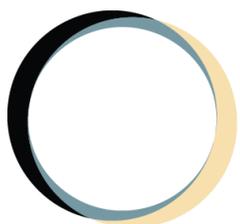


THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Ashland, VA
Community Livability Report

2014



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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Ashland. 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 316 residents of the Town of Ashland. 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.

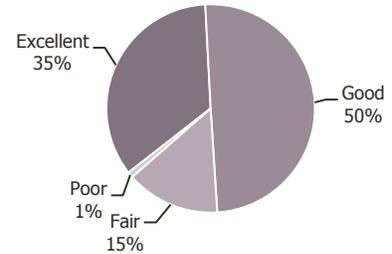


Quality of Life in Ashland

A majority of residents rated the quality of life in Ashland as excellent or good. This was similar to ratings in comparison communities (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.

Overall Quality of Life



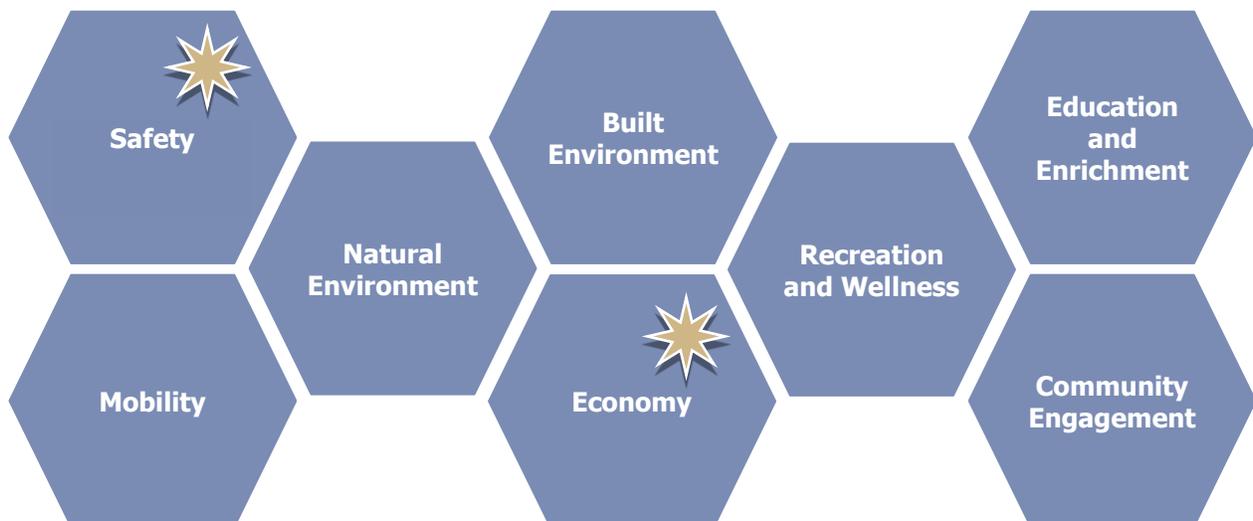
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Ashland community in the coming two years. Ratings for all eight facets were positive and similar to other communities. 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 Ashland’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 Ashland, 89% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Ashland as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the Town as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Ashland as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Ashland and its overall appearance. At least 3 in 5 residents gave ratings of excellent or good to each measure and all of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark comparisons.

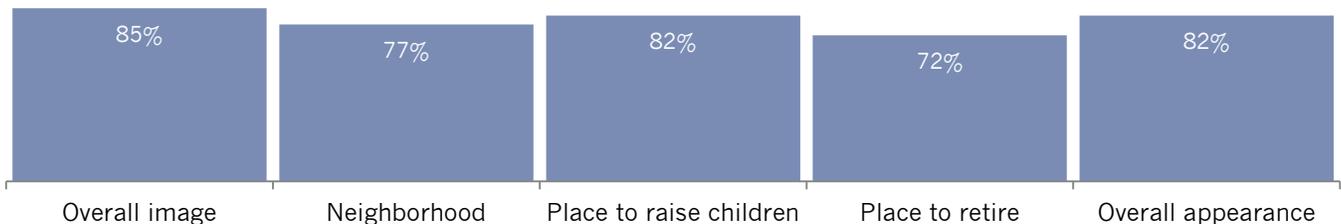
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Ratings across most facets were similar to the national benchmark comparisons. Within the facet of Mobility, four aspects had ratings higher than in comparison communities (public parking, travel by car, travel by bicycle and ease of walking), three aspects were similar (traffic flow, paths and walking trails and overall ease of travel) and one was lower than ratings in comparison communities (travel by public transportation). Safety had the highest ratings; almost all residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and in downtown/commercial areas. A strong majority gave excellent or good ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Ashland. All ratings for Natural Environment and Community Engagement were rated positively by a majority of residents. Ratings within other facets tended to be a mix of negative and positive.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



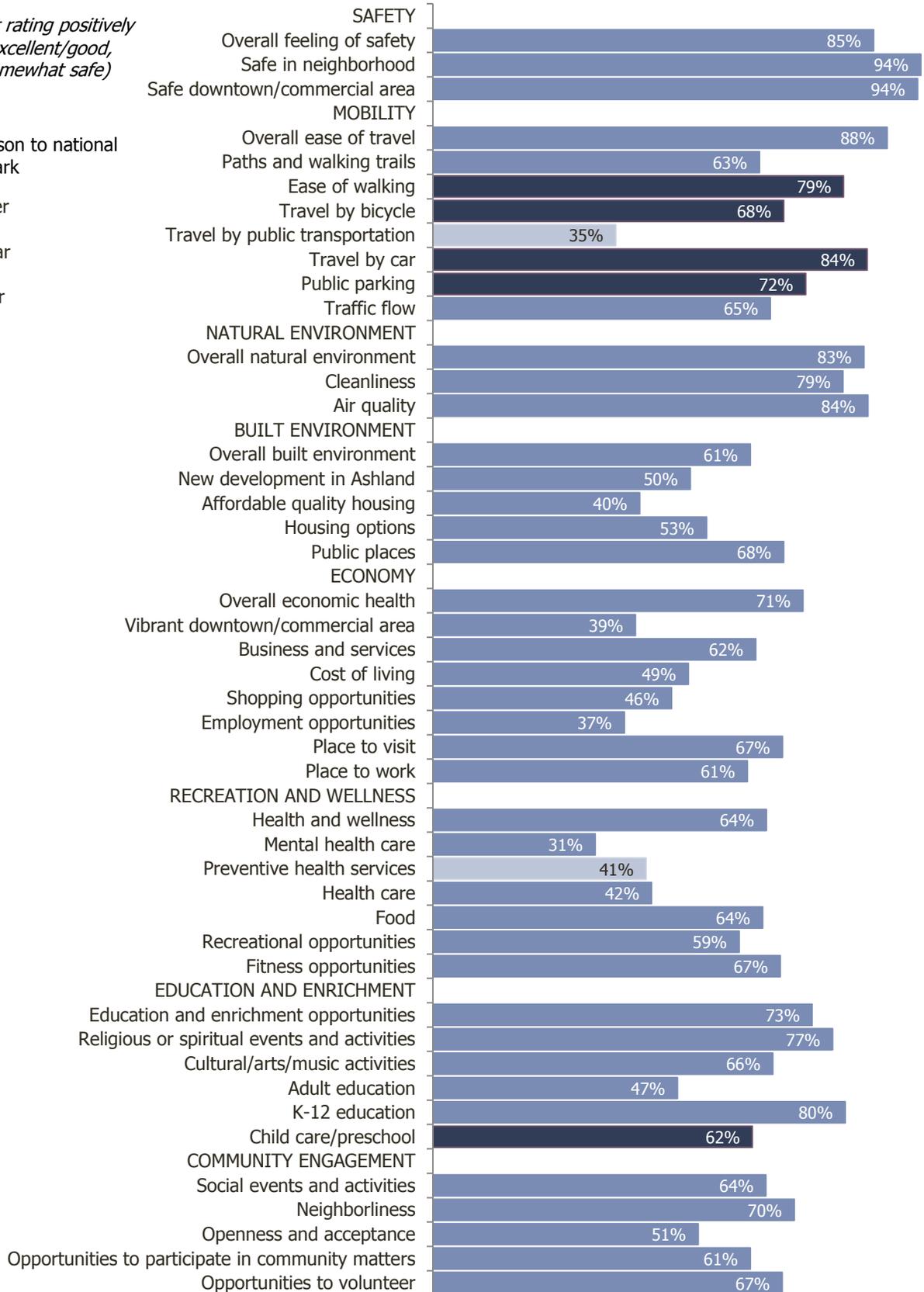
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



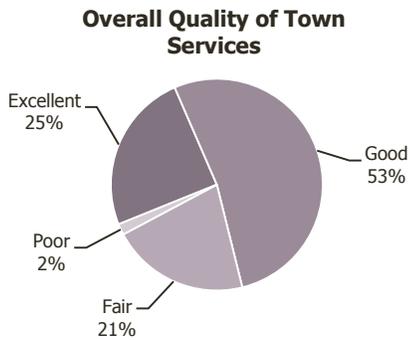
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Ashland as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About twice as many residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of Town services vs. those who gave positive ratings to the Federal Government.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Ashland’s leadership and governance. These aspects of Governance were rated as excellent or good by a majority of respondents and were similar to ratings seen in other communities across the nation. Customer service, value of services for taxes paid and the overall direction of Ashland received the highest ratings.

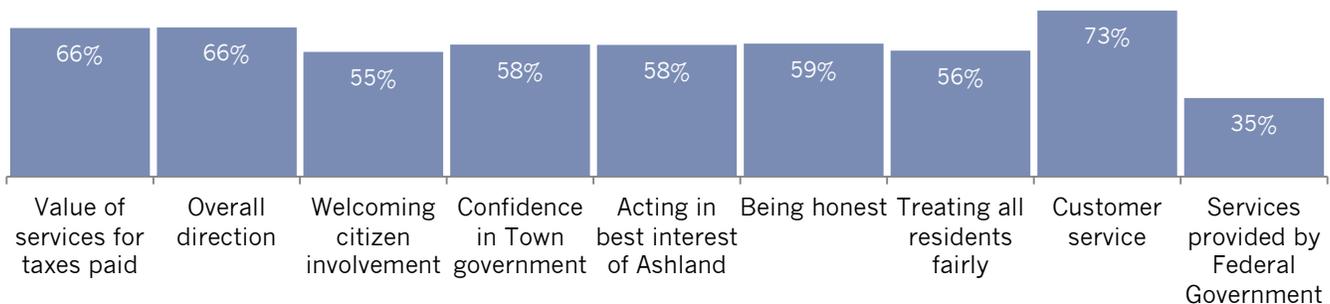
Respondents evaluated over 20 individual services and amenities available in Ashland. A majority of residents gave positive ratings to all of these services, and they were all at least similar to the benchmark comparison. Ratings for crime prevention, traffic enforcement, street repair and street cleaning were all higher than in comparison communities. Police services and garbage collection were the highest rated services, followed by crime prevention, traffic enforcement, street cleaning and recycling.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



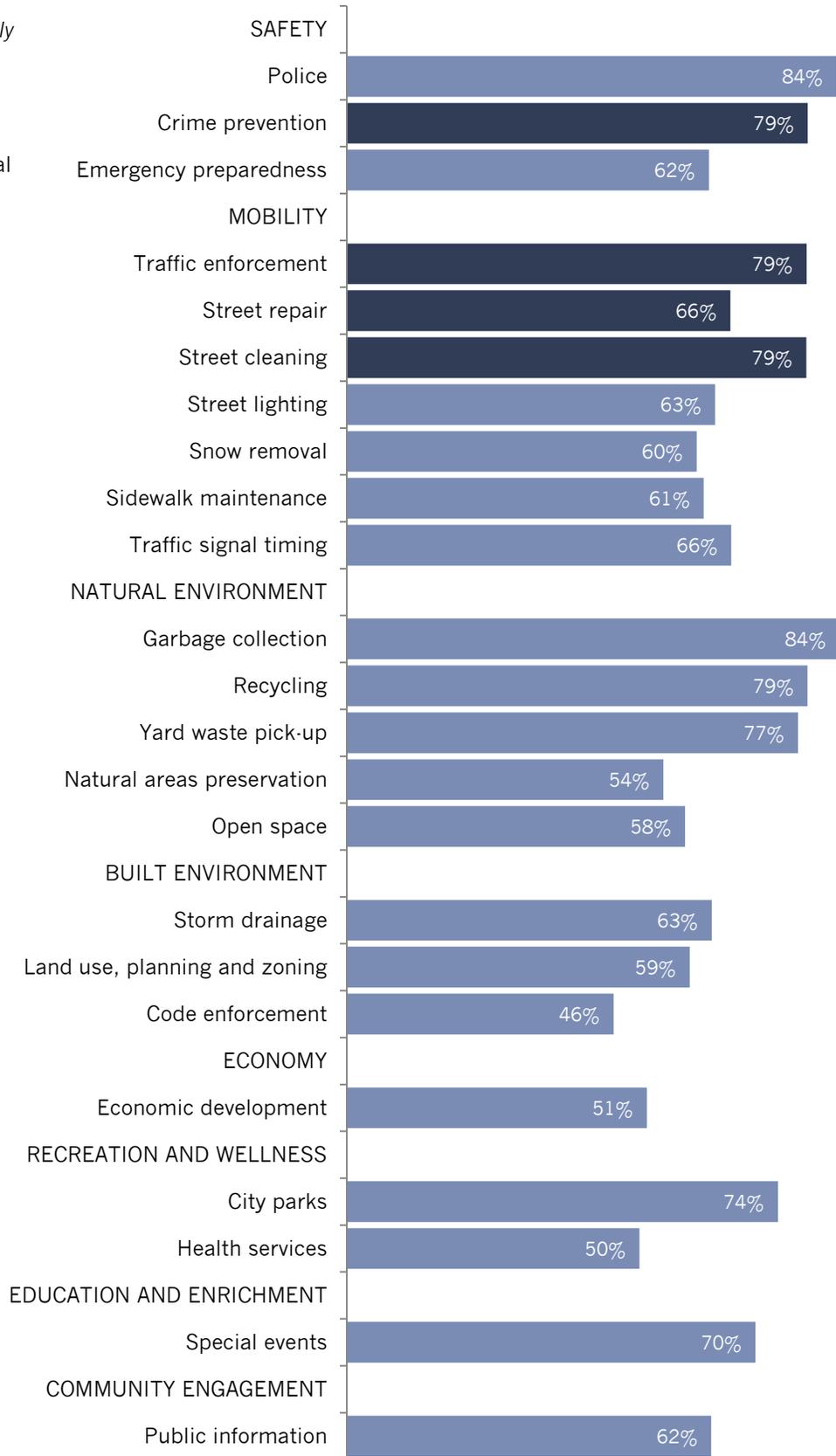
The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



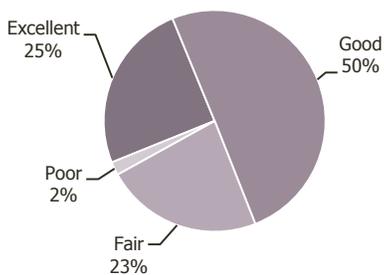
Participation

Are the residents of Ashland 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. Three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community; this rating was similar to the national benchmark. About 9 in 10 residents were likely to recommend living in Ashland and planned to remain in Ashland for the next five years.

The survey included over 20 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 other communities. More Ashland residents reported rates of stocking supplies for an emergency, walking or biking instead of driving and attending a Town-sponsored event. Almost all residents purchased goods or services in Ashland, talked to or visited with neighbors and had not been crime victims in the last 12 months. Less than one third of respondents reported that they had campaigned, contacted Ashland elected officials, participated in a club or attended a local public meeting.

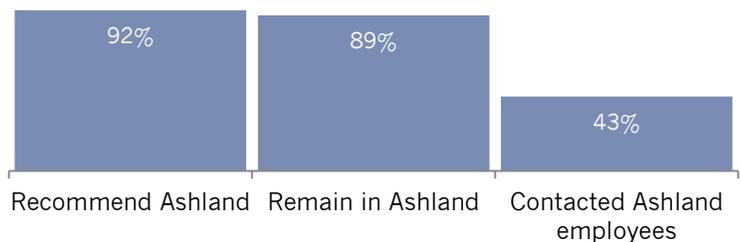
Sense of Community



*Percent rating positively
(e.g., very/somewhat likely,
yes)*

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



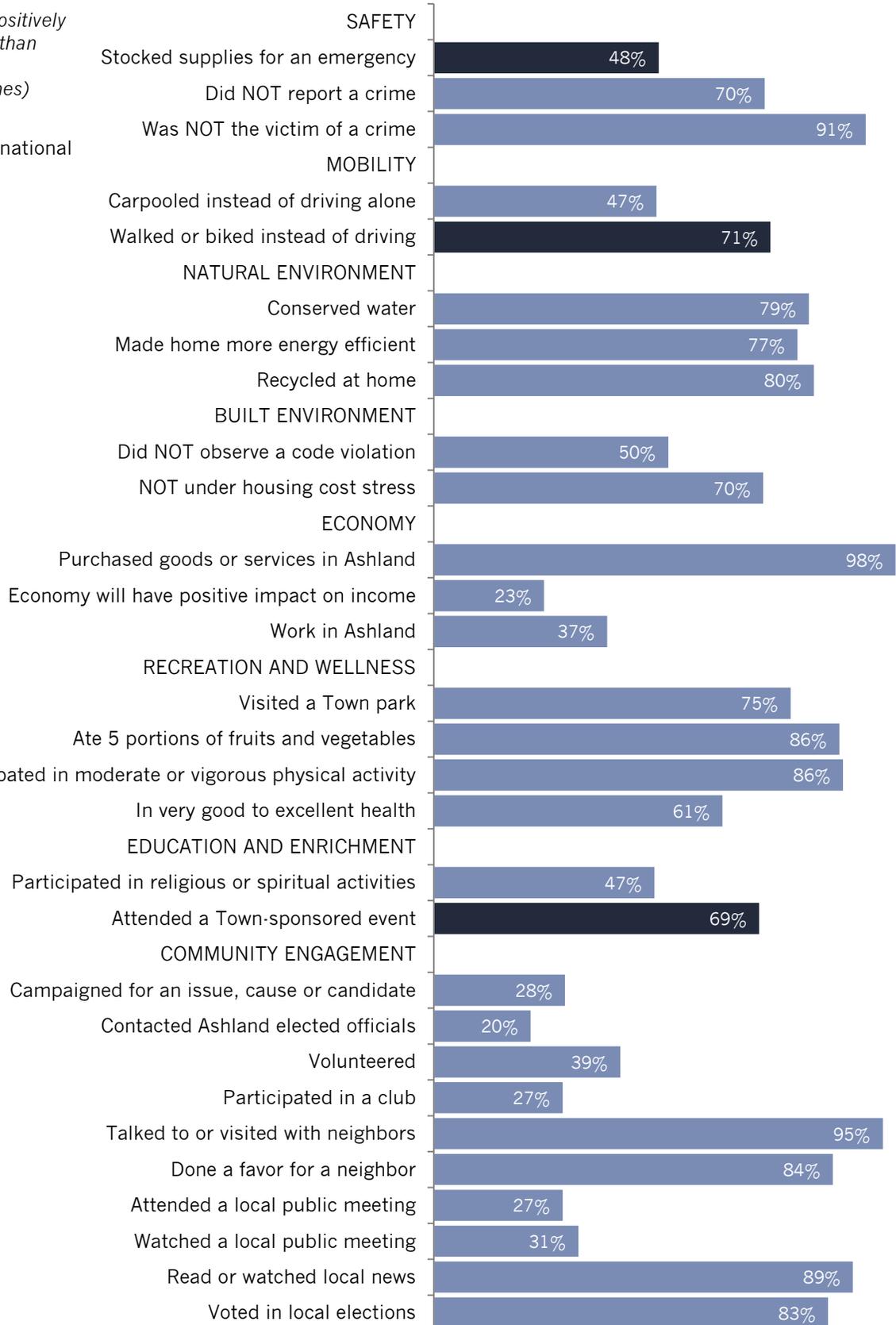
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

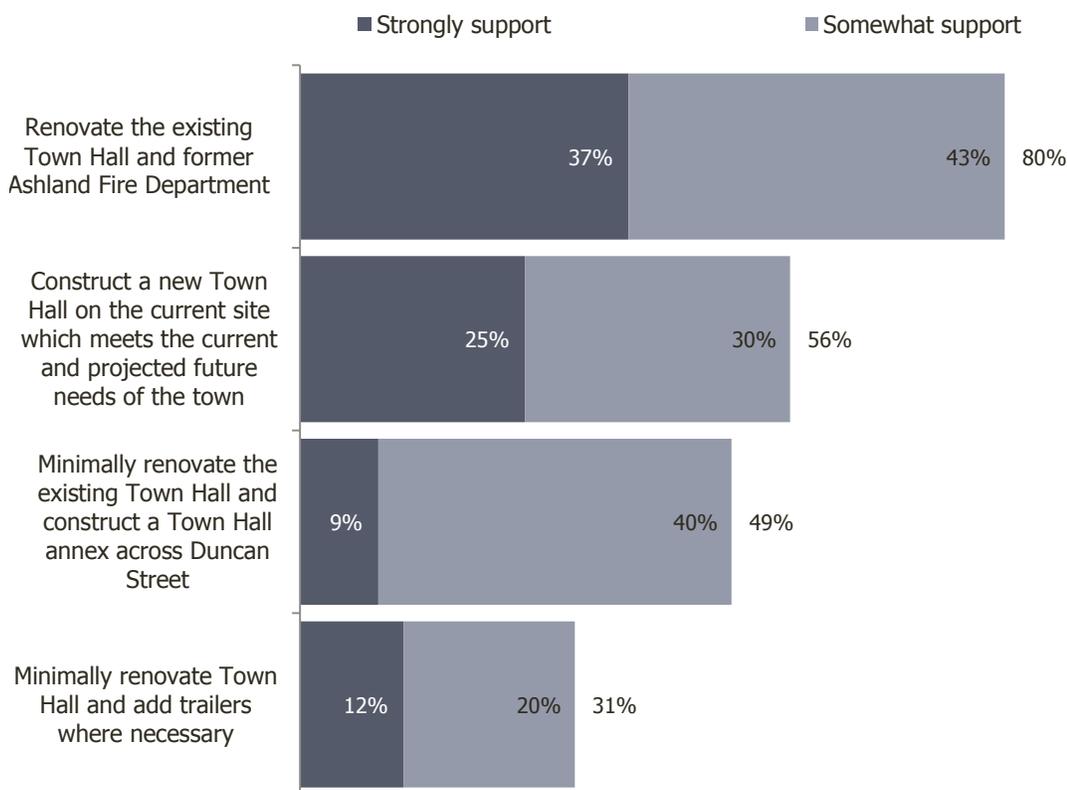


Special Topics

The Town of Ashland included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked respondents to indicate their level of support or opposition for renovating or constructing Ashland Town Hall. The option that received the most support was to renovate the existing Town Hall and former Ashland Fire Department. A majority of respondents also supported constructing a new Town Hall on the current site. Close to half supported minimally renovating the existing Town Hall and constructing a new Town Hall annex. Most residents opposed the option to minimally renovate Town Hall and add trailers when necessary.

Figure 4: Town Hall Renovations

Recent building analyses suggest that Ashland Town Hall may require significant structural work and other remodeling to serve its current needs. The Town is interested in possibly renovating Town Hall with some additions or replacing Town Hall with a larger, more efficient building on the same plot. Please indicate the degree to which you support or oppose the following options:

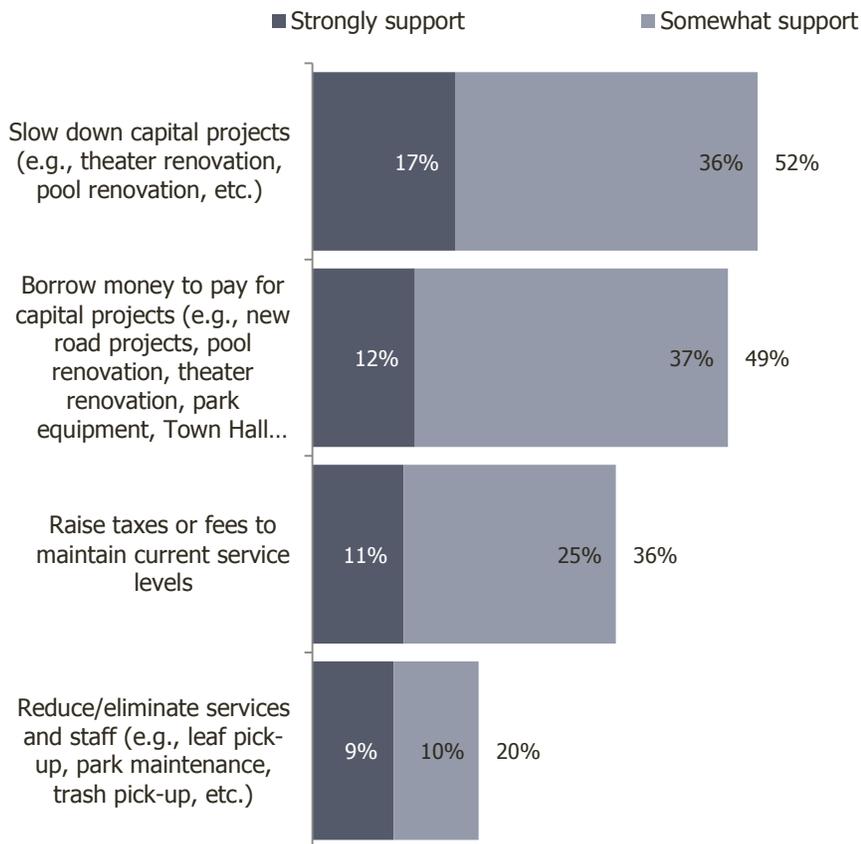


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The second question asked residents to indicate their level of support or opposition for different options to balance the Town budget. About half of the respondents supported slowing down capital projects or borrowing money to pay for new capital projects. Most residents opposed raising taxes or fees or reducing/eliminating services and staff as means to balance the Town budget.

Figure 5: Town Budget

The Town is in the process of creating a five-year budget plan to help balance the budget and reinforce long term fiscal stability. Please indicate how much you support or oppose each of the following methods of balancing the Town budget:

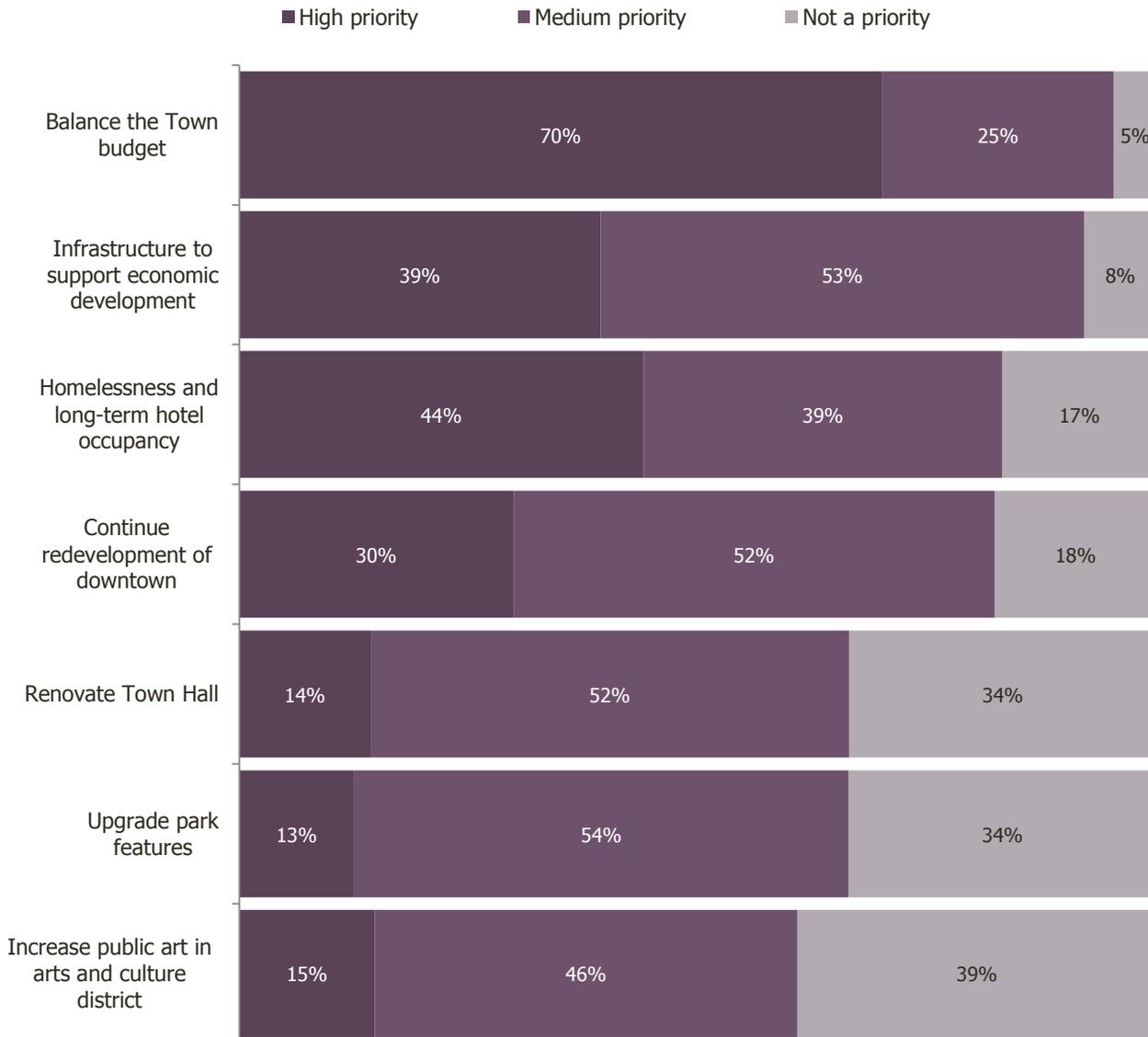


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The final question asked residents to rate the priority of several items. All items were rated at least a medium priority by a majority of respondents; almost all indicated that balancing the Town budget was a priority. Increasing public art in the arts and culture district was rated as the lowest priority; however 6 in 10 respondents indicated that it was a priority.

Figure 6: Town Priorities

How much of a priority, if any, should it be for the Town to address each of the following in the next three years?



Conclusions

Ashland residents continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

At least 85% residents rated their overall quality of life and Ashland as a place to live as excellent or good. About 9 in 10 would be likely to recommend Ashland as a place to live to someone who asks and planned to remain in Ashland for the next five years. Ashland's overall appearance and overall image along with neighborhoods as a place to live and to raise children received high ratings by about 4 in 5 residents. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and remained stable from 2011 to 2014 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover).

Residents feel safe in Ashland.

Safety was an important feature of the community for residents and most residents wanted the Town to continue to provide excellent safety services and amenities. Almost all felt safe in their neighborhoods and in downtown/commercial areas and the overall feeling of safety in Ashland received high ratings. Residents rated safety services highly and most participants were not a victim of a crime or did not report a crime.

The Economy is important to the community.

Residents indicated that the Economy is an important community feature to focus on over the next two years. Participants gave positive ratings to the overall economic health of the community and about 3 in 5 gave favorable ratings to Ashland as a place to work, to visit and to the overall quality of businesses and services. The cost of living in Ashland was also rated positively by about half of respondents. Economic development services were rated positively by about 6 in 10 respondents. Ratings for positive economic outlook increased from 2011 to 2014.