

THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Alexandria, VA

Community Livability Report

2020



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



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
icma.org • 800-745-8780

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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 Community 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.

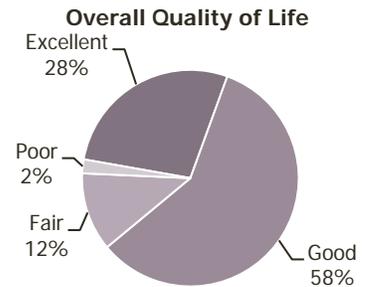
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 634 residents of the City of Alexandria. 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 Alexandria

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

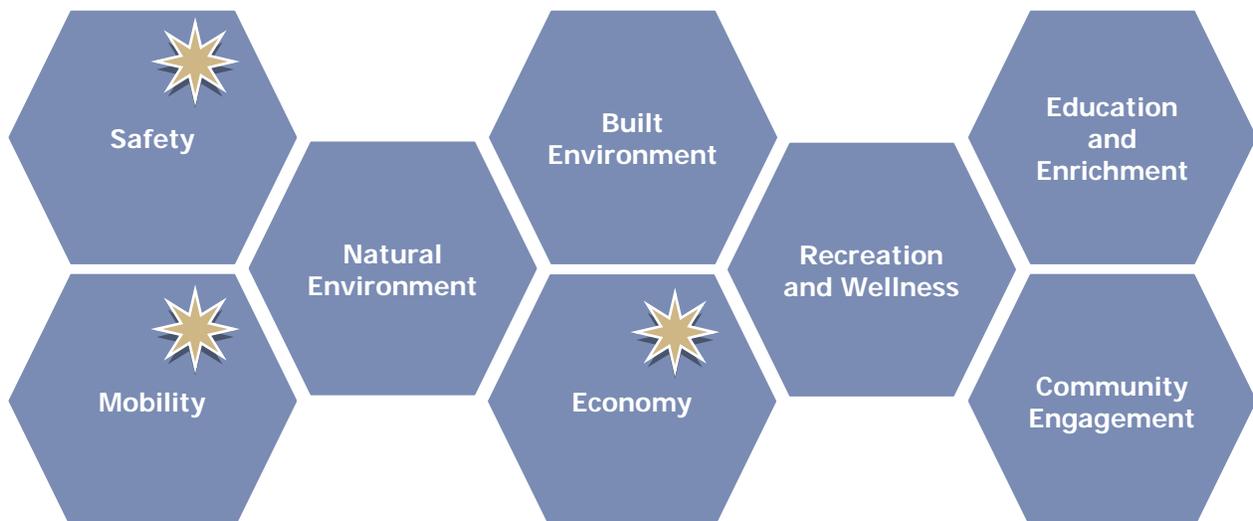
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Mobility and Economy as priorities for the Alexandria community in the coming two years. Ratings across all facets tended to be positive and similar to the benchmarks. 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, 91% 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 4 in 5 respondents gave high marks to the overall image of Alexandria, and this rating was higher than in comparison communities across the U.S. About 2 in 5 gave high marks to the City as a place to retire; and this rating was lower than the national benchmark. At least three-quarters gave high marks to the other aspects and these ratings were on par with national averages.

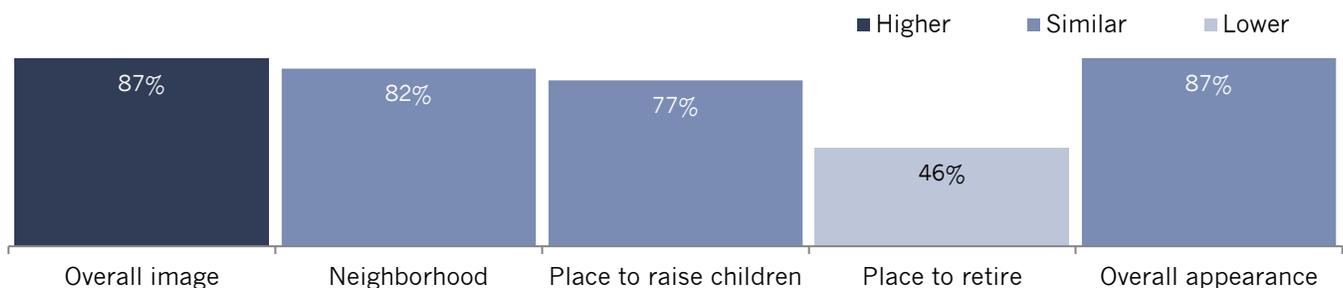
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Ratings across the facets of Safety, Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, and Community Engagement were positive and similar to the national benchmarks. While most aspects of Mobility were also on par with comparison communities, residents' assessments of ease of walking and public transportation were higher than national averages and ratings for travel by car and public parking were lower than observed elsewhere. Ratings for traffic flow, travel by car, overall ease of travel and public parking decreased in 2020 compared to 2018 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover). Most aspects of Economy received positive ratings that were higher than national averages; however only about 18% gave excellent or good ratings to the cost of living in Alexandria and this rating was lower than the benchmark.



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

Comparison to national benchmark



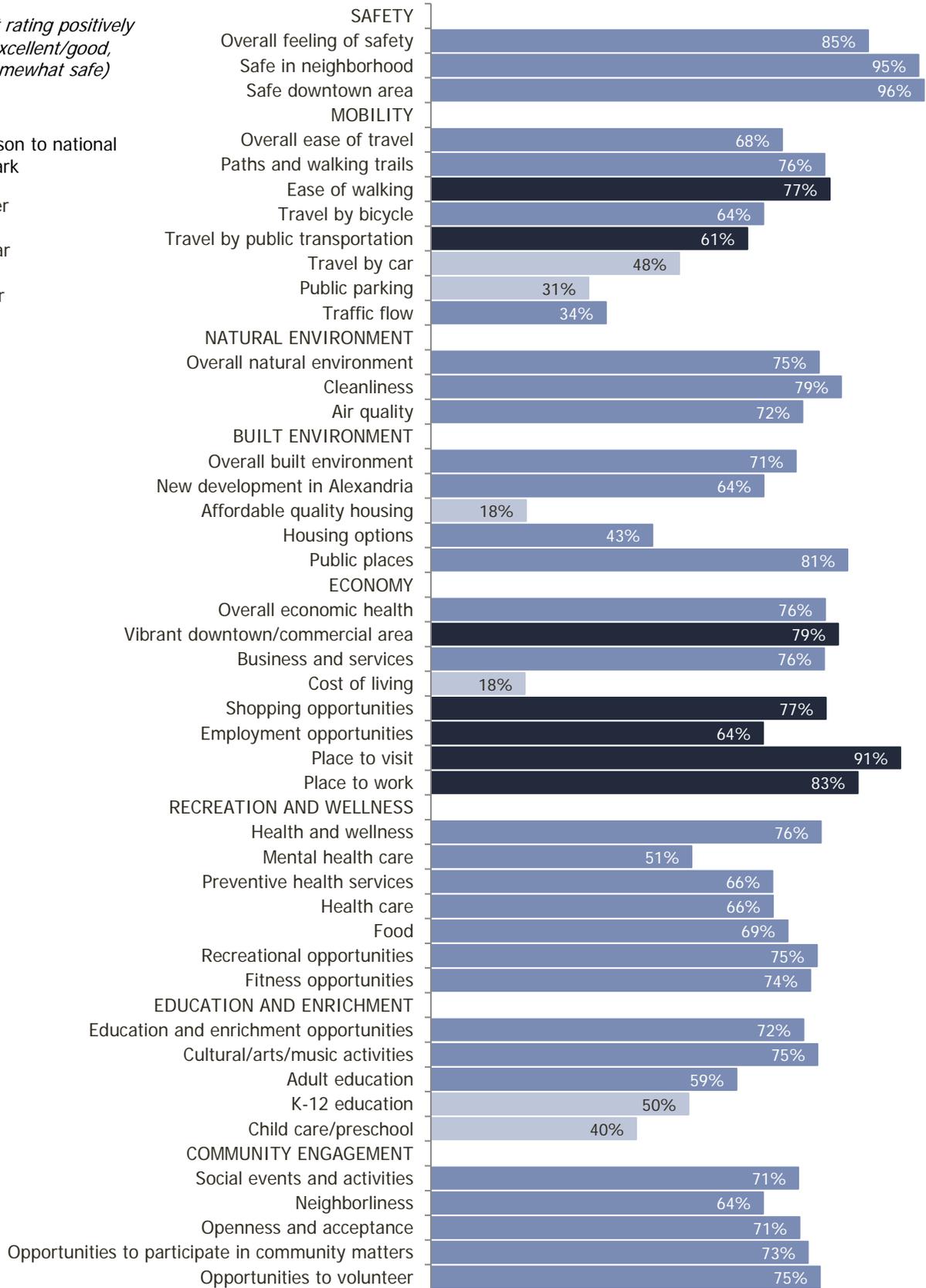
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

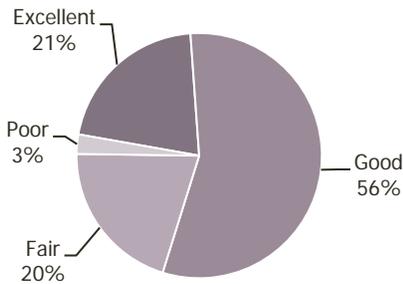
How well does the government of Alexandria meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Alexandria as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About three quarters of respondents gave high marks to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Alexandria, and about half gave high marks to the services provided by the Federal Government. Both ratings were on par with national averages.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Alexandria’s leadership and governance. A majority of respondents gave high marks to each aspect, and all ratings were similar to the national benchmarks. Customer service provided by City employees received the highest marks.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Alexandria. Ratings across all facets tended to be positive and similar to the national comparisons. Ratings for bus or transit services were higher than the national average, while ratings for recycling and cable television were lower than ratings in comparison communities.

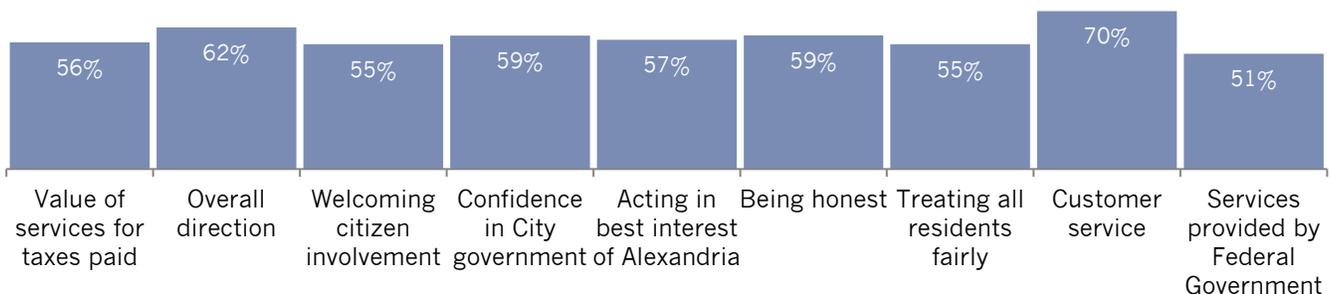
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



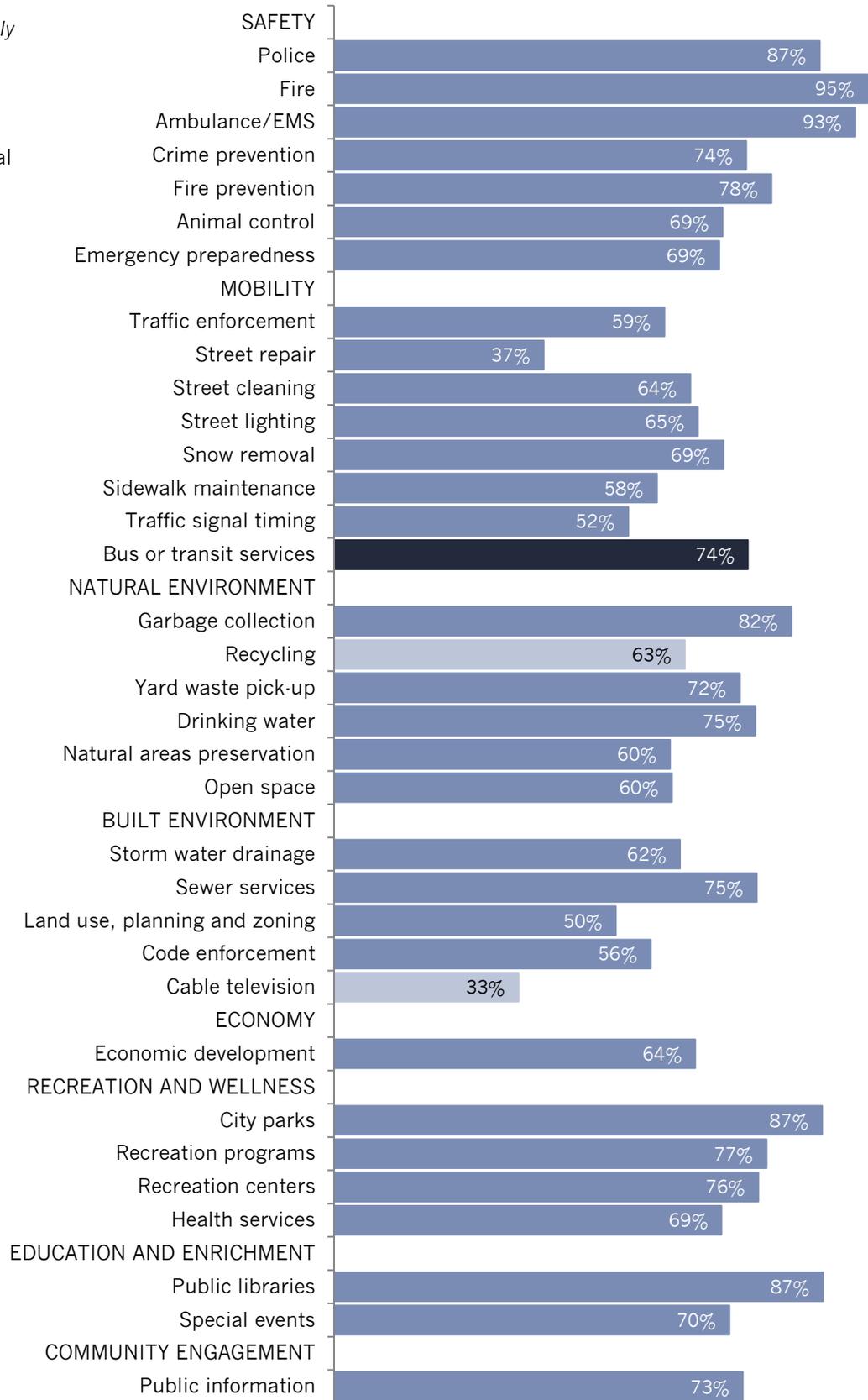
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



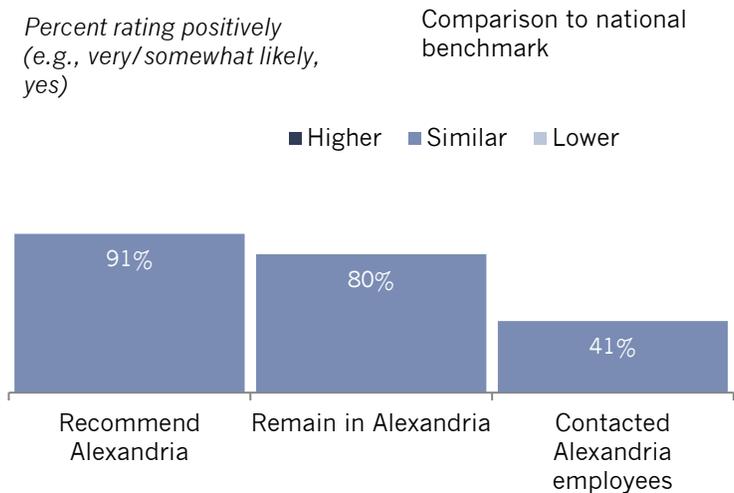
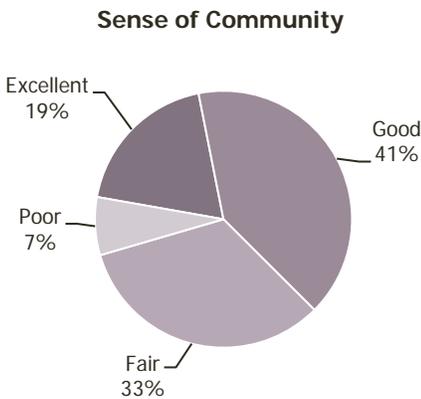
Participation

Are the residents of 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. About 6 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good marks to the sense of community in Alexandria, this rating was similar to the benchmark but decreased from 2018 to 2020. About 8 in 10 residents planned to remain in Alexandria and about 9 in 10 would recommend living in the City.

The survey included over 20 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Generally, Alexandria’s residents tended to participate at levels similar to those seen in comparison communities. Almost all residents reported that they had purchased goods or services in Alexandria and were not crime victims in the last 12 months.

Survey respondents were less likely to observe a code violation, compared with national averages, and Alexandria residents were less likely to make their homes more energy efficient than residents in other communities across the nation. More Alexandria residents reported that they worked within city limits in 2020 compared to 2018.



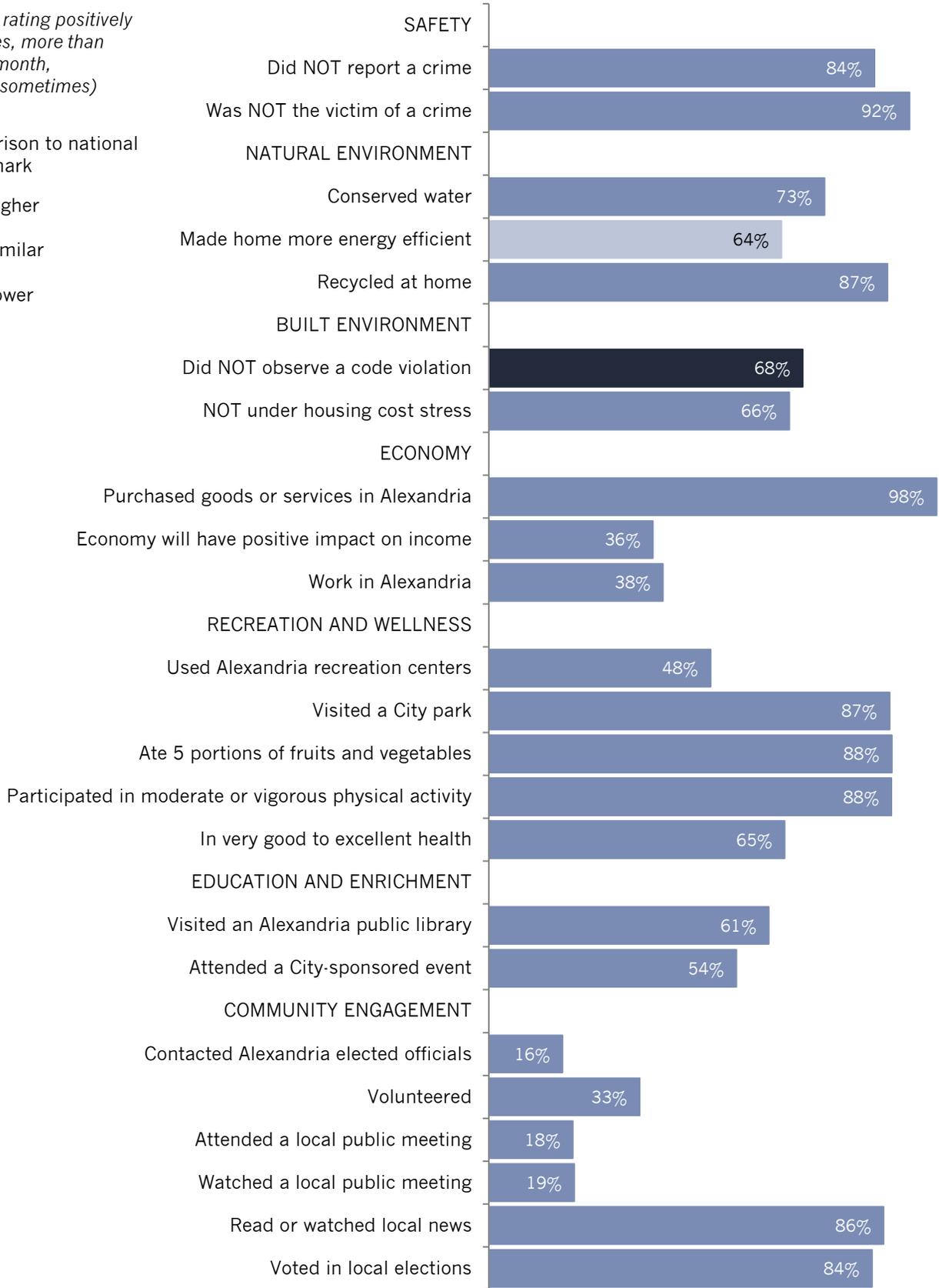
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



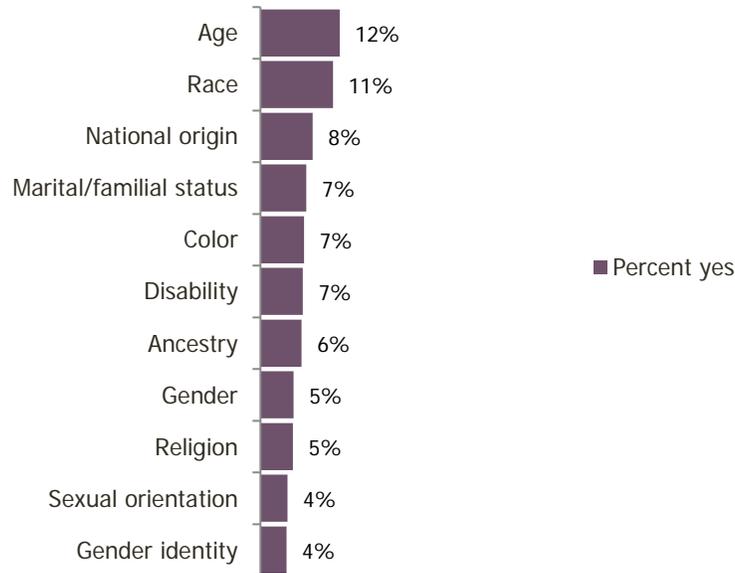
Special Topics

The City of Alexandria included several questions of special interest on The NCS. City leadership sought resident feedback regarding perceived barriers to community inclusion, interactions with police and other City staff, household behaviors related to emergency preparation, and mental and physical health.

Around 1 in 10 residents felt there were barriers to living in Alexandria based on their age or race, while fewer felt the same based on other characteristics.

Figure 4: Perceived Barriers in Alexandria

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



About one-quarter of survey participants reported they had contact with a City police officer in the 12 months prior to the survey. Of those respondents, about 9 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to their interaction.

Figure 5: Contact with Alexandria Police

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

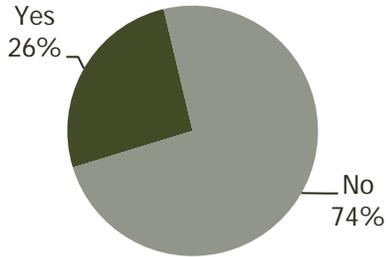
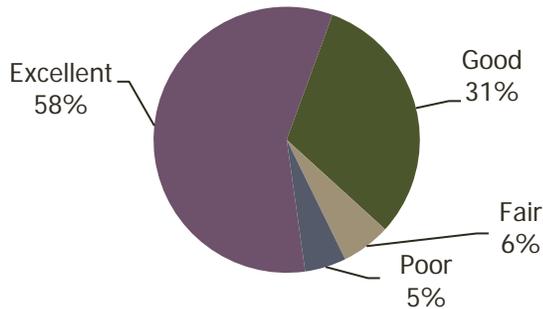


Figure 6: Alexandria Police Officer Rating

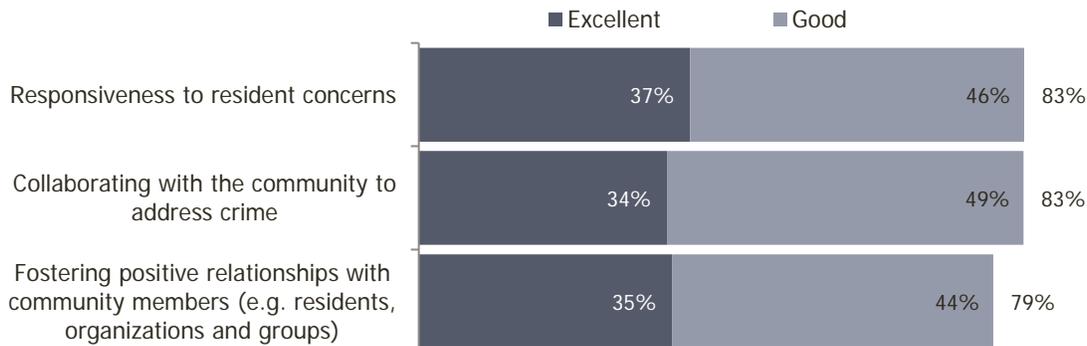
Thinking about your most recent contact, how would you rate the police officer?



The City also inquired about the performance of the police department in three areas: the department’s ability to collaborate with the community to address crime, respond to resident concerns and foster positive relationships with community members. About 8 in 10 gave high marks to each aspect.

Figure 7: Police Department Performance

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



Respondents were asked if they had had contact with a City of Alexandria staff member other than a police officer in the last 12 months, about half reported they had. These respondents reported positive interactions with city staff. At least 8 in 10 gave excellent or good scores to the staff member's courtesy, responsiveness and knowledge, as well as to the overall impression of the contact.

Figure 8: Contact with Alexandria Staff

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

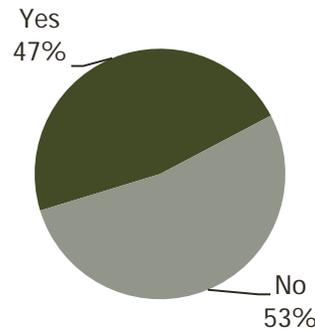
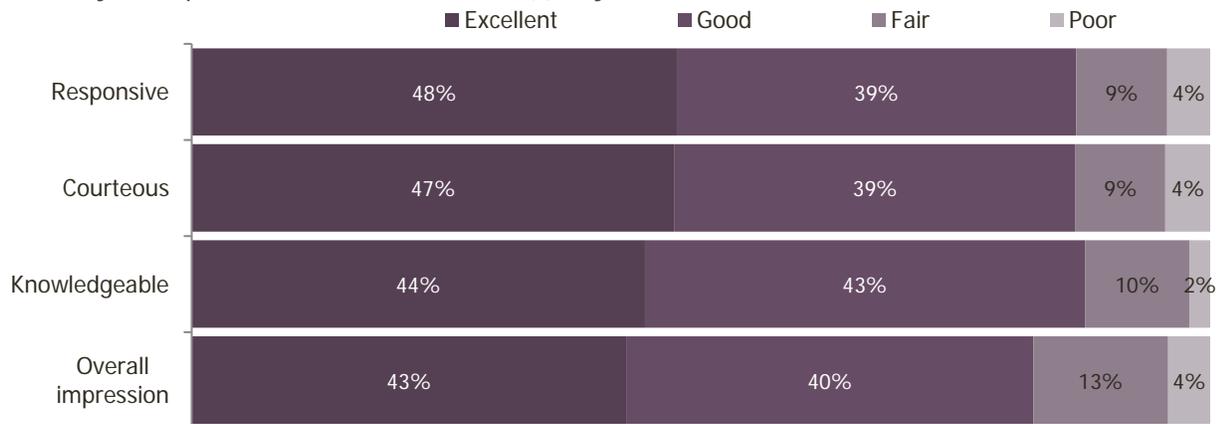


Figure 9: Alexandria Staff Performance

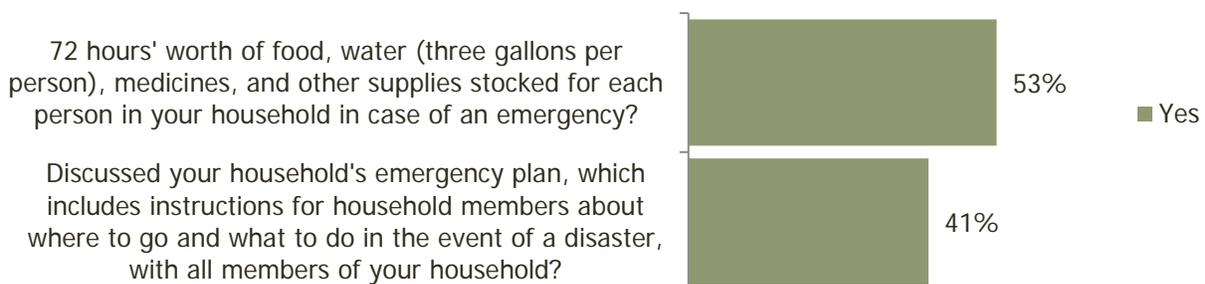
What was your impression of the staff member(s) in your most recent contact?



The City included a question to assess residents' readiness to respond to an emergency. About half of respondents reported they had 72 hours of supplies, such as water, food and medicines and about 4 in 10 had discussed their household's emergency plan with all members in the event of a disaster.

Figure 10: Emergency Preparation

Please indicate whether or not you currently have...



The City also chose to include some health-related questions on the 2020 survey. Close to half of respondents had zero days where they considered their mental health to be not good; about one-third said their mental health had been not good for 1-5 days in the past 30 days. When reporting their alcohol consumption, half of the respondents reported that they had not had four or more alcoholic drinks in one occasion; about one-quarter reported having four or more alcoholic drinks for 16 or more of the last 30 days. A majority of respondents reported that they had visited a dentist within the last 6 months; very few had not been in more than a year.

Figure 11: Mental Health

In the past 30 days, how many days would you consider your mental health (including stress, depression, and issues with emotions) to be not good?

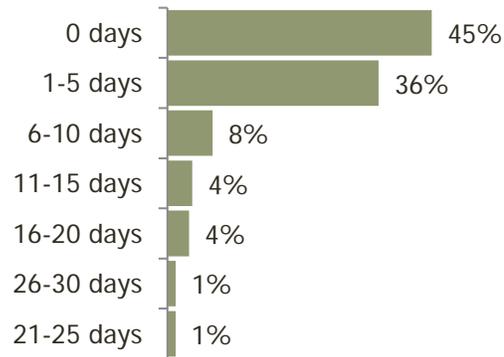


Figure 12: Alcohol Consumption

In the past 30 days, how many times have you had four or more alcoholic drinks in one occasion?

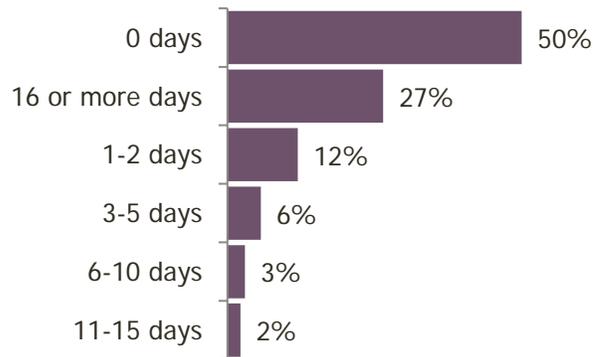
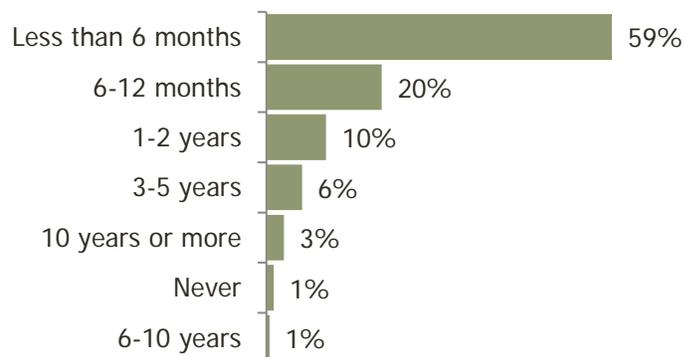


Figure 13: Dental Visits

Thinking about all types of dentists (orthodontists, oral surgeons, hygienists, etc.), how long has it been since you last visited a dentist or dental office for any reason?



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Alexandria also added several specific questions to previous sections of the survey. The tables below depict these results, but for more detail, please see the *Technical Appendices* under 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	48%	N=294	40%	N=244	11%	N=69	1%	N=8	100%	N=615

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	42%	N=260	39%	N=240	10%	N=63	8%	N=50	1%	N=8	100%	N=621
In Alexandria's downtown area (i.e., Old Town) at night	48%	N=282	39%	N=230	9%	N=53	4%	N=26	0%	N=2	100%	N=592

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	26%	N=160	32%	N=195	23%	N=139	20%	N=121	100%	N=615
Availability of on-street and garage parking near shopping	12%	N=74	40%	N=241	34%	N=201	14%	N=84	100%	N=600

Table 4: Question 6

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
Dining opportunities	44%	N=261	44%	N=258	11%	N=63	2%	N=10	100%	N=593
Out-of-school activities for youth	17%	N=32	43%	N=82	29%	N=55	10%	N=19	100%	N=188

Table 5: 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	34%	N=206	66%	N=401	100%	N=607

Table 6: Question 8

In the last 12 months, about how many times, if at all, have you or other household members done each of the following in Alexandria?	2 times a week or more		2-4 times a month		Once a month or less		Not at all		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Participated in recreation programs or classes	7%	N=45	9%	N=57	13%	N=79	70%	N=425	100%	N=606
Used an Alexandria online public library service	6%	N=37	12%	N=76	20%	N=122	61%	N=373	100%	N=608

Table 7: 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	20%	N=83	50%	N=202	26%	N=106	4%	N=15	100%	N=405
Historic preservation	37%	N=187	49%	N=246	12%	N=60	2%	N=11	100%	N=504
Street signs	24%	N=136	58%	N=333	15%	N=85	3%	N=20	100%	N=574
Elections and voting process	37%	N=182	48%	N=240	11%	N=57	4%	N=18	100%	N=497
Voter registration process	36%	N=181	50%	N=251	13%	N=64	2%	N=8	100%	N=504
Tax collection	20%	N=103	49%	N=253	22%	N=113	9%	N=44	100%	N=513

Table 8: 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	13%	N=55	39%	N=170	30%	N=130	18%	N=78	100%	N=433
The responsiveness of Alexandria government to resident requests, questions and concerns	15%	N=61	41%	N=165	29%	N=116	16%	N=63	100%	N=405

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Table 9: 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	
Housing affordability	48%	N=283	31%	N=184	16%	N=92	5%	N=29	100%	N=588
Parking and traffic management	41%	N=239	38%	N=223	20%	N=117	2%	N=10	100%	N=589
Pre-K and child care (including access for low-income families)	35%	N=208	37%	N=216	15%	N=89	12%	N=73	100%	N=585

Table 10: Question D1

How often, if at all, do you do each of the following, considering all of the times you could?	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total	
Smoke cigarettes	93%	N=546	3%	N=20	1%	N=6	2%	N=9	1%	N=6	100%	N=587

Conclusions

Alexandria continues to be a desirable place to live, with Safety as a feature that contributes to quality of life.

About 4 in 5 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Alexandria, the city and their neighborhoods as places to live, Alexandria as a place to raise children, the city's overall appearance and overall image. About three-quarters of residents favorably rated the city's overall image or reputation and its overall appearance. Ratings for Alexandria's overall image eclipsed national averages. About 8 in 10 respondents planned to remain in Alexandria for the next five years and 9 in 10 were likely to recommend living in Alexandria to someone who asked. These ratings remained stable from 2018 to 2020.

As in 2018, residents indicated that Safety was an important focus area for the Alexandria community to address in the coming two years. About 4 in 5 residents assigned positive scores to the overall feeling of safety. Additionally, almost all residents felt safe in their neighborhoods (95%) and in the downtown/commercial areas (96%). Out of all City services, police, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention and fire prevention were given some of the most positive reviews. Compared to 2018, more people positively rated emergency preparedness in 2020.

Alexandria's vibrant economy is a both a strength and challenge.

As in previous years, residents saw the Economy as an important aspect of their quality of life and focus area for the next two years. Economy-related ratings tended to be high and were frequently higher than in comparison communities nationwide. At least three-quarters of residents gave positive scores to the overall economic health of Alexandria as well as the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping and businesses. At least 4 in 5 residents of Alexandria felt the city was a good place to work and visit. More residents reported that they worked in Alexandria in 2020 compared to 2018.

As with many attractive communities, affordability was an issue. The cost of living and housing affordability were rated positively by fewer than 2 in 10 community members. These ratings were lower than the national benchmarks and received the lowest quality ratings of any items on the survey.

Challenges are noted within Mobility.

Mobility was identified by respondents as a third focus area for the next two years and ratings within this facet were a mix of positive and negative. At least about two thirds of residents awarded excellent or good marks to the overall ease of travel in Alexandria, ease of walking, and the availability of paths and walking trails, while about one-third were pleased with public parking and traffic flow on major streets. Ratings for public transportation and ease of walking were higher than national benchmarks, while assessments of public parking and travel by car were lower than national averages. Alexandria residents gave lower marks to traffic flow, car travel, overall ease of travel, public parking, traffic enforcement and bus or transit services in 2020 compared to 2018.