

**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Citizen Survey<sup>TM</sup>

**Needham, MA**  
Community Livability Report

2016



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# Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Needham ..... 2

Community Characteristics ..... 3

Governance ..... 5

Participation ..... 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions ..... 12



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# About

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

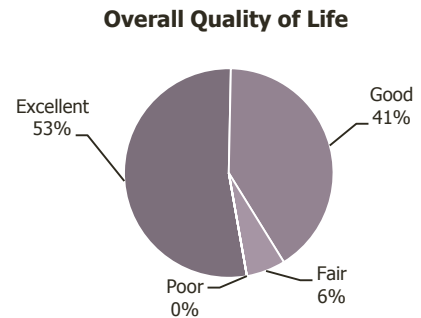
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 563 residents of the Town of Needham. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Needham

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Needham as excellent or good. This rating was higher than the national benchmark comparison (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.



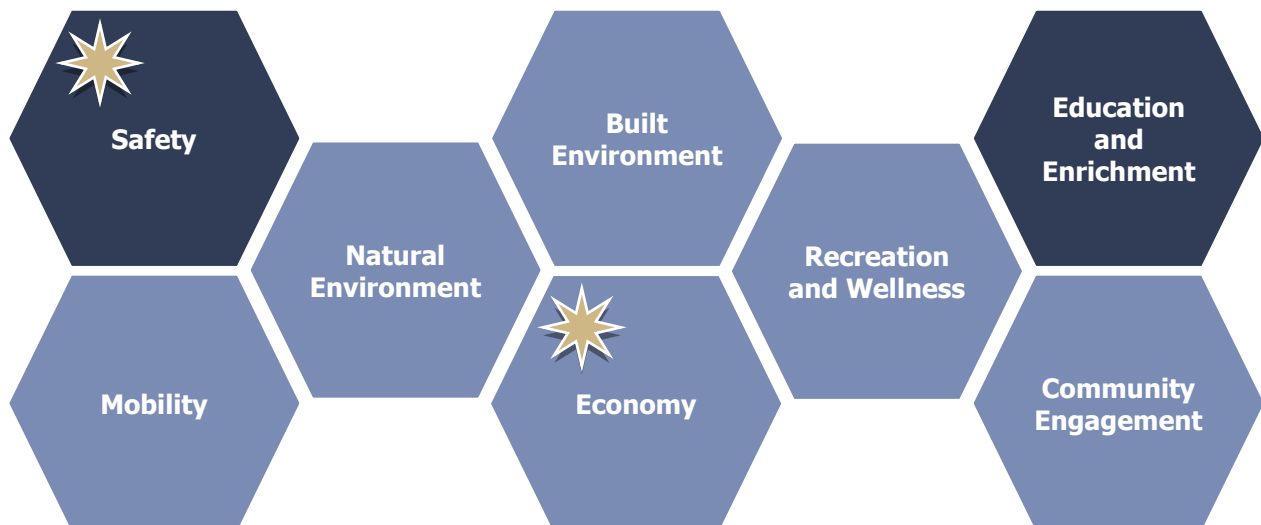
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Needham community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Needham residents gave strong ratings to Safety as well as to Education and Enrichment. Ratings for Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness 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 Needham’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 Needham, 98% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Needham as a place to live were higher than ratings in other communities across the nation.

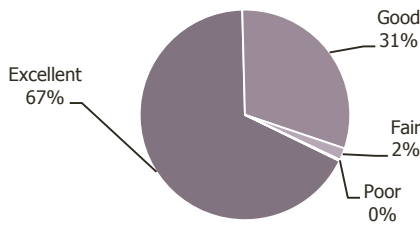
In addition to rating the Town as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Needham as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Needham and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image of Needham, their neighborhood as a place to live, Needham as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the Town. These ratings were all higher than ratings in other communities across the nation. About half of respondents gave positive ratings to Needham as a place to retire; this rating was similar to ratings in comparison communities.

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 residents gave high ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Needham and more residents felt safe in in Needham's downtown/commercial areas than in comparison communities. All aspects of Mobility were rated positively by a majority of respondents, and ratings for ease of walking and overall ease of travel in the town were higher than the national benchmarks. At least 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to all aspects of Natural Environment, and both air quality and the cleanliness of

Needham received ratings that were higher than the benchmarks. Ratings within Built Environment were mixed. At least 6 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall built environment and public places in Needham. However, fewer than 4 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the availability of affordable quality housing and housing options; both of these aspects received ratings that were lower than ratings in comparison communities. In the facet of Economy, more than 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the overall economic health of Needham and more than 7 in 10 reported that the town is an excellent or good place to work; ratings for Needham as a place to work and employment opportunities increased from 2014 to 2016 (for more information see

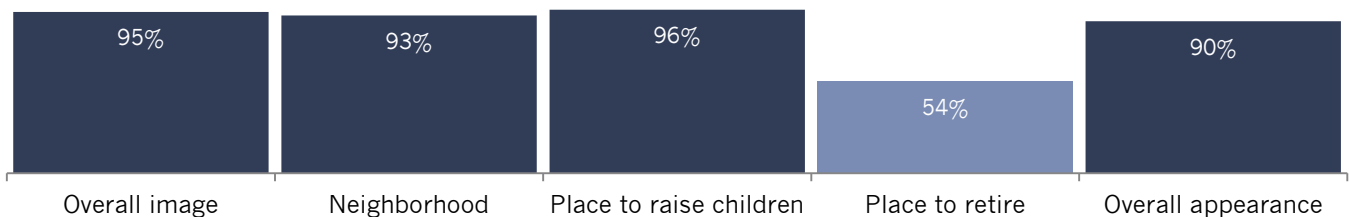
the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover). Ratings in Recreation and Wellness were strong and generally similar to or higher than the national benchmarks: at least 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to health care, preventive health care, and overall health and wellness. All aspects of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to or higher than the benchmarks.

**Place to Live**



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

Comparison to national benchmark  
 ■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



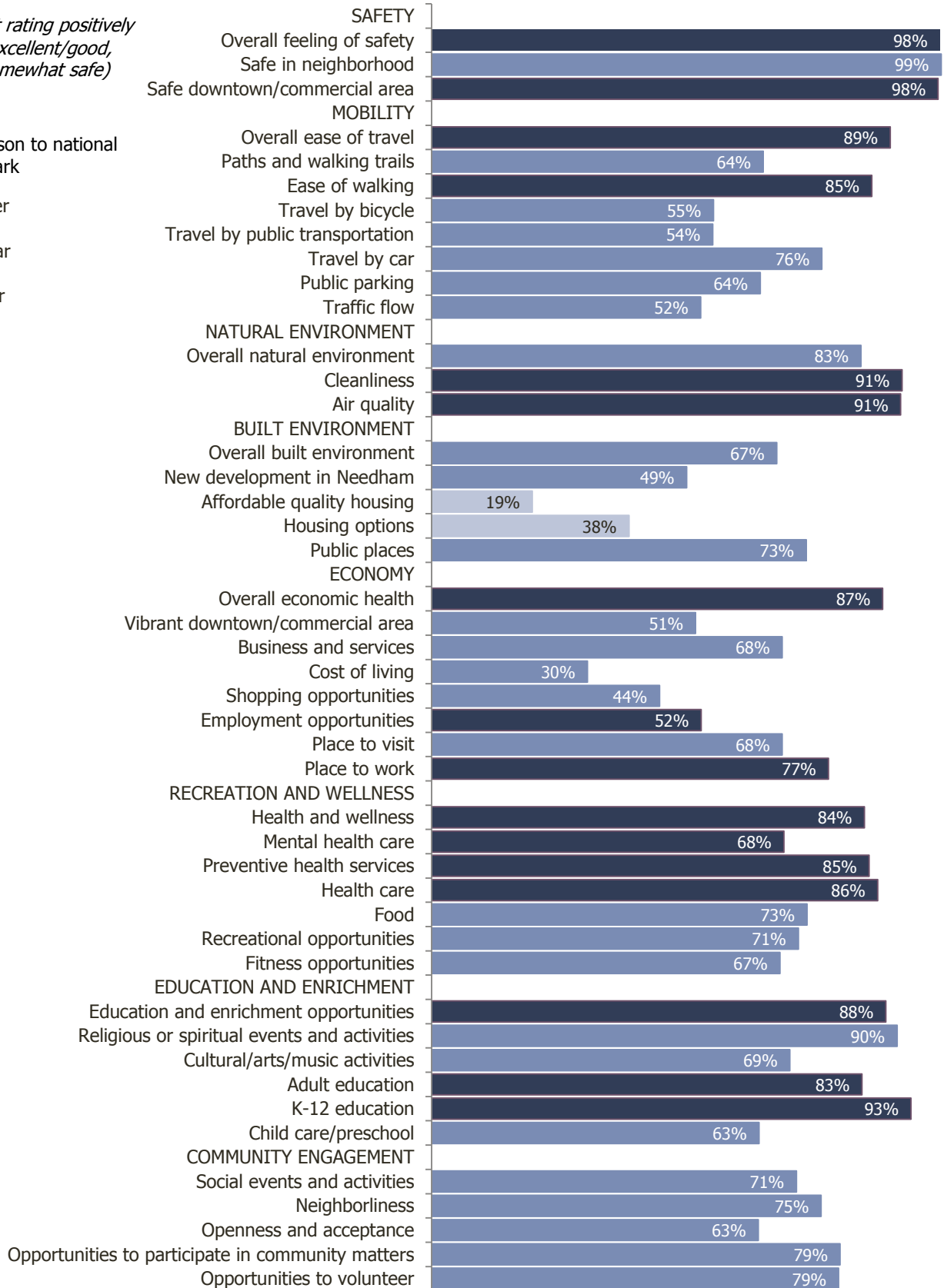
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



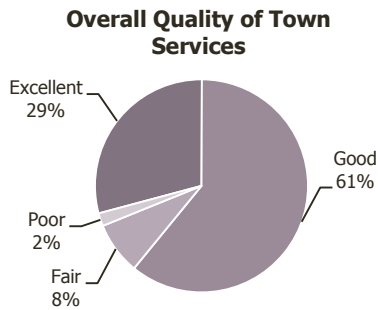
# Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Needham 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 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of Town services, while about 5 in 10 gave positive ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmarks.

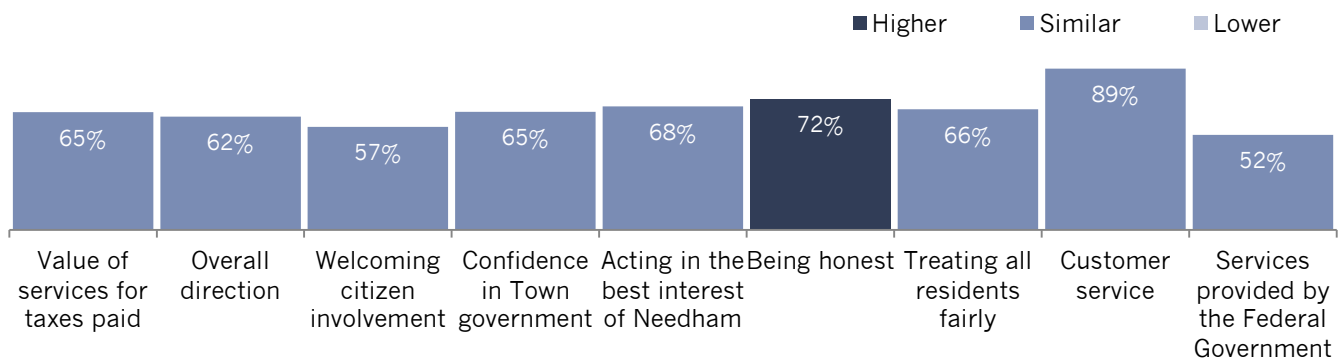
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Needham’s leadership and governance. About 6 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction of the Town, confidence in Town government and treating all residents fairly. At least two-thirds of respondents gave high marks to Town customer service, being honest and acting in the best interest of Needham. The job the Town does at being honest received a rating that was higher than the benchmark; all other aspects were rated similarly to comparison communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Needham. Ratings within the facet of Safety were strong: at least 4 in 5 residents gave favorable ratings to police services, fire services, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention and fire prevention and about three-quarters gave high marks to animal control and emergency preparedness. All of these aspects, except for emergency preparedness, were higher than the national benchmark. Residents gave excellent or good ratings to many aspects of Mobility, including traffic enforcement (78%), snow removal (76%) and street cleaning (69%); all aspects of Mobility were rated similarly to other communities. Ratings for street lighting, snow removal, sidewalk maintenance and bus or transit services increased from 2014 to 2016. At least 6 in 10 survey participants gave high marks to all aspects of Natural Environment; drinking water was rated positively by about 9 in 10 respondents, a rating that was higher than the benchmark. The facets of Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Economy were also highly rated: at least 8 in 10 respondents rated sewer services, storm drainage, Town parks, and health services as excellent or good. Economic development was rated positively by about 6 in 10 residents and recreation centers were given high marks by about 7 in 10 respondents. All aspects of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated positively by at least three-quarters of respondents, and were similar to or higher than the benchmarks.



