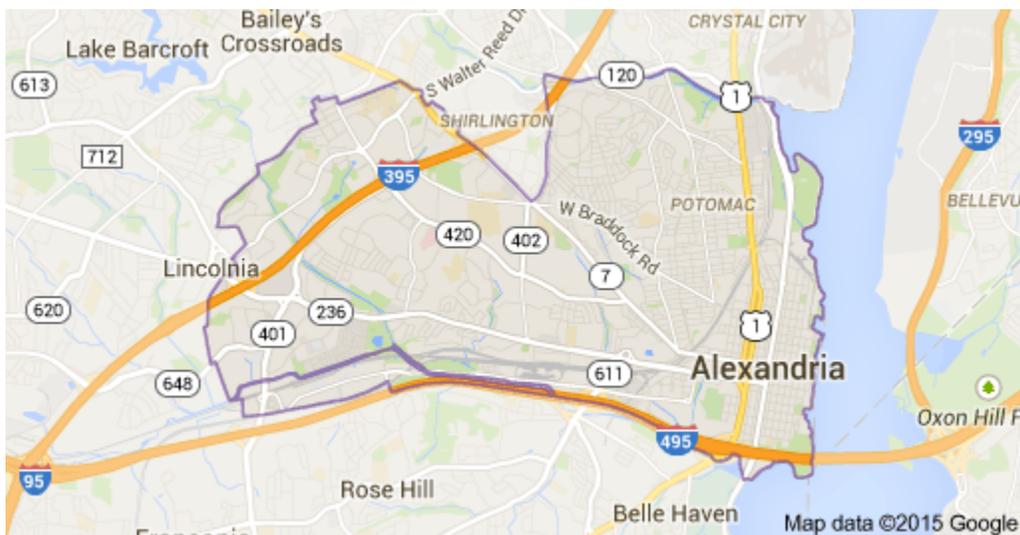




Situation Analysis Report



City of Alexandria

2013

Alexandria Extension Staff

Reginald Morris, 4-H Youth Extension Agent

Kirsten Buhls, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent

Jennifer Abel, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

Octavia Walker, Unit Administrative Assistant

Introduction

The Alexandria Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted its situation analysis by reviewing the unit profile generously prepared for us by VCE staff in Blacksburg and comparing it to the community profile prepared each year by the City of Alexandria. In addition, we utilized data from the Alexandria Children & Youth Well-Being Profile (2013) and the City of Alexandria Child and Youth Master Plan. We also conducted a community survey to assess what community members see as the priority issues in our county. Our Extension Leadership Council (ELC), which is always very active in advocating for us and helping us to market our programs and accomplishments, took an active role in helping to encourage people to complete the survey. As a result, we received 142 community responses from citizens of the City of Alexandria and Arlington County. Staff and the ELC analyzed the data from the unit profile and the community survey in order to identify priority issues.

Unit Profile

The city of Alexandria is located in Northern Virginia directly across the Potomac River from Washington DC. Rich in history and diversity, Alexandria is nationally recognized as one of the best places to live and do business on the east coast. Alexandria was established on May 11, 1749 and was later incorporated in 1779. As of 2012 the population of Alexandria was 146,294 representing a growth of 9.1% compared to the 2000 Census. At 23.8% the 25-34 year-olds make up the largest segment of population for the city. Alexandria's population is ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse mix representing more than 110 different countries and speaking more than 138 native languages. This diverse population mix creates cultural and language barriers that must be overcome while planning and facilitating educational programming to the citizens of Alexandria. VCE in Alexandria continues to take a proactive role in identifying and targeting a diverse audience of learners by recruiting, training, and developing a wide variety of volunteers and partnering with like-minded community partners to meet the needs of its ever changing population. Alexandria's unemployment rate continues to improve and, as of January 2013, the rate had decreased to 4.5 percent; a rate lower than Virginia's rate of 5.6%. Alexandria is home to over 12,000 thriving businesses and organizations, including a large representation of technology companies, professional organizations, the United States Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) and a tourism industry that hosts nearly 3.3 million visitors each year. Alexandria City Public Schools is one of the most economically and racially diverse school systems in the country. As of FY 2013, school enrollment was listed at 13,114 students, representing a 16.8% increase in public school enrollment since 2009. At \$82,899 the median household income is greater than Virginia's median household income however poverty is still an issue facing Alexandria especially its school age population. Data indicated that in 2011 14.7% of children ages 0-17 were living at or below the federal poverty level, creating unique challenges for Alexandria since this percentage is higher compared to its neighboring counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun. The City of Alexandria has several housing programs to assist low to moderate income households with home purchase, home rehabilitation and accessibility improvements. The number of housing units in Alexandria is 72,376 (2010 U.S. Decennial Census), which includes 22,196 single-family units, 19,844 condominium units,

29,186 rental apartments, and 1,150 public housing and public housing replacement units. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010 U.S. Decennial Census), approximately 43 percent of housing units are owned and 57 percent are rented.

Community and Resident Perspectives

As stated in the introduction we worked with our ELC to craft and distribute a community survey that elicited 142 responses. Because our ELC is a combined Arlington and Alexandria entity and because two of our staff, our ANR agent and one of the FCS agent, do a lot of programming in Alexandria as well as Arlington, we conducted a combined Arlington and Alexandria survey. The survey was sent to current volunteers, program participants, partner organizations, county government contacts, and elected officials. All of these people were asked to send the survey to their friends who live in Alexandria and Arlington so that we could gain the perspective of people less familiar with Extension's programs. Among respondents 5% said they were not familiar at all with Extension's programs, 23% were somewhat familiar, 38% were familiar, and 35% were very familiar. 21% have never participated in an Extension program before while 79% have done so. 80% of respondents were female and 20% were male. The majority of respondents were from Arlington, with 19% from Alexandria. The largest age group of respondents were those over age 65, with 26% of respondents in that category. 25% were between 50 and 59, 17% between 30 and 39, 13% between 40 and 49, 11% between 60 and 64, and 7% were 18-29. Only 5% of respondents were Hispanic or Latino. 86% were white, 6% were African American, 8% were other, and 1% were American Indians or Alaska natives. This analysis is the first report of its type to be conducted since 2004. Since 2004 the Alexandria Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension has seen a great deal of staff turnover without a permanent extension agent or unit coordinator for a number of years. In June of 2013 a new 4-H extension agent and unit coordinator was hired and will provide leadership to the unit for the foreseeable future.

Priority Issues

Priority Issues Based on the unit profile and community survey, staff have identified the following as priority issues:

ISSUE #1: Environment/Land Use/Water Quality/Natural Resources

In their comments many of our survey respondents grouped these four issues together and they all garnered very high numbers in the somewhat important and very important categories. Among the 142 respondents 98 rated the environment as very important. One respondent said: "Note the common theme of those items selected as very important--natural resources, water quality, land use, and the environment. Work that strives to solve or improve upon the region's natural resource issues will reap positive dividends in all other areas that extension is working toward--healthy ecosystems improve the health of people; healthy food comes from healthy plants and gardens cultivated locally; engaging youth in environmental restoration activities boosts their appreciation for a healthy environment and lifestyle while teaching good life lessons in the process; and an increased focus on the local landscape and environment

can boost small business opportunities in the green industry by simultaneously creating an educated workforce and an educated clientele for those businesses to solicit.” Extension is responding to these issues by supporting and training Master Gardener volunteers who reported over 12,000 service hours in 2012. 240 certified plus Intern Master Gardener volunteers assist the ANR agent in offering trainings to residents on how to grow food and flowers with fewer pesticides and fertilizers, providing trainings to the green industry and county employees on safe application of pesticides, helping residents to get their soil tested so that they apply only the necessary amounts of fertilizer and at the right time, and providing other public education events on sustainable growing and landscaping. Because the environment rated so high out of these four issues, it will be important as we design natural resources programs to make sure that they include environmental themes and strategies for improving the local environment. As stated in the following comment from a survey respondent, all program areas have a responsibility to consider the environment when planning programs: “Environment--I think that the topic of environment touches many other topics. For instance, health, natural resources, horticulture, land use, pest/pesticides, water quality/quantity, nutrition, housing/home, and even consumer issues would fall under the main category of environment. We should always think about the environment in all things that we do because it is so important to our well-being.”

ISSUE #2: Community Services

Community services emerged as the next most important issue, with 86 people rating it very important. One respondent commented: “Community services provide the ties that can draw together our diverse communities in Arlington and Alexandria. Services provided by local governments and volunteers, including VCE volunteers, are the main sources for public education on many of the topics identified here as issues.” Respondents reflected that many people don’t know about all of the services that are available in the county and city and noted the need for providing information in other languages about upcoming programs. This is a broad issue and as the quote included above indicates it ties in to all of extension’s programs. We are responding by offering a variety of educational opportunities in the three program areas: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H. VCE educational opportunities and services will provide the citizens of Alexandria with a knowledge base that will improve their decision making and overall quality of life. In terms of increasing awareness about programs, we continually strive to expand outreach efforts. We started a blog in the spring of 2013 and conduct many of our financial and nutrition programs in Spanish. Additionally, some of our gardening education and pest management materials are available in Spanish. We have also made an attempt to strengthen our social media presence by creating and actively updating Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts to reach the segment of our population that engages in social media. Our goal is to attract a new audience to Extension programming and utilize social media to our advantage.

ISSUE #3: Health/Nutrition/Obesity

With 82 respondents rating health as very important in the community survey, this emerged as the next priority issue. Many people combined health, nutrition, and obesity in their comments, so that is why we have put them together here into one issue. Several compelling comments

were submitted, including the following: “Nutrition/Health/Obesity -- All are linked. We believe that we need to reach out to not only adults but also children who need to learn the importance of good nutrition and exercise. We are looking for an out-of-school program to address nutrition/obesity/health for older children.” Extension is addressing this issue in Alexandria through many different programs together with our Master Food Volunteers, Master Gardeners, and Family Nutrition Program (Nutrition Outreach Instructor). We have trained pre-school, elementary, middle and high teachers on the OrganWise Guys, Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, and Teen Cuisine curricula and distributed kits to them so that they can implement the programs in their classrooms. We conduct Cooking Matters programs: six week courses in which participants get an hour of nutrition instruction each week, plus an hour of cooking instruction and a bag of groceries containing all of the ingredients for the recipes prepared in class so that they can replicate them at home. We also offer cooking and nutrition classes at senior centers, in schools, at affordable housing complexes, and community centers. Master Gardeners partner with libraries and community gardens in Arlington and Alexandria to conduct classes on container gardening, seed starting, and vegetable garden pest management and maintain demonstration gardens for public viewing.

ISSUE #4: Child Development/Life Skills/Decision Making for Youth/Youth Activities

With 71 people rating it as very important, child development comes in as our 4th priority issue. In their comments many combined it with the other issues listed above, so that is why we have done so here. One respondent commented that “I think it's important to allow lots of opportunities for children to find support within the county to learn and give back to the community. Participation in both development and volunteer opportunities in Alexandria can create a sense of pride of place and ensure a positive future for the county.” Extension responds to this issue in Alexandria through 4-H/youth development programming (community & special interest clubs, workshops, contest, camping) and adult volunteer training and development. We have had a lot of turnover in the 4-H agent position in recent years, however a new agent began work in June of 2013 and is actively rebuilding the 4-H program and expanding outreach efforts. Through a partnership with Alexandria Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities; participants in the Power On! & Power Up! out-of-school time programs will be actively involved in 4-H related programming, and other opportunities are being developed throughout the city. Both ANR and FCS programs support 4-H youth education efforts within their respective program areas with volunteer efforts in schools, and community centers.

ISSUE #5: Aging Population

“As the population ages heading toward 2030, it is very important to plan ahead to meet the needs of that population & provide the supports & services that will allow them to age in place in a safe & healthy environment. Transportation, resource allocation, social service provision, recreation will all have to take into account the changes in population & plan accordingly, shifting resources as needed, in order to remain relevant & serve their constituents effectively.” Extension is responding to this issue by actively recruiting older adults for our volunteer programs (4-H Adult Leaders, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Master Food Volunteers, and Master Financial Education Volunteers). We also offer many programs in senior centers, especially nutrition. Many of our financial education programs are targeted to seniors, including

passing on personal possessions, controlling clutter, deciding which papers to keep and where to store important records, and planning for future life events.

ISSUE #6: Finances/Personal Financial Management

“Regardless of educational level, many people simply do not have the skills to manage money or credit well. This in turn can cause stress, financial insecurity, and even insolvency that governments ultimately must deal with. To address the problem, schools and community organizations must teach and provide basic principles of finance that people of all ages can relate to and internalize. It's better to prevent financial problems than try to solve them after the fact.” Extension responds to this issue by coordinating a team of Master Financial Education Volunteers who provide one-on-one financial counseling; money management classes in schools, libraries, community centers, homeless shelters, senior centers, and affordable housing complexes; and youth financial simulations at elementary, middle, and high schools.