

City of Valdez – 2025 Economic Development Department Report

Building Economic Resilience, Community Capacity, and Opportunity for 2026 and Beyond

January – March 2025: Strengthening Foundations for Childcare and Workforce Growth

Plans & Priorities:

- **Economic Strategic Plan – Objective #3:** Childcare Expansion & Support
- **City Council Priority (2024–2025):** Workforce Development

2025 began with intentional steps taken toward solving one of Valdez’s biggest barriers to workforce stability: Childcare access.

- The department created and administered the Childcare Start-up and Operating Grants, directly supporting new and existing providers in expanding licensed capacity.
- A major milestone followed with the \$3 million HUD award (secured through Senator Murkowski’s office) to renovate the former School District Office into a future childcare center—a transformative investment for working families.

Continuing into 2026:

- Oversee the HUD childcare facility renovation through completion.

April 2025: Inspiring the Next Generation through STEAM and Workforce Innovation

Plans & Priorities:

- **Economic Strategic Plan – Priority #6:** Workforce Initiatives
- **Valdez Comprehensive Plan:** Workforce & Education

April brought statewide attention to Valdez’s growing leadership in youth workforce innovation.

- In partnership with T3 Alliance, PWSC, Valdez City Schools, and ABEC, the department helped launch the first annual STEAM Fest (April 3–6, 2025). The event drew educators and innovators from across Alaska, offering hands-on experiences in marine science, mariculture, and technology.

- Valdez’s new T3 makerspace took shape as a long-term investment in teaching through technology—preparing students for the blue and green economies of Alaska’s future.

Continuing into 2026:

- Expand the T3 Alliance and makerspace programs.
- Pursue funding for youth maritime education initiatives.
- Support CDL and healthcare workforce development efforts to meet community demand

May 2025: Empowering Small Businesses and Gaining National Recognition

Plans & Priorities:

- **Economic Strategic Plan:** Business Support & Small Business Development

Valdez businesses took center stage this spring during the Valdez Small Business Conference, which achieved record attendance and strong community engagement.

Building on that momentum, Valdez earned a spot among just five centers nationwide featured in the National Media Spotlight Tour, showcasing three standout local entrepreneurs:

- **Poor Betty’s** – leveraging SBA-backed funding to expand statewide.
- **The Gift Shop** – highlighting a sustainable retail model supporting 30 Alaskan makers.
- **Quad Shot Coffee** – Valdez’s first mobile coffee cart, fueled by a startup grant and local mentorship.

(Read more: [Business Impact NW: Valdez Businesses Shine in National Spotlight](#))

Continuing into 2026:

- Host the second annual Valdez Small Business Conference with expanded tracks on marketing, financing, and workforce recruitment.
- Continue the Business Builder Workshop Series, aligning with Alaska Entrepreneurship Week 2026.
- Deepen partnerships with PWSEDD, ASBWC, and other entrepreneurship networks.

Summer 2025: Promoting Valdez as a Destination

Plans & Priorities:

- ***Economic Strategic Plan – Objective #5: Promote Valdez as a Destination***
- ***Valdez Comprehensive Plan – Goal 3.3***
- ***Waterfront Master Plan – Pages 62–67***

Summer 2025 was a season of visibility and vibrancy for Valdez

The department completed the 2025 Valdez Visitor Economy Study and the 2025 Business Climate Survey, providing valuable data to shape tourism and economic policy.

- A major milestone came with the installation of 22 interpretive signs in Old Town, created in partnership with the Valdez Museum & Historical Archive, turning the area into a self-guided cultural destination.
- Work began on an advanced, phased wayfinding plan, linking Old Town to other points of interest as envisioned in the Waterfront Master Plan.
- Collaboration with Ports & Harbors advanced cruise industry expansion, setting the stage for four new cruise lines to visit Valdez in 2026–2027.

Continuing into 2026:

- Implement Phase III of the Wayfinding Project.
- Continued Collaboration on Tourism Best Management Practices (TBMP) to guide responsible tourism.
- Support VCVB marketing initiatives and continued cruise line partnerships.

Fall 2025: Hands-On Learning and Community Building

Plans & Priorities:

- ***Economic Strategic Plan – Priorities #2, #5, and #6***
- ***Comprehensive Plan – Economic Diversification and Workforce Goals***

Responding to local business feedback, the department introduced the Valdez Business Builder Workshops in the fall—offering practical, skills-based sessions on financial management, digital marketing, and growth strategies.

The workshops became a highlight of Alaska Entrepreneurship Week, reinforcing Valdez’s reputation as a connected and resourceful small-business community.

At the same time, the department’s work in the seafood sector and education partnerships continued to deepen:

- Continued partnership with VFDA and Mike Wells in researching grant funding opportunities to secure funding for a new coho building to strengthen the local seafood economy.
- Supported PWSC's Environmental Science Symposium and marine-related workforce programs.

Continuing into 2026:

- Continuing to pursue grant funding for the coho building and continued habitat restoration projects.
- Strengthening marine sciences and mariculture partnerships with PWSC.
- Continue expanding the Business Builder Workshop Series.

Fall–Winter 2025 | Strengthening Community and Connectivity

Plans & Priorities:

- ***Valdez Comprehensive Plan – Goal 4.2: Improve Transportation Connectivity***
- ***Economic Strategic Plan – Objective #5: Community and Event Support***

As the year draws to a close, the department's focus turned to community connection and transportation reliability.

- Supported 11 Community Service Organization (CSO) events, improving grant processes and collaboration through the CSO Committee.
- Continued regional collaboration and representation by serving on local and boards: PWSEDD, Valdez Museum, and VCVB.

Continuing into 2026:

- Continue to monitor the federal shutdown and the effect it may possibly have on Essential Air Service. As of October 29, 2025 USDOT has secured funding until November 18, 2025
- Continue working with state and federal partners to strengthen air connectivity and infrastructure.
- Maintain active partnerships and board service to represent Valdez's economic interests regionally.