



Alexandria, VA

Community Livability Report

2018



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The National Citizen Survey™
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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 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).

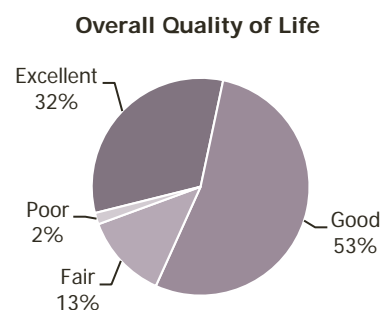
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 695 residents of the City of Alexandria. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Alexandria

At least 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Alexandria as excellent or good. This rating was similar to national and peer comparisons (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.



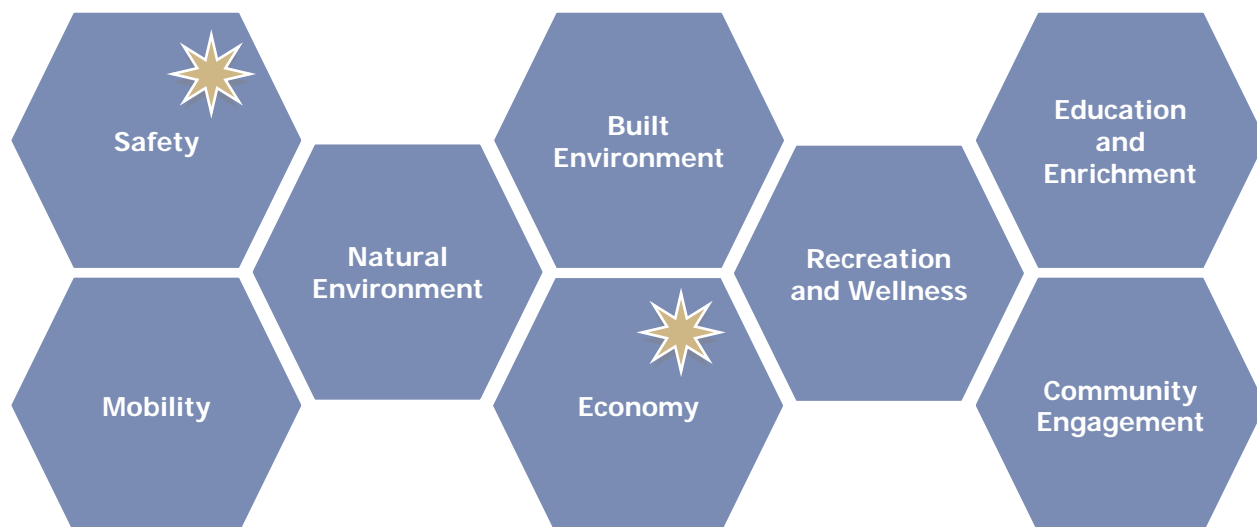
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in previous years, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Alexandria community in the coming two years. Ratings for all facets were positive and similar to the national 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



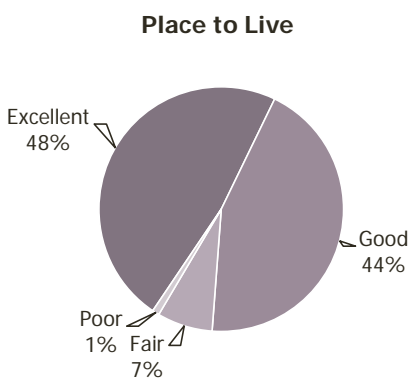
Community Characteristics

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, about 9 in 10 residents rated the city as an excellent or good place to live, which was similar to 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. At least 7 in 10 residents felt favorably about most aspects of the community, providing ratings similar to those of other communities across the U.S. Respondents' ratings for the overall image for Alexandria was positively evaluated by close to 9 in 10 and was higher than national and peer community averages.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, most ratings for aspects of Community Characteristics were positively scored by at least two-thirds of respondents and tended to be similar to the national benchmark. The characteristics receiving the most favorable evaluations from residents were safety in neighborhoods and in the downtown area, as well as safety overall.



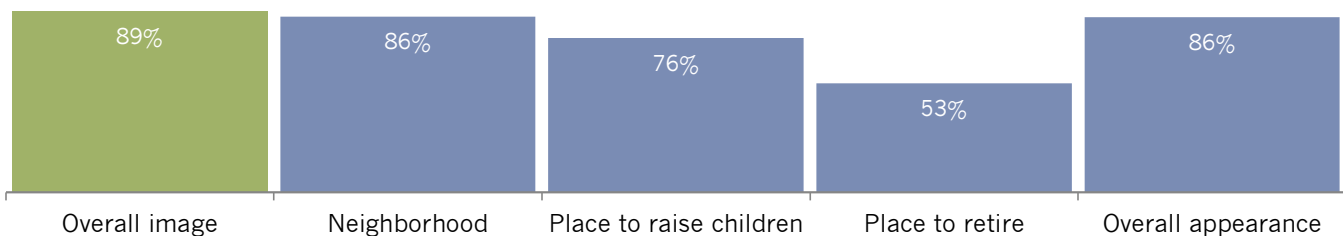
Other notable findings related to Mobility and Economy. For Mobility, respondents' scores for ease of travel by alternative modes (walking, bicycle and public transit) were higher than in other communities nationwide and assessments for travel by bicycle and public parking increased since 2017. Within Economy, the vibrancy of the downtown area, shopping and employment opportunities (a rating that was higher in 2018) and the City as a place to visit and work all stood above the benchmark. Most other aspects of the Economy were similar to the comparison communities except for cost of living, which was rated lower than the national average. Affordable quality housing also received few positive ratings and was lower than the national benchmark.

Most other aspects of the community, while viewed quite positively by respondents, were scored similar to other municipalities nationally, with a few exceptions. The availability of mental health care and the openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds emerged as highlights of the community with at least two-thirds of survey participants reviewing these aspects highly. Ratings for mental health care increased since the last survey iteration. Residents' evaluations of K-12 education lagged behind national averages.

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

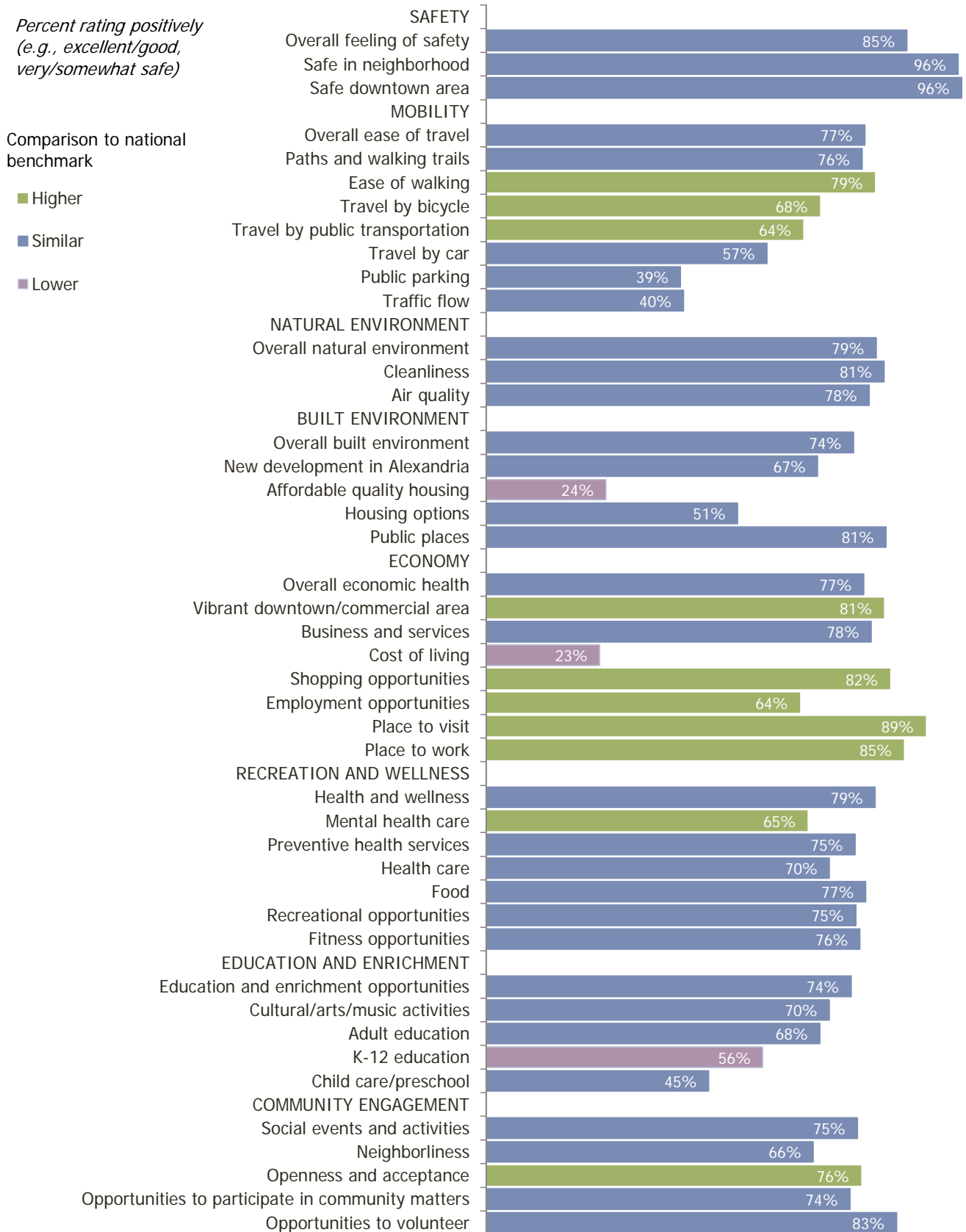
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

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

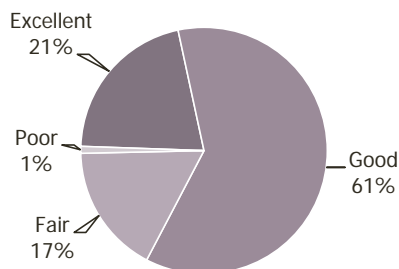
The overall quality of the services provided by Alexandria as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. More than 80% of residents gave excellent or good scores to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Alexandria, similar to communities elsewhere. About half of respondents were pleased with services provided by the Federal Government, which was higher than national comparisons.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Alexandria's leadership and governance. At least half of survey participants awarded high marks to all aspects of government performance, similar to municipalities across the country.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Alexandria. Bus or transit services outshined other communities across the nation, receiving excellent or good reviews from about 8 in 10 residents. Other services that were evaluated positively tended to be concentrated in the areas of Safety, Recreation and Wellness and the Natural Environment. Participants' assessments for most aspects of Governance were similar to other locations, though ratings for cable television were below U.S. averages.

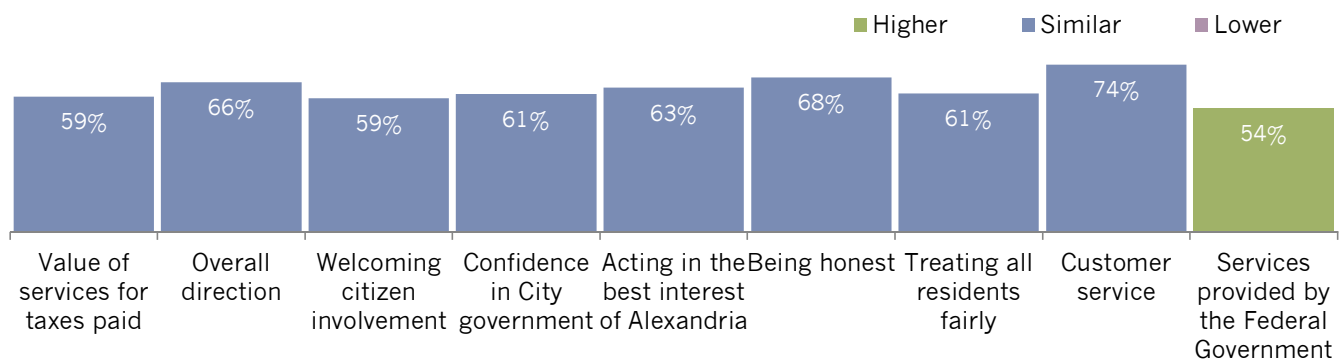
While residents were less pleased with emergency preparedness; land use, planning and zoning; and code enforcement services in 2018, marks for snow removal, yard waste pick-up, recreation centers and programs, special events and public information increased since 2017.

Overall Quality of City Services



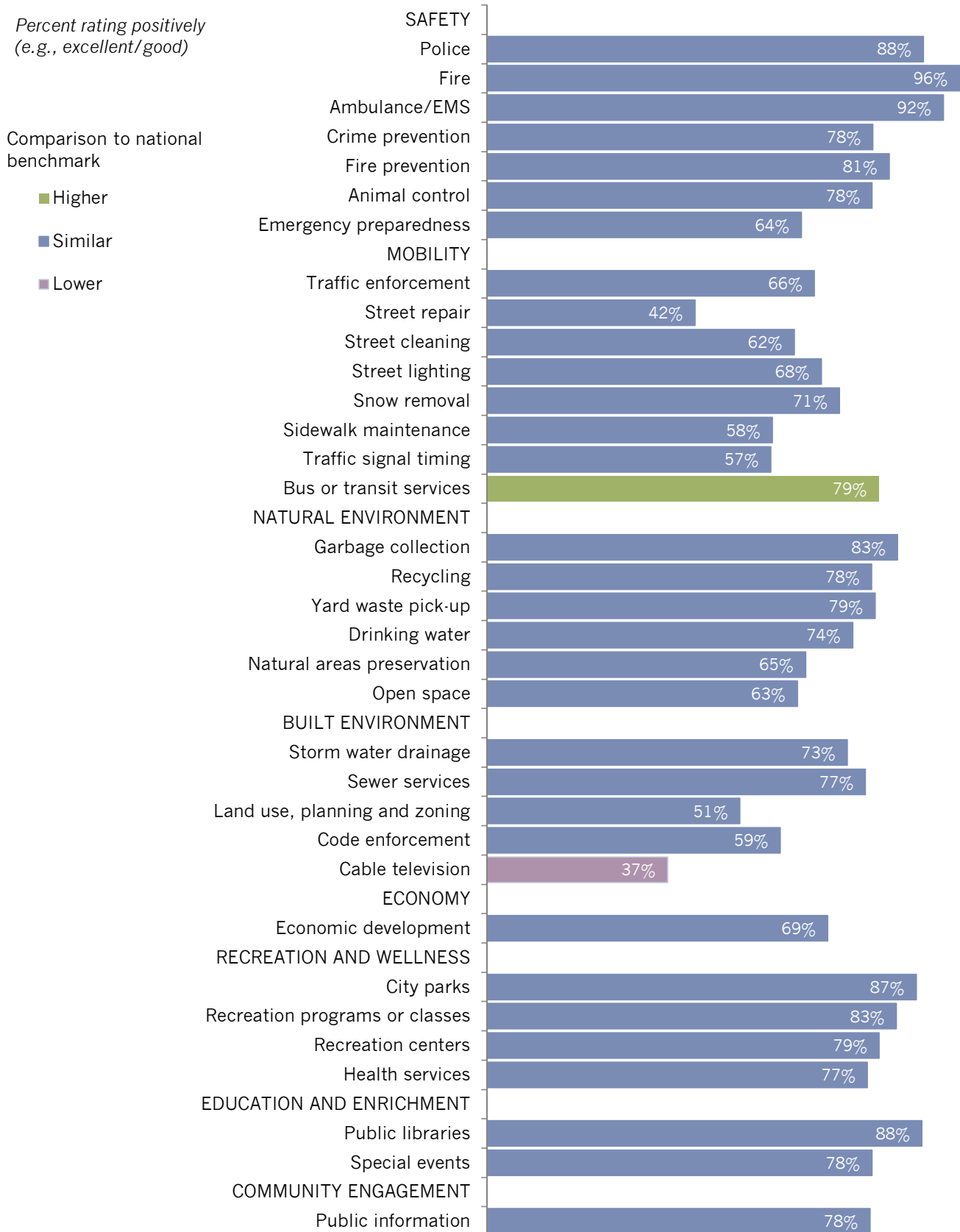
Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark



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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance



Participation

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

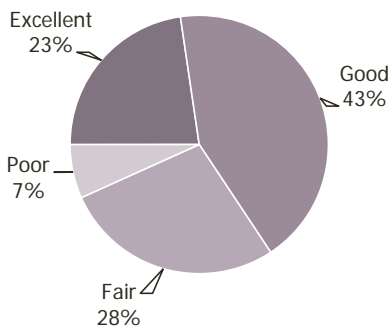
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Similar to other communities in the U.S., about two-thirds awarded positive ratings to the sense of community in Alexandria.

At least 9 in 10 residents indicated they would recommend living in Alexandria to someone who asked and about 8 in 10 intended to remain in the community for the next five years. Around half of respondents reported they had contacted City employees in the 12 months prior to the survey; all of these assessments were similar to national averages.

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. Survey participants were especially engaged in recycling, healthy behaviors, reading or watching local news, voting behaviors and park visitation.

Alexandria residents worked in City boundaries at lower rates than those who lived in peer or national comparison communities. On a positive note, respondents were more optimistic that the economy would have a positively impact their incomes and visited public libraries at higher rates in 2018. Residents were also less likely to observe a code violation, compared with peer and national averages.

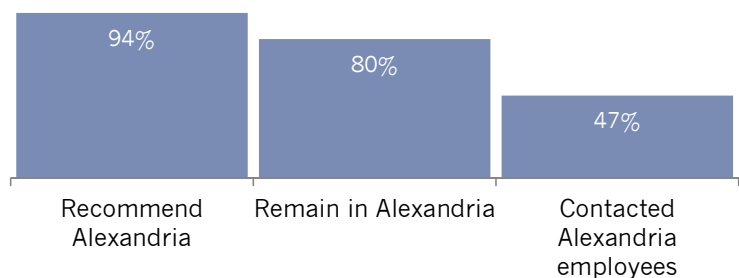
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



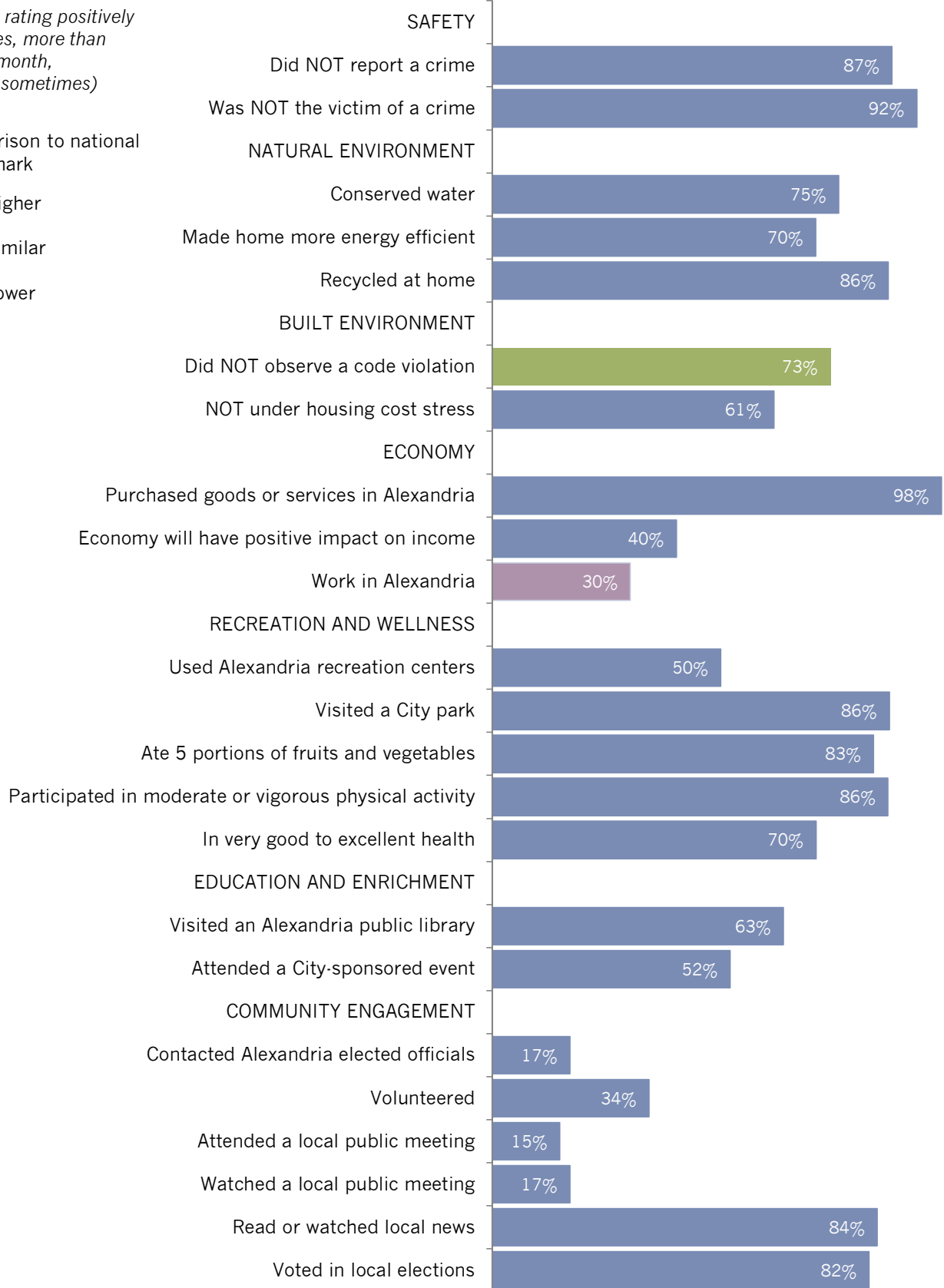
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



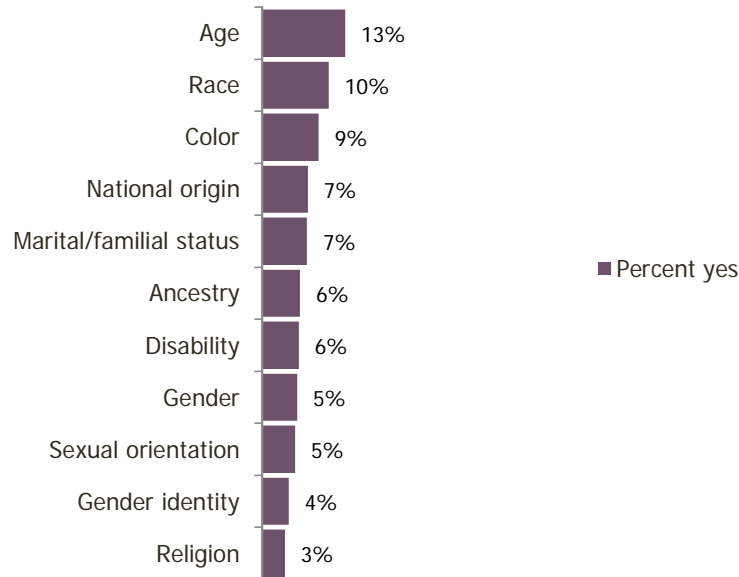
Special Topics

The City of 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 and household behaviors related to emergency preparation.

Around 1 in 10 residents felt there were barriers to living in Alexandria based on their age, race or color, 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-third of survey participants reported they had contact with a City police officer in the 12 months prior to the survey. Of those respondents, at least 8 in 10 gave high marks to the interaction.

Figure 5: Contact with Alexandria Police

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

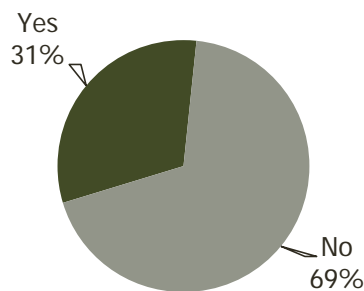
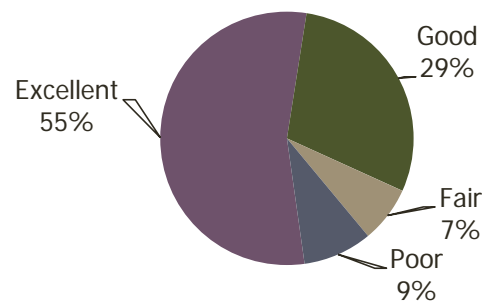


Figure 6: Alexandria Police Officer Rating

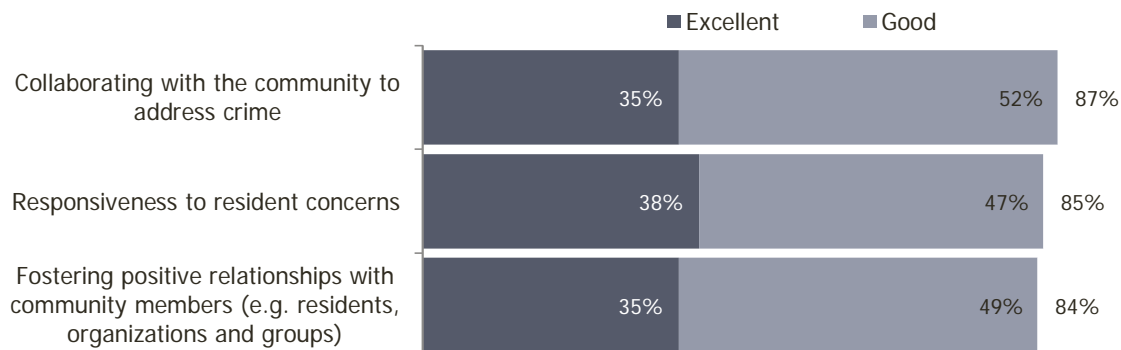
Thinking about your most recent contact, how would you rate the police officer?



The City also inquired about the performance of the police department in three areas: the departments' ability to collaborate with the community to address crime, respond to resident concerns and foster positive relationships with community members. At least 8 in 10 gave favorable assessments to each.

Figure 7: Police Department Performance

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



When asked if they had contact with other staff members in the previous 12 months, about 4 in 10 residents 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?

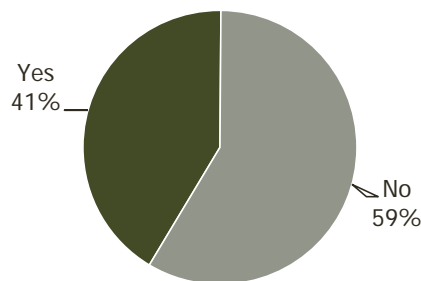
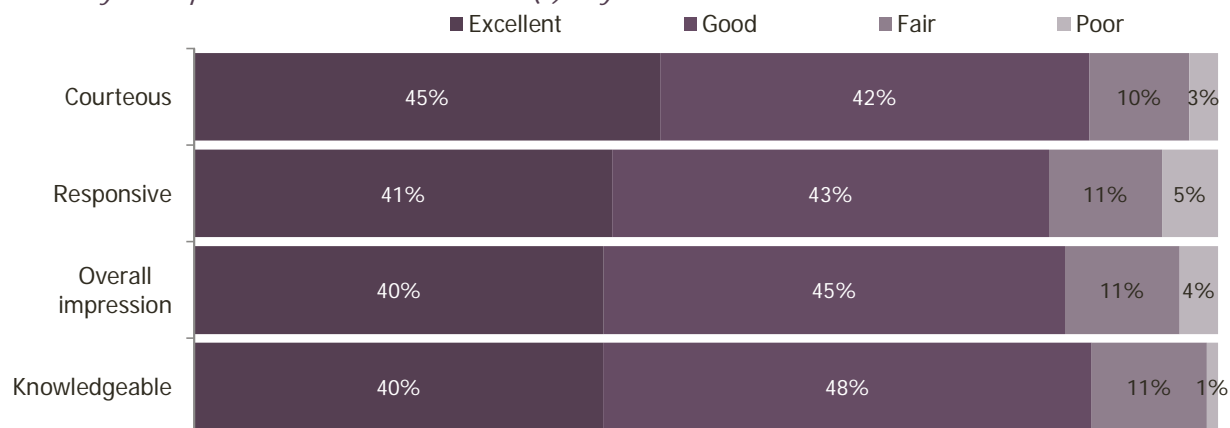


Figure 9: Alexandria Staff Performance

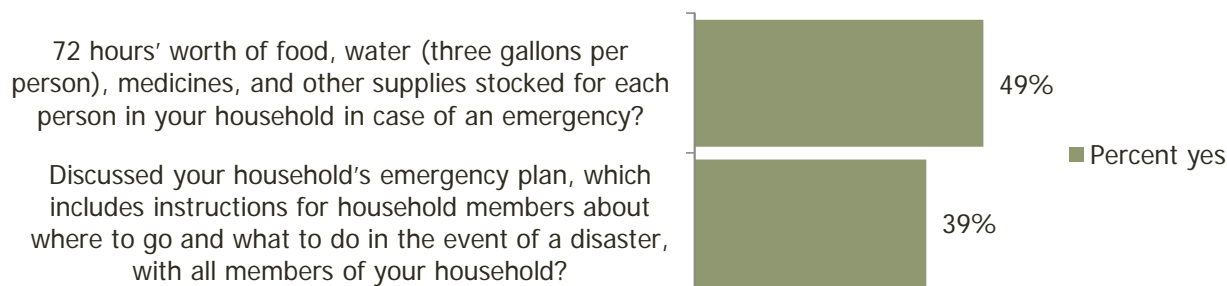
What was your impression of the staff member(s) in your most recent contact?



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 close to 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...



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 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	
Historic character reflected in built environment, exhibits, and events	52%	N=339	39%	N=256	8%	N=51	1%	N=6	100%	N=652

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	
In your neighborhood at night	43%	N=297	40%	N=274	9%	N=61	7%	N=46	1%	N=7	100%	N=685
In Alexandria's downtown area (i.e., Old Town) at night	41%	N=264	47%	N=303	8%	N=51	3%	N=20	0%	N=1	100%	N=639

Table 3: Question 5

Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Alexandria as a whole:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
Availability of parking near my home	27%	N=181	36%	N=243	20%	N=138	17%	N=116	100%	N=678
Availability of on-street and garage parking near shopping	14%	N=94	41%	N=276	32%	N=212	13%	N=85	100%	N=667

Table 4: Question 6

Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Alexandria as a whole:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
Dining opportunities	42%	N=277	45%	N=294	10%	N=68	2%	N=15	100%	N=654
Out-of-school activities for youth	21%	N=42	49%	N=98	22%	N=43	8%	N=17	100%	N=199

Table 5: Question 7

Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.	No		Yes		Total	
Had the flu shot	41%	N=274	59%	N=396	100%	N=670

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	
Participated in recreation programs or classes	5%	N=32	8%	N=53	15%	N=98	72%	N=482	100%	N=665
Used an Alexandria online public library service	6%	N=40	12%	N=83	21%	N=137	61%	N=409	100%	N=669

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Table 7: Question 10

Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Alexandria:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
Museums	22%	N=95	54%	N=235	17%	N=75	6%	N=28	100%	N=433
Historic preservation	35%	N=199	51%	N=294	12%	N=70	2%	N=12	100%	N=575
Street signs	24%	N=159	58%	N=377	16%	N=105	1%	N=9	100%	N=650
Elections and voting process	38%	N=209	50%	N=279	11%	N=61	1%	N=4	100%	N=552
Voter registration process	41%	N=218	49%	N=265	9%	N=46	2%	N=9	100%	N=538
Tax collection	22%	N=124	48%	N=274	22%	N=127	7%	N=41	100%	N=566

Table 8: Question 12

Please rate the following categories of Alexandria government performance:	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Total	
Transparency to the public	15%	N=73	46%	N=224	30%	N=145	8%	N=39	100%	N=481
The responsiveness of Alexandria government to resident requests, questions and concerns	21%	N=85	42%	N=168	32%	N=126	5%	N=20	100%	N=399

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	51%	N=348	33%	N=227	13%	N=90	2%	N=15	100%	N=681
Parking and traffic management	43%	N=288	42%	N=283	14%	N=93	2%	N=12	100%	N=677
Pre-K and child care (including access for low-income families)	40%	N=267	35%	N=238	16%	N=106	9%	N=62	100%	N=673

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	92%	N=617	4%	N=24	2%	N=12	2%	N=14	1%	N=6	100%	N=672

Conclusions

Residents are pleased to live in Alexandria and feel safe.

Most residents rated their overall quality of life as excellent or good in Alexandria and would be likely to remain in the community for the next five years. Additionally, about 9 in 10 of respondents awarded high marks to the City as a place to live, and a similar proportion would be likely to recommend the community to others. At least three-quarters of survey participants rated Alexandria as a place to raise children, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of the community and its overall appearance positively. Respondents' ratings were tended to be similar to comparison communities, although scores for the overall image were higher than national averages.

Residents feel safe in general, as well as in their neighborhoods and in downtown area. Safety service ratings were strong and similar to communities across the country and at least 8 in 10 residents indicated they had not reported a crime or been the victim of a crime. Further, respondents who had contact with an Alexandria police department in the 12 months prior to the survey felt positively about their interaction with most rating their experience as excellent or good. Survey respondents were also satisfied with the relationship between the department and the community, as most residents assessed the police departments' ability to collaborate with the community to address crime, respond to resident concerns and foster positive relationships positively. Each area of police performance showed an increase in ratings from 2017 to 2018.

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 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. Most residents of Alexandria felt the city was a good place to work and visit. Additionally, about 4 in 10 residents were optimistic that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in the next six months, which increased from 2017 to 2018.

As with many attractive communities, affordability is an issue. The cost of living and housing affordability were rated positively by less than one-fourth of community members. These ratings were lower than the national benchmark.

Alternative transportation shines in Alexandria.

About three-quarters of residents assigned positive evaluations to the overall ease of travel in the City and residents were especially pleased with alternative modes of transportation in the City. At least 6 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the ease of travel by walking, bicycle and public transit and these ratings were higher than national benchmarks. Bus or transit services were also favorably rated by at least three-quarters of participants and higher than levels elsewhere. Finally, more residents awarded high marks to ease of travel by bicycle, public parking and snow removal in 2018.