TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
September 10, 2026

Good evening,

I hope this report finds you and your family doing well as we continue to move through a very hot summer. I also hope everyone enjoyed the Labor Day weekend and that everyone is looking forward to our community's biggest festival of the year at the end of this month: the 72nd Annual Chilhowie Community Apple Festival. I extend my sincere thanks to all the volunteers who put so much effort into bringing this festival to life every year!

As we all are aware, tomorrow is the 25th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. Today, a quarter century later, it is difficult for the younger generations to grasp the horror and magnitude of that day nor the seismic impact it had as our nation and our world changed in an instant. I feel that I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to acknowledge this unfortunate anniversary of the largest loss of American lives in one day since the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. My memory during this time goes to the 2,977 folks who got up on a Tuesday morning, went to work that day like any other day, and never got to go home.

My memory is also with the over 8,000 American military personnel who were killed in aftermath of the attacks as our nation launched the Global War on Terrorism and related wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other regions. My memory is also with the hundreds of military members from allied nations who lost their lives as they came to offer assistance to the United States as everyone grappled with just how to not only avenge the terrorist attacks, but to also make the world a better place in hopes that they would never happen again.

This anniversary also has me reflecting on how profound that moment in time had on me personally. After a rewarding eight years in the Air Force from the early 1990s to 2000, I never thought about staying in the military. September 11th was the moment I knew I had to put my uniform back on and continue serving our nation. The military career that followed forged a sense of duty that I carried with me until my retirement and that same sense of duty is a major reason that at this point in my life, I am honored to continue a life of service by being your Town Manager.

Another somber milestone over the past few weeks is the passing of the lady often referred to as "Appalachia's Angel", Ms. Dolly Parton. Her music has filled the lives of all of us, spanning decades. But just as important as her music is the fact that she used her fame and fortune to spread love, kindness,

decency, and LITERACY as far as she could. She was an ambassador around the globe of what is best about America. She never forgot her Appalachian roots and worked hard to care for us "mountain folk" and help bring our story and our culture to the rest of the world. As you know, Chilhowie contributes annually to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library in our support and recognition of this noble and worthwhile project that brings books to thousands of young children.

An interesting, very small tie, between me all these events is that in the fervor of patriotism that followed the attacks of September 11th, Dolly Parton wanted to do her part to help. To that end, in 2004 she hosted a ceremony at McGhee Tyson Air Base (if you've ever flown out of the Knoxville airport, the air base is located on the other side of the runways) where she donated her name and image to be used as the "nose art" on one of the KC-135 aerial refueling aircraft stationed there. That tanker, called "God and Country" but informally known as "Miss Dolly" by those who've had ties to that aircraft has gone on to support so many missions in our post-9/11 world and has carried me and my fellow airmen to support operations all around the globe.

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

Hurricane Helene Recovery

As you're aware, all three aerial wastewater crossings are now back in use and we are moving quickly toward final drawdowns and moving toward project closeout actions. One of the final construction closeout tasks was the rehabilitation of one last manhole near our lowest crossing, which was completed earlier this month.

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 not heard back from VDOT yet regarding the request that was made last month about exploring options to help minimize the blocking of the intersection at Main Street and Whitetop Road. I will update you once I do.

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. I have received a letter from them stating that they will be requesting a new utility easement from the town as part of this project's planning. Once I have details on their specific request, I will update you.

Industrial User Monitoring and Reporting of PFAS

Your staff continues to work with our two industrial partners that were identified for sampling as part of the DEQ mandated monitoring program that Mr. Tristan Preece update you on at last month's Town Council meeting. The staff's interactions with these two organizations continue to be going well.

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 in July. The town has published the required public notices and the 30-day public comment period has passed. I have received word that our final permit within the next few weeks.

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).

Mount Rogers Water/Wastewater Funding Program

Your staff has received the application packets from the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) for the FY 2027 funding cycle. As you'll remember, the town has requested, and has been approved, for over $700,000 in grant funding that has allowed significant improvements to our water and wastewater systems. In the past two fiscal years, these grant funds have been used to make critical repairs to equipment at the wastewater treatment plant as well as the rehabilitation of one of the town's five water tanks.

Our application this year will be for a rehabilitation project on our Shuler Hollow Water Tank, which has not had any major maintenance since it was placed in service over 30 years ago. Applications are due on October 16th.

Virginia Drought Status

The drought watch for our region has now been lifted. However, I still, and will always, encourage the town's water customers to be mindful of their water usage. I personally feel that our generation has a responsibility to future Chilhowie residents to safeguard our precious resources and not take it for granted.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Study

I met with Mr. Todd Gordon with EPR Consulting on August 26th. His firm is currently conducting a bicycle and pedestrian study for the Smyth County Tourism Association and I wanted to ensure that Chilhowie's needs and desires are included in the overall study. It was a productive meeting and I stressed the town's goal of becoming a more walkable community, while also pursuing projects to better attract outdoor tourism visitors to our town.

Virginia DEQ Brownfields Program

I am currently working with staff from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), MRPDC, Stantec Engineering, and local property owners to bring funding to Chilhowie to conduct environmental assessments on at least two former industrial properties. This is the first phase of site redevelopment and is an important step in bringing new life to these properties.

As you're aware, the Brownfields Program is a state-funded program that aims to redevelop former industrial and commercial properties that are no longer in use with the goal of making them more accessible for future economic growth. The town has utilized this program previously in the past and I have taken advantage of it on several other projects in another locality that I worked with. I am hopeful that it will continue to be a beneficial tool to help spur Chilhowie's economy.

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