

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Dover, NH

Community Livability Report

2017



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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Dover. 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).

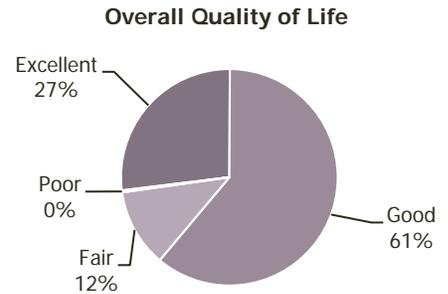
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 401 residents of the City of Dover. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Dover

About 9 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Dover as excellent or good, a rating similar to 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.



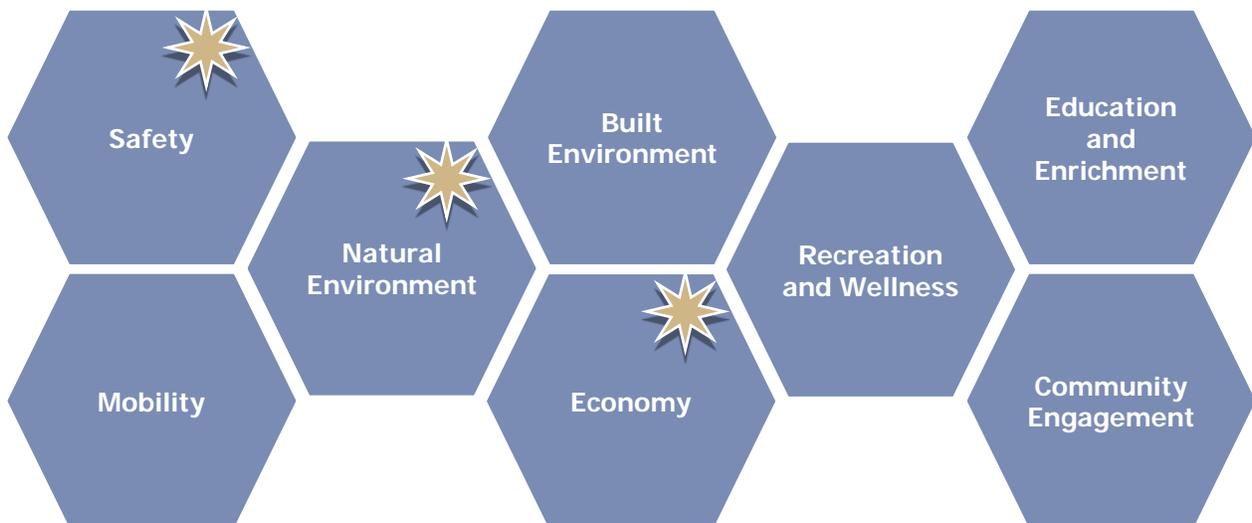
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Similar to 2015, residents identified Safety and Economy as a priority for Dover in the coming two years, and, new to 2017, residents also identified Natural Environment as an important area of focus. Dover residents gave ratings similar to comparison communities across all facets. 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 Dover’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 Dover, 95% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Dover 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: Dover as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Dover and its overall appearance. Around 8 in 10 respondents were pleased with most of these aspects of community. Ratings for the City's overall appearance increased between 2015 and 2017 (see *Trends Over Time* report available under separate cover). Dover as a place to retire received less favorable ratings, but all characteristics of community quality were on par with national peers.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, Dover performed at or above national averages. About 8 in 10 respondents were pleased with health care and preventative health services, which were higher than the national benchmark.

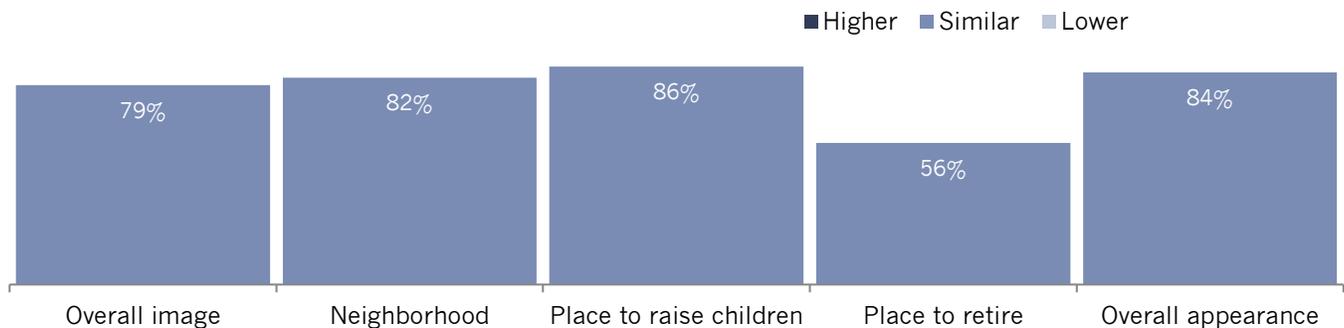


Economy fared well with a majority of respondents evaluating most aspects favorably. Ratings for vibrant downtown/commercial area were higher than the national average. Compared to 2015 ratings, overall economic health in Dover increased while the cost of living decreased.

As for other notable trends over time, areas trending up included ease of public parking, cleanliness and opportunities to attend social events and activities, while areas trending down included affordable quality housing and variety of housing options.

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

Comparison to national benchmark



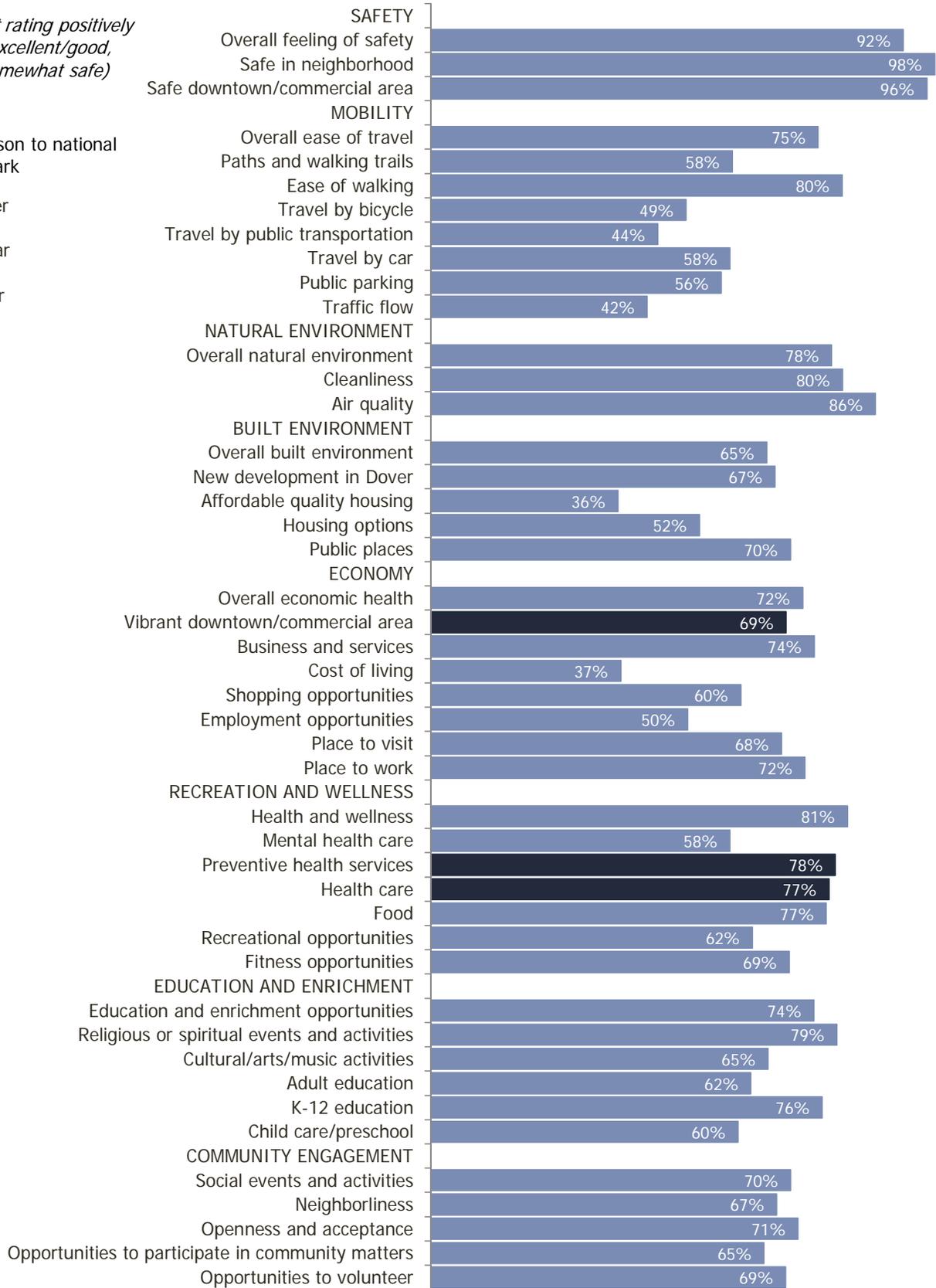
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

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

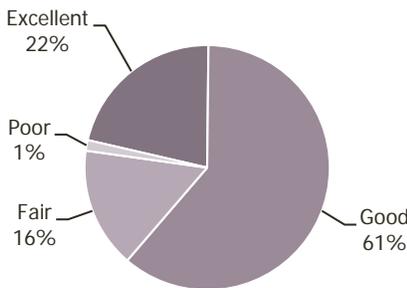
The overall quality of the services provided by Dover as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 residents positively evaluated the overall quality of services provided by the City and about half as many gave excellent or good ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for City and Federal government services were similar to the national average and similar to 2015 results.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Dover’s leadership and governance. Overall, at least half of respondents reported being pleased with all aspects of City governance. All of these ratings were akin to those given in communities across the nation. Compared to 2015, the job government does at welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of Dover and treating all residents fairly increased.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Dover. Generally, most services received positive ratings from at least half of residents and most ratings were similar to the national benchmark. Within the facet of Safety-related police and ambulance/EMS services were rated above the national average and in Natural Environment, yard waste pick-up was rated lower than the national average.

When compared to 2015, Governance ratings increased in the areas of animal control, street cleaning, street lighting, snow removal and sidewalk maintenance.

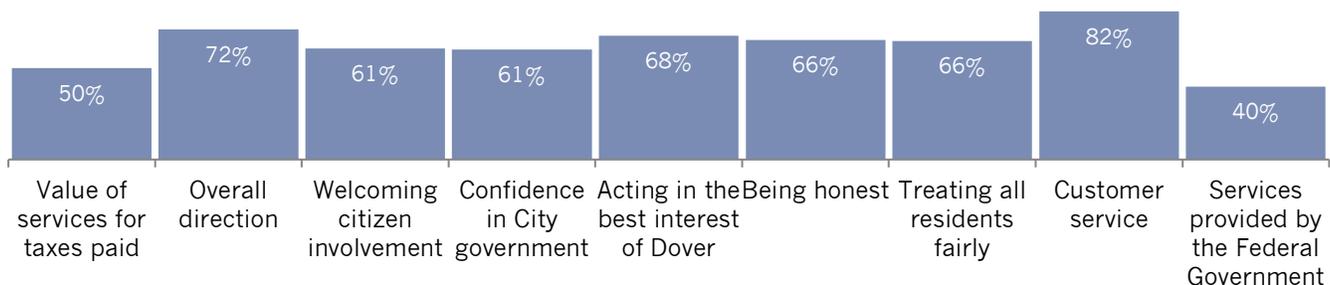
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



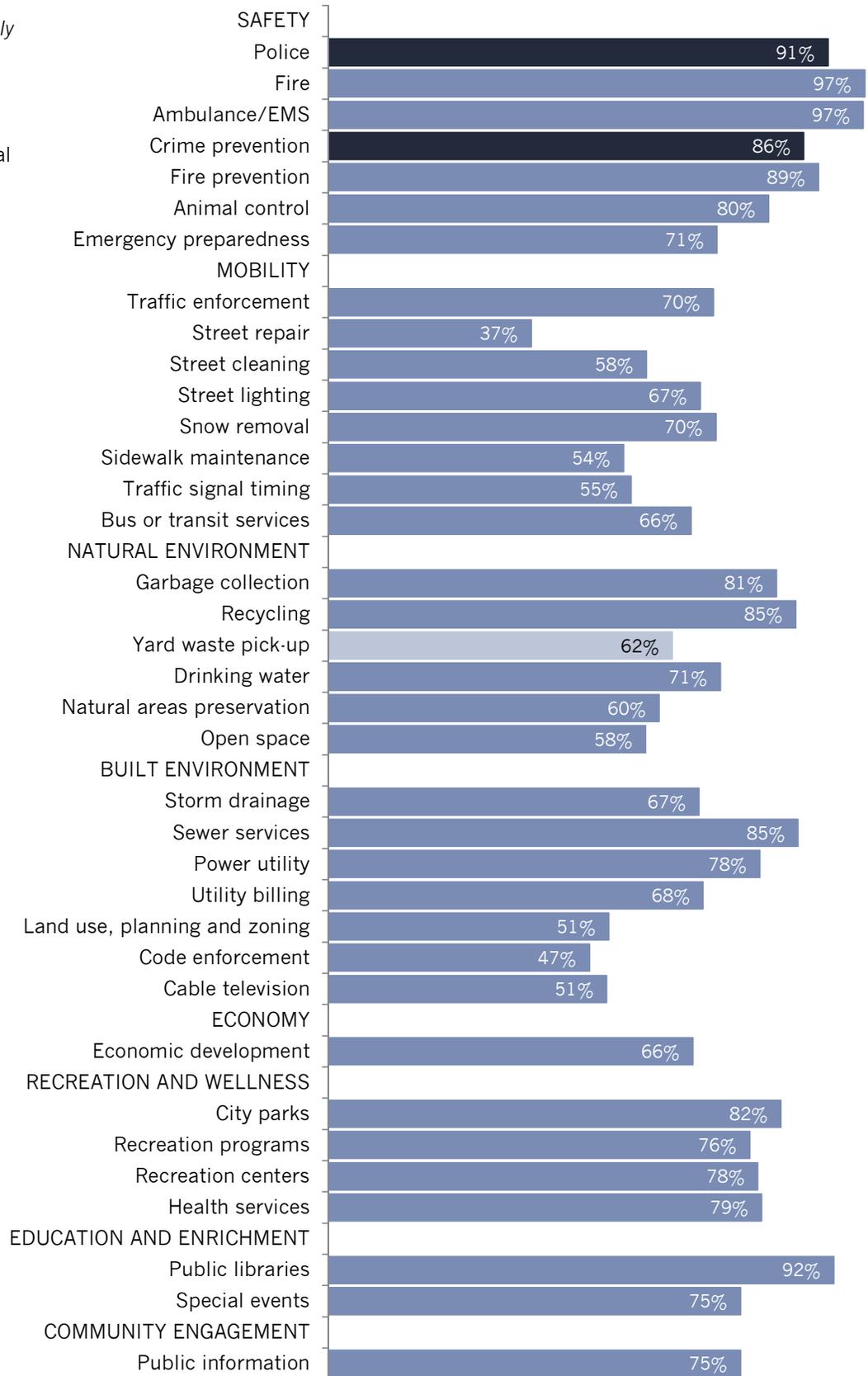
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



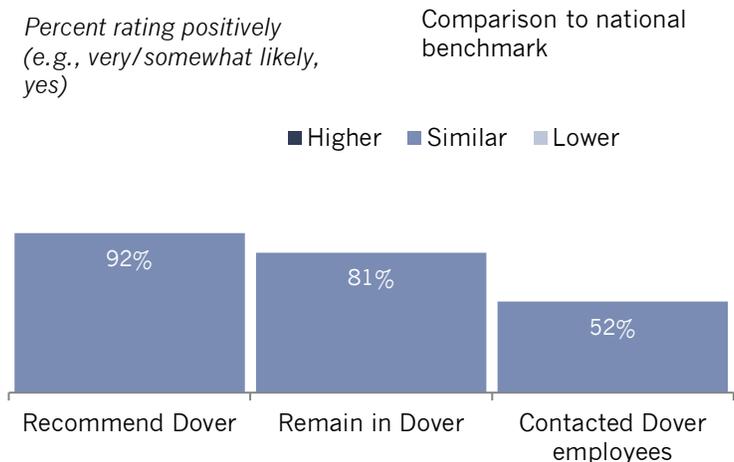
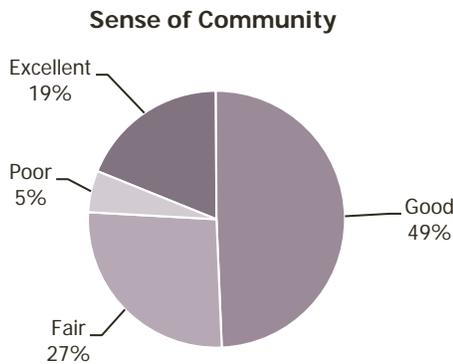
Participation

Are the residents of Dover 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 survey participants evaluated the sense of community in Dover positively, which was similar to comparison communities. Resident loyalty remained stable with around 9 in 10 saying they would recommend living in Dover and 8 in 10 expecting to remain in the City for the next five years. At least half of respondents reported contacting Dover employees.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Engagement by Dover residents tended to be on par with other communities nationwide. Similar to other communities across the U.S., about three-quarters of residents were not under housing cost stress. Fewer residents in Dover than in comparison communities reported observing a code violation. An average number of residents reported using Dover’s libraries and attending a City-sponsored event, but a lower than average number reported participating in religious or spiritual activities. Almost all residents purchased goods or services in the City and few attended a local public meeting.

Levels of Participation by Dover residents remained relatively unchanged between 2015 and 2017 though fewer Dover residents were under housing cost stress and fewer respondents stocked supplies for an emergency in 2017.



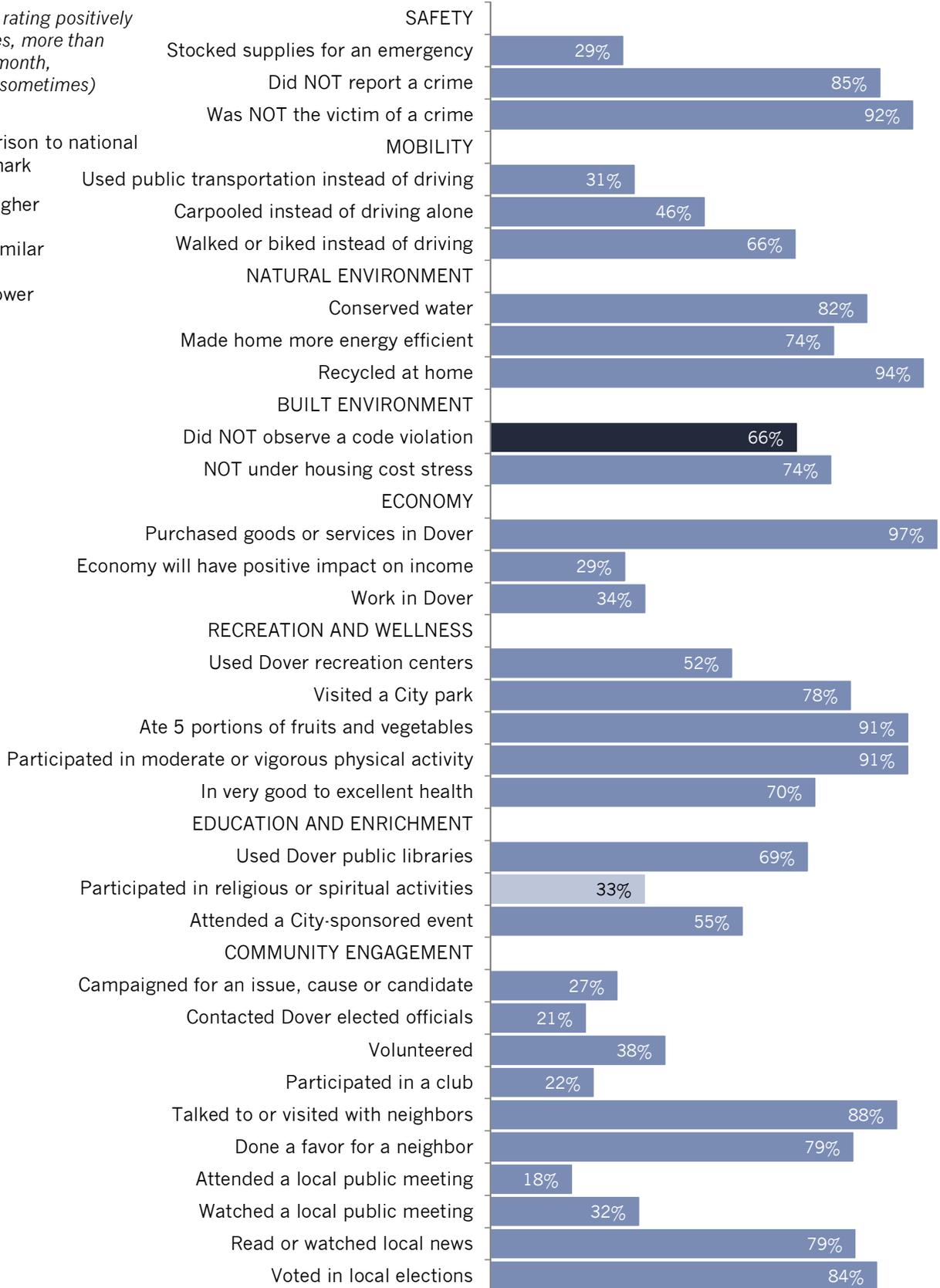
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



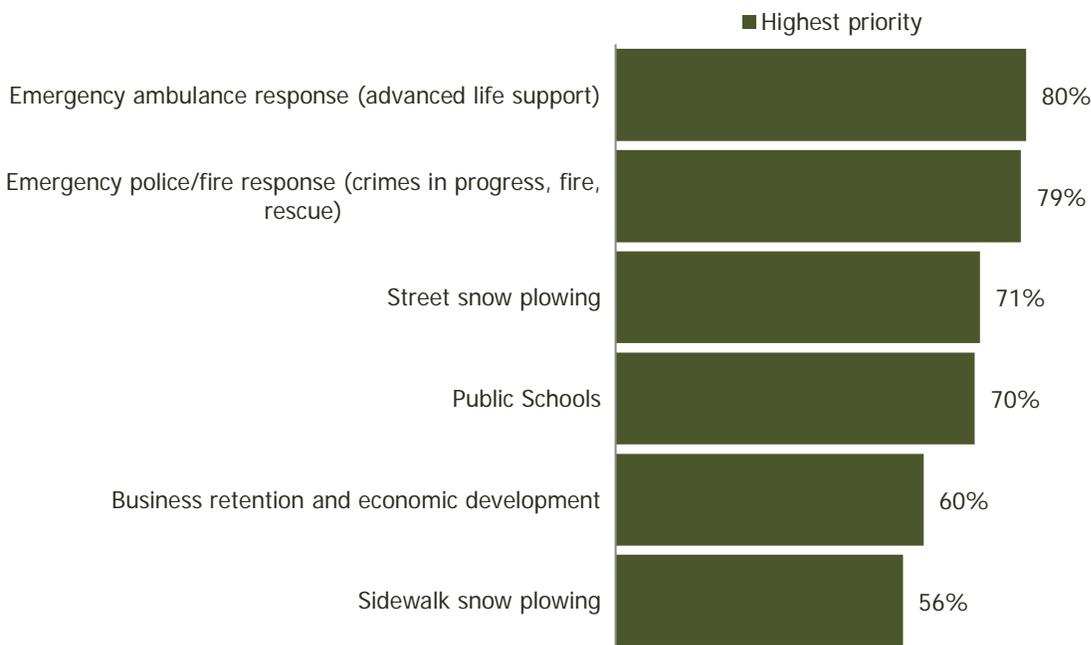
Special Topics

The City of Dover included a question of special interest on The NCS. The City wanted to gauge resident opinion on levels of priority for budget dollars for a list of 42 services.

Overall, half or more of respondents deemed each service as at least a “medium” priority. Almost 8 in 10 rated emergency ambulance and police and fire response as the “highest” priority, followed by street snow plowing with about 7 in 10 rating this service as the one of the highest. Public schools, business retention and economic development and sidewalk snow plowing were among the other “highest” priority services. The services with the least support for budget dollars included public meeting space availability, outdoor pool, recycling center hours, animal control and library computer availability (see Figure 5, page 10).

Figure 4: Highest Priorities for Budget Dollars

Cities are faced with difficult choices. If you were a member of City Council, which of the services listed below would you give high priority for receiving budget dollars, and which of them would you give low priority?



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Figure 5: Priorities for Budget Dollars

Cities are faced with difficult choices. If you were a member of City Council, which of the services listed below would you give high priority for receiving budget dollars, and which of them would you give low priority?	Highest priority	Medium priority	Lowest priority	Total
Emergency ambulance response (advanced life support)	80%	18%	3%	100%
Emergency police/fire response (crimes in progress, fire, rescue)	79%	18%	3%	100%
Street snow plowing	71%	27%	2%	100%
Public Schools	70%	27%	4%	100%
Business retention and economic development	60%	35%	5%	100%
Sidewalk snow plowing	56%	38%	6%	100%
Health inspections (restaurants, housing standards, disease control)	49%	41%	11%	100%
Student transportation	46%	45%	9%	100%
Youth drug/alcohol prevention efforts (Youth to Youth, DARE)	43%	41%	16%	100%
Street, sidewalk and curb maintenance	41%	49%	11%	100%
Victims of crime assistance (case consultation, legal system support)	38%	45%	17%	100%
Programs for low-income families (health services, housing, childcare)	38%	42%	19%	100%
Extracurricular (school) activities	37%	49%	15%	100%
Storm run-off drainage system maintenance	36%	49%	14%	100%
Middle/high school assigned police officer	34%	40%	26%	100%
Fire and life safety public education efforts (home and business)	33%	48%	19%	100%
Curbside solid waste and recycling pick up	32%	52%	16%	100%
Community oriented policing (downtown/neighborhood patrols)	31%	53%	16%	100%
Downtown public parking	30%	49%	21%	100%
Parks and playground maintenance (grounds, equipment, safety upgrades)	29%	61%	10%	100%
Building inspections (plumbing, electrical, safety codes)	29%	52%	18%	100%
Teen Center and related recreation activities	28%	51%	22%	100%
City Hall office hours (auto registration, vital records, tax assessing)	27%	50%	23%	100%
Public transportation (COANH, FasTrans, Transportation center)	26%	54%	21%	100%
Youth playground and summer camp programs	26%	49%	25%	100%
Community events/programs (4th of July, Coheco Arts, Holidays)	23%	55%	21%	100%
Communication with citizens (newsletter, program brochures, Web site)	23%	54%	22%	100%
Roadside tree trimming and weed control	23%	48%	29%	100%
Senior Center and related recreation activities	22%	54%	23%	100%
Library children's room and related programming	22%	46%	32%	100%
Library materials (literature, audio, historical documents, museum passes)	21%	53%	27%	100%
Indoor pool and related year-round recreation activities	21%	45%	34%	100%
Traffic related police patrols (stop sign, speed, crosswalk enforcement)	20%	44%	36%	100%
Library public computer availability	19%	43%	38%	100%
Streetscape maintenance (flowers, litter, decorative lights, street signage)	18%	52%	31%	100%
Library hours of operation	18%	48%	34%	100%
Outdoor pool and related summer only recreation activities	17%	42%	41%	100%
Municipal building maintenance (custodial/preventative maintenance)	16%	60%	24%	100%
Community Fitness Center/Gymnasium and related recreation activities	15%	52%	32%	100%
Recycling Center hours	15%	46%	39%	100%
Animal control (investigate complaints, retrieve/shelter stray animals)	15%	44%	41%	100%
Availability of public meeting space for organizations and non-profit groups	9%	42%	49%	100%

Conclusions

Leadership's approval is on the rise.

More residents in 2017 than in 2015 were pleased with a number of aspects of Dover's leadership and governance including: the job Dover does at welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of the City and treating all residents fairly. Additionally, a number of government services increased in ratings over time including: animal control, street cleaning, street lighting, snow removal and sidewalk maintenance. Overall, about 8 in 10 favorably rated the overall quality of City-provided services and the customer service provided by Dover employees. Residents' ratings of Dover's leadership, governance and service providing tended to be on par with communities across the nation.

Residents see a sound economy and raise concerns over cost of living.

As in 2015, residents maintained that the Economy should be an important focus area for the Dover community for the next two years. Since the baseline survey in 2011, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities and the city as a place to work have increased steadily to all-time highs in 2017, and the downtown/commercial area received marks higher than those in peer communities. Residents' sentiment regarding the overall economic health of Dover improved between 2015 and 2017, while the cost of living declined. Additionally, residents' ratings of affordable quality housing, variety of housing options and availability of affordable quality child care/preschool also declined during this same period. However, fewer residents in 2017 than in 2015 were experiencing housing cost stress (housing costs were 30% or more of income). When asked to identify priorities for budget dollars, three in five residents cited business retention and economic development as among the highest priorities.

Residents emphasize Safety as a priority for community.

Residents felt Safety should be among the community's top focus areas in the coming two years, and overall, the City is doing a good job in keeping the community safe. Almost all residents felt safe in their homes and downtown and fewer than 1 in 10 respondents reported having been the victim of a crime. Police services and crime prevention received ratings higher than the national average; other Safety-related services were on par with peer communities. As for priorities for budget dollars, four in five residents identified emergency ambulance response (advanced life support) and emergency police/fire response (crimes in progress, fire, rescue) as the highest priorities.