

**TOWN OF VALDESE
TOWN COUNCIL CITIZENS BUDGET PRIORITIES (WPCOG 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN)
MARCH 18, 2024**

The Town of Valdese Town Council met on Monday, March 18, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the Town Council Chambers at Town Hall, 102 Massel Avenue SW, Valdese, North Carolina. The Council meeting was live-streamed on YouTube @townofvaldese. The following were present: Mayor Charles Watts, Mayor Pro Tem Gary Ogle, Councilwoman Rexanna Lowman, Councilwoman Heather Ward, Councilman Glenn Harvey, and Councilman Paul Mears. Also present were: Interim Town Manager Bryan Steen, Town Attorney Tim Swanson, Town Clerk Jessica Lail, and various Department Heads.

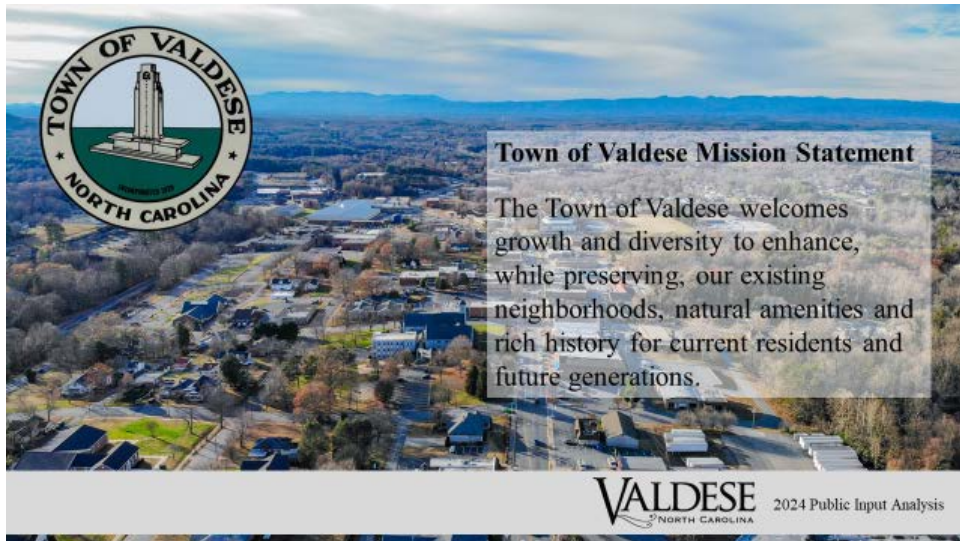
Absent: None

A quorum was present.

Mayor Watts called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He offered the invocation and led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

NEW BUSINESS

PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN Alison Adams, WPCOG Community & Regional Planning Director, provided Council with an overview of the Strategic Planning that was completed with the citizens and Town Council. Ms. Adams presented the following presentation:

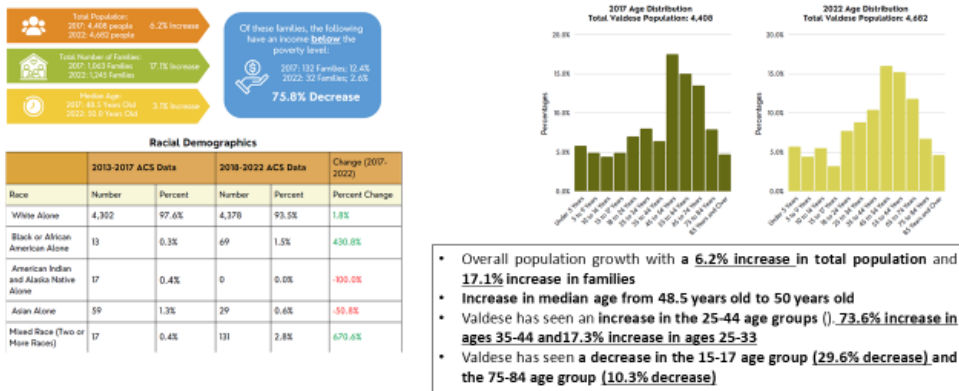


PURPOSE AND THE ROLE OF TOWN COUNCIL

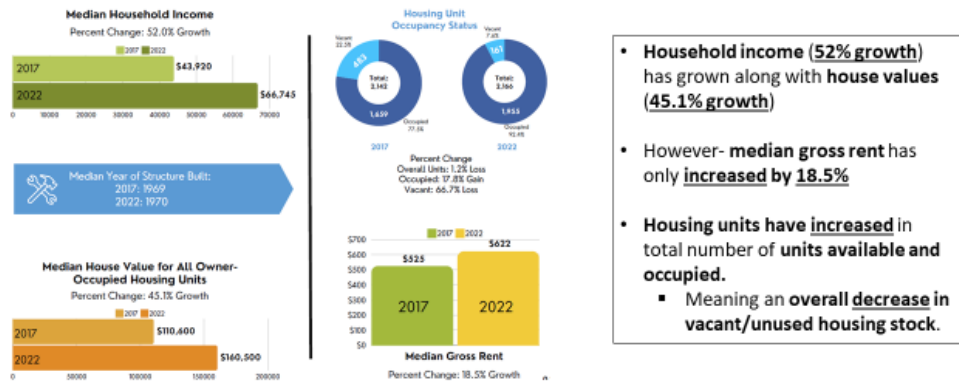
- **Main Roles:** establishing administrative policy, adopting ordinances based on North Carolina General Statutes and the Town's Charter for public protection, and levying taxes for these functions. Town Council represents Valdese citizens and serves the community through legislative and policy making body.
- **Other Duties:**
 - Approve policies and budgets
 - Provide direction to the Town Manager
 - Oversee municipal operations and assets
 - Provide services/facilities to taxpayers
 - Foster the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the town.



Town of Valdese Demographics- Population Trends



Town of Valdese Demographics- Housing Trends



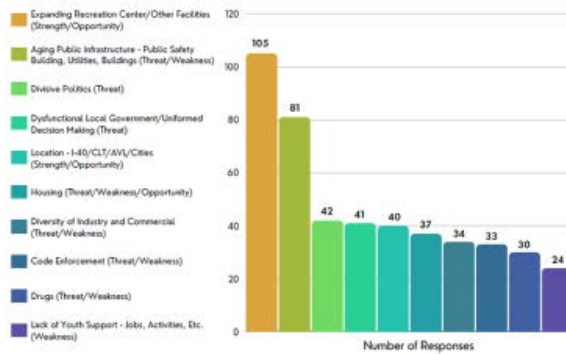
Public Input Meeting

- Meetings held on January 17th and 24th at the Old Rock School.
- Participants participated in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) exercise.
- Participants were encouraged to fill out the public input survey either digitally or the one received in the mail.
- Each of the SWOT results were broken down by percent of votes within each category to identify common themes.



Public Input Meeting Results

Public Input Meeting Top Issues



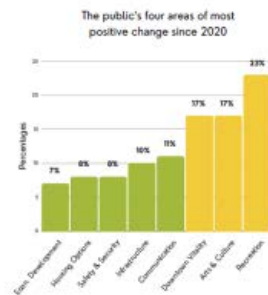
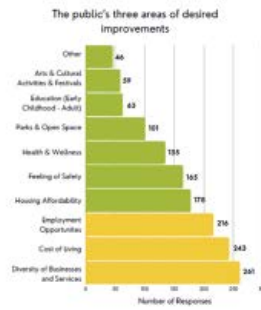
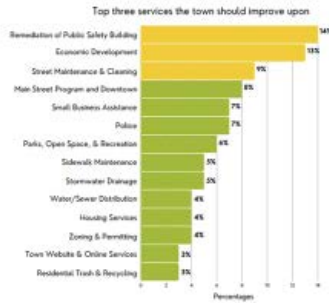
Top Results:

- **Strength/Opportunity:** Expanding Recreation Center and other recreation facilities
- **Threat Weakness:** Aging public infrastructure-Public Safety Building, utilities, public buildings
- **Threat:** Divisive politics

Public Input Survey Results

- Both a digital survey and a paper survey were administered to obtain feedback.
- 1,915 paper surveys were sent and 313 were received providing for a 16.3% response rate.
- Total of 218 digital surveys were completed. The total number of responses both digital and paper were 531.
- A total of 12 questions were asked of the participants – 9 rating scale questions and three open-ended questions.
- Results - comparisons from the paper to digital survey results were very similar. Top 3 to 4 responses were consistent between the two survey types.
- Analyzing the data – paired together the positives (excellent/good), the negatives (Fair/Poor), neutral and Don't know were analyzed individually.
- Written explanations were analyzed with AI technology to create a summarized consensus of the comments received.

Public Survey Results



Areas in need of improvement include:

- Economic development- diversity of businesses/services and a need for more employment opportunities
- Remediation of the Public Safety Building
- Street maintenance/cleaning
- Cost of living

Areas that have improved since 2020

- Recreation
- Arts and culture
- Downtown vitality

Town Council Priorities

During the Town Council's strategic planning session, council members identified the main takeaways from the public input/survey materials. The council participated in a SWOT analysis, which guided a prioritization of goals, needed policy changes, and future projects. The action items stated below were created from the priority identification process and their corresponding votes.

Top Results

1. Hiring the best town manager
2. Tackle Public Safety Building issues
3. Recruitment and retention of town employees
4. Address infrastructure
5. Continue the repaving schedule started in 2023

- Hiring the best town manager (4)
- Tackle the public safety building issues (updating the existing structure) (4)
- Recruitment and retention – develop strategies for town employees (3)
- Create permanent structure over the recreation pool (3)
- Addressing infrastructure (water/sewer and public safety building) (3)
- Continue the repaving schedule started in 2023 (3)
- Address the housing issue (1)
- Continue improving the Old Rock School (consider establishing a committee) (1)
- Recruit at least one job creating industry (significant number of employees) (1)
- Expand cultural affairs program (1)
- Strategy to retain young people

Town Council Focus Areas

From the identified priorities, four focus areas were created as actionable items for the town.



1 Employee Retention & Recruitment

Employee Retention & Recruitment

Recruitment and retention of a town manager and qualified employees



3 Public Infrastructure

Public Infrastructure

Public buildings, streets, and utility upgrades



2 Economic Development

Economic Development

Business recruitment, retention, and expansion



4 Old Rock School

Old Rock School

Expand and upgrade Old Rock School



Focus Area 1: Employee Retention and Recruitment

- 1. Recruit and retain a knowledgeable and experienced town manager.**
 - a. Complete a standardized nationwide search.
 - b. Recruitment of candidates that not only have experience as a town manager, but show strengths in soft skills (empathy, transparency, attentive to employee and citizen needs).
 - c. Market position in a way that highlight's Valdese's values and mission.
- 2. Conduct analysis regarding employee benefits, compensation, and satisfaction**
 - a. Conduct an anonymous survey regarding current benefits to employees that allows for feedback and assesses current employee needs.
 - b. Compare Valdese employee benefits and compensation packages to local governments in the region.
 - c. Identify vacant positions and departments that will need additional staffing capacity.
- 3. Promote the assets in the area to prospective employees.**
 - a. Promote the excellent healthcare resources, school systems, shopping, and recreation opportunities that impact the quality of life outside of work.
 - b. Market the quality of life in Valdese.
 - i. Partner with WPCOG to utilize NC Foothills Experience as recruitment/retention tool.
 - ii. Partner with Burke County Tourism for marketing and tourism opportunities.
 - iii. Distribute digital and paper marketing/employee recruitment materials throughout the region.
 - c. Spotlight and market employee success stories and their employment milestones in order to promote workforce recruitment and retention.



Focus Area 2: Economic Development

- 1. Attract and retain young people to the area. Specifically, young adults within the workforce age group.**
 - a. Facilitate engagement with young adults within the region. This can be done by job fairs, partnerships with college educators, community college students, and young adult community stakeholders.
 - b. Use this data to evaluate the target market audience and incorporate in branding strategy.
 - c. Engage with local employers with information on promotional employment opportunities they can attend in the region.
 - d. Partner with WPCOG Workforce Development initiatives to promote and attract workforce age adults to the town.
- 2. Recruitment of an industry that creates 75 jobs or more.**
 - a. Engage in an industrial site identification that can be marketed to potential
 - b. Identify possible target industries that would be compatible with Valdese topography, utility capacity, and workforce needs.
 - c. Work with Burke County Development Inc. to develop and implement economic development/business recruitment strategies.
- 3. Increase and diversify the housing stock within the Town of Valdese.**
 - a. Town staff, planning board, and council should provide support for the developers through streamlined efficient processes to ensure project success.
 - b. Create a zoning "roadmap" for housing developers to easily understand Town zoning policies and approval processes.
 - c. Consider implementing strategies featured in the Western Piedmont Housing Growth Toolkit to promote diverse housing types.



Focus Area 3: Public Infrastructure

- 1. Rehabilitate the public safety building.**
 - a. Provide appropriate support and resources for the fire and police department.
 - b. Develop a cost-effective rehabilitation plan that meets the current and future needs of the police and fire departments.
- 2. Construct a permanent structure over the pool at the Valdese Aquatic and Fitness center.**
 - a. Identify possible coverage options, compare the cost and functionality and determine a construction timeline.
 - b. After construction is complete encourage and market the pool for year-round swimming.
- 3. Maintain and implement the current Capital Improvement Plan.**
 - a. Expand and replace the water lines on a schedule that represents good stewardship of the utility systems, while balancing consumer needs with the cost burden.
 - b. Continue advancing water and wastewater infrastructure development.
 - i. Identify annual projects for implementation.
 - c. Analyze water and sewer capacity at targeted sites/areas in order to recruit large industries and new employers.
- 4. Identify and pursue relevant grant funding for building rehabilitation and utility upgrades**
 - a. Work with WPCOG Community and Economic Development Department to seek and obtain grant funding for implementation.
- 5. Continue current street paving/maintenance schedule.**
 - a. Evaluate feasibility of expediting schedule based on recent progress.
 - b. Develop and maintain a street re-paving prioritization plan.



Focus Area 4: Old Rock School

1. **Create a citizen action group that can provide recommendations and guidance to Town Council regarding the future of Old Rock**
 - a. Identify Valdese residents and community members who hold experience in relevant fields and therefore can offer expert recommendations.
 - b. Consider forming a committee to provide input regarding community activities and future plans for the facility.
2. **Assess the expansion and revitalization of the existing facilities.**
 - a. Use insight from the public, town council, the newly formed committee, and staff to identify possible next steps for expansion and revitalization.
3. **Identify and pursue relevant grant funding for building rehabilitation and upgrades.**
 - a. Create a funding timeline and planning documents needed to submit grant applications.
 - b. Align capital improvement plan with grant submittals and possible funding awards.
4. **Market and advertise existing and expanded activities.**
 - a. Evaluate public/private partnerships and small businesses to offer activities/events/etc.

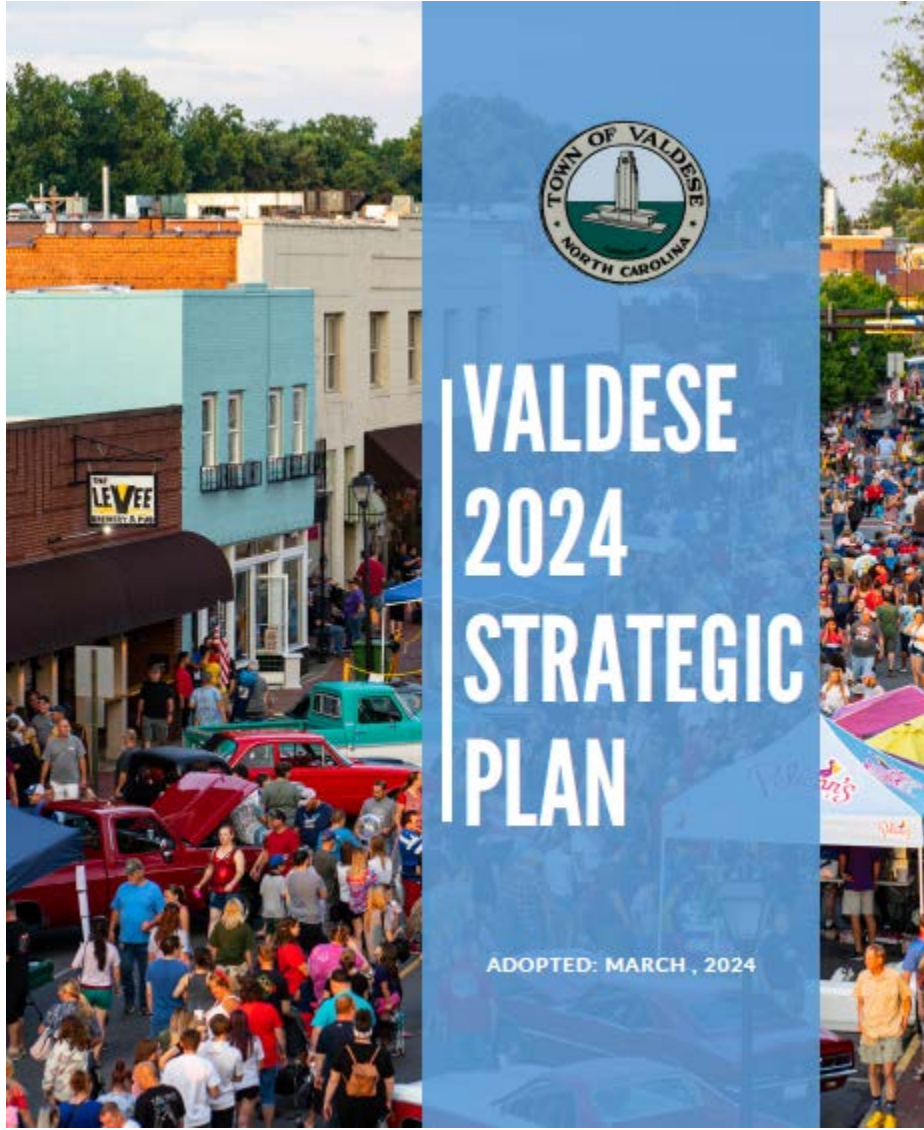
Conclusion

- This plan's implementation is dependent on both the staff and the town council acting on the recommendations in this report.
 - The staff has the responsibility to take on these goals as a part of the operations of the town.
 - The town council must reinforce the desire and need for these actions to occur.
- 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.
- Ongoing public input is key to assisting the town with implementation of this plan.



Ms. Adams recommended that this exercise be completed annually. Councilman Harvey thanked Ms. Adams for the great work and hopes we can get started on this earlier next year. Ms. Adams noted that the 2024 Strategic Plan document is a quick reference to hand citizens, but more attachments could be included if Council wishes. Councilman Mears thanked Ms. Adams as well.

ADOPTED 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN Ms. Adams presented the final 2024 Strategic Plan document for adoption consideration.



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.

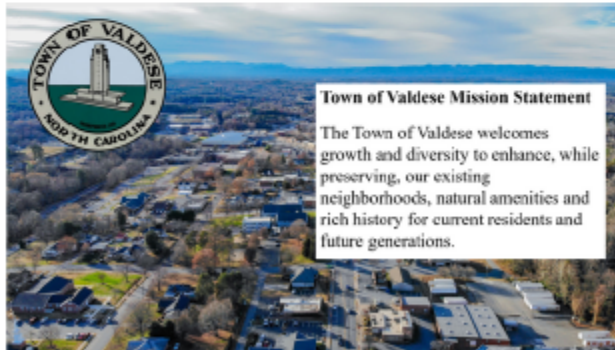
Mayor
Charles Watts

Mayor Pro-Tem
Gary Ogle

Council Members
Glenn Harvey (Ward 1)
Paul Mears (Ward 2)
Rexanna Lowman (Ward 3)
Gary Ogle (Ward 4)
Heather Ward (Ward 5)

Interim Town Manager
Bryan Steen

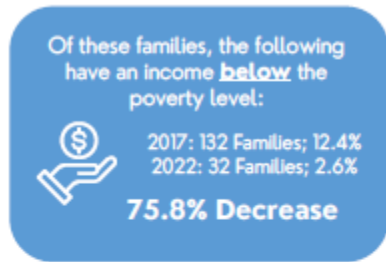
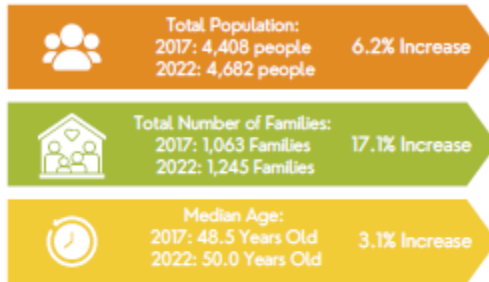
Town Clerk/Human Resources Director
Jessica Lail



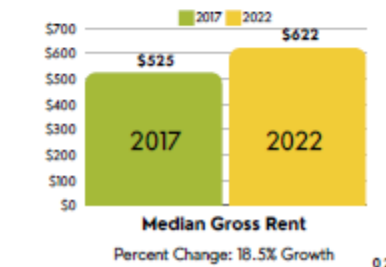
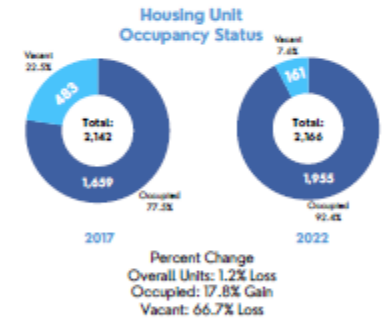
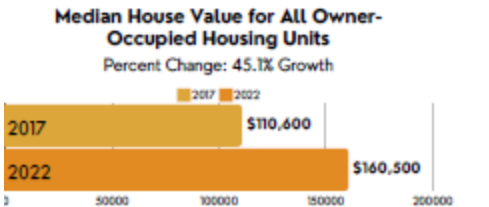
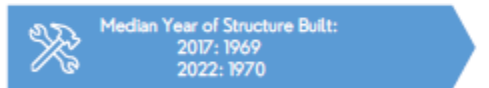
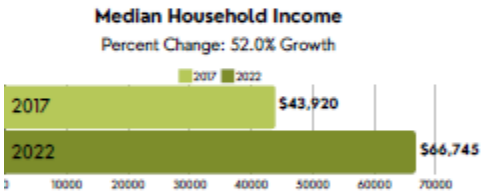
Town of Valdese Mission Statement
The Town of Valdese welcomes growth and diversity to enhance, while preserving, our existing neighborhoods, natural amenities and rich history for current residents and future generations.

Prepared by Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Allison Adams, Community and Regional Planning Director
Rachel Wooster, Community and Regional Planner
Katelyn Smith, Community and Regional Planner

Town of Valdese Demographics



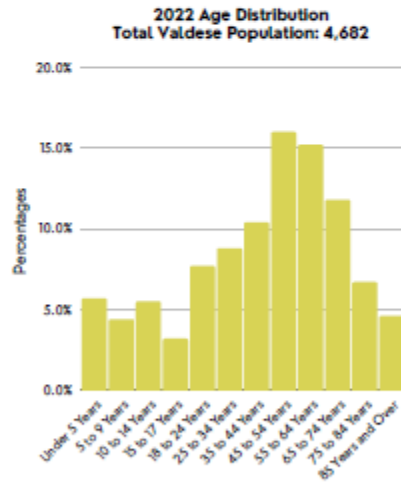
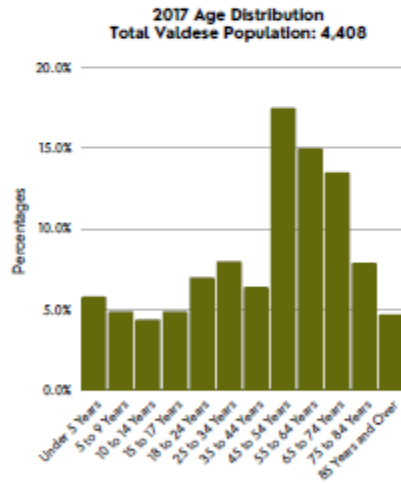
Housing



Town of Valdese Demographics

Racial Demographics

Race	2013-2017 ACS Data		2018-2022 ACS Data		Change (2017-2022)
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Percent Change
White Alone	4,302	97.6%	4,378	93.5%	1.8%
Black or African American Alone	13	0.3%	69	1.5%	430.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	17	0.4%	0	0.0%	-100.0%
Asian Alone	59	1.3%	29	0.6%	-50.8%
Mixed Race (Two or More Races)	17	0.4%	131	2.8%	670.6%



Notable Changes in Age Demographics

<p>Increases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 73.6% Increase in ages 35-44 • 33% Increase in ages 10-14 • 17.3% Increase in ages 25-33 	<p>Decreases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29.6% decrease in ages 15-17 • 10.3% decrease in ages 75-84
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Role of the Town Council

The town council's main roles include establishing administrative policy, adopting ordinances based on North Carolina General Statutes and the Town's Charter for public protection, and levying taxes for these functions. The town council represents the citizens of the Town of Valdese. The 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. The council is responsible for providing oversight related to municipal operations and assets, and to provide services and facilities considered necessary or desirable for taxpayers. The council strives to foster the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the town.



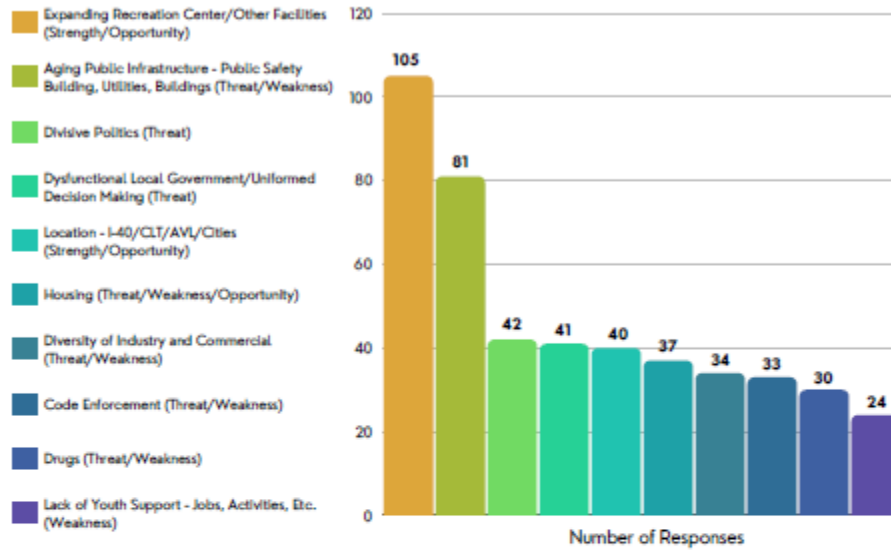
Public Input Meetings

At the request of the mayor and town council, WPCOG staff led attendees through an interactive SWOT analysis to compile input regarding the community's perception of the Town of Valdese's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The results of this analysis are a combination of the responses of two public meetings that were held in January 2024. These responses were taken into consideration while drafting the Strategic Plan.

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is defined as the following. Strengths are internal and supportive characteristics that are the foundation of a community and provide stability. Weaknesses are internal and harmful characteristics to the community's stability. Opportunities are external and helpful characteristics for continued growth. Threats are external and harmful characteristics that weaken community stability.

WPCOG staff members moderated a discussion between the attendees on each SWOT category and recorded the identified topics. After the discussion, the attendees voted on individual topics under each SWOT category. Each attendee was instructed to cast up to 4 votes per strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat category. Participants were not permitted to vote for a topic more than once. Below are the collective results from the public input meetings.

Public Input Meeting Top Issues



Public Survey Results

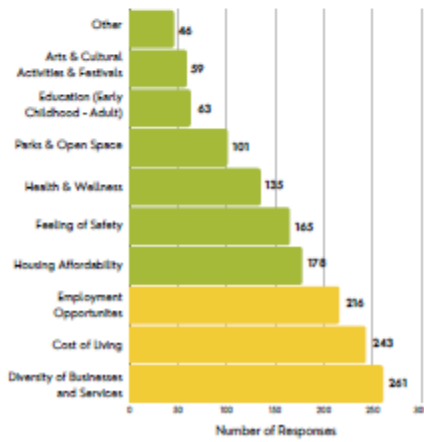
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- A total of 12 questions were asked of the participants – 9 rating scale questions and three open-ended questions.
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- Analyzing the data – paired together the positives (excellent/good), the negatives (fair/poor), neutral and don't know responses were analyzed individually.
- Written explanations were analyzed with AI technology to create a summarized consensus of the comments received.

Survey Results

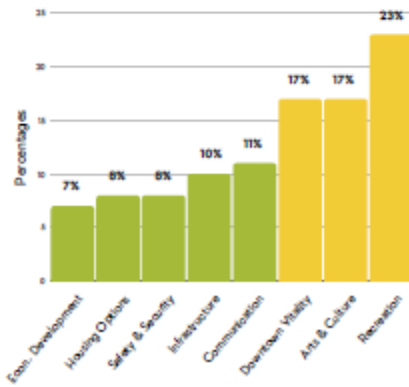
Top three services the town should improve upon



The public's three areas of desired improvements



The public's four areas of most positive change since 2020



Town Council Priorities

During the Town Council's strategic planning session, council members identified the main takeaways from the public input/survey materials. The council participated in a SWOT analysis, which guided a prioritization of goals, needed policy changes, and future projects. The action items stated below were created from the priority identification process and their corresponding votes. The items in bold received the most votes from participating council members.

- **Hiring the best town manager (4)**
- **Tackle the public safety building issues (updating the existing structure) (4)**
- **Recruitment and retention – develop strategies for town employees (3)**
- **Create permanent structure over the recreation pool (3)**
- **Addressing infrastructure (water/sewer and public safety building) (3)**
- **Continue the repaving schedule started in 2023 (3)**
- Address the housing issue (1)
- Continue improving the Old Rock School (consider establishing a committee) (1)
- Recruit at least one job creating industry (significant number of employees) (1)
- Expand cultural affairs program (1)
- Strategy to retain young people



Valdese Town Council Focus Areas 2024-2025

From the identified priorities, four focus areas were created as actionable items for the town.



Employee Retention & Recruitment

Recruitment and retention of a town manager and qualified employees



Economic Development

Business recruitment, retention, and expansion



Public Infrastructure

Public buildings, streets, and utility upgrades



Old Rock School

Expand and upgrade Old Rock School



Focus Area 1: Employee Retention & Recruitment

1. Recruit and retain a knowledgeable and experienced town manager.

<p>a. Complete a standardized nationwide search.</p>	<p>b. Recruitment of candidates that not only have experience as a town manager, but show strengths in soft skills (empathy, transparency, attentive to employee and citizen needs).</p>	<p>c. Market position in a way that highlight's Valdese's values and mission.</p>
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2. Conduct analysis regarding employee benefits, compensation, and satisfaction.

<p>a. Conduct an anonymous survey regarding current benefits to employees that allows for feedback and assesses current employee needs.</p>	<p>b. Compare Valdese employee benefits and compensation packages to local governments in the region.</p>	<p>c. Identify vacant positions and departments that will need additional staffing capacity.</p>
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3. Promote the assets in the area to prospective employees.

<p>a. Promote the excellent healthcare resources, school systems, shopping, and recreation opportunities that impact the quality of life outside of work.</p>	<p>b. Market the quality of life in Valdese. I. Partner with WPCOG to utilize NC Foothills Experience as recruitment/retention tool. II. Partner with Burke County Tourism for marketing and tourism opportunities. III. Distribute digital and paper marketing/employee recruitment materials throughout the region.</p>	<p>c. Spotlight and market employee success stories and their employment milestones in order to promote workforce recruitment and retention.</p>
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Focus Area 2: Economic Development

1. Attract and retain young people to the area. Specifically, young adults within the workforce age group.

<p>a. Facilitate engagement with young adults within the region. This can be done by job fairs, partnerships with college educators, community college students, and young adult community stakeholders.</p>	<p>b. Use this data to evaluate the target market audience and incorporate in branding strategy.</p>	<p>c. Engage with local employers with information on promotional employment opportunities they can attend in the region.</p>	<p>d. Partner with WPCOG Workforce Development initiatives to promote and attract workforce age adults to the town.</p>
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2. Recruitment of an industry that creates 75 jobs or more.

<p>a. Engage in an industrial site identification that can be marketed to potential industries.</p>	<p>b. Identify possible target industries that would be compatible with Valdese topography, utility capacity, and workforce needs.</p>	<p>c. Work with Burke County Development Inc. to develop and implement economic development/business recruitment strategies.</p>
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3. Increase and diversify the housing stock within the Town of Valdese.

<p>a. Town staff, planning board, and council should provide support for the developers through streamlined efficient processes to ensure project success.</p>	<p>b. Create a zoning "roadmap" for housing developers to easily understand Town zoning policies and approval processes.</p>	<p>c. Consider implementing strategies featured in the Western Piedmont Housing Growth Toolkit to promote diverse housing types.</p>
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Focus Area 3: Public Infrastructure

1. Rehabilitate the public safety building.		
a. Provide appropriate support and resources for the fire and police department.	b. Develop a cost-effective rehabilitation plan that meets the current and future needs of the police and fire departments.	
2. Construct a permanent structure over the pool at the Valdese Aquatic and Fitness center.		
a. Identify possible coverage options, compare the cost and functionality and determine a construction timeline.	b. After construction is complete encourage and market the pool for year-round swimming.	
3. Maintain and implement the current Capital Improvement Plan.		
a. Expand and replace the water lines on a schedule that represents good stewardship of the utility systems, while balancing consumer needs with the cost burden.	b. Continue advancing water and wastewater infrastructure development. i. Identify annual projects for implementation.	c. Analyze water and sewer capacity at targeted sites/areas in order to recruit large industries and new employers.
4. Identify and pursue relevant grant funding for building rehabilitation and utility upgrades		
a. Work with WPCOG Community and Economic Development Department to seek and obtain grant funding for implementation.		
5. Continue current street paving/maintenance schedule.		
a. Evaluate feasibility of expediting schedule based on recent progress.	b. Develop and maintain a street re-paving prioritization plan.	



Focus Area 4: Old Rock School

1. Create a citizen action group that can provide recommendations and guidance to Town Council regarding the future of Old Rock School.

a. Identify Valdese residents and community members who hold experience in relevant fields and therefore can offer expert recommendations.

b. Consider forming a committee to provide input regarding community activities and future plans for the facility.

2. Assess the expansion and revitalization of the existing facilities.

a. Use insight from the public, town council, the newly formed committee, and staff to identify possible next steps for expansion and revitalization.

3. Identify and pursue relevant grant funding for building rehabilitation and upgrades.

a. Create a funding timeline and planning documents needed to submit grant applications.

b. Align capital improvement plan with grant submittals and possible funding awards.

4. Market and advertise existing and expanded activities.

a. Evaluate public/private partnerships and small businesses to offer activities/events/etc.

Conclusion

This plan's implementation is dependent on both the staff and the town council acting on the recommendations in this report. The staff has the responsibility to take on these goals as a part of the operations of the Town and the town council must reinforce the desire and need for these actions to occur. 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. Ongoing public input is key to assisting the town with implementation of this plan.



13

Councilwoman Lowman made a motion to adopt the 2024 Strategic Plan as presented by Alison Adams from WPCOG, seconded by Councilwoman Ward. The vote was unanimous.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS: Councilman Harvey thanked the citizens who completed the surveys and attended the public input sessions. Councilman Harvey noted that the staff has sent out an RFQ for the Public Safety Building, eight architectural firms have responded, and the Facilities Review committee will recommend which proposal the Council shall pursue. Councilman Harvey asked the citizens to provide suggestions to the staff, Council, or Town Manager on how to save money and raise revenue. Councilman Harvey said they are talking with local manufacturers, and Valdese should be proud of the world-class manufacturers we have. Councilman Harvey shared that there is an world-class Easter Sunrise Service at 7:00 a.m. Easter morning at the Trail of Faith.

Councilwoman Ward shared that the Drug & Homeless Task Force will meet on March 26, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. at Valdese First Baptist Church. Councilwoman Lowman asked if the committees would share their minutes with the Council.

ADJOURNMENT: At 6:36 p.m., there being no further business to come before Council, Councilman Harvey made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilman Mears. The vote was unanimous.

The next regular Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 1, 2024, 6:00 p.m., at Valdese Town Hall.

Town Clerk

Mayor

jl