

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Somerset, MA
Community Livability Report

2017



NRC
National Research Center Inc

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

ICMA

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 Somerset 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 12



The National Citizen Survey™
© 2001-2017 National Research Center, Inc.

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

NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About

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

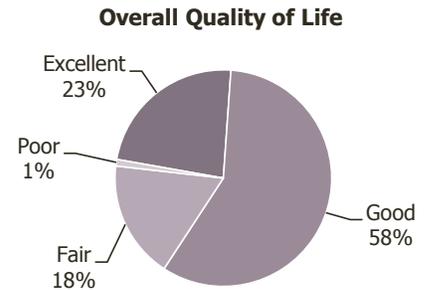
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 543 residents of the Town of Somerset. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Somerset

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



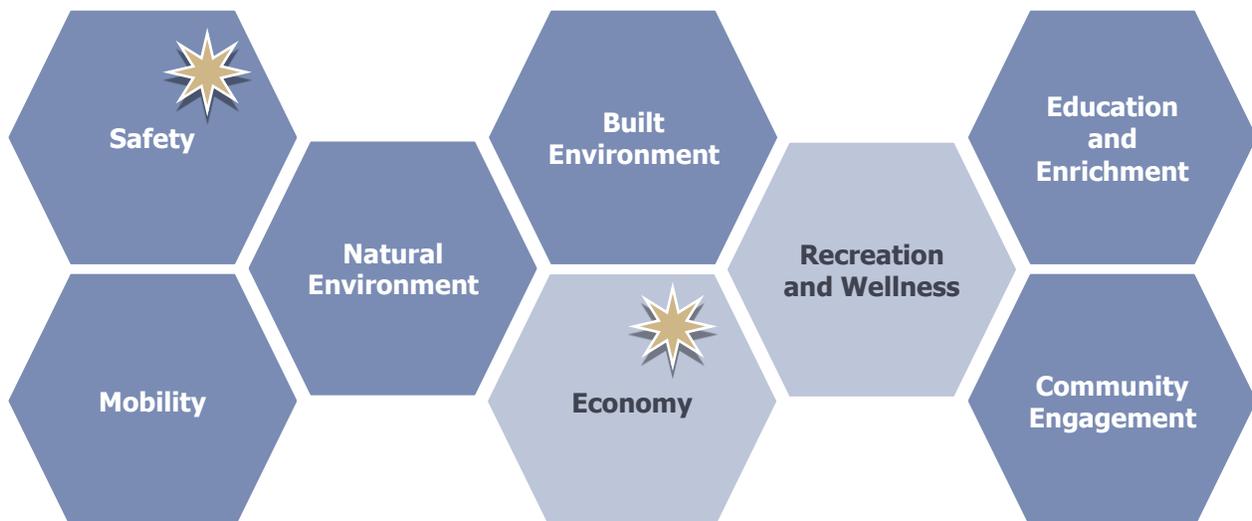
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Somerset community in the coming two years. Ratings for Economy and Recreation and Wellness were lower than ratings elsewhere, but all other facets were similar to the national benchmark. 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 Somerset’s unique questions.

Legend

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

★ Most important



Community Characteristics

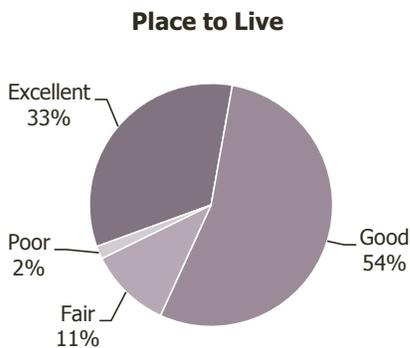
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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 Somerset, 87% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Somerset as a place to live were similar to those 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 Somerset as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Somerset and its overall appearance. Ratings for most of these aspects were similar to the national benchmark, with positive ratings from at least 7 in 10 residents. The only exception to this was Somerset as a place to retire which was rated positively by about half of survey participants and was lower than in other communities.

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 and tended to be similar to or lower than comparison communities.

Almost all respondents gave excellent or good scores to each aspect of Safety. Evaluations of Mobility tended to be more mixed; about 8 in 10 residents gave high marks to ease of travel by car and traffic flow and these ratings were higher than the benchmark. However, measures for availability of paths and walking trails and ease of travel by public transportation were less favorably rated and lower than those seen elsewhere. Residents gave similar ratings for Natural Environment in relation to other community scores.

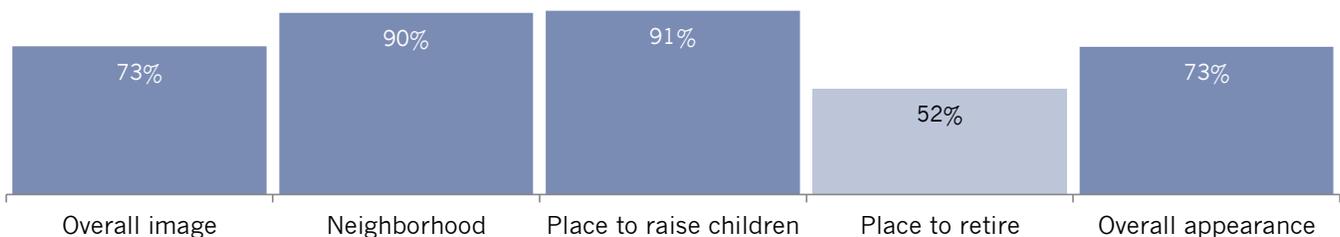


Somerset residents appreciated Education and Enrichment in the community, with about 7 in 10 or more participants giving positive reviews to K-12 education, the availability of affordable quality child care/preschool and to overall education and enrichment opportunities. Ratings for Economy were less strong and most aspects were given favorable marks by less than half of residents and were lower than communities across the country.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



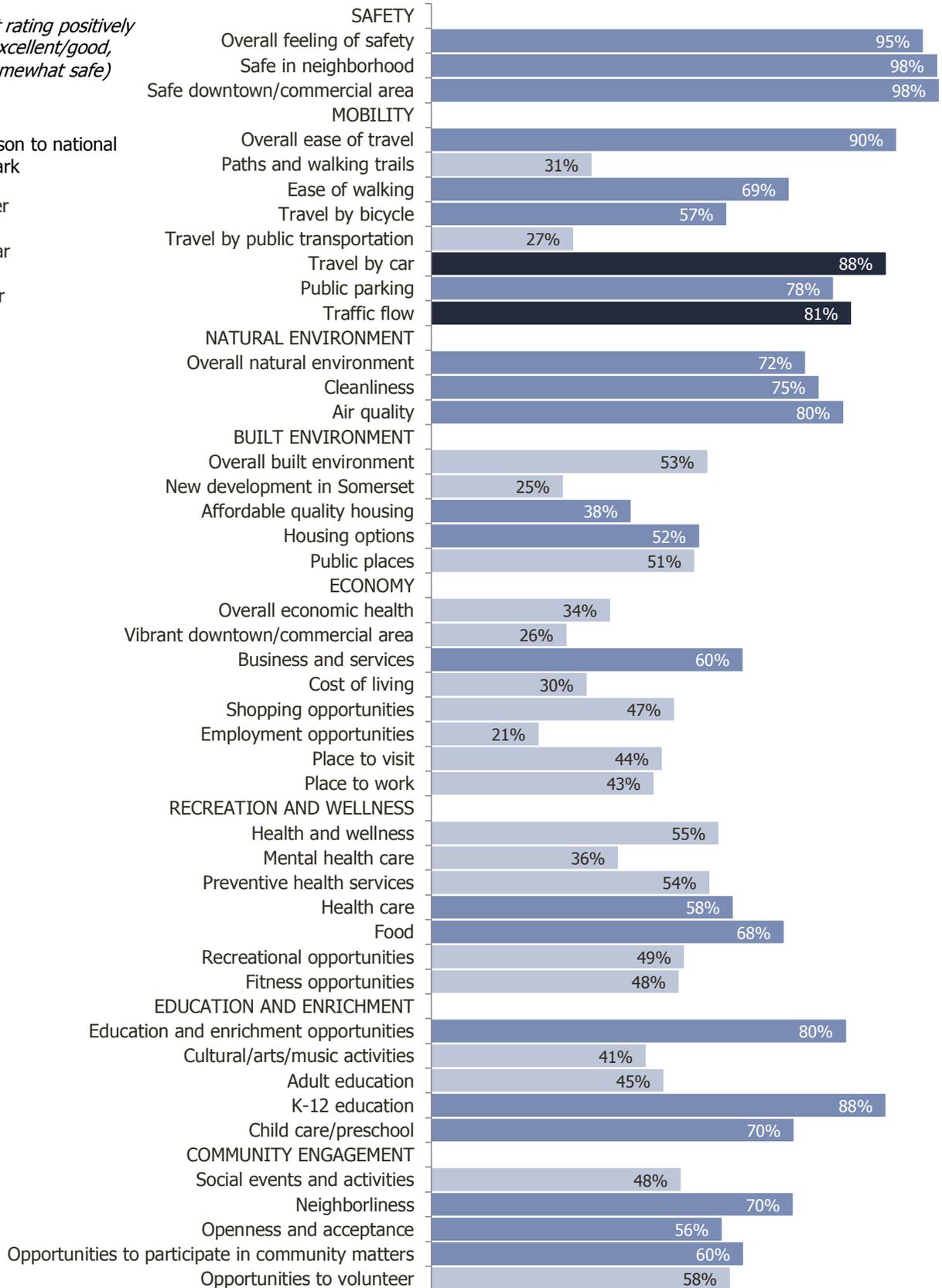
The National Citizen Survey™

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 Somerset meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

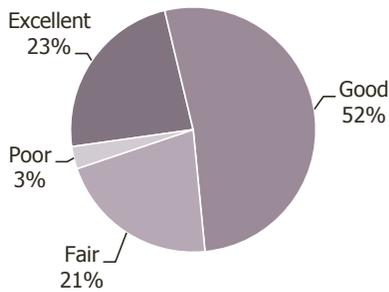
The overall quality of the services provided by Somerset as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About three-quarters of residents rated the overall quality of services provided by the Town of Somerset as excellent or good. Only about two in five gave high marks to the services provided by Federal Government. Both ratings were similar to the national benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Somerset’s leadership and governance. About two in five or more survey participants favorably rated most of these aspects (e.g., value of services for taxes paid, welcoming citizen involvement, being honest and treating all residents fairly) and were rated either similar to or lower than national comparisons. Over 8 in 10 awarded excellent or good scores to the customer service provided by Somerset employees and this measure was evaluated at levels similar to communities nationwide.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Somerset. Police services, crime prevention and traffic signal timing outshined other communities across the nation, receiving excellent or good marks from about 8 in 10 or more residents. Other service evaluated positively by at least 9 in 10 residents included fire, ambulance/EMS, fire prevention, sewer services and public libraries, though these were all similar to the national average.

Participants’ assessments for most other aspects of Governance were similar to comparison communities, though several ratings that lagged behind the national average could be found across aspects of livability, most notably within Mobility, Natural Environment, Economy and Recreation and Wellness.

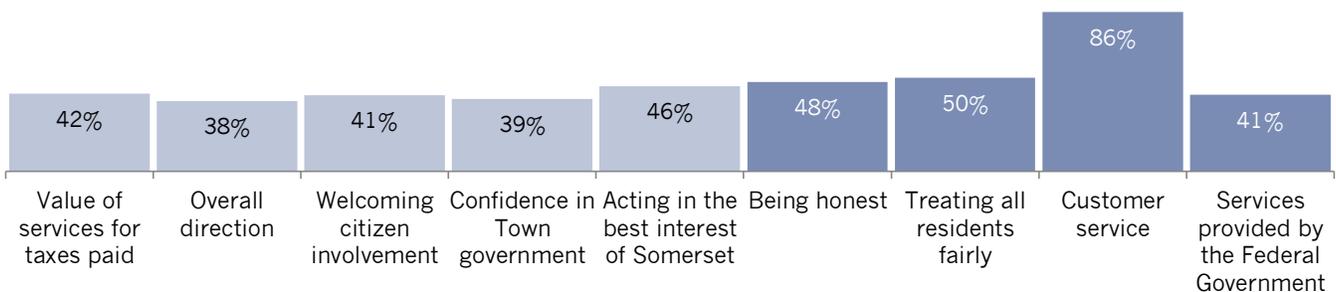
Overall Quality of Town Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



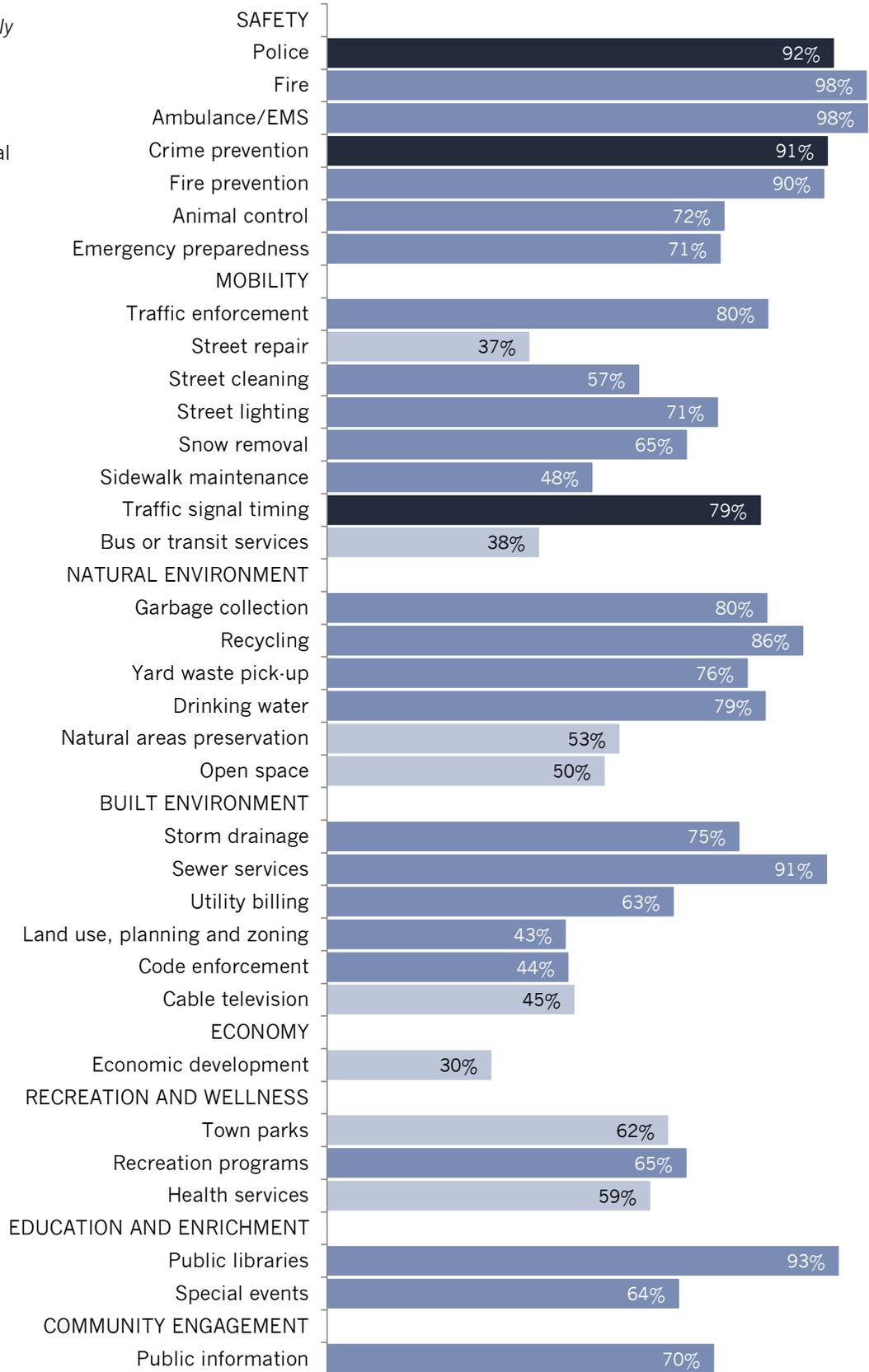
The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

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

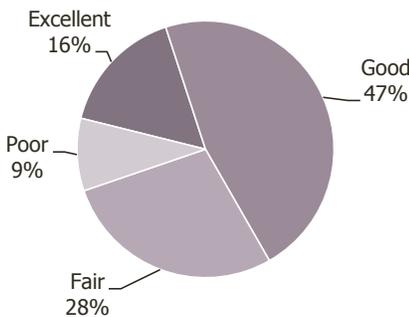
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Similar to other communities in the U.S., about 6 in 10 of respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in Somerset.

About 8 in 10 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Somerset 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 City 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. Somerset resident engagement varied; in most cases, rates of Participation were similar to the national average, but there were a few exceptions. Survey respondents had high participation in green initiatives, such as conserving water and recycling; more Somerset residents recycled than did other residents across the country. Residents reported high levels of neighborliness and political and social engagement.

Compared to communities nationwide, Somerset participants were less likely to indicate they had carpooled, visited a Town park or worked in the Town. Respondents were also less optimistic about the economy and its impact on future income compared to the national average.

Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



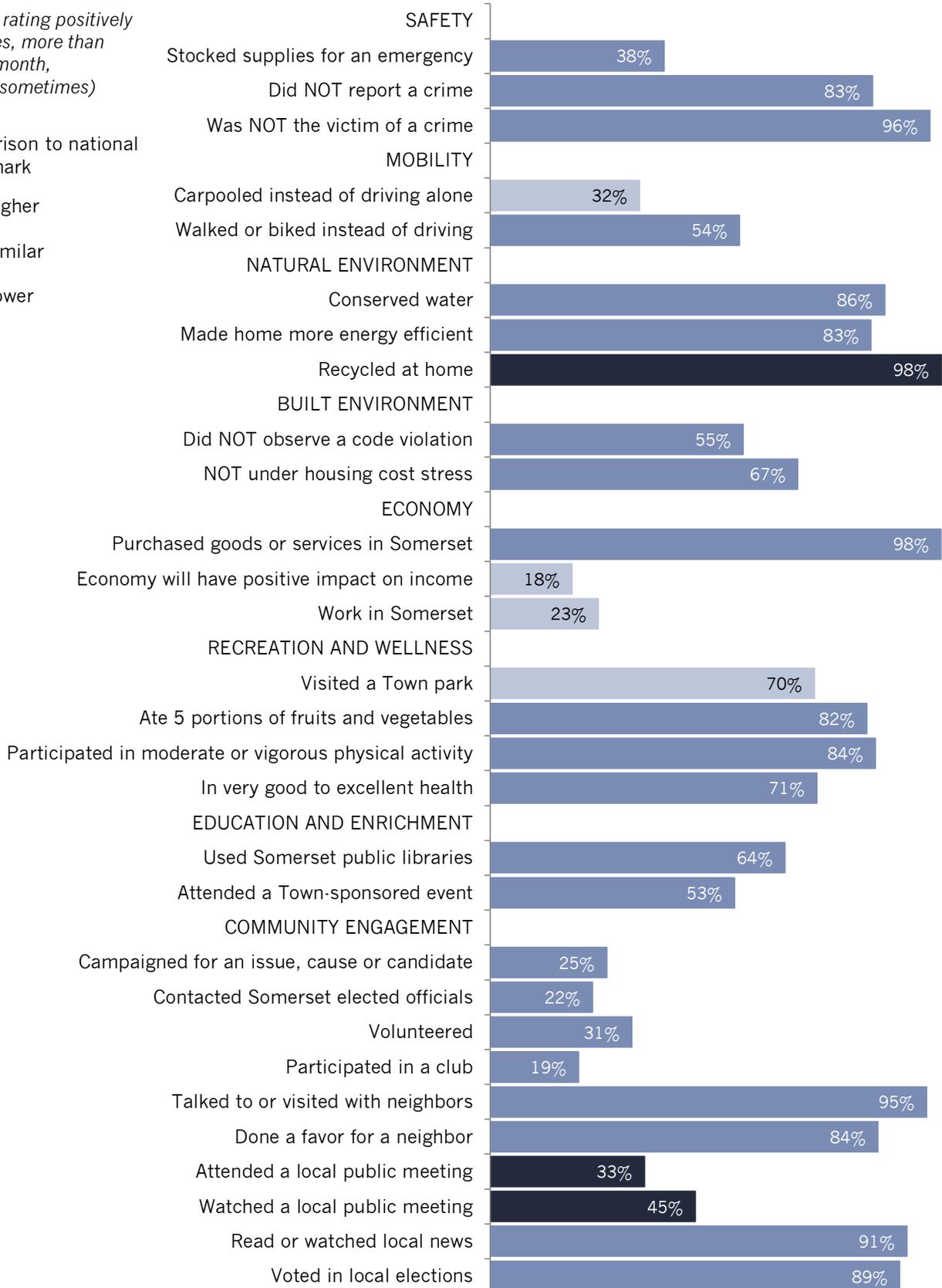
The National Citizen Survey™

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



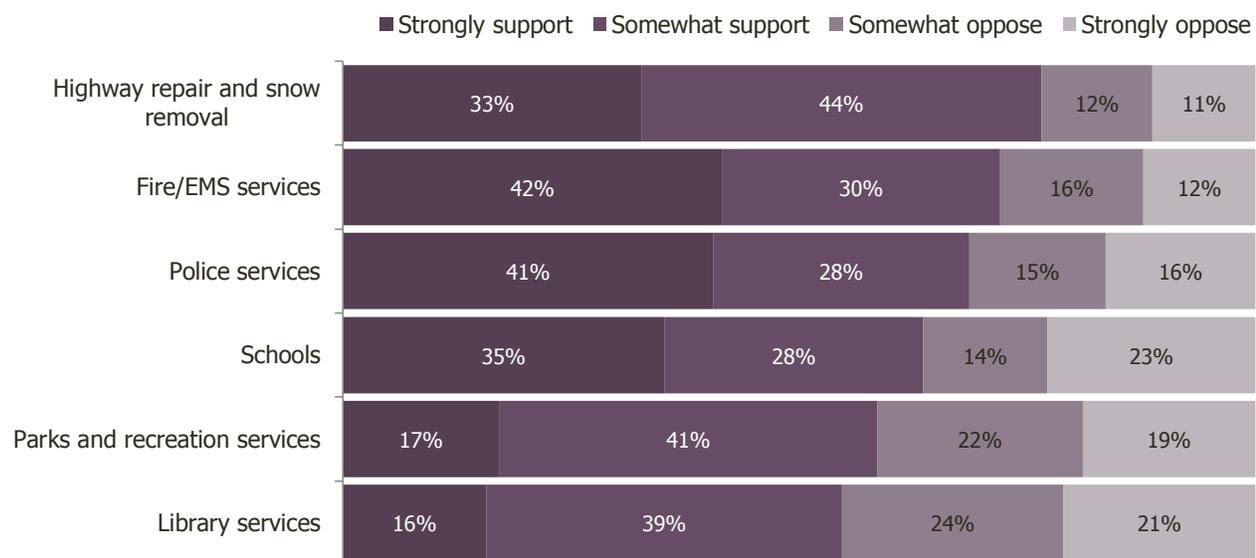
Special Topics

The Town of Somerset included four questions of special interest on The NCS. Town leadership sought to gain insight into residents' level of support for an increase in property taxes to fund services, sources of information about Somerset, frequency of contact with various Town departments and their assessment of that contact overall.

The first question asked residents about their support for a property tax increase to fund various services. About three-quarters would support funding highway repair and snow removal, while slightly fewer supported funding fire/EMS and police services. Residents were on the fence about funding library services with a property tax increase.

Figure 4: Level of Support for Service Funding

Somerset's Brayton Point Power Plant is closing and the Town is faced with difficult choices due to the loss of revenue. To what extent do you support or oppose an increase in property taxes to fund the following services:

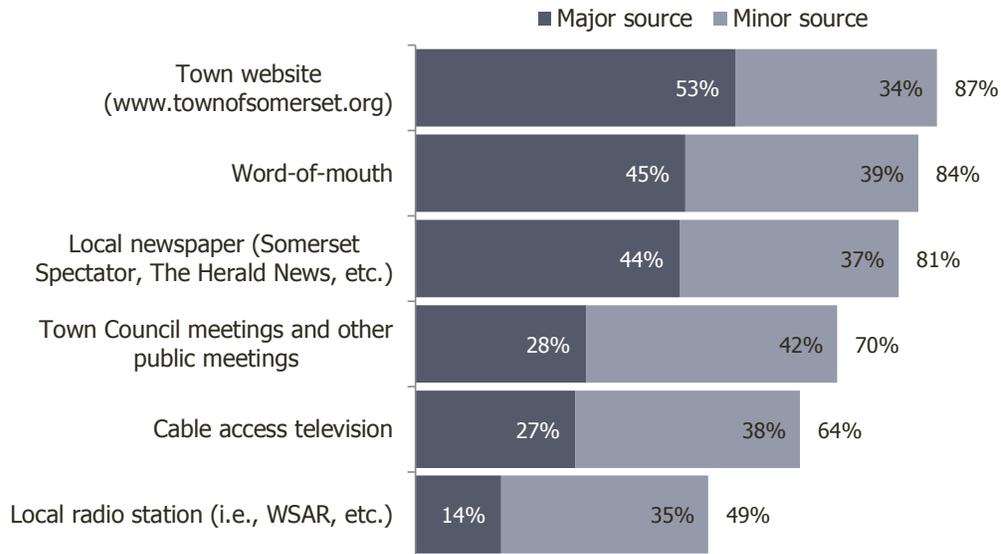


The National Citizen Survey™

Town residents indicated their level of reliance on six sources of information about the Town. Around 8 in 10 respondents reported using the Town website, word-of-mouth and the local newspaper as minor or major sources of information. While just 14% indicated they used the local radio station as a major source, it was still utilized as a minor source by about one-third of respondents.

Figure 5: Sources of Information

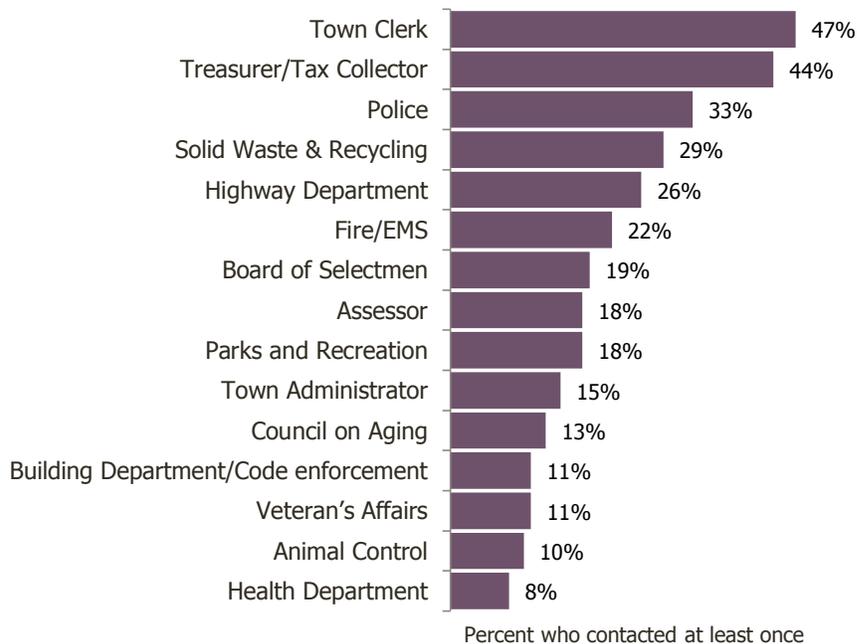
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the Town government and its activities, events and services:



About half of respondents indicated they had contacted the Town Clerk at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey and two in five had been in contact with the treasurer/tax collector. Only about 1 in 10 residents reported they had contacted the building department/code enforcement, Veteran's Affairs, animal control or the health department in the previous 12 months.

Figure 6: City Department Contact

In the last 12 months, about how many times, if at all, have you or other household had in-person, phone or email contact with the following Town offices?

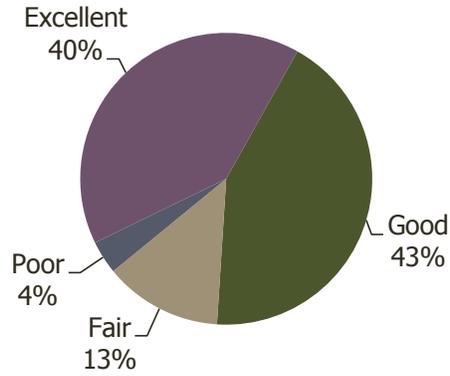


The National Citizen Survey™

Of those survey respondents who indicated they had contacted at least one of the Town departments one or more times in the 12 months before the survey administration, about 8 in 10 residents gave excellent or good scores to their overall impression of the employee in their most recent contact. Only 4% assigned poor evaluations to Somerset employees.

Figure 7: Overall Impression of City Employees

What was your overall impression of the employee(s) of Somerset in your most recent contact?



Conclusions

Mobility received mixed reviews and appears to be an area in which residents would like to see improvements.

The facet of Mobility received evaluations on both ends of the spectrum. Overall ease of travel was positively scored by about 9 in 10 residents and roughly 8 in 10 or more gave favorable reviews to the ease of travel by car, traffic flow and traffic signal timing; each of these measures were rated higher than the national average. Alternatively, about one-third or less awarded excellent or good marks to availability of paths and walking trails, ease of travel by public transportation, street repair and bus or transit services, which were evaluated lower than communities elsewhere. Additionally, about one-third of residents reported they had participated in carpooling efforts, which was lower than the national average. Finally, when asked if they would support funding highway repair and snow removal with an increase in property taxes, over three-quarters indicated they would support this investment.

Economy and Safety are priorities for the community.

Residents identified Safety as an important area on which the Town should focus in the coming two years. Nearly all residents indicated that they felt safe in the community overall, as well as feeling safe in the Town's downtown/commercial area and in their neighborhoods; these positive evaluations were reflected in residents' reviews for the overall quality of life in Somerset and the Town as a place to live and raise children. About 9 in 10 respondents positively evaluated fire, ambulance/EMS and fire prevention and were especially pleased with police and crime prevention, as both of these services were higher than ratings given in comparison communities. Additionally, close to 7 in 10 Somerset respondents supported an increase in property taxes to fund fire/EMS and police services.

Survey participants also highlighted Economy as an area of focus for the Town. Nearly all residents had purchased goods in Somerset and were generally pleased with the quality of business and service establishments. However, less than half of respondents have favorable scores to the other Economy-related characteristics and services and residents evaluated these aspects at levels lower than national averages. Respondents were also less likely to work in the Town or feel positively about their economic futures.

Residents are engaged in the civic process and would like to be heard.

Respondents reported higher rates of attending and watching local public meetings than rates around the country and nearly 9 in 10 respondents indicated they read or watched local news and voted in local elections. Residents were also generally pleased with opportunities to participate in community matters and about half felt that the Town government did an excellent or good job at being honest and treating all residents fairly. Conversely, respondents gave lower evaluations than those seen elsewhere to the overall direction of Somerset, the Town welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in the Town government and the Town acting in the best interest of the community. The Town might consider additional efforts to communicate their willingness to involve residents in local government to build trust. Since respondents indicated they relied upon the Town website, word-of-mouth, local newspapers and Town Council meetings and other public meetings for information about the Town, communicating about the decision-making process via these sources could help bolster residents' feelings about being heard in the civic process.

Somerset residents take steps to stay healthy, but would like to see improvements in Recreation and Wellness related services.

About 7 in 10 Somerset residents indicated they were in very good or excellent health and most respondents reported they ate five portions of fruits and vegetables and participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity regularly. However, residents gave lower than average ratings to health and wellness opportunities, recreational and fitness opportunities, the availability of mental health care and preventative health services and health services provided by the Town. Residents also gave less positive evaluations to Town parks, which could explain participants' visitation of community parks at rates below national levels. Finally, a majority of respondents supported increasing property tax rates to fund parks and recreation services and close to 2 in 10 had contacted the Parks and Recreation department at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey, indicating that these services could be an important focus area for the Town.