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

Comparison to national benchmark



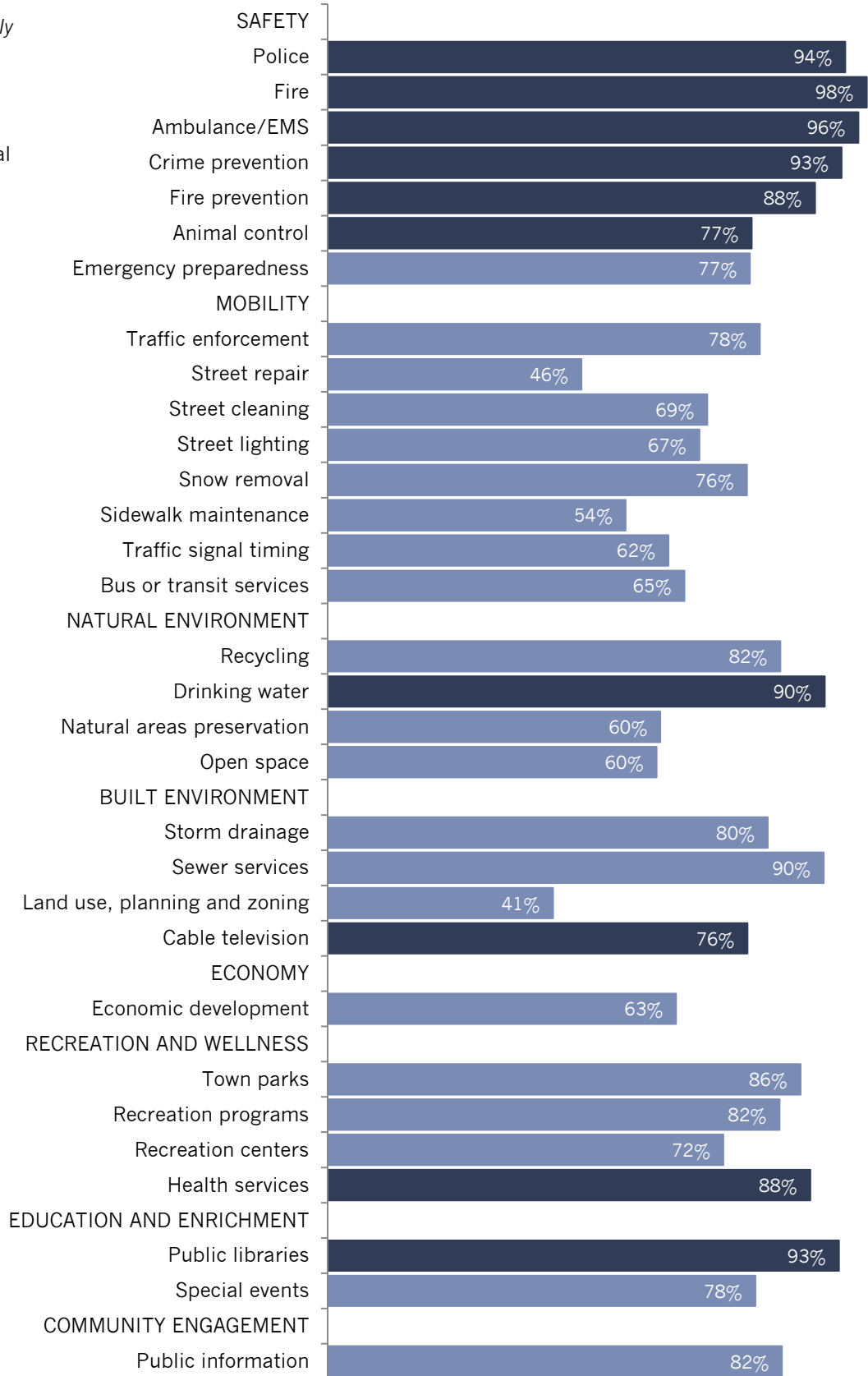
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower





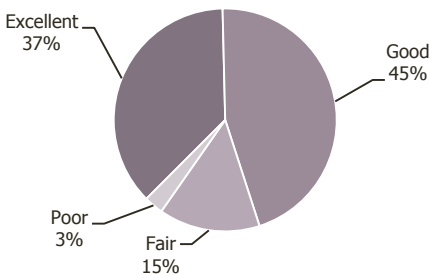
# Participation

*Are the residents of Needham 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 4 in 5 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in Needham, this was higher than the national benchmark. Almost all residents reported that they would recommend living in Needham, and that they planned to remain in Needham. A majority reported that they had contacted a Town employee in the last 12 months.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Within the fact of Safety, about 9 in 10 residents had NOT been the victim of a crime and did NOT report a crime in the past 12 months. Within Mobility, about 7 in 10 survey participants had walked or biked instead of driving and about half indicated they had used public transportation instead of driving; these rates were higher than rates in other communities. Participation rates in Natural Environment, Economy and Recreation and Wellness were strong and similar to other communities; at least 8 in 10 residents reported that they made efforts to conserve water, recycled at home, purchased goods or services in Needham, ate five portions of fruits and vegetables a day and participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity. Within Built Environment, about three-quarters of respondents reported that they were NOT under housing stress, and fewer residents reported observing a code violation than in other communities. About 9 in 10 respondents reported that they had talked to or visited with a neighbor and done a favor for a neighbor and 85% reported that they used Needham public libraries, a rate that is higher than rates reported in other communities across the nation.

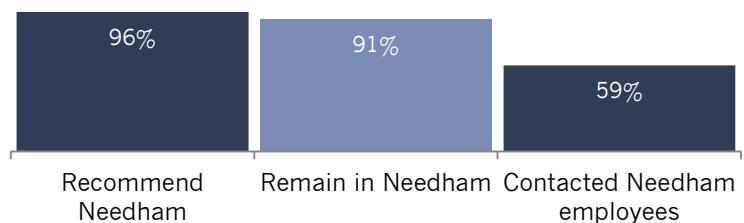
**Sense of Community**



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



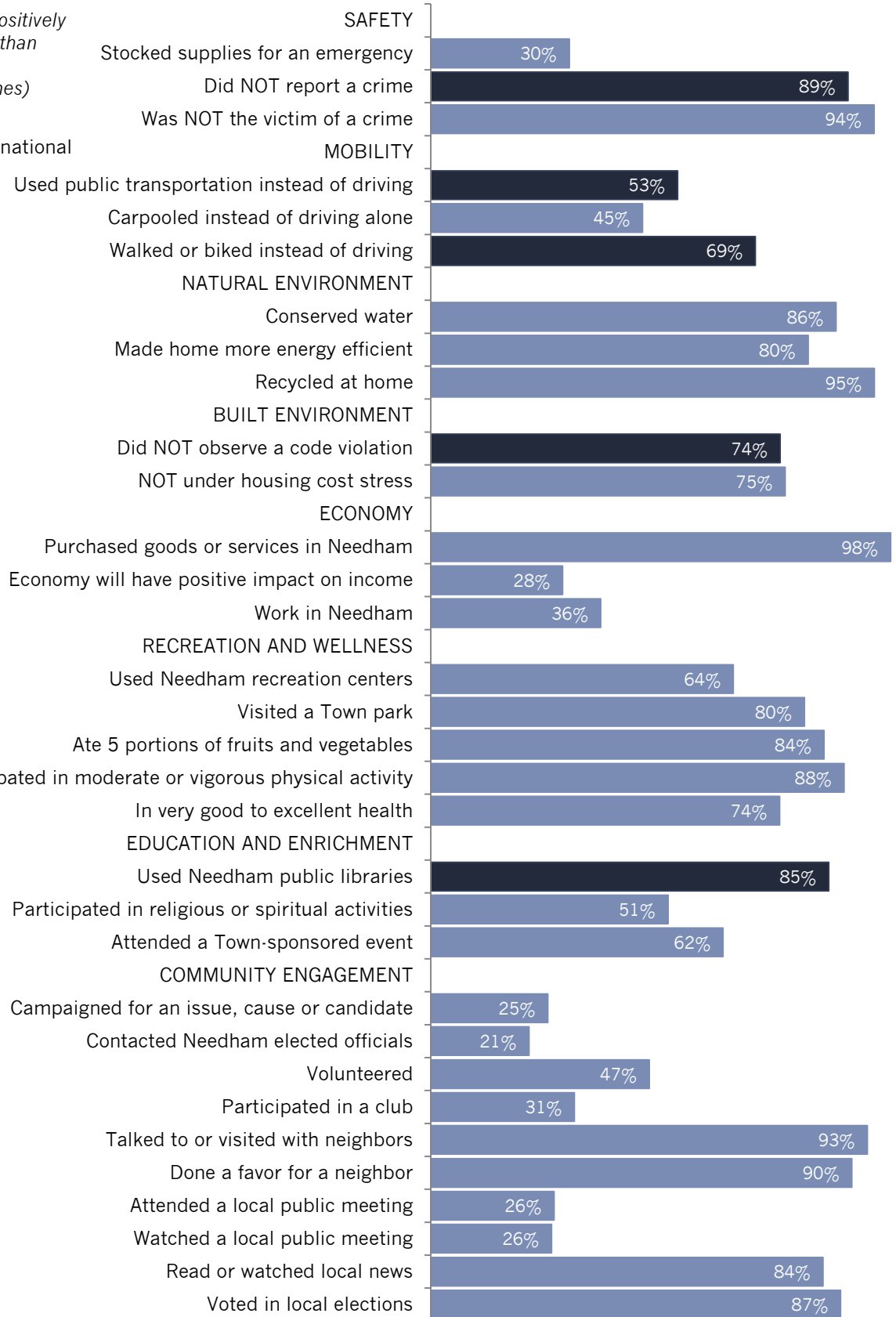
# The National Citizen Survey™

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

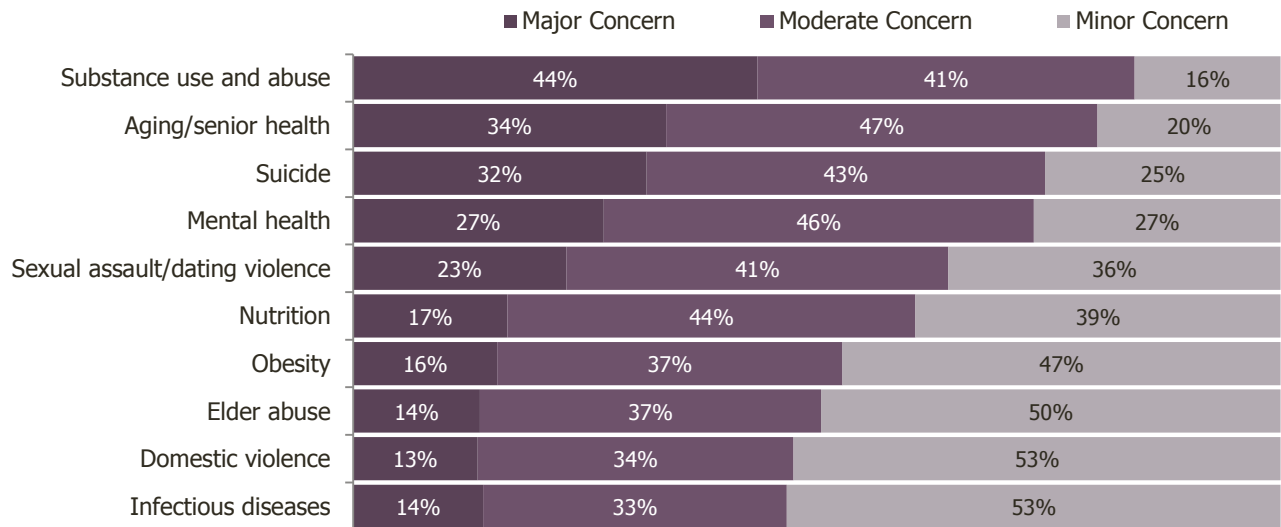


# Special Topics

The Town of Needham included five questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special interest question asked respondents to report their concern about various health issues