Valle Crucis Community Park
Strategic Plan
2021
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“...never had there been so rare a day, or so rich a solitude to spend it in.”
~ Aldo Leopold
Overview

Valle Crucis Community Park was founded in 1983 when members of the Valle Crucis community joined forces to preserve a 12-acre tract of land that was slated for development as a recreational vehicle campground. Today Valle Crucis Community Park has grown into a 28-acre preserve providing walking trails, playgrounds, picnic shelters, weekly summer musical events, year-round environmental education programming, and much more.

Valle Crucis Community Park was incorporated as Valle Crucis Park, Inc., and operates as a non-profit entity. This organization was created as a land trust to maintain a community recreational park in an area not presently served by any tax-supported parks, and relies almost exclusively on donations from users and other private donors. Valle Crucis Community Park is governed and managed by a Board of Directors made up of volunteers from the surrounding community. The Board consists of between 11 and 15 members, each of whom serves a two-year term, with the possibility of renewing for a second term. The Board of Directors oversees the work of the Park’s Executive Director and other staff members.

In 2021, the twelve members of the Board of Directors include Tracy Hastings (Past President), Holly Ambler (President), Tracey Heiss (Vice President), Alex Dale (Treasurer), Jeanette Vines (Secretary), Paul Cribbins, Andy Hill, Mitch Mayhew, Anna Shine, Lisa Stinson, and Mary Wood. The Park’s Executive Director is Ashley Galleher. Maintenance Team members include John Welsh, Blaine Bare, Stefan Kunz, and Skipper Blair.

This 2021 Strategic Plan provides an overview of key accomplishments from 2020 and details the strategic initiatives that will be implemented by the Board of Directors for the current year. We wish to acknowledge and thank all of you who continue to be Park supporters and donors; without you, this special place would not exist.
Mission Statement

To provide a safe and peaceful recreation resource and gathering space for our community, to preserve open space, and to educate our visitors about natural resources and the importance of protecting them for future generations.

Strategic Focus

The operational structure of the Valle Crucis Community Park Board of Directors was changed in 2021 and now comprises five strategic committees, each having specific areas of emphasis. Committee objectives include ongoing overall goals, long-term goals, short-term objectives, and operational tasks.

The ongoing overall goals are aspirations that are extremely important for the Park’s long-range future but that will not necessarily ever reach a conclusion. Consequently, a budget line item has not been generated, but the goals are sufficiently worthwhile to be emphasized in the Strategic Plan.

The long-term or continuing goals are significant endeavors (as opposed to critical tasks like a broken water pipe) that are deemed urgent in terms of solving a particular problem or fulfilling a stated ambition, and may represent recurring tasks for the committee. These assignments may require allocation of funds and may require more than one year to complete.

The short-term objectives are undertakings that can be accomplished within a one-year period and that may or may not require funding. These are considered priority tasks to be completed within a designated short-term time frame.

Situation Analysis

2020 Strategic Plan Outcomes

Environmental Education (EE) Committee Key Accomplishments:

- Completed grass swale project.
- Coordinated socially-distanced summer EE program series for children.
- Applied to serve as a HotSpot for ecoEXPLORE, a citizen science initiative.
- Created an EE resource library in the Park office.
Executive and Governance Committee Key Accomplishments:
- Conducted an annual review of the Executive Director and Maintenance Director and established performance expectations for the coming year.
- Created a social media policy statement (adopted by Board).
- Created a liability waiver policy for Park volunteers (adopted by Board).
- Undertook review of Park insurance coverage and need for possible changes.
- Implemented the parking fee that was approved in 2019.

Facilities Committee Key Accomplishments:
- Completed phase one of the swale repair project.
- Hosted multiple Park work days, focusing on mulching, raking gravel, weeding, playground repairs, and more.
- Conducted a tree analysis park-wide to identify dying and damaged trees for removal.

Finance and Fundraising Committee Key Accomplishments:
- Hosted a successful online Park auction in August 2020, netting over $35,000.
- Worked to update the tree donor program, with a strategy for time-limiting our commitment to maintain signage.
- Put plans in place to have a tree carver create nature sculptures out of the tree trunks left over when the dead/dying pine trees are cut.
- Consulted with the executive director of the Centennial Park Conservancy in Nashville, TN regarding fundraising initiatives.
- Revised some of the Park’s financial policies, including accounting procedures for handling money from Music in the Valle.
- Worked to close out the capital campaign account (from purchase of the Church Property and construction of the Park office).
- Provided oversight for financial transactions.
Committee Structures, Goals, and Priorities for 2021

The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is charged with overseeing the overall direction and administration of the Park and supervision of initiatives to fulfill our mission. Although specific projects are managed by one or more of the Board’s strategic committees and by members of the Park staff, the long-term goals of the Board are broader in scope. They are to:

1. Increase the green space preserved by our facility through the pragmatic acquisition of additional land.
2. Manage expenditures and debt so that further capital projects may be implemented, dictated by availability of funds and priority of need.
3. Identify and provide solutions for maintenance problems in order to improve Park aesthetics, safety, and accessibility.
4. Systematically review, revise, and implement policies that will promote safe, effective, and efficient management of the Park.
5. Adopt and implement programs and projects to encourage use of the Park by, and enhance its appeal to, our stakeholders.
6. Plan and implement an annual fundraising program to meet the financial requirements of the Park’s operating budget.
7. Execute capital fundraising campaigns, when necessary, to fund major capital improvements.
Communications Liaison
Marie Hoepfl (former Board member/Board President)

Formerly structured as a strategic committee, this was updated in 2020 to the role of Board liaison who will work with the Executive Director to develop and implement the Park’s communication strategy. The overall goal of this position is to foster and maintain strong relationships with Park users, donors, and the general public.

The Communications Liaison, in conjunction with the Board, has identified the following overall strategies for 2021:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
- Advise on all public relations efforts, including print materials and online presence (website, email newsletter, and social media), to promote the Park, its events, and its mission.
- Make recommendations to the Board regarding any necessary additional signage in the Park, or to update existing signage.
- Evaluate and update promotional plans for the annual Park auction and other events.
- Help grow the Park’s database of donors and subscribers (newsletter, Facebook, Instagram).

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
- In conjunction with the Fundraising Committee, pursue outreach to specific donor groups (anglers, birders, families, and so on).
- Create an annual performance report and strategic plan for distribution to donors and other funders.
- Prepare press releases to advertise Park events.
- Work with Executive Director on selected correspondence with patrons.

**2021 Objectives:**
- Create and disseminate press releases about Park activities such as Music in the Valle, parking, the Park auction, and other fundraising initiatives.
- Maintain the Park website to ensure all information is current and accurate.
- Assist with development of the Spring and Fall fundraising letters.
- Catalog all signage for the annual Park auction; decide what needs to be updated or newly created and strive for greater uniformity in the look.
- Assess communications for the year and plan revisions for the coming year.
**Environmental Education Committee**
Andy Hill (Chair), Holly Ambler, Marisa Sedlak

Committee members are responsible for creating and implementing a plan for diverse and engaging environmental education (EE) programming, projects, and exhibits in the Park.

The Environmental Education Committee has identified the following overall strategies for 2021:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
- In partnership with state and local environmental groups, oversee the planning and scheduling of EE programs and exhibits at the Park.
- Work with the Executive Director to develop or purchase materials for EE exhibits and displays.
- Keep abreast of local, national, and international environmental issues and determine whether and how best to address those through the Park’s EE programming.
- Identify grant opportunities for EE programming and assist with writing those grant proposals.
- Make budget requests to the Finance Committee for EE initiatives.
- In conjunction with Communication Liaison, develop and implement strategies to publicize EE programs.
- Recruit volunteers for EE activities.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
- Promote the Park’s status as an Environmental Education Center with the North Carolina Office of Environmental Education (NCEE).
- In conjunction with Facilities Committee, complete the conversion of the former pond area to an educational wetland, including signage and a boardwalk.
- Plan and help implement the annual summer EE workshop series for children.
- Work with partner organizations to host workshops for environmental educators.
- Explore the possibility of an educational lecture series featuring university and partner organization experts.
- Monitor and remove as necessary non-native plants within the Park and along its associated waterways.
- Work with the Watauga Riverkeeper to house a volunteer water monitoring program, both as a training center and as a monitoring site.
2021 Objectives:

a. Prepare content for a grass swale sign and work with the Park Executive Director on sign fabrication.
b. Recruit and supervise a seasonal EE staff person (preferably a science teacher or other EE professional).
c. Work with EE staff person on the summer EE program for kids.
d. Work with EE staff person to create “Earth Minute” content for Park events and for social media posts.
e. Work with EE staff person to expand the Park’s EE Resource library.
f. Work with EE staff person to develop more educational content for the website, and assist with Wildlife Wednesday social media postings.
g. Work with EE staff person to update Park kiosks with fresh EE materials.
h. Evaluate EE activities at end of the year and plan for the next year
i. Participate in the High Country Habitat Restoration Coalition, a working group facilitated by Mountain True that has a focus on invasive species removal and management.
j. Host live-staking workshops with volunteers and plant 2000 native trees in riparian areas in the Park (Watauga River and Dutch Creek). Harvest live stakes from trees in the Park’s wetland (self-sustaining).
Executive and Governance Committee
Holly Ambler (Chair), Alex Dale, Tracey Heiss, Tracy Hastings, Jeanette Vines

This committee is responsible for promoting overall board and staff effectiveness, ensuring the organization’s compliance with legal requirements and industry best practices, managing development and implementation of the annual Strategic Plan, engaging all Board members in strategic planning and implementation processes, and assessing progress toward strategic goals.

The Executive and Governance Committee has identified the following overall strategies for 2021:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
- Oversee the general functioning of the Park Board, individual board members, and the Executive Director.
- Identify, screen, and recommend prospective new Board members.
- Stay abreast of current legal requirements and industry best practices, and develop policies/procedures to ensure Park compliance.
- Help identify professional development opportunities for the Executive Director, Board members, and staff members.
- As needed, review and update Park use policies, both administrative and those related to use of the Park.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
- Meet regularly (target is bi-weekly) with the Executive Director to discuss Park initiatives, concerns, needs, etc.
- Establish the various Board operating committees and monitor their progress toward completion of agreed-upon action items.
- Monitor the Park policies document semi-annually and propose changes as needed for approval by the full Board.
- Implement annually a review of the Executive Director by Board members, and self-assessments by Board members and the Director.
- Produce and disseminate the annual Strategic Plan in consultation with the Executive Director, who will be responsible for final formatting and publication of the document.

**2021 Objectives:**

a. Finalize updates to Park policies regarding large events, including short-term event insurance for these events or events that serve alcohol.
b. Hire a part time Associate Director.
c. Create updated job descriptions for all staff members.
d. Participate in the annual review of staff members, to be led by the Executive Director.
e. Identify strategies to better inform users about, and to enforce, Park policies (e.g., web site updates, targeted signage, social media posts).

f. Review the current committee structure and identify potential changes to improve Board productivity and effectiveness.

g. Review the Park’s corporate By-laws and current Park policies and, where necessary, propose updates for approval the Park Board.

h. Develop policies for handling large gifts from donors, including a long-term plan for enhancing and managing the Park’s endowment.
Facilities Committee
Tracey Heiss (Chair), Mitch Mayhew, Paul Cribbins

This committee is responsible for evaluating Park facilities and determining a prioritized schedule and budget for the repair, replacement, or addition of any structures, facilities, or equipment to ensure that the Park safely meets the needs of its users in a way that creates a balance between preservation and development.

The Facilities Committee has identified the following overall strategies for 2021:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
- Oversee the maintenance of existing facilities and equipment.
- Make recommendations to the Board regarding upkeep of facilities, use of Park property, and purchase of new equipment.
- Keep abreast of land that may be available for donation to or purchase by the Park and make recommendations to the Board regarding land acquisition.
- Oversee the planning, development, and maintenance of any new facilities.
- Identify grant opportunities for facility construction and/or maintenance, and work with the Executive Director to write those grants.
- Make budget requests to the Finance Committee for facility needs.
- Recruit volunteers for Park work days and other facility needs.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
- Research and consider solutions to storm water drainage problems throughout the Park.
- Monitor the condition of the walking paths and make recommendations to the Board for improvements.
- Expand use of volunteers in landscaping/garden care when needed.

**2021 Objectives:**
- Complete side concrete wings for the swale bridge project.
- Remove and replace two of the existing playhouses.
- Reseed all of the grass paths that run throughout the property.
- Rake and reseed other areas of the Park grounds where needed.
- Identify and prioritize routine facility management needs, and establish work plans (including volunteer days) to carry out these tasks.
- Expand the exterior of the storage shed to house the second mower.
- With Executive Director, oversee expansion of the existing parking lot.
h. With Executive Director, meet with professionals and establish a proposal for updating the existing front path. This will involve removal, grading and replacement of existing asphalt. Anticipate this to be a 2021 project.

i. With Executive Director, meet with professionals to establish a proposal for updating the existing walking path by the large bathrooms in the center of the Park. This project is projected to be a possible 2022 capital improvement.
Finance Committee
Alex Dale (Chair), Anna Shine, Tracy Hastings

The committee is responsible for determining, updating, and implementing financial policies and procedures to ensure sufficient oversight and transparency with regard to the Park’s financial activities.

The Finance Committee has identified the following overall strategies for 2021:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
- Make recommendations to the Board regarding use of emergency funds.
- Oversee cash and debt management, monthly financial reporting and analysis, and annual budgeting.
- Oversee compensation plan for the Executive Director and other Park staff members, and update as needed.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
- Create an equipment reserve fund to prepare for major equipment purchase/replacement.
- Identify strategies to save the necessary funds for major capital improvements.
- Oversee and review all financial recordkeeping, monthly bank statements and reconciliation reports, and payroll administration.
- Conduct quarterly audits of the Park finances with the Executive Director.

**2021 Objectives:**
- a. Finalize and implement our major donors’ recognition program; market our giving plan more aggressively.
- b. Develop a plan for growing the Park endowment fund, including ways to inform and attract diverse givers to consider legacy gifts to the Park.
- c. Establish updated procedures for handling cash on hand to enhance safety and accountability (e.g., parking money collected, donations at Music in the Valle).
Fundraising Committee
Lisa Stinson (Chair), Jeanette Vines, Mary Wood

This Committee is responsible for ensuring that the Park’s fundraising strategies meet projected annual operating expenses, and for coordinating and overseeing selected fundraising activities.

The Fundraising Committee has identified the following overall strategies for 2021:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
- Oversee fundraising activities, including Music in the Valle, the annual Park auction, the Valle Country Fair, spring and fall fund drives, and other fundraising events as identified.
- Recruit volunteers, as needed, for fundraising activities.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
- Develop donor recognition strategies, including for major donors, and oversee implementation of those strategies by the Executive Director.
- In conjunction with the Communications Liaison, pursue outreach to specific donor groups (anglers, birders, young families, retirees, and so on).
- Increase fundraising potential of ongoing Park activities, including rentals, special events, Music in the Valle, and so on.

**2021 Objectives:**

a. Look into possible challenge grant funding to launch a matching gifts campaign (like is done on NPR) as a way to expand our donor list.

b. Oversee Park auction planning.

c. Set up two “passive” fundraising opportunities for this year (e.g., partnering with a local business for a share of proceeds from sales for a given week or month).

d. Partner with local businesses for small-scale income potential (e.g., work with a local brewer to create a “Valle Crucis Park Boardwalk” brew; partner with restaurants and stores for round-up campaigns).
“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.”

~ John Muir