

Verde Valley Leadership Training

Shaping the Future of Yavapai County and the Valley Verde

September 15, 2022 – Prescott, AZ

INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2022, approximately 20 high-school age youth from across the Verde Valley met at Yavapai Community College, Verde Valley campus, to participate in leadership training utilizing Arizona Town Hall techniques to weigh in on the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan 2032 (the “Plan”). The agenda, which includes questions discussed by the participants, is included at the end of the report along with documents referenced in the questions: the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan 2032 and the Verde Valley Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023.

In addition to learning about and practicing leadership skills on how to facilitate a robust and respectful community dialogue, participants reached the following consensus on how best to shape the future Yavapai County and the Verde Valley.

THE YAVAPAI COUNTY DRAFT VISION STATEMENT

In general, the vision statement for the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan captures the priorities and provides a good baseline; however, it is a bit vague. We should consider strengthening the focus on water, bolstering the emphasis on inclusiveness, education, child development, and making sure to include tribal perspectives. We should incorporate the idea of “Healthy Communities”, which includes expanding the access and knowledge of recreational activities along with providing services for substance use and mental health issues.

Mental health, suicide and depression are major issues that many are struggling with. We should consider preventative measures and peer support that help provide resources and reduce stigma, so those who need it will seek services.

We need to have a detailed plan on how we will address and overcome our county’s challenges – one that incorporates collaboration, inclusiveness, tribal and Hispanic perspectives, and that inclusively brings in both current and new members of our community.

If we are focusing on the future, we should be focusing on what young people want and desire. The vision and actions stemming from it should focus more on our youth, including better education, and more opportunities for recreation, sports and other activities that allow youth to build on their passions.

VERDE VALLEY’S STRENGTHS

The Verde Valley’s greatest strengths for accomplishing the plan include its diverse people, its ability to bring people together, and community involvement and support by those who live here. There is a sense of community and inclusiveness in the Verde Valley. People are willing to consider changes and there is a universal recognition of the Verde Valley’s potential. There is also a sense of community and inclusiveness in the Verde Valley, as demonstrated by this gathering.

The Verde Valley’s diverse natural beauty and temperate climate is an important asset.

The Verde Valley has good education opportunities, a retirement population that brings in added resources, and opportunities for economic growth.

VERDE VALLEY'S CHALLENGES

Population is exploding. We need to watch the use of water and land to ensure that we balance the needs of ranchers, people who need housing, and other needs of our growing community. We also need to pay attention to safety issues that may come with development and growth, such as those related to the Cottonwood airport.

There are a lot of items that we want. We need to be mindful of how and where we spend resources. Determining how to find common ground that benefits the community is one of our greatest challenges.

While our diversity is a strength, it can also be a challenge for bringing people together in one vision to accomplish community goals and projects. Partisanship and lack of trust create challenges as do differing opinions about growth, taxes, and spending.

While our close community creates strength; it also creates challenges. Everyone knows everything that happens, good or bad. We should be more compassionate and thoughtful when people make mistakes.

There should be more gatherings like this that are available and accessible to diverse and working members of the community and that bridge government officials and resources with members of the community.

In addition to gatherings, there should be other opportunities for community members to learn about the "Plan". We should expand marketing, communication, and advertising so more people know about these opportunities. These expanded efforts should include social media that targets youth.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

As youth representing the Verde Valley, we would like our elected and government leaders to consider the following:

- Be educated and accepting of diverse people, such as people who are LGBTQ+, so that the community is more loving and accepting.
- To build a strong future community we must start now. This will help the next generation. We need to look at where we are now, where we have been, and where we want to be in the future.
- We need to support and nurture all talents – not just being good in school and going to college.
- Work life balance is important, especially for teenagers. It is stressful for youth leaders to have so much pressure on them. It is important for youth to know that mental health is important. It is **critical** that we create opportunities for more youth to have their voices heard and that we create opportunities for more youth to develop leadership skills.
- Small and local businesses are important to our future.
- Have people in the community who will mentor youth.
- Have more opportunities to learn life and civic skills. For example, balancing social media, taxes, balancing a checkbook, how to be involved in the community, etc. Expand opportunities with organizations like Skills USA.
- Work together NOW with everyone, including youth to address future challenges. Create the building blocks day by day to address these challenges to help take pressure off future generations.
- Working with youth, incorporate their input and actively listen to those who disagree with you.

- Your time is temporary. A lot of change is going to happen. You need to nurture younger people and provide resources for addressing mental health challenges and stress. You also need to address some of the future concerns now and not put all the pressure on future generations to solve them.
- We need to provide educational opportunities for parents and guardians on how to better communicate and support their kids.

TAKING ACTION

A final component of the Future Leaders Town Hall was to ask each participant to commit to an action they would take based on the discussion. The following is a sample of what the participants committed to doing.

I WILL...

- Use my voice to get my opinion out there.
- Help educate my community, especially about being inclusive.
- Have fun in high school and enjoy it.
- Try to help people without putting too much on my plate.
- Be a good role model.
- Share the information I learned here today with student council and other peers back at school in order to effectively gather opinions about the vision statement draft.
- Find way to stay connected with what is happening with the county plan.
- Focus on myself and make sure I have a good work, social, and personal life balance. Making sure to say no to some opportunities, so I can ensure to keep a healthy balance.
- Promote involvement and collaboration within these programs so that the workshop is divided evenly and everyone can work together to be a part of the solution.
- Assist young children in making the correct choices and I will protect their joy.
- Educate myself and those who care to hear the direction of the community and how I can bring to light ideas that may be expressed by those around me.
- Try to get more involved with the community.
- Balance work, life, and prioritizing what makes me happy in life.
- Advocate for students in need and try my hardest to better the community and closeness among myself, my peers, and those we associate with in clubs and school events.
- Be a leader in my community, helping people in the community and speaking what I believe and how I think the community can change.
- Hone in on a specific field so that I can be most effective in serving other people.
- Seek out more information about more things happening locally or other programs to get involved in to better the community.

Go here to view the Yavapai Comprehensive Plan 2032: <https://planningyavapai2032.org/>