TOWN OF CHILHOWIE, VIRGINIA

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Police Chief: Andrew K. Moss
Director Public Works: Daniel W. Combs
Fire /EMS Chief: C. David Haynes
Building Official: C. David Haynes
Wastewater Operations: Luke A. Lowe
Water Operations: Don Cole, II
Special Events/Recreation: Stephen Fields
Legal: Cassell & Crewe, P.C.

Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
September 12, 2024

Good evening, Mayor Heninger and Members of the Town Council. Your town staff has had a busy, but very productive month as we work toward completion of the State-mandated Lead Line Survey Project, see the kickoff of our Sewer Improvement Project, and prepare for our community's biggest event of the year which happens the last weekend of this month.

Community Committee Meetings

At their request, I met with three community committees this month.

First, I attended the Apple Festival Committee meeting held at Chilhowie Methodist Church on August 26th, along with Mr. Stephen Fields, to hear about their plans for this year's festival.

On September 6th, I met back-to-back with the Smyth County Public Library Committee and then the Chilhowie Garden Club to introduce myself to them in my new official role as your Town Manager. Both groups shared some of their ideas with me and I'm glad that we have such involved volunteers in our community.

VDOT Letter and Meeting

At your direction, I drafted a letter to Mr. Jeff Harrison, the Residency Administrator for VDOT's Abingdon Residency, to express your concerns brought up at our August meeting. My letter and his response are included in your agenda packet.

In addition to his email response, Mr. Harrison also met with me and other town staff (Felicia Eller, Danny Combs, Tyler Keene, and Chris Johnson) at the Chilhowie VDOT site to discuss in person several matters, one of which is the town's contracting with VDOT for snow removal and salt spreading on state-maintained streets and roads.

Prior to this meeting, Ms. Eller had worked diligently to get the town set up for this year in VDOT's "Plow4Virginia" web portal. As she worked through a newly updated website that proved to be challenging to navigate, she was ultimately able to get the town signed up (pats on the back for her efforts). As she and Mr. Combs were explaining to me how both the website and the entire VDOT contracting system is set up I was made aware that the town had not requested an hourly rate increase

from the state in the three years since we started this program. Therefore, I authorized Ms. Eller to request an hourly rate increase of 66% (from $100 per hour to $150 per hour).

Map of Town-Maintained Streets

As you're aware, VDOT maintains most of the streets and roads in Chilhowie, but the town maintains a handful of streets: 15 to be exact. The town has long held a list of the town-maintained roads, but no one could locate or remember an accurate map of them. I reached out to the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission (MRPDC) to request such a map, which they have created for us at no charge to the town. A copy of the map is in your agenda packet.

VRSA

On August 14th, Ms. Eller, Ms. Carter, and I attended the VRSA Training Session in Clifton Forge where we were updated on legislation and policies related to marijuana and employee drug testing, proposed legislation for the 2025 General Assembly session, and latest trends/threats related to cybersecurity.

The next week, Mr. Eddie Shelton, Senior Safety Specialist for VRSA, came to Chilhowie where I provided him with a tour of our facilities and introduced him to several of our staff members. As a result of his visit, he has now worked with Luke Lowe to address some issues that can improve our wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Shelton also proposed making some videos highlighting some of our efforts on their website, which is visible to all localities in our Commonwealth.

Ms. Eller and I are scheduled to attend the VRSA Fall Forum in Wytheville on September 26th.

Smyth County Commissioner of Revenue Visit

As both the town and the Commissioner of Revenue's Office have relatively new staff, I requested a visit with Mr. Bradley Powers to provide introductions between staff members to hopefully ensure a continued strong relationship. Ms. Eller and I met with him at his office in the Smyth County Courthouse where we discussed several different issues. One subject I wanted to hammer home is Chilhowie's commitment to on time mailing of our town tax tickets. A copy of our email conversation is in your agenda packet.

As his office is making a transition to a more modern software package, Ms. Eller was able to provide him with last year's town tax documents in order for his office to make a quicker transition and as a result, we now have our tax information from Smyth County and, assuming the town's software provider is on time with their conversions, I feel confident that we will have our tax tickets mailed out in a timely manner.

Smyth County 4-H Watershed Day

Once again, Chilhowie hosted the annual Smyth County 4-H Watershed Education Day in our Town Park. Students from all three Smyth County schools were at the event and representatives from the Smyth County Extension Office, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Department of Health, Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Smyth County Chamber of Commerce, and the Museum of the Middle Appalachians were on hand to host different stations educating the students on the importance of protecting our clean streams and drinking water. I attended the event and thanked each of the agencies for helping with the event. Dr. Dennis Carter, Superintendent of Smyth County Schools wanted me to extend his personal thanks to Mayor Heninger and the Town Council for allowing another successful year.

I would like to thank Mr. Stephen Fields, Mr. Chris Johnson, and Mr. Nathaniel Blevins, along with everyone else who helped provide our guests with a clean and friendly environment for the event.

Smyth County Community Foundation

The Smyth County Community Foundation has recently wrapped up their annual fundraising initiative. Considering the importance of their mission and the impacts that they have on Chilhowie's residents, I authorized a donation of $400 from the town. I visited their Executive Director, Ms. Lynda Helton, who wanted me to pass along her gratitude to you and expressed her hopes that we will continue to be solid partners in making Smyth County an even better place to live.

Town Project Updates

Lead Service Line Survey and Inventory

As you know, the state has set a deadline of October 15th to have this inventory of EVERY water service line in the town's system completed. Our engineering consultants at Hurt & Proffitt have spearheaded this effort for the town. However, despite the work done by their sub-contractor, Badger, Inc., your Public Works leadership team was very concerned that we were not going to be able to meet the October deadline. To that end, I authorized our Public Works crew to do overtime hours to bolster the contractor's efforts and they have done an outstanding job! As of today, we are down to less than 150 to be completed (out of over 2,400!) I am extremely proud of them for jumping in on a brand new process that they had never undertaken and absolutely knocking it out of the park!

While it may have cost the town several hours of unanticipated overtime, I sincerely believe that mobilizing our own staff was the right call because I in good conscience could not risk having our town miss the deadline on this high-visibility statewide program.

Additionally, Chilhowie was selected to be one of the approximately 10 percent of localities required to complete an additional online survey about our water system. I want to thank Mr. Don Cole for taking the time to complete this ahead of deadline.

Sewer Improvement Project

The contractor selected to undertake this project, Portland Utilities Construction Company, is now staged on site and ready to begin this renovation project. The actual relining work is expected to begin approximately one week from today. Most of this project area will be in the section of the town's sewer system running from behind Chilhowie High School through Seven Mile Ford and terminating near the Smyth County Technical School. As a reminder, the goal of this project is to reduce the amount of Inflow and Infiltration (I&I) coming into our system, which will help reduce the load, and therefore expenses, at our wastewater treatment plant. A copy of the funding page for this project and a copy of minutes from our September 4th Progress Meeting are in your agenda packet.

Water Line and Meter Replacement Project

This project, which is projected to kick off later in 2025 is still in the planning phases. On August 7th, town staff and Hurt & Proffitt met at Town Hall with Mr. Matt Beyer for the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Drinking Water to discuss the Environmental Review process for the project. After our meeting Mr. Beyer viewed the project area with Mr. Danny Combs and Mr. Tyler Keen. Based on his

analysis, the town will pursue a Categorical Exclusion since the entire project will be replacing existing equipment and therefore will not be impacting previously undisturbed ground.

Not directly related to this project, but nevertheless impacting it, I requested a meeting with the town's bookkeepers and auditor to discuss the status of the town's audits. As you're aware, the town is current through Fiscal Year 2022. Last week Ms. Eller and I had a very productive meeting with both our bookkeeping firm and the auditors. I'm pleased to report to you that work is being done diligently to complete our FY 2023 audit. However, I regret to have to tell you that at the absolute very best, the audit for FY 2024 will not be able to be completed any earlier than July 1, 2025.

As this meter replacement project is slated for a VRA loan closing in March 2025, it is apparent that this project schedule will slip by several months unless VRA is willing to relax their stringent requirements.

A bright note related to our audits is the fact that, assuming that both annual audits can be completed on our discussed timeline (no small feat to say the least), the town will then be completely current on its audits for the first time in over a decade.

Questions

As always, I welcome any questions about the status of the town's busy activities.

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Brian Martin
Town Manager