

# **The National Citizen Survey™**

## **Harrisonburg, 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 Harrisonburg. 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.

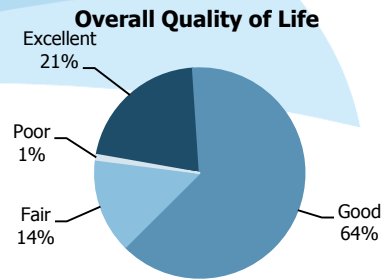
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 236 residents of the City of Harrisonburg. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% 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 Harrisonburg

Most residents rated the quality of life in Harrisonburg as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



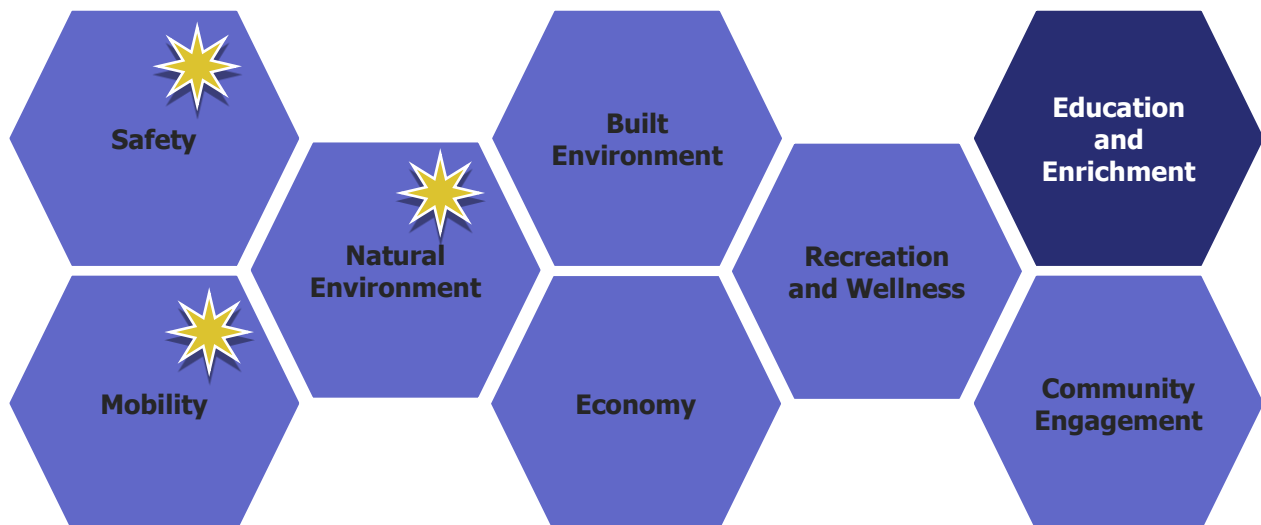
Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were 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, Mobility and Natural Environment as priorities for the Harrisonburg community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Harrisonburg residents gave favorable ratings to each of these facets of community as well as to the others listed. Ratings for seven of the eight facets were similar to the benchmark, while ratings for Education and Enrichment were higher than ratings in 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 Harrisonburg’s unique questions.

## Legend

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



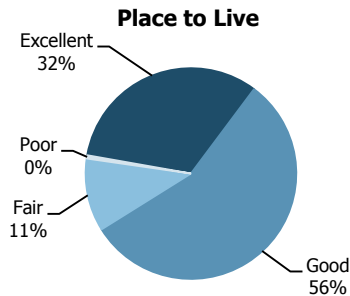
# Community Characteristics

*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 Harrisonburg, 88% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Harrisonburg 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 Harrisonburg as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Harrisonburg and its overall appearance. All five General Community Characteristics received positive ratings from at least 7 in 10 residents and were similar to the national benchmark comparison.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 35 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, ratings of Community Characteristics in Harrisonburg tended to be similar to other communities in the nation. There were no ratings lower than the benchmark and only two aspects received positive ratings from less than a majority of survey respondents. Respondents tended to give the highest ratings to Safety, where at least 8 in 10 of respondents gave ratings of excellent or good to each aspect of Safety. Of the six aspects of Education and Enrichment, four were rated higher than the benchmark comparisons and two were similar; all but one of these ratings were rated as excellent or good by at least 7 in 10 respondents. Two aspects of Economy received ratings higher than the benchmark comparison while only one aspect (employment opportunities) received positive ratings from less than a majority of survey respondents.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower □ Not available

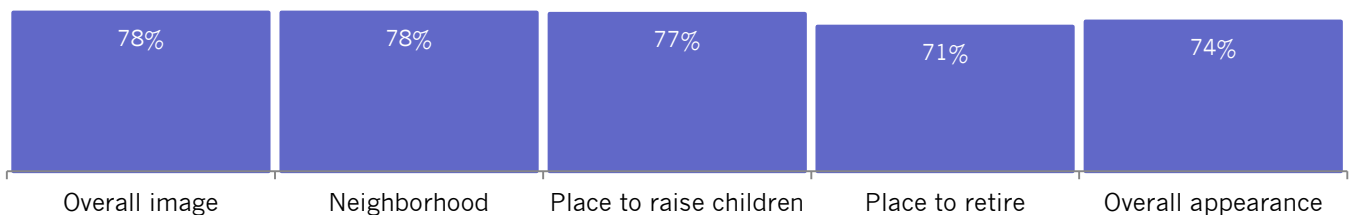
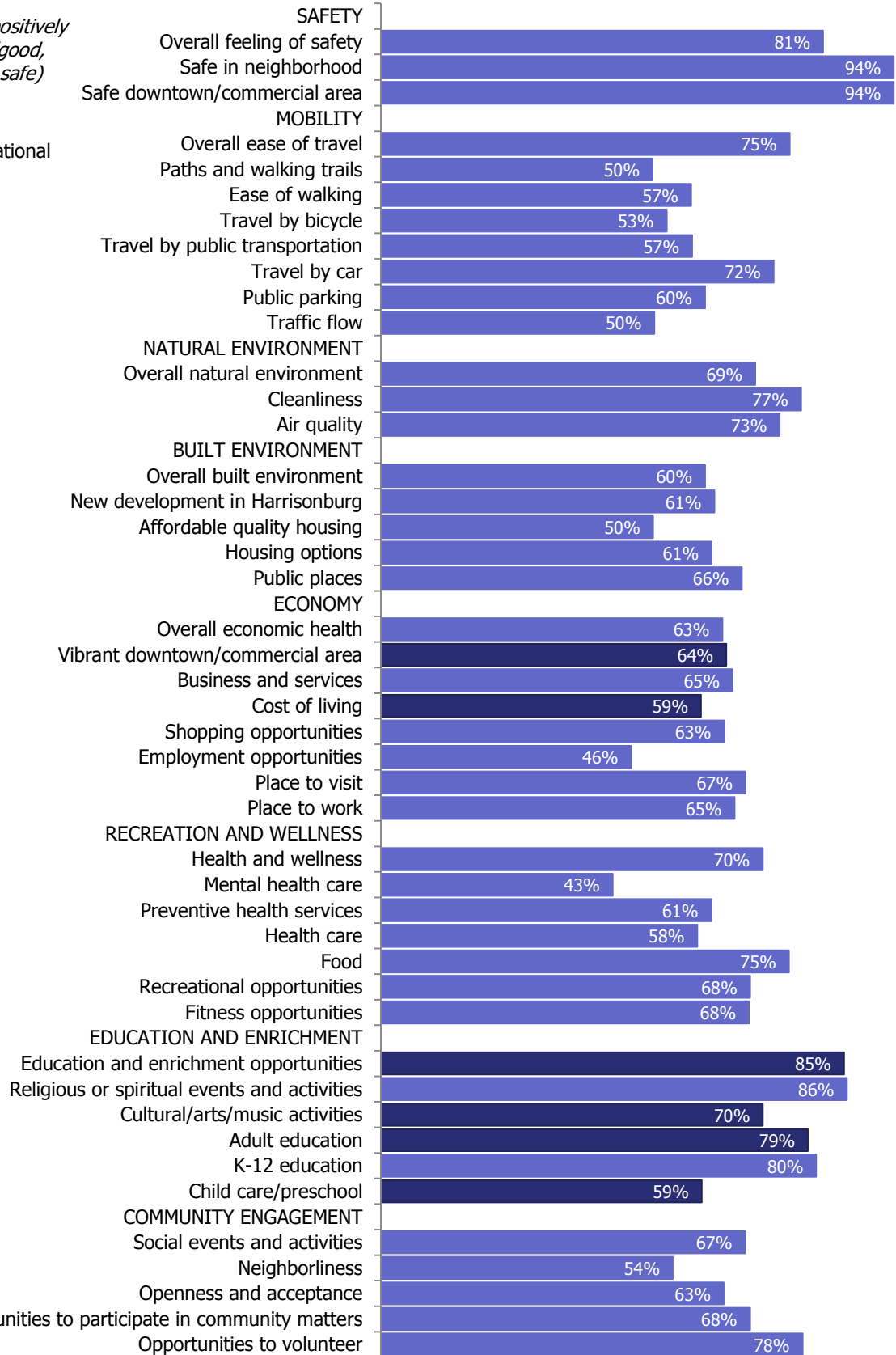


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available



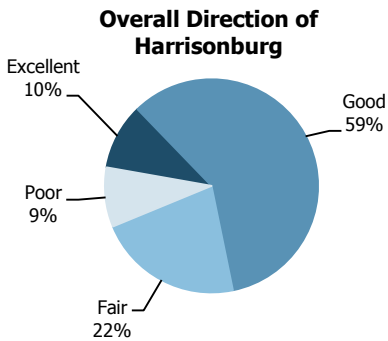
# Governance

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

The overall direction that the City of Harrisonburg is taking as well as the manner in which City services are provided are key components of how residents rate their quality of life. The overall direction the City is taking was rated positively by 69% of residents, a rating similar to the benchmark comparison.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Harrisonburg’s leadership and governance. A majority of respondents gave a positive rating to each aspect of General Governance in Harrisonburg. These ratings were all similar to the benchmark comparison.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Harrisonburg. Overall, Harrisonburg residents rated each service area highly within each facet and at a level similar to other communities. Safety services generally received the highest ratings; nearly all residents rated fire services and ambulance/EMS services as excellent or good. Within the face of Mobility, street repair and bus or transit services scored higher than the benchmarks and at least 6 in 10 survey respondents rated these services as excellent or good.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower □ Not available

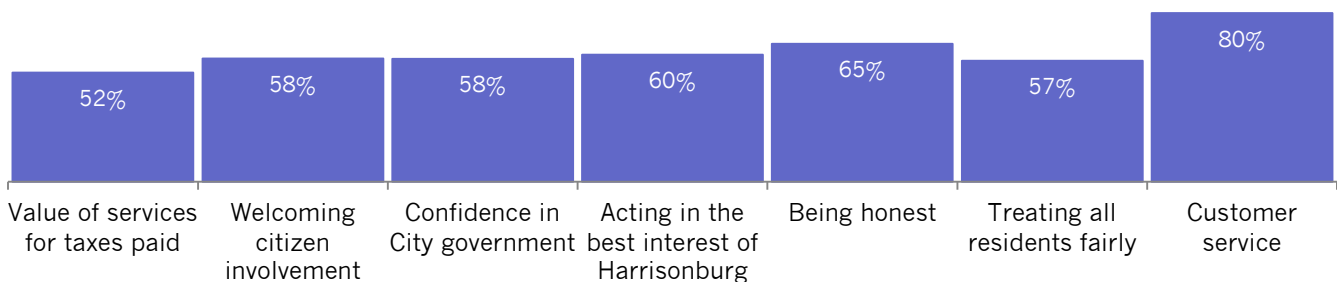


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

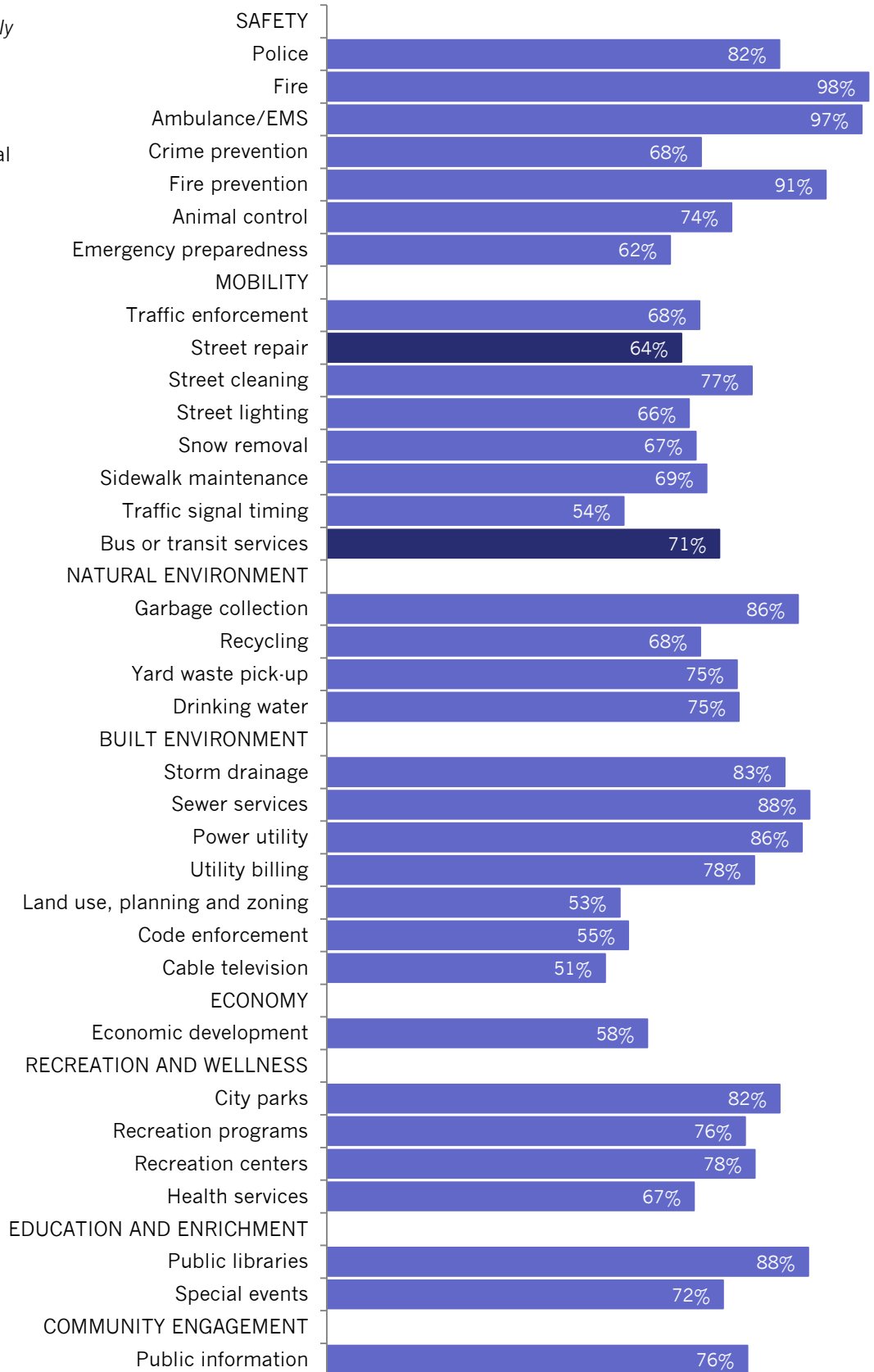
Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher

■ Similar

■ Lower

□ Not available





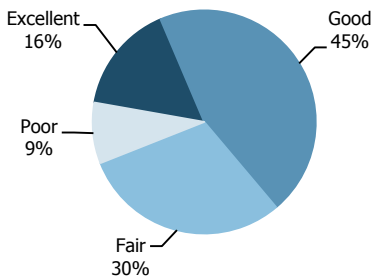
# Participation

*Are the residents of Harrisonburg 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. Similar to the benchmark, about two-thirds of respondents gave a positive rating to the sense of community in Harrisonburg. Nearly all residents indicated that they would recommend Harrisonburg to others and most would continue to live in the city. Fewer residents than elsewhere (about 4 in 10) said they had contacted a City employee.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Measures of Participation in Harrisonburg tended to be similar to the benchmark across all eight facets of community livability, though there were a handful of activities that Harrisonburg residents did with less frequency and more frequency than residents elsewhere. About 6 in 10 residents had made their home more energy efficient and voted in a local election, but these ratings were lower than ratings in comparison communities. The rate at which Harrisonburg residents reported reading or watching local news was also lower than the benchmark. Harrisonburg residents reported volunteering, carpooling, participating in religious or spiritual events and working in the city at higher rates than comparison communities. When rating the impact of the economy on their income in the next six months, Harrisonburg residents rated the economic impact more positively than comparison communities.

**Sense of Community**



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

Comparison to national benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available

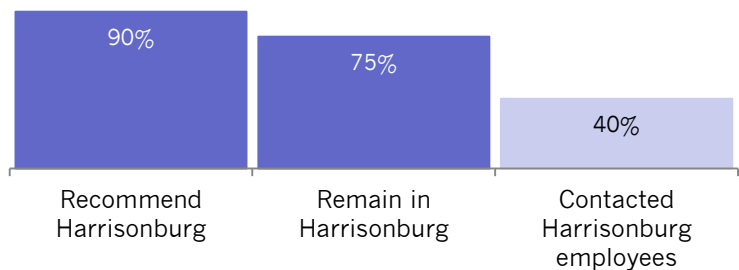
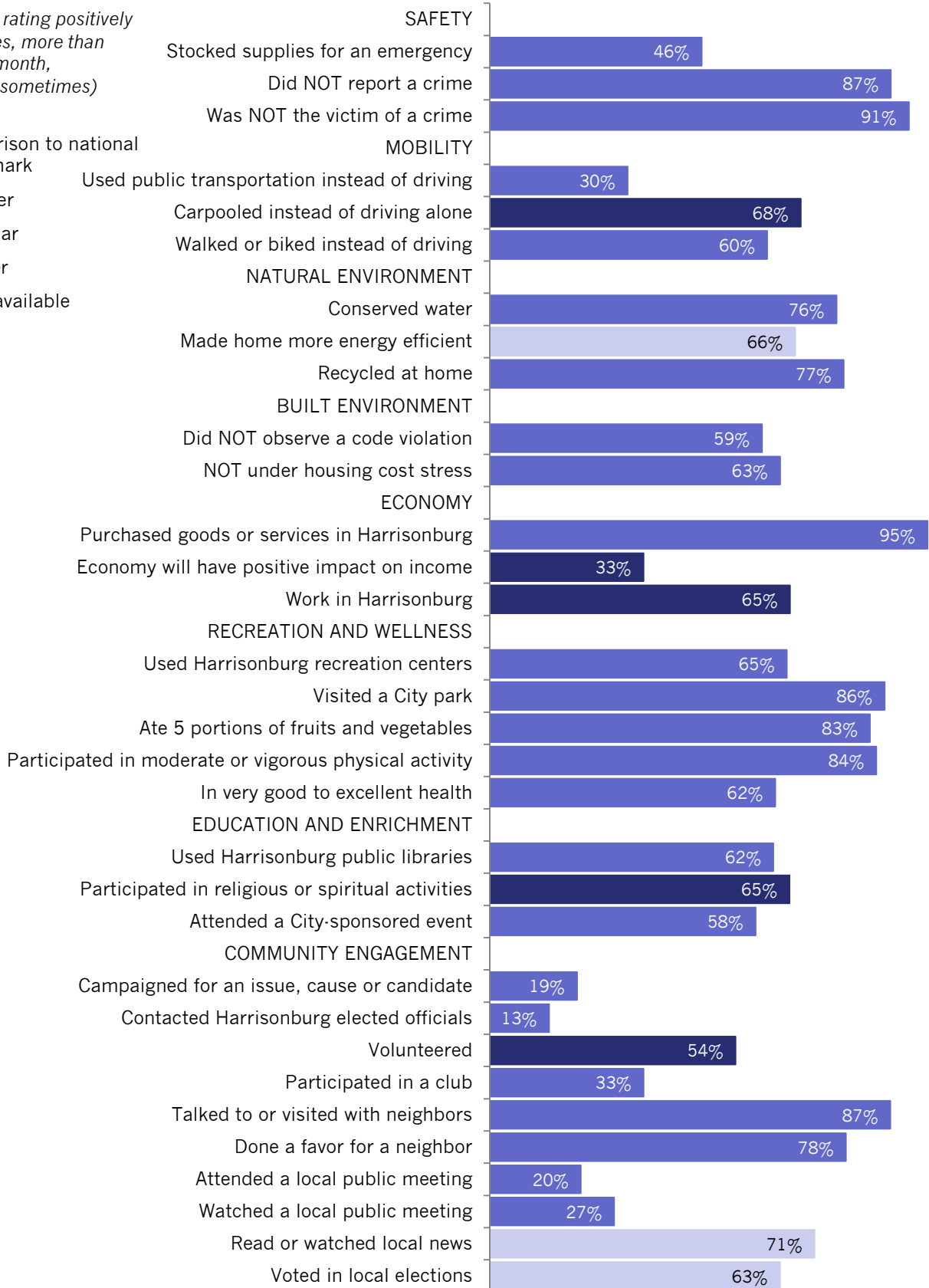


