

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Asheville, NC
Community Livability Report

2015



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The National Citizen Survey™
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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Asheville. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

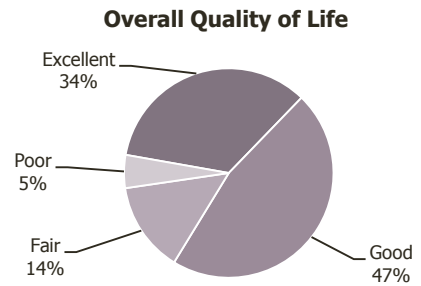
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 337 residents of the City of Asheville. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Asheville

About four in five residents rated the quality of life in Asheville as excellent or good. This rating was similar to ratings in comparison communities across the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

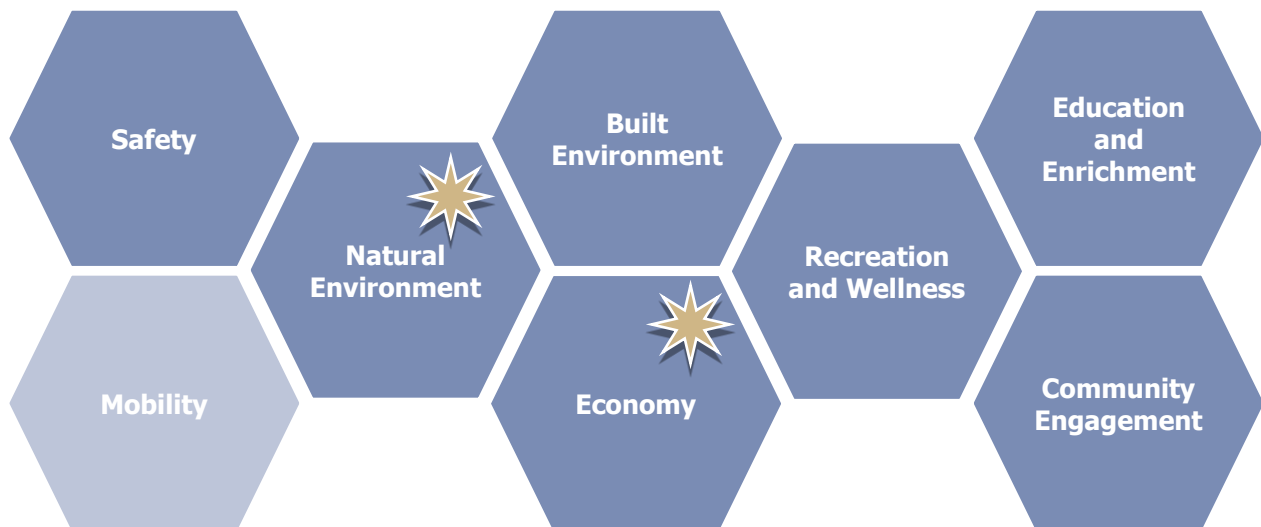
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Natural Environment and Economy as priorities for the Asheville community in the coming two years. Ratings across almost all facets were positive and similar to other communities. Mobility ratings tended to be lower than in other communities across the nation. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for Asheville’s unique questions.

Legend

- Higher than national benchmark
- Similar to national benchmark
- Lower than national benchmark

- Most important



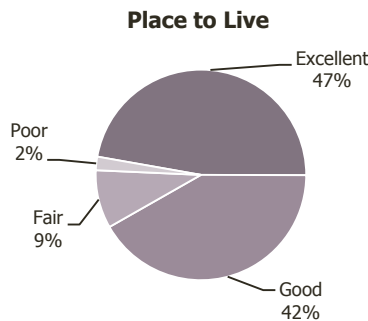
Community Characteristics

What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Asheville, 89% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Asheville as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the City as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Asheville as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Asheville and its overall appearance. These aspects were all rated positively by at least 7 in 10 residents. Ratings for the overall image or reputation of Asheville and for Asheville as a place to retire were higher than in comparison communities.

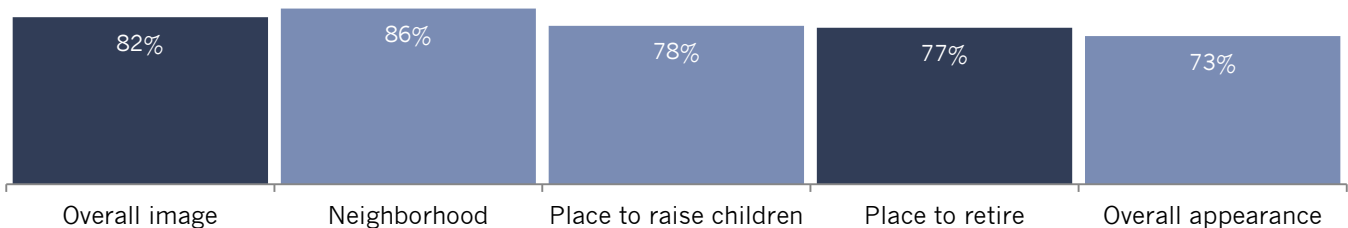
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Many aspects were rated positively and were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation. Ratings of aspects of Economy were mixed. Ratings for Asheville's vibrant downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities and Asheville as a place to visit were higher than in comparison communities and were rated positively by three-quarters or more of respondents. However, ratings for cost of living, employment opportunities and Asheville as a place to work were lower than the national benchmarks and were rated positively by 36% of residents or fewer. Ratings for aspects of Mobility tended to be lower than the benchmark and only about 25% of respondents gave positive ratings to travel by bicycle, travel by public transportation and public parking in Asheville. All aspects of Safety were rated positively by a majority of respondents and these ratings were similar to ratings in comparison communities. All aspects of Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were similar to or higher than the benchmarks.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



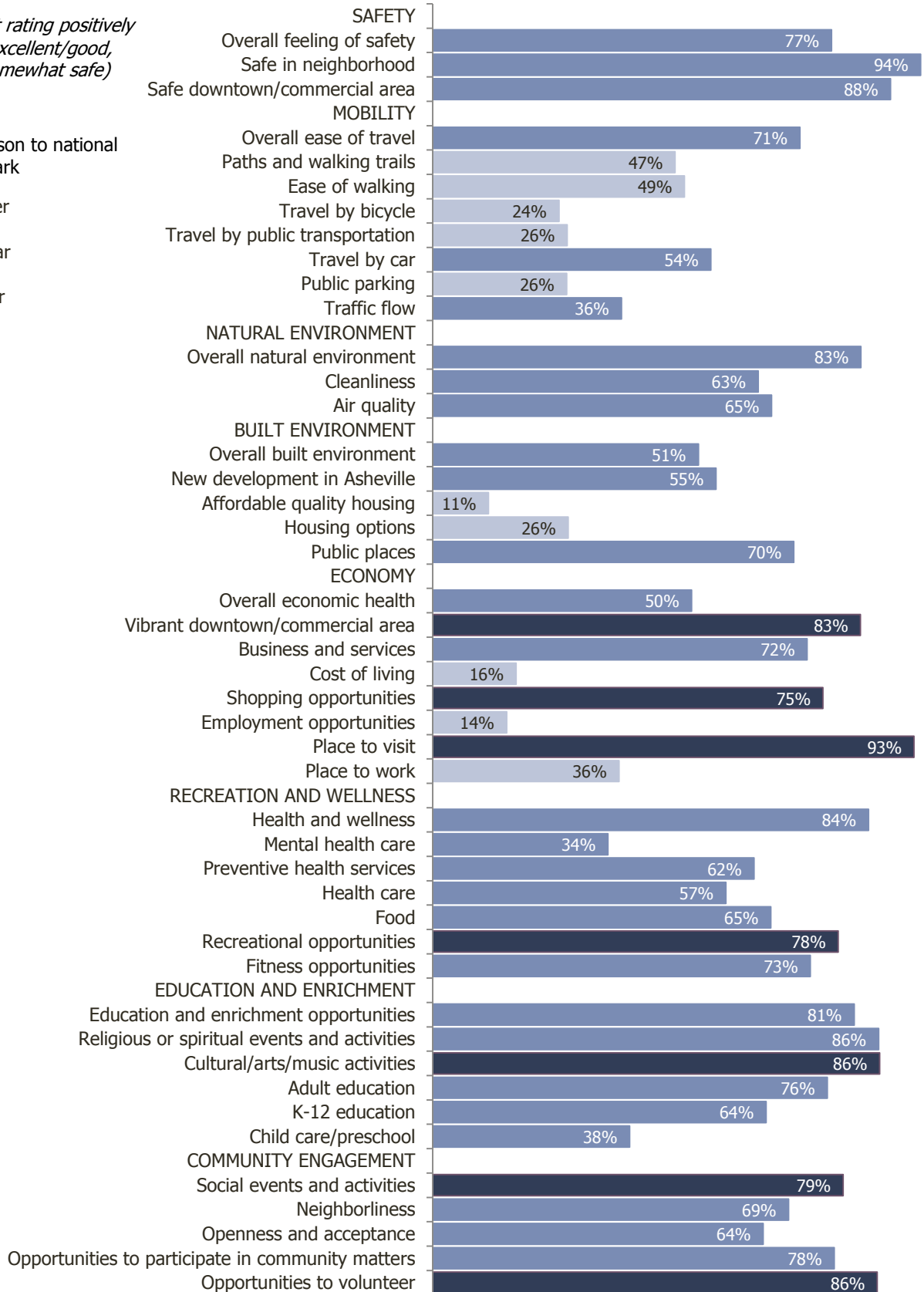
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

*Percent rating positively
(e.g., excellent/good,
very/somewhat safe)*

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

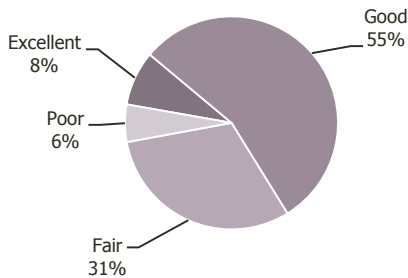
How well does the government of Asheville meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Asheville as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 63% of Asheville’s residents rated the overall quality of City services as excellent or good; while only about 34% rated the Federal Government’s services as excellent or good. Both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark comparisons.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Asheville’s leadership and governance. These ratings tended to be similar to or lower than the national benchmarks. Ratings for the value of services for taxes paid to Asheville, treating all residents fairly and the overall customer service provided by City employees were lower than in comparison communities. Less than ½ of respondents gave positive ratings to the rest of these aspects; however these ratings were similar to ratings in comparison communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Asheville. All aspects of Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were similar to ratings in comparison communities. Most aspects of Safety were similar to the benchmarks; however ratings for police and crime prevention were lower than the benchmarks. Of the eight aspects of Mobility; five were lower than the benchmark and three were similar. Most aspects of Mobility were rated as excellent or good by less than half of Asheville’s residents. Aspects of Built Environment also tended to be a mix of positive and negative and ranged from 30% excellent or good (code enforcement) to 66% excellent or good (sewer services).

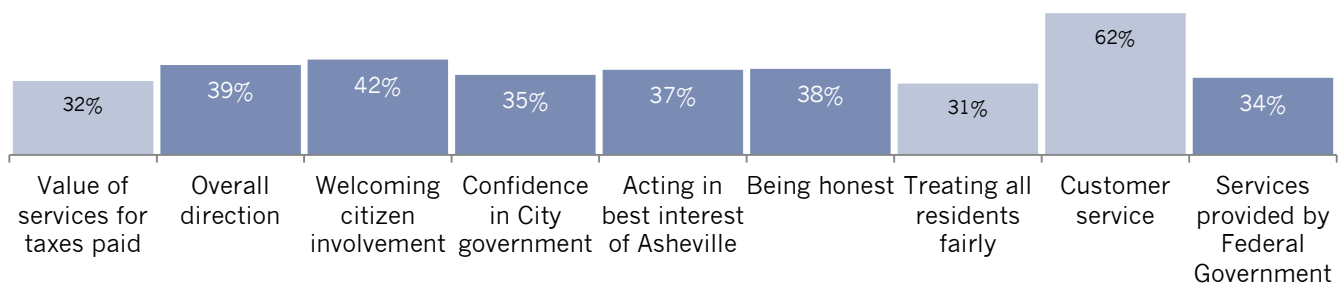
Overall Quality of City Services



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



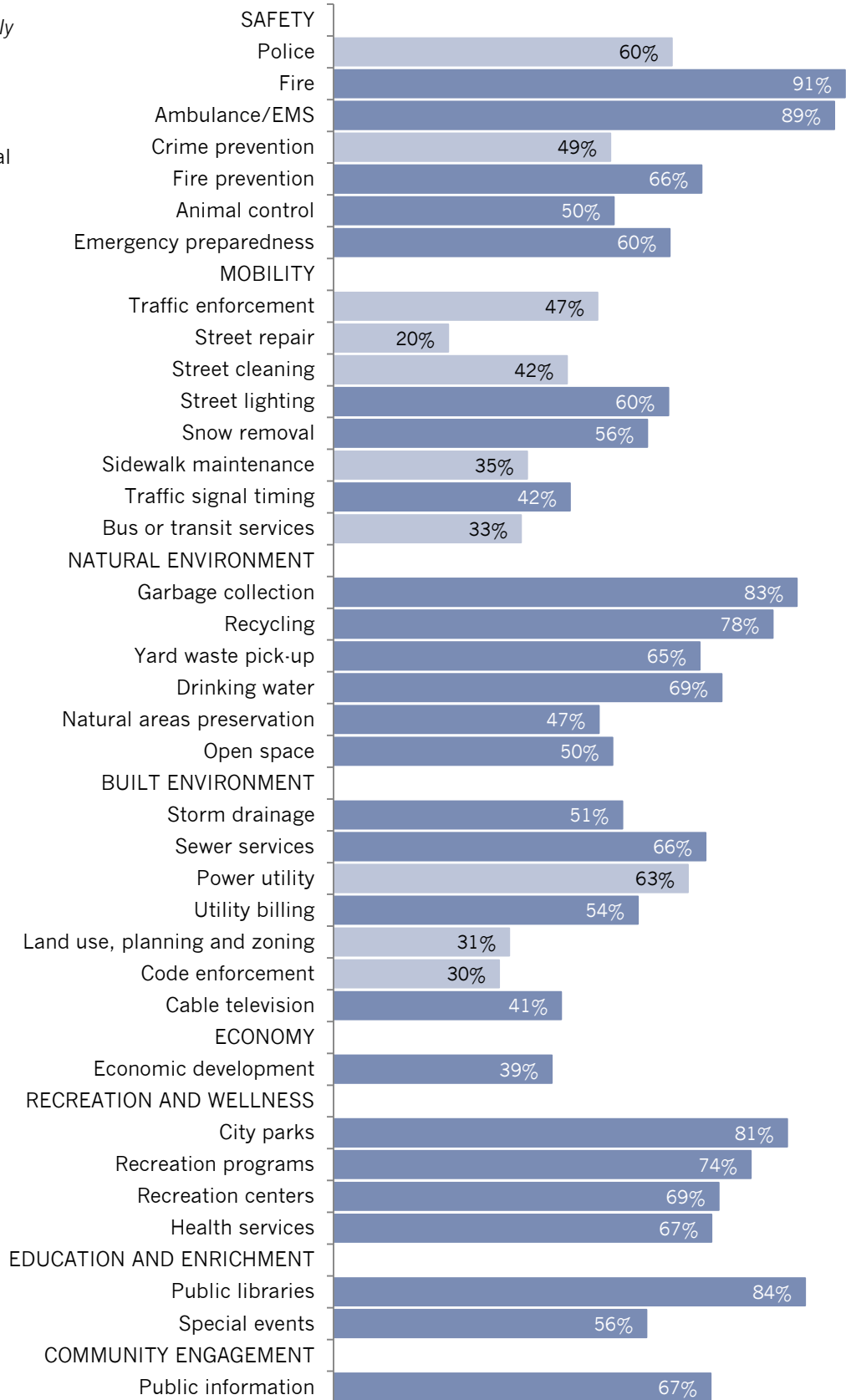
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

Percent rating positively
(e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

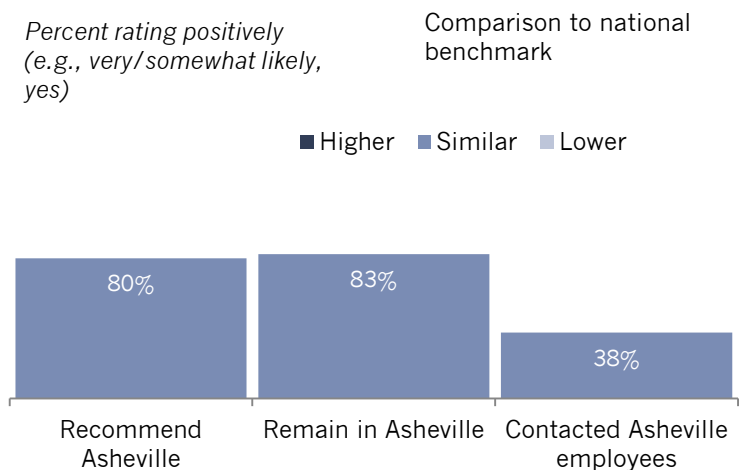
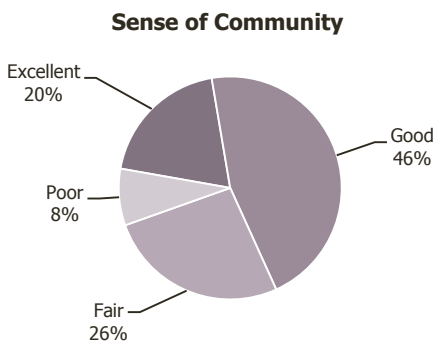


Participation

Are the residents of Asheville connected to the community and each other?

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community; a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About two-thirds of Asheville’s residents rated the overall sense of community as excellent or good and this rating was similar to the national benchmark. About 4 in 5 respondents indicated they were likely to recommend living in Asheville and were likely to remain in Asheville; these ratings were also similar to ratings in comparison communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Most reported rates of Participation were similar to reported rates in comparison communities. Only about 17% of Asheville’s residents reported that they had used public transportation instead of driving in the last 12 months; this rating was lower than in other communities across the nation. More Asheville residents reported that they work within the City (65%), that they campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate (41%), volunteered (60%) or participated in a club (41%) than residents in comparison communities.



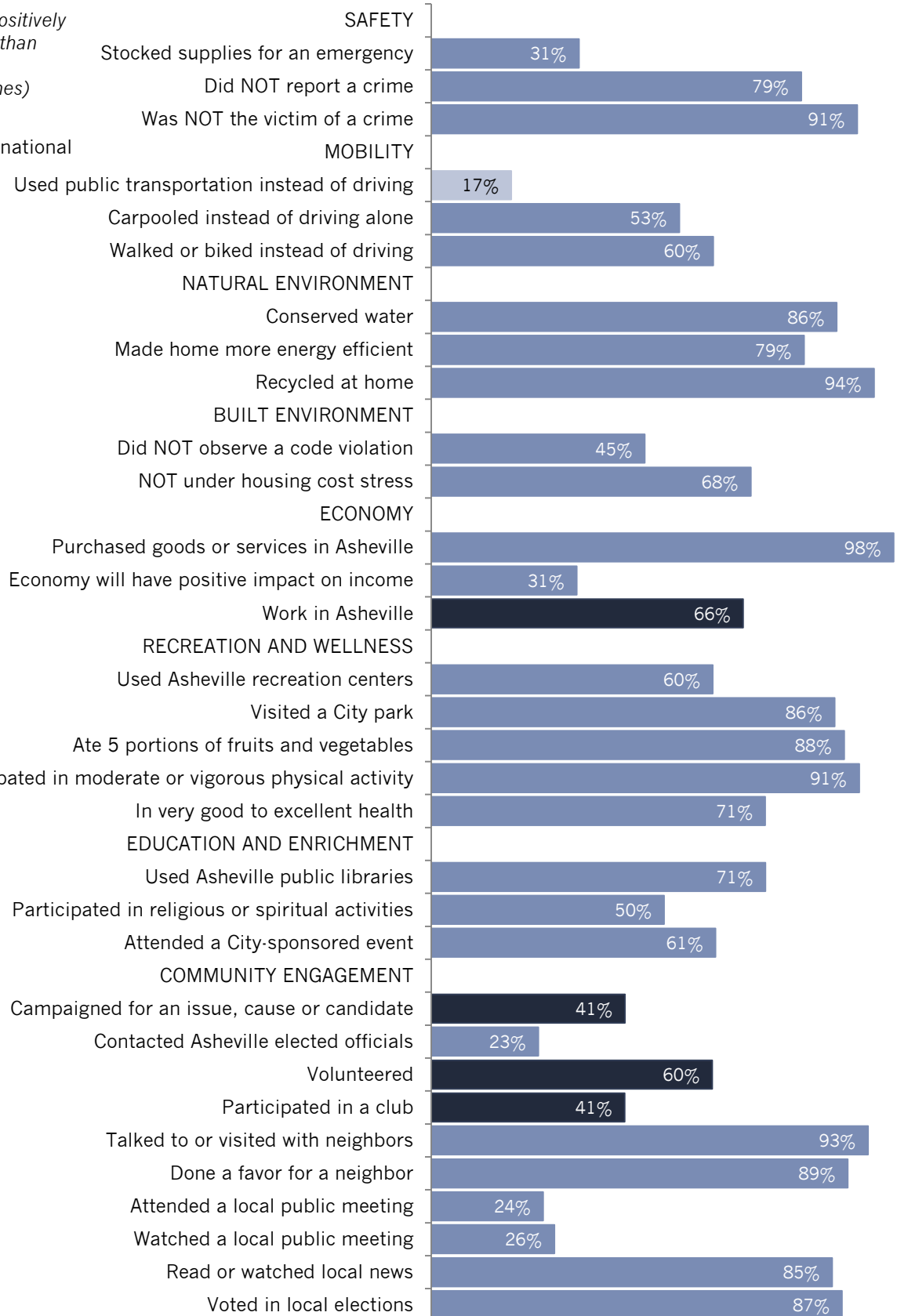
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

Percent rating positively
(e.g., yes, more than
once a month,
always/sometimes)

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

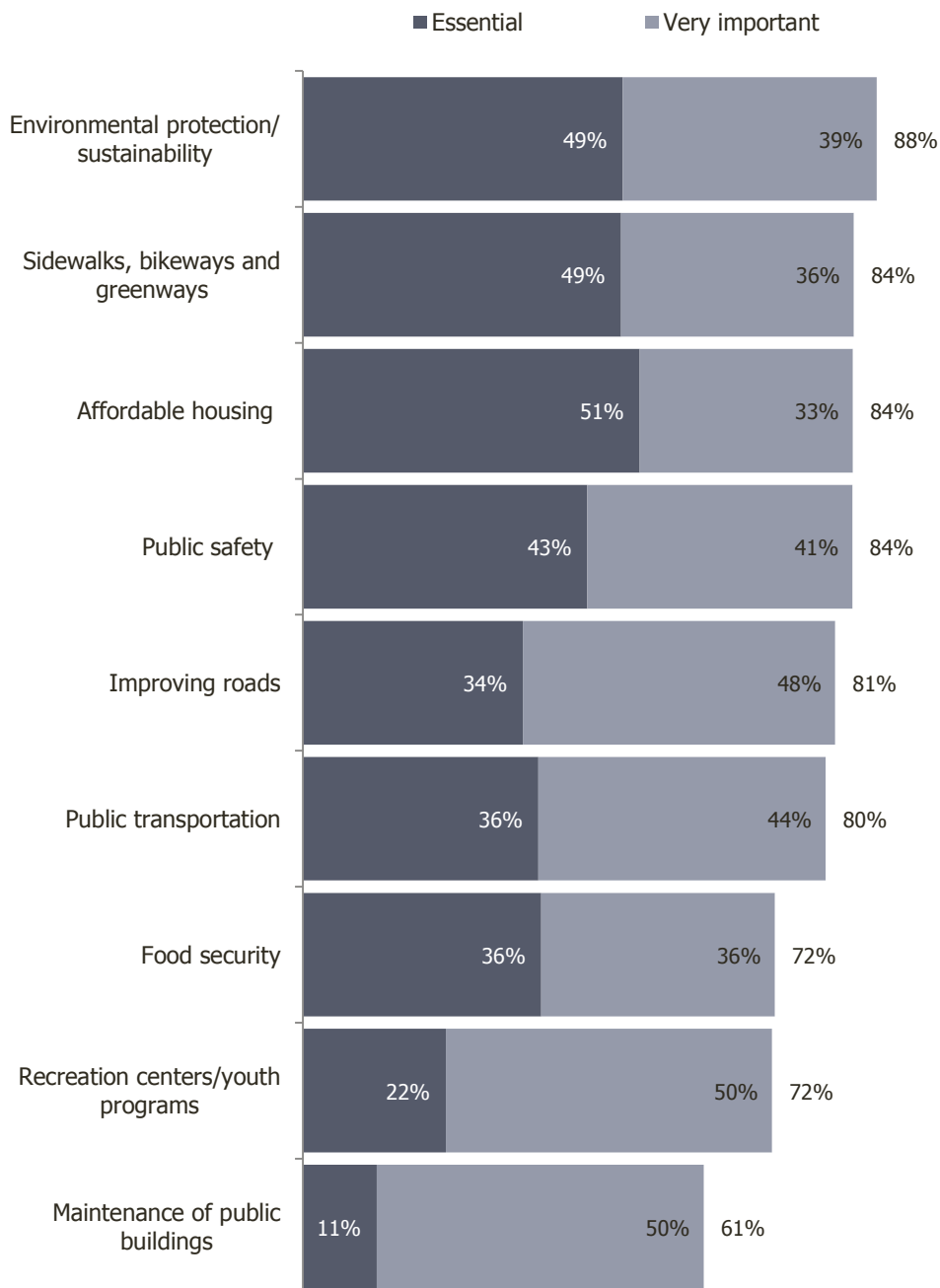


Special Topics

The City of Asheville included four questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents to rate the importance of several potential investments for the City of Asheville. All 10 items were rated as essential or very important by a majority of respondents. The items that were ranked as the most important were environmental protection/sustainability, sidewalks, bikeways and greenways, affordable housing and public safety.

Figure 4: Importance of Potential City Investments

Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following investments is for the City of Asheville:

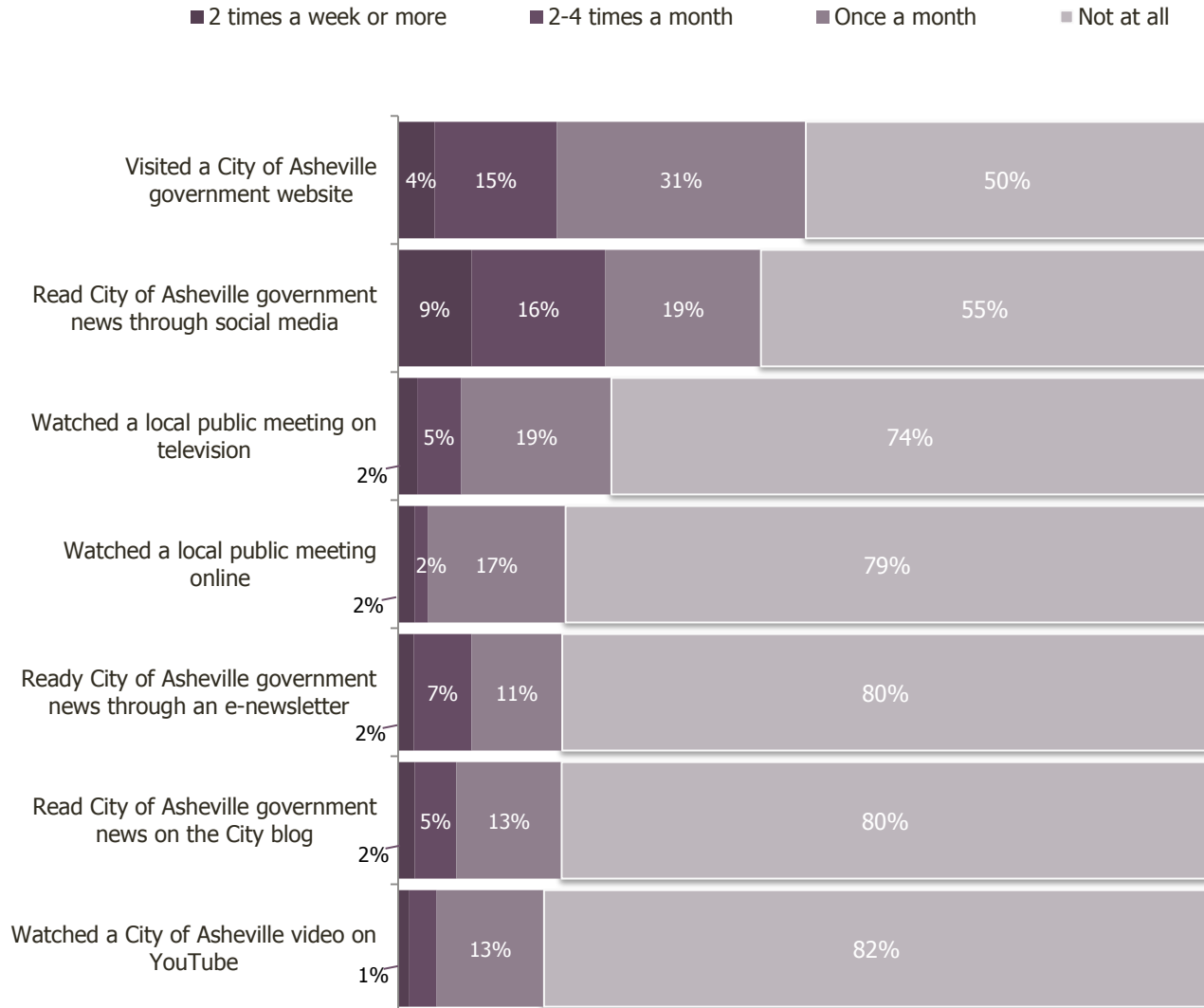


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The second custom question asked residents their frequency of watching local meetings, City video or reading City of Asheville Government news in various mediums. Fifty to 82% responded “not at all” to the different available ways of watching or reading about City news. About half of the respondents reported that they had visited the City of Asheville website once a month or more in the last 12 months. Less than 25% reported that they had watched a local public meeting online, read City government news through an e-newsletter, Read City government news on the City blog or watched a City video on YouTube.

Figure 5: Rates of Accessing Local Government News

In the last 12 months, about how many times, if at all, have you or other household members:

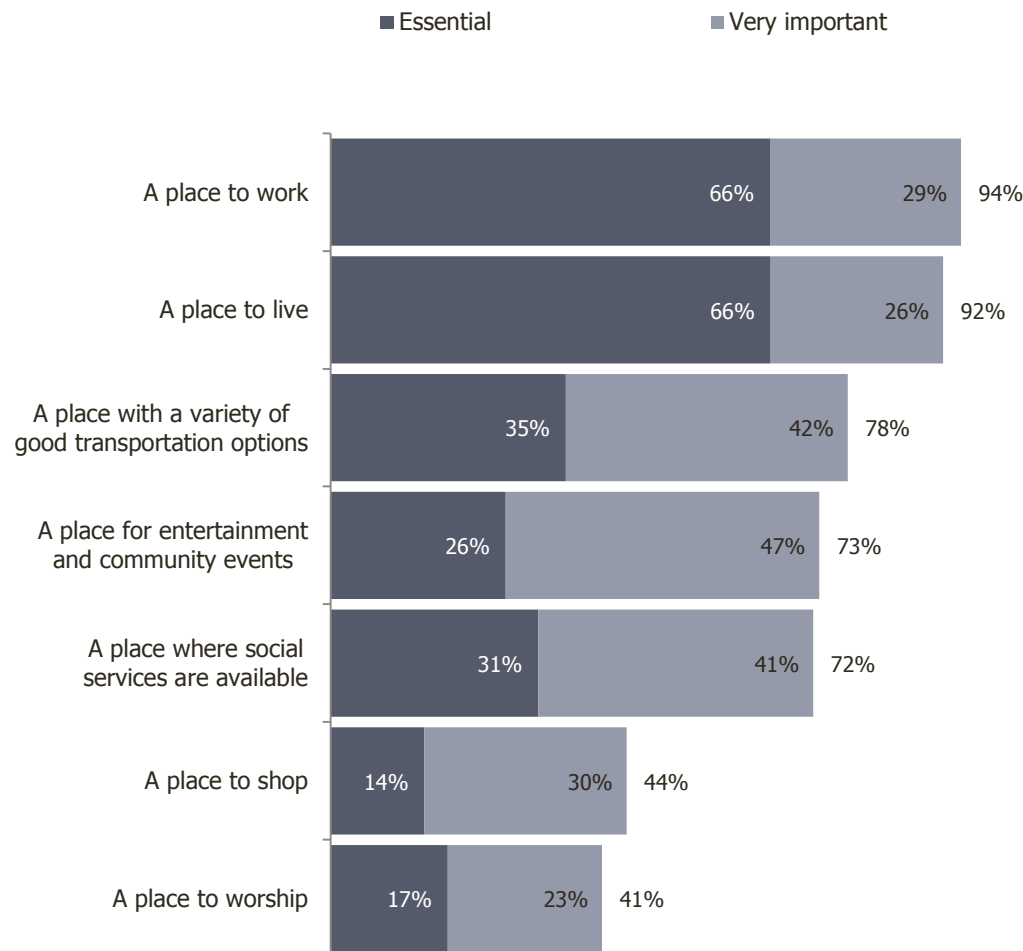


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The third question asked residents to rate the importance of several aspects of the City’s identity when planning future development. Almost all rated Asheville as a place to work and as a place to live as essential or very important. Further, a strong majority rated a place with a variety of good transportation items, a place for entertainment and community events and a place where social services are available as essential or very important. Fewer than half of the respondents rate a place to shop or a place to worship as essential or very important to the City’s identity and character.

Figure 6: Importance of Aspects of Future Development

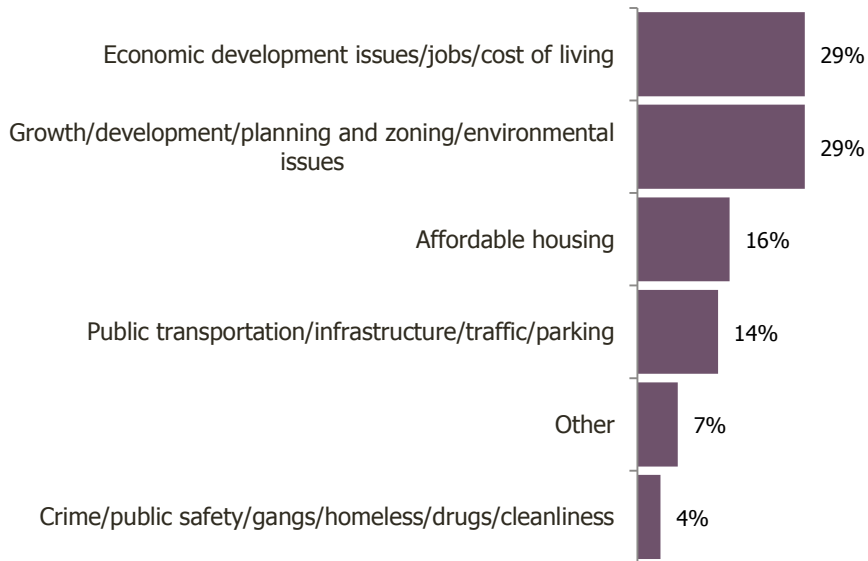
In planning future development, how important if at all, are each of the following to the City of Asheville’s identity and character?



Asheville chose to include an open-ended question on the survey (full responses to this question are provided in the *Open-Ended Question Report* under separate cover). The most commonly cited themes by residents had to do with economic development, growth, affordable housing and public transportation.

Figure 7: Open-Ended Question

What do you think is the single biggest issue facing Asheville over the next three to five year?



Conclusions

Asheville residents continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

At least 80% residents rated their overall quality of life and Asheville as a place to live as excellent or good. About four in five were likely to recommend Asheville as a place to live to someone who asks and planned to remain in Asheville for the next five years. Asheville's overall appearance and overall image and neighborhoods as a place to live also received high ratings by about four in five residents. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and remained stable from 2008 to 2015 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover).

Asheville's Natural Environment is a strong feature of the community.

Asheville's Natural Environment was identified as a top priority for the community and was an area that received favorable from residents. Asheville's residents rated all aspects of the Natural Environment similarly to comparison communities. Ratings for Asheville's overall natural environment and for air quality increased from 2008 to 2015. When asked to rate the importance of potential investments the City of Asheville should make, environmental protection and sustainability was rated as the most important by residents. Many also cited environmental issues when asked to write in their own words about the single biggest issue facing Asheville in the next three to five years.

Asheville's Economy is a top priority.

Economy was also rated as a top priority for the community. Ratings within the facet of Economy tended to be a mix of positive and negative. The highest rated aspects of Economy were Asheville as a place to visit (93% excellent or good), Asheville's vibrant downtown/commercial area (83% excellent or good) and shopping opportunities (75%). These ratings were all higher than ratings in comparison communities. Ratings for employment opportunities (14%), cost of living (16%) and Asheville as a place to work (36%) were lower than the national benchmarks. Most respondents worked in Asheville and almost all purchased goods or services in Asheville. Economy ratings remained stable from 2008 to 2015. When asked about the importance of several aspects of future development, Asheville as a place to work was rated as the most important by residents. Further, when asked to describe the single biggest issue facing Asheville a commonly mentioned theme was economic development, jobs and cost of living.