

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Charlottesville, VA

Community Livability Report

2018



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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 Charlottesville. 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.

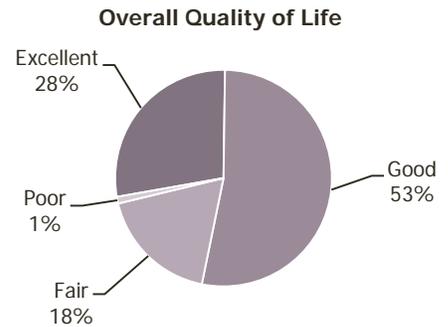
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 414 residents of the City of Charlottesville. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Charlottesville

Most residents (81%) rated the quality of life in Charlottesville as excellent or good. This was similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

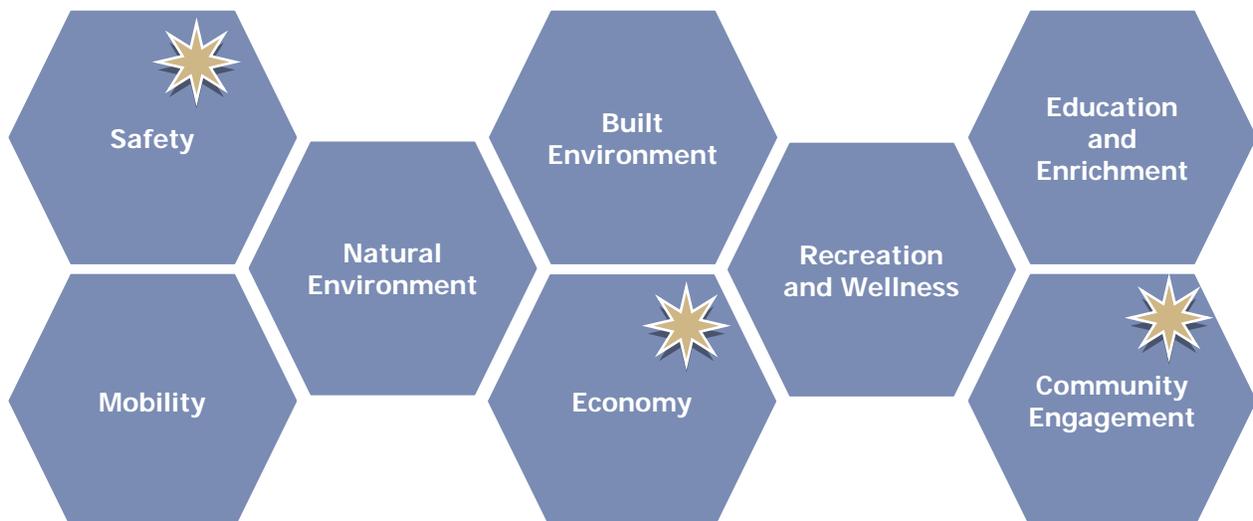
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Economy and Community Engagement as priorities for the Charlottesville community in the coming two years. Ratings for all facets of community livability were positive and similar to those observed in 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 Charlottesville’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



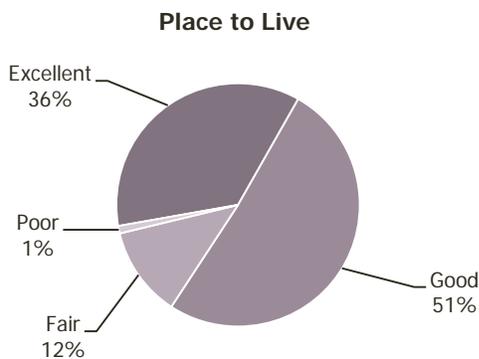
Community Characteristics

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 Charlottesville, 87% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Charlottesville 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 Charlottesville as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Charlottesville and its overall appearance. About 8 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, Charlottesville as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the city, and these ratings were similar to the national benchmarks. Three-quarters were pleased with Charlottesville as a place to retire, which was a higher rating than seen elsewhere; however, only 6 in 10 residents gave positive marks to the overall image of the city, which was lower than average and decreased 24% since 2016 (for more information on trends see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Almost all aspects of Safety, Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness were rated positively by at least three-quarters of respondents and these ratings were similar to the national benchmarks except for health and wellness opportunities, which was higher. However, while most Recreation and Wellness ratings were similar to national averages, several health-related aspects declined since 2016.



Resident evaluations of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive, and many of these aspects (including education and enrichment opportunities, adult educational opportunities and social events and activities, among others) received ratings higher than those given elsewhere. However, only 4 in 10 residents gave favorable marks to the availability of affordable quality child care, which was below average.

