Virginia: **At the regular meeting of the Council of the Town of Chilhowie held at the Municipal Building, April 9, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.**

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

Absent: **None.**

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; Jenna Prater, Building Official; Tyler Keen, Public Works Director, Chris Prater, Public Works Foreman; Heather Carter, Deputy Clerk; and Chris Johnson, Foreman Building, Grounds and Streets.**

Mayor Heninger called the meeting to order. Mrs. Julie Sturgill 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 March 12, 2026, Council meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Special Presentation:

The Commonwealth Attorney, Phillip "Bucky" Blevins, appeared before Council and reported many individuals present have previously served in combat zones, and in a combat zone, you knew who your combatants were. You knew who the enemy was. It was clear, but our law enforcement partners in today's volatile society don't know who their enemies are. As a matter of fact, they strap on a gun, in a bulletproof vest every day and step into a combat zone. Mr. Blevins stated that he was present to recognize and commend two officers, Chief Deputy Smith, as well as Master Police Officer Prater.

Mr. Blevins also noted that he had the privilege of recognizing Master Police Officer Prater earlier that evening at the Board of Supervisors meeting, where a group of officers was honored. Mr. Blevins presented the following:

COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY
SMYTH COUNTY, VIRGINIA
PRESENTS THIS
CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION
TO MASTER POLICE OFFICER GAGE PRATER
FOR
MERITORIOUS SERVICE

Smyth County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Gale Greer, along with Deputies Adam Bordwine, Cassidy Gates and Endrakial Johnson, and Chilhowie Master Police Officer Gage Prater, and Washington County Sherriff's Deputy Tanner Couch distinguished themselves by exceptional meritorious service while assisting in the apprehension of a wanted individual on violent charges from Scott County, Virginia

The subject refused lawful commands, was armed, and fled from law enforcement into a wooded area, initiating a prolonged and dangerous pursuit. Over the course of an hour, the above named law enforcement professionals demonstrated extraordinary restraint, professionalism, and tactical discipline while attempting to deescalate the situation. Despite their continued efforts, the suspect suddenly advanced toward officers with the knife from close range, creating an immediate and life-threatening situation. Through coordinated action, sound judgement, and adherence to training, the involved officers employed measured, less-lethal force options, ultimately subduing the suspect and taking him into custody. Their restraint and commitment to preserving life directly contributed to preventing a fatal outcome.

The actions of these professionals reflect the highest standards of law enforcement service. Their courage under pressure, disciplined use of force, and unwavering dedication to the safety of both the public and the suspect brought great credit upon themselves, their respective agencies, and the citizens they serve.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND
09 April 2026

Phillip L. Blevins, JR.
Commonwealth's Attorney

Master Police Officer Gage Prater was awarded a Certificate of Commendation for his hard work and dedication to the Town of Chilhowie.

Mr. Blevins reported Deputy Chief Aaron Smith's actions on August 29, 2024, preserved the life of a man. Mr. Blevins presented the following:

COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY
SMYTH COUNTY, VIRGINIA
PRESENTS THIS
CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION
TO DEPUTY CHIEF AARON SMITH
FOR
MERITORIOUS SERVICE

On August 29, 2024, Deputy Chief Aaron Smith responded to a catastrophic traffic accident on Highway 107, where he rendered critical assistance to the Chilhowie Fire Department and the Virginia State Police under extremely difficult and emotionally taxing circumstances. Demonstrating exceptional professionalism and composure, Deputy Chief Smith went above and beyond the call of duty in his efforts to preserve the life of the victim.

Although the victim ultimately succumbed to his injuries, Deputy Chief Smith's immediate and sustained actions reflected the highest standards of emergency response and public service. Moreover, his diligence, attention to detail, and coordination at the scene contributed significantly to the successful investigation and subsequent conviction for involuntary manslaughter at the at-fault driver.

Deputy Chief Smith's conduct on that day exemplifies honor, integrity, and dedication to duty. His actions serve as a testament to the vital role of first responders and stand as a credit to his agency and the community he serves.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND
09 April 2026

Phillip L. Blevins, JR.
Commonwealth's Attorney

Deputy Chief Aaron Smith was awarded a Certificate of Commendation and a Challenge Coin for his hard work and dedication to the Town of Chilhowie.

Citizen Time:

Mrs. Rose Likins, Smyth County Library, appeared before Council to report the Smyth County Library Board will be meeting in the Old High School, on Thursday, April 16, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. The Friends of the Library will meet in the Old High School, on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. The Makerspace Advisory Committee will also be holding a meeting on April 13, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Since the onboarding of Ms. Christy Berry, the Makerspace is now open to the public on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. In addition, one-on-one appointments are available to assist citizens in learning how to operate the equipment more effectively. Several classes have also been offered,

including a mug-making class at the end of March. Current classes include instruction on the use of the Xtool laser cutter, with participants creating small items such as mushroom-shaped earrings.

Mrs. Likins reported that she and Ms. Heather Carter visited recording studios in Tennessee last week and have identified a preferred option. Plans are underway to move forward with this project in the near future.

A Textile Artist will be in Town from April 29 through May 2, 2026, to host a series of workshops, including embroidery, fabric preparation, and indigo dyeing. In recognition of Citizen Science Month, the Library is dedicating April to educational programming focused on mushrooms and their role in the ecosystem.

On Saturday, April 11, 2026, a Rosarian will be at the Old High School to provide instruction on rose care. Additionally, on Saturday, April 18, 2026, a culinary herbs class will be held at the Old High School at 11:00 a.m.

The first major Smyth County Virginia 250th program will feature free movies at the Lincoln Theatre, with all films centered on the American Revolution. These showings will take place on Sundays throughout the summer. Additional related activities are planned and will be announced at a later date.

Old Business:

- Update on Removal or Repair of Identifies Unsafe (Burned Out) Structures – Mr. Martin reported progress has been temporarily delayed on removal or repair of identified unsafe structures. Efforts will resume this year, with three properties identified for attention over the course of the year. The primary focus will be the removal of a blighted structure on the east end of Old Stage Road. Additional properties on the west end of Town and near the Old High School have also been identified for potential action.

  The delay was due to staff prioritizing several other projects aimed at supporting the Town's growing economic development. With multiple initiatives underway, attention was temporarily shifted; however, staff intend to refocus on these cleanup efforts in the coming months.

- Update on Hurricane Recovery, Approval of Pay Request Number 6 – The Hurricane Helene repair project is nearing completion. Currently, the only remaining items are the three aerial crossings. The first aerial crossing at Chilhowie Middle School has been successfully installed across the river and is now in place. As a result, the four-inch pump that had been supporting that portion of the system has been removed.

  Repairs to the aerial crossing at Tattle Branch are currently underway. The casing is in the process of being welded and will slide across the river. Upon completion, the Town will

be able to eliminate the remaining pump rentals, which currently cost approximately $20,000 per month.

Mr. Martin expressed his appreciation to Town staff, Hurt & Proffitt, and Portland Utilities Construction Company for their hard work and dedication throughout the Hurricane Helene repair efforts. He respectfully requested that Council approve Pay Request Number Six, which is entirely for construction, in the amount of $125,400.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bob Jeter, Council approves Pay Request Number Six in the amount of $125,400. 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 Chilhowie High School Senior Banners – The brackets have been ordered and have been received. The banners are on order and are expected to be delivered by April 15, 2026. Once the Town receives the banners, they will be installed by April 20, 2026, and will remain in place through the end of June.

- Discussion of the State of Virginia 250th Celebration – Councilman Bill Clear reported that he has gathered information and photographs of statues, which he plans to compile into a video. The video will highlight Smyth County's involvement in the nation's independence. He also noted that several individuals from the area were involved in the Revolutionary War and that there are 39 burial sites of Revolutionary War Veterans located throughout Smyth County. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 29, 2026, at the Town Hall.

- Update of Double D Water Project – The Double D Water Project will be completed in-house, with Public Works staff fully dedicated to the effort, rather than utilizing an outside contractor. Mr. Martin, Town Manager, reported that the necessary materials have been ordered, and the project design has been approved by the Virginia Department of Health. The next phase will involve securing the required easements, as the existing water lines have been in place since the late 1960s, when the trailers were originally installed.

  Mr. Martin noted that, due to the scope of the project, routine day-to-day operations may be temporarily limited while work is underway. He emphasized that the project must be completed within the current budget year.

  Mr. Keen, Public Works Director, reported that the project will include the installation of approximately 480 feet of six-inch water line extending to the fire hydrant, followed by approximately 880 feet of four-inch water line. There will be 35 meters replaced. The Town

has been actively working to improve water accountability and given that the Double D lines are among the oldest in the system, they are known to have leaks. Replacing both the water lines and meters is expected to significantly improve system efficiency and accountability.

New Business:

Mr. Martin requests to amend the Agenda to include the Paving of North Pine Avenue and Mason Alley.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bob Jeter, Council approves to amend the Agenda to include Paving of North Pine Avenue and Mason Alley. 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

- Paving of North Pine Avenue and Mason Alley – The Town advertised a Request for Proposals in the Smyth County Newspaper and on the Town's website for the paving of North Pine Avenue and Mason Alley. The Town received one bid in the amount of $54,825 from W&L Construction. The 2025–2026 Budget included $45,000 earmarked for this paving project; however, due to increases in petroleum and material costs, the bid amount exceeded the budgeted allocation.

  A discussion ensued regarding the funding source for the budget shortfall. After deliberation, it was determined that the difference would be funded by paying $6,000 from the Contingency line item and $3,825 from the Recreation Park Repair line item.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bill Clear, Council approves to accept the bid from W&L Construction in the amount of $54,825 and pay the shortfall by paying $6,000 from the Contingency line item and $3,825 from the Recreation Park Repair line item. 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 Chilhowie Apple Festival Master Plan – Mrs. Rebecca Wilkinson-Smith, Chilhowie Apple Festival, presented the Master Plan to Council. Mrs. Wilkinson-Smith reported that there will be no bull riding event this year. She also noted that the Queen crowning and parade awards will be held at the Will Walker Farmer's Market.

  The concert will take place at the Will Walker Farmer's Market on Saturday, September 26, 2026, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., with a cruise-in to follow. The Town staff assisting

with the Chilhowie Apple Festival will be compensated by the Chilhowie Apple Festival, consistent with the arrangement from the previous year.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bob Jeter, Council accepts the Chilhowie Apple Festival Master Plan. 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

- Presentation of Quarterly Report for Highway Safety Initiative – Due to Deputy Chief Aaron Smith's computer being affected by a virus and requiring Tri-Cities I.T. to rebuild the system, he requested that this matter be continued until the next meeting.

- Discussion of Purchase of Town Excavator – Mr. Keen, Public Works Director, reported that the Town's excavator is currently experiencing mechanical issues. The unit is 17 years old and is used daily. He noted that the cost of repairs would exceed half of the equipment's trade-in value.

  Mr. Keen further reported that he has been working with Caterpillar (CAT) to obtain pricing for a replacement excavator. The total purchase price of a new unit, after rebates, is $83,332. With a trade-in allowance of $14,000 for the existing excavator, the net cost would be $69,332. The new equipment would include a seven-year and 3,000-hour warranty, which provides for pickup, repair, and return of the machine as needed.

  Mr. Keen requested that the purchase be funded through the Fire Hydrant Fund account, noting that proper maintenance of the Town's infrastructure system is essential to the functionality of fire hydrants. Last year, the Public Works Department replaced five hydrants, which improved the Fire Department's ISO ratings. There are two additional hydrants that still need to be replaced, and Mr. Keen will coordinate those replacements, as the water must be temporarily shut off to complete the work. He also stated that the equipment will assist in the replacement of older and faulty fire hydrants throughout the system.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Bob Jeter, Council approves to the purchase of an excavator with trade in at the cost of $69,332 utilizing the Fire Hydrant 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

- Purchase of SCADA for Shuler Hollow Tank and Reid's Pump Station – The Shuler Hollow Tank is the most sensitive component of the Town's water system. It requires a

two PSI differential to open the pressure valve. If a downstream leak occurs, that differential is lost, impacting system operation. With the implementation of additional SCADA modules, the Town will be able to remotely monitor both upstream and downstream pressures. This will allow leaks to be detected prior to becoming more significant issues.

The system will include pressure sensors with alarm notifications, enabling staff to be alerted immediately when pressure deviations occur and allowing crews to begin locating and addressing leaks promptly. Early detection will help prevent the depletion of the Shuler Hollow Tank. When the tank is depleted, it negatively affects pressure throughout the entire system. The cost for the additional SCADA modules installation at the Shuler Hollow Tank is $6,324.

The Reid's Pump Station utilizes a floating meter to monitor water production. The existing meter is aging and will need to be replaced soon, with an estimated cost of $3,000.

A discussion ensued regarding funding sources for the additional SCADA modules system at the Shuler Hollow Tank and the replacement floating meter at Reid's Pump Station.

Motion by Bob Jeter, second by Brent Foster, Council approves the purchase of additional SCADA modules for Shuler Hollow Tank and Reid's Pump Station in the amount of $9,324 and utilize the Fire Hydrant 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

- Surplus of Water Department Vehicle – The Police Department maximizes the use of its fleet vehicles, and the Town further extends their usefulness by repurposing them for use in the Public Works Department when appropriate. Mr. Martin reported that the Water Department is currently utilizing a 2017 Ford Interceptor, which has reached a point where staff have expressed concern about shutting the vehicle off due to reliability issues. Mr. Martin respectfully requested that the 2017 Ford Interceptor be declared surplus and listed for sale on GovDeals.

  In continued efforts to recycle Police Department vehicles, a 2014 Ford Explorer will be transferred to the Water Department to replace the 2017 Ford Interceptor. The 2014 Ford Explorer has been fully decommissioned, with all markings removed, and has recently been serviced to remove the emergency blue lights. Mr. Martin suggested the installation of an amber light bar to enhance visibility and alert motorists when Town staff are working outside of the vehicle, to improve safety.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by P.J. Wolfe, Council deems the 2017 Ford Interceptor as Surplus and directed staff to 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

- 2026 Spring Rabies Vaccination Schedule – Mr. Martin shared information received annually from the State regarding the 2026 Spring Rabies Vaccination schedule. He reported that low-flying helicopters will be conducting aerial distribution of rabies vaccine baits as part of an effort to vaccinate the raccoon population and reduce the incidence of rabies. Chilhowie has been identified as an area that will be a high priority for these vaccination efforts.

- Scheduling of Annual Budget Workshop - The proposed Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget is balanced and will be submitted to Council. The Budget Workshop was scheduled for Thursday, April 30,2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Department Reports:

Mr. Martin, Town Manager, commended Ms. Rose Linkins for serving as a Diplomat. Mr. Martin shared a quick shot of Smyth County News on what was going on in Chilhowie 81 years ago, in April 1945 was included in the Town Manager's Report. The news article shows how much went into building the community. Mr. Martin does not take his responsibility lightly as he knows neither does elected officials; they all do their best to honor the past but also honor the future by doing the best they can to lead the Community.

Mrs. Felica Eller, Clerk/Treasurer, reported the Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail invited Council to join the Chilhowie Bluegrass JAM-Boree as they recognize its new role as a affiliate venue along the Crooked Road on Tuesday, April 28, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

Mrs. Jenna Prater, Building Inspector, provided Council with the Fire and EMS Department 2025 annual report. The Annual Report highlights the Fire and EMS Department accomplishments and statistics for 2025. Mr. Ryan Bunnell, Firefighter/EMS, was hired as a full-time employee. Mr. Bunnell, who was previously employed part-time with the department, began his full-time role Friday, April 3, 2026. Mrs. Peyton Lynch, Firefighter/Paramedic, was also hired and is scheduled to begin employment towards the end of April. Mr. Bunnell's former part-time position has been filled by Hayden Jackson, Firefighter/EMT. The Fire and EMS Department is now fully staffed.

Mrs. Prater invited everyone to join the Fire/EMS Department for their awards and promotion ceremony on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Old High School. The Fire and EMS Department has received a grant in the amount of $750 from the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition to promote home fire sprinklers within the Community.

Mr. Andrew Moss, Police Chief, reported Officer Chance Sessor is now a Certified Federal Aviation Administration. Master Police Office Gage Prater was called out to assist Smyth County Sherrif's Office with drone services during the month of March. Officer Chance Sessor was called out once to assist Smyth County Sheriff's Office and once to assist Washington County Sheriff's Office with drone services during the month of March.

It was reported that Deputy Chief Aaron Smith and Lieutenant Ben Perry will receive Life Saver commendations in recognition of their efforts assisting the Fire Department in saving a citizen on the Appalachian Trail. The renaming ceremony for the Dog Park, in memory of Deputy Chris Paschal, will be held on Friday, May 15, 2026, at 3:30 p.m. Deputy Chief Smith also reported that the new vehicle is expected to be marked and fully equipped soon.

Mr. Tyler Keen, Public Works Director, introduced Mr. Chris Prater, Public Works Foreman. Mr. Keen reported that the Public Works Department received 23 applications for two open positions. Ten applicants were selected for interviews, which were scheduled for Tuesday, April 14, 2026. The Public Works Department repaired eight water leaks, cleared three clogged sewer lines, replaced four pressure-reducing valves, installed two new water meters, and upgraded the meters at Greever's Clinic and Valley Health Care to two-inch meters. In addition, staff marked 49 Miss Utilities.

Chris Johnson, Foreman Building, Grounds, and Streets, reported the concrete has been poured and they are ready to install the Chris Paschal monument at the Dog Park.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Shannon Donnelly Council continues this meeting until April 30, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. 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

_____Mayor
Gary L. Heninger

_____Clerk
Felicia Eller, CMC