

**Narrows Town Council Meeting
December 9, 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, Debbie Thomas, and Lindsey Thompson.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Councilman George Conley gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of November 12th Meeting Minutes

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

Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Recognition

Mayor Spangler presented Councilman George Conley with a certificate of recognition to thank him for everything he had done for the town by being a council member for the last four years.

Councilmember Mills said it had been a privilege and honor to work with Councilman Conley the last four years.

Audit Report (FY24)

Corbin Stone with Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates PLLC thanked council for allowing him to present the FY24 budget to council. The audit went very well. There is a note in the back of the audit report that says there is a 'lack of segregation of duties' and this simply means there are not enough employees for all the roles. There are times that the same person could be doing billings and collections but that is expected for a town the size of Narrows. Employees have to wear multiple hats. The general fund had an ending balance of \$321,703 and that is up from about \$150,000 the prior year. Long-term debt stood at \$591,447 and the town took out some debt to purchase property during FY24. Enterprise funds, which are water and sewer, had a net position of \$1.6 million at the end of the year. This is what the water and sewer system is worth. Long-term debt for the enterprise fund was down to \$635,317 at the end of the year. The town's population, using census data, was 2,093. This makes the debt per capita at \$586, which is pretty low. This is usually around \$2,000. The general fund balance has been increasing since 2021, which was largely due to ARPA funds. The water and sewer net positions came up in 2024, which is also the result of being able to use ARPA funds. Long-term debt has been on the decline since 2015. Major revenue sources that have seen an increase are sales tax and general property taxes. Federal dollars, which in this case were ARPA funds, show a large increase in 2022. Those funds are not shown until they are spent. Personal property assessed values have significantly increased since around 2021 because of the shortage of used cars. Those numbers should normalize in 2025 and 2026. The next few pages of the audit contain 'communication with those charged with governance'. If there were any issues with the audit, they would be contained in this section. When the auditors requested something, Debbie Thomas was very prompt in giving it to them.

Councilman Mills thanked Corbin Stone for his presentation.

Consent Agenda

Library Report

Councilmember Bowles said she loved the idea of paint night.

Cindy Laws said she had about six people show up and it was a great night.

Parks & Recreation Report

No comments.

Farmers Market Report

Councilmember Bowles thanked Lindsey Thompson for helping plan 'A Very Narrows Christmas' and the town crew for helping. It was very well attended.

Police Report

Councilman Mills thanked Police Chief Ratcliffe and his officers for all their hard work.

Financial Report/Treasurer's Report

Councilman Conley told council to look at the treasurer's report and notice that the ARPA funds are at a balance of zero (the remaining balance was transferred to the general fund). The town did their due diligence in spending federal money they were given.

Town Manager's Report

Councilman Hale said he does not feel the town has a rat problem but the subject seems to attract a lot of attention from the news media, social media, and people having conversations. Terry Nicholson made a comment in his report stating 'but the owner has not done any of the recommended corrective actions'. Are there actions the town can take in situations like this and others where people are not taking actions necessary leading to circumstances like the one in this instance? Are there recommendations that can be given concerning other remedies that may be available?

Mike Bedsaul said circumstances that create a health or safety issue could be perceived as a nuisance action. A court order could be presented to the owner of the property to take corrective action.

Councilman Hale asked if this needed to be done at this time.

Mike Bedsaul asked Terry Nicholson what his thoughts were.

Terry Nicholson said it would be possible for the town to pursue this in court. He does feel like that is the problem. The town has been working with this homeowner for a couple of months, and it is a problem within the residence. There is no one living in the residence at this time. The previous tenants moved out and there was a cleanliness issue there. This is difficult for the town to enforce because they do not see the inside of a house unless they are invited in. In this instance, the public works director and utility supervisor were invited into the house at one point.

Mike Bedsaul said he and Terry Nicholson will discuss this more.