in the community. At least 7 in 10 residents reported that substance abuse, aging/senior health, suicide and mental health were a major or moderate concern in Needham. Furthermore, sexual assault/dating violence, nutrition, obesity and elder abuse were major or moderate concerns to at least half of respondents.

Figure 4: Concern over Health Issues

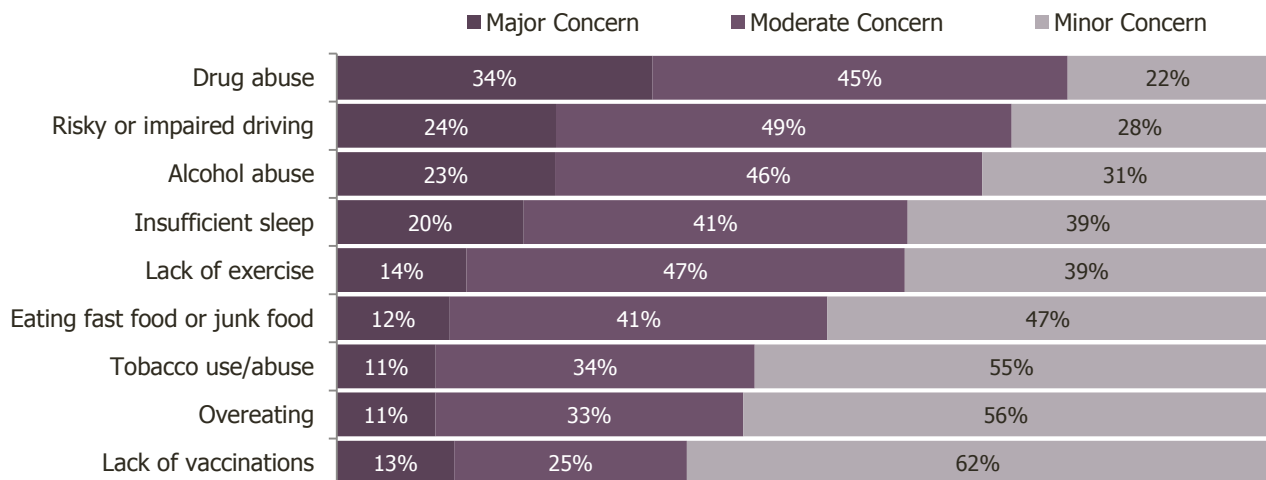
To what extent, if at all, do you think each of these health issues is a current concern in Needham?



Residents were next asked to report their concern about various health behaviors in Needham. About 8 in 10 participants reported that drug abuse was either a major or moderate concern, and at least 6 in 10 reported that risky or impaired driving, alcohol abuse, insufficient sleep and lack of exercise were concerns for the community.

Figure 5: Concern over Health Behaviors

To what extent, if at all, do you think each of these health behaviors is a current concern in Needham?

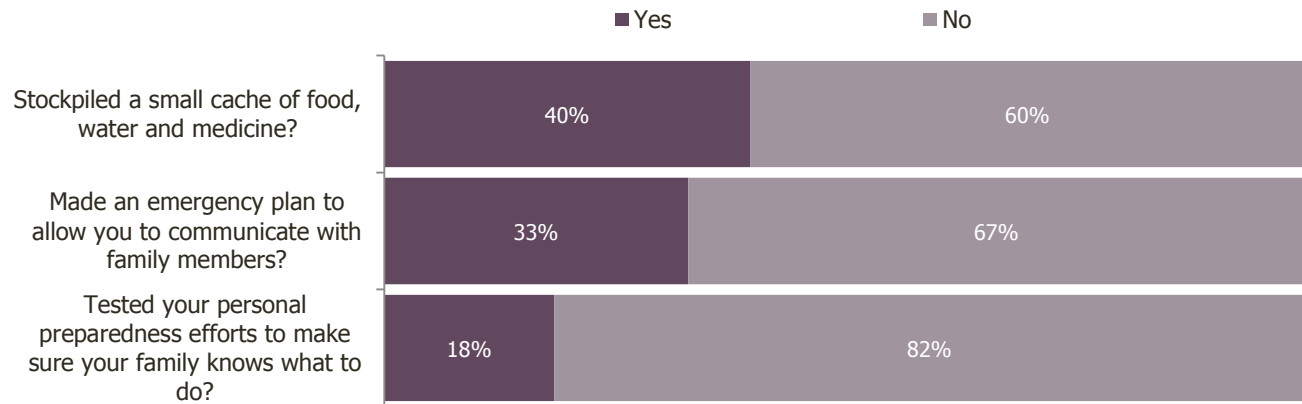


## The National Citizen Survey™

The third special interest question asked survey participations if they had made certain preparations for emergencies and natural disasters. About 40% of respondents had stockpiled food, water and medicine, and about one-third had made an emergency communication plan with their family members. Only about 1 in 5 had tested their personal emergency preparedness with their family.

Figure 6: Resident Emergency Preparedness

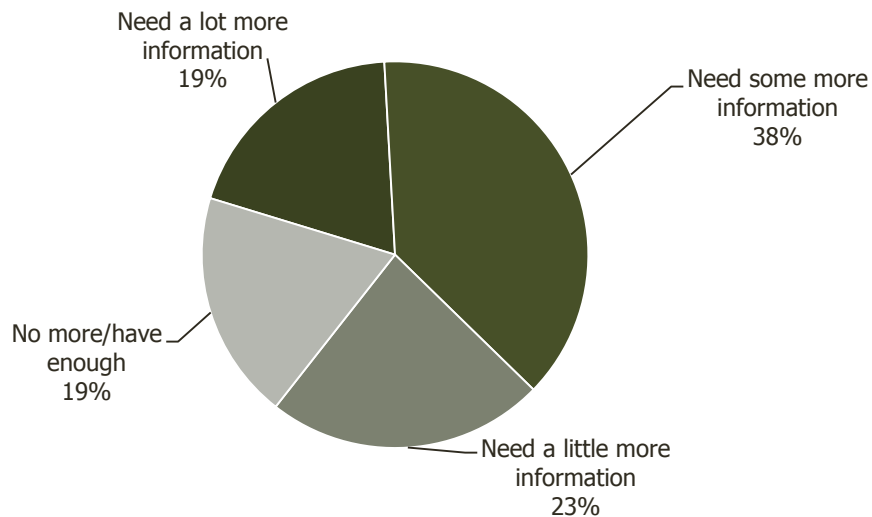
*Thinking about your family's preparedness for a natural disaster or man-made emergency, please indicate whether you have done each of the following. Have you...*



Survey participants were then asked how much more information they needed regarding emergency preparedness. About 80% responded that they at least need a little more information; of these respondents, about 2 in 10 said that they need a lot more information and about 4 in 10 reported that they need some more information.

Figure 7: Need for Emergency Preparedness Information

*How much more information, if any, does your family need regarding emergency preparedness?*

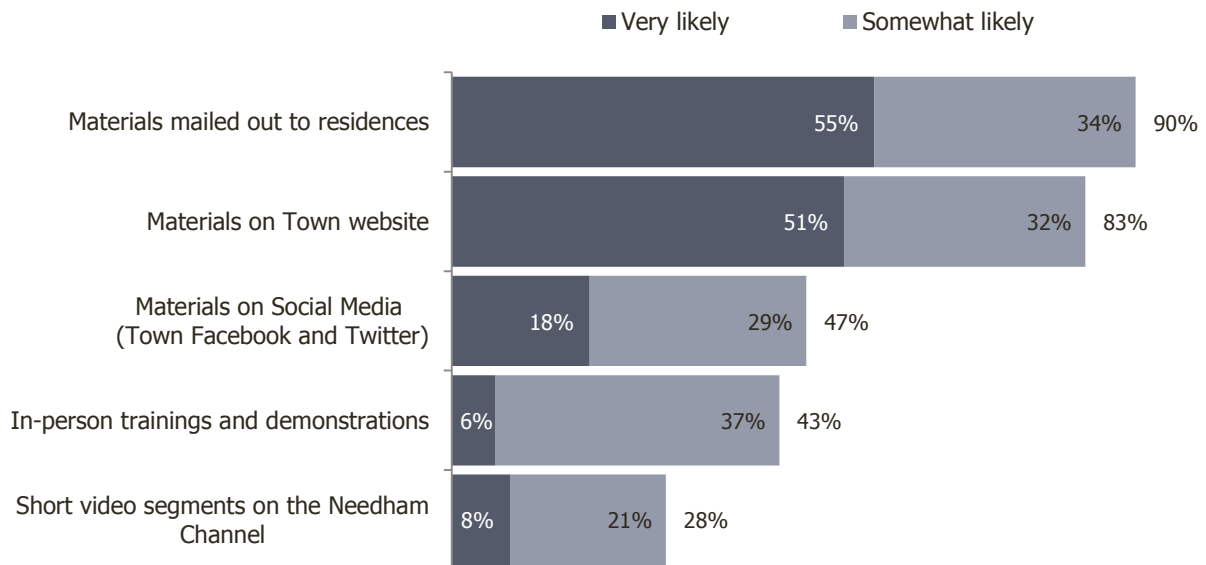


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The final special interest question asked residents how likely they were use various sources to get information about Needham. About 9 in 10 residents reported that they were very or somewhat likely to get information from materials mailed out to residences, and 8 in 10 would get information from materials on the town website. About 4 in 10 respondents reported that they would use materials on social media and in-person trainings and demonstrations.

Figure 8: Sources of Town Information

*How likely, if at all, would you be to use each of the following sources of information to learn about various Town information (including health, safety and services)?*



# Conclusions

## **Needham continues to be a great place to live.**

Almost all survey respondents rated the overall quality of life in Needham and the Town as a place to live as excellent or good; these ratings remained stable over time and were higher than the national benchmarks. About 9 in 10 would recommend Needham as a place to live and planned to remain in the community. Ratings for features that enhance quality of life, such as Needham as a place to raise children, the overall image of the Town, and their neighborhoods as places to live were given positive ratings by at least 9 in 10 respondents. Additionally, about 8 in 10 respondents rated Needham's sense of community as excellent or good, a rating that was higher than ratings in other communities.

## **Needham residents are pleased with local health services but have concerns about health issues in the community.**

About 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to overall health and wellness opportunities in the community. Further, residents gave high ratings to the availability of preventive health services (85% excellent or good) and the availability of affordable quality health care (86%), and health services in the Town (88%). Roughly 7 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings to the availability of mental health care; all of these ratings were higher than ratings in comparison communities. However, Needham residents indicated that they had major or moderate concerns regarding health issues and behaviors in the community. More than 8 in 10 survey participants reported that substance use and abuse was a major or moderate concern in the community, and about 7 in 10 indicated that drug abuse, risky or impaired driving and alcohol abuse were health behaviors of concern. At least 6 in 10 residents reported that they were moderately or majorly concerned about aging/senior health, suicide, mental health and sexual assault/dating violence.

## **Safety is an important and positive feature of the community.**

Residents indicated that Safety is an important area for the Needham community to focus on in the next two years. Almost all residents (98%) gave excellent or good ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Needham, and a similar number of respondents reported that they felt very or somewhat safe in their neighborhoods and in Needham's downtown/commercial areas. Safety related services also received high ratings from respondents. At least 9 in 10 residents gave high marks to police, fire, ambulance/EMS and crime prevention services; all of these ratings were higher than ratings seen in comparison communities. Additionally, about 9 in 10 participants did NOT report a crime and were NOT the victim of crime in the past 12 months. However, there may still be room for improvement in public safety: fewer than half of residents had stockpiled food, water or medicine and made or practiced an emergency communication plan with their family, and about 8 in 10 reported that they need at least a little more information on emergency preparedness.