TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

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

Good evening,

Later this month, our nation and our community will commemorate Memorial Day weekend. For many in our country, this is the kick off of summer and a time to celebrate with backyard barbeques. I don't want to dampen the fun of the holiday weekend, but for those of us who have worn our nation's uniform and our family members, the holiday means something else.

While Veterans Day is observed in November to honor all American veterans, Memorial Day is observed to honor those who have given their lives in defense of our country. For those of us who have lost friends or family members, the holiday is a time of conflicting emotions. For all Americans, it's an opportunity to honor the young men and women who never made it home alive so that we can continue to enjoy the blessings of being able to live in the greatest country the world has ever known.

Of the young Smyth County boys who went to war during World War II to quite literally save the world from the evils of Nazi Germany, the Japanese Empire, and Mussolini's Facist government in Italy, over 30 were killed overseas. Of these, many were returned home after the war to be buried in their home communities, but others were buried overseas and remain there. That being said, I wanted to take an opportunity to thank the dedicated workers of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) for continuing to watch over these brave souls who never made it home. The ABMC operates 26 permanent American cemeteries in 17 foreign countries where almost 200,000 Americans are buried or paid homage if their remains could not be recovered. I have had the privilege and honor of visiting three of the cemeteries to pay my respects and the care that is given to the graves and the grounds is humbling.

The relevance of this to my report is that as we prepare for this Memorial Day, please take a moment to remember the seven Chilhowie sons who rest in these cemeteries, two of which are my cousins.

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

Hurricane Helene Recovery

With the exception of the three aerial river crossings in the town's wastewater collection system, all major repairs have been completed.

All three of the aerial crossings now have their casings welded together and the pipes inserted inside the casings. The first line (nearest Chilhowie High School) is now in place across the river and connected into the wastewater collection lines. Additionally, the Tattle Branch crossing is now in place and back in service. The welding crew has now moved to the Seven Mile Ford crossing and we anticipate the pipe being laid in place within the next month.

As a reminder, the installation of the first two lines at the school and just below Tattle Branch Road facilitated the removal of the pumps and piping system involved in the temporary bypass system. The pumps are now removed and the temporary piping is undergoing cleaning and disassembly. Once finalized, this step alone will result in savings of almost $20,000 per month.

On February 24th, Ms. Eller and I had the town's closeout meeting with staff from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). After that meeting, the town's relationship with FEMA for this disaster is now complete and all Federal funding allocated to reimburse the town is now at the state level at the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM).

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!

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.

As you're aware, the town has been in conversation with the VDOT, the Principals of Chilhowie High School and Chilhowie Middle School, and the Smyth County Superintendent of Schools in our combined efforts to install more visible signage at both of the crosswalks at the schools on Highway 11. At this point, VDOT has agreed to install solar powered lighted pedestrian signage. All signs and poles have now arrived at VDOT, are currently being calibrated, and are slated to be installed within the next two months.

A public meeting was held on May 7th to provide the public an opportunity to comment of the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) Six Year Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2027-2032. While I was unable to attend in person this year, I did provide written requests that the interchange at Exit 35 be addressed in hopes of improving public safety and visibility when turning off the ramps onto Whitetop Road.

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.

Chilhowie Jam-Boree Event for The Crooked Road

Mayor Heninger and I represented the town the evening of April 28th at the ceremony celebrating the formalization of the Chilhowie Jam-Boree as an affiliate venue of The Crooked Road, Virginia's Music Heritage Trail. As you know, this event is held weekly at the Chilhowie Lions Club and is an outstanding platform for our region's mountain music heritage. I thank everyone who helped make this possible and we look forward to The Crooked Road now being part of our Chilhowie Community!

Wastewater Treatment Plant Permitting Renewal

As a reminder, Chilhowie's current permit expires this 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

Last month 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.

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.

Southeast Utility Trailer Grand Opening Celebration

On April 30, Mayor Heninger and I were invited to represent Chilhowie at the grand opening of Southeast Utility Trailer's Chilhowie Modification Center. It was a well-attended event and showcased the growth and vitality of our community's industrial sector.

Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board

I represented our town at the quarterly meeting of the Mount Rogers Regional Cigarette Tax Board. As has been the trend over the past year, we continue to see declines in revenues from cigarette taxes directly correlated to the societal move away from tobacco products and opting for other choices such as vape products, etc.

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.

Virginia 811 Agreement Update

On April 30th, I signed and submitted the town's updated membership agreement with the Virginia Utility Protection Service, Inc. (VUPS), which is more commonly known as Virginia 811. This is basically nothing more than an administrative action required by all Virginia localities whenever there is an amendment to the Virginia Underground Utility Damage Prevention Act, which occurred during the recently adjourned General Assembly session.

Elected Officials and Staff Appreciation Cookout

It is our desire to hold a cookout in the Town Park, weather permitting, on Friday, May 22nd to relax for a few minutes, share a meal together, and take a quick opportunity to thank our elected officials and staff members who are all working hard together to keep our town moving forward. We hope you can join us.

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

I was invited to serve 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.

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