

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
November 2, 2022**

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

Staff members present were Terry Nicholson and Debbie Thomas.

Mayor Spangler gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Consider Approval of Tax Assessment Values for Personal Property

Terry Nicholson said the town was notified last week by Giles County that the county would be using 85% of the NADA vehicle assessment to calculate personal property taxes. The town can't change the tax rate but they can change the tax assessments. If the town uses the 85% assessment the town would collect the same amount of \$239,800 which is right at what the town budgeted for. If the town uses the 100% assessment the town would collect around \$42,000 more and people would be upset because their tax bill would be significantly higher. Mr. Nicholson is proposing that the town be consistent with what the county is doing and rate the assessments at 85%.

Councilman Conley made a motion to mirror the county and use the 85% assessment rate for calculating personal property taxes. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Mayor Spangler said there are two items that need to be added to the agenda. One is a request from Pks and Rec which Sara Bowles will present. The other is a request from Terry Nicholson to approve proceeding with a financial analysis through Davenport and Company in order to determine our capacity to take on additional debt.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to add to the agenda the request from Parks and Rec and the request from Terry Nicholson. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Terry Nicholson said council has already seen the Davenport agreement and they have talked about it before. After speaking to Mike Bedsaul they decided they may have to put it out for an RFP (Request for Proposal) for procurement reasons. Davenport has an agreement with Dinwiddie County called a Cooperative Procurement Agreement which means Dinwiddie worded their agreement so that any other locality in the State of Virginia could use their RFP as a basis for choosing Davenport and Company as their provider for these financial services. The town can do this without having to put out an

RFP. He needs council to approve the \$12,500 they had originally discussed and will proceed with the purchase through the cooperative agreement.

Councilman Conley made a motion to approve the \$12,500 needed to cover the cost for Davenport and Company. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilmember Bowles said she presented council with a copy of a proposal from Parks and Rec. They spent quite a bit of time researching this project and are asking council for \$3,500 in support of this project.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve \$3,500 for Parks and Rec. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Discussion of Town's Planning for Possible School Consolidation

Councilman Conley said he would like to speak last because it will take him a little while.

Councilmember Bowles said she really thinks that as a town they need to take a stance and represent the town by taking the stance of "save the school/save the town". She believes it would be well advised for the town to pursue an economic study of how consolidation would impact the town. There will be a school board meeting on November 22nd and she would like for there to be a representative from the town that can discuss some questions for the school board and ask for some help with an economic study.

Mayor Spangler said he spoke with Jason Ballard a couple days ago. It was brought to the mayor's attention that some individuals on the school board were looking for a way to possibly secure funding without involving the Giles County Board of Supervisors. He asked Jason Ballard about this and he said as far as being a practicing attorney regardless of what funds might be acquired or made available to them in any other way he did not see any way possible that anything could be done with those funds without involving the Giles County Board of Supervisors. That was his opinion and the mayor would tend to agree. He doesn't see how the school board could spend money since they are not qualified to determine where that money needs to go. Personally, he has a little bit of a concern spending the kind of money that will be necessary for an economic impact study, although he doesn't believe it's a bad idea. Regardless of what the impact study may show the individuals on the school board that are in favor of consolidation will not change their vote. He believes that the county is already aware of the potential problems it could create for the town.

Councilmember Bowles said it may not change what they think but it will change the bottom dollar. A decrease in property values will impact the county and also funds the schools receive.

Mayor Spangler said it very much affects the community. All three proposals that were presented proposed getting rid of Narrows High School as a high school. One of the proposals was to close Narrows High School and build a new middle school, which he is sure wouldn't be in the Town of Narrows. Losing our high school would be detrimental to the town.

Councilman Turner said the middle school project is off the board. It would cost too much money to build a new middle school. This is what he was told.

Mayor Spangler said he thought it was a shame that Giles County has around 15,000 people and there was one person driving this issue. If a poll was taken of citizens in the county it would be overwhelmingly not in support of consolidation. That seems to make no difference to the ones that are pushing this.

Councilman Turner said the three studies they have don't show what it would save to keep Narrows High School and Giles High School open. This is not only detrimental to the Town of Narrows but would also be detrimental to the Town of Pearisburg. These studies don't include any tax rate increases but he has heard it would be a 3-5% tax increase on county taxes and taxes for Narrows and Pearisburg will be double that at around 6-10%. That's why he says the study is not complete enough to say where their kids should go to school.

Councilman Mills said thank God the school board doesn't have taxing authority because in some places they do. He is vehemently opposed to losing Narrows High School. It's dear to him and his family and he will fight it. He guesses where he has a difference of opinion is there is nothing they can say that will alter the school board's stance. He has so much faith in the Giles County Board of Supervisors that he knows they will not do the town like that. When Chris McKlarney tells him to start worrying he will worry but until then they will keep doing what they are doing. Sara Bowles, Joe Goorskey, and Clyde Turner have done an amazing job representing the town. When the time comes, he will go before the board of supervisors because he can reason with them. They can't reason with the school board. He wants to fight this but doesn't want to spend money the town doesn't have.

Terry Nicholson said he would like to make a point of clarification. Council mentioned that the school board did not consider leaving things the way they are. On the last 6 pages of the Giles County Public Schools Division Wide Facility Study dated September 2022, they give 6 options and the first one is to 'maintain all facilities with the current grade alignment and a capital improvement plan'. This is actually the cheapest plan.

Councilman Mills said there is another fact that's not being articulated by some school people. This isn't the first time this monster has reared its ugly head. This came up several years ago and got everyone torn up. He worked with Bob McCracken and Jim Wheeler for a long time and Bob McCracken was a numbers guru: he really knew the

budget. He showed them that, at the time, the way they were doing things was financially beneficial to this county. He hasn't heard anyone develop an argument since then that holds water. The way he looks at this is it's a personal agenda. Has anyone showed council it's better for the kids? They haven't shown him it's better. As far as finances, this will ruin Narrows. Narrows High School is the hub of the town and they might as well forget all the big plans they have. If consolidation happens, they won't accomplish anything.

Mayor Spangler said he also noticed several school board members have commented on questions that have been asked of them and they said it was not a 'consolidation' study but a 'facility' study. The minutes council received from the different meetings with the school board all say 'consolidation' study. In his opinion, the individuals that are saying it was only a 'facility' study are not being truthful about it.

Councilman Mills said he sat right there and was a part of what was supposed to be a facility study. Mayor Spangler is correct in his observations. It was mentioned several times and he distinctly remembers telling an individual he would comment on the facilities until the cows come in but he would not be for consolidation. There was a discussion held and it was early on in the process. He was on that committee.

Mayor Spangler said one of the questions that was raised was if students would have the option of having the opportunity of more advanced classes and Dr. Arbogast said the school system would continue to function as it currently does. There would be no change in the way classes were offered or conducted.

Councilmember Bowles said they stated course offerings would be similar to what they are now.

Councilman Turner said if the study it shows it would cost more to revitalize Giles High School than it would Narrows High School, why don't they close Giles High School and bring the kids to Narrows High School?

Councilman Goorskey said the thing that makes him most nervous is the way the school board approaches this whole topic. They are not very forthcoming with information and the information you do receive has to be forced out of them and then you get incomplete information. If you read the FOIA request the school board was sent and look at the information they received it is incomplete. The town specifically asked for reports/documents that address the renovation and/or construction of existing or proposed school buildings. What was received was some studies, a list of minutes, and emails. The emails stop in 2020 but the last facility study was done in 2022. Are they saying no emails were sent or received after 2020? He knows they have left out information which gives them an air of hiding something that they don't have to do. It leaves questions unanswered and leaves it up to interpretation. That ambiguity is what certain school board members are looking for. They are letting people believe there will be more course offerings. Dr. Arbogast even stated numerous times he couldn't give them information because he didn't know what direction he was going in. They haven't said they are or are not doing a middle school: they haven't said anything. They've let people believe this is on the table or that is off the table. Councilman Goorskey is a parent and has kids in the

county school system. There are a lot of things about this that bother him, but what bothers him for the town is not being able to know what the town needs to start preparing for. If they need to start preparing for something is there enough reason to believe that consolidation will go through? In some of their facility studies it appears that some of the items where they've listed the cost to maintain as they are may be higher than what that truly is, and some of the total costs of consolidating are not in their numbers. One of their options of consolidating and not having the middle school and moving straight to Giles High School has a zero up-front cost in the first two years and that can't be possible. They have a cost of somewhere between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for bussing kids but there will have to be rebranding and a lot of other things that will have to happen. One of the studies talks about the use of the building and one of the questions he asked was were there enough classrooms, and they have alluded to that as not being possible, so there may need to be an expansion at Giles High School. The reason this affects the town is they look at taxes, and he knows the school board is trying to make it seem like they have some way of getting through this with no additional cost. Once they go down that path for two, three, four years they are stuck with it. Once Narrows High School is closed for three years, the cost to get it back up will be enormous. Once people are sucked into the idea that this is a little bit different but it will be so much better because half of the county thinks they will get more sports teams, course offerings, and other things and start to believe that, they are stuck with it. What happens when those expansions are done and the student/teacher ratio is too high? What happens when the county has to increase taxes and the town has lost a tax base and has to increase taxes to cover operating expenses? That is what he wants to know. Maybe he doesn't need the study right now maybe he just needs definite information but he would like to know that the school board is willing to contribute toward that study. What is going to happen to the rest of the county they are trying to serve when they do this?

Councilmember Bowles said she believes they need to have these conversations with Rich Creek and Glen Lyn because this will also affect them.

Councilman Turner said if they are going to consolidate schools and have it be a 'county' school it does not need to be in the town limits. That is his personal opinion.

Mayor Spangler said it was mentioned that if the schools consolidate they could have better sports teams. If you look currently at all of the young men and women that play sports some of them would never make the team if schools were consolidated. Life lessons are also being learned and that is important also.

Councilman Goorskey said he believes a part of the tactic the school board is leaning on is allowing people to assume their own answers and a rebuttal to that is they can have additional sports like wrestling, croquet, etc. These sports also require funding. They won't even spend money to have the track at NHS paved so how will they fund additional sports? He understands the logic behind it, but they are allowing people to believe that is going to happen. He would like the school board to be a little more transparent with this and wake up and say what they are going to do to this town when they do this. They need to say they would like to consolidate high schools so the Town of Narrows diminishes and is no longer a town.

Councilman Conley said he hopes everyone is about finished because this is going to take him a little while. He welcomed John Lawson, the Western district board of supervisors representative, to the council meeting. At the last council meeting, council asked Mike Bedsaul to draft a letter from Terry Nicholson. This was to be a FOIA request to the Giles County School Board requesting any and all information concerning the consolidation between Narrows High School and Giles High School. They provided different packets to the town. He sat down at his desk and began reading them. One packet contains minutes and emails that Councilman Goorskey explained and some of them were very troubling. The minutes went back to 2016. Mr. Steele said when he ran for election there was a lot of discussion on consolidation and how it should be discussed again so they could make the right decision for the kids. Councilman Conley does not see that consolidation is the right idea for the kids. He read in some of the paperwork that the board hasn't had time to discuss consolidation but it is on the agenda. One statement was that a person on the school board believed they needed a new middle school in the county but this hasn't been discussed. Mrs. McMahon stated they needed a feasibility study performed because it had expired. The consolidation was brought about as a Giles County Public Schools Division-Wide Facility Study and as a Giles County Public Schools Facility Evaluation and Efficiency Review. They did their onsite evaluation on October 25-26, 2017 and was reported on March 2, 2018. When they look at the numbers and the cost, they are saying for Narrows High School it will cost between \$1.25 million and \$1.598 million to revitalize the building. The cost to revitalize Giles High School was a lot higher. It lists the cost to revitalize several buildings. Some of the figures he looked at are insulting to him because they were astronomical. He doesn't know if the county has that kind of money but that will be up to John Lawson and his colleagues to determine. Another study they are leaning on is the Giles High School Life Cycle Cost System Comparison, which was performed August 11, 2021, by CMTA. To him it's not worth the paper it's written on because with inflation what costs \$1.2 million today could be \$1.75 million tomorrow. The troubling things he saw in the facility studies were 3 options and every option stated that Narrows High School be closed. There are actually 6 options and the last option states to do nothing. He knows the high schools are old but his house is older and he still lives in it. If they close Narrows High School and let it sit for a year it will be in the same shape as a house that hasn't been lived in for a year: it will deteriorate. He was also concerned about the direction Mr. Arbogast took because he didn't have a clear understanding of what the board wanted. He found an email dated February 4, 2020, from Catherine Wright to Terry Arbogast concerning the facility review. Ms. Wright is listed as a mathematics teacher at Giles High School and is listed as the GEA president. The email from Ms. Wright reads: *I am sure you are all 'fielding' questions and concerns about the Facilities Review in the past 24 hours with the release of Mr. Buckland's article in regards to 'consolidation'. I am currently trying to relay the correct information for the purpose of this study to GEA members who are concerned and questioning the intent. In every conversation I have had with many of you, the statement has been made that this is not a consolidation attempt, but merely a study of facilities. The GEA is requesting complete transparency in information about the facilities study to calm the storm that may be inevitable. Please share with us this information. The GEA Leadership would be happy to sit down to discuss this matter with you if necessary.* He doesn't know if the school board was transparent with the teachers and how much they did or didn't know. At one of the school board meetings he watched, someone stated that no one would lose their jobs because of consolidation.

