

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Narrows Commercial Historic District

Other names/site number: VDHR# 266-0021

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 100-300 block Main St. 100 block Mary St., 100 block MacArthur Lane, 100 block Monroe Street, 100 block Center Street

City or town: Narrows State: VA County: Giles

Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide **X** local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

**X** A \_\_\_ B **X** C \_\_\_ D

<p>_____  <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>  <u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>  <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>Date</b></p>
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____  <b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>Date</b></p>
<p>_____  <b>Title :</b></p>	<p>_____  <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal
- 

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>29</u>	<u>15</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	sites
<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>32</u>	<u>21</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- DOMESTIC: hotel
- COMMERCE/TRADE: business (office building)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: professional (law office)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store (auto showroom)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store (hardware store)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store (furniture store)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: department store (general store)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: financial institution (bank)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant
- SOCIAL: meeting hall (fraternal organization)
- GOVERNMENT: government office (municipal building)
- GOVERNMENT: post office
- EDUCATION: school (secondary school)
- EDUCATION: library
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater (movie theater)
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility (stadium)
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation (park)
- HEALTH CARE: medical business (pharmacy)
- TRANSPORTATION: rail-related (railroad)
- TRANSPORTATION: rail-related (railroad train depot)
- TRANSPORTATION: rail-related (railroad bridge)
- INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: waterworks (pump station)

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- DOMESTIC: hotel
- COMMERCE/TRADE: business (office building)

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- COMMERCE/TRADE: professional (law office)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: department store (general store)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: financial institution (bank)
- COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant
- SOCIAL: meeting hall (fraternal organization)
- GOVERNMENT: government office (municipal building)
- GOVERNMENT: post office
- EDUCATION: school (preschool)
- EDUCATION: library
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility (stadium)
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation (park)
- TRANSPORTATION: rail-related (railroad)
- TRANSPORTATION: rail-related (railroad train depot)
- TRANSPORTATION: rail-related (railroad bridge)
- VACANT/NOT IN USE

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:

Commercial

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Collegiate Gothic

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, CONCRETE, ASPHALT, STUCCO, METAL (Aluminum), SYNTHETICS (vinyl)

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, and style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Narrows Commercial Historic District is located in the Town of Narrows, Giles County, Virginia. Situated at the confluence of Wolf Creek with the New River, Narrows developed along the Cumberland Gap Turnpike, now Route 100 (Main Street) and Route 61 (Monroe Street and MacArthur Lane). The 14.67-acre district is centered on the intersection of Main and Monroe streets and MacArthur Lane. Dates of construction range generally from the 1882 construction of the Norfolk & Western Railway and its trestle bridge through the mid-twentieth century. The majority of the buildings in the district date to the 1920s, 1930s and post-World War II as waves of construction resulted from periods of flood recovery in 1916 and 1933 as well as the growth of the town in association with the establishment of the American Celanese Plant (Celco) in 1939 and its continued expansions after World War II. Resource types include the railroad with its depot and bridges, commercial buildings, a hotel, the municipal building and fire station, a former high school with football stadium and vocational building, a library, a post office, a pump house and a park around a former mill pond and dam. Architectural styles in the district range from the simple commercial style to the Colonial-Revival and Moderne styles. Most of the district's commercial buildings are one- and two-story masonry construction with detailing often limited to corbelled brickwork. Although many of the storefronts have been altered and there are some vacant lots in the district, there is a strong sense of identity in the

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commercial center with sections of contiguous buildings that reflect the growth of the town during the mid-twentieth century and its role as the commercial center for the region. There are a total of 53 resources in the district, with 32 resources considered to be contributing and 21 considered non-contributing.

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## **Narrative Description**

The Narrows Commercial Historic District is bounded on the west by the Norfolk Southern Railroad (formerly Norfolk & Western Railway) tracks, with its 1927 Depot, 1940 overpass across Route 61 and the 1882 Trestle Bridge over Wolf Creek. Running alongside the New River, these resources immediately reflect the important role transportation and industry played in the development of Narrows. The ca. 1940 concrete overpass with its stylized N&W Railway emblem serves as a gateway to the town, and to the south stands the 1927 Norfolk & Western Depot. This low, long brick building with hip roof and wide overhanging eaves with brackets and projecting center bays is typical of railroad depot design of the early twentieth century. The ca. 1900 pump house on Princeton Street and Mill Pond Park, with its reconstructed dam, are the only surviving resources that relate to the tannery industry that played an important role in the early industrial development of Narrows.

Just beyond the railroad overpass, the 1940 General MacArthur Hotel serves as an imposing anchor at the entrance to the town's commercial district. This large, Colonial Revival-style hotel, which was built to accommodate management and customers of the Celco Plant, has thirty rooms and sits on a large lot overlooking MacArthur Lane (Route 61). The two-story brick building features a monumental portico and pedimented end wings. Another prominent building in the commercial district is the former Narrows Motor Company (211 Main Street), built ca. 1930 on the east side of Main Street. This two-story brick building, which has recently been renovated, features a prominent stepped parapet. Along the west side of Main Street, the 1939 Narrows First National Bank (300 Main Street), with its simple pilastered façade (later modernized) and the three-story ca. 1950 Wheeler Furniture Company (208-210 Main Street), with its unadorned brick façade, small windows, stylized lettering and simple flat metal canopy, anchor the streetscape. Other commercial buildings along Main and Monroe streets and MacArthur Lane consist of one- and two-story masonry buildings with minimal ornamentation. Corbelled brickwork details the earlier 1920s buildings while the use of concrete and stone veneers on simple, unadorned facades characterizes the post-World War II buildings. Many of the storefronts have been altered, but the upper-level facades remain relatively intact.

The former Narrows High School (110 Mary Street), built in 1931, sits back from the street at the intersection of Monroe Street and Mary Street, and forms the nucleus of an educational complex to the west of the commercial area. The Collegiate-Gothic-style high school features a crenellated central entrance tower and contrasting cast-concrete door surrounds. A large stadium complex is located immediately adjacent to the west and a former home economics "cottage" and vocational "shop" building, which now serve as a library and preschool, are located across Mary Street to the east (109-111 Mary Street). The home economics cottage, built in the early 1940s, is a good example of the Colonial Revival style with its side-gable roof with dormers and six-over-

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six, double-hung wood sash windows. The former vocational building is simple in design with a gable front, gabled entrance overhang and paired double-hung wood sash windows with six-over-six lights.

The one-story municipal building, built in 1950 on Center Street one block to the west of Main Street, and the adjacent fire station represent a new modern mid-century approach to civic facilities. Set apart from the dense commercial development, the municipal building sits on its own lot with land and parking surrounding it. The emphasis is on function and accessibility rather than street presence. The one-story brick veneer building has a projecting front vestibule and accommodates the town offices, an auditorium for council and public meetings, and originally housed the public library. The adjacent fire station is also designed to be strictly functional with easy access to both the commercial and residential sections of town. The size, location and functional design of these buildings reflect the growth of the town and the emphasis on streamlined function in the period after World War II.

## Inventory

Resources are determined to be either contributing (C) or non-contributing (NC) based on their date of construction within the period of significance established for the district (ca. 1882-1963) and its association with the areas of significance for the district, which include commerce/trade, education, and transportation. In addition, all resources are evaluated for their integrity to determine if they retain a sense of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with their period of significance for the Narrows Commercial Historic District.

## Center Street

<b>131 Center Street</b>	<b>266-0021-0001</b>	<i>Other DHR Id #:</i>
<i>Primary Resource Information:</i> <b>City/Town Hall, Stories 1.00, Style: Moderne, 1951</b>		
<i>Individual Resource Status:</i> <b>City/Town Hall</b>	<b>Contributing</b>	<i>Total:</i> 1 building
<i>Individual Resource Status:</i> <b>Fire Station</b>	<b>Contributing</b>	<i>Total:</i> 1 building

## Depot Street

<b>Depot Street</b>	<b>266-0003</b>	<i>Other DHR Id #:</i> <b>266-0021-0002</b>
<i>Primary Resource Information:</i> <b>Depot, Stories 1.00, Style: Other- Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movement, 1927</b>		
<i>Individual Resource Status:</i> <b>Depot</b>	<b>Contributing</b>	<i>Total:</i> 1 building

## MacArthur Lane

<b>117 MacArthur Lane</b>	<b>266-0018</b>	<i>Other DHR Id #:</i> <b>266-0021-0036</b>
<i>Primary Resource Information:</i> <b>Hotel/Inn, Stories 2.00, Style: Colonial Revival, 1942</b>		

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*Individual Resource Status:* **Hotel/Inn**  
*Individual Resource Status:* **Shed**

**Contributing** *Total:* 1 building  
**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**118-122 MacArthur Lane 266-5004**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0003**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1940**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**124 MacArthur Lane 266-5005**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0004**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.50, Style: Commercial Style, 1940**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**126 MacArthur Lane 266-5006**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0005**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1940**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**Main Street**

**101 Main Street 266-0021-0006**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1950**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**103 Main Street 266-0025**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0007**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1940**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**200 Main Street 266-0021-0037**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Park, Stories 0.00, Style: No Style, 2004**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Park** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 site

**203 Main Street 266-0017**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0008**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1940**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**204 Main Street 266-0009**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0009**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Other, 1935**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building  
*Individual Resource Status:* **Shed** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**206 Main Street 266-0010**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0010**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1920**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**206.5 Main Street 266-0031**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0038**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1920**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

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- 207 Main Street 266-0029** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0011*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1940*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 208-210 Main Street 266-0022** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0012*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 3.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1950*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 211 Main Street 266-0016** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0013*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1930*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 212 Main Street 266-0011** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0014*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1930*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 214 Main Street 266-0012** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0015*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1930*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 216 Main Street 266-0013** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0016*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1949*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 222-226 Main Street 266-0021-0017** *Other DHR Id #:*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1940*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 300 Main Street 266-0015** *Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0018*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 3.00, Style: Art Deco Style, 1939*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 302 Main Street 266-0021-0019** *Other DHR Id #:*  
*Primary Resource Information: Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1950*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*
- 305 Main Street 266-0021-0020** *Other DHR Id #:*  
*Primary Resource Information: Post Office, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1963*  
*Individual Resource Status: Commercial Building Contributing Total: 1 building*

**Mary Street**

- 109 Mary Street 266-0021-0021** *Other DHR Id #:*  
*Primary Resource Information: Library, Stories 1.50, Style: Colonial Revival, 1941*  
*Individual Resource Status: Library Contributing Total: 1 building*

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**110 Mary Street 266-0021-0022**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **School, Stories 2.00, Style: Other- Collegiate Revival, 1931**

*Individual Resource Status:* **School**

**Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

*Individual Resource Status:* **Playing Field**

**Contributing** *Total:* 1 site

*Individual Resource Status:* **Storage**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 2 buildings

*Individual Resource Status:* **Other**

**Contributing** *Total:* 4 buildings – 1940s ticket booth,

1950s ticket booth, 1950s concession stand/restroom 1950s press box

*Individual Resource Status:* **Other**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 2 structures, 1 building –

2010 metal bleachers (2); 2010 concession stand (1)

**111 Mary Street 266-0021-0023**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Classroom Building, Stories 1.00, Style: No Style, 1941**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Classroom Building**

**Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

## Mile Post 333.82

**Mile Post 333.82 035-5048**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0033**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Bridge, Stories 0.00, Style: Other – Bridge, 1892**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Bridge**

**Contributing** *Total:* 1 structure

## Monroe Street

**Monroe Street 266-0021-0035**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Dam, Stories 0.00, Style: Other, 1986**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Park**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 site

*Individual Resource Status:* **Dam**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 structure

*Individual Resource Status:* **Gazebo**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 structure

**100 Monroe Street 266-0030**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0024**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1930**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**112 Monroe Street 266-0021-0025**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1930**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**114 Monroe Street 266-0024**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0026**

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 0.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1950**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building**

**Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**118 Monroe Street 266-0021-0027**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1950**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building**

**Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**120 Monroe Street 266-0007**

*Other DHR Id #:* **266-0021-0028**

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*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 2.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1920**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**122 Monroe Street 266-0021-0029**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1950**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**126 Monroe Street 266-0021-0030**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: Commercial Style, 1925**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

**134 Monroe Street 266-0021-0031**

*Other DHR Id #:*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Commercial Building, Stories 1.00, Style: No Style, 1965**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Commercial Building** **Non-Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

### **Princeton Lane**

**Princeton Lane 266-0020**

*Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0032*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Pump House, Stories 1.00, Style: No Style, 1900**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Pump House** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 building

### **VSH 100**

**VSH 100 266-5002**

*Other DHR Id #: 266-0021-0034*

*Primary Resource Information:* **Bridge, Stories 1.00, Style: Art Deco, 1941**

*Individual Resource Status:* **Bridge** **Contributing** *Total:* 1 structure

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE  
TRANSPORTATION  
EDUCATION  
ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1882—1963  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1882  
1904  
1931  
1939  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

none known  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Narrows Commercial Historic District is eligible for National Register designation under Criteria A and C as the commercial center of the town and the surrounding region that developed due to its strategic location along the New River and major transportation routes. The district's areas of significance are transportation, commerce, education, and architecture. Originally settled in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century at the narrow gap in the mountains where the New River passed, the community of Narrows developed along the Cumberland Gap Turnpike, the route of which formed the two main streets in the district. The town grew over the years as various industries, including mills, tanyards, power plants and railroad-related industries took advantage of the natural resources and transportation routes. The arrival of the Norfolk & Western Railway in 1882, followed by the Virginian Railway in 1907-1909, established Narrows as the major industrial town in the region and the largest town in Giles County. As the town exists today, with many of its commercial buildings dating to the 1940s and later, the district's architectural character reflects the tremendous growth Narrows experienced after the establishment of the nearby Celco Plant in 1939 and the plant's dominance as a global industry after World War II. The district is eligible for listing on the local level of significance. The period of significance for the district ranges from 1882, with the construction of the railroad and depot, through 1963 when the United States Postal Service built a new post office in downtown Narrows. By this date, nearly all of the resources in the district had been constructed and the commercial district served as the center of commerce, industry, government services and education for the Town of Narrows and the surrounding area of Giles County. The peak of employment and operations of the Celco Plant, which supported much of the growth and commerce in Narrows, continued through the third quarter of the twentieth century before environmental regulations and foreign competition began to impact the plant's operations.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Town of Narrows lies at the confluence of Wolf Creek and the New River. It was named for the gap between the East River Mountain and Peter's Mountain where the New River "narrows." This gap also has geological significance as it shows that the New River predates the mountain range, making the New River one of the oldest rivers in North America.<sup>1</sup> Although the earliest settlers in the area arrived in the late eighteenth century, there was no permanent settlement established until the early nineteenth century, when the Hale family operated a mill on Wolf Creek. Agricultural production was the primary occupation of most early settlers.

Travel into the Narrows area originally took place primarily over primitive trails or by the river. With increased settlement and the need for improved connections to external markets, antebellum period road improvements became a priority for the area. As a result, the Cumberland Gap Turnpike was chartered in 1834 and built 1838-1843. Linking with the Great Wagon Road

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in Botetourt County, this new "highway" brought large numbers of settlers seeking undeveloped lands through western Virginia to Kentucky and Tennessee; some elected to stop in Giles County, including the area of Narrows. Route 100 (Main Street) and Route 61 (MacArthur Lane and Monroe Street) heading southwest along Wolf Creek follow approximately the original path of the Cumberland Gap Turnpike through town. Because of its location on the turnpike, the village expanded its offerings in the antebellum period to include transportation-related services for travelers along the road.<sup>2</sup>

During the Civil War, Narrows was considered a highly strategic location due to its proximity to one of the most important water gaps and transportation routes through the Alleghany Mountains. From Tannery Hill in Narrows, Confederate forces were able to keep lookout in three directions and constructed breast-works to better guard against approaching Union forces. In the winter of 1863, the 36th and 60th Virginia regiments under the command of General McCausland made their winter quarters on Tannery Hill, locating a fort with three cannons on the bluff overlooking the river.

On February 14, 1873, the first post office was established in Narrows and operated by local postmaster Franklin N. Priddy out of his general store. The mail route, operating between Dublin, Virginia, and White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, brought regular stagecoach service to the community and undoubtedly spurred additional business traffic. But major expansion of the community came only after railroad investments during the late nineteenth century brought an era of high economic expectations to the region. To better exploit the rich coal deposits of West Virginia, the Norfolk & Western Railroad built its New River line through Narrows in 1882. The Virginian Railway soon followed, building its line along the opposite side of the New River from the Norfolk & Western line in 1907-1909. Branch lines, including the Wolf Creek Railway along the northern edge of town, soon followed, extending into nearby valleys to help extract the area's timber and mineral resources. The railroads provided the most efficient form of transportation to and from Narrows, and attracted important regional industries that brought employment and commercial activity to the community. In 1880-1881, prior to the railroad's arrival, Giles County's population stood at only 5,870; by 1884-1885, population had grown to 8,794 (a 50% increase in less than five years). Resources related to the railroad in the historic district include the 1882 Norfolk & Western Railway trestle bridge over Wolf Creek, the 1927 Norfolk & Western railway depot, and the 1941 Norfolk & Western Railway bridge over Route 100.

In 1891, enterprising local developers pushed to change the town's name to "Intermont," in an attempt to make the community seem more urbane and to help lure additional industries.<sup>3</sup> This effort did not last long as by 1895, following the economic Panic of 1893, the town decided to change its name back to Narrows. In 1895, Thomas Cover and Company established the Snowflake Tannery, which was later purchased and operated by the Union Tannery Company. Due to the local abundance of raw materials needed for the tannery process (tanbark from forests, lime from limestone quarries, water, and animal hides) the tannery quickly became one of the most important industries in Narrows. Its large processing facility, which eventually also included an extract plant and workers' housing section, dominated Tannery Hill, to the southeast of the district. The ca. 1900 brick Pump house on Princeton Street at Wolf Creek and the dam at

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the Mill Pond (reconstructed in 1986) survive as a reminder of the tannery operation. The tannery was also responsible for providing water and fire protection to the Town of Narrows. In nearby Bluff City, Leas & McVitty, Inc., established the New River Tannery the same year.<sup>4</sup> For much of the early twentieth century, tanneries remained the county's leading employers.

Employment associated with the railroads and other major industries led to greater expansion of the town of Narrows in the early twentieth century. The larger population required more housing and could support additional retail and service establishments. As a result, Narrows became an important regional commercial center and experienced steady business growth. In 1880-1881, prior to the railroad's arrival, Narrows' businesses amounted to only one flour mill, one general merchant, and one physician. Four years later, Narrows had three general merchants, one gristmill, a hotel, and two sawmills. By 1894-1895, the complement of businesses had grown to include a carpenter/contractor (P.J. Fillinger), a coach and wagon builder, two dentists, four general merchants, one hotel, a gristmill, two sawmills, and two physicians.

The first charter for the Town of Narrows was approved by the Virginia Legislature on March 14, 1904.<sup>5</sup> The financial prospects of the community were reinforced when the First State Bank of Narrows opened for business in 1905; prior to that time, the nearest bank was in Pearisburg, an hour's ride away by horse.<sup>6</sup> By 1917, shortly after the town first was electrified, *The Virginia Gazetteer and Business Directory* described the business community as including the Narrows Electric Light & Power Company, the Narrows Bottling Company, five general stores a grocery store, a hardware store, a hotel, a milliner, two gristmills, a painter, two physicians, railroad contractors White & Wood, and an undertaker. In 1919, the bank joined the Federal Reserve System and was renamed the First National Bank of Narrows. Also in that year, Appalachian Electric Company put into operation a coal-fueled electric generating plant at Glen Lyn, located just downstream from Narrows, to supply power to an increasing number of customers. By 1926, it had taken over local franchises such as the Narrows Electric Light & Power Company, and was supplying all of the area's electric power.

