

# Narrows Town Council Meeting

## April 13, 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, Roger Shepherd, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Mayor Spangler gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

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## Approval of March 9th Meeting Minutes

Mayor Spangler called for a motion to approve the minutes from the March 9th meeting.

**Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the March 9th meeting minutes. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Abstain: Hale**

**Motion Carried 4-0**

A brief discussion was held regarding the new format of minutes. Attorney Mike Bedsaul confirmed that FOIA requirements for minutes are general in nature -- minutes need only summarize what was discussed, with specific requirements limited to accurately capturing motions and votes.

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## Recognition -- Narrows High School

Mayor Spangler presented a Certificate of Recognition to the staff and students of Narrows High School for receiving a distinguished rating under the Virginia Department of Education School Performance and Support Framework.

Councilmember Sara Bowles provided context on the distinguished rating. The Virginia Department of Education's School Performance and Support Framework measures school performance across several criteria including testing, readiness measures such as chronic

absenteeism and graduation rates, and 3E (Enrollment, Employment, and Enlistment) readiness. Schools receive ratings across five performance categories, with distinguished being the highest. Approximately 23% of Virginia schools receive the distinguished rating, which identifies a school as exceeding expectations. Narrows High School has earned this designation.

Mayor Spangler and council members offered congratulations and expressed pride in school leadership, staff, and students. Mayor Spangler noted the council's prior advocacy to preserve the high school when its continuation was threatened.

## **Citizen Thank-You Note**

Mayor Spangler read a thank you note from resident Tom Bode, expressing appreciation to town employee Andy Sparks for assembling and delivering a wheelbarrow as a favor on the occasion of a 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The note expressed gratitude to the town crew for consistently providing reliable service over their 20 years of residence.

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## **Consent Agenda**

### **Library Report**

The library report was briefly reviewed. Council noted the bookmobile operates out of a separate location. No further discussion was held.

### **Parks & Recreation Report**

Council reviewed the parks and recreation report, noting favorable revenue figures. Discussion was held regarding an outreach to pursue a pitch-hit-and-run contest. Staff reported that an email inquiry had been sent and a response was pending. Councilman Creger noted that the new fencing on the lower end of the park looks well done and that the new gate will be an asset.

### **Police Report**

Mayor Spangler thanked Chief Ratcliffe for progress on the streetlight program. Chief Ratcliffe was asked to investigate a streetlight outage in front of a residence on Roberta Street.

Council reviewed the speed enforcement data contained in the police report. Councilman Mills noted that anyone traveling 20 or more miles per hour over the limit in town deserves a citation and expressed appreciation for the department's professionalism. The criminal arrest report was also noted favorably.

### **Financial Report**

Council reviewed the financial report. Councilman Mills acknowledged that fiscal conditions are difficult but expressed confidence that the town is managing responsibly. Councilman Creger stated the town was moving in a positive direction.

### **Town Manager's Report**

Terry Nicholson reported that Lindsey Thompson is transitioning into an assistant treasurer role and training with Debbie Thomas. Council expressed appreciation for this succession planning effort.

Terry Nicholson noted that several applications have been received for his position. The initial application deadline is the end of April.

Terry Nicholson provided an explanation of the tree planting project conducted by the New River Conservancy at Camp Success and the Mill Creek area. Due to a miscommunication about the intended planting locations, approximately 400 of 2,189 trees were planted in areas not agreed upon, including parking areas and grassy park areas. Terry Nicholson and Public Works Director John Davis met with the Conservancy to identify the problematic plantings. The Conservancy has begun removing the misplaced trees, though a scheduling conflict may require town staff to assist with some removal ahead of upcoming events, including Kids Fishing Day.

Terry Nicholson emphasized that the project involved no cost to the town or taxpayers; all expenses were borne by the Conservancy. The trees planted in the riparian buffer areas -- intended to improve soil absorption, reduce debris flow into waterways during flood events, and provide stream habitat -- will remain. Additionally, the Conservancy removed invasive species from the areas prior to planting.

