



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Needham, MA

Community Livability Report

2018



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Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Needham 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 11



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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 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 591 residents of the Town of Needham. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% 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 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.

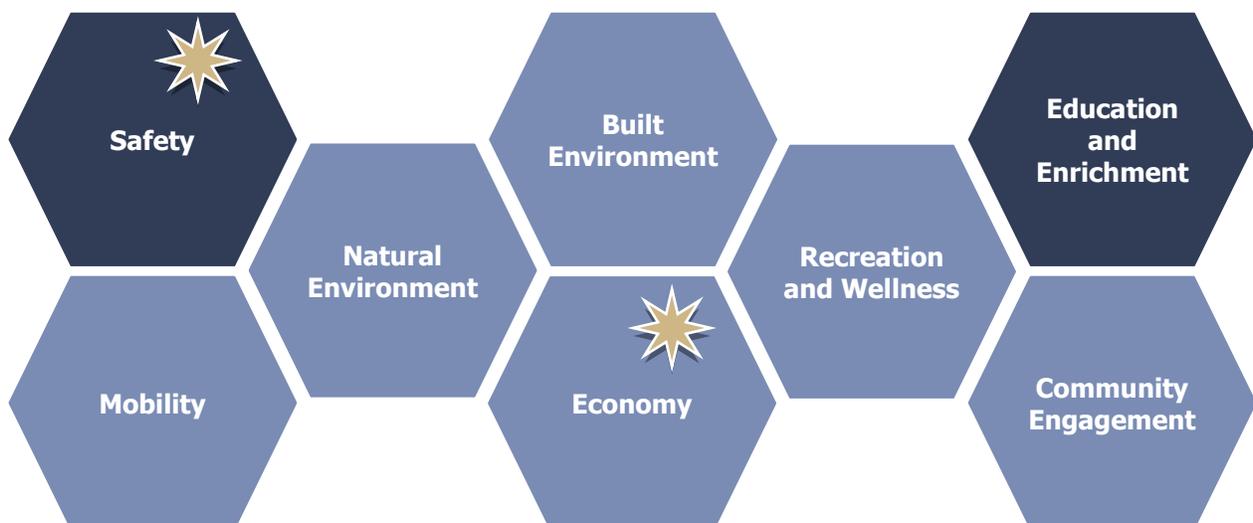


In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Needham community in the coming two years. Ratings for Safety and Education and Enrichment were exceptionally strong and tended to be higher than the benchmarks. Ratings within all other facets were positive and tended to be similar to the benchmarks. 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
- 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.

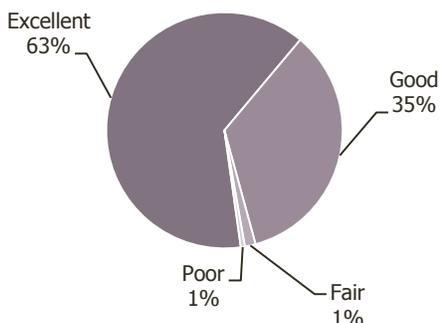
In addition to rating the Town as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Needham as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Needham and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the overall image of Needham, their neighborhoods, Needham as a place to raise children and to the overall appearance of the Town. These ratings were all higher than the national averages. About half gave high marks to Needham as a place to retire and this rating was similar to the national benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Almost all residents positively rated each aspect of Safety and these ratings tended to be high than the benchmarks. A majority of respondents gave high marks to all aspects of Mobility, Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community

Engagement. All ratings within these facets were similar to or higher than the national benchmarks. Ratings within Built Environment were mixed. About one-third of respondents or fewer gave positive marks to housing options and to the availability of affordable quality housing in Needham. Both of these ratings were lower than the national benchmark comparisons.

Compared to 2016, all ratings for Community Characteristics remained stable in 2018 except for the overall quality of new development in Needham, which increased (for more detail please see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover).

