

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
March 11, 2024**

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

Staff members present were John Davis, Cindy Laws, Jimmy Joe McCroskey, Terry Nicholson, Roger Shepherd, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Councilman John Mills gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of February 12th Meeting Minutes

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the February 12th meeting minutes.

Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Conley, and Mills

Abstain: Goorskey

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Consent Agenda

Library Report

No comments.

Parks & Recreation Report

No comments.

Farmer's Market Report

No report until April.

Police Report

Councilman Conley said he would like to thank Police Chief Ratcliffe and all of the officers for all they do. It looks like they had a really busy month.

Financial Report/Treasurer's Report

No comments.

Town Manager's Report

Terry Nicholson said he received a call from Morgan Griffith and Tim Kaine's offices in response to the letters they were sent about developing the properties the town has been looking at. Both Griffith and Kaine asked if the town was working with the New River Valley Regional Commission and were told they were. Griffith and Kaine are setting up meetings to talk with the town and the NRVRC to receive more information about the potential development.

Councilman Hale asked Terry Nicholson if the town takes initiative to make sure the properties the town owns that are for sale, or potentially for sale, are maintained and kept in a good condition so they are presented in the best way possible.

Terry Nicholson said they are working on doing that. Lead and asbestos surveys will be done this week and once they have that they will have a marketable building. These buildings include the Wheeler building and the bank building. The old town hall and fire department building will be

tested as well, although those will probably not be used again once they are replaced. They will probably be demolished since they are in the floodplain.

Councilman Conley asked Terry Nicholson if he had received word on when the restrooms for Mill Creek will be delivered.

Terry Nicholson said they should be delivered in May.

Mayor Spangler said Boy Scout Troop 68 delivered the totem pole to Camp Success and it was installed. It looks very nice and he encouraged everyone to go take a look at it.

Terry Nicholson said Cherie Fenne's husband William is working on placing an explanation of what the totem pole means so it can be posted on the town's Facebook page.

Public Works Director's Report

Councilman Mills said the water loss has really improved.

Councilman Hale asked John Davis if he could provide one year of water loss information to council.

Terry Nicholson said he has it in an Excel spreadsheet for six or seven years. He would be happy to provide that to council.

Councilman Hale said council needs to receive this information on a regular basis. He also wanted to thank the people that straightened the tubes where the trees were planted.

Councilman Mills said the tree-planting project went really well. It will pay for itself when the trees begin blooming.

Terry Nicholson said the town would like to thank the NRVRC and Nicole Hersch that is with the Native Plant Society. She actually arranged for the plants to be donated to the town and had members of the New River Conservancy to help on planting day. There was some good collaboration to get this accomplished.

Council asked for a letter of recognition to be sent to the entities that helped with planting day.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

Richard Duncan said he was present tonight to ask for an abatement for penalty and interest on his 2023 real estate taxes. He did not receive the original bill and believes it was sent to where the former owner lives.

Councilman Conley made a motion to abate the penalty and interest in the amount of \$123.65 on Richard Duncan's real estate tax bill. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Terry Nicholson said Judy Thomas was not present at the meeting tonight but was on the agenda to speak concerning her utility bill. Judy Thomas owns property at 1001 Westview Street. There are two apartments there and the one in question has not had a tenant to live there since 2022. In November 2023, she asked for a ten-day connect on the water so the apartment could be worked on. She knew there was a leak and when the town turned the water on the meter kept spinning and since there was no one at the property the meter was turned back off. The town tried to reschedule a day and time with Judy Thomas to turn the water on but she never called back.

However, the water was turned on in November for a period of time. Judy Thomas called the town to let them know the water had been turned off and on by her plumber,. This is “tampering” and there is generally a penalty charged for doing that. She was cautioned at that time that it was not legal for anyone to turn the water off and on other than town employees. In March of 2024, the town received a complaint from Judy Thomas that she had called the sheriff’s department, (which is the entity our phone system says to call on off hours if there is a water emergency), at 5:00 am on a Saturday morning and that the town did not respond until 4:30pm on the same day. The town does not have a record of that call, and the sheriff’s department does not have a record of that call happening at 5:00am. The town did receive a call at 4:00 pm on Saturday from her plumber, (who is not a licensed plumber), asking for the water to be turned off. A town employee arrived at 4:30pm to turn the water off. The town had not turned the water on. There is a graph showing water usage from November 2023 until March when the water was turned off.

Councilman Mills asked what Judy Thomas was asking council for.

Terry Nicholson said he is not really sure. He believes she is asking for a leak adjustment but it would be really hard to do one because they would typically take the previous six months’ worth of usage, which was basically zero until someone turned it on, and calculate an average usage.

Councilman Mills asked how big of an adjustment it would be.

Terry Nicholson said right now the bill is \$573. He is at a loss because the town did not turn the water on but someone else did. Judy Thomas said the tenant turned it on, but her plumber was involved as well, so he may have turned it on. The only thing is that \$573 of water went through the meter in one week, but the town did not turn the water on and the town has no record of anyone being responsible for turning the water on.

Mayor Spangler asked how many times the meter was turned off and on after Judy Thomas was instructed that the meter was leaking.

Terry Nicholson said one time. In November 2023, it was turned off and on several times. In February 2024, they turned it on and left it on and it leaked badly for one week.

Mayor Spangler asked if they turned the meter on knowing there was a leak.

Terry Nicholson said yes.

Councilman Conley said there is no one living there.

Debbie Thomas said there are people living there but they have no water. She believes they moved in this past Friday. She only knows this because she lives in the area.

Councilman Conley asked if there was anyone living there while water was going through the meter.

Terry Nicholson said that part is not clear.

John Davis said when the town worker was called out, he turned the meter back on because he was told the leak had been fixed and there were tenants living there. That is the only time the meter was turned back on.

Councilman Mills said there should be some responsibility for someone other than the town for turning the meter off and on.

Councilman Conley said Judy Thomas needs to come and plead her case to council.

Council decided to take no action on this matter.

Terry Nicholson said William Waddle was not present at the meeting tonight but was on the agenda to speak concerning police response. There was some trespassing on his property and there were certain areas in town where minors were trespassing on property and causing other problems. These minors have been apprehended and are being charged with some pretty serious

charges. The issue has somewhat resolved itself since some of the ones that were detained were the ones trespassing on his property.

Councilman Mills asked Terry Nicholson to have someone follow up with William Waddle.

Councilman Conley asked Terry Nicholson if he had spoken with Timmy Spicer to resolve the issue concerning the gate at the Mill Creek Property.

Terry Nicholson said yes. They have spoken with police officers about locking the gate. There is a catch-22 because they want to make sure Mill Creek is available for use by as many people as possible but there are several neighbors around the entrance to the park that are complaining about people going in and out of the park at night. They have asked the police officers, when they are working the night shift, to lock the gate. There is a period of time during the year that is bear hunting season and people like to access that area at night so they can hunt. During that season they have left the gate open at night so hunters can go in and out, and he did explain that to the people that complained and they were ok with that.

Councilman Conley said there is a posting there that the gate will be closed and locked at dusk. He took a picture of the sign and he knows what it says. He can also understand their concerns.

Councilman Mills said he saw where it was posted and either enforce the law or change the law.

Terry Nicholson said Police Chief Ratcliffe has spoken to the officers about closing and locking the gate if they are working night shift.

Communications from Mayor, Council, and Staff

Councilman Mills said he is going to have a lot to say at the next PSA meeting about the boil water notice. He should have some answers by the next council meeting.

