Introduction

The City of Chesapeake provides opportunities for people to live in many different environments, varying from the traditional neighborhoods of South Norfolk, to the open countryside of Southern Chesapeake. The city faces a challenging task of meeting the different needs of divergent communities with the diverse character of these wide ranging neighborhoods. This study, the "Chesapeake Neighborhood Quality of Life Study", was developed as a tool to aid community residents, elected officials, and local government staff. It provides the opportunity to take a closer look at the critical individual issues that impact different neighborhoods. Collaboration to develop plans and strategies that meet neighborhood needs and citywide concerns is essential. The goal of this study is to provide a tool that evaluates Chesapeake's neighborhoods in terms of long-term sustainability.

In 2004, the City Manager appointed a Steering Committee to guide the development of this project. The members of the Committee represented key public agencies and departments that provide critical services and infrastructure to Chesapeake residents. Over the past 20 months, the Steering Committee members offered valuable insights into technical data and helped the consultants better understand the community's concerns and local quality of life issues.

One of the first tasks of the project was to determine how the community could be grouped to create the Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSAs). Using existing subdivision and community development information, the Steering Committee delineated 172 NSAs. The NSAs are larger than traditional socially constructed neighborhoods. However, they are sized to permit the collection of statistically accurate information. In this way, the NSAs are building blocks for measuring quality of life.

Next, the Steering Committee developed a comprehensive list of analytical variables to be used in classifying and measuring quality

of life. Over 59 variables were initially considered. Of these, 23 variables were found to be technically feasible for data collection and analysis.

In collecting the information, every effort was made to gather the most current data that was available. In some cases, this meant using information that was two years old. This is a limitation that is inherent in a project that involves the use of large, complex data sets where updates are difficult and/or costly to carry out. The age of these information sources does not detract the value of the information, especially when it is paired with related information to help understand complex community issues.

At the conclusion of the process, the 23 variables were statistically analyzed to assess the neighborhood-scale livability in the NSAs. These research findings represent a baseline of information that permit the present-day examination of neighborhood-level quality of life, as well as, lay the groundwork for future analyses. Indeed, this study is intended to serve as a benchmark. It is the first step in an ongoing effort to monitor progress toward achieving the goals of sustaining and revitalizing Chesapeake's neighborhoods.

This report presents the entire neighborhood quality of life study. It is intended to be a reader-friendly document that lays out the research process, the findings, and the larger set of information that contributed to the study conclusions.

The goal of this report is to increase public awareness and understanding of critical quality of life issues and challenges facing the City of Chesapeake; and to foster collaboration and discussion around finding solutions. By working together, citizens, elected officials, businesses, community groups, and staff can create stronger neighborhoods throughout Chesapeake.