

DAMASCUS TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes for March 2, 2026
6:00pm Regular Called Council Meeting

Council Members Present: Buddy Albro, Jeff Buckley, Sammy Campbell, Derwin Creech, Hunter Faust, and Charles Fields

Absent: None

Also Present:

Katie Lamb, Mayor	Chris Bell, Town Manager
Tuesday Pope, Town Clerk	Kermit Turner, Police & Fire Chief
Shawna Cook, Treasurer	Julie Kroll, Recreation Program Director
K.T. Martin, Community Events & Economic Engagement Coordinator	

Mayor Lamb called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance and Dr. Dane Lee, First Baptist Church, gave the invocation.

Mayor Lamb asked for approval of the February 9, 2026, Regular Council Meeting, as presented.

- Mr. Faust made a motion to approve the Minutes, as presented. Mr. Albro 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

Mayor Lamb asked for approval of the agenda, with the addition of Admin Personnel Matters to the Closed Session items, and the removal of Website Registration under Parks & Rec.

- Mr. Faust made a motion to approve the agenda, with the requested addition and removal. Mr. Campbell 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

Committee Reports

Budget, Finance, and Administration:

Town Treasurer, Shawna Cook, submitted the following report for the previous month:

Real Estate & Personal Property Taxes: The collection rate for 2025 Real Estate is 92.63%, and 2025 Personal Property is 73.72%.

Meals & Lodging Tax: \$15,071.83 in Meals Taxes and \$4,930.79 in Lodging Taxes were collected for February 2026.

Town of Damascus Virginia Investment Pool (VIP)	Account Balance	FYTD Income	Inception Date
RESERVE FUND	\$63,968.39	\$1,729.06	08/11/2017
EARMARK POLICE VEHICLE	\$541.88	\$14.52	04/04/2018
SEWER FUND CD	\$31,095.91	\$840.51	11/26/2018
ANTHEM RECOVERY	\$51,971.01	\$1,404.83	12/21/2018
ADDITIONAL WORKING CAPITAL	\$627,318.98	\$13,329.55	08/08/2019
TRAIL DAYS RESERVE	\$8,818.69	\$238.35	05/14/2020
TOD ARPA 2021	\$193,311.26	\$6,251.25	06/29/2021
Damascus Endowment Fund	\$218,382.60	\$5,949.71	11/7/2024
FLOOD DISASTER RESERVE	\$15,457.66	\$417.83	06/06/25
VIP Stable NAV Liquidity Pool	\$1,210,866.38	\$30,175.61	

The balances shown below are from online banking:

Bank of Damascus:

General Fund: \$163,880.54

CDBG ARC Downtown: \$478.70

CDBG Program Income: \$13,548.82

ARPA: \$76.00

Damascus Endowment Fund: \$13,348.48

Police Asset Forfeiture: \$3,461.42

Total: \$194,793.96

- Health Insurance Renewal for 2026-27 – rates increase by 7% July 1st
 - Mr. Albro made a motion to renew the Town’s group health insurance policy for the 2026-27 year. Mr. Buckley 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

- Reminder - Budget Workshops on March 10th and 24th at 3:30pm

Streets, Lights and Maintenance:

Mr. Creech reported that Public Works has been busy with the following projects, along with their regular brush, leaves, and trash pick-ups:

Repaired the decking at the DTC; painted and repaired pump room door at the pool; removed branch on Shady Ave; fixed the ground next to the Veterans Memorial; ground repair at Town Park with top soil; repaired the Creeper Trail/Food City parking lot ramp; started preparations for Creekside Park repair project; cleared spaces and cut trees from Creekside Park; cleaned and rearranges the maintenance shop; relocated bridge beams and leveled the ground for new supply storage.

Parks and Recreation:

- Marketing Plan Adoption 26-28 – Julie Kroll presented the following marketing plan overview:



MARKETING PLAN OVERVIEW

FIND YOUR WAY TO DAMASCUS

To amplify our status as Trail Town USA and showcase the wide range of outdoor recreation assets and activities nearby. There's an adventure for everyone here!

TRAIL TOWN USA: OUR CLAIM TO FAME

The Heart of the Virginia Creeper Trail . Gateway to Mount Rogers . Friendliest Town on the Trail

Damascus, Virginia has some of the best outdoor recreation of the Southeast right in our backyard. At the edge of town is Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, which holds more than 400 miles of trails. Those trails lead right to the highest peaks in Virginia. There's an adventure for everyone here!

RECOVERY PRIORITIES 2025-28

- Drive visitation to Damascus with an emphasis on overnight visitors (from greater than 50 miles away) and multi-night stays.
- Diversify the Damascus tourism economy beyond the upper half of the Virginia Creeper Trail, which remains closed until it can be rebuilt. Highlight our many assets, expand existing audiences, and reach new audiences.
- Year-round growth: May and October are the busiest months in Damascus, and we have high potential for growth both within the busy season and into the off season.

MEALS & LODGING TAX TRENDS

The monthly report of meals and lodging tax revenue (M&L) is a strong metric for visitation. This reflects the aggregate gross receipts for businesses within town limits. M&L dropped by about 70% year-over-year for Oct/Nov 2024 in the first two months post-Helene. These are usually two of our busiest months.

In the first year post-Helene, the Town of Damascus saw a 31% decrease in lodging tax revenue and 13% decrease in meals tax, which equals an overall decrease of 20%. This represents a significant setback, equivalent to a three-year loss, in our sustained tourism growth over the past ten years.

HIGH IMPACT PROJECTS

- Owned media: VisitDamascus.org, organic social, promotion of local businesses
- Earned media: public relations & news features
- Advertising: Virginia Welcome Centers, Virginia Travel Guide, digital ad campaigns, airport advertising, interstate billboards
- Advertising: lifestyle publications

Questions? Contact Julie Kroll at recreation.director@damascus.org.

**Review the
Marketing Plan
2026-28:**



- Strategic plan format - in line with past three years, looks ahead to the next three

- Helps with requesting additional funding and applying for grants

- Also valuable to staff, interns, contractors, and regional partners, so we can all be on the same page with marketing efforts.

-- Will be especially helpful for continued website development, and if we're able to work with a PR firm again this year.

- Mr. Buckley made a motion to adopt the Marketing Plan, as presented. Mr. Albro 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

➤ Pool Fees for the 2026 season:

2026 Damascus Town Pool Fee Schedule

*Effective Memorial Day Weekend – End of 2026 Season**

**Pool closed Mondays except designated holidays*

I. Season Passes

Pass Type	Residency / Eligibility	Fee
In-Town Season Pass	Resident within Town Limits	\$20.00
Student Pass	Enrolled in Damascus Schools (K-12)	FREE

II. Daily Admission Rates

Category	Age Range	Fee
Toddlers	Ages 3 and under	FREE
Kids	Ages 4 – 17	\$6.00
Adults	Ages 18 – 59	\$8.00
Seniors	Ages 60+	\$6.00

III. Private Pool Parties

Available for after-hours rental.

Party Size	Attendance Cap	Fee
Small Group	Under 25 People	\$200.00
Large Group	25 – 50 People	\$250.00

Planning Commission:

- Zoning update recommendation: minimum site size and PUD district. Mr. Bell gave an overview of the proposed ordinance and instructed the Council that if they wish to move forward, the next step is a Public Hearing.

- Mr. Albro made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing during the April Council meeting. Mr. Faust 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

Police and Fire Advisory:

Chief Turner presented the following reports for the previous month:

Operations:

February 2026, Damascus Officers had 107 calls for service. We have taken 6 investigative reports and made 2 arrests. We had 0 reportable accidents.

Arrests are as follows: Trespass 1, Elude Law Enforcement 1, Drive on Revoked 1, and will be obtaining an Unauthorized Use of a Vehicle 1.

Traffic Enforcement Activities:

We issued 45 citations along with 31 warnings. The Speeding violations were 25 MPH Zone 33, 35 MPH Zone 1, Trespass 1, Defective Exhaust 1, No Inspection 1, No License 1, Drive Revoked 1, Fail to Obtain Registration 1, Expired Temp Tag 1, Expired Registration 1, No Insurance 2, Reckless Driving 1.

Speeding complaint areas include:

N Beaver Dam Ave & Laurel Ave

Special Report:

We have completed our 2026/2027 DMV Grant, we have completed the LOLE FY24 Grant, both have been submitted waiting approval.

*Officer Thurston approached me about starting a new program for the PD for kids. I have a packet here that I will pass around due to the amount of ink. I would like to ask the council to allow me to move forward with this. *It was the consensus of the Council to move forward with the program.*

K9 Report:

Marco was called out 2 times to assist WCSO. We completed February's with VSP. I will be out of the office Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday this week to get my Monthly training done.

Police Vehicles:

We just replaced the brakes and rotors on the 2023 Ford Explorer.

Auxiliary:

I will be having a range day for all auxiliary this month, we will be gearing up for Trail Days 2026 and getting in the training for all full time and Auxiliary.

Arrest Race/Sex Totals by Offense

Damascus Police Department

(02/01/2026 - 02/28/2026)

Primary Offense:	White Male:	Black Male:	Indian Male:	Asian/ Pac. Isl. Male:	White Female:	Black Female:	Indian Female:	Asian/ Pac. Isl. Female:	Juven.:	Adult:	Resd.:	NonRes.:	Arrests:
90J - Trespass of Real Property	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
18.2-817 - Elude Law Enforcement Endanger	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Totals:	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	2

Citation Totals by Charge

Damascus Police Department

(02/01/2026 - 02/28/2026)

Charge:	Number of Charges:
18.2-119 - Trespassing	1
46.2-1049 - DEFECTIVE EXHAUST	1
46.2-1157 - FAILURE TO HAVE VEHICLE INSPECTED	1
46.2-300 - NO DRIVERS LICENSE	1
46.2-301 - REVOKED/SUSPENDED	1
46.2-600 - fail to obtain registration	1
46.2-613 - Expired thirty day tag / Improper Registration	1
46.2-646 - EXPIRED REGISTRATION	1
46.2-707 - DRIVING WITHOUT INSURANCE	1
46.2-852 - reckless driving	1
46.2-874 - SPEEDING 25 MPH ZONE	33
46.2-875 - SPEEDING 35 MPH ZONE	1
46.2-902.1 - NO PROOF OF INSURANCE	1
Total:	45

Incident Case Status Totals by Offense

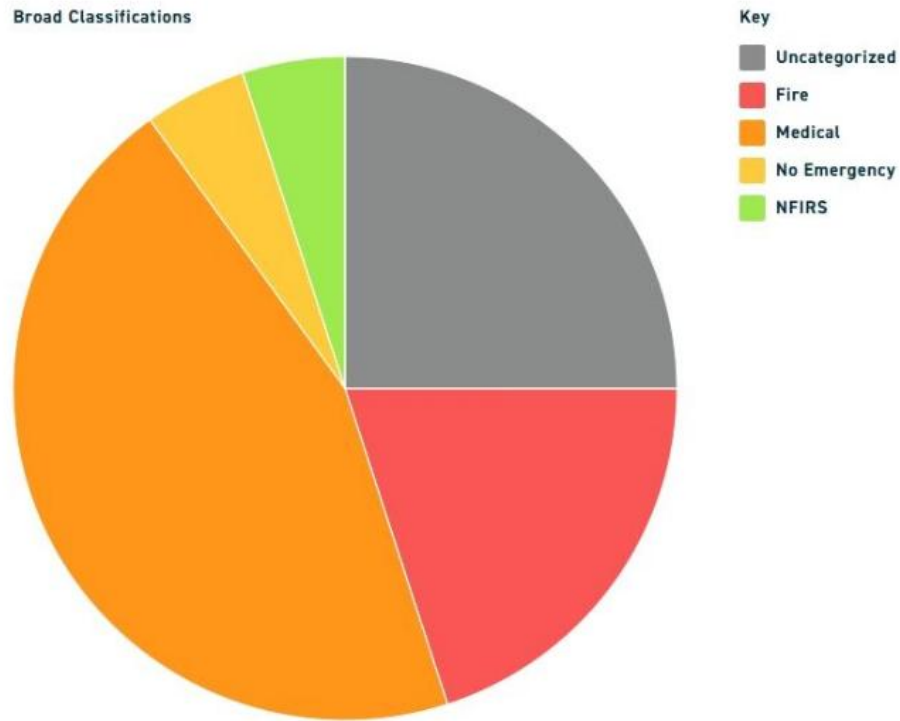
Damascus Police Department

(02/01/2026 - 02/28/2026)

Offense:	Active:	Active TOT O/A:	Inactive:	Inactive WOF:	Closed Service:	Closed Except.:	Closed Arrest:	Adult Arrest:	Juvenile Arrest:	Adu./Juv. Arrest:	Unfd.:	Rptd.:	Actual:
18.2-817 - Elude Law Enforcement Endanger	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	2
23G - Theft of Motor Vehicle Parts or Accessories	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
90J - Trespass of Real Property	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
90Z - All Other Offenses	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2
Totals:	2	0	1	0	2	0	1	3	0	0	0	6	6

Damascus Volunteer Fire Department

February 2026 calls are as follows:



Alert Type	Volume
NFIRS - NFIRS	1
UNCATEGORIZED - Uncategorized	5
FIRE - Fire	4
MEDICAL - Medical	9
NOEMERG - No Emergency	1

A quote for roof repair is attached for Council approval. *Cornett Roofing proposal for roof repairs \$5,700

- Mr. Campbell made a motion to approve the roof repair proposal, as presented, and paying the fee out of the Capital Outlay line item 10-500-13. Mr. Fields 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

Code Enforcement:

Mayor Lamb presented the following activity report for the previous month from the Town's Code Enforcement Officer, Marty Berry:

Visits and Contacts: 41

Zoning: 6

Business License: 4

Lodging: 0

Meals: 0

Complaints and Investigations: 1

Assist P.D.: 2

Special Committees

- Community Events & Economic Engagement Coordinator – K.T. Martin presented the following:

*As we move into March, Damascus is transitioning from **preparation season into event season**. Our first Town of Damascus event of 2026 is just over five weeks away & momentum is strong across multiple initiatives.*

Town Events Update

****Trout Days | April 10–12***

Trout Days, including our first-ever Saturday festival component, is approaching quickly on April 10-12, with the Trout Days Festival on Saturday, April 11 from 12 to 4pm in The Speckled Trout Annex lot with vendors, our sponsors, casting lessons & competition, fly tying tips, & family-friendly games. Key updates:

- *Festival vendor spaces are full.*
- *Sponsorship funds have nearly doubled from \$9,500 in 2025 to \$18,900 in 2026.*
- *Registration for the fishing tournament continues steadily.*

Thank you to Council Member Derwin Creech for registering to participate in the tournament, and to Council Member Hunter Faust for the many hours he has committed behind the scenes to help strengthen this event.

****Farmers Market | 2026 Season***

Our Farmers Market Preview Party & first market of the season will take place on Thursday, May 7 from 4 to 7pm in The Speckled Trout Annex lot. This kickoff event launches the market season and gives attendees the first look at what's in store.

The full 2026 Farmers Market season will run every Thursday, beginning May 21 through the end of October, 4 to 7pm

Donna Foltz, our Market Manager, is actively securing both vendors and sponsors for the upcoming season.

****Trail Days | May 15–17***

Trail Days remains our largest annual event, and the Trail Days Committee led by Council Member Buddy Albro along with Town Staff Tuesday Pope and Julie Kroll, is working hard to ensure another successful celebration.

****Virginia Highlands Festival – Day in Damascus | July 30***

As previously announced, the 77th annual Virginia Highlands Festival will host a dedicated “Day in Damascus” on Thursday, July 30.

We currently have over 40 experiences confirmed. This continues to be a significant regional partnership that introduces new audiences to Damascus through immersive experiences. Thank you Mayor Katie Lamb for your steadfast support & partnership with this event.

****New 2026 Partnership: Taste of Damascus***

*I'm excited to share a new collaboration between Chef JW of Wilsons Café and Appalachian Sustainable Development, a non-profit dedicated to building thriving regional food and agriculture systems. **Together with our local restaurants, they will host Taste of Damascus on Saturday, August 15 in Town Park, showcasing the flavors and creativity of our town.***

This event will:

- *Feature tasting portions from local restaurants*
- *Allow attendees to vote for a "People's Choice" award*
- *Highlight Damascus' culinary community*
- *Include live music provided by The Crooked Road*

This adds a new opportunity for our local restaurants and aligns perfectly with our vision of Damascus as the ideal place to host events.

Business & Economic Updates

As warmer weather arrived this past weekend, downtown activity noticeably increased and businesses reported strong foot traffic.

****Business Updates:***

- ***Bad Bagels Pet Emporium** is operating in a temporary space at The Speckled Trout Annex while its permanent downtown location is being built out.*
- ***Along for the Ride Caboose Vacation Rentals** will host a Ribbon Cutting/Open House on Thursday, April 9 from 10 to 11:30am.*
- ***The Coffee Thief** (coffee shop, bakery, and gathering space) is preparing for a May opening in the former Main Street Sweets and Eats location.*
- ***Mount Rogers Outfitters** has announced it will close, with March 31 as its final day of operation.*
- *The **Washington County Business Challenge** winner will be announced March 19 at the Chamber of Commerce breakfast and we are cheering for our Damascus businesses that took part in this opportunity.*
- *We have our first **Damascus Business Group** meeting of 2026 tomorrow evening, March 3 at 6pm.*

In closing, thank you for your continued support as we enter a very active and visible season for the town.

Citizens Comments

Nothing at this time.

Manager's Report

Chris Bell presented the following Manager's Report for the previous month:

Creeper Trail

- *Demolition of Trestles 16 & 17 scheduled this month*
- *Awaiting decision on temporary bike detour from VDOT*
- *Awaiting floodplain submittals for Trestle 16 & 17 from Kiewit*
- *Finalizing Mutual Aid agreement with USFS & Washington County*

Town Hall

- *Temporary repair to town hall roof completed 2/19/26*
- *Seeking state disaster relief funding for backup generator thru MRPDC & DHCD disaster relief funds. Awaiting direction from new state administration.*

Emergency Preparedness

- *Washington County proposed funding warming shelter at One Way Ministry*

FEMA/VDEM

- *6 to 12 month approval timeline from FEMA on Greenspace Land Acquisition Program for 205 N. Railroad*
- *Town received \$20,206.85 from FEMA/VDEM for additional road repair work*
- *VDEM selected our town for Desk Monitoring Review beginning in April*

Grants

- *Flood resiliency planning committee met and discussed hosting public events @ Trout Days & Farmers Market*
- *RKG Associates kick-off meeting complete for Laurel Gateway Project, site survey and interviews being scheduled for March 11 & 12 (previous IDA property)*
- *Town awarded \$1,000 with Bass Pro & Cabela's Outdoor Fund Local Impact Grant for Trout Days support*
- *Town awarded \$1,500 from VA Tech & VA Association of Museums via the PEDAL Bike 76 project. This will fund a temporary exhibit at the Trail Center for the 2026 season highlighting biking, America's 250th anniversary, and the 50th Bikecentennial anniversary.*

Miscellaneous

- *Scattered Site Rehab Phase II – Qualified contractor list approved by board. Seeking sign quotes.*
- *Bayer Property – Sales agreement signed and application for VRP program with DEQ submitted. Awaiting meeting, survey, and soil sampling schedule with DEQ.*

- Stormwater Study –DEQ approved preliminary plans, H&P moving forward with dual discharge design.
- Trademark– 6 to 9 month timeline for decision on request to trademark “Trail Town, USA” and “Appalachian Trail Days”
- New River Float Calculator – The town signed a letter of support for Grayson County for a grant funding the rebuild of their float calculator tool and monitoring along the New River in partnership with Fish Blue Ridge.

Legal Matters

At the appropriate time, motion to Recess into Closed Session for Discussion and Consideration of Administration and Public Works Personnel Matters , per VA Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1).

Unfinished Business

Nothing at this time.

New Business

- Ordinance Modifications, First Reading, Council Review/Discussion (2nd reading and Council action at the April 6th Council meeting):
 - a. Clarification of definition & requirements of Music Entertainment Festival
 - b. Addition of definition & requirements for Special Events (i.e. Dashing thru Damascus, Festival of Miles, C-TREC, etc. type of non-town sponsored events)
 - c. Update of property tax due dates to align with Washington County
 - d. Removal of meal and lodging tax discount to eliminate confusion and miscalculations
 - e. Refund authority for Treasurer as previously approved by Council
 - f. Clarification and addition of peddler definitions including mobile food vendors and qualifying events
 - g. Update of business fees to separate mobile food establishments from peddlers and a special events peddlers fee

Consent Agenda

- Mr. Faust made a motion to pay the bills for invoices exceeding \$2,500, 2nd by Mr. Albro. The motion passed (6-0).
- Mr. Fields made a motion to pay the bills presented as well as the standard and/or recurring bills that will come in before the next Council meeting. Mr. Buckley 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).

Mayor & Council Members Reports

Mayor Lamb expressed her appreciation for the Town staff and Council Members.

Mr. Albro said he is looking forward to starting the season.

Mr. Campbell reported that the Justin Foundation Auction will be taking place on Thursday, March 5th, at Rhea Valley Elementary School.

Announcements

UPCOMING EVENTS & OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- For information on upcoming events, go to our website visitdamascus.org. For citizen info go to damascus.org, and don't forget our social media presence on **Facebook** and **Instagram!**
- Mr. Faust made a motion to Recess into Closed Session for Discussion and Consideration of Administration and Public Works Personnel Matters, per VA Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1). Mr. Campbell 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).
- Mr. Campbell made a motion to return to Open Session, 2nd by Mr. Faust. The motion passed (6-0).
- *CERTIFY (individually): We Certify that only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements and only such matters identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed, or considered in the closed meeting.*
 - Buddy Albro – Yea
 - Jeff Buckley– Yea
 - Sammy Campbell – Yea
 - Derwin Creech - Yea
 - Hunter Faust – Yea
 - Charlie Fields - Yea
- Mr. Buckley made a motion to hire Joe Phipps for a seasonal Public Works position, at \$16/hour, and a start date of April 1st. Mr. Albro 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).
- Mr. Faust made a motion to increase the hourly pay rate for Seth Walsh from \$19 to \$20/hour, effective immediately . Mr. Albro 2nd the motion, which passed (6-0).
- Mr. Faust made a motion to recess until a later date for a continuation of Closed Session, 2nd by Mr. Fields. The motion passed (6-0). 8:39pm

