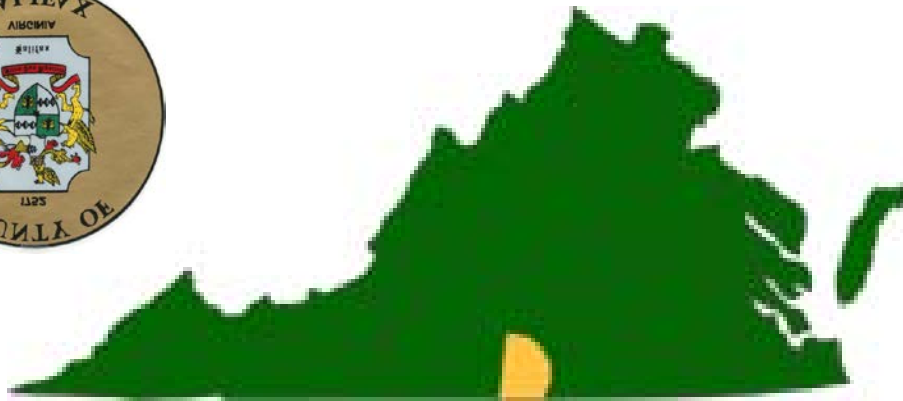




Situation Analysis Report



Halifax County

2019

Table of Contents

Contributors.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Unit Profile.....	4
Population.....	5
Housing/Income/Poverty.....	5
Education.....	5
Business/Economics/Employment.....	5
Community Health.....	5
Community and Resident Perspectives.....	6
Results of the ELC Data Gathering.....	6
Strategic Plan for Halifax County Economic Development Highlights.....	6
Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Forestry – Halifax County; 2017 Statistics.....	7
Priority Issues.....	7
Appendices.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

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Introduction

The purpose of the Halifax County Situation Analysis is to identify specific needs within the locality; especially areas of need which can be addressed through Virginia Cooperative Extension programming. Information and data was gathered in a variety of methods for this report. In 2018, the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce commissioned a private corporation to gather data and create a strategic plan. This plan is utilized here as much as possible. However, much of that report is specific to economic development. Additionally, the Halifax County Agriculture Development Committee commissioned a Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Forestry in 2017. A summary of information from that report is also included. Both of these strategic plans gathered data from various stakeholders within the county. Both of these strategic plan studies actually hindered information gathering because many stakeholders and community leaders had already responded to the aforementioned surveys and felt that should be sufficient not realizing that the questions and therefore results could be quite different.

The Halifax Extension Office has monthly staff meetings in which relevant needs and programs are regularly discussed and recorded. The Halifax County Extension Leadership Council (ELC) has been invaluable in gathering community and resident perspectives on issues within the county. The ELC meets quarterly with the last quarter of the year being the input session. Information gathered in recent years is included in this report. Ideas and information from the local government have also been included. Additional information was collected from various governmental websites as listed throughout the report. The data collected is used to direct both individual and unit programming.

Unit Profile

Halifax County is located in south central Virginia, approximately 50 miles south of Lynchburg and bordering North Carolina. It is the fourth largest county geographically in the Commonwealth covering approximately 818 square miles with a population density of 46 per square mile. The Halifax County Virginia Cooperative Extension Office is made up of two county Extension Agents; Agriculture and Natural Resources and 4-H Youth Development; five county support staff; one Unit Administrative Assistant, one Horticulture Technician, one 4-H Youth Development Program Assistant, one youth SNAP Ed Program Assistant, and one adult SNAP Ed Program Assistant; and three district faculty and staff members; one district Forestry Agent, one SNAP Ed Administrative Assistant and one SNAP Ed. Area Coordinator.

Population

Halifax County currently has a population of about 35,000 although the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service predicts that the population will decrease by 5,000 within the next 20 years. Fifty-five percent of the citizens are between the ages of 18 and 65 years old with the median age being 46. There are about 7,000 youth under the age of 18. About 60% of the population is Caucasian, 36% Black or African American, 2% Hispanic, and about 2% biracial. There are about 14,000 households

Housing/Income/Poverty

Although there are about 14,000 households there are over 18,000 housing units making the availability of housing obtainable. The average house value \$110,000 and about 73% of the population owns their own home which is about 10% above the national average. The average rental fees for those who do not own is \$595 a month. Additionally, 37% of children are in single parent households.

The average annual income is about \$39,000 with males making about \$41,000 while females are bringing in around \$32,000. The salary gap between racial categories is even more significant with the average Caucasian earning \$46,000 while the average for African American earns only \$27,000. The overall poverty rate is 19%, while the percentage of children in poverty is 26%. Additionally, 62% of children in the public school system qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Education

Halifax County Public Schools serves just under 5,000 students in grades PreK through 12. This system consists of one high school, one middle school and seven elementary schools. High school students are able to take dual enrollment classes through the local community college and therefore some students are able to obtain an Associate's Degree while still in high school.

About 80% of the overall population has a high school diploma or the equivalent. Twenty percent of the population has gained at least some college credits with 8% obtaining an Associate's Degree, 10% a Bachelors Degree, and 6% completing graduate degrees.

Business/Economics/Employment

There are 697 registered businesses in Halifax County which employ personnel. The largest employers are Halifax County Public Schools, Halifax Regional Hospital, Dolgencorp LLC, ABB Service Company, Presto Products, and Walmart. There are about 2,000 people in the county who are self-employed and the majority of them are white males who have not served in the military. The unemployment rate is about 4% which is close to the state average.

Community Health

The physical health of Halifax County rank 114 out of 133 localities across Virginia. The doctors and dentists have caseloads that are 2-4 times higher than average. Citizens with

limited access to healthy foods is 2.5 times higher average and Halifax has the highest percentage of people with diabetes in the state. The average health care cost annually per capita is \$7,556 and 13% of the citizens are without health insurance. The average person lives five years less than the state average. Twenty-one percent of the population is considered in fair to poor health with 18% of the total population being formally disabled with ambulatory difficulties rating highest at 11%, independent living at 9%, and cognitive disabilities at 8%. The low birthweight is higher than the state and national average at 10% with African American babies being over 2 times more likely to fit into this category. The number of babies born to teens is twice the state average and nearly three times the national average. Accidental deaths and communicable diseases are also considerably higher than average.

Results from a local survey on community health, sponsored by the local hospital, revealed that citizens are most concerned about mental health issues with 80% of respondents listing it as the most important problem in their community. Also ranked high on the survey was illegal drug use at 72%, prescription drug abuse at 60% and the use of tobacco 68% and alcohol 52%. When asked what the biggest need was in the community the survey revealed support for mental health issues. These survey results were supported by the results of interviews and focus groups. Additional evidence for support services is the \$3,650,000 annual line item in the local budget for incarceration and recidivism for both youth and adults.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Results of the ELC Data Gathering

On October 30, 2017 at the quarterly Extension Leadership Council meeting members were asked to participate in a local needs assessment that consisted of four questions. When asked what hinders the positive growth of Halifax County residents the top four responses were: self-motivation, economic opportunity, collaboration/transparency, and poverty. When asked what negatively impacts the citizens of Halifax County the top four responses were: generation gaps, poor relationships, crime rates, and lack of a family unit. When asked to identify the biggest successes within VCE programming the top five responses were: 4-H Camp, Master Gardener programs, collaboration/teamwork, clubs, and grants. When asked what they would like to see accomplished in Halifax by VCE if there were no limits they responded: ways to help families, better space, more personnel, better funding for education. Staff and space were the top two responses.

Strategic Plan for Halifax County Economic Development Highlights

The purpose of the Halifax County Community Assessment by the Chamber of Commerce was to ensure that a foundation was laid to allow “people and businesses to thrive and wealth to accumulate.” This would be accomplished through a community assessment, creating a community strategic plan and implementing the plan. Some of the finding include: struggle to attract high-quality jobs, poor perceptions about the school facilities, community’s inability to

work together, generational poverty, and a shrinking workforce. Throughout the report was the common theme of leaderships inability to work together causing inaction and erosion of the community's well-being.

Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Forestry – Halifax County; 2017 Statistics

Halifax supports a substantive agriculture and forestry industry sector despite changing market demands. Of the roughly 528,000 acres in the county, approximately 57% comprises farmland and as much as 70% is forested land. Note that some farmland is forested. Agriculture and forestry are among the county's top traded industries, or those that export products outside the region thereby generating new money for the economy. Animal and crop production are ranked #6 and #8 respectively among top exporting industries. For every \$1 spent on animal production in Halifax, an additional \$1.23 is generated in household income. An additional \$1.14 is generated in income for crop production. Finally, every \$1 spent on timber and logging generates an additional \$1.16. Value-added agriculture production, which is part of the industry sector's downstream supply chain, has even greater multipliers. Wineries, breweries, and sawmills generate two to three additional dollars of income from one dollar spent.

The agriculture and forestry industry sector also significantly contribute to the county's gross regional product (GRP) and tax income. Crop and Animal Production accounted for more than \$30 million of the county's GRP in 2016, while forestry and logging accounted for almost \$8.2 million. Together, they contributed to approximately \$2.7 million in taxes, or 3.2% of total taxes for the county in 2016. Farmers in Halifax continue to look for opportunities to grow their businesses and diversify their products, and many stakeholders in the county cite trees as one of the least leveraged resources. Many opportunities exist for the county with growing interests in national food security, nutrition, and buying local for purposes of supporting regional economies and cutting distribution costs.

Priority Issues

Many of the issues found in need of addressing point to the need for a Family Consumer Science Agent in Halifax County. A plan for funding this position has been created and is generating interest with local stakeholders and businesses.

Strengthening Communities

Reports reveal that Halifax County would benefit considerably if collaborations and relationships were strengthened and transparency enhanced. Various facets of community are intertwined and can reinforce each other or aid erosion of community. When community pulls together for the greater good the value of all collaboratively increases. Ensuring that our youth have access to increase life skills and leadership skills will be an investment in the future of the community.

VCE can assist with strengthening communities in a variety of ways. Many agents are trained in facilitation skills, conflict management, and teamwork. Building collaborations is a strength and sharing the workload and recognition is valued. Positive Youth Development strategies are utilized consistently through camps, clubs, and competitions. Adding career readiness and more technology based programs would be of benefit. Additionally, the ANR Agent will continue to encourage and support agricultural collaborations such as comingled sales.

Health

Both physical and mental health high priorities for the citizens of Halifax County. The average lifespan is 5 years lower than the state, diabetes is higher here than any other locality, and the overall health of 21% of the population is only fair or poor. Citizens listed problem with mental health and substance abuse considerably higher than any other topic. Halifax County pays over 3 million dollars annually to support citizens who have been incarcerated.

VCE is continuing to address the health needs of the community through food and nutrition classes, food pantry donations from a community garden, and gardening classes offered by the SNAP Education youth and adult program assistants and the Master Gardeners. With the addition of a traditional Family Consumer Science Agent a stronger impact would be made including educating citizens on Trauma Informed Care.

Generational Poverty

Generational poverty is a hard cycle to break. It is categorized by feelings of difficulty in seeing benefits of education, don't connect respect with a job, higher rate of illiteracy, family never owned land and highly mobile – not rooted to a location. When those from generational poverty are employed they typically earn considerably less than others. Halifax has an overall poverty rate of 19% but the youth living in poverty is 26% and 62% of all school aged children qualify for free and reduced lunch.

VCE programming can offer opportunities for people to learn about how to stretch a dollar and make more nutritious choices at the grocery store. Poverty simulations can be done to increase empathy for those in less fortunate circumstances. The value of education can be learned in smaller increments through one time classes. Additionally youth can increase a sense of belonging as well as life and leadership skills.

Economic Improvement

Data shows that workforce in Halifax is in need of strengthening. This is due in part to many of the local youth finding work in another location rather than returning to Halifax after acquiring skills or a college education. Highspeed internet is not available to all.

VCE can offer career readiness workshops for youth to increase market. Technology knowledge gap between youth and seniors can be bridged with 4-H led collaborations and programming for seniors.