

Narrows Town Council Meeting

February 9, 2026

Mayor Tom Spangler called the meeting to order. Council Members present were John Hale, Sara Bowles, Jonathan Creger, John Mills, and Alicia Lane.

Staff members present were John Davis, Cindy Laws, Terry Nicholson, Benji Ratcliffe, and Lindsey Thompson.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Councilman Mills gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of January 12th Meeting Minutes

Councilman Hale noted corrections on page two regarding references to local taxes, suggesting clarity by using "tax revenues" instead of just "taxes." He also requested that acronyms GHWC (Giles Health and Wellness Center), EJCDC (Engineers Joint Contract Documents Committee), and SPA (Supplemental Project Agreement) be spelled out for clarity.

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the January 12th meeting minutes as amended. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane

Abstain: Bowles

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Recognition of Individuals

Thacker Underwood – Eagle Scout Project

The town recognized Thacker Underwood for the successful completion of his Eagle Scout project, which involved constructing kayak lockers at Camp Success. The project provides a vital amenity for residents and visitors to the New River, featuring two caged storage bays and four racks for secure gear storage. The project was developed in collaboration with Virginia Tech.

Councilman Mills noted that being an Eagle Scout is a significant achievement that provides advantages in hiring.

Councilmember Lane mentioned that Thacker Underwood also participated in the town's litter pickup on Wolf Creek and shared details about the Virginia Tech plans for the kayak-locker project.

Elwood Lambert – 50 Years of Service with Narrows Fire Department

The town recognized Elwood Lambert for 50 years of dedicated service to the Narrows Fire Department. Elwood joined the department in 1975 and at age 69 continues to actively serve. Throughout his career, Elwood has held nearly every major leadership role including president, assistant captain, engineer, captain, and chief. He has been instrumental in bringing new equipment and advancing technology within the department. He helped establish a local blood drive at the Narrows Fire Department. Alongside his volunteer service, Elwood spent more than 30 years at Celanese where he also served as assistant fire chief. He has been a mentor to younger firefighters for decades, teaching through training sessions, school visits, and fire safety talks with students of all ages. Elwood's greatest accomplishment is his family. His son Michael and daughter Katie have grown into loving parents, reflecting the values of dedication, kindness, and integrity he has lived by. When not at the fire department, he enjoys spending time with his wife, supporting his grandchildren at sporting events, and helping the community by riding roads and plowing gardens for local residents during summer months.

Councilman Mills noted that Elwood was one of the first people he worked with when he came to Giles County and praised their strengthened relationship over the years.

Councilmember Lane encouraged community members looking to volunteer or challenge themselves, to talk to Elwood and take advantage of learning from one of the town's great leaders.

Councilman Hale, on behalf of council, thanked Jon Butler for his work with Terry Nicholson to clean up debris by the Precision K9 building.

Councilman Mills praised Jon Butler for his weather reports, which provide better information than national media for emergency management purposes.

Councilman Mills made a motion to amend the agenda to include an executive session under Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711.A.1 for personnel matters and Section 2.2-3711.A.3 for discussion of the acquisition or disposition of real property (bank building and Main Street property). Councilman Creger seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Public Hearing – Lease of Town Owned Property

Mayor Spangler opened the public hearing concerning the lease of town-owned properties, including the rec center and the bank building.

Councilman Hale said anytime anyone wanted to do a legitimate business in the Town of Narrows he was in favor of it. Were there any repairs that needed to be made at the rec center?

Terry Nicholson explained that Brittany Cook Photography has proposed to lease two upstairs rooms at the rec center that had been used for storage. Roger Shepherd worked to clean out the two upstairs rooms for use. The lease would be for two rooms at \$120 per room for a total of \$240 per month. The tenants would be allowed to use up to half of the rent each month for the first 12 months (not to exceed \$1,440) toward improvements, which would be considered reimbursement.

Terry Nicholson noted the public hearing was also set up to provide flexibility to work with a potential developer regarding the bank building.

Mayor Spangler closed the public hearing.

Consent Agenda

Library Report

Councilman Hale expressed appreciation for Cindy Laws' plans to attend a professional conference in Harrisonburg beginning March 19th. He noted the value of professional conferences for networking and learning opportunities.

Parks & Recreation Report

Councilman Mills stated the town has the best director and recreation department anywhere, especially considering the size of the town. He expressed support for the department and noted the increasing difficulty in recruiting people for these positions.

