TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
August 14, 2026

Good evening,

I hope this report finds you and your family doing well as we continue to move through a very hot and dry summer.

Over the past few months, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) has undertaken a renewed search for human remains aboard the Japanese ship *Oryoku Maru*, which was sank by American warplanes in 1945 during the battle to retake the Philippines from Imperial Japanese forces during World War II. The ship was carrying American Prisoners of War (POWs) from the prison camps in the Philippines where they had been brutally held since American forces surrendered in the spring of 1942. The Japanese military was desperate to relocate the American prisoners as it became obvious that the United States would prevail in retaking these islands. Tragically, American aviators had no idea that other American troops, the POWs, were onboard the *Oryoku Maru* when they sank her in their efforts to cut off Japanese resupply lines. No one would know the extent of the tragedy until after the war was over.

Now that modern technology makes it more feasible than ever to access and search the wreck, I applaud the renewed effort to find, and finally bring home, as many American warriors as possible.

In 1942 after long, hard months battling the overwhelming Japanese troops, over 12,000 starving Americans were taken prisoner along with 65,000 Filipino allies. They were marched over 60 miles with no food and little water to prison camps in what would come to be known as the Bataan Death March. Many died on the march, many more died in the camps. Some remained in the Philippine camps until 1945, while others were put on transport ships earlier to be used in Japan or other occupied territories as slave labor.

You may ask, how is this noble project relevant to Chilhowie? One of Chilhowie's own, Corporal Wiley Martin, was one of those American troops who was captured. After enduring the horrors of the Bataan Death March, we was eventually sent to Japanese controlled Indochina (modern day Vietnam) to work in coal mines for the Japanese Army. He was eventually liberated after Japan's surrender and was able to return home to Chilhowie, where he lived until his death a decade year later. My cousin Wiley is buried just east of town alongside his wife, Lucille, in the Middle Fork Cemetery. If fate had been that he was one of the POWs who was shipped away later in the war, it may have been him lying under the Pacific Ocean and not yet accounted for.

I share this with you because, as a veteran who has served in combat zones, I have seen enough to know how terrible war can be. However, the things I have done in service to our nation pale in comparison to the sacrifices of earlier generations.

So as our town works to undertake our veteran recognition banner project, I just wanted to highlight my cousin, Corporal Martin, as an example of the men and women buried in our community's cemeteries and, maybe more importantly, the ones who are still missing and haven't had the honor of returning home after fighting our nation's war and helping build the nation that we have today. As we honor today's veterans with our banner program, let's always strive to honor those who defended us before.

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

Hurricane Helene Recovery

As I reported last month, all three aerial wastewater crossings are now back in use and we are moving quickly toward final drawdowns and moving toward project closeout actions.

At this point, I would like to once 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, the town staff, and the volunteers 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.

I will continue to report on this for several more months, but our progress is to a point where most of my reporting to you will be regarding administrative and financial closeout matters instead of the construction updates I've provided since October 2024.

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.

I have reached out to VDOT to request their consideration for improvements to the intersection at Whitetop Road and Main Street in hopes of minimizing blocking of the intersection by traffic. Given that this busy intersection is located between our town's traffic light and the railroad crossing, it's a very congested area and often gets blocked by idling vehicles. This causes added congestion and makes it difficult for vehicles to turn, which is an impediment to our local business community. The issue of this intersection has been brought to my attention by concerned community members, elected officials, and local business owners. I had requested that VDOT look into this previously with no success, but the town has had very good communication with the new VDOT leadership team and is hopeful that a solution can be found moving forward.

Officials from VDOT, the Town of Chilhowie, Smyth County School Administration, Chilhowie High School, and Chilhowie Middle School held a brief dedication ceremony on August 10th to recognize the joint effort that culminated in the improvements to the crosswalks across U.S. Highway 11 that serve our high and middle schools. As I've stated before, I am grateful for VDOT's assistance in helping make our crosswalks safer for our young Warriors and also for visitors to our community who come to attend our sporting events.

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

As I brought to your attention last month, 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 to 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 were to take place no later than July 31, 2026. Town staff met that goal.

As is typical of them, your operators of the Chilhowie Wastewater Treatment Plant are ahead of the curve on this and have already drafted a plan of how they intend to meet with our local industries to initiate the first steps of this new reporting process. All identified local industries have now been visited for inspection and the number that will be subject to monitoring has been greatly reduced.

I will continue to 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 in May. I received the town's draft permit reissuance last month. The town has published the required public notices and is now in the 30-day public comment period. Once that timeframe is passed, I expect to receive our renewed permit.

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

A few months ago, I brought to your attention several maintenance issues and repairs needed at the Bonham House. To update you, the replacement of the rubberized roofing is now complete, and town staff has completed repairs to the extremely deteriorated stucco/concrete siding on the semi-rotunda

above the building's front door. This will hopefully take care of the water leak issues that have frustrated all parties involved for quite some time.

Additionally, two problematic leaks that have proven hard to locate in other areas of the roof has finally been tracked down and your town staff have re-sealed the areas which will hopefully rectify these leaks as well.

Also, town staff has made repairs to and repainted the support columns on the porch.

As you're aware, over the past nine 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.

Materials quotes have been collected by your town staff for the ADA-Compliant accessibility ramp that we intend to construct so that we can remove the increasingly problematic chair lift. Smyth County has expressed their willingness to share in these costs and I have reached out to the other two Smyth towns to request their financial assistance. I will update you when I hear back from them.

Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board

The election of officers was held during the July 22nd quarterly meeting of the Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board. I was nominated for, and now serve, as Vice-Chairman.

Virginia Drought Status

I have attached the most recent drought monitor map for Virginia. As you can see, the recent much needed rains have had a positive impact on our state. While there is still a Drought Watch in effect for Smyth County, the dire situation that I worried about for our water supplies has been headed off. However, that being said, I encourage everyone to continue to be mindful of their water consumption and conserve as much as possible.

Smyth County Tourism Association

Amanda Livingston scheduled, in conjunction with Friends of Southwest Virginia, a tourism focus group meeting on July 16th. I represented our town at the meeting, which Ms. Livingston located at Chilhowie Town Hall in the upstairs community room. A very good discussion was conducted focusing on how we as a region better focus on promoting regional tourism in the future.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Study

I am scheduled to meet with Mr. Todd Gordon with EPR Consulting one day next week. His firm is currently conducting a bicycle and pedestrian study for Smyth County and I wanted to ensure that Chilhowie's needs and desires are included in the overall study. I hope this is a productive venture and I will update you in next month's report.

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