Councilman Goorskey said Mr. Wilburn was the one that made that statement and tried to redact it at the next meeting. He said he didn't make that statement and no one should be putting words in his mouth but it was clearly stated on the recording.

Councilman Conley asked how transparent the school board was? No one has any idea how it will affect the town but he does know this: it's not good. If this is the basis they are using for closing Narrows High School, it will cost money. By the time they need to do all that will need to be done there is no way this will be cheap.

Councilman Mills said as long as Chris McKlarney is at the county office, he will not allow the smoke and mirrors to influence his decision for the board of supervisors. The school board has not approached the board of supervisors.

Councilman Conley said when he went back and read the state law once it's voted on by the school board then it's taken to the board of supervisors if he is correct.

Councilman Goorskey said the board of supervisors doesn't have a vote on consolidation but do have a hold on the finances.

Councilman Mills said if the golden rule applies the one holding the finances has the money and there has been speculation that one person on the school board is going to pull a rabbit out of his hat, so the board doesn't have to be involved. He doesn't believe it can or will happen.

Mayor Spangler said somewhere in the minutes Dr. Arbogast was tasked with a request by the school board, but he stated he didn't agree with consolidation. When the school superintendent says that someone should ask him why he feels that way.

Councilman Turner said every teacher in the county has to teach students so they pass SOL's. That is where funding comes from and how schools are accredited. In the last 15 years, Narrows High School has been accredited more than Giles High School. It will cost a lot of money to bus kids to the consolidated high school.

Mayor Spangler said the unfortunate thing about all of this is that Mr. Steele, Mr. Wilburn, and Mr. Pennington (primarily Mr. Steele) are pushing for a vote on consolidation before their terms run out. They want to do that because after the next election things may be completely different than they currently are. What they are doing is in their best interest, not in the best interest of the kids. He doesn't agree with this.

Councilman Mills said he doesn't care what they do and until they get the board of supervisors lined up talk is all it is. How can they consummate the deal without money?

Councilman Goorskey said he shares Councilman Mills belief in that. He believes in their board of supervisors and believes they have the same questions and feel about the Town of Narrows the way council does. He believes council should have a list of things they expect if and when the consolidation comes up now or in the future. Council needs to be in part of this discussion and ask for greater clarity. They need to work with Terry

Nicholson and Mike Bedsaul concerning holding the school board's feet to the fire because council didn't receive all of the documents in their FOIA request and there may be some time limits. There is probably a time limit to remedy that. They were called out on this once before and a certain report was given and all of the numbers were redacted out of the document. Council should set a precedent that when a government body requests FOIA information they should respond fully to the best of their ability. The town should call out the school board because the FOIA request they were sent was not filled in its entirety. The town should be recognized and their needs heard and will ask for Narrows to be recognized and their needs heard. They will ask the entire county to do this with them and say is this also worth what it's going to do to the town.

Councilmember Bowles said she wants the work session tonight to bring some things to fruition and make a stance so the school board knows the town is just not sitting back and waiting for others to make a decision that are impacting the town and her kids. She wants the town to have a list of questions such as how will it affect the town economically and what are they going to do with Narrows High School. She knows there is some pushback on this economic study and it is a great financial undertaking but she doesn't believe they can afford not to make it. There are some things that may not happen in town based on consolidation. Whether everyone votes to invest in that study she believes they could still ask the board(s) for assistance on that. Being told no or yes doesn't cost the town any money.

Councilman Goorskey said he would at least like for the school board to say no. He knows they are going to but he would like for them to say it publicly.

Councilman Conley said before they go that route he believes it would be better to have the mayor and town manager draft a letter to the school board and ask if they know what the economical impact of the closure of Narrows High School would have on the town.

Councilman Goorskey said he believes that is a great approach and he looks forward to their response.

Councilmember Bowles said she would like for someone to be physically present at the November 22nd meeting that is representing the town. She is going to be there but will be asking some questions that will impact her family. She and Councilman Goorskey are with some other concerned parents and are not seeing traction from the eastern end on this. They were hoping that when the question was addressed and an answer was given by Dr. Arbogast that course offerings and curriculums were going to be very similar to what they are now they were hoping that would ruffle some feathers. They have talked about a slogan of 'Save Our School, Save Our Town' and tossed around an idea of a billboard that would be all encompassing of how it will impact all of their kids. If they base it on the questions that were answered, there is nothing she can tell her child that says it would be beneficial to consolidate schools because it's not. There is nothing they have put forward that will benefit their children.

Councilman Mills asked how much a billboard would cost?

Councilmember Bowles said the first month is \$750 and each month after that is \$600. She doesn't know how long they would run it but the town really needs to be behind this.

Councilman Goorskey asked if it would be ok if they put the town seal on the billboard or some other endorsement from the town?

Councilman Conley said the only thing that concerns him about a project like this is there is nothing to say an ostrich can't bury its head in the sand and bring it out later. There is nothing to say the school board can't say they will put this off until a later date and then there is a billboard that will cost thousands of dollars.

Mayor Spangler said in the past there has been tractor trailers placed in strategic areas with big vinyl signs on the side advertising whatever someone wanted to. There may be a possibility of having different individuals do that as well.

Councilmember Bowles said she isn't sure that the target market would be reached if they did that.

Councilman Conley said he believes a letter to the school board and ask them some of the questions the town has.

Councilman Goorskey said one of the questions he as for the school board is the care and attention they have for the Town of Narrows and another is for them to let people know the route they are going because the town needs to be able to plan. If council doesn't have a problem with it he would like to attend the school board meeting as a member of town council but that would mean only he and Councilmember Bowles could be in attendance.

Councilman Conley said they would probably need to get the blessing of Mike Bedsaul to do that.

Councilman Goorskey said Mike Bedsaul laid that out pretty clearly for them at one of their council meetings. More than 2 can attend but no more than 2 can make statements representing the town.

Councilman Turner said his personal opinion is that they need to be at the school board work session tomorrow because he believes the vote is going to be quicker than what they think. He believes it will be before the end of the year.

Mayor Spangler said as far as an economic impact study the best people to do it would be the New River Valley Regional Commission because they know more about the town than anyone else he knows of. The Giles County Board of Supervisors would have to be involved as well or it becomes a conflict of interest for the New River Valley Regional Commission. Before they commit themselves to spend a lot of money.

Councilman Goorskey said they would have to have 3 entities be in on the study so they would have to have the school board as well. He said he will ask the school board if they will be part of the study. If the time limit is up on the FOIA by November 22 he may not have to address it. He is really interested in the idea of billboards placed in other areas of

the county. Some people may just look at them and drive away but some people may see them and ask why it's such a big deal. If the sign contains items such as 'no new course offerings' some people may say they thought there would be new course offerings. If the school system is going to be changed, questions need to be asked. The biggest question is would the town be in agreement with allowing their endorsement to be on the billboard.

Councilman Mills made a motion to secure a billboard for 5 months with a cost not to exceed \$3,150. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Abstain: Bowles and Goorskey

Councilman Goorskey said he is with another group of individuals, along with Councilmember Bowles, so he believes he should abstain since money is involved. He knows this would be greatly appreciated because the group of individuals is seeking funding for this.

Councilman Conley asked if it would be better to wait on a response back from the school board before they commit money to this?

Councilman Goorskey said he doesn't see how the two are intertwined. The billboard isn't something that's asking the school board to consider economic impact.

Councilmember Bowles said what will be on the billboard is about education and the kids. They don't want to wait on this.

Mayor Spangler said he believes it would also be fitting to draft a letter to Rich Creek and Glen Lyn explaining the town's concerns and ask them if they would commit to financial support to help support the effort. It will be almost as detrimental to them as it will be Narrows.

Councilman Conley said their regular council meeting is in 2 weeks so he believes they would be better off sending the letters and come back and revisit this issue in 2 weeks. They will probably have more information then that they would want on a billboard.

Councilmember Bowles said time is of the essence because there aren't that many billboards available.

Councilman Goorskey said he can't remember how many billboards are available and how many are spoken for.

Councilmember Bowles said there is one billboard available in the spot where they want to put it so they don't need to wait 2 weeks. She believes 2 months would be long enough to get their point across.

Councilman Mills withdrew his first motion.

Councilman Mills made a motion to secure a billboard for 2 months with a cost not to exceed \$1,350. Councilman Turner seconded the motion.

Ayes: Turner, Conley, and Mills

Abstain: Bowles and Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 3-0

Councilman Conley said he believes they still need to ask the other localities for help.

Councilmember Bowles asked if some of the other localities were on board with the study to be done by the New River Valley Regional Commission would that work?

Councilman Goorskey said they would also have to be on board financially and that would be part of the discussion. He is going to demand to know whether the school board will be a part of this study and he knows they will say no.

Councilman Turner asked if they could invite some school board members to the next council meeting?

Councilman Goorskey said they could ask them.

Mayor Spangler said the questions and uncertainties are because the school board doesn't have any definitive answers and not everyone on the school board is ok with any of the directions they want to go in.

Councilman Conley said that's why they need to have it in black and white and let the mayor and town manager let the school board know the direction of council.

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

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler