TOWN OF CHILHOWIE, VIRGINIA

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Director Public Works: Daniel W. Combs
Fire /EMS Chief: C. David Haynes
Building Official: C. David Haynes
Wastewater Operations: Luke A. Lowe
Water Operations: Don Cole, II
Special Events/Recreation: Stephen Fields
Legal: Cassell & Crewe, P.C.

Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
October 10, 2024

Good evening, Mayor Heninger and Members of the Town Council. As you're aware, over the past week and a half our town has lived through the most damaging natural disaster since the storied "Flood of '77". While it has been an exhausting several days for the entire town staff and our community as a whole, I am extremely proud of the hard work of our entire staff. From our Fire/EMS and Police Department personnel running a potentially record number of calls during the height of the crisis while also assisting with traffic control and several rescues of stranded vehicles in the height of the flooding to our Public Works Department crew who were working relentlessly to keep the water on as they battled the floodwaters and the prolonged power outage at our springs and water plant, I truly am inspired by their hard work and dedication to our community! And I also am extremely proud of the volunteers who've reached out to help our town in our time of need. We truly are blessed to be part of such a tight-knit community that is no doubt Warrior Proud!

Community Committee Meetings

On Tuesday, October 2nd I met with the Friends of the Library Committee along with Councilman Foster and Mr. Stephen Fields. We heard some of their views on the status of our branch library and how we can work more closely together going forward.

VDOT Correspondence

On September 25, I wrote an email to Mr. Jeff Harrison, Resident Engineer for the Virginia Department of Transportation Abingdon Residency, to thank him for the prompt attention that his staff provided the town in our preparations for the 70th Chilhowie Apple Festival. I value the good working relationship he and I have developed and I am hopeful that this will benefit the town going forward.

VRSA Fall Forum

Ms. Eller and I attended the VRSA Fall Forum on Thursday, September 26. We were briefed on updated regulations relative to Workman's Compensation, Marijuana in the Workplace, and available training for our staff members.

Chilhowie Apple Festival

The 70th Chilhowie Apple Festival was held, albeit with significant revisions to the schedule due to the storm and associated flooding. As always, the town staff worked closely with the Apple Festival

Committee and their volunteers to provide the best experience possible for our town's citizens and guests. Despite the extra stresses of the flooding, damage, and overall chaos of the storm weekend, your staff excelled at supporting the Apple Festival…and did it with a smile!

Town Project Updates

Lead Service Line Survey and Inventory

You may remember that the deadline for completion of this project and results of our survey reported to the Virginia Department of Health is October 15. Due to the partnership between Hurt & Proffitt and our town staff, we have completed this project and hopefully put it behind us as part of the town's history. I can happily report that no lead service lines were found in our system. I have drafted a letter in evidence of this, a copy of which can be found in your agenda packet.

Sewer Improvement Project

The contractor selected to undertake this project, Portland Utilities Construction Company, is now staged on site and has begun work on this renovation project. Pre-lining CCTV work on the 15-inch main has started and the relining crew is mobilized and set to begin. Pay Requests are being processed in a timely manner and the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission has stated that all Labor Compliance interviews have been completely upright and proper.

Water Line and Meter Replacement Project

It was our intention to have an orientation meeting on this project on October 2. However, we opted to delay this meeting until November due to the overwhelming volume of work after Hurricane Helene.

Hurricane Helene Response

We as a community have rallied to assist each other as well as offer to help our surrounding communities. The town has suffered unprecedented damage to our wastewater system with the destruction of all three of our aerial stream crossings. We have also suffered the loss of one of our two primary pumps at the influent station of our wastewater treatment plant. Also, we were extremely fortunate that the town water system did not fail. The floodwaters at the Reid Store Pump Station came within six inches of getting into the control electronics, which would have brought our water production capability to a halt. Additionally, power was knocked out for over five days at the town's two source springs and the water plant. To maintain capacity required a vigilant effort by the Public Works Department to "ride the route" and keep the generators at our facilities fueled, while also navigating the downed trees, high waters, and flood debris littering the roads.

Damage was sustained to our security fencing at the Widener Spring by downed trees and at the Reid Store Pump Station by the floodwater. Minor damage was sustained at the pump station resulting from the inflow of mud into the facility.

Damage to the wastewater system was considerably more extensive, as discussed in the above paragraph. I and other staff members have worked non-stop since Saturday September 28 to ensure that the appropriate regulatory agencies have been notified of our issues with the sewer system and are updated daily on our progress toward a temporary repair so as to stop the flow of raw sewage into the river and back into the town's wastewater collection system. I have been in regular contact with the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (Water Quality Office), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Each agency has been made aware of our efforts toward the temporary repair to our system and given their approval for us to proceed without the normal regulatory processes due to everyone's shared belief that getting the waste out of the river and back into the treatment system is the absolute overriding goal at this point.

The town coincidentally finds itself in a very good situation due to the fact that Portland Utilities Construction Company was already onsite for the Sewer Improvement Project. As you can imagine, hundreds of surrounding localities are vying to get on the schedule of a limited number of companies that provide this type of work. With PUCC already being staged in town, we were not only first on their list to assist, but the town and our engineering consultants at Hurt & Proffitt have worked with them to come up with a fast-moving temporary repair that I have approved and is now already underway.

I want to extend my thanks to Dr. Carter, Superintendent of Smyth County Schools, and his entire staff for their support and cooperation as we construct this temporary repair line. A small section of the line will be laid across the footbridge leading from Chilhowie High School to the Baseball Field.

On Tuesday, October 1, the Chilhowie hosted several visitors to town wanting to help out or just express their concern and caring for our community. There were over 50 volunteers from Emory & Henry University who helped with cleanup efforts in the Town Park and at First Baptist Church. Also, all through the week, Smyth County Public Schools staff volunteered their time at Chilhowie High School to offer warm meals and a place to rest for our residents in need.

Senator Tim Kaine also visited the town and rode with Mayor Heninger and me to view some of the damage. In addition to the ride to see our plight, Senator Kaine and Mayor Heninger took time to visit with the students from Emory & Henry and then with the Smyth County Schools staff to thank them for their heartfelt efforts to help out.

After much demand was identified, I made the decision to open the Old High School as a collection point for donated items to help those members of our community needing food, cleaning supplies, etc. The demand for this aid has been overwhelming but the community seems to be very grateful for our town's efforts to be of aid. I personally thank Mr. Stephen Fields who has been supervising the facility and spearheading the donation and distribution efforts. Not only has be been the leading force behind its success, he has also been the backbone of the manual labor required for movement of so many items. I also thank all of the volunteers who have stepped up to help out.

There is more to do and the next several months will bring hurdles as we work to return the town's facilities and infrastructure back to normal. I will continue to keep you updated and I will continue to be Warrior Proud of our community as we face this together!

Questions

As always, I welcome any questions about the status of the town's busy activities.

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager