

# **The National Citizen Survey™**

## **Charlottesville, VA**

Community Livability Report

2014

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The National Citizen Survey™  
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# About

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

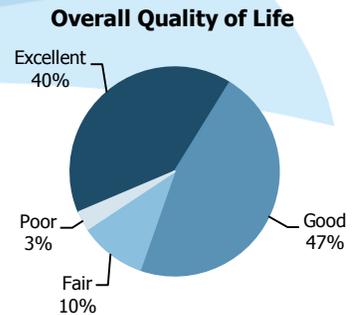
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight facets of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

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 269 residents of the City of Charlottesville. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% for the entire sample. The full descriptive methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Charlottesville

Most residents rated the quality of life in Charlottesville as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national comparison benchmark (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.

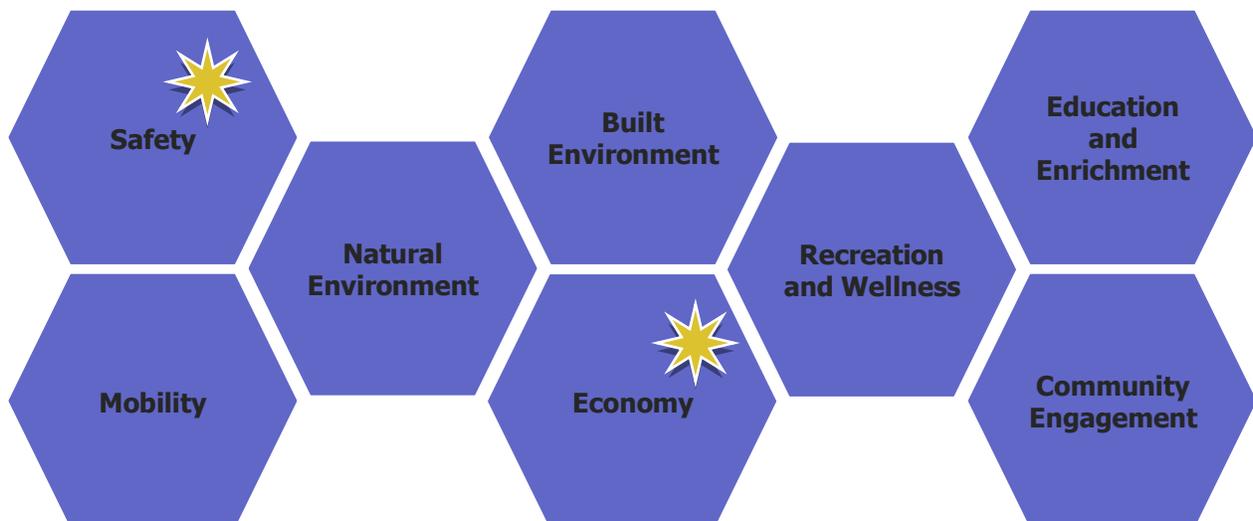
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Charlottesville community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Charlottesville residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community. In fact, ratings for all facets including Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive and similar to other 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 Charlottesville’s unique questions.

## Legend

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

★ Most important



# Community Characteristics

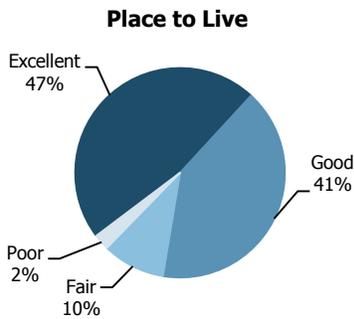
*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

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 Charlottesville, 88% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Charlottesville 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 Charlottesville as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Charlottesville and its overall appearance. Each measure received positive ratings from at least 8 in 10 residents and ratings for Charlottesville as a place to retire and Charlottesville's overall image were higher than the benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, most results were similar to other communities and most features had positive ratings from a majority of respondents. Aspects within the facets of Natural Environment and Safety tended to receive positive ratings from the most respondents with about 8 in 10 or more and received ratings that were similar to the national benchmark. Other notably strong ratings with benchmark comparisons higher than the national average were clustered in Economy, Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment. These ratings include Charlottesville as a place to visit (85% excellent or good), health and wellness (84%), education and enrichment opportunities (89%), cultural/arts/music activities (84%) and adult education (82%).

Vibrant downtown/commercial area and health care were also rated more highly in Charlottesville than in other communities in the national comparison and received positive ratings from about 7 in 10 respondents. Items that were lower than the benchmark and received favorable ratings from one-third or fewer residents were public parking, traffic flow, affordable quality housing and cost of living. Nearly all Community Characteristics had similar or higher ratings in 2014 as in 2012 (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover).



