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
December 12, 2024

Good evening, Mayor Heninger and Members of the Town Council. I hope you had a good Thanksgiving and are enjoying this cold start of December. I want to thank you for the Christmas bonuses and gift cards you generously approved for your staff members. It is appreciated by each member of YOUR staff to help with the expenses of the holiday season.

Here's a brief look at what's going on in our town:

Hurricane Helene Recovery

The staff continues to work toward full recovery from September's storm damages. The removal of the downed trees at the Widener Spring has been completed. The contractor is scheduled to replace the damaged security at both the Widener Spring and the Reid Store Pump Station before the end of December. Design work is underway for the permanent repairs to our three aerial crossings. I estimate that design work will be completed and ready for review by the appropriate regulatory agencies shortly after the first of the year. The review process can take up to three months to complete, but once we have approval, the town can then go to bid for the construction process.

I appreciate the good teamwork the week before Thanksgiving when the Chilhowie Police Department's Officer Gage Prater partnered with Mr. Don Cole to utilize the police department's new drone to survey the damage to the top of the water tank at the Widener Spring. This would have been a very difficult task, but the use of the drone allowed the quick and easy inspection of our tank to confirm that no major damage occurred by the fallen tree.

The temporary wastewater bypass that is in place continues to work effectively, thanks to the diligence of Mr. Lowe and Mr. Treece at the wastewater treatment plant and the members of the town's Public Works Department. As you know, the temporary bypass is expensive to maintain considering the pump and pipe rentals. It is currently costing the town approximately $17,000 per month. However, initial costs were closing in on $30,000 monthly, so I truly commend the town's staff for being innovative and persistent on talking through options, which has resulted in these savings.

The Smyth County Disaster Recovery Center closed permanently (the official notice is attached to this report) on Saturday, December 7th, but the FEMA team operating out of Bristol that has been assigned to

Chilhowie continues to work closely with the town. Your staff has sent our first expenses related to the initial aftermath of the storm and the construction of the temporary bypass forward for reimbursement. FEMA staff has met in person several times in our town and site survey crews are expected to arrive here within the next two weeks. I genuinely appreciate the efforts FEMA has made to educate the town staff about how the process will work going forward.

Sewer Improvement Project Update

The relining of the planned sewer pipes is almost complete. This phase of the project is expected to be completed by year's end. Fortunately for the town, there were some areas of the project that were unexpectedly found to be in good shape, which allowed them to be bypassed resulting in a cost savings that the town can now use to focus on other problem areas of our wastewater system. It was determined that the section of our system that causes the highest level of problem is the main line that runs along Bonham Avenue from Old Stage Road, under Highway 11 and under the Chilhowie High School parking lot, then on to its connection to another main line near the railroad tracks near the high school's grass practice field for the band.

The cost savings from the reline work has allowed us the opportunity to address this problematic section of the system. This first Change Order of this project will see the contractor, with approval from the town's engineering consultant, initiate work on this area by first completing an open-cut replacement of the old line in the grass field, which will begin in the first few days of January, weather permitting. The remainder of the work is slated to be done by the pipe bursting process, which allows the lines to be upsized and replaced while also ensuring no or minimal damage to above ground property. This phase of the project is expected to be completed by the end of February, weather permitting. I have attached a copy of Change Order Number 1 to this report for your review and consideration.

The end result of this project should see a considerable reduction of the inflow and infiltration (I&I) entering our wastewater system. This reduction should correlate to reduced operating costs for our wastewater treatment plant, including reduced electricity consumption.

VDOT Communications

I have corresponded by email with Mr. Jeff Harrison, the Residency Administrator for our area, to get updates on the requests you instructed your staff to undertake. Mr. Harrison informed me that the traffic study at the intersection of I-81 and Whitetop Road has been completed and determined that the traffic count and low number of accidents deemed that this area does not warrant a traffic light.

Your request for VDOT to study options for safer pedestrian transit has been sent to their Bridge Division and results are still pending.

The replacement of the drain tile near McDonalds is still planned but has understandably been delayed by Hurricane Helene recovery and the need to completely rebuild roads in our region.

I approved a VDOT request to access the town's property at the Town Shop to conduct surveying related to the upcoming improvements to I-81, which may see the addition of a third lane in coming years.

Emory and Henry Visit

I had the opportunity to showcase our town during a recent visit by Dr. Theresa Burris and Mr. Dirk Moore, Directors of Community Engagement with Emory & Henry University. During our tour, I was able to educate them on our town's history, show them two of our historic cemeteries, ride through our central business district, and took them for a brief (and chilly) walk in the Town Park, where I was able to show them the area that their students volunteered in as they came to help clean up debris after the hurricane. We discussed several ideas going forward as to how we can strengthen the ties between the town and their university, including projects in which students can continue to volunteer here in Chilhowie. I feel that closer ties with our local university could result in stronger economic growth for our town, as well as a way for young people, quite a few of which are local, to give back to our community and help our town out at the same time.

RAN/TRAN Update

Your staff continues to collaborate with the consultants at Davenport & Company to close the Revenue Anticipation Note (RAN) that you approved last year and open the Tax and Revenue Anticipation Note (TRAN) that we will carry for the next year. I appreciate all the hard work Ms. Eller and her staff have been doing to satisfy all the requirements needed for this. I also would like to again thank you for working with staff to find financial solutions that will set the town up for a more solid financial footing going forward, which I firmly believe will eliminate the need for a TRAN or any other "insurance policy" for satisfying our debt service in the future.

VOSH/DOLI Inspection, Follow-up, and Town Safety Program

This past summer, inspectors with the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry made a surprise inspection (which they can perform at any time) at our Wastewater Treatment Plant. During this inspection, they identified a handful of safety violations. Shortly after the inspection, I came on board as your Town Manager and when I was made aware of the inspection, I quickly introduced Mr. Lowe to Mr. Eddie Shelton, Safety Specialist for the Virginia Risk Sharing Association. I would like to commend Mr. Lowe for doing an outstanding job of addressing the bulk of the issues promptly and properly. For the few issues that couldn't be addressed "in house", Mr. Shelton and his new relationship with the town have proven key to their successful resolution.

Our most recent step toward rectifying all discrepancies was an in-person meeting at the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) Regional Office between me, Mr. Tristan Preece, Mr. Shelton, and Mr. Paul Saunier to address each identified violation individually. It has been determined that none of the violations are deemed serious and DOLI has granted us a period of time to complete the last remaining actions needed. No fines will be assessed so long as the town completes the actions and provides proof of completion.

While not necessarily due to this matter, but also bolstered by it, Mr. Shelton has been proactive in helping the town establish a renewed emphasis on a safety program and has provided much documentation for the town staff's education. Additionally, he has thus far provided one in-person workplace safety class and is slated to be back in town several times in 2025 to conduct more focused training to include forklift training, traffic control training, and an OSHA 10 class.

As your Town Manager, I feel that my utmost responsibility is to ensure that our staff has the proper training and equipment to serve our town while going home safely to their families at the end of the day.

Questions

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

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager