

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Alexandria, VA
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 Alexandria 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 Alexandria. 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.

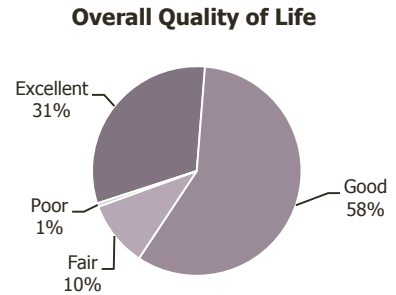
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 689 residents of the City of Alexandria. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% 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 Alexandria

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Alexandria as excellent or good, which increased since 2016. This 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.

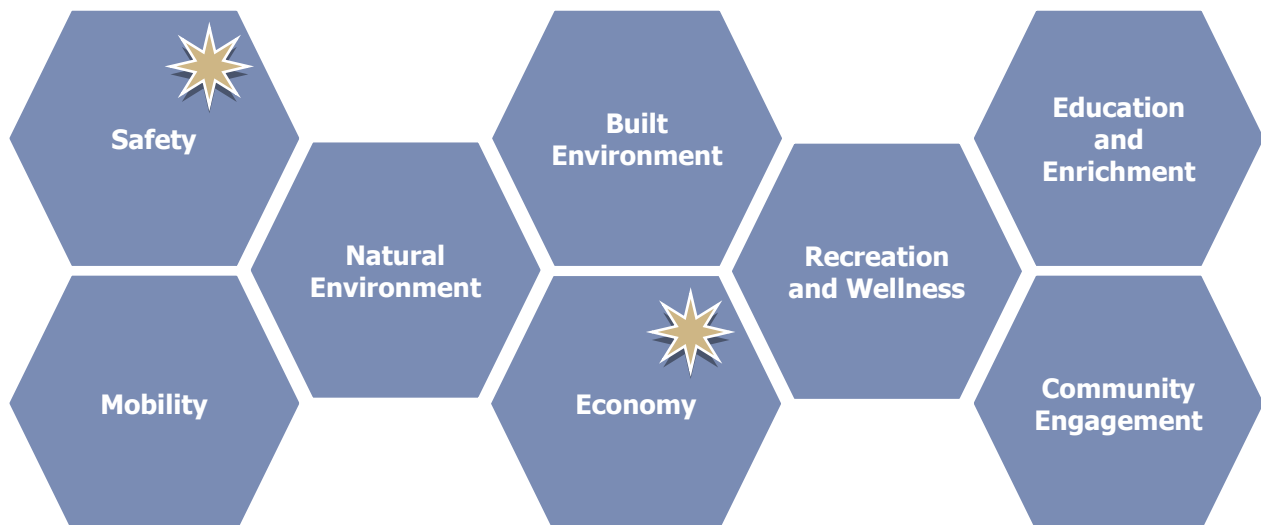
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2016, residents identified Economy and Safety as priorities for the Alexandria community in the coming two years. Alexandria residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community as well as to Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. Ratings for all facets were 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 Alexandria’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



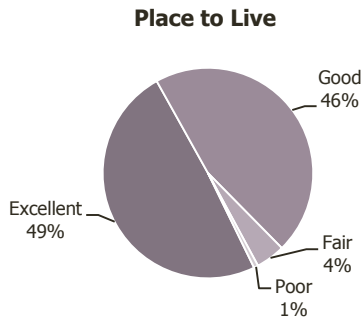
Community Characteristics

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 Alexandria, 95% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Alexandria 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 Alexandria as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Alexandria and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 thought highly of the overall image of the community, while at least 8 in 10 awarded excellent or good ratings to their neighborhoods and the overall appearance of Alexandria. About three-quarters felt positively about the City as a place to raise children and over half favorably rated Alexandria as a place to retire. These ratings tended to be similar to comparison communities; however, evaluations of the overall image were higher than the national, Washington D.C. and similarly sized metropolitan-adjacent benchmark municipalities.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. At least 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Alexandria, and nearly all participants felt safe in their neighborhoods and in the City's downtown/commercial area; these ratings were similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation. All items within the facets of Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, and Community Engagement were rated strongly, with at least half of residents giving excellent or good ratings to each aspect. These ratings tended to be similar to benchmark jurisdictions. All aspects of Economy were also rated very highly by a majority of participants and tended to be higher than the national and custom comparison communities with the exception of cost of living, which was rated positively by about 2 in 10 residents and was lower than the benchmarks. Most aspects of Mobility, Built Environment and Education and Enrichment received positive ratings from at least half of respondents and were similar to or higher than the benchmarks. However, ratings for public parking, the availability of affordable quality housing and K-12 education were lower than those in comparison communities.

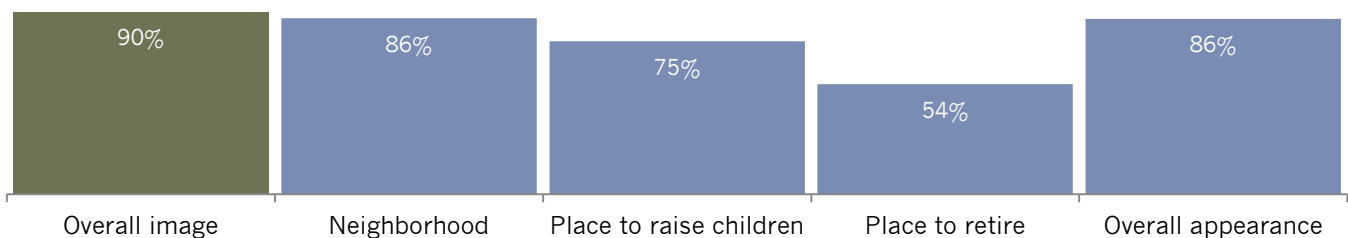


Compared to 2016, ratings were higher for five aspects in Community Characteristics in 2017, while four items decreased (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under a separate cover for more detail).

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



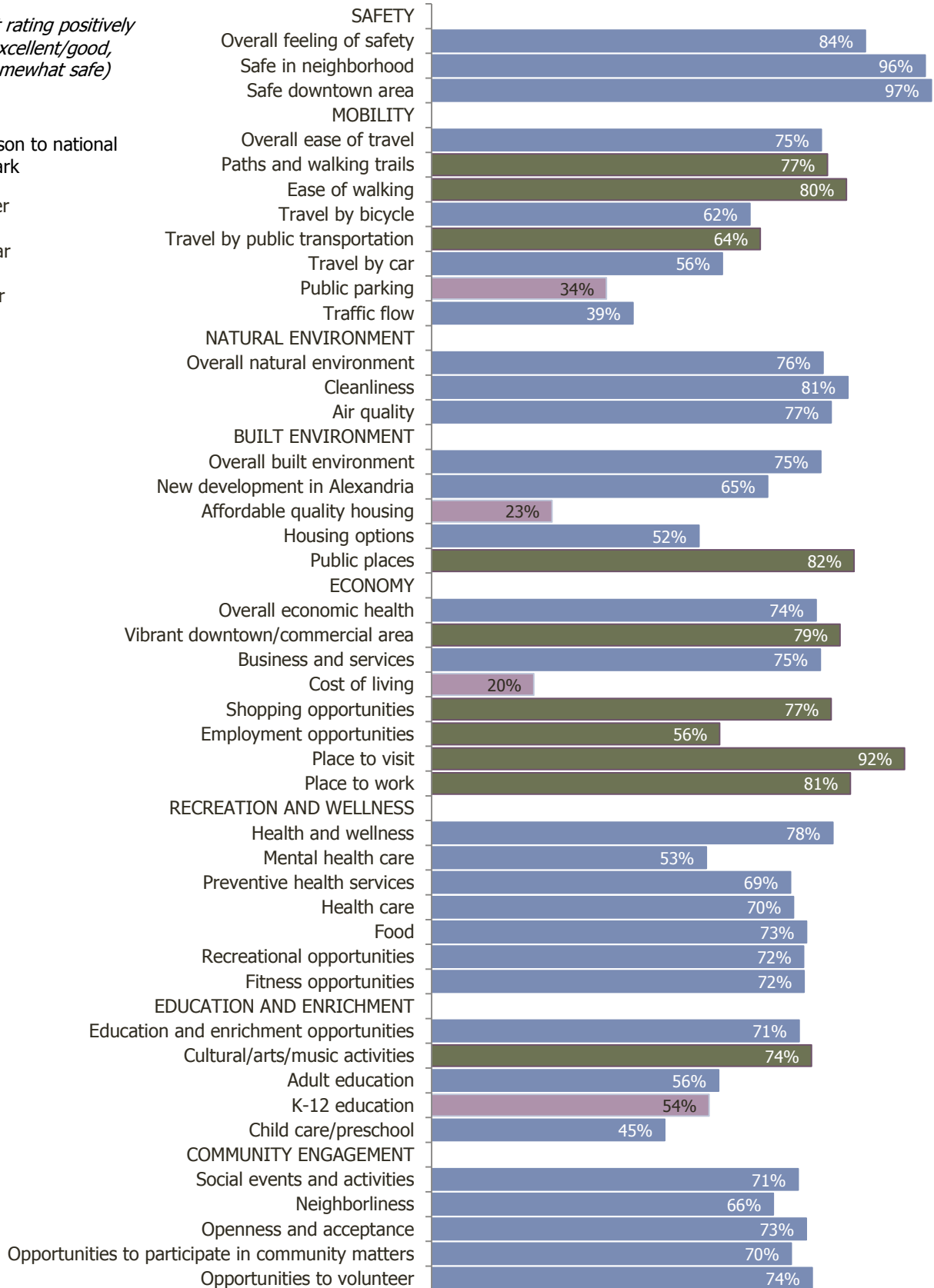
The National Citizen Survey™

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 Alexandria meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Alexandria as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 4 in 5 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Alexandria, a rating that was similar to the national and custom benchmarks and increased since 2016. Nearly 6 in 10 participants gave favorable ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government, which was higher than comparison communities.

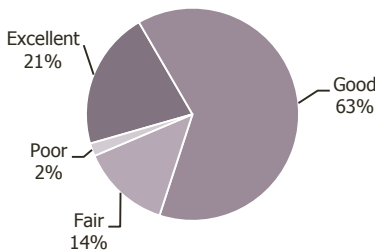
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Alexandria’s leadership and governance. About 6 in 10 or more rated the value of services for taxes paid, overall direction of the City, confidence in City government, Alexandria acting in the best interest of the community, being honest and treating all residents fairly as excellent or good. Close to 7 in 10 residents gave high marks to the customer service provided by City employees. All of these ratings were similar to other communities across the nation and evaluations of value of services for taxes paid, overall direction, confidence in City government, being honest and the government treating all residents fairly increased from 2016 to 2017.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Alexandria. Safety services were highly scored, ranging from 94% excellent or good for fire services to 70% for emergency preparedness. These ratings tended to be similar to those seen elsewhere; on the other hand, ratings for animal control were higher than ratings given nationally and in select communities near major metropolitan areas of comparable size. Within Mobility, about three-quarters awarded high marks to bus or transit services, which was higher than the benchmarks. Close to two-thirds also felt positively about traffic enforcement, street cleaning and street lighting; all of these ratings were similar to communities elsewhere. All aspects of Natural Environment, Recreation and

Wellness and Community Engagement were rated positively by 6 in 10 or more residents and were similar to ratings seen elsewhere in the nation. Evaluations for items within the facet of Built Environment tended to be similar to benchmark communities and rated as excellent or good by about 6 in 10 residents or more. Ratings for cable television were favorably scored by about two in five and were lower than jurisdictions in the U.S.; however, this aspect was evaluated higher in 2017 than in 2016. Finally, ratings for economic development were awarded high marks by 68% of respondents and were rated higher than national municipalities, and similar to custom comparisons.

When comparing 2017 results to 2016, ratings for nine items increased and three decreased over time (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under a separate cover for more detail).

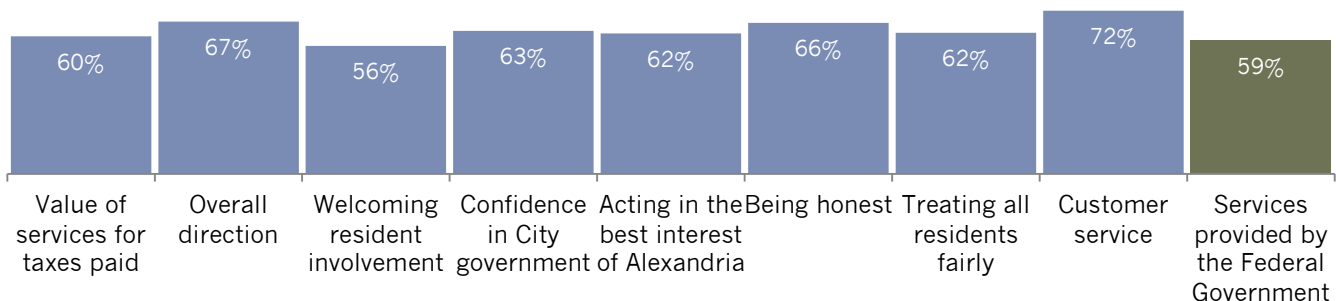
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



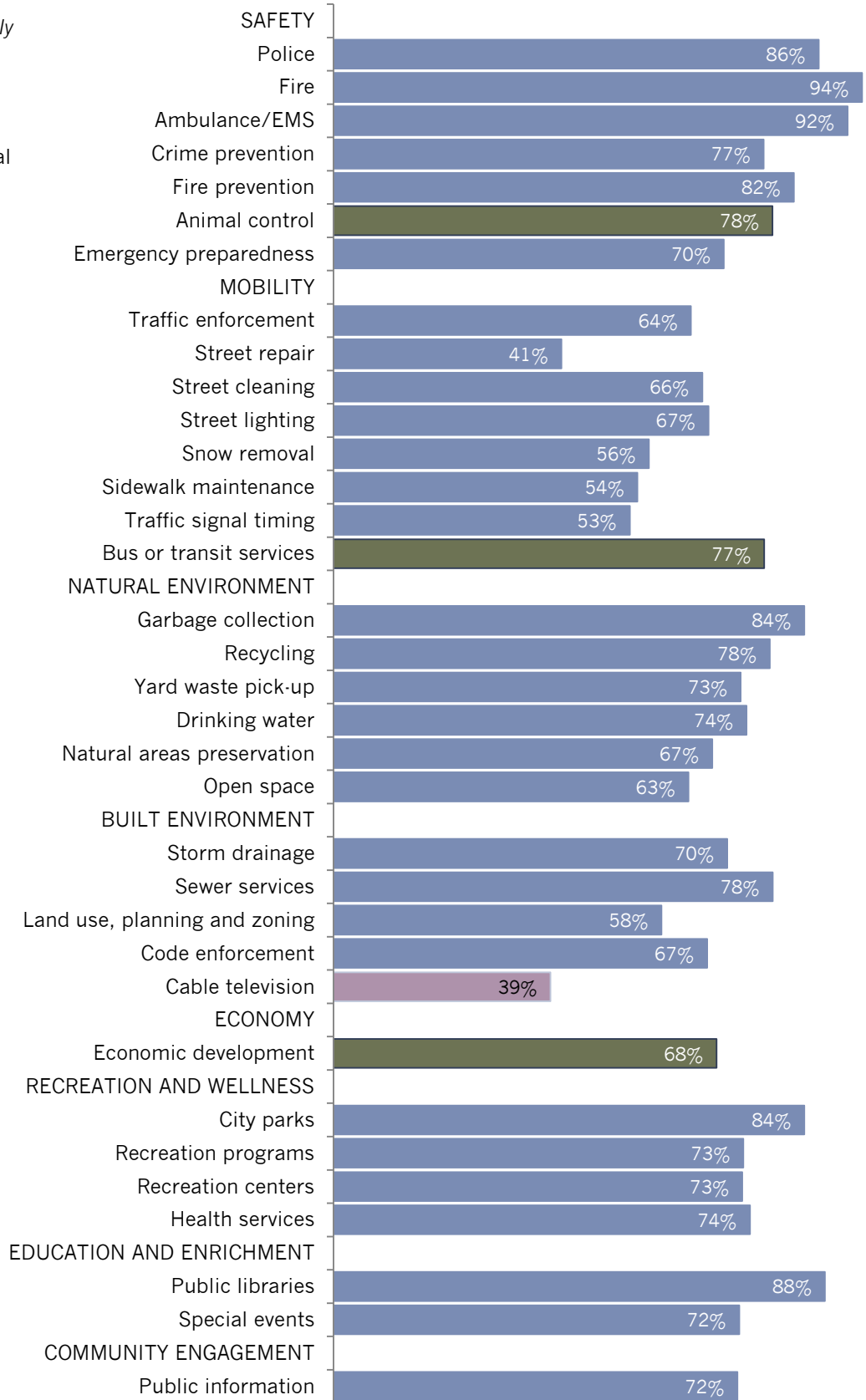
The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

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

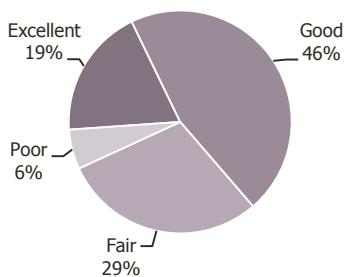
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. The overall sense of community in Alexandria received positive ratings from 65% of residents, a rating that was similar to ratings observed in other benchmark communities nationwide.

Nearly all residents were likely to recommend living in Alexandria to someone who asked and over 8 in 10 planned to remain in the City for the next five years; these ratings were similar to other communities across the nation. About 4 in 10 citizens reported they had contacted a City employee, a level similar to those reported in other communities.

The survey included over 25 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of Participation tended to be mixed across the different facets. Within Mobility, about 7 in 10 or more indicated they had used public transportation or walked or biked instead of driving and both of these rates were higher than levels seen across the nation. Nearly three-quarters reported that they had not observed a code violation in the last year, which was higher than the national benchmark, but only about 6 in 10 were not under housing cost stress, a rating that was lower when compared to communities of similar size adjacent to major cities and across the U.S., but similar to other D.C. jurisdictions. Most aspects of Recreation and Wellness were evaluated as excellent or good by close to 7 in 10 respondents or more, including the proportion of residents who had visited a City park, ate five portions of fruits and vegetables, participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity and indicated they were in excellent or very good health; these ratings were similar to other municipalities. On the other hand, only about two in five had used the City’s recreation centers, which was a level lower than benchmark comparisons. At least half of residents tended to participate in all other facets within Participation, and these rates were on par with other jurisdictions.

Fewer Alexandria residents reported that they had used public libraries or contacted the City in 2017 than in 2016. However, more respondents reported that they had made their homes more energy efficient in 2017 (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under a separate cover for more detail).

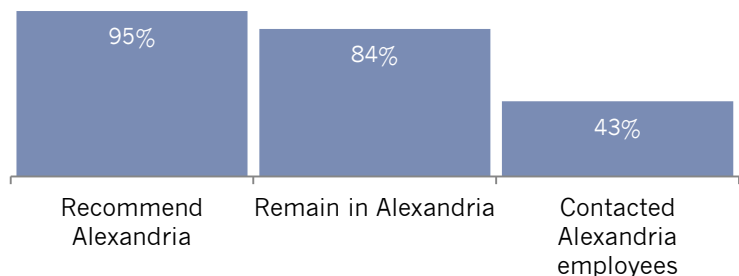
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



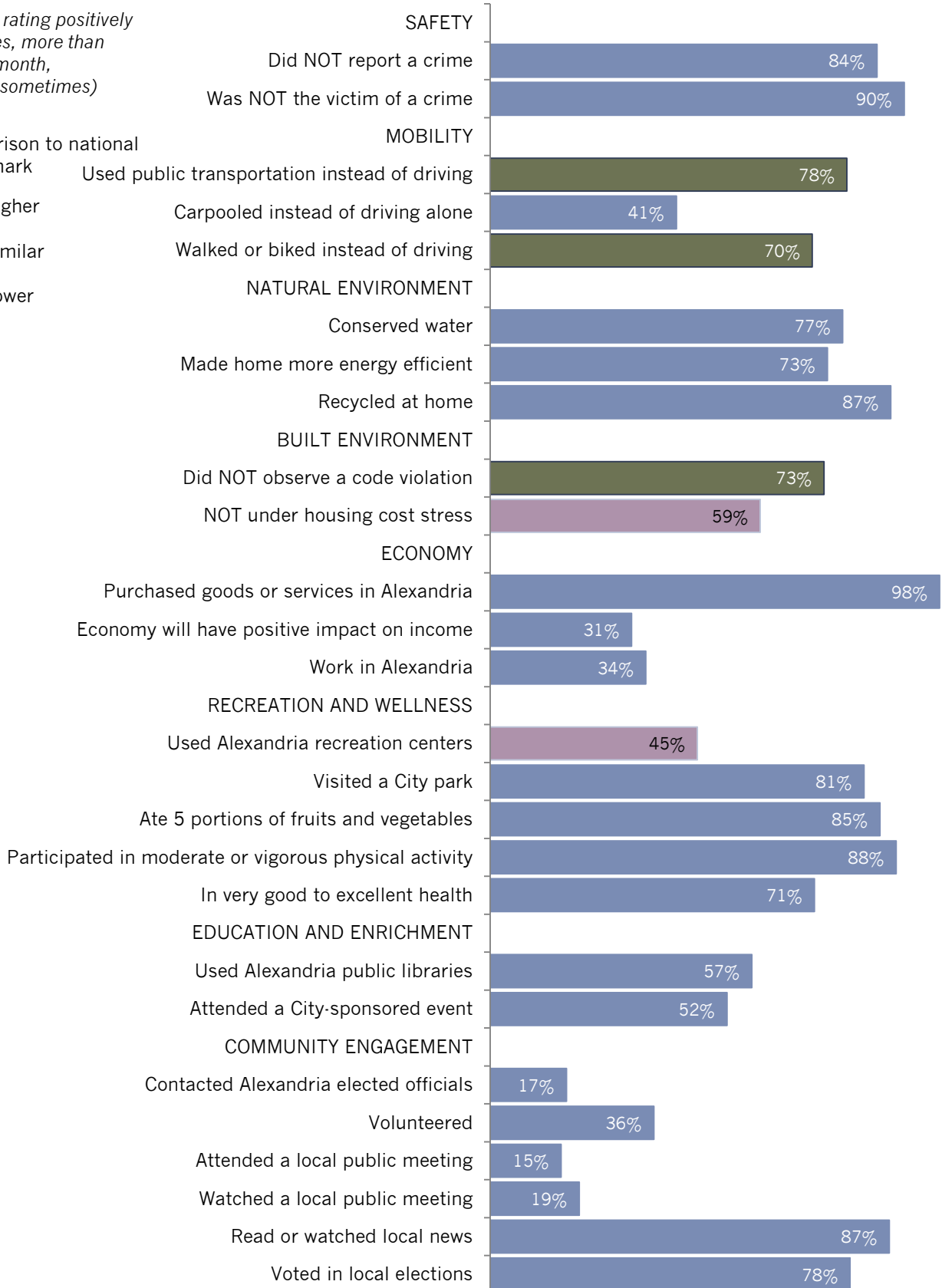
The National Citizen Survey™

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

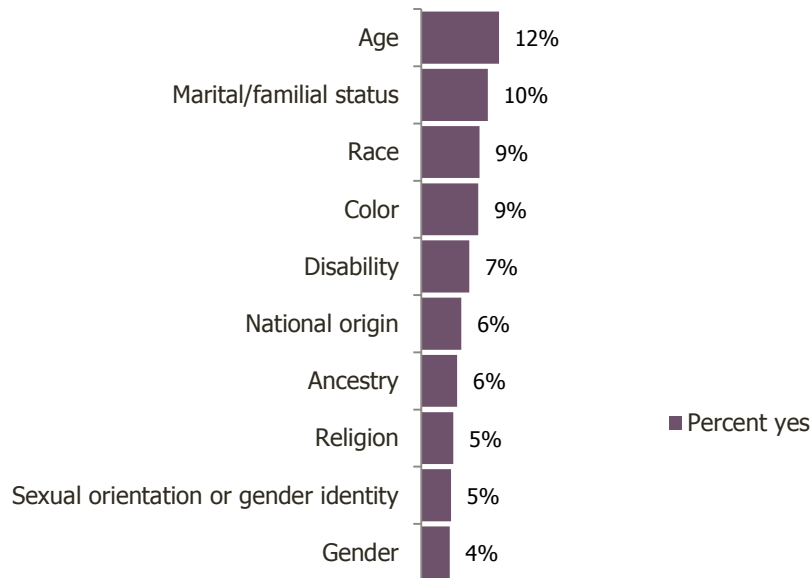


Special Topics

The City of Alexandria included five questions of special interest on The NCS. The first custom question asked respondents if they perceived any barriers to living in the City. About 1 in 10 or less stated they felt any of the items in the list were barriers to residing in Alexandria, with age, marital/familial status, race and color being chosen by the greatest number of residents (12% yes or fewer).

Figure 4: Perceived Barriers in Alexandria

Please indicate whether or not you currently perceive barriers to living in Alexandria based on your ...:



Residents were also asked if they had contact with a City of Alexandria police officer in the past 12 months, and if they had, to rate their satisfaction with that officer. Only about one-quarter had been in contact with an officer and approximately 8 in 10 rated that experience as excellent or good.

Figure 5: Contact with Alexandria Police

Have you had contact with a City of Alexandria police officer within the last 12 months?

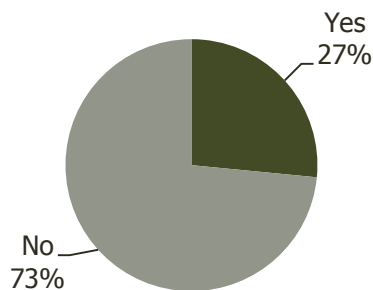
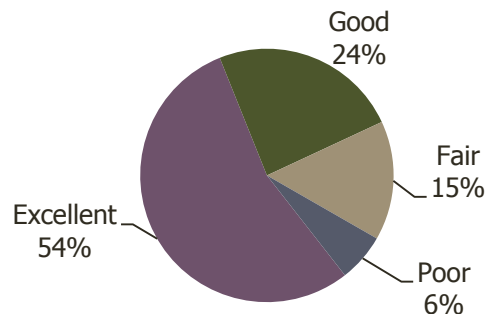


Figure 6: Alexandria Police Officer Rating

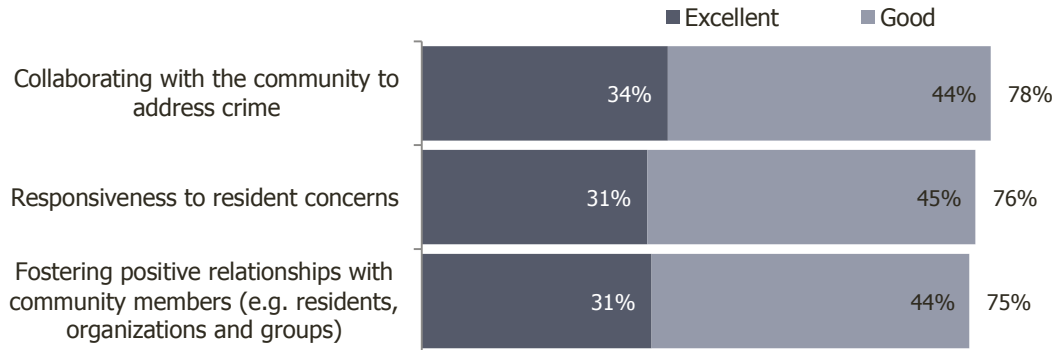
Thinking about your most recent contact, how would you rate the police officer?



The City also asked respondents to rate aspects of the Alexandria Police Department. Around three-quarters evaluated the police department’s ability to collaborate with the community to address crime, respond to resident concerns and foster positive relationships with community members as excellent or good.

Figure 7: Police Department Performance

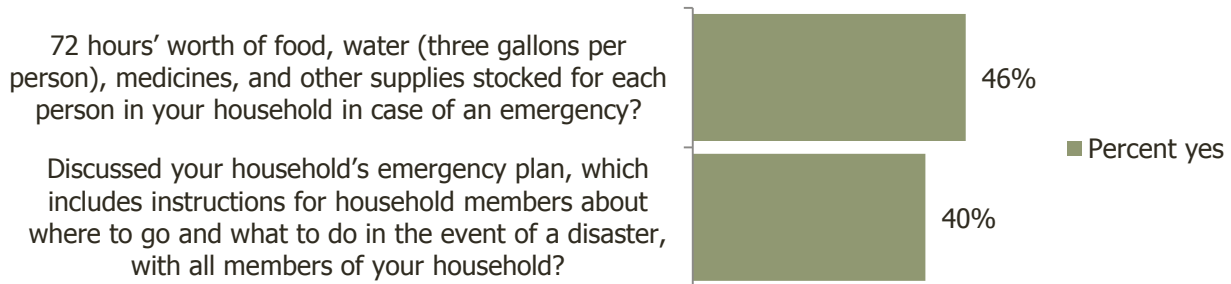
Please rate the following categories of City of Alexandria Police Department performance:



The final special-interest question related to how prepared residents are for emergencies. A little less than half reported they had 72 hours’ worth of food, water, medicine and other supplies stocked in case of an emergency and 40% had discussed a household emergency plan with all members of the home.

Figure 8: Emergency Preparation

Please indicate whether or not you currently have...



Alexandria also added several questions to previous questions in the survey. The tables below depict these results, but for more detail, please see the *Technical Appendices* under a separate cover.

Table 1: Question 2

Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Alexandria as a whole:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Historic character reflected in built environment, exhibits, and events	51%	N=333	37%	N=242	9%	N=61	2%	N=15	100%	N=651

Table 2: Question 4

Please rate how safe or unsafe you feel:	Very safe		Somewhat safe		Neither safe nor unsafe		Somewhat unsafe		Very unsafe		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
In your neighborhood at night	36%	N=246	43%	N=291	11%	N=76	8%	N=55	1%	N=7	100%	N=675
In Alexandria's downtown area (i.e., Old Town) at night	43%	N=273	44%	N=283	7%	N=48	5%	N=31	1%	N=3	100%	N=638

The National Citizen Survey™

Table 3: Question 5

Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Alexandria as a whole:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Availability of parking near my home	25%	N=167	34%	N=229	24%	N=163	16%	N=108	100%	N=666
Availability of on-street and garage parking near shopping	14%	N=89	39%	N=259	35%	N=232	12%	N=80	100%	N=660

Table 4: Question 7

Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.	No		Yes		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Had the flu shot	44%	N=289	56%	N=372	100%	N=662

Table 5: Question 10

Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Alexandria:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Museums	24%	N=105	48%	N=214	25%	N=110	3%	N=14	100%	N=443
Historic preservation	37%	N=206	47%	N=261	14%	N=77	3%	N=17	100%	N=560
Street signs	27%	N=174	56%	N=363	13%	N=84	3%	N=21	100%	N=643
Elections and voting process	43%	N=243	45%	N=256	10%	N=55	2%	N=10	100%	N=564
Voter registration process	44%	N=246	45%	N=254	9%	N=49	2%	N=10	100%	N=560
Tax collection	25%	N=132	52%	N=280	19%	N=103	4%	N=22	100%	N=536

Table 6: Question 12

Please rate the following categories of Alexandria government performance:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Transparency to the public	12%	N=60	44%	N=219	28%	N=137	16%	N=78	100%	N=494
The responsiveness of Alexandria government to resident requests, questions and concerns	16%	N=66	47%	N=197	26%	N=109	10%	N=43	100%	N=415

Table 7: Question 13

Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Alexandria community to focus on each of the following in the coming two years:	Essential		Very important		Somewhat important		Not at all important		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Housing affordability	48%	N=319	30%	N=198	19%	N=126	3%	N=21	100%	N=663
Parking and traffic management	34%	N=222	43%	N=286	22%	N=142	1%	N=7	100%	N=657
Pre-K and child care (including access for low-income families)	36%	N=240	37%	N=242	16%	N=106	11%	N=72	100%	N=660

Conclusions

Alexandria continues to be a great place to live.

Almost all survey respondents rated the overall quality of life in Alexandria and the City as a place to live as excellent or good; ratings for quality of life increased from 2016 to 2017 and both were similar to comparison communities. Over 9 in 10 would recommend living in Alexandria to someone who asked and about 8 in 10 participants planned to remain in the community for the next five years. Ratings for features that enhance quality of life, such as Alexandria as a place to raise children, the overall image of the City, overall appearance and their neighborhoods as places to live were given positive ratings by about three-quarters or more of respondents and ratings for overall image were higher than national, Washington D.C. and similarly sized metropolitan-adjacent jurisdictions.

Economy and Safety are the main focus areas for the community.

Residents indicated that Economy and Safety are important areas for the Alexandria community to focus on in the next two years. Ratings for aspects of Economy tended to be rated more positively than ratings in comparison communities, including the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping and employment opportunities, Alexandria as a place to visit and as a place to work and economic development. Cost of living was an exception, with about 2 in 10 rating this measure favorably, which was lower than ratings in other municipalities across the nation.

Most Safety ratings were similar to ratings seen elsewhere. Nearly all residents felt safe in their neighborhoods and in Alexandria's downtown/commercial area. Further, 8 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Alexandria. These high safety ratings remained stable from 2016 to 2017. Residents also valued safety services provided by the City. Ratings for fire, police, ambulance/EMS, fire prevention, crime prevention (a rating that increased from 2016 to 2017) and animal control were rated positively by at least three-quarters of participants. Ratings for animal control were higher than national and select communities near major metropolitan areas of comparable size. In a series of special-interest questions, it was revealed that of those respondents who had contact with an Alexandria police officer, about 8 in 10 would rate the experience as excellent or good. Finally, about three-quarters of residents awarded high marks to performance aspects of the City's police department, including their ability to collaborate with the community to address crime, respond to resident concerns and foster positive relationships with community members.

Residents' ratings for government performance have increased over time.

A majority of residents gave high ratings to aspects of Alexandria's government performance and many of these aspects increased from 2016 to 2017. Over 8 in 10 evaluated the overall quality of City services as excellent or good, which trended up from 2016. About 6 in 10 participants awarded excellent or good scores to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction of the City, confidence in Alexandria government, being honest and treating all residents fairly; all of these ratings have increased over time and were similar to comparison communities.