TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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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
June 11, 2026

Good evening,

We are off to a warm and very dry start to this summer season!

As we see new businesses being constructed and others opening in existing locations, as well as a housing development coming together within walking distance of our downtown commercial areas, I am optimistic that our community is growing in a very positive direction. Your staff continues to partner with Smyth County and Washington County on potential projects that may add to further economic prosperity for Chilhowie.

That being said, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank you as elected officials for all you do to help guide our hometown into the future, while also honoring our past. I truly feel that our town is moving in a good direction. However, I also welcome any feedback or constructive criticism on your staff's performance or any other thoughts as to how we can better serve Chilhowie.

Here's a summary of what's going on in our town:

Hurricane Helene Recovery

It is with great pleasure that I let you know that all three of the aerial wastewater system river crossings have now been completed! I am sure that each of you remember those first few days after Hurricane Helene when none of us knew how to even begin to proceed toward recovery, so after these long months of rebuilding, it truly feels like a weight being lifted off our community's shoulders as we finalize these last repairs.

On June 4th, your town staff conducted a Substantial Completion Inspection with our engineering consultants and project contractors. A few minor items that the contractor needs to address as part of the final "punch list" are now being taken care of and this project is well on its way to construction completion.

Once that's accomplished, the remaining tasks related to Helene recovery will be from Ms. Eller to coordinate receipt of final payments from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), which as a reminder now holds all Federal funds allocated by FEMA for Chilhowie.

At this point, I would like to again thank our engineering consultants at Hurt & Proffitt, our construction contractors with Portland Utilities Construction Company, everyone at FEMA, VDEM, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) who were so helpful throughout our recovery. I also want to extend my sincere gratitude to our outstanding elected officials and town staff who worked so hard and so well together as we have strived to rebuild our community's infrastructure!

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! As a reminder, Chilhowie was one of only three localities in the Commonwealth to receive this funding and we are by far the first to near project end.

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.

You may have already seen that the new crosswalk signs for the two crosswalks at Chilhowie Middle School and Chilhowie High School are now installed. In talks with the principals of both schools last year, increased safety at these crossings was stated as one of their priorities they hoped to address. The combination of their concerns and those expressed by you as elected officials prompted the initial conversations with VDOT, and I am hopeful that this new and more visible signage will improve pedestrian safety. In addition to the signage being taller and brighter, there is lighting than can be activated by pedestrians when crossing. This is a great example of a very beneficial project coming to fruition when local leaders and state agencies work together to benefit our community!

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.

Industrial User Monitoring and Reporting of PFAS

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has recently released notice that as a result of new legislation from the 2026 General Assembly session, now codified in the Code of Virginia as Chapters 709 and 710 of the 2026 Acts of the Assembly, that all publicly owned treatment works (POTW) are mandated require quarterly monitoring and reporting for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) by specified categories of industrial users that are a source of indirect discharge to the POTW. This mandate will add to the workload of town managers and operators of wastewater treatment plants as we notify and begin coordination with industries located in our communities. Initial notifications from localities to industrial partners must take place no later than July 31, 2026.

I will keep you updated on this matter as we lean into this new requirement related to PFAS, more commonly referred to as "forever plastics".

Wastewater Treatment Plant Permitting Renewal

As a reminder, Chilhowie's current permit expired last month. As of now, the town has not received our new permit. However, the town staff has completed all necessary requirements and submitted to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), which has acknowledged receipt of our submissions and has notified us that they are working as quickly as possible to complete their review. Our staff have had recent discussions with DEQ and we expect to receive our new permit any day.

I once again would like to commend the town's outstanding staff, as well as our partners at Hurt & Proffitt for undertaking this re-permitting process as this is the first time doing so since the town's transition away from land application of biosolids and also the first since the increased scrutiny on localities related to forever chemicals (PFAS/PFOS).

Bonham House Repairs and Renovations

Two months ago, I brought to your attention that there are several maintenance issues and repairs needed at the Bonham House. To update you, the replacement of the rubberized roofing is now complete. The town staff will now replace the extremely deteriorated stucco/concrete siding on the semi-rotunda above the building's front door. Hopefully this will completely take care of the water leak issues that have frustrated all parties involved for quite some time. I am hopeful that the siding repairs to finalize this project will occur in the next couple of weeks.

As you're aware, over the past eight 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 since the building serves as the tourism center for our entire county and considering how drastically maintenance costs have risen over the past five years.

Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board

The next meeting of the Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board is scheduled for July 22nd. In addition to regular business, we plan to discuss possible options to propose for future General Assembly consideration to modernize taxation for non-tobacco nicotine products (vapes). With no taxation legislation yet in place, Chilhowie along with our regional neighbors continue to push our state legislators to come up with a workable plan to have such legislation passed by the General Assembly.

Smyth/Washington County 4-H 8th Grade Career Explore Event

I served as a presenter at the Smyth/Washington 4-H 8th Grade Career Explore Event, which was held on May 12th. I attended 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.

Virginia Drought Status

As you are aware, Virginia continues to be in a severe drought. I have attached a copy of the most recent DEQ Drought Update, which shows that our region is not alone in this trying time. Until considerable precipitation is received, there is little relief for localities. That being said, I encourage everyone to be mindful of their water consumption and conserve as much as possible. While not yet to a critical state, as the water tables continue to fall, I am concerned about the health of our town springs and our ability to provide current outflow levels if the drought persists.

Smyth County Tourism Association

Amanda Livingston has scheduled, in conjunction with Friends of Southwest Virginia, a tourism focus group meeting on July 16th. The meeting will be held at Chilhowie Town Hall in the upstairs community room. I will represent Chilhowie so please feel free to provide me your thoughts and ideas ahead of time.

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