Narrows Town Council Meeting
September 14, 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 Town Manager Joe Butler, John Davis, Roger Shepherd, Chief Benji Ratcliffe, and Lindsey Thompson.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Mayor Spangler gave the invocation, asking that the families of Bill Riddle and Dr. Michael McMahon be remembered.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of August 10th Meeting Minutes

Mayor Spangler called for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 10th meeting.

Councilman Hale made a motion to approve the August 10th meeting minutes. Councilman John Mills seconded the motion. No corrections were offered.

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

Consent Agenda

Library Report

Council reviewed the library report and asked Town Manager Butler to relay council's support to Cindy Laws. Council commended her openness to programming suggestions and her offer of library space for AA meetings and other special programs. Suggestions included reviewing programming in similar-size communities, partnering with schools and social services, a story time for young children, a Mothers' Morning Out program, and asking patrons what they would like to see. Council also noted a substantial increase in participation.

Councilmember Lane suggested a space in the library for free mental health resources, possibly including a private telehealth station using a donated computer. She noted that communicating with residents remains a challenge, since social media reaches a small audience, and suggested additional ways to publicize library hours and programs, such as an "Open" flag at the entrance.

Council noted that an intergovernmental committee is being formed with the county, with subcommittees for library, fire, EMS, and parks and recreation. This was seen as an opportunity to partner with other libraries in the county and improve marketing.

The library is currently open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Parks & Recreation Report

Council thanked Parks & Recreation Director Roger Shepherd for his continued work on expanding programming.

Discussion was held regarding complaints about the community center. Mr. Shepherd reported the main issues are temperature and bathroom odors in an older building. The town invested in the boiler last year and it has worked well. A recent volleyball game was held during a week of temperatures above 90 degrees with only doors and a fan for ventilation. Staff are working to improve the facilities.

Mr. Shepherd reported that school facilities are used when possible. Volleyball and younger basketball use the annex, and fourth through seventh grade basketball games and practices are held at the school.

Council expressed support for exploring automated operation of the splash pad, noting many communities operate unstaffed splash pads. Moving the sensor into a secure building was discussed. Mr. Shepherd raised concerns about liability if the splash pad is unattended and someone is injured. Council agreed that liability questions should be looked into thoroughly.

Farmers Market Report

Town Manager Butler noted that Savannah Horney has had difficulty attracting additional food trucks and food vendors. Staff are working on potential events for the farmers market next year and will share details once they have been investigated further.

Police Report

Council thanked Chief Ratcliffe and the department for their professionalism and service.

Council recognized a letter from Wesley Woodyard of the Giles County Sheriff's Department commending Officer Brian Hughes for the compassion he showed an individual during a shoplifting incident. Chief Ratcliffe stated that Officer Hughes used good judgment and that he has full confidence in all of the town's officers. Council asked whether a gift card could be provided to the individual through the department.

Financial Report

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

Public Works Report

Council congratulated Public Works Director John Davis on continued success in reducing water loss, his work at Mill Creek including the footbridge, and progress on waterline replacement. Council encouraged communicating waterline replacement progress to residents through the *Virginian Leader* and the town website, so citizens know how their fees are being invested.

Council noted that the town's water loss was once about 50%. Mr. Davis reported that, after several calls with the PSA, more than one million gallons were removed from the town's bill because the PSA's figures were incorrect. Staff read every meter where water enters and leaves the town daily, keep a log, and reconcile the numbers with the PSA monthly.

Town Manager's Report

Council thanked Town Manager Butler for his work with the committees and asked him to propose follow-up meeting dates. Mr. Butler said he would set regular meeting dates.

Councilman Mills noted two well-attended meetings, one on dilapidated buildings and one on draining the duck pond, and said the questions raised had been addressed.

In response to a question about the Virginia Tech report on staffing, Mr. Butler stated he is still reviewing it and will share it with council once discrepancies are resolved and it is finalized.

Councilmember Lane expressed support for the two new Parks & Recreation Commission members. She asked for information on how the commission is set up to operate and whether it will use the parks and recreation master plan prepared by the regional commission. Mr. Butler stated that the parks and recreation ordinance sets guidelines for the commission, including a five-member minimum, and that the commission has not been operating as intended for some time. He plans to use the strategic plan as a starting point. It was noted the commission also has bylaws, with a maximum of 10 members and requirements for in-town and out-of-town membership. Councilmember Lane suggested possible advisors on outdoor recreation, such as master naturalists.

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

Mr. Phillips addressed council, noting that his information came from the *Virginian Leader* and council minutes posted on the town website. He pointed to roughly 83 comments on a local Facebook page about recent water bills.

Mr. Phillips stated that residents are overtaxed. He noted the county's November referendum on a 1% sales tax and asked that, if it passes, the town should reduce its meals tax to zero.

He acknowledged that aging water lines are a necessity, noting that 63% of the town's lines are 33 years past their lifespan, and that water loss has dropped from 50% to 15%. He noted that council passed an ordinance to borrow $650,000 for real estate purchases, that two properties on the Gallimore property were purchased (in 2023 and 2025) for a total of $395,000, and that water rates were raised 10% annually for three years and then 30% last year. He asked that borrowed funds go toward water line repairs before other projects.

Mr. Phillips made two requests:

- A summary of the Gallimore property purchases, including payback terms and the town's commitments.
- That a member of council act as a champion for taxpayers. He observed that most council votes pass unanimously.

He also disagreed with past advice from the town's financial advisor that revenues should match expenditures, stating that expenditures should instead be set to match revenues.

Mayor Spangler noted that a public hearing was held on the water rates and no members of the public attended.

Councilman Mills thanked Mr. Phillips for his research and respectful approach. He stated that council works as a team but that members are not afraid to vote independently. He said council hopes to reduce taxes in the future but is not yet in a position to do so, and that several business development efforts involving buildings in town are underway. He encouraged Mr. Phillips to continue attending.

Councilmember Lane asked Mr. Phillips to share any ideas from his research on economic development in small rural communities, including tourism and outdoor recreation. Mr. Phillips agreed to bring information to the next meeting.

Communications from the Mayor, Council, and Staff

PSA Report

Councilman Mills reported that Thursday's PSA meeting was postponed so that Chris McKlarney could have complete information available for members. He stated that he expects a marked turnaround at the PSA within six months. He noted the PSA lost its director three to four weeks ago and asked for patience, adding that he expects to have good news at the next meeting.

Wastewater Treatment Plant: Primary Clarifier Bid

Chad Robertson, Project Manager, and Matthew Peters, Senior Engineer, of Thompson & Litton addressed council regarding the primary clarifier bid. The bid came in substantially higher than estimated:

- Engineer's estimate (March 2026): $52,688
- Bid price (August 2026): $92,220
- Difference: $39,552
- Town share (8%, with FEMA funding 92%): $7,377, compared to approximately $4,200 under the original estimate

Mr. Robertson and Mr. Peters cited several reasons for the difference:

- **Lack of competition.** Four to five contractors attended the pre-bid meeting, but only one bid was received. Small, specialized plant projects are unattractive to contractors, and the number of firms doing this work has shrunk through consolidation.
- **Small job premium** and market volatility between March and August.
- **Electrical costs.** The contractor chose to replace existing conduit, wiring, a starter, and a local disconnect rather than reuse them, at about $25,000 compared to an estimate of about $5,000.
- **Project management costs** of roughly $10,000 to $15,000 that were not in the estimate, along with higher labor costs.

Mr. Peters noted that the project's scope, which addresses damage from Hurricane Helene, had been reduced as the town took on more of the work itself. He cautioned that rebidding typically results in a higher price.

Councilman Hale asked what would happen if the town did not proceed. It was noted the town could lose the FEMA funding. Town Manager Butler noted the town would need to pay the full cost up front and use its line of credit while awaiting reimbursement. He stated approximately $65,000 has already been spent on the project that will be reimbursed once it is completed and submitted to FEMA.

Councilman Mills made a motion to proceed with the primary clarifier project at the bid price of $92,220. Jonathan Creger seconded the motion.

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

Councilmember Lane asked for the timeline on the FEMA grant. Mr. Butler said he would report back, and noted loan fees may also be reimbursable. In response to Councilman Mills, Mr. Butler said he is hopeful FEMA reimbursement will move faster once all documentation is submitted.

CDBG Urgent Need Grant Update

Town Manager Butler reported that the town received a grant agreement from DHCD for the generator at the wastewater treatment plant. The town has already spent $49,420, and invoices can be submitted once the agreement is signed. The total project cost is approximately $733,000.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee. Town Manager Butler reported the committee held its first meeting. He has analyzed five years of actual data to project cash flow trends and will use the trends to monitor monthly expenses and investigate significant variances. The committee also discussed debt service. At its next meeting, the committee plans to finalize a plain-language format for reporting the town's financial position to council.

Bad Buildings Committee. Mr. Butler reported the town has the authority to impose a tax on derelict buildings above the normal real estate rate. He will work with Attorney Bedsaul to outline the steps needed to enact it. Councilman Mills supported moving forward. Councilmember Lane asked that owners receive advance notice and information on options or assistance. Councilman Hale asked that existing property maintenance ordinances be posted on the town website. Mayor Tom Spangler also asked staff to obtain a sample letter to derelict property owners suggested previously by West Virginia University. Mr. Butler stated the town should also address properties it owns, and he will contact DEQ about possible funding for the old town hall property.

Personnel Policy Committee. Mr. Butler stated this committee will begin meeting in October. It will consist mostly of staff and one council member. Councilmember Bowles expressed interest in serving.

Duck Pond

Town Manager Butler reported that volunteers raised liability questions at a recent meeting. After contacting VRSA, he added coverage for leased, rented, and borrowed equipment to the town's policy: a $400,000 blanket limit for less than $500 per year. The stop logs were removed to lower the water level and let the silt dry so its depth can be measured. An initial measurement with a four-foot rod did not reach bottom. Staff will take a deeper measurement before reporting back to volunteers. Mr. Butler will look into signage around the pond. The lowered water level was announced on Facebook.

Mill Creek Runs Wild

Councilmember Lane reported on the Mill Creek Runs Wild 5K/10K race. Last year's race sold out with more than 260 participants and brought more than 550 people to Narrows. It raised $15,000 for Mill Creek Nature Park, which is being used for footbridge repair, maps, signage, and a website. This year's race is October 24th. Proceeds will fund a strategic plan for long-term trail maintenance, since the trails have been built and maintained largely by one volunteer. Sponsors include Sands Anderson, Thompson & Litton, Giles County, Carilion Hospital, Celco Community Credit Union, and First Community Bank.

Councilmember Lane noted Mill Creek has drawn visitors from every state and other countries, and saw opportunities for local businesses and library programs. Council thanked Councilmember Lane for her work on the event.

Fall Festival

Town Manager Butler announced the Fall Festival on September 26th and thanked Ralph Robertson for his work.

New Business

Additional Parks & Recreation Commission Members

Town Manager Butler reported that he met with the Parks & Recreation Commission. The commission needs two additional members to reach the five-member minimum required by ordinance and resume regular meetings. Lindsey Thompson to return to the commission, and Mr. Butler offered to serve as well. He asked council to appoint them both.

Councilman John Mills made a motion to appoint Joe Butler and Lindsey Thompson to the Parks & Recreation Commission. Councilman Jonathan Creger seconded the motion.

Councilmember Bowles asked whether she could vote since she already serves on the commission. Council saw no reason she could not.

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

Unfinished Business

Proposed Charter Amendment: Town Manager Residency

Attorney Bedsaul reviewed the July 13, 2026 public hearing on the proposed charter amendment to remove the requirement that the Town Manager reside within town limits. Al Phillips was the only speaker and spoke in opposition.

Attorney Bedsaul explained that two council members were absent at that meeting, so three members and the mayor were present, which constituted a quorum. Under the default rule, most actions pass by a majority of members present and voting. The vote was 2-1, with Councilman Creger voting against. Council believed a majority of the full council was required, and the July 13th minutes recorded the motion as failed. In Attorney Bedsaul's opinion, the motion passed.

Because of the public interest in this issue, Attorney Bedsaul had recommended deferring approval of the July 13th minutes so the matter could be explained in open session. He recommended that council ratify, approve, and confirm the July 13th vote now that the full council is present.

Councilman Mills stated that he was absent from the July meeting due to hospitalization and would have voted in favor of the amendment.

Councilman Mills made a motion to ratify, approve, and confirm the vote taken on July 13, 2026 on the proposed charter amendment. Councilman Jonathan Creger seconded the motion.

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

Not-to-Exceed Cost for the Primary Clarifier Project

Council noted that this item was addressed by the earlier motion approving the primary clarifier project. No separate action was taken.

CDBG Urgent Need Grant Agreement: Wastewater Treatment Plant Generator

Attorney Bedsaul stated he reviewed the grant agreement and shared his comments with Town Manager Butler, and that it appeared acceptable. He asked council for a motion to approve the agreement and authorize the Town Manager to sign it on behalf of the town.

John Mills made a motion to approve the CDBG Urgent Need grant agreement and authorize Town Manager Butler to sign it on behalf of the town. Councilman Jonathan Creger seconded the motion.

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

Other Information

The Board of Supervisors minutes, PSA report, and fire department report were provided to council for review.

Approval of July 13th Meeting Minutes

Attorney Bedsaul noted that the July 13th minutes had not yet been approved. He recommended approving them with an amendment on page 8 changing "Motion failed 2-1. Majority of full council would be required to pass the motion" to show that the motion passed 2-1, with a reference to these minutes for further explanation.

Jonathan Creger made a motion to approve the July 13th meeting minutes with an amendment on page 8 stating that the motion on the Town Manager residency charter amendment passed 2-1 rather than failed, with a reference to the September 14th minutes for further explanation. Councilwoman Alicia Lane seconded the motion.

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

Executive Session

Councilman John Mills made a motion to enter executive session for the following purposes:

- **Discussion of personnel matters pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711.A.1 (Public Works Department)**
- **Discussion of the acquisition of real property pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711.A.3 (Main Street properties)**

Jonathan Creger seconded the motion.

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

Councilman John Mills made a motion to return to open session. Jonathan Creger 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 Jonathan Creger] made a motion to certify that what was discussed in closed session was limited to personnel matters and real property, pursuant to Code of Virginia Sections 2.2-3711.A.1 and 2.2-3711.A.3. Councilman John Hale seconded the motion.

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

Wheeler Building Contract

Councilman Jonathan Creger made a motion to authorize Town Manager Joe Butler to sign and approve the contract for the Wheeler building. Councilman John Mills seconded the motion.

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

Adjournment

Councilman John Mills made a motion to adjourn. Council John Hale seconded the motion.

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

_____ _____
Interim Clerk, Lindsey Thompson Mayor, Tom Spangler