



**Virginia Cooperative Extension**

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# Situation Analysis Report

## New Kent County

# 2013

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## Introduction

New Kent conducted a comprehensive situation analysis during the fall of 2013. The New Kent Extension Leadership Council along with the office staff developed a Qualtrics Survey to gather information from the residents. Groups were specifically targeted to receive the survey link. Beside the Extension Leadership Council other groups invited to participate were: Master Gardeners, Friends of Extension email list, farmers, New Kent University participants, and New Kent County's Outreach Council. The survey link was placed on the New Kent County website and the Virginia Cooperative Extension New Kent webpage. This report came out of that survey, along with key informant interviews.

## Unit Profile

New Kent County is home to 18,806 people according to the 2010 Census Data and is comprised of about 183 square miles of land and 21 square miles of water. It is located in the Virginia Coastal Plain, between the Richmond and Hampton Roads Metro Area. Interstate 64 runs east and west the length of the county, essentially bisecting it, and county residents can be in downtown Richmond or Newport News area within 30 to 45 minutes. New Kent's location gives it a reputation as a bedroom community with 75% of the workforce commuting to the Richmond/Petersburg area, and 16% working in the Hampton Roads area. It is bounded by the Pamunkey and York Rivers to the north and east, and the Chickahominy River to the south and west. The counties of Hanover, King William, King and Queen, James City, Charles City and Henrico all surround New Kent County. There are two rail lines that run the length of the county but no stops are available for the citizens.

The 2010 Census Data for New Kent County reports the gender distribution as 51.1% male and 48.9% female. The County is 81% white and 16% black or African American. The median age for the county is 42. Twenty-seven percent of the population is over 55 years of age. Another 20% of the population makes up the school age group. The 2010 median family income was \$71,198, which is above Virginia's median of \$62,391.

Farming and forestry have been prominent to the New Kent County economy for many years. However, trends are slowly changing for the agricultural and forestry industries. In 2012, there were three farms in New Kent County that were 1,000 or more acres in size. The current trend in New Kent County is to see small acreage niche farms. Corn, soybeans and small grains are the main crops with gross cash receipts of \$7,000,000, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. Forest is the dominant feature of the New Kent County landscape, and covers approximately 72% of the county. A large portion of the county is in conservation programs like Agricultural and Forestal Districts.

The total number of housing units in New Kent County has increased by 80.84% from 1990 to November 2007. The median house value in 2006 was \$235,000, compared to \$128,100 in 2000, which constitutes an 83.45% increase in only six years. The housing market has declined with the economic down turn but a slight increase has begun in 2013.

New Kent County operates four public schools: G.W. Watkins Elementary, New Kent Elementary, New Kent Middle and New Kent High School. The county is investigating ways to open a fifth school to meet the growing needs of the school system. All schools are fully accredited by the Virginia Department of Education and comply with the Virginia Standards of Accreditation, the Virginia Standards of Quality, and the Virginia Standards of Learning. Eighty-six percent of residents are high school graduates or higher. Twenty-three percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

The Parks and Recreation Department has expanded their park facilities from one, Wahrani Nature Trail, to include three more facilities: Eltham Battlefields, Quinton Community Center, and Quinton Community Park which offers a variety of activities for youth, adults and seniors. Land for another park has been acquired and planning is in the initial stages. Accessibility to the school fields are limited due to heavy usage by school sports teams and little league programs.

There are several recreational areas in the county. Boating and fishing are very popular on the rivers and at Chickahominy Lake. The Chickahominy River is a water supply for Newport News. Also there is a large camp ground.

The western end of the county has the largest population area and the largest number of small businesses. Most of the businesses are service providers. The possible approval of a third truck stop is causing concern about the traffic flow off of Interstate 64.

## **Community and Resident Perspectives**

The New Kent Extension Leadership Council was an informal focus group which helped to develop the survey. They identified the following as key issues: obesity, niche farms, aging population, healthy behaviors, and agriculture technology.

New Kent's Comprehensive Plan listed four overarching goals:

- Preserve the County's existing rural character
- Protect the natural environment
- Encourage responsible economic development with a target of realizing thirty percent of local tax revenues from business sources by the year 2040
- Maintain as low a real property tax rate as possible into the future

We also conducted a few informal key informants' interviews. The New Kent Qualtrics Survey was our primary source of information. There were 46 on-line surveys completed.

**New Kent County Qualtrics Survey  
Closed End Questions**

1. Land Use	30
2. Natural Resources	30
3. Water Quality	30
4. Community Planning	29
5. Emergency Preparedness	29
6. Health	28
7. Environment	26
8. Science & Technology	26
9. Community Services	25
10. Agriculture Technology	24
11. Careers	24
12. Leadership/Life Skills Decisions	24
13. Small Business/Entrepreneurs	24

**Summary of Opened End Questions  
(Number of Issues that Topic Appear in)**

1. Emergency Preparedness	5
2. Community Planning	4
3. Youth Volunteers & school drop out	4
4. Careers	3
5. Horticulture/ Ag Production	3
6. Environment	2
7. Natural Resources	2
8. Wildlife	2
9. Obesity	2
10. Leadership	2
11. Before & After School	2
12. Forestry	2
13. Aging	2

## Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and resident perspectives data from above, the following top priority issues were identified for New Kent County. We chose to group some of the issues since they are so interrelated.

### Issue 1: Emergency Preparedness

Within the past 10 years, New Kent has experienced some very serious weather conditions from an ice storm, tornadoes, and hurricanes. Citizens are very concerned about emergency preparation. After Hurricane Irene in 2010, House of Delegate member, Chris Peace held a Town Hall meeting with citizens. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) provided some educational information on preparedness. Our involvement was well received.

Most of this issue rest with the County's Emergency Services Department but VCE can provide some educational publications. There is a need for development of more educational information by VCE. Also, VCE is heavily involved in the Surry Nuclear Plant drills. In addition, we canvas storm damage and report to various agencies.

### Issue 2: Natural Resources

Citizens caring for the natural resources of New Kent County is synonymous with protecting their way of life. Forestry, wildlife, and water quality were mentioned. Numerous creeks as well as the Pamunkey, York, and Chickahominy River need surface water quality protection. Most people in the county depend on ground water for personal household use. This is a shared water resource that also needs protection through awareness and education. Many land owners manage forest lands. Timber contributes to the county economy, and provides recreation, water, wildlife, and aesthetic values for current and future generations.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) conducted a drinking water clinic in 2013 to increase knowledge about ground water and how to care for private wells. Another clinic will be held in 2014 due to public interest in the program. VCE also conducts pesticide recertification classes each year for those who hold private pesticide application licenses. These classes help protect both surface and ground water quality by teaching license holders how to apply pesticides correctly. VCE held a farm tour in 2013 to increase awareness of where food and other products from the land come from. One of the farms featured a forestry presentation.

### Issue 3: Environment

Production agriculture is big business in New Kent County. Producers grow crops on about 17, 000 acres. These farms contribute to the rural setting by creating pastoral scenery that citizens and tourists alike want to preserve. The farmers protect the environment using no-till practices, fertilizing at agronomic rates, and applying pesticides only as needed.

Alternative agriculture producing local food was identified as a need in New Kent County. Some citizens want to produce food in gardens for their family. However, there is growing

interest in small farms engaging in commercial alternative agriculture. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) works with Virginia State University to bring small farm income ideas to the county. In addition, VCE will be conducting workshops in raised bed gardening, fruit tree pruning, and grape production in 2014. In 2013, VCE worked with 2 small farm vegetable growers to authenticate that their crops were grown locally enabling them to sell at the West Point Farmers Market.

#### **Issue 4: Community Planning – Land Use**

There is a divide in the county in maintaining the rural character of New Kent and expanding the number of businesses to offset the increasing population and the tax burden. There has been an increase in suburban type subdivisions and strip residential and commercial developments. Citizens are looking for a responsible balance. Also of concern is which type of businesses that the County will attract.

Most of this issue rest with the County's Planning Department. New Kent VCE does not have the resources to currently address this issue. We can work with the community viability specialists to research ways to be of assistance and locating available resources.

#### **Issue 5: Community Services – Health, Youth, and Aging**

The residents of New Kent expressed an interest in several community service areas but they primarily focused on health, youth population and aging population. Several of the health comments evolved around aging concerns.

VCE does not have the resources to currently address the aging issue. There is not an FCS agent in this unit. Last year we lost our youth Food Nutrition Program position because of numbers.

Concerns were expressed about youth and life skills and decision making. Also some residents were looking for youth activities that were not sports related. Other comments were centered on dropouts and/or volunteers.

4-H has a place to work and coordinate programs for the youth of New Kent. Currently 4-H works with youth between the ages of 5 and 18. There is a Cloverbud program, a program for all 1<sup>st</sup> graders, a 4-H Club at the Middle School and one community club. Junior 4-H camp is also available for the youth of New Kent. There is room for further expansion of the program if volunteers step up.