

**TOWN OF VALDESE
TOWN COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 30, 2026**

The Town of Valdese Town Council met on Monday, March 30, 2026, at 6:00 p.m., in the Town Council Chambers at Town Hall, 102 Massel Avenue SW, Valdese, North Carolina. The following were present: Mayor Keith Huffman, Mayor Pro Tem Rexanna Lowman, Councilman Gary Ogle, Councilwoman Heather Ward, Councilwoman Melinda Zimmerman, and Councilwoman Shannon Radabaugh. Also present were: Town Manager Todd Herms, Assistant Town Manager/CFO Bo Weichel, Town Attorney Tim Swanson, Town Clerk Jessica Lail, and various department heads.

Absent: None

A quorum was present.

Mayor Huffman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Matt Matthews from the Valdese Waldensian Presbyterian Church, offered the invocation and Mayor Huffman led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

OPEN FORUM/PUBLIC COMMENT

OPEN FORUM/PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDELINES: Mayor Pro Tem Rexanna Lowman read the following open forum/public comment guidelines: The Council shall provide at least one period for public comment per month during a regular meeting, unless no regular meeting is held that month. Any individual or group who wishes to address the Council shall inform the Town Clerk, any time prior to the start of the meeting, and provide their name, address and subject matter about which they wish to speak. Person(s) must be present if they wish to address the Council. Comments should be limited to five minutes per speaker.

Open Forum is not intended to require Council or staff to answer impromptu questions. Speakers will address all comments to the entire Council as a whole and not one individual member. Discussions between speakers and the audience will not be permitted. Speakers will maintain decorum at all times. Speakers are expected to be courteous and respectful at all times regardless of who occupies the Council chairs. These guidelines will help ensure that a safe and productive meeting is held and all those wishing to address the Council will be afforded the opportunity.

PROCLAIMED – DECLARING APRIL 2026 AS BURKE IMPACT GROUP (B.I.G) CHALLENGE MONTH

Mayor Huffman invited Ms. Tonia Stephenson, President and CEO of the Burke County Chamber of Commerce, up to the podium. Ms. Stephenson thanked the Mayor, Council, and Staff for allowing her to speak on behalf of their “big” event which was coming up. Ms. Stephenson stated that over the past four (4) years, the Chamber had proudly organized their community litter sweep. Ms. Stephenson shared that the most important thing they had learned from the event over the years was that people in the community genuinely wanted to do good, but noted that not everyone was physically able to get out and pick up litter and that others may feel called to serve in different ways. Ms. Stephenson reported that the Chamber had discovered that limiting the effort to a single week caused scheduling conflicts amongst many potential participants.

Ms. Stephenson stated that in 2026, after thoughtful discussions, the Chamber was expanding and enhancing the litter sweep into something bigger and more inclusive. Ms. Stephenson reported that the Chamber was launching the B.I.G. (Burke Impact Group) challenge, which would run the entire month of April. Ms. Stephenson expressed that the expanded format allowed more individuals to participate in ways that matched their abilities, interests, and schedules. Ms. Stephenson continued that they still welcomed and encouraged anyone who wanted to do the traditional litter pickup efforts to do so and stated the Chamber still had the necessary supplies to do so.

Ms. Stephenson invited groups to make an impact in other meaningful ways, whether that was hosting a baby shower to support organizations that served new mothers, sewing blankets for hospice patients,

helping to build a habitat home, constructing an accessibility ramp, or undertaking other service projects that strengthened the community. Ms. Stephenson expressed that the goal of the B.I.G. Challenge was simple, stating it was to give everyone in Burke County an opportunity to make a difference and to ensure that every act of service, large or small, was seen, valued, and celebrated.

Mayor Huffman then read a proclamation as follows, declaring the month of April as the Town of Valdese Chamber of Commerce's Burke Impact Group (B.I.G.) Challenge Month:

**DECLARING THE MONTH OF APRIL AS TOWN OF VALDESE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S BURKE IMPACT GROUP (B.I.G.)
CHALLENGE MONTH**

WHEREAS, the Burke Impact Group (B.I.G.) Challenge, led by the Burke County Chamber of Commerce, builds upon the success of the community's annual Litter Sweep efforts conducted over the past four years; and

WHEREAS, this expanded month-long initiative provides increased opportunities for residents, businesses, civic groups, and organizations throughout Burke County to participate in meaningful community improvement activities; and

WHEREAS, the B.I.G. Challenge is intentionally designed to be inclusive of individuals of all ages and physical abilities by offering a variety of ways to serve beyond traditional litter pickup; and

WHEREAS, these activities may include beautification projects, volunteer service, environmental stewardship, and other acts that strengthen community pride and engagement; and

WHEREAS, the Burke County Chamber of Commerce continues to demonstrate leadership in fostering partnerships that promote a cleaner, more connected, and more vibrant community; and

WHEREAS, the Burke Impact Group Challenge encourages citizens to take collective ownership in preserving the natural beauty and quality of life in Burke County;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, I Mayor Keith Huffman and Town of Valdese Town Council do hereby designate the month of April, 2026 as the **Burke County Chamber of Commerce's Burke Impact Group (B.I.G.) Challenge Month** and encourage all residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, and community groups to participate in activities that make a positive impact throughout our county.

ADOPTED this 30th day of March, 2026.

Keith Huffman, Mayor

PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITIES/FLUORIDE - DR. ROBERT STEVENSON – 1009 CREEKSIDE DR NE, VALDESE

Dr. Stevenson thanked the Mayor and Council for the opportunity to speak and stated he was going to try and speak on two topics in five (5) minutes. Dr. Stevenson stressed the immediate need for a new, and properly built, public safety complex in Valdese. Dr. Stevenson reported that the present arrangements, where part of the Town Hall was being used as a police station and the fire department operated from a trailer, were a terrible idea and failed to meet most required codes for both fire and the police. Dr. Stevenson expressed that the previous regime dropped the ball and even chased ridiculous options, such as the Lovelady Fire Department taking over Valdese's Fire Department and Burke County taking over the Town of Valdese's Police duties. Dr. Stevenson continued that these were totally unworkable ideas and stated this was recognized in the election by a landslide vote for change.

Dr. Stevenson stated that if the Town would have gone ahead with the original plan from four (4) years ago, the Town could have built the fire department and the police department for much less money. Dr. Stevenson noted that this was water under the bridge. Dr. Stevenson encouraged the present Town Council to pursue the building of the new public safety facility as soon as possible, adding that time was money.

Dr. Stevenson reported that he served for 15 (fifteen) years as a Board Member of the Lovelady Fire Department, which was currently building a new fire department, and strongly recommended the following things for consideration. Dr. Stevenson continued that the first thing to consider was that one had to plan for the need up to 50 years forward, noting that additions and remodels would cost much more in the future. Dr. Stevenson stated that the second thing to consider was to allow the policemen and firemen to help with suggestions on the layout plans, stating they knew what was needed on a daily basis to provide Valdese with excellent services and were much more aware of present codes that had to be met. Dr. Stevenson moved onto the third suggestion, which was to research several builders and lenders for the best deals and consider information available from others who had done the same process.

Dr. Stevenson expressed that the citizens of Valdese needed and deserved properly designed and built facilities for their fire and police departments, which would afford citizens with the safest environment and best services possible. Dr. Stevenson noted that nothing was free, or even cheap, at the present moment, but noted delaying the process would just accentuate the problem. Dr. Stevenson specified that the many newly built, and planned, homes of the future would increase the tax revenue yearly and aid in the affordability of the much-needed project.

Dr. Stevenson moved onto his second concern, where he urged the Council to think long and hard before considering the elimination of fluoride in the Town's water, as well as the surrounding communities that the Town provided water for. Dr. Stevenson asserted that he was a dentist that worked two (2) years for the North Carolina Public Health service and for 40 (forty) years in private practice and urged the Council to study all of the scientific data which was available and the results obtained by water fluoridation as far as caries reduction especially in children, but applicable to adults. Dr. Stevenson reported that Dr. Sanders and Dr. Slade both cite quotes that in counties where at least 75% of the population was served with fluoridated water children experienced less dental decay than children in counties with lower fluoridation regardless of household income. Dr. Stevenson stated there was no scientific evidence to support the removal of fluoride from the water, noting he had heard the proposal was to save money. Dr. Stevenson stated he had reached out to a friend and colleague, Scott Edson, who had recently retired from being the head of the operative department at the UNC Dental School in Chapel Hill. Dr. Stevenson reported that Dr. Edson stated that the Dental School, as well as the North Carolina Public Health Service, strongly recommended fluoridation of public water and that the results spoke for themselves. Dr. Stevenson continued that Dr. Edson equated the removal of fluoride to the refusal of the measles vaccine.

Dr. Stevenson stated that there was a difference in ingested fluoride and topically applied fluoride, noting that both were important, but that the ingested fluoride strengthened the teeth during their formation. Dr. Stevenson continued that topical fluoride strengthened the outer layer of enamel, but the success of topical fluoride depended on the time in contact with the teeth.

Dr. Stevenson asserted that the proposal to remove fluoride from the water could well affect whether people wanted to move to Valdese, and added that this would come on top of the backlash from other communities that the Town charged for water. Dr. Stevenson concluded that he was just touching the surface of the repercussions to overall public health efforts, and that citizens, regardless of income, deserved to get the advantage of water fluoridation for improved dental health. Dr. Stevenson expressed that one should not vote on this important issue without first studying the facts, continuing that this was about community health, not just money.

POLLING SITE - GEORGE F. HENNE JR. – 104 MAIN ST W, APT 4, VALDESE

Mr. Henne stated the following:

"My name is George F. Henne Jr. and I live in Valdese.

I have a concern for the upcoming midterm election this November. While not a presidential year, we do have a Senate election as well as Representatives and several local positions being contested.

I think under the present circumstances, that there is going to be a large turnout for this election. And while I intend to vote early, I am concerned about one of our polling places here in town.

I do not think that the splash pad building next to the recreation center will be adequate. While the building itself seems fine, I think the lack of adequate parking will be a deterrent for people wishing to vote there on election day.

There are only about ten (10) spaces for parking in front of the building and half of those will be needed for people who will need a ballot brought out to them.

There is a grassy knoll near the lot, but would everyone want to go there to park? There are about ten (10) spaces at the back of the building but people would have to walk a block to get to the entrance of the polling site.

I understand why the splash pad has replaced the town hall as a polling site. And I could be wrong about the number of people I believe will be voting at the splash pad on election day. But I think the voting site should be moved to the Valdese Recreation Center for the upcoming midterm election.

In speaking with the director of the Burke County Board of Elections, I understand that there would be some complications to trying to change the polling site. But we have six (6) months to notify people if a change should be approved. There is a handicapped ramp at the Rec center. A person could be placed at the splash pad to direct people. Concern for people maneuvering from the parking area to the center could be handled by a crossing guard. There is adequate parking at the Rec center. And while it would disrupt the Recreation Department do to this, I believe that providing a space for citizens to conveniently vote is worth this effort. Other concerns may be voice, and solutions might be needed, but I humbly believe my proposal should be considered.

Thank you for listening.”

POOL DOME UPDATE – DAVID ANDERSEN

Mayor Huffman stated there was one addition he wanted to bring to the public’s attention, which was an update on the pool dome. Mayor Huffman invited Mr. David Andersen, Parks and Recreation Director, to come forward and provide an update. Mr. Andersen stated he was pleased to announce that the Town had received its certificate of occupancy that afternoon for the pool dome and that the Town would resume swimming Wednesday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. Mr. Andersen reported that a more complete schedule would be posted on the Town’s Facebook page and website in the days which were to come. Mr. Andersen expressed that everyone’s effort was appreciated, that it was truly a team effort by the entire staff, including part time staff, to get the dome up and running. Mr. Andersen thanked everyone and stated that everyone was excited to get back in the pool.

CONSENT AGENDA: (enacted by one motion)

Mayor Huffman asked if there were any items Council wished to discuss. Mayor Pro Tem Lowman stated she would like Item C, Resolution for Fluoride Removal Water Treatment Plant Process, to be removed from the consent agenda. Item C, Resolution for Fluoride Removal Water Treatment Plant Process, was moved to New Business without objection.

Mayor Huffman brought the Council’s attention to Item F, Call for Public Hearing – Text Amendment for Electronic Message Sign Ordinance, stating Staff had requested the removal of the item from the consent agenda so additional regulatory changes to the ordinance could be reviewed. Mayor Huffman continued that Staff advised that the text amendment would be brought back to the Planning Board and then returned to Council after recommendation. Item F, Call for Public Hearing – Text Amendment for Electronic Message Sign Ordinance, was removed without objection.

APPROVED REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 2, 2026

APPROVED RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE 2025 LOCAL WATER SUPPLY PLAN

RESOLUTION FOR APPROVING 2025 LOCAL WATER SUPPLY PLAN

WHEREAS, North Carolina General Statute 143-355 (l) requires that each unit of local government that provides public water service or that plans to provide public water service and each large community water system shall, either individually or together with other units of local government and large community water systems, prepare and submit a Local Water Supply Plan; and

WHEREAS, as required by the statute and in the interests of sound local planning, a Local Water Supply Plan for Town of Valdese, has been developed and submitted to the Town Council of the Town of Valdese for approval; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of the Town of Valdese finds that the Local Water Supply Plan is in accordance with the provisions of North Carolina General Statute 143-355 (l) and that it will provide appropriate guidance for the future management of water supplies for Town of Valdese Water System, as well as useful information to the Department of Environmental Quality for the development of a state water supply plan as required by statute;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council of the Town of Valdese that the Local Water Supply Plan entitled, Valdese LWSP dated 2025, is hereby approved and shall be submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Water Resources; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Council of the Town of Valdese intends that this plan shall be revised to reflect changes in relevant data and projections at least once every five years or as otherwise requested by the Department, in accordance with the statute and sound planning practice.

This the _____ day of _____, 2026.

Keith Huffman, Mayor

Jessica Lail, Town Clerk

MOVED TO NEW BUSINESS – RESOLUTION FOR FLUORIDE REMOVAL WATER TREATMENT PLANT PROCESS

APPROVED FY 25-26 AUDIT CONTRACT – LOWDERMILK CHURCH & CO., LLP

APPROVED - CALL FOR PUBLIC HEARING – REZONING OF 0 GRIFFIN

REMOVED – CALL FOR PUBLIC HEARING – TEXT AMENDMENT FOR ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN ORDINANCE

APPROVED - CALL FOR PUBLIC HEARING – FOOD TRUCK ORDINANCE

End Consent Agenda

ITEMS REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA: Item C, Resolution for Fluoride Removal Water Treatment Plant Process, was removed from the consent agenda and moved to New Business for further discussion. Item F, Call for Public Hearing – Text Amendment for Electronic Message Sign Ordinance, was removed from the consent agenda.

Mayor Huffman asked for a motion to approve the remaining consent agenda items. A motion was made by Councilwoman Zimmerman to approve the remaining items on the consent agenda. Seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Lowman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

POSTPONED - RESOLUTION FOR FLUORIDE REMOVAL WATER TREATMENT PLANT PROCESS

Assistant Town Manager, Bo Weichel, stated the following:

"Mayor and Council, I want to start by being very clear, this item is not being presented from a political standpoint. I fully understand there are a wide range of opinions on fluoride. Staff is supportive of whatever direction Council decides to take.

As Staff, we were tasked with identifying a cost saving measure in the water fund to assist in keeping future necessary water rate increases minimal. This is challenging because we're bound by quite a few State mandated regulations that require expensive chemicals and processes just to provide clean water. However, we did identify one process can help with this, by removing the voluntary addition of fluoride. I mention voluntary because this chemical is not required by the State. It would reduce the need from double digit percentage increases down to single digits in the water fund, which really impacts all water users.

This is strictly a financial and operational item for discussion. This is not about whether fluoride is good for you or bad for you. It's about the most financially responsible way that the Town can operate its water system.

At the end of the day we want to make sure we are providing safe, compliant drinking water in the most cost-effective way possible for our customers.

Why this is being brought forward now? The reason this is in front of you now is because fluoride is not required by the State, and as we've been working through both our short-term operating budget and long-term capital planning, this stood out as a significant cost driver worth evaluating.

As outlined in the memo, we're currently budgeting around \$16,000 annually just for the chemical itself, that does not include the equipment, safety measures, and long-term system impacts that it takes on the water plant.

This becomes even more important when you look at the bigger picture.

We have major upcoming investments at the Water Treatment Plant as we have talked about these major updates that we've been planning. These are getting ready to go out for bid soon, so this plays a factor into that. The fluoride system is not just an annual operating cost, it also affects how we design and fund upcoming improvements, including chemical storage and the facility layout.

By removing fluoride, it would allow us to repurpose existing infrastructure, improve safety conditions for our staff, and free up financial capacity for other State mandated treatment processes.

If we keep fluoride in place, it will directly impact the financial resources available for other larger capital needs, thus impacting the need for additional revenues through higher rate increases.

Every dollar allocated toward a non-required process is a dollar that puts upward pressure on future water rates, ultimately impacting the ratepayers.

This resolution you have before you tonight is simply identifying a process where we can control costs to keep future water rate increases as minimal as possible now and in the future.

I do want to acknowledge that the memo failed to communicate an important detail. Do you remember a few moments ago I mentioned whether the current process of providing fluoride is the most financially responsible way for the Town to provide that benefit?

To help alleviate the concern about maintaining access to fluoride for those who do want it, and do need it, there is a much more cost-effective alternative.

Rather than injecting it into the entire water supply, the Town could provide - at no cost - a monthly supply of fluoride rinse. This would be available at Town Hall for any customer who wants it.

A single one-liter bottle can serve about three people for a month when used daily as directed on the label. This approach gives residents choice of whether they want to use fluoride or not, while significantly reducing system-wide costs.

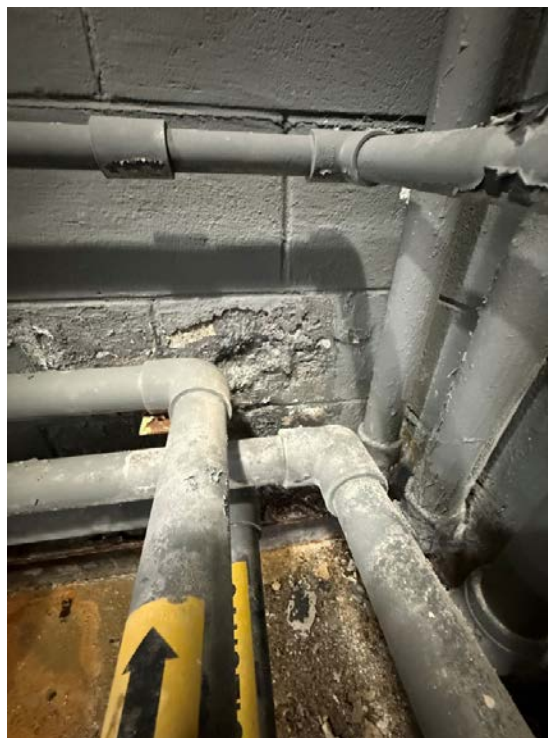
There is no regulatory requirement to provide fluoride. The question is simply whether this is a service the Town wants to continue funding at the system-wide level, do we pursue a more cost-effective way to meet that need.

In a moment Mr. RJ Mozeley, an engineer with McGill Associates, will walk us through the technical and facility impacts this has on the plant and how it ties into the upcoming upgrade costs.”

Mr. Weichel stated he wanted to provide a few photos of the water plant to show the Town’s current fluoride system.



Mr. Weichel reported that this was the outside tank that held the fluoride, noting that there were patches present from years of wear and tear. Mr. Weichel stated that this tank would need to be replaced, and that currently the Town had to keep the tank from leaking fluoride, a highly corrosive chemical.





Mr. Weichel specified that the fluoride starts to eat at the concrete and the piping around the tank, not just the feed lines that go to the fluoride, but also the tanks and other chemicals around it. Mr. Weichel stated that these were just a few of the photos that show what fluoride does to the concrete of the facility. Mr. Weichel noted that these were the costs that he was talking about, not just the chemical costs, but also equipment and infrastructure costs around the plant.

Mr. Mozeley stated he would limit his comments to the technical aspects and the rules that were enforceable upon the Town as the water system owner, by the EPA and the State. Mr. Mozeley established that all of the regulations for public water systems were derived from the EPA at the federal level and then delegated the responsibilities for enforcement of those rules to state agencies. Mr. Mozeley expressed that, when that terminology is used, one must understand that there are certain federal requirements that do apply and that there are also certain state requirements which may go above and beyond.

Mr. Mozeley reported that the EPA did not require a public water system to add fluoride to the drinking water supply. Mr. Mozeley stated that only about three (3) out of five (5) public water systems in the United States fed fluoride. Mr. Mozeley recounted that it was not a required addition, but if the State chose to make it mandatory it could. Mr. Mozeley explained that if a public water system chose to feed fluoride on their own decision they could, reporting that Valdese made that decision in the 1970s, completed the notification requirements, and began feeding fluoride.

Mr. Mozeley continued that since the Town chose to feed fluoride, it must follow what the EPA and the State consider secondary standards, stating these standards were technically non-enforceable, except at certain levels. Mr. Mozeley reported that there was a recommended minimum concentration of fluoride of 0.7 (point-seven) milligrams per liter. Mr. Mozeley explained that if the concentration were to reach two (2) milligrams per liter or greater, public noticing would be required within 12 (twelve) months for every water user that the Town supplied water to. Mr. Mozeley stated that such a requirement acknowledged the fact that one can overfeed fluoride. Mr. Mozeley continued that if fluoride feed were to leave the plant at a concentration of four (4) milligrams per liter or greater, it would no longer be a secondary standard, it would become a primary standard, which was an enforceable maximum. Mr. Mozeley stated notification would have to occur at, or above, the four (4) milligram per liter concentration, and that the Town would at that point communicate with the State to coordinate next steps. Mr. Mozeley stressed that this was a drastically higher amount than had ever been measured in the Town's system, but added that there was an acknowledgement on the EPA's behalf to limit the maximum dosage.

Mr. Mozeley stated that everything in the process of the resolution to consider removing fluoride feed was governed by the Department of Environmental Quality, which was responsible for administering the North Carolina Administrative Code, which is where the previously mentioned primary and secondary standards

come from. Mr. Mozeley added that this was where the process for both adding, and removing, fluoride was added, stating that the process for removing the feed was simply a resolution by the current governing board acknowledging the chemical's removal from the public water system. Mr. Mozeley continued that once that decision was made, a notice had to be provided to the Health Department, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Oral Health Section, and DEQ.

Mr. Mozeley moved to discuss the current project and what it included. Mr. Mozeley stated that the upcoming Water Treatment Plant Project was funded through an earmark from the North Carolina Legislature in 2023, adding that the project had been modified through the course of its development to also address other needs with local Town funds.

Mr. Mozeley explained that the photos presented by Mr. Weichel were of the bulk storage tank for fluoride feed, stating the tank held several thousand gallons of fluoride that was then dosed into the public water supply. Mr. Mozeley added that the fluoride sat in a day tank, and from there was fed by a chemical metering pump into the water system, which was then dispersed into the distribution system for everybody to consume.

Mr. Mozeley established that the overall intent of the water treatment project was to restore reliable water treatment capacity for increased production. Mr. Mozeley spoke to why this was important, outlining that the water plant was a twelve (12) million gallon per day (MGD) plant, that was built in the 1950s and upgraded throughout its lifetime. Mr. Mozeley continued that while it was a 12 MGD facility, actual production and water consumption dropped drastically in the 1990's when textile industries left the Town. Mr. Mozeley asserted that the plant was presently operating at approximately a quarter of its rated capacity, which was why the water plant was able to get by with deferred improvements over the years. Mr. Mozeley stated the intention of the project was to prepare for increased usage, mainly due to the potential of the Lenoir interconnect project, where the Town had a contract to sell up to 4,000,000 gallons per day to the City of Lenoir. Mr. Mozeley expressed this number was important, as current production was approximately 3,300,000 gallons per day on average, and maximum production over the previous two (2) to three (3) years was 4,700,000 gallons in a single day. Mr. Mozeley stated with the 12 MGD rating, both of those numbers sounded reasonable and achievable, adding that the Town would also be able to meet not only the previously mentioned secondary standards, but also the primary standards.

Mr. Mozeley said that with those numbers in mind, when one considered 3,500,000 to 4,000,000 gallons per day of current Town usage and added the potential of an additional 4,000,000 gallons per day to the City of Lenoir, the production levels and the certainty of being able to meet all requirements became more questionable. Mr. Mozeley asked if the plant would fail to meet other standards at that level, answering that nobody could say, but that it was a matter of taking care of the processes in total to make sure the Town can be where it needs to be. Mr. Mozeley spoke to one of the project components that needed to be completed, reframing that the plant would potentially be doubling production to a total of 8,000,000 GPD, stating that one of the main required chemicals that needed to be fed was caustic. Mr. Mozeley continued that caustic was a chemical used to adjust the pH of the water, before treatment began, and aided with all other treatment processes, especially the settling of sediment.

Mr. Mozeley stated that ultimately what was being talked about was that a bulk fluoride tank needs to be replaced, if it were to stay in service. Mr. Mozeley posed the alternative which was using the space where the bulk fluoride tank currently was to place a new, second, caustic bulk tank. Mr. Mozeley summarized that it was, in that sense, a real estate issue. Mr. Mozeley stated there were other options for moving the fluoride, or the second caustic tank, to other spots on the project site, but that those options were not within the current project scope or budget. Mr. Mozeley reported that a replacement bulk fluoride tank would cost approximately \$160,000. Mr. Mozeley continued that if the Town replaced the fluoride tank, it would then have to ask itself later in the project how much an additional chemical treatment facility would cost to construct at the water plant. Mr. Mozeley indicated that the cost could range widely, noting that recent, similar, projects of a similar scope had costs ranging from \$1,600,000 to \$2,000,000 for the additional treatment system. Mr. Mozeley indicated details such as specific locations of tanks would still have to be scoped out.

Mr. Mozeley referenced the chemical cost to feed fluoride, which was \$16,000 annually, stating that these costs would have to continue to be budgeted unless the Council decided to end the feeding of fluoride. Mr.

Mozeley discussed the corrosive properties of fluoride, acknowledging that there were material safety data sheets (MSDS) that OSHA required the Town to keep on hand which helped operators operate in a safe way. Mr. Mozeley continued that there were consequences if there were spills, adding that whether or not these were acceptable risks was a valid question. Mr. Mozeley stated he would be happy to answer any questions.

Mayor Pro Tem Lowman asked how much money the Town had received to do the upgrades which were discussed. Mr. Mozeley answered that the total original award from the state was \$7,000,000, adding that the Department of Water infrastructure, as well as design fees, took a cut off the top of this figure. Mr. Mozeley reported that if one took those costs out, then added back in additional bulk chemical funds that the Town decided to contribute to the project, the total budget for construction would be \$6,670,000. Mr. Mozeley continued that the Town was leading up to bidding later in the summer, but that present estimates were in the range \$6,400,000 to \$8,000,000, depending on alternates.

Councilman Ogle clarified if Mr. Mozeley was discussing keeping the fluoride tank and building a new tank. Mr. Mozeley responded that if the current fluoride feed was to continue being used, the Town would have to build more chemical storage for caustic relatively soon. Councilman Ogle asked how long down the road this would be. Mr. Mozeley answered that this was largely unknown, noting that the Town had an agreement in place with the City of Lenoir, which, upon completion of the interconnection line, would begin using a minimum of 300,000 gallons per day. Mr. Mozeley continued that the City of Lenoir could request an additional 3,700,000 gallons daily, to reach their maximum of four (4) MGD. Mr. Mozeley expressed that no one knew if the City of Lenoir would request four (4) MGD on day one, stating it did not seem like a likely scenario, but also noted that it was wise to plan for operating at a point where the Town could be operating on a project with such a size and magnitude.

Mayor Pro Tem Lowman asked what the approximate start date was for the project with the City of Lenoir. Mr. Mozeley answered that the project was presently under design, and would go to permits early in the Summer, adding that the project was behind the Town of Valdese's project, and likely would not go to bid until the end of the year. Mayor Pro Tem Lowman asked when the project would start. Mr. Mozeley gave an example of the project starting in early 2027, stating, in that case, it would not be completed until early-to-mid 2028.

Town Manager Herms clarified that the question before Council was, if they wanted to keep fluoride, Staff needed to be able to go out and make that one of the alternates. Mr. Mozeley responded in the affirmative. Town Manager Herms asked if Mr. Mozeley was estimating this cost to be somewhere between \$1,600,000 and \$2,000,000, in today's dollars, and also asked if \$160,000 for the replacement of the tank needed to be included in the upcoming budget. Mr. Mozeley responded that it would be important to discuss the timing with Staff and Council as the additional chemical treatment facility was completely outside of the scope of everything that had been discussed so far. Mr. Mozeley indicated it would take time to prepare all the required design documents, and recommended maintaining the project schedule for the current scope, adding that the chemical feed addition would be a project to happen a year, or so, down the road.

Councilwoman Zimmerman sought to clarify that the Council had to consider adding the \$160,000 replacement tank to the upcoming budget. Mr. Mozeley responded in the affirmative, adding that this would depend on some of the alternates that were already planned. Mr. Mozeley stated that he did say it was \$160,000 of value, but if one were to not do the fluoride, that would be \$160,000 that would be free to go to another alternate. Mr. Mozeley expressed that if one kept the fluoride, and the Town had to make a switch to include a new bulk fluoride tank, this would ultimately impact the overall funds available for the project.

Councilwoman Zimmerman asked how the decision to discontinue fluoride feed would impact bulk customers, such as Lenoir, who thought the water they would be purchasing would have fluoride in it. Mr. Mozeley responded that Lenoir was also a water producer, not simply a bulk customer, stating that they would be buying water from Valdese to supplement what they already produced, also adding that Lenoir presently dosed fluoride. Mr. Mozeley reported there would be some residual fluoride that would remain in Lenoir's system if they kept feeding and Valdese did not. Mr. Mozeley expressed that the customers who were more dependent on fluoride were going to be the bulk customers in the County who were simply just

buying water, and did not have a plant of their own. Mr. Mozeley reported that those customers were Icard water, Rutherford College, and Burke County.

Mayor Pro Tem Lowman asked if the possibility of discontinuing the fluoride feed had been discussed with Rutherford College, Icard, and Burke County. Mr. Weichel answered that it had not been discussed with bulk customers. Mr. Weichel added that the Town generally did not discuss their processes with their bulk customers, that these decisions were decided internally within the Town.

Mayor Pro Tem Lowman expressed that this was an important issue, that she had received a lot of emails and calls about the issue, and that she had spent her whole career working with children, to whom fluoride was very important. Mayor Pro Tem Lowman reported that the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Medical Association all continued to endorse community water fluoridation. Mayor Pro Tem Lowman stated it was very hard for her to sit and listen to all the information that the Council did not have until that night.

Town Manager Herms stated that he thought the intention was well meaning, but that maybe the execution failed a little bit, adding that at the end of the day the Town was trying to find ways to lessen the burden of water rate increases. Town Manager Herms asserted that if Council was not amendable to removing fluoride, Staff was totally in support of that. Town Manager Herms continued that they just wanted Council to understand and know that due to the damage of the tank, and the replacement that will be needed, there would be a significant cost associated with that in the future.

Councilwoman Ward stated that that was her biggest question for the night, that she knew Council had received a lot of information that would make it difficult to make a decision that evening, but expressed Council needed to look at how much this would cost. Councilwoman Ward put forward that some individuals considered fluoride important, while others did what they could to stay away from it, adding that it was a touchy subject. Councilwoman Ward reiterated that the biggest thing for her was what the cost increase may be, as water rates were discussed often in Valdese. Councilwoman Ward expressed the Council may want to take a minute, and wait a month, to make these decisions, as she did not think deciding that evening was wise. Town Manager Herms thought this was totally fair, adding that \$160,000 would have to be spent for the replacement of the tank regardless of the removal.

Mr. Weichel stated that the bigger question, over the next year or so, was to decide what the Town would do with its bulk chemical storage. Mr. Weichel continued that this would be the main part of the money, as this is where the approximate \$1,620,000 to \$2,000,000 cost would come in from reallocating areas for a new fluoride system. Mr. Weichel expressed that if fluoride were to be removed, the Town could use the existing area for the new caustic tank, and would not have to build new infrastructure.

Councilwoman Ward asked if it was possible to, in the near future, break down the cost to the customer. Town Manager Herms responded that it depended on when the Town decided to do it, and what interest rates it got at that time. Town Manager Herms reported that if the Town were to pull the trigger and build the additional chemical storage unit, one would probably be looking at somewhere between an 8% and 9% increase, just to pay off the loan. Town Manager Herms continued that if the Town were to do it in two (2) years, and interest rates were lower, that number could drop, if they were higher, the number would go up. Mr. Weichel added that this was on top of normal operating costs.

Mr. Weichel recounted that this was one item that the Town had identified, that was not regulated or required by the State, that could have maybe saved ratepayers some money. Councilwoman Ward reported that there were states and counties that had banned fluoride, that there were counties that had gotten rid of it in North Carolina, and that it was a pretty big topic. Mr. Weichel stated that the Town could offer fluoride rinse at Town Hall, keeping it in stock, so that if any of the Town's customers wanted a monthly supply, the Town would be happy to provide the rinse as an alternative.

Councilwoman Zimmerman stated that she too had received a lot of phone calls and emails from residents and customers that were concerned about fluoride not being in the water supply. Councilwoman Zimmerman expressed that the Council at least needed to table the decision, if they did not want to go ahead and vote. Councilwoman Zimmerman thought the Council needed to be very thoughtful about the decision, adding that residents and customers needed to understand that their rates would be affected.

Town Manager Herms thought it important to note that this was not uniquely a Valdese problem, that there were a lot of water providers going through the same issues. Town Manager Herms asked Mr. Mozeley if the fluoride delivery system lasted five (5) to seven (7) years before requiring replacement. Mr. Mozeley responded in the affirmative. Town Manager Herms stated, as pressure was put on every water provider, these were questions they had not answered yet themselves, continuing that he did not want one to believe this was just a Valdese problem.

Mr. Weichel stated that it would not hurt the project timeline if the Council needed to table this matter.

Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that she had several people reach out to her about the issue, from both sides, adding that they were concerned about having anything added to the water. Councilwoman Radabaugh asserted that she knew the fluoride had been in the water, but that those reaching out to her wanted the option of whether to have it or not. Councilwoman Radabaugh reported that fluoride was known to have been helpful in the past, for children specifically.

Councilwoman Radabaugh appreciated the opportunity to speak on the topic of fluoride in the Town's water system, an issue which had generated important discussion, and strong opinions on both sides. Councilwoman Radabaugh asserted that fluoride was a naturally occurring mineral that had been added to public water systems for decades as a way to reduce tooth decay. Councilwoman Radabaugh acknowledged that from both public health data, and her own experience working in the dental field, fluoride had played a meaningful role in improving dental health. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that fluoride strengthened tooth enamel and could help reduce cavities if daily oral hygiene was maintained. Councilwoman Radabaugh noted that fluoride was also widely available through other sources, such as toothpaste, mouthwash, and professional dental treatment. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that most people received adequate fluoride exposure, without relying on drinking water, adding that one should consider how people consume tap water presently. Councilwoman Radabaugh continued that many individuals and families relied on bottled water, rather than drinking it directly from the tap, which could reduce or eliminate their exposure to fluoridated municipal water altogether. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that this raised the question of how much benefit was truly being delivered through the water system alone.

Councilwoman Radabaugh expressed that there were also valid concerns that deserved consideration, acknowledging that some residents felt strongly about personal choice and the idea of adding anything to the public water supply. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that it was pointed out that fluoride exposure presently may be higher than it was in the past, raising questions about whether water fluoridation was still necessary in the same way that it once was.

Councilwoman Radabaugh articulated that there were operational and cost responsibilities associated with maintaining a fluoridation system, and that ultimately, this was a decision about balance. Councilwoman Radabaugh continued that it was about weighing a longstanding public health benefit, against the evolving access to dental care, individual preference, and the priorities of the community. Councilwoman Radabaugh expressed, as someone with experience in the dental field, that she recognized both sides, both that fluoride had provided benefit, and that the ways to access dental care had changed over time.

Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that she was open to thoroughly consider whether fluoride needed to remain in the Town's municipal water. Councilwoman Radabaugh believed it was appropriate for the Town to evaluate this decision with current information, community input, and the focus on what was the best to serve all of the Town's residents.

Councilwoman Zimmerman made a motion to table the agenda item to the Council meeting which was to follow. Seconded by Councilman Ogle.

Councilwoman Ward asked if there was a way to know a number associated with the change, so people would know what the Town was looking at. Mr. Weichel stated that this would be worked on, that numbers would be plugged into the model to provide a figure. Councilman Ogle added that he thought the Council needed more information than they had.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

MARCH 30, 2026, MB#33

**RESOLUTION FOR DISCONTINUATION OF FLUORIDATION OF THE DRINKING WATER SYSTEM
BY GOVERNING BODY OF THE TOWN OF VALDESE**

WHEREAS, The TOWN OF VALDESE has a standing Fluoridation Resolution which was adopted by the Town Council on March 2, 1970 to add fluoride to the drinking water that the Town produces; and

WHEREAS, The TOWN OF VALDESE recognizes the need for fluoride to be added in drinking water is no longer as pertinent as during the time frame during which it was added; and

WHEREAS, The TOWN OF VALDESE now is in the process of discontinuing the addition of fluoride to its drinking water; and

WHEREAS, The TOWN OF VALDESE recognizes that to complete the discontinuation process, the Town must follow the process enumerated by the applicable sections of the NC Administrative Code (15A NCAC 18C .1406); and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, BY THE TOWN BOARD OF THE TOWN OF VALDESE:

THAT the TOWN OF VALDESE hereby and in accordance with 15A NCAC 18C .1406 elects to rescind its prior resolution to feed fluoride at the Town's water treatment plant and will provide notice of this decision to the local board of health and also to the NC Department of Health and Human Services – Oral Services Section.

Adopted this the 30th day of March, 2026, at TOWN OF VALDESE, North Carolina.

SIGNATURE OF CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIAL/AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

DATE

TYPED NAME

TYPED TITLE

CERTIFICATION BY RECORDING OFFICER

The undersigned duly qualified and acting Town Clerk of the TOWN OF VALDESE does hereby certify:

That the above/attached resolution is a true and correct copy of the resolution by the TOWN OF VALDESE to rescind its prior resolution to feed fluoride in its drinking water treatment process, as regularly adopted at a legally convened meeting of the Town Council of the TOWN OF VALDESE duly held on the March 30, 2026; and, further, that such resolution has been fully recorded in the journal of proceedings and records in my office. IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this ____ day of _____, 20__.

SIGNATURE

TYPED NAME

TYPED TITLE

STATE OF THE DEPARTMENT – FIRE DEPARTMENT

Fire Chief, Truman Walton, thanked the Council for having him and apologized in advance for a long presentation.

Chief Walton then presented the State of the Department presentation for the Fire Department. Chief Walton began by reviewing departmental accomplishments over approximately the last five years. Chief Walton stated that the Town had obtained an ATV, or side-by-side, which had been used at festivals, the

parade, for wildland search and rescue, and for wildland fire response. Chief Walton noted that the vehicle had been used several times at the park to assist individuals off of trails.

Chief Walton stated that, a couple of years prior, the Department obtained a water rescue boat and water rescue equipment through a private donation. Chief Walton explained that the equipment was needed because the Department covered approximately seven (7) miles of shoreline, from Huffman Bridge to Castle Bridge. Chief Walton noted that prior to obtaining the boat, the Department would often be dispatched to water emergencies but had limited ability to assist until another agency arrived. Chief Walton stated that the Department could now provide direct assistance on the water while still receiving support from other responding agencies.

Chief Walton also stated that, through a private donation approximately two years prior, the Department switched to a national standard thread on its two-and-a-half-inch hose connections. Chief Walton explained that the Town had historically maintained a custom thread on hydrant connections, which resulted in increased delays and higher costs when ordering new equipment because components had to be specially manufactured. Chief Walton stated that all of the threads on the Department's trucks had been changed, and that the only remaining Valdese-specific threaded component was an adapter used on hydrants. Chief Walton noted that the change made it easier to work with surrounding departments during automatic aid responses.

Chief Walton further stated that the Department had obtained high angle rescue equipment, including ropes and related gear, which expanded the Department's ability to respond to rescues involving cliffs, holes, trees, and similar situations. Chief Walton stated that, in the month prior to the presentation, the Department had received certificates from the North Carolina Association of Rescue and EMS indicating certification in light rescue, surface water rescue, swift-water rescue, high angle rescue, and as a medical responder unit. Chief Walton added that the Department was also working toward certification in medium rescue vehicle extrication and hoped to obtain the remaining necessary equipment within the next few months.

Chief Walton then reviewed the Department's apparatus and equipment. Chief Walton stated that Engine One was a 2004 Pierce Quantum pumper and served as the Department's primary first-out truck for in-town fire calls. Chief Walton noted that the truck also responded to many medical calls and that fire personnel were required to remain on scene until EMS arrived. Chief Walton stated that Engine Three was a 1995 Pierce Dash 1250 pumper which was used predominantly for mutual aid responses outside the Town and also typically caught the hydrant and laid the line to Engine One during in-town fires. Chief Walton stated that Ladder One, the Department's newest apparatus, was a 2017 Pierce Enforcer 75-foot ladder truck with a 2,000 gallon-per-minute pump.

Chief Walton continued that the Department had somewhat replaced its medic truck during the previous year with a 2025 Chevrolet 2500 HD pickup. Chief Walton noted that the truck included a winch on the front, which was required as part of the rescue standards necessary for certification. Chief Walton stated that the Fire Marshal truck was used primarily by Assistant Chief Henry in his role as Fire Marshal to conduct inspections and investigations. Chief Walton explained that Command One had formerly served as the Department's medic truck and still belonged to Burke County, but had been retained and re-designated as the Chief's vehicle after replacement. Chief Walton stated that Utility One was a 1996 GMC 3500 pickup truck used mainly for hydrant maintenance and hauling miscellaneous materials. Chief Walton noted that the truck had visible overspray from hydrant painting and was used for dirtier work to avoid damaging other vehicles. Chief Walton stated that ATV One was a 2020 Kawasaki Mule used at the park, festivals, and brush fires to transport personnel and equipment. Chief Walton further stated that Marine One was a 2022 fifteen-foot inflatable rescue boat with a 40-horsepower motor.

Chief Walton then discussed the range of services provided by the Fire Department, noting that many people associated the Department primarily with structure fires and medical calls, but that it provided substantially more services. Chief Walton stated that the Department responded to structure fires, wildland fires, medical emergencies, and mutual aid calls to assist other agencies, fire departments, and rescue departments as needed. Chief Walton stated that the Department also conducted in-house fire investigations, pre-incident planning for businesses, and fire prevention inspections, the latter of which

were primarily carried out by Assistant Chief Henry. Chief Walton noted that the Department performed plans review for all construction and renovations other than one- and two-family dwellings.

Chief Walton continued that the Department provided smoke alarm installations at no cost to Town residents and also provided fire prevention education in schools, businesses, and factories, including instruction on fire extinguishers, evacuation plans, and other requested topics. Chief Walton stated that the Department participated in Safe Kids Worldwide and Burke County Safe Kids, through which it conducted bicycle rodeos in the summer to teach children bicycle safety, hand signals, and riding skills. Chief Walton noted that the Department also conducted car seat inspections, medicine drop events, hot car awareness displays, and general public safety education.

Chief Walton further stated that the Department provided vehicle extrication, water rescue, land search and rescue for lost individuals, high angle rescue, and special event standby coverage for activities such as foot races, 5Ks, festivals, and football games. Chief Walton stated that the Department also offered station tours, performed hydrant maintenance, and administered a Knox Box program which allowed the Department to access keys for businesses more efficiently through a single key system carried on the trucks. Chief Walton noted that the Department responded to hazardous materials incidents at the operations level, removed trees from roadways when needed, conducted confined space standbys, and provided vehicle lockout assistance under certain circumstances. Chief Walton also stated that the Department had made forcible entry into homes when needed and performed its own janitorial services, facility maintenance, equipment maintenance, and apparatus maintenance.

Chief Walton then discussed several additional Department activities and programs. Chief Walton stated that the Department operated a junior firefighter program for individuals between the ages of fourteen (14) and eighteen (18), allowing participants to learn about the fire service, handle equipment, and run calls with the Department, though they were not permitted to enter burning structures or drive apparatus. Chief Walton stated that the Department worked with the Draughn High School Fire Academy, participated in parades, and assisted with the Mingle with Kringle Christmas Breakfast with Santa Claus. Chief Walton noted that the Department also operated as an SCBA fill station and occasionally filled SCBA bottles for businesses in Town that used their own equipment in their industrial processes. Chief Walton stated that the Department had also assisted with re-rigging flag poles when reachable by the ladder truck, participated in the Burke County Homeland Security Task Force, provided continuing education in-house and through Western Piedmont, and handled emergency management processes and disaster preparedness for the Town, along with other emergencies that did not require law enforcement response.

Chief Walton then explained that, in addition to serving as Fire Chief, he also served as the Town's Safety Director. Chief Walton stated that in this role he was responsible for OSHA compliance for Town facilities, the safety data sheet program for chemicals at Town facilities, safety policy revisions and updates, the DOT CDL drug testing program, and workers' compensation paperwork. Chief Walton noted that he also handled risk management, technical safety guidance and recommendations, facility safety inspections, and monthly checks of Town Hall fire extinguishers, exit lights, and emergency lights.

Chief Walton then moved into discussion of call volume. Chief Walton stated that call volume had remained relatively steady over the previous couple of years, but had increased sharply in the years before that. Chief Walton reported a 17.7% increase from 2021 to 2022 and a 16.67% increase from 2022 to 2023. Chief Walton stated that call volume also increased from 2023 to 2024, and although the increase from 2024 to 2025 was smaller, approximately thirty-three (33) calls in 2024 were directly related to Hurricane Helene. Chief Walton stated that, based on calls run through the Friday preceding the presentation, the Department was on pace to run approximately 871 calls during the current year, representing another slight increase. Chief Walton stated that, since 2010, call volume had increased by an average of 4.7% annually, noting that the Department ran 448 calls in 2010 and was on pace to nearly double that figure during the current year.

Chief Walton explained that the increase in call volume was attributable to multiple factors, including population growth, additional residential and apartment development, an aging population, and the provision of expanded rescue services. Chief Walton noted that the median age in Valdese was in the mid-50s, which contributed to a higher proportion of medical calls. Chief Walton stated that, while many departments nationwide saw approximately 70% of their calls as medical in nature, Valdese was in the

80% to 82% range. Chief Walton also stated that lack of volunteerism and reduced fire department personnel availability contributed to operational challenges connected to call volume increases.

Chief Walton then reviewed Department staffing. Chief Walton stated that the Department had seven (7) full-time positions, of which six (6) were currently filled. Chief Walton stated that those positions included the Fire Chief/Safety Director, the Assistant Chief/Fire Marshal, one (1), eight (8) to five (5), Captain position which had been filled in October after being vacant for over a year, and four (4) Engineer positions, one (1) of which had been vacant since January 2025. Chief Walton also stated that the Department had sixteen (16) part-time firefighter/EMTs and one (1) junior firefighter.

Chief Walton then discussed staffing levels throughout the week. Chief Walton stated that, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the Department had an absolute maximum of five (5) people, though that total included a part-time firefighter slot which had become increasingly difficult to fill. Chief Walton stated that the difficulty in filling the part-time slot stemmed from many employees working multiple jobs and from competing departments offering similar or slightly higher pay along with twelve-hour and twenty-four-hour shifts rather than the Town's eight-hour shift. Chief Walton stated that, although five (5) was the maximum, the Department generally had four (4) personnel available during the daytime, excluding those out for training or leave. Chief Walton noted that on the day of the presentation one (1) employee was away at training, leaving three (3) personnel on duty.

Chief Walton further stated that nights, weekends, and holidays typically dropped to one (1) person on duty, generally a single Fire Engineer, and expressed concern regarding the safety implications of such staffing levels. Chief Walton explained that many firefighter line-of-duty deaths now involved cardiac incidents after calls, and that the Department's current facility included an upstairs bedroom, raising concerns about a lone firefighter suffering an injury while responding to a call without immediate assistance available. Chief Walton stated that staffing challenges included the eight-to-five part-time shift model, the overall decline in volunteerism across the fire service, and the fact that many part-time firefighters worked full-time elsewhere and treated Valdese as a second, third, fourth, or even fifth job.

Chief Walton then compared the responsibilities of a Valdese Fire Department Engineer to those of personnel in larger departments such as Hickory. Chief Walton explained that in larger departments, firefighter operations, apparatus operation, company supervision, and incident command were generally separated among firefighters, engineers, captains, and battalion chiefs. Chief Walton stated that in Valdese, when only one (1) person was on shift, that individual had to drive and operate the apparatus, pull hose, throw ladders, make initial tactical decisions, supervise equipment, and often serve as incident commander until additional personnel arrived. Chief Walton stated that, although the position was titled Engineer, the individual could function in roles equivalent to firefighter, captain, or battalion chief depending on the situation.

Chief Walton then discussed response percentages. Chief Walton stated that in 2025 the Department's full-time personnel averaged responding to 40% of total calls per person, while part-time personnel averaged only 4% of calls per person. Chief Walton further stated that, in the current year, full-time personnel were averaging approximately 41% of calls while part-time personnel were averaging approximately 3%. Chief Walton stated that this reflected the broader decline in volunteer-style participation, even among paid part-time personnel, due to competing work and family obligations.

Chief Walton then reviewed structure fire response trends. Chief Walton stated that approximately ten (10) years earlier, an initial structure fire dispatch in Valdese typically resulted in eight (8) to ten (10) Valdese firefighters responding, along with one automatic aid department contributing four (4) to five (5) personnel, for a total initial response of approximately twelve (12) to fifteen (15) personnel. Chief Walton stated that, by 2025 and into 2026, Valdese was seeing only approximately four (4) to six (6) personnel from its own department respond to a structure fire, while now receiving two automatic aid departments, each generally contributing one (1) to two (2) personnel. Chief Walton noted that the total personnel now responding to a structure fire was roughly half of what it had been ten (10) years earlier. Chief Walton also stated that where automatic aid responses to other departments had once involved a race to the station to secure a seat on the truck, such responses now generally involved only the on-duty engineer and the Chief.

Chief Walton stated that both ISO and OSHA established a minimum expectation of four (4) personnel from the primary department on a structure fire response. Chief Walton stated that, with Valdese currently operating in the four (4) to six (6) person range for such incidents, the Department was close to potentially dropping below that threshold if additional staffing and support were not secured. Chief Walton also noted that surrounding departments were now dispatching three (3) automatic aid departments on structure fires, illustrating that staffing shortages were affecting neighboring departments as well.

Chief Walton then discussed the Department's response district. Chief Walton stated that the Town's primary response district encompassed approximately 7.87 square miles, within which the Department was responsible for fire, medical, hazardous materials, investigations, inspections, and pre-plans. Chief Walton further stated that the automatic aid district in which Valdese responded to neighboring departments' fires covered approximately 45 square miles. Chief Walton explained that this automatic aid area had grown because neighboring departments were dispatching more agencies to obtain sufficient personnel, and that Valdese's participation was necessary in order to maintain reciprocal aid.

Chief Walton then discussed training requirements for new personnel. Chief Walton stated that a new part-time firefighter with no prior experience would need approximately 684 hours of training to become functional as a basic firefighter/EMT, including Incident Command System training through FEMA, North Carolina firefighter certification, hazardous materials operations training, and EMT certification. Chief Walton further stated that a firefighter moving from part-time to full-time status would require an additional approximately 706 hours of training in emergency vehicle driving, driver/operator qualifications, rapid intervention, technical rescue disciplines, apparatus-specific drive time and training, wildland training, and child passenger safety technician certification. Chief Walton stated that, in total, bringing someone from no experience to a fully functional new Engineer required approximately 1,390 hours of training. Chief Walton noted that those totals did not include recommended advanced training such as instructor certifications, fire officer certifications, fire life safety educator training, fire inspection training, Incident Command System 300 and 400, National Fire Academy courses, leadership courses, fire investigation training, technician training, additional technical rescue certifications, the UNC Charlotte Fire and Rescue Management Institute, and Chief 101.

Chief Walton then discussed the cost of hiring and training personnel. Chief Walton stated that even before offering a position, the Department incurred approximately \$300 in applicant costs for a physical, drug test, and background check. Chief Walton stated that bringing on a new part-time firefighter cost approximately \$20,000, including approximately \$6,000 for turnout gear, \$1,700 for uniforms, and approximately \$12,300 for training. Chief Walton further stated that hiring a full-time person with no prior training cost approximately \$41,000, including approximately \$6,500 for turnout gear, \$2,500 for uniforms, and approximately \$32,000 for training. Chief Walton noted that those figures did not include shift coverage needed during the six (6) to seven (7) month training period, hotel stays, travel costs, or administrative expenses.

Chief Walton then reviewed recent cost increases over approximately the last five (5) to six (6) years. Chief Walton stated that firefighter physicals had increased approximately 129%, SCBA compressor maintenance approximately 20%, generator service approximately 41%, ground ladder testing approximately 30%, aerial ladder testing approximately 58%, apparatus tires approximately 19%, turnout gear approximately 60%, the Active911 subscription approximately 57%, and property casualty insurance for the Department approximately 104%. Chief Walton stated that the Department's records management system had experienced the largest increase, approximately 213%, due in part to federal transition requirements from the former NFIRS system to the newer NERIS system and to the acquisition and price increases imposed by the vendor that replaced the previous reporting platform.

Chief Walton then discussed the Department's current facility. Chief Walton stated that the facility had numerous shortcomings and was not set up to house multiple people, particularly not personnel of different genders. Chief Walton stated that the training room was too small, the makeshift kitchen lacked ventilation, and the apparatus bays were small for the size of the trucks. Chief Walton noted that lockers positioned beside the trucks made it difficult to move equipment in and out, and that turnout gear and the SCBA system were located directly in the bay where they were exposed to exhaust. Chief Walton also stated that the Department did not have enough gear lockers for personnel.

Chief Walton further stated that the ceiling height in the bays prevented the Department from opening truck cabs for maintenance, requiring apparatus to be moved outside, though the front pad caused the trucks to extend into Faet Street. Chief Walton stated that the Department therefore had to move apparatus to the rear of the building for maintenance. Chief Walton also stated that Department offices were located in an exterior trailer, which made communication throughout the day more difficult. Chief Walton further noted ongoing plumbing issues, clogged drains, and electrical problems, including wiring difficulties due to all wires being the same color. Chief Walton added that the Department's server room, which housed the main internet server and phone system, remained in the portion of the building that had been condemned.

Chief Walton then transitioned into discussion of the Department's ISO rating. Chief Walton explained that ISO, or the Insurance Services Office, rated fire departments across the country, with 9S representing a recognized fire department and Class 1 representing the highest possible rating. Chief Walton stated that Valdese was currently a Class 3 department and that its last inspection occurred in January 2022. Chief Walton explained that areas located more than five (5) miles from a station would otherwise fall into Class 10 unless covered by contract with another fire protection provider. Chief Walton stated that Lake Vista Development received Valdese's Class 3 rating through a contract with Lovelady, while another outlying area known as The Settings received the same through a contract with Triple Community.

Chief Walton explained that the ISO score was based on emergency communications at 10%, the fire department at 50%, water supply at 40%, and community risk reduction as a bonus of up to 5.5 points, with divergence serving as a negative adjustment based on disparity between the water supply and fire department categories. Chief Walton stated that general ISO guidance indicated insurance premium impacts were more significant when moving from a Class 10 to a Class 9 or from a Class 9 to a Class 8, while homeowner policies typically saw little effect once a community was below a Class 5, with greater relevance at that point shifting to commercial insurance.

Chief Walton reported that Valdese had received a total ISO score of 74.7 points, comprised of 9.91 out of 10 points for emergency communications, 31.44 out of 50 points for the fire department, 33.69 out of 40 points for water supply, and 3.93 out of 5.5 bonus points for community risk reduction. Chief Walton stated that the Department also received a divergence penalty of negative 4.27 points due to the stronger performance in water supply relative to the fire department score.

Chief Walton stated that Burke County Communications was wholly responsible for the emergency communications portion of the ISO score. Chief Walton explained that the County used an E-911 system, maintained sufficient telecommunications, and performed well enough to receive approximately 99% of the available points in that category.

Chief Walton then discussed the fire department portion of the ISO score. Chief Walton stated that the Department's engine company score was 5.18 out of 6 points, which included counting one automatic aid pumper because ISO generally based that category on three (3) engines while Valdese directly operated two (2). Chief Walton stated that the Department received full credit for pump capacity and ladder service, but did not receive credit for a reserve pumper or reserve ladder because it did not have those units. Chief Walton also stated that company personnel represented the largest area for potential improvement and that the score in that category was driven by both on-duty staffing and the number of personnel returning for structure fires. Chief Walton noted that ISO considered only structure fire responses in this evaluation. Chief Walton added that the Department performed relatively well on training at 72% and received full credit for operational considerations.

Chief Walton then discussed apparatus and deployment further. Chief Walton stated that the Department had increased training with automatic aid departments over approximately the last year and a half to two years, which should improve the engine company score. Chief Walton explained that deployment analysis was based on the percentage of built-upon area within one and one-half (1.5) road miles of a pumper and two and one-half (2.5) road miles of a ladder company. Chief Walton stated that he had been asked both directly and indirectly whether Valdese needed a ladder truck, and stated that the answer was absolutely yes. Chief Walton explained that ISO required a ladder company when a district included either five (5) or more buildings with a needed fire flow of 4,000 gallons per minute or more, or five (5) or more buildings

three (3) stories or taller from the lowest apparatus access. Chief Walton identified Bimbo Bakery and Kellogg's as examples of the first category and cited the hospital, medical office building, WSVM building, many Main Street buildings, Pine Crossing Apartments, and Tron's Place as examples of the second. Chief Walton stated that the ladder truck was necessary to maintain the Department's ISO rating.

Chief Walton then returned to the personnel portion of the ISO fire department score. Chief Walton stated that the Department received 3.41 out of 15 points in that category. Chief Walton explained that, in 2022, the Department averaged 1.95 personnel on duty when total on-duty hours were divided by the number of hours in a year. Chief Walton stated that the current average had dropped to approximately 1.71 personnel on duty due in part to difficulty filling the part-time shift. Chief Walton further stated that, in 2022, the previous five (5) structure fires averaged 8.4 on-call personnel returning to the station, while the last four (4) structure fires averaged only 4.6 on-call personnel returning. Chief Walton stated that this represented just over half of the prior level and indicated the Department could lose additional ISO points if current trends continued.

Chief Walton stated that full ISO credit for staffing would require six (6) personnel on every engine and six (6) personnel on every ladder truck, a standard he did not believe most departments in the country fully met. Chief Walton stated that for Valdese to meet that standard with two (2) engines and one (1) ladder truck would require eighteen (18) personnel on duty twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week. Chief Walton further stated that if the Department relied solely on on-call personnel, it would need forty-nine (49) people returning to every structure fire to maximize personnel credit.

Chief Walton then discussed training within the ISO rating framework. Chief Walton stated that the Department performed relatively well in that category and was able to count some training completed by personnel who also worked full-time at other departments. Chief Walton explained that facility training had to be conducted at a burn building or three (3) story training tower, requiring the Department to send personnel to outside locations such as Western Piedmont, Morganton, or Shelby. Chief Walton stated that company training included most training activities conducted around the station. Chief Walton also explained minimum annual hours needed for officers, new drivers, general drivers, hazardous materials, and recruits, and noted that pre-plans were counted in the training category, for which the Department received full credit because all buildings were updated annually. Chief Walton stated that, to receive maximum credit, the average firefighter/driver would need a minimum of 228 hours of training annually. Chief Walton stated that he did not expect the Department to receive full points in training, but did expect improvement because the Department had significantly improved its documentation practices.

Chief Walton then discussed the water supply portion of the ISO score. Chief Walton stated that the Department received 33.69 out of 40 points in that category, including 27.44 out of 30 points for the supply system. Chief Walton explained that the supply system score was based on hydrant testing against required fire flows for selected buildings identified by the Office of State Fire Marshal. Chief Walton stated that the Department received 2.25 out of 3 points for hydrants, or 75%, and noted that previous ISO standards required larger hydrant barrels than were commonly found locally, though that requirement had since been removed. Chief Walton stated that the Town's hydrants should receive full credit in the future as long as they had a four-and-a-half-inch (4.5") steamer connection.

Chief Walton further stated that the Department performed annual hydrant maintenance every April and received points for that work, but did not currently conduct system-wide flow testing or hydrant marking. Chief Walton explained that full flow testing and marking could provide additional points, and that marking could now be accomplished digitally through Active911 and the records management system, instead of paint. Chief Walton stated, however, that even routine hydrant flushing generated public complaints and that the Department had therefore not undertaken full flow testing except when required for ISO purposes or when specifically requested by a business for insurance or sprinkler design purposes.

Chief Walton then discussed community risk reduction, the bonus point category. Chief Walton stated that the Department received 1.88 out of 2 points for fire prevention and code enforcement, noting that the primary limitation was the lack of a dedicated full-time staff member solely assigned to those duties, along with annual training requirements for maximum credit. Chief Walton stated that the Department received approximately half of the available points for public fire safety education, again due largely to limited dedicated staff and prior documentation shortcomings, though documentation had recently improved.

Chief Walton also stated that the fire investigation program was limited by the lack of dedicated personnel and by annual training requirements necessary to maximize credit for investigators.

Chief Walton then explained the divergence calculation, stating that it reflected the imbalance between the fire department score and the water supply score. Chief Walton explained that the formula used was one-half (.5) times the water system credit minus 0.8 times the fire department credit, which in Valdese's case resulted in a divergence of 4.27 points. Chief Walton summarized that, with a total of 74.7 points, the Department remained a solid, middle-of-the-road, Class 3 department.

Chief Walton then discussed changes made since the last ISO inspection and possible future improvements. Chief Walton stated that the Department had added small pieces of equipment to its engines to capture additional points, increased training opportunities, improved training documentation, increased automatic aid training, and significantly improved documentation for public education programs. Chief Walton also stated that one ongoing negative factor was the decline in available personnel, both through unfilled daytime part-time coverage and reduced on-call response to structure fires. Chief Walton stated that possible improvements still available included increasing on-duty personnel, beginning hydrant flow testing and digital marking, and replacing out-of-service hydrants.

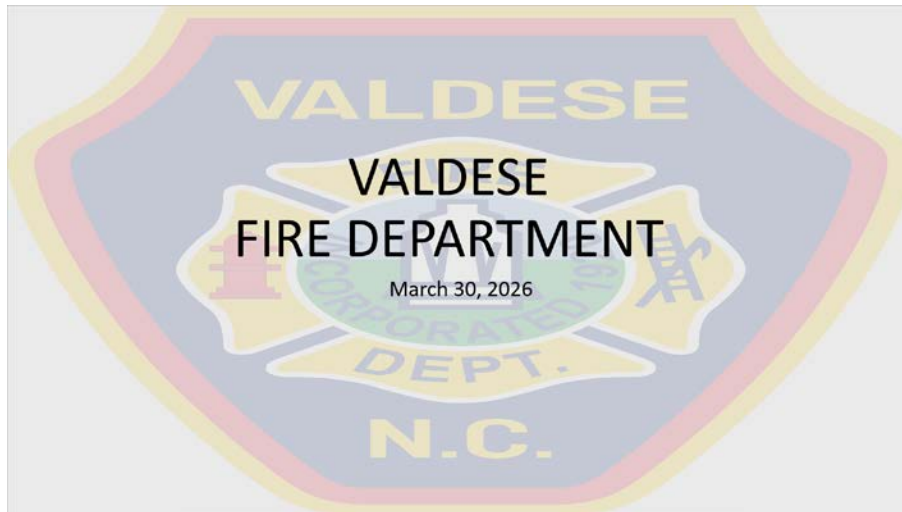
Chief Walton concluded by discussing the Department's needs moving forward, which he referred to as a "three (3) headed monster." Chief Walton stated that the first need was personnel, including retaining current staff, improving pay and benefits, establishing some form of career progression or merit raise program, and potentially increasing the number of personnel on shift. Chief Walton noted that, at present, an employee entering as an Engineer had little opportunity for pay growth beyond cost-of-living adjustments.

Chief Walton stated that the second need was a new facility. Chief Walton explained that the proposed facility plan on display in the lobby addressed many of the safety concerns discussed during the presentation, provided space for additional personnel, and included improved space for apparatus maintenance and training activities.

Chief Walton stated that the third need was apparatus replacement. Chief Walton stated that Engine Three was thirty-one (31) years old and would need to be replaced soon. Chief Walton stated that one option would be to replace Engine Three and retain the old unit as a reserve pumper for possible ISO credit, though his preference would likely be replacement without long-term reliance on the existing truck because parts were becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. Chief Walton further stated that Engine One, currently twenty-two (22) years old, would likely need to be discussed for replacement within the next ten (10) years. Chief Walton noted that current truck lead times were approximately three (3) to four (4) years from contract execution to delivery.

Councilwoman Zimmerman thanked Chief Walton for his presentation, noting it was quite in-depth.

Mayor Huffman announced there would be a five (5) minute recess.



Previous Accomplishments

- ATV for land search and wildland fire operations
- Water Rescue boat and equipment – private donation
- National Standard threads – private donation
- High Angle Rescue equipment – private donation
- NCAREMS Certifications – February 2026
 - Light Rescue
 - Surface Water Rescue
 - Swift Water Rescue
 - High Angle Rescue
 - Medical Responder

Apparatus

- 60 Engine 1 – 2004 Pierce Quantum 1250 gpm Pumper



Apparatus

- 60 Engine 3 – 1995 Pierce Dash 1250 gpm Pumper



Apparatus

- 60 Ladder 1 – 2017 Pierce Enforcer 75ft Aerial, 2000 gpm Pump



Apparatus

- 60 Medic 1 – 2025 Chevy 2500 HD pick-up



Apparatus

- 60 Fire Marshal 1 – 2021 Chevy 2500 HD pick-up



Apparatus

- 60 Command 1 – 2005 Ford F350 Dually pick-up



Apparatus

- 60 Utility 1 – 1996 GMC 3500 pick-up



Apparatus

- 60 ATV 1 – 2020 Kawasaki Mule Pro side-by-side



Apparatus

- 60 Marine 1 – 2022 Inmar 15.5 ft Inflatable Rescue Boat with 40 Hp Motor



Fire Dept Services Provided....

- Structure Fire Suppression
- Wildland Fire Suppression
- Emergency Medical Services
- Mutual Aid to other agencies
- Fire Investigations
- Pre-Incident Planning
- Fire Prevention Inspections
- NC Fire Code Plans Review
- Smoke Alarm Installation
- Fire Prevention Education
 - Schools
 - Fire extinguishers
 - Evacuation plans
 - Other as requested
- Safe Kids Worldwide
 - Bicycle Rodeos
 - Car Seat Inspections
 - Medicine Drop Events
 - Hot Car Displays
 - Public Education

Fire Dept Services Provided ... Continued

- Vehicle Extrication
- Water Rescue
- Search & Rescue
- High Angle Rescue
- Special Event Standby
- Station Tours
- Hydrant Maintenance
- Knox Box Program
- Hazardous Materials Response
- Tree removal from roadways
- Confined Space Standby
- Vehicle Lock-outs
- Forcible Entry
- Internal Janitorial Services
- Maintenance
 - Facility
 - Equipment
 - Apparatus

Fire Dept Services Provided ... Continued

- Junior Firefighter Program
- Training with Draughn HS Fire Academy
- Parades
- Mingle with Kringle
- SCBA Fill Station
- Restrung Flag Poles
- Burke County Homeland Security Task Force
- Continuing Education Training
- Emergency Management
- Disaster Preparedness
- Anything else called in to 911 that doesn't require a badge and gun

Safety Director Services Provides

- OSHA Compliance – All Town Facilities
- SDS Program
- Safety Policies Revision & Updates
- DOT CDL Drug Testing Program
- Workers' Compensation Processing
- Risk Management
- Technical Guidance & Recommendations
- Facility Safety Inspections
- Monthly Check of Town Hall Extinguishers, AED, Exit lights & Emergency Lights

Call Volume

Year	Call Volume	% Increase
2022	678	17.71
2023	791	16.67
2024	855	8.09
2025	860	0.58
2026 - Estimated	871	1.28

- Average annual increase since 2010, 448 calls – 4.7%
- Contributing Factors
 - Increasing population
 - Aging population
 - Additional services provided
 - Lack of volunteerism & fire department personnel

Personnel

- 7 Full-time Positions
 - Chief / Safety Director
 - Assistant Chief / Fire Marshal
 - Captain (filled in October 2025 after being vacant for over a year)
 - 4 – Fire Engineers (1 vacancy since January 2025)
- 16 - Part-time Firefighter/EMTs
- 1 - Volunteer Junior Firefighter

Staffing

- Monday – Friday 8 am – 5 pm: maximum of 5 personnel
 - Includes filling 8-5 part-time Firefighter slot, which is very rare
 - Does not account for someone going to training or taking time off
- Night, Weekends & Holidays: 1 person

Staffing Challenges

- Only offering Monday – Friday 8am to 5pm Part-time hours
- Lack of volunteerism
- Part-time Firefighters working elsewhere

Fire Personnel Responsibilities Comparison

Valdese Fire Department

- Firefighting operations
 - Engineer
- Drive / Operator Apparatus
 - Engineer
- Oversee / Supervise Apparatus
 - Engineer
- Incident Command
 - Engineer

Hickory Fire Department

- Firefighting operations
 - Firefighter
- Drive / Operate Apparatus
 - Engineer
- Oversee / Supervise Apparatus
 - Captain
- Incident Command
 - Battalion Chief

Personnel Response Percentages

- Average for 2025
 - Full-time Personnel – 40%
 - Part-time – 4%
- Average for 2026
 - Full-time Personnel – 41%
 - Part-time - 3%

Structure Fire Response ... Initial Response

2016

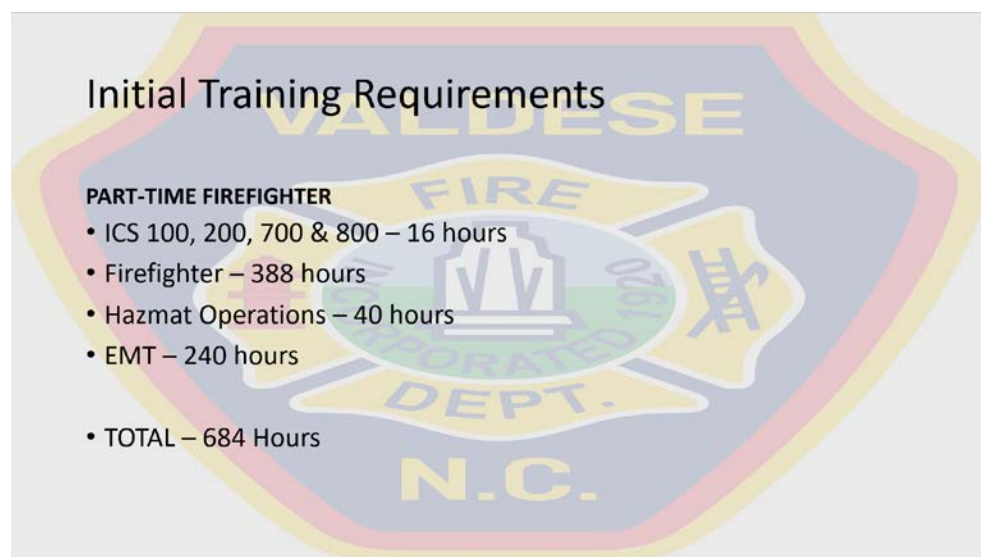
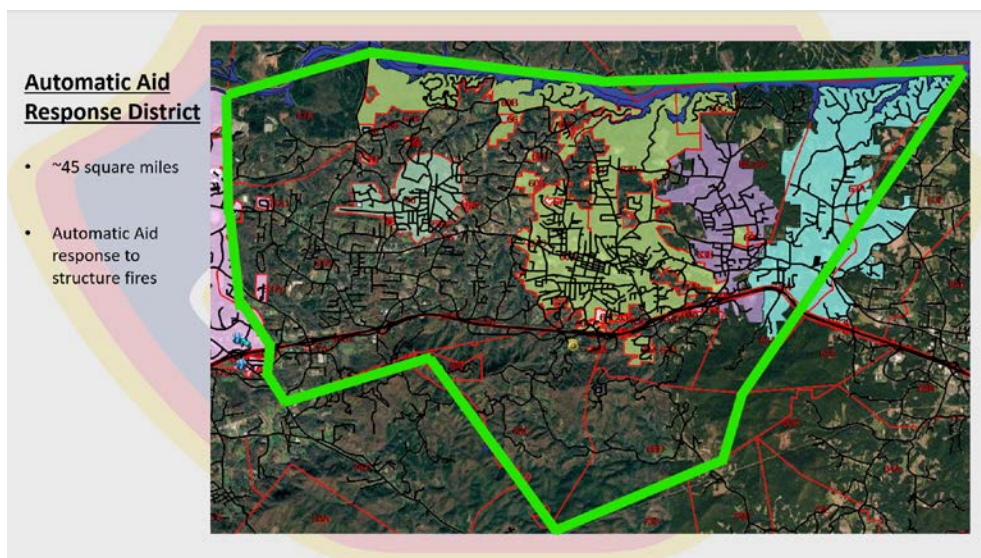
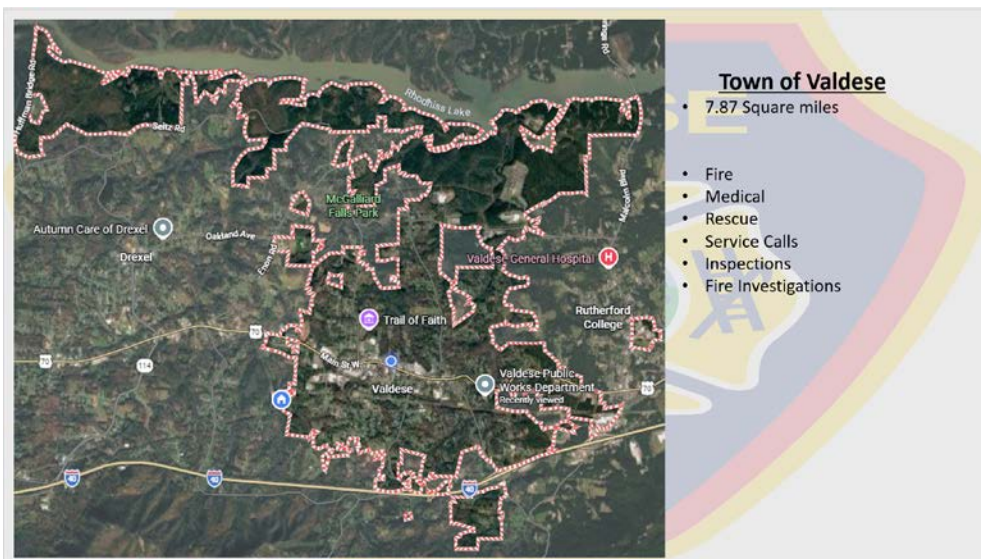
- Valdese Fire Department
 - 8 – 10 Personnel
- 1 Auto-aid Department
 - 4 - 5 Personnel
- Total Personnel: 12-15

2025 / 2026

- Valdese Fire Department
 - 4 – 6 Personnel
- 2 Auto-aid Departments
 - 1 – 2 Personnel each
- Total Personnel: 6 - 10

ISO / OSHA minimum response requirement: 4 personnel from the primary department

Surrounding departments have started having 3 automatic aid departments for structure fires



Initial Training Requirements

FULL-TIME FIRE ENGINEER

- D/O EVD – 24 hours
- D/O Pumps – 110 hours
- D/O Aerials – 60 hours
- Rapid Intervention Crew – 48 hours
- TR Intro – 45 hours
- TR Common Passenger Vehicle – 48 hours
- Apparatus Drive Time & Training – 40 hours
- TR Heavy Vehicle – 36 hours
- TR Ropes – 111 Hours
- TR Surface Water – 36 hours
- TR Swift Water – 36 hours
- TR Machinery & Agriculture – 40 hours
- Wildland S130, S190, L180 – 40 hours
- CPS Technician – 32 hours

TOTAL in addition to Part-time Firefighter – 706 hours

TOTAL Including Part-Time Firefighter Requirements – 1390 hours

Recommended Advanced Training

- Fire Instructor
- Fire Officer
- Fire & Life Safety Educator
- Fire Inspector
- Law & Admin
- ICS 300 & 400
- NFA Courses
- Leadership Courses
- Fire Investigation Technician
- Additional TR certifications
 - Confined Space
 - Trench
 - Structural Collapse
 - Wilderness
- UNCC Fire & Rescue Management Institute
- Chief 101

Cost of Hiring New Personnel

- Applicant \$300
 - Physical, drug test, and background checks
- Part-time Firefighter \$20,000
 - Turnout gear - \$6,000
 - Uniforms - \$1,700
 - Training - \$12,300
- Full-time Engineer \$41,000
 - Turnout gear - \$6,500
 - Uniforms - \$2,500
 - Training - \$32,000

*Does not include any administrative costs, travel or hotel cost for training, shift coverage while employee is completing training, or advanced training courses

Recent Cost Increases 2020 to 2026

- Firefighter Physicals – 129%
- SCBA Compressor Maintenance – 20%
- Emergency Generator Service Contract – 41%
- Ground Ladder Testing – 30%
- Aerial Ladder Testing – 58%
- Apparatus tires (set) – 19%
- Firefighter Turnout Gear – 60%
- Active 911 Subscription – 57%
- Property & Casualty Insurance – 104%
- Records Management System – 213%

Current Facility Issues

- Only one shower
- Training room too small
- No ventilation from current kitchen area
- Bays are small and tight
- No bay ventilation system
- Turnout gear and SCBA compressor directly exposed to exhaust in bays
- Not enough gear lockers for personnel
- Cannot open truck cabs in bays to perform maintenance
- Cannot pull trucks out onto front pad without being in the road
- Offices in exterior trailer
- Plumbing issues
- Electrical Issues
- Server room is still in the condemned section of the building

ISO Rating

- 1 – 90.00 or greater
- 2 – 80.00 to 89.99
- 3 – 70.00 to 79.99
- 4 – 60.00 to 69.99
- 5 – 50.00 to 59.99
- 6 – 40.00 to 49.99
- 7 – 30.99 to 39.99
- 8 – 20.00 to 29.99
- 9 – 10.00 to 19.99
- 10 – 0 to 9.99 - not rated, includes areas greater than 5 road miles from station, unless contracted with other fire protection
- Emergency Communications 10%
- Fire Department 50%
- Water Supply 40%
- Community Risk Reduction – up to 5.5 Bonus Points
- Divergence – negative impact based on disparity between the water supply and fire department

ISO Rating Insurance Premium Impacts

- Class 10 – No Impact
- Class 9 – 20%
- Class 8 – 7%
- Class 7 – 10%
- Class 6 – 16%
- Class 5 – 7%
- Class 4 – 5%
- Class 3 – 3%
- Class 2 – 5%
- Class 1 – 4 %

Homeowner's policies are generally not reduced for classes below 5.

General guideline for commercial insurance only.

Current ISO Rating.....Class 3.....74.70 Points

2022 ISO Inspection

Category	Points Earned	Points Available	Percentage
Emergency Communications	9.91	10	99.1%
Fire Department	31.44	50	62.9%
Water Supply	33.69	40	84.2%
Community Risk Reduction – BONUS POINTS	3.93	5.5	71.5%
Divergence	-4.27	-----	-----

Current ISO Rating ...Emergency Communications ...9.91 out of 10 points

	Points Earned	Points Available	Percentage
Emergency Reporting	3.00	3	100%
Telecommunicators	4.00	4	100%
Dispatch Circuits	2.91	3	97%

*Emergency Communications are entirely through Burke County

Current ISO Rating ...Fire Department ... 31.44 out of 50 points

	Points Earned	Points Available	Percentage
Engine Companies	5.18	6	86.3%
Reserve Pumps	0	0.5	0%
Pumper Capacity	3.00	3	100%
Ladder Service	4.00	4	100%
Reserve Ladder Service	0	0.5	0%
Deployment Analysis	7.31	10	73.1%
Company Personnel	3.41	15	22.7%
Training	6.54	9	72.7%
Operational Considerations	2.00	2	100%

Current ISO Rating... Fire Department: Apparatus

- Engine Companies: 5.18 of 6 points
 - Based on having 3 pumps
 - Includes using an automatic aid pumper
 - Requires training with automatic aid departments
- Reserve Pumps: 0 of 0.5 points
- Reserve Ladder Service : 0 of 0.5 points
- Deployment Analysis: 7.31 of 10 points
 - Based on percentage of built upon area within 1.5 miles of a pumper and within 2.5 miles of a ladder or service company.

ISO Inspection Need for a Ladder Truck

- A Ladder Company is needed if the district has:
 - 5 or more buildings with a needed fire flow of 4000 gpm or more
 - 5 or more buildings that are 3 stories or taller
 - Or 32' to the eave from the lowest fire apparatus access
 - A total of 5 or more buildings have a 4000 gpm needed fire flow or are 3 stories or more

Current ISO Rating...Fire Department: Company Personnel – 3.41 out of 15 points

- 2022 On-duty personnel – 1.95 personnel on average
 - Current average – 1.71 personnel
 - Currently unable to fill 8-5 part-time Firefighter shifts
- 2022 On-call personnel on structure fires – 8.4 personnel on average
 - Current average – 4.6 personnel
 - Reduced response from part-time and off-duty full-time

ISO Personnel Requirements for Maximum Points

- Each Engine Company – 6 personnel
- Each Ladder Company – 6 personnel
- Valdeese's 2 Engines & 1 Ladder would require 18 personnel 24/7 for maximum credit
- On call personnel count as 1/3 of an on duty person.
 - Based on current on duty personnel credit of 1.71 we would need 49 on-call personnel to run each structure fire

Current ISO Rating... Fire Department: Training ...6.54 of 9 points

Training Type	Hours for Max Credit	Earned Credit	Available Credit	Percentage
Facilities	18 hours	18.90	35	54%
Company	192 hours	16.81	25	67.2%
Officer	12 hours	9.75	12	81.25%
New Driver	60 hours	5.00	5	100%
Driver	12 hours	4.46	5	89.2%
Hazardous Materials	6 hours	0.73	1	73%
Recruit	240 hours	5.00	5	100%
Pre-Plans	-----	12.00	12	100%

The average Firefighter / Driver must have 228 hours of training annually to get maximum credit.

Current ISO Rating... Water Supply...33.69 out of 40 points

	Points Earned	Available Points	Percentage
Supply System	27.44	30	91.5%
Hydrants	2.25	3	75%
Hydrant Inspections & Flow Testing	4.00	7	57.1%

Supply System – Based on available fire flow for chosen locations

Hydrants – previously to get full credit hydrants must have had a 5 ¼" of larger barrel, ours are 4 ½"

- This has been removed, it is now based on the connection size on the hydrant

Inspection and Flow Testing – We currently do not flow test or mark hydrants based on their available flow

- 2.4 points available for flow testing
- 0.6 points available for marking based on available flow

Current ISO Inspection.... Community Risk Reduction...3.93 of 5.5 BONUS POINTS

	Points Earned	Points Available	Percentage
Fire Prevention & Code Enforcement	1.88	2.2	85.5%
Public Fire Safety Education	1.07	2.2	48.6%
Fire Investigation Program	0.98	1.1	89.1%

Fire Prevention & Code Enforcement – number of staff & training hours

- 24 hours of annual training

Public Fire Safety Education – number of staff & training hour, documentation of public education programs

- 10 hours of annual training

Fire Investigation Program – number of staff & training hours

- 40 hours of annual training

Current ISO Inspection ... Divergence –4.27 Points

- Either the fire department is limited without adequate water supply
- Or the water supply cannot be fully utilized without an adequate fire department
- Therefore credit totals are proportionately adjusted to balance the variance between the earned credit of the two categories

Current ISO Inspection... Divergence –4.27 Points

$$\text{DIV} = 0.5 \times (\text{WS} - 0.8 \times \text{FD})$$

DIV = Divergence

WS = Water Supply Credit

FD = Fire Department Credit

$$\bullet \text{ DIV} = 0.5 \times (33.69 - 0.8 \times 31.44)$$

$$\bullet \text{ DIV} = -4.27$$

Divergence always has a negative value

ISO Rating Improvements Next Inspection: January 2027

Changes Since Last Inspection

- Additional small equipment to assist with Engine Company Score
- Increased offered training hours
 - Facility hours with MDPS
 - Automatic Aid Training
 - Increased documentation of on shift training
- Increased documentation of public education programs
- Fewer personnel on-duty & on call

Possible Improvements Still to be Made

- Increase on-duty personnel
- Hydrant flow testing & marking
- Replace out of service hydrants

Dept Needs – The 3 Headed Monster

- Personnel
 - Increase Pay
 - Improve Benefits
 - Career Progression / Merit Raise Program
 - Increase number of personnel
- New Facility
 - Address safety concerns at current facility
 - Allow for more personnel
 - Adequate space for apparatus maintenance & training activities
- Apparatus
 - Replace 60 Engine 3 – 1995 Pierce Dash 1250 gpm Pumper
 - Or order a new apparatus & keep Engine 3 as a reserve engine
 - Plan to replace 60 Engine 1 – 2004 Pierce Quantum 1250 gpm Pumper in ~10 years
 - Once ordered trucks have ~3 to 4 year lead time

PRESENTATION OF THE PROPOSED PAY STUDY

David Hill, Management Analyst at Piedmont Triad Regional Council, recounted it had been five (5) years since he had presented a similar report, and explained that the presentation before Council that evening

represented the culmination of approximately six (6) months of work. Mr. Hill stated that he would provide a broad overview of the study, discuss several specific classifications, and then review recommendations that resulted from the study's findings.

Mr. Hill explained that the study began in Town Hall, where he met with employees as well as department directors. Mr. Hill stated that the purpose of the study was to gather as much information as possible about each Town position so that those positions could then be compared to similar positions in other local governments. Mr. Hill noted that Valdese was a good example of a workforce in which employees wore multiple hats, explaining that smaller local governments typically required employees to perform more generalized duties while larger local governments tended to have more specialized positions.

Mr. Hill stated that the purpose of the study was to review the information collected and return to the Town Manager with recommendations regarding where Valdese should position itself in the labor market in order to remain competitive. Mr. Hill explained that he was not comparing Valdese to only the highest-paying or lowest-paying governments, but instead identified a geographic market by examining local governments located within approximately a one (1) hour drive of Valdese. Mr. Hill stated that he selected a representative sample from within that geographic area in order to provide Council with meaningful market information relevant to recruitment and retention.

Mr. Hill further stated that, as part of the study process, he met with employees and explained that he could only stand before Council and make recommendations if employees fully cooperated and provided the information he needed. Mr. Hill stated that each employee completed a twelve (12) page position description questionnaire describing in detail the duties, responsibilities, authorities, and percentage of time spent on each function. Mr. Hill noted that employees were given two (2) weeks to complete the questionnaire so they could fully consider everything they did over an extended period of time. Mr. Hill stated that, after the questionnaires were completed, supervisors and department directors were given an additional week to review their employees' responses to ensure the information was thorough and accurate.

Mr. Hill stated that, after collecting the questionnaires, he gathered market data and began analyzing both the Town's workforce and the workforce of the identified market. Mr. Hill explained that, based on his initial findings and interpretation of the data, he met several times with Town Manager Herms, Mr. Weichel, and Town Clerk Lail to review the data and discuss recommendations, which ultimately led to the presentation before Council.

Mr. Hill stated that the full scope of the study included not only the pay and classification analysis, but also a complete review of the Town's personnel policies, which remained ongoing, as well as a survey of employee benefits offered by the comparison governments. Mr. Hill stated that his presentation that evening would focus specifically on market pay comparisons, while the personnel policy review and benefit survey data would be discussed separately during a budget work session.

Mr. Hill explained that, at the beginning of the study, he received from Town Clerk Lail a printout of all Town employees, including their department, job title, pay, employment date, and date of appointment to their current position. Mr. Hill stated that he used that report to develop an initial interpretation of the Town's workforce data. Mr. Hill then described the concept of a mature workforce, stating that his definition of a mature workforce was one with an average years-of-employment between eight (8) and ten (10) years. Mr. Hill explained that, in a mature workforce with a sufficiently large sample size, he would generally expect to find approximately two-thirds (2/3) of employees in the middle one-third (1/3) of a distribution curve.

Mr. Hill stated that he first reviewed years of employment with the Town. Mr. Hill explained that the graph before Council showed the number of employees who came to work for the Town in each calendar year and were still employed by the Town. Mr. Hill stated that the graph also reflected recruitment and retention trends, with the highest bars appearing on the left side as the newest employees. Mr. Hill noted that the Town also had a number of employees with more than twenty (20) years of service, and stated that the Town's average years of employment was seven-point-one-five (7.15) years, which he said was slightly below his definition of a mature workforce. Mr. Hill further noted that nearly one-quarter (1/4) of Town employees had been with the Town less than two (2) years and that more than 50% of employees

had been with the Town less than five (5) years. Mr. Hill stated that, in his experience, this pattern was similar to what he observed in local governments across the state.

Mr. Hill then stated that he next reviewed how long employees had been in their current positions. Mr. Hill explained that the Town's average time in current position was four-point-nine-nine (4.99) years, which he said was probably a good average across the state. Mr. Hill noted that approximately 30% of Town employees had been in their current position less than two (2) years and almost 70% had been in their current position less than five (5) years. Mr. Hill stated that nothing in the first two (2) graphs appeared unusual to him.

Mr. Hill then stated that the third (3) graph, which reflected where employee salaries fell within the Town's current pay grade ranges, was unusual. Mr. Hill explained that, in his experience, he would normally expect to see a pattern more similar to the first two (2) graphs, with more employees near the lower end of the salary range. Mr. Hill stated that the graph indicated that the Town's pay grade ranges were not competitive with the identified market and that the Town was having to hire employees further up in the grade range, away from entry-level salaries. Mr. Hill noted that no employees were at minimum, no employees were within 2% of minimum, only one (1) employee fell within less than 5% of minimum, and only five (5) employees fell within less than 10% of minimum. Mr. Hill stated that, although the Town's pay grade structure had a 50% range from minimum to maximum, average salaries were already 19.61% above the minimum of their assigned ranges, which in his opinion suggested that the Town's grade ranges were not competitive.

Mr. Hill then stated that he next reviewed market data to determine whether it supported or refuted his initial interpretation. Mr. Hill explained that he would review three specific classifications as examples, but that every Town position had its own worksheet using the same format. Mr. Hill stated that the market governments used in the study represented those places where Town employees could potentially go to work without relocating, merely by changing commuting direction. Mr. Hill emphasized that no two (2) local government positions were exactly alike and that his comparisons were based on positions that were approximately an 85% match in primary duties and responsibilities.

Mr. Hill then reviewed the Police Officer I classification as the first example. Mr. Hill explained that everything above the blue line on the worksheet represented the market data and showed the minimum, midpoint, maximum, average salary, compa-ratio, and percent above minimum for similar positions in the comparison governments. Mr. Hill explained that the "compa-ratio" column reflected where salary stood in relation to the midpoint of the pay range, while the percent greater than minimum reflected how far the salary was above the range minimum. Mr. Hill stated that below the blue line was the Town's current data for Police Officer I, which was in Grade 17 with a minimum of \$40,708, a midpoint of \$50,885, and a maximum of \$61,062. Mr. Hill stated that, at the time the data was compiled, the Town's average salary for Police Officer I was \$47,120.

Mr. Hill stated that the average minimum salary in the identified market for Police Officer I was \$49,848, while the average market salary was \$52,904. Mr. Hill explained that the Town's average salary for the position was 10.9% below the market average and 9.5% below the market median. Mr. Hill further stated that the Town's pay grade range for that classification was 18.3% below the market average minimum. Mr. Hill explained that the worksheet also included a "3%" column, which projected where he expected market data to be on and after July 1 based on likely cost-of-living, performance, and similar adjustments. Mr. Hill stated that, based on those projections, he recommended moving Police Officer I from Grade 17 to Grade 21, which represented a four (4) grade or 20% movement and would place the position in a much more competitive market position.

Mr. Hill then reviewed Fire Engineer as a second example. Mr. Hill stated that the Town's pay grade range for Fire Engineer was 16.7% below the market average and 17.4% below the market median. Mr. Hill further stated that salaries for the position were 13.8% below the market average and 13.3% below the market median. Based on those findings, Mr. Hill stated that he recommended moving Fire Engineer from Grade 16 to Grade 20, again representing a four (4) grade or 20% movement.

Mr. Hill then reviewed Water Treatment Plant Operator C as a third example, noting that the "C" designation represented the entry-level operator classification under the state's licensing system, while

some local governments used numerical designations instead. Mr. Hill stated that for Water Treatment Plant Operator C, the Town was similarly in the range of 16% to 17% below the market on pay grade ranges and approximately 14% to 15% below the market in actual salaries.

Mr. Hill stated that, although only three (3) classifications were shown that evening, every Town position had been reviewed in the same manner. Mr. Hill stated that, when all positions were considered together, the Town's pay grade ranges were on average 14.1% below the market average and employee salaries were on average 10.3% below the market average.

Mr. Hill then reviewed the Town's existing pay plan structure. Mr. Hill stated that the Town currently used a 50% range from minimum to maximum salary within each pay grade and a 5% differential between grades. Mr. Hill explained that, based on his findings and recommendations, a number of positions would need to be moved into grades beyond the Town's current existing pay plan. Mr. Hill noted that the highlighted area on the proposed plan represented his recommendation to add additional grades at the high end of the pay plan. Mr. Hill stated that there might eventually be an opportunity to eliminate some lower-end grades, but recommended keeping the existing structure for now because the 50% range and 5% differential remained sound. Mr. Hill stated that the principal change he recommended was the addition of six (6), seven (7), or eight (8) grades at the upper end of the plan.

Mr. Hill then summarized his recommendations. Mr. Hill recommended that the Town consider adopting the proposed pay plan with the additional pay grade ranges and assign each Town position to the grade that was supported by the market comparison data. Mr. Hill further recommended an employee salary implementation method that recognized both years of service and time in position. Mr. Hill explained that the goal was not to disadvantage employees who may have been with the Town for a long period but had only recently moved into a new position. Mr. Hill stated that the system he recommended gave credit for both years of service and time in position and was designed so that an employee's salary would reach the midpoint of the assigned pay range in the seventh (7) year of either service and/or time in position.

Mr. Hill explained that the recommended salary approach also served as a mechanism to address salary compression by giving greater recognition to longer-serving employees and creating more separation between employees with significant service and newer employees. Mr. Hill noted that, under the proposed plan, a brand-new employee would start at or near the new minimum of the recommended competitive range rather than at the Town's current lower minimums.

Mr. Hill then reviewed the estimated implementation cost of the study recommendations. Mr. Hill stated that the salary adjustments alone would total approximately \$541,000. Mr. Hill further stated that payroll-associated costs, including FICA, retirement, and similar expenses, would add approximately 27%, or approximately \$146,000. Mr. Hill stated that the total estimated implementation cost would therefore be slightly more than \$687,000. Mr. Hill noted that the figure represented the total adjustment across all funding sources and could fluctuate up until the point of implementation as employees left, new employees were hired, or employees changed positions.

Councilman Ogle acknowledged Mr. Hill had presented material on Police and Fire positions, and asked if he had included parks and recreation and public works. Mr. Hill answered he had covered every position in every department.

Town Manager Herms disclosed to Council that the pay study had already been included in the start of the budget process, noting that when the budget came to Council, they would see the new salary schedule. Town Manager Herms continued that the Council would also see a breakdown, by department, which spoke to salary, benefits, and more. Town Manager Herms stated, unless Council informed staff not to, that the budget presentation would include the fully funded pay study as recommended by Mr. Hill.

Mr. Hill reported that he had the proposed pay plan, which would show one what paygrade he had recommended for every position, and that Town Clerk Lail had those copies.

TOWN OF VALDESE PAY STUDY REVIEW



MARCH 30, 2026

TOWN OF VALDESE MARKET STUDY REVIEW

EXPECTED STUDY OUTCOMES

TO DETERMINE AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS
REGARDING THE GEOGRAPHIC MARKET PLACEMENT FOR
THE TOWN OF VALDESE TO SUPPORT THE TOWN'S
EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION INITIATIVES.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

- EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION
- DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR PARTICIPATION
- WORKFORCE DATA COLLECTION
- COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WORKFORCE DATA
- INITIAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DEVELOPED
- INTERNAL EQUITY REVIEW
- FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS
- PRESENTATION OF STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

TOWN OF VALDESE MARKET STUDY REVIEW

SCOPE OF STUDY COMPONENTS

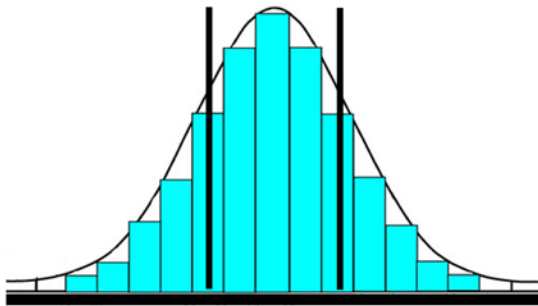
- PERSONNEL POLICIES REVIEW AND UPDATE
 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SURVEY
 - MARKET PAY COMPARISONS

WORKFORCE ANALYSIS AT BEGINNING OF STUDY

Standard Deviation “Bell” Curve

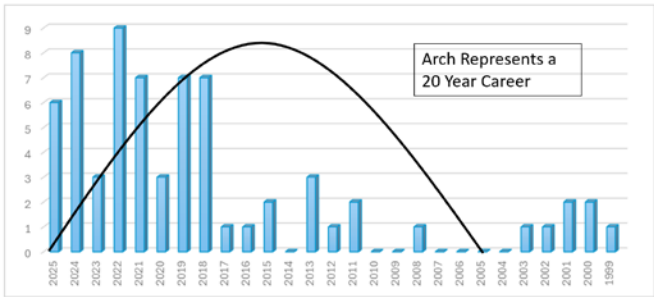
In a mature workforce, practically every element regarding employees’ pay and performance would expect to be within standard deviations and resemble the “Bell Curve”

Two-thirds of workforce, typically, should be located within the middle third of the measured metric.



DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYEES BY YEARS EMPLOYED

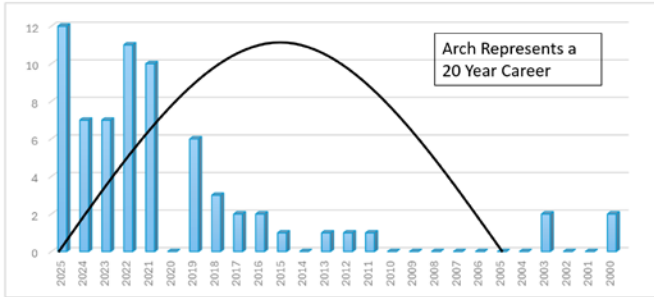
AVERAGE YEARS EMPLOYED: 7.15 YEARS



<2 Yrs	16	23.53%
<5 Yrs	35	51.47%
<10 Yrs	52	76.47%
AVG	7.15	

DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYEES BY YEAR IN POSITION

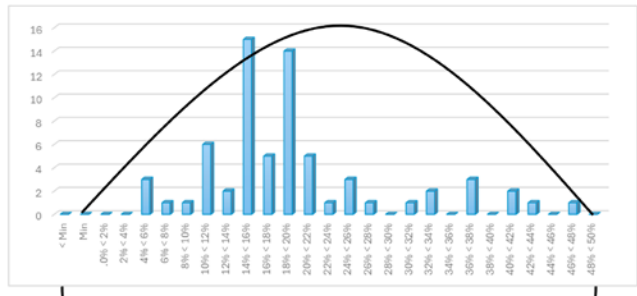
AVERAGE YEARS EMPLOYED: 4.99 YEARS



<2 Yrs	21	30.88%
<5 Yrs	47	69.12%
<10 Yrs	60	88.24%
AVG	4.99	

DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYEES BY % ABOVE GRADE MINIMUM

AVERAGE PERCENT ABOVE PAY GRADE MINIMUM: 19.61%



Min	0	0.00%
<2%	0	0.00%
<5%	1	1.49%
<10%	5	7.46%
AVG		19.61%

MARKET COMPARISON EXAMPLES

MARKET

Conover	Lincolnton	Saw Mills
Drexel	Maiden	Wilkesboro
Granite Falls	Morganton	Burke Co.
Hickory	Newton	Caldwell Co.
Lenoir	N. Wilkesboro	Catawba Co.

Police Officer I	3%	Grd	Min	Midpt	Max	Avg	Range	CR	% > Min	Comparison Titles
Conover			50,289	62,861	75,434	54,451	50.00%	0.87	8.28%	Police Officer
Drexel			47,428	54,828	62,229	50,659	31.21%	0.92	6.81%	Police Officer I
Granite Falls			47,559	57,070	66,582	49,729	40.00%	0.87	4.56%	Police Officer I
Hickory			58,716	64,588	70,460	60,407	20.00%	0.94	2.88%	Police Officer
Lenoir			48,904	58,684	68,465	50,251	40.00%	0.86	2.76%	Police Officer I
Lincolnton			50,732	63,416	76,099	52,147	50.00%	0.82	2.79%	Police Officer I
Maiden			51,635	64,544	77,453	53,185	50.00%	0.82	3.00%	Police Officer I
Marion			47,112	60,068	73,024	49,746	55.00%	0.83	5.59%	Police Officer
Morganton			49,772	62,214	74,657	53,214	50.00%	0.86	6.92%	PublicSafety Ofcr I
Newton			49,427	61,784	74,141	51,981	50.00%	0.84	5.17%	Police Officer
Wilkesboro			45,087	46,214	47,368	49,620	5.06%	1.07	10.05%	Police Officer I, II, III
Burke County			52,144	60,797	70,948	56,674	36.06%	0.93	8.69%	Deputy Sheriff
Caldwell County			44,106	55,547	66,989	50,424	51.88%	0.91	14.32%	Deputy Sheriff
Catawba County			54,967	72,831	90,696	58,164	65.00%	0.80	5.82%	Deputy Sheriff
Valdese		17	40,708	50,885	61,062	47,120	50.00%	0.93	15.75%	
Average	51,344	-18.3%	49,848	60,389	71,039	52,904	42.51%	0.88	6.13%	-10.9%
Median	51,087	-17.9%	49,600	61,291	71,986	52,064	45.13%	0.85	4.97%	-9.5%
Recommendation		21	50,965	63,706	76,448		50.00%			

MARCH 30, 2026, MB#33

Fire Engineer	3%	Grd	Min	Midpt	Max	Avg	Range	CR	% > Min	Comparison Titles
Conover			43,296	53,025	62,754	47,185	44.94%	0.89	8.98%	Fire Engineer I
Drexel			47,428	54,828	62,229		31.21%			Fire Engineer VACANT
Granite Falls			43,137	51,764	60,392	43,784	40.00%	0.85	1.50%	Fire Engineer
Hickory			50,318	62,898	75,477	60,072	50.00%	0.96	19.38%	Fire Apparatus Oper I
Lenoir			44,331	53,197	62,063	47,802	40.00%	0.90	7.83%	Fire Driver/Operator
Lincolnton			50,678	63,348	76,017	55,036	50.00%	0.87	8.60%	Fire Engineer
Maiden			46,835	58,543	70,251	52,225	50.00%	0.89	11.51%	Fire Engineer
Marion			47,112	60,068	73,024	51,203	55.00%	0.85	8.68%	Fire Engineer
Morganton			45,144	56,430	67,716	53,237	50.00%	0.94	17.93%	Fire Engineer
Newton			47,089	58,862	70,634	49,946	50.00%	0.85	6.07%	Fire Engineer
Wilkesboro						47,633				Firefighter Engineer
Valdese		16	38,770	48,462	58,155	43,823	50.00%	0.90	13.03%	
Average	47,933	-16.7%	46,537	57,296	68,056	50,812	46.24%	0.89	9.19%	-13.8%
Median	48,371	-17.4%	46,962	57,487	68,984	50,575	46.89%	0.88	7.69%	-13.3%
Recommendation		20	48,538	60,673	72,807		50.00%			

WTP Operator C	3%	Grd	Min	Midpt	Max	Avg	Range	CR	% > Min	Comparison Titles
Granite Falls			39,127	46,952	54,777	41,912	40.00%	0.89	7.12%	WTP Operator I
Hickory			41,379	53,793	66,207	46,368	60.00%	0.86	12.06%	WTP Operator I
Lenoir			35,539	42,647	49,755	36,613	40.00%	0.86	3.02%	WTP Operator C
Lincolnton			39,708	49,635	59,562	42,803	50.00%	0.86	7.79%	WTP Operator C
Marion			36,913	47,064	57,215	38,001	55.00%	0.81	2.95%	WTP Operator
Morganton			38,997	48,747	58,496	41,357	50.00%	0.85	6.05%	WTP Operator C
Newton			38,727	48,409	58,091	42,267	50.00%	0.87	9.14%	WTP Operator C
Wilkesboro			36,598	38,427	40,348	46,030	10.25%	1.20	25.77%	WTP Operator I
Valdese		12	31,896	39,870	47,843	35,785	50.00%	0.90	12.19%	
Average	39,525	-16.9%	38,373	46,959	55,556	41,919	44.78%	0.89	9.24%	-14.6%
Median	40,028	-17.9%	38,862	47,737	57,653	42,090	48.35%	0.88	8.31%	-15.0%
Recommendation		15	38,031	47,539	57,046		50.00%			

OVERALL AVERAGES

- PAY GRADE RANGES: 14.1% BELOW MARKET AVERAGE
- EMPLOYEE SALARIES: 10.3% BELOW MARKET AVERAGE

REVIEW OF PAY PLAN

CURRENT PAY PLAN

Pay Grade	Min	Market	Max	Range	MinDiff	MdptDiff	MaxDiff
10	28,930	34,441	41,329	42.86%			
11	30,377	37,971	45,565	50.00%	5.00%	10.25%	10.25%
12	31,896	39,870	47,843	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
13	33,491	41,864	50,236	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
14	35,165	43,956	52,747	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
15	36,924	46,154	55,385	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
16	38,770	48,462	58,155	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
17	40,708	50,885	61,062	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
18	42,744	53,429	64,116	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
19	44,881	56,101	67,321	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
20	47,125	58,906	70,687	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
21	49,481	61,851	74,221	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
22	51,955	64,944	77,933	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
23	54,552	68,191	81,829	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
24	57,280	71,600	85,920	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
25	60,145	75,181	90,217	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
26	63,151	78,939	94,728	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
27	66,309	82,886	99,463	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
28	69,625	87,031	104,437	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
29	73,106	91,383	109,659	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
30	76,761	95,951	115,141	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
31	80,599	100,749	120,899	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
32	84,629	105,785	126,942	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
33	88,859	111,074	133,288	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
34	93,302	116,627	139,953	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
35	97,967	122,459	146,951	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
36	102,865	128,582	154,298	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
37	108,009	135,011	162,013	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
38	113,409	141,761	170,114	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
39	119,080	148,849	178,619	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
40	125,034	156,292	187,550	50.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%

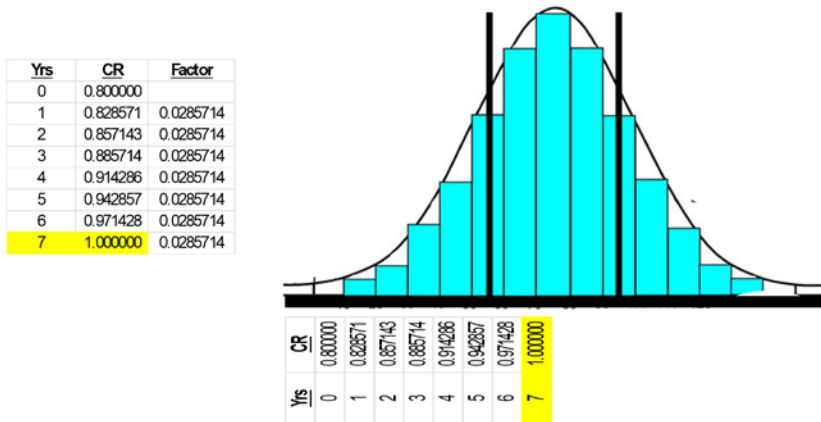
RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ADOPT RECOMMENDED PAY PLAN (SLIDE #17)
- ASSIGN EACH POSITION TO THE MARKET SUPPORTED PAY GRADE.
- ESTABLISH EMPLOYEE SALARIES UTILIZING THE IMPLEMENTATION OPTION RECOMMENDATION BASED ON RECOGNITION OF AN EMPLOYEE'S YEARS OF SERVICE AND TIME IN CURRENT POSITION WITH THE FOCUS OF AN EMPLOYEE'S SALARY REACHING MIDPOINT IN THEIR 7TH YEAR OF SERVICE AND/OR TIME IN CURRENT POSITION .

COMPA-RATIO MODEL

EMPLOYEE'S SALARY REACHES MIDPOINT (MARKET RATE) IN 7TH YEAR



IMPLEMENTATION COSTS EQUAL WEIGHT TO YOS & TIP

IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRED FUNDING:

Salaries: \$541,439 (ALL FUNDS)
 (27%) FICA/Retirement/401(k)/etc. \$146,189 (ALL FUNDS)
 Total Implementation Costs* \$687,627 (ALL FUNDS)

*The specific required funding requirements will fluctuate up to the time of approval and implementation as employees terminate, are employed, are promoted, etc. The required funding amount will also fluctuate slightly based on the specific percentage required for FICA, Retirement, 401(k), and other payroll associated costs.

THANK YOU
I LOOK FORWARD TO DISCUSSION AND ANSWERING
QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.

Councilwoman Radabaugh made a motion to direct Staff to include funding of the pay study in the FY26-27 budget to support recruitment and retention efforts. Seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Councilwoman Zimmerman asked if the recommendations would be in the budget presented at the budget work day in April. Town Manager Herms responded in the affirmative and clarified that Council was not voting to implement the pay study at that time, continuing that the motion present on the floor was for Staff to put them in the budget recommendation.

The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARING – APPROVED RIGHT-OF-WAY CLOSURE

Mayor Huffman declared the public hearing for the Faet Street right-of-way closure open at 8:30 p.m. and opened the floor to Mr. Michael Rapp, Town Planner. Mr. Rapp stated that the subject right-of-way was approximately one hundred sixty (160) feet in length and twenty-six (26) feet in width. Mr. Rapp explained that the portion of right-of-way had never been opened, improved, or used for vehicular or pedestrian purposes and did not serve a current or future public transportation purpose.

Mr. Rapp then identified the subject area on a map and explained that, as one traveled down Faet Street into the curve toward Praley Street Southwest, the area appeared to have originally been intended as a T-shaped intersection, though that connection had never been completed following earlier planning of the area.

Mr. Rapp then reviewed the procedural requirements for Council to consider closure of the right-of-way. Mr. Rapp stated that Council was first required to adopt a Resolution of Intent and call for a public hearing, which had occurred on February 9. Mr. Rapp explained that the Resolution of Intent was then required to be published once a week for four (4) consecutive weeks prior to the hearing, that a copy of the resolution had to be sent to all owners of adjoining property along the street or alley, and that notice had to be prominently posted in at least two (2) places along the subject right-of-way. Mr. Rapp stated that, following completion of those requirements, Council would conduct the public hearing and could then determine whether or not to adopt an order closing the street or alley, which would subsequently be filed with the Register of Deeds if approved.

Mr. Rapp then referenced the Resolution of Intent adopted on February 9 and reviewed the mailed notice requirements. Mr. Rapp stated that mailings had been sent to all adjoining property owners identified on the map and noted that proof of those mailings was included in the record. Mr. Rapp explained that the mailer included information regarding the proposed right-of-way closure, the date and time of the public hearing, the adopted Resolution of Intent, and a map outlining the subject area.

Mr. Rapp further stated that the required newspaper advertisement had been published once a week for four consecutive weeks on March 7, March 14, March 21, and March 28. Mr. Rapp also stated that signs had been posted and remained posted leading up to the public hearing.

Mr. Rapp then reviewed the standards Council was to consider during the public hearing. Mr. Rapp stated that the applicable statute provided that any person may be heard on the question of whether or not the proposed closing would be detrimental to the public interest or to the property rights of any individual. Mr. Rapp further stated that Council was required to be satisfied that the closing was not contrary to the public interest and that no individual owning property in the vicinity of the street or alley, or in the subdivision in which it was located, would be deprived of a reasonable means of ingress and egress to their property.

Mr. Rapp then explained that, if the closure were approved following the public hearing, Council would be asked to adopt both an Order of Closing and a Declaration of Retention of Utility Easements. Mr. Rapp stated that municipal infrastructure existed beneath the right-of-way and that, while this did not prevent closure of the area, the Town would retain all existing and future utility easements, whether public or private and whether located within, upon, under, or above the portion being closed, in order to protect Town infrastructure.

Mr. Rapp concluded his presentation and stated that he would be happy to answer any questions, after which the public would have an opportunity to be heard.

Mayor Huffman asked if there was anyone present wishing to come forward and speak in regard to the right-of-way closure. No one came forward.

**PUBLIC HEARING –
PROPOSED RIGHT-OF-WAY CLOSURE**

Faet Street Southwest, Valdese, NC 28690

Town Council Regular Meeting - 3/30/26

PROPOSED RIGHT-OF-WAY CLOSURE STATS

- Right-of-way approximately 160' x 26'
- This portion of right-of-way has never been opened, improved, or used for vehicular or pedestrian travel and does not serve a current or future public transportation purpose.



REQUIRED STEPS

- Council adopts resolution of intent and calls for public hearing.
- Resolution must be published 1x a week for 4 consecutive weeks.
- Copy of the resolution must be sent to all owners of property adjoining the street or alley.
- A notice of the closing and public hearing shall be prominently posted in at least two places along the street or alley.
- Public hearing occurs.
- Council may adopt an order closing the street or alley.
- Shall then be filed with the Register of Deeds.

RESOLUTION OF INTENT TO PERMANENTLY CLOSE UNOPENED RIGHT-OF-WAY OF FAET STREET SW

WHEREAS, the Town of Valdese has received a request from an adjoining property owner to permanently close an unopened portion of a right-of-way identified as Fast Street SW (the "Unopened ROW"), said Unopened ROW being located to the south of Burke County PIN: 2733825079 and to the north of Burke County PIN: 2733814633; and

WHEREAS, the Unopened ROW extends beyond the existing improved street through an undeveloped property and serves no current or future public transportation purpose; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of the Town of Valdese finds that the Unopened ROW is not needed for public use and that its closure would promote orderly land development, clarify property boundaries, and eliminate an unnecessary right-of-way from the Town's inventory; and

WHEREAS, N.C.G.S. 160A-299 authorizes municipalities to permanently close any street or portion thereof that is not needed for public purposes, following proper notice and public hearing; and

WHEREAS, adoption of this Resolution of Intent is the first step in the statutory process and establishes the date, time, and place of a public hearing to consider the proposed closure.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council of the Town of Valdese that:

1. **Intent to Close:** The Town Council hereby declares its intent to permanently close the Unopened ROW, more particularly described as follows:

The southeastern portion of Fast Street SW being located to the south of Burke County PIN: 2733825079 and to the north of Burke County PIN: 2733814633, having an approximate length of 160 feet. The road segment lies within the corporate limits of the Town of Valdese.

2. **Public Hearing:** A public hearing on the proposed permanent closure of the Unopened ROW shall be held by the Town Council at 6:00 p.m. on March 30, 2026, at the Town of Valdese Town Hall located at 102 Massel Avenue, Valdese, North Carolina, at which time all interested persons shall be heard on the question of whether the proposed closure is contrary to the public interest or would deprive any property owner of reasonable means of ingress and egress.

3. **Notice of Hearing:** The Town Clerk is directed to:

- a. Publish this Resolution of Intent once each week for four (4) consecutive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation prior to the public hearing;

- b. Post a copy of this Resolution of Intent at two or more prominent locations along the unopened portion of Fast Street SW proposed for closure for a minimum of twenty (20) days prior to the hearing; and

- c. Mail a copy of this Resolution of Intent by certified mail to all property owners adjoining the portion of Fast Street SW proposed for closure;

4. **Purpose:** The purpose of this Resolution of Intent and the subsequent public hearing is to allow all interested persons an opportunity to be heard on the question of whether closing the Unopened ROW would be contrary to the public interest or would deprive any individual owning property in the vicinity of reasonable access to their property.

5. **Further Action:** Following the public hearing, the Town Council may adopt an Order to Permanently Close the Unopened ROW of Fast Street SW if it determines that the closing is not contrary to the public interest and that no property owner will be deprived of reasonable access as a result of the closure.

ADOPTED and APPROVED this the 9th day of February, 2026.


Keith Huffman
Mayor

ATTEST:


Jessica Jail
Town Clerk



MAILINGS SENT TO THE FOLLOWING PROPERTIES.



MAILER

- Enclosed within this mailer:
 - Information about the RoW Closure
 - Public Hearing Information
 - The adopted resolution
 - A map outlining the area proposed for closure.

Town of Valdese
102 Mansel Avenue
Valdese, North Carolina 28690
(828) 879-2124
February 10, 2026



RE: Notice of Public Hearing – Proposed Closure of Unopened Portion of Fast Street SW

Dear Property Owner,

The Town of Valdese is providing this letter as official notice that the Valdese Town Council has adopted the enclosed Resolution of Intent to Permanently Close an Unopened Portion of Fast Street SW, in accordance with N.C. General Statute 160A-209.

You are receiving this notice because Town records indicate that you own property adjoining, or located in the immediate vicinity of, the portion of Fast Street SW proposed for closure. The section proposed for closure is an unopened and unimproved segment of right-of-way located at the Southern most portion of Fast Street Southwest.

As required by state law, the Town Council will hold a public hearing to receive comments and input regarding whether the proposed closure is contrary to the public interest or would deprive any property owner of reasonable means of ingress and egress.

Public Hearing Information

Date: March 30, 2026

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Location: Council Chambers - Valdese Town Hall - 102 Mansel Avenue, Valdese, NC 28690

All interested persons are invited to attend and will be given an opportunity to be heard.

If you have questions prior to the hearing or would like additional information, please contact the Town of Valdese Planning Department at (828) 879-2124 or planning@valdesenc.gov.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael Rapp
Valdese Town Planner

Enclosure:

- Resolution of Intent to Permanently Close Unopened Right-of-Way of Fast Street SW
- Map of Proposed Right-of-Way Closure Area (Highlighted Lime Green)

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

- As outlined by statute, the Resolution was published once a week, for four consecutive weeks, prior to the hearing.
- Advertisement was conducted on:
 - March 7, 2026
 - March 14, 2026
 - March 21, 2026
 - March 28, 2026

RESOLUTION OF INTENT TO PERMANENTLY CLOSE UNOPENED RIGHT-OF-WAY OF FAST STREET SW

WHEREAS, the Town of Valdese has received a request from an adjoining property owner to permanently close an unopened portion of a right-of-way identified as Fast Street SW (the "Unopened ROW") and known to the Town of Burke County, NC, as being located in the north of Burke County PIN 273202019 and to the north of Burke County PIN 273201403; and

WHEREAS, the Unopened ROW extends beyond the existing improved street through an undeveloped property and serves no current or future public transportation purpose; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of the Town of Valdese finds that the Unopened ROW is not needed for public use and that its closure would promote orderly land development, clarify property boundaries, and eliminate an unnecessary right-of-way from the Town's inventory; and

WHEREAS, N.C.G.S. 160A-209 authorizes municipalities to permanently close any

...the Town of Valdese, North Carolina, is hereby notified that the Town Council has adopted the enclosed Resolution of Intent to Permanently Close an Unopened Portion of Fast Street SW, in accordance with N.C. General Statute 160A-209. You are receiving this notice because Town records indicate that you own property adjoining, or located in the immediate vicinity of, the portion of Fast Street SW proposed for closure. The section proposed for closure is an unopened and unimproved segment of right-of-way located at the Southern most portion of Fast Street Southwest. As required by state law, the Town Council will hold a public hearing to receive comments and input regarding whether the proposed closure is contrary to the public interest or would deprive any property owner of reasonable means of ingress and egress. The public hearing will be held on March 30, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Valdese Town Hall, 102 Mansel Avenue, Valdese, NC 28690. All interested persons are invited to attend and will be given an opportunity to be heard. If you have questions prior to the hearing or would like additional information, please contact the Town of Valdese Planning Department at (828) 879-2124 or planning@valdesenc.gov. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Sincerely, Michael Rapp, Valdese Town Planner. Enclosure: Resolution of Intent to Permanently Close Unopened Right-of-Way of Fast Street SW; Map of Proposed Right-of-Way Closure Area (Highlighted Lime Green).

SIGN POSTS



- Any person may be heard on the question of whether or not the closing would be detrimental to the public interest, or the property rights of any individual.
- Council shall be satisfied that the closing is not contrary to the public interest, and that no individual owning property in the vicinity of the street or alley or in the subdivision in which it is located would thereby be deprived of reasonable means of ingress and egress to his property.

ORDER OF CLOSING AND RETENTION OF UTILITY EASEMENTS

- These are what would follow the public hearing if approved.
- It would then be filed with the Register of Deeds and the alley would be closed.

[illegible]

DECLARATION OF RETENTION OF UTILITY EASEMENTS

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 160A-295, when a city or town proposes to permanently close a street or public alley, the council shall adopt a resolution declaring its intent and setting a public hearing; and

WHEREAS, the statute requires that notice of the hearing shall be published once a week for four consecutive weeks, mailed by certified or registered mail to adjoining property owners as shown in county tax records, and posted in at least two conspicuous locations along the street or alley; and

WHEREAS, following the public hearing, the council may order the closure upon determining that the closure is not contrary to the public interest and does not deprive any property owner in the vicinity of reasonable means of ingress and egress. A certified copy of the order must be filed with the county register of deeds; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of the Town of Valdese has complied with the requirements of N.C.G.S. § 160A-299 in connection with the proposed permanent closure of an unopened portion of public right-of-way known as First Street SW (the "Unopened ROW") located within the corporate limits of the Town of Valdese to the south of Burke County PIN: 2733825079 and to the north of Burke County PIN: 2733814633; and

WHEREAS, after providing notice and conducting a duly advertised public hearing, the Town Council of the Town of Valdese has determined that the permanent closure of the Unopened ROW is not contrary to the public interest and will not deprive any property owner in the vicinity of reasonable means of ingress and egress; and

WHEREAS, N.C.G.S. § 160A-299(g) authorizes a municipality, after public hearing, to retain public and private utility easements within a permanently closed street or right-of-way upon approval of the declaration specifically describing such easements; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of the Town of Valdese finds that retaining utility easements within the area of the permanently closed right-of-way is necessary and in the public interest in order to preserve existing and future utility infrastructure and access thereto.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT DECLARED by the Town Council of the Town of Valdese that:

- Retention of Utility Easements:** The Town of Valdese hereby expressly retains all existing and future utility easements, whether public or private, within, upon, under, and across the portion of First Street SW that is permanently closed as more particularly described herein.
- Description of Area Subject to Easements:** The utility easements retained by this Declaration apply to the southeastern portion of First Street SW, being an unopened right-of-way located to the south of Burke County PIN: 2733825079 and to the north of Burke County PIN: 2733814633, extending from the southeastern property line of Burke County

PIN 2733827121 to that portion of First Street SW identified as a public paved roadway on the "Town of Valdese, Burke County, North Carolina, 2022 Parcel Bid Map," dated June 30, 2022, and lying within the corporate limits of the Town of Valdese and being described on Exhibit A attached hereto for a more particular description.

- Scope of Easements:** The retained utility easements include, but are not limited to, the right to construct, reconstruct, install, operate, inspect, maintain, repair, replace, relocate, and remove utility facilities of any kind, including without limitation water, sewer, stormwater, electric, gas, telecommunications, fiber optic, cable, and related infrastructure, together with reasonable rights of ingress and egress for such purposes.
- Running with the Land:** The utility easements retained herein shall run with the land and shall be binding upon and inure to the benefit of the Town of Valdese, public and private utility providers, and their respective successors and assigns, notwithstanding the permanent closure of the right-of-way and any subsequent conveyance, subdivision, or reconveyance of the underlying property.
- Recordation:** This Declaration of Retention of Utility Easements shall be recorded with the Burke County Register of Deeds and shall be referenced in the Order Permanently Closing the Unopened ROW.

ADOPTED AND APPROVED this ____ day of _____ 2026.

TOWN OF VALDESE

By: Keith Huffman
Tide Mayor

ATTEST:

Jessica Lusk, Town Clerk

EXHIBIT A

BEFOREME at a place and time being the southeast corner of Burke Properties, LLC as a member in Burke County, North Carolina, I, the undersigned, being a duly qualified and sworn Notary Public for the State of North Carolina, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the Declaration of Retention of Utility Easements as the same appears in the records of the Burke County Register of Deeds. In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of my office, at Valdese, North Carolina, this ____ day of _____, 2026.

*Also mailed to petitioner at least 5 days prior.

ANY QUESTIONS?

- If not the public hearing may proceed.

Mayor Huffman closed the public hearing at 8:34 p.m.

Councilwoman Zimmerman made a motion to close the right-of-way that had been described. Seconded by Councilman Ogle. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

Councilwoman Zimmerman made a motion to adopt the Declaration of Utility Easements associated with the right-of-way closure. Seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Lowman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

APPROVED - RESOLUTION APPROVING UPSET BID PROCESS – RIGHT-OF-WAY CLOSURE

Mr. Weichel reported this bid was for the Town's half of the right-of-way which was just closed by Council. Mr. Weichel explained that when a right-of-way is closed, the properties extend out and meet in the center line. Mr. Weichel disclosed that the property was approximately thirteen (13) feet wide and one-hundred-sixty (160) feet long, making up approximately .05 acres.

Mr. Weichel noted there was no appraised value for the property as it was a right-of-way. Mr. Weichel stated the Town had an offer of \$500 for that section of property and had received the required bid deposit.

Mr. Weichel stated that the process included authorizing the upset bid, then advertising it for ten (10) days; continuing if no bids were received, the Council, at its next meeting, could consider a resolution to authorize

the sale of the property. Mr. Weichel added it was important to remember that the sale was not occurring at this moment in time.

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING UPSET BID PROCESS ON
ROW Faet St SW, VALDESE, NC**

WHEREAS, the Town of Valdese (the "Town") is the owner of that certain tract or parcel of real property (the "Property") situated in Burke County, Valdese, North Carolina commonly known as ROW Faet St SW, Valdese, North Carolina, the southeastern portion of Faet St. SW located to the south of Burke County PIN 2733825079 and to the north of Burke County PIN 2733814633, having an approximate length of 160 feet and an approximate width of 13 feet and lying within the corporate limits of the Town of Valdese;

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. §160A-269 a city or town may receive, solicit, or negotiate an offer to purchase property and advertise it for upset bid. When the offer is made and council proposes to accept it, the council shall require the offeror to deposit five percent (5%) of his bid with the city clerk, and shall publish a notice of the offer. The notice shall contain a general description of the property, the amount and terms of the offer, and a notice that within ten (10) days any person may raise the bid by not less than ten percent (10%) of the first one thousand dollars (\$1,000) and five percent (5%) of the remainder. When a bid is raised, the bidder shall deposit with the city clerk five percent (5%) of the increased bid, and the clerk shall re-advertise the offer at the increased bid. This procedure shall be repeated until no further qualifying upset bids are received, at which time the council may accept the offer and sell the property to the highest bidder. The council may at any time reject any and all offers;

WHEREAS, on March 12, 2026, Hook Properties, LLC offered to purchase the Property from the Town for five hundred and 00/100 Dollars (\$500.00) and deposited fifty and 00/100 Dollars (\$50.00), representing ten percent (10%) of his bid.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. Town Council authorizes sale of the Property through the upset bid procedure of N.C. Gen. Stat. §160A-269. The Town Clerk shall cause a notice of the proposed sale to be published. The notice shall contain a general description of the Property, the amount and terms of the offer, and a notice that within ten (10) days any person may raise the bid by not less than ten percent (10%) of the first one thousand dollars (\$1,000) and five percent (5%) of the remainder.
2. Persons wishing to upset the offer that have been received shall submit a sealed bid with their offer to the office of the Town Clerk within ten (10) days after the notice of sale is published. At the conclusion of the 10-day period, the Town Clerk shall open the bids, if any, and the highest such bid will become the new offer. If there is more than one bid in the highest amount, the first such bid received will become the new offer.
3. If a qualifying higher bid is received, the Town Clerk shall cause a new notice of upset bid to be published, and shall continue to do so until a 10-day period has passed without any qualifying upset bid having been received. At that time, the amount of the final high bid shall be reported to the Town Council. A qualifying higher bid is one that raises the existing offer by not less than ten percent (10%) of the first \$1,000.00 of that offer and five percent (5%) of the remainder of that offer.

4. A qualifying higher bid must also be accompanied by a deposit in the amount of five percent (5%) of the bid. The deposit may be made by cashier's check or by certified check. The Town will return the deposit on any bid not accepted and will return the deposit on an offer subject to upset if a qualifying higher bid is received. The Town will return the deposit of the final high bidder at closing.

5. The terms of the final sale are that:

- (a) the Town Council must approve the final high offer before the sale is closed, which it will do within sixty (60) days after the final upset bid period has passed;
- (b) the buyer must pay the purchase price in certified funds at the time of closing;
- (c) the Property shall be sold "as is" and subject to all existing easements, restrictions, utility easements and right of ways of record;
- (d) the Town will reserve easements for all town utility lines located on or under the Property; and
- (e) the Property shall be conveyed by special warranty deed.

6. The Town reserves the right to withdraw the Property from sale at any time before the final high bid is accepted and the right to reject all bids at any time.

THIS RESOLUTION IS ADOPTED this _____ day of _____, 2026.

THE TOWN OF VALDESE,
a North Carolina Municipal Corporation

[SEAL]

ATTEST:

By: _____
Keith Huffman, Mayor

Jessica Lail, Town Clerk

Councilman Ogle made a motion to authorize the upset bid process. Seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Lowman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

APPOINTMENTS TO THE BOARDS/COMMITTEES/COMMISSIONS

Mayor Huffman stated that the town had appointments to reappoint to the Drug and Homeless Task Force. Mayor Huffman disclosed that recommendations to serve on the task force for the upcoming year included the appointment of Kimberly Wilson and Officer Sean Link. Mayor Huffman noted that if the appointments were approved, they would fill the vacancies which were created by the departures of Annette Skidmore and Sergeant William Beck.

Mayor Huffman stated that the task force also recommended the reappointment of current members, Reverend Josh Lail, Councilwoman Ward, Mark Queen and Police Chief Marc Sharpe, to serve an additional year.

Mayor Pro Tem Lowman made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments. Seconded by Councilwoman Zimmerman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

Mayor Huffman stated that the next appointment to be made was for the Valdese ABC Board. Mayor Huffman explained that Mr. Weichel was previously appointed to complete the unexpired term for the Chair of the Valdese ABC Board while he served as interim Town Manager. Mayor Huffman reported that Mr. Weichel's term was set to expire on April 1, 2026.

Mayor Huffman announced that the ABC Board recommended the appointment of Town Manager Herms to serve as the Valdese ABC Board Chair. Mayor Huffman continued that if Town Manager Herms were appointed, his term would expire on April 1, 2029.

Councilwoman Ward made a motion to approve the appointment. Seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Lowman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Town Manager Todd Herms reported:

MARCH 30, 2026, MB#33

Numerous events are scheduled throughout the month of April. An Event Calendar is included in the reading materials for your review and provides details on upcoming activities.

Members of the Valdese Town Council will attend the Town & State Dinner in Hickory, NC on April 1, 2026. A quorum may be present, but no Town business will be discussed.

Town Offices Close on Friday, April 3, 2026, in Observance of the Easter Holiday

Annual Town Council Budget Retreat – Tuesday, April 14, 2026, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., in the Community Room, Valdese Town Hall

Members of the Valdese Town Council will attend the Annual WPCOG Dinner in Hickory, NC on April 16, 2026. A quorum may be present, but no Town business will be discussed

FY 26-27 Budget Presentation for Council is scheduled for Monday, May 11, 2026, 5:00 p.m., Council Chambers, Valdese Town Hall

Next Regular Council meeting scheduled for Monday, May 11, 2026, 6:00 p.m., Council Chambers, Valdese Town Hall

MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that there was a Burke County Public School Board meeting at the present moment that Council obviously was not able to attend, continuing that she had a statement she would like to make. Councilwoman Radabaugh spoke about the proposal of the integration of Hallyburton Academy with Draughn High School. Councilwoman Radabaugh asserted that she was not just speaking as a concerned parent, but as a citizen who cared deeply for each student, family, and the community which the decision would impact. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that Hallyburton Academy served a critical purpose, providing structure and a supportive environment for students, who often faced behavioral and academic challenges, and needed a different setting succeed. Councilwoman Radabaugh expressed that this aforementioned environment existed for a reason, and that simply placing those students into a traditional high school setting did not eliminate those challenges, it shifted them. Councilwoman Radabaugh added that her concerns were centered around safety, discipline, academic impact, and the strain on the community's resources.

Councilwoman Radabaugh began by discussing safety, noting that parents sent their children to school each day, trusting that they would be in a secure and stable environment. Councilwoman Radabaugh continued that integrating two (2) very different student populations without a clear, detailed, plan, raised real concerns about whether safety could be maintained for all students and staff. Councilwoman Radabaugh added that it also raised concerns about the potential increase in incidents that could require involvement from the Town's first responders. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that more calls to Draughn High School meant additional strain on law enforcement and emergency services, resources which the community depended on every day.

Councilwoman Radabaugh then spoke to discipline, expressing that alternate schools operated with different expectations, structures, and supports. Councilwoman Radabaugh asserted that bringing those students into a traditional high school setting risked overwhelming administrators and teachers, who were already working hard to maintain order and consistency. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that without proper resources in place, discipline issues could increase, affecting the entire student body.

Councilwoman Radabaugh moved to her third point, which was that academic impact, noting that teacher to student ratios would inevitably increase. Councilwoman Radabaugh added that large classroom sizes would lead to less individual attention, more classroom disruptions, and fewer opportunities for students to fully engage and succeed. Councilwoman Radabaugh expressed that students who were there to learn, prepare for college, and enter the workforce, deserved an environment that supported focus and achievement.

Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that, at the same time, students from Hallyburton deserved the special attention which helped them succeed, attention which may be diluted in a larger, traditional, setting.

Councilwoman Radabaugh asserted that it was not about labeling, or excluding, any group of students, adding that every child mattered and deserved the right environment to succeed. Councilwoman Radabaugh stated that one size did not fit all, and that removing a system designed to meet specific needs risked failing everyone involved. Councilwoman Radabaugh continued that the decision would ripple through the community and affect family confidence, teacher retention, public safety resources, and the overall perception of the schools. Councilwoman Radabaugh declared that these were not small consequences and urged the Council to take a look at how the action would affect the Town, to ask the hard questions, and to ensure that the decision was being made with a full understanding of the long-term impact. Councilwoman Radabaugh voiced that once one changed the foundation of the schools, they did not just affect one (1) group of students, they changed the experience, the safety, and the opportunities for every child who walked through the school's doors.

Councilwoman Radabaugh reported that the decision had been tabled by Burke County Public Schools until April 27, 2026 and asked the public to reach out to their board members with questions about funding. Councilwoman Radabaugh continued that there was no extra funding proposed, which was why it had never been presented to the public for discussion.

Councilwoman Zimmerman acknowledged the passing of the Town's Former Fire Chief, Ernest Bertalot, whose services were on that day. Councilwoman Zimmerman reported that Former Chief Bertalot was Chief from 1988 to 1998, adding that he had been with the Fire Service in Valdese for decades. Councilwoman Zimmerman continued that Former Chief Bertalot was a fine individual and a fine servant to the Town of Valdese.

Mayor Pro Tem Lowman gave a shout out to Old Colony Players (OCP), a local theater group. Mayor Pro Tem Lowman stated that OCP had done an outstanding production of Cinderella over the last two (2) weekends, adding that she hoped if one got the chance that they would support their next production, which was an outdoor drama titled From This Day Forward, during July and August. Mayor Pro Tem Lowman asked for support for this local community theater at OCP.

Councilwoman Ward asked the public to share the State of the Department presentations, as they had done with the previous month's presentation. Councilwoman Ward expressed the importance of sharing these presentations as they helped people understand the decisions being made during the budget process. Councilwoman Ward continued that it would help individuals give their input. Councilwoman Ward urged citizens to be as involved as possible, and thanked Kimberly Wilson and Officer Link for joining the Task Force, stating she looked forward to working with them.

Mayor Huffman thanked those who came to Council meetings, and encouraged the public to come, both physically and virtually. Mayor Huffman expressed that this involvement meant a lot, that the Town was their Town, and that the Council was their Council.

At 8:48 pm, Mayor Pro Tem Lowman made a motion to go into Closed Session under NC General Statute 143-318.11(a)(6) to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee and NC General Statute 143-318.11(a)(3) to consult with an attorney retained by the Town in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the Town attorney and the Town Council, which privilege is hereby acknowledged. Seconded by Councilwoman Zimmerman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

At 9:30 pm, Councilwoman Ward made a motion to go out of Closed Session, seconded by Councilwoman Zimmerman. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

Councilwoman Radabaugh made a motion to grant the Town Manager and Town Attorney authority to negotiate the development agreement, with Burke County, on the Bluff's project, and to authorize the mayor to execute that agreement upon approval. Seconded by Councilwoman Ward. The vote was unanimous and the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT: At 9:33 p.m., there being no further business to come before Council, Councilwoman Zimmerman made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Lowman. The vote was unanimous.

Town Clerk

Mayor

mr