Virginia: **At the regular meeting of the Council of the Town of Chilhowie held at the Municipal Building, May 14, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.**

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

Absent: **Councilors Shannon Donnelly and Mr. Brian Martin, Town Manager.**

Also Present: ; Mrs. Felicia Eller, Clerk/Treasurer; Messrs. Paul Cassell, Town Attorney; Heather Carter, Deputy Clerk; Andrew Moss, Police Chief; Aaron Smith, Deputy Chief; Chris Prater, Public Works Foreman, Luke Lowe, Chief Wastewater Operator; Leroy Sullivan, Wastewater Operator II, and Chris Johnson, Foreman Building, Grounds and Streets.

Mayor Heninger called the meeting to order. Reverand David Gary, Deer Valley Baptist Church, gave the Invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Bob Jeter, second by Bill Clear Council approves the regular April 9, 2026, and Continued April 30, 2026, Council meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Special Presentation:

Mr. Bailey Robertson, Smyth County 4-H Agent, appeared before Council to introduce students from Chilhowie Schools who will be participating in and presenting information regarding the Virginia 4-H Congress, as well as requesting support for their attendance. Mr. Robertson explained that 4-H has been in existence for 123 years, with the Virginia 4-H Congress having a 104-year history. Students attending the event will participate in college-level workshops covering a variety of subjects, ranging from stream science to helmet engineering. In addition, students will take part in the election process for representatives, ambassadors, and the State Cabinet. Mr. Robertson noted that Chilhowie High School will have one student seeking election to an ambassador position this year.

Mr. Lucas Haynes appeared before Council and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to speak and for Council's consideration of support for the Virginia 4-H Congress trip. Mr. Haynes stated that State Congress is one of the highest honors a 4-H member can achieve, providing students with opportunities to represent their community, connect with young leaders from across the Commonwealth, and develop important skills in leadership, citizenship, communication, and

service. He explained that the experience is a unique opportunity that can have a lasting impact on students and help shape their futures.

Mr. Haynes noted that attendance at the event involves expenses including registration fees, transportation, meals, lodging, and supplies, which can create a significant financial burden for participating families. He stated that support from the Town would make a meaningful difference by helping reduce these costs and allowing students to focus on the experience rather than financial concerns. Programs such as 4-H help students become stronger leaders, better communicators, and more engaged citizens, and that an investment in these students today is an investment in the future of the community. Mr. Haynes concluded by stating that he would represent Chilhowie with respect and gratitude.

Mr. Landon Johnson appeared before Council to discuss the importance of the Virginia 4-H Congress and the impact of the 4-H program. Mr. Johnson stated that 4-H is more than clubs, projects, teamwork, and leadership activities; it also provides young people with opportunities to grow and discover their potential. He explained that one of the most valuable lessons taught through 4-H is the importance of giving back to the community, becoming active leaders, and developing into responsible citizens.

Attending 4-H Congress would help students prepare for the future by fostering independence, strengthening communication and teamwork skills through real-world experiences. The knowledge and lessons gained through participation in 4-H Congress would have a lasting impact and remain with students throughout their lives.

Ms. Sadie Paine appeared before Council to discuss the importance and influence of the Virginia 4-H Congress experience. Ms. Paine stated that 4-H Congress provides students with the opportunity to participate in college-level classes taught by professionals in a variety of fields. During the previous year's Congress, she attended three classes in different subject areas and also participated in a public speaking competition, where she was awarded a blue ribbon.

Ms. Jaiden Hogston appeared before Council to discuss the impact of the 4-H program and the value of attending Virginia 4-H Congress. Ms. Jaiden stated that she has participated in 4-H for nine to ten years, including four years as a member of the Teen Club, and shared that the program has played a significant role in shaping her personal growth and development.