In 1920, Narrows' population totaled 1,141, making it the largest town in Giles County, with double the population of the next most populous town, Pearisburg; that year the county Land Book recorded 159 buildings on 258 town lots in Narrows. While railroads remained the most important means of passenger and freight transportation to and from Narrows, in 1920 approval of a countywide bond issue for road improvements and U.S. Route 460, which continues to be the primary highway in the area, was constructed in Giles County between 1926 and 1932.<sup>7</sup> This major state highway through the county led to an increased use of automobiles and encouraged additional industrial development in the region as well as the development of automobile-related businesses in Narrows. In 1926, the Virginian Railway completed an electric generating plant on the New River at Narrows to power its locomotives up steep mountain grades between Roanoke, Virginia, and Mullins, West Virginia.<sup>8</sup> This plant's construction and operation brought additional employment to Narrows. Land Book records indicate that by 1930 the town's developed lands had grown to a total of 283 buildings on 427 lots. Many of the extant downtown commercial buildings date from this period. Public improvements in this period, financed with funds brought in by increased industrial development, included the 1921 Town Hall building (razed 1953), the

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1925 water system, a volunteer fire department founded in 1926, and the 1931 Narrows High School building.<sup>9</sup>

The high school was built following broader rural educational reforms that emerged from the Country Life movement of the first decades of the 1900s. American education reformers and sociologists saw a key role for schools in improving the quality of modern rural life, and the Virginia State Board of Education responded by advancing a number of educational initiatives in rural areas. These included consolidation of rural one- and two-room schools at larger schools in the towns, expanding the curriculum of secondary schools to include vocational education and physical education programs, and providing modern school facilities with spaces for these new programs, as well as for administration, libraries, and community space for the public.<sup>10</sup> The Collegiate-Gothic style high school was built on a large parcel at the intersection of Monroe and Mary Streets. The new facility served an expanded curriculum with an auditorium and gymnasium, and the school complex grew in the years prior to World War II to include a home economics building, a vocational/agricultural education building and a football stadium. The complex retains all of these components, illustrating the rural educational reforms and expanded secondary school curriculum of the mid-twentieth century as well as the continued role of the Town of Narrows as the community center for the surrounding region. The high school closed in 1961 when a new facility was built in North Narrows. The 1931 high school building now serves as a community center, public library, and Head Start preschool facility. The Stadium, named Ragsdale Field, continues to serve as the football stadium for the new Narrows High School in North Narrows.

In 1939, the Celanese Corporation of American ("Celco") established a new plant on the New River between Narrows and Pearisburg to produce acetate staple fibers. The Celco plant started production in December 1939, employing 400 men and one woman. The height of production was reached in 1948, when there were 600 staff and 4000 hourly workers. The company continued to grow as it developed a special fiber for filtered cigarettes in 1956. In the mid-1980s, the American Celanese Corporation was sold to a German firm, however, operations continued as normal in Giles County. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Celco plant was confronted with increased environmental regulations as well as foreign competition with cheaper labor forces. By 2004, the employment at the plant had dropped to 931 workers.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of this plant with its influx of new jobs and people into the community was tremendous. As a direct result, the Narrows First National Bank constructed new headquarters on Main Street in 1939 in spite of the ongoing Great Depression.<sup>12</sup> Narrows' population during this period nearly doubled, increasing in the 1940s from 1,489 to 2,520. A large number of Narrows' downtown commercial buildings (as well as residential neighborhoods) date from this Celco-induced period of development. With the drastic increase in population (and employment), Narrows became the largest town in Giles County. The commercial activity of the town's downtown increased as well and new buildings were constructed and existing ones modernized to sell goods (particularly furniture and automobiles) and provide services for the many people now living in Narrows and the surrounding region. In 1940, the General MacArthur Hotel was constructed in cooperation with Celco in order to provide lodging for its executives, clients and visitors. Important to the growth of Narrows as the largest industrial town in Giles County was

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the fact that the route of U.S. 460 was re-aligned from the south side of the New River and Pearisburg to the north side of the river in 1939 because of the construction of the Celco Plant.<sup>13</sup> Narrows continued to be a prime site for industries due to its access to the river and Route 460 and in 1942 Appalachian Power Company constructed a high efficiency generator in nearby Glen Lyn.

Public facilities were also improved or replaced during the period of continued growth after World War II. A new Narrows Grade School was completed in 1949 and the original Town Hall was replaced in 1950 with a Moderne-style brick building that included the town offices, the Narrows Public Library, an auditorium and a kitchen. A fire station was also built in 1951 at the rear of the municipal building and equipped with a heating plant, office, workshop, hose tower, and storage bays for several fire trucks. A municipal sewage system was completed in 1952. A new post office was constructed in 1963 on Main Street, signaling the continued role of Narrows as the commercial center for the area.

After this peak in development and growth in the post-World War II years from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, the Town of Narrows began to decline in population and commercial and industrial activity. The decline of local industries such as the Union Tanning Company, the consolidation of the Norfolk & Western and Virginian railways, the reduction of passenger rail service, the increasing automation of other area industries, and a dramatic increase in the number of people owning automobiles for basic transportation—and thus able to live farther from their places of employment—led to losses of population and businesses from Narrows in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The bypassing of downtown by a new alignment of Route 460 removed additional regular traffic from the community and contributed to further financial difficulties for the commercial district.

The district as it survives today reflects the development of the town from the early to mid-twentieth century. The district contains commercial, local and federal government buildings, a social hall, a hotel, a school complex, a railroad depot and associated railroad bridges as well as a power house and mill dam associated with the early tannery industry. These resources, which date from the 1880s to early 1960s, represent a range of stylistic influences that reflect their function and the architectural tastes of the times. Notable examples include the Norfolk & Western Railroad Depot, with its standardized depot design with Arts and Crafts influence evident in the massive hipped roof (originally slate) and wide eaves supported by decorative brackets; the Colonial Revival MacArthur Hotel with its classical portico; the Narrows High School complex with its Collegiate-Gothic design with projecting entrance tower and its Colonial-Revival style Home Economics Building; and the streamlined Municipal Building with low horizontal lines accented by horizontal bands of corbelled brickwork at the corners. The majority of the commercial buildings are simple in design with minimal detailing. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings, such as the Narrows Motor Company and the building at 214 Main Street often used stepped parapets and corbelled or patterned brickwork to accent their facades. Later mid-20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings, such as the Wheeler Furniture Company (208-210 Main Street), are simpler and more streamlined in their detailing with unadorned window openings, flat rooflines, and simple metal, glass or marble veneer used as accents. Although many of the storefronts have been altered and new pitched roofs have been added to

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some of the buildings, the majority of the buildings in the district retain their form and association with the development of the commercial district during the period of significance. Most of the buildings in the district contain at least a minimal level of integrity to be considered contributing resources to the historic district.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This NRHP Registration Form is submitted as an update to the PIF prepared in 1996 and reviewed by VDHR in December 1996 and the Historic Resources Board in April 1997. The initial research and draft PIF for this proposed historic district were prepared by Virginia Tech

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graduate planning student Donald Walters, an intern working under the direction of Narrows Town Revitalization Consultant Randi Lemmon in Summer 1996. The initial PIF was revised by RRPO Architectural Historian Leslie Giles; volunteer Ann Angert of the Giles County Housing Development Corporation undertook color slide photography for submittal with the other PIF documentation in August 1996.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** DHR File No. 266-0021

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 14.67 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

A. Zone: 17 Easting: 516490 Northing: 4131800

B. Zone: 17 Easting: 516950 Northing: 4131800

C. Zone: 17 Easting: 516400 Northing: 4131050

D. Zone: 17 Easting: 516950 Northing: 4131050

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary includes all tax parcels indicated within the boundary line on the attached Narrows Commercial Historic District Tax Parcel Map, and includes the following tax parcels: 38A-6-C-1B; 38A-6-C-5; 38A-6A-F-4; 38A-6A-F-3A; 38A-6A-F-3; 38A-6A-F-2A; 38A-6A-F-2; 38A-6A-F-2B; 38A-6-B-1; 38A-6-B-1A; 38A-6A-F-1; 38A-6-A-1; 38A-6-A-2A; 38A-6-A-3; 38A-6-A-4; 38A-6-A-5; 38A-6-A-6; 38A-6-A-7; 38A-6-A-7A; 38A-6-A-5B; 38A-3-E2; 38A-3-E4; 38A-3-C; 38A-7-1; 38A-7-2; 38A-7-3; 38A-7-4; 38A-7-5; 38A-7-7A; 38A-6A-F-4A; 38A-6A-E-7A; 38A-6A-E-8; 38A-6A-E-9; 38A-6B-A-1A; 38A-6B-A-1B; 38A-6B-A-1; 38A-6B-A-2; 38A-6B-A-3; 38A-6B-A-4; 38A-6B-A-4A; 38A-6B-A-5; 38A-6B-A-5A; 38A-6B-A-6; 38A-6B-B-1; 38A-6B-B-2; 38A-6B-B-7; 38A-6-C-5A; 38A-6-C-4; and 38A-2-A-1A.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The district boundary includes the historic resources associated with the commercial, industrial and institutional development of the Town of Narrows for the period of significance from 1882 to 1963.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Alison S. Blanton

organization: Hill Studio

street & number: 120 Campbell Avenue SW

city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24011

e-mail ablanton@hillstudio.com

telephone: 540-342-5263

date: November 29, 2012

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### **Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### **Photo Log**

The following information is common to all photographs:

Name of Property: Narrows Commercial Historic District

City or Vicinity: Narrows, VA

County: Giles

Photographer: Alison Blanton / Hill Studio

Date Photographed: 2010 - 2012

Description of Photograph(s):

Photo 1 of 14: Main Street at Center Street, looking NW

Photo 2 of 14: Main Street, looking NW

Photo 3 of 14: Main Street, looking NE

Photo 4 of 14: Main Street, looking SW

Photo 5 of 14: Monroe Street, looking NE

Photo 6 of 14: Monroe & Main Streets, looking SE

Photo 7 of 14: General MacArthur Hotel, Monroe Street, looking SE

Photo 8 of 14: Municipal Building and Fire Station, Center Street, looking SE

Photo 9 of 14: N&W Depot, Depot Street, looking south

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- Photo 10 of 14: N&W Railroad Overpass, ca. 1941 (266-5032)
- Photo 11 of 14: Narrows Pump House (Snowflake Tannery Co.), ca. 1900 (266-0020)
- Photo 12 of 14: N&W Railroad Trestle Bridge over Wolf Creek, ca. 1892 (266-5048)
- Photo 13 of 14: Narrows High School, ca. 1931
- Photo 14 of 14: Narrows High School Home Economics Building/Public Library

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> The Fiftieth Anniversary History Committee, 1956:1
- <sup>2</sup> The Fiftieth Anniversary History Committee, 1956:4
- <sup>3</sup> Friend, 1956: 33
- <sup>4</sup> Friend, 1956: 42
- <sup>5</sup> Friend, 1956: 54
- <sup>6</sup> Friend, 1956: 54.
- <sup>7</sup> The Fiftieth Anniversary History Committee, 1956:4
- <sup>8</sup> Friend, 1956:40
- <sup>9</sup> Friend, 1956: 35
- <sup>10</sup> *Public Schools*, 1984: Item 8, p. 3
- <sup>11</sup> Friend, 1956: 44; The Fiftieth Anniversary History Committee, 1956:24 – 25
- <sup>12</sup> Friend, 1956:42
- <sup>13</sup> The Fiftieth Anniversary History Committee, 1956:23 – 25