Kathleen Armstrong from the New River Valley Regional Commission said she was there tonight to provide a draft of the Parks and Recreation Ordinance updates. The Town of Narrows is going through their strategic plans and updating them so that entails updating the Parks and Recreation Ordinance to make sure it is up to date and has been reviewed and refreshed as guidance for town staff, the New River Valley Regional Commission, town residents, and visitors. She is going to go through the document and hit some of the high points and will accept Council's feedback and comments. It will then hold a public hearing that will be published in a newspaper and council will hopefully approve it in April. This document has been reviewed by Mike Bedsaul and Terry Nicholson along with staff at the New River Valley Regional Commission. They are trying to provide some clarity and nuance to the ordinance and also update the legal language to line up with the State Code of Virginia. Under 'Article I. In General' they added language to give direction to and define the Parks and Recreation Director position which was not in the parks and recreation ordinance. This is an overview of the responsibilities and there are a few edits that can be seen throughout Article I. Under 'Article II. Park Regulations' section 20-17 adds a little more clarity on the responsible entity that deals with responsibility and enforcement of park regulations. Sections 20-19 through 20-24 have updates to bring in current language and accurate legal-use terms. Section 20-25 states specifically where debris will be placed. Section 20-28 which is 'Prohibited Acts – Generally' and this is where they got into some clarity in the content and elaborate on the existing policy so there is some additional language there. Section 20-30 'Violations and penalties' adds language to be concurrent with the Virginia Code. Under 'Article III. Parks and Recreation Commission' there is a change on the wording around 'advisory in nature'. The parks and recreation commission recommends to council different items that are outlined in Article III. Section 20-64 elaborates on the duties of the roles within the commission, including the necessitation of minutes for their meetings. Under the same section, item C, they have inserted language to deal with things such as the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. Section 20-66 expands upon the expectations and language and duties and articulates the order of operations and streamlines that process. The commission talks to the town manager with their concerns and then brings it to council. There are no suggested changes in the last two pages of the ordinance. There are three points she would like to bring up about the ordinance. Section 20-22 'Controlled substances prohibited': right now, there is language contained in this section about marijuana and hashish and they are asking council on their advisement on whether or not to add a no smoking policy to parks and recreation

facilities. Section 20-23 'Exclusion of vehicles': right now, the way the park shelters are being used and how it is written in the ordinance says people can be dropped off at the shelters that are handicapped but the shelters may also be receiving large coolers or people may be dropped off that are not handicapped but may be older and have mobility issues. Is council against allowing a temporary loading zone at the shelters. Section 20-27 'Dogs prohibited during summer': right now, dogs are prohibited in the park during the summer season extending from April 1 through November 1. Would council be against removing that prohibition and updating it to be more current. A lot of town and municipal parks allow dogs on leash and the Town of Narrows does have a leash policy.

Councilman Mills said he is against marijuana but he is for letting dogs in the park.

Mayor Spangler said as far as smoking it would be up to what the State of Virginia will eventually regulate as far as marijuana use. If the town allows smoking and the state says it is legal to smoke marijuana then he believes they should ban smoking in the park altogether.

Councilman Goorskey asked if the state would allow the town to ban smoking in the park now. In the past they have not had the ability to do that.

Councilmember Bowles said a few years ago the town purchased 'no smoking' signs to place at the park but were told it could not be a law and could not be enforced. They could advise and ask people not to smoke around playground equipment. They had a petition that was signed by a lot of town individuals supporting a smoking ban at the park.

Mike Bedsaul said he could recall the smoking ban was the subject of several town council meetings and from the state's standpoint they could advise and ask people not to smoke but it could not be enforced.

Terry Nicholson asked Mike Bedsaul to check on that for them.

Councilman Goorskey said it would be interesting to see if marijuana fell more under the same category as alcohol and open containers.

Mike Bedsaul said if someone were prescribed medical marijuana and were smoking it openly around children it could have an adverse effect.

Councilman Conley said under Section 20-2 'Functions of the Parks and Recreation Department' he is thinking about Mill Creek and the Webb Property. If the grant goes through, will those properties be included as parks and recreation properties.

Terry Nicholson said yes.

Councilman Conley said he has no problem with the exclusion of vehicles. In Section 20-95 'Enforcement' there are no longer game wardens in the State of Virginia. They did away with that about three years ago and they are now called state conservation police officers.

Kathleen Armstrong thanked Councilman Conley for letting her know this.

Mayor Spangler said his concern with the car drop-offs would be primarily the upper shelter. Cars would have to drive along the creek and if it is in the summer that area could be heavily populated. That would place the town at a considerable liability.

Mike Bedsaul said the language could be changed to say 'there shall be no private vehicles allowed inside the playground area at the park except those dropping off or picking up handicapped people, town crews, delivery trucks, or as approved by the director of the parks and recreation department'. He would assume that if someone rented a shelter they would have to obtain a permit and pay a fee. The director could take into account all of these circumstances such as whether it is a busy time of year at the park and no one could be dropped off. The town manager could also decide this but it makes more sense if the director decides since they would be collecting the fee.

Councilman Hale said he is concerned about cars being parked at the shelters and not leaving. He believes they are fooling themselves that if they think just changing the wording is going to fix the problem. It needs to be worded properly but also needs to be enforced.

Councilman Goorskey said enforcing this would fall on the Narrows Police Department.

Councilman Hale said the drop-off point becomes a parking area not for minutes but for hours.

Councilman Goorskey said what happens is the director receives a call concerning this and he cannot do anything about it. It is up to the town police department to enforce the rules as put forth in the ordinance.

Mike Bedsaul said the language could be changed to say ‘once handicapped persons are dropped off or picked up or goods or equipment delivered or removed, the vehicle shall be removed from the playground area’.

Councilman Goorskey said people that are renting shelters could be made aware that if they need to drop people off they may not want to rent the upper shelter.

Mayor Spangler said he believed the exception on people that are handicapped would be if they had a handicapped placard displayed.

Councilman Goorskey said they ultimately want everyone to be able to enjoy the park and its facilities but not hinder the other people that are there at the same time.

Councilmember Bowles said they will be asking for police presence at the park and driving through the area every couple of hours so some of these things should be caught and addressed in a timely fashion.

Councilman Hale said he would be for letting dogs in the park all year long as long as there were bags made available for picking up after them.

Councilman Goorskey asked if the town’s leash law stated they had to be on a leash or did it also include adhering to commands.

Mike Bedsaul said he would check on that.

Councilman Hale said he believes they should be on a leash. If they change these things and later find out they are not working what would the process be for addressing that.

Mike Bedsaul said they would amend the ordinance the way they are now.

Councilman Hale said in the past, swimming at the park has been closed because of water quality issues. Does anything need to be included in the ordinance about that. Is the water tested they are swimming in?

Mayor Spangler said they swim at their own risk.

Councilman Hale said that may have been when the park had a lifeguard and was fully staffed.

Mike Bedsaul said in the ordinance the parks and recreation director has the authority to close off parts of the park or any recreation facility.

Councilman Hale asked what they have seen in other localities concerning dogs being permitted in a park year-round. Are pet owners being responsible?

Kathleen Armstrong said pet owners are being responsible. As long as there is signage concerning the dog being on a leash and picking up after them. The waste stations are also pretty commonplace.

Councilmember Bowles asked in parks where dogs are permitted do they usually have a portion of the park that is considered a ‘dog park’ so they could be off leash.

Kathleen Armstrong said a dog park is very contemporary in most localities. That is something they will look at.

Mayor Spangler said Section 20-2 states ‘the department of parks and recreation shall be responsible for operating and maintaining all public parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities and grounds within the Town government’. With that it would seem that the parks and recreation department was responsible for mowing the grass and trimming the trees/bushes, which is not possible.

Terry Nicholson mentioned there was verbiage in the ordinance that directed the parks and recreation director to communicate to public works when something needed to be done. He would not like for a future public works director to read that ordinance and believe it is not their job to do these things.

Kathleen Armstrong said she made a note of that. She will go back and make the changes and resubmit the draft ordinance.

Mike Bedsaul said the next step would be to advertise the proposed ordinance, hold a public hearing, and then consider adoption. If a public hearing is held and council feels like the ordinance should be tweaked a little bit they could always approve the ordinance subject to some other amendment they would like to make.

Councilman Goorskey said he would like to commend the work Kathleen Armstrong has done on the parks and recreation ordinance.

Terry Nicholson said council has a copy of the task order amendment between the Town of Narrows and the New River Valley Regional Commission concerning the zoning ordinance update. The comprehensive plan update was recently done and part of that was changing the names of the zones in town. The zoning ordinance now needs to be updated and he asked the New River Valley Regional Commission to put together a proposal for their help in doing that. This process will take about 2.5 years so the costs will be spread out over FY24 (\$5,000), FY25 (\$12,500), and FY26 (\$12,500). The New River Valley Regional Commission is splitting the cost with the town so the town would pay a total of \$30,000 and the New River Valley Regional Commission would cover the remaining \$30,000 through a grant. He is asking council to approve the task order with a total of \$30,000 spread out over the next two years.

Councilman Hale asked if they would have the option to opt out of this at any point.

Terry Nicholson said they could opt out at any point with 30 days written notice from the Town of Narrows.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the Task Order Amendment between the Town of Narrows and the New River Valley Regional Commission. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Mayor Spangler said the town received three bids from three different contractors for sewer replacement on Northview Street and George Street. The lowest bid came in at \$248,280 from Main Street Builders, LLC in Princeton, WV.

Terry Nicholson said council has a copy of the three bids that were received for sewer replacement on Northview Street (300’) and George Street (170’). Some modifications were made to try and get the cost down from what they were initially told it was going to be. The low bid came in at \$248,280 from Main Street Builders, LLC and council has a copy of a letter from Peed & Bortz, L.L.C. recommending the town accept that bid. Terry Nicholson has begun working with the Virginia Resources Authority to finance this repair and funds will have to be borrowed to do that. VRA has begun looking at the town’s financials and if council will approve the amount up to the contract price he will proceed with obtaining the financing. Once a contract is in place council will have to approve the contract for the contract amount.

Councilman Mills said the town will go with Main Street Builders, LLC. With the difference in bid prices, the town needs to pay attention and make sure the price stays the same.

Councilman Conley made a motion to approve Terry Nicholson pursuing financing in the amount of \$248,280 for Northview Street and George Street sewer replacements.

Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Terry Nicholson said there are fire department members present to discuss the purchase of a pumper truck. Chris Stump has asked Terry Nicholson to speak for them. The fire department members did some research on some used trucks that has been given to council. They have found several that are comparable to the one they are wanting to replace. On each vehicle, they listed the number of operating hours on the pumper truck and the actual miles on the truck. When you buy a used truck you really do not know what you are getting and Chris Stump said Celanese had just purchased a used truck and they almost immediately had to put it in the shop to be repaired and are spending quite a bit of money to repair it. They know what the maintenance has been on the existing truck so if they look at a used truck one of the things council mentioned last month was refurbishing the truck they already have. Chris Stump did some research to try and find someone that would refurbish the truck but has not been able to locate anyone, so they would have to find someone. They did find a value for the current fire truck but you cannot get a true appraisal without signing a sale order for it because the person that appraises it wants to be the one to sell it. They received a rough estimate from the salespeople they have been speaking with, and they would estimate the current truck to be worth around \$100,000. They have also had problems with the current truck's transmission and recently had to put it in the shop for repair and the cost to fix it will be \$18,311.00 plus a fee for the work that has already been done in the amount of almost \$1,800.00. He has spoken with Chris Stump about the fire department's financial status and they would be hard pressed to pay for the repair on the truck so the town needs to work with them so the repair can be made.

Councilman Mills said the town wants to help the fire department. He asked the fire department members if the town could pay to fix the truck would that tide them over until the town could come up with funds to purchase another truck.

Councilman Hale said in the last few days a grant request was made on behalf of the town and the community through FEMA for a new fire truck. Where that may go he does not know but he wanted council to be aware.

One of the fire department members stated that the grant that was applied for was not to replace the primary pumper but to replace the oldest truck they have, which is a 1985 model.

Councilman Conley asked if there was any ARPA money that could be transferred to fix the fire truck.

Terry Nicholson said yes.

Mayor Spangler asked if they knew what it would cost to refurbish the truck they have now once the transmission is fixed.

One of the fire department members said it would be hard to find someone to refurbish the truck.

Councilman Conley said he would say to go ahead and repair the truck and see what happens with the FEMA grant.

Terry Nicholson said the current pumper truck the fire department has only has 23,281 miles on it and the hours on the pumper are 1,710 so it has far less usage than the pumper truck examples council has been given. The fire department is going to work with Terry Nicholson on the replacement of the rest of the fleet so they can add it to the town's ten-year plan. The fire department has done a lot of homework to get the information to give to council.

Councilman Conley made a motion to approve Terry Nicholson spending up to \$20,483.67 for the repair of the Narrows Fire Department's pumper truck. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Terry Nicholson said council has in their packets a report from Davenport & Company. He has been speaking with Kyle Laux concerning the money the town is going to have to borrow for sewer repairs. He has also spoken with a representative from USDA Rural Development about the fire department building they want to build. He asked Kyle Laux to give him a proposal for a ten-year plan. The town would take into account what their borrowing capacity is over a ten-year period and make sure there is a plan for that. Davenport & Company has broken this down into a couple of phases. When the town was purchasing the Gallimore property, Davenport & Company asked the town to put \$15,000 into the town's budget for them in case the town decided not to purchase the Gallimore property so the town could pay Davenport & Company for their efforts on the town's behalf. When the Gallimore property was purchased, the Davenport payment was financed, so the \$15,000 is still there. He is asking council to approve the agreement with Davenport & Company for Phase I on page 3 of their proposal, which is a total compensation of \$15,000 plus out-of-pocket direct expenses (which are billed at cost) and a 4% administrative fee. That will get the town through this year. Davenport & Company would like to continue to work with the town next year and ask that the town place another \$15,000 in next year's budget. If the town does something with them next year Davenport & Company would finance that into their fee. Their help has been invaluable to him and it has helped him to understand the complexity of this. They have a number of puzzle pieces that have to mesh together for all of this financing and he feels like the work Davenport & Company is doing is well worth the money they are paying them.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the agreement with Davenport Financial. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

New Business

Terry Nicholson said he was going to try to save council a budget work session meeting this month by talking in general about salaries. He has begun working on the town's operational budget for the coming year and feels pretty good about things compared to last year. There are a number of things he would like to draw council's attention to and wanted to give them an idea of the percentage they are looking at concerning increasing wages for the coming fiscal year. They need to consider the cost-of-living increase and if they look that up it is really difficult to come up with a value for that because it ranges from 3.2% to 8.7%. The town's health insurance rates are going to go up on July 1, 2024, and that will be a monthly increase of \$15.00 monthly for single coverage and \$71.00 monthly for family coverage. That amounts to \$180.00 yearly for single coverage and \$852.00 for family coverage. Some of the lower paid employees who are paying for family coverage would see half of their raise taken by insurance coverage if they were given a 5% increase. There is a part-time police officer that has left employment with the town so he has been speaking with Police Chief Ratcliffe about that, and they feel like the best plan for replacing that officer would be to hire someone that is not certified yet and pay for them to attend the academy. They would then have this person sign a contract to work for the town for a certain number of years. There are several other police officers that are nearing retirement age they need to consider in their long-range planning. One of the things that has hurt Narrows this year is that the Town of Pearisburg has changed their starting salary for police officers to \$50,000/year and Narrows has a couple of officers that make less than that and have been with the town for a number of years. A minimum-wage increase is in the legislature right now (but has not been signed by the governor). The town will need to budget for that in case it is passed. The minimum wage is now \$12.00/hour and if the bill is passed the rate will increase to \$13.50/hour January 1, 2025, and then to \$15.00/hour January 1, 2026. Jumping to \$13.50 is an 18% increase in the town's part-time budget, which is a significant increase. He feels like they will be in the 10% salary increase range to be able to give a reasonable cost-of-living increase to most employees and, like last year, salaries for entry-level positions are getting pushed up toward salaries of

employees that have been with the town for several years. Those salaries will need to be adjusted as well. He just wanted council to be aware of these things and that they are alright with operating in the 10% increase range.

Mayor Spangler said it does not appear they have a choice.

Councilman Hale asked Terry Nicholson if he was asking council to give employees both a cost-of-living increase and a merit increase.

Terry Nicholson said not all of them would get that. The merit increase would be used to bump up some of the lower-paid positions that are being compressed by the increase of minimum wage. Employees go through a self-review process where they fill out a form of self-review for the last year and then their supervisors go over that with them and make their own review and comments. That performance review is used to judge what kind of merit increase the employee will receive.

Councilman Mills asked if there is ever a situation where an employee is an underachiever and they will not receive a raise.

Terry Nicholson said they would receive nothing except the cost-of-living increase.

Councilman Conley asked if the 10% raise is an average and will everyone receive a 10% raise.

Terry Nicholson said 10% is the total they would increase employees across the board. There would be a 5% increase across the board, which would be the cost-of-living increase, and then adjustments would be made for lower-paid employees. Merit increases tend to go to lower-paid employees because higher-paid employees typically match within the town's job-classification scale.

Councilman Mills asked Terry Nicholson how much they would have to raise taxes to accomplish this.

Terry Nicholson said he does not know that yet but does not believe it will be significant. He does not believe it will be any more than it was last year. He is cautiously optimistic they will not have to raise real estate taxes but will probably have to raise water and waste water fees.

Councilman Goorskey asked if water and waste water fees could be used to pay for salaries outside of that department.

Terry Nicholson said not outside of that department.

Councilman Hale said he wanted to be fair to employees and to town citizens and, with that said, relative to the performance evaluations does everyone have a set of performance expectations so they clearly know what the expectation is.

Terry Nicholson said they do that through their job description and through their performance review process as well.

Councilman Hale asked if these performance reviews are done semi-annually or annually.

Terry Nicholson said annually.

Councilman Hale asked if the town knew what Giles County was doing or what neighboring municipalities are doing.

Terry Nicholson said he does not know yet other than Pearisburg's pay scale is what Narrows is using and they make bigger increases than Narrows is going to.

Councilman Conley said he believes because of all the things that have hit Narrows this year such as fire trucks and sewer repair they really need to look at what they need and what they do not need.

Councilman Goorskey said he understands where Terry Nicholson gets his numbers from but he wonders what kind of raise is being given in this area. He believes the cost-of-living increase in this area is around 3%.

Terry Nicholson said he has a meeting with the chief administrative officers this week and they usually talk about things like that.

Councilman Mills said if the minimum wage is increased they do not have a say in that. Is a minimum wage increase included in the 10% raise.

Terry Nicholson said yes.

Councilman Mills said that means they have to do something. They need to know what this will cost taxpayers before they commit.

Councilman Goorskey said council has never gone against a cost-of-living or merit increase. The hard part he has with this is increasing the cost-of-living for citizens to give employees a cost-of-living increase. That will be hard to balance.

Councilman Mills said these increases are discretionary and do not have to be done but they have always done them and they want to take care of employees. The town is the town staff, but he would like to know more about how much taxes may have to be raised and other things before he commits to this.

Terry Nicholson said he is not asking council to commit to this tonight he is just trying to give them a ballpark figure for what he is seeing.

Councilman Conley said he sees this as a starting point.

Mayor Spangler said money is always a consideration but the town has employees that if the minimum wage goes up and council does nothing to compensate the ones that have a salary slightly above that, they have experience and knowledge that may allow them to find employment elsewhere.

Terry Nicholson said there have been several times in the last year where someone left employment with the town and the town realized how much they had to pay to replace them, which was significantly more than they were paying the person that left. Sometimes they learn lessons the hard way.

Councilman Mills said he is just asking for more information.

Unfinished Business

None.

Matters for Consideration by Council

Terry Nicholson said council has an engagement letter from Rodefer Moss to perform the town's preaudit for FY24. This was previously done by Mary K. Earhart. Her company was purchased by Rodefer Moss so she and her office will be performing the preaudit. The cost for the preaudit is slightly higher than it was last year but not significantly.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the engagement letter from Rodefer Moss concerning performing the town's preaudit for FY24. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Terry Nicholson said he called each council member and polled them on approving extending the contract with Peed and Bortz. He has already signed the agreement but Mike Bedsaul asked that council ratify that agreement tonight.

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Councilman Goorskey made a motion to ratify the previous agreement to extend the contract with Peed & Bortz. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Mayor Spangler told Terry Nicholson they probably needed to wait and see if Kathleen Armstrong could make the changes to the parks and recreation ordinance before they scheduled a public hearing.

Terry Nicholson said they will tentatively schedule the public hearing for the April 8th council meeting but if for some reason that does not happen they will schedule it for the May 13th meeting.

Mayor Spangler said council is being asked to give a donation to the Giles-Narrows After Prom Party.

Terry Nicholson said last year council donated \$500.

Councilman Conley made a motion to donate \$500 to the Giles-Narrows After Prom Party. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

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

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler