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City of Danville 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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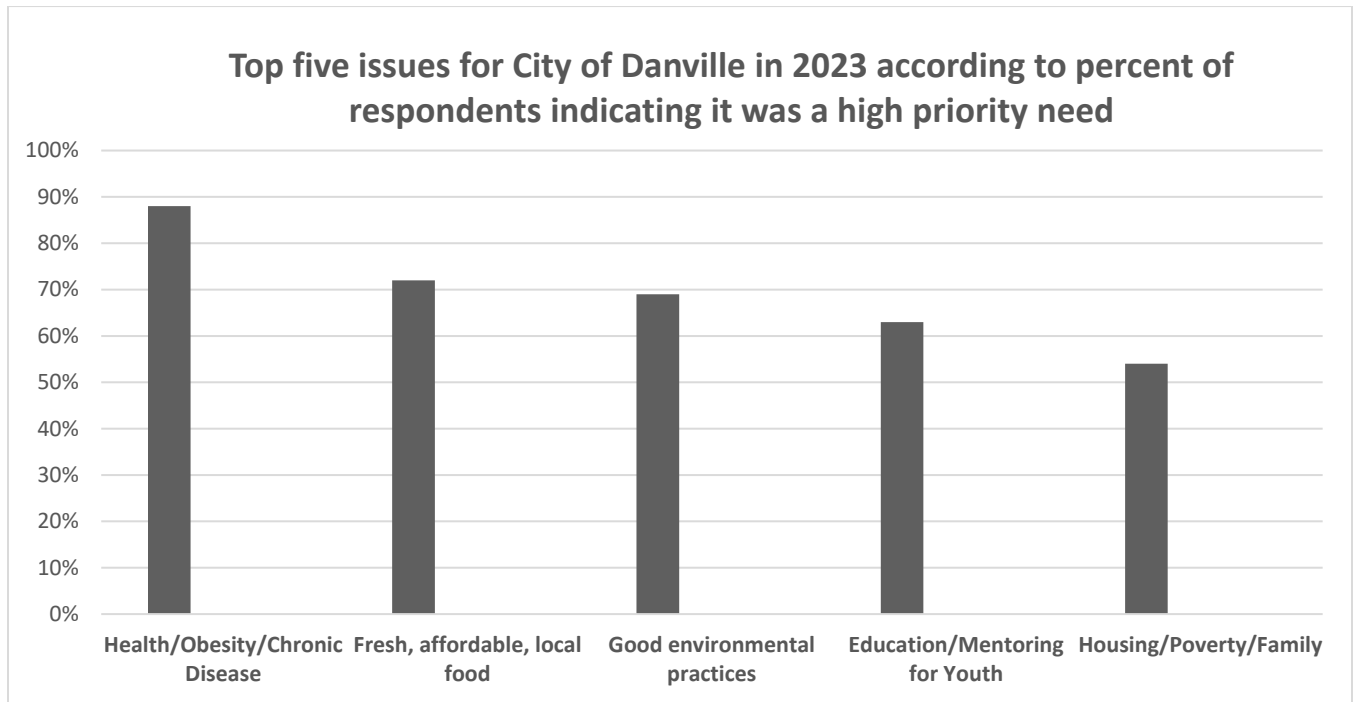
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Chart 1 – Top five issues recognized by citizens of the City of Danville



Introduction

The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) City of Danville Unit conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the calendar year of 2023. The unit coordinator of the City of Danville Office led the situation analysis process. Maggie Richardson assisted with gathering community and resident perspectives on issues in the county through a survey. Data and information from the survey and recently completed area needs assessments were analyzed and recurring themes were identified leading to the creation of the priority issues. The City of Danville Extension Unit decided to use the provided Qualtrics survey. Using available resources from VCE, City of Danville, and state/federal sites, the unit profile was developed. Focus groups were identified, and surveys were distributed throughout the community. Our focus groups included our Danville Master Gardeners, Danville Parks and Rec/Danville Public Works, and data from partners that work collectively with The Health Collaborative and Maggie Richardson. Findings from the surveys and focus groups were analyzed and top priority issues were identified.

Unit Profile

The City of Danville was established near the Virginia-North Carolina border in 1793. It was initially a crossroads for transportation and agricultural production. By 1900 it was established as a textile center producing various cloth products from cotton and as a tobacco market for the bright leaf type of tobacco.

There are a few notable historical events that Danville is known for. The City served as the capitol of the Confederate States of America for a very short time following the fall of Richmond in 1864. The method that was used to auction tobacco through the 1990's was developed in Danville. The first recorded song to sell over 1 million copies, "The Wreck of the Old 97", related the story of a train wreck that happened here in 1911. And Lady Astor, the first woman to serve in the British House of Commons, was born here in 1879.

Population:

The population of Danville has been steadily declining since around 1980. Between 1990 and 2010 the population decreased by approximately 10,000 residents. In 2020 according to the US Census data the population was 42,592. In 2022 the population as estimated to be 42,229. The population has very slowly decreased in the last few years. Additional businesses and entertainment options are coming to Danville in the future so these numbers may change soon. The reasons for the decline in population may be somewhat complex. Some former residents have moved into the surrounding counties in Virginia and North Carolina and commute to their jobs in the City. Others relocated to different areas after Dan River Mills closed down its manufacturing facilities and offices. Many young people go away to college and never return as permanent residents, choosing to start their careers elsewhere as employment options are somewhat limited.

The majority population is Black or African American at 50%. The second largest group was White with 42%. The third highest population was Mixed (two or more races) at 5.5%. Following up with Hispanic at 4.9%, Asian at 1.4% and 0.1% Native American/Alaskan Native. Approximately 22% of the population is 18 years old and younger, approximately 21.1% is aged 65 years and older. The city has a 14% military veteran population.

Approximately 43% of children live in homes where income is at or below the poverty level. Just over half of Danville children live in single parent households, mostly with a female head-of-household. The overall poverty rate in Danville is was estimated in 2022 at 25.3%. Danville consistently ranks low in overall poverty rates compared to the rest of the state.

Employment:

The majority of employment opportunities are in retail sales/hospitality, health care, and education with manufacturing, construction, and communications at the next level. According to the Virginia Employment Commission Danville's 2023 estimated unemployment (4.5%) is a bit higher than the state average (2.9). According to a study completed by the The National Institute of Health, the City of Danville's household incomes are consistently below average at \$38,904. This ranks Danville as the 7th poorest city or county in Virginia. The surrounding county, Pittsylvania, has a median income of \$49,486. Caesars casino is building a facility, Caesars

Virginia, which will be completed in 2024. This is being constructed in the city and the hope is that it will likely create jobs and attract many visitors/tourisms and possibly, new residents. On the eastern line of Danville/Pittsylvania county companies also built some new businesses such as a Purdue chicken facility and Aerofarms hydroponic indoor farm.

Education:

The graduation rate in Danville is 84.4%. This is less than the state average of 92% and many of the schools have been battling staffing and accreditation issues. According to Virginia Department of Education in 20223 only three schools have met the accreditation requirements out of a total of 13 schools within Danville. This means that only 23% of the schools in Danville are accredited compared to 89% in the rest of the state of Virginia. According to the US Census 18.7% of people in Danville have completed a 4-year degree. Primary school enrollment for grades K – 12 is 5,736 in 2023 and the student/teacher ratio is 16.53. In addition to public and private schools, there are 2 colleges and one university in the City and at least 9 colleges or universities within a 90-minute drive of Danville.

Housing:

There are a total of 18,755 housing units in Danville, both owned and rented. Much of the housing in the City is considered to be of advanced age but there are lots of historic areas and buildings that can be found. Danville City is working to increase the amount of housing available to residents by renovating old tobacco storage buildings in businesses/apartments. One of the old mill buildings is also being converted into a large apartment/condo building with businesses as well. Unfortunately, home prices are inflated like many areas of the country and some homes are being lost by being converted into Airbnb's to rent out to casino visitors. There are many people who are homeless and live in vacant buildings, outdoors, and shelters/churches. Many of the shelters and churches are reaching or above capacity.

Community and Resident Perspectives

The results of the data collection show that Danville residents are primarily concerned about the overall health of the community including access to fresh, healthy foods and the ability to afford food and housing. Another big topic that the community finds important is the education of the youth. Many people believe that because many of our school system are not accredited – students are not learning as well as they could and people also say that the quality of teachers is limited because many do not want to work in this area with unaccredited schools. Turnover within the school system employees is very high among employees/educators.

To assess resident perspectives, our unit utilized two formal strategies. However, our unit also strives to informally assess the needs of our community with constant engaged conversations.

1. Community survey. This survey was widely distributed throughout the City of Danville. The survey was sent to members of the community. Master Gardeners assisted with this process and Danville Parks and Recreation also helped to ensure the survey was properly distributed. The survey was also distributed to members of the city through Maggie Richardson who works for The Health Collaborative here in Dan River Region. Maggie shared the survey with partners the Health Collaborative works with in the city.
2. Internal discussions of issues between the Extension Leadership Council (ELC), Virginia Cooperative Extension and other important members of the community (Parks and Rec./Publics Works etc.). throughout the year as well as reviewing information from The Health Collaborative weekly reporting.

Community Issues

Surveys and recent needs assessments were reviewed and it was determined that the top issues were linked and could be grouped into three priority issues.

Table 1 – Top issues selected by respondents based on survey results

| Issue | Rank |
|--|------|
| Strengthening the local food system | 1 |
| Ensuring safe, high quality foods | 2 |
| Protecting Water Quality | 3 |
| Controlling invasive pests (plants, animals, insects) | 4 |
| Reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers | 5 |
| Helping consumers make healthy food choices | 6 |
| Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills | 7 |
| Protecting freshwater resources, (lakes, rivers, springs, wetlands) | 8 |
| Addressing hunger issues | 9 |
| Reducing obesity | 10 |

Top three priority issues

#1 Food system/quality/food education

#2 Environmental Issues – Water Quality, invasives, misuse of pesticides/fertilizers

#3 Youth leadership, citizenship, and other life skills

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

In order to better address and look at our main priority issues – several of the top issues were put into three topic areas that need to be most looked at here in Danville. All three priority issues are broken down into issues that can be addressed with similar methods.

Priority Issue #1: Strengthening the local food system/ensure safe, high quality foods/helping consumers make healthy food choices

The City of Danville office can focus on these priority issues in many different ways. The ANR agent partners with churches and other groups around Danville that run community gardens. We offer programs for citizens to learn how to grow and produce their own food – or learn where their food comes from. The Danville Master Gardener group works with elementary school students at Gibson Elementary in a greenhouse and teaches them about food, gardening and more. In the future – we would like to expand beyond Gibson Elementary school with these classes – hoping that our new 4-H agent can assist with getting into different schools to teach programs. In addition to the ANR side, we have SNAP education adult and youth program assistants who have been working in and assessing the situation here in the City. The ANR agent can partner with these program assistants and provide full spectrum programs to show how food is grown and how to prepare and cook health meals for families – especially focusing on low income families as that is a large portion of the Danville audience. Our SNAP

education program assistants work with many different people and can help them make healthy food choices while shopping on a budget. One partner is God's Storehouse (where our SNAP education adult program assistant is located) and they have an urban farm that will allow us to teach classes about growing vegetables and also have a certified industrial kitchen that is used to teach cooking classes on healthy foods. We can also teach people in Danville about different healthy foods that they may not be familiar with eating/growing and how to prepare/grow it. Danville is also assigned a Family and Consumer Sciences agent specializing in SNAP education. Between ANR and these SNAP education faculty and program assistants the food issues can be addressed to what citizens are wanting. One program that we can promote more in our area in a partnership with our local farmers market/Danville Parks and Recreation is that SNAP-Ed card users can double their dollars at the local market. For example, if they swipe their EBT card for \$10 – they will be able to use \$20 to purchase fresh, healthy, and locally produced goods.

Priority Issue #2: Protecting water quality/invasive pests/reducing misuse and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers

The City of Danville office is currently offering pesticide education for commercial pesticide users and private users, field visits, home visits, and collaborating with numerous local agencies such as Dan River Basin Association. The purpose of this work is to help ensure that all citizens and city workers are educated on the importance of water quality and how quickly it can be affected. All of this work goes towards the goal of addressing water quality through proper understanding of the issues at hand. In addition to providing a comprehensive solution that not only addresses the immediate need, usually pesticides and erosion, but educates the landowners and others on how the situation got to where it is. The office works directly with Dan River Basin Association and partners with the organization and others on multiple projects going on throughout the city. Dan River Basin Association also educates our master gardener group in training classes every year. Invasive insect education can be addressed with programming, by word of mouth, and advertising/marketing materials. Reducing and misusing pesticides falls into a similar category as water quality but will be addressed through programs, yearly pesticide recertifications, home and field visits.

Priority Issue #3: Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills

The City of Danville office has not had a person in the role of 4-H extension agent since November 2021. This is an area that has recently been lacking and needs further assessment when an agent is hired. A new agent was hired, accepted, and will start on January 10th, 2024. The agent will focus on building up the 4-H program in the area. The new agent will plan to do in-school programming along with multiple out of school programs. The agent plans to create/build the teen program here in Danville stronger. He will also focus on recruiting and maintaining adult volunteers who can help with 4-H summer camp. Youth development is a very important issue in Danville with the status of the school systems and the 4-H agent will be able to provide a big boost to issues in this area. The new agent also plans to partner with as many organizations as possible, such as Danville Parks and Recreation, Danville Police Department, Danville Public Schools and more, to assist making 4-H in Danville great again. It will take some time to establish the program and build it back up to support the community needs.

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