Narrows Town Council Meeting
July 13, 2026

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

Staff members present included Joe Butler, Cindy Laws, Terry Nicholson, Benji Ratcliffe, Roger Shepherd, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Reid Broughton was present.

Mayor Spangler gave the invocation.

Council and Audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

Councilman Hale noted the following corrections to the June 10th minutes: on page five, line two, the word "may" should read "many" in reference to the age of the town's water lines; and on page six, regarding Al Phillips' comments on projected tax increases, he asked that the percentage increase cited (32%) be double-checked against the underlying dollar figures ($785 to $2,361). Staff confirmed the recording was reviewed and the figures as stated matched what was said, though the percentage itself did not appear to be mathematically correct even under a corrected figure; the minutes were left as originally recorded to reflect what was actually said at the meeting.

Councilman Hale also asked that the minutes reflect his understanding, regarding the proposed general fund cuts discussed on page eight, that the reduction in part-time recreation staff hours and elimination of the part-time code enforcement position is not intended to eliminate those functions, but rather to shift responsibility for related park visits and code enforcement work to the police department, under the direction of the town manager. This was noted as a clarifying comment rather than a correction.

Councilman Hale made a motion, subject to the above corrections, to approve the council minutes from June 10th, June 17th, and June 24th. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger
Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

Consent Agenda

Library Report

Council reviewed the library report. Council commended the library's modified hours, adopted to reach a broader portion of the population, and asked that the change be promoted as widely as possible. Cindy Laws reported that the hours are being publicized on Facebook, the town's website, and by word of mouth, and agreed to also post the change on the town's Facebook page. She reported good traffic during the new hours, primarily children on summer break using the computers. Discussion followed regarding the library's operating costs relative to the town's contribution and the librarian's part-time status and health insurance needs; council indicated it did not wish to reduce library hours and asked that any proposal regarding staffing be brought to the town manager first for further discussion.

Parks & Recreation Report

Council reviewed the parks and recreation report. Council asked that the Parks & Recreation Department give consideration to expanding programming to serve teens and adults, in addition to current youth-focused programs, as a means of generating additional revenue for the department. Roger Shepherd reported that he has considered a number of options, including adult basketball and volleyball leagues, an e-sports club in the annex, softball and kickball leagues, and yoga and other activities for senior residents, but noted that facility limitations (including the lack of field lighting) and residents' typical work schedules present scheduling challenges. He reported that the recent 3-on-3 basketball tournament went well, as did the parks committee's pickleball tournament. In response to a question, staff explained that funds raised through recreation events are directed either to the town or to the Parks & Recreation Commission's separate checking account, depending on the event, and that the commission determines how commission funds are spent, generally for park improvements.

Regarding the July 4th festival, staff reported that the event's net proceeds for the Parks & Recreation Commission are not yet finalized but are expected to be close to break-even this year, due to a significant increase in the cost of fireworks. Staff explained that the prior fireworks provider was no longer able to perform the service due to legal issues, requiring the town to transition to two newly licensed local operators this year. During the display, a newly assigned fire marshal required police to clear a vehicle that had stopped on the road near the launch site, which paused the show briefly; officers also had to prevent attendees from leaving prematurely, as many believed the show had ended. The display resumed and was completed successfully. The launch site was also relocated this year, after the site used last year was determined not to meet safety requirements; the display returned to a previously used site.

Staff also provided an update on a plumbing failure at the park restrooms, caused by a feminine hygiene product that had been flushed and disabled the sewage pump; the pump was repaired the following day, and staff are evaluating options to prevent recurrence without requiring full

removal of the pump for cleaning. Council expressed appreciation to the local business, Tickle Septic, that provided replacement portable toilets while the repair was completed, and to staff, police, and volunteers for their work planning and supporting the July 4th festival. Council also discussed the practice of collecting both a gate fee and a tournament entry fee from festival participants and agreed that fee collection should be applied consistently across events such as the 3-on-3 basketball tournament and the pickleball tournament.

Farmers Market Report

Council asked that staff inquire with the market coordinator regarding the possibility of adding additional food truck vendors to complement the Cabo Fish Taco truck, which is well received by residents and is expected to return to its regular monthly schedule this month.

Police Report

Council reviewed the police report. No additional discussion was held.

Financial Report

Council reviewed the financial report. In response to a question, staff explained that a recent buyout of the town's prior wireless carrier by T-Mobile required staff to replace SIM cards in certain town equipment; the transition was completed at no cost to the town, though it required staff time.

Town Manager's Report

Terry Nicholson confirmed he is briefing incoming Town Manager Joe Butler on potential FY2028 budget add-backs for items deferred this year, including the rotating biological contactors and the inflow-and-infiltration study.

In response to a question regarding the cost of making the park restrooms more presentable to the public, staff estimated $50,000 to $100,000, noting that ongoing vandalism (including kicking in of plywood stall doors) has been a significant and frustrating challenge for staff and police. Staff reported some recent success identifying individuals responsible for vandalism using security camera footage and following up with them and their parents. Staff also discussed the possibility of a larger renovation of the park's middle shelter building, including installation of a commercial kitchen for offseason and summer use (an additional estimated $100,000) and conversion of adjacent storage rooms to usable space, and noted that grant funding opportunities for this work continue to be pursued.

Council thanked Terry Nicholson and staff for hosting the recent community flood-preparedness meetings.

In response to a question regarding time limits on renovation of a previously condemned structure for which a building permit was issued, staff explained that any time limit imposed depends on the specific circumstances; in the case referenced, the prior owner was incarcerated and unreachable, the property went to tax sale, and the new owner purchased it with the intention of completing the renovation. Council discussed concerns about absentee buyers who purchase inexpensive properties intending to rent or resell them, begin repairs, and then abandon the project when it proves uneconomical.

Staff provided an update on the Mill Creek project, reporting that the required environmental review has identified the need for an additional cultural resources (archaeological) study, and that Virginia's Native American tribes have been contacted and have raised no objection to the project. This step is expected to take approximately 30 more days, after which the town can proceed to negotiate its contract with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Council expressed support for the town's engagement of a consultant to review the town's finances and said it looks forward to that report.

In response to a question about whether additional security cameras are needed at the park, staff indicated no additional cameras are needed at this time; the existing system was strategically placed to address vandalism and to safeguard cash-handling areas and has assisted in resolving prior investigations. Staff reminded council that the town is two years into a five-year camera service contract that includes a ten-year guarantee, meaning the final five years of service will be provided at no additional cost; discontinuing the contract early would forfeit that benefit. Council agreed the benefit should not be given up.

Public Works Report

Staff reported that the Camp Success geogrid project is 100% complete and the town has received reimbursement of approximately $80,000 this month. Water loss remains low. Council asked that appreciation be conveyed to the Public Works crew for responding overnight to remove a large, rotted willow tree that had fallen and blocked the road near Mill Pond. Council also asked staff to continue monitoring erosion and undermining beneath the foundation of the park's swim platform. Council thanked the Public Works staff and volunteers for their continued work maintaining the town's flowers, noting the positive impression they create for residents and visitors.

Council asked staff to look into restoring a crosswalk near the park at Scenic Drive that was not replaced following a prior repaving project, and asked whether anything could be done about spilled yellow paint on Route 460, which staff noted falls under the Virginia Department of Transportation's jurisdiction.

Councilman Creger made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger

Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

Public Hearing -- Proposed Charter Amendment: Town Manager Residency Requirement

Mayor Spangler opened a public hearing on the proposed charter amendment to remove the requirement that the town manager reside within town limits. The town attorney confirmed that this amendment does not require a town-wide public vote; rather, it must be adopted by council and subsequently sponsored and approved by the General Assembly, with Delegate Jason Ballard and Senator Travis Hackworth responsible for introducing the legislation.

Al Phillips addressed council in opposition to the proposed amendment, stating that the town manager should be required to reside within the town to be personally subject to the effects of the town's policies and actions.

Mayor Spangler stated that he could see merit on both sides of the issue and that he would support letting the outcome reflect the town's wishes, while noting that a public referendum is not part of the current proposal.

Hearing no further comments, Mayor Spangler closed the public hearing.

Public Hearing -- Proposed Charter Amendment: Length of Mayor's Term

Mayor Spangler opened a public hearing on the proposed charter amendment to change the mayor's term of office from two years to four years, to match the term length of council members.

Al Phillips voiced support for the change, with the suggestion that the terms of the mayor and vice mayor not expire in the same election cycle, in order to preserve continuity in town leadership. Council members agreed this was an important consideration and confirmed that, under the proposal, three council seats (including the mayor's) would carry four-year terms offset by two years from the remaining two council seats, so that half of council's seats would come up for election every two years rather than requiring the mayor to run every two years as under the current charter. Staff noted that the vice mayor's position is not an elected office, but is selected by council, and would therefore be unaffected by the proposed term change.

Hearing no further comments, Mayor Spangler closed the public hearing.

Public Hearing -- Proposed Meals Tax Increase

Mayor Spangler opened a public hearing on the proposed increase of the town's meals tax from 5% to 6%.

Al Phillips raised concern that the town's published materials were inconsistent regarding the current meals tax rate: the town code and the March 9th council minutes referenced a current rate of 4%, while the public notice advertising this hearing referenced an increase from 5% to 6%. Staff clarified that the correct current rate is 5%, which was properly and legally established at a prior public hearing raising the rate from 4% to 5%, but that the change had not been updated in the town code, an oversight staff acknowledged and agreed to correct. The resident reiterated his opposition to raising the meals tax and to tax increases generally and expressed concern about the ordinance book not being kept current.

