# Narrows Town Council Meeting
# August 10, 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 included Joe Butler, Terry Nicholson, Benji Ratcliffe, Roger Shepherd, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Councilman Mills gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

## Recognition of Retiring Town Manager

Councilmember Lane presented outgoing Town Manager Terry Nicholson with gifts marking his retirement at the end of the month, including a sundial and a one-night stay at Mountain Lake.

Council and staff thanked Mr. Nicholson for his four years of service, noting his dedication and the family-like culture he fostered among staff. A photograph was taken to commemorate the occasion.

## Amendment to Agenda

**Councilman Mills made a motion to amend the agenda to move approval of the July 13th meeting minutes to after closed session. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

## Consent Agenda

*Library Report*

Council reviewed the library report. No questions or comments were raised.

*Parks & Recreation Report*

Council reviewed the parks and recreation report, noting increased revenue from concessions and registrations. Staff reported that volleyball, cheer, and football are currently occupying available time and space, with fourth-and-fifth-grade basketball to follow, and a decision still pending on whether to run PreK-through-third-grade basketball or sixth-and-eighth-grade basketball next.

Staff indicated interest in eventually establishing adult volleyball and basketball leagues, pending available space and time.

Council discussed staffing requirements for the splash pad. Councilmember Lane asked whether staffing is required given that the unit can be activated by a button. Staff explained that the splash pad is controlled by a timer dial (maximum 30-minute run time) and a sensor pad that a staff member must stand on to activate it, and that staff has historically preferred not to fully automate the unit due to liability concerns, safety oversight for children using the equipment, and concerns about vandalism by unsupervised older children.

Mike Bedsaul recommended that, if the town considers removing staff supervision, it should first confirm with its insurance carrier (VRSA) whether staffed supervision is a condition of coverage.

Council commended Public Works and park staff for the cleanliness of the park, noting light trash accumulation even after a busy weekend, and thanked staff for maintaining the shelters, which remain a popular destination for picnics and reunions in the region.

*Farmers Market Report*

Council asked that staff work with the market coordinator, Savannah Horney, on increasing the frequency and variety of social media content promoting the farmers market, such as vendor- and recipe-specific posts, to increase engagement. Staff agreed to follow up. Council also noted some vendor confusion regarding the market coordinator's expected arrival time and asked that market start-up logistics be clarified with vendors going forward.

Council also raised a recurring concern regarding vehicles driving past the "authorized vehicles only" signage near the park shelters. Staff explained that the standing policy allows vehicles to enter briefly to drop off goods or persons with disabilities before immediately exiting, but that vehicles may not park inside the lower or middle shelter areas; vehicle access to the upper shelter is not permitted due to lack of adequate roadway.

*Police Report*

Council commended the Police Department, and Officer Melissa Cohen specifically, for department work leading to an arrest in a child exploitation material case, and thanked officers for their diligence. In response to a question, staff indicated that overall crime statistics appear to

be up slightly compared to the prior year, based on the report's year-to-date comparison, but that this was not viewed as reflecting poorly on the department.

*Financial Report*

Council reviewed the financial report and commended staff on the format, noting the upcoming pre-audit. Staff discussed succession planning within the finance office given its small staff size, explaining that cross-training is difficult given the tenure and specialized knowledge of long-serving staff, but that plans are underway to have another staff member trained on utility billing so that additional shadowing of other duties can occur.

*Town Manager's Report*

Staff reported that a meeting with the Parks & Recreation Commission needs to be rescheduled following a last-minute cancellation. Staff reported positive news regarding funding discussions with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the HOME Consortium related to potential housing projects in the town.

*Public Works Director's Report*

Staff and council discussed the town's ongoing water loss reduction efforts, noting that the town has shifted from a "band-aid" approach to full replacement of aging water lines, which requires greater upfront investment but has produced sustained improvement. Staff reported that 41 water leaks were repaired over the past year, the majority detected and addressed before surfacing, crediting the town's continued investment in leak-detection technology. Council noted that the town's water loss percentage has improved from the 40-45% range to a consistent 20% or lower, in contrast to neighboring systems that remain near 50%.

Council commended the improved format of the public works report, noting that it makes clear what has changed since the previous month. Staff indicated that a condition assessment and capital improvement plan for the park's swim platform is nearly complete and will be distributed to council.

**Councilman Mills made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

# Communications, Concerns, and Requests from the Public

Al Phillips addressed council regarding several matters. He noted continued public criticism on social media regarding water rate increases in the broader county. He requested clarification on

the calculation underlying the town's meals tax revenue since its 2022 increase, stating his understanding that a 1% increase should generate approximately $20,000 in revenue and asking staff to confirm actual figures. He cautioned council against characterizing tax increases as the town "making money," noting that tax increases take money from residents rather than generate revenue for the town, and cited general economic data on household financial strain. He commended council for declining pay this year but presented data comparing the town's real estate tax rate to surrounding counties and towns, noting that Narrows' combined town-and-county tax rate is higher than that of Blacksburg or Christiansburg, and asked council to take this into consideration going forward.

Jenny Martin addressed council, expressing appreciation for town staff while raising concerns regarding the recent water rate increase, requesting that any future increases be phased in smaller increments to ease resident budgeting. She asked why the town has needed to borrow money to meet payroll; staff explained that a line of credit was established in part due to significant flood-related expenses that had to be paid before FEMA reimbursement was received, and that the line of credit remains available to cover interim shortfalls. She also asked why town crews maintain property outside town limits; staff clarified that the properties in question, while outside town limits, are town-owned and therefore maintained by the town.

Ms. Martin also asked about the town's purchase of a six-acre parcel intended for future police development, questioning why the police department could not simply remain in its current space given the chief's frequent field presence. Staff explained the property was purchased with long-term development in mind, including relocating an outdated fire department facility that cannot accommodate current apparatus, and noted that any related timeline reflects the town's five-year capital improvement planning cycle rather than a legal restriction on the property's use. Council reiterated its intention to phase future rate increases more gradually where possible.

Audre Roberts raised concerns on behalf of lower-usage, single-person households regarding the town's water billing structure, suggesting a different rate structure that would shift more cost onto higher-usage customers. Council noted concerns that such a structure could be viewed as discriminatory in application. The current rate structure has a minimum bill (up to 2000 gallons), with additional charges for each additional 1000 gallons. Staff also reminded the public that bill relief program information and resources are available through the town office for residents having difficulty paying their water bills.

# Communications from the Mayor, Council, and Staff

**PSA Report**

Councilman Mills reported that the PSA is currently without a director following a recent retirement, and that Chris McKlarney has agreed to serve as interim director while a permanent replacement is sought. Council expressed confidence in Mr. McKlarney's ability to lead the PSA through the transition.

The councilmember also reported ongoing efforts to enforce collection of unpaid solid waste and water accounts, including enacting the PSA's existing legal authority under the Code of Virginia to hold property owners (landlords) responsible for unpaid garbage bills where tenants have not paid, noting that this authority has generated significant pushback from affected landlords but is not a new provision. Mike Bedsaul confirmed the PSA's authority in this area.

**Primary Clarifier Bid Receipts**

Joe Butler reported that the sole bid received for replacement of the primary clarifier drive at the wastewater treatment plant came in substantially higher (approximately double) than the engineer's (Thompson & Litton's) prior estimate. Staff explained that the town must front the cost of the project and seek reimbursement from FEMA, which has agreed to reimburse 92% of eligible costs even with only one bidder, but that reimbursement timing has historically lagged behind the town's up-front expenditures.

Council discussed whether to authorize a "not to exceed" amount to allow staff to move forward without waiting for the next meeting. Mike Bedsaul advised against publicly identifying a "not to exceed" figure while negotiating with a sole bidder, as doing so could compromise the town's negotiating position, and recommended that staff continue negotiating with the bidder subject to council approval, with a special meeting available if needed to authorize an award before the next regular meeting. Council directed staff to obtain a detailed explanation from Thompson & Litton regarding the basis for the increased bid and to continue negotiations for approximately one additional month, noting that the clarifier remains functional at this time.

**Duck Pond Dredging Project**

Joe Butler reported on a proposed project to remove approximately 25,000 square feet of accumulated silt from the duck pond. Staff confirmed that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality have each indicated no permit is required for the project, and that the Virginia Marine Resources Commission has informally indicated the site falls outside its jurisdiction. Staff reported strong interest from community volunteers and indicated that a councilmember with construction experience has agreed to assist in coordinating the project with local contractors. Staff cautioned that, due to the heavy equipment involved, volunteer participation should be limited to those directly assisting with planning and logistics rather than general on-site volunteers, for safety reasons.

**VDOT Street Maintenance Funding**

Staff reported that the Virginia Department of Transportation reduced its per-lane-mile maintenance reimbursement rate this year, resulting in an approximate $50,000 decrease in funding, consistent with reductions reported by neighboring localities. Staff indicated the town

intends to offset the reduction by reducing the amount of paving performed this year. Council commended recent paving and restriping work completed near the high school.

**Virginia Housing Grant Opportunity**

Joe Butler reported on a deconstruction and stabilization grant opportunity through Virginia Housing that could assist in addressing the Wolf Street property, and indicated an application is being developed with input from Virginia Housing and in partnership with Habitat for Humanity.

**Ordinance Repository**

Joe Butler reported that, following a prior citizen’s concern regarding outdated printed ordinance books, staff is pursuing a quote for an online ordinance repository to be hosted on the town's website, allowing self-service updates and public access.

**Additional Council Items**

Councilman Creger raised continued concern regarding a yellow paint stripe on Route 460 that appears to be causing unnecessary lane changes and presenting a safety hazard; staff agreed to follow up with VDOT, which has jurisdiction over the road.

Council also revisited the previously failed charter amendment regarding the town manager residency requirement. Councilmembers expressed differing views: some emphasized the importance of maintaining a process, regardless of the residency requirement's ultimate disposition, for actively recruiting town manager candidates well in advance of any future vacancy. Discussion included the possibility of listing town residency as a preferred, rather than required, qualification in any future search, which Mike Bedsaul confirmed could be implemented by policy or contract regardless of the charter's requirement. Councilman Mills expressed continued disappointment that the amendment had not passed and requested that, if revisited, the matter be presented to the public with a full discussion of the benefits and drawbacks.

Staff confirmed that a pending code enforcement matter regarding a residential property had resulted in some voluntary cleanup by the property owner, and that the town's standard enforcement process remains available and has been used multiple times in the past several weeks.

# New Business

**Appointment of Primary PSA Board Member**

**Councilman Hale made a motion to reappoint John Mills as the town's primary representative on the PSA Board. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**

**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, and Lane**
**Abstain: Mills**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 4-0**

**Establishment of Council Committees**

Joe Butler proposed the establishment of three council committees to assist with ongoing town business:

- A Finance Committee, to review how financial information is communicated to council and to begin early preparation for the FY28 budget. Councilmembers Hale and Lane volunteered to serve.

- A BAD Buildings Committee, to pursue additional strategies for addressing blighted properties in town, building on the Virginia Housing grant opportunity discussed above. Councilman Mills and Councilman Creger volunteered to serve.

- A Personnel Policy Committee, to review and update the town's outdated personnel policy, targeted for completion by the start of FY28. Councilmember Bowles volunteered to serve.

Councilmember Lane said she would participate in either finance or personnel or could participate in both. Mayor Spangler asked whether a council member could participate in committee meetings virtually from another location; staff and the Town Attorney noted that any such participation would still count toward the composition of the meeting for purposes of public meeting requirements. Staff agreed to work out scheduling and participation details, with a preference for meetings to occur on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Fridays.

# Unfinished Business

**E-Bicycle Restrictions**

Terry Nicholson and Police Chief Ratcliffe provided an update on ongoing e-bike concerns, noting that most jurisdictions surveyed restrict e-bikes to roadways rather than sidewalks, but that those jurisdictions typically have dedicated bike lanes, which the town lacks. Staff expressed concern that removing e-bikes from sidewalks without bike lanes could increase risk to riders. Staff reported that a permit program requiring a safety class as a condition of issuance would not be legally permissible, as permits must be issued to any applicant regardless of class completion. Staff recommended tabling the matter for the time being, noting that usage is expected to decline with the start of the school year, providing additional time to study the issue, pursue safety education in schools, and continue enforcement of existing helmet requirements (which apply to riders under a certain age generally, and to all riders of Class 3 e-bikes regardless of age).

Council decided to table the matter. No formal vote was taken on this informational item.

# Matters for Consideration by Council

The approval of a ‘not to exceed’ cost for the primary clarifier contract was tabled until a future meeting.

# Items for Council Information

Council received informational reports from the Board of Supervisors, the New River Regional Commission, and the Narrows Fire Department. No discussion was held.

# Executive Session

**Councilman Mills made a motion to amend the agenda to add a closed session for consultation with legal counsel, pursuant to Virginia Code § 2.2-3711.A.8, regarding the proposed charter amendment on the town manager's residency requirement and meals tax. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

**Councilman Mills made a motion to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters pursuant to § 2.2-3711.A.1 concerning the Police Department; property acquisition matters pursuant to § 2.2-3711.A.3 regarding the Main Street and Hare Street properties; and consultation with legal counsel pursuant to § 2.2-3711.A.8 regarding the charter amendment and meals tax. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

**Councilman Creger made a motion to return to open session. Councilman Hale 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 provisions 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 certified that only matters lawfully permitted to be discussed in closed session, and identified in the motion to convene closed session, were discussed therein. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

**Action Following Closed Session**

**Councilman Creger made a motion to defer approval of the July 13, 2026, meeting minutes until the next meeting. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None Motion**
**Carried 5-0**

Mike Bedsaul explained that, while in closed session, council discussed a proposed purchase agreement for a piece of property the town has been considering acquiring using the EPA GHHI grant funds, and that negotiations are anticipated to be finalized before the next regular meeting. Given that delay could compromise the town's bargaining position, a motion was made to authorize the town manager to execute the purchase agreement on behalf of the town.

**Councilman Mills made a motion to authorize the town manager to execute the purchase agreement on behalf of the town. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

**Councilman Mills made a motion to amend the agenda to add consideration of a motion to ratify, approve, and confirm council's July 13, 2026, vote on the meals tax increase. Councilman Creger seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

The Town Attorney noted for the record that this matter had been discussed in closed session prior to the amendment of the agenda.

**Councilman Creger made a motion to ratify, approve, and confirm council's July 13, 2026, vote approving the meals tax increase. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

# Adjournment

**Councilman Mills made a motion to adjourn. Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.**
**Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane**
**Nays: None**
**Motion Carried 5-0**

_____ _____

Clerk, Debbie Thomas Mayor, Tom Spangler