Virginia: **At the regular meeting of the Council of the Town of Chilhowie held at the Municipal Building, March 12, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.**

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

Absent: **Councilors Brent Foster 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 P.J. Wolfe, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council approves the regular February 12, 2026, Council meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Public Hearing:

- Proposed Increase in Building Inspection Fees – Mrs. Eller Presented the following

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
FOR
PROPOSED INCREASE IN BUILDING INSPECTION FEES

Pursuant to Section 15.1427 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, The Town of Chilhowie Town Council will conduct a Public Hearing on the proposed increase in Building Inspection Fees. The Public Hearing will begin at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 12, 2026, in the Council Chambers, Chilhowie Town Hall, 325 East Lee Highway, Chilhowie, Virginia.

By Order of Mayor Heninger and Chilhowie Town Council

Mayor Heninger opened the Public Hearing at 7:20p.m.

No one wished to speak.

Mayor Heninger Closed the Public Hearing at 7:21p.m.

- Proposed Fire, EMS, and Fire & EMS Training Center Fees - Mrs. Eller Presented the following

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
FOR
PROPOSED FIRE, EMS, AND FIRE & EMS TRAINING CENTER FEES

Pursuant to Section 15.2-1427 of Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, The Town of Chilhowie Town Council will conduct a Public Hearing on the proposed increase in Fire, EMS, and Fire and EMS Training Center Fees. The Public Hearing will begin at 7:05 p.m. or shortly after on Thursday March 12, 2026, in the Council Chambers, Chilhowie Town Hall, 325 East Lee Highway, Chilhowie, Virginia.

By Order of Mayor Heninger and Chilhowie Town Council

Mayor Heninger opened the Public Hearing at 7:22p.m.

No one wished to speak.

Mayor Heninger Closed the Public Hearing at 7:23p.m.

Citizen Time:

No one wished to speak

Old Business:

- Update on Removal or Repair of Identifies Unsafe (Burned Out) Structures – Mr. Martin opened his remarks by acknowledging that the Town of Chilhowie's implementation of its own maintenance code and in-house building inspection program has proven to be highly successful over the past two years. He commended the Public Works Department, as well as the Buildings and Grounds staff, for their diligent efforts in maintaining and cleaning up properties throughout the town. Mr. Martin also recognized Mrs. Eller and the Town Attorney for their effective oversight of financial matters, including the placement of liens on noncompliant properties. Additional investigation is needed for certain properties in the fall, specifically those located on Old Stage Road Extension and at the dead end of Sunset Drive.

- Update on the Sewer Infiltration and Inflow Project- Mr. Martin reported that the project has been completed following two years of work, with significant improvements achieved through the rehabilitation of water lines, sewer lines, and multiple manholes. A surplus in project funding allowed for the execution of five change orders, addressing additional problem areas along Bonham Avenue as well as issues identified by the Public Works Department in Seven Mile Ford. Early results from these improvements are already becoming evident. As a pilot project, performance data will be tracked over the course of one year to evaluate and quantify overall success. This item will be removed from the agenda moving forward.

- Update on Hurricane Recovery, Approval of Pay Request Number 5 – Mr. Martin reported that, following several challenging months, the project has entered the final phase of recovery, which includes the replacement of three aerial crossings. All three crossings have been installed and are ready for the pipes to be suspended across the river, pending suitable weather conditions and delivery of the crane. Mr. Martin and Mrs. Eller recently participated in a closeout meeting with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Town of Chilhowie's disaster related to Hurricane Helene has been officially closed at the federal level. All remaining funding will now proceed through the reimbursement process to the Town. Mr. Martin expressed confidence that all Hurricane Helene-related matters will be fully resolved by the end of the calendar year. Mr. Martin respectfully requested Council's approval of Final Pay Request No. 5 in the amount of $176,971.62.

  Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Bill Clear, Council approves the Final Pay Request Number 5 in the amount of $176,937.62. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Discussion of Chilhowie High School Senior Banners- Mr. Martin reminded Council that Mrs. Whitt addressed the body at the previous meeting on behalf of the Chilhowie High School senior parents. The Town subsequently obtained three quotes, with the lowest bid for 50 brackets totaling $1,705.00. The banners will be displayed from the end of April through graduation, scheduled for May 22, 2026. Each pole will be equipped with one bracket, with a senior featured on each side. The senior parents involved have expressed strong enthusiasm and support for this initiative.

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council approves the purchase of the brackets for the Senior Banners. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Discussion of Fire & EMS Junior Program- Chief Haynes reminded Council that the reinstatement of this program had been discussed several years ago; however, the effort was not pursued due to its affiliation with the Boy Scouts and their Explorer Program. Chief Haynes respectfully requested that Council approve the suspension of the Fire & EMS Junior Program, noting that doing so would result in savings on insurance costs.

  Motion by P.J. Wolfe, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council approves to suspend the Fire & EMS Junior. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Update of Double D Water Project- Mr. Martin reported that the water line replacement project will be completed in-house through a collaborative effort among the Public Works, Buildings and Grounds, and Water/Wastewater Departments, along with the Town Manager. Completing the project internally is expected to result in significant cost savings by avoiding the need for outside contractors. At this time, the project is on hold pending review and approval of the plans by the Health Department. Mr. Martin indicated he will follow up with the department the following Monday, noting that the project is included in the current fiscal year budget and should move forward while funds remain available.

- Discussion of Community Flood Preparedness Fund- Mr. Martin reminded Council that the Town has been awarded $450,000 from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to conduct a comprehensive study of stormwater and drainage issues. He further noted that the Town is providing a $50,000 matching contribution, which may be allocated over a two-year period.

New Business:

- Council Action, Public Hearing, For Proposed Increase in Building Inspection Fees- Mr. Martin respectfully requests council approves the Proposed Increase in Building Inspection Fees

  Motion by Bill Clear, second by P.J. Wolfe, Council approves the Proposed Increase in Building Inspection Fees. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Council Action, Public Hearing for Proposed Fire, EMS and Fire & EMS Training Center Fees- Mr. Martin respectfully requests Council approves the Proposed Fire & EMS and Fire & EMS Training Center Fees

  Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Bill Clear, Council approves the Proposed Increase Fire & EMS and Fire & EMS Training Center Fees. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Board of Zoning Appeals, Expiring Terms- Mrs. Eller informed Council that three BZA members were up for reappointment, she respectfully asks Council to recommend to reappoint Nick Deskins, Rebecca Wilkinson-Smith, and Kathy Wright.

  Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council recommends to reappoint Nick Deskins, Rebecca Wilkinson-Smith, and Kathy Wright to serve a 5-year term on the Board of Zoning Appeals. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Presentation of 2025 Annual Drinking Water Quality Report- Mr. Cole reported to Council that the Town's water quality remains excellent, noting that the community is fortunate to be supplied by naturally filtered spring sources. He explained that the annual water quality report is required by the Virginia Department of Health and includes testing for contaminants, metals, inorganic compounds, and synthetic substances. Mr. Cole further stated that any detected levels, regardless of how minimal, must be disclosed in the report. The report will be made available on the Town's website, distributed with utility billing statements, published in the Smyth County newspaper, and displayed on the marquee outside Town Hall.

- Discussion of Alternative Water Sources- Mr. Martin informed Council of the need to proactively evaluate additional water sources to support the Town's continued growth. He noted that the Town is currently permitted to withdraw up to 3.1 million gallons per day from the water treatment plant; however, as the customer base expands, it is essential to ensure an adequate and reliable water supply for both potable use and fire protection. Mr. Martin further explained that several spring sources are currently offline, including a Town spring line that has been inactive since the 1990s. He stated that Mr. Cole, Mr. Keen, Mr. Amos, and the Washington County Service Authority (WCSA) have been working collaboratively to explore options for bringing these spring sources back online, which would significantly increase the Town's available water capacity.

- Discussion of Paper Lawn and Leaf Bags for Removal of grass clippings- Mr. Keen informed Council that the Town has been awarded a Litter Grant to assist residents within the Town limits. He explained that, due to the challenges associated with burning plastic materials, the Town will no longer permit plastic in brush pile disposal. Mr. Keen noted that the Town currently spent $20,000 this annual year on brush pile cleanup, including significant time dedicated to removing plastic debris. He further stated that public notification will be provided through inserts with utility billing statements, as well as postings on the Town's website, social media platforms, and the marquee outside Town Hall.

- Discussion of the state of Virginia 250th Celebration- Councilman Clear reported that he has taken the lead on an initiative to ensure the Town of Chilhowie is represented in upcoming festivities. He noted that he has attended an initial planning meeting to advocate for the Town's inclusion and to increase awareness of Chilhowie's historical significance. Councilman Clear further stated that, aside from the Bonham House (Tourism House), there are currently limited attractions within Town limits that draw visitors. He expressed a desire to expand tourism opportunities and bring additional events and features to Chilhowie. He also noted that the Town of Marion is planning to install one flag

representing each state and that, while the monument is located nearby, Chilhowie represents the furthest historically significant location included in the program.

- Student Government Day- Mrs. Eller reminded Council that Student Government Day is scheduled for March 19. Students will arrive at the Lincoln Theatre in Marion at 9:15 a.m. and will return at approximately 12:30 p.m. Mrs. Eller explained that the students' visit will begin in the Council Chambers, where they will receive a brief overview of the Town's history and an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of Council. She also noted that all Council members are encouraged to attend and are welcome to speak with the students during the event.

- Crooked Road Announcement for Chilhowie- Mrs. Livingston informed Mr. Martin that the Town of Chilhowie has now been added to the crooked road due to the Jam-bores at the Lion's Club every Thursday.

- Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day- Martin reminded Council that the Town participates in this initiative with a contribution of $2,000. He noted that Smyth County funds the majority of the program, with each of the three towns providing a smaller contribution. The event will be held at the Smyth Career and Technical Center in Seven Mile Ford on May 2, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Committee Reports:

Mrs. Prater explained that the Town currently relies on manual processes for building permits, fire inspections, and building inspections, with documentation maintained through Microsoft Word. This process is time-consuming for staff and requires citizens and contractors to appear in person to complete applications and submit payments at Town Hall. She noted that most surrounding localities—including Smyth County, Grayson County, Washington County, and the Town of Abingdon—have implemented digital permitting and inspection platforms. As the Town is the only locality in the immediate area not utilizing such software, there is an increased risk of inefficiencies, including the potential for missed permits and delayed inspections.

The Fire and EMS Department's current use of ESO software for reporting purposes. He explained that a portion of the ESO contract is funded through the Mount Rogers Ambulance Service Authority (MARSAMB), which includes certain software and hardware components; however, the Town incurs additional costs for supplemental modules. These include a required fire reporting module, a hydrant testing and maintenance module used to track inspections and readings, as well as inspection and occupancy modules. He noted that ESO integrates with the 911 dispatch system,

allowing incident information entered by dispatchers to automatically populate reports, thereby improving efficiency and reducing time spent on documentation in the field.

Chief Haynes further advised that the proposed cloud-based permitting software under consideration includes fire inspection and occupancy tracking capabilities similar to those currently provided through ESO add-on modules. As a result, the Town could potentially eliminate the existing ESO inspection and occupancy modules. He stated that the funds currently allocated for these modules could be reallocated to support the implementation of the new permitting software, resulting in improved functionality while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

The Finance and Personal Committee recommends to Council to use Cloud Permit and use ESO & PF Track to off set the cost of the Building Inspection Software.

Motion by P.J. Wolfe, second by Julie sturgill, Council approves the recommendation of the Finance and Personal Committee to Purchase Cloud Permit and offset the expense by removing ESO and PF Tracking. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Department Reports:

Mr. Martin, Town Manager, addressed Council regarding a recent sewer-related issue that has received attention on social media, along with several other operational concerns. He provided an overview of the situation and acknowledged the public interest it has generated, noting that staff have been actively working to address the matter in a timely and professional manner. Mr. Martin took the opportunity to commend the Town's employees for their continued dedication and strong work ethic. He emphasized that staff across all departments consistently perform their duties at a high level and remain committed to serving the community effectively. He also recognized the efforts of the Town's first responders, highlighting their exceptional service and ongoing commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of residents. Mr. Martin expressed his appreciation for all Town employees, stating that their collective contributions play a vital role in maintaining the quality of services provided to the citizens.

Mrs. Eller, Clerk Treasurer, informed Council that she had no formal report to present for the month. She advised that operations have continued as usual, and no significant issues or updates required Council's attention at this time. Mrs. Eller reminded Council of her continued availability and stated that she remains readily accessible by phone or email should any questions, concerns, or matters arise requiring her assistance. She reaffirmed her commitment to maintaining open communication and providing support to Council as needed.

Chief Haynes, Fire Chief, informed Council that he was recently contacted by a colleague while attending a class at Ballad Health. He reported that, during the class, his colleague relayed that Chilhowie Virginia Fire & EMS was recognized as the only locality in the Commonwealth currently in compliance with the applicable standards. Chief Haynes shared this information as a point of pride, reflecting the department's commitment to maintaining high levels of preparedness and regulatory compliance.

Mrs. Prater, Building Official, gave her appreciation for the approval of the Building Inspecter Program.

Chief Moss, Police Chief, informed Council that we're completely compliant with the Flock Cameras.

Mr. Keen, Public Works Director, informed council that for the month of February that they changed 5 Pressure reducing valves, unclogged 3 sewer lines, 8 water leaks; 1 of which being a 8-inch main line.

Mr. Cole, Water & Wastewater, started off by commending his coworkers for their hard work during the cold spell.

Mr. Johnson, Building & Grounds, reported for the month of February there were around 30 dump truck loads of brush, phase one & phase two of the drainage issues finished at the police department.

Closed Session:

- Discussion of Public Works Personnel, Justification Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) and Legal Consultation, Justification Section 2.2-3711(A)(8) of the Code of Virginia, as Amended -

Motion by Shannon Donnelly, second by P.J. Wolfe, and unanimously passed Council hereby enters into Closed Session under Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) and Section 2.2-3711(A)(8) of the Code

of Virginia as amended, to discuss Administrative Personnel. The motion was approved with following recorded vote:

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

Motion by P.J. Wolfe, second by Shannon Donnelly and unanimously passed Council hereby enters into Open Session. The motion was approved with following recorded vote:

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

Certification of Closed Session

The Town of Chilhowie has convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) and Section 2.2-3711(A)(8) of the Code of Virginia requires a certificate by the Council that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the Town of Chilhowie hereby certified that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this certificate applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the Town Council.

Approved with the following roll call vote:

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

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by P.J. Wolfe Council approves new position in the Public Works Department. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Shannon Donnelly, Council adjourns this meeting at 9:38 p.m. The motion was approved with following recorded vote:

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

_____Mayor
Gary L. Heninger

_____Clerk
Felicia Eller, CMC