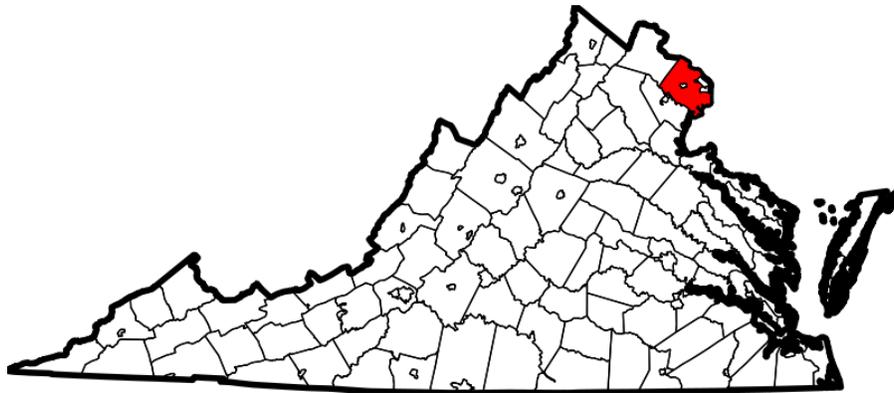




# Situation Analysis Report



## Fairfax County

# 2013

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## Introduction

Fairfax County was once a rural area that is now a thriving metropolis. Fairfax County and the independent cities and towns of Falls Church, Reston, Fairfax City, Herndon, and Vienna are located 15 miles west of Washington, D.C. The county covers 395 square miles within the Shenandoah/Chesapeake Bay Watershed and along the Potomac River shoreline.

## Unit Profile

Since 1970, Fairfax County's population has more than doubled in size; Fairfax's population reached 1,100,692 in the 2011 U.S. Census. As the most populous jurisdiction in Virginia, Fairfax County's population exceeds that of eight states and the District of Columbia. One in eight Virginians resides in Fairfax County.

Fairfax County has a rich diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds, and our diversity has continued to grow since our last situation analysis. In 2011, more than one in three (37%) residents reports a race/ethnicity other than non-Hispanic white, which is up from 32% in 2007. In the past 25 years, the Asian population has more than doubled; the Hispanic population has more than tripled. Nearly forty percent of residents speak a language other than English at home, and students in Fairfax County Public Schools speak 150 languages.

Fairfax County's median household income of \$107,096 is higher than the state and national medians (\$62,391 and \$51,484, respectively). Yet, with a notably higher cost-of-living in Fairfax, 19.5% of households earn incomes below \$50,000, the amount a family of four needs to cover basic living expenses (<http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/51059>). In Fairfax, 8.4% of households earn less than \$25,000. Poverty rates have increased since our last situation analysis in 2008. The poverty rate increased from 4.5% in 2000 to 5.8% in 2012. Fairfax County's Department of Human Services and other emergency assistance providers are under more pressure than ever to find food, rent, utilities, and other support services for our County's most vulnerable residents.

To keep up with the high cost-of-living in Fairfax, two wage-earner households rose to a new high, creating challenges for parents of school-aged children. The need has increased for community-based programming that provides a safe place for children to go. According to 2012 data, 27% of the population is under 20 years old. There are 238 public schools and educational centers in Fairfax County, with 184,625 students. The Fairfax County Public School district is the largest school system in the Commonwealth and the eleventh largest school district in the nation. The high school graduation rate has remained constant (92%) since the last situation analysis; 58% of the county's residents have a four- or six-year college degree.

Since 2007, Fairfax County has shown a slight increase in percentage of residents ages 60 and over. County Services are continually challenged to engage and support Fairfax's aging population, particularly those 65 and older.

Fairfax County has over 30,000 acres of parkland. This includes bike trails, athletic fields, golf course and lakes. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Metrorail train service is 96 miles long and has 76 stations; five stations serve Fairfax County. Developers are working with Metrorail to build another branch of train tracks and bus services to the Dulles Airport and other Western areas of Fairfax County.

## Community and Resident Perspectives

One hundred and forty-three community residents completed the online community survey, which asked respondents to rate the importance of 30 issues. Agents analyzed the community survey results and identified eight themes from the issue rankings and comments. Agents presented these preliminary findings at a community forum, which included representatives from each of the three major volunteer groups (4-H Volunteers, Master Gardeners, and Master Food Volunteers). The findings were endorsed by the ELC and volunteer group representatives. Community and resident perspectives are included with each priority issue description.

## Priority Issues

The 2013 Fairfax County Situation Analysis consists of eight key issues, which were identified by evaluating shifts in demographic surveillance data, surveying community stakeholders (e.g., VCE volunteers, program partners, program participants, and local elected officials), and consulting boards and committees (i.e., the ELC, Northern Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, Master Gardeners, Master Food Volunteers, and 4-H Clubs). Surveillance data included the Fairfax Unit Profile prepared by VCE, along with county government reports on diversity, economic stability, education, and community planning ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/about/data/](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/about/data/)).

### Issue # 1: Chronic Disease and Obesity

Healthy lifestyles was the #1 priority issue in Fairfax's last situation analysis in 2008, and improving lifestyle persists as the most important issue today. One community survey responder wrote for chronic disease and obesity: "... both lead to decreased quality of life and increased healthcare expenses. Involvement by the business and non-profit community is crucial." Although the Northern region's obesity and chronic disease rates are generally lower than state and national averages, Fairfax County community health status assessments report dramatic and increasing health disparities among ethnic and racial minorities, particular age groups, income groups, as well as certain geographical areas. In Fairfax County, three of the five leading causes of death are mediated by lifestyle choice: cancer, cardiovascular disease, and cerebrovascular disease. A community behavioral assessment by the Partnership for a Healthier Fairfax identified the top contributors to premature death and chronic disease, by percentage of population: no exercise (14.6%), few fruits and vegetables eaten daily (71.5%), overweight and obesity (51.8%), and high blood pressure (19.6%). Further, chronic conditions such as diabetes (4.6%) and high cholesterol (40.1%) are prevalent among Fairfax adults.

Though lead by FCS nutrition programming, chronic disease and obesity is addressed by all faculty and staff at the Fairfax Unit, including Horticulture, 4-H, and general office activities. Since the last situation analysis in 2008, the Fairfax office met its goal of expanding FCS faculty and staff. Nutrition programs empower residents to make healthy choices by teaching basic nutrition and cooking skills, and the Master Food Volunteer program helps FCS reach even more people. While all community members benefit from improved lifestyle, the Fairfax Unit pays special attention to low-income communities. Our two Family Nutrition Program Assistants and Nutrition Outreach Instructor provide nutrition classes for low-income individuals and families receiving or eligible to receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

## **Issue #2: Resources for an Aging Population**

Fairfax County's aging population has increased steadily over the last several years. Individuals have decided to retire locally, with an increased need for programs and resources. The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Committee on Aging identifies health promotion among people of retired age to be a priority in this population. The strategic plan for the county identifies Virginia Cooperative Extension as a key partner agency for providing nutrition education classes and support. The ELC is in agreement with these assessments, and continues to support County efforts to prevent chronic disease among the aging population.

VCE collaborates with Senior Services in offering programs and activities. Intergenerational programs are a key component in many of our VCE Programs. Master Gardener and Master Food Volunteer education programs are popular with those who are retiring or near retirement age. 4-H program lend themselves to opportunities for intergenerational programs. Ninety-three percent of participants in a 2013 Neighborhood and Community Services customer satisfaction survey claimed they feel more involved and connected to their community by being involved in or volunteering for VCE's programs.

## **Issue #3: Environment/Water Quality/Pesticides**

Seventy-three percent of community survey respondents reported these topics as important. Housing development continues to increase steadily, totaling 11% growth in housing units over the last 10 years. This rapid growth has led to several challenges in the community, and VCE plays a role in addressing these challenges. With the loss of tree canopy due to land development, tree replacement is essential. As larger trees are removed and replaced with smaller trees after construction, these trees are left to struggle in harsh conditions. Trees planted in urban survive approximately 7-10 years. Other related and pressing environmental issues are storm water management, water quality, wetland preservation, turf reduction and proper use of fertilizers and pesticides. As development increases, storm water management and water quality become issues as more and more impervious surfaces are developed. Urban sprawl directly affects the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem through compromised water quality and excess algae growth. Flora and fauna management (wildlife, invasives/exotics, "right plant, right place") becomes increasingly important with land development. Due to development issues and lack of education, residents and professionals often have conflicts with wildlife and

invasive plants. Consumers are often unaware that certain plants sold at nurseries can become invasive and detrimental to local flora.

Pesticide use and misuse encompass many pressing environmental issues in Fairfax County. Residents and professionals often seek a “silver bullet” rather than a safe, comprehensive approach to pest and weed management. Major issues include overuse of pesticides, professionals with lack of pesticide certification, lack of product knowledge, and lack of use of proper personal protective equipment (PPE). Although Fairfax County has thousands of certified pesticide applicators, hundreds remain uncertified and in need of education.

VCE Master Gardeners have 23 plant clinics across the county in which plant problem diagnosis and insect identification can be obtained. Programs for Nutrient Management such as “Home Turf” help the homeowner learn more about their lawn and fertilizers and being more sensitive toward the Chesapeake Bay. VCE also plays an active role in presentations at Green Industry professional workshops, local civic associations and citizen groups. This is a large issue in which many other partnership agencies contribute they include the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District NVSWCD (VCE Horticulture Extension Agent is a member of the Board), Fairfax County Department of Public Works, Environmental Services (DPWES), Fairfax County Tree Commission, Fairfax ReLeaf, Virginia Department of Forestry and Earth Sangha.

VCE addresses pesticide education (certification and re-certification programs) through workshops and classes that they partner with Green Industry Professional organizations and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) who investigates and regulates pesticide problems.

#### **Issue #4: Youth Life Skills/Decision Making/Development/Activities**

The UNESCO institute for Education recommends that youth development organizations "ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs." In a survey of Fairfax County Virginia Cooperative Extension clientele, 75.52% responded that life skills, leadership skills, and citizenship skills are major issues confronting youth of Fairfax County that can be addressed through educational programming. It is important that a variety of 4-H programming is offered to provide ample access to positive youth activities including leadership, citizenship, and life-skills development programs. It was reported in Social Forces that adolescents who are involved in community service have been found more likely to have a strong work ethic as adults and are more likely to volunteer in the future. Volunteering in adolescence is also related to overall positive academic, psychological, and occupational outcomes. Regarding workplace readiness as youth transition, the following skill development and educational opportunities are suggested: having a sense of purpose so youth can navigate labor market fluctuations, healthy behaviors, avoiding risky behaviors, positive mental health, resilience, strong work ethic, social competence and creativity. Additionally, 74.13% of Fairfax County residents surveyed ranked leadership and personal development as one of the most important programming areas for youth in the county.

Extension addresses these issues through its 4-H youth development program. Here in Fairfax County, we provide positive youth development programming through a variety of methods. We have 26 4-H clubs that meet on a monthly basis. These clubs are safe places for youth to meet and learn about a certain area of focus. Our clubs meet at all times, some directly after school, some in the evenings, and some of our home school groups even meet during the school day. These clubs also have a wide range in the projects that they complete. We have clubs focusing on a specific project, such as beekeeping, shooting sports, and robotics to name a few. We also have community clubs which select several projects to work on throughout the year. For example one of our community clubs in the past has completed home food preservation, sewing, water quality, and community service projects. No matter what project a youth participates in, they will learn valuable life skills that develop them into outstanding individuals. These clubs provide an outlet for youth to foster positive development including leadership and citizenship skills.

Along with volunteer-led clubs, the county provides additional experiences. The extension office organizes the annual public speaking and presentation competition giving 4-H members the chance to display what they have learned. We also host the Fairfax County Hippology Competition. Competitions afford youth the opportunity to exhibit their skills and get valuable feedback on how to improve for next year. Extension also organizes an annual overnight camp, providing youth a week-long fun, safe, educational environment. 4-H is also involved in the embryology and Ready, Set, Grow! school enrichment programs. During school enrichment, extension is involved directly in the classroom with the participants actively engaged in learning the material. Using the school enrichment delivery method, 4-H is able to impact the lives of many more youth in the community. These experiences provide youth opportunities for afterschool activities, development, leadership opportunities, and community involvement, all while learning skills that they will rely on for the rest of their lives.

### **Issue #5: Food Safety and Preservation**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 76 million people in the United States become sick with foodborne illnesses annually: 325,000 are hospitalized, and 5,000 die each year. Foodborne illnesses are typically caused by food prepared improperly. People who become sick with such illnesses are less productive in both their professional and home lives. In Fairfax County, as in the United States as a whole, *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* were the most commonly reported causes of foodborne illness over the last 10 years. The 2009 Fairfax County incidence rates for foodborne illness were comparable to the statewide and national rates (CDC, Preliminary FoodNet, 2010). In the community survey, one responder said that food safety was so important that volunteers across all program areas should be trained.

Extension addresses this issue through education on the five behaviors identified by the CDC to prevent most foodborne illness outbreaks: purchasing food from safe sources, cooking food correctly, holding food at proper temperatures, using uncontaminated equipment, and practicing good personal hygiene. Food safety is incorporated into every nutrition program, including FNP classes. Extension provides food safety training for professionals and community members serving the public. Trained FCS agents and Master Food Volunteers

provide food preservation programs at community centers and other partner groups throughout the county.

### **Issue #6: Edible Food Production/Local Food Initiative**

With the help of Virginia Cooperative Extension, the local foods movement throughout the commonwealth has gained momentum in support of Virginia agriculture. This movement not only promotes green, sustainable agriculture, but also contributes to Virginia's economy. Even in urban areas such as Fairfax County, residents want to grow their own food, eat more locally grown foods or know how far it traveled.

VCE Master Gardeners and Master Food Volunteers promote programs to eat more green and local foods. Master Gardener and Master Food Volunteers facilitate education programs at schools, community gardens and farmers markets. Connections are made with growing your own food and nutritious eating habits as a healthy lifestyle.

### **Issue #7: Transportation**

Transportation is a critical component of self-sufficiency and impacts youth, family, and senior issues. Everyday transportation is a challenge; geographic distance and traffic congestion are major barriers for VCE program participants. This is especially true for the working poor, elderly, persons with disabilities, or those wishing to access services.

VCE's role is limited in this issue. We collaborate with FASTRAN, a County transportation service, part of Neighborhood and Community Services. Transportation continues to be an issue that surfaced in our 2013 community needs assessment survey. In the fast-paced urban environment of Fairfax County, most residents wish there were more hours in the day. Residents find themselves with challenges such as needing to avoid traffic jams and caring for their children as well as their aging parents.

### **Issue #8: Parenting and Financial Education**

Parenting and Financial Education are key components of FCS Programming, and these issues were important to community survey respondents. Poor family management practices are defined as parents failing to communicate clear expectations for behavior, and parents failing to monitor and supervise their children (knowing where they are and with whom they are occupied). Children exposed to poor family management are at greater risk of substance abuse, violence, delinquency, school drop-out or general failure.

In Fairfax County, the Department of Family Services, Department of Housing and Department of Adoption and Foster Care focus on programs for these issues. Our FCS agent works in Fairfax County only 60% of her time. Instead of parenting and financial education, Fairfax County's Neighborhood and Community Services leadership has asked VCE to focus our limited resources on pressing issues related to food, nutrition and health, as well as food safety and preservation.