

THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Grand Rapids, MI

Community Livability Report

DRAFT
2019



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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

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About

The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of Grand Rapids. 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.

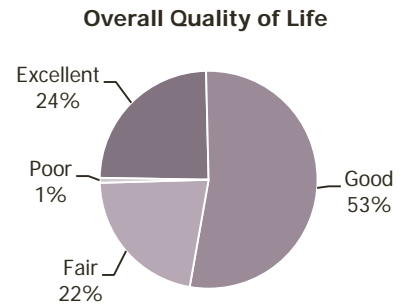
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance, and Participation) across eight central 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 399 residents of the City of Grand Rapids. 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 Grand Rapids

Three-quarters of residents rated the quality of life in Grand Rapids as excellent or good. This rating was similar to national and peer comparisons (similarly sized 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.

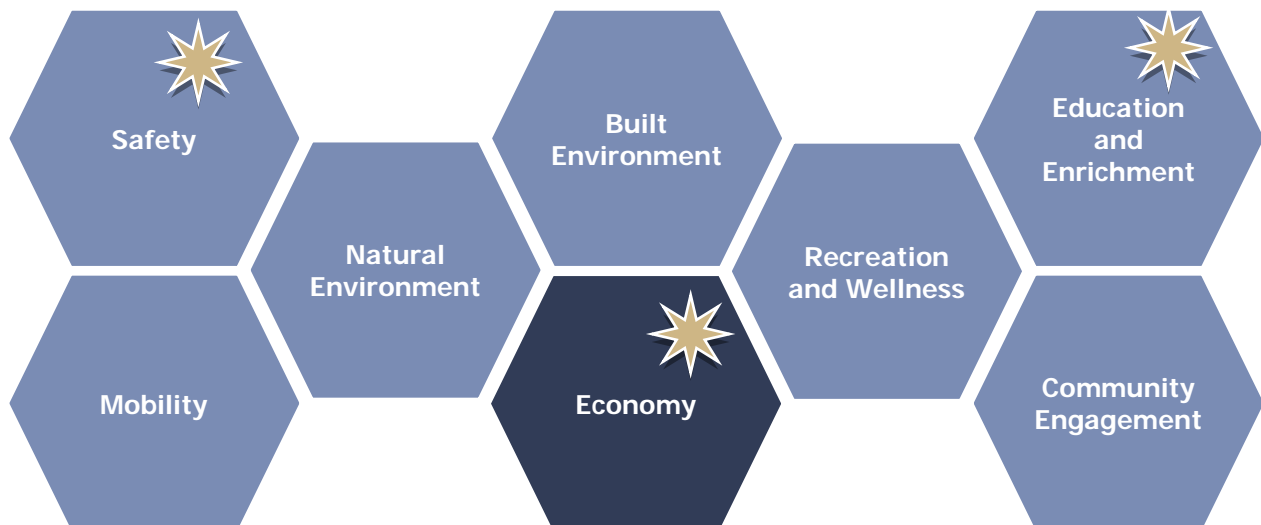
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Economy, and Education and Enrichment as priorities for the Grand Rapids community in the coming two years. Ratings for Economy surpassed national benchmarks while scores for the remaining facets were on par with communities nationwide. 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 Grand Rapids' unique questions.

Legend

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

- * Most important



Community Characteristics

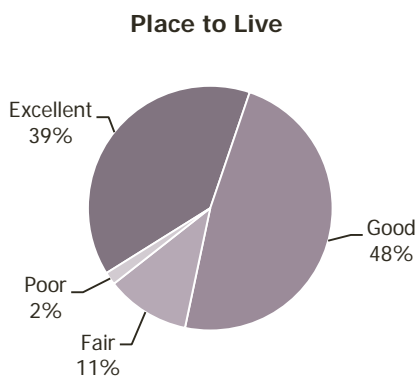
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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 Grand Rapids, 87% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Grand Rapids 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 Grand Rapids as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Grand Rapids, and its overall appearance. About 7 in 10 survey participants were pleased with most aspects of community livability, including the overall image or reputation of the community, the city as a place to raise children, their neighborhoods as places to live, and the overall appearance of Grand Rapids. At least half of residents also gave positive reviews to Grand Rapids as a place to retire. All measures of community quality were on par with national averages.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, residents' ratings for Community Characteristics varied, but tended to be similar to national comparisons.

At least 8 in 10 respondents indicated they felt very or somewhat safe in their neighborhoods and in Grand Rapids' downtown area. However, about 6 in 10 awarded positive marks to the overall feeling of safety in the community, which lagged behind national levels. Evaluations for public parking (31% excellent or good) and K-12 education (47%) were also below-national averages.

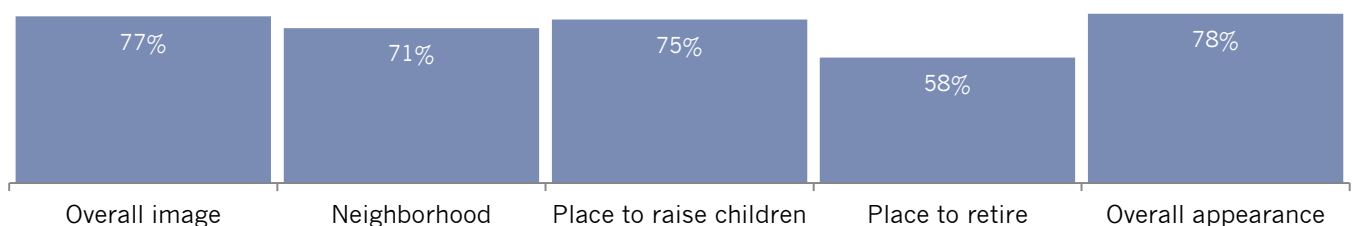


Grand Rapids residents identified the Economy as a highlight in the community, with around 7 in 10 praising the vibrant downtown area, shopping and employment opportunities, and the city as a place to visit and a place to work; these measures exceeded all national levels and most peer benchmark municipalities. Survey respondents also commended the quality of new development in Grand Rapids and the opportunities to attend cultural/art/music activities, with at least 7 in 10 assigning top marks and eclipsing benchmark averages.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



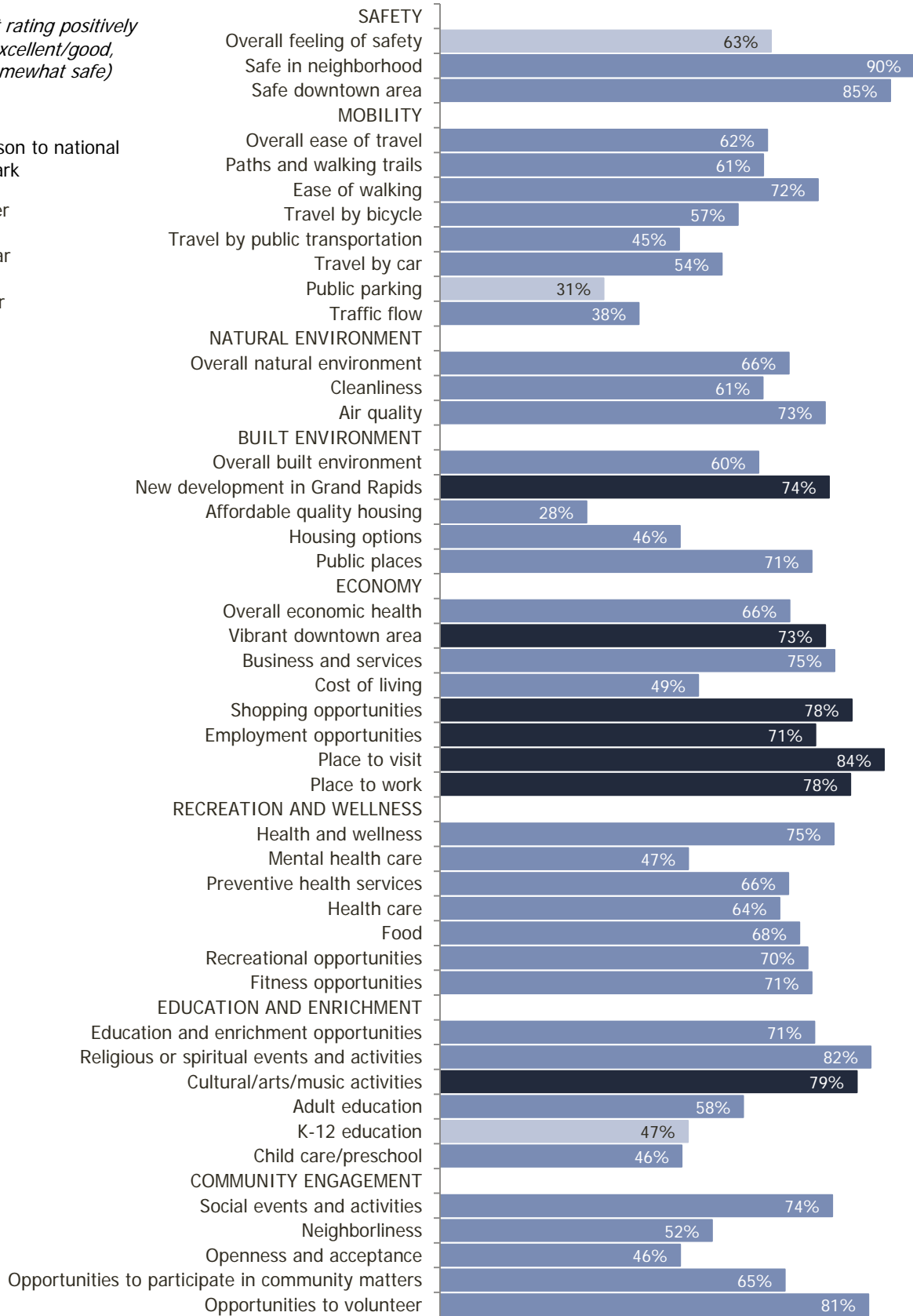
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

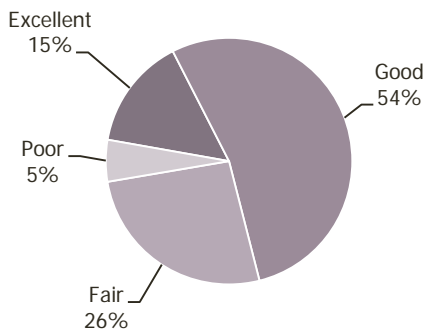
How well does the government of Grand Rapids meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Grand Rapids 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 Grand Rapids, which was similar to national and peer comparison communities.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Grand Rapids' leadership and governance. About 4 in 10 residents positively evaluated the value of services for taxes paid, the City welcoming resident involvement, and treating all residents fairly, and at least half of participants felt favorably about the remaining government performance aspects. All measures were on par with national and peer municipalities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Grand Rapids. On the whole, ratings for individual services provided by Grand Rapids were positive and similar to or lower than national and peer benchmarks. The highest rated services included fire, ambulance/EMS, garbage collection, recycling, and public libraries, with 8 in 10 or more respondents awarding high marks. The services that lagged behind national averages included police, crime prevention, street repair and cleaning, and snow removal.

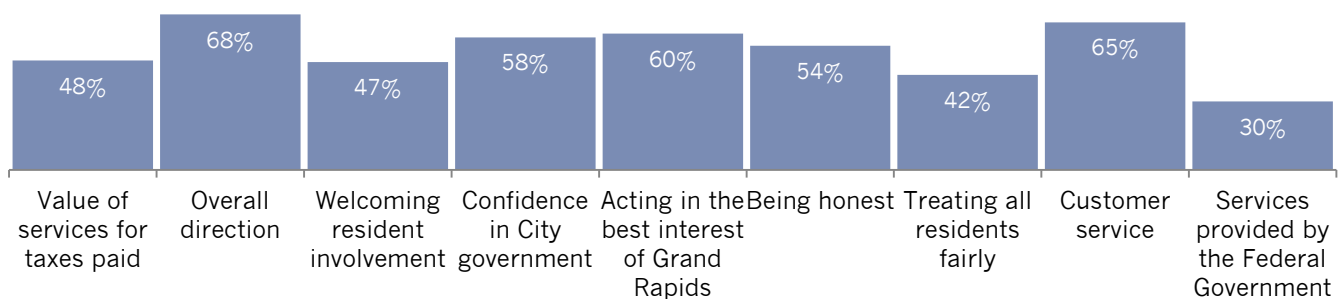
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



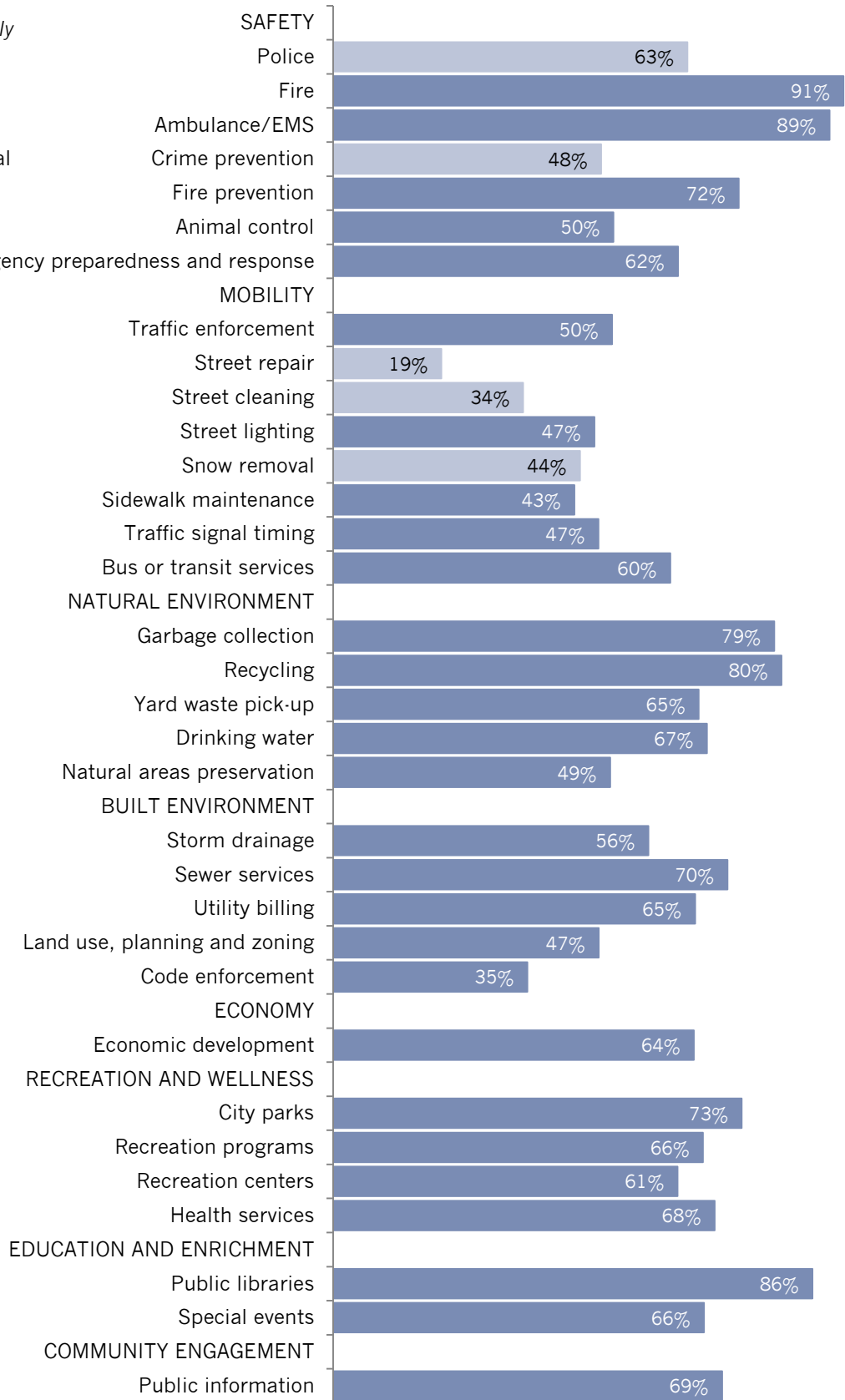
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

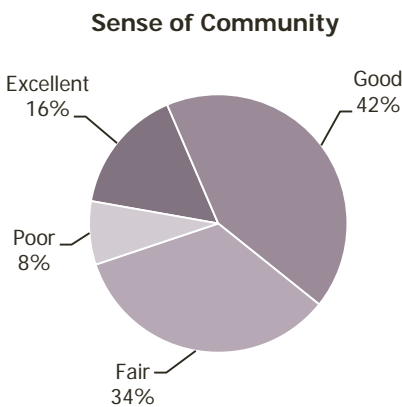
Are the residents of Grand Rapids connected to the community and each other?

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., about half of respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in Grand Rapids, which was similar to national and peer levels.

At least 8 in 10 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Grand Rapids to someone who asked and planned to remain in the community for the next five years, which were similar to levels reported elsewhere. About half of residents reported they had contacted a City employee in the 12 months prior to the survey, which was also similar to rates nationwide.

The survey included over 25 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Participation rates within Grand Rapids varied and tended to be commensurate with peer municipalities.

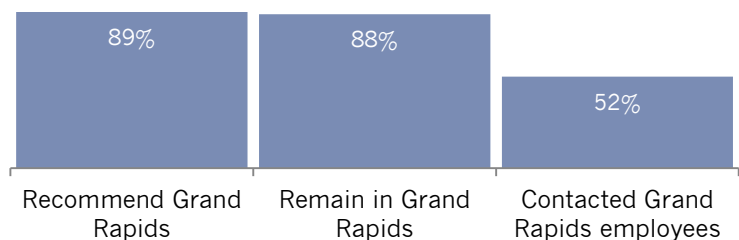
Around 8 in 10 respondents or more reported they had recycled at home, purchased goods or services in the community, participated in healthy behaviors (visiting parks and maintaining exercise regimens), interacted with their neighbors, and voted in local elections. A similar proportion reported they had not been the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey. Residents demonstrated a dedication to alternative modes of transportation, as around 4 in 10 or more indicated they had used public transit, carpooled, walked or biked instead of driving; rates for using public transportation and walking or biking instead of driving outpaced levels seen nationwide. Survey respondents also reported elevated levels of working in the community and volunteering compared to their peers nationally and in similarly sized communities.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



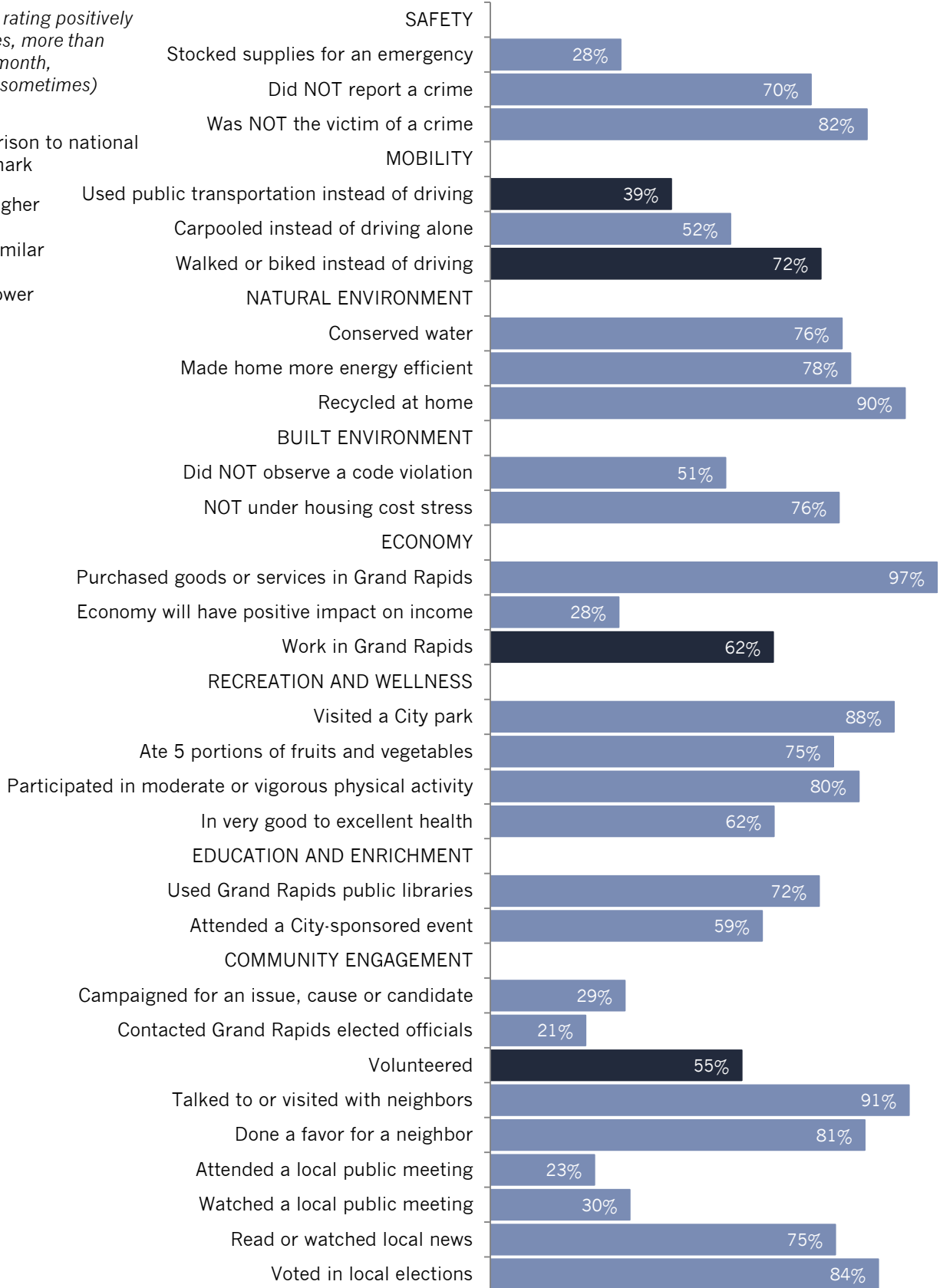
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



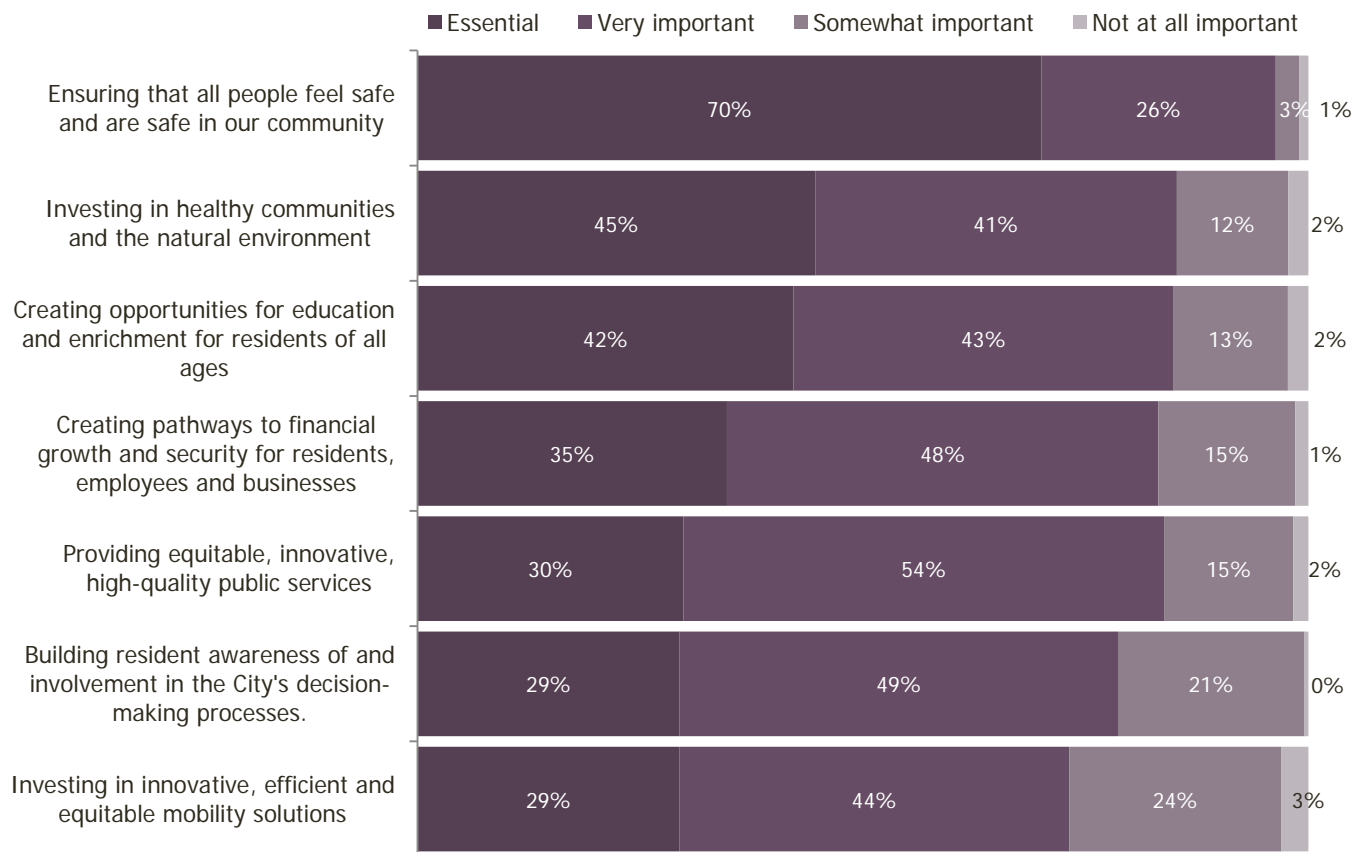
Special Topics

The City of Grand Rapids included several questions of special interest on The NCS. The City sought feedback regarding strategic planning areas, familiarity of mobility options, interactions with the City and justice system, and garbage collection options.

When asked about the importance of the seven strategic planning areas for the City, nearly all residents (96%) indicated that ensuring the safety of community members was essential or very important, topping the list. Residents were least likely to prioritize building resident awareness of and involvement in the City’s decision-making process and investing in innovative, efficient, and equitable mobility solutions, with about 7 in 10 deeming these areas as at least very important.

Figure 4: Strategic Planning Areas

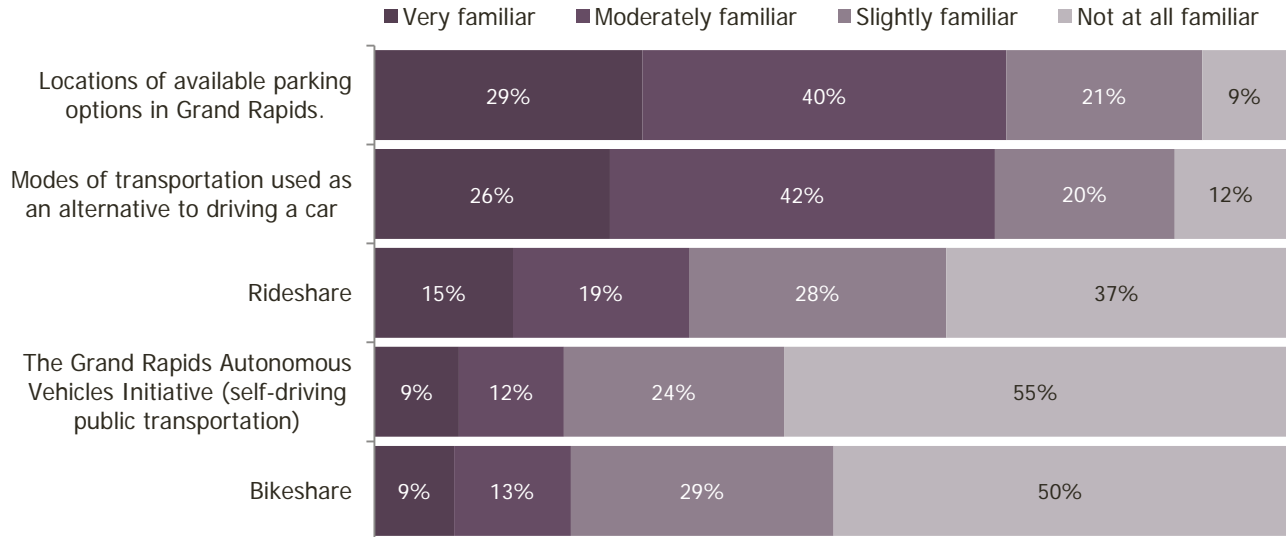
Please rate how important, if at all, you think each of the following strategic planning areas are to the overall quality of life in Grand Rapids:



Around two-thirds of survey participants reported they were very or moderately familiar with the locations of available parking areas and alternative modes of transportation. Community members were less familiar with rideshare (34% very or moderately familiar), the Autonomous Vehicles Initiative (23%), and bike share (24%).

Figure 5: Familiarity with Mobility Options

How familiar, if at all, are you with the following types of mobility-related options?



Approximately 4 in 10 survey respondents had contacted the City for information or services in the six months prior to the survey. Of these residents who had contact, about 8 in 10 stated they were very or somewhat satisfied with the outcome of the interaction and only 6% were very dissatisfied.

Figure 6: Resident Contact with the City

Have you contacted the City of Grand Rapids for information or services in the past six months?

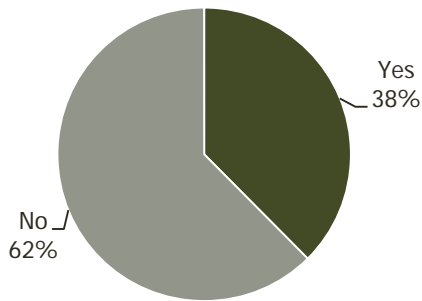
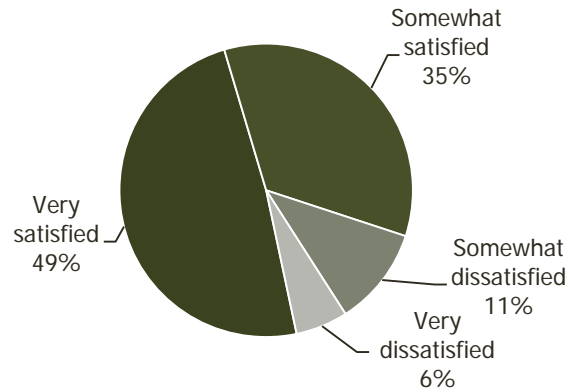


Figure 7: Satisfaction with City Interaction

Thinking about your most recent contact with the City, please rate your satisfaction with the outcome of the interaction:



The City also wanted to learn about residents' interactions with the justice system in Grand Rapids. About one-third of respondents reported they had interacted either with the police department or municipal courts and of those respondents, 84% agreed that they were treated with fairness and respect during the contact.

Figure 8: Resident Contact with Justice System
Have you had an interaction with either the police department or municipal courts in Grand Rapids in the past six months?

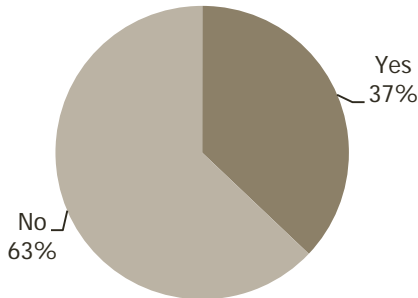
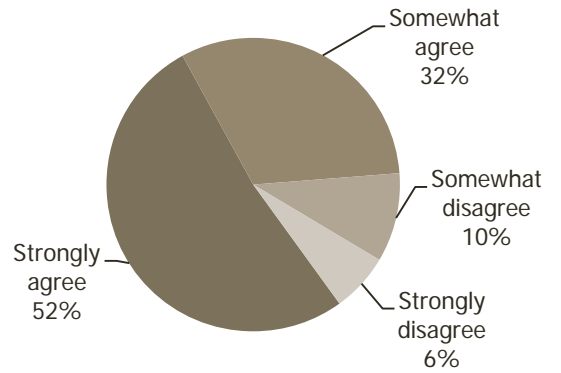


Figure 9: Perceptions of Interaction with Justice System
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: 'In my interaction with the police and/or municipal courts in Grand Rapids, I felt I was treated with fairness and respect.'



About 8 in 10 Grand Rapids respondents indicated they currently receive solid waste collection services from the City and 91% of these customers were very or somewhat satisfied with the service.

Figure 10: Participation in Collection Service
Do you currently receive solid waste (trash, recycling, yard waste collection) services from the City of Grand Rapids?

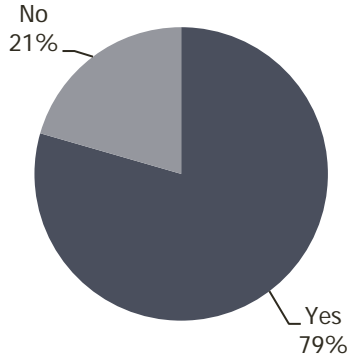
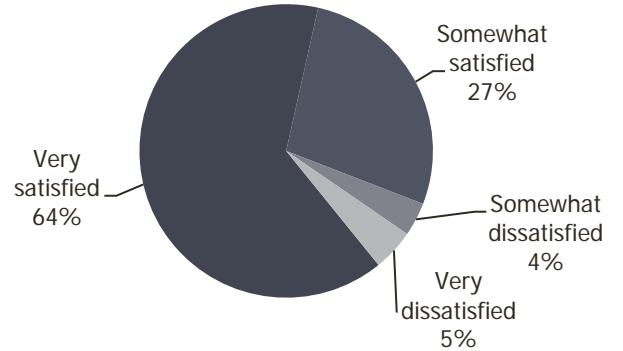
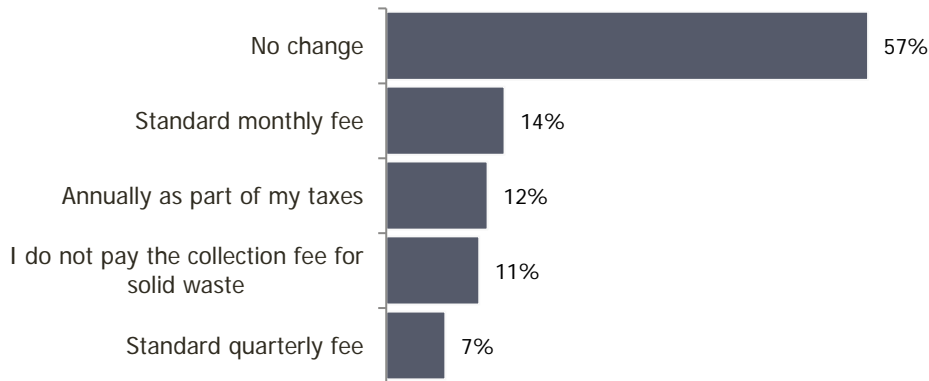


Figure 11: Satisfaction with Collection Service
Please rate your level of satisfaction with the current 'pay as you throw' system of payment for solid waste:



Residents provided their opinions regarding their preferences for paying for solid waste collection. A majority of residents would like to continue to pay using their current method, while about 1 in 10 preferred a standard monthly fee or to pay annually as part of their City taxes. A similar proportion of respondents reported that they were not responsible for the waste collection fee.

Figure 12: Preference for Collection Service Payment Schedule
How would you prefer to pay for your solid waste collection service?



Conclusions

Safety is a priority.

Grand Rapids residents indicated that Safety was an important area for the City to focus on in the next two years. At least 8 in 10 residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhood and in the downtown area, and more than 6 in 10 were pleased with fire, ambulance/EMS, fire prevention, animal control, and emergency preparedness and response services. However, evaluations for the overall feeling of safety in the city, police, and crime prevention were below-average. When asked about the importance of seven strategic planning areas for the overall quality of life in Grand Rapids, ensuring the safety of all residents was the top priority, with nearly all respondents indicating this goal was essential or very important.

Grand Rapids' Economy is a strength and residents applaud shopping and employment opportunities.

Survey respondents also indicated the Economy as a top area of focus in the future and measures tended to be assessed at levels commensurate with or above comparison communities. About two-thirds of residents gave favorable reviews to the overall economic health of the community and economic development services, which was on par with national averages. Survey participants lauded both employment and shopping opportunities, as well as the vibrancy of the downtown area, new development in the community, and the city as a place to visit and as a place to work. All of these economic measures outpaced national and peer municipality comparisons. Further, more residents reported working in the city than their peers nationwide. Around 8 in 10 residents felt that creating pathways to financial growth and security for residents, employees, and businesses was at least very important to the quality of life in Grand Rapids.

Residents reveal K-12 education as an area of opportunity.

The overall education and enrichment of the community was deemed a top priority by about 8 in 10 survey participants and 7 in 10 provided excellent or good scores to the education and enrichment opportunities in Grand Rapids, which was similar to national and peer benchmarks. Similarly, residents' views on opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events and activities, adult education, and child care/preschool were on par with comparison communities, whereas opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities were above average. However, reviews for K-12 education lagged behind levels seen elsewhere. Regarding strategic planning areas important to the quality of life in Grand Rapids, 85% of participants indicated creating opportunities for education and enrichment for all ages was an essential or very important focus.

Aspects of car travel could be improved, but residents appreciate alternative transportation options.

In general, residents evaluated many Mobility-related aspects and services positively, with half or more providing favorable reviews that were similar to national and peer comparisons. Some aspects of car travel were identified as challenges to survey respondents, including public parking, street repair, street cleaning, and snow removal, all of which were below average. Conversely, residents participation in alternative modes of transportation were exceptional, with 4 in 10 residents indicating they had used public transportation and 7 in 10 had walked or biked instead of driving; both of these rates eclipsed national and peer comparisons. About two-thirds of community members reported they were familiar with locations of public parking and modes of alternative transportation available to them, while one-third or fewer stated they were very or somewhat familiar with Rideshare, Bikeshare, or the Autonomous Vehicles Initiative.