Virginia: **At the regular meeting of the Council of the Town of Chilhowie held at the Municipal Building, January 8, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.**

Present: **Honorable Gary L. Heninger, Mayor, presiding;**
Councilors Bill Clear, Brent Foster, Julie Sturgill, and P.J. Wolfe.

Absent: **Councilors Shannon Donnelly and Bob Jeter.**

Also Present: **Mr. Brian Martin, Town Manager; Mrs. Felicia Eller, Clerk/Treasurer; Messrs. Paul Cassell, Town Attorney; Andrew Moss, Police Chief; Aaron Smith, Deputy Chief; David Haynes, Fire and EMS Chief; Jenna Prater, Building Official; Tyler Keen, Public Works Director, Luke Lowe, Chief Wastewater Operator; Heather Carter, Deputy Clerk; and Chris Johnson, Foreman Building, Grounds and Streets.**

Mayor Heninger called the meeting to order. Reverand Justin May, Chilhowie Christian Church, gave the Invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by P.J. Wolfe, second by Julie Sturgill, Council approves the regular December 11, 2025, Council meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

Citizen Time:

Mrs. Rose Likins, Smyth County Library, appeared before Council to express her appreciation to Mr. Brian Martin, Mr. Brent Foster, Mrs. Julie Sturgill, and Mr. Bill Clear for attending the Makerspace ribbon cutting on December 1, 2025. Mrs. Likins also showed her appreciation to Councilman Clear for playing Santa for the children for Christmas. Makerspace classes began during the month of December. Beginning with cerebral 3D printing as well as some Cricut classes. The Library is planning in March to open labs, which will take place on Saturdays. Friends of the Chilhowie Library are meeting Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 6:00 pm. Mrs. Linkins reported that approximately 65 individuals have utilized the Makerspace machines during the first month, which have been conducted in an "in-class" instructional format. Staff are currently developing a January schedule for the Makerspace, which will be posted on both the library's website and Facebook page.

Old Business:

- Update on Removal or Repair of Identifies Unsafe (Burned Out) Structures – Mr. Martin reported that over the past 15 months, Town staff has undertaken efforts to address fire-

damaged and blighted structures, including the demolition of several unsafe properties. He noted that the Town worked cooperatively with the property owner regarding the residence on Sanders Avenue, which has since been demolished at the owner's expense.
Mr. Martin further stated that the property located on the east side of Old Stage Road Extension is scheduled to be addressed in the upcoming Spring, as its location presents logistical challenges. Mr. Martin also advised that there are several additional properties currently under review that may be considered questionable; however, these properties are not presently in direct violation of the Property Maintenance Code. Mr. Martin reminded Council members to notify him if they observe or receive reports of other potentially unsafe properties, and he will review those locations as appropriate.

- Update on Sewer Infiltration and Inflow Project Mr. Martin reported that the Town maintains a strong working relationship with the project contractors and the project is considered substantially complete. An outstanding issue remains involving Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), related to work performed on Bonham Avenue. A meeting with Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is scheduled for Monday, January 12, 2026, to address this matter. Mr. Martin explained that the original scope of the project specified no open-cut excavation of asphalt roadways. However, during the replacement of sewer lines and laterals on Bonham Avenue, the asphalt was cut and subsequently patched. Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) representatives were present for the final project walkthrough, and the On-Site Inspector expressed satisfaction with both the Contractor's work and the Town's efforts. Mr. Martin further noted that a subsequent review by a higher-level Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) official determined that certain requirements were not fully met. The upcoming meeting is intended to reach a resolution with Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Mr. Martin added that the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is prepared to close out the project within the next 30 to 60 days, pending a resolution of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) issue.

- Update on Hurricane Recovery, Approval of Pay Request #3- Mr. Martin advised Council that all repairs have been completed except for three sewer aerial crossings. According to Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) requirements, all work must be completed and out of the water by February 1, 2026. The Contractor has completed all drilling at the Chilhowie Middle School crossing and the Tattle Branch crossing. Work is now progressing at the Seven Mile Ford crossing. Once drilling is completed, concrete placement will begin. Mr. Martin reported, under the alternative design, no structures will be located within the river. All piers will be constructed on the riverbanks, with a hardened casing suspended across the river. The Town received $2.28 million in Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) grant funding last year and that $1,407,778.60 of that funding remains available. He explained that additional costs will remain after the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) funds are expended and that assistance from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will still be required. Mrs. Eller remains in close communication with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regarding this matter. Mr. Martin expressed confidence that the project remains on schedule and that the February 1 deadline

will be met. He respectfully requested Councils approval of Pay Request Number 3 in the amount of $806,948.15.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill, Council approves Pay Request Number 3, in the amount of $806,948.15 The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

- Discussion of Surveillance of Town Hall and Recreation Parks- Several vendors have been contacted regarding surveillance system options. Some proposals received were not feasible due to cost constraints, while others exceeded the technical needs of the Town. Mr. Martin
- reported a meeting was held with the I.T. Contractor currently providing surveillance services for Smyth County Schools; however, no follow-up information has been received to date. Mr. Martin requested that Council continues the discussion of this matter until additional information becomes available.

New Business:

- Rededication of Chilhowie Dog Park- Chief Moss reported that fallen officers have memorials dedicated in their honor. A citizen approached Chief Moss with a request for a memorial bench in honor of Chris Pascel. Chief Moss expressed his belief that a more lasting tribute would be appropriate for the Pascal family and requested that Council consider allocating funding for a Memorial Plaque to be located Dog Park. Council agreed to continue consideration of this request to allow the Chief to consult with local businesses regarding pricing. Chief Moss is requesting to do the Memorial during Police Week during the month of May.
- Adoption of Resolution in Support Increase Aid to Locality Funding- Chief Haynes explained that Department of Fire Programs (DOFP) funding is derived from homeowners' insurance premiums and is allocated annually to each Town and County. The minimum allocation is $15,000**,** which the Town of Chilhowie currently receives due to its population and size, while larger Towns and Counties receive allocations of up to $7 million**.** Chief Haynes noted that the Town's current allocation of $15,000 is insufficient to cover the cost of protective clothing purchased within a single year.

WHEREAS, the Aid to Localities Program that provides monies to localities has not been increases since 1995 and has not kept pace with inflation; and,

WHEREAS, agencies serving communities at, or below, the poverty line face greater challenges but receive the same formula as the more affluent communities in Virginia; and,

WHEREAS, the rising call volumes, declining human resources, and increasing costs are straining departments statewide, and the current Aid to Localities Program formula does not adequately account for poverty levels or local fiscal stress; and,

WHEREAS, the Town of Chilhowie has a higher percentage of residents at, or below, poverty, meaning there are fewer resources to sustain essential emergency services; and,

WHEREAS, the Town of Chilhowie Fire/EMS system is increasingly dependent on local tax dollars; and,

WHEREAS, Chilhowie also has an above average fiscal stress index according to the latest report by the Commission on Local Government; and,

WHEREAS, without reform to the Aid to Localities Program, communities risk longer response times, unsafe staffing levels and outdated equipment.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council of the Town of Chilhowie, Virginia, respectfully requests the General Assembly to: (1) Adopt legislation reforming the Aid to Localities Program funding formula to prioritize agencies serving communities at, or below the poverty line; (2) Increase the overall State support Fire/EMS, as recommended by a Virginia Commonwealth University report; (3) Raise the property insurance fee from (1) percent to two (2) percent over the next biennium to strengthen the Virginia Fire Programs Fund to ensure that Localities can purchase training, protective equipment and apparatus; (4) Make the new $5 Million PPE Grant Fund permanent to guarantee that all firefighters have basic protective equipment; and, (5) Create a targeted "At-Risk Locality" Fund to support jurisdictions struggling most with financial constraints.

Adopted this 8th day of January, 2026. _____

MAYOR

On Behalf of the Town of Chilhowie, Virginia

ATTEST: _____

Town Clerk

Motion by Brent Foster, second by P.J. Wolfe, Council approves the motion to adopt the Resolution in support of Increase Aid to Locality Funding. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

- Review of Second Quarter for Highway Initiative- Deputy Chief Smith reported that during this quarter, 153 traffic stops were conducted, resulting in 112 summonses. Speeds ranged from 82 mph to 99 mph, with 221 total hours worked in highway safety enforcement. Mr. Martin expressed his appreciation for the officers that work Highway safety.
- Update on Recent Updates at Wastewater Treatment Plant- Mr. Lowe, Chief Wastewater operator reported that the Capital Outlay Project for the installation of Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs) is completed, with all units installed and operating as intended. Mr. Lowe advised that the Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs) are expected to result in annual power savings. He further noted positive operational improvements at the oxidation ditch, including biological activity typically observed during summer months occurring during the winter season. These improvements are anticipated to reduce overtime requirements and have demonstrated significant progress in the reduction of biosolids. Mr. Marin and Mr. Lowe discussed how the Packinghouse Road Meter has not been accurately reading consumption. That has since been changed and corrected. The Town has a much more accurate reimbursement from Smyth County for treating wastewater.
- Discussion of Upgrading Gas Meters- Chief Haynes reported the current fiscal year budget includes Capital Expenditure funding designated for the replacement of gas meters. These meters are used in response to carbon monoxide, natural gas, and propane leak incidents. Several of the existing units are more than ten years old. Chief Haynes advised that the department is experiencing increasing operational issues with the equipment, noting that of the four units, two are currently out of service and have been sent for repair. Chief Haynes reported the Department received a Fire Programs grant to cover the cost of turnout gear. He respectfully requested Council's approval to reallocate the budgeted funds originally designated for turnout gear and utilize the Capital Expenditure funds to purchase new gas meters.

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Brent Foster, Council approves the purchase of Gas Meters at the cost of $38,000.00. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

Committee Reports:

- The Finance and Personnel Committee recommends Council to review the proposed purchase of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs). The Committee recommends it

would be more cost-effective to equip each police vehicle with an Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), at a total cost of $9,900.00. This expense shall be considered during the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget process.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill, Council approves the recommendation from Finance & Personnel Committee to review the purchase of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) during the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget process. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

- The Finance and Personnel Committee recommends Council to rename the Tax Revenue anticipation Notice (TRAN) Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) account to Capital Improvements and approve a wire transfer of $80,000.00 from the Cap Fee Fund. The current Capital Fee Fund balance is $96,347.40. Following the payoff of the Tax Revenue anticipation Notice (TRAN), a balance of $6,828.73 remains in the Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) account. With the starting balance of Capital Improvement account being $86,828.73.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill, Council accepts the recommendation from the Finance & Personnel Committee to rename the Tax Revenue anticipation Notice (TRAN) Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) account to Capital Improvements and wire transfer $80,000.00 from Cap Fee Funds. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

- Purchase of New Police Vehicle- Deputy Smith presented three quotes for the purchase of a police vehicle.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill, Council approves the purchase of 2026 Chevrolet Tahoe from Hardy Automotive in the amount of $54,966.00. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

Department Reports:

Mr. Martin advised Council that the Town has sufficient funds available to transfer $80,000.00 into the Capital Improvement Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) account. These funds are currently held in a Town checking account earning minimal interest; by transferring them to the Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) account, the Town would earn approximately four times the current interest rate. Mr. Martin reported that the Town is in a stronger financial position than it was one to two years ago and is currently able to both transfer $80,000.00 to the LGIP account and purchase a new police vehicle using available funds. He commended Mrs. Eller and Mrs. Carter for their hard work and dedication to the Town.

Mrs. Eller expressed her appreciation to Council for their continued support and dedication to the Town and staff. She also advised Council that Mrs. Heather Carter has been promoted to Deputy Clerk and will begin the process of obtaining her Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) Certification. Mrs. Eller further reported that Town staff has issued the second notice of 2025 taxes to customers.

Chief Haynes expressed his appreciation to Council for the generous time off and Food City gift cards provided to staff during the holiday season. Accompanying Chief Haynes at the meeting were Captain Taylor Hyatt, Fire/EMT JJ Barrett, and Engineer Jordan Brown, who attended to observe the Council meeting. Chief Haynes also informed Council that Mrs. Jenna Prater assumed the role of Building Official effective January 1, 2026.

Chief Moss expressed his sincere appreciation to Council for matching the contribution raised for the Santa's Elves program. He reported that while he was on vacation, he delegated responsibility for the program to the Deputy Chief Smith, Lieutenant Perry, and Master Patrolman Millsaps, who successfully managed the fundraiser in his absence. Chief Moss commended their efforts and emphasized that Santa's Elves continues to be an outstanding and meaningful fundraiser that provides significant support and benefits to children within the community.

Mr. Keen expressed his gratitude to Council for the generous time off provided during the holiday season. He reported that staff responded to a total of 13 water leaks, including four main water line leaks located on the Chestnut Ridge. Mr. Keen suggested considering in the coming years replacing the Chestnut Ridge water line, as it is one of the most fragile and oldest lines in the water system. He explained that the line is highly sensitive to pressure fluctuations, and if pressure is not properly maintained, the Schuler Hollow tank will not fill adequately. Mr. Keen further noted that due to the scope and complexity of the project, replacement of this line would most likely require contracted services. Mr. Keen also reported that the Public Works crew cleared five sewer line stoppages and replaced six pressure-reducing valves. Additionally, the Public Works crew assisted the Buildings and Grounds Department with clearing the property located on Overlook Drive. Mr. Keen reported that a homeless encampment was discovered on the property and that removal of the encampment was scheduled to take place.

Mr. Johnson informed Council that a new heater was recently installed at the Loaves & Fishes building. He reported the organization contributed fifty percent of the cost for the heater, with the remaining portion covered by the Town. Mr. Johnson stated that the installation was completed

successfully and will help ensure the building remains adequately heated and functional. Mr. Johnson further reported that the Buildings and Grounds Department removed all Christmas decorations throughout the Town and completed maintenance work involving concrete and drainage improvements behind Town Hall at the Police Department. These efforts were undertaken to address drainage concerns and improve the overall condition and safety of the area.

Any Other Council Business:

Councilman Brent Foster welcomes back Mayor Gary Heninger.

Motion by Bill Clear, second by Brent Foster, Council adjourns this meeting at 7:58 p.m. The motion was approved with following recorded vote:

Bill Clear	Aye	Shannon Donnelly	Absent
Brent Foster	Aye	Bob Jeter	Absent
Julie Sturgill	Aye	P.J. Wolfe	Aye

_____Mayor
Gary L. Heninger

_____Clerk
Felicia Eller, CMC