# TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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Fire /EMS Chief: C. David Haynes
Building Official: Jenna Prater
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**
**March 12, 2026**

Good evening,

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. As 2026 is an even-numbered year, this year's session is a "long session" of approximately 60 days. The session is slated to end sometime in the latter two weeks of this month.

I will continue to track the proposed bills relevant to local governments such as proposed cannabis-based products taxation and changes in sales tax to go toward school modernization and construction.

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.

All three of the aerial crossings now have their casings welded together and the pipes inserted inside the casings. The lines should be placed across the river and permanently connected to the new piers within the next two weeks. The most recent project progress meeting was held on March 5th, where it was determined that the project is still on track for a tentative May 1 completion date.

As a reminder, 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 savings of almost $20,000 per month.

On February 24th, Ms. Eller and I had the town's closeout meeting with staff from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). After that meeting, the town's relationship with FEMA for this disaster is now complete and all Federal funding allocated to reimburse the town is now at the state level at the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). This is a very positive step and I am breathing a bit easier as we can see light at the end of tunnel on the recovery that was originated in October of 2024.

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. This will be the last month I will have it in this report.

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. All signs and poles are on order and should arrive in time to be installed before the end of this school year.

Over this past winter I received numerous compliments about the condition of the roads in our community and how well they were cleaned during snow events. I have thanked VDOT for the great partnership that allows Chilhowie staff to salt and scrape our streets and roads.

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.

*DEQ Brownfields Program*

I will be attending a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Brownfields Program meeting on Tuesday, March 17th. This program was used in previous years to assist with demolition of blighted industrial buildings in Chilhowie. I'm hopeful that we may be able to use this program for future projects to keep Chilhowie growing and prospering.

*Mount Rogers Planning District Commission Annual Commission Meeting*

Ms. Eller and I will be attending the annual business meeting of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) on Thursday, April 2nd. As the Chilhowie member of the Full Commission, I am always proud to represent our town, especially considering how invaluable the MRPDC is to our town through programs such as the Mount Rogers Water/Wastewater Fund, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) programs, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, GIS/mapping services, and assisting with Federal labor law compliance (Davis-Bacon requirements) on the town's Federally-funded infrastructure projects, and administration of Chilhowie's cigarette tax collections through the Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board.

*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.

All community organizations requesting town funding met the submission deadline of last Friday and their requests are included in the preliminary draft budget.

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