Place to Live



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



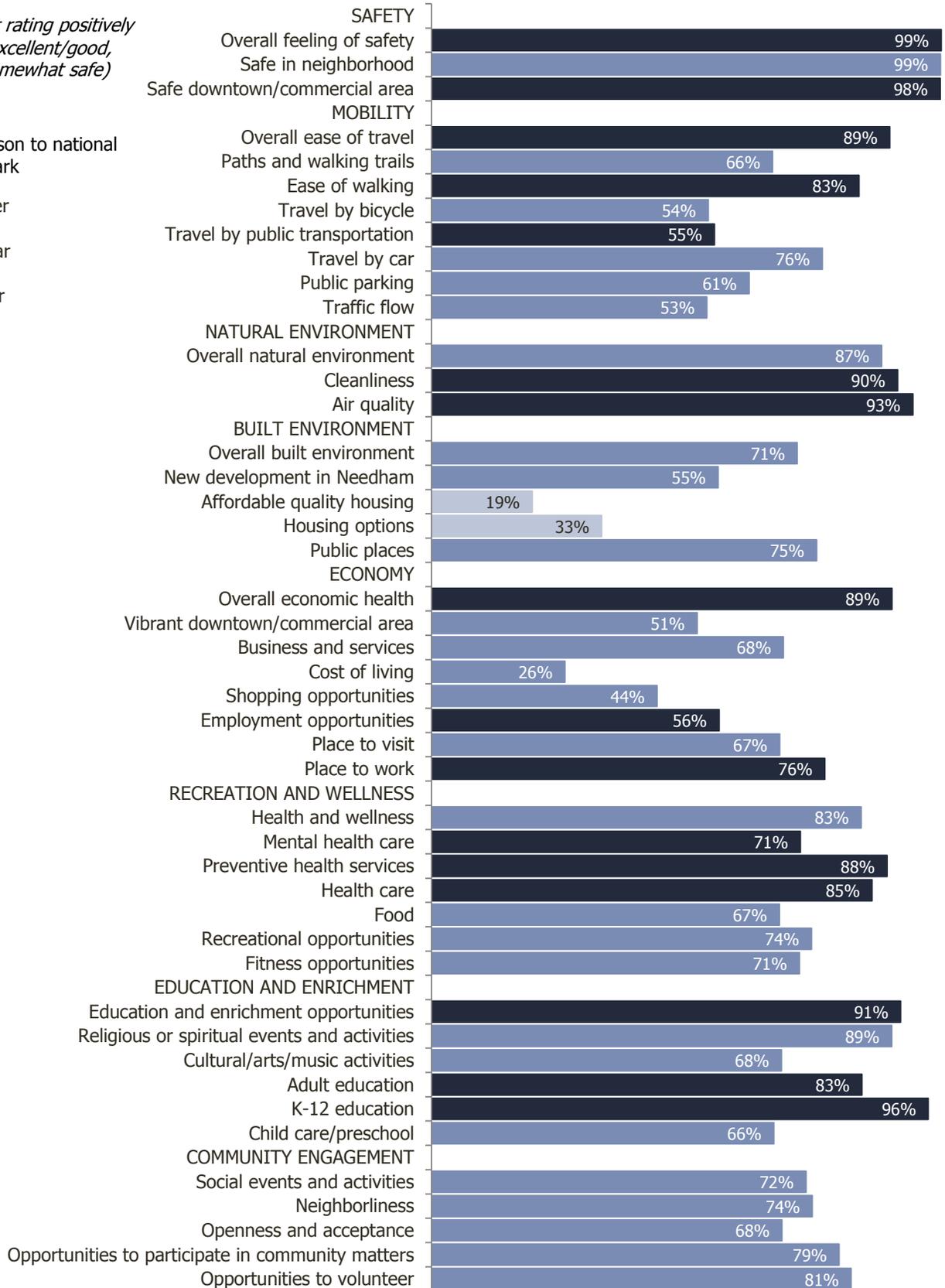
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

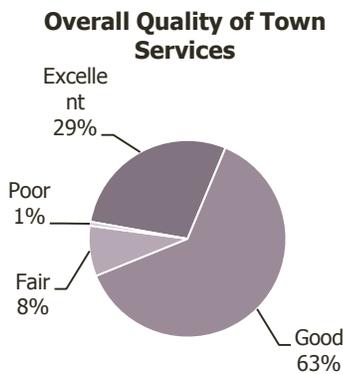


Governance

How well does the government of 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 is 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 services provided by the Town while about 5 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings of Town services were higher than the national average while ratings of the Federal Government were similar to ratings observed elsewhere.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Needham’s leadership and governance. At least 6 in 10 respondents gave high marks to each aspect and most ratings were similar to the national benchmarks. However, about 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the job Town government does at acting in the best interest of Needham, being honest and treating all residents fairly. These ratings were all higher than ratings in comparison communities. Ratings for the overall direction of Needham, welcoming citizen involvement and treating all residents fairly increased in 2018 compared to 2016.



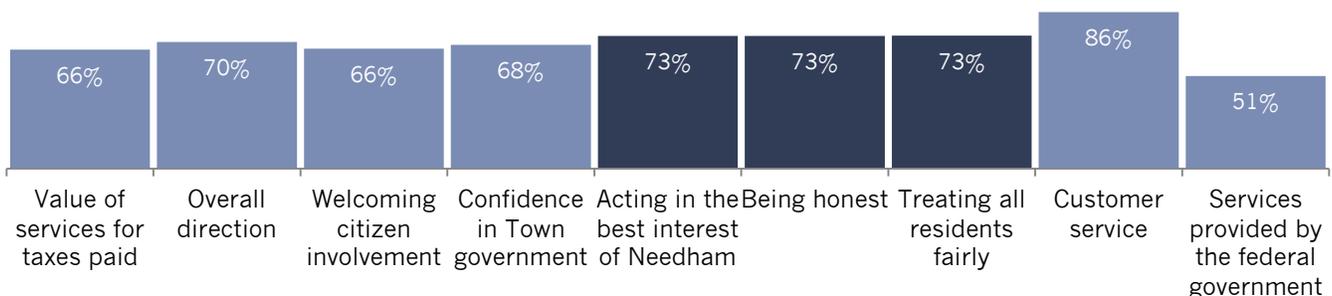
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Needham. Almost all aspects of Safety received ratings higher than the national averages. Further, almost all residents rated police, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention and fire prevention as excellent or good. Ratings across all other facets tended to be rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to or higher than the benchmarks. About 9 in 10 respondents gave especially high marks to sewer services, health services and public libraries and these ratings were all higher than ratings in comparison communities.

Compared to 2016, ratings for land use, planning and zoning, economic development and recreation centers increased in 2018 while the rating for street lighting decreased.

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

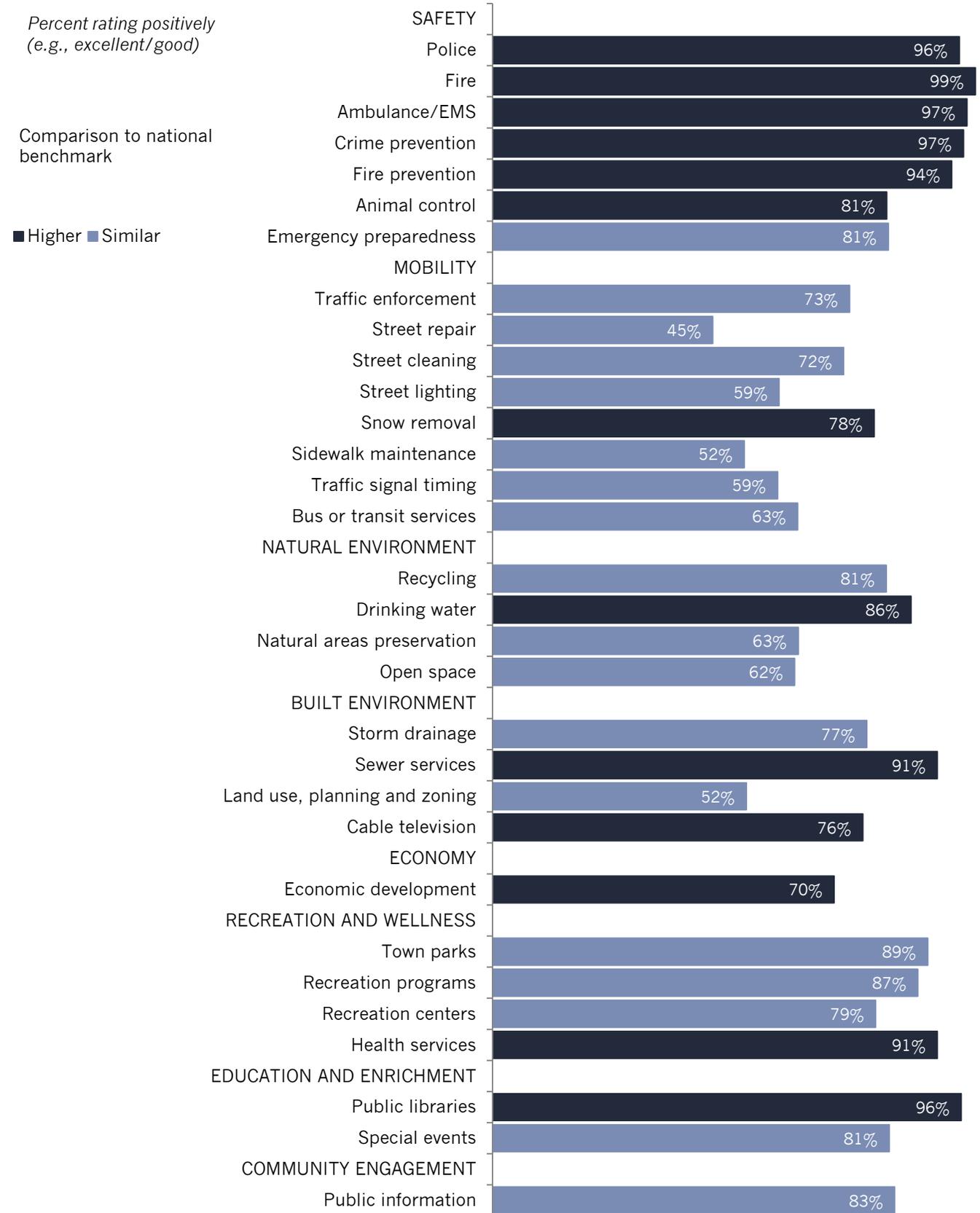
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

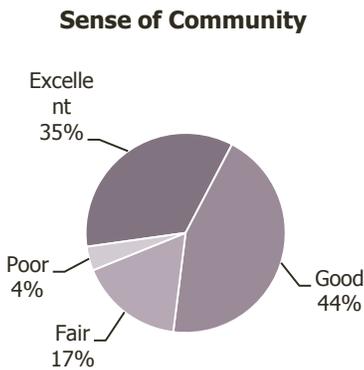


Participation

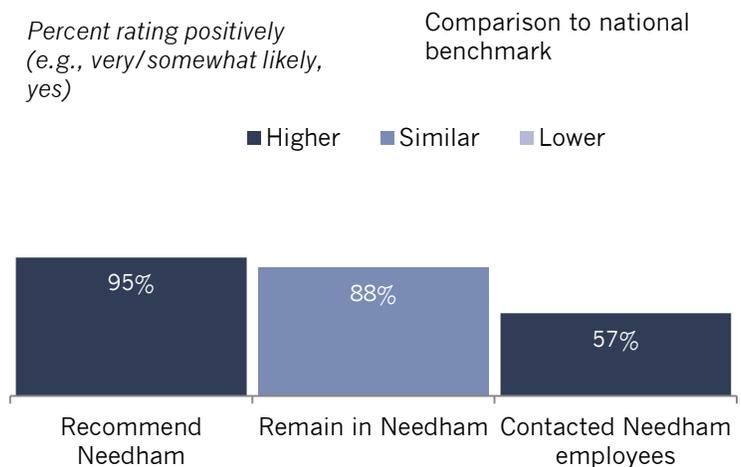
Are the residents of Needham connected to the community and each other?

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. Almost all respondents were likely to recommend living in Needham and this rate was higher than rates in other jurisdictions across the nation. About 4 in 5 respondents planned to remain living in Needham for the next five years; this rate was similar to rates observed elsewhere.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. While reported rates of participation varied widely; almost all were similar to rates reported in comparison communities. Perhaps not surprisingly, fewer Needham residents reported that they worked in Needham than residents in other communities across the U.S. More Needham residents had NOT reported a crime and had NOT observed a code violation compared to residents elsewhere. Further, more survey respondents indicated that they had used public transportation, walked or biked instead of driving or had used Needham public libraries in the last 12 months compared to residents in other communities.



Almost all reported rates of Participation remained stable in 2018 compared to the 2016 survey; however, more Needham residents reported that they had a positive economic outlook in 2018, while fewer residents had made their homes energy efficient, watched a local public meeting or done a favor for a neighbor.



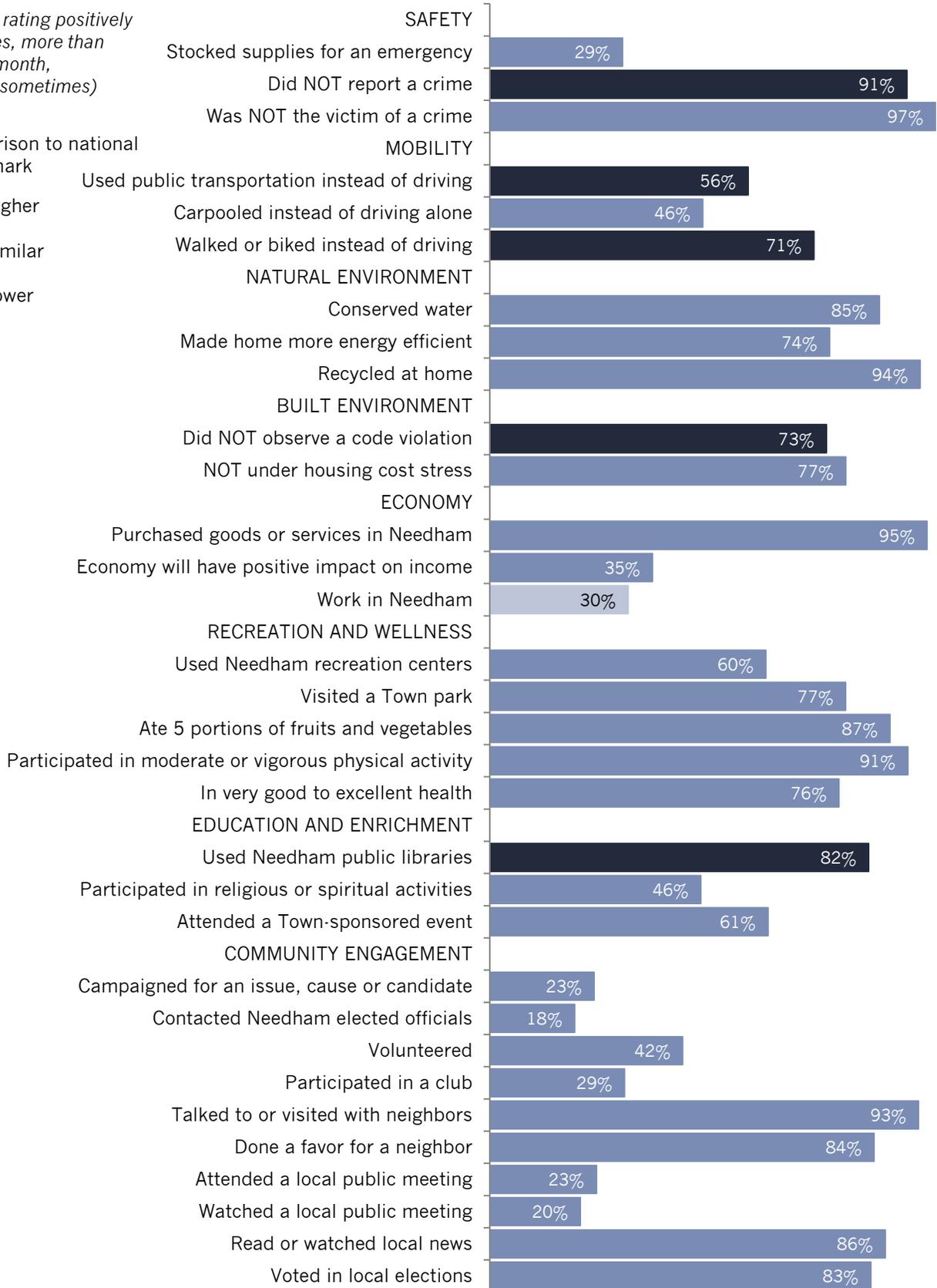
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

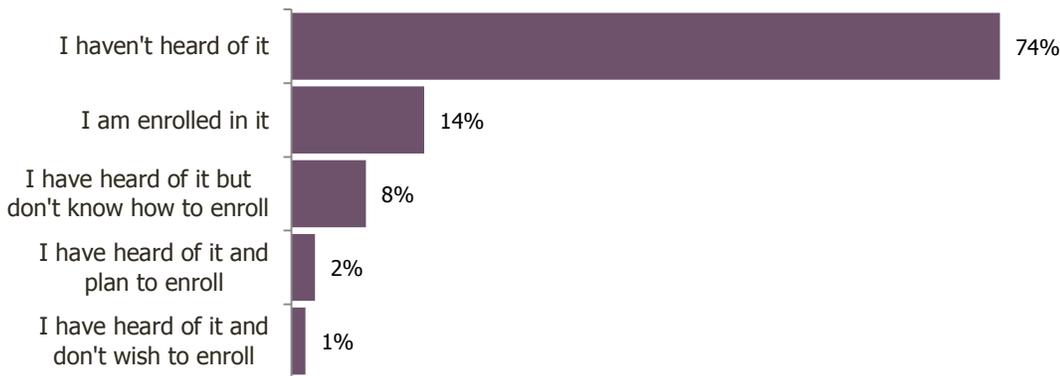


Special Topics

The Town of Needham included three questions of special interest on The NCS. About three-quarters of Needham residents indicated that they had not heard of the Rave Alert Smart911 emergency notification system used by the Town to communicate with residents during emergencies. Of the remaining 26%, 14% indicated that they were enrolled in it, 8% had heard of it but didn't know how to enroll, 2% indicated that they planned to enroll and 1% had heard of it and didn't wish to enroll.

Figure 4: Rave Alert Smart911

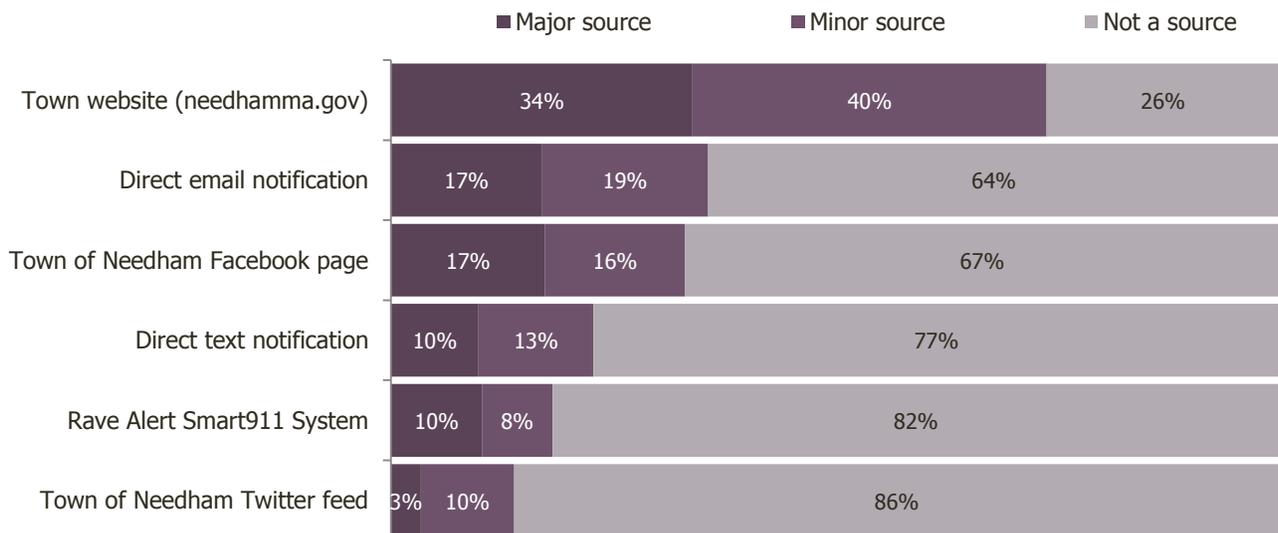
Rave Alert Smart911 is the official emergency notification system used by the Town of Needham to communicate with residents during emergencies. Please select the statement that best represents your enrollment status with Rave Alert:



About 7 in 10 respondents considered the Town website to be a major or minor source of information to obtain news from the Town of Needham. At least 6 in 10 did not consider each of the other listed items to be an information source.

Figure 5: Information Sources

Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, each of the following is for you to obtain news from the Town of Needham:

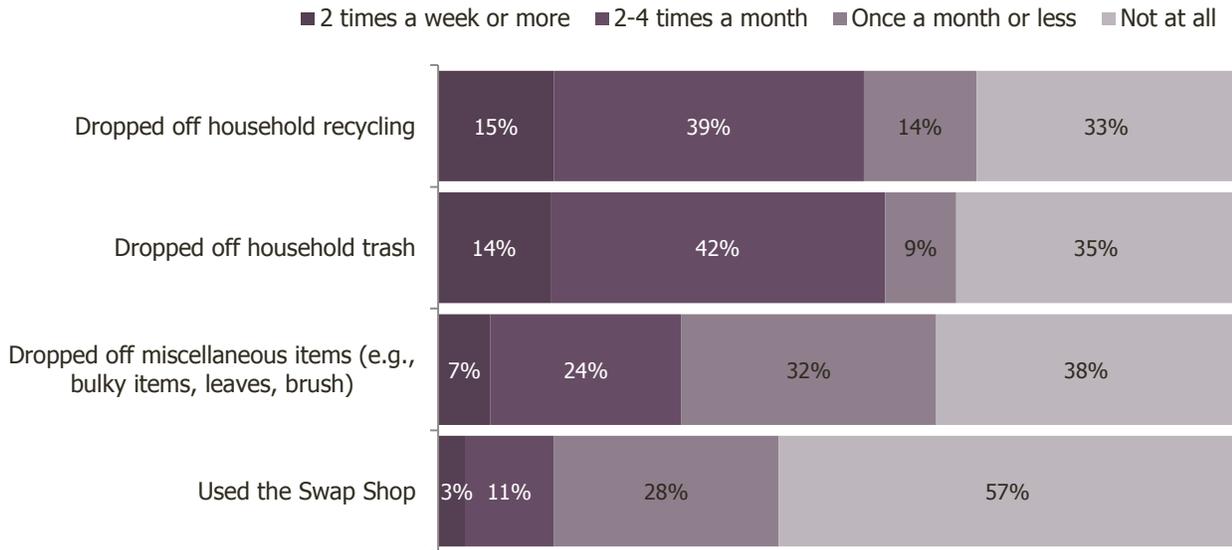


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A majority of residents reported that they had dropped off household recycling, dropped off household trash or dropped off miscellaneous items at the Needham Recycling & Transfer Station at least once a month or less in the last 12 months. Fewer than half indicated that they had used the Swap Shop during the same time period.

Figure 6: Use of Needham Recycling & Transfer Station

In the last 12 months, about how many times, if at all, have you or other household members done each of the following at the Needham Recycling & Transfer Station?



Conclusions

Needham continues to be a highly desirable and safe 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 benchmarks. Residents remained loyal to the community, with at least 4 in 5 being likely to recommend Needham as a place to live and planning to remain in Needham for the next five years. Further, about 9 in 10 gave high marks to the overall image of Needham, their neighborhoods, Needham as a place to raise children and to its overall appearance. Each of these ratings was higher than the national benchmark and remained stable from 2016 to 2018.

Residents identified Safety as one of the most important focus areas for the community and the survey results showed that the Town is meeting resident expectations. Nearly all Needham residents felt safe in their neighborhoods and in downtown and gave high marks to the overall feeling of safety. Safety-related services also received high marks from the vast majority of respondents. Ratings for Safety services such as police, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention, fire prevention and animal control were all higher than the national benchmarks. Not only were most ratings higher than the benchmarks, but some of the ratings were among the highest ever recorded in NRC's benchmarking database. Needham ranked in the top 10 out of over 400 jurisdictions nationwide for the overall feeling of safety, police services, crime prevention and fire services.

Trust in Town Government is high, and Town services are well-regarded.

At least two-thirds of Needham residents gave high marks to each aspect of Needham's leadership and governance. Ratings for the job the Town does at acting in the best interest of Needham, being honest and treating all residents fairly were higher than national averages. Further, ratings for the overall direction of the Town, welcoming citizen involvement and treating all residents fairly increased in 2018 compared to 2016. Almost all residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of Town services and individual services were also rated highly by most residents. Most aspects of Governance remained stable from 2016 to 2018.

Education and Enrichment contributes to Needham's high quality of life.

About 9 in 10 survey respondents rated education and enrichment opportunities in Needham as excellent or good, which was a higher rating than observed elsewhere. Several other aspects of Education and Enrichment received ratings higher than the national benchmark, including K-12 education, adult education and public libraries. Further, more Needham residents reported that they had used a public library in the last 12 months than residents in comparison communities. Ratings for Education and Enrichment tended to remain stable from 2016 to 2018.