Council expressed measured frustration regarding the misplacement, while acknowledging shared responsibility for the miscommunication and recognizing the value of the partnership. Discussion turned to future collaboration, including potential volunteer litter cleanups along the creek and Conservancy participation in Kids Fishing Day to provide educational programming.

Discussion was also held regarding tree planting opportunities near the pond area and along the ball fields near the PSA dump site, where fencing damage and trash accumulation were noted as concerns.

Terry Nicholson provided a brief overview of a meeting attended regarding data centers. No sites in Narrows or the immediate area are considered viable candidates due to site size requirements. Giles County has participated in related discussions. Council expressed awareness of potential burdens on localities and utilities associated with data center development, including possible impacts on electricity rates. The Regional Commission's planning commissioners training on April 22nd will also include information on data centers.

### **Public Works Report**

Council recognized the Public Works Department for reducing water system loss to approximately 15%, down from a previous high of around 50%. Mayor Spangler and council members credited strategic investment in replacing aging water lines and the use of data systems to identify and track losses. The department's performance was described as the envy of peer localities.

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

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

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## **Communications, Concerns, and Requests from the Public**

### **Amanda Moser -- Water Bill Adjustment Request**

Amanda Moser, a business renter at the VFW hall, addressed council requesting assistance with a water bill of approximately \$160, significantly above her normal bill of \$56. She stated that a water leak had occurred while she was traveling and that her husband repaired the issue. Council acknowledged that a similar situation had been addressed previously and directed her to meet with Lindsey Thompson to apply the town's standard formula for billing adjustments. Staff noted that the town's new water metering system can verify whether a leak has been resolved by confirming usage returns to zero during non-use periods.

### **Al Phillips -- Tax Rate and Town Charter**

Al Phillips, a resident of High School Hill, addressed council regarding the town's real estate tax rate and the overall tax burden on Narrows residents. He presented the following data points:

- Giles County real estate tax rate: \$0.68 per \$100 of assessed value
- Narrows town rate: \$0.51 per \$100, which is 52% higher than the Pearisburg rate of \$0.335
- Combined county and town tax on a \$100,000 property in Narrows: approximately \$1,190 per year, or roughly \$100 per month
- Countywide assessments increased 58% this cycle

Mr. Phillips proposed that council consider nullifying the town charter, describing the process under Virginia law: council would notify the Board of Supervisors, negotiate a transfer of assets, liabilities, and services, pass a majority vote of the council, obtain a circuit court order, and submit the question to a voter referendum. He cited the recent example of Glen Lyn as a locality that completed this process.

Mayor Spangler acknowledged the concern and stated that the upcoming budget is expected to include a reduction in the tax rate to partially offset the impact of higher assessments. He expressed confidence that the county does not want the responsibility of absorbing Narrows and outlined the range of services -- parks, public works, police, fire, public events, and street maintenance -- that the town provides and that would be at risk under dissolution.

Councilman Hale and other council members echoed these points, acknowledging the tax burden while highlighting the town's infrastructure history, ongoing capital investment in water and

sewer systems, and recent positive momentum including new businesses and events drawing visitors. Members committed to passing along future tax base growth to residents in the form of rate reductions.

Council encouraged Mr. Phillips and other residents to attend budget meetings, where public input is most impactful, and to engage in volunteer opportunities to help build the community. Mr. Phillips was thanked for his preparation and invited to return.

Councilman Mills stated directly that the tax rate would be reduced in the upcoming budget, but would not be reduced to zero, and encouraged realistic expectations. Councilmember Bowles expressed that dissolving the town charter would be a significant and saddening outcome and reaffirmed the council's commitment to stewardship and growth.

Wayne Gautier raised the question of public engagement, noting that many community members, particularly elderly residents, cannot attend meetings in person. Council discussed the YouTube streaming of meetings, with acknowledgment that this has been done since COVID. Staff was asked to look into making the livestream more visible and accessible.

### **Giles County Public Schools Comprehensive Plan Presentation**

Dr. Marlin Campbell, Superintendent of Giles County Public Schools, presented to council on two topics: the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the school division, and the creation of a new division-wide mission and vision.

Dr. Campbell opened by expressing his commitment to the community and his intention to spend the remainder of his career in Giles County. He outlined three current-year goals for the division:

- Chronic absenteeism: Reduced from 20% to below 10% this school year
- Academic performance: Goal to reach the top third of Virginia schools by SOL assessments; currently approximately six to seven percentage points below that threshold
- Graduation rates: Target of 96-97%

Regarding the comprehensive plan, Dr. Campbell described a structured process involving employee and parent surveys (approximately 200 responses each), AI-assisted data analysis, and committee-based drafting organized by component. The plan is organized around seven to eight components: school safety and security, culture and climate, student learning, student and staff well-being, student engagement and enrichment, governance and operational efficiency, facilities, and community engagement.

Each component includes goals, measurable objectives, and three to five specific strategies to be accomplished over three years. Dr. Campbell shared a draft of the student learning component as an example. The full plan is not yet ready for public release. A first reading before the school board is anticipated by late April or May, with approval targeted for May or June.

Strengths identified through the needs assessment process and to be preserved in the plan include: a strong community culture and family atmosphere, dedicated and caring teachers and staff, and standout CTE and dual enrollment programs.

Areas for improvement identified include consistent expectations and communication across the division, student and staff well-being and mental health support, positive discipline, student engagement opportunities, and facilities maintenance.

Dr. Campbell also described four 'tensions' identified through community feedback that will inform the mission and vision: community identity versus division-wide consistency; caring environment versus high expectations; tradition versus future readiness; and school autonomy versus alignment. Several draft mission and vision statements were shared; council was invited to provide feedback on which language best reflects Giles County Public Schools.

The goal is to adopt a new mission and vision by June or July and use it as a foundation for system-wide branding at the start of the next school year.

Council members expressed strong support for Dr. Campbell's approach, praised the division's teachers and staff, and encouraged broad community engagement in the planning process. Mayor Spangler encouraged Dr. Campbell to pursue ongoing partnership with council and offered assistance as needed.

### **Citizen Request -- Trail Naming in Honor of Ralph Robertson**

Terry Nicholson advised council that a community member has suggested naming one of the Mill Creek trails after Ralph Robertson in recognition of his significant contributions to its development. This consideration is timely given improvements being made to Mill Creek through the RTP grant and funds raised by the 5K/10K race. Staff indicated they would pursue the idea further and bring a proposal back to council. Council expressed unanimous enthusiasm for the recognition.

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

### **PSA Report**

Councilman Mills reported that PSA budget meetings are ongoing. He and Terry Nicholson are working to ensure the PSA budget is fiscally sound. He stated he would not vote to approve a PSA budget he is not comfortable with and confirmed the council would be updated as the process moves forward.

### **Water Leak Detection -- Second Asterra Survey**

Terry Nicholson reported that a second water leak detection survey has been completed by Asterra at no cost to the town, funded through an Office of Drinking Water grant. Staff will work with the survey team for one day to address identified leaks. John Davis noted that a preliminary

review of the results suggests most flagged locations may have already been addressed, and that a full review will be completed shortly.

Council emphasized the importance of communicating grant-funded projects to the public to clarify that many improvements are made at no direct cost to taxpayers.

### **BRIC Grant Application -- Wastewater Treatment Plant**

Terry Nicholson reported that the FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which had been suspended, has been reinstated following a federal court ruling. The program represents a significant funding opportunity. Terry Nicholson submitted a pre-application based on the hazard mitigation grant previously prepared for the wastewater treatment plant project with Pearisburg and has been approved to proceed with a full application. The potential grant award could be approximately \$20 million. The Regional Commission is assisting with the application. No council action was required at this time.

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## **Unfinished Business**

### **Kimberling Street/Memorial Boulevard Intersection Safety**

Chief Ratcliffe, Public Works Director John Davis, and Terry Nicholson presented findings and recommendations regarding the intersection of Memorial Boulevard and Kimberling Street, following a request from residents at the March meeting.

Chief Ratcliffe reported that over the past five years, there have been four reportable accidents at the intersection. All four were caused by vehicles failing to stop at the stop sign on the Memorial Boulevard approach. Two drivers reported not seeing the stop sign. One driver stopped and then pulled out into traffic. One involved a juvenile driving at excessive speed without proper authorization.

A prior speed study conducted in approximately 2022 or 2023 showed that speed feedback signs temporarily slowed traffic, but no persistent speeding problem was documented at that time. Morning and afternoon peak traffic periods (approximately 7:30-8:30 a.m. and 3:00-4:00 p.m.) were identified as times of heavy traffic due to school pickup and drop off.

Staff recommended against a four-way stop due to concerns about traffic congestion during school hours on the Memorial Boulevard corridor, and because all accidents involved running the existing stop sign rather than failures on the Kimberling approach. Instead, staff recommended the following immediate measures:

- Install double stop signs (two per approach) on Memorial Boulevard to increase visibility
- Refresh stop bar striping with reflective glass bead material on both sides of the intersection
- Increase police radar enforcement and speed monitoring on Kimberling Street and Memorial Boulevard

- Post speed feedback signs on Kimberling Street

Council discussed the recommendations at length. Residents present from Memorial Boulevard expressed support for action and raised concerns about vehicle speeds on Kimberling Street beyond the intersection. Council acknowledged the speeding concern as a separate but related issue and discussed options including rumble strips and speed tables. Staff agreed to research the cost of embedded rumble strips for Kimberling Street and report back.

Council agreed to proceed with the staff recommendation as a first step, with a two-month monitoring period before reassessment.

**Councilman Creger made a motion to install double stop signs on both approaches of Memorial Boulevard, refresh the stop bar striping, add speed feedback signs on Kimberling Street, and re-evaluate effectiveness in two months. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

### **Wastewater Treatment Plant Generator -- Project Update**

Terry Nicholson reported that Thompson & Litton is preparing construction documents for the natural gas generator at the wastewater treatment plant, funded by a 100% DHCD grant with no local match required. Attorney Mike Bedsaul is reviewing the legal documents for compliance with grant conditions. Once the project goes to bid, the contract will be brought back to council for approval. No action was required at this time.

Terry Nicholson also noted that bids and RFPs are posted on the town's website and on eVA, Virginia's procurement website, which is monitored by contractors.

### **Mill Creek Park Improvements Update**

Terry Nicholson provided updates on two Mill Creek Park improvement projects:

**Signage and Entryway:** The Virginia Department of Forestry has offered to fund a timber-frame archway sign at the park entrance on Northview Street, to be constructed by a local timberwright. The sign will include a gate using mountain laurel as natural spindles. The entryway sign will count as match for the Recreational Trails Program grant. Trail signs within the park, also part of the Community Design Assistance Center (CDAC) design, are being coordinated with the Department of Forestry.

**Bridge Replacement:** Funds raised by the 5K/10K race will be used to rehabilitate the metal bridge at the trailhead creek crossing. Because the metal structure is in good condition, staff can repair welds, repaint, and replace only the weathered wood components, at a lower cost than originally anticipated. The bridge is expected to remain in service for another 20 years following the repair.

## **Budget Preparation Update**

Terry Nicholson provided a brief budget update. The town remains in a position to reduce the real estate tax rate modestly while still capturing some benefit from the 58% increase in assessed values -- the first reassessment in six years. Outstanding variables include the state budget (affecting VDOT payments), personal property valuations, and final water and sewer rate structure. A 5% meals tax rate and a 10% water and sewer rate increase remain included in the draft. A draft budget is expected at the May meeting, with final approval anticipated in June.

In response to a question from Mayor Spangler, Terry Nicholson noted that several blighted properties are already moving through the condemnation and disposition process, including a property on Wolf Street sold at auction to a local developer, and a burned structure on Main Street where demolition is in progress. Habitat for Humanity is also engaged on a town-acquired property. The HOME Consortium program will bring funding to the county in the coming year for new construction on blighted sites. The FY2027 draft budget includes a part-time code enforcement officer position.

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## **New Business**

### **Flowers / Graduation Decorations**

Councilmember Bowles announced that the flower pots are expected to be in place around May 27th. Councilman Hale offered his space again for assembly. Volunteers will be sought to assist with placement.

### **Park Cleanup Day**

Councilmember Bowles announced she is organizing a park cleanup day and has reached out to NHS students needing service hours and other volunteers. The goal is to complete cleanup before park opening, with particular focus on mulching. Additional volunteers are welcome.

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## **Unfinished Business**

### **Public Hearing -- Sale of Bank Building**

A public hearing regarding the sale of the bank building is scheduled for April 23rd at 6:00 p.m. Council confirmed a quorum will be present.

### **Donation to Narrows After Prom**

Mayor Spangler presented a request for council to consider a donation to the Narrows After Prom, consistent with the \$500 donation made in the prior year.

**Councilman Mills made a motion to donate \$500 to the Narrows After Prom. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.**

**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**  
**Nays: None**  
**Motion Carried 5-0**

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## **Items for Council Information**

The following reports were provided for council review: Board of Supervisors meeting minutes, PSA minutes, New River Regional Commission update, and the fire department monthly report.

### **Town Charter Amendment -- Town Manager Residency Requirement**

Councilman Hale addressed council regarding the charter requirement that the Town Manager reside within the town limits. With the expected need to hire a new Town Manager, he proposed that council consider amending the charter to remove the residency requirement, in order to expand the candidate pool.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul outlined two options for amending the charter:

- Option 1 -- Referendum: Place the question to voters via a court-ordered referendum. The amendment, if approved, must still be enacted by the General Assembly at the next legislative session. If not enacted at that session, the process must restart.
- Option 2 -- Public Hearing: Council adopts the proposed amendment, advertises and holds one or more public hearings (published twice within 28 days, with the second publication at least seven days before the hearing), and then submits the amendment to the General Assembly for enactment at the next legislative session. This option is more flexible in timing and allows for public discussion.

In either case, the charter cannot be amended until enacted by the General Assembly, which means the earliest effective date would be 2027. Attorney Mike Bedsaul recommended beginning the process in late summer or early fall to allow sufficient time before the January legislative session.

Council discussed both options and expressed strong preference for the public hearing route, which allows constituents to hear the rationale and offer comment. Council members expressed support for removing the residency requirement, citing the complexity of the town manager role and the importance of maximizing the candidate pool. Mayor Spangler stated clearly that he would not support informal workarounds to avoid the charter requirement.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul agreed to draft a resolution for council review at the next meeting as a first step toward scheduling public hearings.

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## **Executive Session**

**Councilman Mills made a motion to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing real property pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711.A.3 (discussion of acquisition of real property under the EPA GHHI grant). Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

**Councilman Mills made a motion to amend the executive session motion to also include discussion of personnel matters pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711.A.1.**

**Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

Council entered executive session.

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

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

**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 Mills made a motion to certify that what was discussed in closed session was real property and personnel matters, as declared. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

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## **Adjournment**

**Councilman Mills made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.**

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

**Nays: None**

**Motion Carried 5-0**

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Clerk, Debbie Thomas

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Mayor, Tom Spangler