

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

**Lynchburg, VA**  
Community Livability Report

2017



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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.

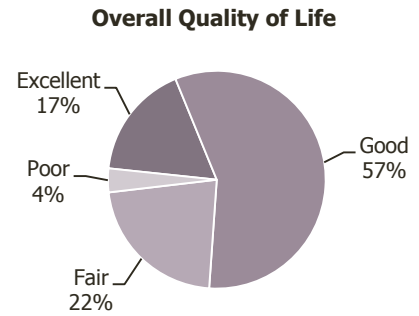
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 963 residents of the City of Lynchburg. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% for all respondents. 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

About three-quarters of residents rated the quality of life in Lynchburg as excellent or good. This rating was similar in comparison to national and peer benchmarks (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.

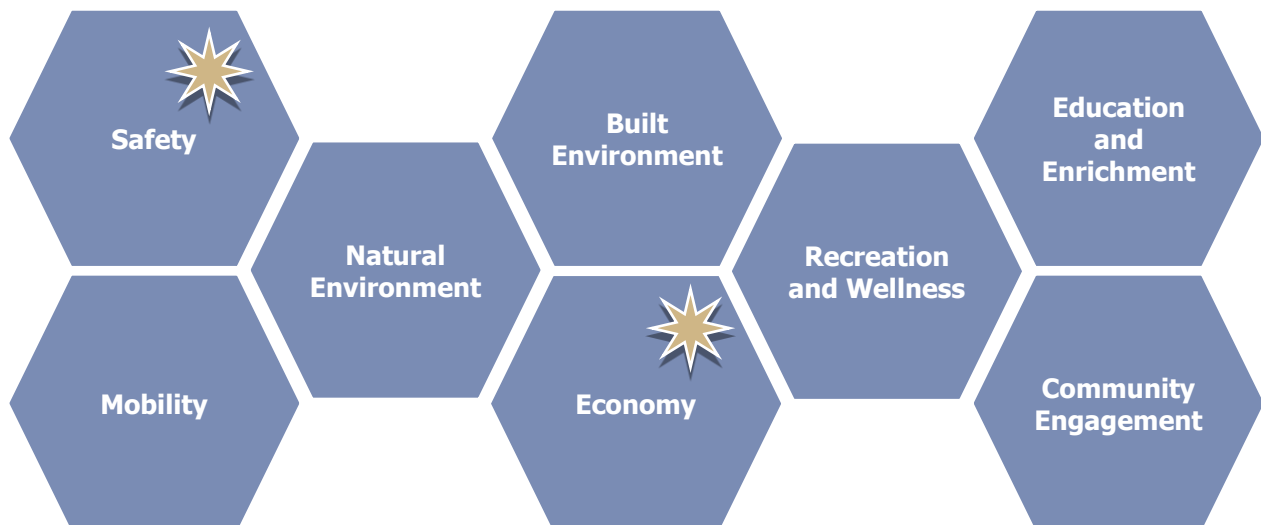
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2015, residents identified Economy and Safety as priorities for the Lynchburg community in the coming two years. Ratings for 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

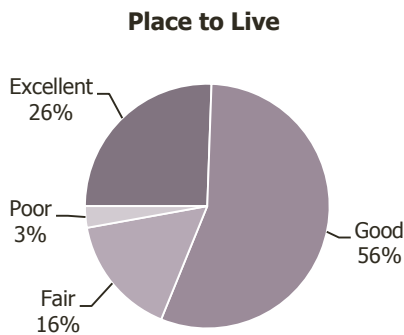
*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

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, 8 in 10 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 in similarly sized peer communities.

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. Overall, at least 6 in 10 residents felt favorably about each of these aspects of the community, providing ratings similar to those of other communities across the U.S.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, at least half of respondents positively scored most aspects of Community Characteristics, by tending to yield ratings similar to the national and peer community benchmarks.

Evaluations of Safety were similar to comparison communities with about 9 in 10 residents indicating they felt safe in their neighborhood and 8 in 10 felt safe in the downtown/commercial area. Within Mobility, residents' ratings were a mix of average and below average; scores for overall ease of travel, ease of travel by bicycle and public parking (which decreased over time; see *Trend over Time* report for more details) were lower than comparison communities, while respondents were generally pleased with other modes of transportation (travel by public transportation and car) as well as traffic flow, providing ratings similar to national and peer averages.

