

Narrows Town Council Meeting
August 12, 2024

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

Staff members present were Cindy Laws, Terry Nicholson, Benji Ratcliffe, 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 July 8th Meeting Minutes

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the July 8th meeting minutes. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Conley, and Mills

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Consent Agenda

Library Report

Councilman Conley thanked Cindy Laws for the report she gives to council every month. It is very informative.

Parks & Recreation Report

Councilmember Bowles thanked Roger Shepherd for applying for and receiving the grant from Dick's Sporting Goods. She also mentioned that the splash pad looks great.

Councilman Hale asked Roger Shepherd if he could explain what the grant will be used for.

Roger Shepherd said it has to be used for sports programs and will be used to purchase things like catcher's gear, uniforms, balls, etc. He will have to do a report at the end of the year showing what was purchased.

Councilman Hale asked if the disc golf course at Camp Success was operational.

Roger Shepherd said part of it is. About four of the baskets have been moved to the ballfield because of flooding so they are trying to find somewhere to put them.

Terry Nicholson said what was an 18-hole course is now a 9-hole course. The new outfitter is going to use some of the baskets at their facility.

Councilman Hale said he has spoken with Terry Nicholson about vehicles being parked at picnic shelters on weekends. He would like to see the 'park manager' position reestablished in the summer to help with these sorts of things. He remembers when there was a full-time park manager and that was very helpful. This position could also be over tournaments on weekends. He knows this will have to be budgeted for and would like Terry Nicholson to check on reestablishing this position.

Terry Nicholson said it is too late to hire someone this year but it could be budgeted for in next year's budget, but the position could begin in May or June of 2025.

Councilman Mills said the park is a great asset for the town so this position should definitely be brought back.

Roger Shepherd said a school teacher may possibly be interested in this position. A teenager should not be in this position.

Councilman Mills said he wanted to recognize Sara Bowles for the student recognition event held at the town park. This needs to be done every year.

Councilmember Bowles said a ‘thank you’ will be sent to Walmart for the \$200 donation they gave. She also thanked Terry Nicholson, Tom Spangler, John Hale, and others that helped with the event.

Farmers Market Report

Councilmember Bowles said she wanted to recognize Lindsey Thompson for all her hard work with the Farmers Market.

Police Report

Councilman Conley said he received a call last week from someone in Indiana concerning the Narrows Police Department. This person was on the phone with someone in Narrows and the person he was speaking with, which is an elderly resident, fell down and could not get back up. Frank Gough called Police Chief Ratcliffe and he sent someone to the elderly resident’s home to help him get up.

Financial Report/Treasurer’s Report

Debbie Thomas told council that the town is almost done with their pre-audit and beginning their fiscal year audit.

Town Manager’s Report

Councilman Hale asked if there was anything the town could do to help support the new outfitter business such as placing information on the town’s website or posting information in the town hall.

Terry Nicholson said they could do that and they will also place their events on the town’s Facebook page. Cora Gnegy has been working with them on marketing their business.

Councilman Conley asked if there were any updates on the generator at the waste water plant.

Terry Nicholson said he wanted to make sure the town’s generator was not the problem. They had it tested about a month before work began so they assumed it was performing as it should be. They moved the generator to the digesters and tried to run them off of it and that was kicking it off. They retested the generator and it was not performing as it should have been. They diagnosed it and found there was a fuel pump problem so they have ordered the parts to repair that. They will test it again after the repairs and see if it was the generator's problem.

Public Works Director’s Report

Councilman Conley said the 13% water loss is fantastic.

Terry Nicholson said J.J. Perdue is performing leak detection and the water/sewer crew is fixing leaks he finds and that setup is what is keeping the water loss down.

Councilman Hale said a lot has been done to beautify Camp Success but there is 20-30 yards of milled asphalt near the entrance. Could that be moved?

Terry Nicholson said they are planning to use that to put on the road at Camp Success. VDOT gave it to the town when they were milling Route 61.

Councilman Conley made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Conley, and Mills

Nays: None
Motion Carried 4-0

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

Mayor Spangler asked if there was anyone from the public that had any comments on changing the tax due date. There were no comments.

Terry Nicholson said council has a copy of comments that were made on the post the town placed on Facebook. The majority of the comments seem to be in favor of the change.

(Councilman Goorskey arrived)

Councilman Hale thanked everyone for listening to the questions he has had concerning this. The reason this is so important to him is because they are messing with people's money and that is one thing that gets their attention. He just wants to do the right thing. He asked Terry Nicholson if he recommends changing the tax due date.

Terry Nicholson said yes.

Communications from Mayor, Council, and Staff

Councilman Mills said neither he nor Terry Nicholson were able to attend the last PSA meeting but from what he understands there was nothing discussed that was urgent. They are moving forward with drilling a well at Pembroke. They are still trying to negotiate with DEQ to refresh the river withdrawal permit, which has been active for over 15 years.

Terry Nicholson said they have gone through grant processes for the bank building and Wheeler building where they did the highest and best use study for each building. They also did lead and asbestos testing. The buildings are ready to be marketed and people have approached him interested in the buildings. He spoke with Mike Bedsaul and they do not feel like the town needs to do an actual RFP but simply work with the people that have expressed interest and have them submit a proposal that Terry Nicholson will bring back to council.

Terry Nicholson said the town had received a grant proposal from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) for the land purchase at Mill Creek. The West Virginia Cave Conservancy is interested in purchasing a four-acre tract of land that encompasses the cave that is on the property. They would limit access to the cave, which is one thing Dr. Webb wanted to happen. The VOF has agreed this is a great idea and will help modify the grant agreement to include the sale of the small parcel to the cave conservancy. This should happen in January 2025. The town has hired someone to do a survey and a Phase I environmental study will have to be done.

Councilman Conley asked if a biological study had been done concerning bats and other wildlife in the cave.

Terry Nicholson said yes. This was looked at as part of the larger area when the easement was put on the parcel.

Mike Bedsaul asked what the time frame was on the grant funding versus closing on the purchase of the property. Will the town have to front the money of the Phase I survey.

Terry Nicholson said the funds cannot be released until the easement is in place so the closing and land transfers will all happen in one day. The town will have to front the money for the survey and the Phase I survey.

Terry Nicholson stated the town has been working with people from West Virginia University that helped with the BAD building survey. They have scheduled a meeting for August 19, 2024, where the internal team will look at the list of properties that was generated as part of the survey and narrow it down. On September 26, 2024, there will be a public meeting where the whole group will be invited again to determine steps to proceed with contacting owners of the properties, resources that could be offered to them, and options for what they could do with their property. He has invited several council members to attend both meetings.

Terry Nicholson said Police Chief Ratcliffe's department has had a tough run on vehicles recently. Police Chief Ratcliffe's vehicle was totaled and Officer Melissa Cohen hit a deer with her vehicle and all of the airbags were deployed. They suspect that vehicle will be totaled as well. Her vehicle was the one that was going to be replaced next year anyway, it is the oldest vehicle in the fleet, but it has to be replaced ahead of time. To replace Police Chief Ratcliffe's truck would cost \$61,250 and that includes outfitting the vehicle as well. Money will be recovered from UPS for the vehicle loss in the amount of \$51,650 so they will still need around \$10,000 to purchase and outfit the new vehicle. The town has not received the assessment for Melissa Cohen's vehicle yet but he would like to put that amount toward the purchase of Police Chief Ratcliffe's new truck. The total cost to replace Melissa Cohen's vehicle will cost \$62,569. Davenport & Company recommended sending RFP's to local banks and let them bid on a car loan for the town. He would like for council to approve Terry Nicholson purchasing both of these vehicles and financing the Dodge Durango with payments spread over 5 years.

Councilman Goorskey asked if UPS was responsible for totaling Police Chief Ratcliffe's vehicle why does the town have to pay a deductible and why is the replacement cost not the responsibility of UPS's insurance company.

Mike Bedsaul said the town would have to pay a deductible if the town was submitting a claim on their own vehicle so Councilman Goorskey is asking why does the town have a deductible. The town should be made whole.

Councilman Goorskey said the town needs to have replaced what it lost and if it now costs more than it did that would be on UPS.

Mike Bedsaul said he would ask for some explanation on this.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve Terry Nicholson moving forward with purchasing two new police vehicles and financing one of them over 5 years.

Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Terry Nicholson said the New River Valley Regional Commission is located in the Pulaski Innovation Center in Fairlawn and have leased this space for around 15 years. They have the opportunity to purchase the old American National Bank building in Christiansburg, which is across from the Corning plant. They are looking at options for financing the purchase. All counties, cities, towns, and higher education facilities have pro-rated membership dues that are based on population. The Town of Narrows dues are \$2,700/year. They will spread the cost of the building purchase over each locality and have presented the town with a number of options and will present these to council to see which option they want to choose. The town will not be able to handle an up-front payment like Blacksburg will probably do. There is a chart that shows what Narrows' annual payment would be. It will roughly double what the town now pays in dues. The New River Valley Regional Commission is invaluable to the town so he would encourage council to look at this.

New Business

Rick Chitwood said he was vice president for client services with Thompson and Litton. He and his coworkers Keli Ratcliffe (client service manager) and Mike Jeffries (project manager) were at the council meeting to discuss the preliminary engineering report for the wastewater treatment plant. This is such a critical project for the town so he wants to make sure he does not talk too fast and if he says things council does not understand they need to stop him. This will be an expensive venture, and he wants to share what they have learned to date. A little over two years ago, the Town of Pearisburg hired Thompson and Litton to do a preliminary engineering report for their wastewater plant. He has been very transparent to the Town of Pearisburg and the Town of Narrows because they have contracts with both towns. When they finished the preliminary engineering report Pearisburg filed for a funding application to upgrade their plant. They were subsequently offered around \$13 million at .5% interest for 25 years and DEQ offered \$689,087 in principal forgiveness (grant funds), which reduced the original amount. They took .5% on the

project amount over a 25-year period so the interest was forgiven on the loan. The Town of Pearisburg wanted to put their project on hold because there was discussion on doing a regional facility between Pearisburg and Narrows. DEQ agreed to putting Pearisburg's project on hold and Thompson and Litton finished the PER for Narrows. The Town of Narrows I&I (Inflow and Infiltration) is very high, and the first phase of this project is to try to decrease the amount of I&I and this will help decrease the size of the improvements to Narrows' plant, thus reducing the cost. I&I is a constant battle and will have to be treated like leak detection. Pearisburg and Narrows both seem to be in agreement to explore the regional approach. They would expand the structure at Pearisburg and eventually pump the flow from Narrows to Pearisburg. When Thompson and Litton completed Narrows' PER, a full buildout of the sewer plant would cost around \$9.6 million. Construction costs are sky high right now, especially in wastewater. Wastewater projects cost 3 times what water projects cost. Several people made a trip to Richmond to meet with DEQ. A full buildout of the Narrows wastewater plant would be around \$9.6 million. If Narrows wanted to look at becoming a partner with Pearisburg, it would cost around \$5 million to modify Narrows' plant to convert it into a big pump station. To pump the flow to Pearisburg they looked at two routes: along Route 100, which would cost around \$11 million and along Route 460, which would cost around \$14 million. T&L recently opened bids to replace sewer line on Route 19 near Wardell, Virginia, near Southwest Virginia Community College and 10" water line was \$150/foot. The other bid was \$210/foot. He does not believe construction costs will come down any time soon and contractors are hard to find because they are all busy. Pearisburg would have to expand their wastewater plant to accommodate the flow from Narrows which will be around \$3.5 million. Rick Chitwood said he spoke with Kelly Ward, the Director of Construction Finance at DEQ, and asked her if she had a \$11 million grant and she said no. Before going to Richmond, he had given up hope on a regional facility because of her comment. They went to Richmond and explained the situation to Kelly Ward and Karen Durand, the manager of the department that works under Kelly, and they both became excited about the regional approach and felt it would be more attractive to obtain financing and principal forgiveness because the General Assembly promotes regional projects. DEQ has 'procedural guidelines' determining how they look at costs. When offering to lend money, DEQ looks at the median household income. The median household income for Giles County is \$61,987/year, the median household income for Narrows is \$58,411/year, and the median household income for Pearisburg is \$70,905/year. The chart from DEQ relating to lending money for projects shows if you are at a certain level it goes from .75% to 1.5%. If the median household income is \$58,411/year or higher like Narrows is, they expect the monthly sewer bill to be at least 1.5% of what the median household income is each year. That would make the average sewer bill for Narrows around \$61. DEQ expects this before they begin talking about any principal forgiveness. He has passed out paperwork to council showing different municipalities in Virginia and what their median household income is. DEQ is recommending a two-phase approach. They increased the amount for Pearisburg to take into account the expansion of their wastewater plant to handle the flow from Narrows. They also submitted a funding application to DEQ for Narrows to look at the I&I in this first year and DEQ will definitely want this looked at because they will not pay to expand a plant with too much I&I. Phase 2 will be next year and that will pertain to applying for a funding application to modify Narrows' current plant to a big pump station and the force main. DEQ feels like they could help more financially if this was done over a two-year period rather than one. Rick Chitwood, Terry Nicholson, John Mills, Keli Ratcliffe, and Mike Jeffries met with Jason Ballard and employees from Giles County. This issue was explained to all of them because these towns have a certain amount of money they can borrow, and Narrows does not have enough for what they would need to borrow. However, the county might agree to give a moral obligation bond for each town. If the Town of Narrows folds, it will go back to the board of supervisors anyway. There are no promises of this, but it is being looked at. If they began this project tomorrow, before Narrows could pump wastewater to Pearisburg it is going to take 3.5-4 years at a minimum. Narrows is going to have to borrow money for either option but it seems DEQ is going to offer more money for a regional approach. The town is going to have to look at the dreaded words of 'rate increases'. Pearisburg realizes the same thing. The good side of this is Narrows has a four-year window to look at this and can raise their rates a little each year. There are not a lot of contractors that build waste water plants and Thompson and Litton prequalifies contractors at that level. The first thing Narrows needs to do is approve the I&I study and any monies can be reimbursed for up-front costs covered by Narrows. The town would receive the money back when the loan is received.

Terry Nicholson said the I&I study will determine what needs to be fixed in the system.

Mayor Spangler asked what was the I&I limit according to DEQ.

Rich Chitwood said as long as the town does not exceed its discharge limits and as of now the limits are really being exceeded.

Councilman Conley asked what the longevity was if they went to a regional approach.

Rick Chitwood said they would have a long-term intermunicipal agreement in place stating it cannot be canceled without someone's notice of five years (timing up to legal counsel) but it should definitely go for the term of the loan but would be renewable.

Councilman Conley asked about additions to this new plant.

Rick Chitwood said there would be room for expansion.

Rick Chitwood said Jason Ballard is going to go back to Richmond and meet with DEQ and other legislators to see if he can help with financing. Chris McKlarney said the county may be able to help by using some of their employees, and Narrows and Pearisburg employees, to help build the force main from Narrows to Pearisburg.

Councilman Conley asked if there would be any issues with rights-of-way in building the force main.

Rick Chitwood said there may be but they are going to try to stay as close to the road as they can. They were unsure Narrows could upgrade their plant because of site restrictions but they found out they can but the cost will be around \$10 million.

Councilman Mills said if they are going to do this now is the time.

Rick Chitwood said the Town of Narrows has a discharge permit for their wastewater and if they joined Pearisburg's plant Pearisburg would hold the discharge permit.

Rick Chitwood said Jason Ballard is going to Richmond and will be with other delegates and senators that represent counties and towns that do not have the same median household income that Giles County towns do. These will be some of the biggest costs that Narrows and Pearisburg will have to deal with for a while. Narrows will probably receive a letter in October from Karen Durand stating the \$1.5 million the town applied for is being offered at a 100% loan with .5% interest. In December, if the loan is accepted, DEQ takes that to the State Water Control Board of Directors and they approve all of that. In March or April, the EPA will let each state know how much principal forgiveness they will give each state. They normally try to take 30% of their monies toward principal forgiveness. Keep this in mind: next year will be the last year they will have bipartisan infrastructure grant money. That is why they are pushing it on a two-year approach. They want these applications before the grant funds expire.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the I&I Study to be performed by Thompson and Litton. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Rick Chitwood told council to remember if the regional approach does not work each town may have to look at upgrading each of their plants on their own.

Terry Nicholson said there is a problem at the pump station on Old Virginia Avenue. The pump is usually lowered on rails because the well it goes into is so deep and those rails have rusted and cannot be used anymore. They have been looking for someone to repair this and now have a quote from Main Street Builders. He has spoken with Mike Bedsaul concerning this and was wondering if the town needs to do an RFP for this.

Mike Bedsaul said they could do it by invitation to bid. Under the procurement act, because the town has a population of less than 3,500, they do not need to meet all requirements of the procurement act. He would like to have more details on this.

Councilman Mills asked if there were any provisions for emergencies.

Mike Bedsaul said yes. In fact, the new sewer project was being looked at as an emergency.

Councilman Goorskey asked what needed to be done at the pump station.

Terry Nicholson said they need to install the equipment to lower and raise the pumps, they will reuse the pumps that are there, and they will install a new hatch. The main reason for doing this is to replace the rails so the pump can be lowered easily.

