

**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Citizen Survey<sup>TM</sup>

**Lynchburg, VA**  
Community Livability Report  
2015



**NRC**  
National Research Center Inc

2955 Valmont Road Suite 300  
Boulder, Colorado 80301  
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863



*Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*

777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20002  
icma.org • 800-745-8780

# Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Lynchburg ..... 2

Community Characteristics ..... 3

Governance ..... 5

Participation ..... 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions ..... 11

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# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Lynchburg. 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).

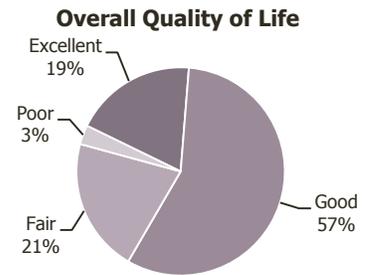
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 349 residents of the City of Lynchburg. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Lynchburg

Most residents rated the quality of life in Lynchburg as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark comparison (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.



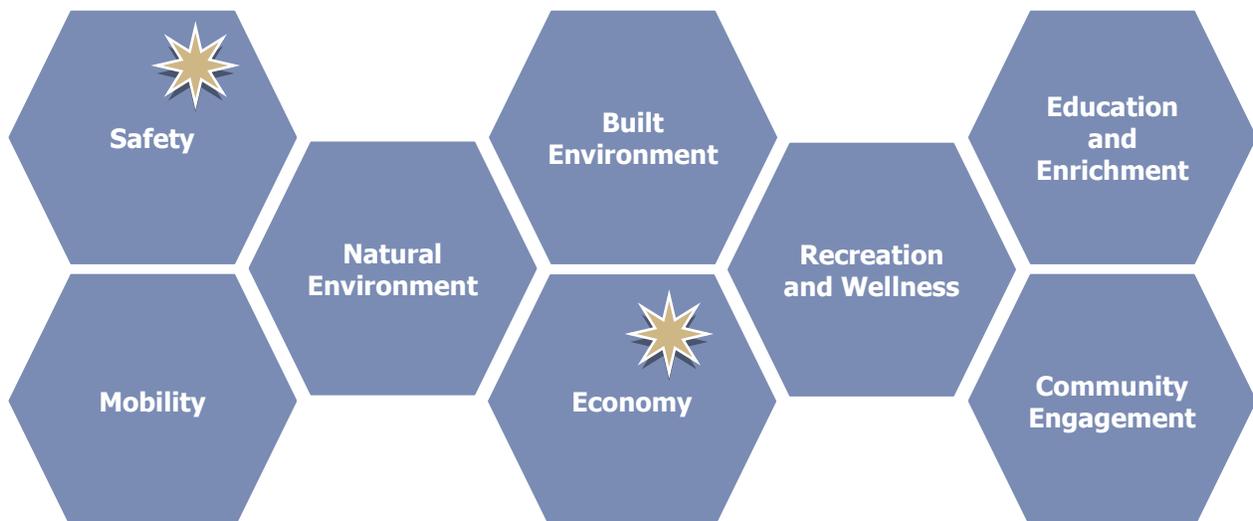
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Lynchburg community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Lynchburg residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community. Ratings for all facets were positive and similar to other communities. 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 Lynchburg’s unique questions.

## Legend

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

★ Most important



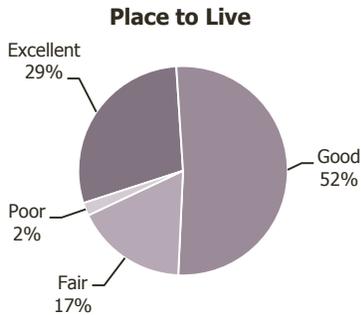
# Community Characteristics

*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 Lynchburg, 81% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Lynchburg as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation and to communities in the Southern region with populations ranging from 50,000-100,000.

In addition to rating the City as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Lynchburg as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Lynchburg and its overall appearance. All of these ratings were similar to both of the benchmark comparisons and each received positive ratings from about 6 in 10 residents.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, results were similar to other communities and most aspects were given positive ratings by a majority of respondents. Aspects within the facet of Safety tended to be positively rated by at least 8 in 10 residents and were similar to the benchmark comparisons. Most aspects within the facets of Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment were also rated positively by a majority of residents. Within the facet of Economy, the cost of living was rated positively by about 6 in 10 respondents and was rated higher than in other communities across the nation and in the Southern region with populations between 50,000 and 100,000. The aspects of Community Characteristics that received ratings lower than comparison communities were the ease of travel by walking and by bicycle and the openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds.



Nearly all Community Characteristics had similar or higher ratings in 2015 as in 2013 and only one aspect (overall quality of new development) was lower. Please see the *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover for more details.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



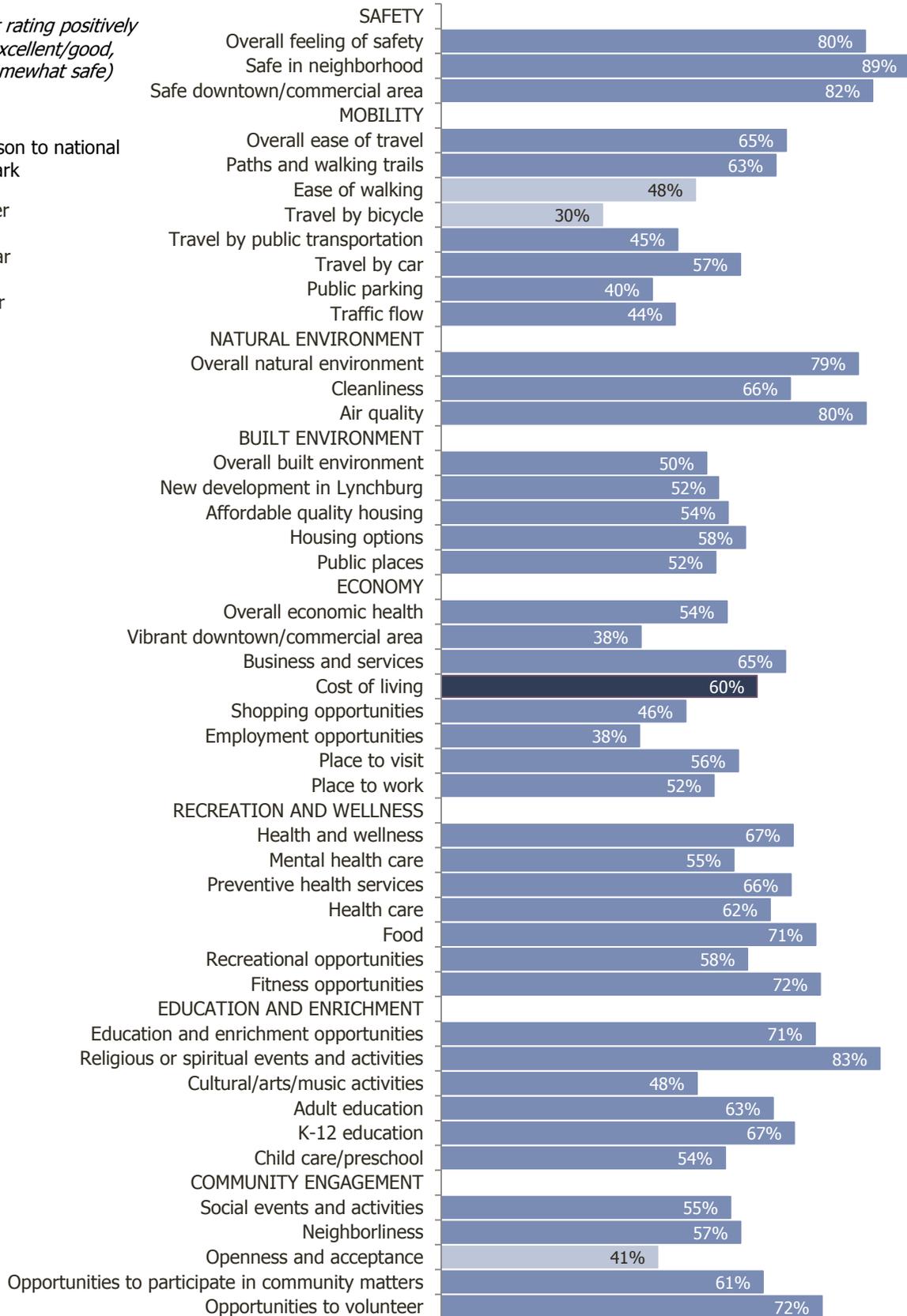
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Governance

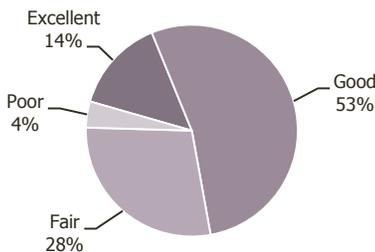
*How well does the government of Lynchburg meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Lynchburg as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. The overall quality of services provided by the City of Lynchburg received excellent or good ratings from 68% of residents, while the Federal Government received positive ratings from 43% of participants. Both of these ratings were similar to the national and custom sets of benchmarks.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Lynchburg’s leadership and governance. A majority gave positive ratings to the overall direction of the City, acting in the best interest of Lynchburg and the customer service provided by Lynchburg employees. About 4 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the value of services for taxes paid, welcoming citizen involvement, being honest and treating all residents fairly. All of these ratings were on par with other communities across the nation and in the Southern region with populations ranging from 50,000-100,000.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Lynchburg. Most ratings for services in Lynchburg were rated as excellent or good by at least half of residents and tended to be similar to the national benchmark. The services with the highest ratings included police, fire services, ambulance/EMS services, fire prevention services, garbage collection and sewer services, with at least 7 in 10 giving high marks to these aspects. Services that were given ratings lower than those seen across the nation included street repair (29% excellent or good), street cleaning (45%), snow removal (45%), recycling (56%), code enforcement (35%), cable television (37%) and library services (70%). These ratings also tended to be lower than those seen in Southern region communities with populations 50,000-100,000.

**Overall Quality of City Services**

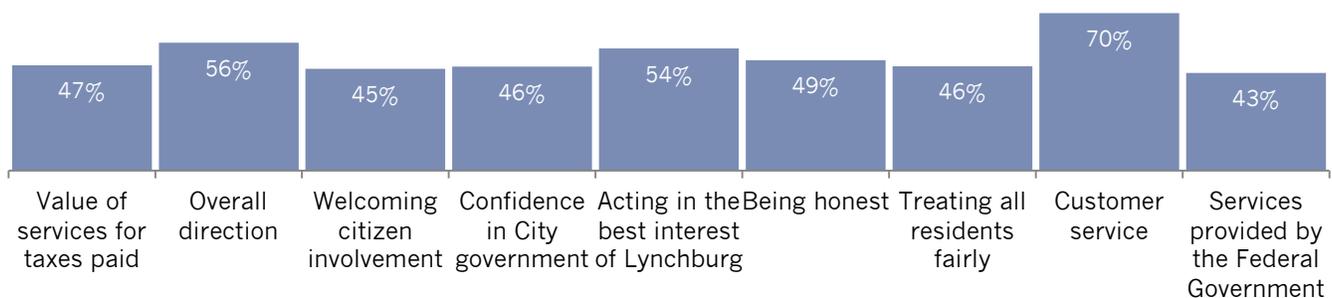


In 2015, ratings in the pillar of Governance tended to be stable, but did have a mix of a few increases (fire prevention, emergency preparedness, drinking water and overall direction of the City) and decreases (snow removal, City parks, public information services and customer service) since 2013.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



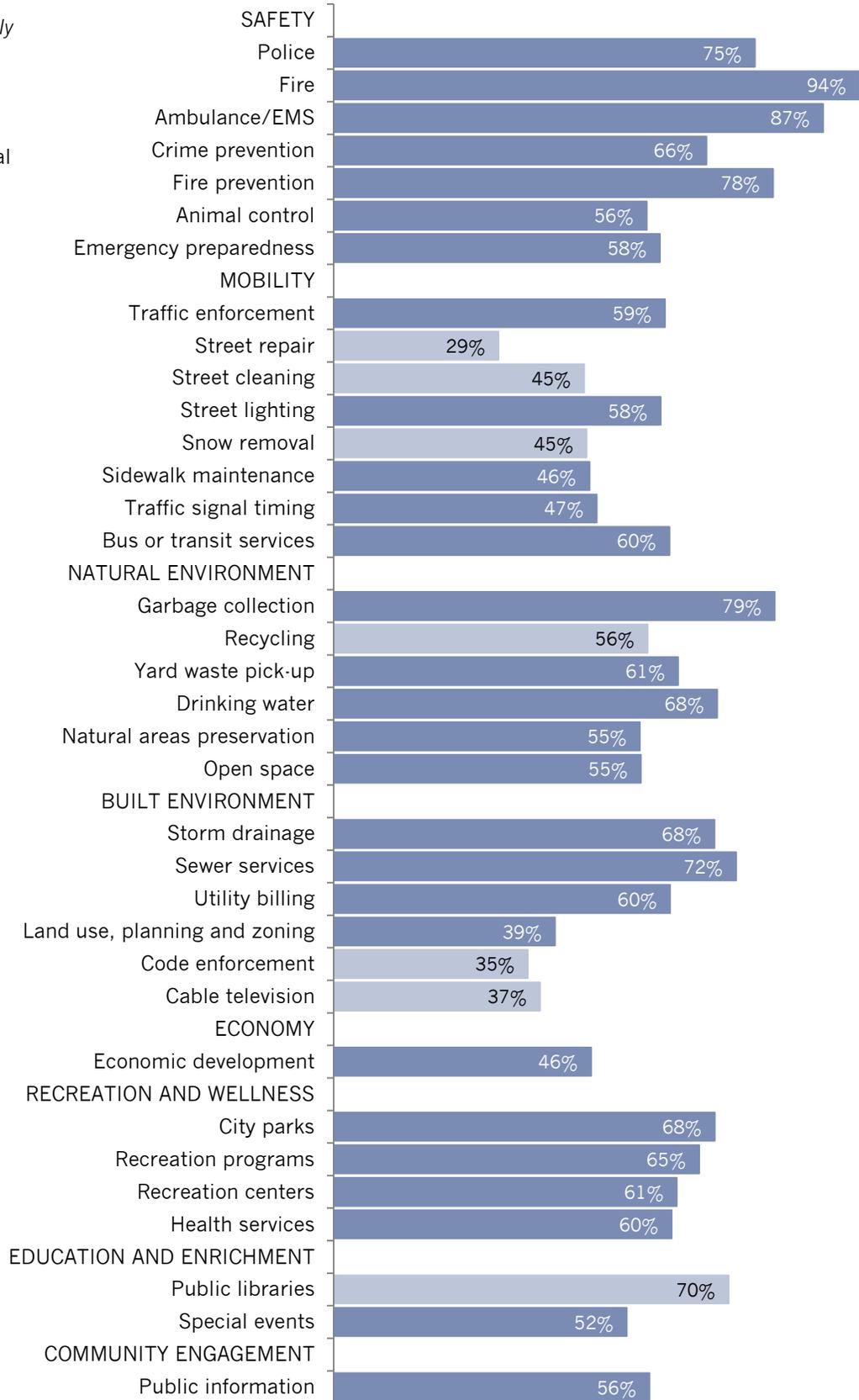
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



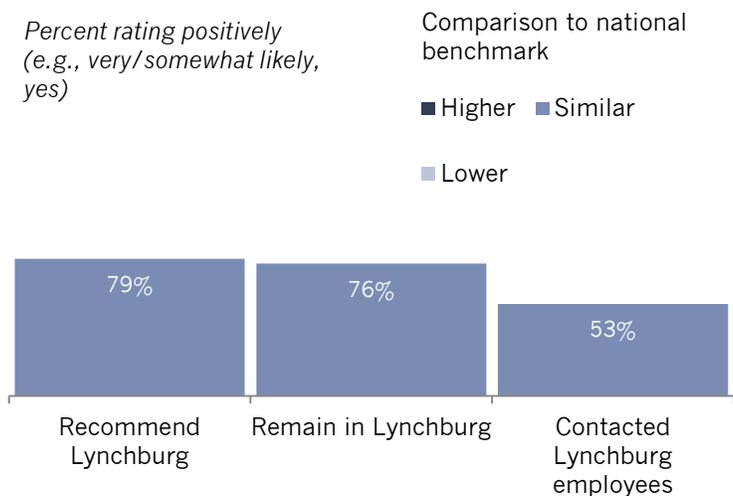
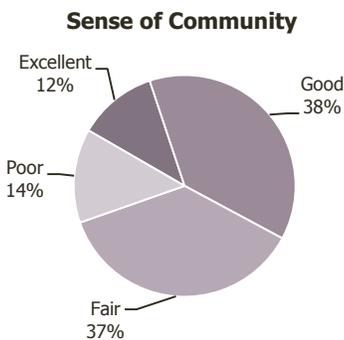
# Participation

## *Are the residents of Lynchburg 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 half of residents gave a positive rating to the sense of community in Lynchburg and this level was similar to other benchmark communities, but has decreased from 2013 to 2015. About three-quarters of residents were likely to recommend living in the City to remain in Lynchburg for the next five years. About half of citizens have contacted City of Lynchburg employees, a level similar to levels reported in other communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of participation measured in the survey varied widely; most aspects of Participation were similar to other benchmark communities. A vast majority of residents had purchased goods or services in Lynchburg (97%), participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity (80%), talked to or visited with neighbors (86%) and read or watched local news (86%). Strong ratings higher than the national benchmark were also seen in the facets of Economy (work in Lynchburg) and Education and Enrichment (participated in religious and spiritual activities). Lynchburg residents reported the lowest rates of participation for using public transportation instead of driving, campaigning for an issue, cause or candidate, contacting Lynchburg elected officials and attending a local public meeting. The aspects of Participation that received lower ratings than other communities across the nation included public transportation use, walking or biking instead of driving, recycling at home and using Lynchburg's public libraries. These ratings also tended to be lower than communities in the Southern region with populations of 50,000-100,000.

Where comparisons were possible, measures of Participation in 2015 tended to vary; eight aspects were similar, seven were lower and two were higher.



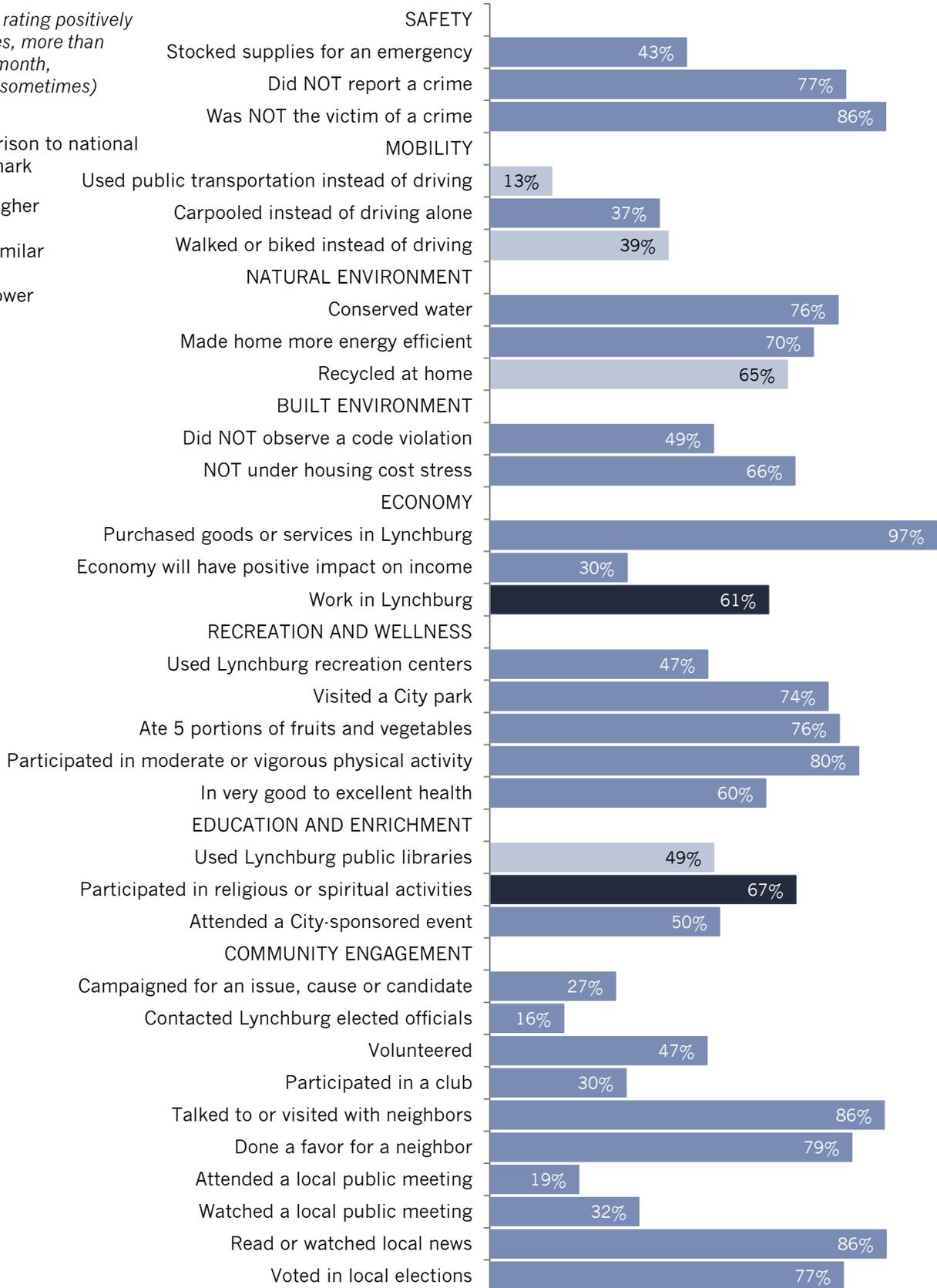
## The National Citizen Survey™

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

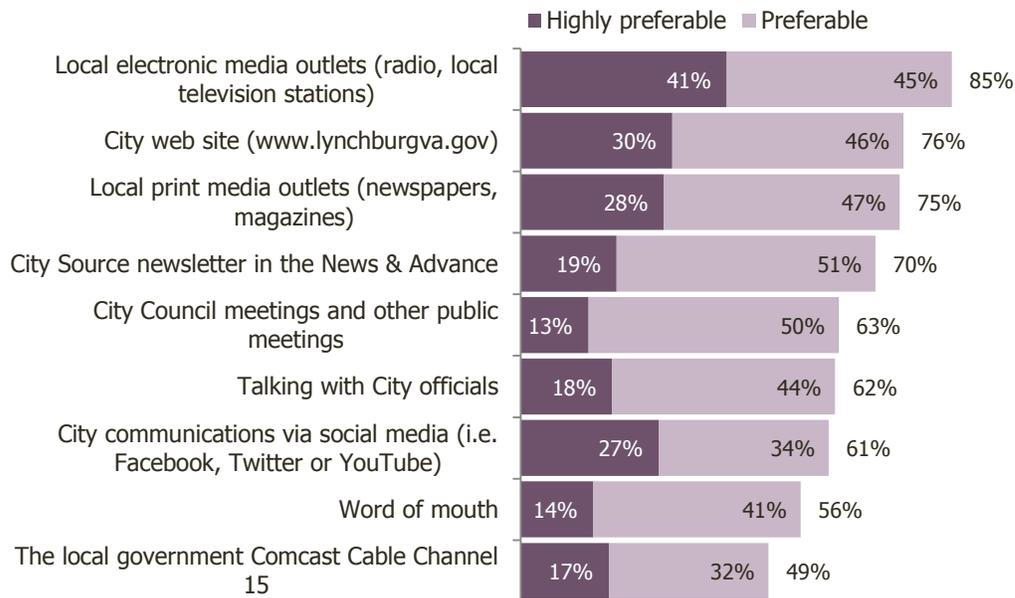


# Special Topics

The City of Lynchburg included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents to indicate which methods they prefer to receive information about City government, its activities, events and services. About 8 in 10 respondents indicated that local electronic media outlets would be the most preferable way to receive information. Close to three-quarters of participants also identified the City web site and local print media outlets as at least preferable. The local government channel was the least preferable option for information.

Figure 4: Information Preferences

*Please indicate how you prefer to receive information about City government and its activities, events and services.*

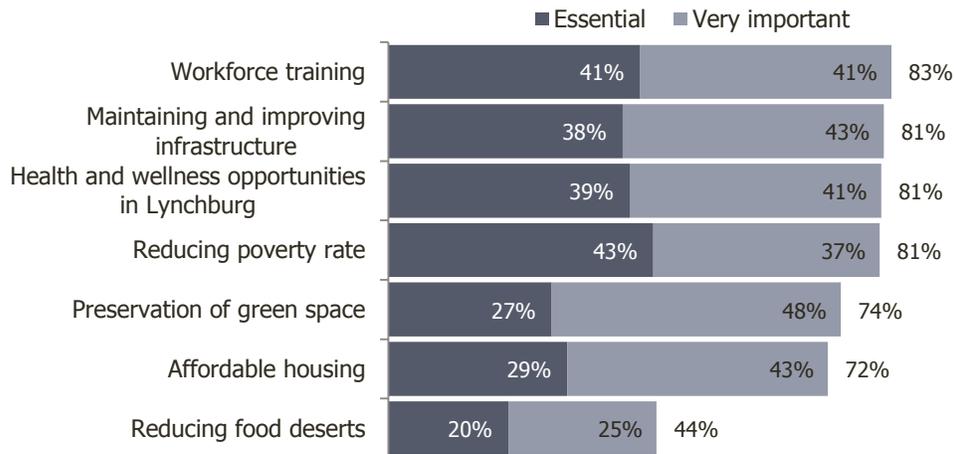


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The second question asked residents about their opinions about the importance of various City issues for the next five years. The most important issue was workforce training, rated as essential or very important by 83% of participants. This was closely followed by maintaining and improving infrastructure, health and wellness opportunities and reducing the poverty rate with 8 in 10 respondents giving high importance to each. About 4 in 10 residents gave high levels of importance to reducing food deserts.

Figure 5: City Priorities

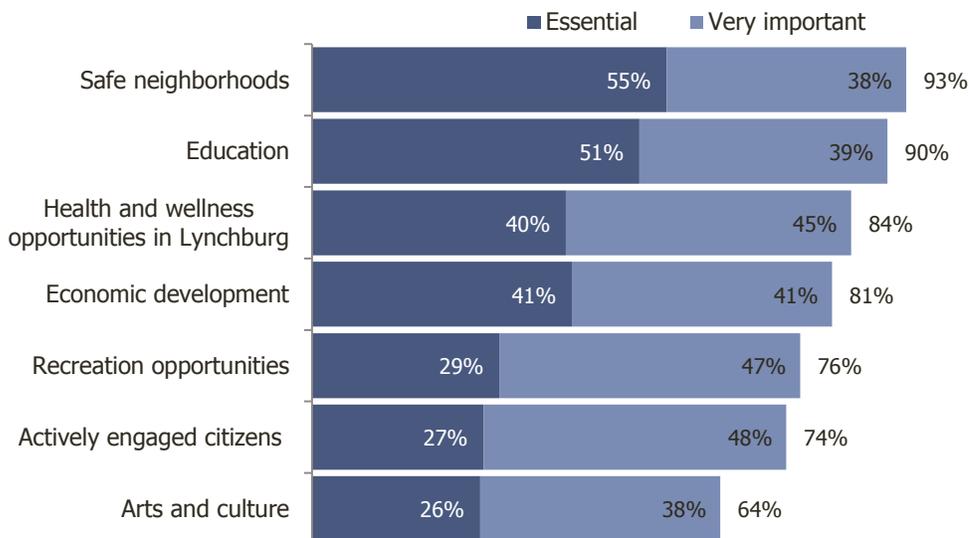
*Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following issues will be for the City to address over the next five years:*



The survey also gauged the importance of strategic planning areas to the overall quality of life in Lynchburg. Residents indicated that safe neighborhoods and education were the most important to quality of life with at least 9 in 10 respondents deeming those areas as essential or very important.

Figure 6: Quality of Life Strategic Planning Areas

*Please rate how important, if at all, each of the following strategic planning areas are to the overall quality of life in Lynchburg:*



# Conclusions

## **Lynchburg residents continue to enjoy a high quality of life.**

A vast majority of residents gave positive ratings for the overall quality of life and Lynchburg as a place to live (81% excellent or good). About 8 in 10 residents rated Lynchburg as a place to raise children positively with most respondents reporting that they plan on remaining in the City. Lynchburg's overall appearance and overall image received high ratings by about 6 in 10 residents. These ratings are similar or higher to the ratings from the City's 2013 iteration of the survey, which suggests that residents continue to enjoy living in Lynchburg.

## **Mobility ratings have increased but there are still opportunities for improvement.**

While ratings for Mobility were generally similar to the benchmark communities, both nationally and in comparison to selected Southern communities, across the three pillars, residents' ratings of ease of walking, travel by bicycle, street repair, street cleaning and snow removal were all lower than the benchmarks; Lynchburg residents also used public transportation and walked or biked instead of driving at a lower rate than other communities across the nation and in Southern cities with populations that range from 50,000-100,000. Ratings for traffic flow and ease of travel by public transportation increased from 2013 to 2015. When asked about the importance of different priorities for the City of Lynchburg, about 8 out of 10 participants indicated that maintaining and improving infrastructure were essential or very important.

## **Residents identified Economy and Safety as main focus areas.**

Survey participants indicated that Economy and Safety were important areas for the City to focus on over the next two years. Many of the Economy ratings tended to be similar or higher than ratings seen in other communities. Cost of living received more excellent or good ratings than other communities and more residents work in Lynchburg compared to the national benchmark. In 2015, more residents reported being optimistic that the economy will have a positive impact on income than in 2013. Workforce training and reducing poverty rates were deemed at least very important by 8 in 10 residents when they were asked to identify priorities for the City for the next five years. Economic development was also identified as a strategic planning area that is important to the overall quality of life in Lynchburg, with 8 in 10 reporting it was essential or very important.

Overall, ratings for Safety across all three pillars were positive and similar to benchmark communities. A vast majority of residents reported a high level of overall feeling of safety and felt safe in their neighborhoods and in Lynchburg's downtown/commercial area. A majority of residents also gave excellent or good ratings to safety services, and the ratings for fire prevention and emergency preparedness improved since the last iteration of the survey. The number of participants reporting crimes (a rating that improved from 2013 to 2015) was similar to other communities. When asked about City focus areas in a special interest question, safe neighborhoods rated was the most important strategic planning area to the overall quality of life in Lynchburg.