Terry Nicholson said the town went above and beyond to help the homeowner with the rat problem. The homeowner stated the exterminator told him it was the sewer line, so the town ran a camera through the line. They found a dislocated Fernco fitting so the town dug it up and repaired it. In the process of digging, the town broke another piece of pipe and repaired that as well.

Councilman Hale thanked Terry Nicholson for everything he had done to address this. He also thanked John Davis and Mayor Spangler.

Terry Nicholson said the town got Virginia Cooperative Extension involved in this as well and they were also interviewed by the television station, but the reporter did not use that portion in their newscast.

Public Works Director's Report

12/09/2024

Councilman Hale asked John Davis if they replaced the laterals on Warner Street and Woodland Avenue.

John Davis said they did.

Mayor Spangler said he saw in John Davis's report where five leaks were fixed. Were all of those found by J.J. Perdue?

John Davis said three of them were.

Councilman Hale said it seems like under 'unaccountable water' the town was penalized for the water used on the house fire.

John Davis said the town was not penalized. It was water from the PSA but ran through the town's system. None of the hydrants are metered so that number was just an estimate. They met with Andy Crocker with the PSA and received information from him concerning the water used. Andy Crocker estimated about 1' of water came out of the north tank that night and that is what they used to come up with the usage.

Councilman Hale said when he said penalized he meant it was unaccounted for.

John Davis said the same issue occurs when the town uses the camel jet because all of that comes out of hydrants.

Terry Nicholson said they billed for utilities three days earlier but paid the PSA for the full month. They divide the amount of water sold by the amount purchased and that is how the loss is calculated.

Councilman Mills said previously they patched the water lines but now they are being replaced. That helps with water loss.

John Davis said the more the water system is tightened up the more trouble there will be.

Councilman Mills said they will just have to deal with it.

Councilman Goorskey said the town has had eleven months of being at or near a 20% water-loss average where it used to be 45-50%. The amount of savings helps pay for the water line being replaced. He has been keeping up with ruptured meters and there have not been any for a long time.

John Davis said since the new water meters had been installed they have not had a ruptured meter.

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

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Communications, Concerns and Requests from the Public

Jason Buckland said he was in attendance at the council meeting representing the Narrows Little League Football Board. Zach Patteson (Director) and B.J. Sparks are also in attendance. They are in attendance with a plea to the town, but he wanted to give them some background. Narrows Little League Football has around seventy-five kids in three different age groups. They participate in the New River Valley Football League and geographically, this is the best league for them. This is the only league in the area that has 6th and 7th graders participating. Narrows does not have a middle school football league but they need one. There have been problems in the past with an eligibility issue for a player and some sportsmanship issues. Chris McKlarney was notified in the past that Narrows Little League Football was on the chopping block because of sportsmanship issues. The result of a meeting that was held concerning this is if Narrows was to still have a team, they would have to turn over competition issues to someone that is a

recreation director or under the governance of an elected body. The Town of Narrows seems like the most likely entity because he does not believe Giles County or the Town of Pearisburg are under the same scrutiny. He is worried about where these kids will play this year.

Mayor Spangler said if eligibility and sportsmanship are the two big issues the coaches should be aware of those whether it is true or not.

Councilman Conley asked Jason Buckland if they are asking that Narrows Little League Football be placed under the parks and recreation umbrella.

Jason Buckland said that is correct. The little league board would be more than willing to continue fundraising for insurance, equipment, etc. without adding to the town's bottom line. Ruth Perdue was over the board and since she left it has never been the same.

Mike Bedsaul said that Jason Buckland stated Narrows had lost its voting rights in the league. What do the bylaws of the league say about regaining their voting rights. If the league is placed under the umbrella of the Narrows Recreation Department, would they be able to regain voting rights.

Jason Buckland said he believes so. They are looking for accountability.

Zach Patteson said there is a rule book but he does not know about bylaws.

Mike Bedsaul said bylaws would be needed to regain voting rights. How is participation currently funded.

Jason Buckland said it is funded by fundraising and sponsorships.

Mike Bedsaul said if this is placed under the umbrella of the town and fundraising is held where would the money be placed.

Jason Buckland said it would be whatever council determined. He thought there could be an agreement between the town and the Narrows Little League Board concerning the funds.

Terry Nicholson said he had spoken with Jason Buckland a couple of times concerning this and his thought is that he does not want Roger Shepherd responsible for this because he already has more responsibilities than a full-time job. He is concerned about the perception that moving under the parks and recreation department whether the town is financially responsible for it or not, the town will be perceived as if it is responsible. He suggested considering appointing a three-person board to be responsible for the eligibility and sportsmanship issues. They could have one elected official from Narrows, one elected official from Pearisburg, and one elected official from Giles County, since this is a county-wide program.

Jason Buckland said that is an option.

Councilman Mills said everyone wants to see the kids have an opportunity to play but the town has had a time trying to hire and keep a parks and recreation director and Roger Shepherd does a great job. He does not want Roger to be overloaded and decide to quit his job.

Jason Buckland said they could appoint anyone that answers to Terry Nicholson.

Councilman Goorskey said speaking as a parent that has three kids that have benefitted from this league at different points in time, he recalls they were always provisional in this league. He does not remember having a vote in this league. They need to be clear on what they are getting.

Councilman Mills asked Jason Buckland if he had any assurances from this body that if their request is honored then everything will settle down.

Jason Buckland said not in so many words. They do not want to lose the kids in Narrows and want them to play.

Councilmember Bowles said she appreciates their investment in this, but this is a tinder box and needs to be handled very gingerly. Is there an impartial commissioner over the whole thing.

Jason Buckland said that was a point of discussion in the meeting. He believes they are looking at this but have not made a decision.

Councilman Conley said he understands the urgency but this needs to be looked at closely.

Mike Bedsaul said he would like to see the bylaws. Where the funds for this are going to be managed and who will be responsible for them will be issues.

Jason Buckland said the Narrows Little League Board would be willing to have meetings concerning this.

Councilman Goorskey asked if it would be reasonable to structure this in a way that council appoints the board of the little league from the volunteer pool, establish bylaws, and establish eligibility. There is going to be a whole lot of headache and time. Unless someone has kids on the team they will not be as willing to put time into it. If they place this under Roger Shepherd and keep finances separate, which is fine, someone will have to dedicate hours to that and would be paid by taxpayer dollars so that gets a little weird. If issues cannot be resolved by coming to a 3-4 person board then they could bring the issues to council.

Councilman Mills said staff needs to discuss this.

Councilman Goorskey said one person from council needs to be in the meeting as well. This community gets behind volunteer-run programs and if it is placed under the recreation department he wonders what will be lost.

Councilman Mills said Terry Nicholson, Joe Goorskey, and Mike Bedsaul will make up the team that discusses this issue.

Councilman Hale thanked Jason Buckland for being in attendance tonight.

Terry Nicholson said Roger Shepherd will be included in the meeting as well.

Jason Buckland said the Giles County School Board values its relationship with the Town of Narrows. The school board will pay for the signs at the schools and want to make sure the town receives what they want. He believes the amount is \$25,000.

Terry Nicholson said that is correct. The town will choose where to place the signs and the public works crew will install the signs to save some money. The town will also maintain them.

Communications from Mayor, Council, and Staff

Councilman Mills said he and Terry Nicholson attended the PSA meeting. The board decided to stop the well drilling operation at Pembroke, because they were not successful at getting clear water from the well. The contractor that was doing the work said it was time to stop drilling.

Councilman Mills said that the PSA has presented a rate schedule that would be used if the PSA provided workers and/or equipment to any of the Towns. He and Terry Nicholson thought the rates were fair to everyone.

Terry Nicholson said the agreement stated the PSA would be paid for labor if any town asked for help. The fees are very reasonable.

Councilman Hale said he supports this. Councilman Mills said they have more reciprocity between Narrows and Pearisburg than they have ever had.