Police Report

Councilman Hale made an observation about traffic citations, noting two instances of driving with suspended licenses but no instances of no insurance violations, suggesting responsible behavior by those without licenses to still ensure vehicle coverage.

Councilman Mills noted that Police Chief Benji Ratcliffe would be attending a meeting of police chiefs in Bluefield and recently returned from the Virginia State Chiefs' Conference. He emphasized the importance of continuing training.

Mayor Spangler expressed appreciation for the professionalism and courtesy of the police officers and the positive feedback received from citizens about their interactions with officers.

Councilmember Bowles thanked the police for their presence on Park Drive which helps keep speeds down.

Financial Report

Treasurer Debbie Thomas was absent attending her nephew's basketball game.

No comments or questions were raised regarding the financial report.

Town Manager's Report

Terry Nicholson reported on FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) reimbursement status. The town has not received additional payment beyond the one received several months ago. He met with FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) last week and two more projects are getting closer to completion and reimbursement.

The wastewater treatment plant primary clarifier replacement project was discussed last month. The town requested an extension beyond the April deadline, which is standard for larger damages. VDEM (Virginia Department of Emergency Management) is working to secure the extension.

FEMA has discharged the town and moved responsibilities to VDEM (Virginia Department of Emergency Management) exclusively for handling reimbursements, which is a positive step forward.

Regarding property maintenance, Attorney Mike Bedsaul suggested contacting the bankruptcy attorney representing a property owner and giving them a deadline to contest the town's taking of the property. Mike Bedsaul will work with the bankruptcy attorney in his firm on this matter.

Mayor Spangler requested a hard stand on the clutter issue come springtime, noting several residences are repeat offenders. He also emphasized priority for addressing dilapidated buildings.

Councilman Creger praised the continued reduction in water loss.

Councilman Mills praised the snow removal efforts. He acknowledged the difficult financial times but promised not to forget the hard work of the crews when budget circumstances improve.

Terry Nicholson noted snow crews were on the road for 13 days straight during recent cold weather.

Public Works Director's Report

Councilman Mills requested that when temperatures warm up above freezing, public works address the sidewalks on Park Drive. A jogger has to run in the street due to sidewalk conditions, creating safety concerns with vehicle traffic.

Council discussed the town's water accountability system. Councilman Mills noted the town is the envy of PSA members due to consistent and diligent water management, despite having an antiquated system. He attributed success to replacing water lines rather than applying band-aids to leaks and praised the decision to replace water meters.

Councilmember Bowles expressed gratitude for the new system that alerts when there are water leaks and appreciation for public works' snow removal efforts.

John Davis noted that Lindsey Thompson does an excellent job staying on top of water accountability and calling customers early about leaks, unlike many other areas that have the same system but do not provide this level of customer service.

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

Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane

Nays: None

Motion Carried 5-0

Communications, Concerns, and Requests from the Public

None.

Communications from the Mayor, Council, and Staff

PSA Report

Councilman Mills and Ricky McCoy serve on the advisory board at the tech center. They are establishing a team program through the tech center for water plant operators. Those who obtain certificates will have lifelong job opportunities in this field.

Councilman Mills reported the PSA is working together better than ever and he believes Narrows' concerns are now being heard. He stated he is not concerned about the situation at the PSA lot, as it is not costing the town and any alternative would cost money. He suggested organizing a group cleanup in the spring.

Terry Nicholson clarified misinformation on Facebook regarding the PSA attendant. The county provides a vehicle and gas for the attendant to stay warm on cold days. The county cannot put a permanent building back, due to flooding problems, and temporary buildings cannot have heating. The county is paying for gas, contrary to social media claims.

Registered Apprenticeship Program Presentation

Councilman Hale presented information about a new registered apprenticeship program for water and wastewater operators in conjunction with Giles County Schools. Key points included:

- The objective is to fully prepare apprentices for Class 4 water operator and/or Class 4 wastewater operator licenses
- The program is modeled after a successful apprenticeship program in the Roanoke area sponsored by Western Virginia Water Authority
- Requirements include 288 hours of related technical instruction (science, math, communications) and 4,000 hours of on-the-job training
- Training covers multiple disciplines: water operator, wastewater operator, and field operations (utilities construction and water distribution)
- Program ideally begins for high school juniors (age 16) and continues through senior year and one year as an adult apprentice
- Estimated cost per person is \$35,000 total for on-the-job training; anticipated cost to Town of Narrows would be \$3,000-\$5,000 per year per apprentice
- Starting salary range for Class 4 operators in the area is \$50,000-\$60,000
- The program will be introduced to students at a technical fair at Narrows High School on April 1st
- There will be a pre-screening and interview process for students; emphasis is on quality over quantity

Discussion included questions about class size limits, student selection process, and program expansion. Councilmember Bowles noted the value of students graduating with industry certifications.

(Councilmember Bowles left the meeting to attend 2 ball games)

Councilman Creger discussed potential expansion to include electrical apprenticeships, noting he is a certified apprenticeship sponsor. He described a previous program where electricians met weekly at the local high school for related instruction courses. Councilman Hale offered to connect him with Virginia Works contacts to explore options.

Councilman Mills emphasized confidence in the team implementing the program and the importance of selecting qualified candidates to ensure program success.

Terry Nicholson indicated he would build the costs into next year's budget. Council expressed support for participation in the program without requiring a formal motion.

New Business

Renewal of Thompson Litton Agreement for Engineering Services

Terry Nicholson presented the renewal of the Thompson Litton agreement for general engineering services. The agreement was established in 2023 with automatic renewal provisions, but town procurement rules require annual council approval.

Next year the town will need to go back out to bid for general engineering services. Thompson and Litton has been working on multiple wastewater projects and several smaller projects involving town buildings. Terry Nicholson recommended renewal for another year.

Councilman Creger made a motion to renew the Thompson and Litton contract for general engineering services for the coming year. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Flood Insurance for Ball Field

Terry Nicholson explained the need for flood insurance on the concession stand building at the ball field. The town had reduced reimbursement for flood damage because it did not carry flood insurance on that building. FEMA issued an "obtain and maintain" notice requiring the town to carry flood insurance if it wants to make future claims under FEMA public assistance.

The town carries flood insurance on the outfitters building as part of the grant requirements. Terry Nicholson presented quotes with varying premiums and deductibles from Selective Insurance Company of the Southeast (obtained through the town's insurance provider).

Significant discussion occurred regarding:

- Whether the current claim reimbursement (\$15,000 of the original \$30,000 claim) would be released only upon obtaining insurance
- The balance between premium costs and deductible levels

- Self-insurance strategies given that contents can be removed if flooding is predicted and the building is structurally sound
- Historical damage was \$7,000 to the building and \$25,000 to contents
- Premium increases typically run 5-7% annually based on experience with the outfitters building
- Whether FEMA could claw back the current payment if insurance is cancelled in the future
- Possibility of pro-rated refunds if the policy is cancelled after receiving reimbursement

Council consensus was to select the lowest premium option with the highest deductible (\$100,000) to obtain the current FEMA reimbursement, with Terry Nicholson to investigate whether there are any claw back provisions and whether the premium could be pro-rated if cancelled.

Councilman Creger made a motion to accept flood insurance with an annual premium of \$2,684 (with \$50,000 deductible on contents and \$50,000 deductible on building), subject to Terry Nicholson's review and confirmation that this strategy will not jeopardize obtaining the current reimbursement or create future claw back risks. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Creger, and Lane

Nays: Mills

Motion Carried 3-0

Unfinished Business

None

Matters for Consideration by Council

Approval of Town Lease – Brittany Cook Photography

Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the lease for Brittany Cook Photography as presented during the public hearing. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.

Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane

Nays: None

Motion Carried 4-0

Mayor Spangler read a thank you letter from Giles County Christian Service Mission acknowledging the town's \$500 donation, which helps provide food, clothing, and emergency assistance to the community. The letter encouraged donations of clothing, household goods, shopping in their store, and volunteer time.

Executive Session

Councilman Hale made a motion to enter executive session per the amended agenda. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane
Nays: None
Motion Carried 4-0

Councilman Mills made a motion to return to open session. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane
Nays: None
Motion Carried 4-0

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 Mills made a motion to certify that what was discussed in executive session was what was proposed on the agenda. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane
Nays: None
Motion Carried 4-0

Councilman Mills made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Creger, Mills, and Lane
Nays: None
Motion Carried 4-0

Clerk, Debbie Thomas

Mayor, Tom Spangler