Wayne Gautier addressed council with additional concerns unrelated to the meals tax, including: the number of active volunteers currently serving on the Parks & Recreation Commission relative to the number specified in its bylaws; the disposition of funds transferred to the Parks & Recreation Commission when a prior civic organization that had organized the July 4th event dissolved, including equipment purchased with those funds; supervision and vandalism of the park restrooms after hours; and the need to resurface the park's basketball court, which has not been redone in many years. Council thanked him for his comments.

Hearing no further comments, Mayor Spangler closed the public hearing.

Communications from the Mayor, Council, and Staff

PSA Report

Terry Nicholson reported nothing unusual, noting that the PSA continues working to address past-due solid waste and water accounts, particularly involving landlord-tenant situations, which generated public comment at the PSA's own recent hearing. He also reported on a satellite-based water leak detection scan conducted with two town staff members, which identified two previously known leaks not yet repaired and one additional leak on a customer's line. A third, countywide scan will be conducted at no cost to the town through a SERCAP grant; the town's own initial scan had cost approximately $7,000, and the town had determined that funding additional self-paid scans was not the best use of funds.

E-Bicycle Restrictions

Police Chief Benji Ratcliffe and Terry Nicholson reported ongoing concerns regarding e-bikes traveling at speeds up to 25-30 miles per hour on town sidewalks, creating a safety hazard for pedestrians. Staff explained that current state helmet requirements apply only to younger riders, except for Class 3 e-bikes, which require helmets for all riders regardless of age. Staff reported that letters explaining applicable Virginia traffic laws had already been sent home with students

prior to the end of the school year, and that the department's practice has been to issue a warning for a first offense and a citation for a second offense. Staff and council discussed possible approaches, including prohibiting e-bikes from sidewalks, and establishing a permit program requiring younger riders to complete a safety class, potentially in partnership with a local community organization, before receiving permission to operate an e-bike in town. Staff indicated they are continuing to research approaches taken by other jurisdictions and will bring a recommendation to council.

Councilman Creger suggested that staff obtain direct online access to VTC (Virginia Town & City) magazines, which currently arrive at the town office later than they are available online. He encouraged council to move forward on revenue-generating ideas discussed during the recent budget cycle, including annexation and additional fundraisers and events, so that the town is not addressing the same issues again next budget cycle. He also raised continued interest in identifying a way for the town to benefit financially from the Stockpen, which generates heavy truck traffic passing through town. Regarding concerns raised during the public hearing about park security, he noted that the position that might have addressed this had recently been eliminated as part of budget cuts. He asked that the Parks & Recreation Commission provide an accounting of its checking account balance and expenditures at its next meeting, noting that commission funds are subject to spending guidelines and that the account's activity is not widely visible to the public. Staff noted that a separate account also exists for library donations, which the librarian manages without a governing board, unlike the Parks & Recreation Commission, which operates under bylaws set by council and currently has four active members, fewer than the number specified in its bylaws; council acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting volunteers for the commission.

Mayor Spangler noted that, as Terry Nicholson transitions into retirement and is succeeded by Joe Butler, he would like to nominate Joe Butler to take Terry Nicholson's place as the town's alternate representative on the PSA Board, with John Mills continuing as the regular member.

Councilman Hale made a motion to appoint Joe Butler as the town's alternate representative on the PSA Board, effective upon Terry Nicholson's retirement. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger
Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

New Business

Co-Town Manager Designation

Terry Nicholson and Attorney Reid Broughton explained that, during the transition period before Terry Nicholson's retirement, it would be beneficial for Joe Butler to hold legal authority equivalent to the town manager's, including authority to sign checks and act as a signatory on the

town's bank accounts. Attorney Reid Broughton recommended that council designate Joe Butler as co-town manager alongside Terry Nicholson from the date of this meeting until September 1, 2026, at which time Joe Butler would assume the position of town manager solely.

Councilman Hale made a motion to designate Joe Butler as co-town manager alongside Terry Nicholson, effective immediately through September 1, 2026. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger
Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

Action on Proposed Charter Amendment -- Town Manager Residency Requirement

Councilman Hale made a motion to approve the town charter amendment as presented, removing the town manager residency requirement. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale and Bowles
Nays: Creger
Motion Failed 2-1 (Majority of Full Council would be required to pass the motion.)

Action on Proposed Charter Amendment -- Term of Mayor

Councilman Hale made a motion to approve the charter amendment as proposed, changing the mayor's term of office from two years to four years. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger
Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

Action on Proposed Meals Tax Increase

Councilman Creger made a motion to approve the meals tax increase to 6%.
Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger
Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

Minutes of Various Boards and Committees

Council received minutes from various affiliated boards and committees for review. No discussion was held.

Adjournment

Councilman Hale made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, and Creger
Nays: None
Motion Carried 3-0

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Clerk, Debbie Thomas Mayor, Tom Spangler