knowledge they may have to that map?

John Davis said iamGIS shows just about everything related to our sewer system but more needs to be added concerning our water system.

Councilman Mills said the utility crew could add commentary to those areas that have problems.

Susan Kidd said they hired another utility worker to free J.J. Perdue up to do those sorts of things. The town has been short that extra worker for over a year now so J.J. Perdue has not been free to do a lot of that.

Councilman Mills said they could pay an individual overtime to catalog this stuff.

Councilman Goorskey said he agrees with that.

Councilman Conley said he remembers Buddy Kast showing pictures of wooden sewer lines. They need to prioritize these jobs and see that they get done.

Mayor Spangler asked if they still have wooden sewer lines?

John Davis said not to his knowledge.

Councilman Goorskey said they could have wooden water lines.

Councilman Mills said they need to have a tentative date to begin working on this.

Susan Kidd said Peed & Bortz should have those timelines. They should be bringing back a contract to be approved.

John Davis said Peed & Bortz are looking at sewer lines that need attention the most. A big problem area is on high school hill on Sunset Street that runs down to Woodland Avenue and then down toward the cemetery. Another problem area is from Riley Street down through Dingess Street toward Reece's Building Supply.

Councilman Mills asked at what point in time do they receive a cost estimate from their licensed professionals for these repairs?

John Davis said what Peed & Bortz has already presented was around \$600,000 to do the areas with the most problems. That was to do some work to lift stations, some work to pump stations, manhole inserts, refinishing a lot of the manholes themselves, replacing three sewer lines, and putting a roof on the salt house. They are going to add a roof to the chlorine room and the lab at the wastewater treatment plant.

Councilman Goorskey said the prices listed are only cost estimates.

Councilman Mills asked if there was any possibility of taking this money and turning it into more money?

Susan Kidd said ARPA funds cannot be used to match federal funds.

Mayor Spangler said they need to do the underground work with ARPA money and do things such as putting a roof on with town funds. He would like to know how much of a difference there is after the work is done.

John Davis said after the roofs are added the total cost will be around \$650,000.

Mayor Spangler asked if there are backup pumps for the wastewater?

John Davis said there are and Cody Kast has the pumps rebuilt when he can to save the town money.

Councilmember Mills asked what the current condition was and the expected life of the sewer plant?

Susan Kidd said Cody Kast presented her a report. To replace the three RBC units would extend the life of the plant around 20 years. Cody Kast feels replacing those and dealing with the I&I would help. The town is exceeding its permit capacity each month and DEQ is the entity they have to deal with concerning that.

John Davis said the only reason DEQ has not acted on that is that the town is working on fixing the issues.

Susan Kidd said the RBC replacement could be in excess of \$1 million. Cody Kast said because the plant is an RBC plant the town may look at replacing one at a time instead of all three because if you do that you lose the buildup of biological film. This may need to be done with a loan and they may even want to try to get a grant.

John Davis said the RBC's are at their life expectancy now.

Susan Kidd said the employees at the wastewater plant are excellent mechanics and try their best to keep the plant going.

Councilman Conley asked how much a new wastewater plant would cost?

Susan Kidd said probably around \$10-\$15 million.

Councilman Mills asked if they could work with another jurisdiction to get what they need and split the cost or is that farfetched?

John Davis said they have discussed that. Cody Kast's opinion is that they do not want to go in with Pearisburg. Rumor has it that Pearisburg is going to build a new wastewater plant.

Susan Kidd said they built a new plant about a year and a half ago and it does not work.

Councilman Mills said they need to listen to their staff because they are valued but he would also like to know they have exhausted every feasible opportunity to save some money but he would like to get an opinion of an impartial third party. Please articulate they are not disputing our own expert's opinion. He would rather have something to explain to folks that this is why they are doing this and here is why they are doing it this way.

Susan Kidd said a PER could look at options of upgrading the current plant, replacing the current plant, or joining with another locality.

Councilman Goorskey said when they get that information and look at the cost of things, he would be interested to know the type of funds that would be available. They have been talking about borrowing money but what about matching grant money.

Susan Kidd said there are CDBG and DHCD funds for this but she would caution them that in using those funds on water and sewer it would mean them telling the town what their rates have to be.

Councilman Goorskey asked if there were other funding options?

Susan Kidd said maybe.

John Davis said they currently share a camel jet with the Town of Pearisburg. The town has had a lot of trouble going back and forth to Pearisburg to get it because both towns use it frequently. If there is a sewer backup, they do not need to wait 2 hours to go to Pearisburg to pick it up. If Narrows goes to Pearisburg to get it Pearisburg is usually in Narrows by the end of the day to take it back. This week Narrows has had it and used it several times. He has received a quote of \$75,000 for a new camel jet from the same company they purchased the one that is being used now. Narrows does pay into a shared-equipment fund with Pearisburg and even the county uses it sometimes. He would like to recommend that Narrows purchase their own.

Susan Kidd said the town does participate in sharing equipment so what if Narrows approached the shared-equipment group (Narrows, Pearisburg, Giles County) and see if they could go together and purchase one to be housed at Narrows.

Councilman Conley said if you purchase a new one Pearisburg will want both of them.

Councilman Goorskey asked who owned the camel jet we use now?

John Davis said it is in the Town of Pearisburg's name.

Susan Kidd said in the agreement it rotates and whoever houses it owns it and pays the insurance on it.

