



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Charles County, MD

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 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.

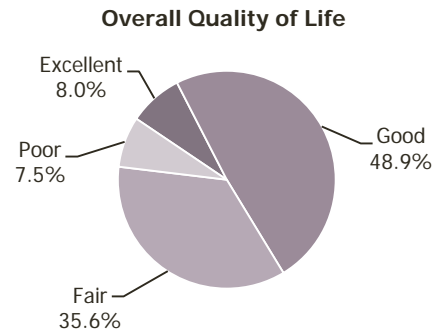
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 representative sample of 279 residents of the County of Charles County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% 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 Charles County

About 6 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Charles County as excellent or good. This was lower than 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.

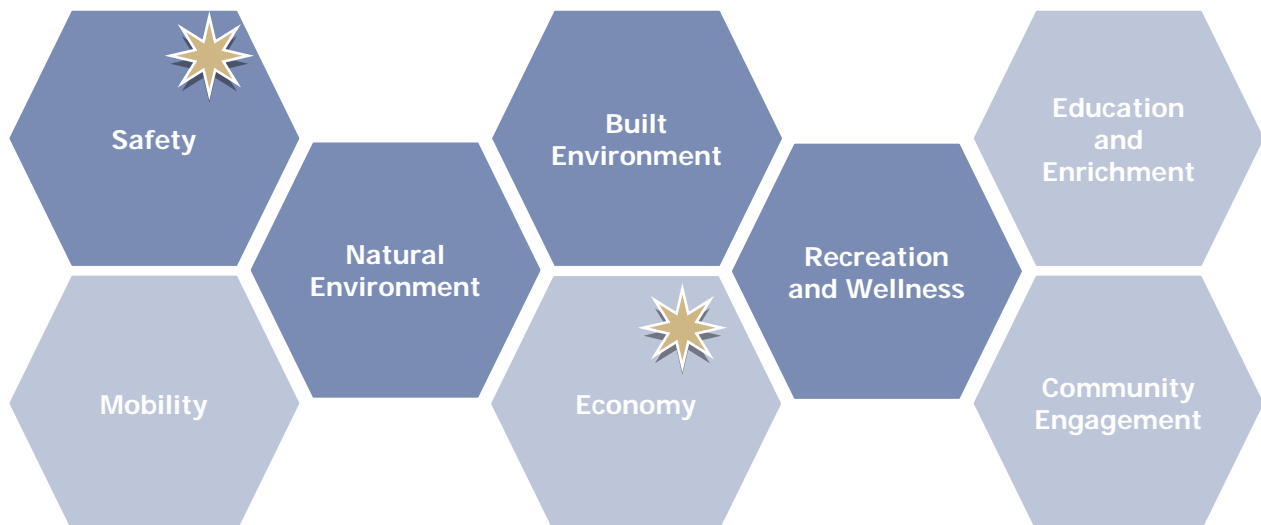
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2016, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Charles County community in the coming two years. This overview 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?

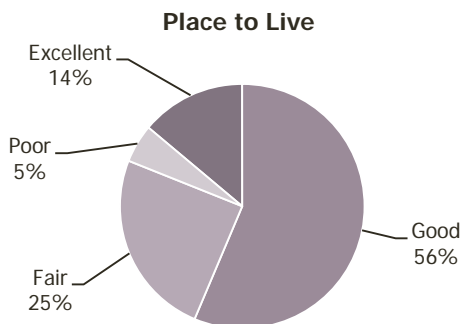
Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Charles County, 70% rated the County as an excellent or 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 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, which was similar to the national benchmark. Half of residents or fewer gave favorable marks to the overall image and overall appearance of Charles County and the County as a place to raise children and to retire; these ratings were lower than those given in other communities.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Generally, ratings across and within the different facets tended to be similar to or lower than the national comparisons. For example, while about 9 in 10 residents gave positive reviews to the feelings of safety in their neighborhood (which was similar to the benchmark), three-quarters of residents gave positive marks to feeling safe in the County's downtown/commercial area and half favorably rated the overall feeling of safety in Charles County; both of these ratings were lower than those given elsewhere.

Aspects related to Mobility, Natural Environment and Community Engagement received ratings lower than the national benchmarks, and several ratings for Community Engagement decreased since 2016 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover for additional details).

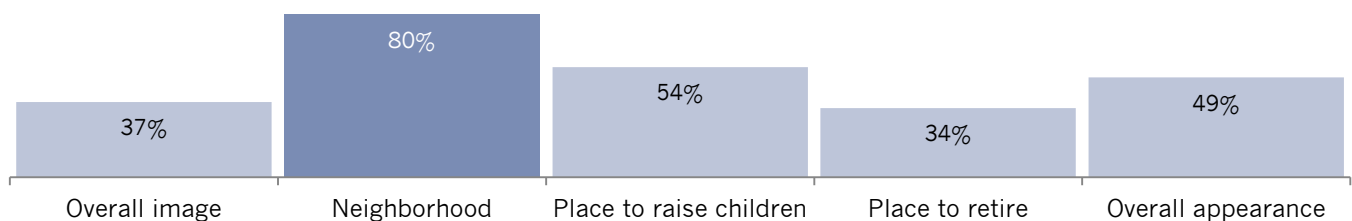
Most aspects of Education and Enrichment were also rated lower than average and evaluations for K-12 education and adult educational opportunities declined over time. However, ratings related to the availability of housing, health-related services and employment and shopping opportunities were similar to those given in other communities nationwide.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



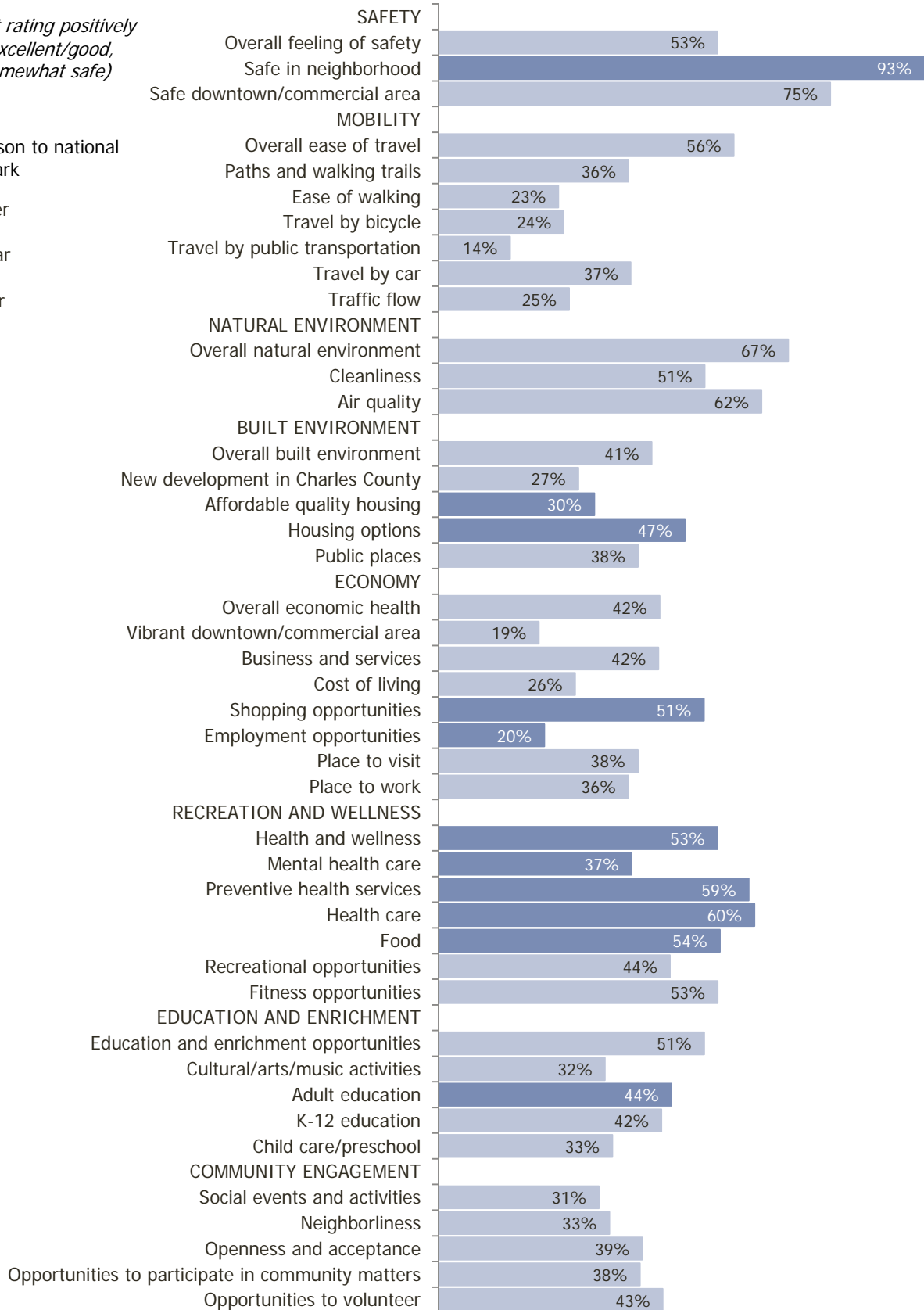
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

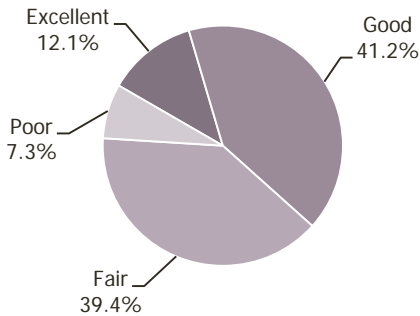
How well does the government of Charles County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Charles County as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About half of residents gave favorable marks to the overall quality of County 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 Charles County's leadership and governance. About 6 in 10 residents were pleased with the customer service provided by the County, which was similar to the benchmark, but decreased since 2016. About one-third of respondents or fewer gave positive reviews to the remaining aspects of government performance and these ratings were lower than those given elsewhere.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Charles County. Ratings for County services were similar to or lower than those observed in other communities across the nation. The highest-rated services included police/sheriff, fire, ambulance/EMS, garbage collection, recycling, yard waste pick-up, power utility and public libraries, with at least 7 in 10 residents awarding excellent or good ratings to each of these. However, one-third of the remaining listed services received positive ratings from about half of residents or fewer and these ratings were lower than the national benchmarks. Further, evaluations for crime prevention, fire prevention, open space, storm drainage, County parks and recreation centers and programs declined since 2016.

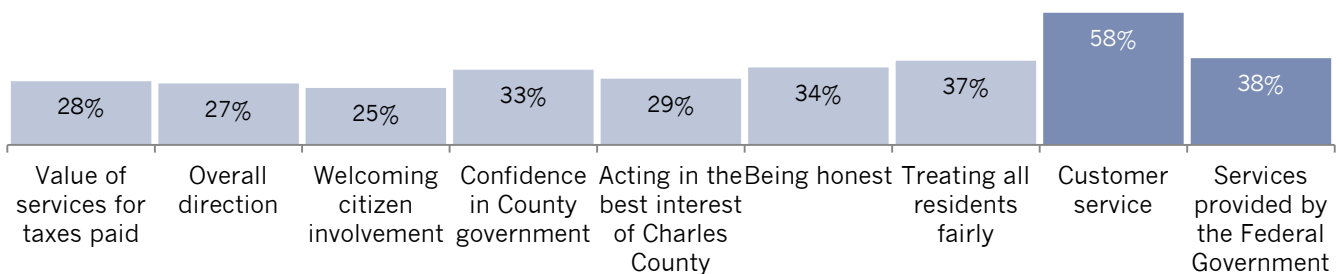
Overall Quality of County Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



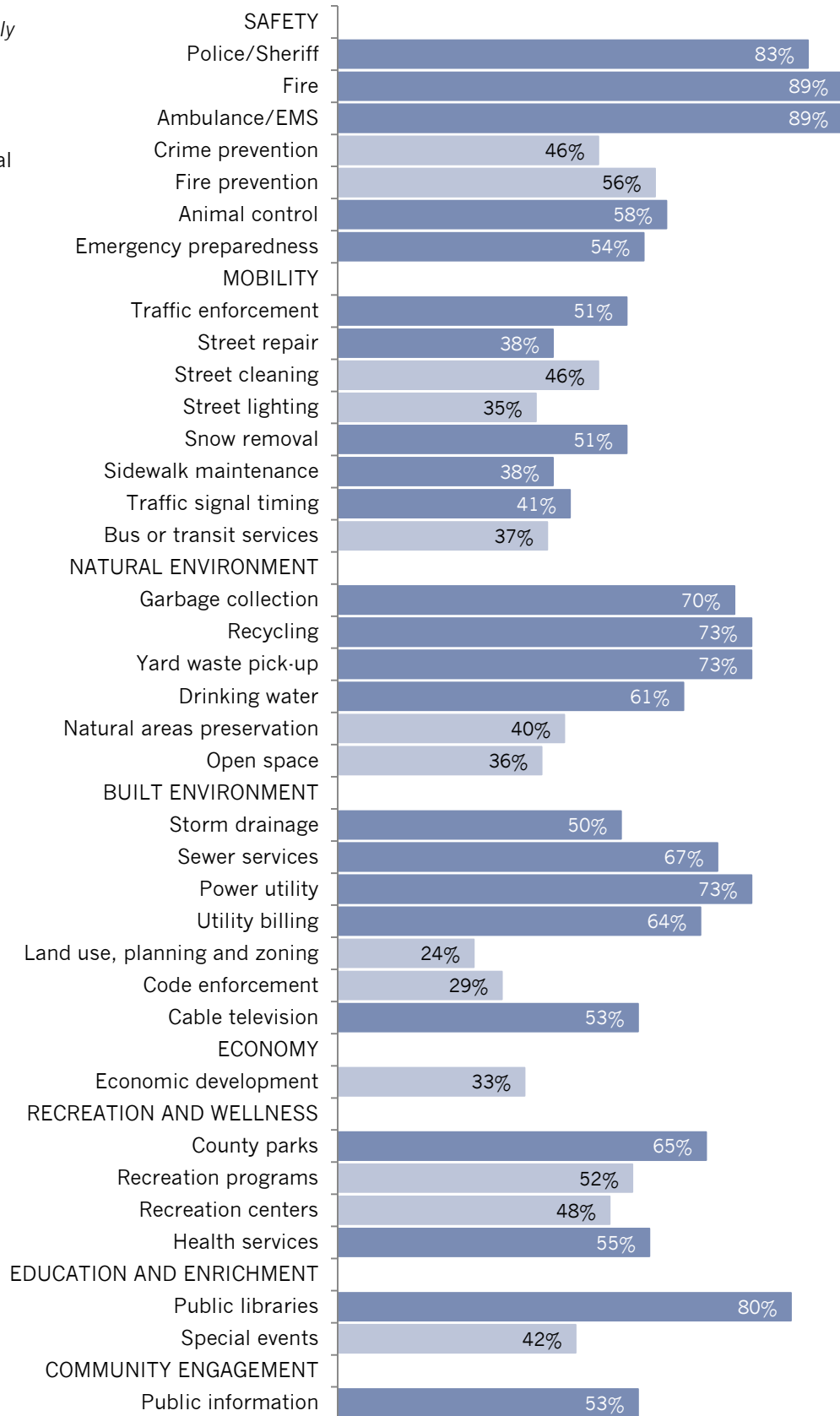
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



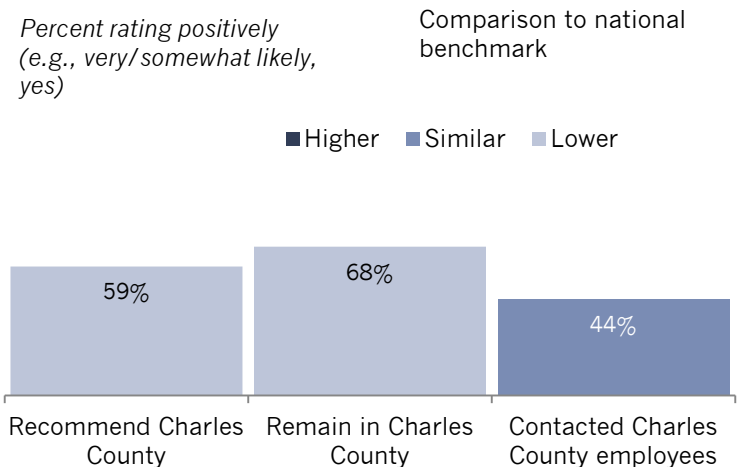
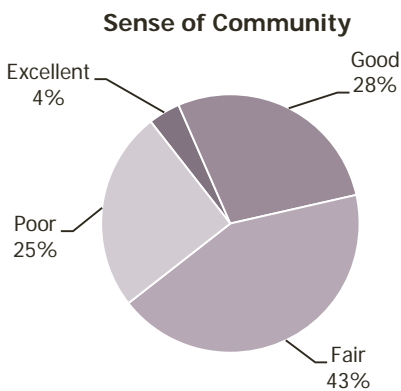
Participation

Are the residents of 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 one-third of residents rated the sense of community in Charles County as excellent or good, while 6 in 10 would recommend living in the County to someone who asked and two-thirds planned to remain in Charles County for the next five years. These ratings were lower than those given in other communities nationwide.

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 comparison to the benchmarks, as well as to Charles County ratings over time, useful for interpreting the results. Residents participated in most activities at rates similar to those observed in other communities. Respondents were less likely than those who lived elsewhere to have used alternative transportation instead of driving, worked in the community, visited County parks, used County public libraries, attended a County-sponsored event or campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate. On a positive note, residents were more likely to have stocked supplies for an emergency than their peers.

Compared to 2016, residents in 2018 participated in aspects of Community Engagement at lower rates, and also were less likely to work in the County or to give positive ratings to County customer service. However, they were more likely to have a positive economic outlook on the future and to be in very good to excellent health, and they observed code violations at lower levels than in 2016.



