Four Dimensions of Quality of Life

Measuring the quality of life components in a neighborhood is a very complex assignment. In communities such as Chesapeake where neighborhoods are diverse and continually changing, the task is made even more difficult. Because individual Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSAs) have such varied circumstances, it is necessary to assess their strengths and weaknesses from a variety of perspectives.

Recognizing that each community is unique, this study measures community-level quality of life across a wide array of variables. The factors used in the analysis were primarily derived from local government agencies and organizations. They ranged from social measures of community health to environmental quality criteria. Within this diverse set of information, the common element is how an individual variable impacts the quality of life in Chesapeake. The importance attached to a variable will vary based upon community attitudes and interests. Clearly, some variables are linked to other variables in a positive or negative fashion so that synergistic impacts may be presented. Ultimately, one use of this study will be to allow city staff and neighborhood residents to identify the relative importance of a key variable or set of variables to improving the livability of a Chesapeake neighborhood.

Organizationally, the 23 analytical variables used in the analysis were organized across four areas. These are social, crime, physical, and economic dimensions. This grouping scheme puts together variables that are related and work together in affecting neighborhood-scale quality of life. Often times, these factors are interrelated. Thus, separating the effects of a particular factor from other factors may be difficult. Consequently, the combining of similar variables into dimensions avoids this measurement problem. Table 1 lists the variables and their dimensional affiliation.