

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Urbandale, IA
Community Livability Report

2016



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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 Urbandale. 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 444 residents of the City of Urbandale. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% 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.

Urbandale’s results were also compared to NRC’s database of comparative resident opinion, which is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in surveys from over 500 communities whose residents evaluated the same kinds of topics on The National Citizen Survey™. Throughout this report, Urbandale’s results are noted as being “higher” than the benchmark, “lower” than the benchmark or “similar” to the benchmark, meaning that the average rating given by Urbandale residents is statistically similar to or different (greater or lesser) than ratings reported in other communities in NRC’s national database. For more information on the national benchmark comparisons, please see page 19 of the *Technical Appendices*.



Quality of Life in Urbandale

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Urbandale as excellent or good. This rating was higher than quality of life ratings seen 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.

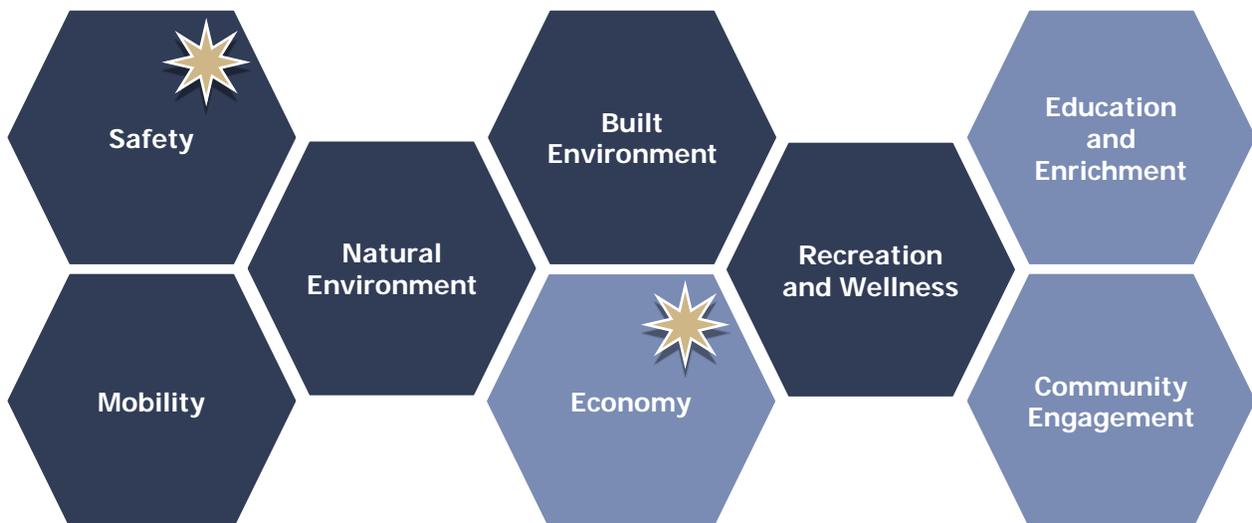
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Urbandale community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Urbandale residents gave favorable ratings to Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness; these facets were higher than the national benchmark comparisons. Ratings for Economy, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive and similar to comparison 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 Urbandale’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 Urbandale, 97% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Urbandale as a place to live were higher than 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 Urbandale as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Urbandale and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 survey participants gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image of Urbandale, their neighborhood as a place to live, Urbandale as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the city, while about 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the city as a place to retire. All of these aspects of community quality were higher than the national benchmark comparisons.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. More than 9 in 10 respondents gave favorable ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Urbandale, the feeling of safety in their neighborhood and the feeling of safety in Urbandale's downtown/commercial area. Almost all aspects of Mobility were rated positively by at about 7 in 10 residents or more and received ratings that were higher than ratings seen in comparison communities; the only exception was travel by public transportation, which received excellent or good ratings from 44% of respondents and was similar to the benchmark. Ratings in the facets of Natural Environment and Built Environment were strong: all aspects within these facets received ratings that were higher than the national benchmark comparisons. All aspects within Natural Environment were given excellent or good ratings by about 9 in 10 survey respondents. Within Built Environment, about 8 in 10 respondents gave favorable ratings to housing options, public places where people like to spend time and the overall built environment in Urbandale, while around three-quarters favorably rated the availability of affordable quality housing and new development. The overall economic health of

Urbandale was rated favorably by about 9 in 10 city residents, which was higher than ratings typically seen in other communities across the county. Other ratings within the facet of Economy ranged from a low of 41% excellent or good for the vibrancy of Urbandale's downtown/commercial area to a high of 83% for the city as a place to work; it is also noteworthy that ratings for the city as a place to work, the cost of living and employment opportunities were rated higher in Urbandale than in other communities. About two-thirds of residents or more awarded high marks to all aspects of Recreation and Wellness; within this facet, only recreational opportunities was not rated higher than the national benchmarks. All aspects of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated favorably by at least half of respondents and were similar to or higher than the benchmarks.



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

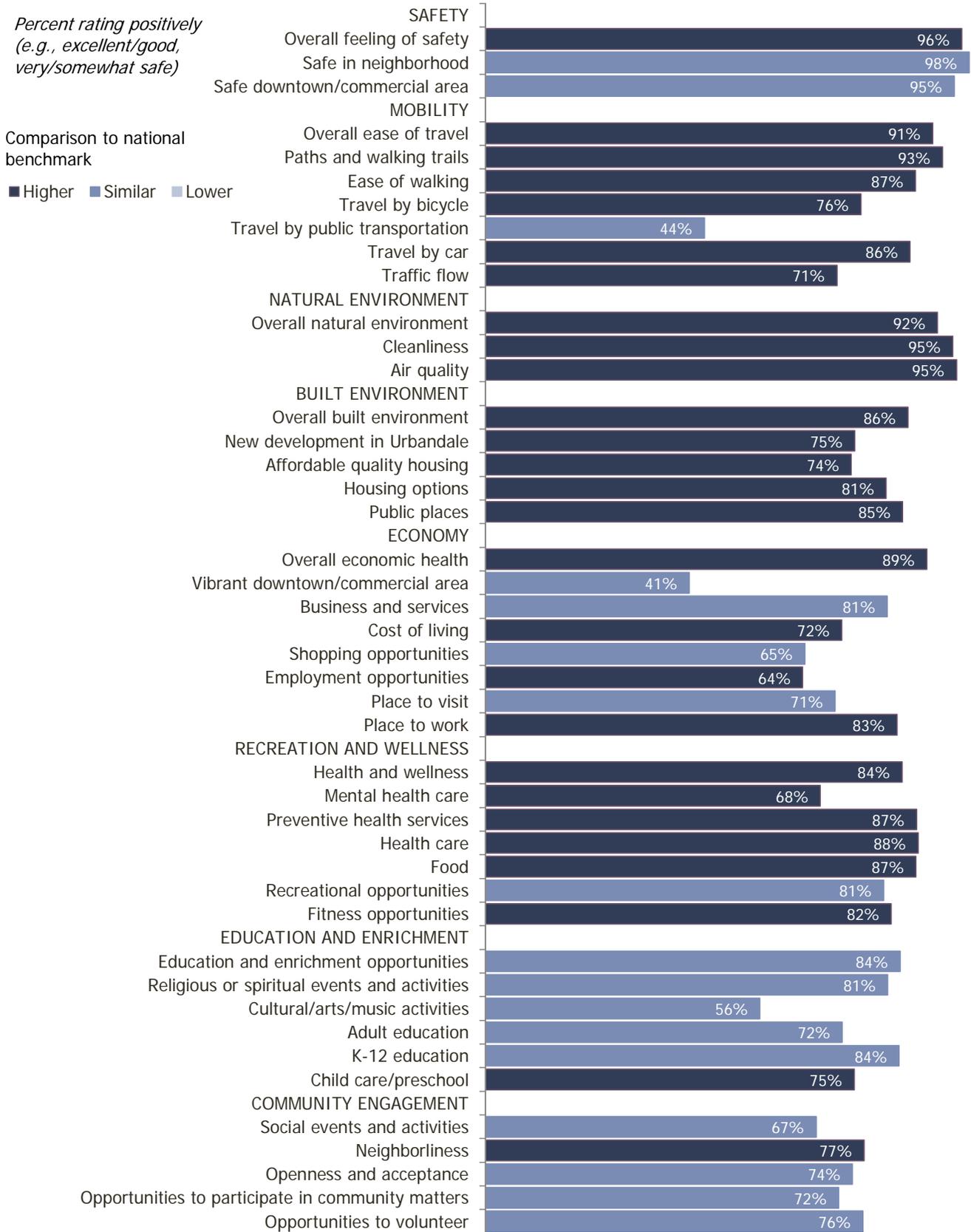
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

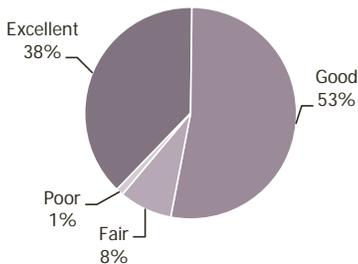
How well does the government of Urbandale meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Urbandale as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of City services provided by Urbandale, which was higher than the national benchmark comparison. In contrast, about half of participants favorably rated services provided by the Federal Government, which was similar to ratings seen in comparison communities.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Urbandale’s leadership and governance. About 7 in 10 or more residents gave favorable ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction that Urbandale is taking, confidence in the City government, the job the City does at acting in the best interest of the community, being honest and treating all residents fairly; all of these aspects of Urbandale’s leadership and governance were higher than the benchmarks. About 9 in 10 respondents gave favorable ratings to the customer service provided by City employees and about two-thirds gave high marks to the job the Urbandale government does at welcoming citizen involvement; both of these ratings were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Urbandale. All Urbandale services and amenities were rated positively by a majority of residents, and most services were rated higher than the national benchmark comparisons. At least 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to all Safety-related services; it is especially noteworthy that about 9 in 10 or more residents gave excellent or good ratings to police, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention and fire prevention services. Ratings within the facet of Mobility varied, but were generally strong and similar to or higher than the national comparisons. All aspects in Natural Environment, with the exception of drinking water, received ratings that were higher than ratings seen in other communities nationwide. Ratings within Built Environment were similarly strong, with two-thirds or more of respondents giving favorable ratings to all aspects within this facet. All aspects within the facets of Economy and Community Engagement were given excellent or good ratings by at least three-quarters of respondents and were rated higher in Urbandale than in other communities nationwide. At least 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment; Urbandale City parks and Urbandale public libraries received ratings that were higher than the benchmarks.

Overall Quality of City Services

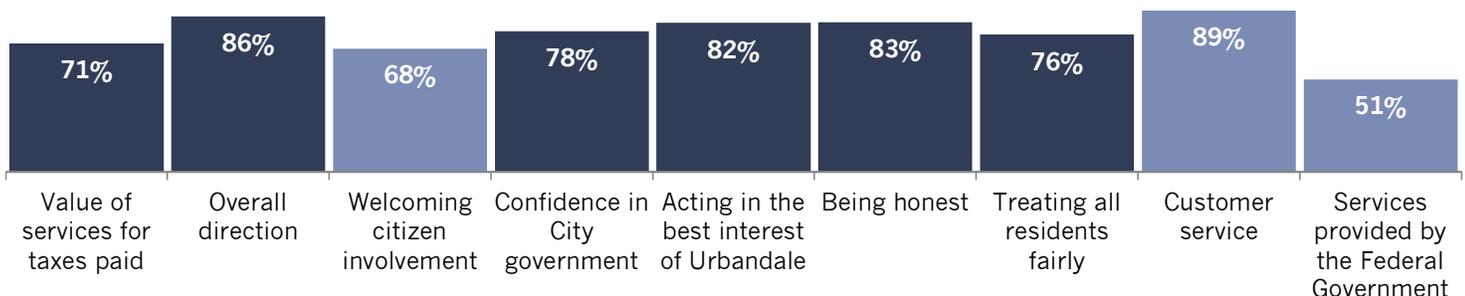


Ratings increased from 2014 to 2016 for several Urbandale services and amenities, including animal control, snow removal, bus or transit services, natural area preservation, recreation centers, recreation programs and City-sponsored special events (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under a separate cover for more detail).

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



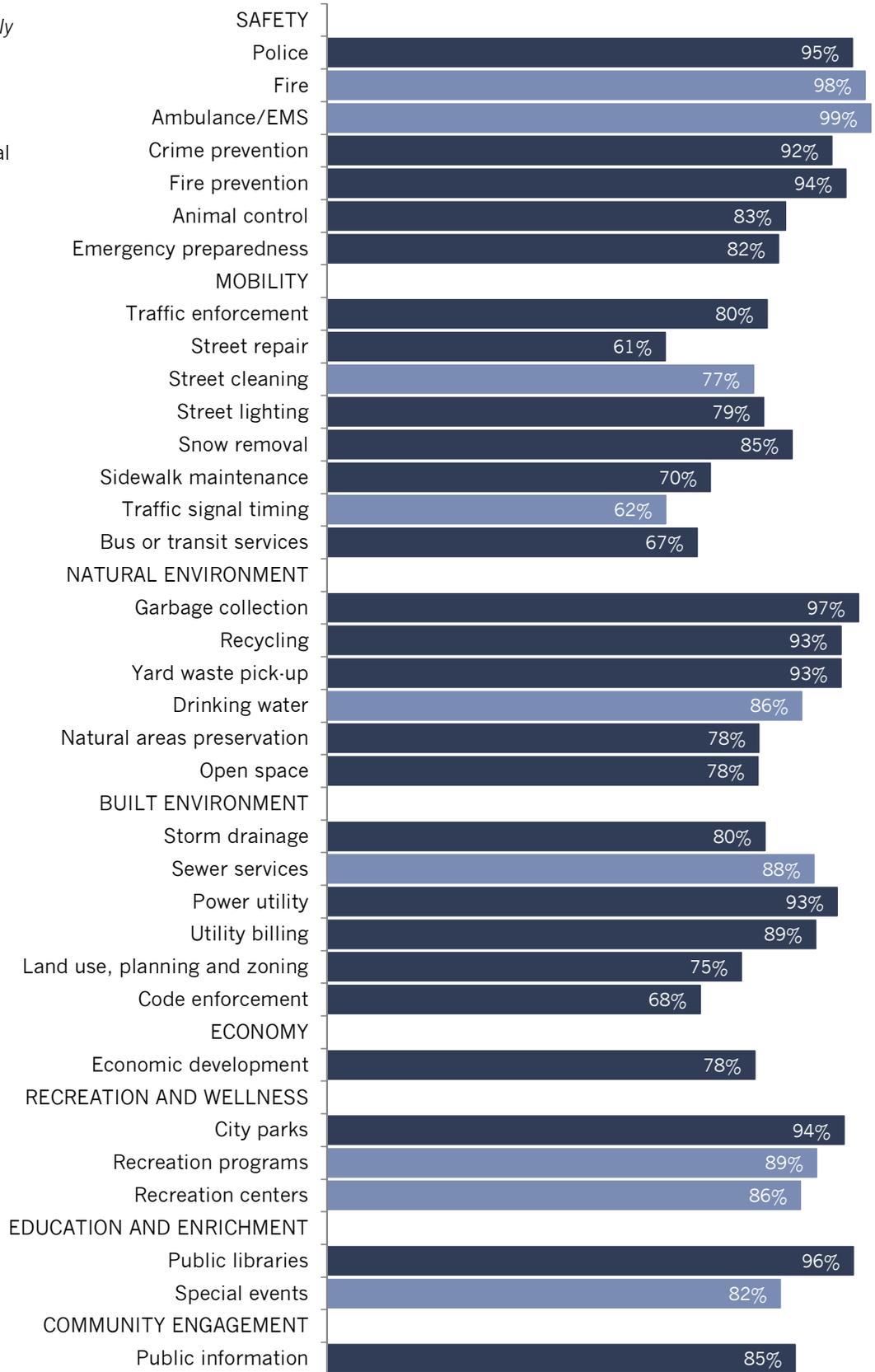
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

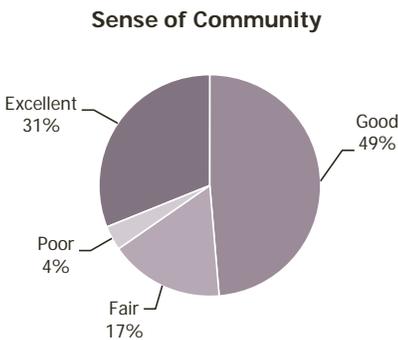


Participation

Are the residents of Urbandale 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 8 in 10 residents gave an excellent or good rating to the sense of community in Urbandale, which was higher than the national benchmark. Ninety-six percent of respondents reported both that they plan to remain in Urbandale for the coming 5 years and that they would recommend living in the city to someone who asked; these ratings were higher in Urbandale than in other communities nationwide. About 4 in 10 participants had contacted an Urbandale employee in the 12 months prior to the survey, which is similar to the benchmark comparison.

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 Safety varied: while more than 8 in 10 respondents did not report a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey (a rate which was higher than the national benchmark), only about one-quarter had stocked supplies for an emergency (a rate that was lower than the benchmark). Within the facet of Mobility, about half of respondents indicated that they walked or biked instead of driving. However, only about 3 in 10 participants had carpooled instead of driving alone, and less than 1 in 10 had used public transportation instead of driving; both of these participation rates were lower in Urbandale than in other communities nationwide. While ratings were generally similar within Natural Environment, about 7 in 10 respondents reported that they conserved water, which was lower than levels seen in communities across the nation. Almost all residents (96%) reported purchasing goods or services in Urbandale, while about one-quarter indicated that they work in the city; the level of respondents who reported working in Urbandale was lower than the benchmark. Levels of participation in Recreation and Wellness were strong and similar to rates seen in comparison communities. Within Education and Enrichment, about two-thirds of respondents reported using Urbandale public libraries and about half had attended a City-sponsored special event. Overall, Community Engagement in Urbandale was generally similar to the national benchmark. About 9 in 10 respondents reported voting in local elections, talking to or visiting with neighbors and reading or watching local news; however fewer Urbandale residents (17%) reported watching a local public meeting than residents in other communities across the nation.

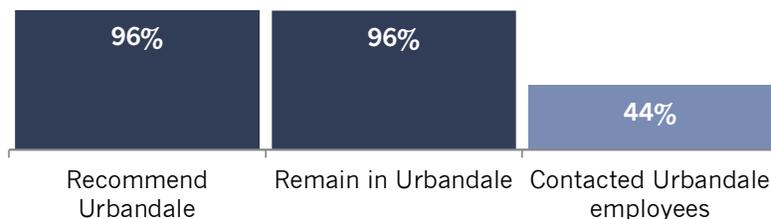


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Percent rating positively (e.g., very/somewhat likely, yes)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



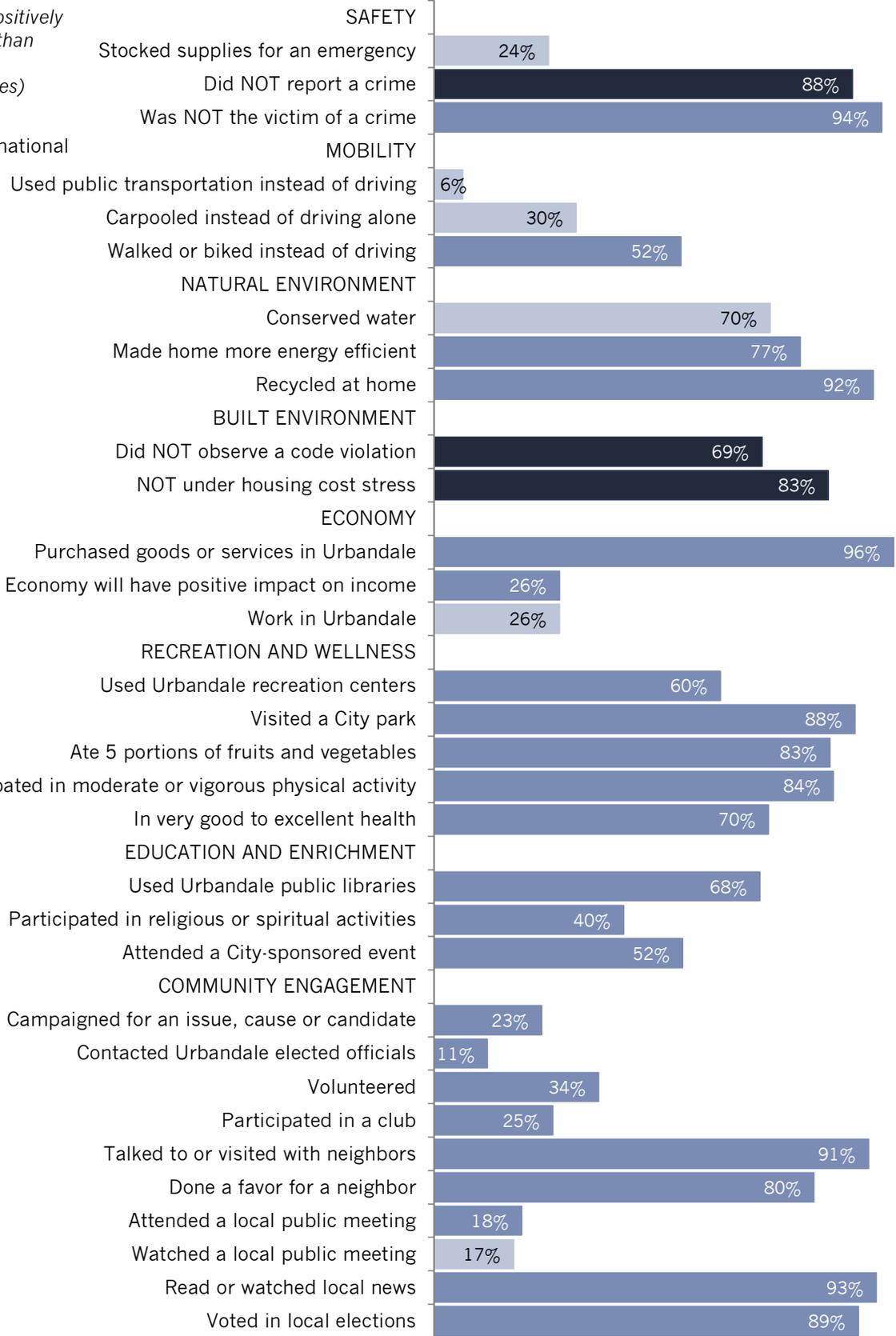
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

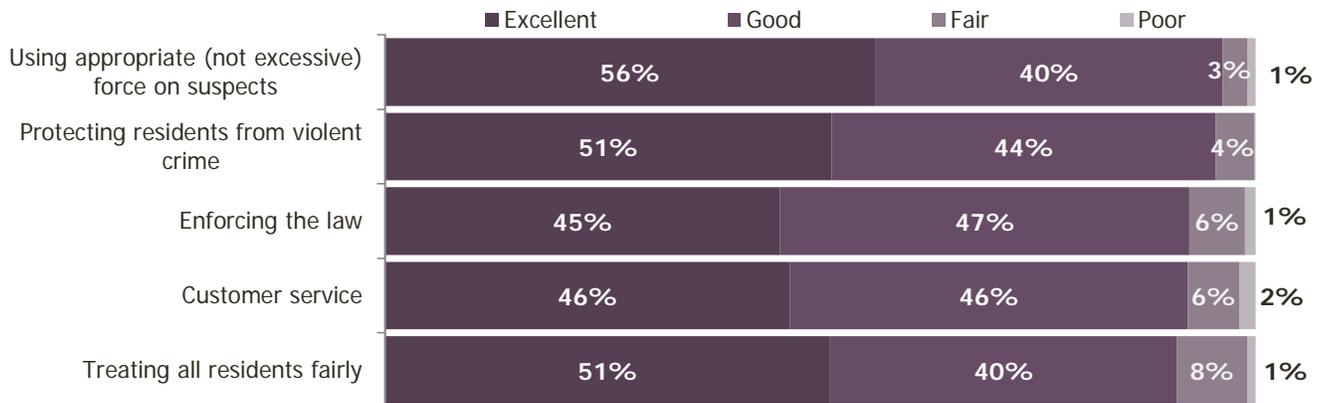


Special Topics

The City of Urbandale included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special interest question asked residents to rate various aspects of the Urbandale Police Department's performance. About 96% of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the job the Urbandale Police Department does at using appropriate (not excessive) force on suspects and protecting residents from violent crime. At least 9 in 10 participants gave favorable ratings to all other aspects of Police Department performance.

Figure 4: Police Department Performance

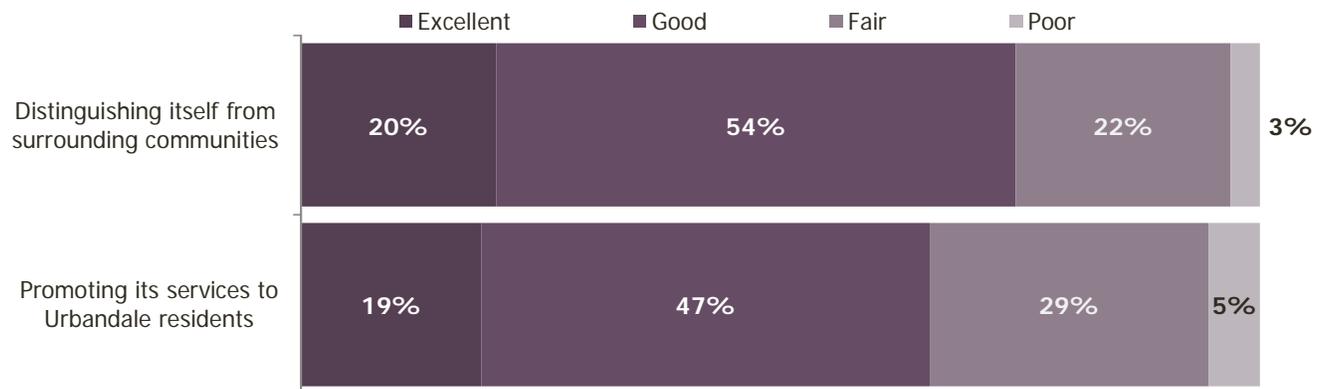
Please rate the job the Urbandale Police Department does at each of the following:



Residents were next asked to rate two aspects related to the City of Urbandale's reputation and promotion of services. About three-quarters of survey participants gave favorable ratings to the job the City does at distinguishing itself from surrounding communities. Roughly two-thirds of respondents gave high marks to the job the City does at promoting its services to residents.

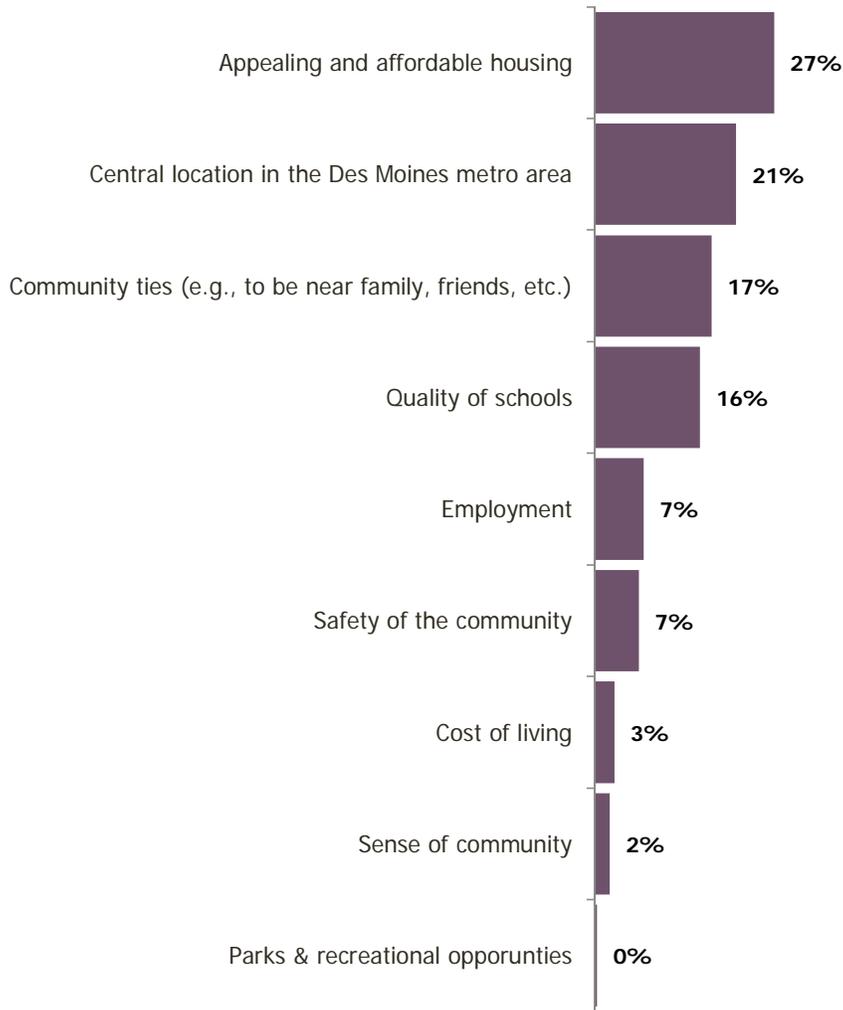
Figure 5: City of Urbandale Reputation and Promotion

Please rate the job the City of Urbandale does at each of the following:



The final special interest question asked residents to identify what the most important factor was in their decision to move to Urbandale. About one-quarter of respondents indicated that the appealing and affordable housing in the community was the most important factor in their decision to move to Urbandale. The other most commonly identified factors were Urbandale's central location in the Des Moines metro area (21% indicated it was the most important factor), community ties (17%) and the quality of schools (16%).

Figure 6: Resident Reasons for Moving to Urbandale
What was the most important factor in your decision to move to Urbandale? (Please select only one.)



Conclusions

Urbandale residents enjoy an exceptionally high quality of life.

Almost all survey respondents rated the overall quality of life in Urbandale and the city as a place to live as excellent or good; these ratings remained stable over time and were higher in Urbandale than in other communities nationwide. More than 9 in 10 respondents would recommend living in Urbandale to someone who asked and a similar proportion of respondents reported that they plan to remain in the community for the coming 5 years. Ratings for features that enhance quality of life, such as the overall appearance of the city, the City as a place to raise children and their neighborhoods as places to live were rated positively by around 9 in 10 residents, and were all higher than the national benchmark comparisons. Additionally, about 8 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in Urbandale, which was higher than sense of community ratings typically seen elsewhere.

Safety is an important and positive feature of the community.

Residents identified Safety as an important focus area of the Urbandale community in the coming two years. Almost all residents (96%) gave excellent or good ratings to the overall feeling of safety in the City, which was higher than ratings seen in comparison communities. Ratings for Safety-related services were also strong and generally higher than the national benchmark comparisons. About 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to police, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention and fire prevention services. Although only about one-quarter of residents reported stocking supplies for an emergency (a rate that is lower than what is typically seen in comparison communities), about 9 in 10 respondents had not reported a crime and were not the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey. It is also noteworthy that at least 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to all aspects of Urbandale Police Department performance, including to the job the Urbandale Police Department does at using appropriate (not excessive) force on suspects and protecting residents from violent crime.

The Economy is a top priority for Urbandale residents.

The Economy was also identified as an important focus area for the Urbandale community in the coming two years. Ratings in the facet of Economy were stable over time and generally strong and similar to or higher than ratings seen in other communities nationwide. About 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the overall economic health of Urbandale, and about 8 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to Urbandale as a place to work and the quality of business and service establishments in the city. Economic development, the cost of living and employment opportunities were also rated positively by a majority of respondents and received ratings that were higher than ratings seen in comparison communities. Almost all residents reported purchasing goods or services in Urbandale. However, only about one-quarter of respondents reported working in the city of Urbandale, a rate that was lower than rates typically seen in other communities.

City government leadership and services consistently meet or exceed the needs and expectations of residents.

This year, as in previous years, Urbandale residents gave high marks to aspects of the City of Urbandale's leadership and governance. At least 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall direction that Urbandale is taking, confidence in the City government, the City government acting in the best interest of the community, being honest and the job the City does at treating all residents fairly. These ratings were higher than ratings seen in other communities across the country. Ratings for services and amenities provided by the City also tended to be strong and similar to or higher than ratings seen in comparison communities. It is especially noteworthy that ratings for several City services, including bus or transit services, natural areas preservation, recreation centers, recreation programs and City-sponsored special events, increased from 2014 to 2016. A majority of residents also indicated that the City does an excellent or good job at distinguishing itself from surrounding communities and promoting its services to Urbandale residents.