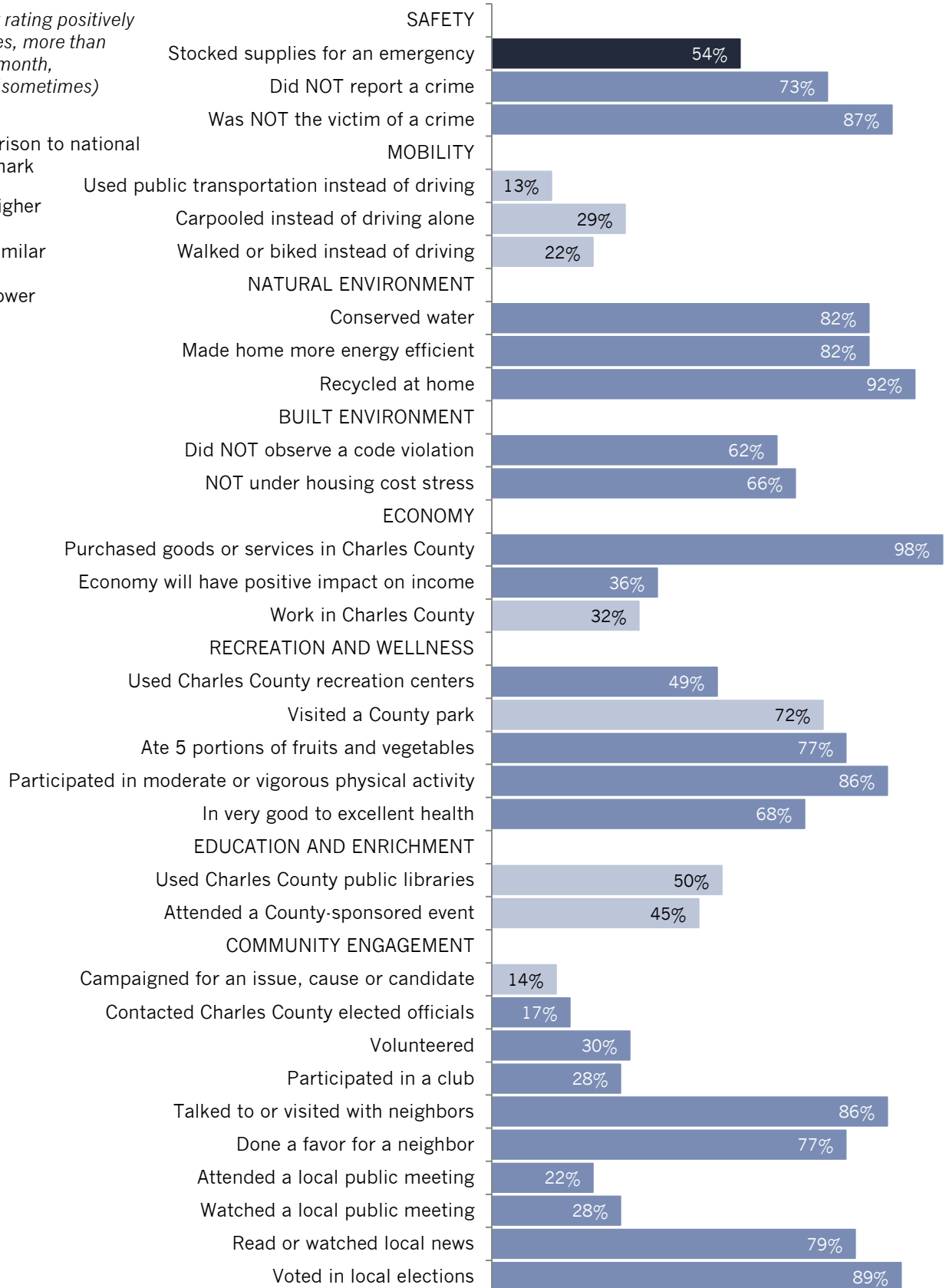
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



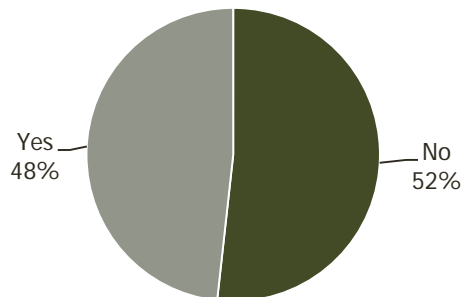
Special Topics

Charles County included seven questions of special interest on The NCS as well as several line item additions to standard questions. Topic areas included relieving traffic congestion, services and programs at the Charles County Animal Shelter and contact with County employees, among others.

About half of residents had utilized the services of animal control or the Tri-County animal shelter in the past 12 months, while half had not.

Figure 4: Line Addition to Question 7

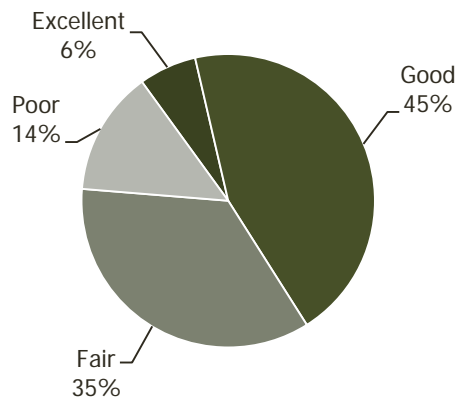
Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months: utilized the services of animal control or the Tri-County Animal Shelter



Half of residents gave excellent or good ratings to services and programs for seniors in Charles County; one-third gave these services a fair rating and about 2 in 10 rated them as poor.

Figure 5: Line Addition to Question 10

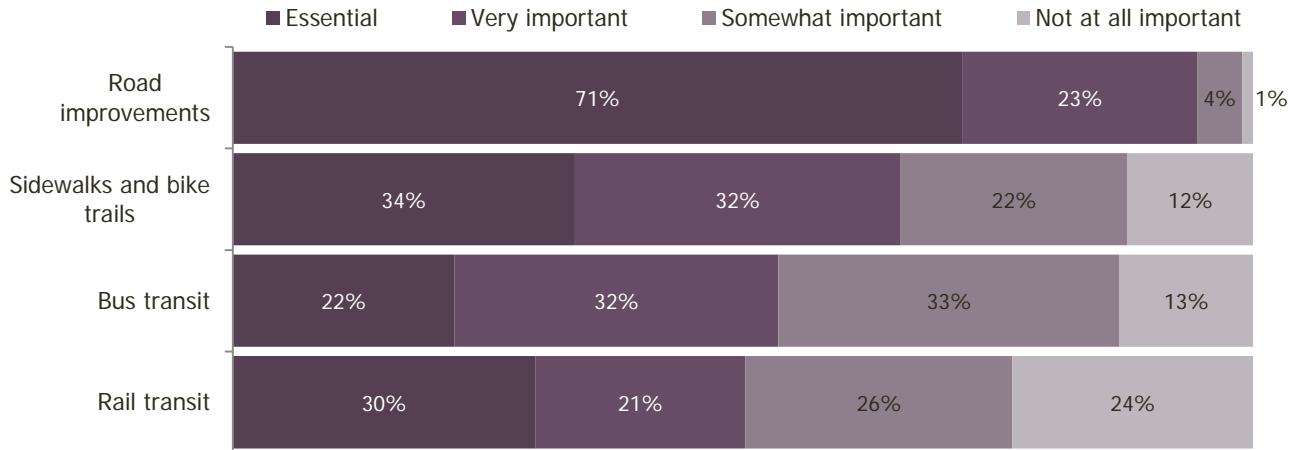
Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Charles County: services and programs for seniors aged 55 and older



Thinking about various methods of relieving traffic congestion, nearly all residents thought it was essential or very important for the County to invest in road improvements and two-thirds thought investing in sidewalks and bike trails was important. About half of respondents thought bus or rail transit were essential or very important.

Figure 6: Traffic Congestion Relief

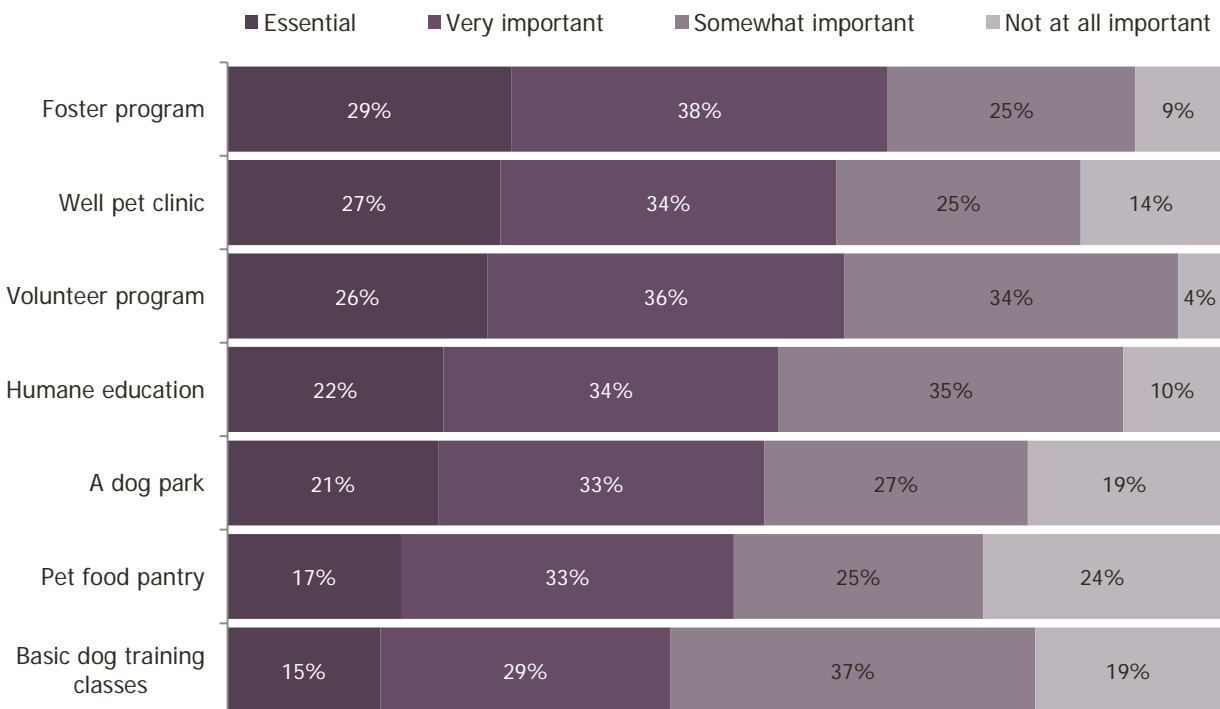
Traffic congestion is a problem in parts of Charles County. In your opinion, how important, if at all, is it for Charles County to invest in the following in order to relieve traffic congestion?



Roughly 6 in 10 residents thought it was essential or very important to have foster programs, well pet clinics and volunteer programs at the new Charles County Animal Shelter and about half thought having humane education, a dog park and a pet food pantry was important. More than 4 in 10 residents thought it was important for the shelter to have basic dog training classes.

Figure 7: Animal Shelter Services and Programs

Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is to have the following services/programs at the new Charles County Animal Shelter:



About half of residents had contact with a County employee in the 12 months prior to the survey. Of those who had contact, 6 in 10 had contact by phone, more than 3 in 10 had contact in person and less than 1 in 10 were in contact online or via email. At least 8 in 10 residents who had contacted County employees gave excellent or good ratings to the friendliness, knowledge, helpfulness and overall impression of the employee with whom they had most recently had contact.

Figure 8: 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)?

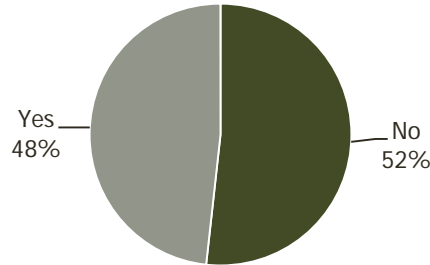
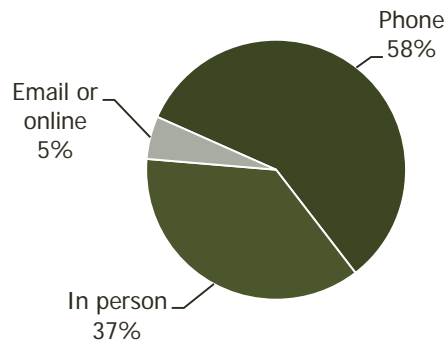


Figure 9: Method of Employee Contact

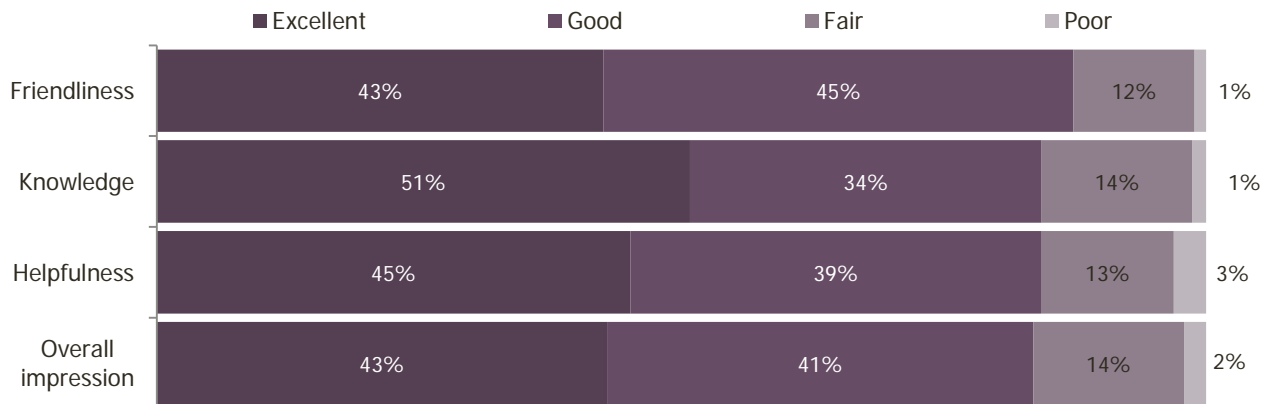
How did you reach the County employee(s) in your most recent contact?



This question was only asked of residents who had contact with a County employee.

Figure 10: Impression of County Employees

What was your impression of the County employee(s) in your most recent contact? (Rate each characteristic below.)

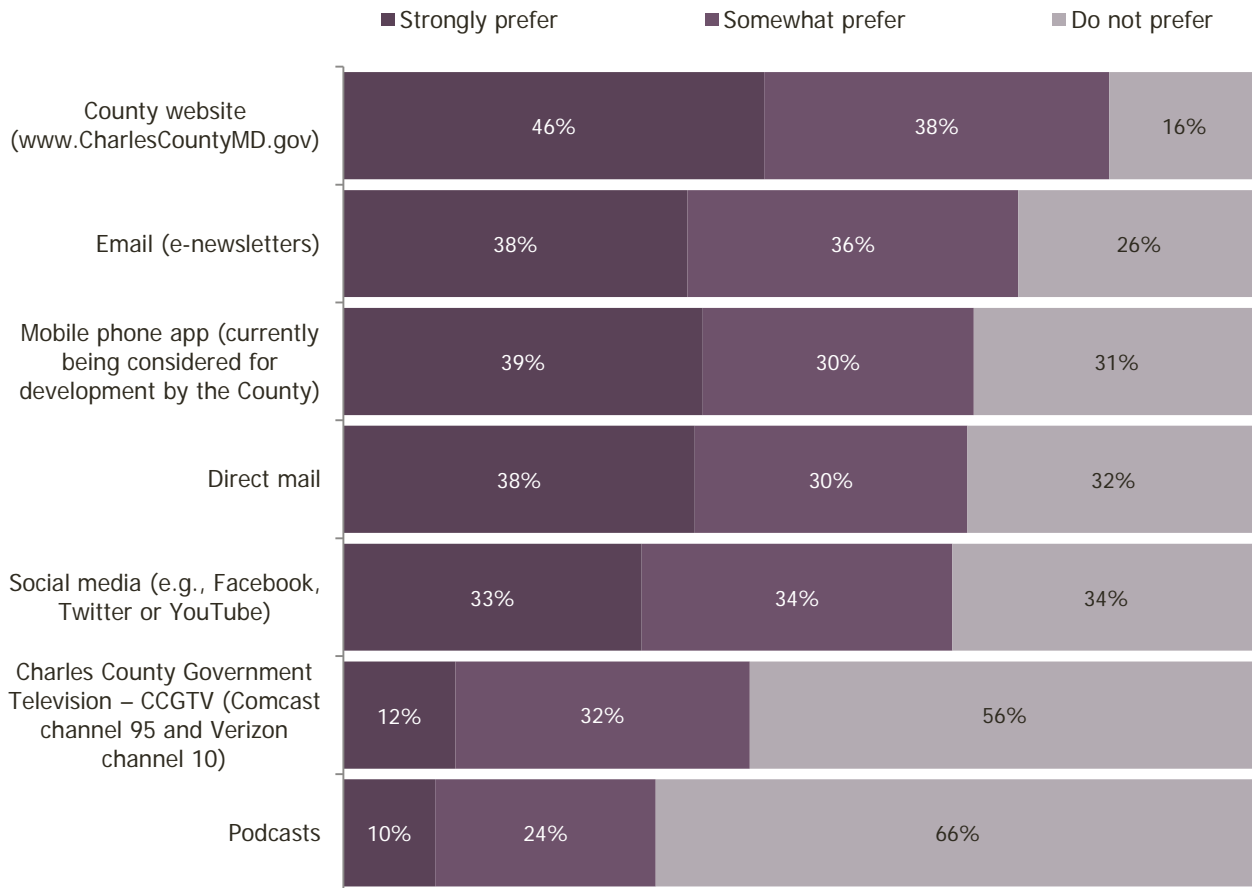


This question was only asked of residents who had contact with a County employee.

Thinking about how they preferred to receive County information, residents indicated the highest levels of preference for the County website (84% strongly or somewhat prefer) and email (74%). About 7 in 10 preferred a mobile phone app, direct mail or social media. Only 4 in 10 preferred County government television and one-third preferred podcasts.

Figure 11: Preferences for County Information Sources

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:



Conclusions

Safety and Economy are continued priorities for residents.

As in 2016, Charles County residents in 2018 indicated that Safety and Economy were important areas of focus for the County in the next two years. Ratings within both of these facets tended to be lower than those observed in other communities across the nation. For example, three-quarters of residents gave positive ratings to the feeling of safety in the County's downtown/commercial area while half gave favorable marks to the overall feeling of safety in the County, crime prevention and fire prevention; all of these were lower than the national benchmarks, and the ratings for crime and fire prevention decreased in 2018. In Economy, about 4 in 10 residents gave positive evaluations to the overall economic health of the County, vibrant downtown/commercial area, overall quality of business and service establishments, cost of living, Charles County as a place to visit and to work and economic development. These ratings were also lower than average.

Mobility is also an area of opportunity for the County.

Ratings within the facet of Mobility also tended to be lower than those seen in other communities. About half of residents or fewer gave favorable marks to the overall ease of travel in the County, paths and walking trails, traffic flow on major streets and ease of travel by all modes (car, bicycle, walking and public transportation). While ratings for the majority of Mobility-related services were similar to the national benchmarks, those for street cleaning, street lighting and bus or transit services were lower. Further, Charles County residents were less likely than those who lived elsewhere to have used alternative transportation modes. Finally, thinking about various methods of relieving traffic congestion, nearly all residents thought it was essential or very important for the County to invest in road improvements and two-thirds thought investing in sidewalks and bike trails was important.

Engagement within the community and ratings for government performance still show room for improvement, but residents remain satisfied with County customer service.

About 4 in 10 residents gave positive reviews to opportunities to participate in community matters, opportunities to volunteer, social events and activities and the neighborliness of residents; these ratings were lower than the national benchmarks and declined from 2016 to 2018. About one-third of residents or fewer gave favorable marks to various aspects of public trust, such as government acting in the best interest of the County, treating all residents fairly and being honest; these ratings were also lower than average.

However, as in 2016, residents who had contact with County employees generally gave positive reviews to their most recent interactions. About half of residents had contacted the County in the 12 months prior to the survey, and of those, about 8 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the friendliness, knowledge, helpfulness and overall impression of the employee with whom they had most recently had contact.

Regarding levels of engagement within their community, at least three-quarters of residents had interacted with their neighbors, read or watched local news or voted in local elections; these rates were similar to the national benchmarks. Finally, thinking about how they preferred to receive County information, residents indicated the highest levels of preference for the County website (84% strongly or somewhat prefer) and email (74%) while about 7 in 10 preferred a mobile phone app, direct mail or social media. Therefore, the County could use these avenues to communicate about decision making and opportunities to participate within the community to bolster engagement with the County and trust in their government.