Councilman Goorskey asked if we could sell the current one to Pearisburg and have a down payment to purchase one of our own?

Susan Kidd said the county is in on that one too.

Councilman Goorskey said they could both pay for it.

Susan Kidd said it would take all three entities to agree to purchasing another one.

Mayor Spangler said they could check to see if the current one could be sold to the town if it is in decent shape.

John Davis said the current camel jet's motor is in decent shape but there has been a lot of wear and tear on it.

Mayor Spangler asked if there was other shared equipment the Town of Narrows pays into that will continued to be paid?

John Davis said yes.

Susan Kidd said Narrows was paying around \$3,000/year toward shared equipment but a few years ago they found out there was enough money in the account that now they pay \$1,500/year plus insurance on equipment they have.

John Davis said Narrows has a bucket truck, actually there are two bucket trucks and they were keeping them both in Pearisburg but now the older bucket truck is in Narrows.

Susan Kidd said if they can buy a second bucket truck why cannot they buy a second camel jet.

Councilmember Mills said to check with Pearisburg and Giles County on purchasing another camel jet.

John Davis said the town needs to replace water meters. The current system is a big lot of their water loss. They have talked to several meter companies and several have come to meet with the town. They found a meter they really like that is an ultrasonic meter and has no moving parts inside and measures the water flow that comes through the meter. They have several different types. There is a drive-by system that reads them like they do now by driving around. There is an AMI system where they have antennas on water tanks and points of contact that read the system and send the readings straight to a computer. This system constantly reads 24-7. They have 250-pound PSI working pressure, 15-year full warranty, and 10-years on the battery and the antennas. He has talked to several people that really like these meters. The meters also have ALD (automatic leak detection) that will detect leaks on the customer's side as well as the town's side and it measures the flow which will alert if there is an issue with the water flow.

Susan Kidd said that would be great because you could tell a customer within one day if they have a leak where now it could be 30 days.

John Davis said the Town of Pearisburg and the Town of Pembroke are looking at purchasing the same type of meter. Giles County is talking about going with the same type of meter when the time comes for replacement. Narrows wants to do an RFP soon to put out bids for receiving quotes for the water meters. This should be our top priority in replacement of infrastructure because there is a lot of leak loss. The leak loss is down from last month and they fixed two big leaks recently.

Mayor Spangler asked John Davis if he has spoken to anyone that is using the meters currently?

John Davis said yes. The company gave him references of a couple of agencies that he contacted. They had nothing but good things to say about the meters and wished they had purchased them 20 years ago. He met with an employee from Christiansburg that also has Hersey meters. They have taken the new meters that Narrows would like to purchase and hooked Hersey antennas to them so they can be read electronically.

Mayor Spangler asked what the cost of the meters is?

John Davis said with the ALD they are \$325/meter.

Councilman Mills asked if money could be saved by the entities that want the meters if they purchase them together?

John Davis said they discussed that and from what he can tell the meters are \$325/each if you buy 1 or if you buy 1,000.

Susan Kidd said they may receive a savings in the installation of the meters.

John Davis said the cost for the meters will be around \$600,000.

Councilman Conley asked what the meter is made from?

John Davis said it is like a composite plastic. The company that makes the meters went to the Lego corporation to come up with a plastic base and the meter is one solid piece. Their replacement rate is so low the company says if they install 10,000 meters and have to go back and replace 2 meters that is 2 too many.

Councilman Goorskey asked how long these meters have been out there?

John Davis said around 10 years.

Mayor Spangler said they need to purchase what they want the first go round.

John Davis said they have to reread around 10% of the water meters every month. The current software will work with the new meters. The company is doing a propagation study to see where antennas will need to be placed for the meters to be read.

Mayor Spangler said they may want to hire someone part time to help install the meters.

Councilman Conley asked if they are installed by the company will it be under warranty by them?

John Davis said that is something they will have to be asked. One of the companies said they would love to come to a council meeting and talk to council about the water meters.

Susan Kidd said minimum wage is going to \$12 in the next budget year and they have employees who had to receive a raise to get them to \$11. She gave council a document showing a suggested pay range. A starting laborer will be at \$12 and all other employees would be raised above that amount. On the back of the document, she has listed all full-time town employees, their years of service, and their current hourly rate. The salary scale is the scale Todd Meredith did for Pearisburg several years ago when minimum wage was \$7.25. Pearisburg said they could not pay those wages then and if the scale was re-done with the current minimum wage the wages would be higher than that. The proposed increase is what she wants to get those people to. The final column is the total of the increase and what the total is. The total for hourly employees would be \$92,165. The upper part of the chart is a suggestion for an 8% increase for salaried employees. She gave Chad Stilley a little more because he is a policeman that makes \$33,990. That amount is so low on any scale, and Chad would not say a word, but she gave him an increase to \$36,709. He has worked for the town for 5 years. The Parks and Rec Director probably works 80 hours a week. She is open for suggestions because she knows it is a budget hit but at a \$12 minimum wage, she does not know what else to do.

Councilman Mills asked what that means as far as a tax increase of what magnitude?

Susan Kidd said she has not plugged these numbers into the budget because she did not know if it was anywhere in the ballpark they were going to look at. Debbie Thomas plugs the numbers into a spreadsheet but putting the salary into the budget is a complicated process. Todd Meredith had Virginia Tech do the salary scale.

Mayor Spangler said he has always been a firm believer in merit-based pay increases. He believes there are workers that get paid the same whether they are a good worker or a not-so-good worker.

Councilman Conley asked if supervisors do yearly evaluations on employees?

Susan Kidd said yes. Everyone gets an evaluation but no matter what that may be you still have to pay them \$11/hour.

Mayor Spangler said he believes anyone that has any seniority needs to be on a higher pay scale than someone that is hired last week.

Councilman Mills said he believes in paying people as much as the town can afford and expect a lot out of them.

Mayor Spangler said if you expect 100% out of someone and you continually get 60% it needs to be addressed. If they do not improve, they can move on.

Councilman Mills said he would like to know what the raises will mean in the case of raising taxes.

Councilman Conley said he agrees with the first 4 categories but the last 3 categories are a huge increase, especially when you are talking about a higher salary.

Susan Kidd said those are huge increases but if you look at the other side of the paper at the mid-range scale the proposed salaries do not come close. Any of the town's staff can go somewhere else to work and make a higher salary.

Debbie Thomas said some town employees hold a lot more hats than what people think.

Councilman Conley said to be equal and fair to everyone the supervisors and department heads should not receive more of a raise than the laborers.

Councilman Mills asked the people present to not go out and say he was not for everyone but the simple fact of the matter is the 3 town employees present at the meeting today are a lot harder to replace than some other employees and that is not discounting their contribution or what they do. What they need to do sometimes, and he realizes the more money an employee makes the more of a raise they will receive, is give an across-the-board raise and bring the lower people up. If you do a percentage raise their whole career, they will be the lowest paid their whole career. He believes in supporting staff and expecting a lot out of them.

Susan Kidd said health insurance is going up 11% and there is still the 5% employees have to pay toward their VRS retirement. The portion of VRS the town has to pay will go down almost 1% so that will help to offset the raises a little bit.

Councilman Mills said they can do the bare minimum and bring the people they have to up to \$12/hour or bite the bullet and give everyone a raise.

Susan Kidd said the salaries she gave them are just a suggestion but what she tries to do is look at guys on the bottom and the guys that supervise them and make sure there is a difference. If you are expecting someone to take the responsibility to supervise someone and only pay them \$1/hour more they will not take that job.

Mayor Spangler said the salary increase chart shows an employee that was just hired making \$11/hour and an employee that has been with the town 17 years making \$12.24/hour. That is pitiful.

Susan Kidd said some people have 12-15 years of knowledge and it may not seem like they do much but take them out of the equation and you will soon find out how much they did.

Mayor Spangler said they are going to have to do something.

Mayor Spangler thanked Chris McKlarney and Cora Gnegy for being at the meeting today.

Chris McKlarney said he is going to discuss Giles County's economic development process and Cora Gnegy will discuss tourism and how all of that relates. In a lot of places economic development kind of gets tangled with industrial development. They are more on the economic development side in that they will work with a business. Their IDA has as much to do with tourism as it does industrial development. Giles County is somewhat challenged with having product to show from an industrial standpoint. They have no buildings available today. They had one in Pembroke but it was recently purchased. The IDA has been recently looking at constructing buildings to show people. Very few businesses today are willing to wait for a new building to be constructed. Metal buildings

that are constructed today are pre-engineered and packaged and the time to wait for a building is 11 months so it could take 2 years to construct a building. When you tell a prospect they can have a building ready in 2 years that is a joke. Businesses now look at a return on investment of 3-5 years and will not look beyond that. Celanese now looks at a 3-year return on investment. Business incubators are not that popular now. The last estimate they received for a building was around \$11 million. Economic development covers a plethora of things from tourism to every aspect of business development, from small business to larger companies. They receive their potential business opportunities from a multitude of different channels and one of those is through the state. There is something called the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and when a new business is looking to relocate to this region, they will contact Giles County to see if they have anything available and give the specifications of what the business is looking for. What does Narrows want to see their community become in the next 10 years? How much do they want it to change? He tells the board of supervisors if they want things to remain the same the costs are still going to go up and taxes will go up. If growth happens, services paid for will be over a larger group of people. In the last 15 years, 12% of new houses have been built in Giles County and that is a big deal. This means a lot of things have changed. The subdivision ordinance is relatively liberal, the zoning ordinance is relatively liberal, and it allows for growth all over the county. They have extended water and utilities into a lot of areas which gives people the ability to build. In Montgomery County you cannot put a subdivision anywhere because it has to be close to utilities and roads have to be built. Giles County's subdivision ordinance is easier to deal with so there is a lot of growth. There has been some really positive changes in Narrows. People have come in and flipped houses that were not in good shape and housing prices are going up. The town is very clean and has a great police department. If Narrows really wants growth, they will have to provide additional reasons for people to come to town. He does not believe there is a town in Southwest Virginia that has the potential that Narrows does. There are 14,000-16,000 vehicles per day coming through Narrows on Route 460, there is the New River, Wolf Creek, Mill Creek, Mill Creek Falls, and 2 schools. That does not exist anywhere else. Many towns would spend a lot of money just to have one of those things. Cascades has around 150,000 people per year visiting and Narrows could have that many people at Mill Creek. Does Narrows want that? The IDA spent \$30-\$40 thousand on a plan to develop a whitewater park on Wolf Creek. It was to start at the town park with 8-9 sets of rapids that would have been constructed and end at Camp Success. The investment required was \$1.2-\$1.3 million. That is a lot of money but that is a no brainer. If you want to change downtown Narrows in an instant and want traffic in town it could happen overnight. Narrows is near Virginia Tech, Radford University, and Concord University. There is a lot of potential but do they want an extra 1,500 college students in town on weekends. Those are decisions that need to be made because along with that come problems. This will require debt and investment in Narrows. There is a Fortune 500 company (Celanese) that lists its address as Narrows and there are over 1,000 employees there who make a lot of money. If you pulled Celanese out of Giles County it would cost almost double to provide the services the county provides today.

