TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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Wastewater Operations: Luke A. Lowe
Water Operations: Don Cole, II
Recreation/Special Events Coordinator: Stephen Fields
Buildings, Streets, & Grounds: Christopher Johnson
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Town Manager's Report to Mayor and Town Council
September 11, 2025

Good evening, Mayor Heninger and Members of the Town Council. As we transition from a busy summer into Autumn, I would like to point out some historical highlights from this September that have impacted the course of our nation, as well as our community.

First, last Tuesday, September 2, marked the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender to Allied Forces. This surrender officially ended World War II, the largest conflict in world history and one that impacted so many Chilhowie families in profound ways.

Also, this month's Town Council meeting falls on September 11th, which as many of us remember, was a day of tragedy that once again changed the course of our nation's history and, for me, changed the course of my military career and my entire life as the wars that were fought in its aftermath unfolded over the next two decades. For today, I would just like to respectfully honor the 2,977 innocent victims who did nothing other than simply get up and go to work on a Tuesday morning and never got home.

Finally, September 19th will commemorate POW/MIA Day. As a veteran who has traveled the world, both in wartime and peacetime service to our nation, I know the overwhelming joy of being able to return home. Therefore, I also hold a very special place in my heart for the men/boys who were held as prisoners of war or are still missing on some old and forgotten battlefield. Specifically coming to mind at the time of this writing is my cousin Wiley Martin, who is buried just east of Chilhowie in the Middle Fork Cemetery. Wiley was stationed in the Philippines when the Japanese attacked in December 1941. By late Spring of 1942, American forces could no longer hold out due to lack of food, supplies, and medicine. After their surrender, he was one of the soldiers who endure the Bataan Death March and spent remaining three years of World War II as a prisoner of war mining coal by hand for the Japanese. Another local, although not from Chilhowie that I think about this POW//MIA Day is Sgt. Cleveland "Coot" Poore. Sgt Poore was from Saltville and was killed in 1950 in the early days of the Korean War. His body was unable to be recovered due to the heavy fighting so he most likely remains buried in a foreign land far away from family and home. Sgt Poore's direct tie to Chilhowie is that he is the great-uncle of Chilhowie Police Officer Ben Perry.

As we look toward the future of our community, I wanted to take a moment to honor the past and the memories of these soldiers from our community who paid such heavy prices so that we can enjoy the blessings that we do today.

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

Hurricane Helene Recovery

The town staff continues to work with FEMA, our engineering partners, wastewater project contractors, and appropriate regulatory agencies to work towards full restoration of infrastructure impacted by Hurricane Helene last Fall. All repairs are now complete related to the town's water system. The park benches you were informed of last month were delivered and have been installed by the Buildings and Grounds staff. Additionally, Chief Haynes is currently working with Ms. Eller to develop a solid plan for the final repairs at the Fire Training Center which will be approved by FEMA.

Regarding the repair of the three aerial sewer crossings, a pre-construction conference was held on August 20th, where town staff, Hurt & Proffitt, Portland Utilities, and representatives from our funding and regulatory agencies met for final planning as the contractor stages for construction initiation as we strive to commence work in September which will allow us to undertake the work located in the river on October 1, which is the date we are approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to access the water while still abiding by endangered species stream restrictions.

We plan to begin work at the crossing behind Chilhowie Middle/High School and then proceed to the crossing just below the Tattle Branch Bridge. Reconstruction of these two aerials will allow the removal of the temporary wastewater bypass that will result in a savings to the town of over $17,000 per month. Temporary access roads have been completed and initial equipment staging is underway. If all goes as planned, substantial completion is slated for 120 days from entry into the water.

I would like to again thank Ms. Diana Thompson from FEMA for her outstanding support since she has taken over at the town's FEMA representative. Also, I cannot begin to express my gratitude to your staff for helping corral these repairs and itemized expenses over the past eleven months. Finally, I would like to give a special thank you to Ms. Eller who has done a top-notch job of keeping me and the other department heads on point with the requirements that FEMA had set forth. Without her dedication, the town would not be receiving reimbursements anywhere near the level that we are.

Additionally, I am very pleased to announce that the town has been awarded a $2,281, 678 forgivable loan from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to assist with reconstruction of the aerials! This money was awarded to only three localities in Virginia and Chilhowie is the first community out of the gate moving forward with this funding! VCWLRF SA-HMW Project #001 is an absolute gamechanger for how our town will finance these repairs and I am grateful beyond measure to everyone who helped make this funding possible.

Sewer Improvement Project Update

The town's contractor, Portland Utilities, continues to wrap up small "punch list" tasks as this project winds down toward completion. Change Order #3, which you approved last month, is now underway and will address issues with leaking and unstable manholes in two areas and will replace approximately 700 feet of old sewer pipe along Sunset Drive. This line was not part of the original scope of work, but was identified by Public Works a few months ago and, after assessing the condition of this line, has been deemed a key area of I&I (Inflow and Infiltration).

Public Works has identified a final manhole in our system that we hope to address in a Change Order #4. Portland Utilities is compiling cost estimates at this time and I hope to have a plan to present to you at October's Town Council meeting.

As a reminder, this $3.9 million project was funded through pilot program funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, so project reporting to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will be ongoing for two years after project completion and closeout.

Seven Mile Ford Waterline Replacement and Sytemwide Meter Replacement Project

Due to inactivity on this project for several months due to audits, other projects, etc. I can report that this project is still moving forward. The town has worked with the Virginia Health Department to complete all environmental review requirements, and a Categorical Exclusion has been approved for the project.

Town staff have met several times over the past month to review project plans and have met with Hurt & Proffitt to determine changes necessary to make final preparations.

Ms. Eller, myself, and several others continue to work through the parity process required by VRA and USDA/Rural Development to close the funding package.

I'm hopeful for Spring 2026 closing on this project.

VDOT Communications

Mr. Matthew Lewis and other VDOT staff members visited Chilhowie on two different occasions over the past month to meet with both Mayor Heninger and Councilman Jeter to hear their concerns about safety at Exit 35 as well as other matters around the town.

As a reminder, VDOT has scheduled construction to begin on the Interstate bridges at mile marker 34 in early 2027. Construction is slated to be for 30 months.

Wastewater Treatment Plant Permitting Renewal

The town is currently working with Hurt & Proffitt and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to renew our operating permit under the Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES). This renewal is required every five years and this is the first renewal since the town moved away from land application of biosolids and also the first since monitoring for PFAS is required.

The staff continues to take the steps required for permit renewal. I signed the renewal request packet and it was submitted to DEQ last week. As a reminder, the town's current discharge permit expires May 3, 2026.

Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board

The next board meeting will be held in October. However, I along with some other local administrators are collaborating on a proposal to submit for consideration by the Virginia General Assembly to expand the current legislation to allow for taxation of non-tobacco products such as vape and vaping accessories.

Improved Water Capacity/WCSA

To address increased demand and to also plan for contingencies, the town continues to investigate the viability of bringing back online a former town spring that was brought offline in the early 1990s. A meeting is scheduled for mid-September between the town, the Washington County Service Authority, our engineering consultants, and the Virginia Department of Health to gauge our progress thus far and determine our investigative process going forward.

Mount Rogers Water/Wastewater Fund

Annual funding applications for this $586,000 pool of funding were posted in late July. This year, our staff has applied for funding to refurbish the water tank at the Widener Spring. We anticipate notifications from Mount Rogers in late September or October.

Virginia Energy Visit

Earlier this week I met again with representatives from Virginia Energy to discuss ideas for solar power at some facilities, as well as strategies to reduce overall power consumption, which is a considerable expense for the town each month. I hope to bring some more developed plans to you within the next few months for your consideration.

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