

THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Lynchburg, VA
Community Livability Report

2019



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About

The National Community 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.

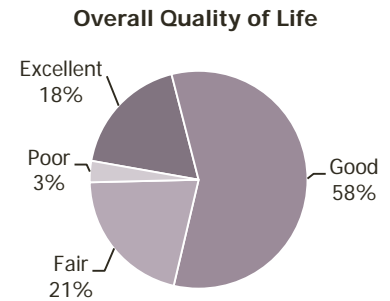
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 377 residents of the City of Lynchburg. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% 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 on par with national and peer (Southern U.S. communities with populations between 50,000 and 100,000) comparisons (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.

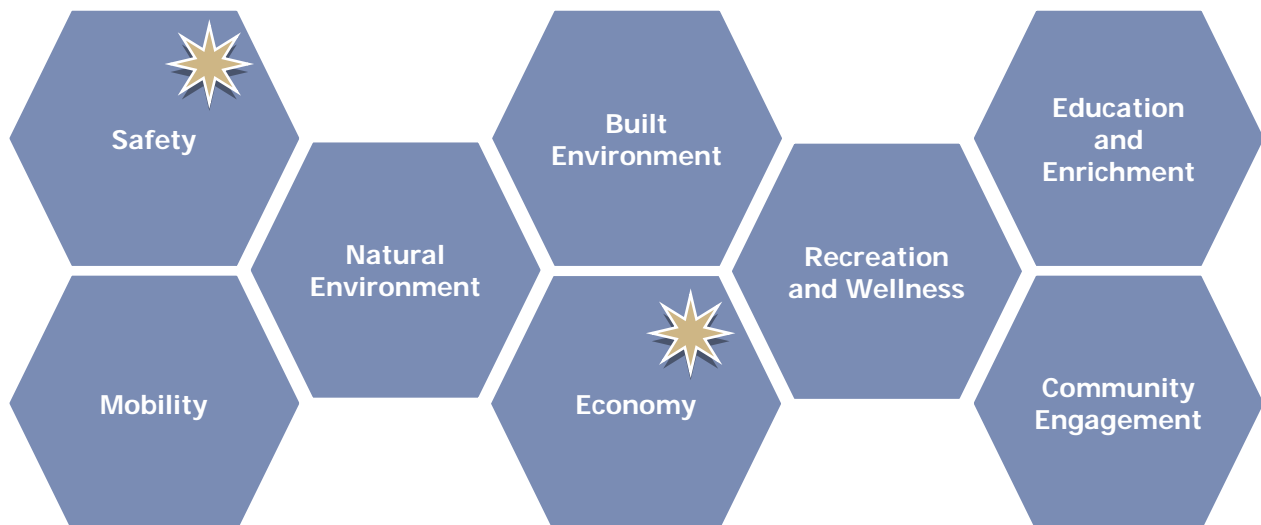
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in previous years, community members identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Lynchburg community in the coming two years.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



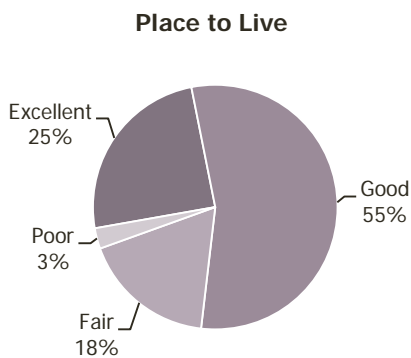
Community Characteristics

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, about 8 in 10 respondents 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.

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. At least two-thirds of survey respondents thought highly of most of these aspects and around 6 in 10 were pleased with the overall image or reputation of the community. Most aspects were reviewed at levels similar to comparison communities (the overall image was lower than regional, similarly sized peer communities).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Broadly, Lynchburg residents evaluated most aspects at levels similar to those seen across the country, with a majority of aspects receiving excellent or good ratings by at least half of respondents.



Community members felt safe in Lynchburg, with at least 8 in 10 revealing that they felt safe in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area during the day, and three-quarters awarding high scores to the overall feeling of safety in the city. About 7 in 10 or more survey participants were pleased with the overall natural environment, air quality, fitness opportunities, overall education and enrichment opportunities, opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events and activities, and opportunities to volunteer.

Most measures of Mobility were on par with municipalities elsewhere, apart from ease of travel by bicycle, which lagged behind their peers. However, several increases were noted in

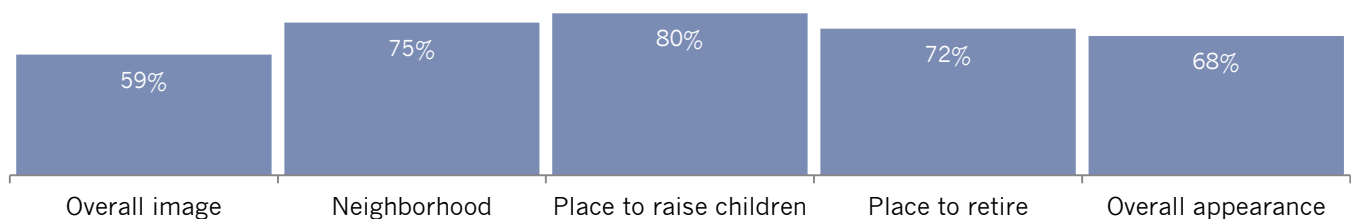
2019 within this facet, including overall ease of travel (71% excellent or good), ease of car travel (68%), traffic flow (51%), and public parking (44%; see the *Trends over Time* report for more details). Only reviews for the availability of paths and walking trails decreased since 2017.

Assessments for Economy characteristics were also mostly on par with benchmark comparisons, though respondents' ratings for the cost of living in the community surpassed those provided in other communities. Residents' ratings for shopping opportunities were lower than communities elsewhere; conversely, reviews for the employment opportunities in Lynchburg improved to the highest level since the survey was first conducted in 2004.

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

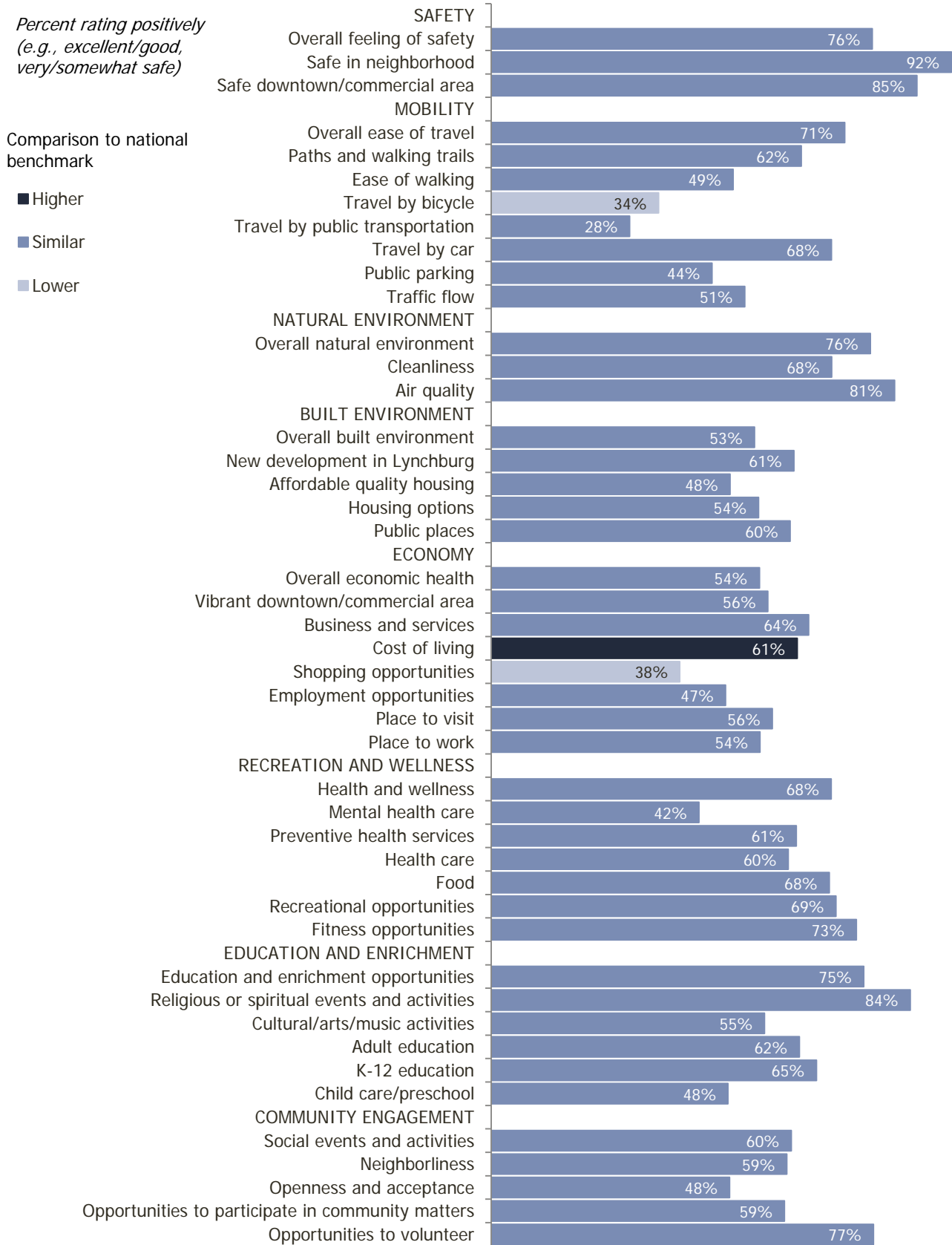
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



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. Around three-quarters of survey participants praised the overall quality of services provided by the City of Lynchburg, which was commensurate with national and peer benchmark municipalities, as were ratings for services provided at the federal level.

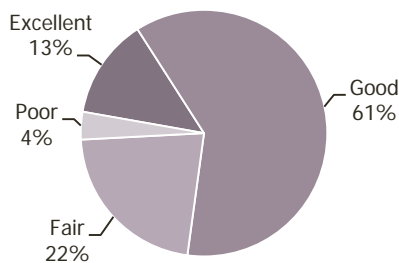
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Lynchburg’s leadership and governance. Around half of Lynchburg’s residents awarded high marks to most aspects of government performance, including value of services for taxes paid, the City welcoming resident involvement, acting in the best interest of Lynchburg, and treating all residents fairly. About 6 in 10 community members felt positively about the overall direction of the City and three-quarters thought highly of the customer service provided by City employees, a rating that increased since the last survey iteration.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Lynchburg. Most evaluations of Lynchburg provided services were positively rated by half or more of residents and were generally similar to benchmark comparisons.

Survey participants thought particularly well of Safety-related services, including police, fire, and ambulance/EMS, as well as garbage collection, sewer, City parks, recreation programs and centers, and public libraries in the community, with more than 7 in 10 respondents assigning favorable scores. Further, assessments of the community’s recreation programs and recreation centers improved since 2017.

Only three services received below average ratings from residents: recycling, yard waste pick-up, and code enforcement. Marks for yard waste pick-up declined in 2019, as did reviews for storm drainage and public information.

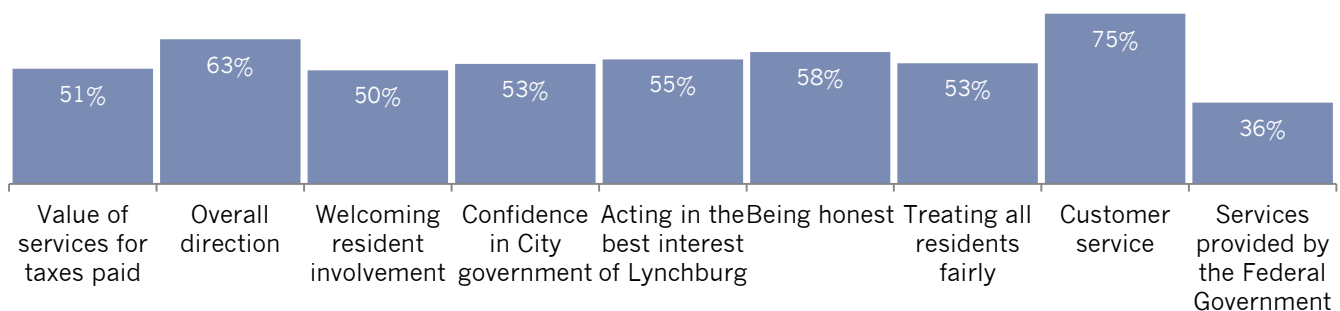
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



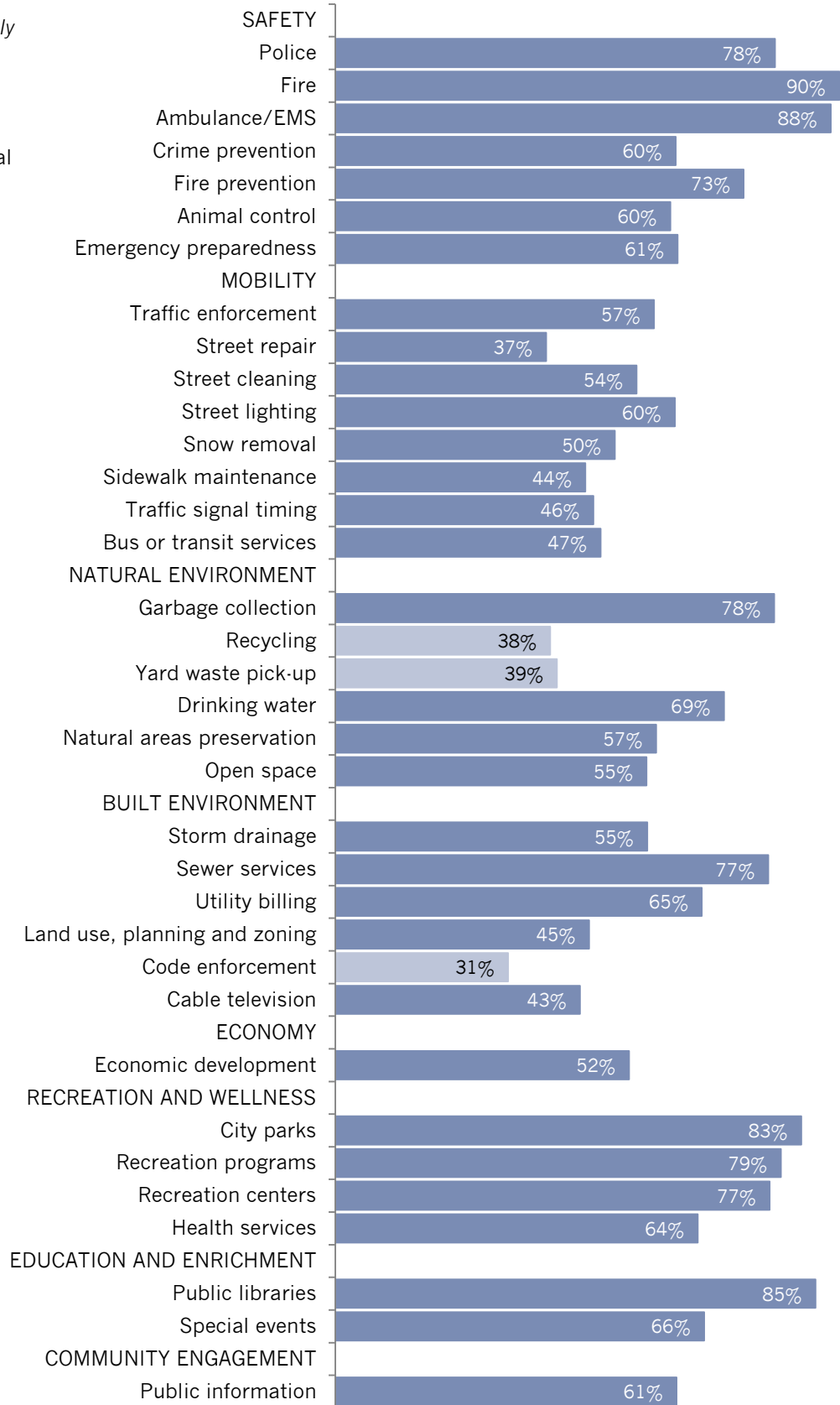
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

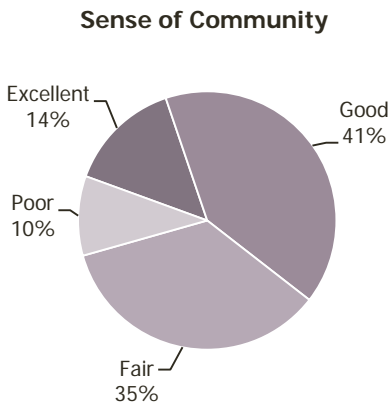
Are the residents of Lynchburg connected to the community and each other?

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 peer comparisons, about half of residents felt positively about the sense of community in Lynchburg. Residents also felt a strong sense of loyalty to the city, with 8 in 10 indicating they would recommend living in the community to someone who might ask and 77% revealing they were likely to remain in Lynchburg for the next five years.

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 varied widely and tended to be on par with Lynchburg's national peers. About 8 in 10 or more participants indicated they had purchased goods or services in the community and maintained a healthy diet and exercise regimen. More residents reported they had used recreation centers and programs in 2019 compared to 2017. As for Community Engagement, most residents reported high levels of neighborliness and attention to local news, and around half had volunteered, a rate that exceeded benchmark averages. Fewer respondents indicated they had watched a local public meeting and campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate in 2019.

Lynchburg residents exhibited higher than national and peer average participation rates in religious or spiritual activities and worked within the community at higher levels than those seen elsewhere.

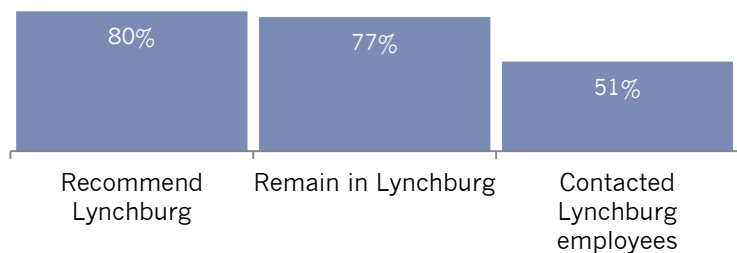
Compared to municipalities across the country, Lynchburg community members tended to report lower levels of walking or biking instead of driving, conserving water, and recycling. Additionally, respondents' participation in conserving water and carpooling declined since 2017.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



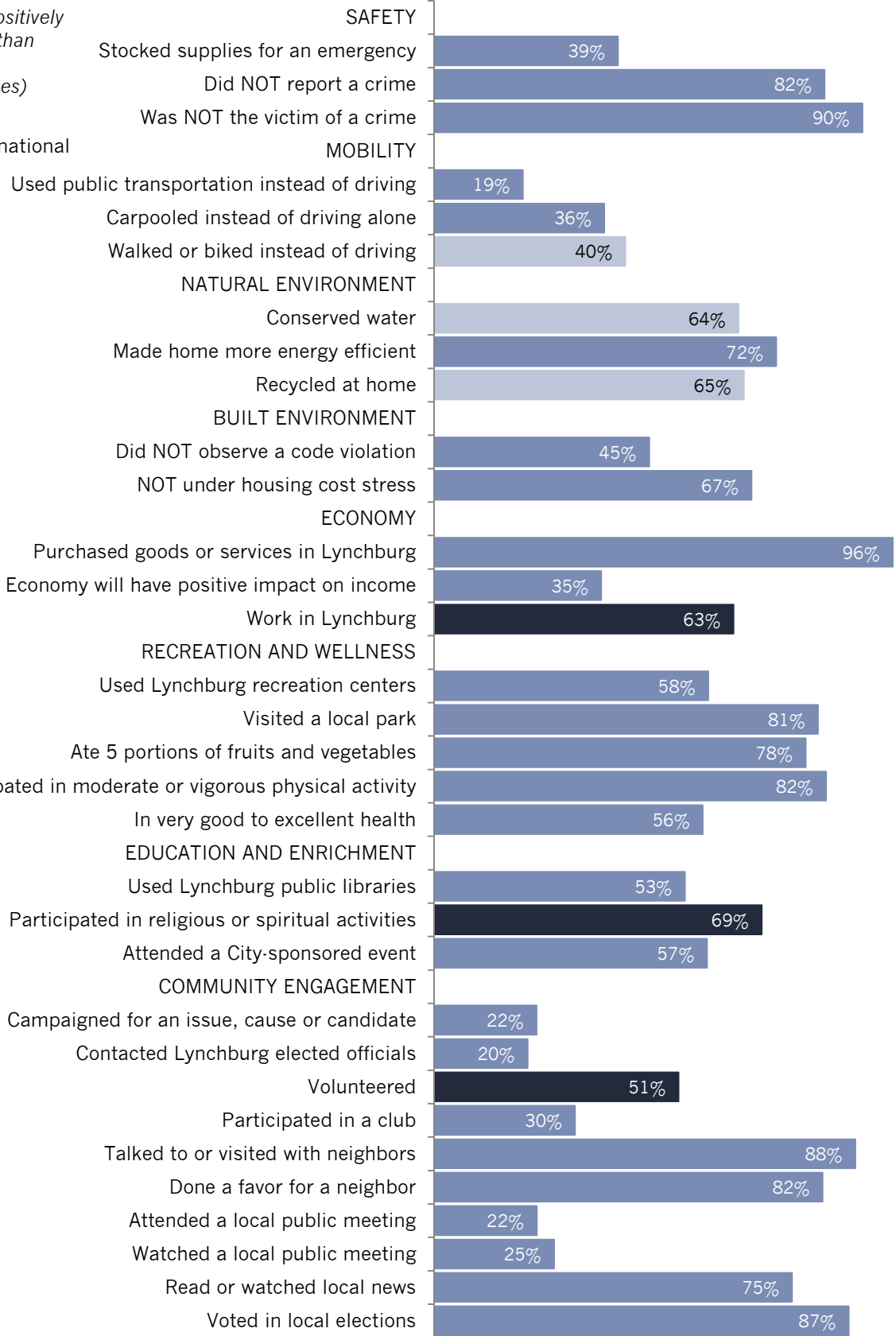
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



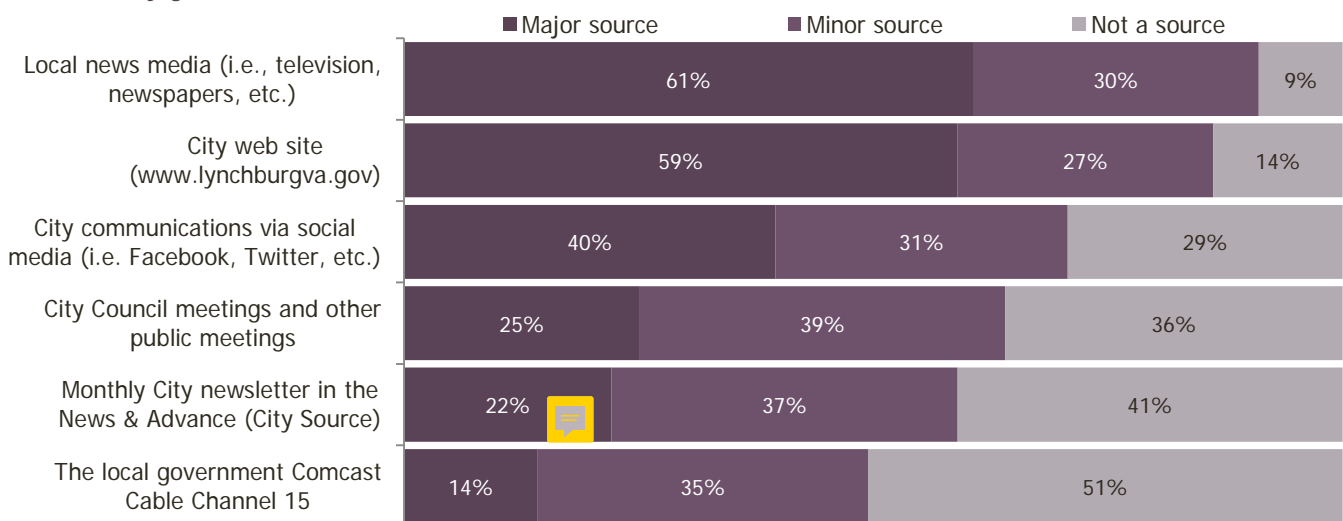
Special Topics

The City of Lynchburg included several questions of special interest on their community survey, asking for residents' feedback on the sources of information they relied upon for information about their city, housing availability, community priorities and perceptions regarding the City's progress on these goals, and an open-ended question asking residents to cite any issues they felt were not addressed by the survey.

Nearly all residents (91%) revealed that they used the local news media as a major or minor source of information about the City and its activities, events and services. About 8 in 10 survey respondents utilized the City website and 7 in 10 relied on City communications via social media. The local government cable channel was the least used source; however, about half of residents gathered information through this media.

Figure 4: Sources of Information

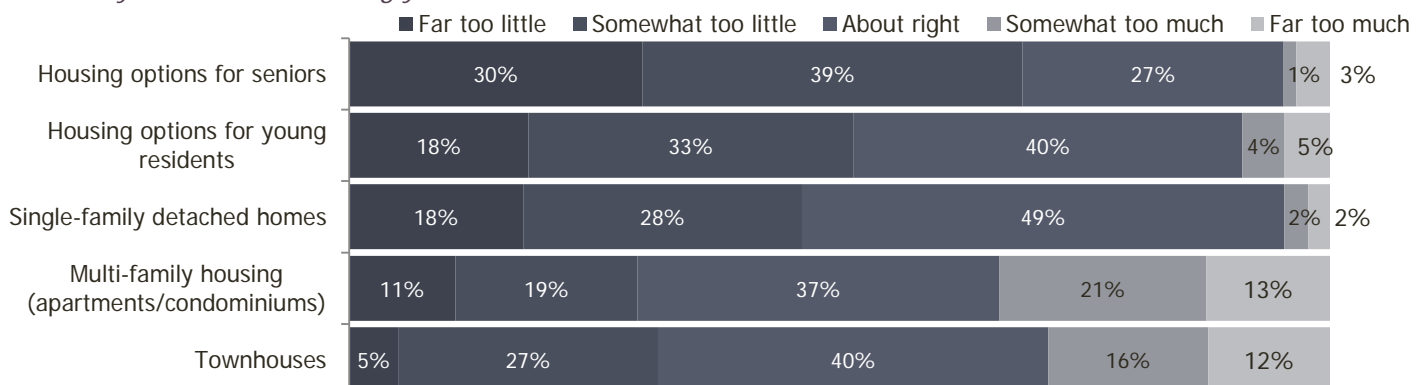
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the City government and its activities, events and services?



About two-thirds of participants felt that there was far or somewhat too little housing options for seniors in Lynchburg and around half felt the same about housing options for young residents. Residents' opinions regarding the amount of multi-family housing was split three ways, with about 3 in 10 residents indicating there was too little, about right, or too much of this housing variety. Very few residents indicated that there were too many single-family detached homes in the community.

Figure 5: Housing Availability

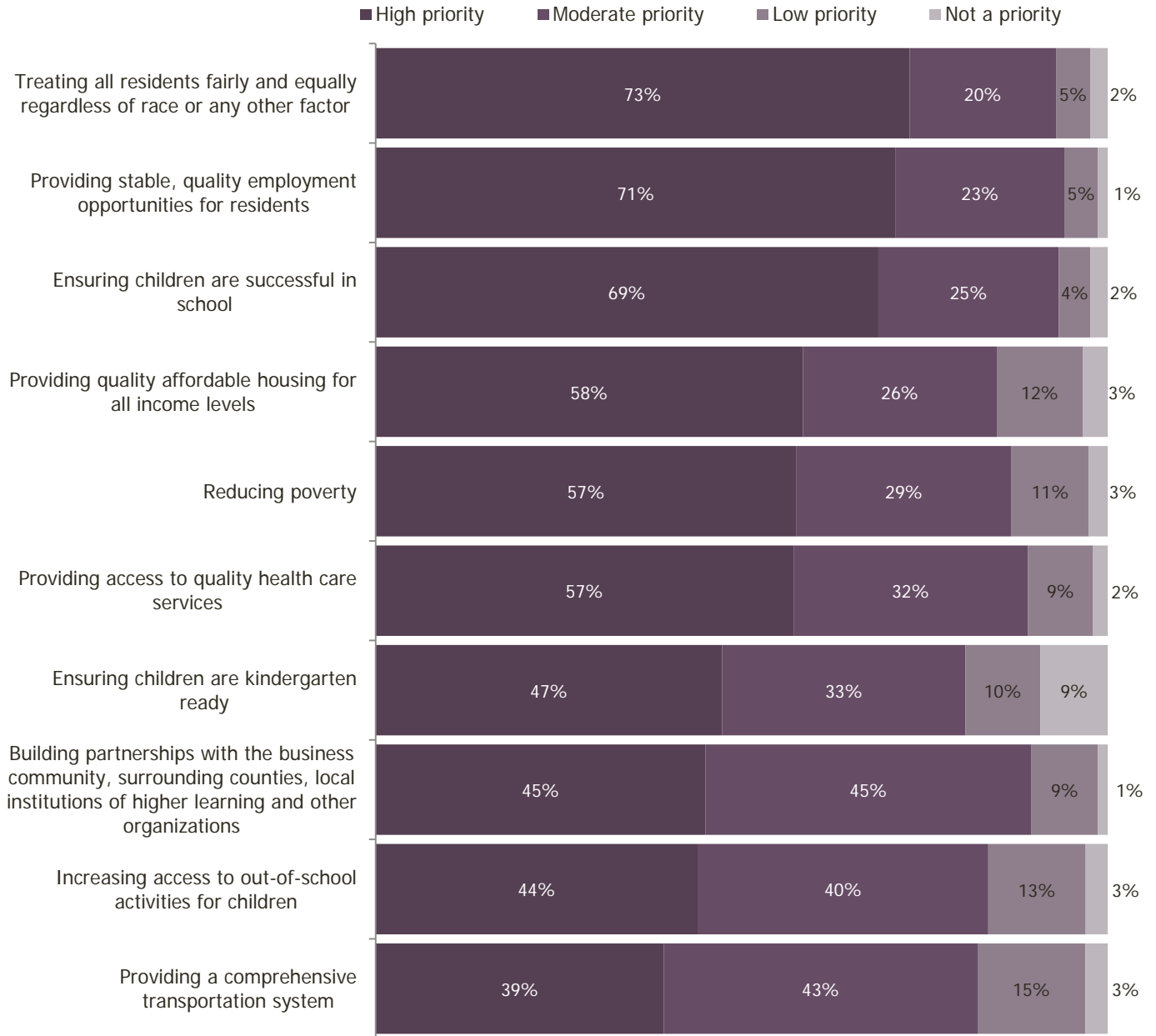
Lynchburg's population is projected to grow to over 90,000 by the year 2030. Please indicate if you feel there is too little, too much, or about the right amount of each of the following housing types in Lynchburg to meet the community's needs in the coming years:



Almost all community members revealed that treating all residents fairly and equally, providing good employment opportunities and ensuring children are successful in school should be high or medium priorities for the City and its partners to focus on in the future. Moreover, at least half of survey participants felt that providing quality affordable housing for all income levels, reducing poverty, and providing access to quality health care services are high priorities.

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.):

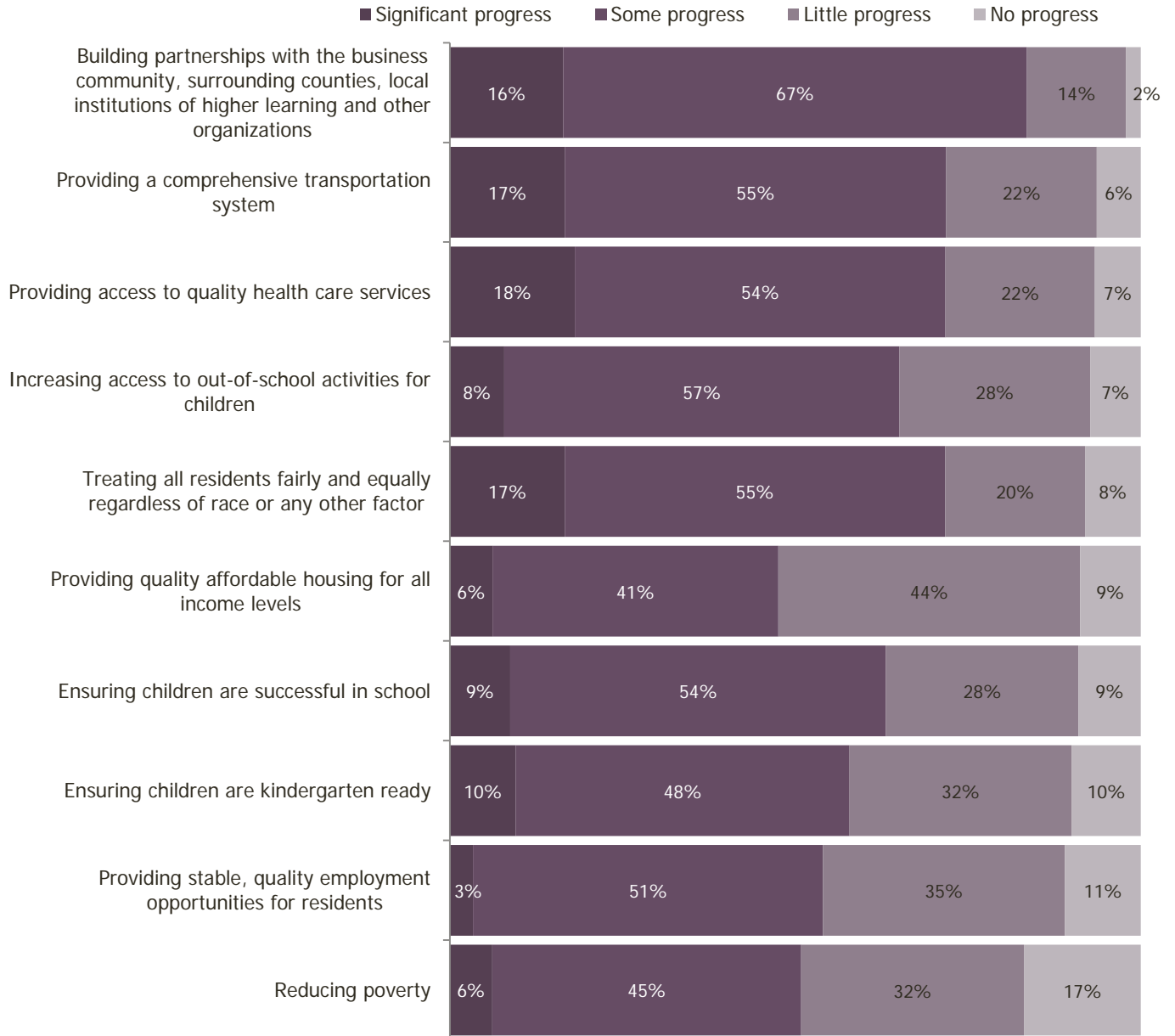


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City leadership also sought resident feedback regarding the progress they had made in each of these areas in the last two years. About 8 in 10 community members indicated that the City had made some or significant progress building partnerships and 7 in 10 stated leadership had moved forward in advancing a comprehensive transportation system, providing health care services, and treating residents equally regardless of background. Conversely, around half of survey respondents felt the City had made little to no progress on providing affordable housing for all income levels.

Figure 7: Perceptions of Progress on Resident Priorities

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

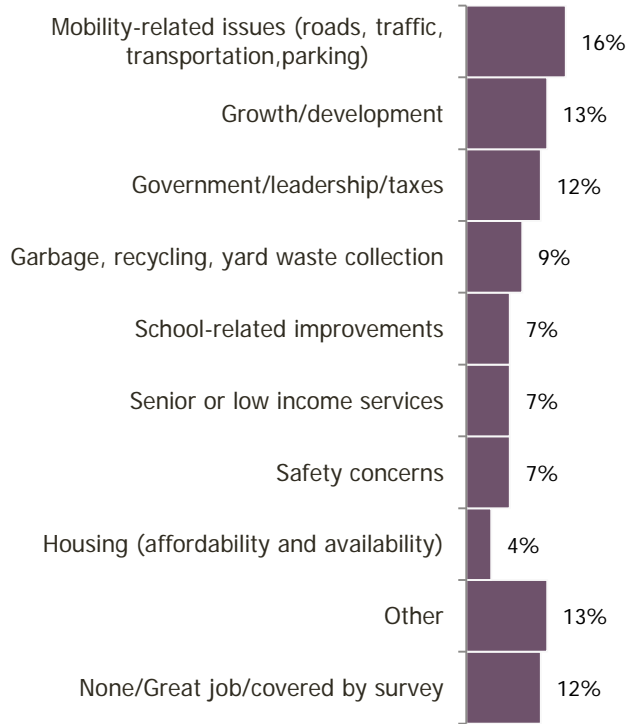


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About 1 in 10 respondents cited a concern or issue related to mobility (including roads, traffic, transportation, and parking), garbage/recycling/yard waste collection, or growth and development. A similar proportion of residents wrote a comment regarding government, leadership decisions, or taxes and 7% of residents mentioned an issue related to school improvements, senior or low income services, and safety.

Figure 8: Additional Resident Concerns

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



Conclusions

The city's Economy is a priority for residents.

As in previous years, survey participants prioritized the facet of Economy for Lynchburg to focus on in the coming years. The overall economic health was viewed as excellent or good by about half of respondents, similar to national benchmarks, but lower than their peers. Residents noted that the city as a place to work were similar to national and peer community averages, and reviews of the cost of living in Lynchburg exceeded both sets of benchmark comparisons. Community members were pleased with employment opportunities, hitting a 15 year high. Even so, at least 9 in 10 respondents view employment opportunities as a high or medium priority for the City. While residents' reviews for shopping opportunities lagged behind comparison communities, economic development was on par with municipalities across the nation. Like the rest of the country, most respondents purchased goods or services in Lynchburg and about 35% of respondents believed the economy would have a positive impact on their income. Notably, about 6 in 10 community members worked in Lynchburg, surpassing benchmark comparisons. While the variety and availability of affordable quality housing were commensurate with communities elsewhere, about two-thirds of participants indicated there was too little housing for seniors and half also felt housing was lacking for young residents. Among potential future efforts by the City, more than half of residents stated that providing housing for all income levels should be a high priority, while less than 1 in 10 felt the City had made significant progress in this area in the last two years.

Residents have mixed feelings about Mobility.

Generally, Mobility-related items received ratings similar to the national average; about 7 in 10 residents positively rated the overall ease of travel in the community, while more than half were pleased with ease of travel by walking and by car. Further, residents provided more positive assessments for the overall ease of travel, travel by car, traffic flow, and public parking in 2019 compared to 2017. All of the evaluations for Mobility services provided by Lynchburg were positive and similar to comparison communities.

However, challenges related to Mobility were also identified. The rating for the availability of paths and walking trails declined since the previous survey iteration, and residents gave below-average marks to the ease of travel by bicycle. Unsurprisingly, Lynchburg residents were less likely to have walked or biked instead of driving than their peers nationwide. When asked about priorities for the community, about 4 in 10 community members indicated that the City providing a comprehensive transportation system should be a high priority and a similar proportion stated this should be a medium priority; however, around 7 in 10 respondents felt the City had made at least some progress for this goal. In an open-ended question on top community issues that were not addressed by the survey, concerns regarding Mobility (roads, traffic, transportation, and parking) topped the list.

The Natural Environment presents opportunities for improvement.

Residents' ratings of most Natural Environment-related aspects and services, such as overall natural environment, cleanliness, air quality, garbage collection, natural areas preservation, drinking water, and open space were similar to those given in other communities. However, respondents' felt the quality of recycling and yard waste pick-up services were below-average and evaluations for yard waste pick-up declined since 2017. Lynchburg residents were also less likely than those who lived elsewhere to have conserved water or recycled (a rate that also decreased over time). Additionally, about 1 in 10 of the respondents who provided a written response to other concerns or issues not addressed by the survey cited a comment related to garbage, recycling and yard waste pick-up. Thus, the Natural Environment in Lynchburg may be an area of focus for the City in the future.