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

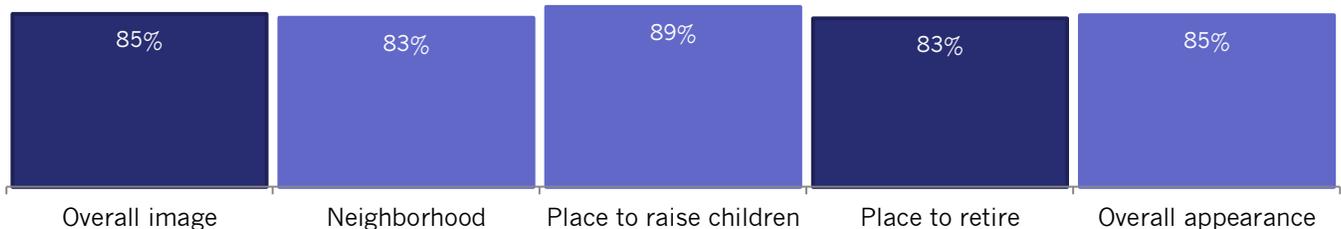
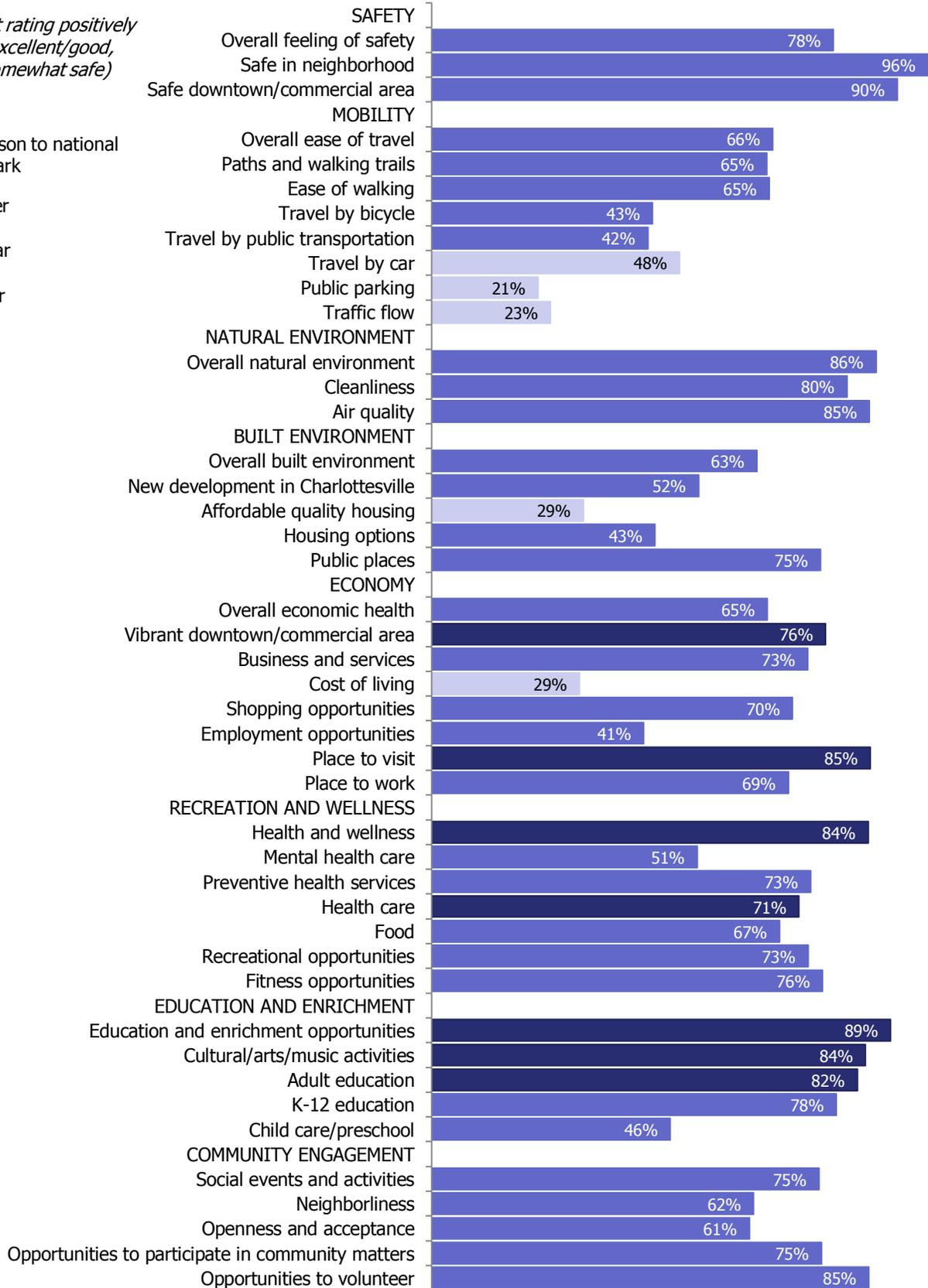


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Governance

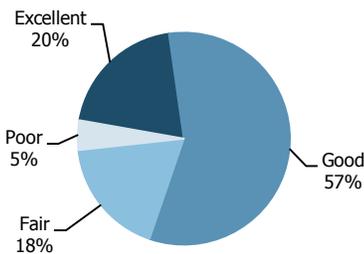
*How well does the government of Charlottesville meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Charlottesville as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. The overall quality of services provided by the City of Charlottesville received excellent or good ratings by 77% of residents; while the Federal Government received positive ratings from 50% of residents. Both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark comparisons.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Charlottesville’s leadership and governance. A majority of residents gave positive ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction of the City, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of Charlottesville, being honest and customer service of City employees. These ratings were similar to communities across the nation.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Charlottesville. Most ratings for the quality of services in Charlottesville were rated as excellent or good by a majority of residents and tended to be similar to the national benchmark. Crime prevention, snow removal, and cable television received favorable ratings from less than half of respondents and were rated lower than the benchmark. Safety received a wide range of positive ratings from 49% excellent or good for crime prevention to 96% excellent or good for fire services. The seven aspects included in Built Environment also saw a wide range of positive ratings from 40% excellent or good for cable television to 78% excellent or good for sewer services. The four aspects within Recreation and Wellness were strong and similar to the benchmark with at least 77% of residents giving an excellent or good rating. In 2014, ratings within the pillar of Governance tended to be similar to or lower than ratings in 2012.

**Overall Quality of City Services**



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

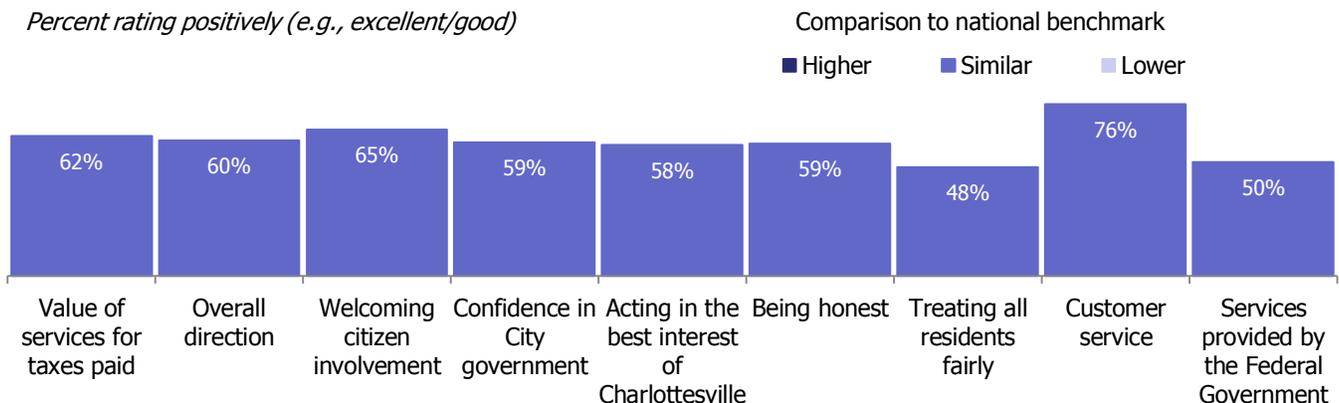
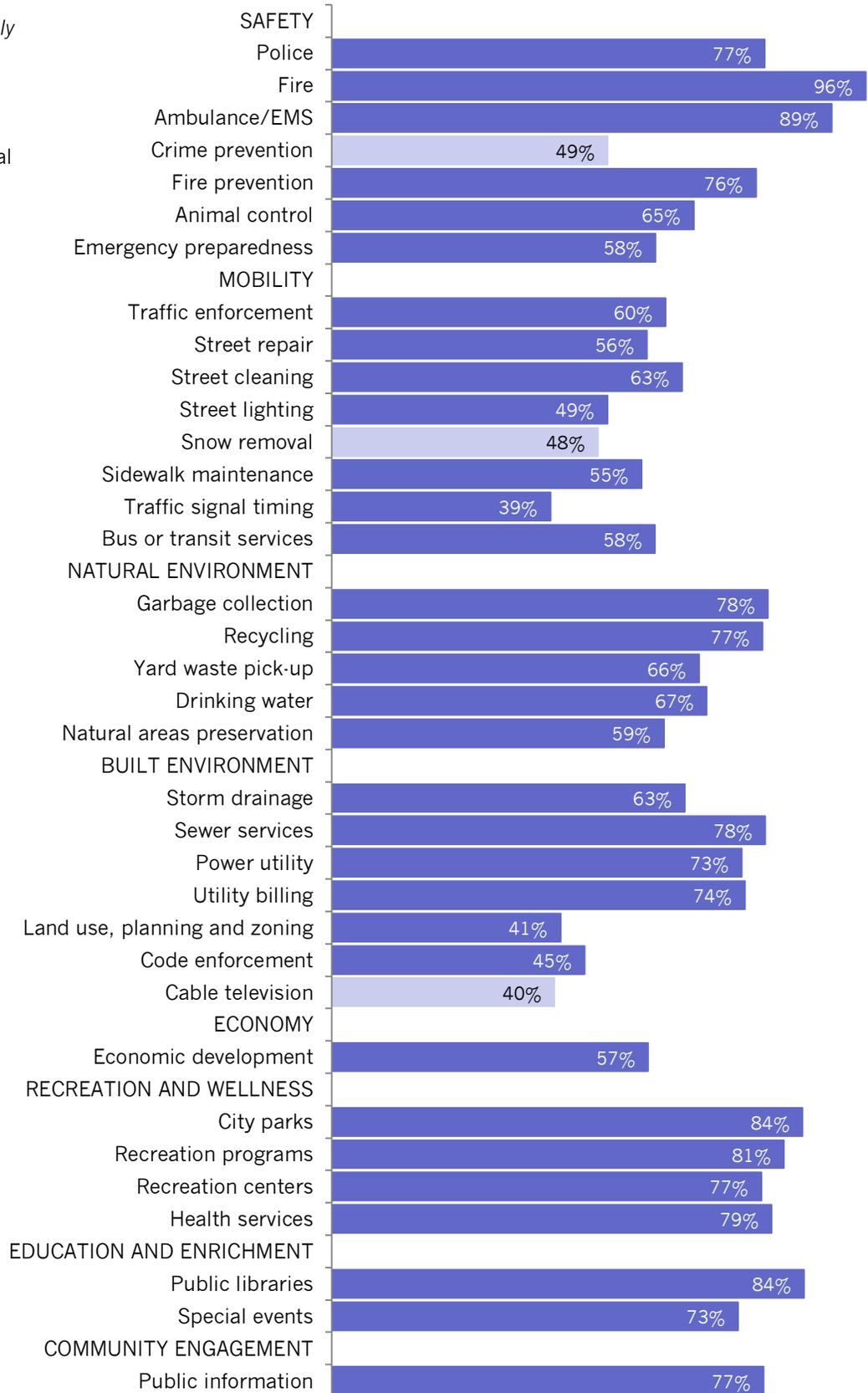


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

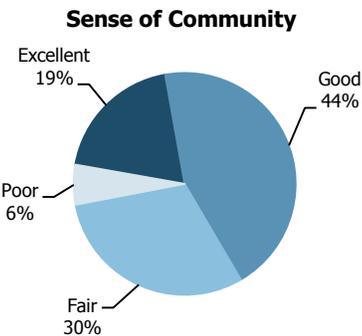


# Participation

*Are the residents of Charlottesville 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. Sixty-three percent of residents gave a positive rating to the sense of community in Charlottesville and this level was similar to ratings given in other communities in across the nation. About 7 in 10 residents were likely to remain in Charlottesville for the next five years and almost 9 in 10 were likely to recommend living in the city.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. While levels of participation measured in the survey varied widely, most aspects of Participation were similar to other communities. Of all of the measured items, Charlottesville residents were most likely to have recycled at home, purchased goods or services in the city, visited a City park, participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity and talked to or visited with neighbors. Alternately, Charlottesville residents were least likely to have contacted a Charlottesville elected official, campaigned for an issue, to have attended or watched a local public meeting and to feel the economy will have a positive impact on their income. All three measures of Mobility (used public transportation instead of driving, carpoled instead of driving alone and walked or biked instead of driving) were higher than the benchmark. Other rates of Participation that were higher than the benchmark were the level of residents indicating they work in Charlottesville, attended a City-sponsored event, volunteered and participated in a club. The only rate of Participation that received a comparison lower than the benchmark was the use of Charlottesville public libraries. Where comparisons were possible, measures of Participation in 2014 varied in comparison to 2012; twelve measures were similar and four measures showed lower levels of participation.



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

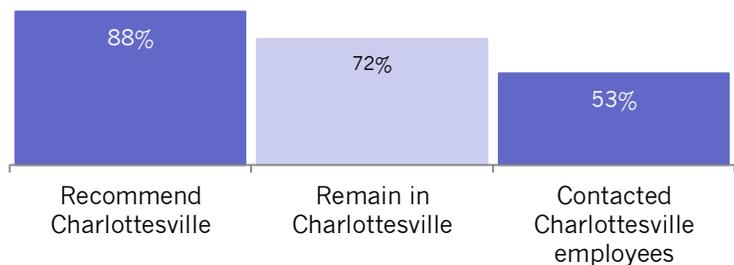
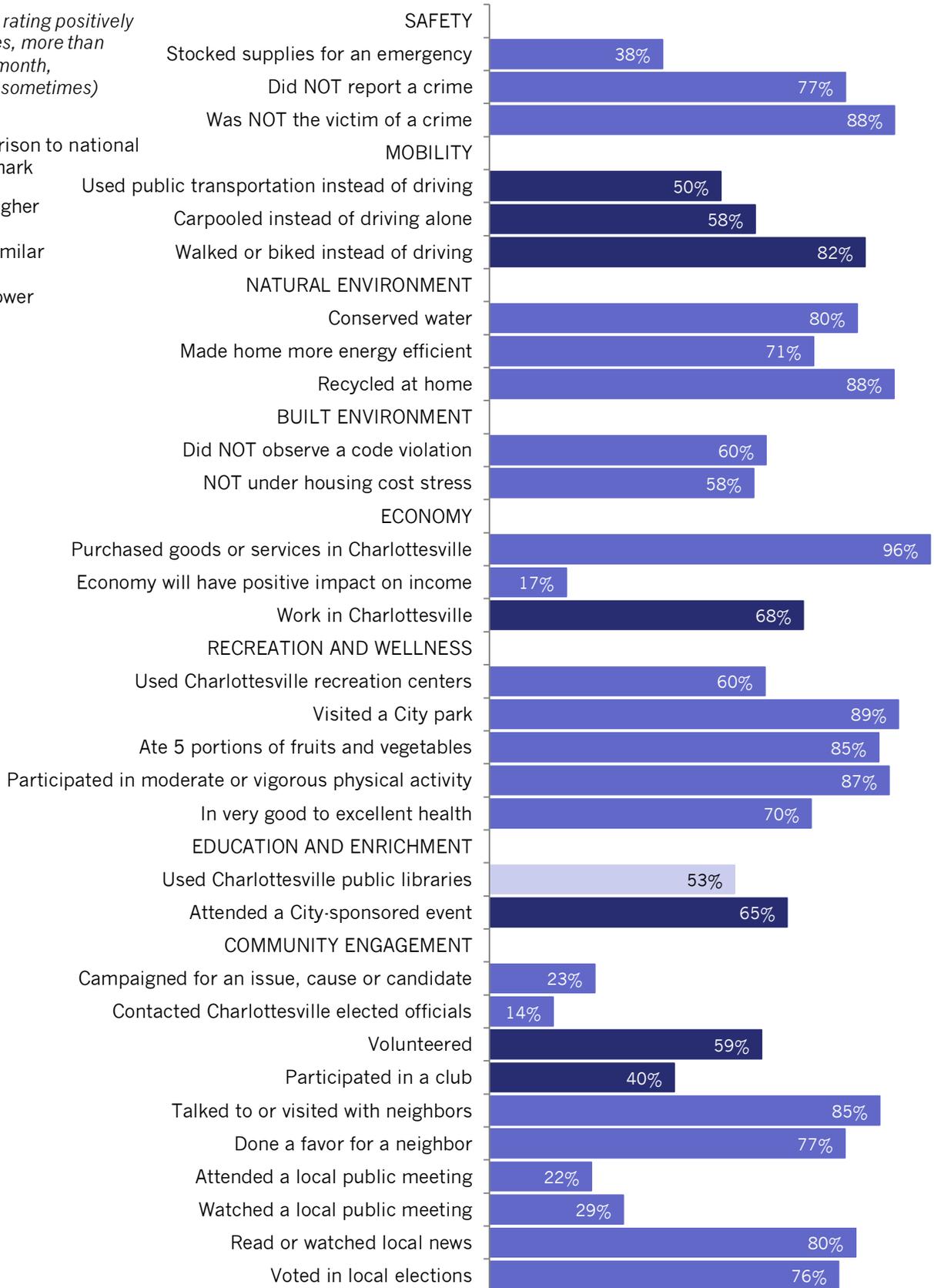


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



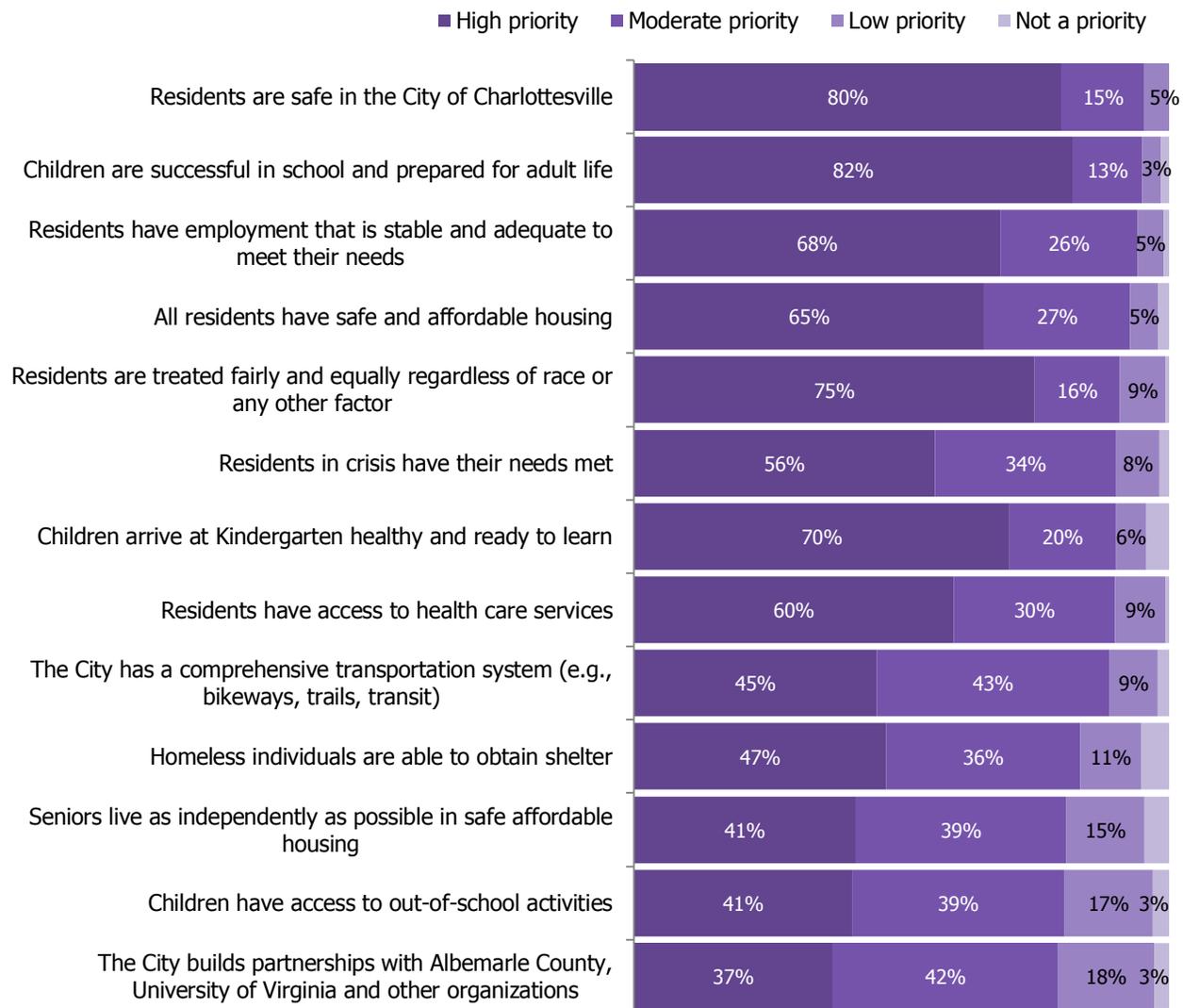
# Special Topics

The City of Charlottesville included four questions of special interest on The NCS. These questions related to priority areas for the City to focus on, progress toward those priorities, service delivery funding and the biggest issue facing the City in the coming years.

The survey included a two-part question that asked residents to first rate how much of a priority they deem 13 potential priorities to be for the City and then to indicate how much progress, if at all, the City has had on accomplishing each of the potential priorities. Residents felt that a variety of areas were important priorities for the City. Of the 13 categories, eight were considered a high or moderate priority by 9 in 10 residents. The priorities of children are successful in school and prepared for adult life and residents are safe in the City of Charlottesville were considered to be high or moderate priorities by 95% of respondents. No far behind were the priorities of residents have employment that is stable and adequate to meet their needs (94%), all resident have safe and affordable housing(92%) and residents are treated fairly and equally regardless of race or any other factor (91%).

Figure 4: Priority Areas

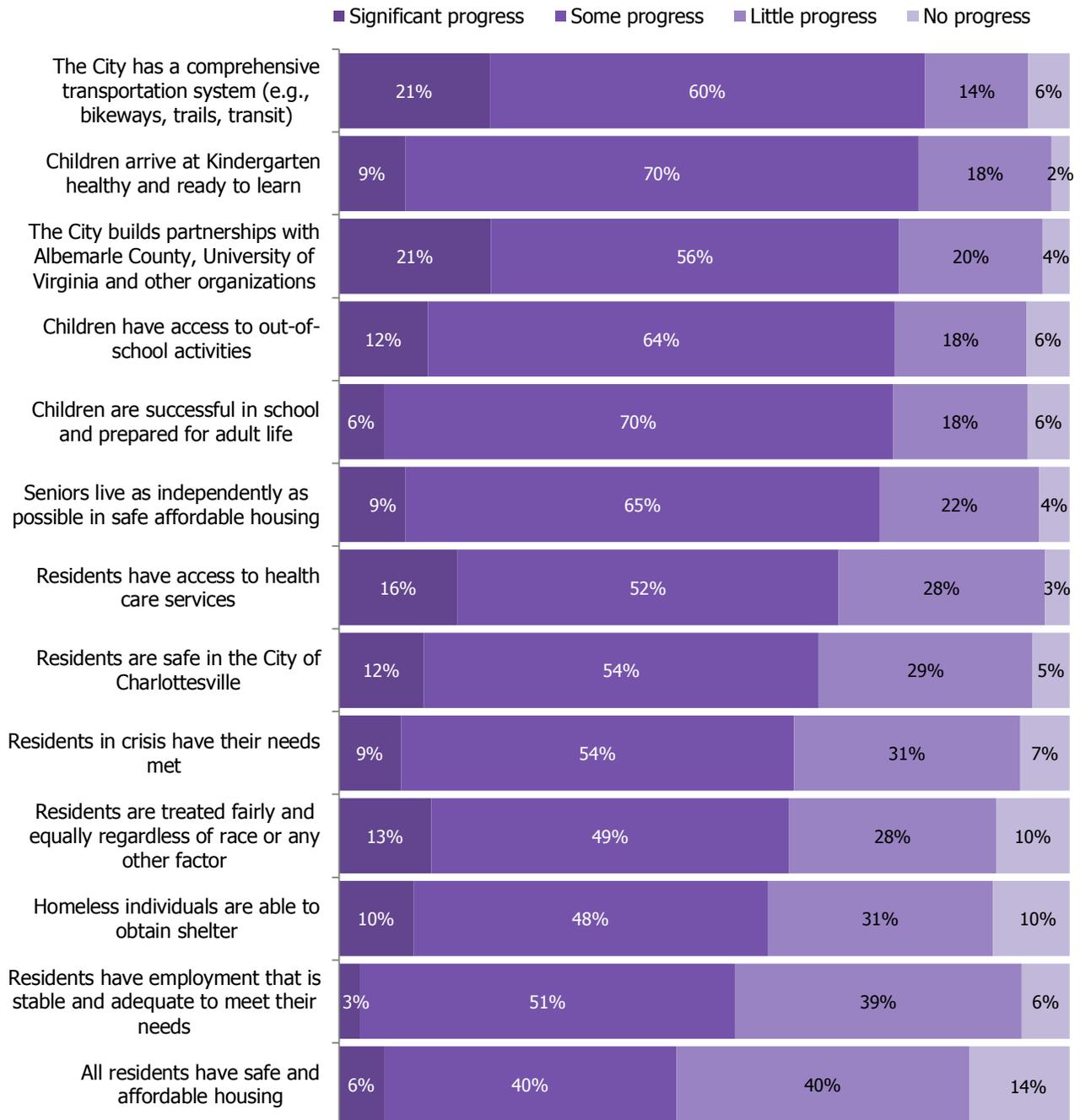
*For each of the following, please indicate how much of a priority, if at all, each area should be to the City and to what extent, if at all, you believe the City is making progress towards meeting each area.*



When asked about the progress that has been made by the City of Charlottesville for areas identified as priorities, a majority of residents responded that the City had made significant or some progress in 12 of the 13 areas. Only one priority area (all resident have safe and affordable housing) had more than half of residents indicate that little to no progress has been made (54%).

Figure 5: Progress toward Priority Areas

*For each of the following, please indicate how much of a priority, if at all, each area should be to the City and to what extent, if at all, you believe the City is making progress towards meeting each area.*

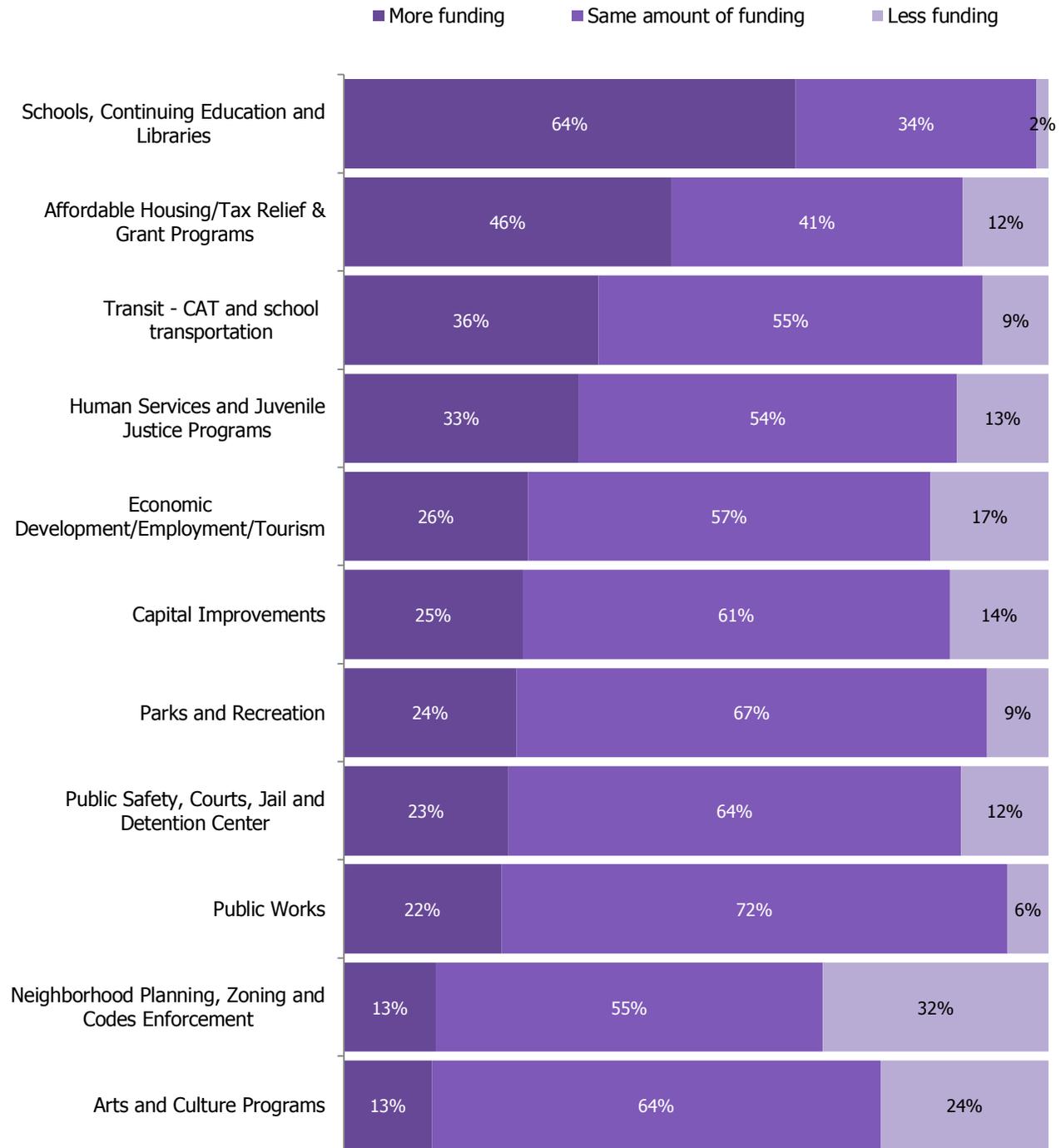


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When asked to indicate their preference for the amount of funding allocated for 11 City of Charlottesville service delivery areas, a majority of residents responded that they felt schools, continuing education and libraries could have more funding applied. For 9 of the 11 areas, a majority of respondents indicated that the same amount of funding should be allocated for these City services.

Figure 6: Service Delivery Funding

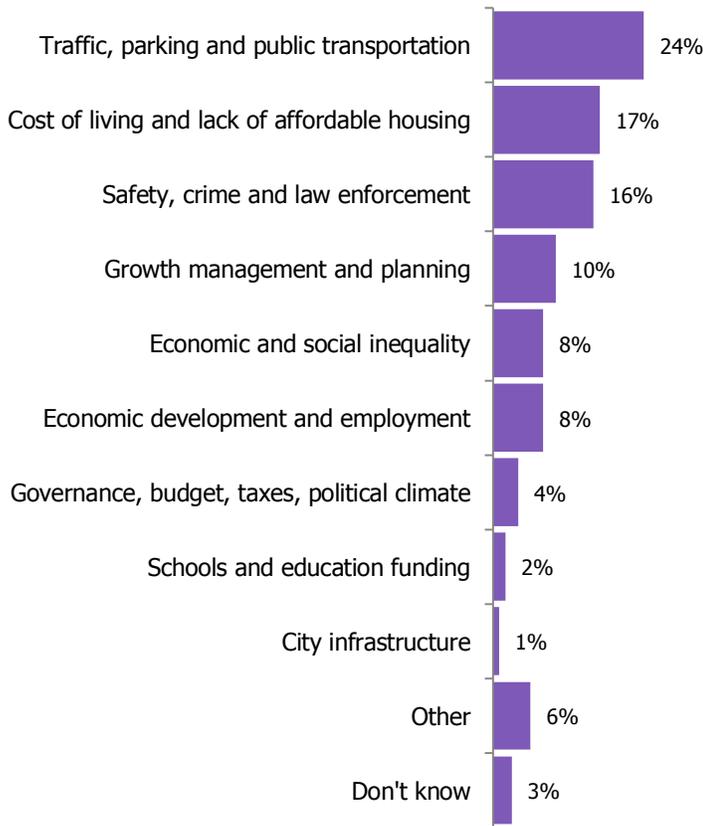
*Considering each of the areas of the City of Charlottesville’s service delivery, please indicate whether you feel the City of Charlottesville should apply more funding, the same amount of funding or less funding toward each:*



When Charlottesville residents were asked to provide the single biggest issue facing their City in their own words, responses varied. About one-fourth of residents who wrote in a response believed that traffic, parking and public transportation was the single biggest issue. Next on the list of issues facing Charlottesville per residents' opinions were cost of living and lack of affordable housing (17%) and safety, crime and law enforcement (16%). All of the remaining categories received responses from 10% or less of residents (the verbatim responses can be found in the *Open Ended Responses Report* provided under a separate cover).

Figure 7: Single Biggest Issue Facing the Community

*What do you see as the biggest single issue facing the City of Charlottesville in the next several years?*



# Conclusions

## **Charlottesville residents enjoy a high quality of life.**

A large majority of respondents felt positively about the overall quality of life in Charlottesville and the City as a place to live. Not only did most residents appreciate living in Charlottesville, 8 in 10 residents rated the overall image of Charlottesville and the City as a place to retire highly which were ratings that were higher than the national benchmark. Residents also valued the community as a place to raise children with nearly 9 in 10 providing an excellent or good rating. Ratings for the overall quality of life in Charlottesville and the City as a place to raise children and retire were higher in 2014 than in 2012.

## **Education and Enrichment is a strong feature, but there is still room for improvement.**

Aspects of Education and Enrichment consistently received high ratings from residents. Ratings of educational and enrichment activities, cultural/arts/musical activities, adult education and attendance of City-sponsored events were positive and higher than ratings observed in other communities. However, fewer residents gave positive ratings to K-12 education and child care/preschool. When asked about priorities for the community, most residents identified children arriving at kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and that children are successful in school and prepared for adult life as high priorities (70% and 82% respectively). These are also priority areas where a majority of residents have seen at least some progress made by the City of Charlottesville.

## **Participation in alternative transportation is high, but Mobility ratings show room for improvement.**

About half or more of respondents indicated that they used public transportation (50%), carpooled instead of driving alone (58%), and walked or biked instead of driving (82%). These were ratings that were higher than ratings given in communities across the nation. However, within Governance and Community Characteristics, Mobility measures were less favorably rated, including travel by car (48% excellent or good), public parking (21%), traffic flow (23%) and snow removal (48%), all of which were lower than observed elsewhere. Nearly 9 in 10 residents indicated that the City having a comprehensive transportation system is a priority for Charlottesville, with 81% of respondents suggesting that progress has been made by the City in this area. About 3 in 10 residents reported they would support more funding for transit when asked to consider funding levels for 11 service areas in Charlottesville. Issues related to traffic, parking and public transportation were identified by residents as the biggest single issue facing the City of Charlottesville.

## **The Economy is important to residents.**

Survey participants indicated that Economy is an important facet for Charlottesville to focus on in the coming years. Many residents gave high ratings to aspects of Economy, with about 7 in 10 residents indicating they worked in Charlottesville (68%) and felt that that Charlottesville has a vibrant downtown/commercial area (76%) while nearly all indicating they had purchased goods or services in the community (96%). When compared to other communities across the nation, more Charlottesville residents indicated they work in the community and more gave positive ratings to Charlottesville having a vibrant downtown. Fewer residents gave positive marks to the cost of living or to employment opportunities. While only 17% felt the economy will have a positive impact on their income, this rating was similar to the benchmark.

Residents also responded that having employment that is stable and adequate to meet their needs is a high to moderate priority for the City of Charlottesville, with about half of respondents indicating that there had been significant or some progress made by the City in these areas. Survey respondents also provided priorities for the City in their own words, marking the cost of living and lack of affordable housing as the second biggest issue facing Charlottesville.