TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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

325 East Lee Highway
P.O. Box 5012
Chilhowie, Virginia 24319
Phone: (276) 646-3232
Fax: (276) 646-3012
www.chilhowie.org

Town Manager: Brian Martin
Clerk-Treasurer: Felicia C. Eller
Police Chief: Andrew K. Moss
Director-Public Works: Tyler Keen
Fire /EMS Chief: C. David Haynes
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
January 8, 2026

Good evening,

Happy New Year! I want to once again thank all of our elected officials and staff for helping lead our town through another successful year in 2025 and I look forward to working to make our community even stronger in 2026.

I look forward to hearing from you what you feel should be the priorities for our community in the upcoming year. As for me, one thing I will prioritize is the final repairs of our aerial wastewater crossings that were destroyed during Hurricane Helene and finalizing our accounts with FEMA and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). It will be a great feeling when we can finally put this chapter behind us. Another issue I would like to prioritize is to partner with the Smyth County Public Schools to undertake improvements to the baseball field at Chilhowie High/Middle School so that our student athletes and their families have a field that is second to none in Smyth County. Also, I want to work with the Pathway Park Industrial Facility Authority to either locate a suitable industry on that site or begin the process of working to remove the industrial covenants on the property so that our community can look toward other economic development opportunities. Finally, I want to work with anyone who wants to help grow our town and our economy…but in the right way and on Chilhowie's terms.

In the next couple of weeks, I plan to write a letter of congratulations and welcome to the incoming Virginia Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs. Retired Major General Timothy Williams was selected to serve in this role last month and began his new duties at the first of the year. He had previously served as Virginia's Adjutant General (Commander of the Virginia National Guard) from 2014 until his retirement in 2023. While the Office of the Secretary is most always held by a retired military officer, the appointment of Major General Williams pleases me in the fact that he was a citizen-soldier, as I was, and will bring a firm understanding of the challenges of our Commonwealth's reserve component (RC) soldiers and airmen that our active duty counterparts often don't grasp. Additionally, as a former military commander myself, I am very happy to see him in this position given his leadership positions in the 29th Infantry Division, which is an operational headquarters unit of the National Guard and has strong historic Virginia ties dating back to World War I, but is most noted for their actions as one of the first units to land on Omaha Beach during Operation Overlord. The significantly high losses that the 29th suffered during the Normandy landings is the reason that the National D-Day Memorial was built in Bedford, Virginia. Finally, like me, he is a veteran of the war in Iraq so he truly understands the serious nature of doing everything you possibly can to take care of the men and women that trust you to lead them in a

combat zone and bring them back home. I wish him well in his tenure as Secretary and hope to invite him to visit Chilhowie.

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

2026 Virginia General Assembly Session

As you're aware, the 407th Virginia General Assembly session is scheduled to begin on January 14th, 2026. Some of the proposed legislation that I will be tracking are the bills related to energy affordability, increased vape restrictions, marijuana retail licenses, and improved PBM reform. These four "hot items" may have the most direct impacts for the residents of our community. Additionally, I will continue to advocate for the creation of a taxing mechanism for vape products, hopefully mirroring the calculations for cigarette taxation.

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/

The VML/VACO Local Government Day is set for February 5th. I plan to represent Chilhowie and intend to visit with each of our state legislators and their staff while there. Over the next few weeks, I will be drafting our town's list of priorities to bring to their attention. Please let me know any issues you would like to see addressed so that I can include them.

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. Temporary access roads have been built, materials have been mobilized, and cleanup of debris is complete. Staff, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), our contractors with Portland Utilities, Hurt & Proffitt, and staff from the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission will hold our fourth progress meeting next week.

The alternative design for the support of the crossings has now been approved by Hurt & Proffit and DEQ. This revised design will eliminate the need for support structures in the waterways, therefore drastically minimizing points where debris can accumulate during high water events. This alternative design has all support structures located on the riverbanks, while also providing more resilient support for the casings over the river, and if the pipes are ever broken again, this design should allow for much quicker and economical repair.

In addition to a small cost savings of approximately $40,000, this revised, more resilient design, will be more likely to be eligible for mitigation reimbursements from FEMA. Ms. Eller has submitted plans for this new design to FEMA, and they are currently under review.

We have initiated work at the crossing behind Chilhowie Middle/High School and then will proceed to the crossing just below the Tattle Branch Bridge. Reconstruction of these two aerials will allow the removal of the temporary wastewater bypass that will result in savings to the town of over $17,000 per month.

I cannot begin to express my gratitude to your staff for helping corral these repairs and itemized expenses over the past year. Finally, I would like to give a special thank you to Ms. Eller who has done a top-notch job of keeping me and the other department heads on point with the requirements that FEMA had set forth. Without her dedication, the town would not be receiving reimbursements anywhere near the level that we are.

Finally, the $2,281,678 funding package from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that Chilhowie was approved for is now closed with the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA). I signed the closing documents in early November and the town has begun drawing these funds down. Once again, I would like to thank everyone whose efforts contributed in our town's approval for this money through the Virginia Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund (VCWRLF)!

Sewer Improvement Project Update

This project is now complete, with the exception of a final decision from VDOT on pavement patching along Bonham Avenue, where lateral lines were replaced. Once a determination is received from VDOT, any street repairs deemed necessary can be made and this project will officially be completed. At this point, the town is working with VDOT to coordinate an in-person site visit to flesh out the final approach to address this issue.

As a reminder, this project was funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law 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 Area 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. Hopefully now that we are past the holidays, we can get momentum on making this project a reality.

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.

Mount Rogers Water/Wastewater Fund & Widener Tank Refurbishment

This $93,752 rehabilitation project is completed, the contractor (Mid-Atlantic) has been paid in full, and the town has received our grant funds from the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission to reimburse the town's expenses in full.

Assuming that the General Assembly again funds this invaluable program, your staff will apply for funding next fiscal year in hopes of undertaking rehabilitation and renovation on more of our aging water tanks.

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