

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Ashland, VA

Trends over Time

2017



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Summary

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS™) is a collaborative effort between National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The survey and its administration are standardized to assure high quality research methods and directly comparable results across The NCS communities. 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). This report discusses trends over time, comparing the 2017 ratings for the Town of Ashland to its previous survey results in 2011 and 2014. Additional reports and technical appendices are available under separate cover.

Trend data for Ashland represent important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines. Deviations from stable trends over time, especially, represent opportunities for understanding how local policies, programs or public information may have affected residents' opinions.

Meaningful differences between survey years have been noted within the following tables as being "higher" or "lower" if the differences are greater than seven percentage points between the 2014 and 2017 surveys, otherwise the comparison between 2014 and 2017 are noted as being "similar." Additionally, benchmark comparisons for all survey years are presented for reference. Changes in the benchmark comparison over time can be impacted by various trends, including varying survey cycles for the individual communities that comprise the benchmarks, regional and national economic or other events, as well as emerging survey methodologies.

Overall, ratings in Ashland for 2017 generally remained stable. Of the 118 items for which comparisons were available, 89 items were rated similarly in 2014 and 2017, nine items showed a decrease in ratings and 20 showed an increase in ratings. Notable trends over time included the following:

- Related to Economy, ratings for both Ashland as a place to work and Ashland's vibrant downtown/commercial area increased in 2017 compared to 2014; further, more residents in 2017 compared to 2014 felt that the economy would have a positive impact on their income.
- Community Engagement also saw notable increases. Within Governance, five aspects had a higher rating in 2017 compared to 2014 (public information, welcoming citizen involvement, acting in the best interest of Ashland, being honest and treating all residents fairly) and within Community Characteristics, residents gave higher ratings to opportunities to participate in community matters and openness and acceptance of the community.
- While residents felt more positively in 2017 toward snow removal and sidewalk maintenance within Mobility, residents gave lower ratings to a few Mobility-related aspects in 2017 (the quality of ease of travel by car and by public transportation and a lower rate of carpooling instead of driving alone). Recreation and Wellness also saw a mix of ratings with two aspects showing an increase from 2014 to 2017 (health care and mental health care) and three showing a decrease (fitness opportunities, recreation opportunities and availability of affordable quality food).

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Table 1: Community Characteristics General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
	2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
Overall quality of life	92%	85%	86%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Overall image	86%	85%	79%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Place to live	95%	89%	93%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Neighborhood	87%	77%	77%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
Place to raise children	92%	82%	86%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Place to retire	85%	72%	75%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Overall appearance	80%	82%	81%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar

Table 2: Community Characteristics by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark			
		2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017	
Safety	Overall feeling of safety	NA	85%	84%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Safe in neighborhood	97%	94%	93%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar	
	Safe downtown/commercial area	96%	94%	96%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar	
Mobility	Overall ease of travel	NA	88%	91%	Similar	NA	Similar	Higher	
	Paths and walking trails	71%	63%	60%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar	
	Ease of walking	81%	79%	81%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher	
	Travel by bicycle	74%	68%	71%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher	
	Travel by public transportation	75%	35%	25%	Lower	Much higher	Lower	Lower	
	Travel by car	77%	84%	76%	Lower	Much higher	Higher	Similar	
	Public parking	NA	72%	67%	Similar	NA	Higher	Similar	
	Traffic flow	68%	65%	59%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar	
	Natural Environment	Overall natural environment	85%	83%	78%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
		Cleanliness	87%	79%	82%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Air quality		85%	84%	86%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar	
Built Environment	Overall built environment	NA	61%	61%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
	New development in Ashland	63%	50%	56%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar	

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
		2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
	Affordable quality housing	53%	40%	41%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Housing options	57%	53%	49%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Public places	NA	68%	72%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Economy	Overall economic health	NA	71%	67%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Vibrant downtown/commercial area	NA	39%	52%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
	Business and services	69%	62%	62%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Cost of living	NA	49%	46%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Shopping opportunities	62%	46%	42%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Employment opportunities	39%	37%	36%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Place to visit	NA	67%	71%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Place to work	63%	61%	68%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Health and wellness	NA	64%	64%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Mental health care	NA	31%	38%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Preventive health services	62%	41%	47%	Similar	Higher	Lower	Lower
	Health care	56%	42%	50%	Higher	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Food	77%	64%	55%	Lower	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Recreational opportunities	66%	59%	51%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Lower
	Fitness opportunities	NA	67%	58%	Lower	NA	Similar	Similar
	Religious or spiritual events and activities	82%	77%	75%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Cultural/arts/music activities	70%	66%	73%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Adult education	NA	47%	45%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	K-12 education	NA	80%	83%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Child care/preschool	50%	62%	64%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Similar
	Social events and activities	75%	64%	68%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Community Engagement	Neighborliness	NA	70%	65%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Openness and acceptance	71%	51%	64%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Opportunities to participate in community matters	73%	61%	69%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Opportunities to volunteer	79%	67%	70%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar

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Table 3: Governance General

	Percent positive			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
	2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
Services provided by Ashland	82%	77%	78%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Customer service	81%	73%	81%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Value of services for taxes paid	62%	66%	61%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Overall direction	65%	66%	66%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Welcoming citizen involvement	67%	55%	65%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Confidence in Town government	NA	58%	65%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Acting in the best interest of Ashland	NA	58%	67%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
Being honest	NA	59%	70%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
Treating all residents fairly	NA	56%	67%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
Services provided by the Federal Government	44%	35%	38%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar

Table 4: Governance by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
		2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
Safety	Police	86%	84%	85%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Crime prevention	87%	79%	85%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher
	Emergency preparedness	NA	62%	67%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Mobility	Traffic enforcement	82%	79%	77%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Similar
	Street repair	69%	66%	67%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher
	Street cleaning	82%	79%	80%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher
	Street lighting	70%	63%	65%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Snow removal	70%	60%	67%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Sidewalk maintenance	75%	61%	72%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Higher
	Traffic signal timing	78%	66%	70%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Higher
	Natural Environment	Garbage collection	90%	84%	88%	Similar	Much higher	Similar
Natural Environment	Recycling	82%	79%	81%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Yard waste pick-up	78%	77%	83%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Natural areas preservation	69%	54%	62%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Open space	NA	58%	63%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Built Environment	Storm drainage	72%	63%	75%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Land use, planning and zoning	68%	59%	55%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Code enforcement	52%	46%	51%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
Economy	Economic development	53%	51%	58%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Town parks	88%	74%	76%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Health services	NA	50%	52%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Special events	NA	70%	75%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Community Engagement	Public information	67%	62%	71%	Higher	Similar	Similar	Similar

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Table 5: Participation General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
	2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
Sense of community	87%	75%	75%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Recommend Ashland	93%	92%	89%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Remain in Ashland	87%	89%	85%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
Contacted Ashland employees	45%	43%	46%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar

Table 6: Participation by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
		2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
Safety	Stocked supplies for an emergency	NA	48%	41%	Similar	NA	Higher	Similar
	Did NOT report a crime	NA	70%	79%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
	Was NOT the victim of a crime	86%	91%	90%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
Mobility	Carpooled instead of driving alone	NA	47%	38%	Lower	NA	Similar	Similar
	Walked or biked instead of driving	NA	71%	70%	Similar	NA	Higher	Higher
Natural Environment	Conserved water	NA	79%	81%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Made home more energy efficient	NA	77%	70%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Recycled at home	63%	80%	73%	Lower	Much lower	Similar	Lower
Built Environment	Did NOT observe a code violation	NA	50%	57%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
	NOT under housing cost stress	64%	70%	64%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
Economy	Purchased goods or services in Ashland	NA	98%	97%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Economy will have positive impact on income	13%	23%	31%	Higher	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Work in Ashland	NA	37%	33%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Visited a Town park	81%	75%	79%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables	NA	86%	85%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity	NA	86%	86%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	In very good to excellent health	NA	61%	60%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Participated in religious or spiritual activities	48%	47%	43%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Attended a Town-sponsored event	NA	69%	59%	Lower	NA	Higher	Similar
Community Engagement	Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate	NA	28%	28%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Contacted Ashland elected officials	NA	20%	24%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Volunteered	40%	39%	40%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Participated in a club	24%	27%	25%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar

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	Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)			2017 rating compared to 2014	Comparison to benchmark		
	2011	2014	2017		2011	2014	2017
Talked to or visited with neighbors	NA	95%	92%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Done a favor for a neighbor	NA	84%	84%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Attended a local public meeting	24%	27%	31%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
Watched a local public meeting	33%	31%	25%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar
Read or watched local news	NA	89%	81%	Lower	NA	Similar	Similar
Voted in local elections	73%	83%	87%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar