



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Charles County, MD

Community Livability Report

2016



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

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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Charles County. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

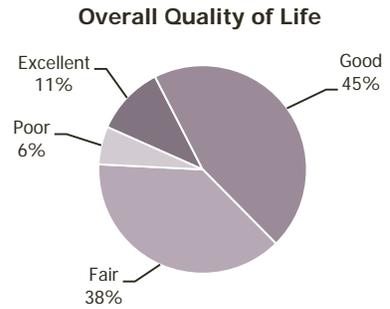
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a sample of 903 residents of Charles County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% 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 Charles County

A majority of residents rated the quality of life in Charles County as excellent or good. This rating was lower than ratings reported in comparison communities (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



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

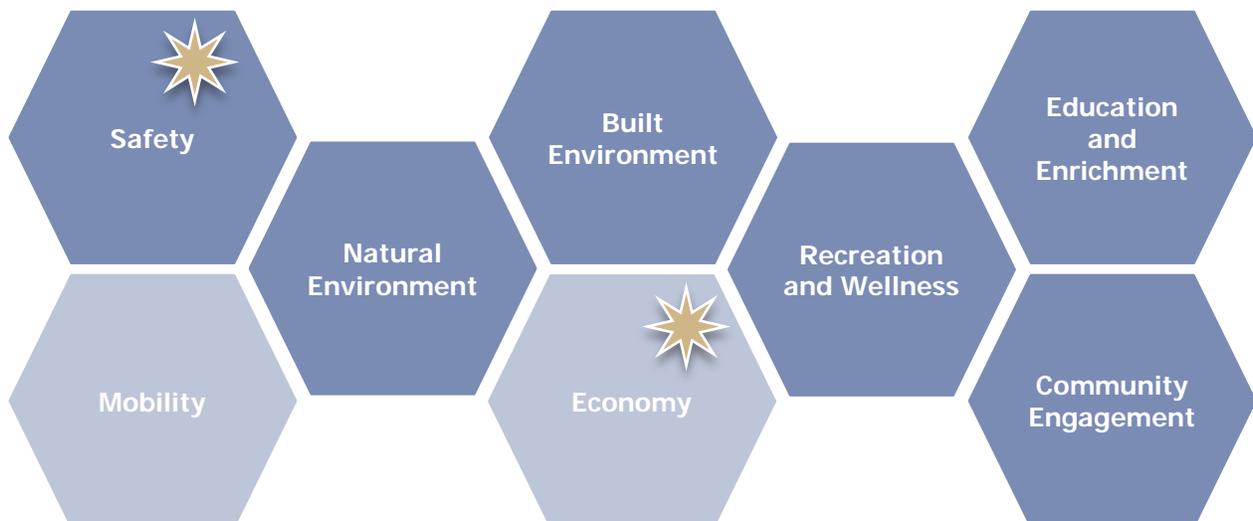
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Charles County community in the coming two years. Ratings for Safety, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive and similar to other communities. Ratings for Mobility and Economy tended to be lower. 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 Charles County's unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



Community Characteristics

What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Charles County, 68% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Charles County as a place to live were lower than ratings in other communities across the nation.

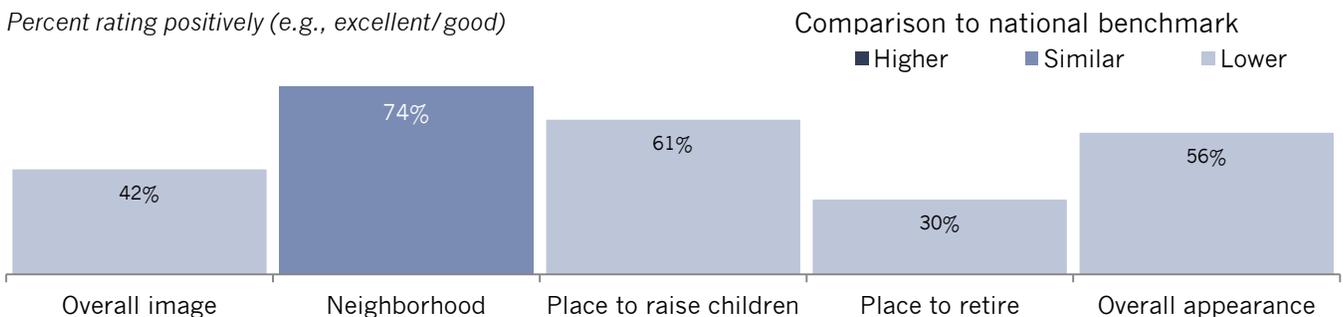
In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Charles County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Charles County and its overall appearance. About three-quarters of survey participants gave excellent or good ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live; this rating was strong and similar to the national benchmark. Ratings for other general aspects of Community Characteristics ranged between 30% and 61% excellent or good, and were lower than ratings seen in other communities nationwide.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. More than 4 in 5 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the feeling of safety in their neighborhood, while about three-quarters of residents gave high marks to the feeling of safety in Charles County's downtown/commercial area, and about 6 in 10 gave favorable ratings to their overall feeling of safety in the County. Ratings within the facet of Mobility ranged between 13% excellent or good for travel by public transportation to 52% excellent or good for the overall ease of travel in the County; these ratings were all lower than the national benchmark comparisons. Ratings within the facet of Natural Environment were mostly similar to ratings seen in comparison communities; about two-thirds of residents gave favorable ratings to

the overall quality of the natural environment and to air quality. The facets of Built Environment and Economy saw fairly mixed ratings. Although the availability of affordable quality housing, housing options and shopping opportunities received ratings that were similar to the benchmarks, all other aspects within these facets received ratings that were lower than the benchmarks. Within Education and Enrichment, a majority of residents gave favorable ratings to overall opportunities for education and enrichment, K-12 education and adult education opportunities. About 4 in 10 residents or more gave excellent or good ratings to all aspects of Community Engagement, and about 3 in 5 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to opportunities to volunteer in Charles County.



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



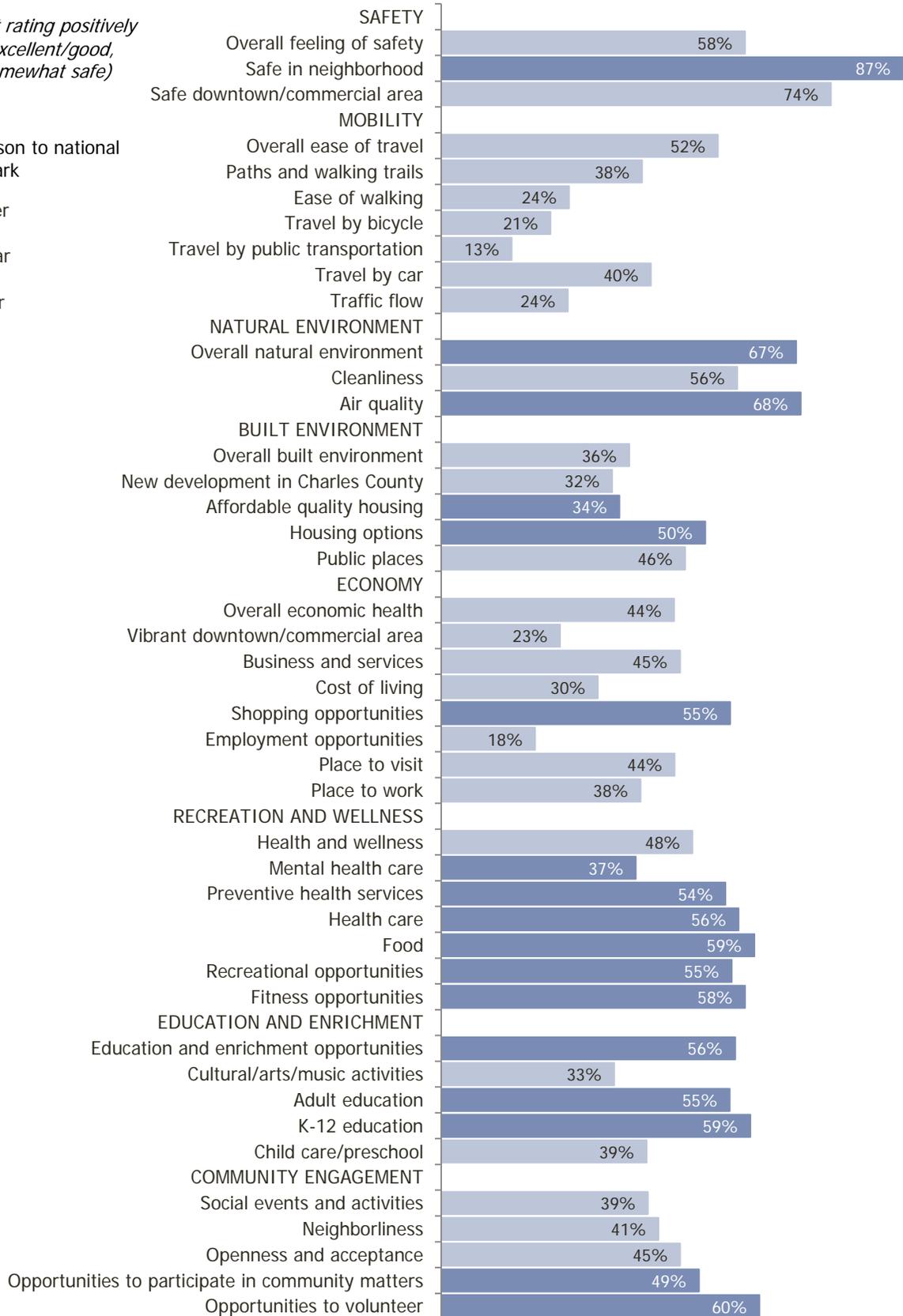
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



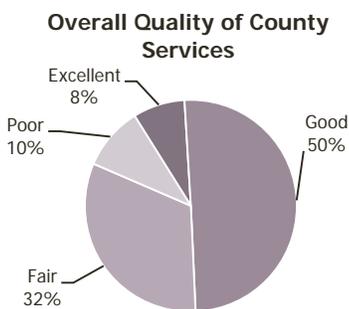
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Charles County as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 6 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the overall services provided by Charles County while about 4 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for services provided by the County were lower than the benchmark, while ratings for services provided by the Federal Government were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities.

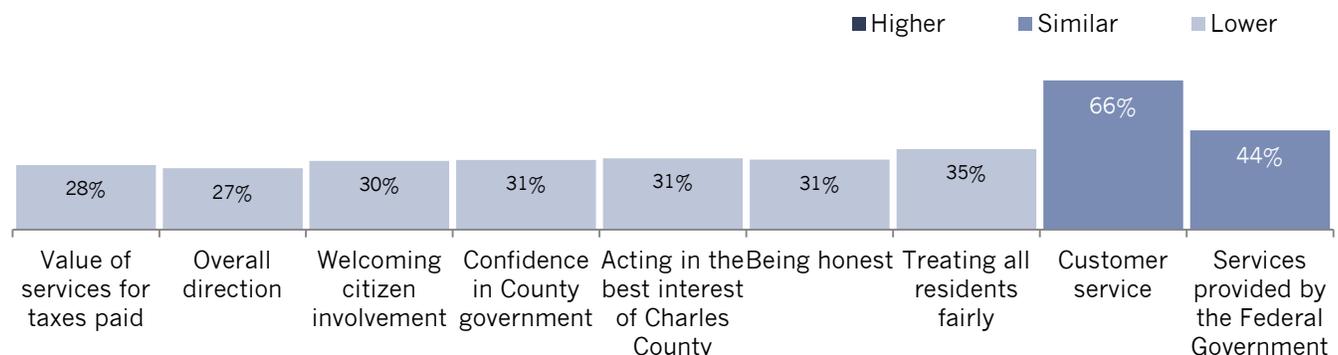
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Charles County's leadership and governance. About two-thirds of residents gave favorable ratings to the customer service provided by Charles County employees; this rating was strong and similar to ratings seen in other communities. All other aspects of Charles' County's leadership and governance were given excellent or good ratings by about 3 in 10 residents, and were lower than the benchmark comparisons.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Charles County. Ratings of Safety-related services in Charles County were very strong: at least half of residents or more gave high marks to all aspects of Safety, and all of these ratings were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities. Within Mobility, more than half of survey participants gave high marks to traffic enforcement and snow removal. However, fewer than 2 in 5 respondents gave positive ratings to street cleaning, street lighting and bus or transit services; these services received ratings that were lower than the benchmarks. About three-quarters of respondents gave favorable ratings to garbage collection and recycling services, and about two-thirds gave excellent or good ratings to yard-waste pick-up and drinking water. Ratings for all aspects within the facet of Natural Environment were similar to ratings seen in other communities nationwide. Ratings in Built Environment were generally similar to the benchmarks; they ranged from a low of 27% excellent or good for land use, planning and zoning to a high of 78% excellent or good for power utility services. About 3 in 10 respondents gave an excellent or good rating to economic development, which is lower than the benchmark. Within Education and Enrichment, three-quarters of respondents awarded high marks to public libraries and about half reported that County-sponsored special events were excellent or good. A majority of residents gave favorable ratings to all aspects of Recreation and Wellness and Community Engagement, including County parks, recreation programs and public information services.



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

Comparison to national benchmark



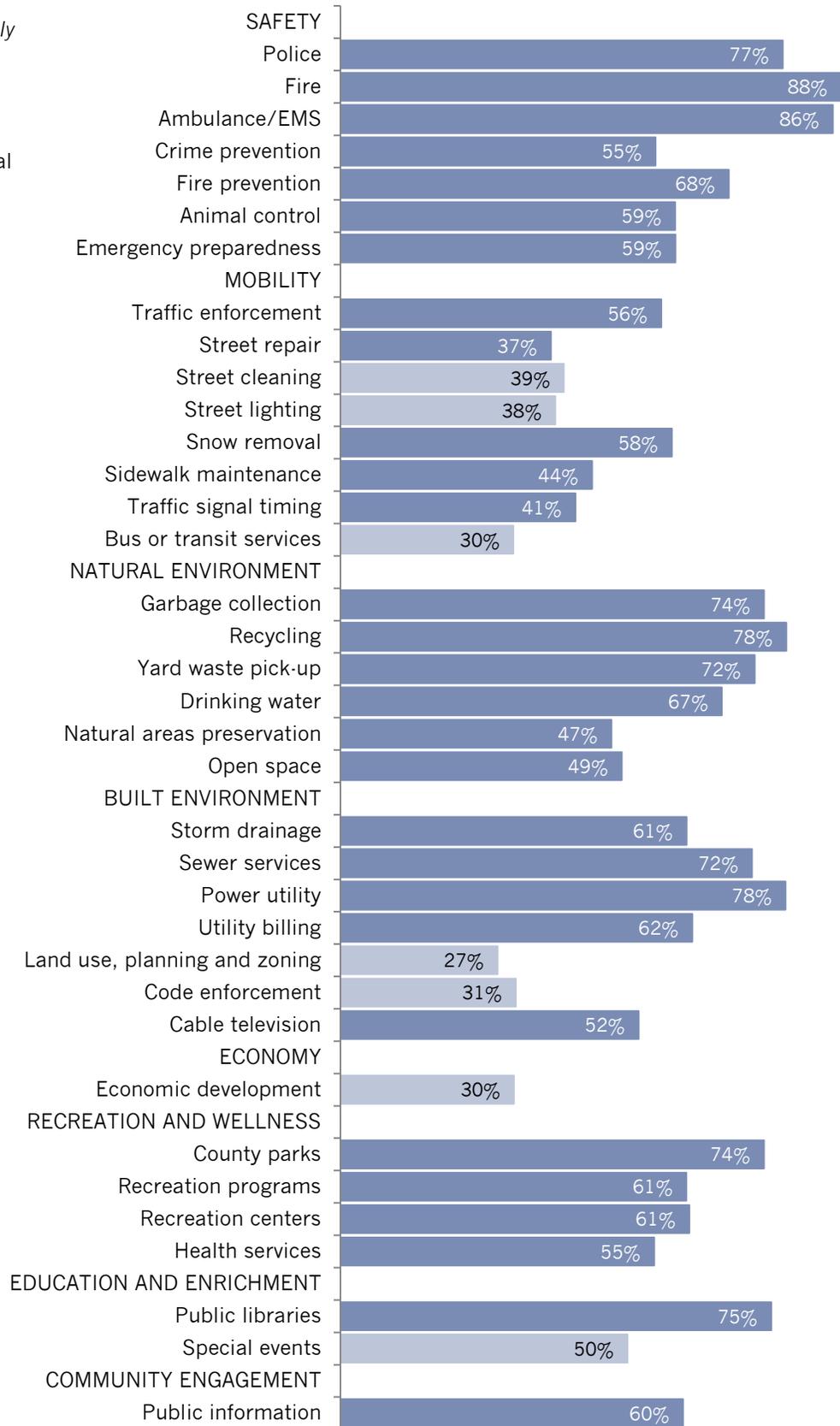
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



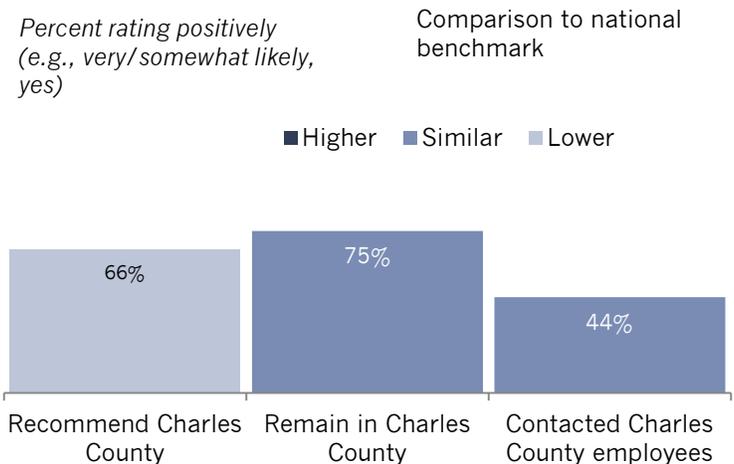
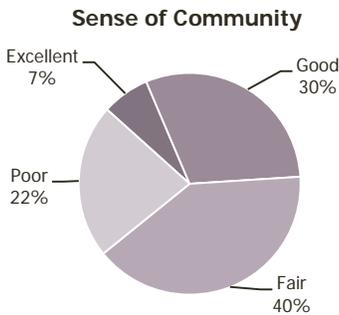
Participation

Are the residents of Charles County connected to the community and each other?

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About three-quarters of respondents rated the overall sense of community in Charles County as being fair or better. Further, about 3 in 4 residents reported that they plan to remain in Charles County in the coming five years and 44% indicated that they had contacted a Charles County employee for help or information in the 12 months prior to the survey; both of these participation rates were strong and similar to rates reported in other communities across the country. About two-thirds of residents would recommend living in Charles County to someone who asked.

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 in the facet of Safety were generally strong: three-quarters of residents or more had not reported a crime and were not a victim of a crime in the previous 12 months. Additionally, about half of respondents had stocked supplies for an emergency, a rate which was higher than the national benchmark comparison. Participation rates in Mobility tended to be lower: only about one-quarter of participants had carpooled instead of driving alone, and about 1 in 5 had walked or biked instead of driving. Both of these participation rates were lower in Charles County than in comparison communities. At least a half of respondents reported participating in all aspects of Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness, including about 9 in 10 who reported recycling at home and about 8 in 10 who had visited a County park. All participation rates in Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness were strong and similar to the national benchmarks.

Within the facets of Built Environment and Economy, almost all respondents (99%) reported that they had purchased goods or services in the County; about 2 in 5 indicated that they work in the County, and about two-thirds of respondents were not under housing-cost stress. Within Education and Enrichment, about half of residents had attended a County-sponsored special event and about 3 in 5 had used Charles County public libraries. All reported levels of participation within Community Engagement were similar to or higher than the national benchmark comparisons. About 9 in 10 survey participants reported voting in local elections and a similar number had read or watched local news; further, about one-third of respondents had attended a local public meeting, which is a higher attendance rate than what is typically seen in comparison communities.



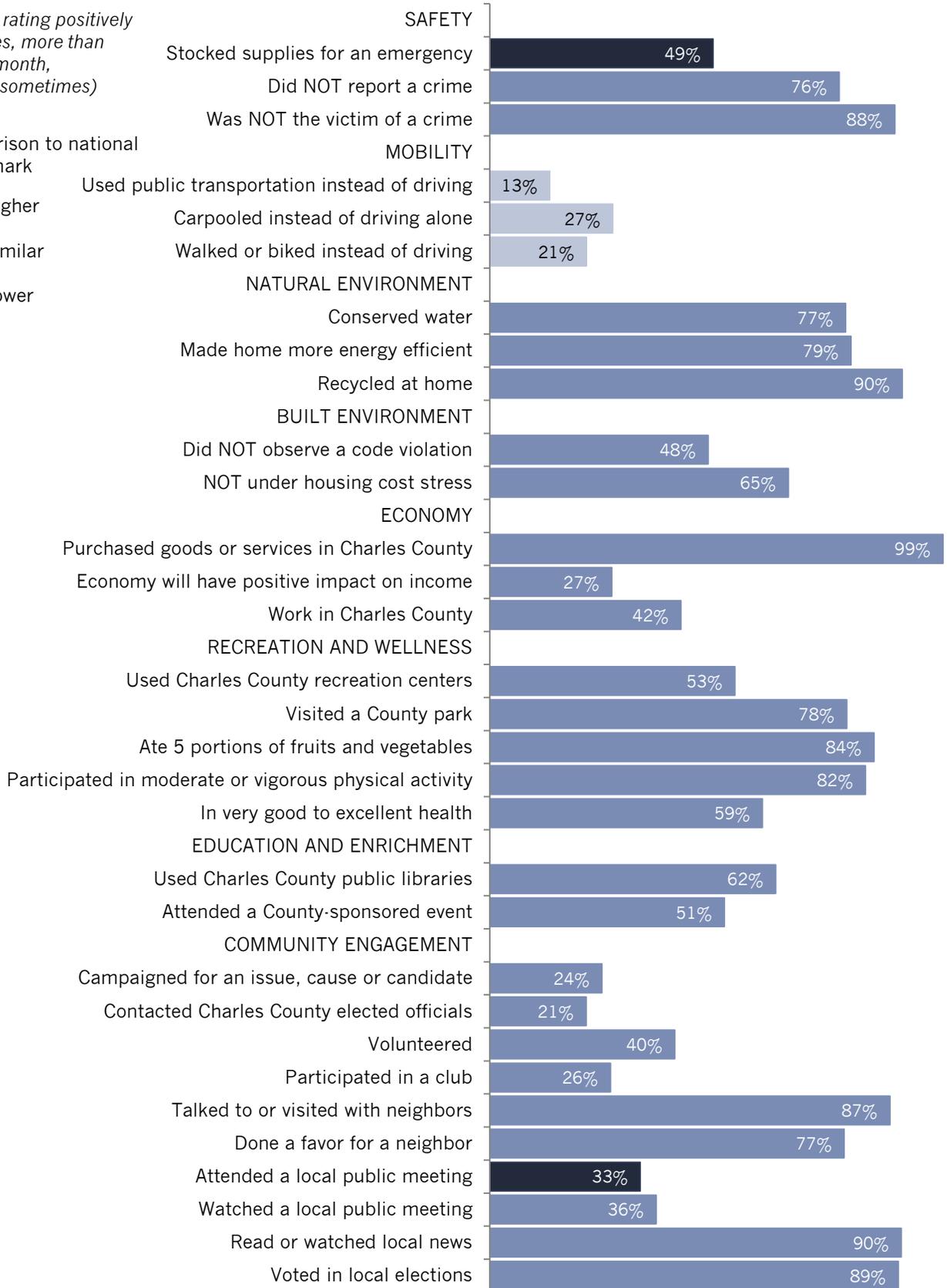
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

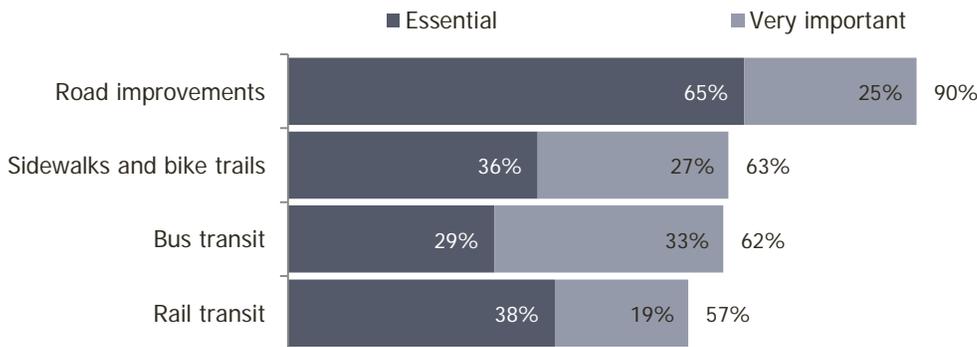


Special Topics

Charles County included eight questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special-interest question asked residents to rate how important investing in several transportation projects would be for relieving traffic congestion in the County. About 9 in 10 survey participants indicated that investing in road improvements was essential or very important for relieving traffic congestion. Investing in sidewalks and bike trails, bus transit and rail transit were rated as essential or very important by about 6 in 10 respondents.

Figure 4: Traffic Congestion

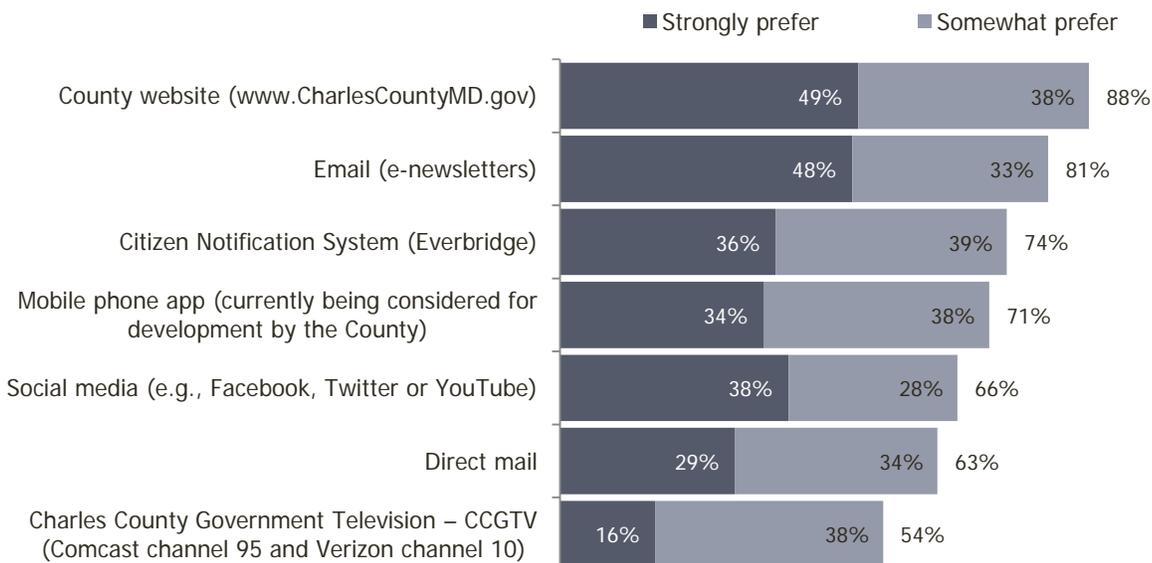
Traffic congestion is a problem in parts of Charles County. In your opinion, how important, if at all, is it for Charles County to invest in the following in order to relieve traffic congestion?



Respondents were next asked to indicate what their current and future preferred sources were for receiving information and updates about the Charles County Government. About 9 in 10 residents indicated that the County website was a preferred source of information, while about 4 in 5 reported that email was a strongly or somewhat preferred source. Further, about 7 in 10 participants indicated that they would strongly or somewhat prefer a County mobile phone app and the Citizen Notification System.

Figure 5: Sources of County Information

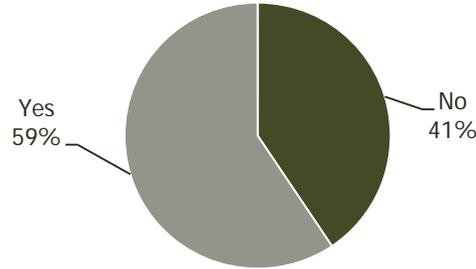
Please indicate your level of preference, if any, for each of the following current and potential future sources for receiving information and updates about Charles County Government meetings, events, and services:



The third special-interest question asked residents if they had any contact with a County employee in the 12 months prior to the survey. About 6 in 10 respondents had contacted a County employee during this time period.

Figure 6: Contact with County Employees

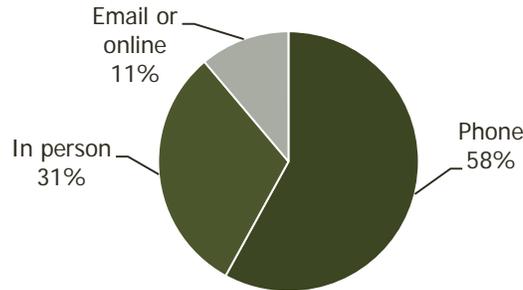
Have you had any in-person, phone, or email contact with a County employee within the last 12 months (including police, utility, receptionists, or any others)?



Residents who reported having been in contact with a County employee were next asked two follow-up questions. The first follow-up question asked residents how they had reached a County employee in their most recent contact. About 6 in 10 had reached the employee over the phone, while about 3 in 10 had contacted the employee in person and about 1 in 10 had reached the County via email or online.

Figure 7: Method of Contact with County Employees

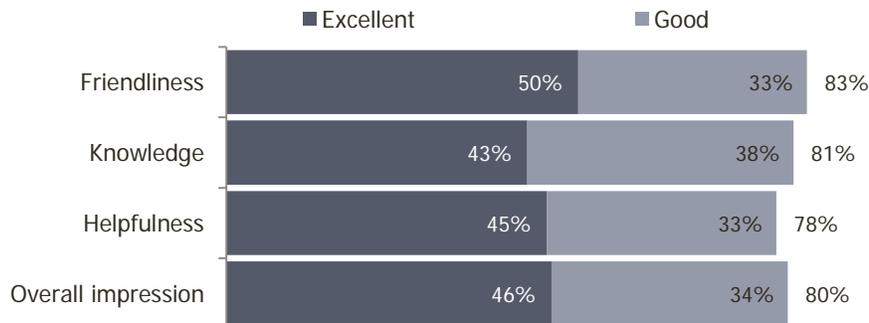
How did you reach the County employee(s) in your most recent contact?



The second follow-up question asked survey participants to rate aspects of their impression of County employees in their most recent contact. Ratings for aspects of residents' impressions of employees, including ratings of friendliness and knowledge, ranged from 78%-83% excellent or good. The overall impression of County employees was rated positively by 80% of respondents.

Figure 8: Impression of County Employees

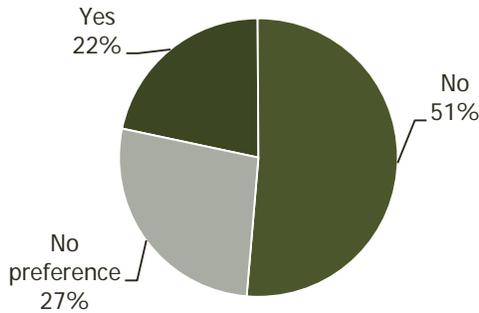
What was your impression of the County employee(s) in your most recent contact?



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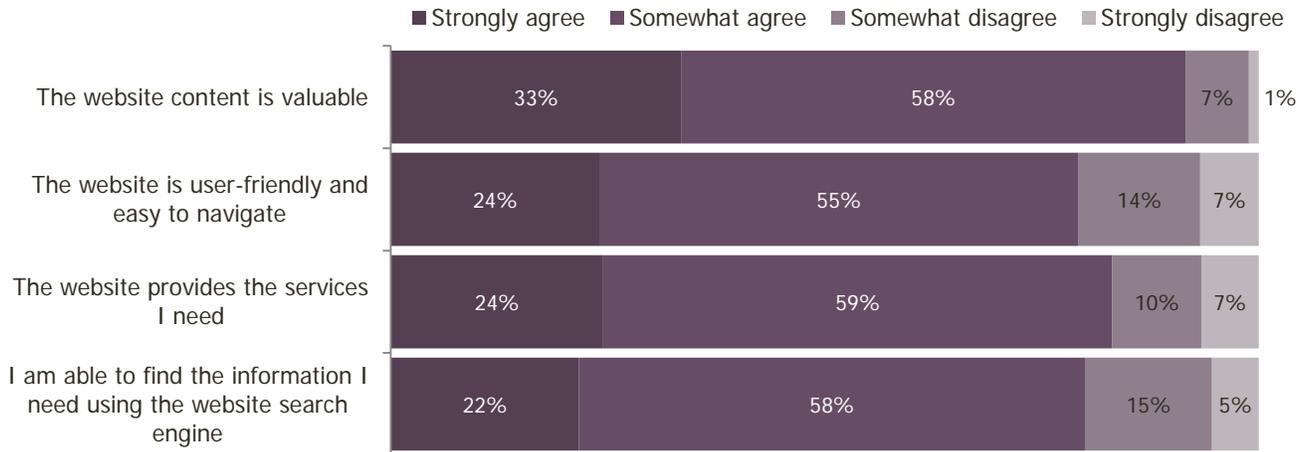
Survey respondents were next asked if they would prefer to receive their County tax bill electronically. About half of respondents reported that they would not prefer to receive their bill electronically; about 2 in 10 selected that they would prefer to receive their bill this way, and about one-quarter of respondents had no preference.

Figure 9: Tax Bills in Charles County
Would you prefer to receive County tax bills electronically?



The seventh special-interest question asked participants to indicate how much they agreed with several statements regarding the County website. A vast majority of respondents (92%) indicated that they strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement “the website content is valuable”. About 8 in 10 respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with all other statements about the County website.

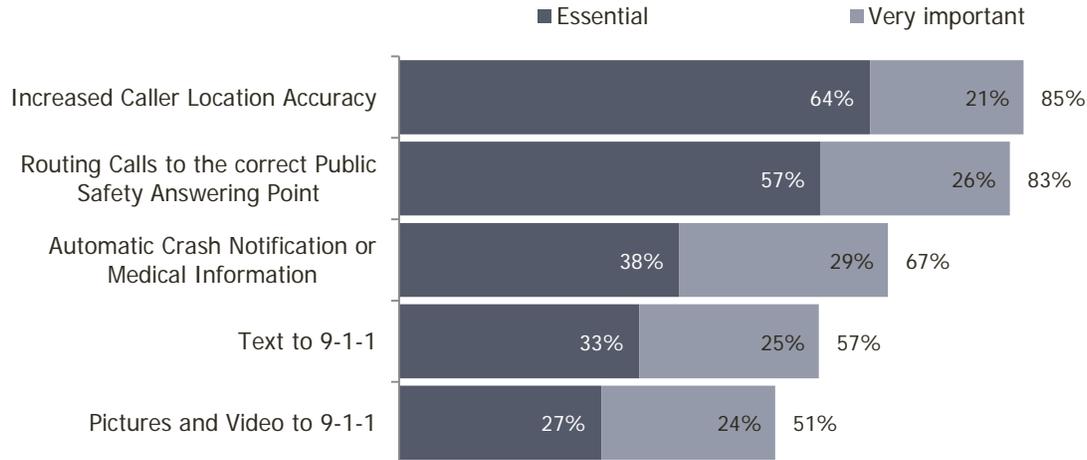
Figure 10: Website Options
Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the County website, www.charlescountymd.gov:



The final special-interest question asked residents to rate the importance of several 9-1-1 capabilities. More than 4 in 5 respondents said that increased caller location accuracy and routing calls to the correct Public Safety Answering Point were essential or very important capabilities. Further, about two-thirds of respondents reported that automatic crash notification or medical information were essential or very important 9-1-1 capabilities. Text to 9-1-1 was indicated to be at least a very important capability by 57% of respondents; slightly fewer residents reported that pictures and video to 9-1-1 was an essential or very important 9-1-1 capability.

Figure 11: 9-1-1 Capabilities

Please rate how important each of the following capabilities are to you if you had to call 9-1-1:



Conclusions

A majority of Charles County residents enjoy a good quality of life.

Overall, the quality of life in Charles County was seen as excellent or good by a majority of residents. At least half of respondents or more rated the County as a place to live, their neighborhood as a place to live and Charles County as a place to raise children as excellent or good. About three-quarters of residents reported that they planned on remaining in the county for the next five years, and about two-thirds of residents indicated that they would recommend living in Charles County to someone who asked. Additionally, about 4 in 5 respondents reported that the sense of community in the County was at least fair or better.

Mobility is a potential opportunity for improvement in the County.

Ratings for Mobility-related services were mostly strong and similar to ratings seen in other communities. About 4 in 10 or more residents gave favorable ratings to traffic enforcement, snow removal, sidewalk maintenance and traffic signal timing. Fewer residents gave positive ratings for street cleaning, street lighting and bus or transit services, all which received ratings that were lower than the benchmarks. Overall ease of travel was rated positively by 52% of respondents, and about one-quarter or fewer residents gave excellent or good ratings to traffic flow, ease of travel by public transportation, ease of travel by bicycle and ease of walking. Only about one-quarter of residents had carpooled instead of driving alone and 13% had used public transportation instead of driving. About 9 in 10 survey participants indicated that investing in road improvements was essential or very important for relieving traffic congestion in the County, and about 6 in 10 indicated that investing in sidewalks and bike trails, bus transit and rail transit was at least very important.

Safety is a key focus area for the Charles County community.

Survey respondents identified Safety as an important item for the community to focus on in the coming two years. Safety-related services in Charles County, including police, fire and ambulance/EMS services, were all rated positively by a majority of residents and were similar to the national benchmark comparisons. Almost 9 in 10 survey respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the feeling of safety in their neighborhoods. More than half of residents gave favorable ratings to the overall feeling of safety in the County and the feeling of safety in the County's downtown/commercial area; these ratings were lower in Charles County than in other communities across the nation. Participation rates in Safety were generally strong: about three-quarters of residents or more had not been the victim of a crime and had not reported a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey. Further, about half of residents indicated that they had stocked supplies for an emergency; the rate of residents who reported stocking supplies for an emergency was higher in Charles County than in comparison communities. Residents also indicated that several 9-1-1 capabilities were important to them: about 8 in 10 participants reported that increased caller location accuracy and routing calls to the correct public safety answering point were essential or very important features.

Public trust ratings are mixed, but residents are pleased with the customer service provided by County employees.

Ratings of aspects of Charles County's leadership and governance, which are often reflective of public trust in a local government, tended to be lower than ratings reported in other communities. Only about 3 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall direction of the County, the job the County does a welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in the County government and being honest. Despite these lower public trust ratings, residents gave very favorable ratings to the customer service provided by County employees. About 6 in 10 residents reported having contact with a County employee in the 12 months prior to the survey, and a similar number of residents gave high marks to the overall customer service provided by County employees. Residents who had been in contact with a County employee in the previous 12 months were asked to rate various aspects of their performance. About 4 in 5 of these respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the friendliness, knowledge, helpfulness and the overall impression of County employees for their most recent contact.