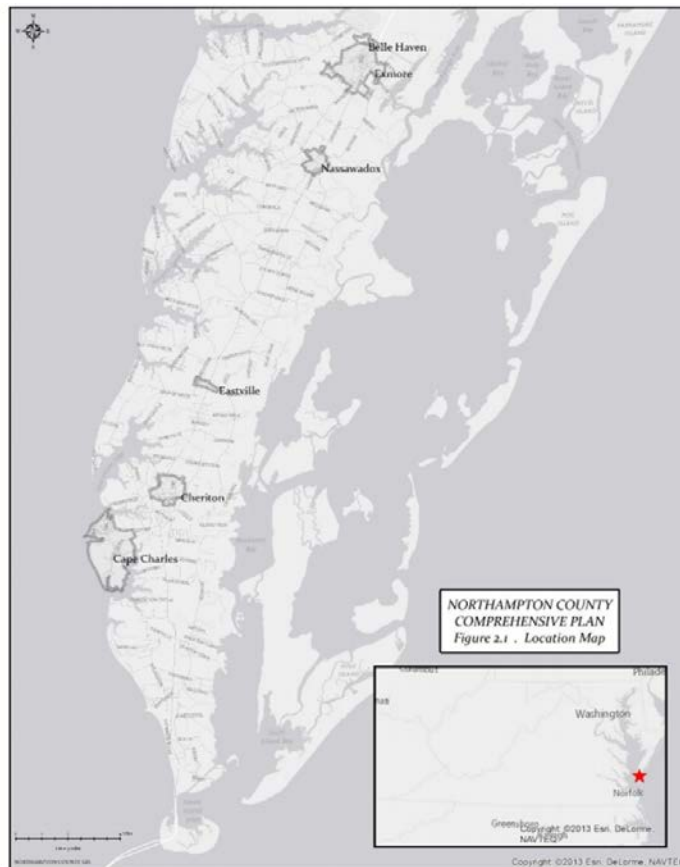




Situation Analysis Report



Source: Northampton County GIS

Northampton County 2018

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Virginia Cooperative Extension *Situation Analysis Report*

Situation Analysis Report Northampton County 2018

Introduction

The Northampton County Extension office conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the 2018 calendar year. The situation analysis process was led by Northampton County Extension staff who sought input from local stakeholders. It involved the development of a Northampton County Unit Profile as well as gathering community and resident perspectives on issues and problems in the county. Data and information from these two activities were analyzed and priority issues were identified.

The situation analysis surveys were developed from discussions with local stakeholders about needs of the county. They were handed out at local meetings, posted on social media, and sent to numerous list serves to solicit responses from Northampton County citizens. Using the data sets from the VCE Situation Analysis Resource Website, VCE staff was organized to analyze assigned pieces of the data set. From that data, the unit profile was developed.

Unit Profile

The County of Northampton Virginia, is the southern most of the two Virginia counties on the Delmarva Peninsula, commonly referred to as the “Eastern Shore”. The county is comprised of a total 211.61 square miles, and is bordered to the north by Accomack County Virginia. Bodies of water border the other three sides of Northampton County - to the east the Atlantic Ocean, to the west the Chesapeake Bay and the south is where the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean meet. Northampton County is connected to the Virginia mainland of Virginia Beach by the 17-mile long Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Northampton County consists of many rural villages surrounded by large agricultural tracts, as well as five incorporated towns: Exmore, Nassawadox, Eastville, Cheriton, and Cape Charles.

Topography in Northampton County is generally flat, and the highest point in the county is a little more than 50 feet above sea level. Soils mainly consist of 8 to 10 inches of sandy loam above 30 inches of sandy clay and shell strata. Groundwater is the source of potable water. The county enjoys a mild climate in growing zone 7b – 8a, with four distinct seasons.

The “seaside” of Northampton County is protected from erosion by Virginia’s barrier islands. These barrier islands are part of the Virginia Coast Reserve, but are open to the public for low-impact day use. The “bayside” is made up of several small peninsulas or “necks” which serve as estuaries for aquatic life.

Conservation is a central element to Northampton County. Not only is the county part of the longest expanse of coastal wilderness remaining on the eastern seaboard of the United States, but it is an important avian migration funnel in the North American flyway. Preservation has been a central concern to economic development officials as well as county zoning officials. Both have structured efforts in a way that will preserve natural resources while promoting growth, including eco-tourism and small business entrepreneurship.

According to data gathered from the 2017 US Census Bureau, Northampton County has a population of 11,846 people, which is a 4.4% decrease since 2010. There are 58.5 people per square mile in the county. The racial makeup of the county is 61.7% white, 34.7% black, 8.8% Hispanic, 2.0% two or more races, 0.4% American Indian, and 0.9% Asian. The elderly over the age of 65 makes up 25.7% of the population, while 19.8% of the population is under the age of 18.

The mean household income in Northampton County is \$41,468, 28% lower than the mean household income of the United States. The poverty rate for Northampton County in 2017 was reported at 18.6%.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that unemployment rates have fallen from 9.9% in 2011 to 5.2% in 2018 in Northampton County. In the workforce, the American Community Survey (ACS) data shows that 12% of those employed are not high school graduates, 34% have a high school degree or equivalent, 26% have some college or an associates degree, and 22% of the employed workforce in Northampton County has a bachelors or post-graduate degree. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting have historically played a large part in the economic and social lives of Northampton County residents. However, Health Care, Social Assistance, Education and Local Government industries employ the majority of the county residents.

Although they do not employ the most people, agriculture and aquaculture are the largest industries in the county. Northampton ranks within the top ten agricultural producing counties in the Commonwealth. Top commodities include soybeans, wheat, corn, potatoes, tomatoes, and snap beans. Northampton is home to the largest fresh market snap-bean operation on the East Coast of the United States as well as other large fresh market vegetable producers of potatoes and tomatoes. Even with impactful vegetable producers in the county, Northampton has seen a loss in the number of farms, and also in the amount of farmland. In 2007 there were 151 farms compared to the 147 farms reported in the 2012 Ag Census. Likewise, land in farms has decreased by 12.1% (more than 7,700 acres) to 56,050 acres since 2007. The net operating income per farm average for the state of Virginia is \$11,300. In Northampton County it is \$196,274, this is largely due to the number of high-value vegetables grown in the county. The market value of agricultural products sold in Northampton went up 3% from 2007 to 2012.

Northampton is home to the largest clam and oyster producing operation in the United States. Clams feed by pumping large amounts of water through their gills and filtering out their microscopic sized food particles. Along with these small particles, they also filter out bacteria and viruses from the overlying water. Since these shellfish may be eaten raw, care has to be taken to ensure that shellfish harvested for direct marketing are taken from very clean water. Waters approved for the direct harvest of shellfish therefore must be much cleaner than waters approved for swimming, fishing, etc. The 2012 USDA Ag Census reports that 34% of all agricultural products sold in Northampton County were “livestock” based. On this report clam and oyster production is reflected in the livestock number. According to the executive director of the Virginia Marine Products Board, 476 million clams were planted in Virginia in 2016 with the majority of them being planted in Northampton County. This contributed \$38.1 million to the state’s economy. This multi-million dollar industry has become a major agricultural commodity for Northampton County. Consequently, Watershed Conservation was identified as a priority issue.

There are two public elementary schools and one middle/high school in Northampton County. The two elementary schools are Pre-K through 6th grade. The middle/high school covers grades 7-12th. Currently, the middle/high school is in desperate need of structural repair. Additionally, there are four private schools who offer a Pre-K through 6th grade education. One of the four private schools offers grades through 12. The Eastern Shore Community College in Melfa, Virginia (Accomack County) serves as a regional gateway to post-high school education and training on the Eastern Shore.

According to the *US News and World Report*, of the 457 students enrolled in Northampton High School, 34% participate in Advanced Placement courses. The student body makeup is 51% male and 49% female, and the total minority enrollment is 69%. Data from countyhealthrankings.org indicates that 22% of Northampton High School students do not graduate on time or drop out of school.

The ACS 2013-2017 5- year estimates reports, 21% of children in Northampton County live in a single parent home and 37% of children live with a grandparent as their primary care giver. These lifestyle choices lead to low income and poverty situations. Over 75% of the students in the public elementary schools receive free or reduced lunch services according to schooldigger.com.

In 2013, the collective Eastern Shore region had 627 total deaths. The Virginia Department of Health stated that the leading causes of mortality by a large margin were malignant neoplasms (i.e., cancer) and heart disease, followed by chronic lower respiratory diseases, cerebrovascular diseases, and diabetes. Age-adjusted death rates were higher than the statewide rate for all combined deaths.

Obesity issues can lead to other illnesses from chronic to acute, some very severe and deadly, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, coronary vascular disease,

heart attack, stroke and even cancer. Thirty-six percent of Northampton County residents are obese which is 8% more than the Virginia state average of obesity according to countyhealthrankings.org. Health challenges do not stop with obesity, 16% of residents in the county are uninsured and there were 45 teen births in 2018. Additionally, Northampton residents have had statistically more poor physical and mental health days than the rest of the state of Virginia.

Community and Resident Perspectives

Based on issue areas identified in the unit profile, a Qualtrics survey was developed and distributed by the faculty and staff of the Northampton County Extension Office.

The surveys were distributed through social media, email, and in paper format at local subject area meetings.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for Northampton County.

Issue 1: Soil Health and Watershed Conservation

Soil health and watershed conservation was identified as the most pressing issue of Northampton County. This is a key issue to the economy of our county. All of the respondents that commented on this issue felt that managing potential runoff from agricultural and urban areas was crucial to the agriculture and aquaculture industries as well as the tourism of Northampton County.

This issue is a hot topic in the state of Virginia with the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay receiving a sub-standard evaluation. VCE is working to address this issue through conservation based educational programs and collaborations with the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and other Federal Agencies to identify programs, such as cost-share, which encourages the use of cover crops, buffer zones, nutrient management plans, and other nutrient runoff reduction practices.

Issue 2: Ag Education and Life Skills for Youth

Ag Education and Life Skills for Youth was identified as the second most pressing issue in Northampton County. This includes ensuring a positive education experience, working to establish Ag and STEM based clubs and in-school training opportunities, and youth development and teen leadership opportunities. Many of those surveyed called for more “youth activities” and “education of kids/new-comers of the importance of agriculture to our community”. Concerns were raised that our “community is losing touch with the agricultural (or rural) way of life”.

This issue is currently being addressed with unit resources. Agents will increase efforts to provide supplemental “hands-on” learning experiences, partner with other youth serving agencies and community groups to provide Ag education and life skills to youth in Northampton County. This issue is addressed by all unit agents and staff during annual programs such as the Northampton County Ag Fair and the Reality Store.

Issue 3: Health and Healthy Food Access

Health and Healthy Food Access was identified as the third issue of concern in Northampton County. This includes nutrition education as well as addressing obesity and obesity prevention. Respondents voiced a need for education and public awareness. Although health is important to all age groups, some interviews said that young families needed nutrition and disease prevention education. The result of early intervention would be a healthier population in the future. The survey confirmed that “healthy food access for low income” is a priority of many in the county. This healthy food access would facilitate a reduction of obesity and the health related issues tied to obesity.

This issue is currently being addressed with current unit VCE resources, as well as, other agencies. The Family Nutrition Program is working with several agencies to provide nutrition education to low income families. Adult nutrition programs consists of Eat Smart Be Active and Healthy Eating and Staying Active as we Age. The youth component provides nutrition education with interactive lessons from Preschoolers to high school students. The 4-H agent plans to do in-school enrichment at the elementary schools with health and nutrition curriculum.