Digital Access Update
Information Technology Committee

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Digital Access Update

- *Staff presented to the Board in June 2021 on*
  - *The Digital Access and Literacy working group comprised of Fairfax County and FCPS staff*
  - *The coordinated roll out of Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) support for applicants*
  - *The implications of COVID-19 related to the need for consistent, affordable access to broadband*
  - *Future plans for a Digital Equity Plan of Action*

Digital Equity Defined

*"**Digital equity** ensures opportunities for Fairfax County residents to participate and engage in a connected community. The ability to access, understand and use digital tools is essential for many tasks in modern life, including applying for jobs, paying bills, enjoying recreational activities, completing homework, staying informed and connecting with government/community services."*

In Fairfax County, the ideal state of digital equity means:

1. Affordable digital hardware and connections
2. Awareness of digital resources and services
3. Access to specific digital tools
4. Advancement of digital literacy skills
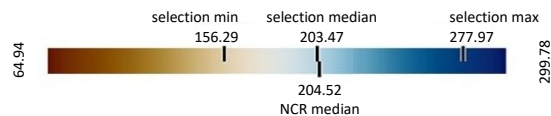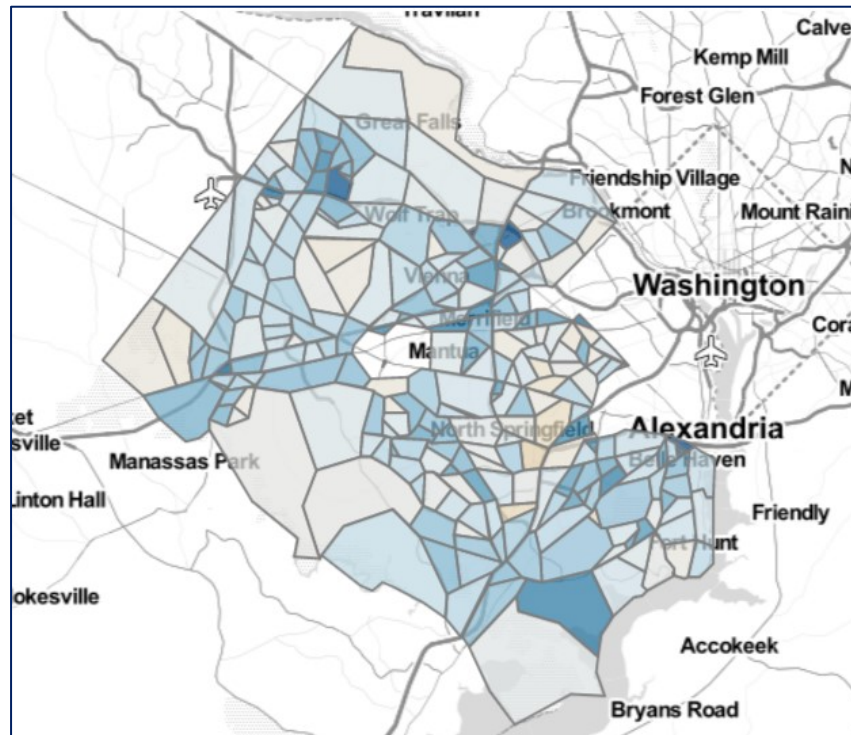
Average download speeds

Average Download Speed by Census Tract in Mb/sec

Average download speeds in Mb/sec
Selection: all census tracts
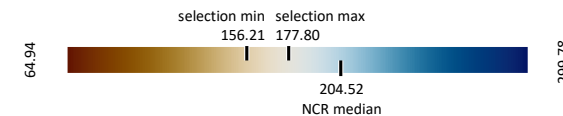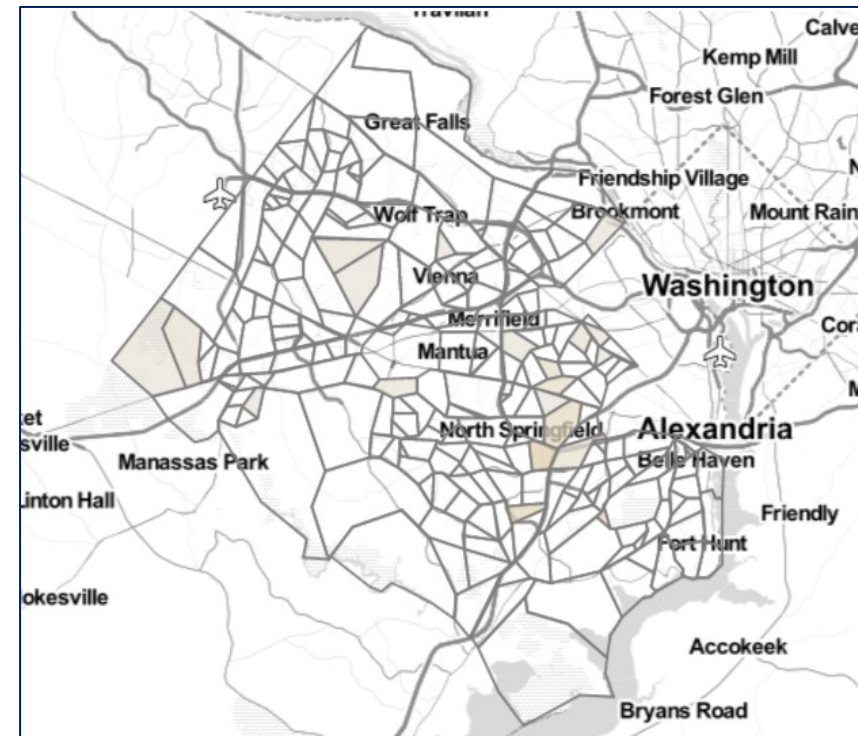Fairfax County, 2021
Source : Ookla Open Data Initiative

Average download speeds in Mb/sec
Selection: lowest 20 census tracts
Fairfax County, 2021
Source : Ookla Open Data Initiative

SOCIAL IMPACT
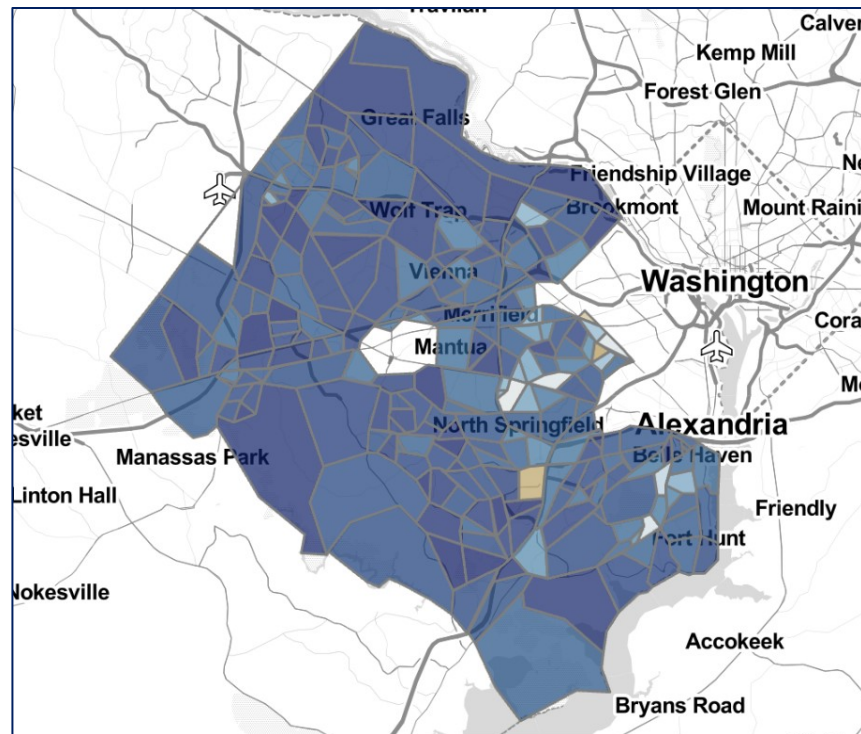DATA COMMONS

Households with broadband

Households that reported having a broadband connection

Percent households with a broadband connection
Selection: all census tracts
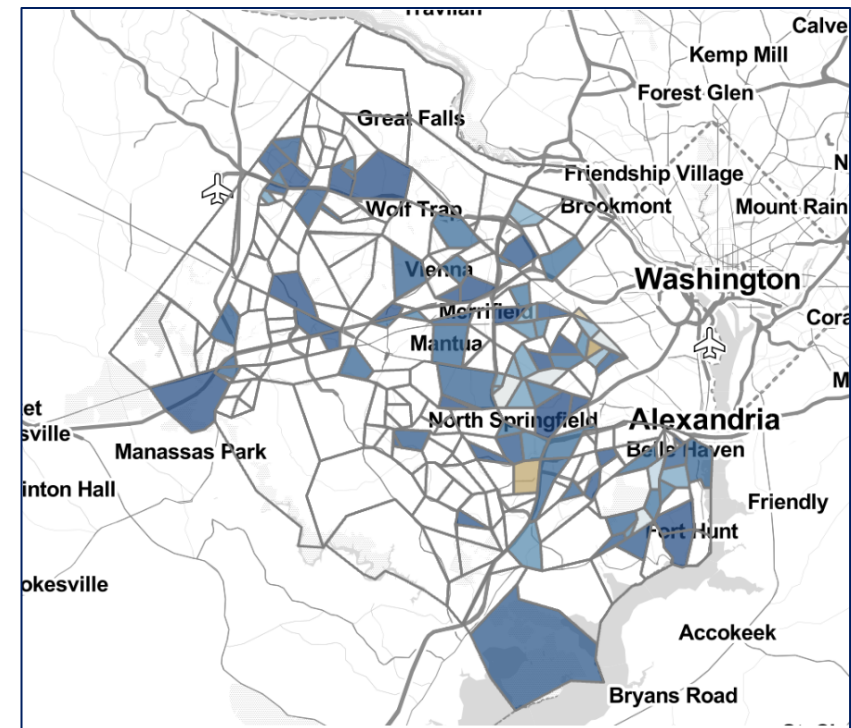Fairfax County, 2019
Source : American Community Survey

Percent households with a broadband connection
Selection: census tracts with lower-than-average broadband connections
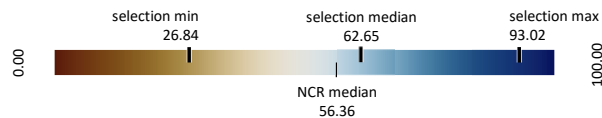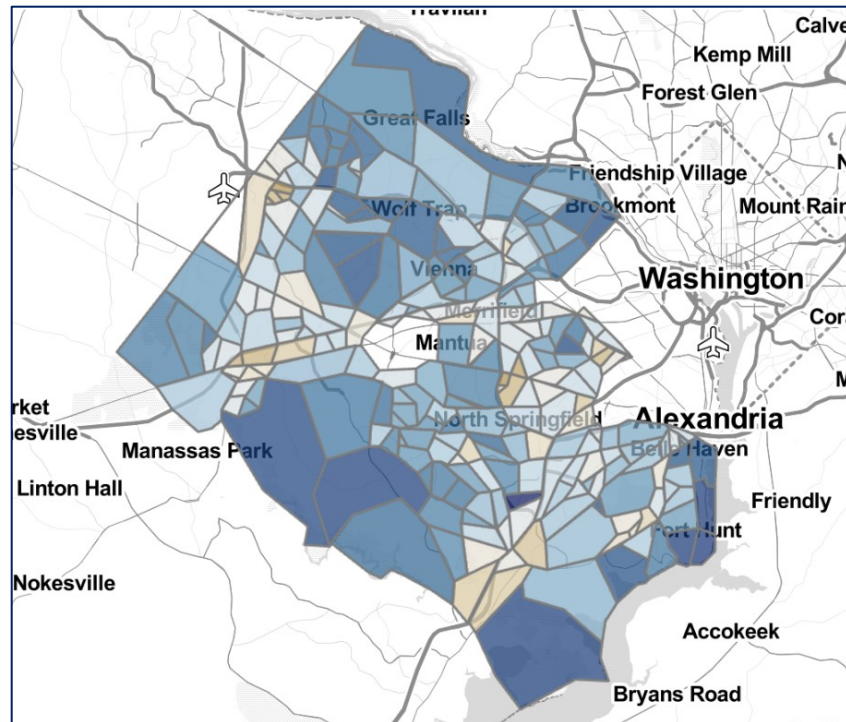Fairfax County, 2019
Source : American Community Survey
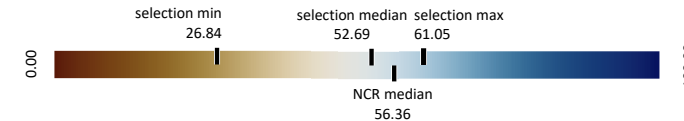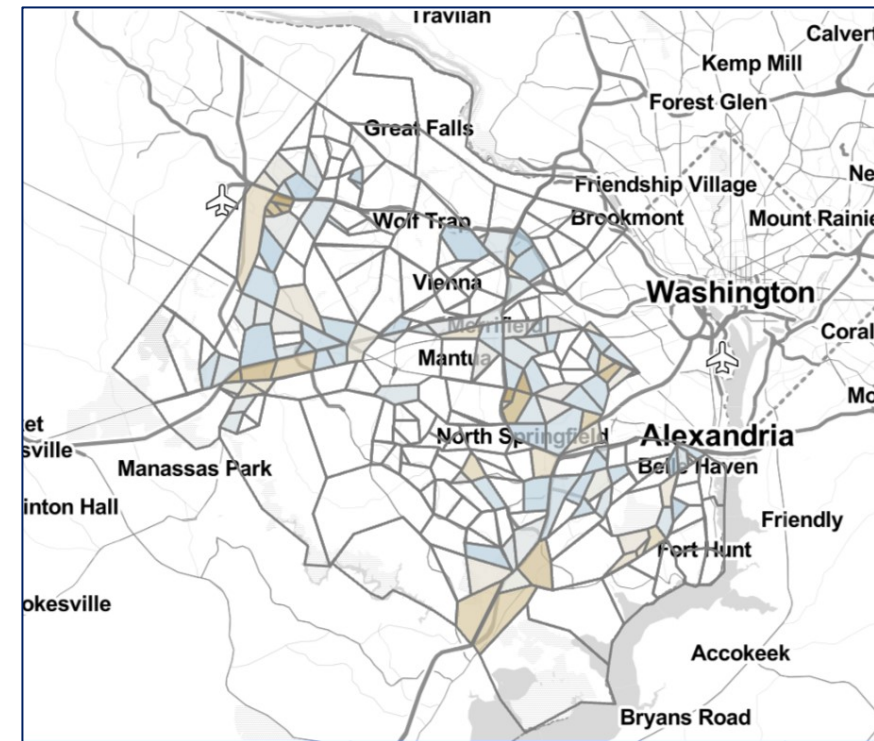

SOCIAL IMPACT
DATA COMMONS

Concentration of people-of-color by tract

Percent non-Hispanic white population, all census tracts vs census tracts below median

Percent population that is non-Hispanic white
Selection: all census tracts
Fairfax County, 2019
Source : American Community Survey

Tracts with highest percentage of people-of-color
Selection: census tracts with lower than the county
median pct non-Hispanic white, < 62.65%
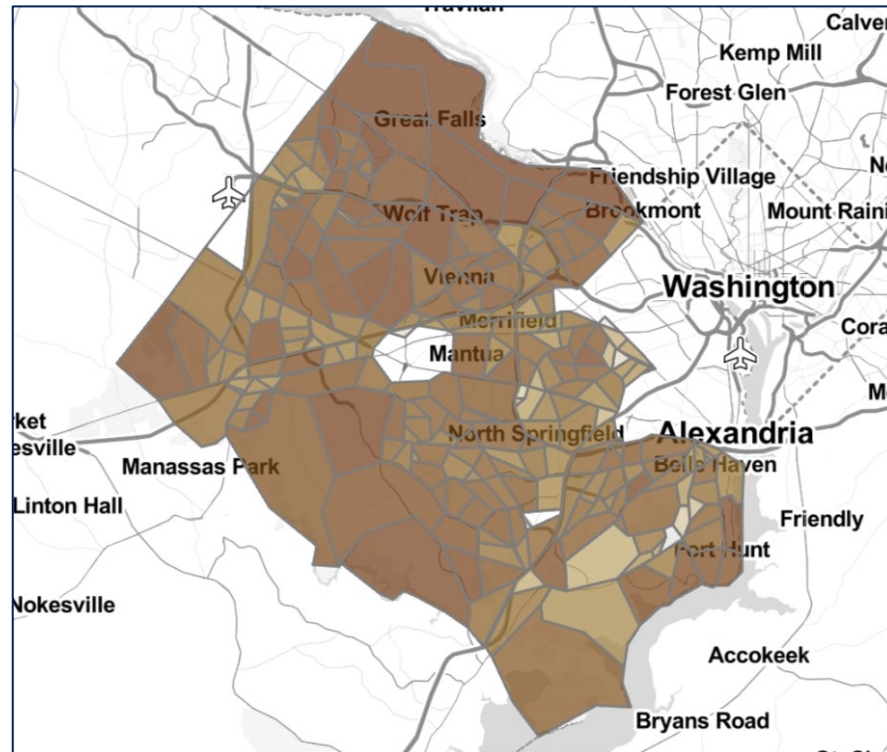Fairfax County, 2019
Source : American Community Survey

selection min
26.84

selection median
62.65

selection max
93.02

0.00

100.00

NCR median
56.36

selection min
26.84

selection median
52.69

selection max
61.05

0.00

100.00

NCR median
56.36

Percent household income to purchase broadband

Distribution of tracts with highest impact of broadband costs

Cost of broadband as a percentage of household income
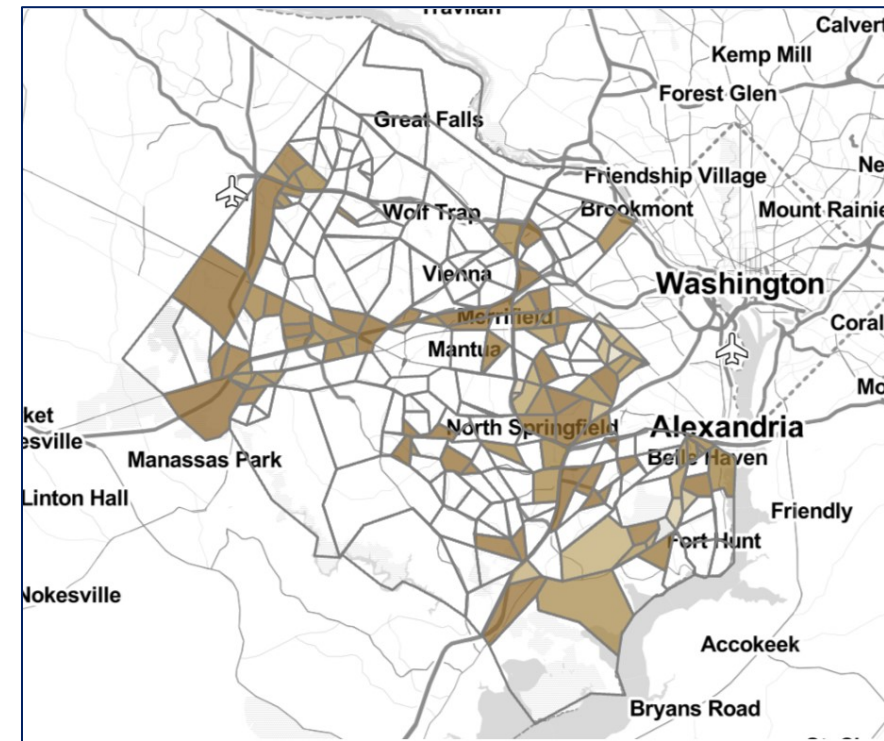Selection: all census tracts
Fairfax County, 2021

Cost of broadband as a percentage of household income
Selection: census tracts where cost of broadband is greater than the county median (0.55%)
Fairfax County, 2021

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Digital Access: Third Party Review

- Staff engaged with subject matter consultants to review local data, conduct stakeholder interviews, assess current legislation as well as federal programs in support of digital access
- Their findings support that Fairfax County is in an optimal position to extend digital access and equity initiatives to the population of people who don't have reliable, high speed, affordable access and those who have knowledge or device barriers

Digital Access: Recommendations

- Short term recommendations include
  - Conducting speed testing to ensure accurate and timely data for local wireless and wired connection speeds.
  - Finding broader pathways to provide devices to residents in need.
  - Supporting residents as they apply for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), similar to the County's support for the earlier Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)

Digital Access: Recommendations

- Mid term recommendations include
  - Comprehensive and coordinated digital literacy opportunities for seniors
  - Expanded support for small cell (5G) networks
  - Ensuring that wired and wireless connections to County sites are capable of high speed connections
    - 51 County sites have been completed in Phase 1 (of 186 total) to provide broader reach, faster speeds and more simultaneous connections.

Digital Access: Recommendations

- Long term recommendations include
  - Review of agencies and staff that support digital access and equity initiatives to ensure coordination
  - Municipal wireless network for County use
  - Review and explore state programs that provide funding to ensure that affordable housing and public facility sites have strong and reliable connectivity

Digital Access Action Plan

- Convene group under Countywide Coordination to assess cross-agency efforts around digital access and literacy.

- Develop support for public applications to the Affordable Connectivity Program

- Explore partnership opportunities with nonprofits to reach community members in need and leverage unique skillsets

- Coordinate with corporate partners on communities of highest need for wired broadband and wireless small cell access

- Report back to Board on progress and impact at a future IT Committee meeting

Questions
&
Discussion