Virginia: **At the regular meeting of the Council of the Town of Chilhowie held at the Municipal Building, February 12, 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. Mrs. Stephanie Porter-Nichols gave the Invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Bill Clear, second by Brent Foster, Council approves the regular January 8, 2026, Council meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Citizen Time:

Mrs. Amanda Livingston, Director of Tourism for Smyth County, reported that visitors to the Historic Downtown District primarily consist of local residents within a 30-mile radius, with many travelers also entering the Town by way of Interstate 81 (I-81). According to the most recent 2024 data, Smyth County's tourism industry generated 33.6 million in economic impact, reflecting an increase from 2023. Mrs. Livingston expressed satisfaction that tourism numbers remained strong despite the challenges presented by the 2024 Hurricane. A grant-funded article highlighting the history of Chilhowie was published on the Visit Smyth County website and is currently ranked among the top 20 most visited articles. Increased marketing efforts could potentially result in additional Meals Tax revenue and tourism-related growth for the Town. $200,000 has been secured through grant funding to support tourism initiatives. Additionally, Mrs. Livingston requested consideration of including the Chilhowie Historic District in the Virginia Main Street Program, similar to the Town of Marion and the Town of Wytheville. Participation in this program would provide access to grant funding opportunities, including studies and resources to support small business development; exploring possible enhancements to the Recreation Park as a strategy to

attract additional visitors. Mrs. Livingston stated that these initiatives are among the primary goals for the 2026–2027 fiscal years.

Ms. Lola Whitt, the mother of a senior at Chilhowie High School, appeared before Council to discuss the possibility of displaying senior banners throughout the Town. Ms. Whitt reported that while traveling through Russell County, she noticed that the Town displayed banners featuring senior portraits. She explained that the Chilhowie High School Class of 2026 has 96 seniors and proposed that each banner feature two students, with one student displayed on each side. The banners would be purchased by the parents, and the Town would assist by installing them on existing poles.

Mrs. Sturgill requested that Mr. Johnson obtain quotes for brackets needed to mount the banners on the poles and present that information for further discussion at the next Council meeting.

Ms. Heather Carter, Branch Manager of the Chilhowie Public Library, expressed her appreciation to all who attended the appreciation dinner held in honor of Mr. Lynn Pease. Mrs. Connie Wyatt was elected as the new President of the Friends of the Library as of January. Ms. Carter reported several Maker Space programs were scheduled; however, a number of them were canceled due to inclement weather. Additional programs have been posted on the Library's website, which has recently been updated to allow for appointment scheduling. The Makers Space operating hours will be Tuesday and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Friday and Saturdays reserved for scheduled programs.

Old Business:

- Update on Removal or Repair of Identifies Unsafe (Burned Out) Structures – Mr. Martin reported that, since August 2024, the Town has successfully addressed seven burned or blighted residential structures. These efforts were accomplished through coordination with property owners, when necessary, by utilizing enforcement measures in collaboration with the Building Official, Law Enforcement, and the Public Works Department. Mr. Martin identified two primary goals for the upcoming calendar year: addressing the property located on Eastern Old Stage Road Extension and the property on Sunset Drive. He also noted that a residence on Greevers Street has recently changed ownership, and the Town is currently working with the new owners, who are working diligently to remediate the property.

- Update on Sewer Infiltration and Inflow Project, Approval of Final Pay Request Number 15 - Mr. Dennis Amos, Hurt and Proffitt, reported that the Town is working diligently to close out the project. The Department of Environmental Quality has issued a Certificate to Operate; however, several additional documents are required to complete the closeout process. Mr. Amos stated that the final pay request has been submitted in the amount of $173,115.51. For the first year following the project completion the Town is required to submit a follow-up report to the Department of Environmental Quality to evaluate the

impact and effectiveness of the improvements. The Wastewater Treatment Plant will compile and compare the original performance data with updated figures to ensure all regulatory requirements are satisfied and the project can be fully closed out. Mr. Martin respectfully requests council approve the motion of the final Pay Request number 15 in the amount of $173,115.51.

Motion by Bill Clear, second by Julie Sturgill, Council approves the Infiltration & Inflow Project Final Pay Request Number 15 in the amount of $173,115.51. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Update on Hurricane Recovery, Approval of Pay Request Number 4- Mr. Dennis Amos, Hurt and Proffitt, reported that all piers at the three river crossings have been completed and that the established deadline to be out of the river was successfully met. The contractors have received delivery of the encasement pipes and are currently performing exterior welding on the casings. Upon completion of the welding, a crane will be mobilized to place the pipes onto the piers. Mr. Amos noted that the project is progressing at a steady pace and is currently estimated to be completed in early spring, potentially by April. Mr. Martin respectfully requests that council approve the Hurricane Recovery Pay Request Number 4 in the amount of $514,485.47

Motion by P.J. Wolfe, second by Bob Jeter, Council approves the Hurricane Recovery Pay Request Number 4 in the amount of $514,485.47. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Discussion of Surveillance of Town Hall and Recreation Parks - Mrs. Eller reported that she contacted multiple organizations to obtain quotes for surveillance services with only one response. Mr. Martin informed Council that the Police Department manages a significant amount of liability related to custody exchanges and noted that there is currently no exterior camera coverage outside the department. Mr. Martin requested approval to purchase four Ring cameras: two to be installed in the Police Department parking lot, one in the hallway outside the Police Department entrance, and one in the lobby of Town Hall.

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Brent Foster, Council authorizes the purchase of ring cameras not to exceed $1,200.00. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Rededication of Chilhowie Dog Park- Chief Moss reported to Council that he consulted with the vendor that was recommended at the January 8, 2026, Council meeting. The vendor advised Chief Moss the etching would not achieve the same quality or appearance as it would have if completed by Crutchfield Monument. During further discussion, Council acknowledged the commemorative designations within the Town: the baseball fields are dedicated in memory of Officer Prater; the Farmers Market is dedicated in memory of Will Walker; and the Recreation Park is dedicated in memory of Lucas Dowell. A discussion ensued to purchase an additional plaque for the Splash Pad in memory of Officer Reedy.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council approves unbudgeted expense for a memorial plaque in honor of Christopher Kent Paschal in the amount of $1,903.82 from the General Fund Contingency Fund. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

New Business:

- Update on the Town Owned Property, Overlook Drive – Mr. Martin reported that the 1.5-acre lot owned by the Town, located just outside the town limits and previously discussed on the summer agenda, had become significantly overgrown. The property has since been fully cleared. During the process, staff discovered usable, clean land as well as some unexpected occupants on the property. Mr. Martin noted that the Town has owned this parcel since the early 1980s, and with the recent clearing efforts, the property is now in a condition that may make it suitable for potential sale given its location and improved state.

- Discussion of Purchase of Building Inspection Software- Mrs. Prater informed Council that staff have been searching for building inspection software for several years. With several new housing projects anticipated in the coming months, the current permitting process—completed manually using a Microsoft Word document drafted by Mr. Haynes many years ago—has become increasingly time-consuming. She explained that completing a single permit currently requires a significant amount of staff time due to the manual process. Mrs. Prater explained that implementing a building inspection software system would allow the entire permitting process to be completed online. Citizens and contractors would be able to submit permit requests, upload plans and documentation, and track the status of their applications without needing to visit the Town office. Inspections could also be accessed and documented electronically in the field, eliminating the need for paper files. The system would also be compatible with the County's GIS software and would allow the Town to incorporate applicable code sets, including additional local codes and fire codes. Mrs. Prater

reported that she contacted four software companies regarding this service, and two companies responded with proposals. The proposal from Cloud permit includes a one-year setup fee of $6,650, which covers development and implementation of the system. The proposal from Civic Plus totals $24,100.

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Brent Foster, Council refers the purchase of Building Inspection Software to the Finance and Personal Committee. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Request to schedule Public Hearing, Increase Building Inspection Fees- Mrs. Jenna Prater, Building Inspector, reported that the Town's building inspection fees have not been increased since 2017. She stated that, after reviewing Smyth County's current building inspection fee schedule, the County's fees are approximately 36% higher than those currently charged by the Town.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bill Clear, Council authorizes the Town Manager to advertise for a Public Hearing to be held during the regular scheduled Council Meeting Thursday, March 12, 2026 to increase Building Inspection Fees. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Request to Schedule Public Hearing, increase Fire & EMS Fees- Chief Haynes reported that it has been several years since the Fire and EMS Department has increased its Fire and EMS fees. He stated that he worked with Smyth County in reviewing the proposed rates, which are consistent with the rates Smyth County is also proposing to implement.

Motion by Bob Jeter, second by Brent Foster, Council authorizes the Town Manager to advertise for a Public Hearing to be held during the regular scheduled Council Meeting Thursday, March 12, 2026, to increase Fire and EMS Fees. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Request to schedule Public Hearing, Increase Fire & EMS Training Center Fees – Chief Haynes reported that the Fire and EMS Department has experienced challenges with billing for use of the Fire and EMS Training Center, particularly in determining when users should be billed and when fees should be waived. He noted that there are some clear situations where billing is appropriate and others where it is not.

Chief Haynes stated that the fee schedule is currently being refined to provide clearer guidance on what services and uses will be billed, as well as the applicable rates. He explained that the original fee schedule was developed when the program was still relatively new, and the proposed updates reflect the Department's experience and a better understanding of appropriate rates and billable services.

Additionally, Chief Haynes reported that Public Works has installed a water meter at the Training Center, which will allow the Town to measure the amount of water used during training exercises and bill users accordingly.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by P.J. Wolfe, Council authorizes the Town Manager to advertise for a Public Hearing to be held during the regular scheduled Council Meeting Thursday, March 12, 2026, to increase Fire and EMS Training Center Fees. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Discussion of Fire & EMS Junior Program – Chief Haynes reported that several years ago there was interest in establishing a Junior Program. At that time, the Fire and EMS Department utilized the Boy Scouts Exploring Program, primarily because the program provided insurance coverage. The Department participated in the program for several years and it operated successfully. Over time, however, the junior members either moved into the Fire Department as adult members or left the program, resulting in the Explorer Post becoming inactive for a period of time.

  When interest resurfaced in reviving the program, the Department contacted the Boy Scouts to explore reestablishing the Explorer Post. They were advised that the Department would need to restart the program from the beginning, which would require a minimum of five participants. At that time, the Department did not have five interested youth.

  As an alternative, the Department explored obtaining separate coverage through Volunteer Fireman's Insurance Services. Chief Haynes noted that this insurance coverage is costly and, given the current lack of interest in the program, it is resulting in an unnecessary expense to the Town. Therefore, the Town is requesting Council's approval to suspend the program. Chief Haynes also noted that, after reviewing the Town's Code, he believes suspending the program may not be an option under the current ordinance.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bill Clear, Council refers this matter to the Town Attorney to investigate what the Town's options are in regards of suspending the Fire and EMS Junior Program. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Surplus of Recreation Football Helmets – Mr. Stephen Fields, Special Events and Recreation, reported that there are 24 football helmets with an initial purchase date of 2016. He explained that football helmets have a recommended service life of ten years, and these helmets have now reached the end of that period and are no longer considered safe for use by the Town.

  Mr. Fields requested approval to list the helmet shells on GovDeals for disposal. He noted that the internal padding will be removed prior to sale to prevent the helmets from being reused for play.

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Bob Jeter, Council approves surplus of 24 Recreation Football Helmets and place on GovDeals for sale. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Discussion of Wellness and Parks Capital Outlay – Mr. Stephen Fields, Special Events and Recreation, reported that the Abingdon Parks and Recreation Football League generously donated shoulder pads to the Town's Recreation Department. As a result of the donation, the Town no longer needs to purchase shoulder pads but is instead in need of new football helmets. Mr. Fields stated that $1,620 had previously been earmarked for the purchase of shoulder pads and requested Council's approval to reallocate those funds toward the purchase of new football helmets.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council approves to remove the earmarked $1,620 for Recreation Football shoulder pads and reallocate to the purchase of Recreation Football Helmets. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Approval 2026 Chilhowie Little League Agreement – Mr. Fields reported that the Town continues to maintain an excellent relationship with the Chilhowie Little League. He noted

that there are no changes to the 2026 Chilhowie Little League contract from the 2025 agreement.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council approves the 2026 Little League Agreement as presented. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Update of Double D Water Project – Mr. Dennis Amos, of Hurt and Proffitt, reported that the survey of the project site has been completed. He also stated that the preliminary engineering conference with the Health Department in Abingdon has been conducted. Following that meeting, the Health Department issued a letter indicating that a preliminary engineering report, along with plans and specifications, would be required. Mr. Amos reported that Hurt and Proffitt has completed the preliminary engineering report and submitted it for review. Once approval is received, they will proceed with submitting the project plans and specifications for the Health Department's review and approval. He noted that, from a design standpoint, that is the current status of the project.

  Mr. Keen, Public Works Director, reported that once the plans are received, he will begin ordering the necessary materials and preparing to start the project. He noted that there is currently no fire protection in the Double D area, and once the project is completed, fire protection will be available. Mr. Keen also stated that 37 new water taps will be installed, which will increase both revenue and water accountability for the Town.

- Discussion of Community Flood Preparedness Fund – Mr. Dennis Amos, of Hurt and Proffitt, reported that several months ago the firm approached the Town with an opportunity to apply for grant funding to address flood preparedness. Mr. Amos stated that Hurt and Proffitt worked with Town staff to prepare and submit the application to the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

  Mr. Amos reported that the Town was notified in January 2026 that the application was successful. The grant award is in the amount of $450,000, which is fully funded through the grant. The Town is required to provide a $50,000 match, bringing the total project funding to $500,000.

  Mr. Amos explained that the project will involve studying areas within the Town that are prone to flooding and identifying potential measures to mitigate future flooding events.

Department Reports:

Mr. Brian Martin, Town Manager, commended Town staff for their hard work during the recent snow and ice storm. Mr. Martin stated that he has been approached on numerous occasions by residents expressing their appreciation for the outstanding job the Public Works Department does in keeping the Town's streets and roads as clear and safe as possible. During the 48-hour ice storm, the Chilhowie Police Department and the Chilhowie Fire and EMS Department responded to every call despite the hazardous travel conditions. Mr. Martin noted that the Fire and EMS Department typically responds to eight to eleven calls during an average 24-hour period; however, during the 48-hour ice storm, the Department responded to 31 calls, with only one call being transferred to another agency.

Mr. Martin also reported that he represented Chilhowie at the 2026 Virginia General Assembly Session and attended the Virginia Municipal League and Virginia Association of Counties Local Government Day. He stated that the LED crosswalk signs planned for installation in front of the High School and Middle School have been ordered by the Virginia Department of Transportation and are expected to arrive within the next sixty days. Mr. Martin further reported that several issues at the Bonham House need to be addressed and noted that preparation for the upcoming budget process is beginning.

Mrs. Felicia Eller, Clerk/Treasurer, reviewed the Town's account balances. Mrs. Eller reported that she changed the name on the Local Government Investment Pool account from the Tax and Revenue Anticipation Bond account to the Capital Improvements account. She also stated that she will transfer $80,000 from the Capital Outlay checking account to the Capital Improvements Local Government Investment Pool account.

Mr. Andrew Moss, Police Chief, thanked Council for approving funding for him and Deputy Chief Aaron Smith to attend the Chief's Conference in Richmond, Virginia. Chief Moss reported that both he and Deputy Chief Smith received valuable information at the conference and expressed hope that Lieutenant Perry will be able to attend in the future.

Mr. Tyler Keen, Public Works Director, reported that the Public Works Department repaired eight water leaks, unclogged five sewer lines, and replaced five pressure-reducing valves. The Department also completed thirty-seven Miss Utility markings and cleaned the Town-owned lot on Overlook Drive. During the snow and ice storm, the Public Works Department pushed snow for a total of 102 hours, with many employees working up to nineteen consecutive days. Mr. Keen noted that although numerous residents lost power during the storm, no one experienced a loss of water service. He stated that he and his team worked diligently to reroute water around the pump station while the power was out. Mr. Keen also reported that the Department has begun mapping the main water valves in the system using GPS and marking them with blue flags. Additionally, the entire Public Works Department recently received training on rebuilding fire hydrants.

Mr. Chris Johnson, Building, Streets, and Grounds Foreman**,** reported that the Building and Grounds Department has been busy removing brush and debris resulting from the ice storm. A discussion followed regarding the bleachers at the Little League softball field not meeting current code requirements. Council recommended relocating the bleachers from the Town Park to the Little League field and permanently mounting them in place.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill, Council adjourns this meeting at 8:382p.m. The motion was approved with following recorded vote:

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

_____Mayor
Gary L. Heninger

_____Clerk
Felicia Eller, CMC