Terry Nicholson said the other item that was discussed was the location of the convenience center. They looked at several sites within town limits and are now looking outside town limits. There is a spot directly across from State Line Road.

John Davis said it is property on the right before State Line Road.

Terry Nicholson said the town will close on the VOF grant for the Lewis Webb property in early January. Mike Bedsaul will look over the agreement being drafted by VOF. The survey will be done this Wednesday.

Mike Bedsaul said a public hearing will be held on this.

Terry Nicholson said he spoke with Peed & Bortz and told them the town did not want to pay for the work done on the variable drives until they worked, so Peed and Bortz has arranged for an electrical supply company to loan them a variable frequency drive. The contractor can install and run a test to see if it will run. If it does not work the company will take the VFD back. The only thing the town will do is pay for the contractor to do the installation. They quoted a price of \$1,000 not to exceed \$2,000. He believes that is reasonable. He also had Thompson and Litton look at the whole situation and they agreed that the VFD should fix the problem. They also stated upgrading the generator should alleviate the problem but that would be a more costly solution.

Terry Nicholson has been meeting with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) talking about hazard mitigation grants. When there is a presidential disaster declared, a lot of money is channeled into that disaster recovery and of all the money that goes into that 10% has to be used for mitigation projects. Mitigation simply means that something would be done to prevent a flood from causing a future problem. He has been saying that the WWTP regionalization is the epitome of a mitigation plan. He had a meeting today with VDEM and FEMA at the WWTP and they encouraged him to apply for that grant. The funding could be up to 75% of the cost of the mitigation and the town could partner with Pearisburg. It could cost \$43 million to build a new WWTP in Pearisburg and pump from Narrows to Pearisburg. He is submitting the pre-application and has the New River Valley Regional Commission involved because they have grant money to help localities with grant submissions. Thompson and Litton are already involved because they wrote the preliminary engineering report for it. He is excited about this because this seems to be a Godsend because the town really could not afford to do this on their own. VDEM and FEMA both said the town is very well prepared for this venture.

Terry Nicholson said he and Mike Bedsaul met with Rhett Gumm and two attorneys from Cebridge concerning the franchise agreement. Mike Bedsaul did some red-line changes to the agreement, sent it to Cebridge, they did changes, sent it back, and Terry Nicholson and Mike Bedsaul met with them over the phone and went through the changes. It is now back in Cebridge's court so it is not ready to be voted on tonight. Approval will be placed on January's agenda.

Mike Bedsaul said Cebridge knows they are the only outfit in town and are not willing to budge on the language. They know they do not have to.

Terry Nicholson said since Mac Gallimore has passed away that has put the brakes on what the town was pursuing with the purchase of the building. They will wait a little while to let things settle down for the family. He feels like the family will contact the town when they are ready.

Terry Nicholson said the state has issued a contract on debris removal from land so there are contractors at Camp Success to remove the debris.

John Davis said they will also clean up the waterways and have picked up fencing from the Lurich Ballfield and the PSA convenience center.

Councilman Goorskey said someone asked him if they could access the national forest through Mill Creek.

Terry Nicholson said you can get there from Mill Creek.

Councilman Goorskey said someone said they thought because the gates are locked at certain times people are being denied access to the national forest.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said to access the national forest from Mill Creek you would have to go across private land.

Councilman Goorskey asked what time(s) the gate is locked.

Police Chief Ratcliffe said a police officer will usually lock the gate around 9:00 pm in the summer and earlier in the winter.

John Davis said the gate is opened by 8:00am every day.

Councilman Conley said he would like to thank council and staff in working with him for the last four years and also thank the citizens of Narrows for allowing him to serve the town.

New Business

None.

Unfinished Business

None.

Matters for Consideration by Council

None.

Councilman Conley made a motion to go into executive session for personnel matters, Sec. 2.2.3711.A.1 of the Code of Virginia (Discussion of employee conduct). Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Councilman Conley made a motion to return to open session. Councilman Hale 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. Councilman Conley seconded the motion.

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

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler