

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Albemarle County, VA
Community Livability Report

2015



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

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About

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

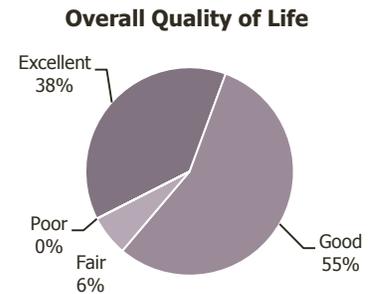
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 375 residents of Albemarle County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Albemarle County

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Albemarle County 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.



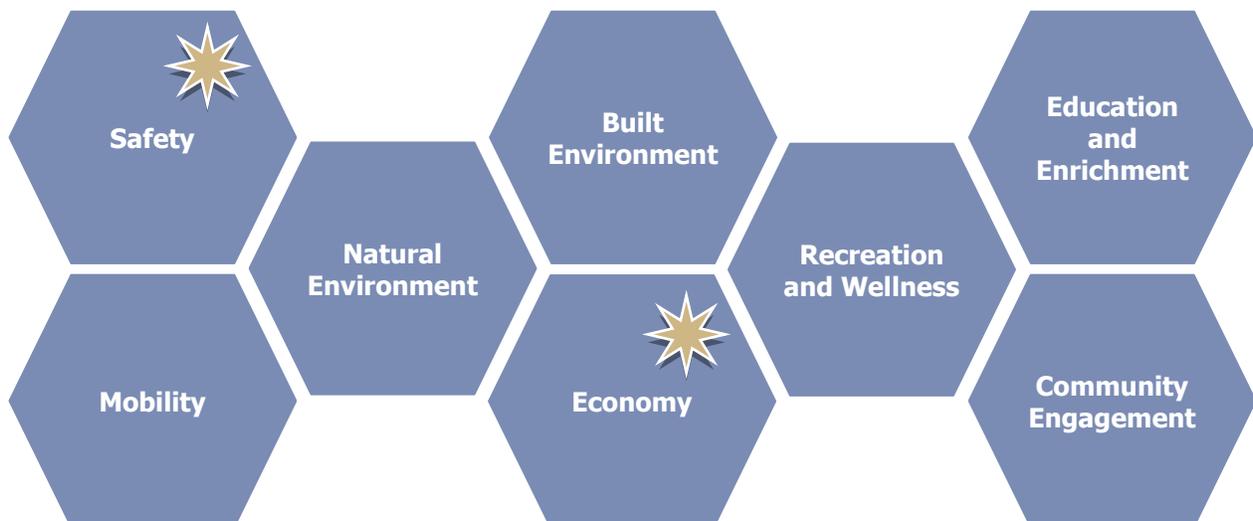
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Albemarle County community in the coming two years. Ratings for all facets 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 Albemarle County’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 Albemarle County, 95% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Albemarle County as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Albemarle County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Albemarle County and its overall appearance. More than 8 in 10 residents rated Albemarle County's overall image, Albemarle County as a place to raise children and the County as a place to retire as excellent or good and these ratings were higher than the national benchmarks. About four in five participants gave positive ratings to their neighborhood and Albemarle County's overall appearance; both ratings are similar to those in comparison communities.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Around 90% of residents positively rated Albemarle County on both aspects of Safety. Ratings within the facet of Mobility were varied; ratings for paths and walking trails, travel by car and traffic flow were similar to the national benchmark. Overall ease of travel, ease of walking, travel by bicycle, travel by public transportation and public parking received ratings lower than in comparison



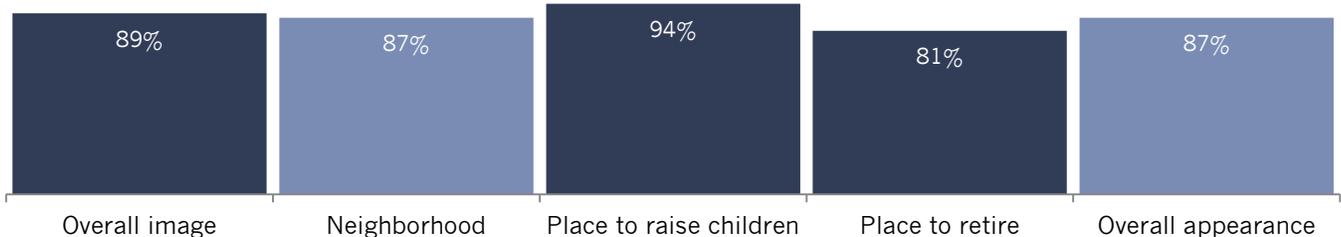
communities. Almost all respondents (92%) rated Albemarle County's overall natural environment as excellent or good and this rating was above the benchmark. Other Natural Environment ratings were similar to the benchmarks. Four out of five aspects of Built Environment were similar to comparison communities; ratings for affordable quality housing were lower than the benchmark. Within Economy, about 87% of residents rated Albemarle County as an excellent or good place to visit (higher than the national benchmark). Ratings for all other aspects were similar to comparison communities with the exception of cost of living (lower than the benchmark). Ratings within Recreation and Wellness were generally favorable, with health and wellness, preventative health services and health care all rated higher than in

communities across the nation. Ratings for education and enrichment opportunities, adult education and cultural/arts/music activities were higher than the national benchmark within the facet of Education and Enrichment. Ratings for all aspects of Community Engagement were rated as excellent or good by a majority of respondents and were similar to ratings in comparison communities.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



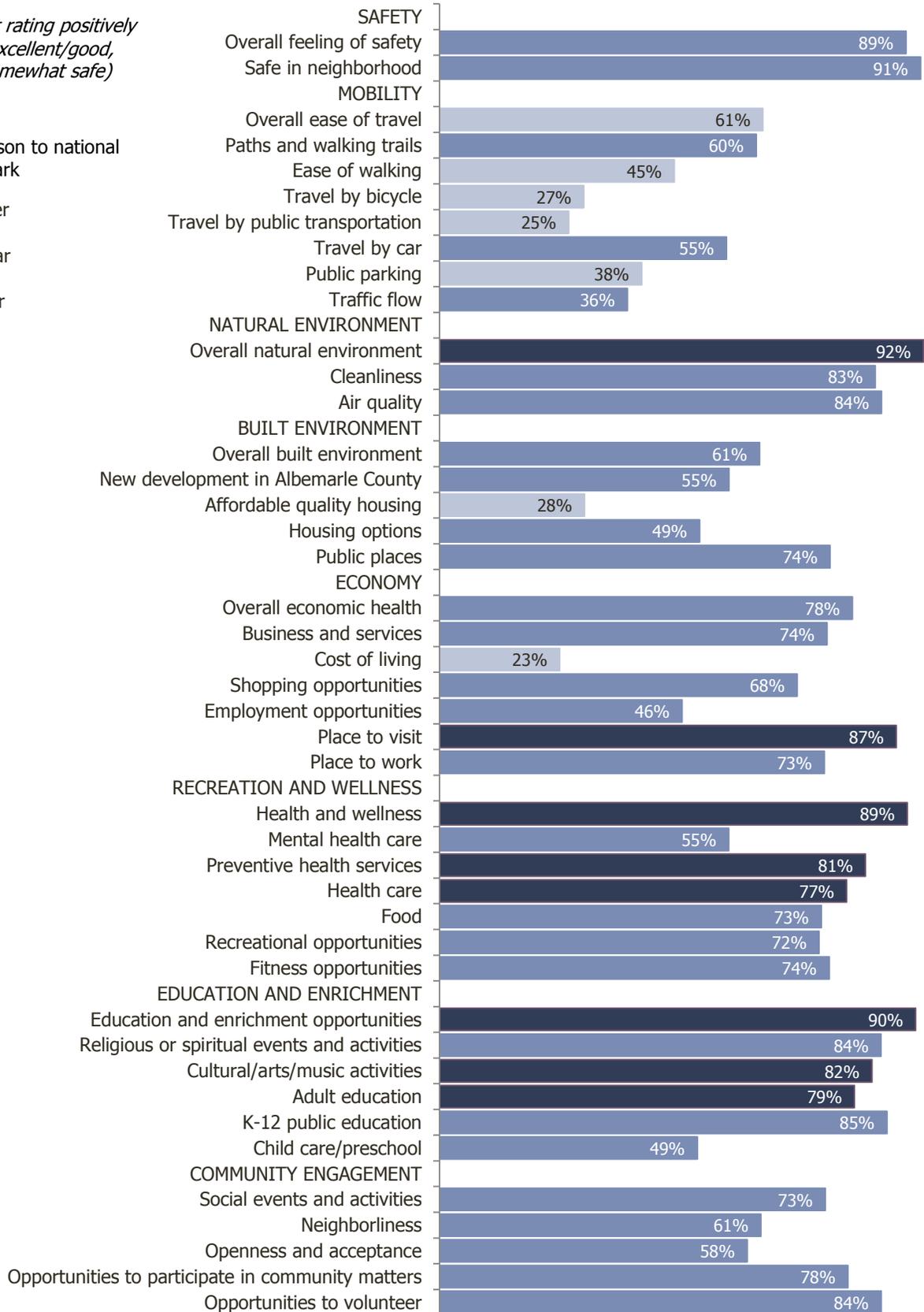
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



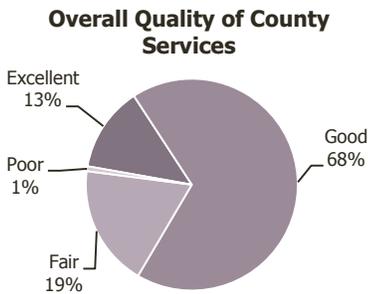
Governance

How well does the government of Albemarle County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Albemarle County as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About four in five residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of County services; this rating was similar to the benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Albemarle County’s leadership and governance. Residents’ ratings for all aspects of Albemarle County government performance were similar to the national benchmarks.

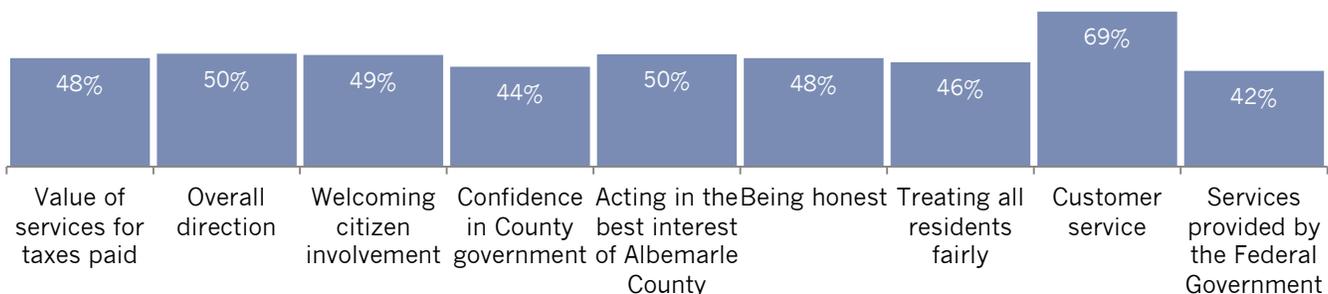
Respondents evaluated close to 30 individual services and amenities available in Albemarle County. Ratings for almost all aspects across each facet were similar to the benchmark, one was higher and none were lower. Within the facet of Natural Environment, around 70% or more of residents gave positive ratings to garbage collection, drinking water, natural areas preservation and open space. About half of the respondents gave positive ratings to economic development services. Around 85% of respondents positively rated health services within the facet of Recreation and Wellness and this rating was higher than the national benchmark. A majority of residents also gave positive ratings to County parks, recreation programs and recreation centers.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



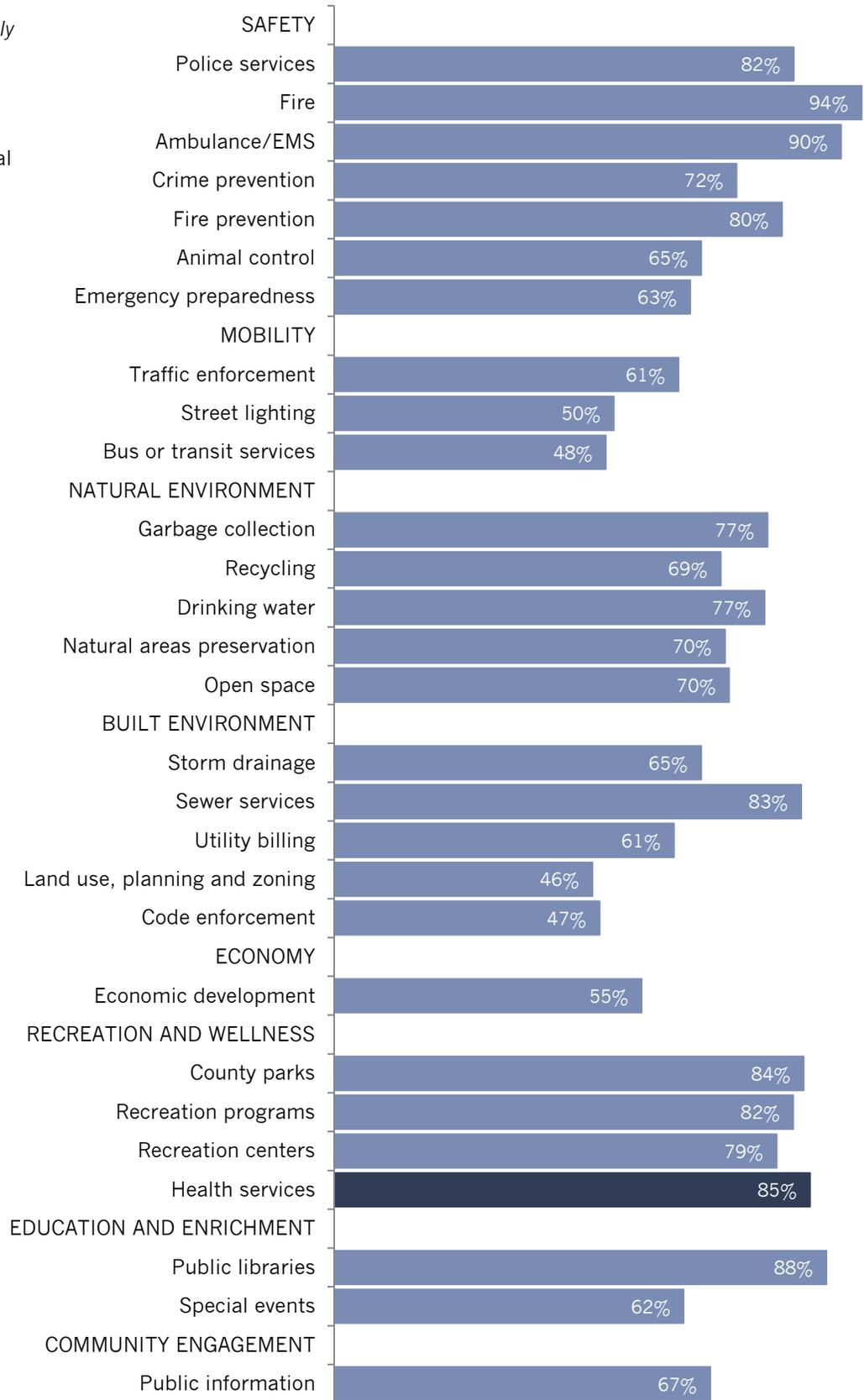
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

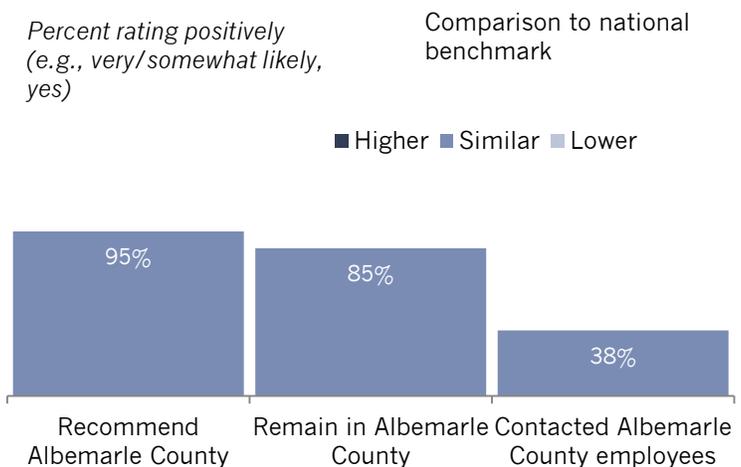
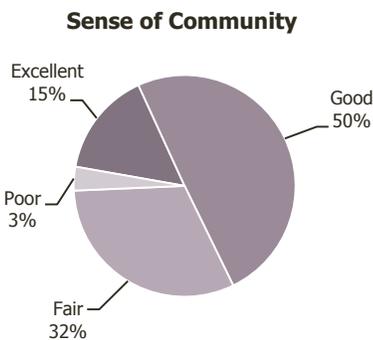


Participation

Are the residents of Albemarle County 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 65% of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in Albemarle County. Almost all residents (95%) were very or somewhat likely to recommend Albemarle County and more than 8 in 10 residents were likely to remain in the County.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. More than 8 in 10 County residents did NOT report a crime and were NOT the victim of a crime. Within the fact of Mobility, only 15% of residents reported using public transportation and 39% walked or biked instead of driving; these ratings were lower than the national benchmark. More than 80% of residents reported conserving water (similar to the benchmark) and around 7 in 10 reporting recycling at home (below the benchmark). Within Built Environment a higher number of residents in Albemarle County than in other communities did NOT observe a code violation and 70% were NOT under housing stress (similar to the national benchmark). Almost all residents purchased goods or services in Albemarle County. More residents in Albemarle County reported that they worked in the County (64%) than residents in comparison communities. Rates of participation within Recreation and Wellness were all similar to the national benchmarks with a majority of residents eating 5 portions of fruits and vegetables, participating in moderate or vigorous physical activity and visiting a County park. More than half of residents participated in religious or spiritual activities in Albemarle County; a rate that is higher than in communities across the nation. Within the facet of Community Engagement, more than 50% of respondents volunteered which is a higher rate than the national benchmark. More than 8 in 10 residents talked to or visited with neighbors, did a favor for a neighbor and voted in local elections.



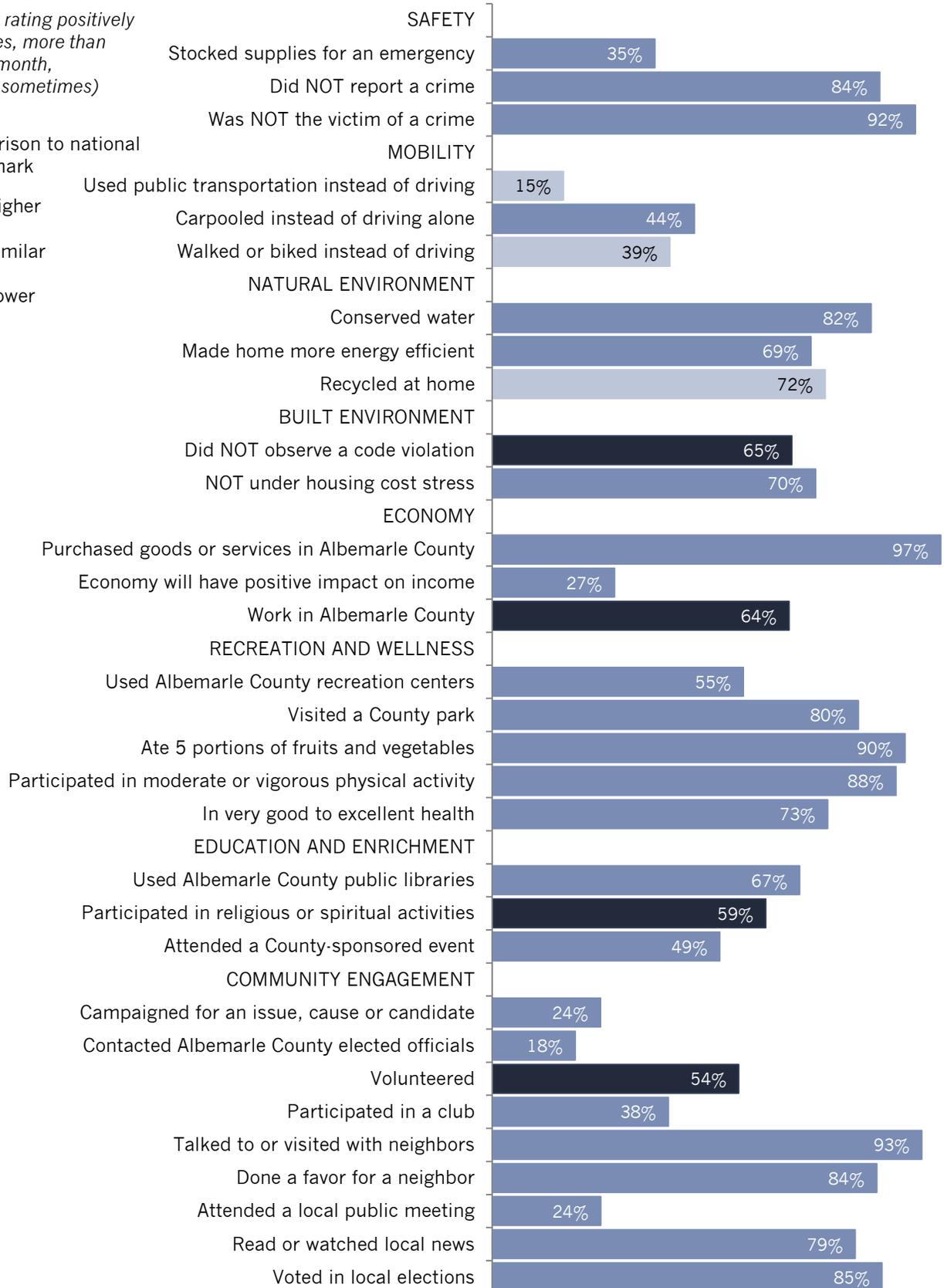
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

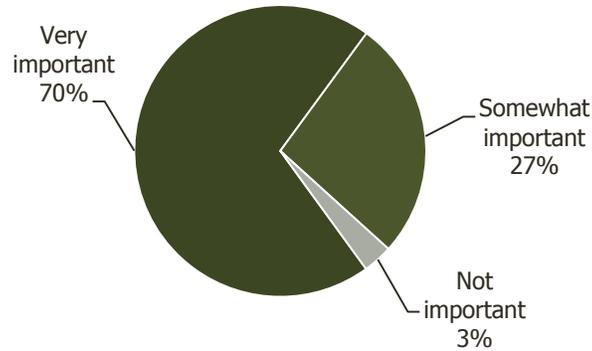
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Special Topics

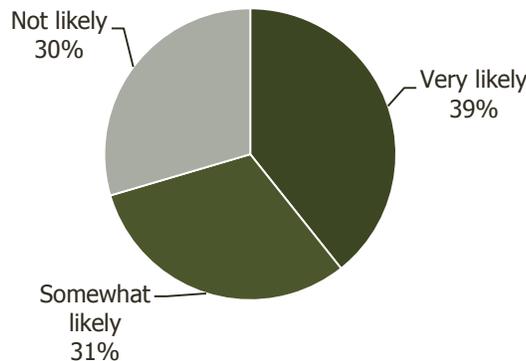
Albemarle County included seven questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents how important they considered recycling to be. Almost all residents thought recycling was a very important or somewhat important service for County residents.

Figure 4: Recycling Importance
Do you consider recycling to be an important service for County residents?



The second question asked how likely residents would be to use a “do it yourself” source separation recycling center if it was conveniently located. About 70% of residents reported they would be very likely or somewhat likely to use the recycling center if it was conveniently located.

Figure 5: “Do it yourself” Source Separation Recycling
The McIntire Recycling Center currently provides a “do it yourself” separation of recyclables by type (aluminum, cardboard, glass, etc.). If a “do it yourself” source separation recycling center was conveniently located, how likely would you be to bring your recyclables to the center?

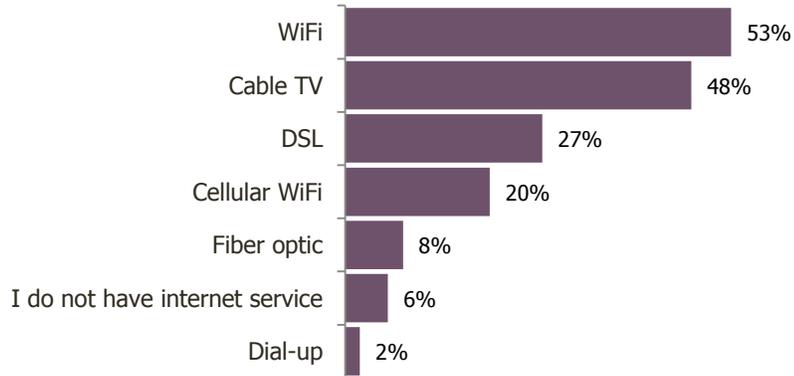


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The third and fourth questions asked residents what type of internet service they have in their home and if they do not have it, why. More than half of respondents reported having WiFi internet service in their home and around 48% had cable TV. Only about 6% of residents reported having no internet service at all.

Figure 6: Type of Internet Service

What type of internet service do you have in your home? (Choose all that apply)

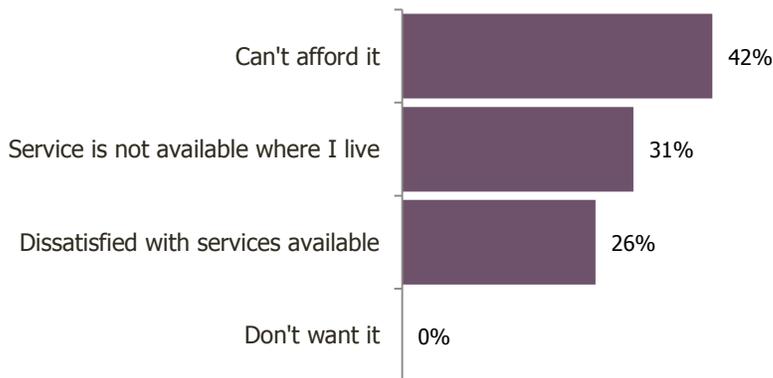


Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

Of those residents who did not have internet service in their home, 42% reported not being able to afford it. Around 3 in 10 residents reported that service is not available where they live and one-fourth said they were dissatisfied with the services available.

Figure 7: Reason for Not Having Internet Service

If you do not have internet service in your home, please indicate why: (Choose all that apply)

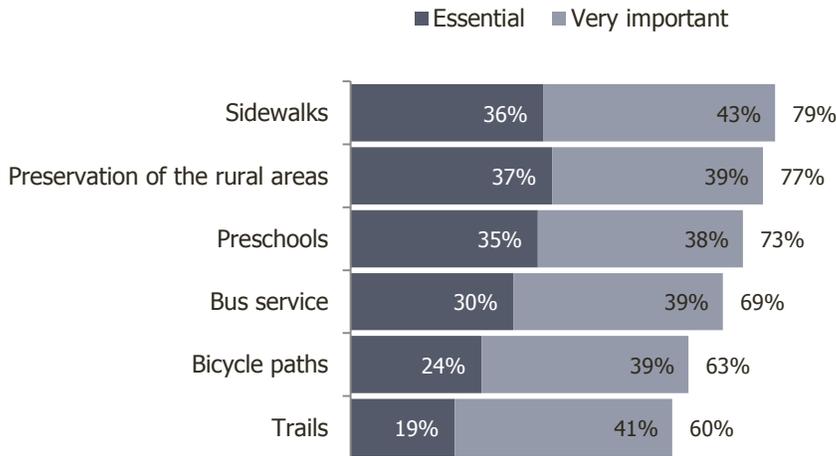


Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

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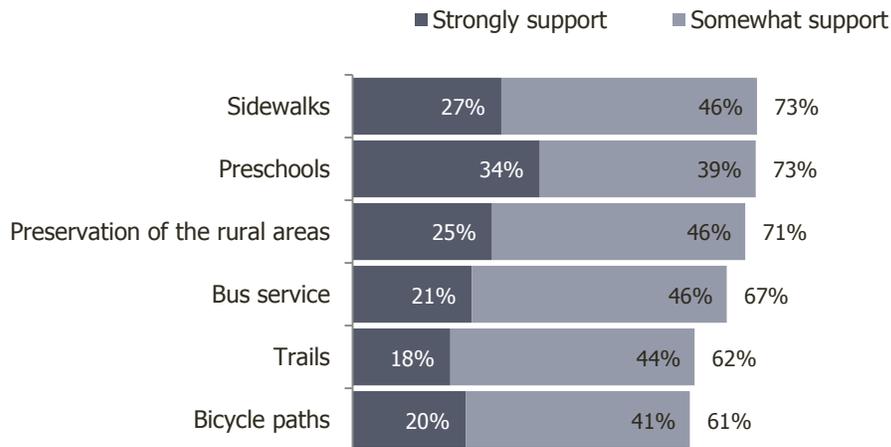
The fifth question asked residents to rate the importance of Albemarle County to provide certain services. At least 73% of residents thought it was essential or very important for the County to provide sidewalks, preservation of the rural areas and preschools. Around two-thirds of residents rated bus service as essential or very important, followed by bicycle paths (63%) and trails (60%).

Figure 8: Importance of Services Provided by Albemarle County
How important, if at all, are the following services for Albemarle County to provide?



The next question asked residents to what extent they would support or oppose paying higher taxes for the same services listed in the previous question. A majority would support tax increases for all of the services listed; sidewalks and preschools received the most support.

Figure 9: Higher Taxes for Services
Please indicate to what extent you would support or oppose paying higher taxes for the following services:

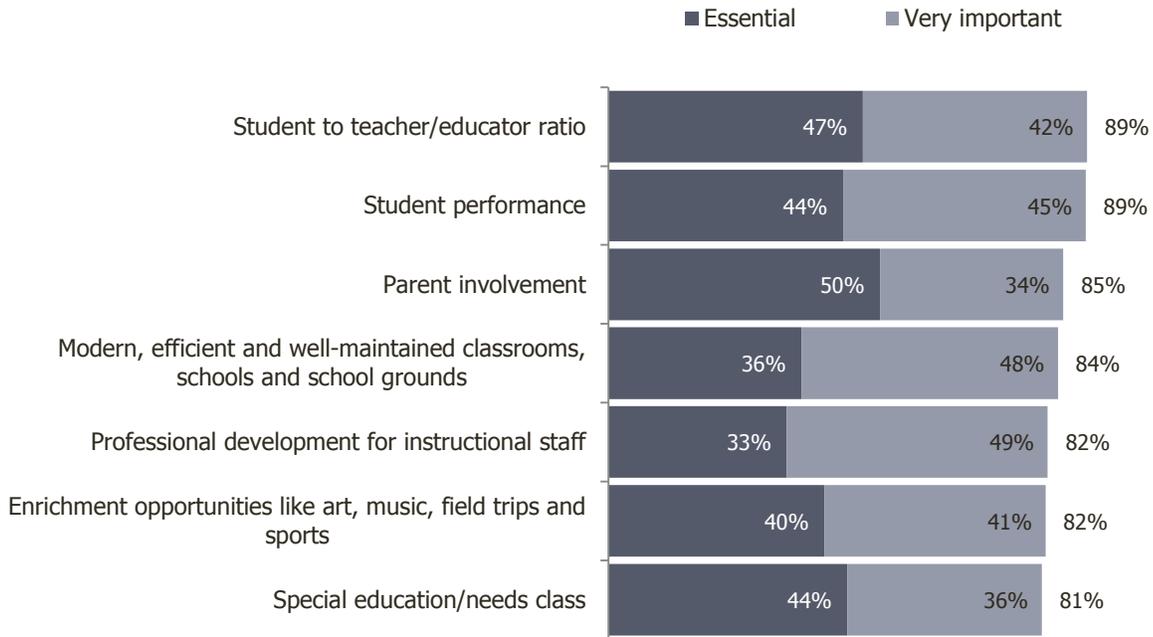


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The last question asked residents to rate the importance for Albemarle County Public Schools to focus on different areas in the next two years. At least four in five respondents rated each item as essential or very important.

Figure 10: Albemarle County Public School's Focus Areas

Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for Albemarle County Public Schools to focus on each of the following in the coming two years:



Conclusions

Albemarle County residents care about Safety.

County residents identified Safety as one of the most important focus areas for the community. Safety services such as fire, fire prevention, ambulance/EMS and police services were all rated highly by more than 80% of residents. Almost all residents said they felt safe in their neighborhood and had an overall feeling of safety in Albemarle County. Additionally, more than 90% of participants reported they were NOT the victim of a crime.

Mobility is a potential area for improvement.

Some aspects of Mobility tended to be lower than for the other facets of community. Ease of walking, travel by bicycle, travel by public transportation and public parking all received ratings that were lower than the national benchmarks. Fewer residents in Albemarle County reported using public transportation instead of driving and walking or biking instead of driving than residents in comparison communities.

Education and Enrichment is important to residents.

Almost all residents thought it was essential or very important for Albemarle County Public Schools to focus on student to teacher/educator ratio and student performance over the next two years. More residents in the County than in other communities rated education and enrichment opportunities positively and around 80% of respondents rated cultural/arts/music activities and adult education higher than the national benchmark. Child care/preschool ratings saw an increase from 2013 to 2015 (for more information see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover) and more residents participated in religious or spiritual activities than in 2013.

Recreation and Wellness is a priority for County residents.

Almost all residents rated health and wellness in Albemarle County as excellent or good. More residents in the County positively rated preventative health services and health care than residents in other communities across the nation; these ratings increased from 2013 to 2015. Health services provided by the County were also rated higher than in comparable communities. Around 8 in 10 or more residents reported visiting a County park, eating 5 portions of fruits and vegetables and participating in moderate or vigorous physical activity.