

Town of Valdese

2022 Action Plan



Adopted:
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Prepared by Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Alison Adams, Community and Regional Planning Director
Rachel Wooster, Community and Regional Planner

The Town Council acknowledges its role in Vision and Action Planning for the future of the Town and pledges that this document will be a living, changing, and evolving document to help guide the Town's path to the future.

Mayor

Charles Watts

Mayor Pro-Tem

Frances Hildebran (Ward 4)

Council Members

Tim Barus (Ward 1)

Paul Mears (Ward 2)

Rexanna Lowman (Ward 3)

Tim Skidmore (Ward 5)

Town Manager

Seth Eckard

Assistant Town Manager/CFO

Bo Weichel

Town Clerk/Human Resources Director

Jessica Lail

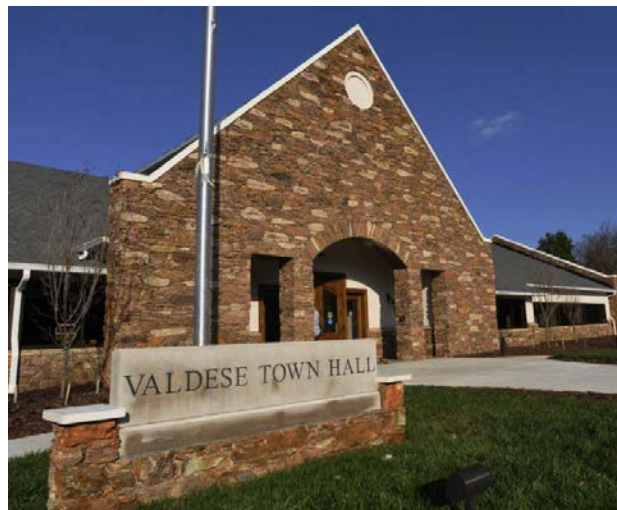


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Introduction

A Council Action Plan is a formal statement of the Council's top priorities for the upcoming budget year and if applicable, the following years. This plan is not a comprehensive, detailed work plan for all municipal operations, nor is it a comprehensive list of all of the issues and initiatives that the Council will undertake throughout the entire year. The purpose of the Council Action Plan is to articulate to both the community and to municipal staff the Town Council's collective focus as it begins governing duties. This plan will also direct Town staff in the achievement of key deliverables that the Council members deem to be in the community's highest interest.

Background

On November 1, 2022, the Town of Valdese held a strategic planning meeting. The Town Council, Manager, Assistant Manager, and Town Clerk, along with staff from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments evaluated past major accomplishments, as well as identified issues, organizational effectiveness, priorities, and future concerns. These items were used to set specific actions, goals, and programs to guide the Town over the next several years.

Planning Process

The joint group was taken through a process to identify concerns/obstacles/challenges, then opportunities/projects/priorities, next to devise a list of policies and actions for the Town's focus. *Attendees: WPCOG Facilitator Executive Director Anthony Starr, Community, and Regional Planning Director Alison Adams, and Community and Regional Planner Rachel Wooster.*

The topics listed received the most votes over the course of the planning session. The number of votes is shown in parentheses.

Role of the Council

The primary functions of a municipal Council are to establish administrative policy, to adopt bylaws governing matters delegated to local government through the North Carolina General Statutes and the Town's Official Charter, for the protection of the public, and to levy taxes for these purposes. The municipal Council represents the citizens of the Town of Valdese. Council provides community leadership by serving as the legislative and policy-making body. The Mayor and Council approve policy and budgets and provide direction to the Town Manager. Council is responsible for providing ethical oversight related to municipal operations and assets, and for providing services, facilities, and other items considered necessary or desirable for taxpayers. Council shall continue to foster the current and future economic, social, and environmental well-being of the Town.

Accomplishments

The Town completed many of the actions put forth in past Action Plans. Listed below are a few of the Action Plan items that were completed. Town Manager Seth Eckard presented improvements that were implemented by the Town within the past five years. Mr. Eckard organized these accomplishments in five areas of focus – Parks and Recreation, Community Affairs – public communication, housing development – subdivisions, utilities – grants and maintenance, and Public Safety – Police, Code Enforcement, and Animal Control.

Council members were then given an opportunity to vote on which accomplishments they felt were most important for the Town of Valdese to undertake. These accomplishments are shown below, with the total number of votes received in parentheses.

- **Housing Growth** - Workforce housing, apartment developments, and planned unit developments (4)
- **Water and Sewer upgrades** - \$11 million of capital investment in utility system and \$5 million of which was funded with grant money (4)
- **Upgrades and upkeep of public facilities** - including parks and the Community Center renovations of the pool, locker rooms, lobby area, and gym. The Old Rock School LED stage lighting conversion project was also completed for the auditorium. (3)
- **Investments** that have proven Valdese is a valuable and attractive community for further investments (2)
- **Fund Balance Increase** (1)
- **Valdese Lakeside Park** - opened in November 2021 and was fully funded through private donations and grants. The park provides a dog park, kayak launch, fishing pier, hiking trails, picnic areas, parking, and restrooms. (1)



Other accomplishments mentioned:

Utilities and infrastructure

- Transportation and transit infrastructure

Recreation

- Grant and money awarded for public projects and facilities
- Downtown Family Splash Park amenities including an exercise building, playground, splash pad, and shelter

Intergovernmental Relations

- Collaborations that led to the establishment of the NC School of Math and Science
- Partnerships that built assets in the community

Public Safety

- Strong and proactive Code Enforcement and Animal Control
- Code Enforcement and Police Department are able to provide excellent service and increase public safety

Community Affairs

- Increased public communication through multiple online, paper, and in-person resources
- Outdoor stage pavilion at Temple Field constructed in the Spring of 2022 and was funded by local contributions and sponsorships. The stage features raised concrete covered stage area equipped with electrical upgrades including lighting and fans. The pavilion while constructed specifically for the summer concert series has been used during the Fall football season as well.

Investment Attraction

- Increased citizen confidence in Valdese because of Central Business District revitalizations and local business successes downtown



Evaluation of the Town’s Mission Statement

After Council reviewed the Town’s recent accomplishments, Council members were given the opportunity to review the Town’s current mission statement and evaluate the need for changes. It is the role of the Council to uphold the Town of Valdese’s mission statement. In the past year, citizens have elected a majority of new council members, who now represent and provide a voice for the Town.

Current - Town of Valdese Mission Statement:

The Town of Valdese welcomes growth and diversity to enhance, while preserving, our existing neighborhoods, natural amenities and rich history for current residents and future generations.

Two suggestions were made to revise the mission statement. The first change suggested was to include the word “stakeholders” in addition to residents and future generations. The reason for this suggestion was that there are individuals who work, visit, and support the Town of Valdese who are not residents of the Town. Secondly, it was suggested that the phrase “welcomes growth and diversity” be changed to “facilitates or invests in growth and diversity”. Council members agreed that with the mentioned changes the mission statement is strong and still upholds the values of Valdese.

Revised - Town of Valdese Mission Statement

The Town of Valdese facilitates in enhancing growth, diversity, and investments for residents and stakeholders, while preserving our existing neighborhoods, natural amenities, and rich history for all.



Following the discussion of accomplishments and the revision of the mission statement, Council worked together on a modified Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The SWOT process was used to identify future opportunities, projects and priorities – as well as concerns, obstacles, and challenges for the upcoming budget year.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES & COUNCIL ACTION PLAN 2022-2023

The goal of the Town of Valdese Council Retreat was to help set the stage for the upcoming year, provide an opportunity to share information and to engage in planning exercises. The retreat resulted in productive discussions, and provided an opportunity for team building and collaboration between the Council members and Town staff. The planning exercises consisted of the identification of concerns, obstacles and challenges, as well as opportunities, projects, and priorities. From the exercises, the participants devised a list of policies and action items for the Town to focus on. The priorities can be found below.

In the sections that follow, more specific deliverables (and their proposed timelines) are laid out within each priority area. It should be noted that these deliverables do not constitute a full work plan for all municipal operations, nor is it a comprehensive list of all of the issues and initiatives that the Council will undertake over the next few years. The purpose of the Council Action Plan is to articulate to both the community and to municipal staff the Council's current collective focus as it begins governing duties.

Council provided their insights regarding challenges, obstacles, and concerns. These are shown below, with the total number of votes provided by the Council in parentheses.

Challenges/Obstacles/Concerns:

- Keeping up with street maintenance and street paving (5)
- Recruitment and retention of qualified employees (4)
- Misinformation about the Town being circulated (4)
- Lack of young families (4)
- Keeping downtown viable (3)
- Seeing businesses leave town (e.g. banks) (1)
- Not enough industrial development (1)
- The next economic recession's impact on the town (1)
- A need to evaluate the types of industries that would be viable in town (1)

After discussing these challenges, Council was then asked to provide their insights regarding opportunities, projects, and priorities. These insights are shown below, with the total number of votes provided by the Council in parentheses.

Opportunities/Projects/Priorities:

- Downtown Revitalization (5)
- Maintain Utility Capital Improvement Plan (4)
- Street maintenance and paving (4)
- Complete public safety building (3)
- Community Togetherness (2)
- Refurbish Tiger Gym (1)
- Assist in the completion of housing projects (1)
- Build a sense of community (1)
- Improve communication of the town's successes (1)
- Wilderness Gateway Trail (1)
- Promote the schools (1)

Other items mentioned, but not receiving votes:

Attract and retain young families, review employee benefits, promote the healthcare services in the area, and effectively involve the Planning Board in projects

After identification of the Challenges, Obstacles, Concerns, Opportunities, Projects, and Priorities Council then determined that the top five priority areas to focus on within the next year would be downtown revitalization, maintaining the utility capital improvement plan, street maintenance and paving, completion of the public safety building, and community togetherness.

Priority Area 1: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

1. Invest in Valdese's downtown to make it viable for future development and use.
 - a. Invest in downtown beautification, landscaping, streetscape, and greenspaces
 - b. Encourage experiences/events that will increase the usage of downtown by visitors and residents such as retail and dining.
 - c. Town/wayfinding/directional signage should be consolidated into a cohesive design style that matches branding scheme and marketing strategies, allowing for quick recognition by visitors and new residents.
 - d. Redevelop entrances to town limits including, gateway signs, landscaping and lighting to enhance the Town's visual appeal.

Priority Area 2: MAINTAIN UTILITY CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1. Replace water lines as needed.
2. Continue working on the water and wastewater developments.

Priority Area 3: STREET MAINTANENCE AND PAVING

1. Develop and implement street paving plan
 - a. Include resources in annual budget.

Priority Area 4: COMPLETE PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

1. Provide appropriate support and resources for the Fire and Police departments.

Priority Area 5: COMMUNITY TOGETHERNESS

1. Build a sense of community and Town pride.
 - a. Invest in public spaces and branding efforts. Residents will be excited about the Town's future if they see positive developments.
 - b. Develop town identity through strategic marketing.
 - c. Implement town slogan to encourage community pride to focus on attracting and retaining young people.
 - i. Use Main Street Committee and surveys sent to community organizations to guide this effort.
 - ii. Utilize the online infrastructure that been built to spread information and increase online engagement.
 - iii. Focus on regional job opportunities, low cost of living, recreation experiences, and quality of life talking points.
2. Promote the Town's successes to residents and visitors.
 - a. Identify best methods to reach target audiences.
 - b. Use the Town's website to highlight the positive things happening in the community.
 - c. Promote regional connections made through outdoor recreation and events.

The implementation of this plan will be dependent on both the Staff and the Town Council taking action on the recommendations outlined in this report. Staff has the responsibility to implement these goals as a part of the operations of the Town, and the Town Council must reinforce the Town's desire to see this plan through to fruition. The staff and Town Council should update and review progress on these action points throughout the year along with an annual review prior to the beginning of the budgeting process to ensure alignment of priorities and funding.