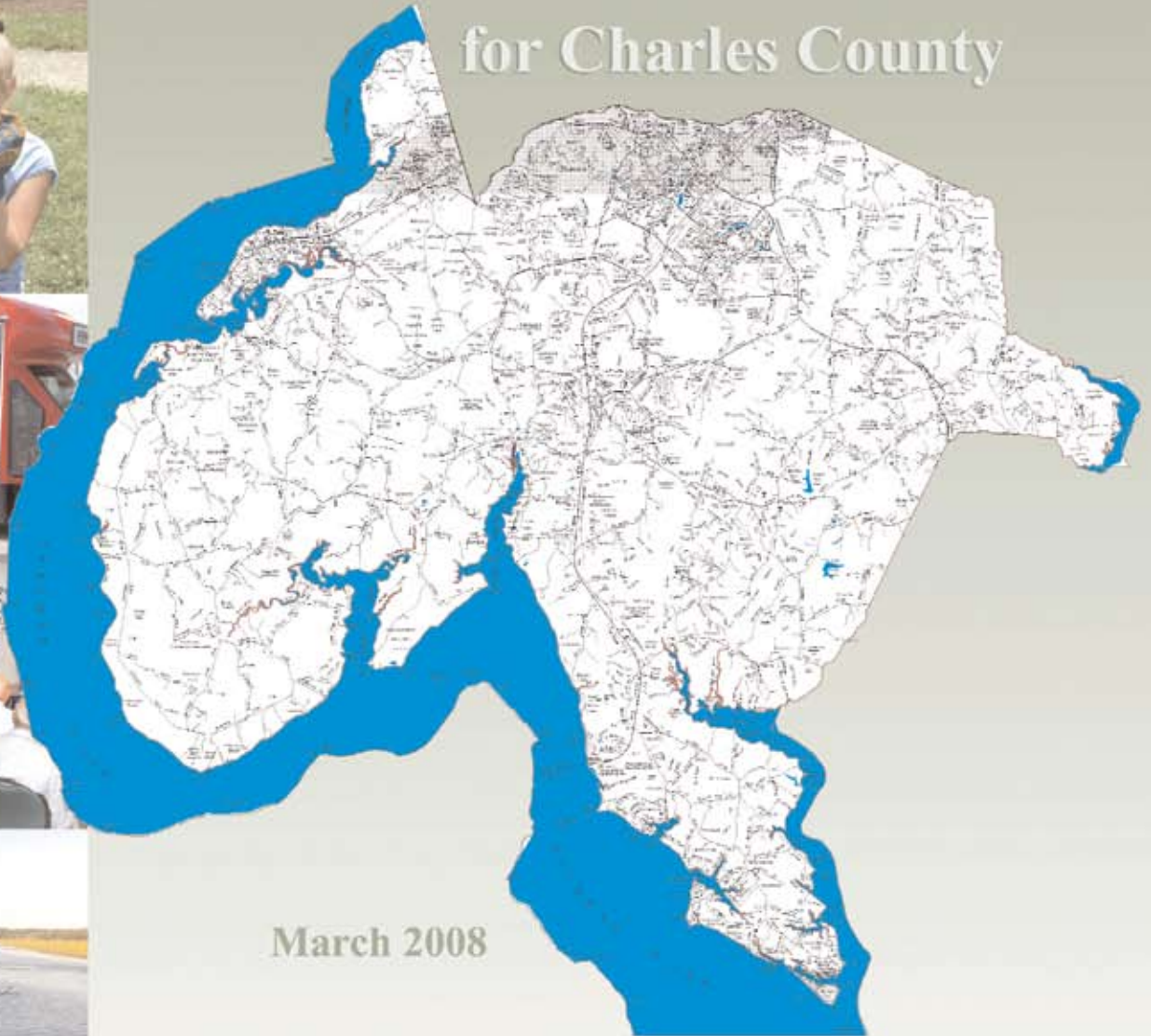


Priority Needs Assessment

for Charles County



March 2008



Acknowledgements

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COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF CHARLES COUNTY (CFCC)

Gretchen Heinze, *Executive Director*
Francis H. Chaney, II, *President*

COMMISSIONERS OF CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND

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Edith J. Patterson, *Vice President*
Reuben B. Collins, II
Samuel N. Graves, Jr.
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UNITED WAY OF CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND

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Lawrence Wright, *Chairman of the Board*

CHANEY ENTERPRISES/CHANEY FOUNDATION

Francis H. Chaney, II, *Chairman of the Board*

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Maura Cook, Charles County Board of Education
Ellen Flowers-Fields, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
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Dorothy Harper, United Way of Charles County
Gretchen Heinze, Community Foundation of Charles County
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Wanda Wills Woodland, Charles County Branch NAACP
Mike Zabko, American Red Cross – Southern Maryland Chapter

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES AND THE MANY RESIDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE COMMUNITY FORUMS

A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

The Community Foundation of Charles County, in partnership with the Charles County Commissioners and the United Way of Charles County, is delighted to present to you the *Charles County Priority Needs Assessment*. The report represents a collaborative effort to look at the community's most pressing needs in the areas of Arts and Culture, Education and Scholarship, Environment, General Community Improvement, Health and Wellness, and Youth Initiatives. It also represents a significant first step in addressing these needs through a collaborative partnership of three key community organizations.

Building on information and insights into community needs available through published sources, the report further examined these issues through a review process, community input and statistical data framing the needs in a broader context. The *Charles County Priority Needs Assessment* represents a building block for future community focused efforts to address these pressing human service and social issues affecting Charles County.

We retained the services of Health Management Consultants, Inc. (HMC) to lead our work on this challenging project. We would like to thank Mildred Brooke, CEO, and the staff of HMC who worked with us to define a process and develop a document that would serve our needs. We appreciate their professionalism and flexibility, which enabled us to establish a process and outcome that would be in the best interests of the community. We'd also like to thank the Waldorf Jaycees for their support during the development of the report. And lastly, but certainly not least, we'd like to thank our dedicated work group and all of the many community members who participated in our public forums. Without them, this report would not have been possible.

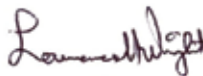
It is our sincere hope that the efforts made as a result of this report will continue to improve the quality of life in Charles County for years to come.



Wayne Cooper, President
Charles County Commissioners



Frank Chaney, President
Community Foundation of Charles County



Lawrence Wright, Chairperson
United Way of Charles County



United Way of Charles County



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
OF CHARLES COUNTY

Building Communities Within

Project Partners

Community Foundation of Charles County

3055 Old Washington Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Phone: (301) 885-0108

www.charlescommunityfoundation.org

The Community Foundation of Charles County is a non-profit, 501(c)3, public charity created by and for the people of Charles County. The Foundation is overseen by a diverse volunteer board and operated by paid professional staff with expertise in understanding the community's needs, opportunities and resources. The mission of the Foundation is to "improve the quality of life for the community of Charles County by aligning philanthropic interests with community needs through stewardship and collaboration." To achieve the mission, the Foundation works with families, individuals, businesses, attorneys, and estate and financial planners to design gift plans that fit every economic situation, ensuring that donors receive the most benefit from their charitable contributions and that their philanthropic dollars are used to the fullest potential. Our vision: To make Charles County the best place to live and give.

Charles County Government

200 Baltimore Street P.O. Box 2150

La Plata, MD 20646

Phone: (301) 870-3000

www.charlescounty.org

The mission of Charles County Government is to provide our citizens the highest quality service possible in a timely, efficient, and courteous manner. To achieve this goal, our government must be operated in an open and accessible atmosphere, be based on comprehensive long- and short-term planning, and have an appropriate managerial organization tempered by fiscal responsibility. Vision statement: Charles County is a place where all people thrive and businesses grow and prosper; where the preservation of our heritage and environment is paramount; where government services to its citizens are provided at the highest level of excellence; and where the quality of life is the best in the nation.

United Way of Charles County, Inc.

10250 La Plata Road P.O. Box 2141

La Plata, MD 20646

Phone: (301) 609-4844 Fax: (301) 392-9286

www.unitedwaycharles.org

The United Way of Charles County is celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2008. We have been providing monetary and volunteer support to Partner Agencies in Charles County for the past 25 years to help them fund the programs necessary to provide services to the men, women, children, and families in our community. Our mission is: "To provide all citizens of Charles County the means to invest in their community to bring about positive changes in peoples' lives." The donations we receive from businesses, corporations, organizations, individuals, and through payroll deduction campaigns help make an impact in our community to make Charles County a better place to live, work, and raise our families.

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The Community

OVERVIEW

Statistics...

Total population,
2006140,416

Households, 2006 . .48,663

Persons per
household, 20062.85

Average family,
size, 20063.23

Median household
income, 2006\$80,179

Unemployment
Rate, 20062.90%

Average
Annual Wage\$36,036

Five top jobs in the County...

Food Services and
Drinking Places4,704

Specialty Trade
Contractors2,537

General Merchandise
Stores2,355

Professional, Scientific,
and Technical
Services1,806

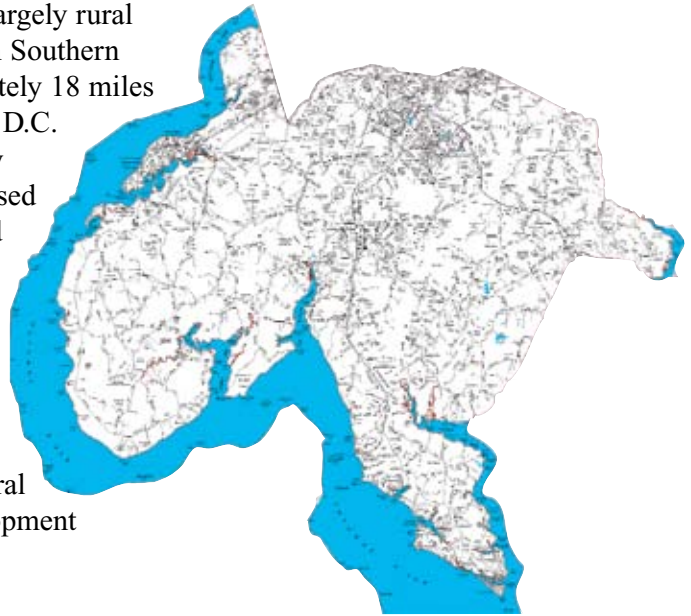
Ambulatory Health
Care Services1,609

Retail sales,
2002 (\$1000)1,939,847

Retail sales per
capita, 2002\$15,130

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Charles County is a largely rural jurisdiction located in Southern Maryland, approximately 18 miles south of Washington, D.C. Agriculture and many years of a tobacco-based economy have shaped the landscape of the County, which is now a mixture of suburban development in the northwest section of the County interspersed with older rural and semi-rural development patterns elsewhere.



The County is comprised of 461 square miles of land, of which more than 60 percent is forested. Bounded by more than 296 miles of tidal coastline, the County offers many areas of natural beauty and provides excellent opportunities for camping and fishing. One of the largest populations of Bald Eagles in the State resides in Charles County.

In addition to its natural resources, Charles County is home to many points of cultural and historic interest. Several historic sites are preserved within the County, such as the La Plata Train Station, Port Tobacco Courthouse and a one-room schoolhouse. The residences of several prominent citizens are also preserved. In the Dr. Samuel Mudd House, John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln, was treated while in flight from authorities. The historic homes of Thomas Stone, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and General William Smallwood, an important military leader in the American Revolution, are also preserved. The County hosts an American Indian Cultural Center and Museum, as well as an African American Heritage Society.

As a result of its proximity to Washington, D.C., the County has experienced rapid growth as the suburbs of the nation's capital have expanded. Significant changes in the demographic makeup of the population have occurred along with this growth, including an expanding minority population and an increasing number of elderly citizens. The decline of the tobacco industry has resulted in significant changes to the local economy and a continuing decline in the land used for agriculture. This population influx, coupled with the economic shift and demographic changes, will continue to offer significant new opportunities and challenges for the County.

The Community

PEOPLE

Charles County is one of the fastest growing jurisdictions in Maryland. Also located in the fastest growing region of the State, the County was ranked sixth among all jurisdictions in percentage of population growth between 2005 and 2006. Looking at an extended period of time between 2000 and 2006, the County was the second fastest growing county in the State with a 16.5% increase in population. Population density has increased by 15% in the period from 2000 to 2005. While there are only 307 people per square mile over the total area of the County, there are 821 people per square mile of developed land. Population density is concentrated in the northern end of the County.

For the most part, Charles County and its citizens are well resourced. On most major quality of life indicators, the County tends to rank above the State of Maryland which, in turn, tends to rank about the majority of other states. This does not mean, however, that there are not citizens and families in Charles County with significant issues and challenges.

With increasing population comes an inevitable increase in social needs and demand for services. This is true not only for citizens who are in financial need, but for all citizens of the County. Housing needs to be expanded. Infrastructure, including roads, water and sewer service and solid waste disposal must be expanded and improved to meet increasing demands. Police, social and health services must increase. Retail, food and entertainment venues will also have to expand to meet the increasing needs.

As part of the response to such needs, and in order to improve the quality of life in the County, the sponsors of this needs assessment have embarked on a process to identify the most pressing needs of the County. It is truly hoped that this report will serve as a tool for not only the partner organizations, but also for the entire community in encouraging conversation and dialogue among citizens and organizations to bring about community change.



For every 100 people in Charles County,

- 51 are female
- 49 are male
- 60 are white
- 35 are African American
- 2 are Asian
- 3 are of Hispanic origin

- 7 are under 5 years of age
- 24 are aged 5 to 19
- 36 are aged 20 to 44
- 25 are aged 45 to 64
- 8 are aged 65 or over

- 7 live below the poverty level
- 15 are disabled
- 5 speak a language other than English at home

Of 100 citizens aged 25 or older

- 86 are high school graduates
- 20 are college graduates

Source: Census Bureau, *Quick Facts*, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24017.html>.

Priority Needs Assessment

METHODOLOGY

In 2006, the Community Foundation of Charles County (CFCC) was created. The mission of the new foundation was to bring together individuals interested in assisting with ongoing improvement in the quality of life in Charles County. By aligning philanthropic interests with community needs through a process of stewardship and collaboration, the new community foundation will have a significant impact on the quality of life in the County.

Early in its formation, CFCC joined forces with the Commissioners of Charles County, Maryland and the United Way of Charles County, Inc. to perform a county-wide needs assessment. The goal of the needs assessment process was to identify the community's most pressing needs in the six interest areas established by CFCC. The report would serve not only as a tool for the partner organizations to use in their philanthropic activities, but also as a valuable resource to the entire community, influencing development decisions, assisting organizations in their planning and encouraging conversation and dialogue among citizens to bring about community change. Collective efforts between public, private and non-profit organizations will be necessary to address the pressing needs of our community.

The Community Foundation's six identified areas of interest, corresponding to those in this report, are:

- Arts and Culture

- Education and Scholarship

- Environment

- General Community Improvement

- Health and Wellness

- Youth Initiatives

A steering committee, consisting of representatives of both the public and private sector, was assembled in early 2007. Representatives appointed to the committee share a commitment to improving life in Charles County and are engaged, either personally or professionally, in fields relating to the six areas of interest. Both individually and collectively, they have extensive knowledge of the community, including both its strengths and areas in which improvement could be achieved.

In order to both complete the project in the most efficient manner and to take maximum advantage of similar previous efforts, the project was designed using existing data and information as its foundation. The steering committee helped to identify and provide reports, studies, plans, program documents, needs assessments and other works that described and defined needs in the focus areas. By reviewing this existing literature, most of which was very recently completed and involved processes with significant stakeholder input, a solid knowledge base, as well as a basis for discussion, was established.

Priority Needs Assessment

The broad array of plans and needs assessment documents presented in the review include:

- *ARC of Southern Maryland- FY 2007 Goals*
- *Arts Vision 2020: Arts Action Team of Charles County*
- *Charles County Area Agency on Aging*
- *Charles County Comprehensive Plan, 2006*
- *Charles County Health Assessment, 2005*
- *Charles County Human Services Partnership: Community Needs Assessment 2005*
- *Charles County Historic Preservation Plan, July 2004*
- *Charles County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan, 2006*
- *Charles County Public Safety Partnership Community Assessment*
- *Charles County Transportation Development Plan*
- *College of Southern Maryland-Communication*
- *A Community Assessment and Report on Gang Activity in Charles County, MD 2006: Charles County Sheriff's Office*
- *Community Development Housing Plan for Charles County*
- *Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2005*
- *Southern Maryland Community Action Agency 2001 Needs Assessment*

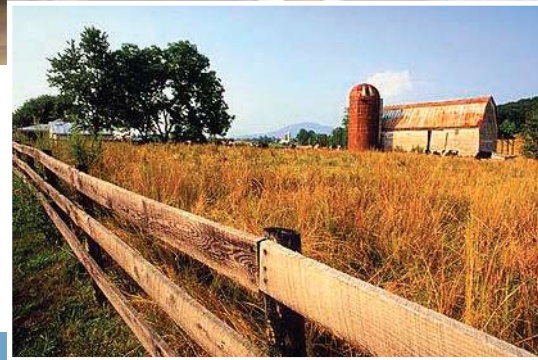
Priority Needs Assessment

Once extracted from the documents, the preliminary list of needs was presented to the steering committee for review and refinement. After several facilitated discussions, an enhanced list of needs was generated. Additional needs were identified in some areas, similar and related needs were combined and other needs were restated to provide clarification.

To tap an even broader range of expertise, this enhanced list of needs was circulated to an expanded group of experts, identified by the steering committee members, as well as to members of the general population. A ballot listing each of the needs within the content areas was prepared and circulated to members of the steering committee. Committee members were charged with obtaining input from both coworkers and other appropriate stakeholders and leaders. Based on this input, steering committee members were asked to select the six most pressing needs in each of the six focus areas.

Data was aggregated from the ballots that were submitted and a revised listing of needs was prepared in each of the six focus areas. Once again, the list was enhanced through the addition of some items as well as the consolidation and restatement of other items. This revised list served as a template for guiding discussions with a broader group of experts and the citizens of Charles County.

In September of 2007, a series of four focus group meetings were conducted to gain additional public input on the needs. The meetings targeted two specific groups of people—service providers and the general public at large. For the service provider sessions, three focus areas were discussed at two separate meetings—the areas of Arts and Culture, the Environment and General Community Improvement were discussed at the first meeting, while the second session hosted discussions on Education and Scholarship, Health and Wellness and Youth Initiatives. At the two meetings held for the public at large, the needs in all six focus areas were presented and discussed.



Priority Needs Assessment

Each of the four sessions began with a brief review of the purpose of the needs assessment, an explanation of the process, and the needs that had been identified to date. One by one, the revised listing of needs were presented to attendees, who were encouraged to discuss and provide comment on those needs. As had been done during previous reviews, the lists were enhanced through the addition of some items, needs were consolidated and restated as necessary, and clarification was added in some instances. Through a balloting process, attendees were then asked to identify the six most pressing needs in each of the focus areas being considered.

After the four sessions were completed, the ballots were tallied and a ranked listing of needs was prepared. Rankings were based on the aggregate number of times the need was identified as a priority during the four focus group meetings. The steering committee was called on once again to evaluate the results and provide their expertise in identifying both existing resources and potential data sources to help frame the needs. This additional data will help provide insight into the extent of the needs, the sources or factors contributing to them, and/or potential tools for evaluation of the current status in the need area and the measurement of progress toward the resolution of the need.

The results of the process are presented in the following pages.



Arts & Culture

PRIORITY NEED:

PRESERVE AND ENHANCE HERITAGE

Opportunities

- Educate the public on historic and cultural resources, and their importance
- Promote existing historical and cultural sites
- Continue documenting the County's historic and cultural resources
- Support new and existing preservation programs at the State, Federal and local levels
- Offer incentives to encourage preservation programs and projects, possibly in the form of tax breaks
- Support privately owned historic resources

Background

Chartered in 1658, Charles County boasts a wealth of historical and cultural sites. These include 716 documented archaeological sites and 1000 resources on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Places, composed of cultural landscapes, tobacco barns, schoolhouses, churches, and early commercial buildings, just to name a few. Notable historic properties include the Dr. Samuel Mudd House, home of the physician who treated President Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, and the Thomas Stone National Historic Site, home of a signer of the Declaration of Independence. At one time, agriculture was the main County industry and tobacco was the main crop. Current trends reveal a major social, cultural and economic shift as the County transitions away from its centuries-old tradition of tobacco production.

Located in the fastest growing region of the State, pressure from population growth as well as the shift away from tobacco are presenting significant challenges and threats to these sites and resources. With population increasing at an average annual rate of over 2% between the 1990 census and the present, and with the percentage of land area dedicated to housing and total developed acreage in the County rising, the threat of losing these connections to our past are a significant concern.



Dr. Samuel A. Mudd house

PRIORITY NEED:

INCREASE COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION AMONG ARTS-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

Opportunities

- Continue the excellent groundwork of networking, communication and collaboration among art groups
- Extend communication and collaboration efforts with surrounding jurisdictions

Background

Currently, many of the arts and arts-related organizations within Charles County are member organizations of the Charles County Arts Alliance (CCAA), the arts council of the county. Working collaboratively, many of these organizations along with individual artists and other interested arts stakeholders, have established "Arts Vision 2020: A Strategic Plan for the Arts in Charles County." The beginnings of collaborative communication efforts can be seen by visiting the website of the CCAA where a common calendar of arts and cultural events is maintained, and where links can be found to the websites of the many arts organizations within the county, including: Ballet Arts Academy at the Old Waldorf School, Black Box Theatre, Black Leadership Council for Excellence, Chesapeake Choral Arts Society, Christ Church Concerts, College of Southern Maryland Fine Arts Center and /Connections /Literary Magazine, Mattawoman Creek Art Center, Port Tobacco Players, Southern Maryland Concert Band, Southern Maryland Carousel Group,... a list that continues to grow.

Arts & Culture

PRIORITY NEED:

ESTABLISH PERMANENT AND MOBILE VENUES

Background

Currently, there are several permanent arts venues in Charles County. Three groups, the Port Tobacco Players, the Black Box Theatre, and the College of Southern Maryland Fine Arts Center operate performing arts venues, while the Mattawoman Creek Art Center provides a home for the visual arts. At times, other venues serve as hosts to artistic endeavors as well. All too often, however, whether permanent or temporary, these venues are not near population centers.

Opportunities

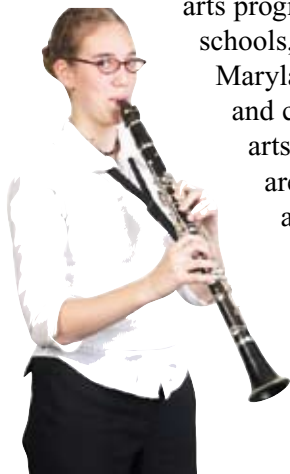
- Provide additional venues, including multiple media venues, for artistic events, especially in more populated areas of the County
- Establish mobile venues to enhance arts accessibility throughout the County

PRIORITY NEED:

INCREASE ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Background

Charles County has a firmly established tradition of including arts in its public school curriculum. In addition to arts programs in elementary and secondary schools, the College of Southern Maryland offers both degree programs and continuing education courses in the arts. A limited number of scholarships are available to students who will be attending college to pursue a career in the arts.



Opportunities

- Assure that funding for the arts (music, visual arts, drama, dance and literature) remains an integral part of both the public school program and private school curricula
- Pursue opportunities for additional community-based, educational arts programs for all ages (such as inter-generational opportunities through which youth can be educated by adult artists in the community)

PRIORITY NEED:

IMPROVE ARTS PROMOTION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Background

As indicated in the discussion of communication and collaboration, the arts and arts-related organizations of Charles County have made significant progress in collaboratively publicizing their events using electronic media (websites and electronic newsletters), and individual organizations promote their own events as well; however, there are populations within the County that do not have or employ access to high-speed internet. Other methods of promoting art events, such as newspapers, radio and TV may also reach only limited audiences. Geographic and other limitations, including transportation to the various venues, sometimes hamper public outreach efforts to provide arts opportunities in all areas of the County.

Opportunities

- Provide additional advertising and promotion of the arts to extend the core of individuals who take advantage of artistic offerings
- Extend public outreach efforts to ensure that arts opportunities are made accessible and known to all areas of the County

Education & Scholarship

PRIORITY NEED:

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Opportunities

- Provide affordable workforce housing opportunities for teachers
- Support higher education courses (continuing education opportunities) within the County and region
- Expand the loan and scholarship programs for aspiring teachers
- Provide affordable child care opportunities for teachers
- Assure that teachers receive competitive salaries and benefits
- Assure a positive and affirming working environment
- Provide incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, for teachers to come to and remain in the County

Background

One of the most pressing educational needs identified by all groups was the necessity of retaining and recruiting quality teachers. Nationally, 50% of all teachers leave the field within five years of entering it. Maryland loses 7,000 teachers each year. Charles County reports a retention rate of 84%, losing 300-400 teachers each year. Retaining good teachers is advantageous both program-

matically and economically. Returning teachers require far less training than new teachers and require far less of administrators' time.



In addition to the initiatives taken by the schools, several scholarships have been established for Charles County residents who elect to enter the teaching profession. The Retired School Personnel Association funds one such scholarship. Others include the Thomas B. R. Mudd Teacher Scholarship at the College of Southern Maryland, the

Teacher Education Assistance Grant, and the Kate Donahue Scholarship Fund.

PRIORITY NEED:

MORE SCHOLARSHIPS AND ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE

Opportunities

- Maintain and expand current scholarship opportunities
- Publicize available opportunities across all schools and to others considering higher education
- Ensure that parents are aware of available resources to search for scholarship/assistance opportunities
- Promote the Cooperating Collection of the Foundation Center, accessible at all Charles County libraries
- Form collaborative partnerships with the Board of Education to promote awareness of sources and resources



Background

In addition to the college-bound students from a class of almost 2,000 seniors graduating annually from Charles County public schools, there are many other residents enrolled in higher education programs. Graduating seniors from Charles County Public Schools are awarded a total of \$35 million in scholarships, on average, annually. Most of this money is in the form of institutional grants, but there are a significant number of awards offered through local individuals, organizations and businesses. The Charles County Scholarship Fund acts as an umbrella organization for over 40 local scholarships, utilizing a common application and geared specifically for high school seniors. Some have requirements and are earmarked for students studying a particular major or attending a certain college. There are also scholarships available through the College of Southern Maryland and other State and national organizations that are open to all county residents.

Each high school has a college and career center, with a full-time staff member who assists students and parents with the scholarship and financial aid process. Schools also track broader scholarship opportunities and publish them on websites and in newsletters. The Charles County Public Library has recently obtained a subscription to the Cooperating Collection of the Foundation Center, providing access to a database of scholarship and other funding opportunities.

Education & Scholarship

PRIORITY NEED:

HELP PARENTS INCREASE SCHOOL READINESS

Background

Two programs designed to assist children and their parents increase school readiness are the Headstart Program and Pre-Kindergarten programs. Charles County actively provides these services to many of its children and parents. Currently, Charles County has 43.9 Head Start slots for every 1,000 children under the age of 5. This compares with a Statewide rate of 27.4 slots. In Pre-Kindergarten, Charles County has 87.5 slots for every 1,000 children under the age of 5, compared with 73.1 slots Statewide.

Opportunities

- Expand resources to meet needs
- Make pre-kindergarten available to more children
- Head Start services should be available to those children at risk, especially those living under the poverty level and a majority of those in single-parent households

PRIORITY NEED:

ENHANCE SPECIFIC PROGRAMS - MATH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, HEALTH & WELLNESS, AND ARTS

Background

Enhancement of several specific programs, including mathematics, science and engineering, health and wellness, and arts, was also perceived as a pressing priority for Charles County. Additional life skills programs, as well as programs teaching skills necessary to satisfy the requirements of the local workforce, were also viewed as priorities. Currently, Charles County public schools offer courses in all of these areas. In some areas, specialized secondary schools have been established.



Opportunities

- Assure that science, math and engineering curricula remain strong and responsive to local, regional and national demands
- Ensure that arts education is supported and expanded
- From a community activism point-of-view, remain actively involved in the County's educational system

PRIORITY NEED:

INCREASE COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Background

Currently, several schools and systems operate in Charles County. At the primary and secondary level, in addition to the Public Schools, there are also several private schools and charter schools. Some children are home schooled. The College of Southern Maryland operates within Charles County, as do several Head Start Programs. There are many partnerships and programs that exist across these boundaries. Communication is maintained and collaboration fostered through several networks and regular established meetings. Such efforts are essential to assure that children and their families transitioning among systems are well served.

Opportunities

- Continue both the formal and informal communication systems and networks among the various schools and systems within the County
- Expand and strengthen existing partnerships and programs

Environment

PRIORITY NEED:

MAINTAIN PLANNED LAND USE PATTERNS

Opportunities

- Monitor compliance with the development programs and plans
- Engage broad-based support to participate in land use plans, programs and decisions
- Ensure adequate funding of related activities
- Manage growth and sprawl
- Model land use efforts on successful, proven models



Background

Through a comprehensive planning process, Charles County has adopted specific plans for the management and regulation of development, including appropriate locations for growth. An area of approximately 50,000 acres in the north/northwestern portion of the County, along with the Towns of La Plata and Indian Head, are designated as Development Districts and intended to be the principal centers of population, service and employment for the County. Designated as either rural and/or agricultural, the majority of the County's remaining land area is intended to remain rural and support the agricultural industry, protect the natural resources, preserve open space, and serve as an area for only limited housing.

According to the *Charles County Comprehensive Plan (2006)*, land in the County's rural areas is being consumed by development at a much faster rate than that of land in the County's designated growth areas. Although the majority of new residential lots being created are located in the intended areas, the majority of the land being developed is located in the rural, agricultural areas.

PRIORITY NEED:

REDUCE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Opportunities

- Educate the public on the importance of natural resource conservation and preservation
- Offer incentives and provide new tools to encourage and enhance natural resource protection programs
- Support existing preservation programs at the State, Federal and local levels

Background

Charles County is rich with natural resources. Rivers, streams, marshland, forests, and shoreline support a variety of plant and wildlife communities. The high percent of forest cover in the County is home to a large number of forest interior dwelling bird species. Coastal estuaries found along the 296 miles of the County's tidal shoreline serve as juvenile fish nurseries, as well as support adult fish populations. National fishing tournaments are held here and water related tourism averages over \$40 million per year in Charles County.

Another example of the County's widely recognized natural resources is the Zekiah Swamp, noted as the largest hardwood swamp in Maryland. Part of the larger Wicomico River and one of only nine rivers in Maryland designated as a Scenic River, the Zekiah received



Mattawoman Creek

the highest rating of all natural areas in the Chesapeake Bay region from the Smithsonian Institution. Collectively, these diverse environments greatly contribute to the overall beauty, quality of life and rural character of the County. As development progresses within the County, it is essential that these and other critical areas are protected.

Environment

PRIORITY NEED:

ESTABLISH CAMPAIGNS TO CLEAN WATERWAYS

Background

Among the major challenges facing Charles County is the effort to clean its waterways. Within the County are coastal brackish estuaries, freshwater streams, lakes and their upland drainage areas. Maryland has determined that all Charles County waterways are impaired for nutrients and sediment, and a few are also impaired with excessive bacteria or do not support biological communities. These impairments are typical across Maryland and are the result of land use impacts over time.

Local residents generally desire safe boating and swimming, safe and abundant seafood, scenic views, and navigable waterways. To achieve these goals, governments and community organizations develop watershed restoration plans.

Opportunities

- Build capacity for local residents to form and grow coalitions to clean up waterways, including the ability to self-organize, establish goals, raise funds and support paid positions within non-profit organizations
- Support existing campaigns, such as the annual Potomac River Cleanup sponsored by the Alice Ferguson Foundation

PRIORITY NEED:

MONITOR AND IMPROVE AIR AND WATER QUALITY

Background

Air and water quality are major issues affecting personal health, environmental health, and overall quality of life for County residents. Monitoring the air and water are necessary to determine current levels, trends and sources of pollutants. Once baseline monitoring and investigation results in findings, improvement strategies can be developed and implemented.



With respect to air quality, SCORECARD rates Charles County twentieth among Maryland's 24 jurisdictions in overall air quality. With respect to surface water quality, Federal, State, and County agencies and citizen organizations collect data on nutrients, sediment, bacteria, and other constituents to address problems at a local scale. Much of this data is posted on each sponsor's website.

Opportunities

- Educate and involve the public in air and water quality efforts
- Work with bordering counties, as well as regional organizations, to curtail local water and air pollution
- Embark on outreach efforts to include neighboring local and state jurisdictions to participate in such efforts
- Continue efforts to improve water quality, including the correction of failing septs, inflow and infiltration issues
- Promote conservation and reuse
- Support non-profits and their efforts

PRIORITY NEED:

INCREASE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Background

Environmental awareness and education are essential for individuals at all age levels and in all life situations. As in many other areas, Charles County does well with respect to the inclusion of environmental education in its public schools. The school system includes ecology in its regular curriculum and is supported by grants from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The schools also maintain the Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center. Two schools have established on-site wetlands habitats for outdoor education. There are several other environmental centers used by public and private schools. The Alice Ferguson Foundation Hard Bargain Farm operates several environmental education programs in cooperation with schools and the Izaak Walton League is developing an environmental education center which includes areas of the Zekiah and Jordan swamps.

Opportunities

- Establish wider public awareness through mass media
- Build capacity and support for environmental awareness through community education efforts
- Encourage personal action to protect the environment and decrease pollution

General Community Improvement

PRIORITY NEED:

PROVIDE A BROAD RANGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS

Opportunities

- Support community-based action strategies to address housing issues
- Ensure that zoning, building and other County programs and regulations work together to encourage and permit a broad range of housing options
- Support the goals and recommendations of the *Community Development Housing Plan for Charles County, 2005*

Background

Among the significant challenges that faces a relatively prosperous county is the provision of affordable housing to its citizens with the greatest needs. Charles County is no exception. While the population increased by over 16% in the years between the 2000 Census and 2006, housing stock increased only 12.6%. Average monthly rentals and average housing prices in Charles County were significantly above Maryland State levels in 2000. The gap has widened further recently. While Charles County housing values were about \$7,000 above Maryland levels in 2000, they are now near \$300,000, about \$20,000 above Maryland level.

For Section 8 housing support, there is a current waiting list of 2,500 individuals and families. The wait is estimated to be approximately three to five years. The price of housing in Charles County coupled with the long waiting list for assistance makes it difficult for the less fortunate citizens of the County and those with disabilities to secure affordable housing.

<u>Housing Units 2006</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Owner occupied	38,565	74%
Renter occupied	10,098	21%
Occupied housing units	48,663	95%
Vacant	2,747	5%
Total housing units	51,410	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

<u>Units and Attachments</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Single detached	37,535	73%
Single attached	6,254	12%
Two or more attached	6,862	13%
Mobile, trailer, other	759	2%
Total	51,410	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Mortgage Status and Selected Monthly Owner Costs

Median mortgage amount for units with a mortgage	\$1,913
Median rental cost for rental units	\$1,133

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Median Housing Values

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>Change</u>
Charles	\$122,000	\$153,000	\$299,167	96%
Maryland	\$115,500	\$146,000	\$280,200	92%

Median Monthly Rental Values

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>Change</u>
Charles	\$690	\$858	\$1,133	32%
Maryland	\$548	\$689	\$953	38%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

General Community Improvement

PRIORITY NEED:

DEVELOP SAFE AND EFFICIENT MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Background

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan sets the goals and objectives for a multi-modal transportation system in the County. This system consists of a roadway network strategy, expansion of the commuter bus and local bus services, preservation of a future rail transit corridor, the addition of bicycle facilities, and creating a pedestrian-friendly community. Development of a safe and efficient transportation network includes proper planning of higher density areas and mixed unit developments. By concentrating population in centralized areas, the provision of transit is more effective and promotes the preservation of natural resources in the rural areas. The combination of all these components, as well as their connectivity to each other, strives to ensure adequate mobility and accessibility for visitors and local citizens through a wide variety of transportation modes.

Planning for transportation systems is the shared responsibility of the County, State and Federal governments, along with the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, responsible for coordinating regional transportation issues. Several recent studies, including the 2004 Transit Services Staging Plan and the Southern Maryland Transit Corridor Preservation Study, have taken a detailed look at the County's transportation needs and possible solutions. The County continues to coordinate with the Maryland State Highway Administration regarding the study to select a roadway alignment to improve US 301, the major north-south corridor. Environmental impacts to the various possible locations for a bypass and/or an upgrade to existing US 301 are currently being studied. Once an alignment is selected, funding for right-of-way purchase and construction will need to be secured. In addition to the work being done on US 301, an urban design study that will comprehensively look at growth and development issues in Waldorf, including transportation, has just been undertaken. The outcome of the study will include recommendations for a safe and efficient multi-modal transportation network in Waldorf.

While over one-half of the workforce commutes to jobs outside the County, the Maryland Transportation Authority continues to add commuter bus trips each year to accommodate the growing demand for commuter service. The County's VANGO Public Transit Program provides public transportation opportunities inside the County. Since its beginnings in the early 1990's, the system has grown immensely in the number of trips per day as well as the types and locations of services it provides. Some of the ridership statistics are shown in the chart at right.

Opportunities

- Focus land use planning efforts on creating a transportation system that is interconnected and multi-modal
- Support and utilize public transportation resources to increase their efficiency and effectiveness



Route	From	To	Trips
MTA901	LaPlata/Waldorf	DC	49
907	LaPlata/Waldorf	DC	16
903	Charlotte Hall/Waldorf	DC	10
905	Charlotte Hall/Waldorf	DC	39
913	Waldorf	Suitland Federal Center	16
WMATAC18	Waldorf	Branch Ave.	17
W19	Indian Head	Southern Ave.	14

Source: Charles County Comprehensive Plan, Page 5-26, Table 5-6
<http://www.charlescounty.org/pgm/planning/plans/commplanning/-compplan/Chapter%2005%20Transportation.pdf>.

Current VanGO Ridership

	FY 1998	FY 2001	FY 2004	FY 2007
Fixed Route	42,360	146,326	388,587	448,054
Demand Response	18,460	20,336	19,288	31,141
Total Ridership	60,820	166,662	407,875	479,195

Source: Charles County Comprehensive Plan, Page 5-27, Table 5-7.

General Community Improvement

PRIORITY NEED:

DEVELOP SHELTERS, EMERGENCY/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR FAMILIES

Opportunities

- Develop a system to accurately determine the number of homeless people and families in the County
- Assess the needs for moving homeless persons into maintainable housing and support those services (may include the provision of affordable housing, support for securing and maintaining employment, or accessing available assistance for a transition from homelessness)
- Address the daily problems that homeless persons face, including the provision of food and temporary housing through the expansion of shelter resources while plans for transitions from homelessness are prepared and implemented

Background

Partially because of the shortage of affordable housing within Charles County, there is a problem with homelessness. Currently, the only available measure of this issue comes from a single Point in Time Survey. Last performed by the Charles County Human Services Partnership on January 25, 2008, the survey identified a total of 443 homeless individuals (including children), clearly an undercount. Although well coordinated with agencies and organizations dealing with homeless persons, the survey does not take into account homeless persons not seen by an agency or not in an agency's system, agencies who had homeless people in their systems but did not respond to the count, nor the homeless population that has not sought assistance from agencies in the County. A more robust system to identify the number of homeless individuals in the County, including possibly a longer term census, is needed to determine the true extent of this issue.



Many agencies and organizations currently serve the homeless population in Charles County. These include emergency and transitional housing provided to some individuals through the Department of Social Services (DSS) and two County shelters. Life Styles provided temporary shelter for 75 homeless individuals on January 25th in the Safe Nights Program. Angel's Watch serves 41 women and children. Fuller House serves 20 men. There are no established shelters which serve entire families, so in order to get shelter, homeless families must split up.

PRIORITY NEED:

EXPAND, INCREASE AND UTILIZE LIBRARIES

Opportunities

- Support both operational and capital plans for expansion of existing library space
- Expand materials, programs and services currently provided by the library
- Expand outreach services to customers on the waiting list with day care visits, homebound visits, senior centers and nursing homes
- Consider the possibility of self check-out services for the Waldorf Branch
- Expand community partnerships to increase the available services
- Promote the library to citizens by publicizing available resources and services through community agencies, organizations and corporations

Background

Currently, the Charles County Public Library operates three branches. These are located in Waldorf (P.D. Brown Memorial Branch), Indian Head (Potomac Branch) and La Plata. Both the La Plata and Potomac branches contain meeting rooms that are available to the public. A typical measure of adequate library space compares the number of borrowers with the square footage of library space, with an accepted target size of one square foot of library per borrower. The current total square footage of the three branches is 36,300 square feet, with just over 70,000 borrowers. To meet the industry standard, the amount of library space in the County would nearly have to double.



General Community Improvement

PRIORITY NEED:

KEEP COUNTY RURAL, ATTRACT ECO-FRIENDLY BUSINESSES

Background

Charles County's history and culture are tightly interwoven with the rural character of the land, as well as with the inseparable connection to the tobacco that was the mainstay of the economy for many generations. The rural character of the County is due in large part to the productive soils that have supported agriculture and forestry operations throughout the years. According to the County's Comprehensive Plan, approximately 81% of the County's 294,400 acres are located in the rural areas of the County. As development pressures continue to increase and the culmination of the Tobacco Buyout Program nears, preservation of the County's rural character becomes increasingly more difficult. The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission is working to promote alternative agricultural enterprises and assist with the farmers transitioning away from tobacco. However, the regional continues to struggle with developing an alternative to tobacco.

Opportunities

- Support efforts of the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission as the County transitions away from a tobacco-based economy
- Support specialized farming options such as organic gardening, possibly focusing on local delicacies and the local restaurant community
- Provide support for resource-based industries such as fishing and agritourism
- Promote heritage tourism and other initiatives to highlight the County's natural beauty



Health & Wellness

PRIORITY NEED:

PROVIDE SERVICES TO UNINSURED AND UNDERINSURED

Opportunities

- Expand the partnership between the County and Civista
- Explore methods to expand coverage, such as expansion of primary care options outside of hospital emergency rooms

Background

The proportion of Charles County citizens who are uninsured is below that of the State and the nation. While up to 11% of Charles County's citizens did not have medical insurance coverage over the last three years, an estimated 10-12% of the Maryland population did not have medical coverage. The percentage of Charles County residents eligible for Maryland Medical Assistance, 9%, is below the State percentage, 12%. Data on individuals whose insurance is sub-standard (underinsured) is nearly impossible to obtain.



Individuals who do not have medical insurance have few choices. They generally must go to emergency rooms to get medical care. This practice contributes to overcrowding in emergency rooms, long waits for all who must use the emergency room, and increased costs for those who have coverage or can afford care. Resolving these issues would improve the quality of life for all citizens.

PRIORITY NEED:

EXPAND AVAILABILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Opportunities

- Work with surrounding jurisdictions to provide these services
- Form partnerships with existing health providers
- Explore partnership opportunities with university professional schools, through programs such as internships and residency programs

Background

While the total number of individuals receiving mental health services is difficult to determine, one very good proxy measure consists of the percentage of Medical Assistance recipients who are receiving mental health services. In 2006, 11.7% of all Charles County residents on Medical Assistance received one or more mental health services; Statewide, this number was 13.6%. This lower penetration rate for mental health services in the Medical Assistance population in Charles County may suggest a shortage of providers. If this is true for the Medical Assistance population, it is very likely to be true for the population as a whole. Some specific service needs that were cited by work groups included children's services, crisis services and inpatient treatment.

PRIORITY NEED:

EXPAND AVAILABILITY OF DENTAL CARE

Opportunities

- Educate the public about the importance of dental care
- Support primary care practitioners to encourage dental care
- Address special areas of concern - medical assistance recipients, uninsured, underinsured, high co-payment requirements

Background

Dental care is one area in which Charles County does not appear to have better care than the State as a whole. Based on 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) results, 26% of Charles County citizens had not seen a dentist in the past year; this was nearly identical to the State rate. Charles County has been designated as a dental shortage area by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services.

There are two projects underway that may improve dental care in the County. The Charles County Health Department is opening a pediatric dental clinic; a private entity, Health Partners, is about to open a dental clinic. These expansions may help to improve dental care in the County.

Health & Wellness

PRIORITY NEED:

RECRUIT AND RETAIN HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE

Background

As is the case with teachers, the recruitment and retention of health care professionals provides a challenge for many areas in the State and the nation.

Retaining health care professionals of all types provides a variety of efficiencies for the healthcare system. Time and money are saved as the resources needed for training those in the system is limited. Allowing patients to form relationships with the professionals encourages appropriate utilization and preventative care.

Some efforts are made through scholarships to encourage County residents to enter healthcare professions and to practice in Charles County. These include the Charles County Health Department and School Nurses' Scholarship, the Thomas B. R. Mudd Nurse's Scholarship at the College of Southern Maryland, the RN Stat Scholarship of Civista Health Systems, and the Nursing/Allied Health Scholarships of the County Commissioners.

Opportunities

- Establish partnerships with local professional schools to encourage students to practice in Charles County
- Recruit middle and high school students to the industry by expanding financial aid opportunities

PRIORITY NEED:

ADDRESS RISING PREVALENCE OF CHILD HEALTH CONCERNS

Background

In this process, several childhood conditions were identified as concerns as a result of increasing prevalence rates. These include asthma, obesity, allergies, and autism. Local data on these conditions is difficult to obtain. Based on results from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System during 2004-2006, the prevalence of childhood asthma in Charles County children ranges from 7% to 14%; these rates were similar to Statewide rates that were consistent at about 13% over all three years. At the State level, 14% of children were identified as at risk of obesity and 22% were determined to be obese. The results from Charles County did not include sample sizes sufficient to determine local rates; it can be reasonably assumed that they would be similar to State rates. No data are currently available for the County or the State for allergies or autism.



Opportunities

- Promote fitness, wellness and prevention activities
- Establish screening processes
- Sensitize practitioners and parents on the concerns and short- and long-term implications
- Implement evidence-based practices

Youth Initiatives

PRIORITY NEED:

MORE YOUTH ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS

Opportunities

- Expand participation of children most in need
- Address issues such as transportation and funding that prevent participation in activities and programs
- Expand offerings of activities and programs, especially in more rural areas of the County

Background

Charles County has an excellent base of established youth activities. The County government, as well as many youth-centered non-profit and other organizations, offers many activities and publicizes them well. Expanding the participation of the children in the County who are most in need can often be an issue. For some children, transportation can be a serious issue. For others, fees may provide a nearly insurmountable obstacle to participation. Addressing these issues will assist the County in maximizing the engagement of children most at risk in wholesome, productive activities.

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Charles County			
All Children < 18	29,096	30,945	6.4%
Children in Poverty	1,565	2,398	53.2%
Percent in Poverty	5.4%	7.7%	
Maryland			
All Children < 18	1,136,669	1,194,489	5.1%
Children in Poverty	124,149	141,877	14.3%
Percent in Poverty	10.9%	11.9%	

Sources: Maryland Child Care Resource Network, *Child Care Demographics 2007*, Page 3; *Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Network Child Care Demographics 2007*, Charles County, Page 3.

PRIORITY NEED:

INCREASE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR PARENTS

Opportunities

- Increase outreach to those most in need of parenting support and other programs and services
- Provide ancillary services to meet some of the challenging issues that affect participation, such as transportation, child care, fees and times courses are offered

Background

The Department of Social Services, Charles County Public Schools, churches and other community organizations currently provide parenting classes and other programs and services for parents. These programs are offered in a variety of locations across the County.



Youth Initiatives

PRIORITY NEED:

ESTABLISH ADDITIONAL YOUTH CENTERS

Background

The Charles County Department of Community Services operates nine community centers, five pools and two recreation centers in the County. Located throughout the County, each of the centers provide a variety of sports and recreation programming for children. Several community centers, owned and operated by private neighborhood associations, are located in the St. Charles community in Waldorf. Typically, these community centers do not operate their own programs, but rather serve as facilities that can be used by neighborhood or other groups for special programs and events.



Opportunities

- Support both public and private entities in enhancing and expanding the existing network, helping to alleviate transportation issues
- Support private and public/private partnerships to address issues such as funding, childcare and transportation that prevent participation in program offerings
- Provide outreach to children at risk

PRIORITY NEED:

INCREASE CHILDCARE AVAILABILITY

Background

The availability of good child care is an issue for communities across the nation and the world; Charles County shares this issue. While the County has slightly more slots for each resident under 18 than the rest of Maryland, this number appears to fall very short of the need. According to Census 2000, four of five Charles County mothers are in the workforce; however, child care is available for only one of every six children in the County.

Opportunities

- Assure that costs are affordable for those most in need
- Increase available childcare resources in areas of greatest need

	<u>Slots</u>	<u>Per 1,000*</u>
Charles County	4,937	1.595
Maryland	157,760	1.321

*Children under age 18

Source: Maryland Child Care Resource Network, *Child Care Demographics 2007*, Page 5; *Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Network Child Care Demographics 2007*, Charles County, Page 5.

PRIORITY NEED:

ADDRESS RISK FACTORS

Background

As indicated in previous narrative, the number of children who live below the poverty level is increasing in Charles County more rapidly than that number is increasing statewide. Most mothers in Charles County are working. These are factors which can place children at risk. Often, these children are inadequately supervised or not supervised at all. Many live in dysfunctional families. Many have poor self images. Additionally, the number of children with special needs is increasing.

Opportunities

- Provide appropriate youth activities, childcare, parenting classes, educational readiness programs and appropriate mental health services to help reduce risks of developing physical, social and/or legal problems
- Reduce barriers to engagement in activities, such as transportation, fees and peer stigma

Conclusion

OVERVIEW

Three important partners, the Community Foundation of Charles County, the Charles County Commissioners, and the United Way of Charles County, joined in this process of identifying the current priority needs of the Charles County community.

The process began enumerating many needs previously identified by various means involving significant stakeholder input. The list of needs was reviewed and expanded using input from consumers, administrators, providers, advocates, and citizens.

The process yielded thirty priority Charles County needs, five needs in each of the six focus areas.

While meeting these needs in whole or in part will improve the quality of life in Charles County, the list is by no means exhaustive nor is the process complete.

Community needs change as the people, businesses, economy, and ecology that constitute the community change. Ongoing efforts will be needed both to monitor progress toward meeting the needs identified and to identify emerging needs.

Ultimately, the involvement of the community in identifying and addressing these needs can produce effects greater than the sum of their parts. Community action and involvement prove to be the most effective elements in improving the quality of life for everyone.

In conclusion, we hope to continue the process of assessing our community's most pressing needs and to involve more members of our community in attempting to meet those needs and improve life for all in Charles County.

“We hope to continue the process of assessing our community’s most pressing needs and to involve more members of our community in attempting to meet those needs and improve life for all in Charles County.”

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