TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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Building Official: C. David Haynes
Wastewater Operations: Luke A. Lowe
Water Operations: Don Cole, II
Recreation/Special Events Coordinator: Stephen Fields
Buildings, Streets, & Grounds: Christopher Johnson
Legal: Cassell & Crewe, P.C.

Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
February 12, 2026

Good evening,

I hope everyone has been faring well during this cold and snowy season! Before getting into my report, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the dedicated hard work of your town staff members over the past few weeks. As you're aware, Chilhowie contracts with VDOT so that the town staff take care of the vast majority of road scraping and salting in our community. A testament to the outstanding job they do for our community is the fact that I have been approached on numerous occasions by residents expressing their gratitude for the top-notch job that your staff does on keeping our streets and roads as clear and safe as possible. I feel confident that our team maintains our roads to the highest standards and I am very proud of them. I also take great pride in hearing so many positive comments about them over the past three weeks.

Additionally, the professionalism displayed by our first responders of the Chilhowie Police Department and Chilhowie Fire & EMS Department as they responded to calls during the treacherous travel conditions resulting from the ice storm are very commendable. An example of this is the fact that over the 48-hour period of the initial ice storm, our Fire & EMS responded to well over double their average call volume while only having one called that had to be rolled over to another agency!

As the head of your Chilhowie town staff, I always take very seriously the responsibility for the safety and well being of our team members. At the same time, I also take very seriously the need for each and every one of us on this staff to do the best job possible and ensure the residents of our community that they have a solid team of professionals taking care of our town. What I have observed over the past few weeks is evidence of the outstanding job each of them do for our town, its residents, and all of our neighbors on the town's water and wastewater systems.

As always, if you see or hear of something in our town that your staff needs to address, please let me know and we will gladly look into the situation.

Here's a summary of what's going on in your town:

2026 Virginia General Assembly Session & VML/VACO Local Government Day

The 407th Virginia General Assembly session is still underway with "crossover day" slated for February 18th.

I represented our community at the VML Local Government Conference on February 5th and also visited the General Assembly building to speak with our state legislators and their aides about matters important to Chilhowie and Smyth County. Additionally, I attended the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Dinner that evening where representatives from Smyth County, Marion, and Chilhowie came together to discuss issues and convey our needs to state legislators as well as hear their views on various proposed bills. I conveyed to our legislators the town's stance that Aid To Locality (ATL) funding should be increased, as indicated by your support and passage of a resolution at the January Town Council meeting.

I was pleased to see that there are several bills proposed to promote Virginia locality's ability to tax cannabis-based products as well as a bill to allow referendum on sales tax increases to be put toward school construction and improvements.

As a reminder, you can follow the calendar of the 2026 General Assembly session and the progress of all proposed legislation through the Virginia Legislative Information System (LIS) at https://lis.virginia.gov/.

Hurricane Helene Recovery

With the exception of the three aerial river crossings in the town's wastewater collection system, all major repairs have been completed.

Regarding the repair of the three aerial sewer crossings, the project is now underway. The piers at each of the crossing sites are completed so the town and its contractor, Portland Utilities Construction Company, completed the required work and all future work can undertaken without accessing the river. This is very good news in that we adhered to the mandate from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to be completely out of the river by February 1st. The work remaining is to hang the new pipe and casing over the river at each crossing and connect them into the new piers. Most of the material needed for this task is now staged, with the exception of the metal casing, which has been delayed by the supplier. Once it arrives, work will resume and the project will hopefully be completed by mid-April.

The installation of the first line will take place at the lowest crossing near Chilhowie Middle School, followed by the crossing just below the Tattle Branch Road Bridge. Once these are completed, it will facilitate the removal of the pumps and piping system involved in the temporary bypass system. This step alone will result in a savings of almost $20,000 per month.

Finally, I would once again like to thank everyone whose efforts contributed in our town's approval for the $2,281,678 grant through the Virginia Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund (VCWRLF) that has made this project financially feasible for our town!

Sewer Improvement Project Update

This project is now complete. I appreciate the representatives from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) who met with town staff members last month to finalize the pavement patching on Bonham Avenue. This step allowed the town and our engineering consultants at Hurt & Proffitt to

close out this project. In your agenda packet, you have the final pay request. The town has received our Certificate To Operate (CTO) from DEQ and we look forward to tracking how this project will improve efficiency in the collection system as well as at the wastewater treatment plant.

As a reminder, this project was funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) through "pilot project" funding and therefore will require the town and our engineering consultants to monitor collection data at the town's wastewater treatment plant for a period of one year and report to DEQ so that the success of the project can be tracked. I commend Mr. Luke Lowe and the staff at the Wastewater Treatment Plant for their diligent recordkeeping to document our findings.

VDOT Communications

Town staff continue to have regular email or phone communication with both our Chilhowie Residency and the Headquarters in Abingdon. We continue to advocate for solutions to address pedestrian safety at the Exit 35 interchange as well as other areas in our community.

As you're aware, the town has been in conversation with the VDOT, the Principals of Chilhowie High School and Chilhowie Middle School, and the Smyth County Superintendent of Schools in our combined efforts to install more visible signage at both of the crosswalks at the schools on Highway 11. At this point, VDOT has agreed to install solar powered lighted pedestrian signage and is currently researching the best options our community. I conferred with VDOT this past week and they will soon be presenting two options for consideration. Once the final design is determined, the new signs will be ordered and, hopefully, installation will occur before May.

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

Wastewater Treatment Plant Permitting Renewal

The town continues to work 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.

As a reminder, Chilhowie's current permit expires in May 2026. As of now, I see no reason that we won't make that deadline.

Bonham House Repairs and Renovations

There are several issues at the Bonham House that need to be addressed. Primarily, there are at least two areas of the roof that are leaking and causing damage to the ceilings and to the front porch. I have been on the roof of the building with Mr. Chris Johnson to personally see the issues at hand. On January 24th, I notified the staff and board members of the Smyth County Chamber of Commerce that the town is aware of these problems and intends to address them just as soon as we could turn away from the pressing town issues arising from the ice, snow, and prolonged cold temperatures. Now that your staff has some time to dedicate to these matters, I have drafted a list of the repairs needed and your staff is working with area contractors to solicit quotes. Once received, I will let you know how much funding we will be looking at.

Additionally, once quotes are received, I plan to approach Smyth County and the other two Smyth towns to request their assistance in funding these repairs.

As you're aware, over the past seven months, the town has replaced both outside HVAC units at the buildings as well as rebuilding a section of the front porch that had become rotted and unsafe. The staff has also repaired on several occasions the chairlift elevator on the side of the building.

As part of our upcoming budget for Fiscal Year 2026-27, I plan to budget funds for the construction of an ADA-compliant ramp that will replace the aging and increasing problematic chairlift elevator. As with the repairs at hand that we are addressing, I intend to request that the other Smyth localities provide a portion of the funding for this improvement project.

Budget Preparation for Upcoming Fiscal Year

It's hard to believe, but it is already the time of year to begin preparations for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026-2027. Ms. Eller and I will be starting the initial steps of gathering information and collecting staff inputs to start the first draft of the budget.

I have sent out the request letter to the community organizations that you chose to fund in this current year's budget. I have set a deadline of March 7th for them to submit their funding requests.

If you have ideas or suggestions for your staff as we begin these initial steps, please contact me or Ms. Eller so that we can incorporate them into our planning.

Smyth/Washington County 4-H 8th Grade Career Explore Event

I was invited to serve as a presenter at the Smyth/Washington 4-H 8th Grade Career Explore Event, which was to be held on January 26-27. The event was cancelled due to the inclement weather and has been rescheduled for May 11-12. I plan to attend so that our community's youth can have a little insight into how a career serving our community can be an option for them and how important service in local government is to our way of life. If you have any ideas or suggestions regarding the information I should provide them, please let me know.

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