Narrows Town Council Meeting
October 12, 2026

Mayor Tom Spangler called the meeting to order. Councilmembers present were John Hale, Sara Bowles (arrived late), Jonathan Creger, John Mills, and Alicia Lane.

Staff members present included Joe Butler, Benji Ratcliffe, Roger Shepherd, and Debbie Thomas.

Attorney Mike Bedsaul was present.

Before the invocation, Councilman Mills welcomed Clerk Debbie Thomas back to the meeting and welcomed members of the audience. Councilman Mills gave the invocation.

Council and audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Presentation — Giles County Public Schools 1% Sales Tax Referendum

Dr. Marlin Campbell, Superintendent of Giles County Public Schools, addressed Council regarding the 1% local retail sales tax referendum that will appear on the November ballot. He stated that his purpose was to share factual information about the referendum and its potential impact on the school division, and provided Council with an information packet, including a question-and-answer letter previously shared with faculty and staff and posted to the division's Facebook page. He invited the public to a community information event on Thursday, October 15th, at the Giles County School Board office.

Dr. Campbell presented the following points:

- This is the first opportunity for most Virginia localities to ask voters to consider a 1% increase in the local retail sales tax.
- The increase is conservatively estimated to generate approximately $1.5 million annually for the school division.
- By law, the revenue may be used only for school construction, renovation projects, and associated debt service. It may not be used for salaries, additional positions, or county projects.
- The decision rests with Giles County voters; neither the School Board nor the Board of Supervisors approves the referendum itself.
- The division's comprehensive plan identified facility needs across all six of its buildings.
- Approximately $52 million has been invested in division facilities over the past year and a half, including new roofs on nearly all buildings, new HVAC units, new windows, and safe school entrances, with work expected to be completed from mid-to-late December into the new year. Track upgrades at Narrows High School allowed the school to host its first officially sanctioned track event in many years.

- Approximately 30% of the $52 million was covered by the state School Construction Assistance Program grant, and the division qualified for a Literary Fund loan through the Virginia Department of Education at 2% interest.
- Future projects would be prioritized in four categories, in order: building preservation; safety and accessibility; learning environment; and student experience.
- Examples of identified needs include replacement of the Giles Tech Center HVAC system, estimated at over $2 million, against an annual operating budget of roughly $40 million; additional handicap-accessible parking at Giles High School, with a similar design prepared for the Narrows High School football field; bathroom renovations across all campuses; and playground replacements at all three elementary schools.
- Real estate tax has historically been the primary source of funding for school capital projects; the sales tax would provide an alternative source. Dr. Campbell stated he could not predict any change to the real estate tax rate.
- The division has committed approximately $1.8 million annually in debt service for the projects currently being completed.
- Groceries and personal hygiene products would be exempt from the tax, and an estimated 30% or more of the revenue would be generated by non-residents shopping in the county.

Councilman Mills expressed support for the referendum and his expectation that it would pass, noting that the Giles Tech Center, while well regarded, is not new.

In response to a question from Councilmember Lane, Dr. Campbell explained that the tax would be collected countywide into a single fund rather than divided by community, and that projects would be selected by need across the division rather than by school, through a collaborative process.

Councilman Mills asked whether the revenue could be applied to debt service on projects already completed.

Dr. Campbell indicated he believed there would be opportunity to do so but deferred to legal interpretation.

Mike Bedsaul stated that it was noted that the statute refers to new school capital projects and associated debt service, and that it is less clear whether the revenue could be applied to debt incurred before the tax is adopted. The process was described as three steps: the resolution to hold the referendum, the referendum itself, and adoption of an ordinance by the Giles County Board of Supervisors, with the tax taking effect no sooner than 120 days after adoption of the ordinance.

Councilman Mills noted that future projects would still require funding regardless.

Councilman Creger asked about community access to the new high school tracks.

(Councilmember Bowles arrived)

Dr. Campbell stated that approximately $150,000 was invested in resurfacing the Narrows High School track, that the division supports opening the track to the community with a system to

monitor use (bicycles, skateboards, and dogs having been concerns), and that he believed the track may already have been reopened but would confirm.

Councilmember Lane suggested a paved track at the wellness center as a future collaboration opportunity, and Council asked that resolutions of such issues be communicated to the public.

Dr. Campbell confirmed that the total sales tax rate on taxable goods would be 6.3% if the referendum passes.

Councilman Creger asked about opportunities for homeschooled students to participate in high school athletics.

Dr. Campbell explained that eligibility is governed by the Virginia High School League rather than the locality. He noted that homeschool families may enroll their children as Giles County students through the division's online partnership with Strive, which would allow athletic participation, and acknowledged the division should communicate that option more effectively.

Councilman Creger asked if the window installation issues at Giles High School had been resolved.

Dr. Campbell confirmed the issues have been corrected, crediting John Ross with identifying them early. He also reported that the Macy phase two project, which would add classroom space and renovate floors, bathrooms, and cabinetry, is expected to go to the School Board for approval at its October meeting.

Council thanked Dr. Campbell for the information.

Approval of September 14, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Councilmember Hale requested a correction to the September 14 minutes to reflect the correct first name of Dr. McMahon, which should read Michael. He also asked that comments be attributed consistently, either to Council or to individual members.

Debbie Thomas explained her current process for drafting minutes and stated that going forward she will attribute specific comments to the individual member and general discussion to Council, and asked Council to let her know if further changes are needed.

Councilman Creger made a motion to approve the September 14, 2026, meeting minutes.
Councilmember Bowles seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane
Nays: None
Motion Carried 5-0

Consent Agenda

Parks & Recreation Report

Councilman Hale thanked Parks & Recreation Director Roger Shepherd and noted the report's mention that the town is the only department in the county offering preschool activities, encouraging staff to promote the program countywide.

Roger Shepherd explained that the program began years ago, that other departments have not shown interest in serving that age group, and that many preschoolers participate.

Councilmember Lane suggested reviewing Placer.ai visitor data for fall Saturdays when the town hosts youth football games, to help build a picture of visitor activity for business development purposes.

Joe Butler indicated the data could be obtained, including historically, and agreed to look into it.

The farmers market/special events report showed that the fall festival had 3,600 attendees and 78 vendors.

Councilmember Lane asked whether additional meals and sales tax generated on the festival day could be reported.

Debbie Thomas explained that meals tax is reported monthly rather than by day. Vendors at town-sponsored events have not been required to file meals tax.

Councilman Mills stated his recollection was that Council had previously voted to exempt vendors at town-sponsored events. He expressed his view that the goodwill generated by the event outweighs one day of meals tax.

Councilman Hale asked Mike Bedsaul about the legality of the data collected by Placer.ai, expressing concern about the level of demographic detail in the report.

Mike Bedsaul stated he was not familiar with the issue and would look into it.

Councilmember Lane explained her understanding that the data combines general location information with publicly available or purchased market data for an area, rather than identifying individuals.

Councilmember Lane proposed a post-event survey of fall festival vendors regarding their experience and offered to help create it.

Joe Butler agreed to let Lindsey Thompson know to contact vendors.

Council congratulated everyone involved on the success of the festival.

Police Report

Councilman Hale thanked the Police Department and noted Chief Ratcliffe's attention to the streetlight situation.

Mayor Spangler asked Police Chief Ratcliffe if Appalachian Power had been replacing the current streetlights with LED bulbs.

Police Chief Ratcliffe stated that most replacement streetlights being installed are LED and that the situation has improved compared to the past.

Financial Report

Council reviewed the financial report. No questions were raised. Mayor Spangler welcomed Debbie Thomas back.

Public Works Report

Councilman Creger noted that water loss had increased.

Joe Butler indicated the increase was approximately 4% and explained that, while individual months may vary, water loss has been consistently and substantially lower for several years.

Town Manager's Report

Councilmember Lane asked about the bad-building options listed in the report. Joe Butler indicated he would address the matter during the committee reports.

Councilman Hale 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

Public Hearing — Wheeler Building

Mayor Spangler opened a public hearing on the real estate matter regarding the Wheeler building. No comments were received, and the public hearing was closed.

Communications, Concerns, and Requests from the Public

Al Phillips — Sales Tax Referendum; Town Debt

Al Phillips addressed Council to present concerns regarding the proposed 1% sales tax, which he stated he had also shared with the Board of Supervisors. His points included the following:

- The sales tax is regressive and would fall more heavily on lower-income residents.
- It could lead residents to make large purchases such as vehicles, furniture, and tires outside the county, including in Montgomery County or West Virginia, at the expense of local business.
- The facility report underlying the referendum dates to 2021.
- Using approximately $1.2 million in annual revenue and a county population of about 17,000, he estimated a cost of roughly $70 per person per year, $280 for a family of four, and $5,600 over 20 years.
- He asked the Board of Supervisors not to adopt the tax even if the referendum passes.
- He noted that the school division received $3.6 million in lottery funds in 2026, about one-third (approximately $1.2 million) of which is discretionary, and suggested directing those funds toward a capital fund. He also suggested the school division contribute its own funds, such as $500,000 per year.

Mr. Phillips also thanked Joe Butler for providing detailed information regarding the town's financing of the Gallimore project. He reported the following figures:

- The town financed $440,580 over five years at 5.99% interest, paying interest only until 2028.
- The principal of $440,580 comes due July 15, 2028, with approximately $13,000 in additional interest at that time, for a payment of $453,776.
- Total interest paid will be approximately $107,902, for a total cost of approximately $548,000.

He asked where funding for the principal payment would come from, asked whether the proposed Hare Street land purchase is related to that project, and urged Council to halt it until the town's water lines are repaired, noting that residents are paying nearly double for water and sewer service to fund those repairs.

Linda Rogers — Written Comment on Water Rates

Mayor Spangler read into the record a letter from Linda Rogers of Franklin Street. Ms. Rogers stated that she has rented in Narrows for over two years and lives alone, working out of town most of the week. She noted that her monthly bill was $51.14 in 2025, then increased to $58.20, and that the new minimum bill is $74.96, which she described as an approximately 40% increase. She expressed concern about the effect on single-person households and senior citizens and asked Council to find another way to generate revenue.

Communications from the Mayor, Council, and Staff

PSA Report

Councilmember Mills reported that interim PSA director Chris McKlarney gave a presentation to the PSA Board and has developed a plan. Councilmember Mills stated that the Board had acted too quickly, based on faulty information, in voting to bill owners of rental properties for unpaid tenant accounts, although that authority has long existed. He reported that approximately 500 accounts have been identified as not paying, rather than the 2,000 figure that had been reported. Mr. McKlarney presented several options, on which the Board expects to vote at its next meeting. Councilmember Mills stated that he has supported delaying hiring a permanent director until the situation is stabilized, that the position will be advertised at some point, and that it may be four to five months before the outcome is clear. He invited residents to bring PSA concerns to him or Joe Butler as the town's representatives.

Treasurer's Report Question

Councilmember Creger noted that collections remain below expenditures, though the gap appears smaller than in previous reports, and asked whether there is a timeline for collections to exceed expenditures.

Joe Butler explained that the finance committee is working on this question, that he built projections using five years of actual data, and that it is premature to provide a timeline while those projections are being refined.

Debbie Thomas noted that September was one of two months in the year with three pay periods for employees paid semi-monthly, which accounted for higher payroll.

BAD Buildings Committee

Town Manager Butler reported that the committee met and that he consulted with Mike Bedsaul regarding the possibility of an additional tax on blighted and derelict properties. Council would need to enact an ordinance, after which the Commissioner of the Revenue would classify qualifying properties and impose the tax. Mike Bedsaul indicated the additional rate would be 5% for blighted properties and 10% for derelict properties. Joe Butler stated that the additional tax appeared to net a couple of cents per $100 of assessed value and asked for Council's direction before the committee meets with the Commissioner of the Revenue.

Councilman Mills supported meeting with the Commissioner of the Revenue before taking further steps. Councilman Hale stated that the town should lead with clear communication and enforcement of existing code before considering the tax, which he viewed as a step to take after other efforts have failed.

Councilman Mills stated that strong code enforcement is the most effective approach and that the town lacks staff dedicated to it. He described his prior experience in Bluefield, where $100,000 was budgeted, an unsafe structure ordinance based on Giles County's was used, and approximately 20 blighted houses were demolished with Lusk Disposal at a cost of roughly $5,000 to $10,000 each, with the resulting lots later sold. He recommended advertising for a code enforcement position.

Councilmember Lane noted that a part-time code enforcement position had been cut from this year's budget and that a resident had expressed interest in the role and asked whether violations carry fees for property owners.

Mike Bedsaul explained that the town has authority, or can obtain a court order, to demolish or clean up a property and place a lien for its costs, but that the town must front the money and may wait years for reimbursement, often from owners who lack the funds to make repairs themselves. He stated that the purpose of the relatively new statute, which he believed took effect July 1 of last year, is to generate revenue that could be earmarked for such work and to give owners an incentive to correct conditions. He noted that a notice of violation typically gets owners' attention, that unsafe structure is a legal term of art, and that any ordinance should be reviewed by counsel.

Councilman Hale discussed sending letters or notices of violation to owners, including a template letter referenced in the WVU study, and the possibility of offering lots to developers in exchange for demolition. It was noted that the additional tax would have no effect on owners already delinquent and that, because taxes are collected annually, the tax would take time to have an effect. Council expressed support for using all available tools together.

Joe Butler stated that the WVU study identified approximately 20 properties but is dated and should be reconciled to current conditions. No formal motion was required. Council agreed by consensus that the committee will meet with the Commissioner of the Revenue regarding the additional tax, and that Joe Butler will begin contacting owners of affected properties by letter regarding the condition of their property and applicable code requirements.

Personnel Policy Committee

Town Manager Butler reported that he has mapped out a process for the committee to complete a revised personnel policy prior to FY28, with discussions beginning in November.

Duck Pond Dredging Project

Joe Butler reported that he met with Charlie Henderson, who is interested in assisting with the project, but that he expects some expense will be required and is working to estimate a cost. He reported that the FY26 audit identified a bank account established for a Mill Pond revitalization effort in the 1980s, and that the account's chairperson has agreed to release approximately $2,700 to the town once equipment begins work at the pond. No start date has been set; staff hopes to begin before winter but work may need to wait until spring. Councilman Mills noted the interest of community volunteers in assisting.

DCR Recreational Trails Grant

Town Manager Butler reported that the New River Valley Regional Commission indicated the project's environmental review was returned for review of endangered species, with an anticipated 30-day turnaround from the prior week. Work is hoped to begin around January 2027.

Wolf Creek Run's Wild 5K/10K

Councilmember Lane provided an update on the 5K/10K race to be held in Narrows on Saturday, October 24. Approximately 250 participants were registered, including some from out of state, with a goal of 300. Proceeds will support Mill Creek, including long-term strategic planning. She invited Council to attend and noted that a litter pickup along Wolf Creek Road is scheduled for Saturday, October 17. Council recognized representatives of event sponsors First Community Bank, Joseph Mills and Ted Alt.

Councilman Hale told Councilmember Lane that another event representative in attendance tonight was Joe Butler with Light's Gas Station.

Councilman Creger asked whether additional parks and recreation events could be added on race day. Councilmember Lane stated that the event is partnering with Mountain Lake as a lodging partner and Giles County Tourism for marketing, that a Sunday guided hike with Ralph Robertson has been added, and that combining the race with the fall festival could be considered in the future, particularly to share food vendors. Councilman Mills recommended focusing on conducting the race well before adding other activities.

New Business

Library Board and Library Director Hiring Committee

Joe Butler reported that, with the transition in library director, the Library of Virginia advised that the town should have a library board. He recommended first appointing a hiring committee for the new library director, then advertising for community members to serve on the library board, which requires a minimum of five members. Council expressed a preference that the library board be separate from Council.

Mr. Butler asked for councilmembers to serve on the hiring committee. Mike Bedsaul noted that participation by three council members would constitute a meeting of Council requiring public notice and suggested limiting participation to two. Councilman Creger and Councilmember Lane agreed to serve on the hiring committee. No formal motion was made. Mr. Butler stated he would circulate the committee list during the week.

Unfinished Business

None.

Matters for Consideration by Council

Equipment and Vehicle Lease Financing

Town Manager Butler presented financing for a police vehicle, a public works truck, and a parks and recreation utility vehicle, all of which were budgeted expenses. He reported the following:

- The budget assumed approximately $127,500 for the three vehicles, with payments of $33,820 this year.
- Staff substituted a used public works truck for a new one, bringing the proposed finance amount to $72,570.39.
- Approximately $8,458 has already been spent upfitting the new police vehicle; staff recommended absorbing that cost rather than financing it.
- Staff recommended financing over a three-year term at 5.15% interest, saving approximately $7,000 in payments this year and approximately $46,000 overall.

Mike Bedsaul advised that Council should specifically approve the resolution, which provides for a term of up to five years.

Councilman Creger made a motion to approve the resolution of the Town Council of Narrows approving equipment and vehicle lease financing as presented, with a term of up to five years, and to authorize the Town Manager to execute any related documents. Councilman Mills seconded the motion.
Ayes: Hale, Bowles, Creger, Mills, and Lane
Nays: None
Motion Carried 5-0

Mayor Spangler encouraged considering used vehicles for town use in the future, excluding the police department. Councilman Hale asked Joe Butler to keep a record of cost savings identified. Councilman Mills asked staff to explore vehicle leasing, citing Tazewell County's experience. Joe Butler stated that shortening the term was intended to reduce debt service.

Town Manager's Financial Presentation

Joe Butler presented a monthly financial position report format developed with the finance committee, noting that projections are still being refined and that the presentation was intended to show the format rather than for decision. He reported the following:

- Unrestricted cash as of October 9 was $275,000.
- The snapshot also showed the minimum operating reserve recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association and the FY27 unassigned fund balance budgeted as a transfer.

- Total FY27 debt service is $764,075; future reports will show the amount remaining for the fiscal year.
- Projections were built from five years of actual data, allocating a monthly percentage to the budget. For July through September, Fund 10 revenue was slightly ahead of projection, Fund 20 revenue slightly below, and expenses somewhat higher than projected, particularly in Fund 20.
- September was projected to produce a gain of approximately $70,000 but resulted in a loss of approximately $4,000, primarily because some bills were paid earlier than anticipated.
- Revenue spikes in March with the collection of real estate taxes.
- Compared to last year, results have been more consistent from month to month; last year included a loss of about $100,000 followed by a gain of about $100,000. Mayor Spangler noted that last year's figures may have included ARPA funds.

Joe Butler reported that he has implemented monthly cash flow monitoring of every budget line and outlined next steps: finalizing the monthly report to Council; an in-depth review of high expense lines with the finance committee; and FY28 budget preparation, including establishing debt ratio limits, setting escalation thresholds that would trigger a special meeting on finances, and exploring options to eliminate the need for revenue anticipation borrowing. Councilman Creger indicated the format was an improvement over the prior report.

Joe Butler also reviewed upcoming items: an assessment of the impact of the mandatory minimum wage increase on staff; the vehicle financing approved above; the Wolf Street property, which he stated is structurally unsafe and at risk of collapse, with quotes indicating it can be addressed for less than $15,000; and a Virginia Tech benchmark study by Stephanie Davis comparing the town to similarly sized localities on staffing levels and water and sewer rates, to be presented at the November meeting.

Executive Session

Councilman Creger made a motion to enter executive session for the following purposes. Councilman Hale seconded the motion.

- Personnel matters pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711.A.1 (Narrows Public Library and Public Works Department, the latter added before the vote)
- Acquisition of real property pursuant to Section 2.2-3711.A.3 (Hare Street property)
- Investment of public funds pursuant to Section 2.2-3711.A.6 (Wolf Street property)
- Contract matters pursuant to Section 2.2-3711.A.29 (Main Street property)

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

Action Following Closed Session

Wolf Street Property Structure Removal

Councilman Mills made a motion to award a contract to Lusk Disposal for removal of the structure at the Wolf Street property in an amount not to exceed $10,500. Councilman Creger 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