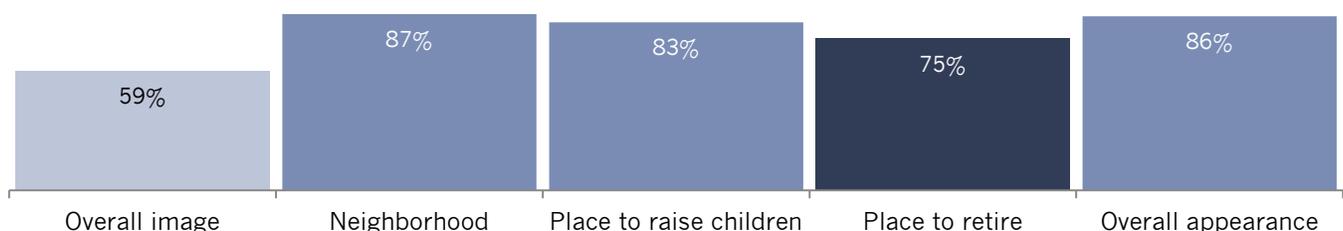
Mobility ratings tended to be less positive and a mix of similar to or lower than the national average. While about 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall ease of travel, paths and walking trails and ease of walking (which were similar to the benchmarks), about one-third or fewer were pleased with ease of travel by bicycle, traffic flow and public parking (which were lower).

Most Economy-related evaluations tended to be strong, and ratings for Charlottesville's vibrant downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities and the city as a place to visit were higher than average. However, ratings for affordability-related items such as cost of living, availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing options were all lower than average and decreased since 2016.

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

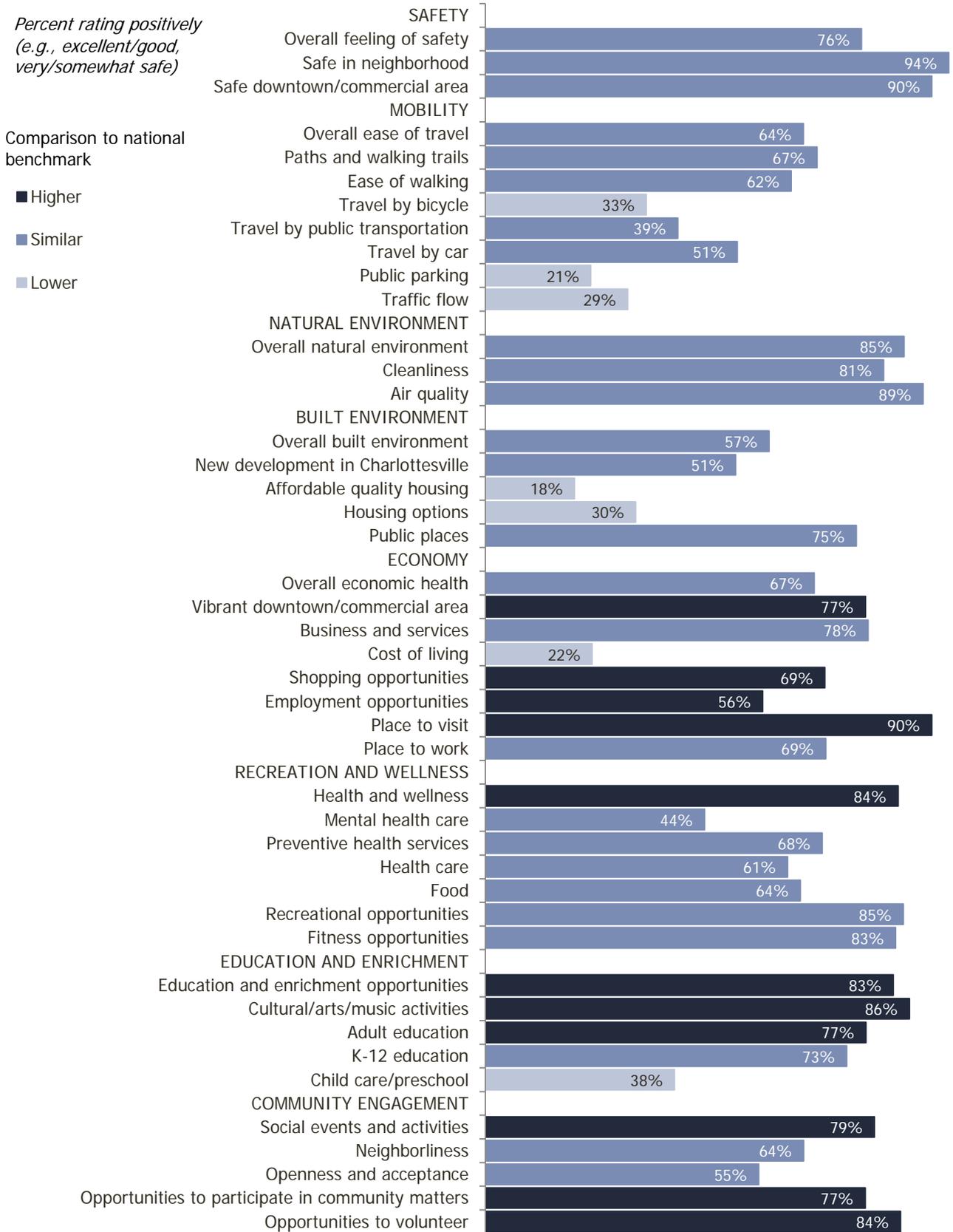
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

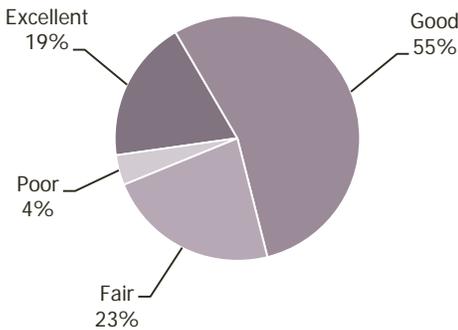
How well does the government of Charlottesville meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Charlottesville 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 gave positive assessments to the overall quality of City services and 4 in 10 were pleased with the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmarks.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Charlottesville’s leadership and governance. About 7 in 10 residents gave favorable marks to the customer service provided by the City and roughly half gave positive ratings to most aspects of government performance, except for the job City government does at treating all residents fairly; this was rated positively by 4 in 10 residents and was lower than ratings given in other communities. It is also noteworthy that ratings for most of these aspects decreased from 2016 to 2018.

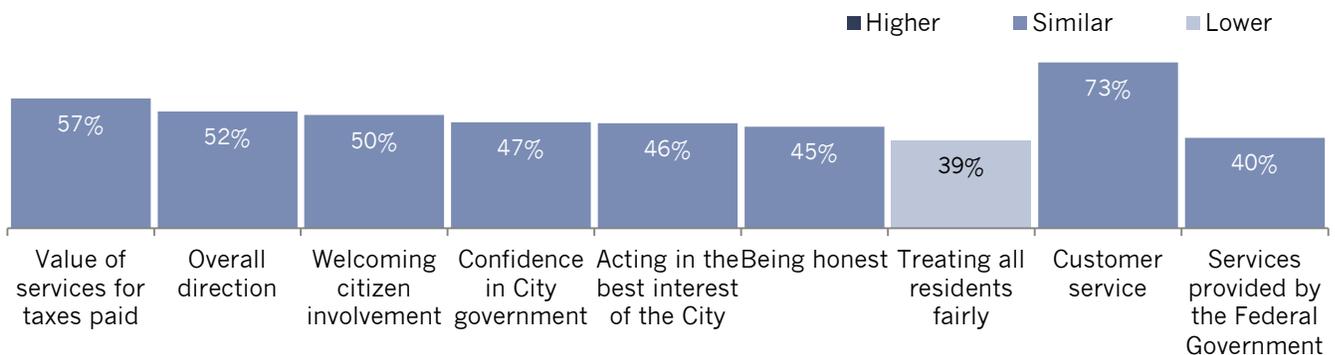
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Charlottesville. All City services received ratings similar to those given in other communities across the country. Services for which about 8 in 10 residents or more awarded positive ratings included fire and ambulance/EMS services, fire prevention, garbage collection, sewer services, power utility, utility billing, City parks, recreation programs, recreation centers and public libraries. When evaluating trends over time, ratings increased for five City services (including animal control and street cleaning) and decreased for seven services (including police, natural areas preservation and several aspects of Built Environment).

Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark



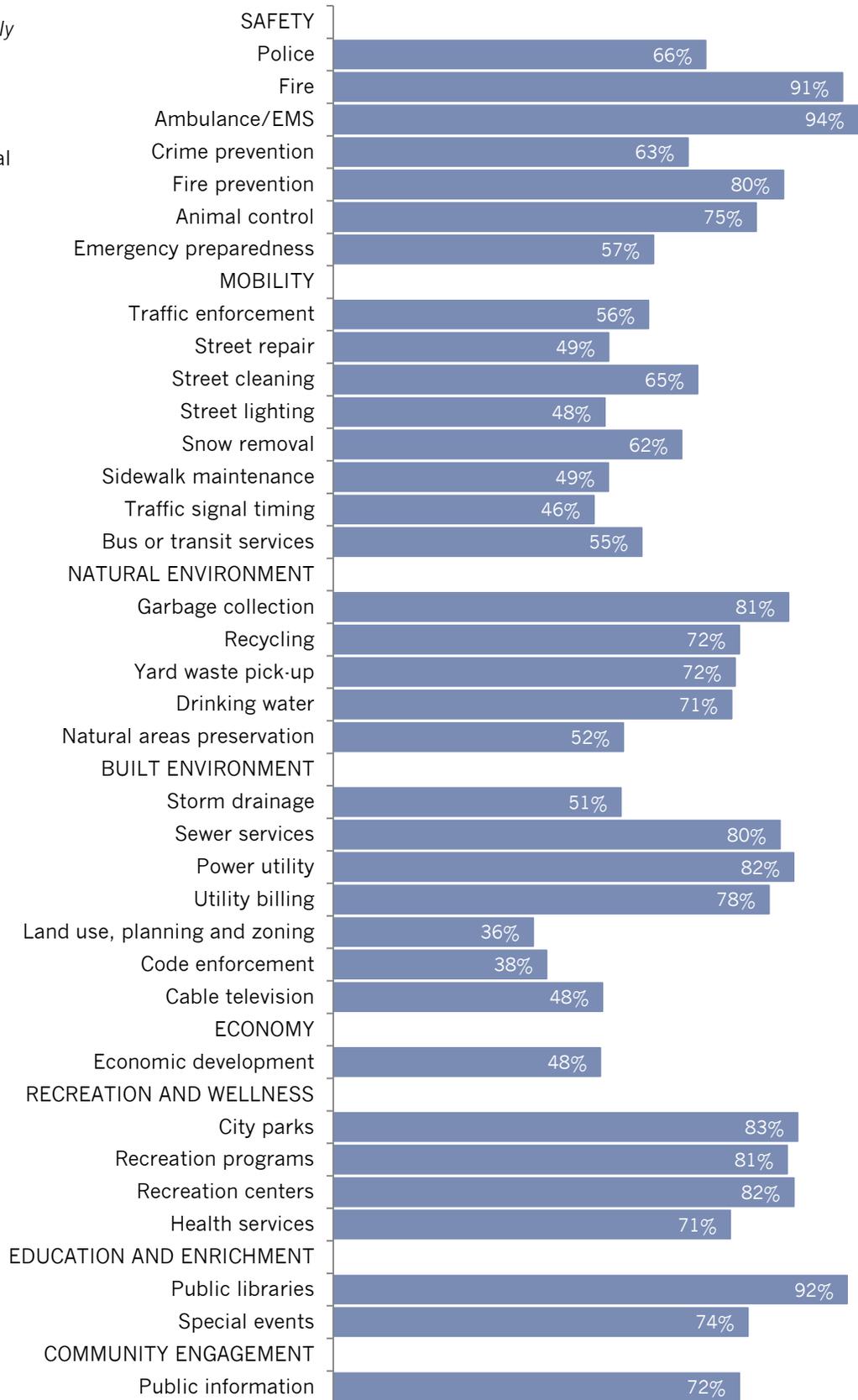
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



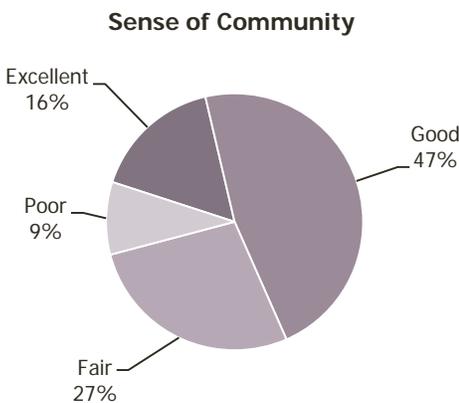
Participation

Are the residents of Charlottesville 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 two-thirds of residents positively rated the sense of community in Charlottesville. Eight in 10 respondents would recommend living in Charlottesville to someone who asked (which was similar to the benchmark) and 7 in 10 planned to remain in the city for the next five years (which was lower).

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of participation varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparisons (as well as comparisons to Charlottesville over time) useful for understanding the results. Charlottesville residents generally participated in activities at similar rates when compared to those living in other communities. Survey respondents in the city were more likely than those who lived elsewhere to have stocked supplies for an emergency, used public transportation or walked or biked instead of driving, volunteered or watched a local public meeting. They were also more likely than others to work in the community. However, Charlottesville residents were less likely than those living in other communities to have talked to or visited with their neighbors.

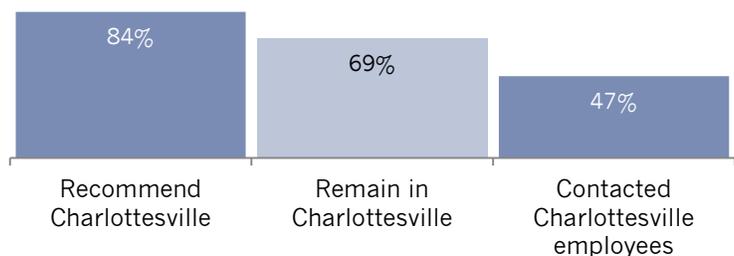
When compared to 2016, residents in 2018 were more likely to have stocked supplies for an emergency, attended or watched a local public meeting or read or watched local news, but less likely to have participated in a club or interacted with their neighbors.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



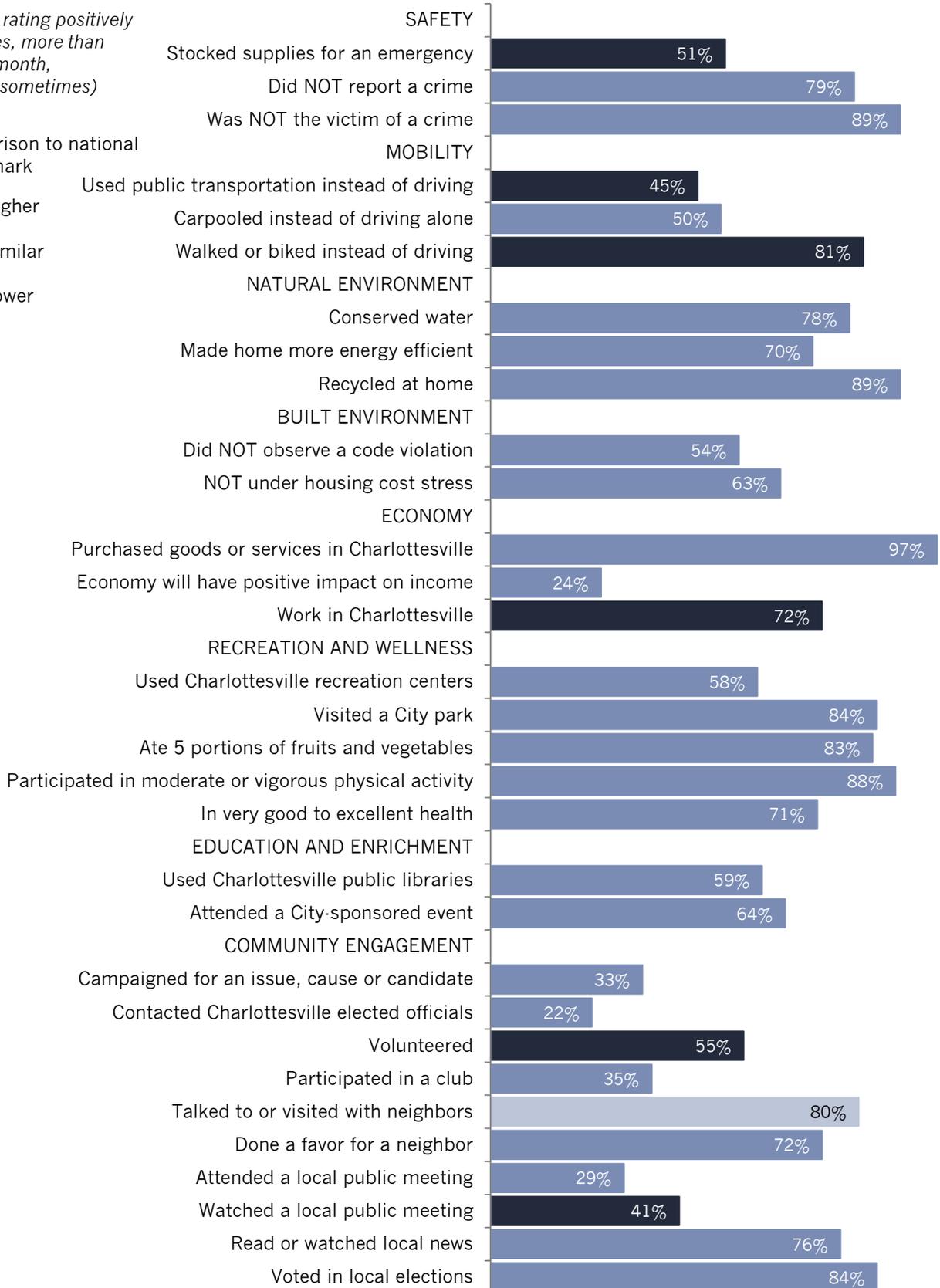
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

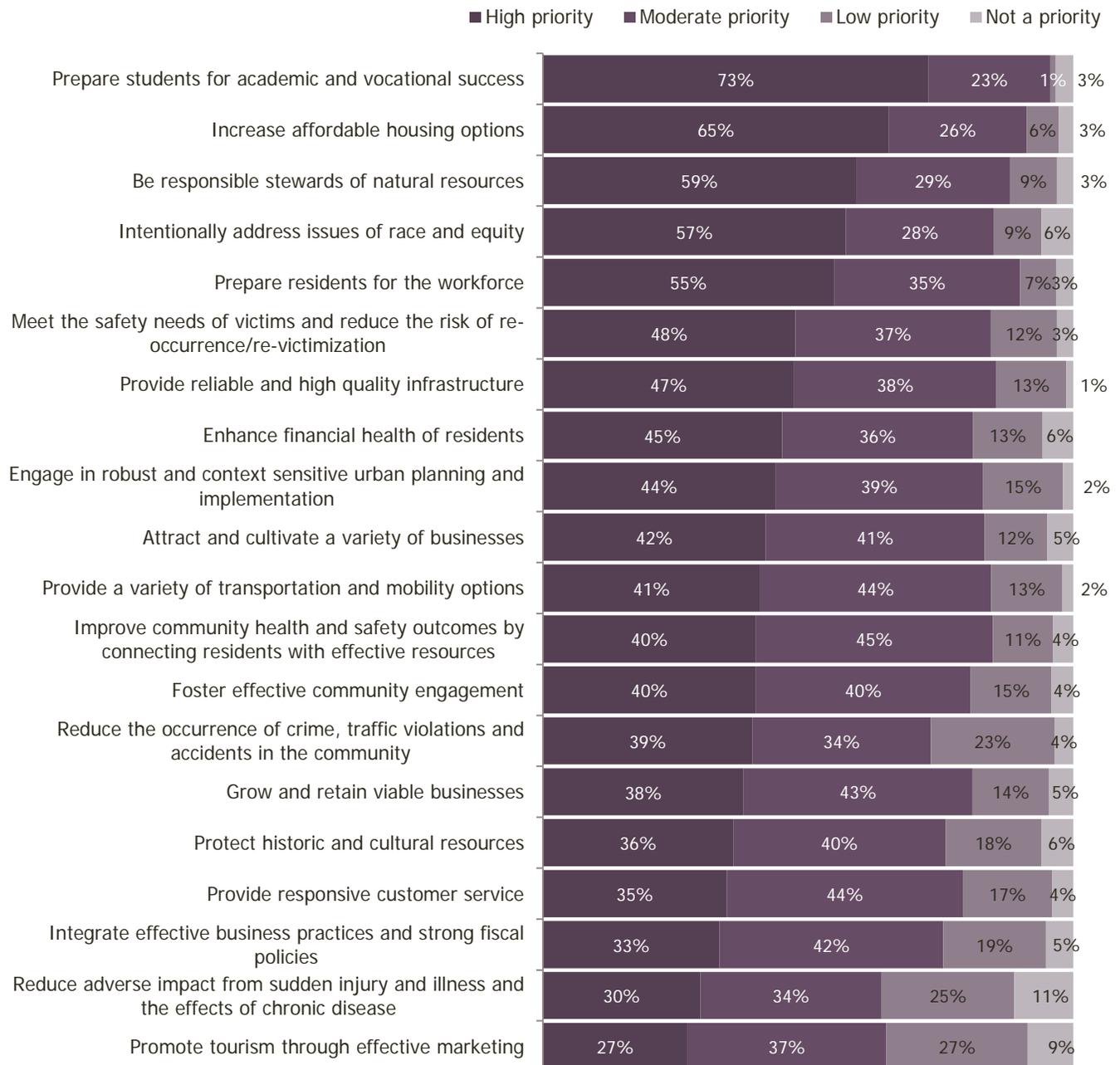


Special Topics

The City of Charlottesville included three questions of special interest on The NCS related to City priorities and the City's progress towards those priorities. Survey participants first prioritized a number of potential goals for the City and then indicated how well the City is doing at meeting each goal. Three-quarters of residents thought it was a high priority to prepare students for academic and vocational success while two-thirds considered it a high priority to increase affordable housing options. About 6 in 10 residents thought that being responsible stewards of natural resources, intentionally addressing issues of race and equity and preparing residents for the workforce should be high priorities for the City. Respondents were least likely to rate reducing adverse impacts from injury, illness or disease and promoting tourism as high priorities for the City; only about 3 in 10 residents did so.

Figure 4: City Priorities

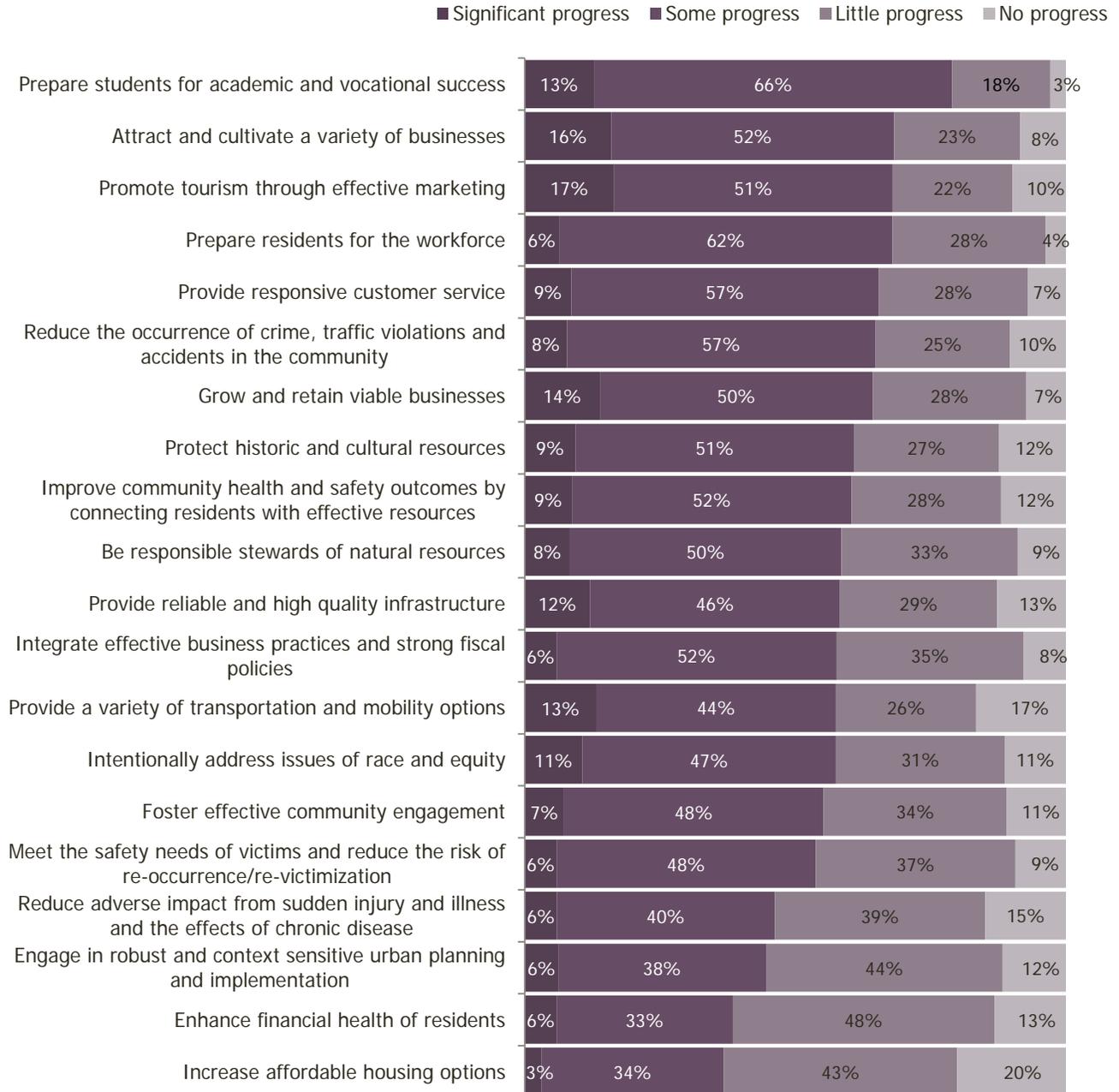
For each of the following, please indicate how much of a priority, if at all, each area should be to the City.



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Thinking about the progress the City has made toward meeting the various priorities, residents were most likely to think that the City had made progress toward preparing students for academic and vocational success; 8 in 10 thought the City had made significant or some progress toward meeting this priority. Between half and two-thirds of residents felt the City had made significant or some progress toward most of the other listed areas. Less than half of respondents thought there had been significant or some progress made toward reducing adverse impacts from injury, illness and disease, engaging in robust urban planning and implementation, enhancing the financial health of residents or increasing affordable housing options.

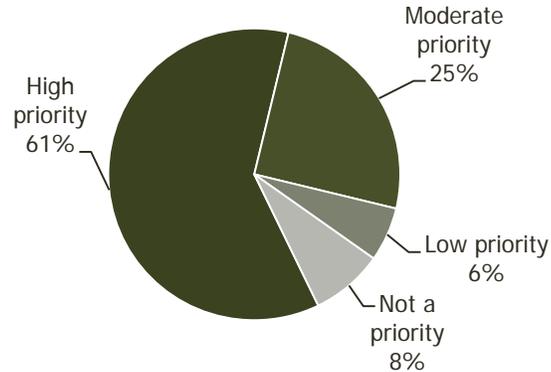
Figure 5: Progress toward City Priorities
 For each of the following, please indicate to what extent, if at all, you believe the City is making progress towards meeting each area.



More than 8 in 10 residents thought that addressing racial equity gaps in jobs, health and housing should be a high or moderate priority; only 6% thought this should be a low priority and 8% thought it was not a priority.

Figure 6: Priority of Addressing Racial Equity

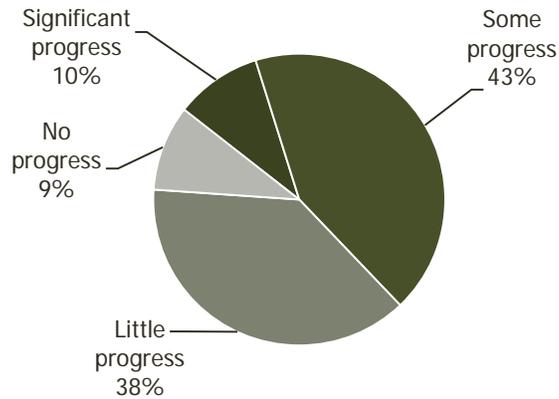
How much of a priority, if at all, do you think it should be for local government to address racial equity gaps in jobs, health, and housing?



Slightly more than half of Charlottesville residents thought that the City had made significant or some progress toward addressing racial equity gaps in jobs, health and housing; 4 in 10 thought the City had made little progress, while 1 in 10 thought the City had made no progress.

Figure 7: Progress toward Addressing Racial Equity

To what extent, if any, do you believe the City is making progress towards addressing racial equity gaps in jobs, health, and housing?



Conclusions

Charlottesville residents continue to enjoy a positive quality of life.

About 8 in 10 residents positively rated their overall quality of life in Charlottesville and 9 in 10 were pleased with the city as a place to live. About 8 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, Charlottesville as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the city, and these ratings were similar to those given in other communities across the nation. Further, three-quarters were pleased with Charlottesville as a place to retire, which was a higher rating than seen elsewhere. However, only 6 in 10 residents gave positive marks to the overall image of the city, which was lower than average and decreased substantially since 2016. About 8 in 10 respondents would recommend living in Charlottesville to someone who asked and 7 in 10 planned to remain in the city for the next five years.

Safety remains a priority to residents.

Residents indicated that Safety would be an important area of focus for the City in the next two years. Ratings within this facet tended to be positive and similar to national benchmarks. Most residents felt safe in the community, with at least three-quarters of respondents giving favorable ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Charlottesville, feelings of safety in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. These perceptions of safety were on par with those in other communities nationwide. Fire services, ambulance/EMS, fire prevention and animal control also received top marks from at least three-quarters of residents. However, the rating for police services, at 66% excellent or good, declined from 79% in 2016.

When thinking about the priority of a number of different City focus areas, 8 in 10 residents felt that meeting the safety needs of victims and reducing the risk of reoccurrence or re-victimization was a high or moderate priority, and three-quarters thought that reducing the occurrence of crime, traffic violations and accidents in the community was at least a moderate priority. Two-thirds of residents thought that significant or some progress had been made toward reducing crime occurrence and about half thought progress had been made toward meeting the safety needs of victims.

Resident trust in the City Government declined over time.

Roughly half gave positive ratings to most aspects of government performance, including the overall direction of the City, overall confidence in City government and being honest. While most public trust ratings were similar to the national benchmarks, several of these declined from 2016 to 2018. Charlottesville residents sought out information about the local government and were more likely than those who lived elsewhere to have watched a local public meeting, and the proportion of residents who had attended or watched a local public meeting or read or watched local news increased since 2016. Relatedly, respondents identified Community Engagement as an important focus area for the City and most voiced appreciation for the City's social events and activities, opportunities to participate in community matters and opportunities to volunteer (ratings that were higher than those given elsewhere).

Economy ratings are strong and many are higher than the national average.

Charlottesville residents also indicated that Economy would be an important focus area in the coming years and ratings within this facet tended to be strong. About 7 in 10 residents or more gave excellent or good reviews to Charlottesville's vibrant downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities and the city as a place to visit, and half were pleased with employment opportunities; these ratings were higher than those given in other communities nationwide. Further, assessments for employment opportunities, Charlottesville as a place to work and overall quality of business and service establishments improved from 2016 to 2018. However, ratings for affordability-related aspects such as cost of living, availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing options were lower than the national averages and decreased since 2016.

About 9 in 10 residents thought that increasing affordable housing options and preparing students for the workforce were high or moderate priorities, while 8 in 10 thought enhancing the financial health of residents, attracting and cultivating a variety of businesses, and growing and retaining viable businesses were priorities. About two-thirds of respondents felt that promoting tourism was a high or moderate priority for the City. About 6 in 10 residents felt the City was making at least some progress toward each of these goals, except for increasing affordable housing options (37% significant or some progress).