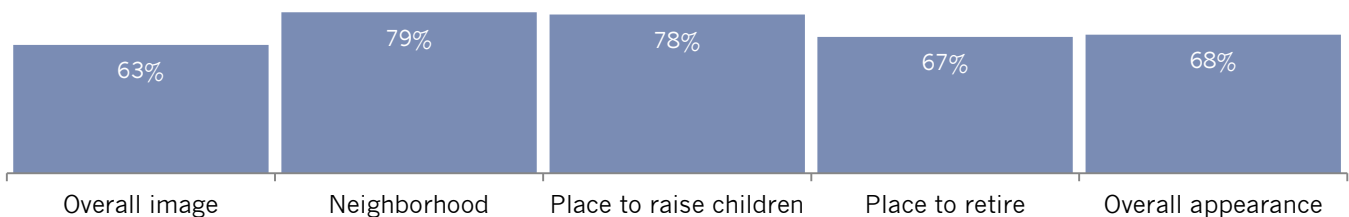


The cost of living was seen as a highlight in Lynchburg, with about three-quarters evaluating it as excellent or good and higher than the national benchmark.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



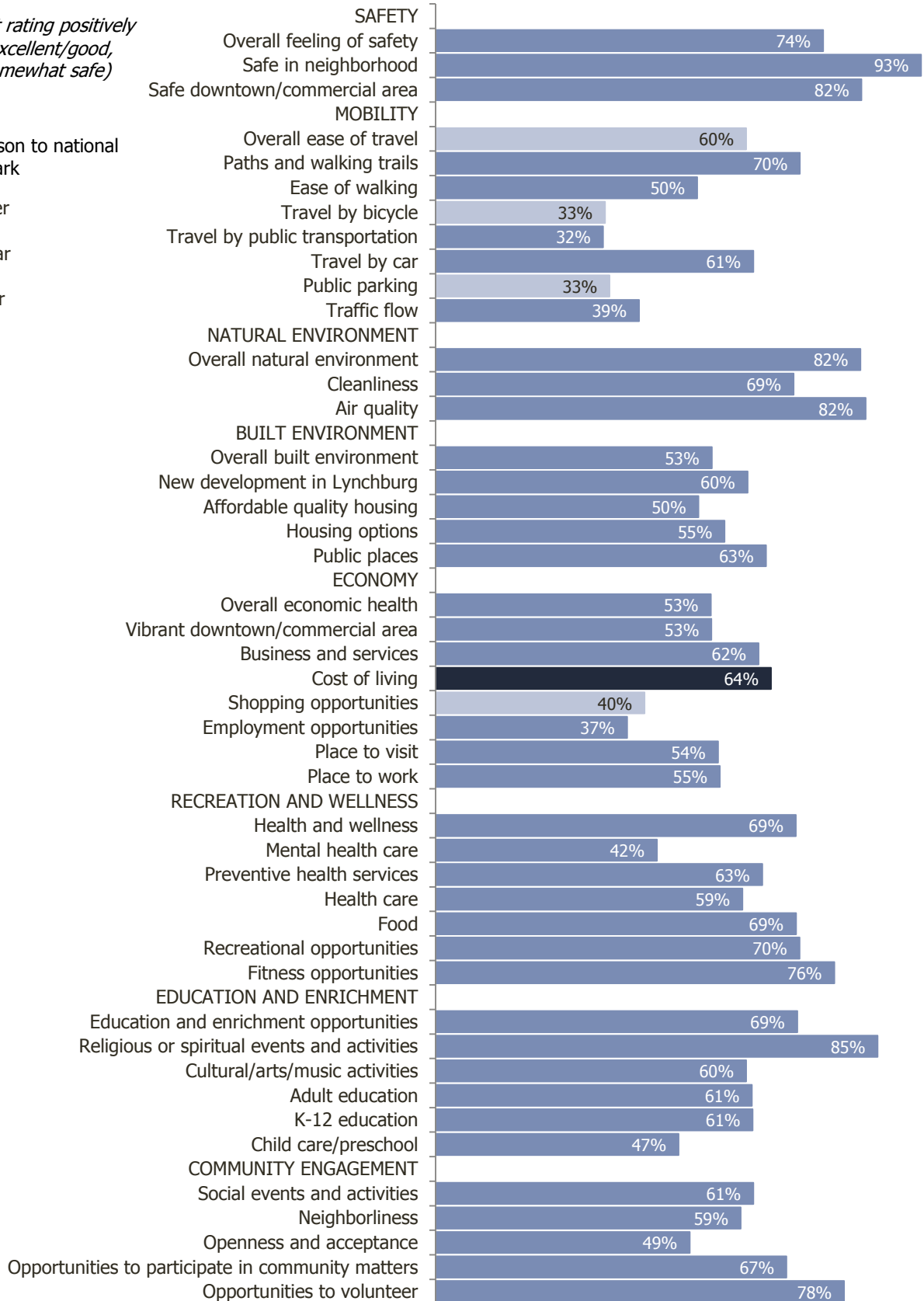
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Governance

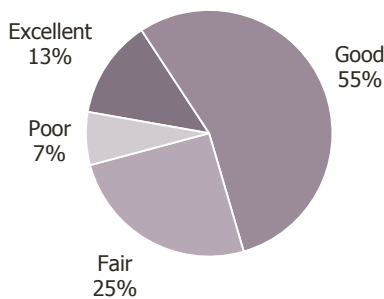
*How well does the government of Lynchburg meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Lynchburg as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About two-thirds of survey respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall services provided by the City. Marks for City services as well as services provided by the Federal Government were similar to national averages.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Lynchburg’s leadership and governance. About half or more of residents rated each aspect positively, similar to those in other communities nationwide. Reviews for the overall direction and the City welcoming citizen involvement were higher in 2017. About three-quarters of respondents scored the customer service provided by City employees as excellent or good.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Lynchburg. Broadly, residents gave ratings to all but three government services that were similar to than communities across the U.S. The services that lagged behind national averages were snow removal, recycling and yard waste pick-up and each was positively evaluated by around half of residents. Reviews for recycling were also lower in 2017 than in 2015. Within Safety, all services were similar to the benchmark; residents gave a lower rating to fire in 2017 than in 2015. Ratings for all services within Build Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were similar to the national average. Participants’ scores for City parks and public libraries, in addition to recreation centers and programs and special events, among others, increased in 2017.

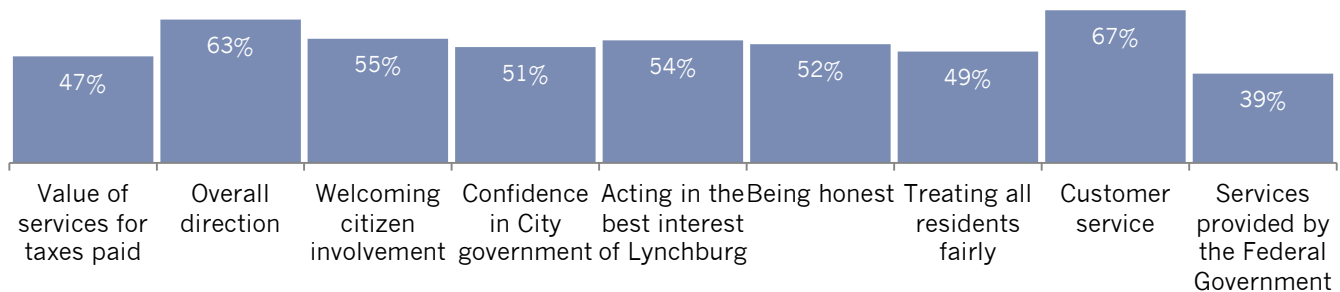
## Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



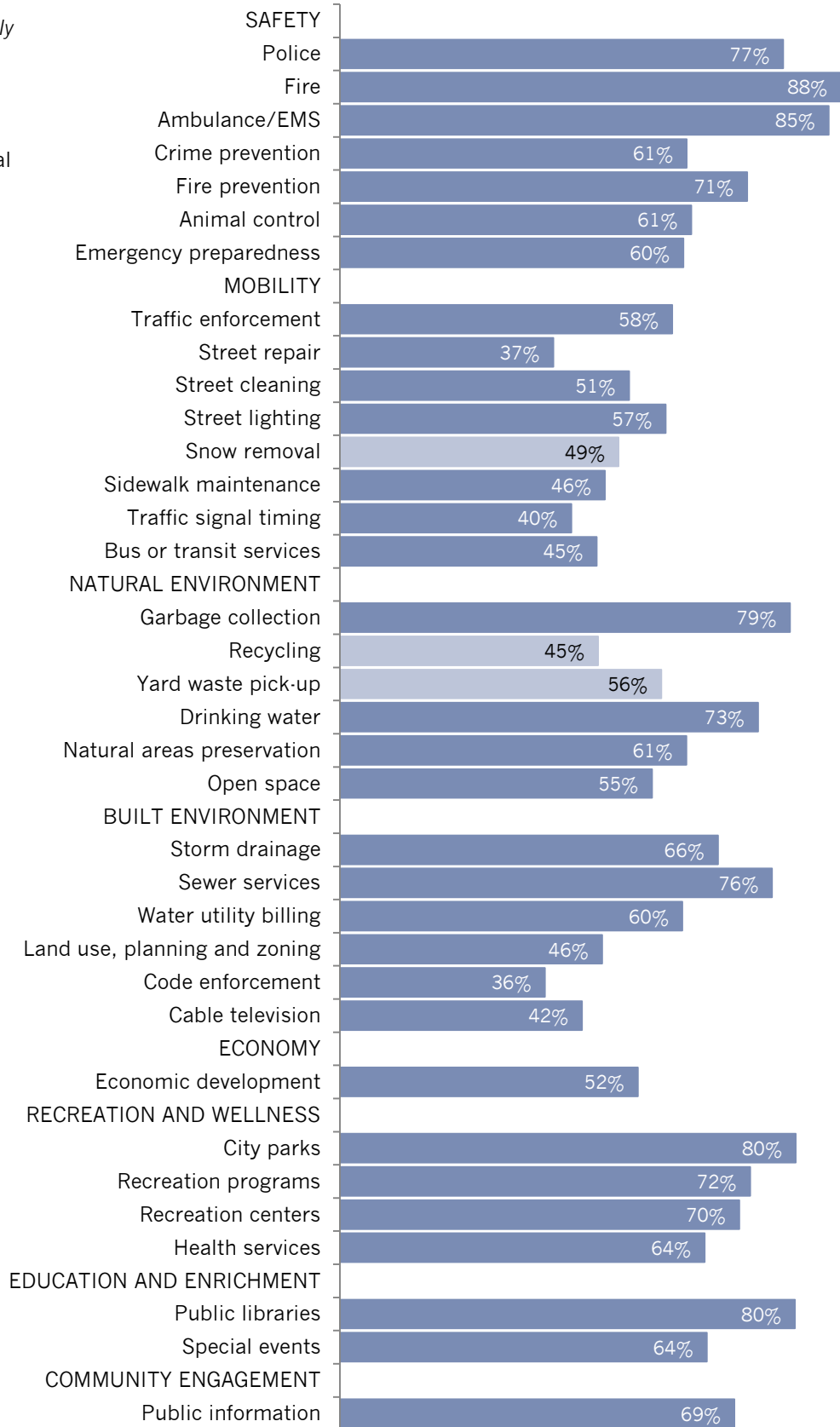
# The National Citizen Survey™

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?*

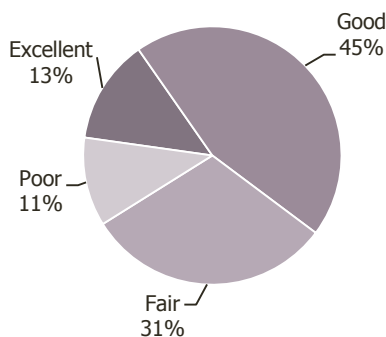
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Similar to other communities in the U.S., at least half of respondents gave excellent or good marks to the sense of community in Lynchburg. This rating increased from 2015 to 2017.

About 8 in 10 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Lynchburg to someone who asked and planned to remain in the community for the next five years and about half of residents reported they had contacted Lynchburg employees. These ratings were similar to those reported across the nation.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Participation rates within Lynchburg tended to be on par with national and regional averages. Residents engaged in three activities at a rate higher than in other parts of the country: working in Lynchburg, participating in religious/spiritual activities and volunteering (which increased in 2017).

At least 8 in 10 participants were engaged in Recreation and Wellness activities, such as visiting a City park (a level higher than in 2015), and reported high levels engagement within their community, including neighborliness, reading or watching local news and voting behaviors. Survey participants reported below average participation rates for walking or biking instead of driving, recycling and using Lynchburg public libraries.

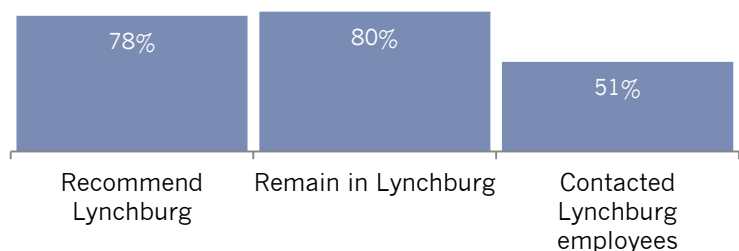
**Sense of Community**



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



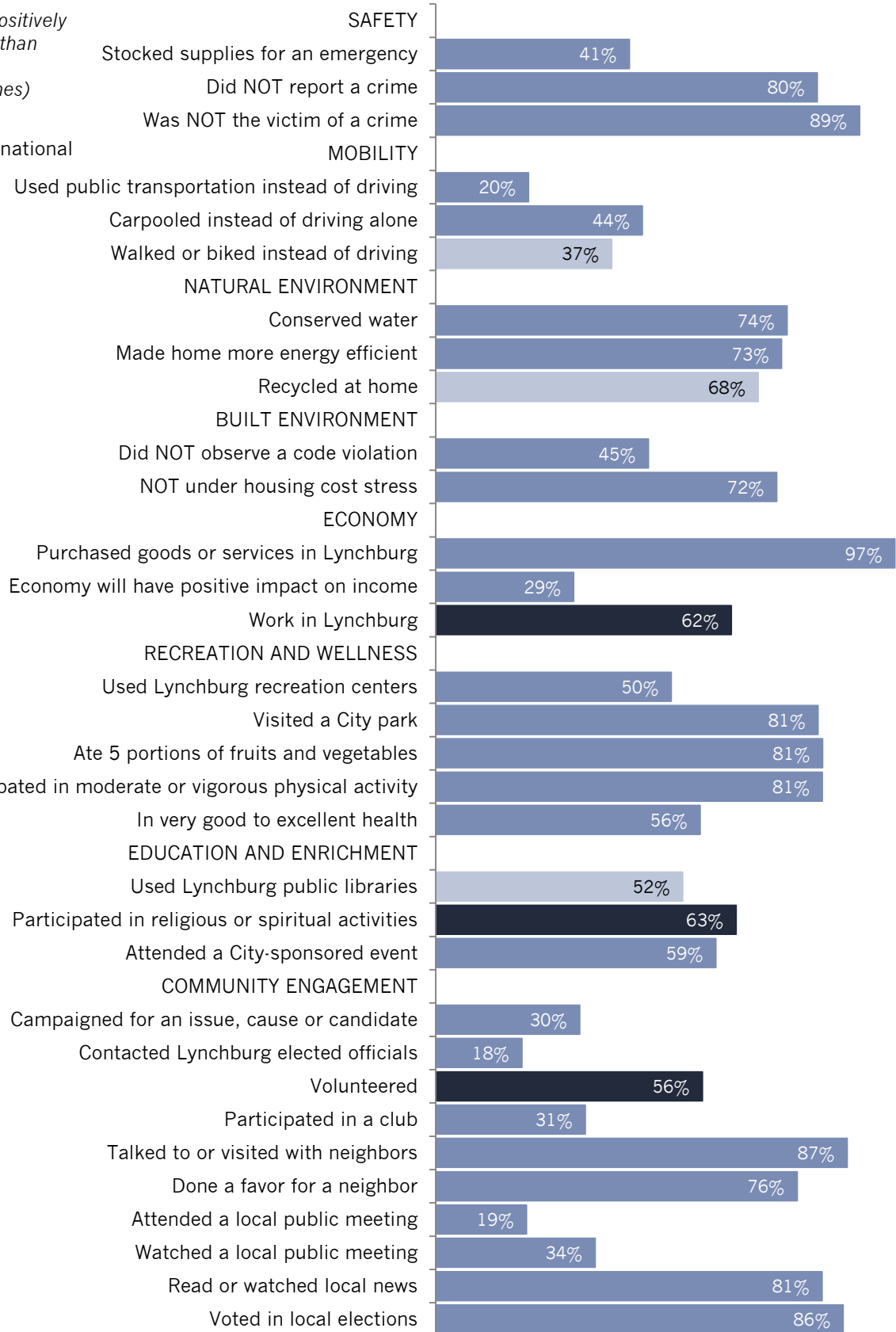
# The National Citizen Survey™

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



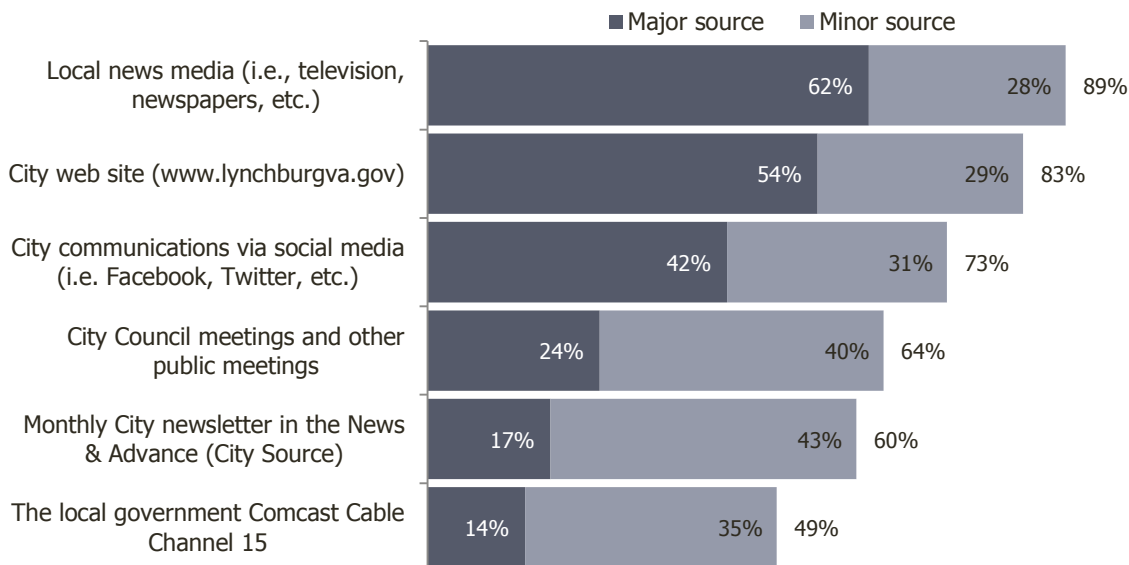
# Special Topics

The City of Lynchburg included several questions of special interest on The NCS. City leaders sought feedback from residents regarding sources of information about the City, additional bill paying locations, priorities for the future and progress made on those priorities in the last two years. The survey also included an open-ended question that asked residents to write in their own words an issue or concern that they felt was not addressed on the survey (see the Open-end Report under a separate cover for a complete set of responses).

Lynchburg residents indicated their level of reliance on sources of information about the City by rating how much of a source each of the six listed items was to them. At least 8 in 10 participants reported using local media outlets and the City website as minor or major sources of information and about three-quarters relied on City communications via social media. While just 14% indicated the local government cable channel 15 as a major source, it was still utilized as a minor source by about one-third of respondents.

Figure 4: Sources of Information

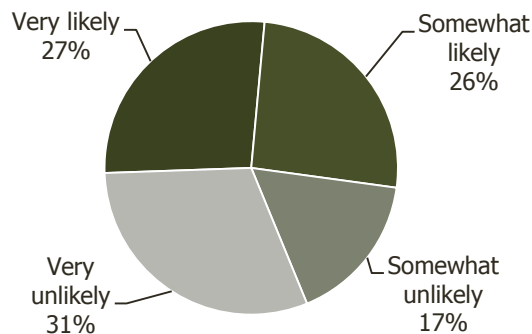
*Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the City government and its activities, events and services?*



The second question asked respondents about how likely they would be to use locations other than City hall to pay their bills. About half of residents reported they would be very likely or somewhat to use other locations, while around one-third indicated they would be very unlikely to use this service.

Figure 5: Likelihood of Utilizing Additional Bill Payment Locations

*Some cities provide citizens with locations other than City Hall (convenience/neighborhood stores, etc.) to pay for water, real estate and other bills and services. If the City of Lynchburg provided this option, how likely or unlikely would you be to use this service?*

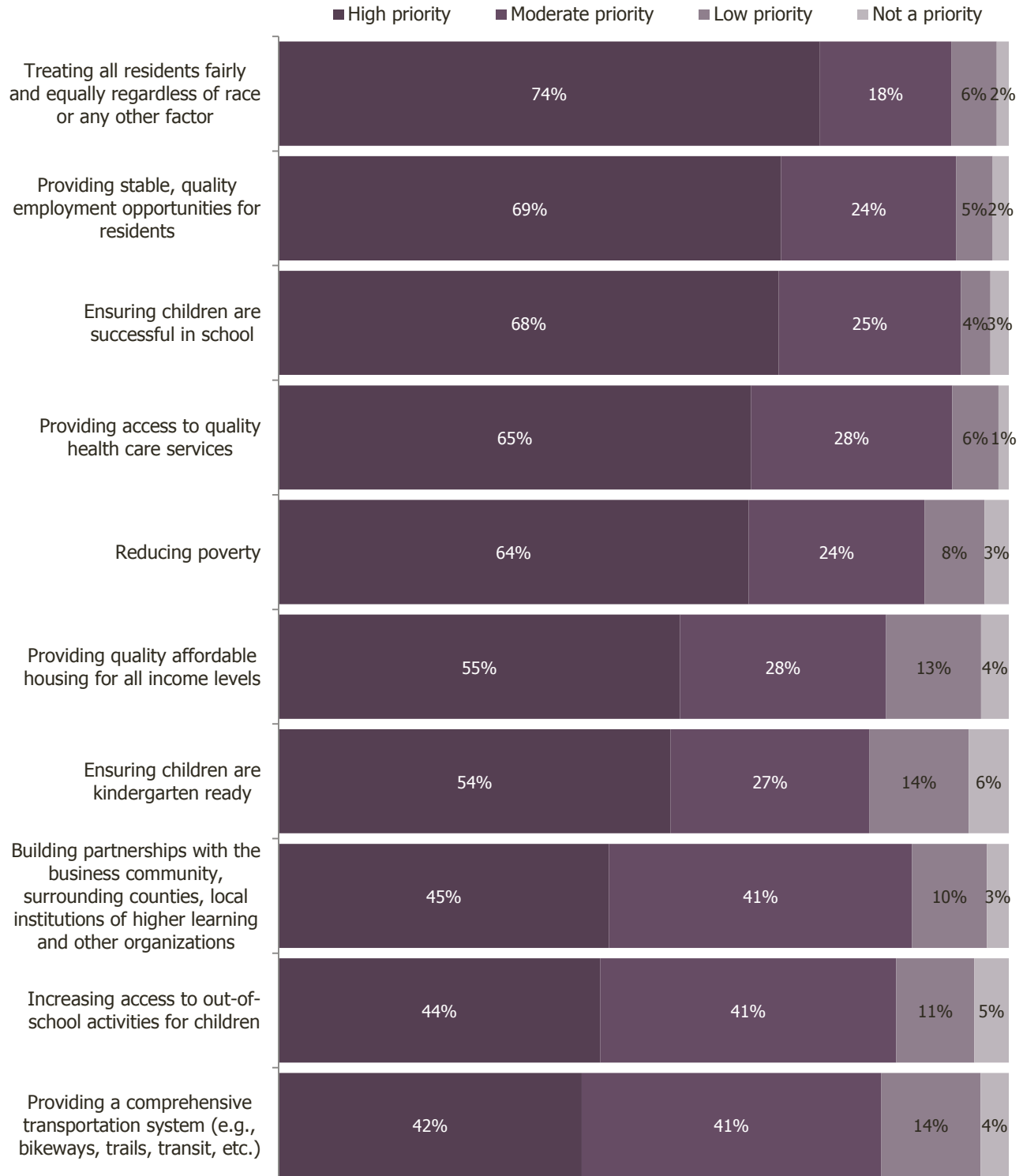


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The survey asked residents to prioritize and rate the progress of a variety of projects and issues for the City to address (see Figure 7 on the following page). Overall, at least two in five rated each project as a high priority; treating all residents fairly and equally regardless of race or any other factor was the top priority with about 9 in 10 participants identifying this issue as a high or moderate priority and 13% indicating that significant progress had been made in the last two years.

Figure 6: Resident Priorities

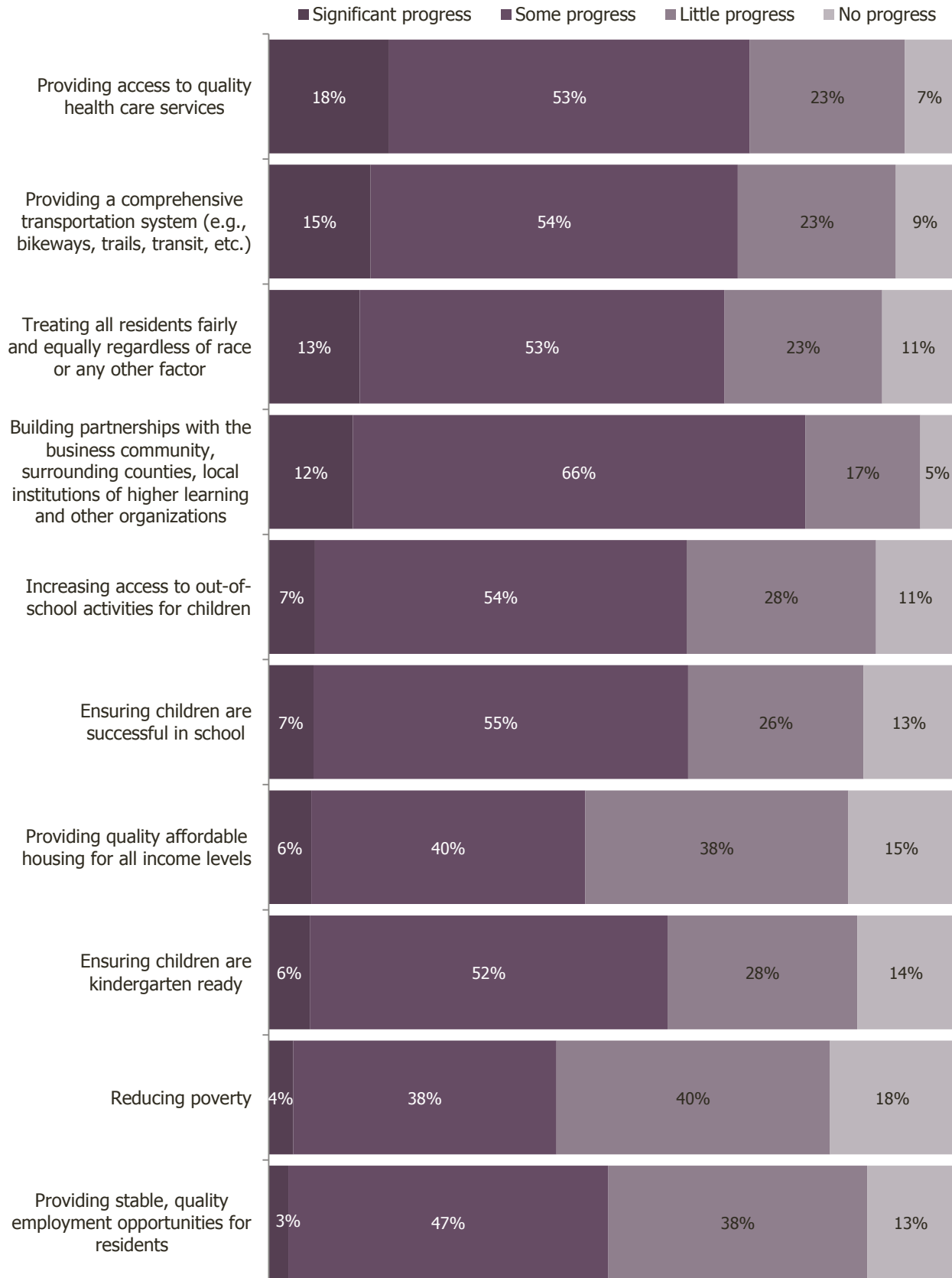
Please indicate how much of a priority, if at all, each of the following areas should be to the City and its community partners (businesses, academic institutions, non-profits, etc.):



The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 7: City Progress on Priorities

Please rate to what extent progress has been made in each area in the last two years:

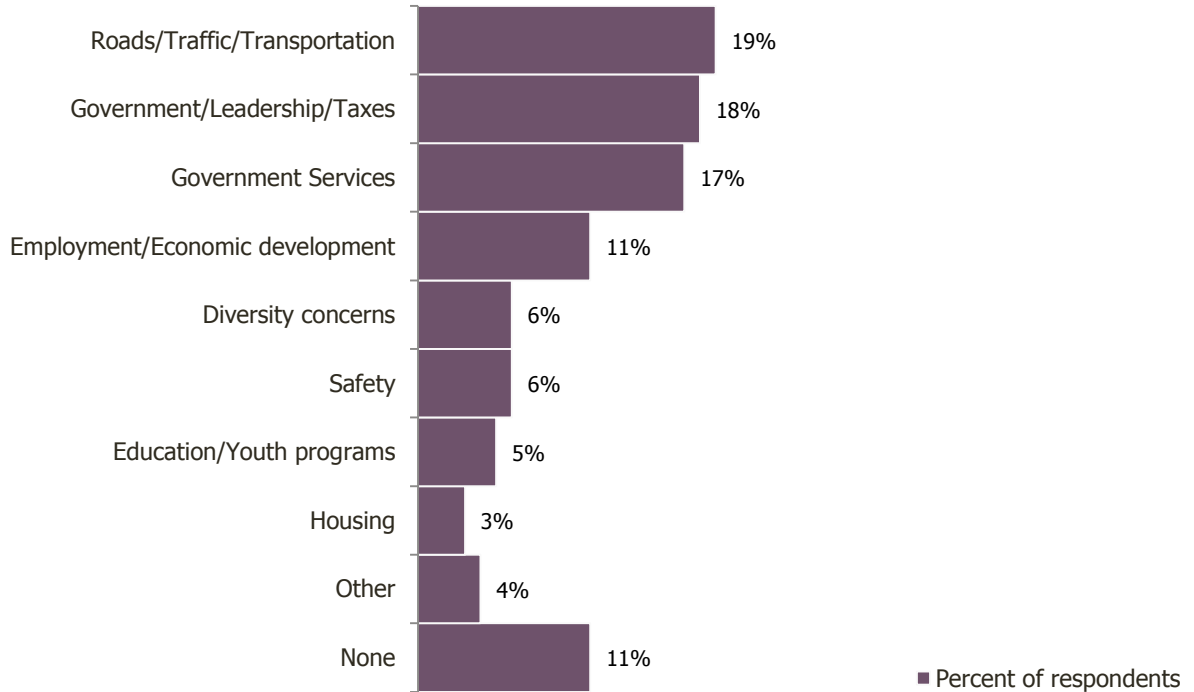


## The National Citizen Survey™

The City also asked residents to identify in their own words an issue or concern that was not addressed in the survey. Of the 963 completed surveys, there were 196 responses to this question. Of the 20% of respondents who wrote in a response, about 2 in 10 identified a concern or issue related to roads, traffic or transportation; City government, leadership or taxes; or improvements or suggestions for services provided by Lynchburg. Additionally, around 1 in 10 said they would like to see an increase in employment opportunities and economic development (see the *Open-Ended Report* under a separate cover for the complete responses).

Figure 8: Resident Concerns or Issues to Address

*Is there a community issue or concern to you that is not addressed in this survey? Please explain.*



# Conclusions

## **Economy ratings are on the rise, reflecting successes and challenges.**

Lynchburg residents identified Economy as one of the top two community focus areas for the coming two years. Ratings of aspects of Economy tended to be average when compared to national and peer communities. In 2017, respondents gave higher marks to the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area and to economic development than in 2015. Additionally, residents were especially pleased with the cost of living and more respondents indicated working in the City; both of these aspects of Economy were higher than in communities across the country. On the other hand, survey participants felt less positively about shopping opportunities, with about 4 in 10 awarding positive evaluations, which decreased from 2015 to 2017 and lagged behind national and peer community averages. When asked about priorities for the City and its community partners to address, at least two-thirds of respondents reported that providing stable, quality employment opportunities was a high priority, while only about half of residents felt that significant or some progress had been made in that area.

## **There is room for improvement in Mobility, but it may not be a priority for residents.**

Aspects of Mobility received ratings from residents that were mostly similar ratings to national and peer comparisons. Respondents viewed the availability of paths and walking trails and street repair efforts more positively in 2017 than in 2015. Additionally, more residents reported they had carpooled and used public transportation than in 2015. On the other hand, survey participants' ratings for travel by public transportation, public parking, traffic signal timing and bus or transit services decreased over time. Overall ease of travel, travel by bicycle, public parking and snow removal also lagged in Lynchburg compared to other communities and residents also reported lower rates of walking or biking instead of driving. While 8 in 10 survey participants identified as a high or medium priority for the community to provide a comprehensive transportation system, this priority ranked last in the list of 10 potential priorities. Of the 20% of respondents who wrote in a topic they felt was unaddressed by the survey, about 2 in 10 described an issue related to roads, traffic and transportation.

## **Residents are more engaged in their community.**

Survey respondents gave more favorable reviews to opportunities to participate in community matters and volunteer. Residents were also more pleased with social events and activities and the openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds as well as the overall direction of the City and the government welcoming citizen involvement. Lynchburg respondents felt more connected to their community and reported higher rates of voting and volunteerism (a level higher than communities across the U.S.) in 2017. Additionally, participants awarded higher marks to public information services, which may have contributed to the increase in residents' reliance on City communications via social media from 2015 to 2017.