Ms. Jaiden explained that through her involvement in activities such as serving as a camp team leader and assisting with instructing classes, she has developed important skills including responsibility, communication, and teamwork. Participation in 4-H Congress further strengthened these skills by providing opportunities to meet individuals from across the Commonwealth, learn from experienced leaders, and compete in presentation activities. She noted that the experience challenged her to step outside of her comfort zone and contributed to her decision to seek additional leadership opportunities, including running for Southwest Virginia District Ambassador and applying for National Congress.

Ms. Jaiden explained that Virginia 4-H Congress brings together youth from across the state to participate in leadership workshops and public speaking activities designed to promote growth and leadership development. She stated that the experience teaches lessons that cannot always be learned in a classroom, including leadership, confidence, and the importance of becoming active and engaged members of the community. She further noted that attending Congress would continue to strengthen skills such as public speaking, collaboration, problem-solving, and leadership, all of which would provide long-term benefits in education and future career opportunities.

Ms. Jaiden concluded by respectfully requesting financial support for the trip, noting that opportunities such as 4-H Congress can create financial challenges for participants and their families. Support from the Town would help students take advantage of valuable opportunities and invest in the growth and development of young people within the community.

Mr. Robertson thanked Council for taking the time to hear from the students and for considering their presentations regarding the importance of Virginia 4-H Congress. During the previous year's 4-H Congress, each student from Chilhowie participated in the state-level public speaking competition, and all participants earned blue ribbon recognition. Mr. Robertson further reported that six students are scheduled to attend 4-H Congress this year, with the cost of participation totaling approximately $310 per student for the week.

Citizen Time:

Ms. Mary Ann Walden, of 20254 Lumberton Road, Damascus, appeared before Council to discuss the proposed establishment of the Saving Place in Konnarock. Ms. Walden explained that the Saving Place would be a unique thrift store that would not only provide quality items at affordable prices but would also serve as a resource center dedicated to meeting community needs. In addition to retail operations, the facility would offer adult literacy classes, GED preparation courses, diabetes education, Eight Laws of Health seminars, and debt reduction workshops.

Ms. Walden reported that she had reviewed demographic data for the three counties surrounding Konnarock—Smyth, Washington, and Grayson Counties. Based on the data, there are approximately 17,649 adults identified as illiterate, 11,324 adults without a high school diploma or GED, and 14,231 individuals living at or below the poverty level. Ms. Walden explained that improving literacy and helping individuals earn a GED can create opportunities for better employment, increased wages, and pathways out of poverty. She stated that the Saving Place is intended to provide those types of opportunities and resources for residents of Konnarock and surrounding communities.

Ms. Walden explained that the Saving Place would operate entirely through volunteers and be managed by a six-member committee responsible for overseeing both the thrift store and community outreach efforts. She identified committee members and their respective backgrounds and roles, noting that the group includes individuals with experience in financial management,

business promotion, social services, facility maintenance, and community leadership. She further stated that she holds a Master's Degree in Elementary Education, taught for 33 years, and plans to personally conduct the literacy and GED preparation classes. Ms. Walden emphasized that all classes and services offered through the Saving Place would be provided free of charge.

Ms. Walden stated that she was appearing before Council to request financial assistance with the purchase of a building needed to establish the Saving Place. She explained that the former Konnarock store property, consisting of approximately 3,000 square feet, is currently available for purchase. Ms. Walden stated that the former car wash bays would be enclosed and repurposed as a drop-off, work, and storage area, while the remainder of the building would serve as the thrift store sales floor. Ms. Walden also provided Council with a letter of support from the Damascus Town Council.

Old Business:

- Update on Removal or Repair of Identifies Unsafe (Burned Out) – Mrs. Eller 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.

- Update on Hurricane Recovery, Approval of Pay Request Number 7 – The Two Aerial Crossings located at Chilhowie Middle School and Tattle Branch have been successfully installed across the river. As a result, the Town has officially been able to discontinue the use of the pump rentals. Portland Utilities Construction Company is currently working on the Aerial Crossing in Seven Mile Ford, which is anticipated to be completed within the next several weeks.

  Mrs. Eller respectfully requests Council to approve Pay Request Number 7 in the amount of $215,175. Mrs. Eller reported that, following payment of Pay Request Number 7, approximately $590,000 will be remaining in the Department of Environmental Quality grant to fund the final Aerial Crossing project. If the project costs exceed the available Department of Environmental Quality grant funds, the Town will seek additional assistance through Virginia Department Emergency Management.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by P.J. Wolfe Council approves Pay Request Number 7 in the amount of $215,175. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Presentation of Quarterly Report for Highway Safety Initiative – During the past quarter, the Town conducted speed enforcement efforts on Interstate 81 at Exit 35. A total of 138 traffic stops were made, with the highest recorded speed being 99 miles per hour and the lowest recorded speed being 82 miles per hour. The Police Officer working the Highway Safety Initiative provided assistance and backup support on several occasions, including five instances for the on-duty Police Officer, three for the Smyth County Sheriff's Office, three for the Saltville Police Department, one for the Marion Police Department, and twelve for the Virginia State Police.

- Discussion of the State of Virginia 250th Celebration – Councilman Clear reported he missed the meeting that was held in April 2026. Councilman Clear created a PowerPoint presentation of local monuments that he will show during a future Council meeting.

- Update on Double D Water Project – Mrs. Felicia Eller, Clerk/Treasurer, reported that the necessary materials have been ordered, and the project design has been approved by the Virginia Department of Health. Town staff are working closely with Mr. Paul Cassell, Town Attorney, in securing the required easements for the project.

New Business:

- Surplus of Water Department Vehicle – During the May 14, 2026, Regular Council Meeting, Council declared a 2017 Ford Interceptor within the Public Works Department as surplus property. Following that action, the Public Works Department began utilizing a 2014 Ford Interceptor from the Police Department; however, the vehicle has since experienced significant transmission issues. Mrs. Eller respectfully requested that Council declare the 2014 Ford Interceptor as surplus and place on GovDeals for sale.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill Council approves to list the 2014 Ford Inceptor as surplus equipment and list on GovDeals for sale. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Adoption of Police Week Proclamation and Presentation of Commemorative Badges – Mrs. Heather Carter presented the following:

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, in 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed the first proclamation recognizing May 15th as Peace Officers Memorial Day and the week in which it falls as National Police week; and

WHEREAS, the members of the Chilhowie Police Department work tirelessly to protect and serve our residents, businesses, and visitors, and keep our community safe; and

WHEREAS, police officers report for duty aware of the sacrifices they may be called upon to make and risk their lives each and every day to safeguard the public and enforce the laws of the Town and Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, three Sons of Chilhowie, Smyth County Deputy, and former Chilhowie Police Officer, Hunter D. Reedy, End of Watch: August 9th 2024, Smyth County Deputy Christopher K. Pascal, End of Watch: January 4th 2009, and Virginia State Trooper Lucas B. Dowell, End of Watch: February 4th 2019, along with Marion Police Chief Ralph S. Wolfe, End of Watch: June 2nd 1954, sacrificed their lives in the line of duty protecting the citizens of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, Virgina Police Week and Peace Officers Memorial Day are opportunities to reflect upon the dedication and service of our police, honor officers who have fallen in the line of duty, and recognize the sacrifices made by the families of those officers and the families of those who continue to protect and serve our community.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, **Gary L. Heninger**, Mayor of the Town of Chilhowie, and on behalf of the Chilhowie Town Council hereby proclaim May 11-17, 2026, as

POLICE WEEK

In the Town of Chilhowie and urge the community to join in commemorating law enforcement officers, past and present, who have dedicated themselves to their community.

Adopted this 14th day of May 2026

_____

Mayor
On behalf of the Town Council of
Chilhowie, Virginia

Attest: _____

Town Clerk

Chief Moss thanked everyone for accepting the proclamation and supporting Police Week activities. He reported that this year, 363 names were added to the memorial wall, including 109 line-of-duty deaths from 2025 and 254 names from previous years that were added retroactively. He noted that in some instances, officers are recognized years later, citing former Marion Police Chief Wolf as an example.

Chief Moss reported that during 2025, a total of 111 Federal, State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Law Enforcement Officers lost their lives in the line of duty. He further stated that the Memorial Wall now contains 24,775 names. Chief Moss noted that firearm-related incidents remained the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths with 44 fatalities, followed by 34 fatalities resulting from traffic-related accidents.

Chief Moss also announced that the Dedication Ceremony for the Dog Park in honor of fallen Police Officer Chris Paschal would take place on Friday, May 15, 2026. The Town of Chilhowie Police Department would like to dedicate the Splash Pad in honor of fallen Police Officer Hunter D. Reedy during next year's Police Week observance on May 15, 2027.

Chief Moss stated that while these memorials stem from tragic circumstances, they provide a meaningful way to recognize and honor individuals whose contributions to the community were significant. He expressed that he felt the Dog Park dedication for Chris Paschal was an appropriate and fitting memorial.

Chief Moss also noted that commemorative badges recognizing the nation's 250th anniversary had been provided. He thanked everyone for their continued support of the Police Department and stated that the badges were intended as a token of appreciation and a way to include Council and community in the celebration.

- Appreciation Luncheon for Elected Officials and Staff – The Administration staff is planning an employee and elected officials' appreciation luncheon to be held at the Town Recreation Park on Friday, May 21, 2026, at 12 p.m. The Town will provide barbecue, chicken, and accompanying side dishes for the event. In the event of inclement weather, the luncheon will be relocated to the Old High School facility.

- Virginia Senate Bill (SB) 87 – It was reported that during the 2026 Virginia Acts of Assembly session, Virginia Senate Bill 87 was enacted. The legislation requires Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) to be installed at all local government sporting events and sporting facilities by July 1, 2028. A discussion followed regarding potential locations where AEDs would need to be installed to ensure compliance with the legislation.

  Chief Moss reported that he is currently working with the Smyth County Community Foundation to pursue grant funding opportunities to equip each Police Department vehicle and the Town Hall building with Automated External Defibrillators.

Committee Reports:

- Request to Purchase a Wet Well Wizard for Wastewater – The primary reason for a Wet Well Wizard system is grease control. Grease naturally rises to the surface and forms a hardened grease cap, which continues to build over time as rags, hair, and other debris collect within it. This buildup can create significant pump-clogging issues and increase maintenance demands. The Wet Well Wizard system breaks up and disperses the grease cap, reducing surges of grease entering the system at one time and helping prolong the life of the pumps by minimizing clogs and the need for frequent pump removal and cleaning.

  The Wet Well Wizard also helps inhibit the formation of hydrogen sulfide gas, which is produced by decaying bacteria and is highly corrosive to metal components within the wet well. The addition of oxygen into the system helps maintain healthier bacteria levels, preventing decay and reducing the production of hydrogen sulfide gas. This would help protect metal infrastructure, such as pump rails and other components, from excessive corrosion and deterioration.

  The aeration process promotes the growth of beneficial bacteria used in wastewater treatment, effectively creating a pre-treatment step before the wastewater enters the plant. Additional benefits discussed included odor reduction and the potential for decreased power consumption due to existing aeration improvements recently installed at the plant, including variable frequency drive (VFD) systems for the aerators. The Wet Well Wizard system presents several operational and maintenance benefits for the Town's wastewater system.

  The Personnel and Finance Committee recommends to Council to purchase the Wet Well Wizard in the amount of $11,217. Mrs. Eller reported that Sewer Department staff have done an excellent job reducing utility and electrical costs throughout the fiscal year. At this time, only one month of utility billing remains for the current fiscal year, as the current month's bill has already been paid.

  Mrs. Eller reported that the utilities line item currently has a remaining balance of $23,926. The average monthly utility expense is approximately $6,003.39. Based on those figures, if the Wet Well Wizard is purchased using funds from the utility line item, an estimated balance of $12,709 would remain in the account at the end of the fiscal year.

Motion by Julie Sturgill, second by Brent Foster Council accepts the Finance and Personnel Committee's recommendation to approves purchasing a Wet Well Wizard utilizing funds from the Sewer Utilities Line Items. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

- Request to Purchase a Vehicle for Water Operations – Mrs. Eller reported the Finance and Personnel Committee took no action at this time. The Public Works Department will obtain quotes for a bigger truck and a small dump truck and report back to Council.

Department Reports:

Mrs. Felicia Eller, Clerk/Treasurer, reported Mr. Martin is absent tonight so he could attend his son's graduation from Virginia Tech. He included the Town Manager's report in the Agenda. Council is invited to a ribbon cutting on May 27, 2026, at 10 a.m. for F.R.E.E. grand opening at 1205 E. Lee Highway.

Andrew Moss, Chief of Police, reported that Deputy Chief Aaron Smith received the Officer of the Year Award from the VFW on Thursday, May 7, 2026. Chief Moss commended Deputy Chief Smith for his leadership, administrative abilities, and dedication to the Department, noting that he consistently exceeds expectations in all assigned tasks. Deputy Chief Smith is currently leading a Leadership Development Program within the Department.

Chief Moss also reported that Deputy Chief Smith and Lieutenant Perry will receive Commendations for their lifesaving rescue efforts on the Appalachian Trail. In addition, Master Police Officer Millsaps intervened at Valley Health Care to prevent a patient from harming himself with scissors, while Master Police Officer Prater assisted Smyth County with drone operations and participated in hostage negotiations. Chief Moss stated that Master Police Officers Millsaps and Prater will each receive Commendations for meritorious service.

Mr. Chris Prater, Public Works Foreman, reported that the Public Works Department repaired eight water leaks, cleared four clogged sewer lines, replaced five pressure-reducing valves, installed one new fire hydrant, and removed two fire hydrants located on four-inch water lines.

Mr. Tyler Keen, Public Works Director, attended the Virginia Rural Water Conference. Public Works staff responded to and marked 86 Miss Utility requests.

Mr. Stephen Fields, Special Events and Recreation Director, reported that the first concert of the One Day at a Time music series will kick off on Saturday, May 23, 2026, at the Recreation Park, featuring The Edge beginning at 6:00 p.m. The Chain is scheduled to perform on Saturday, June 6, 2026, at the Recreation Park at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Fields also announced that the Splash Pad will open for the season on Friday, May 22, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. Valley Health Care will conduct a 5K run through Town on Saturday, June 20, 2026. Registration for Recreation Football and Cheerleading has officially begun.

Any Other Council Business:

Councilman Clear requested that staff obtain quotes for the purchase of a MIG welder and present the information at the Thursday, June 11, 2026, Council meeting. It was noted that the Town currently has two certified welders; however, the Town does not own a MIG welder.

Motion by Brent Foster, second by Julie Sturgill Council requests staff to obtain quotes for a MIG welder and present to Council at the regular scheduled meeting on June 11, 2026. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Councilwoman Sturgill reported that Mrs. Cora Welch is spearheading the Veterans Day Tribute Flag initiative and is currently obtaining quotes from various vendors. Once a vendor has been selected, information will be made available to the public regarding the purchase of tribute flags to be displayed during the Veterans Day observance. Following the event, the flags will be returned to the families, who will also have the option to have the flags rehung annually.

The students participating in 4-H Congress have requested monetary contributions to assist with expenses associated with their trip. It was noted that the Administration Operations line item currently reflects an approximate $17,000 variance within the 2025–2026 Budget.

Motion by Bob Jeter, second by Bill Clear Council approves to donate $1,800 from the Administration Operation line-item to the 4-H Congress. The motion was approved with the following recorded vote:

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

Motion by P.J. Wolfe, second by Brent Foster Council adjourns this meeting at 7:58 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
Heather Carter