

**Narrows Town Council Meeting  
October 14, 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, Terry Nicholson, Benji Ratcliffe, Roger Shepherd, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Councilman George Conley gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Spangler thanked town staff and all individuals that helped with clean-up efforts during and after the flooding from Hurricane Helene.

**Approval of September 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes**

**Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the September 9<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes.**

**Councilman Hale seconded the motion.**

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

**Abstain: Goorskey**

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 4-0**

**Consent Agenda**

*Library Report*

Councilman Conley said he was impressed to see an increase in the number of pre-school and school age children at the library.

*Parks & Recreation Report*

No comments.

*Farmers Market Report*

Councilman Conley reminded everyone that Saturday, October 19<sup>th</sup> is the Narrows Fall Festival.

*Police Report*

Councilman Hale said not too long ago council approved the installation of cameras in various parts of town. He asked Police Chief Ratcliffe if there had been any feedback received from those yet.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said with everything else going on the police department had not had the opportunity to receive feedback yet.

Terry Nicholson said staff has been trained on the cameras and they seem to function very well. The footage is available for thirty days so if an event is known to have happened on a certain day within that thirty-day range they can set parameters in the software and look for certain things. The cameras can also be linked to each other.

Councilman Hale asked if at some point one of the cameras could be linked to the town's website so a live stream could be seen.

Terry Nicholson said they would look into that. They could have live footage from the town park.

Councilman Goorskey said he is glad to see extra police patrol in his area of town.

Mayor Spangler told John Davis that residents have asked him if the lighting at the park and ride could be upgraded.

John Davis said he would look into it.

#### *Financial Report/Treasurer's Report*

Councilman Conley said he was glad to see revenues exceeding expenditures for the month of September.

#### *Town Manager's Report*

Councilman Hale congratulated Terry Nicholson for the water loss percentage.

Mayor Spangler said he read where the generator is working as it should but will still not run the digesters.

Terry Nicholson said he spoke with Martin Jansons with Peed & Bortz and he is getting some quotes for a variable frequency drive that ramps up the voltage on those units so the automatic transfer switch should be able to handle it. This will have to be paid for by the town.

Councilman Goorskey asked how it falls on the town to pay for that. There have been numerous items Peed & Bortz have neglected to foresee, including grounding issues and other add-ons the town has already paid for on this project.

Terry Nicholson said the town will push back on that. He believes this will be a situation where if they had designed it right in the beginning these issues would not be happening. The town will push them to pay for the materials.

Councilman Mills said he is tired of these issues and something needs to be done.

Terry Nicholson said Peed & Bortz will be told the town will not pay for anything else until it is installed and it works.

#### *Public Works Director's Report*

Councilman Goorskey said the 12% water loss is fantastic.

Councilmember Bowles said the crew at the waste water plant worked diligently during and after the flood and wanted to give a big thank you to them.

**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**

Charles Buracker said he was very impressed with the way the town came together and helped during the flood. He is in attendance tonight to talk about placing speed bumps at Narrows High School and Narrows Elementary/Middle School. People fly in vehicles through those areas and kids are walking in those areas. There are no signs near these schools that say 'school zone' and he would like to see something done.

Councilman Mills said Police Chief Ratcliffe and Terry Nicholson are going to speak about this very issue.

Charles Buracker said all the other schools have flashing lights but neither school in Narrows has them. It should not matter if a speed bump would cause issues when scraping roads in winter or if someone has a car that is lower to the ground. The road could also be milled so it will make a

noise if someone drives over it. He has seen kids flying through that area and had one on video and took the video to his parent.

Councilman Conley said he is glad Charles Buracker is in attendance at this council meeting. He has been spending time on high school hill campaigning and last week he spoke with Terry Nicholson and told him the same complaints about vehicles speeding that are coming from residents in that area.

Terry Nicholson said the town had received a number of complaints from residents on high school hill concerning speeding vehicles. Police Chief Ratcliffe has spoken with a company that manufactures flashing signs that can be controlled timewise. They are currently clocking people going through the area in front of the high school and recording their speeds. The company that manufactures these devices will put the monitors up for one week and generate data. If they feel like the traffic and the speeding warrants it, they will place photo-enforced signs up and send out tickets to the people speeding. The town would receive revenue from the tickets and the company would take the rest of the money to pay for the signs so it will not cost the town anything.

Charles Buracker said this also needs to be installed at the elementary school.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said the study has been done by a company called True Blue Solutions. He will receive feedback from them in a couple of days saying if the data from the study warrants the signs being installed. The town would not receive any revenue from the tickets until the equipment is paid for. They also looked at placing these signs at the elementary school but the company does not believe it is feasible because of all the stop signs in that area and the officers working in that area.

Councilman Conley asked if they could get a portable unit to use in various areas of town.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said he has portable units but they can only be used for 6-7 days because they have to be charged. The units True Blue Solutions have are solar powered and will work 24/7. They will only generate tickets during the time that is specified. They anticipate having three signs on high school hill.

Councilman Goorskey said he would like to see this looked at for the elementary school also.

Councilman Conley asked Terry Nicholson to contact the Giles County School Board concerning signs being placed at each school in Narrows.

### **Communications from Mayor, Council, and Staff**

Kevin Byrd (Executive Director of the New River Valley Regional Commission) told council that the Town of Narrows has their full support concerning flood recovery. They have been talking with the Appalachian Regional Commission and they want to be supportive as well. (This presentation is at the end of these council minutes) New River Valley Regional Commission would like to expand their current office but are not able to do that because of the cost so they are currently looking at purchasing a building. This is the former American National Bank Building, which is located at 2950 Market Street in Christiansburg. They will have to construct two large meeting rooms as well as one small meeting room. They will also need to add restroom facilities to the building. Their office is currently in Fairlawn. Their new location would be accessible via public transit, all meeting rooms would be available for members use, and one of the large meeting rooms could serve as a regional Emergency Operations Center. The new building is next to Enterprise Car Rental and across the street from Corning. The building has a current assessed value of \$3,169,800 but the purchase agreement has a price of only \$2,000,000. Davenport and Associates are serving as financial advisors and there are two pathways the NRVRC can take to finance this project: Virginia Resources Authority - Pooled Financing Program or an RFP for Bank Loan Financing. The VRA financing has been chosen. The building will cost \$2,000,000 and construction \$1,250,000 with a total project cost of \$3,250,000. There are sixteen members of the regional commission, thirteen municipalities and three higher education facilities, and each will have increased membership dues based on population. Each member will have the option to contribute a lump-sum payment or an annual assessment for the loan term. The Town of Narrows will owe \$36,355.73 in a lump-sum payment but if they decide

to pay over 20 years the cost would be \$2,884.86 per year for 20 years. The yearly payment would be in addition to the town's current yearly dues of around \$2,800.

Councilman Hale asked if the town could get in the middle of making payments and then decide they want to pay the amount off in one payment.

Kevin Byrd believes the town would have that option but he would have to check.

Councilman Mills asked Terry Nicholson if he could find \$36,355.73 to pay for this.

Terry Nicholson said that would be harder to find than \$2,884.86 per month.

Councilman Mills asked Terry Nicholson to explore options by November 16<sup>th</sup> to pay this in full.

Councilman Hale told Councilman Mills he understood where he was coming from but the town already has future monetary commitments such as a full-time manager at the park and signage at each school. If they can make this work then that is fine.

Terry Nicholson said the town does not have that much money in the general fund to cover this.

Councilman Hale asked Kevin Byrd to let them know if he finds out this can begin as yearly payments and then decide to pay the remaining amount in one lump sum.

Councilman Goorskey said if Terry Nicholson is telling them they need to make payments then that is what they will do but he would really like to be able to find the funds to pay this in one payment.

Kevin Byrd said the lump sum payment would have to be paid by mid-December.

**Councilman Mills made a motion to approve payments to the New River Valley Regional Commission in either one lump sum or yearly payments of \$2,884.86 for 20 years.**

**Councilman Hale seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

Councilman Mills said the main thing that came out of the last PSA meeting was that the well driller had stopped drilling in Pembroke so now he has begun drilling again and will only be paid when he hits water.

Terry Nicholson said all of the county's water comes from wells and not from the river. One of the wells has run desperately low and now they need to add another well.

Councilman Goorskey said the PSA needs to keep their river withdrawal permit because if they ever lost it they may never get it back again.

Terry Nicholson said he told council last month he had been speaking to VDOT about the Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program (VHSIP). Part of this study is to look at specific intersections or specific roads the town felt created some special hazard. He and John Davis met with VDOT employees about this and they came back and said they would be willing to put in an application for the town and there will be no cost to the town. The funding would be 90% federal and 10% state with no match from the town. Mike Bedsaul has put together a resolution that allows Terry Nicholson to continue to pursue this grant with VDOT. He has also participated in triannual meetings with VDOT every four months. The town can give input on not only what they would like to see happen to town-maintained roads but also on VDOT-maintained roads.

**Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the VDOT Highway Safety Improvement Program resolution. Councilman Goorskey seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

Terry Nicholson said he is going to discuss each property that was damaged because of the flood from Hurricane Helene. Riverview Campground was the hardest hit with a significant number of the 250 campers being damaged or completely destroyed. There were some permanent structures on the site such as office space and laundry space that were all under water. They also lost their picnic shelter which was lifted and swept away by the water. The cleanup and debris removal is continuing for them and they have been handling most of that internally and the PSA is supplying dumpsters for that. They are using volunteer labor and the Virginia Tech Cadet Corps helped over the weekend but they still have a long way to go. This is going to be a sore subject moving forward, but many of the damaged campers and structures were not zoning compliant. The town will have to work with the owners of the campground, John Ross will be a part of this, to let the campground know how things will need to be put back. They will also come back to council with some recommendations but this will be something they cannot put back like it was. There were permanent porches put on some of the campers so they could not be moved in time for the flood. The town's zoning ordinance and flood ordinance state if you are in the floodplain with a camper you need to be able to get it out when there is a prediction of a flood. It took a tragedy like this for the campground owners to see the light as to what could and did happen.

Councilman Hale asked when the planning and zoning commission would be meeting.

Terry Nicholson said either October 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> with Aphi Fancon. As of now, it looks like it will be October 28<sup>th</sup>.

Councilman Mills said that would be a good meeting for town council to attend if they can.

Councilman Goorskey asked Terry Nicholson to email council when the date is set.

Terry Nicholson asked Mike Bedsaul if it was permissible for all council members to be at that meeting.

Mike Bedsaul said they would only be attending and not participating in the meeting but he would be cautious in three or more council members huddling together at that time talking about town business.

Councilman Goorskey said he believed it would be a good idea for all council members to attend the meeting because they will all be getting questions concerning the flood and the zoning ordinance.

Councilman Mills said this issue needs to be addressed.

Terry Nicholson said the next area that was flooded was Jason Circle, which was a trailer park. Narrows Police Officers were able to help the people there evacuate and it was very fortunate that everyone there agreed to evacuate. There were ten mobile homes there that were severely damaged and one is completely gone. That area will likely not go back as a mobile home park but the county will be dealing with that. The Iron Skillet took in about 18" of water so they had floor and wall damage and a significant loss of food in the kitchen and pantry. Volunteers from a church and volunteers in general helped to clean the building out on Sunday. The PSA provided dumpsters for the cleanup and Servpro helped with the recovery. The community has offered support with cleanup and The Iron Skillet hopes to be open soon. Grants Supermarket stayed dry in the store and only took in water in the storage area which is about 6" lower than the floor of the store. Most of their inventory was raised on shelving so there was not a significant amount of loss but the PSA provided a dumpster on Sunday and they were able to remove everything that was damaged and they opened on Sunday morning. All of the storage units at Clark's Storage were submerged. Many customers were alerted to the flood but many did not remove their items. The PSA has provided multiple dumpsters over the last couple of weeks and the PSA asked the town to help with this so Terry Nicholson approved the town crews going there once a day and help by using a backhoe and loading larger items to be placed in dumpsters. Simmons Construction on Monroe Street had several inches of water in their basement and help was offered to help remove items. The building at 126 Monroe Street, which is a vacant building, was submerged and the building has collapsed internally so when it got wet it became a mess. The owner has torn off the back of the building so Terry Nicholson and John Ross met with the owner and gave him permission to tear down the rest of the interior. He is going to try to leave the façade in place because it is tied to the buildings on either side but the owner is going to try and get a demolition permit. The first floor of the main building at the waste water treatment

plant had about four feet of water in it and the basement was completely submerged. The basement door, which was made of steel, was completely crushed by the force of the water. Several sections of the fence that faced the river were lost. Two of the outbuildings had 3'-4' of water in them and they had quite a bit of inventory stored in them for the utility department and multiple tools. There was a computer that was completely submerged. He called Thompson and Litton because they recently completed the preliminary engineering report for the expansion of the waste water plant so they had intimate knowledge of the plant. They came and assessed the damage and so far that cost is about \$30,000, which includes a couple of motors that ran digestors. There is some concern because there were some electrical connections to the motors that were submerged so water got into the conduit. They are working now but could corrode in the future and will have to be replaced. At Camp Success there was significant damage to trees, the roadway, boat ramp, the gate was lost and was retrieved but is bent, and there are large piles of debris from the river that is lodged in trees. The restroom facility was completely submerged but there was no damage other than a thick layer of mud in the bottom of it and the storage tank was inundated with water so that had to be pumped out. The town crew and several volunteers have been working on cleaning up the debris piles and the town is hauling out the debris to the VDOT staging area in Pearisburg where the Giles County Farm Bureau is on Route 460 and they grind it into mulch. The town crew has been working on the road at Camp Success and gravel will have to be purchased to replace what was washed away. He has been told that the Army Corps of Engineers will be responsible for river clean up, including anything on the banks of the river, so he is telling the town crew not to clean those areas. The Army Corps of Engineers has not given a timeline for clean up yet because their first priority has been cleaning up a 10-acre debris field at Claytor Lake. The Lurich ballfields lost most of the outside fencing, and some of the poles the fencing was on were bent, but the town was able to retrieve some of that. Wesley Woodyard said he will work with the town and try to use some of what was retrieved but much of the fencing will have to be replaced. The concession stand building itself took on about 4' of water. The concession stand damage included cabinetry, some appliances, stored food items, a water heater, and 4 windows in the front of the building were double-paned windows and there is water between the panes. The storage area in the back of the building had several bins full of sporting equipment, there were tools and supplies for field maintenance, and lime for marking the fields and all of that was inundated. Roger Shepherd and a group of people have been working to get that cleaned up. Power has still not been restored to that building and humidifiers and generators are being used there. The campground across the street is completely gone. Since students did not have school on Monday, they were assigned to help in some way in their community, so Sara Bowles had several students to help with different projects in town. Several residents helped with the cleanup of local residences and businesses. On Monday after the flood, the county had advertised a volunteer clean up page on their website so people that wanted to volunteer could find a place to help. The Giles County team did a great job in handling that. They also set up a disaster relief fund through the National Bank of Blacksburg, which has raised a significant amount of money that will be used county wide. The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets had over 500 cadets come to Giles County to help with cleanup efforts. They elected to do this instead of the fall portion of their Caldwell March. Around 1,000 people were in Narrows on that day to help with cleanup efforts. The following elected officials were in Narrows on Sunday: Governor Glen Youngkin, First Lady Suzanne Youngkin, Congressman Morgan Griffith, Senator Travis Hackworth, and Delegate Jason Ballard. They visited sites in town and then served lunch to volunteers. Senator Tim Kaine came to Giles County and Senator Mark Warner came to Narrows to meet with first responders and visited Riverview Campground. Terry Nicholson and Debbie Thomas filed a claim with VRSA (Virginia Risk Sharing Association), which will be denied because the town does not have flood insurance through VRSA. This had to be done to be eligible for FEMA or Virginia Department of Emergency Management funding. An adjuster from VRSA has already been to Narrows to take pictures of the affected buildings and will send a report back to the town sometime this week. FEMA is just getting started in this area and focusing mainly on individual (residential) assistance at this time and then will deal with commercial assistance. Narrows will be filing for assistance under Giles County. FEMA will be setting up a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) somewhere in Giles County.

Councilman Mills said that will be done this week.

Terry Nicholson said that was everything he had on the flood and welcomed any questions.

Mayor Spangler said there were 48 families that lost everything except the shirt on their back and approximately 20 of those were in the campground. As of about a week ago, the county had placed 30 of those families in long-term housing. This housing is not permanent. The Giles



County Christian Mission had a 40' trailer come from Furnace, Virginia, full of various items from cattle food to water.

Terry Nicholson said the fire department did a tremendous job of collecting things. They began by putting these things in their activity building and were quickly overwhelmed so part of what the cadets did was move everything from the activity building to the old bank building and the store front where The Midkiff House used to be. If anyone was affected by the flood, they can contact the fire department to get supplies they may need.

Councilman Mills said Anna Riddle was a liaison between the county and the people offering to donate time, money, or resources toward flood victims. He wanted to recognize her for her amazing efforts.

Councilman Conley said he spoke to Terry Nicholson about a week ago concerning people's water usage after the flood. He would like to see a discount be given on water usage for people that had to use extra water to clean after the flood.

Councilman Goorskey said it should be easy to see the overage on a person's normal water bill.

Terry Nicholson asked council to give him some parameters on how they would like this to be done.

Mayor Spangler said it would have to be done on a case-by-case basis.

Councilman Goorskey said he would not want it to be too cumbersome on someone to prove they used extra water because they may have been cleaning and not kept receipts on purchases for items used to clean. If they used more water than in previous months they should be given a discount.

Terry Nicholson said they can look at someone's current bill and if it is higher than their previous bill they would be given a discount.

Councilman Conley said this needs to be advertised.

Councilman Goorskey said it needs to be advertised on Facebook and in the Virginian Leader.

**Councilman Conley made a motion to prevent customers paying a higher-than-normal amount on their next water bill due to flooding. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

### **New Business**

Mike Bedsaul said council has a draft ordinance for the franchise agreement renewal with Optimum as well as a copy of the franchise itself. He is not asking council to approve anything tonight. The current franchise agreement expires November 18, 2024, and Optimum has asked for a renewal of that agreement. Whenever there is a company or provider requesting either a franchise or the renewal of an existing franchise, the town is required to hold a public hearing on that. As part of the notice for the public hearing, the town will also be soliciting bids from any other providers who may wish to have a franchise under the same terms. These franchises are non-exclusive in nature which means just because the franchise is renewed for Optimum, this does not mean another company could not ask for a franchise later. Even if a company does not submit a bid when the public hearing is advertised this does not mean they could not ask for a franchise later. Debbie Thomas will be advertising a notice of public hearing that has to be advertised once a week for two weeks prior to the public hearing. The public hearing will be held at the next council meeting on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Councilman Conley said he was not a fan of Optimum and when he was elected to council he directed Susan Kidd to send offer letters to other cable franchises. He does not know what happened to that.

Debbie Thomas said Susan Kidd sent offer letters to several cable franchises and received no responses.

Councilman Conley said Optimum needs to get the message there are residents that pay bills in town. He does not know what the rates are under Section IV but it seems like the town has no input on the rates they can charge.

Councilman Goorskey said the town cannot set Optimum's rates.

Mike Bedsaul said rates are in the franchise but they are also regulated by the SCC. The town does not have the authority to tell Optimum what they want their rates to be.

Councilman Conley said the town needs to let Optimum know people are being double billed and some are not paying the same rate as others.

Mike Bedsaul said in the code section there is a list of customer standards the SCC has set that Optimum is required to meet.

Councilman Conley said town residents are not happy with Optimum at all and someone needs to send this message to them. He is strictly against a franchise and will vote against it.

Councilman Mills said he agrees with everything Councilman Conley is saying but there are no other cable franchises that want to provide service to Narrows so that puts them at a decided disadvantage. He does not know what a decision to vote down the franchise agreement accomplishes.

Councilman Conley asked if the town could put some teeth in the franchise agreement.

Mike Bedsaul said he would like to know what the specific complaints are.

Councilman Conley said he is unhappy with the service, equipment, customer service, and rates.

Mike Bedsaul said he does not believe the franchise agreement states how Optimum does business and the only thing that would help that is competition. These were the same concerns when the franchise agreement was up for renewal last time.

Mayor Spangler said it seems there is no choice if town residents want cable and internet.

Councilman Hale asked if this ordinance precludes Optimum from tying up other rights of way.

Mike Bedsaul said no.

Councilman Hale said it should. They can call the franchise agreement non-exclusive but if they are permitted to execute construction, engineering, or other practices that somehow monopolizes the public rights of way in a way that is an impediment to others then that is an issue from his view.

Mike Bedsaul said, for example, cell towers will be designed in a manner that they cannot use them because they are not tall enough or stable enough to accommodate multiple providers. He asked Terry Nicholson if another provider came to town would the infrastructure be enough to accommodate them.

Terry Nicholson said no because Optimum is already using someone else's infrastructure.

Mike Bedsaul said he does not believe another provider could make an investment to build the infrastructure for their system. He hopes this will change in the next five years.

Terry Nicholson said Narrows is too small of a market to attract another provider.

Councilman Goorskey said he believes they could describe what they believe their technical ability of operating should be, such as x amount of speed and x amount of data.



Mayor Spangler said Gerry Clark cannot get Optimum internet at his storage buildings because the cost to run the lines was exorbitant.

Councilman Goorskey said he does not believe Narrows falls into one of the underserved areas of the county and that is because Optimum provides the bare minimum threshold of speed and data. If what they provide fell under that, federal grant money would kick in and broadband could be provided. Optimum would then have some competition.

Terry Nicholson said he will let the representative from Cebridge know council's concerns and invite him to attend the public hearing.

Mike Bedsaul said if the franchise agreement is not approved Cebridge could take court action.

Terry Nicholson said Lurich Road was hit really hard during the flood, including the PSA lot. All of the dumpsters were removed before the flood but not the compactor. The fencing and building were wiped away. Because of that the PSA decided they are not going to come back to that site. There are four sites they are considering: the land where the pipeline stored their equipment/vehicles on Route 460 across from the park and ride, the land where the pipeline stored their equipment/vehicles on Route 460 near the old SEMCO building, a vacant lot next to Burger King on Route 460, and the old car wash on Route 460.

Councilman Mills said right now the current PSA lot is still being used so they have time to decide on this. The only site he would consider would be the land where the pipeline stored their equipment/vehicles on Route 460 across from the park and ride.

Terry Nicholson said they will need to consider zoning for those. The two properties on the right side of the map are zoned 'general business' and the two on the left-hand side are zoned 'general industrial'.

Councilman Mills said the town could look for a place on their own.

Terry Nicholson said the PSA is asking for council's input and also entertain areas in town that are not in the flood plain.

John Davis said the parcel with the old Jehovah's Witness building would be an ideal area.

Councilmember Bowles said she likes that much better because it would not be on Route 460.

Councilman Hale said they need to explore the area on Old Virginia Avenue and other options as well.

### **Unfinished Business**

None.

### **Matters for Consideration by Council**

None.

**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**

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Clerk, Debbie Thomas

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Mayor, Tom Spangler