Councilman Mills said Narrows has more to offer than Blowing Rock or Boone but they just need a start. They need a hub of some sort and roll the dice.

Chris McKlarney said they overlook what is here because they live here but for a student to come to Giles County to experience the mountains, river, creeks, and trails, that is life changing. A lot of them may end up staying here after college. Every dollar of transient occupancy tax Giles County collects goes back to tourism and most of that is going to Virginia Tech. If you go to a football or basketball game at Virginia Tech, Giles County is all over the jumbotron. They have Cora Gnegy to thank for that. That is where Giles County sees return on investment. A trailhead needs to be built on New River and something needs to be done on Wolf Creek even if it is just tubing or something that draws people there.

Mayor Spangler asked if there was a way to develop Wolf Creek and get around the Army Corps of Engineers?

Chris McKlarney said no, they would have to obtain permits.

Susan Kidd said just the environmental process on the outfitter building cost \$60-\$70 thousand.

Chris McKlarney said \$1 million anymore is not a lot of money. There are 5,000 new lots being developed in Blacksburg and that is not enough.

Councilman Conley said a downside he sees is land availability in Narrows. It may be time to decide if annexation is needed. It may be the time to do this to keep the town growing.

Chris McKlarney said the key to that is providing utilities. If annexation is to occur they need to present it to the public as a way for them to receive more services, not that they just want more people to pay taxes.

Councilman Mills said he agrees with Councilman Conley but he has been through that before and there is a bloodletting when that occurs.

Councilman Conley said there is a lot of land on Route 460 that is landlocked by the owners that will stay that way. There is nowhere to put a new business in Narrows.

Chris McKlarney said Narrows is very well thought of with Giles County Board of Supervisors. They see potential and value in Narrows.

Susan Kidd said the chairman of the IDA is Lee Wheeler.

Chris McKlarney said Lee Blaker sits on the IDA board.

Councilman Goorskey said in order for Narrows to grow they have to have people that believe in them. Lindsey Caudill is doing great things for the town and is getting the town a lot of attention. Narrows is going to lose the duck pond very soon if they do not do something with it. They can either maintain it or invest in it. Does the town do annexation first or work on attractions?

Chris McKlarney said he would suggest building a reason for people to come to Narrows.

Cora Gnegy said the most recent national coverage they have received for Giles County has been Narrows Christmas lights. She has national publications asking for Narrows Christmas lights.

Councilman Goorskey said he thinks about hurdles and what they have to address in Narrows. They need to inventory what they have and what can be done with it. With Susan Kidd retiring they need to know who is going to be their economic development coordinator. That needs to be incorporated into a job title and they need to pay for it.

Councilman Mills said that will not come cheap.

Chris McKlarney said government is going to have to come to the table to maintain good employees and to find good employees. Giles County is hemorrhaging employees right now; they cannot keep them. They have lost 4 of 6 public-works employees who decided to start their own business.

Susan Kidd asked Chris McKlarney what Giles County's starting salary was for a public-works employee?

Chris McKlarney said with no experience but with a CDL around \$38,000. Entities need to share resources, especially people who are knowledgeable including public works, maintenance, water treatment plant, and sewer operator. It makes no sense for them to keep doing business the way they have in the past.

Susan Kidd said a lot of employees stay at the Town of Narrows out of loyalty.

Chris McKlarney said people do not realize it is a short distance from Narrows to Interstate 77.

Susan Kidd said tourism-wise they have some really strong connections at Rocky Gap at the tourist center that push people down Route 61.

Cora Gnegy said southbound on Interstate 77 there is a welcome center, as well as northbound, and they have placed 'Discover Narrows' signs there. The county tracks the QR codes and the one that is checked the most is Narrows.

Mayor Spangler said the bottom line is they have to have something in town so when these people visit they will be attracted to coming back. They do not currently have that; all they have are a lot of empty buildings.

Cora Gnegy said remodeling and checking for asbestos are real challenges.

Councilman Mills said when an interested party calls Susan Kidd they need to be able to show them the process they need to adhere to. If they adhere to that process they will be successful. The town's flood level goes all the way up to Narrows Flower and Gift.

Mayor Spangler said as far as annexation, if you cannot show people the improvements that are going on and there is a reason for them to want to annex you will never get a positive response. They need to start with downtown and revive that area.

Chris McKlarney said there are government-lending programs and the funds are easier to access than someone going to get a loan for a house. Interest rates are now as low as they will ever be. Taxes can be raised to cover these loans if need be. Residents do not see the town replacing water lines or something similar but if they see actual progress, like a whitewater park, they do not mind paying higher taxes.

Councilman Mills said taxes could be raised .01¢-.02¢/year instead of a large increase at one time.

Chris McKlarney said Narrows has an intelligent council that can speak to the public. If you cannot justify a tax increase you should not do it. Narrows has intelligent staff and an intelligent council that can articulate what they want to do. The greatest asset Narrows has is their people and they love their community.

Councilman Goorskey said they need to know what they can and cannot do and find a way to be able to do things with their properties. The outfitter building has been talked about for so long now people have forgotten about it. They need to turn the July 4th event back into the water carnival like it used to be. Council had just been talking about wages and they are not paying enough but talking about raising it up to an amount that is still not enough. How do they pay for that? Narrows does an equipment-sharing program with Pearisburg and Giles County so he does not know why they could not do an employee-sharing program too.

Chris McKlarney said a council does not have the time or the ability to act on behalf of the town so they have to count on Susan Kidd, John Davis, and staff to do those things for them. The difference between being successful and not comes down to those people, period. Susan Kidd has brought a lot of credibility to the Town of Narrows.

Susan Kidd said the Town of Narrows has partnered with Cora Gnegy at Virginia Tech ball games and have received tourists because of that.

Cora Gnegy said Giles County has partnered with Virginia Tech Athletics. They will go to a football or basketball game and have a table and a booth. Inside the stadium they have LED screens and last spring they did a video of a family spending time at Mill Creek and snippets of that video have been playing at basketball games. Before hand sanitizer was cool, they were handing it out and they have also handed out first-aid kits and frisbees. In the New River Valley, which is Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and Radford, Giles has seen the largest growth in tourism expenditures over the last 7 years. They are doing the right things to make people want to come and take advantage of what Giles County has to offer. Tourism expenditures in Giles County are near \$3 million. The years of 2020 and 2021 were not pretty because of Covid, but Mountain Lake had one of their best years and they were closed for 8 months. Tourism in Giles County is a direct employer of 218 people and an indirect employer of 100.

Chris McKlarney said currently there are only 156 people in Giles County seeking employment and the unemployment rate is 2.2%.

Cora Gnegy said a couple of years ago they partnered with the rest of the region and did a visitor profiling study and it is 250 pages long and was done by Virginia Tech. Some of the things that came out of the Giles data make perfect sense for Narrows. Some of the reasons people are coming to Giles are for hiking and fishing, beautiful mountains, and relaxing with friends and family. The more businesses they can bring on the more new businesses like the Bad Apple and Anna's Restaurant they can support.

Chris McKlarney said a visitor or a resident does not care about a county line, it is what services can they drive to in 30-45 minutes. What is good for the New River Valley is good for Narrows and Giles County. The Roanoke Valley will tell you what is good for Giles County is good for them because this is where their visitors come to.

Cora Gnegy said based on the regional data Giles did differ in that their feeder markets (where people are coming from) and the Virginia tourism numbers are only based on people more than 60 miles away. Giles County's feeder markets are Northern Virginia, Richmond, Tidewater, but half of their visitors are coming from Roanoke. That is the day tripper that wants to come and use their hiking trails, biking trails, and river. Then they either go home or stay in Blacksburg before heading back home. They know they have these assets and love them but how do they promote them so people will come and spend money? Some other things she has worked on for Giles that certainly helped Narrows was Jump Start Giles (small business competition) and their small business relief program. They received a grant for \$1.6 million for the relief program and have dispersed the funds to several small businesses in the county but they need \$2.2 million more. There are good businesses within our communities that are trying really hard and Covid has put a damper on that. Community spirit and community support is probably helping to sustain more businesses in Narrows than it has in Blacksburg.

Chris McKlarney said there are 2 projects going on right now concerning broadband. One is called VATI and it is funded by the feds to the state. The federal government wants everyone to have broadband service at their home almost like they wanted everyone to have phone service years ago. They are spending trillions of dollars in broadband infrastructure. Giles has been the beneficiary of some of those funds but not nearly enough. Up until the last 6 months there was a series of maps the federal government held that said certain areas were served by 'XYZ' company and if you looked at those maps it looked like almost all of Giles County was served by broadband, and you could make the argument that they were. Service is minimal and if there was a main fiber line that ran through an area they identified everything on both sides of the road, even if they did not actually have service, as being served. Giles could not apply for VATI funding because of that map. They applied for the only areas they could and there is one outstanding area on those maps today and that is Clendennin. The only area of Clendennin that is served is the front and that is served by Suddenlink. They are doing projects in areas they could apply for and that includes White Gate, the upper end of Wolf Creek, and the Route 100 corridor through Staffordsville. Gigabeam in Rich Creek is now providing service to those areas. They have realized the upper end of Wolf Creek is going to have a hard time being served with fixed wireless so they want to, at their cost, extend fiber to the home which is the ultimate solution to fiber in your house, for speed, and for future capabilities. Fixed wireless has a 'fixed' speed and fiber to the home does not really have any limits on how much speed and what the capabilities are going forward. The fixed wireless is a radio like the one a cell phone uses on 5g service and is a digital radio. The radios have to be upgraded anytime someone wants additional speed. Five years ago, homes usually had one device for streaming the internet, now there are a lot more devices in homes that are streaming. Fixed wireless is going to be obsolete in another 3-4 years so fiber to the home is a better option. On the upper end of Wolf Creek, Bland County just received a grant to extend service all the way to the Giles County line so Giles County will pick up from that service with the current grant they have and extend service down Wolf Creek and run to where Suddenlink does not currently serve. This area will have fiber to the home served by Gigabeam. What does that mean for the Town of Narrows, Pearisburg, Rich Creek, and Glen Lyn where Suddenlink currently operates? Suddenlink has not done a good job and are not reliable. Suddenlink has the infrastructure and were way ahead of the game 10-12 years ago when they extended fiber

to the home. The main fiber line for Suddenlink comes down Interstate 77 and crosses the bridge at Glen Lyn. The problem is that Suddenlink only has assets in Giles County in Virginia, they do not own anything else in the state of Virginia. What has changed in the funding that is available to Giles County now is that they can request money to overbuild in areas that are already served by other people. If you are a provider, you do not like that so Suddenlink will not be happy. The rules are changing because providers like Suddenlink are not investing in their infrastructure and not keeping up with current speed standards. The speed that was required a year ago was 10mbps download and upload was 3mbps. Now 25mbps is the download speed someone has to have to be considered to be served at all. There are underserved and unserved individuals. Underserved means that you have service but it is less than 25mbps download speed. You can stream 2-3 devices on 15-20mbps download. When there are a lot of people on the internet, such as around Christmas, the speed will slow down. They may have noticed fiber has been installed from one end of Giles County to the other. It goes on Route 460 and up Interstate 77 to Pittsburgh. That fiber is actually Facebook's fiber. Facebook has changed its name to 'Meta' and that is short for the Metaverse. If people do not know about the Metaverse he strongly suggests they learn about it. It will blow their mind if they do not know anything about it and it is beyond his ability to understand. Essentially, Facebook and big tech companies are creating the Metaverse which means an alternate reality and a digital world you can live and work in. This will sound ridiculous but it is how the world is going to operate. When you are online it will soon become a 3-D experience. You will wear a pair of goggles and when you look around you will see whatever this digital image is and will be able to communicate. You can pick to be whoever you want to be and look however you want to look. You will have an identity and you will buy real estate in this digital world, which is being sold today for large sums of money. People are now purchasing locations in the Metaverse. Businesses are purchasing locations left and right because the process is that you will work in the Metaverse in your home. If banks want to have a presence in big cities in the Metaverse they have to purchase real estate there. Architects will design buildings, digital buildings, and you will walk into those buildings and into conference rooms. You will be able to design and live in a house in the Metaverse but will still be in your home. He knows this sounds ridiculous and crazy but they are 3 years from literally everyone functioning in the Metaverse. Every meeting they have will be in the Metaverse. The fiber lines that were run through Giles County were to connect their digital data centers to improve speeds in the Metaverse so they can get all of this digital data at the same time. People will either get on board with this or be left behind. If you want to be able to work from home, the federal government sees that people can work from home since the pandemic began. They will be able to collaborate from home. They could be sitting in this meeting at their homes and it will look like they are sitting where they are now. If they have never experienced this, he suggests they go somewhere they can. Giles is doing training now with Oculus goggles and workforce in Narrows has access to these goggles. They came and did a demonstration for him the other day. He took a class on how to run a grinder and you cannot tell the difference, it looks like you are looking at a grinder on a table. There was an instructor that told him what to do. He picked up the grinder and it felt like a grinder running because he had joysticks on his hands and when he closed his grip it closed the grip on the grinder. He picked up the grinder and when he pulled the trigger on the grinder it shook and there were sparks coming off of it. He could not tell he was not actually using a grinder; it is that realistic. He believes they intend to educate the public in this manner in the future. You will have the best teachers in the world that will stand in front of kids and teach them. This is the future and broadband is going to be critical for every household to have so they are allowing Giles to apply for funding to build over top of Suddenlink and anybody else. Suddenlink can take them to court and say they are providing service but Giles believes they have a pretty good argument to say yes they are but are not getting it done. Montgomery County, Pulaski County, and Bland County were recently funded \$4 million to build out broadband service so it is real money. The state wants Giles to present them with a one-time solution to their broadband issue, which is fiber to the home county-wide. That is an enormous project costing tens of millions of dollars. The project that exists today that is in Wolf Creek the county paid to have a road constructed for a lease to go on a tower that will allow fixed wireless in the Town of Narrows. There is an old AEP tower just outside of town and any home that can see that fixed wireless on the tower will be able to get 50-100mbps download speed in the short term by putting a little satellite dish outside of their house. It will be much better service than they receive by Suddenlink from a reliability standpoint. That is the short-term fix for Narrows and Wolf Creek with the long-term goal of providing fiber to the home for every house in the

county. The eastern district has been served because Pemtel is there. The county has had discussions about trying to acquire the assets of Suddenlink and they have no interest. John Lawson is the western district representative for the county and he runs something for the state of Virginia called Internet 2 that institutions use. It allows for research and does not get bogged down during the day by businesses and individuals. The county's plan is to try and get planning money which will help with the engineering services to get a solid estimate together. That application will go in by September. If that is funded, the following September they would apply for construction funds. They are a couple of years out from applying for money but the state of Virginia really wants everyone to have fiber to the home.

Councilman Conley asked who the carrier would be?

Chris McKlarney said that is a fantastic question but they do not know yet. They are talking to Pemtel because they would love to have a local carrier do this. They also work with Citizens Communications which is a co-op just like Pemtel but operates out of Floyd County. Shentel is also a possibility and they already serve the county's schools. Verizon is here but they have no interest in it. It could be a broadband authority. They have had discussions with 50 different scenarios.

Cora Gnegy said meta is already advertising for jobs in our area.

Chris McKlarney said they are relying more on artificial intelligence and relying less on people. They are going to be faced with new challenges.

Councilman Mills said Cora Gnegy and Chris McKlarney have been a true blessing. They have given some very valuable information but also some scary information.

John Davis said they have had several people come and look at buildings in Narrows and have been told it is going to cost a lot to get a building in compliance and it is hurting the town. The town needs some help.

Mayor Spangler said the first thing they need to do is sit down and come up with a document that says if someone wants to purchase a specific building this is what the process needs to be and be able to make sure that is authentic.

Councilman Goorskey said they need to be told how to navigate through the county's regulations so Narrows can grow.

John Davis said the problem is that they have records from DCR that this issue is at a local level.

Mayor Spangler said the problem is that every building in downtown Narrows is in the floodplain.

Chris McKlarney said he knows this is frustrating but they have to do things the appropriate way because of the liabilities involved. There is an individual in Pembroke that just purchased a building, has already paid for it, and the bank has said the building is in a floodplain so nothing can be done to the building. The building has changed hands 4 times in the last 10 years but only this bank happened to pick it up. The bank contacted DCR and asked how the renovations took place and how can future renovations take place. DCR said they cannot, period. DCR showed up at Pembroke and asked them how they allowed those things to happen. They had no explanation for it and now the individual that purchased the building cannot do what he wanted to do with it without spending \$15-\$20 thousand a year for flood insurance on a building that will never flood. Route 460 was built creating a dam around this building and it will never flood. They are better off to deal with these things on the front end rather than the tail end. John Ross is not John Mills. He is very smart and very confident but does not have the contacts and the perceived flexibility that John Mills had. John Ross is making people do things by the book. The design people should take care of the issue.

Councilman Mills said he believes Mike Bedsaul is a very smart person but he was disappointed in the answer he gave council concerning the outfitter building. He thinks Hill Studio has serious obligations in this scenario.

Councilman Goorskey said being in a historic district brings other problems as well. John Ross will not come out and show them what they can or cannot do without exactly showing verbatim where he has to enforce something. He believes this goes back to the design team that knew about these issues, knew how to mitigate this ahead of time, and did not seek out enough funding to get the money up front to pay for what needs to happen there. DCR is setting these regulations or at least telling them how regulations should be written and are killing towns this way.

Councilman Conley said one side of Poplar Street is in a floodplain but the other side is not.

Susan Kidd said she has a draft of the town manager position.

Councilman Mills said they need to know how much taxes will be raised in connection with raising salaries.

Councilman Goorskey said he believes raising salaries is the same as investing in town.

Susan Kidd said this is a general job description and she does not expect council to do anything with it today. Where and how do they want this opening advertised? There have been some people expressing interest in the position and she is sure there are plenty of others out there.

Councilman Mills said they have some disagreements at the table. If they limit their search to a resident of the town, then they either have to make it a condition of employment that if you are hired you move within the town limits or hope they can get someone that already lives in town.

Councilman Conley said it needs to be advertised as 'Narrows Town Manager' just like the charter says. As far as living in town, he would say advertise it everywhere and tell them they are required to establish a residence in town within 6 months.

Susan Kidd said they would probably have to offer a relocation fee if they moved from very far away.

Councilman Conley said when he accepted employment with the state that could have been anywhere in the state and he had to move.

Councilman Mills said he had to sign a contract but he wanted to because he wanted to live in Giles County.

Susan Kidd said she will advertise the position any way council wants her to. It is a job hunters' market.

Councilman Conley said the only thing that jumps out at him as far as experience and training is that he would love to see at least a four-year B.A. in business management or a related field.

Councilman Goorskey asked what they are willing to pay for all of the experience and functions they want for a person in this position to have the title of 'Town Manager' and to move to this town if they cannot find someone already living here? If they have to raise taxes in order to do that, are they comfortable in doing that?

Councilmember Mills said they are going to have to raise taxes to accommodate the new federal regulations.

Councilman Conley said he would really like to see how the budget works out because Susan Kidd's salary is not on the handout they were given.

Susan Kidd said she did not put herself on there but council will have to come up with an amount for the new employee that will replace her.

Mayor Spangler asked Susan Kidd what the salary range was for her position?

Susan Kidd said there was no salary range she knew of but, based on surrounding areas, a town manager makes anywhere from \$90,000-\$150,000/year. It goes without saying that the employee should have a high-school diploma. Do they want to change it to some college experience?

Councilman Conley said he would like it to say a four-year bachelor's degree or equivalent experience.

Mayor Spangler said there may be people that are excellent for the job but do not have a four-year college degree.

Councilman Mills asked if they could say 'preferred qualifications' instead of having it set in stone?

Mayor Spangler said he knows there have been some people that have shown an interest. Do they know when any of those individuals would communicate to Susan Kidd that they may be interested in the position?

Susan Kidd said after it is advertised. The person Mayor Spangler is speaking of is definitely interested.

Mayor Spangler said he believes that would be a good fit and believes it would come in under the salary amount they have spoken of. From what little he knows of the individual he would be excited if they accepted the position.

Susan Kidd said she does not want to say the name publicly as they have asked not to share at this time.

Members agreed they would not discuss a name at this time as all conversations must be recorded.

Councilman Mills said for them to be honest about all of this stuff. For years they have had to be creative with titles and different stuff because they are circumventing the charter. He does not like that. He does not like to be deceptive with a job title to get business taken care of. Chris McKlarney is a prime example of an unparalleled leader that lives in West Virginia. What does it matter where he lives if he does the job and he has done that job for 27 years better than anyone he has ever known?

Councilman Goorskey said the idea that the town manager absolutely has to live inside the town limits, people would vote for that 100% based on a little bit of misconception how the town manager affects the spending of the town's money. Town council sets the budget, approves the budget, and directs the town manager (or other title) on how to administer their job. That person can live on Mars for all he cares because they do not have the authority to spend the town's tax dollars the way they want to. The only conception people have is that this person has to live in town because they are spending our money and that is 100% not true. Susan Kidd has never had the authority to do things with tax dollars that council did not say she could or could not do with it. When they put 'town manager' on that job description and they do not cough up the money to move people here, they limit their pool. He knows the individual they are speaking of that is interested in the position and he seriously wants to see who else is interested. He has some serious misgivings even though he likes the guy. He feels like they are going bargain hunting and he does not like that. If they are going to say the person will have the title 'town manager' and has to live in town then they need to put \$120,000 on the table and they need to tell the people in the Town of Narrows they are going to have to pay for that because this person is going to have to move here. They are going to have to find someone that is qualified and the only way they are going to do this is to have a pool of qualified applicants and pick someone.

Councilman Mills said they are also going to have to offer a guaranteed contract for four years.

Susan Kidd said they will be appointed by council and that is a yearly appointment just like the police chief and the treasurer. No one would take the position without a contract or a severance package.

Mayor Spangler said this is the same scenario as wanting to raise employee's salaries. He lives in the past and wonders how anyone could be worth that kind of money and that is a problem he has to overcome. It will take a reasonable amount of money to get someone in that position. He feels like if they are a qualified individual within the town or surrounding area and if they advertise it as a 'town manager' and require them to live in the town they limit their ability to pick an individual that would be good for the town.

Councilman Mills said he got on council because he loves Narrows and believes in his heart that they have the potential to really do something special. The town does not make widgets and they do not make tractors; people are their business. The folks that occupy these positions have an extreme obligation in moving the town forward. If you get the wrong person in the top position, they could ruin the town before they figure it out and fire them. Common sense dictates that the broader their search area the more odds they have of getting someone worthwhile. They could go on and say the Town of Narrows does not have a town manager but has a chief administrative officer and in one way that gets them clear of the charter but in another way he thinks it makes them a liar.

Councilman Conley said they are circumventing the charter. And concerning a contract, he remembered reading in the charter that all employees are under a 12-month probation. Is that correct?

Susan Kidd said department heads are not under that same rule. Her position, Debbie Thomas' position, and John Davis' position are not 'grievable' positions.

Councilman Goorskey said he is not opposed to hiring a town manager and according to the vote 84% of the town are not opposed to having a town manager that resides in town limits. All he is saying is they will have to pay for it. When taxes go up that is what they have to tell people and that they have to invest in the rest of the town employees before they lose them and they have to invest in the town economically.

Mayor Spangler said the majority of the citizens that you present that to are not going to be very receptive of it because they do not want their taxes to be raised to go toward salaries. Unfortunately, that is what will have to happen.

Susan Kidd said they heard Chris McKlarney sit there and say Celanese is now paying \$30/hour for new employees.

Councilman Mills said they have to decide quickly which way they are going and if they are going to try to get by cheaply and maintain the status quo. He believes everyone on council signed up to try and move this town forward and no one said it would be easy or painless but he believes they have an obligation to try. They have all of this stuff coming up they have talked about and they have a good staff but the most important position is the one Susan Kidd is sitting in. If they do not have that leadership at the top then slowly but surely they will decay and things start getting screwed up. Money does not guarantee the person they are looking for but he will also assure them without having the proper number there they are not going to attract anyone.

Mayor Spangler said another concern is that if they hire someone that does not have the work experience and the understanding of how a town manager's job runs then by the time they get enough experience where does the town stand during that period of time. Do they have any idea as to what percentage of a real-estate increase they would be talking about to cover the different salary increases and the new salary?

Susan Kidd said no but she could try to have that by Monday.

Councilman Conley asked them if they wanted to leave it where it is until Monday night?

Mayor Spangler said it is a decision they have to make before they can advertise the position.

Susan Kidd said she is trying to get the budget together and the only thing she has not inserted is salaries.

Mayor Spangler said it would be nice to know an approximate percentage of increase of a cent amount.

Susan Kidd said if they want to use the recommended salary amounts they can put those in but this will take a while.

Councilman Mills said they could use those numbers and at least six figures for a town manager. They can always back down but at least they have a starting point.

Susan Kidd said she can check with VML on job postings that can be used to advertise for this position.

Debbie Thomas said she had a LinkedIn account and the position could be advertised on there.

Councilman Conley said they need to advertise it in the Virginian Leader.

Mayor Spangler asked Susan Kidd if he heard her say earlier that a relocation fee is required?

Susan Kidd said it is not required but if someone is moving here from Kilmarnock they would expect relocation.

Councilman Conley said they never did.

Susan Kidd said this is an executive position and most executives expect relocation.

Mayor Spangler said he does not know how much money that equates to but that would have to be figured into any kind of real estate increase as well.

Susan Kidd said she can speak to Kevin Byrd and see if he has any insight on this.

Councilman Mills said he would like to see council donate funds toward Eagle Scout projects and have it be the same amount for each one.

Susan Kidd said part of the Eagle Scout project is the Eagle Scout figuring out how to finance it.

Councilman Mills said figuring it out could be the Eagle Scout coming and asking council to help fund it.

John Davis said he would like to see council recognize the Eagle Scouts for the projects they have done.

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

Ayes: Conley, Mills, and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler