

An Assessment of Community Needs in Suffolk County, NY

A Step toward Better Aligning
Community Needs, Health and Human
Services Safety Net, and Available
Resources

December, 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014 members of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island (HWCLI), in conjunction with a consortium of Suffolk County officials and additional community leaders, engaged the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) to conduct a community needs assessment for Suffolk County. The need for an updated community assessment was a consistent theme of a membership survey conducted by HWCLI in early 2012. In the survey, HWCLI members, consisting primarily of health and human service agencies, spoke of significant increases in demand for services, which were exacerbated in the fall of 2012 after Super Storm Sandy devastated parts of Long Island. As the members worked together closely to assist Long Islanders impacted by the storm, they recognized that the needs of the region's most vulnerable residents and the demands for services were changing and that the traditional approaches to addressing those needs also needed to change. HWCLI members and its partners coalescent around the idea that a community needs assessment could help articulate how the needs in Suffolk County have changed, what the driving factors behind the changes might be, and how County and private sector services might come together to respond to potentially new service and funding paradigms. In carrying out the needs assessment, CGR worked closely with HWCLI and a project steering committee of dedicated, engaged community leaders, including representatives from government, nonprofit service providers, the business community, funder/s philanthropic organizations, and other community stakeholders.

Scope of Study

Data-driven analysis is essential for moving beyond perceptions of need and identifying core issues in a community. Thus, the needs assessment began with an extensive analysis of 94 countywide demographic descriptors, from the U.S. Census Bureau and various other sources, of

many aspects of community needs. These were supplemented by numerous other local data measures provided by County, town and nonprofit agencies in Suffolk County. In addition, interviews and focus groups were critical to the needs assessment process: to complement and add nuance to objective data and to flesh out important stakeholder perceptions of needs and service gaps.

The starting point in the process was the identification of core areas to be considered in depth. HWCLI and the project steering committee identified the following eight high-priority topic areas for primary concentration during the needs assessment:

- Housing;
- Crime;
- Jobs/Employment/Economy;
- Health & Welfare/Mental Health/Substance Abuse;
- Food;
- Transportation;
- Education; and
- Child Care.

The needs assessment was not limited to consideration of those priority areas, and other issues surfaced during the data-gathering process. In addition to examining needs at a countywide level, the project steering committee wished to bring particular focus, where possible, to three of the County's 10 towns that it considered to have been hardest hit and most affected by Super Storm Sandy: Babylon, Brookhaven and Islip. Where data and informed perspectives were available to shed particular light on the three towns, the analyses incorporated both a countywide overview and a town-specific focus on needs and demographics (further compared where possible to statewide data for additional benchmark perspective). Wherever possible, data were compared as far back as 2000, to provide historical perspective to the analyses. Because the most recent data were typically from 2012 and in most cases preceded Sandy, this analysis of the quantitative data largely does not reflect the impact of the storm. However, stakeholder interviews provide evidence that these pre-Sandy needs were in fact exacerbated by the storm, which created a "tipping point," or the right conditions for innovation and change.

Findings

Several themes emerged from the analysis, some of which cut across the topic areas and impact the whole community in a variety of ways. Most prominent among the findings was the significant change in demographics in the County over the last decade.

Demographics

Suffolk County population growth has outpaced New York State since 2000, though growth patterns vary across towns. The minority populations across the County have increased at a significantly faster rate than among Caucasians, including a growth of 74% in the Hispanic population (which grew by at least 50% in each of the County's 10 towns). Despite the countywide increase in minority populations, the growth was more concentrated in the towns of Islip, Brookhaven and Babylon. Based on the data and interviews, it became clear that even as the County becomes more diverse, it remains heavily segregated with regards to race/ethnicity, low-income populations, housing and schools, and there are observable splits between "haves and have-nots" in the community. Changes are being felt in schools, in public settings, by the provider network and the County as historical patterns of thinking and responding to needs are being challenged by a new and more diverse, yet still highly-segregated community.

Suffolk County is also becoming significantly older, putting pressure on the community in new ways. The data revealed three key age groups that are experiencing significant changes. Each has placed new service implications upon the community. There has been a noticeable growth in the number of those who are 60 and older, especially the 85+ age group. The service implications for an aging population that wants to age in place are forcing the County and various providers in the community to rethink services and how to meet the needs of the elderly.

At the other end of the age spectrum is the under-20 age group. This demographic has been declining in number in the County overall since the 2000 Census, and now the highest concentrations of this age cohort are predominantly in low-income communities. The implications are significant for schools that are experiencing declining enrollments as well as increasingly diverse yet segregated populations. Language can be a barrier, though many of the younger generation are fully bilingual.

The third age group experiencing significant changes is that of 20-39 year olds. The cohort has experienced significant declines in the last 10 years—a net countywide loss of 45,000 people since 2000. It appears from other data in this study that part of this is due to a loss of well-paying job opportunities which constrain a desired lifestyle or limit housing and transportation options. Those who remain have difficulty finding jobs, and many others who leave for college are not returning, instead favoring better job markets or warmer climates elsewhere—with significant implications for the future workforce and leadership within the County.

Housing and the Economy

As noted, the economy has not been as supportive of job seekers as it once was. What used to be a thriving manufacturing base defined by high-paying jobs, often with limited higher-education requirements, has turned into a more service-oriented job market with higher proportions of part-time, lower-paying jobs—and other jobs requiring increasing levels of education to differentiate job candidates. Household incomes have been declining, and there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people receiving temporary financial assistance, food stamps (an increase of more than 90,000 since 2000) and emergency food support. There are also high unemployment rates, particularly among minorities.

As median household income levels decline, it becomes increasingly difficult for residents to remain economically self-sufficient. As housing becomes increasingly unaffordable, the demographic nature of those who are living at or just above the poverty threshold has changed. More elderly on fixed incomes are struggling to make ends meet, and more traditional “middle-class” individuals and families find themselves one paycheck away from needing assistance. Across Suffolk County, home affordability has declined by 68% since 2000, which is among the worst declines in the State. The data revealed similar patterns for affordability among renters, especially minorities, meaning a higher percentage of declining paychecks is required to meet housing costs and other related basic needs.

Increasing patterns of vacant properties and foreclosures, especially in high-minority communities, are forcing providers and community leaders to grapple with measures to alleviate sub-standard living conditions, while also threatening property values, asset wealth accumulation and quality of life in many communities. This is one area that was undoubtedly impacted by Sandy and will remain an issue for the foreseeable future.

Transportation & Access to Jobs and Services

Relatively few commuters living on Long Island use public transportation to access jobs and other needed services. In fact, about 90% of commuters drive to work, according to the data. Those who rely on public transit have limited options, with bus routes often not convenient to access employers or other services. There are particular gaps in north-south bus routes and on weekends and evenings, when buses run less frequently. Though some progress is being made, the long waits and long bus trips to jobs and services deter many from using the system, making for more congestion on the highways, and contributing to the inability of many to conveniently access jobs, shopping, civic engagements, and needed health, mental health and other social service care across the County.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Suffolk County mental health services fall short of meeting the needs presented in the community. Mental health outpatient clinic visits have increased over the past decade but fall short of statewide usage patterns, especially for children. As mental health institutions have closed or become smaller, there are more people with mental health issues in the community, and they often wind up in emergency rooms, homeless shelters or in jails. Such options are typically more costly than outpatient mental health service providers, but more importantly, those with mental illness are too often not getting the type or quality of treatment that would impact their well-being in a positive and long term way, in part because of insufficient state and local resources invested in community-based mental health care. The push across the country and particularly in New York State is toward a more integrated approach between physical health and mental/behavioral health interventions with the belief that holistic care that cuts across traditional medical and behavioral health silos will be better in the long run for the patients who are being treated.

The data and interviews also revealed a growing substance abuse addiction problem in the County. While overall crime rates are declining, and crime was not often noted as a major concern among stakeholders, substance abuse, especially heroin, was considered by many to be a "growing epidemic." Misdemeanor drug arrests are up 31% in the past decade, and there has been a growing abuse of prescription drugs and heroin, especially among suburban white high school and young adults.

Gangs

About a quarter of those who were interviewed emphasized the importance of addressing the issue of gangs in Suffolk County. A 2012 study identified about 4,100 gang members in 27 separate gangs throughout the County. About two-thirds of the members were identified as being concentrated in areas in Islip, Babylon and Brookhaven associated with concentrated poverty/ low-income populations with insufficient affordable housing and high unemployment.

Education

Education in Suffolk County is perceived to be an overall strength. At the surface, data support this perception: Most school districts in the County have generally high test scores and graduation rates. However, the overall data mask significant disparities in performance outcomes among districts with widely varying resources and differences in concentrations of poverty and racial-ethnic makeup. As minority populations increase, the segregation of communities becomes more pronounced, adding to segregated patterns of schools, and performance disparities are becoming

exacerbated. In interviews, several stakeholders expressed the desire to find ways to de-concentrate poverty and desegregate schools.

Child Care

Child Care subsidies for low-income working families are declining. There has been a 34% reduction since 2003 in the numbers of children per month receiving subsidized child care (a reduction of 1,635 children per month). Declining investment by the State and County in subsidized child care negatively impacts childhood development and economic development through a reduction in work hours or job loss among low-income working families. Subsidizing child care is an investment that ultimately reduces the costs of future temporary assistance, and yet subsidies are being cut. Several stakeholders expressed the view that it will be important for the community to consider ways to strengthen quality child care, invest in kids, and prevent loss of child care jobs and providers.

Perceived Impact of Super Storm Sandy

As noted previously, the issues raised in this needs assessment typically preceded Sandy. However, in some cases, pre-existing needs in the County were exacerbated by the storm, and the full scope of the impact on the affected communities has yet to be fully determined. Housing affordability and access to home ownership have been affected in ways still being played out, and the perceptions are that there may be significant long-term impacts on the social fabric of many communities, both along the shores and inland. Additionally, there are likely to be mental health needs from the storm that have yet to be fully realized in the community. These issues will become more easily assessed as the relevant data for 2013 and 2014 become more readily available.

Concluding Thoughts and Next Steps

Several themes are discussed throughout the needs assessment document: most notably, the lack of adequate housing and housing unaffordability; the loss of employment and good-paying jobs in key industries and the changing landscape of the local economy; and the struggle with developing a transportation system that meets the needs of those who require it. Social and demographic shifts in the population—the aging of the population and the effects of immigration in making the community both more diverse and more segregated—are interacting with these community needs to create a complex environment for social service funders and providers.

This needs assessment represents a starting point for a public discussion about how to make the community stronger. Funding for needed services will continue to be constrained for the foreseeable future. It is widely

understood from all the key stakeholders that sustainability will not be possible if the community tries to meet increasing 21st-century needs in a 20th-century way. The time is ripe for innovation to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are met, a process that will require intentionality coupled with flexibility and commitment.

This report has purposefully not identified specific solutions to identified needs. That task is for the larger community to address: A unified approach will be essential to forming a new, smarter, more efficient and targeted set of responses on behalf of Suffolk County and its various communities.

Acknowledgements

CGR is grateful to the numerous individuals who participated in this study through offering their time for direct interviews, and those who took time to pull together and coordinate the gathering of information to inform the study. Particular appreciation is expressed to President and CEO of the HWCLI Gwen O'Shea for her leadership of this process and tireless pursuit of assuring that the information was gathered and conveyed in the most productive ways. Thank you to the staff at HWCLI for their support of the process as well. Special thanks also go to the County Executive, Steven Bellone and his Commissioner Sammy Chu for their support of this process. Assistant to the Commissioner Katherine Daniel was instrumental in her efforts to coordinate significant amounts of data collection from multiple County Departments. Sue Fredericks and Nancy Engelhardt have also both been instrumental in coordinating this process. Many more could be named, and each has contributed to a solid outcome for this phase of the project.

Staff Team

Dr. Donald Pryor and Scott Sittig were co-leaders of this engagement. They were supported in significant ways by several CGR staff including Associate Director Erika Rosenberg, Research Assistant Rachel Rhodes and Data Analyst Mike Silva.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

In October 2012, Long Island experienced the trauma of disaster when Super Storm Sandy left devastation across shoreline communities in Nassau and Suffolk counties. Long Islanders were left with myriad needs related to the storm, including for home repair and construction assistance, legal services, mental health care, employment assistance, food, shelter and much more. In response, Long Island's health and human service organizations have worked closely together to assist these residents, providing basic necessities as well as vital services to help storm survivors onto the path of long-term recovery and self-sufficiency.

In this innovative, collaborative environment, the storm-related needs that many Long Islanders were newly facing compounded earlier, pre-Sandy observations by service providers that the needs of the region's most vulnerable residents had changed dramatically and that the current health and human service delivery system on Long Island was overloaded by increased demand for services. Even before Sandy hit, the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island (HWCLI) members, in a 2012 membership survey, had recommended that a community needs assessment be done to help articulate how the needs on Long Island have changed, as well as what the driving factors are behind the changing needs.

In 2013, as a first step, HWCLI members, in conjunction with a consortium of Suffolk County officials and additional community leaders, engaged CGR (Center for Governmental Research) to conduct a community needs assessment for Suffolk County. CGR was asked to provide an objective analysis of information that would accurately detail the demographic changes and service needs of Suffolk County. This report presents findings from that assessment.

Changing Realities Shaping the Study

The need for this study, and the process designed to undertake the needs assessment process, was shaped by several current realities and changes in the environment affecting the lives of at-risk and vulnerable Long Islanders. Among the most critical of the current and changing realities that convinced HWCLI members and their partners of the need to undertake this assessment process were the following:

- No comprehensive, community-wide assessment of current and changing needs and demographics, as well as their implications, had been conducted in recent years in Suffolk County. Although considerable data existed in various agencies and many perceptions

of changing demographics and needs have been expressed by community leaders, no one had pulled together the various sources of data and linked them in one document with stakeholder perspectives into a comprehensive assessment of current and emerging community needs, as well as their implications for the future of the County.

- The economic recession has increased demand for safety net services, and Super Storm Sandy has intensified that demand. At the same time, the responses to this devastating storm brought community resources together in a more coordinated, collaborative way than had typically been the case in the past and those experiences have helped point the way to collaborative partnership possibilities in the future.
- The scope of County and municipal contracts with providers to deliver a range of health and human service and safety net services have not changed significantly for years. As a result, providers, services, target audiences and expected outcomes are not well-aligned to meet new or changing needs.

This objective third-party needs assessment was designed as the first step in addressing these and related issues.

Project Steering Committee

To oversee the project's development and assure that its goals were met, a Steering Committee was created. It is made up of community leaders from HWCLI member-agencies, government, nonprofit service providers, the business community, funders/philanthropic organizations, and other community stakeholders. The group pledged to include diverse representation from across multiple levels and sectors of Suffolk County to create stakeholders to support the project.

Project Methodology

Data-driven analysis is essential for moving beyond perceptions of need and identifying core issues in a community. Thus the needs assessment began with an extensive analysis of demographic descriptors of many aspects of community needs (often from U.S. Census Bureau data and related measures captured by various state and national organizations). These were supplemented by local data provided by Suffolk County, town and nonprofit agencies. In addition, because not all core issues are easily quantifiable, and many do not have metrics that can be readily analyzed in a consistent manner, interviews and focus groups were conducted to complement and add nuance to the data analyses.

The Steering Committee requested that CGR, in its study, consider the following topics its highest priorities: child care, crime, education, food, health and welfare (including mental health and substance abuse), housing, jobs and employment, and transportation.

CGR was not limited to consideration of those eight priority focus areas, and other issues surfaced during the data-gathering process and are referenced throughout the report.

In addition to examining needs at a countywide level, the Steering Committee wished to bring particular focus, where possible, to three of the County's 10 towns that it considered to have been hardest hit and most affected by Sandy: Babylon, Brookhaven and Islip. Where data and informed perspectives were available to shed particular light on the three towns, the analyses incorporate both a countywide overview and a town-specific focus of needs and demographics (further compared where possible to statewide data for additional benchmark perspective).

Most of the core topic areas have numerous indicators that can be analyzed at least at the County level, typically with a historical perspective of several years. A core list of 94 separate indicators was identified, based on sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the New York State Department of Health. In many cases, such data also were available at a town or other sub-county level and were analyzed wherever possible. In other cases, the data were available only on a countywide level. The core indicator analyses was supplemented with additional data made available through Suffolk County departments, towns and/or other members of the Steering Committee and other community stakeholders interviewed as part of the process. Where possible, CGR included historical data as far back as the year 2000, brought forward to the most current year available to provide a trend analysis for each.

In September 2013, CGR issued the first part of the needs assessment in the form of a detailed community profile incorporating the initial 94 indicators referenced above. That profile¹ (updated for this report) is considered a companion document to this full needs assessment. To review the companion document in its entirety, see http://files.cgr.org/data/hweli/CGR_Suffolk_Community_Profile_Indicators_Sept_2013.pdf. Excerpts from the profile document are included where relevant in the narrative of this report's summary of community needs.

In addition to its data analyses, CGR project staff conducted interviews and focus groups with about 30 key stakeholders to obtain their

¹ CGR, *Community Profile Indicators for Suffolk County*, September 2013.

perspectives on current and changing community needs and demographics. Interview participants included: (a) Steering Committee members; (b) town officials; (c) County Department/Division heads and fiscal staff; (d) County-contracted nonprofit service providers; (e) funders/philanthropic representatives; (f) United Way of Long Island staff; (g) education sector representatives; and (h) other community leaders representing the faith, business and advocacy communities.

This report integrates findings from the detailed data analyses with information gathered through the interviews and discussions conducted throughout the study.

Caution

Readers should be aware in reviewing this document that there are numerous positive aspects to living and doing business in Suffolk County; however, these are not the primary focus of this report. A needs assessment is by definition about needs and thus focuses primarily on perceived problems and concerns. Those needs should be reviewed in the context of the many strengths of the County.

Additionally, it is not the purpose of this report to identify or recommend specific solutions to needs that are discussed throughout the report. That task is for the larger community to address in response to issues raised in this needs assessment.

2. SUFFOLK COUNTY: COMMUNITY CONTEXT

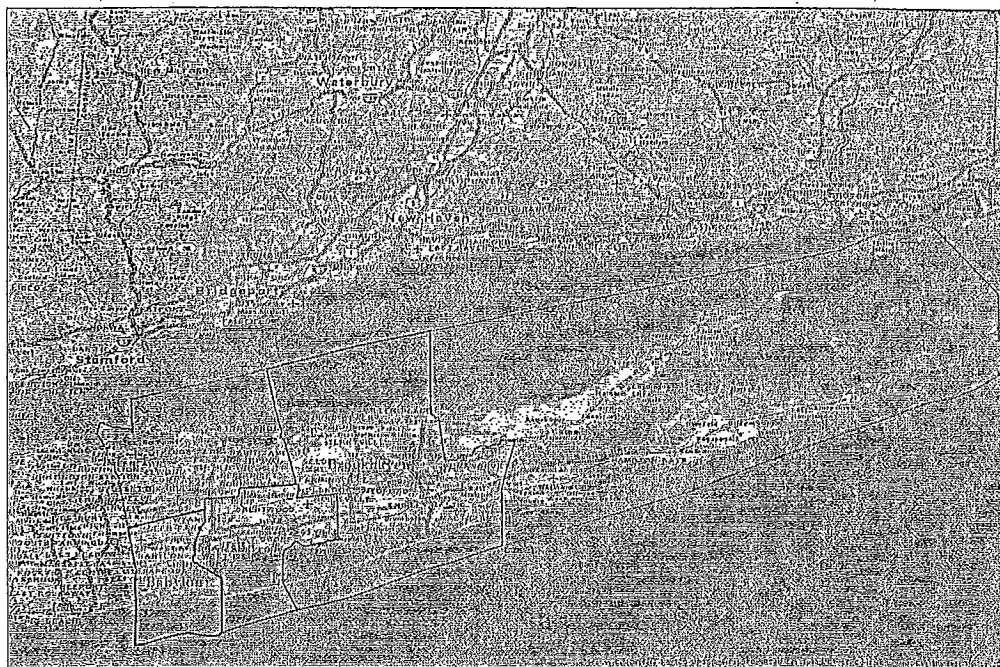
Suffolk County is one of four counties that cover the land mass of Long Island, New York. Regionally, the two easternmost counties, Suffolk and Nassau, are collectively referred to as "Long Island." The two westernmost counties, Kings and Queens, are two of the five boroughs in New York City. Suffolk was established in 1683 and was originally named after Suffolk, England from where its original settlers emigrated. Although close in proximity to New York City, it is primarily a suburban county and is known for its agriculture. Suffolk is the second largest of New York State's 62 Counties, and according to some indices² that monitor output it is the leading agricultural county in the State.

Suffolk is comprised of ten towns covering approximately 910 square land miles (2,373 total square miles including 980 miles of coastline). The average population density is slightly over 1,600 people per square land mile, though there is a great variation between the eastern and western towns. Brookhaven, Islip and Babylon represent three of the top five Towns in terms of population density. Babylon is the closest of the three towns to New York City and represents part of the western border of Suffolk (together with the Town of Huntington). Babylon has a population density of nearly 4,100 residents per square mile. Also located on the southern side of the Island, Islip is the next town to the east of Babylon and has a population density of 3,220 residents per square mile. Of the five largest towns, Brookhaven has the lowest population density at slightly less than 1,900 per square mile and is the next town to the east of Islip. The Town of Brookhaven covers an entire cross-section of the Island with coastline on both the north and south sides of the town.

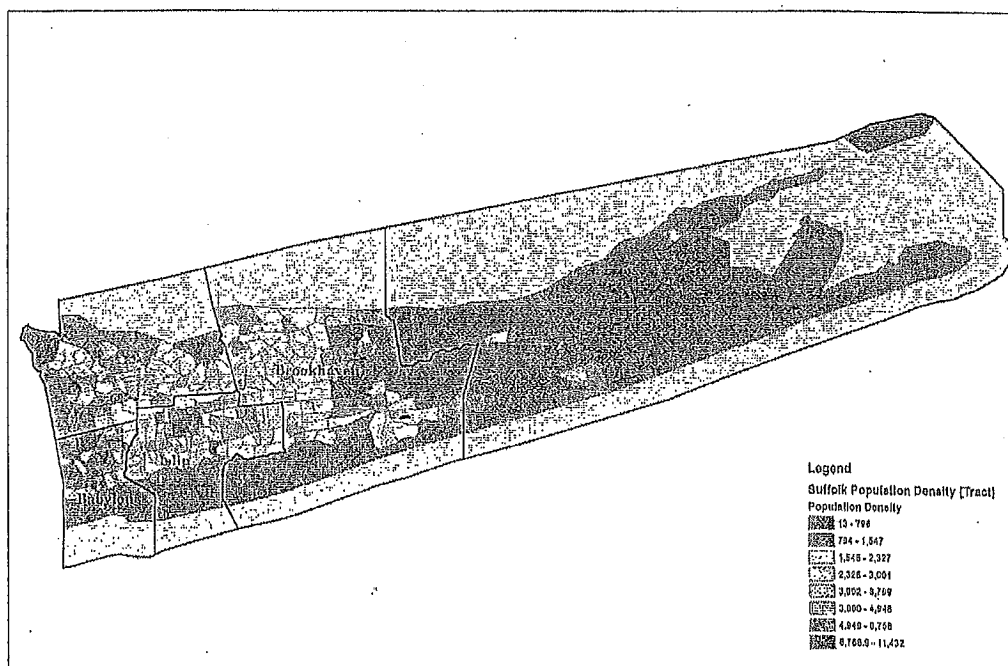
Maps

Long Island is the eastern-most part of New York State and shares water borders with the State of Connecticut. As viewed on the following map, Suffolk County represents nearly 2/3 of Long Island.

² The 2007 Agricultural Census ranks Suffolk County first in terms of value of products sold.



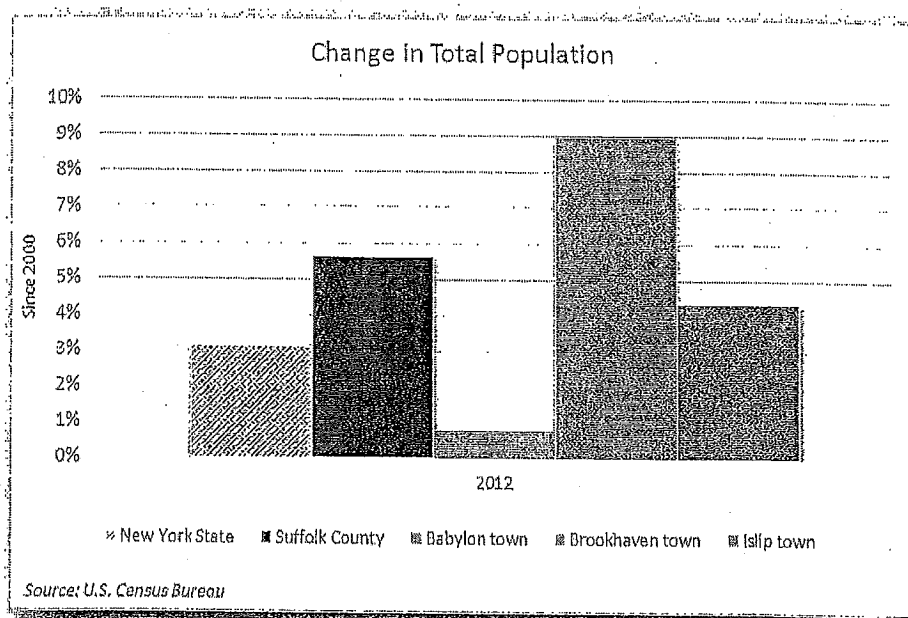
Considered largely suburban, the population density of Suffolk lessens as you travel east on the Long Island Expressway. Though it is a relatively narrow swath of land, the Island still maintains some remote wilderness-type areas through open space and state and national parks.



Population

From 2000 to 2012, the total population of Suffolk County grew 5.6%, with nearly 1.5 million residents currently calling the area home. This compares to growth of 3.1% during this time in the entire state.

The Town of Babylon also experienced growth, though less than 1% since 2000, due to a decline of more than 7,000 residents in 2010. It currently is home to about 213,900 residents. Conversely, Brookhaven grew 9.0% over the decade and is now home to 488,400 residents. The Town of Islip, home to 336,500 people in 2012, grew 4.4% over the same time period.



Population within Towns

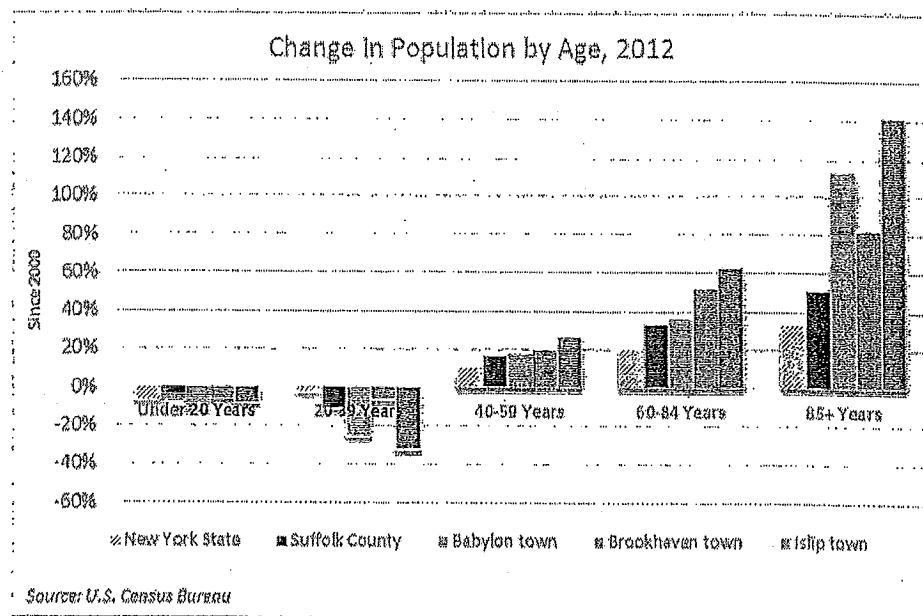
West Babylon is the largest area within the Town of Babylon, comprising over 43,000 people (20%) of the entire town as of the 2010 census. The next three largest areas of Deer Park, Lindenhurst and Copiague comprise approximately 37% of the total population in the town.

The main population centers in the Town of Islip include Brentwood (more than 60,000 residents) and Central Islip (more than 34,000), with nearly 30% of the total population between them. West Islip, Holbrook, Bay Shore and Ronkonkoma constitute the next 30% of the population within the town. The population is fairly evenly dispersed among the rest of the town.

The largest population center in Brookhaven is Coram, which has over 39,000 people but makes up only 8% of the town's population. The population is fairly evenly dispersed throughout the town into 41 other smaller communities.

Age of County Population

The population of Suffolk County has been aging, with 33% growth in the number of people aged 60 to 84 and 51% growth in those 85 or older from 2000 to 2012. This is larger than the statewide gains in these groups. Conversely, the number of residents in Suffolk fewer than 20 decreased 4%, compared to an 8% decline at the state level. The decline was even greater in the 20-39 age group where Suffolk lost 11% over the decade, compared to 3% at the state level.



Median Age within Towns

The three towns of Babylon, Islip and Brookhaven range in median age between 37.6 and 39.2 years. However, each of the towns has a significant range in age within their communities.

The median age in Babylon is 39.2 years with a range of 30.4 to 51.4 years. The youngest median age by community is in Wyandanch. The oldest is in Oak Beach – Captree. The median age for the largest population center in West Babylon is 40.0 years.

The median age in Islip is slightly younger at 37.6 years and there is also a wider range cross-community between 31.7 and 54.8 years. The largest population centers of Brentwood and Central Islip are both significantly younger than the town wide median, having median ages of 32.0 and 32.6 years respectively. Ocean Beach and Saltaire have the oldest median populations at 54.8 years.

Brookhaven has the smallest age range of the three towns (excluding Stony Brook University) ranging between 31.6 and 51.3 years. The overall median age of the town is 38.5 years. The largest population center of Coram is close to the town wide median age at 38.7 years. North Bellport and Gordon Heights are the youngest population centers with median ages of 31.6 and 32.3 years respectively. The oldest community by median age is Bellport at 51.3 years.

Roughly 12% of the Islip and Brookhaven populations are 65 and older, and 13% of the Babylon population falls into this category. The community of Ridge in Brookhaven has the highest percentage of seniors, with over 27% of the community registering in the 65+ age group.

Children Under 18 Years of Age

Roughly one quarter of the population in each of the three towns is less than 18 years of age ranging from 23% in Babylon to 25% in Islip.

In Babylon, seven areas have populations of children less than 18 years of age within their community that meet or exceed the town wide average, ranging from 30% for Wyandanch to 23% in Deer Park, Babylon and Lindenhurst. West Babylon has the most children under 18 in the town (about 9,700), registering 20% of all those in this age category town wide.

In Brookhaven, 27 out of 42 neighborhoods have populations of children less than 18 years old that meet or exceed the town wide average of 24%. North Bellport and Gordon Heights are the highest with nearly 30% and 29% respectively of their communities being under 18 years old. However, the largest population center of Coram has the largest number of children under 18 relative to the whole town with 8% (a total of about 8,700 young people).

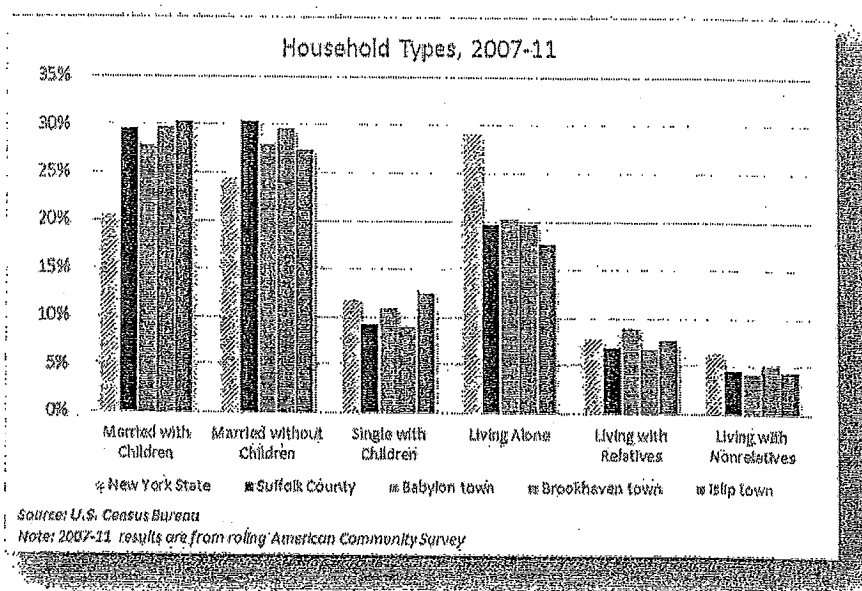
Islip has nine communities that meet or exceed the town wide average for children under 18 within the community. Brentwood, North Bay Shore and Central Islip have the largest percentages at 27%. Brentwood also has the most children under 18 in the whole town (about 16,500), registering 20% of the total kids in this category.

Households

From 2007–11, 30% of households in Suffolk were composed of married couples with children and 30% were married couples without children.

Nine percent of Suffolk's households were made up of single people with children, and 20% were people living alone. The remaining households were people living with other relatives or with non-relatives. Suffolk had a larger proportion of households composed of married couples either with or without children than the state, and a lower proportion of single people with children and people living alone.

Compared to 2000, there was a slight increase in the share of households headed by a single person (both with and without children), and the rate for married couples with or without declined slightly.



Income

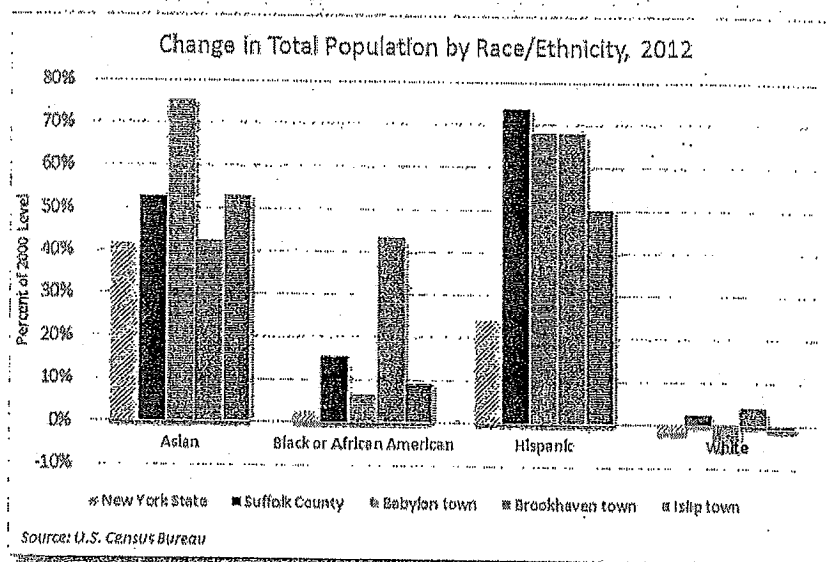
The 2007-11 American Community Survey³ reveals that the median household income for Suffolk County was approximately \$89,000. The three towns of Babylon, Islip and Brookhaven ranged between \$82,000

³ CGR uses the five-year ACS to account for smaller sample sizes. Single year estimates from the ACS vary widely in their statistical margins of error, and for smaller communities or sample sizes, CGR has found that five-year estimates are more reliable than single year estimates. The sample size for Suffolk County as a whole would likely be fine for referencing a single year number such as 2011 or 2012 median household income. However, at the town level, and then within that at the community level, the sample sizes are too small to quote reliably. Thus, we use the five-year estimates for all of our population statistics unless mentioned otherwise. These numbers may differ slightly with those referenced in other sources provided by Suffolk County or partners to this study process.

and \$87,000, with Babylon at \$82,000, Islip at \$86,000 and Brookhaven at \$87,000. The Suffolk County median income is 53% higher than the statewide median. As will be discussed briefly in the section on poverty, the median household incomes may appear to be on the high end relative to many other parts of the state, but due to the overall costs of living on the Island and as a part of being in a suburb of NYC, the median incomes are not significant enough in many cases to rise above basic subsistence living.

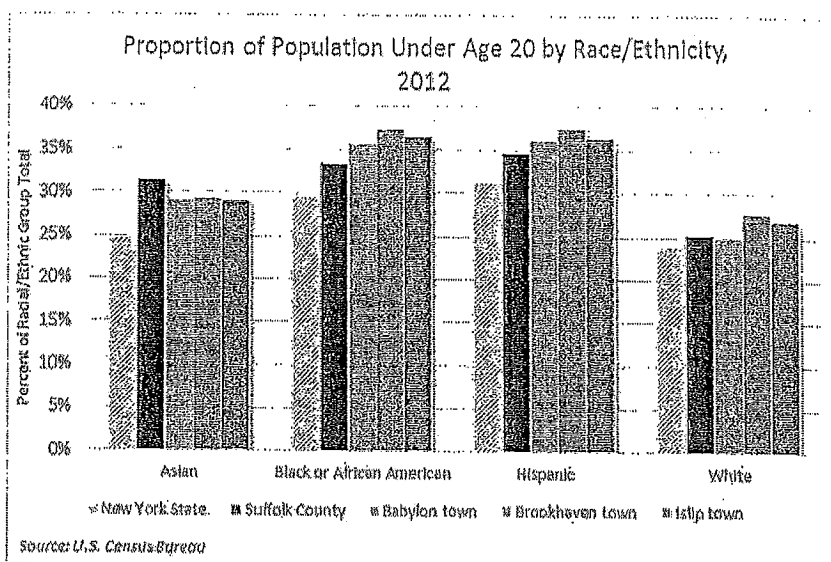
Race

Suffolk County has become increasingly diverse since 2000. Between 2000 and 2012, all racial and ethnic groups experienced growth. The greatest growth occurred in the group identifying themselves as Hispanic, which increased by 74% to make up 17% of the total population in 2012.⁴ This compares to a 24% increase statewide. The African American population in Suffolk increased 15%, the Asian population increased 53%, and the white population increased 2% to make up 86% of the total population in 2012. The rates of increase for all racial/ethnic groups in Suffolk were greater than statewide rates.



⁴ Hispanic is an ethnicity according to Census definitions that can include white, black and other races. This accounts for the discrepancy in statistics when reporting race in the population (i.e. 17% Hispanic when 86% are reported as white). Thus race and ethnicity percentages total to more than 100%.

The Hispanic, African American and Asian populations in Suffolk were all more youthful as a group than were whites in 2012. While 35% of Hispanics, 33% of African Americans and 31% of Asians were under 20, just 25% of whites were. Conversely, whites had a far higher share of residents 60 or older: 19%, compared to 11% of the African American population, 12% of Asians and 7% of Hispanics.



Race and Ethnicity by Town

The Town of Islip is 42% non-white, Babylon is 37%, and Brookhaven is 23% non-white. Islip has five communities with non-white populations over 50%, including North Bay Shore and Brentwood at 86%, Central Islip (81%), and Bay Shore and Baywood, each at 54%. The largest concentrations of non-white residents in the Town of Babylon are Wyandanch (95%), North Amityville (89%) and Wheatley Heights (76%). Brookhaven has only two communities with non-white populations over 50%: Gordon Heights (81%) and North Bellport (62%).

Sixteen percent of all residents in the Town of Babylon are African-Americans, as are 8% of the residents of Islip and 5% in Brookhaven. In addition, 29% of all residents of the Town of Islip are Hispanics, compared to 17% of the residents of Babylon and 12% in Brookhaven.

Town of Babylon: As noted above, Wyandanch in the Town of Babylon is 95% non-white, comprised of 63% African Americans, 28% Hispanics and 4% Asians and other races. Twenty-two percent of all African Americans in the town and 9% of Hispanics live in the community of

Wyandanch. The largest concentrations of the non-white population in the town of Babylon are African Americans living in North Amityville (30% of all African Americans living in the town are in North Amityville) and Hispanics living in Copiague (21% of the town's Hispanic population).

Town of Brookhaven: Gordon Heights in the Town of Brookhaven has the largest non-white concentration of any community in the town at 81%. This consists of 49% African Americans, 25% Hispanics and 7% Asians or other races. Though the concentration of non-white people in Gordon Heights is high, they only represent 3% of all non-whites in the town. The largest number of non-whites in Brookhaven is in Coram, with over 11% of all non-whites in the town. The largest concentrations of the non-white population by race/ethnicity are 16% of the town's African Americans and 9% of its Hispanic population, both living in Coram.

Town of Islip: North Bay Shore (86%) and Brentwood (86%) have the highest concentrations of non-white populations in the Town of Islip. North Bay Shore consists of 15% African American, 65% Hispanic and 6% Asian or other races. Brentwood is 14% African American, 68% Hispanic and 4% Asian or other races. While the communities of North Bay Shore and Brentwood are predominantly non-white, the North Bay Shore community is relatively small and has only 12% of the overall non-white population in the town. Brentwood, however, contains 37% of the overall town's non-white population. The largest concentrations of the non-white population in the town are African Americans living in Brentwood (30% of the town's black population live there) and Hispanics living in Brentwood (43% all Hispanics in the town).

Poverty

Understanding the issue of poverty in Suffolk is complicated by the cost of living and inflated prices for basic necessities on the Island. As noted under the section on Median Income, Suffolk's median income is over 50% higher than the median in New York State. In theory, this should mean that residents are significantly better off in their communities. Indeed, when the Federal poverty guidelines are applied, it appears that Suffolk has a very small poverty rate of 6% compared with over 15% nationally. However, when adjusted for the cost of living, the Federal guidelines fall significantly short in explaining what is required for living on the Island. With some adjustments for basic cost of living factors, the actual poverty rate in Suffolk may significantly exceed the national rate of 15% (inclusive of poor and near poor).

The "face" of those who are poor or in poverty by an expanded definition (200% of current federal poverty level) has also changed. In fact, there is a large percentage of full-time working class and otherwise middle class families that cannot quite make ends meet. Add to that a growing impact

on traditionally more stable populations including seniors, and it is increasingly clear that the impact of poverty is being felt across the entire community.

Poverty still disproportionately impacts people of color as well as vulnerable populations with special needs or those with a mental and/or physical disability. For example, overall poverty rates among African Americans and Latinos/Hispanics are about twice as high as among whites in the county. And the disparities are even greater among children: Poverty rates are two to three times higher among African American and Hispanic children than among whites.

Beyond racial/ethnic disparities, however, the Recession highlighted for many people that there was a very thin line already between barely making it and not making ends meet, and many families in Suffolk fell victim to the losses in the economy. The impact of Hurricane Sandy on housing only exacerbated a troubling situation for these families and has left the community in a far more destabilized position than many would understand from merely looking at the traditional federal poverty guidelines. And even using those traditional guidelines, it is clear that some surprising sectors of the county have significant proportions of poor and near poor: For example, the eastern towns of Riverhead and East Hampton have the highest reported poverty rates of any of the ten towns in the county, albeit with high margins of reporting and statistical analysis error. Babylon, Islip and Brookhaven poverty levels appear to be at about the same level as the countywide proportion. At the intra-town level, in Babylon, highest reported poverty rates were in North Amityville and Wyandanch, while in Brookhaven rates were highest in East Patchogue, Patchogue, Mastic Beach, and Gordon Heights. Rates were higher in Islip within the Central Islip and Ocean Beach communities.

3. THE BIG PICTURE: PRIORITY NEEDS FACING SUFFOLK COUNTY

Of all the needs facing the residents of Suffolk County, key community stakeholders interviewed during this study consistently focused on the interrelationships between the economy and jobs, affordable housing, and transportation and access between housing, jobs and needed services. And throughout most of the stakeholder discussions, an overarching theme emerged—both shaping and shaped by those priority needs, as well as other community priorities: demographic shifts in the makeup of the county population, including the increasing aging of the population and the expansion of immigration and racial/ethnic minority groups in virtually all sectors of the county, even as the county is viewed as remaining highly segregated in its housing patterns and schools.

The Impact of Demographic Shifts

As indicated in the previous chapter, historically the population of Suffolk County has been overwhelmingly white, with relatively small concentrations of Asian, African-American and Hispanic/Latino populations. Over the past decade-plus, those numbers and proportions have begun to change in significant ways. Whites represented 89% of the county's population in 2000; by 2012, that proportion had declined to 86%.⁵

Significant Increases in Minority Populations

Meanwhile, the Asian population increased by 53%, from about 36,500 in 2000 to more than 55,600 residents in 2012, with every town experiencing growth of at least 22%. The African-American/black population increased by 15% during those years, to more than 122,000 in 2012, with more than three-quarters of those concentrated in the towns of Babylon, Islip and Brookhaven. Most dramatically, the Hispanic/Latino population increased by 74% countywide between 2000 and 2012, a growth of more than 110,000, to its 2012 total of more than 259,000—often with accompanying language barriers. As with the black population, about ¾ of the Hispanics are concentrated in Islip, Brookhaven and Babylon, in that order, with almost 40% of the Hispanics concentrated in Islip. Even with these concentrations, the Hispanic population has become more prevalent

⁵ Note that much of the data summarized in this overview chapter on priority needs is based on data referenced in the previous chapter on the county profile, and in more detailed discussions of specific needs/issues in subsequent sections of the report.

throughout all towns, with growth between 2000 and 2012 of at least 50% in each of the county's ten towns.

But even as the minority populations have grown throughout Suffolk County, the data indicate and the interviews underscore the continued concentration of minority populations within the three towns and, even more specifically, within specific villages and other communities within those towns. Those interviewed during the study spoke of Suffolk as one of the most segregated counties in the country, with segregated housing patterns and schools being highly correlated with concentrations of poverty and low-income working poor, patterns of crime and gang concentrations, low school performance indicators, and visible continuing splits between the "haves and have-nots". Most stakeholders view the increased immigration and growth in minority populations as exacerbating historic profiles of segregation, with the attendant patterns of concentrations of needs, unequal opportunity and inequitable allocation of resources.

These historic patterns of segregation and concentrations of low-income residents of the county, as discussed further below, are primarily perceived to be the results of deliberate zoning decisions made and sustained over long periods of time at the town/municipality levels. Restrictive zoning has limited the opportunities to build affordable houses and rental units in sufficient numbers to do more than minimally chip away at patterns of concentrations of racial/ethnic minorities and low-income individuals and families. These in turn have shaped the primarily-segregated nature of student enrollments across the county's multiple school districts. Some local communities have begun to break down historic zoning barriers, but these have been too limited to date to result in significant inroads to changing the historic patterns and to open doors to less segregated housing patterns in the future.

Population Becoming Older

The other important demographic shift made clear by the data, and highlighted in a number of our discussions, is the aging of the population in Suffolk County. Between 2000 and 2012, the number of residents aged 60 through 84 increased by 33%, and the 85-and-older population grew 51%. These increases translate into almost 67,000 more county residents aged 60-84 and an additional 10,000 more who are 85 or older by 2012. These increases have not been accompanied by the development of a comprehensive long-term-care plan or expanded community-based services for seniors, and data suggest increases in waiting lists for programs such as home-delivered meals. Service gaps for seniors are likely to increase as the older population expands and lives longer, even as resources to provide such services dwindle at the County and town levels.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the number of county residents under the age of 20 is declining, with a 4% drop between 2000 and 2012. This reduction has particular implications for declining school enrollments in many communities: Among primary current and future school-age populations, the number of children aged 0-4 declined by 17% during that period; those 5-9 decreased by 14%; and the 10-14 age group declined by 1%. On the other hand, the concentration of minority populations in selected villages and other communities within Babylon, Brookhaven and Islip is associated with significantly younger populations, with higher proportions of young children, adding to demands on the schools in those areas and on other types of human services.

Also of concern for the future well-being of Suffolk County is the significant decline in its young adult population of 20-through-39-year-olds. Between 2000 and 2012, that population declined by 11% countywide, which means there were 45,000 fewer young adults in 2012 than in 2000. Some towns experienced increases in this age range during that period, but each of the three towns focused on in this needs assessment suffered net losses in this population group. Islip was hit especially hard; its 20-39 age group dropped by one-third, compared with its size in 2000—a loss of 31,000 people. Babylon's young adult population declined by almost 16,000 during this period (-26%). Such declines in the young adult population appear to have significant implications for the future workforce and leadership of the county and its individual communities.

Housing and the Economy

Presumably key contributing factors to the decline in the number of residents in the prime age group of young adults in Suffolk County are the related concerns of the declining economy and insufficient affordable housing.

Additional discussion of housing and the economy is included in Chapter 4, from pages 27-41.

Impact of the Economy on Individuals and Families

The data suggest that the economy is in reasonably good shape in the county; but the surface numbers can be deceiving. The total number of businesses is up from 2000, and there were about 89,000 more jobs in 2011 than in 2000 (+12%). However, these totals mask declines in Construction jobs, and in the Manufacturing (-14%) and Information (-31%) sectors. The trend has been for many high-paying jobs to disappear, to be replaced by more part-time, lower-paying jobs throughout the county. At the same time, the unemployment rate countywide has almost

doubled over the past decade, to a high of 7.6% in 2012. Rates among whites in the work force have averaged about 6% in recent years, compared with 8% among Hispanics and almost 10% among blacks. Unemployment rates have been particularly high in the town of Islip, among all ethnic groups, ranging as high as 13% among blacks in the town.

Median household income across the county declined about \$1,000, adjusted for inflation, between 2000 and the averaged years of 2007-2011 (a 1% decline), to a countywide median of about \$89,000. The three town medians were all lower than the county median: about \$86,300 in Islip (a 4% decline since 2000), \$81,200 in Babylon (-2%), and \$86,900 in Brookhaven, up 1%. Median household income levels were significantly lower among blacks and Hispanics (about \$71,500 and \$71,800, respectively).

As indicated in the previous chapter on the county profile, reported poverty rates are relatively low in the county, but these are severely understated when adjusted for the cost of living in Suffolk County. And whichever figures are used, the rates are about twice as high among Hispanics and African-Americans as among whites.

The effects of the declining economy and the ability of individuals and families to cope with their financial needs are demonstrated in stark terms by recent dramatic increases in the numbers of people receiving temporary financial assistance, food stamps and emergency food support. The number of people receiving public assistance through the County-operated Family Assistance and Safety Net programs increased by 8,000 between 2007 and 2012, a 63% increase to 20,700 in 2012. This represents a rate of 14 people per 1,000 residents countywide. About half of those receiving assistance are children.

Even more dramatic evidence of the impact of the economy and the growing disconnect between income levels and ability to survive the costs of living in Suffolk County without supports is provided by the explosion in the numbers of people receiving food stamps (currently known as SNAP). This program reaches a wide range of low-income, often working poor individuals and families, many of whom do not qualify for temporary financial assistance. In 2012, more than 112,000 residents of the county received food stamp support, up 85,000 (+317%) from 2000. This represents a rate of 75 per every 1,000 county residents.

Community stakeholders interviewed during this study emphasized the dramatic change not only of the increased number of food stamp recipients but also of who are among the new participants in the program. Many spoke of the increasing numbers of seniors and others on fixed incomes and of traditional suburban, middle class individuals and families being

added to the welfare and food stamp rolls, as well as seeking support from food pantries—in effect expanding the low-income segment of the larger community. The shift was described as expanding the bottom third of society into the bottom half, while making it more difficult for people to climb the traditional ladder of opportunity from the lower to the middle class or higher.

Stakeholders described the impact these changes are having on the food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters operated by towns, nonprofits and faith community groups. As the resources of these programs dwindle, the demand for their services has increased. From a low in 2001 and 2006 of 3.6 emergency meals served per county resident, 8.7 emergency meals per resident were served in 2011—13 million emergency meals throughout the county.

Impact of Housing Costs

The issues created by the increasing number of part-time and low-paying jobs and (at best) stagnant income levels become even more significant when contextualized with housing prices in the county.

Since 2000, Suffolk County's home affordability has declined by 68%. Expressed as a ratio of the median value of owned homes to the median household income, adjusted for inflation, the county's average affordability ratio from 2007 through 2011 was 4.2—well above the state ratio and significantly higher than the ratio of less than 2 or 3 that is considered affordable. In each of the towns of Islip, Brookhaven and Babylon, typical homes became at least 70% less affordable between 2000 and the end of the decade. Thus, during a time when home ownership rates increased in the county from 80% to 84%, with similar increases in the three towns, higher and higher proportions of the population have been paying much more for housing than is considered affordable and financially healthy.

Among renters (Hispanics and blacks are more than twice as likely as whites to rent housing), patterns of affordability are similar. Expressed as the proportion of household income devoted to monthly rent, utilities and fuel (the ratio of median rental costs divided by median household income for renters), renters spent an average of 37% of their household income for rent in the county in 2007-2011, compared to the 30% level considered by the federal government to be affordable. This 37% level was significantly higher than the 29% rate in 2000. In every town in the county, the proportion of income devoted to rental prices increased between 2000 and the latter years of the decade, as median rents increased by 15% countywide during that time, to almost \$1,500 per rental unit. A number of the stakeholders said one consequence of higher rental costs is that individuals and families are doubling (or tripling) up in rental units to

make housing costs more affordable (while lowering quality of life, safety and health standards).

Not only are houses less affordable in Suffolk County in recent years, but as prices go up and people are less able to afford the upkeep, more homes become vacant. Vacant properties as a proportion of total housing units increased from 10% in 2000 to an average of 13% between 2007 and 2011. It is likely that when the data become available, this proportion will have increased even more in the past two years, factoring in the impact of Hurricane Sandy. Town officials and other observers report increases of vacant, boarded-up homes in many neighborhoods, both in low-income and more suburban areas, as part of a growing trend not started, but exacerbated by, the effects of Hurricane Sandy. Such increased rates are viewed by housing and community development experts as having a negative impact on overall property values, neighborhood safety and the overall social fabric of the community.

Transportation and Access to Jobs and Services

Additional discussion of transportation is included in Chapter 4, beginning with page 41.

The impact of public transportation on residents and their access to jobs and various services is not easily quantified, but the transportation system is widely perceived to be a major impediment to the quality of life in Suffolk County.

In a county as geographically widespread as Suffolk, access to one's own vehicle is critical to minimizing time spent in access to jobs, health care, shopping and other services. Ready access to private transportation options can also make a significant difference in a person's or family's ability to be engaged in schools, religious organizations and other forms of civic participation. And indeed, 95% of all households in the county report having at least one vehicle available for private use. Town proportions are similar to the overall county totals. Proportions are similar in black and Hispanic households as well (93% and 95%, respectively).

However, if a household has more than one driver but only one vehicle, there may still be significant transportation gaps in a family's ability to access jobs and services. Available data do not indicate how many vehicles versus how many drivers are available per household.

Data do suggest, however, that a significant number of county residents need public transportation to access their job. Between 2007 and 2011, an average of more than 43,000 county residents a year used public transportation to get to work, about 6% of all persons who commute to

work. Almost 19,000 others (3%) use some combination of taxi, motorcycle, bike or walking to get to their job. The vast majority of those who use public transportation to get to work are in the four towns of Huntington (11% of commuters in the town), Babylon (9%), Islip (6%) and Brookhaven (4%). Each of those towns has between about 9,000 and 9,500 public transportation commuters to work.

For those residents, as well as for those needing to access public transportation for other purposes, the current system is often perceived as being unable to meet their needs. The difficulty is determining the extent to which the bus routes are not easily accessible to many jobs and needed services, particularly for those who may need to travel during the evenings or on weekends.

In the interviews, reports were widespread of people, for whom the transportation system was a clear barrier to accessing jobs involving evening or shift work and various services, often requiring several transfers and significant expenditures of time. Examples included clients who needed two or three hours of riding on buses and waiting for transfers to make a trip that would take 15 to 20 minutes by car. Additionally, stakeholders described clients who experienced additional wait times after traveling several hours by bus to access needed services.

Such delays in accessing services, as well as bus routes that do not go where a person needs to get, create additional burdens for those attempting to survive and maintain a decent quality of life in communities with insufficient access to well-paying jobs and insufficient affordable housing to live comfortably. The county's transportation system, operated by the Department of Public Works, is in the process of adding evening and weekend routes in an effort to be more responsive to issues of accessibility and timeliness for more riders and is expanding its par transit bus ridership among people with disabilities. The County Executive is also promoting the concept of Connect Long Island, designed to more effectively link public transportation services with hub areas around which more housing and jobs are to be developed, in hopes of better linking the critical priority needs of transportation, housing and jobs.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Additional discussion of mental health and substance abuse is included in Chapter 4, beginning page 47.

Although data documenting mental health and substance abuse prevalence are not widely available in the county, the indicators that do exist—along with the testimony of the stakeholders interviewed—point to issues increasingly burdening a service system insufficiently equipped to address the needs.

The number of community-based mental health clinic visits was 22% higher in the county in 2011 than in 2001, based on state surveys conducted every two years. These 6,000 visits in 2011 represented about 4 clinic visits per 1,000 residents in the county. Similarly, there have been significant increases in the number of county residents admitted to alcohol/substance abuse treatment centers. Between 2008 and 2011, state data indicate that there have consistently been more than 21,000 admissions per year (about 142 per 10,000 residents)—about 13% more than in 2000.

Almost half of those interviewed for this study described growing mental health and drug addiction patterns affecting various aspects of the social fabric of the county. Often the stakeholders talked of dual diagnoses involving both mental illness and substance abuse.

The increased focus on moving people from mental health institutions to living in the larger community was viewed as a good idea that has been badly executed, without sufficient resources of dollars and services flowing into the community to meet the resulting service needs. As a result, those with various types of mental illness are increasingly filling local jails, which are becoming the de facto points of treatment in some cases, for those whose needs have not been met through non-criminal-justice-system services. Others with mental health issues are winding up in emergency rooms and the homeless services system. The consensus of the numerous stakeholders who raised mental health issues as a major and growing need in the community is that neither County government nor the nonprofit sector has been able to keep adequate pace with the growing needs.

A wide range of stakeholders also expressed concern about the impact of what is perceived by several as a “growing epidemic” of abuse of prescription drugs and heroin, especially among middle school and high school youth and young adults. Heroin has become cheap and “incredibly easy to access” and often has deadly consequences on its own, as well as contributing to other types of crime. The issue of crime in the county rarely surfaced as a major issue in the interviews conducted, and the reported rates of serious, property and violent crimes have all declined over the past decade. But the crime-related issue that surfaced repeatedly was drug abuse, particularly of heroin, which was typically reported as an issue in primarily white, more affluent communities. Data on drug-related hospitalizations appear to confirm those perceptions, as the age-adjusted rate of such hospitalizations among whites is almost twice the rate for African-Americans and three times the rate for Hispanics. Several stakeholders spoke of the need for increased, intense educational initiatives to make young people aware of the consequences of any use of heroin or combinations of prescription drugs.

Education

Additional discussion of education is included in Chapter 4, beginning on page 57.

The school districts of the county are generally seen as meeting the educational needs of most students and thus education did not surface as a major growing or unmet need. However, to the extent that the issue did surface, two primary concerns were expressed: (1) The need to find ways to desegregate the schools and/or find ways to break down the impact of the concentrations of poverty in the more urbanized school districts in order to address significant disparities in performance outcomes among districts with widely varying resources and differences in concentrations of poverty and racial/ethnic makeup. With increased segregated patterns of schools, performance disparities between schools and school districts are becoming increasingly exacerbated. (2) The need for schools, including the so-called "elite suburban schools," to work more closely with the business community to offer more course options designed to provide education and training experiences geared to the specific needs of employers, beyond simply focusing on college preparedness. Such initiatives, in conjunction with similar connections between employers and higher education (especially community colleges), are viewed as important components of community efforts to ensure that today's youth will be able to succeed in the economy of the future and to increase the potential of the county to retain more of its young adult population.

Child Care

Additional discussion of child care is included in Chapter 4, beginning on page 44.

About a third of those interviewed raised the issue of child care and the need both to strengthen the overall quality of care network and to increase the numbers of children and families receiving subsidized child care. The issue was consistently framed as a community investment critical in the development of children as well as an economic development issue, providing a resource needed to help low-income families find and maintain job opportunities. Several stakeholders indicated that it is much less costly to invest in subsidizing quality child care than to pay for the same family to receive welfare/temporary assistance/financial aid.

However, about 3,100 children per month in Suffolk County received subsidized child care in 2012, 1,635 fewer (a reduction of 34%) than in 2003. Almost 90% of the child care payments were made to families in three towns: about one-third each to Islip and Brookhaven residents and about 20% to those in Babylon.

Everyone who raised the topic of child care services and subsidies urged the County to find ways to increase its future investment, along with that of the state, in this high-priority issue.

Gangs

Additional discussion of gangs and crime is included in Chapter 4, beginning on page 54.

About a quarter of those who were interviewed mentioned the importance of addressing the issue of gangs in the county. As noted earlier, crime overall was rarely mentioned as one of the highest-priority issues to be addressed in the county. Two exceptions to that were the previously-mentioned need to focus on drugs as a crime-related issue, and gangs. According to a 2012 study on gangs prepared by the Suffolk County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, *Profile of Gang Members in Suffolk County*, about 4,100 gang members have been identified in the county, in 27 gangs (plus some with an unknown gang affiliation). The majority (71%) was young men between the ages of 18 and 30; 31% were under 21, including 9% under 18. About two-thirds of the members were identified as coming from communities in Islip, Babylon and Brookhaven with higher-than average concentrations of poverty and unemployment, which the report says “is consistent with risk factors associated with gang involvement.”

The Suffolk County Police Department, in conjunction with two of the communities with concentrations of gang members, is implementing a pilot project designed in part to work with gang members in a creative intervention to help reduce the impact and criminal recidivism of current gang members, as well as to help prevent gang involvement in the future. This effort was mentioned by several stakeholders as the kind of collaborative effort that can hopefully become a model to reduce the negative impact of gangs in other communities going forward.

Environment vs. Economic Development

Additional discussion of environmental health issues is included in Chapter 4, beginning page 52.

An additional high-priority issue mentioned by stakeholders concerned the role environmental issues play or should play in the ongoing development of Suffolk County. Most specifically, the issue tended to focus in these discussions around the relative lack across the county of municipal water and sewage systems, and the need for expanded enforcement of sewage and ground water issues. Standing ground water and overflows of sewage systems were mentioned as issues that receive little public attention, in part because of their potential to conflict with economic development

projects. These environmental issues were portrayed as being a public health hazard, impacting on the quality of life in many communities across the county, as having a negative impact on the ability to sell houses, and as an issue that ultimately helps drive people from the county who are most directly affected.

Impact of Hurricane Sandy

Most of the trends and priority needs addressed in this chapter and in subsequent discussions preceded Super Storm Sandy. Some were exacerbated by the storm, and the full scope of the impact on the affected communities has yet to be fully determined. As data related to the post-storm time periods become more readily available, further analysis of the impact of the storm will be possible.

Among the issues that were affected by the storm are housing affordability and accessibility. Although many homeowners whose houses were damaged have been able to make needed repairs and return to their homes, unknown numbers are awaiting resolution of insurance and government assistance issues before deciding what to do about their homes. In the meantime, many are still paying taxes on properties they cannot inhabit, though in some cases tax adjustments have been made during the interim period. Some owners have made conscious decisions not to rebuild and instead to relocate to "safer" places farther from the shoreline while others have leased housing while ultimate resolution of the future of their home is pending. These decisions to relocate, either permanently or temporarily, appear to have displaced some previous residents of "inland" housing, causing some dispersal and even limited gentrification impacts in some areas.

Some stakeholders anticipate significant long-term impacts on the social fabric of neighborhoods. Such disruptive impacts could occur (1) along the shores as people decide whether to stay and rebuild or renovate, raise their homes (for those who can afford to do so), or sell their homes, perhaps with resulting depressed market values, or (2) within more inland communities to the extent that significant amounts of housing dispersal and displacement may occur.

Some suggest that the real impact of Sandy on the various affected communities—including the economic impact of restaurants and other businesses that may close permanently or be negatively affected by reduced business traffic—may take years to sort out.

Some suggest that one consequence of storm survivors' having to finance an existing home while living elsewhere may be contributing to the increased use of food stamps, food pantries and other community supports.

Some also speculate that there are likely to be significant, but perhaps mostly invisible, mental health impacts from the storm. The added stresses resulting from the storm may be exacerbating issues that preceded the storm. This observation by a group of stakeholders suggests that such behavioral health impacts may continue to surface the longer storm-related issues remain unresolved or are resolved in unsatisfactory ways. They caution that community providers need to be alert to symptoms that could surface as time goes on.

Several observers noted the positive aspect of communities and agencies working together in collaborative partnerships in the immediate and in some cases ongoing response to the storm. New approaches and a collaborative spirit of working together for a common cause were demonstrated post-Sandy in ways that are hoped will create models for more permanent partnerships in the future.

4. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE COUNTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PRIORITY TOPICS

During the development of this project, eight high-priority topics were identified for primary focus during the needs assessment process. As emphasized in Chapter 3, some of these focus areas—the economy and jobs, housing and transportation—along with child care, mental health and substance abuse and selected other subsets of the eight initial priority topics, stood out as the highest of the high-priority needs. Those issues, and their interconnections, were discussed in Chapter 3.

This chapter examines in more detail each of the original eight priority topics, incorporating data from CGR's companion community profile document analyzing 94 community indicators⁶ (produced in the fall of 2013 as the first product of this needs assessment), along with additional data supplied by County and nonprofit stakeholders in this process, and observations shared by more than 30 stakeholders interviewed over the past four months. These analyses are organized for each of the eight priority areas, presented in the approximate order of priority of needs that resulted from the comprehensive needs assessment process. At the end of each topic section, links are provided to additional data resources for readers to explore for additional information on the topic.

The Economy, Income and Jobs

Employment

A vibrant economy is the foundation of a thriving community. Like many New York State counties, Suffolk County has faced challenges as the local economy shifts from manufacturing and information to financial activity and professional and business services. On the surface, however, Suffolk has experienced both business and job growth over the past decade. But it is important to pay close attention to the nuances of those surface indicators, as suggested in Chapter 3.

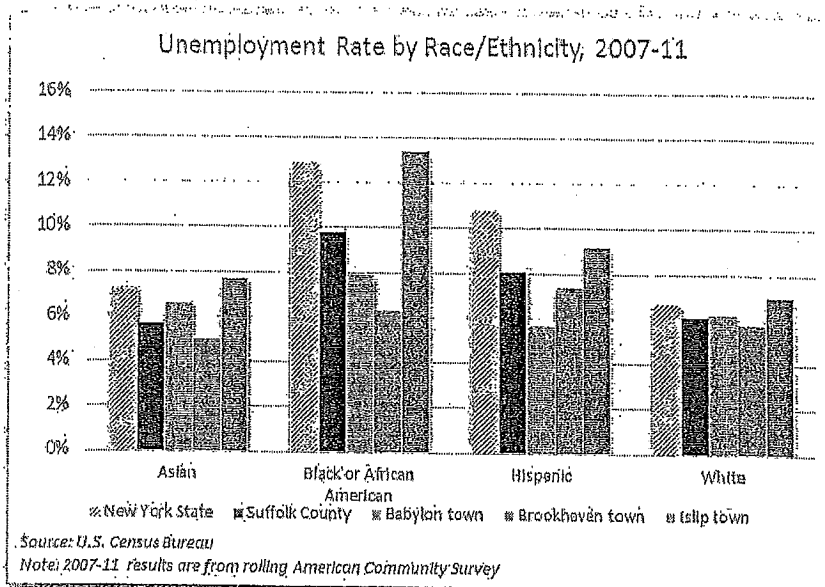
The surface numbers can be deceiving. The total number of businesses has been increasing, and there were about 89,000 more jobs in 2011 than in 2000 (+12%). However, these totals mask declines in construction

⁶ See

http://files.cgr.org/data/hweli/CGR_Suffolk_Community_Profile_Indicators_Sept_2013.pdf

jobs, and in the manufacturing (-14%) and information (-31%) sectors. More recent data made available by the County indicate that construction jobs have begun to increase overall on Long Island since 2011, but that seven of the 12 major employment sectors had experienced declines in jobs from October 2012 through October 2013, including manufacturing (minus 3.9%) and wholesale trade (-3.6%). Although County data indicate that there were 13,500 more county residents employed in October 2013 than a year earlier, the total numbers employed at that point had only caught up to the approximate totals eight years earlier, in October 2005.

The countywide unemployment rate almost doubled over the past decade, to a high of 7.6% in 2012, although the rate had declined by October 2013



to 6.1%, according to data supplied by the County Division of Planning and Environment. But even these encouraging recent trends must be viewed in the context of much higher unemployment rates among the growing African American and Hispanic populations in the county. The actual numbers may have changed somewhat for the better since the averages shown in the graph below, but the patterns are not likely to have changed: Unemployment rates among Hispanics are about two percentage points higher than among whites in the work force, and they are about four points higher among African Americans. Rates have also consistently been particularly high in the town of Islip, among all race/ethnic groups, ranging as high as 13% among blacks in the town.

What all of these numbers tend to mask is the reality, as many stakeholders pointed out in our interviews, that the trend throughout Long

Island has been for many high-paying jobs to disappear, to be replaced by more part-time, lower-paying jobs throughout the county, often with limited benefits coverage. As a result, it is not unusual for many individuals to need to maintain more than one job in order to make ends meet, thereby adding further stresses to the quality of their lives.

Moreover, the declines in good jobs paying sufficient wages to enable job-holders to comfortably cover living costs and support families are further exacerbated by disconnects between the needs of the business community for certain skills and experiences, and the ability or willingness of schools, government, higher education and/or /skills training sectors to provide the types of education and skills training necessary to meet the future needs of the business community. As noted in the previous chapter, there has historically been too little effort to bring these different sectors of the community together to develop an effective plan to bridge these need-versus-reality gaps, to the detriment of both employers and potential employees.

Users of various Department of Labor one-stop services—including job search, workshops, counseling and training—are disproportionately residents of the towns of Islip and Smithtown: More than half of all users. During the 12-month period ending in June 2013, Islip residents accounted for just over a third of all users and visits, compared to about 22% of the county's population. Smithtown, with about 8% of the county's population, accounted for 17% of the users and 22% of all visits during the same period. Brookhaven and Huntington also each accounted for 17% of the users, and Babylon for 13%. DOL data indicate that users of vocational training adult and dislocated worker programs have both declined significantly from 2010 through 2013 (by 83% and 64%, respectively). It is not known whether these declines reflect reductions in need, resources or lack of demand due to discouragement and loss of hope regarding the potential for finding work.

Income and Coping Financially

As noted in Chapter 3, median household income across the county has declined about \$1,000, adjusted for inflation, between 2000 and the averaged years of 2007-2011 (a 1% decline) to a countywide median of about \$89,000. Even with the decline, such household income levels on the surface appear to suggest an overwhelmingly well-off county: For example, the county median income is almost \$31,000 (53%) higher than the statewide median for the same period of time. However, Long Island's apparent affluence is misleading as, due to the overall costs of living on Long Island, some families living at the median income level may barely rise above basic subsistence living, when high housing and other costs of living are factored in. Moreover, median household income levels are significantly lower among blacks and Hispanics (about \$71,500 and

\$71,800, respectively), even though they face the same higher costs of living in the county. Furthermore, the median household income figure hides the reality that about one-fifth of Suffolk families earn under \$50,000 a year, well below the self-sufficiency standard for Suffolk County.⁷

Officially-reported poverty rates are quite low in the county, compared with state and national levels, but these are deceptive and severely understated when adjusted for the standard of living in Suffolk County. And whichever figures are used, the rates are about twice as high among Hispanics and African Americans as among whites—and are two to three times higher among black and Hispanic children than among white children.

The declining economy and the high costs of living are changing the face of the poor in the county, as many full-time working class individuals and families, as well as seniors and others on fixed incomes, are increasingly finding it difficult to survive without support. As noted in the previous chapter, the ability of individuals and families to cope with their financial needs is clearly demonstrated by recent dramatic increases in the numbers of people receiving a variety of supports such as temporary financial assistance, food stamps and emergency food support.

The number of people receiving temporary public assistance through the County-operated Family Assistance and Safety Net programs increased by 8,000 between 2007 and 2012, a 63% increase to 20,700 in 2012. More current data from the County suggest that these numbers may have begun to level off in the past year. Between 2000 and 2011, per-capita public assistance expenditures of all types were up 70% in the county.

Food

Further evidence of the growing disconnect between income levels and ability to survive the costs of living in Suffolk County without supports is provided by the dramatic increase in the numbers of people receiving food stamps (currently known as SNAP). This program reaches a wide range of low-income, often working poor individuals and families, many of whom do not qualify for temporary financial assistance. In 2012 more than 112,000 residents of the county received food stamp support—up 317% (+85,000 individuals) from 2000. More recent data from the County suggests that those numbers are continuing to rise. Between September 2012 and September 2013, the numbers increased by 6,800, an additional 6% increase in just one year. Meanwhile, the numbers of persons enrolled

⁷ For further perspective on the self-sufficiency standard, see Diana M. Pearce, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for New York State 2010*, June 2010.

in Medicaid have almost tripled since 2000, from 5% to 14% of residents of all ages. In 2012, almost 205,000 residents were enrolled in Medicaid, an increase of more than 55,000 just since 2009.

The Suffolk County Community Health Assessment (CHA) document for 2014-2017, published by the County Department of Health Services, notes that food insecurity and hunger are a problem for many financially-challenged residents. Many of those interviewed during this study described the impact these changes are having on the food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters operated by towns, nonprofits and faith community groups. As the resources of these programs dwindle, the demand for their services has increased. From a low in 2001 and 2006 of 3.6 emergency meals served per county resident, a reported 8.7 emergency meals per resident were served in 2011—13 million emergency meals throughout the county. Those numbers declined in 2012 for the first time since 2005; since 2013 data were not available as this report was written, it is not known whether these represented a one-year aberration, with subsequent increases in 2013 post-Sandy, or the beginning of a downward trend. It is known that in January of 2014, there was a waiting list of almost 400 persons for home delivered meals provided to seniors—almost half living in Islip and about 20% each in Babylon and Huntington.

Community stakeholders interviewed during this study emphasized the dramatic impact of not just these numbers, but also of the increased variety of residents throughout the county who are represented in the increased totals.

Poor nutrition and dietary/eating habits are referenced in the County CHA as being significant contributors to the growing obesity rates in the county and nationally. Poor nutrition has also been associated with chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, hypertension and osteoarthritis. As ready food availability becomes more of an issue for residents of Suffolk County, the Department of Health Services has made nutrition a significant issue in its own right and in the context of helping to reduce the impact of the growing number of residents who are obese or overweight. The CHA describes these health issues as the second leading preventable causes of death in the United States.

Obesity rates among children and adolescents have tripled over the past three decades. Currently, one-third of New York's and of Suffolk County's children is obese or overweight, as is 60% of the county's adult population. Among the expressed goals stated in the County Community Health Assessment is for the County to address issues related to obesity as the number one public health nutrition issue.

Additional Stakeholder Comments

Beyond the issues raised above, stakeholders also added nuances to some of the data, and referenced other items not covered explicitly above. These are noted briefly below:

- Finding increasing job opportunities and internships for young people is critical.
- There is a need to get employers engaged with schools and youth in preparing young people for the job market and developing marketable skills. Better links are needed between the education sector and job training opportunities or programs.
- Providing adequate child care subsidies and quality child care is, or at least should be, an important part of a viable economic development plan.
- Jobs, housing, mental health, homelessness and crime are all interconnected.
- There is a dearth of jobs, even for those with a college education, plus college graduates come out with huge debts, so there is often a sense of hopelessness among many young adults that has to be addressed.
- The economy is bad enough for people with everything going for them, but it's much worse for people with disabilities and mental illness. We need to find ways of providing mainstream jobs, and not just sheltered workshops, for such individuals.
- There are not enough immediate supports for those in poverty; current food banks can't keep pace.
- Declining wealth and income levels, high taxes, lost and low-pay jobs result in more foreclosures.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about the economy, income and jobs, explore the following links:

County Business Patterns

Description: Presents data for employment and establishments by industry and size in Nassau and Suffolk counties. Data are from 1970 to 2011.

Related indicators: Change in Number of Businesses by Sector,
Employment by Sector

Economic & Housing Data

Description: Data from the Census Bureau including employment by industry, employment level, unemployment level, unemployment rate, and the decennial census population and households from 1970. The data are October's figures and are annual. Also presents data from the New York State Department of Labor including Long Island employment, unemployment, & unemployment rate data from 1980 to October 2013 (annual) and data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index for Long Island 1985 to Jan-Oct 2013 (annual). Annual sales tax revenues from 2006 through Jan-Oct 2013 were also included from the New York State Department of Taxation & Finance. CB Richard Ellis provided Office Market Vacancy Rate for Nassau and Suffolk from 2006 to 2013 (annual 3rd quarter based). Also included are multiple listing service (MLS) median existing home prices 2008 through 2013. Related indicators: Employment by Sector, Unemployment Rate, Occupied Housing Units, Housing Affordability for Homeowners, Total Population, Household Types.

Food Access Research Atlas

Description: Interactive map illustrating "food desert" areas with limited access to supermarkets, supercenters, grocery stores, or other sources of healthy and affordable food.

Related indicators: None

SCDOLLCA Center Utilization

Description: Jul 12 to Jun 13 usage of the Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing & Consumer Affairs (SCDOLLCA) by zip code (now aggregated).

Related indicators: None

Suffolk DSS SNAP Active Cases

Description: July 2012 to August 2013 count of SNAP benefits by zip (now aggregated).

Related indicators: People Receiving Food Stamps

Suffolk DSS Caseload Trends

Description: Trends in 2007-2013 caseloads for TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid.

Related indicators: People Receiving Temporary Assistance, People Receiving Food Stamps

Workforce Investment Act Programs

Description: Presents data for dislocated worker, adult program, and youth program customers by the type of training. Data are annual from Jul 2009 to June 2013.

Related indicators: None

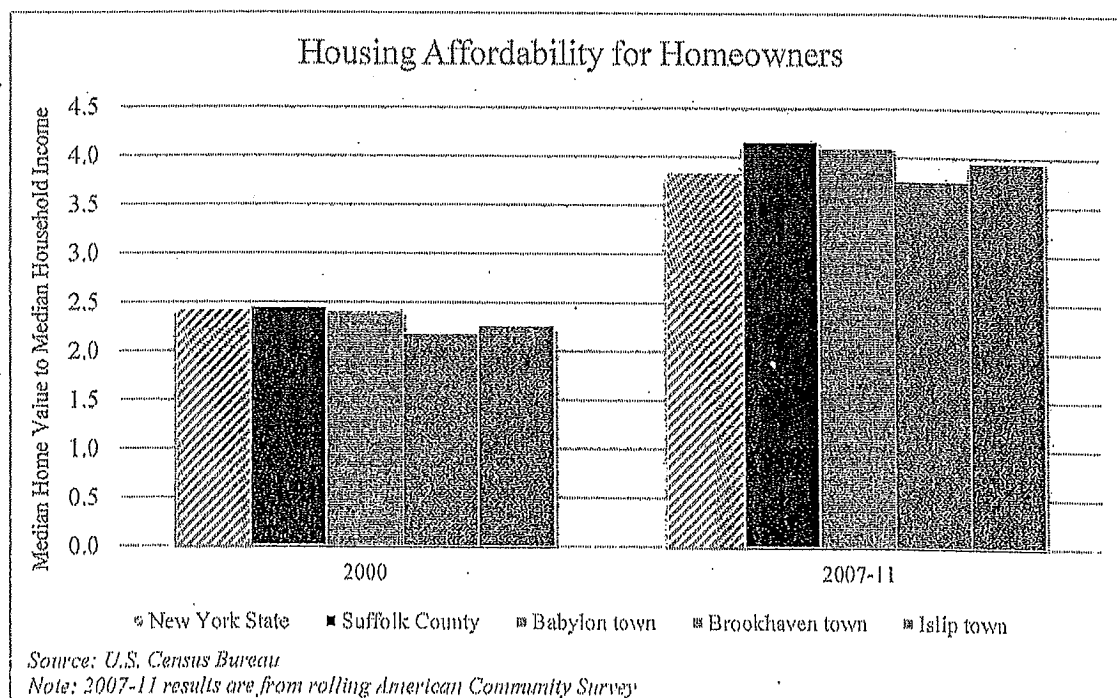
Housing

Owner-Occupied Housing

Suffolk County has historically been made up of towns and communities with high proportions of owner-occupied housing. Compared to a 58% statewide owner-occupied rate (proportion of all occupied, i.e., non-vacant, housing units that are owner-occupied, i.e., not rented), between 2007 and 2011, the Suffolk County proportion was 84%. The proportion of owner-occupied housing units ranged from 75% in East Hampton to 92% in Smithtown, with Islip and Brookhaven at 83% each and Babylon at 82%. Home-owner rates were considerably lower among African Americans and Latinos, though almost two-thirds of both groups own their own homes (62% and 65%, respectively).

It should be noted that correspondence provided by the County indicates that in 2012, the owner-occupied proportion was 79%. It could not be determined whether this apparent 5% decline in the countywide ownership rate reflects different data sources, or whether such a substantial decline had actually occurred in such a short period of time. In that context, and in the aftermath of late 2012's Hurricane Sandy, data for 2013 should be viewed carefully when it becomes available.

In most cases, high home-ownership rates are considered desirable. The difficulty, as suggested earlier, is when the costs of ownership become prohibitive. Defined as the ratio of median home value divided by the median household income, adjusted for inflation, the housing affordability index provides an indication of the value of the home compared to the owner's ability to pay for it. A ratio of 2 to 3 or less is generally considered in the affordable range. By contrast, as shown in the graph below, the Suffolk County affordability average index between 2007 and 2011 was 4.2, 68% higher (worse) than in 2000. The impact of the costs



of housing is updated, using a different metric, in a recent report issued by the State Comptroller. That report indicates that 44% of all Suffolk County homeowners were above the affordability threshold of paying 30% of their household income for housing in 2012—the third highest proportion of all counties in the state, including New York City.⁸

Town ratios ranged from 3.8 in Brookhaven to 9.4 in East Hampton and 10.7 in Shelter Island. In each of the towns of Islip, Brookhaven and Babylon, typical homes became at least 70% less affordable between 2000 and the end of the decade. Thus, with income levels at best stagnant in the county, and increasing numbers of county residents needing to seek various supports to supplement their available resources, housing affordability has become a significant issue across all segments of the county.

For persons who can afford to buy and are just entering the market now, it may be a relatively good time to be buying, as home prices have been declining in the county since 2007, until a recent reported 6% increase in October 2013. However, for those who bought homes earlier and may now be considering selling, the market looks less positive from their perspective, as the median house sale price in October 2013, even with the recent increase, was still 15% lower than the peak median price in October 2006.

Not only may many residents be forced to sell for less than the home's initial purchase price (presumably exacerbated by the effects of Sandy), but significant numbers of other homeowners are facing potential foreclosures on their properties. A recent report by the Empire Justice Center⁹ projects a major potential "foreclosure crisis" in Suffolk County, primarily in communities with high concentrations of minority residents. Tracking 90-day Pre-Foreclosure Filing Notices sent across New York for the first half of 2012, the study indicates that almost 25,000 (15.5% of the statewide total) were from Suffolk County—twice the proportion of the state's population living in the county. The vast majority of such notices were sent to residents in the towns of Babylon, Islip and Brookhaven, and disproportionately in high-minority communities within those towns. The highest-impact potential foreclosure areas are said by the report to also be among the areas where sales prices of homes have declined the most. Thus the report projects major financial losses from declining property values, loss of asset wealth and significant potential harm to African American and Latino communities unless actions are taken to address the

⁸ Thomas P. DiNapoli, NYS Comptroller, *Housing Affordability in New York State*, March 2014, p. 5.

⁹ Empire Justice Center, *The Long Island Foreclosure Crisis: Stabilizing the communities most impacted by foreclosures in Nassau and Suffolk Counties*, April 2013.

issue. Additionally correspondence from the County Planning office indicated that more recent data provided by RealtyTrac noted that foreclosure activity countywide in the first nine months of 2013 was up 28% from the comparable period in 2012.

The foreclosure data seem consistent with increases in vacant properties. As noted in Chapter 3, vacant properties as a proportion of total housing units increased from 10% in 2000 to an average of 13% between 2007 and 2011. This proportion may well be higher now, factoring in the subsequent impact of Hurricane Sandy. Town officials and other observers reported significant increases in the numbers of vacant, boarded-up homes and foreclosure actions in many neighborhoods, both in low-income and more suburban areas, as part of a growing trend not started, but exacerbated by, the effects of Sandy. Such increased rates are viewed with some alarm by housing and community development experts as having a negative impact on overall property values, neighborhood safety and the overall social fabric of the community.

Rental Housing

Availability of affordable rental housing is also an issue throughout the county. Renters typically spent 37% of their household income for rent, utilities and fuel in the county between 2007-2011, compared to the 30% level considered by the federal government to be affordable. This 37% level was significantly higher than the 29% rate in 2000. Median rents increased by 15% countywide during that time, to almost \$1,500 per rental unit. Rental affordability is a pervasive issue, as the proportion of income devoted to rental prices increased in every Suffolk County town since 2000, and the proportion of income spent on rent exceeded the recommended 30% level in every town but one (which was exactly at the 30% level). Hispanics and blacks are more than twice as likely as whites to rent housing, and they typically spend disproportionate amounts of their income on rent (45% is the median proportion among blacks and 37% among Hispanics, compared with 33% among white renters).

The new report on housing affordability just issued indicates that in 2012, 54% of the renters in Suffolk County paid more than 30% of their household incomes for rent—up from 43% in 2000. Only five counties in the state had higher proportions.¹⁰

A number of the stakeholders that were interviewed talked of one of the consequences of these high rental costs as being individuals and families doubling up (or tripling up), often illegally, in rental units to make housing

¹⁰ *Housing Affordability in New York State*, pp. 5, 9.

costs more affordable (while lowering quality of life, safety and health standards). This practice was perceived to be especially pervasive among recent immigrants to the county, with concentrations in the more urbanized communities.

Restrictive zoning at the local municipality level has limited the opportunities to build affordable houses and rental units in sufficient numbers to significantly expand the supply of affordable rental units or to do more than chip away at the margins at segregated patterns of concentrations of racial/ethnic minorities and low-income individuals and families. Stakeholders indicated that some progress has been made in breaking down the restrictive zoning barriers, but there remains a predominant "not in my back yard" mentality in most communities about accepting developments with significant numbers of affordable housing units. Senior housing developments are often viewed as being "safer," but even needed affordable housing developments for seniors are not routinely accepted in many communities.

New Housing Construction

Between 2000 and 2004, Suffolk County averaged about 4,300 new residential housing units authorized by building permits each year. In the four years through 2012, those numbers shrank to an average of about 970 residential permits per year, though permits through October 2013 had increased 44% over the same period in 2012. The value of new construction in 2012 was at its highest level since 2007, but was still 61% lower than the record high value recorded in 2005, according to data supplied by County Planning.

Nearly 85% of all new construction permits have been for single-family houses. Between 2009 and mid-2013, an average of only 150 units per year have been authorized by permit in five-or-more family buildings. These data would seem to lend credence to the anecdotal perspectives that little is currently being done or planned, at least in the foreseeable future, to significantly expand the supply of affordable housing in the county. Beginning with 2009, Brookhaven has been the most active town in authorizing housing units via the permit process, with an average of about 285 units authorized per year; 29% of all the residential permits authorized in the county during that time were in Brookhaven. The next closest was Southampton, with an average of about 210 units permitted per year (21% of all permits during that time). Islip has averaged 110 permitted units per year (11% of the total), followed by East Hampton and Huntington. Babylon lags far behind most of the towns, with an average of 40 per year. Each of the towns has authorized far fewer housing units per year since 2009 than it had authorized in the years between 2000 and 2008.

Homelessness

Stakeholders describe the issue of homelessness in the county as a “hidden issue, increasingly invisible.” No comprehensive data on the extent of homelessness was obtained for this study, other than a 12-month summary of emergency placements funded by the Department of Social Services from mid-2012 through mid-2013. Those data indicate a total of just over 10,000 emergency placements during that time, an average of about 835 per month. It is not clear how many separate individuals or families these data represent. Nor is it clear where their last known residence was before being placed in an emergency housing setting. More than 60% of the placements involved the towns of Islip (34%) and Brookhaven (27%), which we believe refers to the town in which the placements were made, rather than where the person previously lived, although we were not able to independently verify that with certainty. An additional 10% of the placements involved the town of Huntington, 9% Babylon and 8% each in Riverhead and Smithtown.

Whatever the interpretation of the location, these placements are thought to represent only a fraction of the overall homeless population. Other homeless persons wind up as inmates in the jail each night; some were referenced as living for periods of time out of their cars; and many are thought to be doubled up or tripled up in overcrowded rental units in mostly low-income communities. Homelessness is thought to have been prevalent in the county prior to Hurricane Sandy, but to have been exacerbated by it.

The Hurricane Sandy Housing Effect

In addition to its impact on homelessness, various additional issues related to housing affordability and accessibility have certainly been affected by Sandy, as discussed earlier in Chapter 3. Unknown numbers of people whose homes were destroyed or damaged in the storm still are awaiting resolution of insurance and NY Rising reimbursement issues before deciding what to do about their homes. In the meantime, many are still paying taxes on properties they cannot currently inhabit, though in some cases tax adjustments have been made during the interim period. Some owners have made conscious decisions to relocate, either permanently or on an interim basis, while ultimate resolution of the future of their home is pending. These decisions appear to have had the ripple effect of displacing some previous residents of “inland” housing, causing some dispersal and even limited gentrification impacts in some areas.

A number of stakeholders speculated that there will be significant long-term impacts on the social fabric of many neighborhoods in the county. Among directly-affected neighborhoods along the shore—as some homes are not rebuilt and/or abandoned, others are renovated or rebuilt but not

raised, others are able to be raised for greater future security, and others are sold—market values will be affected and perhaps depressed. Distinctions between “haves and have-nots,” in terms of who is able to afford to do what with their homes, may become evident. All of these changes are likely to affect the makeup of, and ongoing relationships between residents of, the evolving neighborhoods. In addition, other more inland communities may be affected to the extent that significant amounts of housing dispersal and displacement may occur in their midst. Some suggest that the real impact of Sandy on the various affected communities may take years to totally sort out, including the economic impact of restaurants and other businesses that may close permanently or be negatively affected by reduced business traffic.

Additional Stakeholder Comments

Beyond the issues raised above, stakeholders also added nuances to some of the data, and referenced other items not covered explicitly above. These are noted briefly below:

- There is a need for increased resources to help rehabilitate housing in the county.
- Housing and good-paying job availability is clearly linked. How do people without jobs or with low-paying jobs afford to live in this county?
- Segregation, racism and zoning are clearly interrelated in this county; zoning restrictions at the municipal level must be relaxed if this community is to prosper in the future. It is easier to get senior affordable housing built than other types of affordable housing, and some of that reflects hidden racism.
- There is a need for more mixed-income housing developments.
- We’re seeing more foreclosures and threats of foreclosures and vacancies as a result of declining incomes and wealth, loss of jobs, high taxes—and now Sandy.
- The county needs to increase its efforts to retain the young adult population, in part by expanding down payment and related supports for those burdened by college debts and perhaps low-paying jobs who want to purchase their first home.
- More affordable housing is needed for those on fixed incomes, such as seniors.

- Islip has significant housing problems, with increasing foreclosures and boarded-up houses, combined with patterns of homelessness in the form of doubled-up housing in rental units, often involving expanding immigrant populations with related language barriers.
- Housing availability, appeal, and prices are often affected by faulty septic systems and inadequate and insufficient municipal water and sewage systems in many parts of the county.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about housing, explore the following links:

Building Permits

Description: Census residential building data for Nassau Suffolk and eastern Suffolk County from 1950 to June 2013. Housing permit data down to the town level for 1980 through June 2013. There is also data on the value of the construction.

Related indicators: Occupied Housing Units

Email from the Planner

Description: Narrative touching upon housing by tenure, new residential construction, New York State Association of Realtors home prices, transportation improvement, MacArthur Airport and Long Island Rail Road.

Related indicators: Various Housing, Jobs & Employment, and Transportation indicators.

Housing Affordability in New York State

Description: March 2014 report by the New York State Comptroller Office. It examines the homeowner and renter housing costs over the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's affordability threshold for 2000 and 2013.

Related indicators: Housing Affordability for Homeowners, Housing Affordability for Homeowners by Race/Ethnicity, Housing Affordability for Renters, Housing Affordability for Renters, by Race/Ethnicity

HUD Community Development Funds

Description: Dollar amounts of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants from 2005-2013.

Related indicators: None

Long Island Foreclosure Crisis Report

Description: Maps and tables illustrating the foreclosure picture in Long Island.

Related indicators: Homeownership Rates, Homeownership Rates by Race, Housing Affordability for Homeowners, Housing Affordability for Homeowners by Race/Ethnicity

Rutgers Workforce Housing Report

Description: Projections of workforce housing needs in 2012.

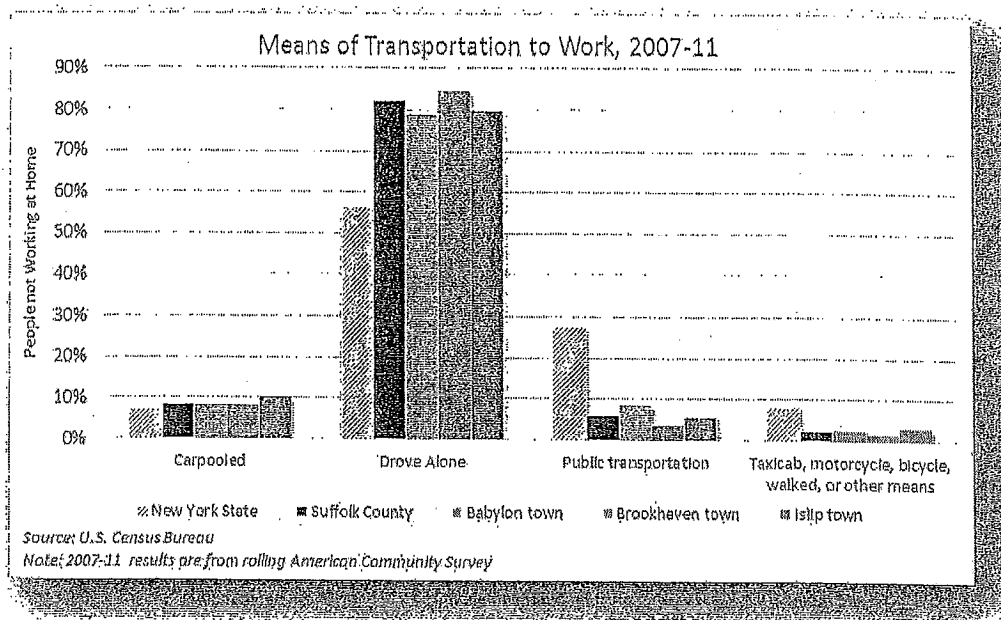
Related indicators: Various Housing and Jobs & Employment indicators.

Transportation

Effective transportation systems are critical to the functioning and growth of an economy and important in maintaining a high quality of life, as well as access to jobs and needed services. Fortunately, the vast majority of Suffolk County residents have access to a vehicle, and most residents travel to work either by driving alone or carpooling. The difficulty arises for the substantial minority of residents who must rely on the public transportation system for access to jobs, medical appointments, shopping and other needed services.

Because Suffolk County is so large and spread out, and its residential and major employment centers are so widely dispersed, it is difficult to effectively provide for the needs of the population with an efficient mass transit system. Thus reliance on private transportation is critical for an individual and family to be able to control, as much as possible, the ability to efficiently access jobs and services on their schedules. Across the county, 95% of all households report having at least a single vehicle at home and available for use. This proportion is fairly consistent for all towns and for all race/ethnic groups across the county. Given the dispersal of residences and jobs, more than 80% of all who commute to work do so by driving alone, with another 9% carpooling (averaged over the 2007-2011 period). These proportions have remained consistent over the past decade.

However, as noted in Chapter 3, there is a significant minority of county residents for whom those options do not meet their needs, and who may prefer—or in most cases may have no choice other than—to use public transportation to access their job. Between 2007 and 2011, an average of more than 43,000 county residents a year used public transportation to get to work—about 6% of all commuters. Almost 19,000 others (3%) use some combination of taxi, motorcycle, bike or walking to get to their job. The vast majority of users of public transportation to get to work are in the four towns of Huntington (11% of commuters in the town), Babylon (9%), Islip (6%) and Brookhaven (4%). Each of those towns has between about 9,000 and 9,500 public transportation commuters to work.



Concerns about the Bus Transit System

The commuter ride only tells a part of the story for those dependent on the public transit/bus system. Many of those must also use the bus to access a wide range of other services such as medical care, shopping, schools, governmental services, religious and civic engagements, etc., as do uncounted numbers of county residents other than commuters. For those residents who need to access public transportation for multiple purposes, "The transportation system is key to everything," as described during the interview process. Others characterized the current system as a "nightmare." People in the towns most dependent on public transportation appear to have reasonable numbers of bus routes running through the communities of high ridership and low-income primary users. The difficulty, however, lies in the extent to which those routes are not easily accessible to jobs and needed services, particularly for those who may need to travel during the evenings or on weekends. Moreover, County materials emphasize the absence of major north-south mass transit connections, "making traveling without a car extremely difficult."

Transportation data supplied by the County indicate that the bus system has been consistent in recent years (through 2012) in serving about 6.8 million passengers (individual rides) per year, about half of which are characterized as full-fare plus another 600,000 or more as student fares. Just fewer than 400,000 rides a year involve DSS tokens. The number of "revenue miles" increased 6% between 2010 and 2012, to more than 14

million miles. The number of buses dedicated to people with disabilities has also been increasing, as have the numbers of riders, with a reported 2,000 riders a day on such specialized services. The bus system operates 31 main routes and 19 feeder routes. Annual riders on these routes range from as few as about 600 and a few thousand riders on the smallest-ridership routes to several hundred thousand riders a year on the most popular routes. Critics have indicated that several routes are only maintained for political considerations and that the routes are not always designed to best meet the needs of the greatest number of riders.

There were frequent reports during the interviews of people for whom the transportation system is a clear barrier to a job involving evening or shift work, and/or to various services without involving several transfers and significant expenditures of time. For example, officials described client trips to access services at DSS and the Department of Labor as sometimes taking a full day, between long bus trips involving transfers and time spent in accessing services. Some places, particularly involving north-south trips, seem almost impossible to get to via bus, or at best involve transfers (often more than one) and long one-way travel times, including time on the bus and waiting transfers. Such travel times can become barriers to jobs and access to a wide range of needed services.

New Opportunities

Such delays in accessing services, as well as routes that do not go where a person needs to get when they need to get there, add additional burdens to those attempting to survive and maintain a decent quality of life in communities with insufficient access to well-paying jobs and insufficient affordable housing to live comfortably. Some new Sunday routes are being added, and the implication expressed by some is that even more expanded routes could and should be added, especially in the evenings, if political considerations could be addressed and overcome.

Additional Stakeholder Comments

Beyond the issues raised above, stakeholders also added nuances to some of the data, and referenced other items not covered explicitly above. These are noted briefly below:

- Too many people currently have to plan their lives around long bus rides; there is a need to move people around the county more efficiently.
- The County transit system needs to significantly expand its number of Sunday and evening bus routes, and needs to carefully assess which routes are likely to have the greatest impact for the greatest number of riders.

- Transportation planners need to be working closely with key employers to make sure that changes in routes are carefully coordinated with work and shift schedules, to maximize their value in expanding employment opportunities for bus riders.
- Access to regular buses for people with disabilities is considered to be problematic in many cases. The par transit service is perceived to be improving, with more buses and riders, but it is limited in how far its routes can deviate from the basic bus routes. The issue has also been raised concerning pedestrians with disabilities, and signal improvements that advocates believe could be improved as part of the existing road construction programs currently underway.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about transportation, explore the following links:

Connect Long Island

Description: Map illustrating a regional transportation plan.

Related indicators: Households with Vehicles, Means of Transportation to Work

Ridership by Fare Type

Description: Ridership by route and type of rider (e.g. student, DSS, full fare).

Coverage: 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

Related indicators: Households with Vehicles, Means of Transportation to Work

Child Care

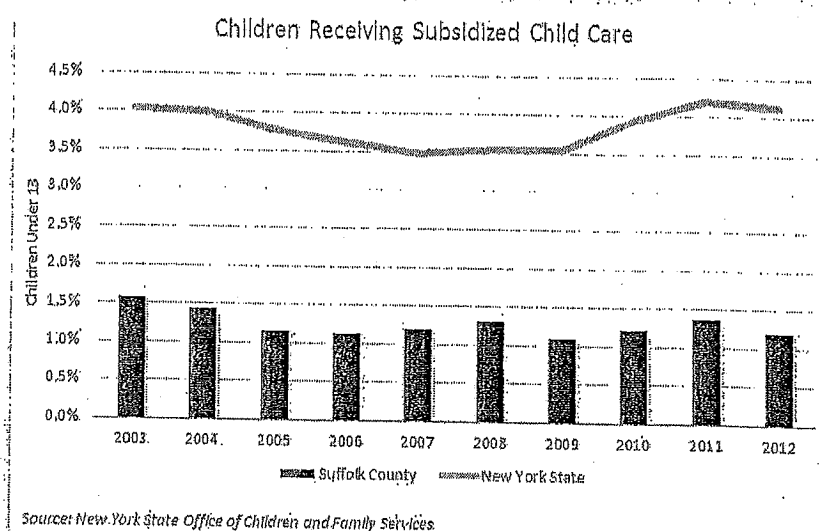
The child care issue was raised as a high-priority need by a number of stakeholders interviewed during the needs assessment process. It is widely perceived as being insufficiently addressed at this point within Suffolk County. Most people viewed it as important from two related perspectives: (1) the need for strong quality child care as a child development issue, and (2) as an economic development issue to help ensure that quality child care providers are able to stay in business, and to help ensure that sufficient child care subsidies are in place to support working families who need the subsidies in order to obtain and retain employment—without having to resort to being subsidized on more costly welfare rolls because the out-of-pocket costs of paying for child care become so prohibitive that it no longer is cost effective to work and pay child care costs.

The issue of subsidized child care, then, becomes important because (1) persons or families who cannot afford to pay for child care on their own may be unable to work, or may be forced to reduce their work hours to qualify for the subsidy, or may have to leave their children unsupervised or in a lower quality of unlicensed child care; (2) the absence of child care may affect the child developmentally; and (3) as some stakeholders pointed out, removing these financial resources (and the children being paid for) from the child care system can have the unwitting effect of helping to reduce the quality of care possible in some child care centers, of contributing to employee layoffs by some child care providers, and of contributing to some child care providers' going out of business as their sources of income are diminished. Moreover, according to a Rauch Foundation study, every dollar removed from the local child care system has a multiplier effect, removing two dollars from the local economy.¹¹

Despite the arguments in favor of investing in child care, and specifically in child care subsidies for working poor families (with children under the age of 13, or children with disabilities under 18, or under a court order), Suffolk County and New York State have significantly reduced their investments in child care subsidies over the years. In 2012 the County paid for about 3,100 children per month to receive subsidized child care—1,635 fewer than in 2003 (a reduction of 34%). At one point the County provided subsidies for families at income levels of 200% or more of the poverty level, then lowered the eligibility level to 100%, and now has upped the eligibility level back to 150% of the poverty level. But even movement in that more inclusive direction is viewed as still being too little by most observers. As pointed out by a cross section of stakeholders, it would be less costly for the County to increase its investment in child care subsidies than to add those same families to the temporary assistance/welfare rolls, but too many decision-makers are perceived as not understanding or willing to support the investment argument.

Not only have the number of subsidized children and families declined over the past decade in Suffolk County, but as shown in the graph below, the proportion of children under 13 who receive subsidies countywide has consistently been well below the state proportion—typically only about one-third of the subsidy coverage levels statewide. Almost 90% of the County's child care subsidy payments are made to families in three towns: about one-third each to Islip and Brookhaven residents, and about 20% to those in Babylon.

¹¹ Luise Stoney, Keri Klockowski, Mildred Warner, *The Child Care Industry: An Integral Part of Long Island's Economy*, The Rauch Foundation, 2004, pp. 4-5.



Recognizing that this study examined only community needs, without evaluating providers of any services, next steps in child care research would be to evaluate to what extent the quality and capacity of the child care system may or may not have declined, how that issue relates to the numbers of children and families receiving child care subsidies, and the interrelated implications for the future.

Several stakeholders underscored the importance of this issue by focusing on its investment in the future, both in individual children and in the families seeking to work and remain off public assistance dependence. They emphasized the net costs to the taxpayers of failing to make adequate subsidy investments, both in terms of the short-term loss of job opportunities for some families, and the longer-term implications both for the development of the child and the avoidance of welfare supports for the family.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about child care, explore the following link:

Suffolk DSS Child Care Payments

Description: June 2012 to July 2013 count of childcare payments by zip (now aggregated).

Related indicators: Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care

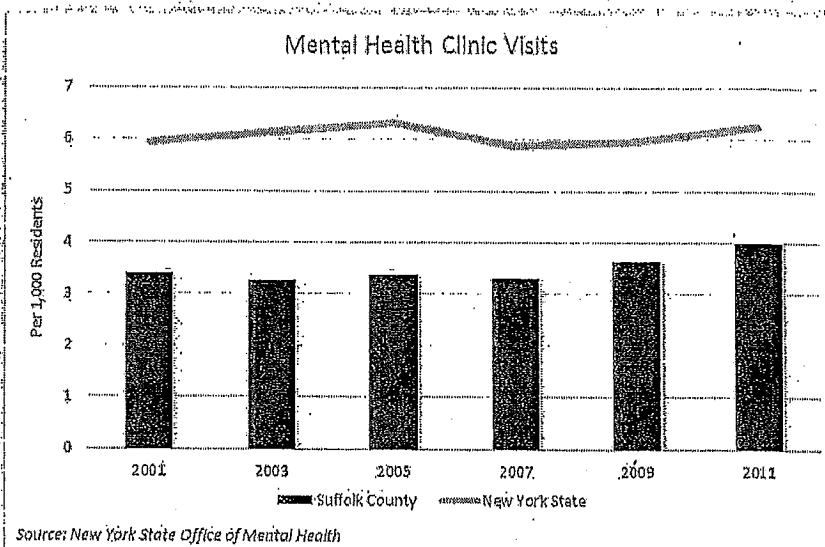
Health and Welfare, Mental Health and Substance Abuse

This broad category of needs encompasses a wide range of issues. We begin with the issues of mental health and substance abuse, which the data and stakeholder testimony suggest are the highest priority needs within this focus area.

Mental Health

Available data and stakeholder testimony point to significant issues and unmet needs increasingly burdening a service system with insufficient resources to address the needs.

The number of community-based outpatient mental health clinic visits was 22% higher in Suffolk County in 2011 than in 2001, based on state surveys conducted every two years. Almost two-thirds of the individuals served during the state survey period in 2011 and 2009 received outpatient services, by far the most prevalent of all services provided (compared, for example, to residential, inpatient and emergency services). These 6,000 visits in 2011 represented about 4 outpatient clinic visits per 1,000 residents in the county, which was higher than a decade ago, but still only represented rates of service at about two-thirds the rate of clinic services provided statewide (6.3), as indicated in the graph below.



The level of outpatient services provided in Suffolk County was well below the statewide rates for both adults and children, but especially for the latter: Among adults 18 and older, the county rate was 4.3 compared

to the state rate of 6.2; among children 17 and younger, the gap was significantly greater—2.9 in the county, versus 6.5 statewide.

The implications of such gaps in service were demonstrated in information supplied in a public hearing by the Mental Health Association in which the link between mental illness and poverty was documented. Unemployment rates for those living with mental illness are three to five times higher than for the rest of the population. Many others with serious mental illness are underemployed, including about 70% of those with mental illness and college degrees earning less than \$10 an hour. Between one-third and half of those with serious mental illness live at or near the federal poverty level, and about 40% of the homeless population have some type of mental health issue. Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety were reportedly increasing with the increases in job losses, foreclosures and financial insecurity. And those increases occurred several months before the devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy.

The Suffolk County Sheriff in public testimony indicated that in the County jail population, at least 15% and perhaps as many as a quarter of the average of about 1,700 inmates per day has some form of severe mental illness. The Sheriff reported that most do not belong in the jail, but were there on mostly minor crimes primarily because of the insufficiency of financial resources and community-based programs available to more appropriately and more cost-effectively meet the needs of the inmates outside the criminal justice system. The Sheriff indicated that “Most mentally ill offenders simply can’t be treated for their mental illness in jail, which is why they have one of the highest recidivism rates of all offenders. Correctional facilities are not equipped to handle these cases.”¹² And yet, the criminal justice system and homeless shelters absorb substantial numbers of such individuals because of the significant disconnect between the numbers of people with mental illness and the inadequate capacity of community resources to meet those needs, especially in light of closings of psychiatric inpatient beds across the region and state.

Beyond such testimony, almost half of those we interviewed painted pictures of growing mental health and drug addiction patterns affecting various aspects of the social fabric of the county. Often the stakeholders talked of dual diagnoses involving both mental illness and substance abuse. Veterans and seniors were mentioned specifically as subgroups of the population with increasing mental health issues, as well as those dealing with post-Hurricane Sandy issues.

¹² Sheriff Vincent F. DeMarco, “Testimony Presented at the OMH Listening Tour at the Pilgrim Psychiatric Center,” May 2, 2013.

Many stakeholders consistently panned the decisions at the state level to move people from mental health institutions to living in the larger community without providing local communities with sufficient resources of dollars and services to meet the resulting service needs. As a result, local jails are becoming the de facto points of treatment in some cases for those whose needs have not been met through non-criminal-justice-system services. The consensus of the numerous stakeholders who raised mental health issues as a major and growing need in the community is that County and state governments have not kept pace with these needs, nor have nonprofit providers had sufficient resources to keep adequate pace with the growing needs.

Integrating Health and Behavioral Health

A growing issue mentioned by several stakeholders is the need to more carefully integrate diagnosis and treatment of health and behavioral health/mental health issues. Managed care is influencing and changing the discussion from a funding perspective, and stakeholders view this as an important time and opportunity to find ways to integrate these services in a more holistic manner in the future, perhaps including co-location of some services where appropriate.

Substance Abuse

Over the past decade in Suffolk County, there have been significant increases in the number of county residents admitted to alcohol/substance abuse treatment centers. Between 2008 and 2011, state data indicate that there have consistently been more than 21,000 admissions of county residents per year (about 142 per 10,000 residents)—about 13% more than in 2000. During a similar period, between 2003 and 2012, drug arrests in the county on misdemeanor offenses increased significantly. While more serious felony drug offenses declined 28% (a decline of less than 300), misdemeanor arrests increased by 31% (an increase of about 1,200). These arrests appear to be concentrated primarily in various locations in Babylon, Islip and Brookhaven.

But more than these general data, the perception among many of the community stakeholders that were interviewed is that the county is facing a “growing epidemic” of substance abuse addiction related to opiates—a combination of prescription drugs and particularly heroin—especially among middle and high school youth, and post-school young adults. National data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration indicate a more than 100% increase in the use of heroin nationally between 2002 and 2012. The Suffolk County Community Health Assessment (CHA) document for 2014-2017, published by the County Department of Health Services, draws similar conclusions, stating that the use of opiate medications “has dramatically increased and is

considered the fastest growing drug problem in the US.” The CHA cites the growth in opiate pain reliever abuse across the state; “most notably in Suffolk County and Staten Island.” It indicates that there were 214 opiate-related deaths in the county in 2012, and 110 more in 2013 by the (unspecified) time the CHA was published. Between 2007 and 2011, deaths involving opiates increased by 30%.¹³

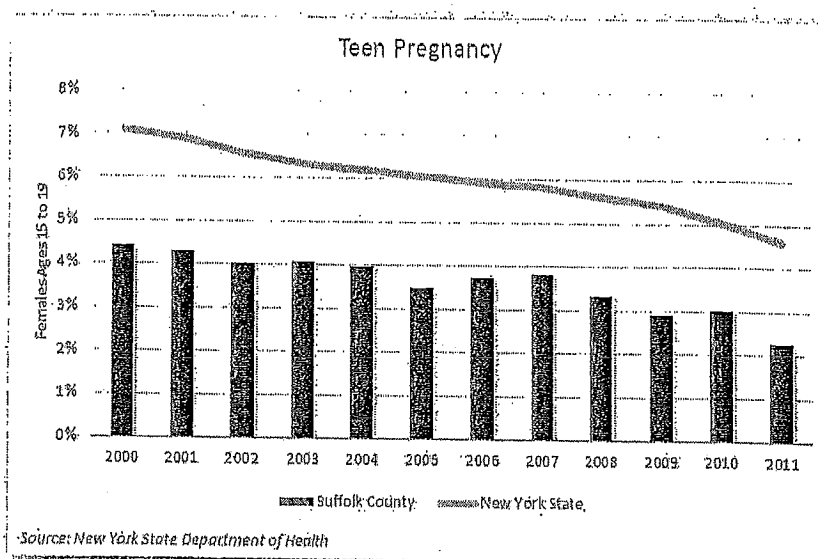
The greatest concern appears to be the increased use of heroin, which has reportedly become cheap, “incredibly easy to access,” and often has deadly consequences on its own, as well as contributing to patterns of crime. Although the issue of crime in the county rarely surfaced as a major issue in the interviews we conducted (see subsequent section below), the issue of drug abuse, and particularly heroin use did receive considerable attention—typically reported as being primarily a suburban issue, rather than being concentrated among low-income or minority youth. Data on drug-related hospitalizations would appear to confirm those perceptions, as the age-adjusted rate of such hospitalizations among whites is almost twice the rate for African-Americans and three times the rate for Hispanics. Several stakeholders spoke of the need for increased, intense educational initiatives to make young people aware of the consequences of any use of heroin or other combinations of prescription drugs.

Infant and Child Health

Suffolk County has experienced mixed results in this area over the past decade. On the positive side, teen pregnancy rates have continued in recent years to decline, and to remain below comparable statewide rates. There were 735 fewer teen pregnancies in 2011 than had been the case in 2000 (-39%), representing pregnancies to 2.3% of all females 15 to 19 in the county, compared to 4.4% a decade ago.

The reduction in pregnancies has in turn resulted in a 26% reduction in live births to females 15-19, to 707 in 2011, representing about 250 fewer teen births than in 2000. Both the teen pregnancy and teen birth rates have consistently been lower in Suffolk than in the rest of the state.

¹³ Suffolk County Department of Health Services, *Community Health Assessment 2014-2017*, pp. 11, 31.



On a less positive level, the proportion of births to women who initiated prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy remains at 75%, well below the 82% level a decade ago (even though the Suffolk County percentage is above the state rate). The proportion is less than that for African American and Hispanic mothers (63% and 65%, respectively), although their respective proportions have both improved since 2000.

Disease and Mortality

Among the expressed goals stated in the Suffolk County Community Health Assessment is for the County to address issues related to obesity as the number one public health nutrition issue, as noted earlier in the Food discussion. Data indicate that about one-third of children and youth of all ages are either considered obese or overweight, and just over 60% of the county's adults fall into one of those categories.

Another stated priority is to more effectively prevent and manage chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. In terms of mortality, the county's overall mortality rate for all deaths per 100,000 residents has been steadily declining over the past decade. Mortality rates have declined across the county for most major diseases since 2000—e.g., by 21% for cancer overall (varying rates by different types of cancer), 16% for chronic lower respiratory disease, 30% for diabetes, 39% for heart disease, and 44% in deaths due to stroke. In most cases, the county mortality rates are similar to those for the state overall, but rates in low-income and minority communities are often considerably higher than the overall rates. Thus there remains considerable work to do, particularly on the preventive side, and the County Department of Health Services has identified this issue as among its priorities over the next few years. For

more details about specific diseases and their morbidity and mortality rates, and what is proposed for actions in response, see the detailed discussions in the CHA.

According to the CHA, Long Island, including both Suffolk and Nassau, has the highest number of people living with AIDS of any suburban area in the US. Rates of gonorrhea have fluctuated from year to year over the past decade, while the rate of chlamydia infection in the county is now three times higher than it was in 2000.

Environmental Health

As noted in Chapter 3, an additional public health-oriented issue mentioned by a few stakeholders concerned the role environmental issues play or should play in the ongoing development of Suffolk County. Most specifically, the issue tended to focus in these discussions around the relative lack across the county of municipal water and sewage systems, and the need for expanded enforcement of sewage and ground water issues. Interviewees indicated that only about 20% of the county's population is covered by municipal sewer systems, with most of the area covered by smaller septic systems considered vulnerable on the Island, given the nature and porosity of the aquifer. CGR was not able to verify the accuracy or full implications of that assertion.

Standing ground water and overflows of sewage systems were mentioned as issues that receive insufficient public attention, in part because of their potential to conflict with economic development projects. These environmental issues were portrayed as being a public health hazard, impacting on the quality of life in many communities across the county, as having a negative impact on the ability to sell houses, as a barrier to retaining young adults on the Island.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about health and welfare, mental health and substance abuse, explore the following links:

Early Intervention Rates

Description: June 2013 count of kids by type of intervention and school district.

Related indicators: None

Funded Youth Center Services of Suffolk County

Description: List of agencies, grant amounts, children served and services provided by town.

Related indicators: None

Indices of Youth Needs in Suffolk County

Description: Data from the 2010 Census and data related to teen pregnancy (news article & 2010 rates by zip), gang violence (news article reference to another report), incarcerated youth (broken out by sex and age), childhood obesity (news article, 2009-10 overweight or obese kids), teen suicide (articles and link to data), HIV/AIDS, live births, child abuse (by zip), and school statistics. ([Spreadsheet](#))

Related indicators: Prevalence of People Overweight, Obese, Rate of Teen Pregnancy

Poverty Stats 2012

Description: A narrative based on one year American Community Survey data covering median household income, poverty rates, people without health insurance, food stamp recipients and amount, census tracts having low income, low access to food, and Medicaid enrollment 2004-2010.

Related indicators: People Receiving Food Stamps, People Living in Poverty, Median Household Income

Sheriff OMH Testimony

Description: Testimony from Sheriff DeMarco in May 2013 about the impact closing mental health facilities has on public safety, given that large proportions of jail inmates have mental health issues.

Related indicators: Various Health & Welfare indicators

Suffolk CHA

Description: Detailed health statistics, with data usually as recent as 2010.

Related indicators: Various Health & Welfare indicators

Suffolk DSS Emergency Housing Placements

Description: June 2012 to July 2013 count of placements by zip (now aggregated).

Related indicators: None

Suffolk Mental Health and Substance Abuse Indicators

Description: Presents data on the 2011 population, including median household income (year unclear), % families in poverty (year unclear), mortality, premature deaths, birth related indicators, motor vehicle and unintentional and fall injuries/hospitalizations, respiratory diseases, heart disease, diabetes indicators, cancer indicators, drug related and suicide, all broken out by race.

Related indicators: Various Health & Welfare indicators.

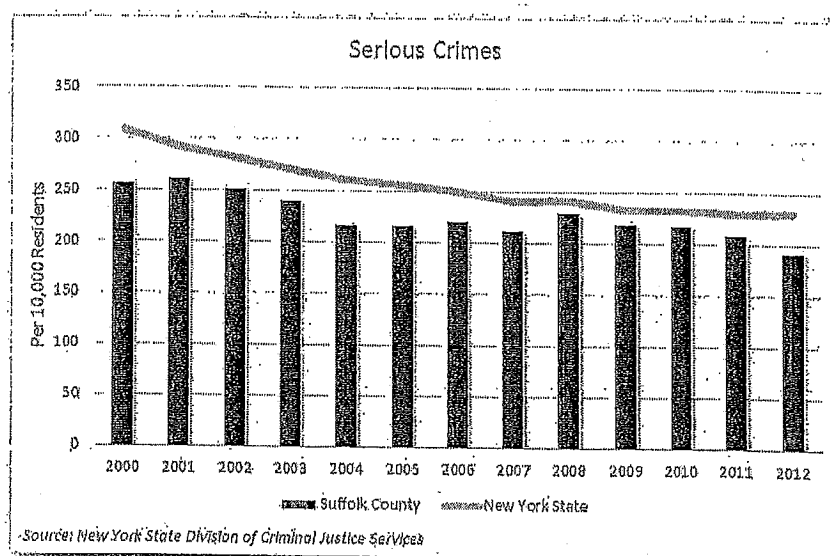
Suffolk Welfare Roll Data

Description: 2013 SNAP, Supplemental Security Income, and Home Energy Assistance participation data.

Related indicators: People Receiving Food Stamps

Crime

The impact of a high crime rate can clearly affect the quality of life in a neighborhood, as well as making an area less attractive for people who are buying a home and lowering not only the sale prices for those homes, but also the property values. As indicated by the relatively few times crime surfaced as a major priority issue in discussions with community stakeholders during this project, Suffolk County is generally perceived to be a relatively safe area overall. Data on major countywide crime patterns confirm that, at least as far as reported crimes are concerned, the county as a whole has been experiencing fewer crimes over the past decade, and



compares relatively favorably with statewide rates and those of comparable communities elsewhere in the country.

Serious crimes are defined by the FBI as murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. Recorded as the number of reported serious crimes per 10,000 residents, the rate of serious crimes has been steadily declining across Suffolk County over the past decade. Since 2000, the rate of reported serious crime has declined by 25%, and has remained consistently lower than the state rate over that period of time. For the first time in the 13 years of crime rates recorded between 2000 and 2012, the county recorded fewer than 30,000 reported serious crimes in 2012 (less than 29,000), and the rate per 10,000 residents dipped below 200 for the first time (192).

As a subset of overall serious crimes, the rate of property crimes most likely to affect residents directly (burglary, larceny and motor vehicle

theft) has fluctuated somewhat from year to year, though the overall trend has been declining: At fewer than 27,000 reported property crimes in 2012, the rate per 10,000 residents was the lowest reported since 2000, 24% lower than in 2000. County property crime rates have consistently been comparable to overall state rates.

The rate of reported violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) was 34% lower in 2012 than it had been in 2000, with just over 2,100 violent crimes reported in 2012 compared to more than 3,000 in the early years of the new century. The Suffolk County violent crime rate was among the lowest in 14 comparison counties in data supplied by the County. The county's violent crime rate has consistently been considerably less than half the overall New York state rate. Probation officials noted, however, that at least among their caseloads, they are seeing increases in violent behavior and shootings that led to people being assigned to probation.

While other crime rates have been declining, the reports of domestic violence have remained relatively constant since 2009, when current reporting practices and definitions went into effect. Suffolk County reported rates have consistently hovered around 50 per 10,000 residents, slightly higher than statewide rates. Domestic violence was mentioned by a handful of community stakeholders as being a priority need in the community, as was sexual abuse.

At the juvenile level, juvenile delinquency petitions, JD intakes by County Probation, and PINS petitions have all been declining in recent years, and have typically been consistent with or, in the case of JD intakes and PINS petitions, well below statewide rates.

It is important to note that despite the overall positive crime patterns in the county, these mask higher rates among some of the county's individual communities. Anecdotally, these are perceived to be primarily the lower-income areas within the county. Several people noted higher concentrations of crime in selected areas, but area-specific crime data were not available during the course of this study.

As noted earlier in the report, two other priority concerns were raised in the context of crime affecting the county: Substance abuse and gangs.

The Increasing Use of Opiates

As indicated above, the increased use of opiates, and most particularly heroin, was frequently noted during our interviews as contributing to patterns of crime. The issue of drug abuse in general, and particularly heroin use, received considerable attention—typically reported as being primarily a suburban issue, rather than being concentrated among low-

income or minority youth. As it relates specifically to crime, over the past decade, while more serious felony drug offenses declined 28% (a decline of less than 300) between 2000 and 2012, misdemeanor arrests increased by 31% during that time (an increase of about 1,200). Several also described the rapidly expanding use of heroin and other opiates as also contributing to other crimes not explicitly reflected as drug-related crimes or arrests.

The Issue of Gangs

As noted earlier in the report, about a quarter of those who were interviewed mentioned the importance of addressing the issue of gangs in the county. According to a 2012 study on gangs prepared by the Suffolk County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, *Profile of Gang Members in Suffolk County*, about 4,100 gang members have been identified in the county, in 27 gangs (plus some with an unknown gang affiliation). The majority (71%) was young men between the ages of 18 and 30; 31% were under 21, including 9% under 18. About two-thirds of the members were identified as coming from communities in Islip, Babylon and Brookhaven with higher-than average concentrations of poverty and unemployment, which the report says "is consistent with risk factors associated with gang involvement."

Several stakeholders noted that gangs often play an important role in sparking patterns of crime in their communities, as well as having an overall negative impact on the perceived quality of life within their respective areas. Some also reported the disruptive impact they have within some school districts. One stakeholder noted that the gangs in the county are not as pervasive or threatening as in places like Compton, California, but that they nevertheless account for significant amounts of the violent crime within their areas.

The Suffolk County Police Department, in conjunction with two of the communities with concentrations of gang members, is implementing a pilot project designed in part to work with gang members in a creative intervention to help reduce the impact and criminal recidivism of current gang members, as well as to help prevent gang involvement in the future. This effort was mentioned by several stakeholders as the kind of collaborative effort that can hopefully become a model to reduce the negative impact of gangs in other communities going forward.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about crime, explore the following links:

Combating Gang Activity in New York

Description: 95 page report describing the gangs and their impact. Includes suppression, intervention, and prevention strategies.

Related indicators: None

Greenbook

Description: Federal Bureau of Investigations Unified Crime Reports data and firearms related crimes and arrests.

Related indicators: Property Crimes, Serious Crimes, Violent Crimes

Profile of Gang Members in Suffolk County

Description: 35 page report describing the gangs. Includes demographics (age, sex, and education), employment status, membership, and geographic breakout.

Related indicators: None

Suffolk Crime Comparison

Description: Compares the 2012 crime rates to national peers.

Related indicators: Violent Crimes, Property Crimes

Suffolk Juvenile Arrest

Description: 2008-2012 juvenile arrests by police agency and Unified Crime Report category

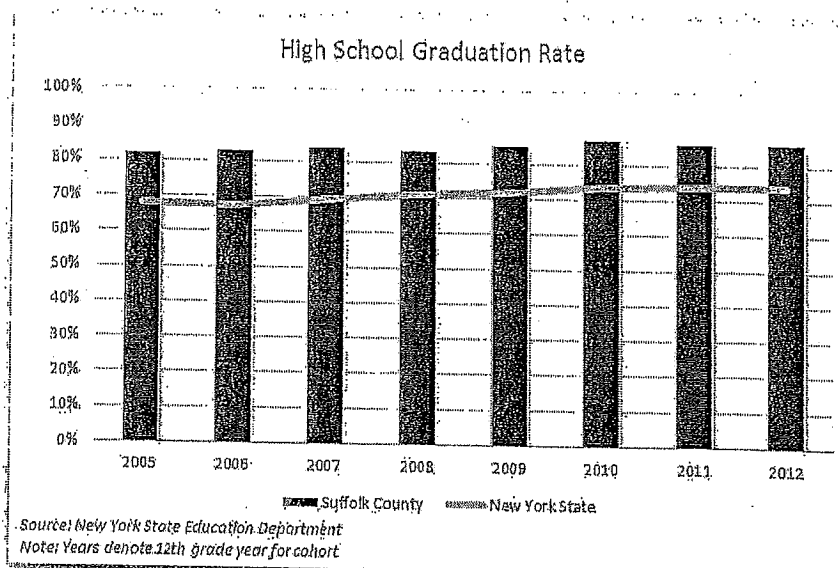
Related indicators: Serious Crimes, Violent Crimes, Property Crimes

Education

Educational opportunities are critical for the development of the next generation and the vitality of the community. K-12 education and the school districts of Suffolk County are generally viewed as an area of strength meeting the educational needs of most students; and therefore the broad issue of education, while clearly a priority, did not surface as one of the major growing or unmet needs in the county in interviews with community stakeholders. Nonetheless, there remain significant challenges to be addressed—including the achievement gap that persists for low-income and minority students in many school districts.

The Strengths

On nearly all traditional metrics used to measure performance of schools and school districts, Suffolk County schools in the aggregate consistently outperform students across the state. Aggregate 4-year graduation rates¹⁴ have typically averaged about 85% across all districts, exceeding statewide aggregate graduation rates by 12 to 15 percentage points (see graph below). Aggregate cohort dropout rates have declined since 2005



from 7% to 4% in county schools—rates that are consistently about half the statewide dropout rate. Suffolk County student performance on Grades 3 and 8 English and Math tests consistently exceed statewide performance levels. Each year, under both previous testing regimens and the new Common Core Standards, Suffolk students consistently outperform students across the state when measured by the proportion of students meeting or exceeding the state standards.

The Concerns: Disparities

Although the aggregate data indicate the strengths of county school districts at an overall level, they mask significant disparities between districts, typically between districts with widely varying resources and significant differences in concentrations of poverty and racial-ethnic makeup. The companion document to this report, *Community Profile Indicators for Suffolk County*, includes more specific information on the various disparities. But a few examples are highlighted here:

¹⁴ Calculated based on the number of graduates from a 9th grade cohort of students.

- 2012 graduation rates in the school districts within the towns of Babylon, Brookhaven and Islip ranged between West Islip (96%) and Sayville (97%), at the high end, to lows of Central Islip (59%) and Wyandanch (62%).
- 2012 graduation rates for white and Asian students (92% and 93%, respectively) were significantly higher across the county, and particularly in its low-income communities, than among Hispanic and African American students (70% and 73%, respectively).
- Dropout rates averaging 4% countywide were as high as 13% in 2012 in Central Islip and 10% in each of the Brentwood, Riverhead and Wyandanch districts.
- African American and Hispanic students dropped out at rates of 7% and 9%, respectively, compared to rates of 2% and 1%, respectively, for white and Asian students.
- Performance levels on the English and Math tests also varied widely by race-ethnic groups.
- Similarly, there were wide variations in the test scores between low-income and other students (as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch).
- Performance levels were typically anchored at the low-proficiency end by districts such as Amityville, Brentwood, Central Islip and Wyandanch

Related Concerns: Concentrations of Poverty and Segregation in Schools

Many of those interviewed for this study expressed their concerns about the segregation of housing patterns, as noted previously, and the related economic and racial segregation of schools—which contribute to the wide disparities in performance levels noted above. A 2002 study noted that more than half of all African American and Hispanic students in the two counties of Suffolk and Nassau at that time were concentrated in just 13 of the Island's 124 school districts.¹⁵ We are not aware of a comparable more recent analysis, but it seems likely that with increases in minority makeup of the overall population, those patterns may now be even more entrenched.

¹⁵ John Powell, "Racism and the Opportunity Divide on Long Island," ERASE Racism, 2002.

The implications of these economic and racial divides can be stark, when measuring educational outcomes. For example, a comparison of Central Islip (27% African American and 52% Hispanic enrollments) and Brentwood (15% and 75%, respectively) school districts with the Hauppauge district (2% African American and 6% Hispanic)—all three districts within different communities in the town of Islip—yields major differences in test scores and college attendance patterns. Using 2010-11 test score data, 79% of the Hauppauge students met or exceeded the 4th grade English standard and 83% the 8th grade Math standard. By contrast, in Central Islip the comparable proportions were 39% and 29%, respectively; and in Brentwood, the corresponding proportions were 43% and 49%, respectively. In Central Islip, 27% of graduates attended a 4-year college, as did 30% of graduates from Brentwood. In Hauppauge, 72% of graduates went on to a 4-year school.¹⁶ In that context, some stakeholders referred to the need for better preparation of low-income students for the college experience, with schools needing to work more closely especially with students who have the potential to become first-generation college students.

In light of such data disparities, stakeholders expressed clear concerns about the need to find ways to desegregate the schools and/or find ways to break down the impact of the concentrations of poverty in the more urbanized school districts.

Some stakeholders also referenced the need for schools, including the so-called “elite suburban schools,” to work more closely with the business community to offer more non-college-track course and vocational education options designed to provide education and training experiences geared to the specific needs of employers, beyond simply focusing on college preparedness courses. Such initiatives, in conjunction with similar connections between employers and higher education (especially community colleges) are viewed as important components of community efforts needed to help link the academic world to providing the skills needed for today’s youth to be able to succeed in the economy of the future.

Links to Other Resources

For additional information about education, explore the following links:

BOCES PowerPoint to LIRPC

Description: 2012 test proficiency scores & Regent’s graduation rates. Presents “If Long Island were a state” on performance indicators. Includes

¹⁶ NYS Department of Education, “School District Report Cards: Comprehensive Information Reports” and “Accountability and Overview Reports,” 2010-2011.

data and discussion of demographic changes, English proficiency (2000), gross domestic product and wage growth, budget impacts (positions lost, restructuring), state aid discussion, and impact of gap elimination adjustment.

Related indicators: All student performance indicators, Population by Race/Ethnicity

Long Island School Indicators

Description: Includes data for 2012 graduation rates, regents, advanced regents, and individualized education program (IEP) diplomas by school.

Related indicators: High School Cohort Graduation Rate

Additional Perceived Needs

Beyond the priority needs raised above, stakeholders also referenced several other items and perceived needs not covered explicitly above. These are summarized briefly below, in no particular order of priority:

- More focus is needed on preventive and intervention services for youth in the county, such as expanding after-school programs, dealing with the traumas of child abuse, etc.
- The Suffolk County community needs to focus more of its attention on the growing senior population. A comprehensive long-term-care plan needs to be developed and implemented. More community-based services need to be developed to help seniors age in place, and support services such as respite care need to be put in place to support senior family members and other caregivers.
- Budgets are tight at all levels of government, but we have to be careful not to always be balancing these budgets on the backs of the most vulnerable. The community needs to be investing in preventive services and initiatives that will pay dividends in the future.
- More attention should be paid to developing better measures of outcomes to track the impact of community services and to hold providers and decision-makers more accountable.
- The community's technological infrastructure needs to continue to be expanded, but in the process, it's important to be careful that we do not inadvertently add to the divide between the "haves and have-nots" in the county. There is the very real possibility if we are not careful to add to the divide between racial-ethnic groups and between the economically well-off and low-income residents by adding a "digital divide" that further separates us and expands the gulf into the future.

- There is a concern that recent immigrants to the county are falling through the cracks and are not being adequately absorbed into community institutions, especially those with language barriers.
- Community agencies, in both government and the nonprofit sector, need to pay more attention to developing cultural competencies to work more effectively with people from different cultures beyond the community's traditional white constituency.
- Race and class and socioeconomic differences create huge undercurrents in our community that must be addressed. Too often fears continue to subtly shape our actions and prevent the development of positive interactions between sectors of the community—and prevent the breakdowns of the historic and continuing effects of segregation.
- The community needs to be more aware of the needs of people with disabilities, and be more conscious of how to more effectively integrate them into the mainstream of the life of the community.

5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Several themes have been discussed throughout this document: Most notably, the lack of adequate housing and housing unaffordability, loss of employment and good-paying jobs in key industries and the changing landscape of the local economy, and the struggle with developing a transportation system that meets the needs of those who require it. Social and demographic shifts in the population—both in terms of aging of the population as well as the effects of immigration in making the community both more diverse and simultaneously more segregated—are interacting with these community needs to create a complex environment for social service funders and providers. Keeping pace with these changes and aligning resources to meet them can be a difficult process and one that requires intentionality coupled with flexibility and commitment.

This document represents a starting point for a public discussion about how to make the community stronger. The report has purposefully steered clear of identifying specific solutions—which is the task for the larger community to address.

This project was also not designed to attempt to document the types of services that already exist and that are being leveraged to address many of the most critical needs. Indeed, it would be beneficial as one possible next step to formally document the full range of services and activities that exist across the County in an effort to better understand the types of resources and expertise that are being brought to bear already. In accounting for the range of services and resources that exist, a better understanding of the service system and overall resource gaps may emerge which could create points of community dialogue about changes that may be required to meet some of the new realities.

Funding for needed services will continue to be constrained for the foreseeable future. It is widely understood from all the key stakeholders that doing business as usual will not be a sustainable model if the community is committed to meeting 21st-Century needs in a 20th-Century way. The time is ripe—considering the many changes that are occurring across funding systems, the smaller pools of resources overall, and the changing demographics—to engage in a community-wide effort to realign resources to meet current needs, and to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable in the Suffolk County community are effectively met going forward.

SAMHSA
Due Date: April 21, 2015
Max: \$300,000
Budget period – 12 months (Anticipated start - July 1, 2015)

Target # to be Served: _____

Staffing: 5 additional staff

Director of Youth and Adolescent Services

Project Director - \$50,000 + fringe

Prevention Educator - \$38,000 + fringe

Prevention Case Manager - \$38,000 + fringe

2 Outreach Workers - \$35,000 + fringe

2 Peer Educators (Stipend at \$15/hr)

Program Supply Costs:

Curriculum

Misc. Supplies

Incentives for recruitment and retention (Transportation, gift cards.....)

Other:

Transportation: Mileage, Trainings

Office Space: 5 in Central Islip

Equipment (5 Staff): Computers, printers, phones, cell phones, desks, chairs

Office Supplies

Printing

Professional Development

Consultants:

- SAE Evaluation (15%) - \$45,000
- Testing Services (up to 15%) - \$45,000

Evaluation: Max 20% on evaluation activities, collection of performance measure data

- EOC Evaluation: (5%) = \$15,000

- Tracking data – Cap60 - % of this annual cost
 - Demographics
 - Attendance
 - Community Needs Assessment
 - Satisfaction Surveys
 - EOC Quality Assurance
- SAE Evaluation: (15%) = \$45,000 (CONSULTANT)

Grantee Meetings (Washington DC) Minimum of 3 Staff – 3 days – once a year