Councilman Goorskey said they need to get invitations to bid on this since it is not an emergency. What he is understanding is that Peed & Bortz called a few contractors and only one gave a quote back.

Terry Nicholson said that is correct. He stated he would send out an invitation to bid on the project and advertise it for ten days.

Mike Bedsaul asked if ARPA funds were going to be used for this project.

Terry Nicholson said yes, it is money that is encumbered for the sewer improvement project. The money could be moved to the general fund before it is expended.

Mike Bedsaul said when ARPA funds are spent the government requires the town to comply with procurement conditions and the contract has to have certain provisions including federal inserts (notices). He would hate for the town to be in a position to where they ask for the money back.

Terry Nicholson said Roger Shepherd and John Davis have been looking for the best options for purchasing a water tank and trailer and Roger found one at Northern Tool and Equipment. They can get a 200-gallon tank, which can be used to spray or water plants with, and a trailer to tow it on for \$3,214.19. This will cut down the time it takes to refill the current 40-gallon tank. They can use this with any town vehicle, even the four-wheeler. He is asking council to approve the purchase of the water tank/trailer.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the purchase of up to \$3,214.19 for a water/tank trailer from Northern Tool and Equipment. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilmember Bowles has had several people reach out to her concerning the status of the duck pond. It looks like it needs dredging. Is there a process that can be started for this.

Terry Nicholson said it is because the water is so low. There is a procedure that can be done. The town has contacted the Army Corps of Engineers, DEQ, and DCR concerning this. It is hard to get a straight answer from anyone because there are multiple agencies involved. The ideal thing to do would be to remove what is there. Years ago, people like Allen Neely would dredge it for the town but now the town can be fined for doing that.

Councilman Goorskey said there is one permit that can be applied for that would go to all agencies that is supposed to speed up the process but it could take at least a year to get through that. An engineering firm would have to fill that out because they are concerned about throwing around sediment in the water. They want to know exactly how the stream will be protected. The town would be able to do the work. This would be very costly.

Terry Nicholson said he does not believe the town could afford to do this.

Unfinished Business

Terry Nicholson introduced Jonathan Taylor and Kaci Spain from Otters Way Outdoors.

Jonathan Taylor and Kaci Spain said they are excited about the opening of their new business in Narrows. He said he and Kaci have scientific backgrounds. He has spent a lot of time talking to local residents about how things were in Narrows in the past. There could be several small approaches to dredging the duck pond without spending a lot of money. They want to have an environmental focus on what they do.

Mayor Spangler said they are going to work toward dredging the duck pond but that will take time. He welcomed Jonathan and Kaci to Narrows.

Terry Nicholson said council has the agreement in their packets that Jonathan Taylor and Kaci Spain have been presented with and agreed to. Mike Bedsaul has reviewed it as well.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the outfitter building agreement and allowing Terry Nicholson to sign the agreement. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Jonathan Taylor told council they have been discussing starting a merchants association. The sign on Route 460 at the campground has a digital sign that can be used to advertise businesses.

Kaci Spain said they will pay to advertise on the sign and also contribute to the payment for electricity. It will be less than \$500/month.

Jonathan Taylor said to bring people into Narrows there needs to be advertising on the other side of Pearisburg as well as in Narrows.

Matters for Consideration by Council

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the draft ordinance concerning changing the tax due date to March 15th. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to donate \$200 to the Hope House. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Conley asked if the VOF grant agreement was in perpetuity.

Mike Bedsaul said yes because since the property is adjacent to the Mill Creek property it would be subject to the same terms and conditions as the previous easement for Mill Creek.

Mayor Spangler said the same stipulations that apply to Mill Creek will apply to this property.

Councilman Goorskey made a motion to approve the Virginia Outdoors Foundation Grant. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Conley made a motion to reappoint John Mills and Terry Nicholson to the Giles County PSA Board. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Conley made a motion to go into executive session to discuss personnel matters (Sec. 2.2-3711.A.1) regarding employee performance. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

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

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Certification

WHEREAS, the Town of Narrows, has convened an executive meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative-recorded vote and in accordance with the provision of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act: and

WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia requires a certification of the Town Council that such executive meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia Law:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE Town of Narrows hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia Law were discussed in the executive meeting to which this certification resolution applies: and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the executive meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the Town Council.

ATTEST: _____

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

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Mills made a motion to adjourn. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler