TOWN OF CHILHOWIE, VIRGINIA

Mayor: Gary L. Heninger
Council: Billy L. Clear
Shannon Donnelly
J. Brent Foster
Bob Jeter
Julie Sturgill
P.J. Wolfe

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Clerk/Treasurer: Felicia C. Eller
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Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
January 9, 2025

Good evening, Mayor Heninger and Members of the Town Council. I want to thank each of the elected officials, staff, and volunteers that helped make our town's annual holiday celebrations go so well last month. I also want to thank you for approving the Christmas bonuses for the staff. Your staff does an outstanding job for our town and the bonus is truly appreciated.

On a very regrettable note, I would like to offer my condolences to the family of Deputy Ernie Atwell, as well as to Sheriff Shuler and the entire Smyth County Sheriff's Office. This most recent passing ends a deeply tragic year for their staff and our community as a whole.

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

Hurricane Helene Recovery

Our staff continues to work with FEMA, our engineering partners, and consultants to address the repairs needed to bring the town to full recovery. Design work is underway for the permanent repairs at each of the three aerial sewer crossings that were destroyed during the storm. I am hopeful that final design can be completed by the end of February, which will allow the project to then go out to bid for construction.

As we have discussed, FEMA and other reimbursements will be slow to come in so I once again thank you for approving the Line of Credit last month that will allow the town to move forward with repairs in a now timely manner without having to pay out expenses from our General Fund. To this point, we have done so out of necessity, but it has made finances tighter that I am comfortable with, especially given the heavy debt service due this month. The documents from the Bank of Marion have been signed by Mayor Heninger, Ms. Felicia Eller, and myself closing the Line of Credit.

Sewer Improvement Project Update

The relining of the planned sewer pipes is complete, with the exception of a couple of small areas that had been identified as needing repairs IF funding were to become available. As we discussed last month, our contractors at Portland Utilities Construction Company have coordinated with the town's engineering

consultants for this project, Hurt & Proffit to locate areas that has originally been planned to reline, but were deemed to be in good working order after visual inspection.
As you will recall, you approved Change Order Number 1 to this project last month, that was made possible due to these identified areas that allowed the town to redirect funding to this problematic area along Bonham Avenue. The "open cut" section of this project (running through the CHS band practice field) is now complete and the next phase (under Highway 11 and along Bonham Avenue to Old Stage Road) began this week.

The monthly progress meeting for this project was held on January 8th. I typically provide you a copy of the minutes, but since that was just one day before I present this report to you, it is not yet available. I will provide it to you with next month's report.

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 and overall better efficiency.

VDOT Communications

Last month I was requested to contact our state legislators prior to their departure for the 2025 General Assembly, which convened on January 8th. I have attached a copy of my letter to them requesting that they look into possible ways to help move forward solutions to the traffic issues at the intersection of I-81 and Whitetop Road.

RAN/TRAN Update

The RAN (Revenue Anticipation Note) was closed out successfully and the new TRAN (Tax and Revenue Anticipation Note) was closed on and is now in place. I would like to thank Davenport and Associates for their assistance. Most importantly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Eller for her diligence and hard work to make this happen!

I am optimistic that at the end term of this current TRAN in December, that we as the staff and elected officials can have a very solid handle on the town's finances going forward and will no longer need to rely on a TRAN as a protective measure to be able to satisfy the town's debts.

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

The repairs at the Town Shop and the safety fencing required around the clarifiers and digesters at our wastewater treatment plant to comply with the DOLI/VOSH citatations are now completed, with the exception of some minor work remaining at the digesters.

The hard work and solid team effort by Chris Johnson, Luke Lowe, Tristan Preece, and all the members of the Public Works Department who assisted in addressing this matter is greatly appreciated. Because of them, we have addressed the violations cited, but more importantly, the site is much safer for our staff!

Smyth 12

The Smyth 12, which is the unofficial venue for the Town Managers of all three Smyth County towns, the County Administrator, and our representative elected officials from each council/board typically meets monthly but has not been active for the past handful of months due to staff changes in the other two towns and unavailability of elected officials from one of the other towns. That being said, I have communicated with the Smyth County Administrator, Mr. Shawn Utt, and we are making a concerted effort to refocus attention to the importance of the venue now that new staff and new elected officials are in place in all localities.

DHCD Letter of Support for Enhanced Food Pantry Services

Last month, I drafted a letter of support for a Smyth County application to the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for enhanced food pantry services in our county. I have attached a copy to this report for your review.

You may recall that Smyth County applied for and received $100,000 of Covid-related funding a handful of years ago which allowed for much needed refrigeration equipment at the Loaves and Fishes food pantry. If this current application is funded, it will again grow the capabilities of our town's food pantry to better assist the residents of our community. Award notices are anticipated for mid-2025.

Certification as to No Default and Tax Compliance and Failure to Submit Timely Annual Audit Statement

On December 18th, I submitted the town's Certification as to No Default and Tax Compliance to the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA). Apparently, this is a new requirement, as I do not recall ever seeing this documentation in other towns I have worked with and I consulted with your previous Town Manager, Mr. Clark, who also did not recall ever having seen this. The document is essentially a certification that the town has never defaulted on a debt. Additionally, I signed and provided a Notice of Failure to Submit Timely Annual Audited Financial Statements, which provides justification for our late audit submissions.

While these documents provide no information that VRA is not already aware of, are simple administrative matters, and do not require action by you as the Town Council, I wanted to keep you informed anytime we have updated correspondence with the state authority that holds much of the town's debt.

Questions

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

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager

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December 19, 2024

Senator Travis Hackworth
Delegate Jed Arnold

RE: TOWN OF CHILHOWIE TRAFFIC ISSUES

Senator Hackworth and Delegate Arnold:

I'm writing you at the request of the Chilhowie Town Council to ask for your assistance with looking into options to address the congested traffic patterns and pedestrian safety hazards in our town at the intersection of Interstate 81's Exit 35 and Whitetop Road (State Route 107).

As both of you have used this interchange, I'm sure you've seen firsthand the challenging and dangerous situation that is faced daily by citizens of Chilhowie, as well as our neighbors in surrounding communities that use this exit as they travel to work and back home.

The town presented our concerns to VDOT earlier this year. Specifically, I corresponded with Mr. Jeff Harrison, the Residency Administrator. Mr. Harrison and his staff were very prompt in scheduling a meeting with the town and were extremely professional and helpful. As a result of our on-site meeting, a VDOT traffic study was quickly undertaken and the need for a safe route for pedestrian passage was forwarded to VDOT's Bridge Division for consideration.

While the town is tremendously grateful for the assistance provided to us by Mr. Harrison and his local staff, we were also disappointed that the results of the traffic study determined that a traffic light at this extremely congested intersection was found to be not warranted.

That being said, the town's request to has nothing to do with our local VDOT partners…they're great folks to work with! Our request is that as our representatives in the General Assembly that you please look into possible options to work toward placement of a traffic light at this dangerous intersection, as well as assist the town in our goal of seeing a sidewalk constructed in order for our pedestrian residents to have a safe way to travel from their homes into the town's central business district, where they walk to obtain their food, prescriptions, banking needs, etc.

I'm aware that you are both going into your busiest time of the year as we approach the New Year, but I am always available at your convenience to give you a tour of Chilhowie and show you the issue that worries our Town Council members. Thank you and please let me know if you have any questions.

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager

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Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
600 East Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Sir or Madam,

On behalf of Mayor Heninger and the Chilhowie Town Council, I am writing to express our enthusiastic support for the grant application to enhance county-wide food pantry services. These food pantries are vital not only for addressing food insecurity but also for contributing to the overall stability and economic resilience of our town and county.

The critical role of our food pantries was unmistakable during Hurricane Helene. The disaster disrupted supply chains and left many residents without essential resources, emphasizing the urgent need for a reliable local support system. Despite limited access to additional inventory, our food pantries rose to the challenge, proving their indispensable value. This crisis underscored the necessity of strengthening these vital services to better serve our community in times of need.

Food security plays a significant role in economic development. By providing essential services to families in need, food pantries reduce the economic strain on households, allowing residents to focus on employment, education, and community engagement. This stability contributes to a stronger workforce, which in turn supports local businesses and attracts potential investors. Furthermore, the presence of well-supported food pantries demonstrates a community's commitment to caring for its residents, a key factor in fostering a positive environment for growth and development.

The grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development would enable our county to expand the capacity of these vital services, ensuring that we are prepared to meet current demands and future challenges. By investing in food security infrastructure, we are laying the groundwork for a healthier, more resilient, and economically robust community.

I urge your full support of this grant application, as it aligns with our shared goals of fostering sustainable growth and improving the quality of life for all residents in Smyth County, our region, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Should you require further information or wish to discuss this initiative in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at (276) 646-3232 or bmartin@chilhowieva.gov. Thank you for considering this important request.

Sincerely,

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager