TOWN OF CHILHOWIE, VIRGINIA

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Building Official: C. David Haynes
Wastewater Operations: Luke A. Lowe
Water Operations: Don Cole, II
Special Events/Recreation: Stephen Fields
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Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
May 8, 2025

Good evening, Mayor Heninger and Members of the Town Council. As our May Town Council meeting falls on the 80th V.E. Day (Victory in Europe Day), I would like to start my report with a moment of gratitude and reflection for the young men who, after our nation was attacked, went to war against Nazi Germany, the Empire of Japan, and Mussolini's Fascist Italy. So many Chilhowie boys of that generation went to war to, quite literally, save the world from the evils of Nazism. The ones that came home undoubtedly built the Chilhowie community that we have inherited and now have the honor and responsibility of safekeeping. Unfortunately, a few didn't get to come home. In a war that saw over 400,000 Americans killed, a handful of them were from Chilhowie. Two names that come to mind are Andy Rhudy and Elmer Heath. Private Rhudy's body was repatriated home to Chilhowie after the war and he rests at Mountain View Cemetery. Private Heath remains on the European soil he helped liberate as he is buried in Henri-Chappele American Cemetery in Belgium. I had the distinct honor of visiting Private Heath, my cousin, in 2018 while I was on duty in Europe on the last overseas trip of my military career.

As an Iraq veteran, I saw enough of war to grasp a small comprehension of what that generation experienced. Unlike modern combat operations where we deploy on a rotational basis and have an expected timeframe of when we will return home, the men who fought in World War II never knew a timeline for coming home…they only knew that they got to come home when the job was done and victory was won.

For those men who were able to come home and build our community, and more importantly for those who didn't get to come home, I am deeply grateful. As time takes the last of that generation to the grave, I am thankful that I got to know them, I am humbled by their sacrifices, and I feel that our nation was much less divided when they were the generation in charge. They are truly missed.

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

Hurricane Helene Recovery

The town staff continues to work with FEMA, our engineering partners, wastewater project contractors, and appropriate regulatory agencies to work towards full restoration of infrastructure impacted by Hurricane Helene last Fall. All repairs are now complete related to the town's water system. There is a

door at the Fire Training Center that still needs to be addressed. Chief Haynes is continuing to work with the vendor for the door and related system since it is custom built hardware and can only be repaired by the original manufacturer. The influent pump at the wastewater treatment plant damaged during the storm is now replaced, but on installation it was discovered that some of the wiring was also damaged. This issue could not be seen until the pump was out for replacement. Mr. Lowe is working with the installation contractor to also replace this wiring.

The biggest and most extensive repair to the town's infrastructure is still not complete, but progress continues forward. The design of the replacement crossings for the three aerial river crossings in the wastewater collection system is now complete and has been reviewed by the town staff. The plans have been submitted to FEMA for review and approval and, additionally, the JPA (Joint Permit Application) has been signed by me and submitted by the town's engineering consultants with Hurt & Proffitt to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other pertinent Federal and state regulatory agencies. Their review process can take between 60-90 days and, assuming they approve the plans as submitted, our reconstruction process can be placed out for bid immediately after their approval.

The staff continues to work diligently with FEMA to track our reimbursement requests that have already been submitted as well as coordinate with FEMA staff on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis to craft all pending and future reimbursement requests in keen detail and ensuring the town provides all documentation required by FEMA for their process. In fact, just last week, the town staff worked with FEMA and VDEM representatives to officially request an extension for our project which should carry the town through construction completion later this year.

I would like to thank Ms. Diana Thompson from FEMA for her outstanding support since she has taken over at the town's FEMA representative.

Sewer Improvement Project Update

The town's contractor, Portland Utilities, continues to wrap up small "punch list" tasks as this project winds down toward completion. Our latest Progress Meeting was held May 7th, where the details of the proposed Change Order Number 2 were discussed.

As a reminder, this $3.9 million project was funded through pilot program funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, so project reporting to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will be ongoing for two years after project completion and closeout.

VDOT Communications

Mayor Heninger and I met with VDOT representatives late last month to discuss options for addressing pedestrian safety concerns at the Exit 35 interchange. While everyone agrees that it is a valid concern, there are still the constraints placed on VDOT by the Federal Highway Traffic Safety Administration. we continue to look into any and all options to address this issue and continue to stay in contact with VDOT on a regular basis.

The drainage issues related to the damaged metal grate on Whitetop Road across from McDonalds is slated to be repaired before July 1. The new concrete drainage tiles have been delivered to the VDOT shop in Chilhowie and the town will be notified prior to replacement.

As a reminder, VDOT has scheduled construction to begin on the Interstate bridges at mile marker 34 in early 2027. Construction is slated to be for 30 months.

A bridge project is also scheduled for the Whitetop Road/Highway 107 bridge in town. Project mobilization is slated to begin on June 22nd and traffic will be impacted by lane closures for the period planned to perform repairs to the bridge, including blast cleaning and painting. Project completion is currently scheduled for July 11th. During this period, the Town's walking trail from the H.L. Bonham House to the Town Park that runs under the 107 bridge will be closed on a temporary basis.

United Way of Southwest Virginia Impact Awards

As this year's winners of the Chilhowie Celebrity Bagging Event, Chilhowie raised more money for charity than any other entity participating in the fundraiser. We were invited to the United Way of SWVA's Impact Awards Dinner and Ceremony. In attendance to represent our town were Mayor Heninger and his wife, Mary, Councilman Bill Clear, staff members Felica Eller, Debbie Snavely, Jesse Winebarger, Cora Pruitt, and myself. Congratulations again to our community for helping lead the way in our region!

Wastewater Treatment Plant Permitting Renewal

The town is currently working with Hurt & Proffitt and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to renew our operating permit under the Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES). This renewal is required every five years and this is the first renewal since the town moved away from land application of biosolids and also the first since monitoring for PFAS is required.

The staff continues to take the steps required for permit renewal. Attached is our official notification letter from DEQ. the town's current discharge permit expires May 3, 2026.

Administrative Professionals Day

I took the opportunity to take the town's wonderful administrative staff to lunch on Administrative Professionals Day on April 23rd. I appreciate your support in allowing us to do this to show these hardworking ladies how much we value and appreciate all they do for our town!

Senator Mark Warner's Visit

I represented Chilhowie at Senator Warner's April 15th visit to Smyth County. Chilhowie, Marion, and Smyth County were well represented and took the opportunity to voice the needs of our communities.

Water Accountability

The town staff continues to work towards higher accountability of the water we produce from our water production plant on Mill Creek. As part of this effort, Public Works has so far replaced the master meters at two of the town's largest water customers. Additionally, the six-inch meter that you approved for the Fire Training Center is now on order and will be installed upon arrival. Staff has even worked with our software provider, Southern, to determine if any anomalies in our billing system are contributors to the issue. Last week I took the Chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr. Jim Bonham, on a tour of the town's water system facilities where he was briefed by Mr. Don Cole.

National Flood Insurance Program Training

Chief Haynes and I are scheduled to attend a class at the Higher Education Center in Abingdon to learn more about recent changes to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The class is being hosted by the Floodplain Management Division of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and will address benefits and responsibilities of participating in the NFIP, basic regulations and permitting, along with a walk-through of using Crisis Track. This database proved crucial in collecting and documenting the damage caused by last year's hurricane.

Questions

As always, I welcome any questions about the status of the town's busy activities. Thank you as always for all you do for our town!

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager