Valle Crucis Community Park Strategic Plan 2022
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Overview

Valle Crucis Community Park has served as a community hub since 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 is a 28+ acre preserve providing walking trails, playgrounds, picnic shelters, weekly summer musical events, year-round environmental education programming, and much more to a broad audience of users.

Valle Crucis Community Park is 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 of Watauga County not served by any tax-supported parks. The Park 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 14 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 2022, the thirteen members of the Board of Directors include Holly Ambler (Past President), Tracey Heiss (President), Jeanette Vines (Vice President), Alex Dale (Treasurer), Alicia Toomey (Secretary), Katherine Chesnut, J.D. Dooley, Heather Pannill, Mike Roberts, Marisa Sedlak, Christine Thompson, Tracey Thompson, and John Tumminello.

The Park’s Executive Director is Gardner Hoover. Michelle Dineen serves as Operations Manager and Amanda Laurent is the Park’s Office Manager. Maintenance Team members include Blaine Bare, Skipper Blair, Wes Borkowski, Forrest Davis-Clark, Matt Duval, and Stefan Kunz. Paul Laurent serves as the Park Naturalist. Welcome Staff members are Madeline Keefer, Jenn Krix, and Ashley Winecoff.

The 2022 Strategic Plan provides an overview of key accomplishments from 2021 and details regarding the strategic initiatives that will be implemented by the Board of Directors for the current year. We extend our most sincere appreciation to all of our 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 2020 and now comprises five strategic committees, each having specific areas of emphasis. At that time the position of Communication Liaison was also created. The work of this liaison and of the strategic committees is outlined in this document and includes ongoing overall goals, long-term goals, short-term objectives, and operational tasks for each strategic committee.

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.
Key Accomplishments from 2021

Environmental Education (EE) Committee Key Accomplishments

1. Hired Paul Laurent as EE staff member.
2. Designed and implemented Sunday summer programs.
3. Continued to host the “Earth Minutes” feature at every Music in the Valle.
4. Created weekly Wildlife Wednesday posts on the Park’s social media platforms.
5. Conducted invasive species removal in conjunction with Mountain True.
6. Conducted live staking along Dutch Creek and the Watauga River for streambank preservation and renewal, in conjunction with Mountain True.

Executive and Governance Committee Key Accomplishments:

1. Conducted a search for a new Executive Director.
2. Worked with Michelle Dineen, Acting Executive Director from May 2021 through March 2022, to expand office and maintenance staff.
3. Facilitated the nominations, election, and onboarding of six new Board members.

Facilities Committee Key Accomplishments

1. Worked with the then Executive Director of the Park to complete the work on the swale bridge project, including new concrete wings and edging.
2. Initiated development of two new picnic areas near the Watauga River.
3. Assisted with updating the design and plantings within the garden “island” that is dedicated to Kitsy Tennant.
4. Finalized work on the memorial seating area dedicated to Sidney
5. Completed parking lot expansion and regrading
6. Installed a shed roof extension and a new parking shed at the Park entrance
7. Initiated planning and consultation process to address storm water drainage problems in the Park. This process will help guide pathway regrading and repaving projects now scheduled for 2022.
8. Oversaw the maintenance of existing facilities and equipment, including mulching and weeding, bathroom and septic repairs, fence repairs, painting, removal of invasive plants, and memorials (gardens, trees, benches) repair and maintenance.
Finance and Fundraising Committee Key Accomplishments

1. Hosted a successful online Park auction in September 2021, netting over $24,000.
2. Created a comprehensive donor recognition plan that identifies donor levels, imagery for each donor level that can be used for marketing, and possible rewards for each level. This draft was approved unanimously by the Board.
3. Created a comprehensive guide for the Park Auction that includes a calendar, goals, objectives for each month, and notes for the next auction.
4. Provided oversight for financial transactions.

Communications Liaison Key Accomplishments

1. Created monthly updates on the Park website and updated information for special events.
2. Drafted the Spring and Fall 2021 fundraising letters.
3. Worked with the Interim Park Director to design Park auction signage that can be reused from one year to the next.
4. Assisted with writing and designing the monthly Park newsletter for donors.
5. Assisted with advertising for the open Executive Director position.
Committee Structures, Goals, and Priorities for 2022

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 / former 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 and the Board of Directors Executive Committee 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 2022:

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

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

**2022 Objectives:**
1. Create and disseminate press releases about Park activities such as Music in the Valle, the Park auction, and other initiatives.
2. Maintain the Park website to ensure all information is current and accurate.
3. Assist with development of the Spring and Fall fundraising letters.
4. Catalog all signage for the annual Park auction and decide what needs to be updated or newly created.
5. Assess communication activities for the previous year and plan revisions for the coming year.
Environmental Education Committee

Marisa Sedlak (Chair), Holly Ambler, Alicia Toomey, Katherine Chesnut

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 2022:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
1. In partnership with state and local environmental groups, and with help from Environmental Education (EE) staff, oversee the planning and scheduling of EE programs and exhibits at the Park.
2. Work with EE staff and the Executive Director to develop or purchase materials for EE exhibits and displays.
3. Keep abreast of local and national environmental issues and determine whether and how best to address those through the Park’s EE programming.
4. Work with EE staff to identify grant opportunities for EE programming and assist with writing those grant proposals.
5. Work with EE staff to establish a budget for EE programming.
6. In conjunction with the Communications Liaison and EE staff, develop and implement strategies to publicize EE programs.
7. With help from EE staff, recruit volunteers for EE activities.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
1. Promote the Park’s status as an Environmental Education Center with the North Carolina Office of Environmental Education (NCEE).
2. In conjunction with the Facilities Committee, complete the conversion of the former pond area to an educational wetland, including signage and a boardwalk.
3. With assistance from EE staff, plan and help implement annual summer EE workshops.
4. Work with partner organizations and with EE staff to host workshops for Environmental Educators.
5. Explore the possibility of an education lecture series featuring university and partner organization experts.
6. Monitor and remove as necessary non-native plants within the Park and along its associated waterways.
7. Work with the Watauga Riverkeeper to house a volunteer water monitoring program, both as a training center and as a monitoring site.
8. Update and maintain wildlife signage along the walkway of the park.
9. Add a map of this signage for staff to have access, utilize Google Maps.
2022 Objectives:

1. Invite the Park Naturalist, Paul Laurent, to attend EE committee meetings.
2. Evaluate EE activities for the next year in partnership with Paul and Michelle Dineen.
3. Work with EE staff to plan and expand summer EE programming for youth.
4. Work with EE staff on a Naturalist Rally or “bio blitz” focused on adult learners and environmental educators.
5. Work with EE staff to continue to provide “Earth Minute” programming at Music in the Valle and on social media.
6. Create more EE-focused interactive opportunities for Park patrons via Instagram and Facebook story posts (voting, polls, etc.)
7. Work with Paul to create an educational booklet that provides a tour of animal habitats in the Park, to serve as a self-guided opportunity for Park users of all ages.
8. Work with EE staff to expand resources for the resource bookshelf in the Park conference room.
9. Work with EE staff to keep Park kiosks up to date with fresh EE materials and information.
10. 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.
12. Partner with Mountain True and the River Keeper to support the return of RiverFest to the Park.
13. Inventory wildlife signage along the walkway of the Park.
Executive and Governance Committee

Tracey Heiss (Chair), Holly Ambler, Alex Dale, Jeanette Vines, Alicia Toomey

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 2022:

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

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
1. Meet monthly with the Executive Director to discuss Park initiatives, concerns, needs, etc.
2. Oversee the various Board strategic committees and monitor their progress toward completion of agreed-upon objectives and action items.
3. Review Park policies semi-annually and propose changes as needed for approval by the full Board.
4. Implement an annual review of the Executive Director and the Operations Manager/Associate Director by Board members, and self-assessments by Board members, the Executive Director, and Operations Manager.
5. Support the Executive Director in finalizing and disseminating the annual Strategic Plan.
6. Support the Executive Director in conducting annual assessments of all Park staff members.

**2022 Objectives:**
1. Finalize updates to Park policies regarding large events, including short-term event insurance for these events and events that serve alcohol.
2. Revise and update job descriptions for all staff members.
3. Develop a Personnel Committee within the Board of Directors.
4. Review the Park’s corporate by-laws and current Park policies and, where necessary, propose updates for approval by the Park Board.
5. Develop policies and strategies (in partnership with the Fundraising, Finance, and Environmental Education Committees) for handling large gifts from donors, including a long-term plan for enhancing and managing the Park’s endowment.
6. Support the transition and onboarding of the new Executive Director.
Facilities Committee

JD Dooley (Chair), Tracey Heiss, Mitch Mayhew (past Board member), Paul Cribbins (past Board member)

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 2022:

Ongoing Overall Goals:
1. Oversee the maintenance of existing facilities and equipment.
2. Make recommendations to the Board regarding upkeep of facilities, use of Park property, and purchase of new equipment.
3. 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.
4. Oversee the planning, development, and maintenance of any new facilities.
5. Identify grant opportunities for facility construction and/or maintenance, and work with the Executive Director and Operations Manager to write those grants.
6. Make budget requests to the Board of Directors for facility needs.
7. Recruit volunteers for Park work days and other facility needs.

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

2022 Objectives:
1. Procure a new mower and upgrade trash cans throughout the Park.
2. Replace two of the existing playhouses.
3. Reseed all of the grass paths that run throughout the property.
4. Aerate and reseed other areas of the Park grounds where needed.
5. Identify and prioritize routine facility management needs, and establish work plans (including volunteer days) to carry out these tasks.
6. Install electricity to the equipment shed and small entrance building.
7. With the Executive Director and Operations Manager, solicit proposals for improving the existing walking paths, particularly the cross-path in the center of the Park and the pathway near the Park entrance.
8. Oversee a comprehensive stormwater assessment of the Park.
Finance Committee

Alex Dale (Chair), Mike Roberts

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 2022:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
1. Make recommendations to the Board regarding use of emergency funds.
2. Oversee cash and debt management, monthly financial reporting and analysis, and annual budgeting.
3. Conduct quarterly audits of the Park finances with the Executive Director.

**Long-Term or Continuing Goals:**
1. Oversee the equipment reserve fund to prepare for major equipment purchase and/or replacement.
2. Identify strategies to save the necessary funds for major capital improvements.
3. Oversee and review all financial recordkeeping, monthly bank statements and reconciliation reports, and payroll administration.

**2022 Objectives:**
1. Continue development of the Park endowment fund, working with the Fundraising committee to make donors aware of giving options.
2. Work with the Executive Director to familiarize him with standard operating procedures in QuickBooks and budget usage.
3. Recommend a protocol for future surpluses in the year-end budget.
Fundraising Committee

Jeanette Vines (chair), John Tumminello, Heather Pannill

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 2022:

**Ongoing Overall Goals:**
1. 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.
2. Recruit volunteers, as needed, for fundraising activities.

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

**2022 Objectives:**
1. Oversee Park auction planning.
2. Create a subcommittee that deals solely with the Valle Auction.
3. Work with the Executive Director and Operations Manager to develop strategies and a budget for overall fundraising activities.
4. Designate leaders within the Fundraising committee to take on specific tasks that are created and that provide support and deadlines for implementation.
Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of autumn.

~John Muir

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts...There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.

~Rachel Carson