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available



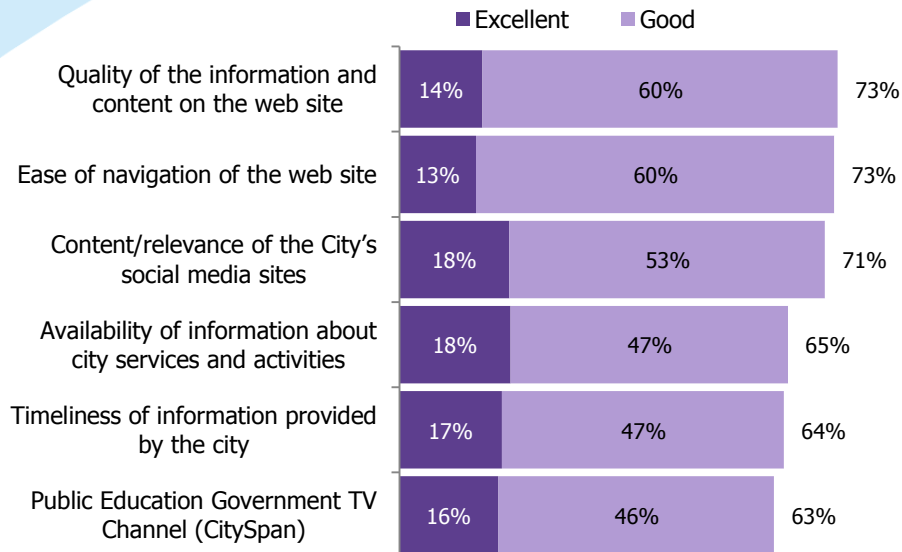
# Special Topics

The City of Harrisonburg included 10 questions of special interest on The NCS.

When asked to rate a variety of categories relating to Harrisonburg’s communication efforts, survey respondents gave generally favorable ratings. Each of the six categories was rated excellent or good by at least 6 in 10 respondents. The quality of information and content on the web site and the ease of navigation of the web site were the top rated categories and were rated excellent or good by about three-quarters of respondents.

Figure 4: Communication Efforts

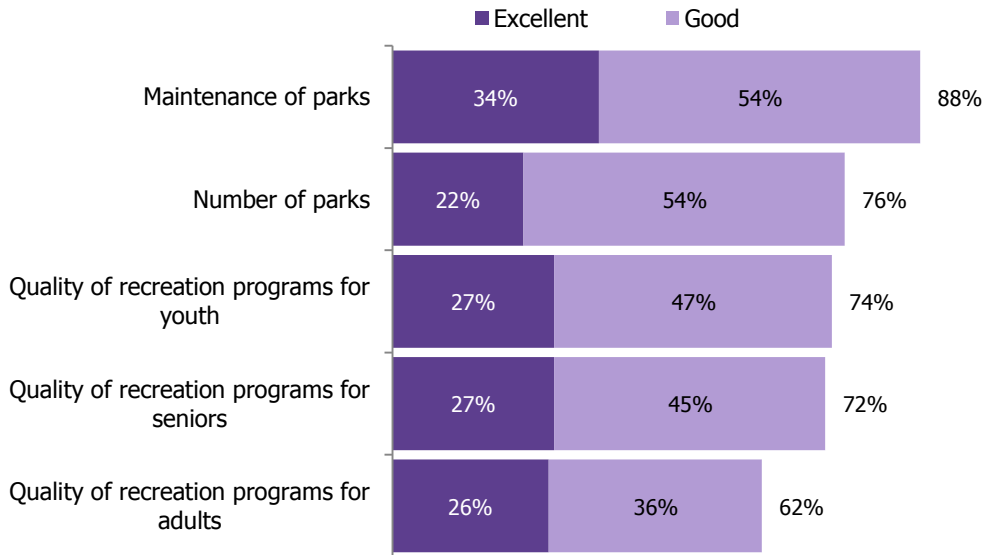
*Please rate the following categories of Harrisonburg’s communication efforts:*



Residents were also asked to evaluate a variety of categories related to Harrisonburg’s parks and recreation. Each of the five categories was rated excellent or good by at least 6 in 10 respondents. Maintenance of parks was given the top rating with 88% excellent or good, followed by the number of parks with 76% excellent or good.

Figure 5: Parks and Recreation

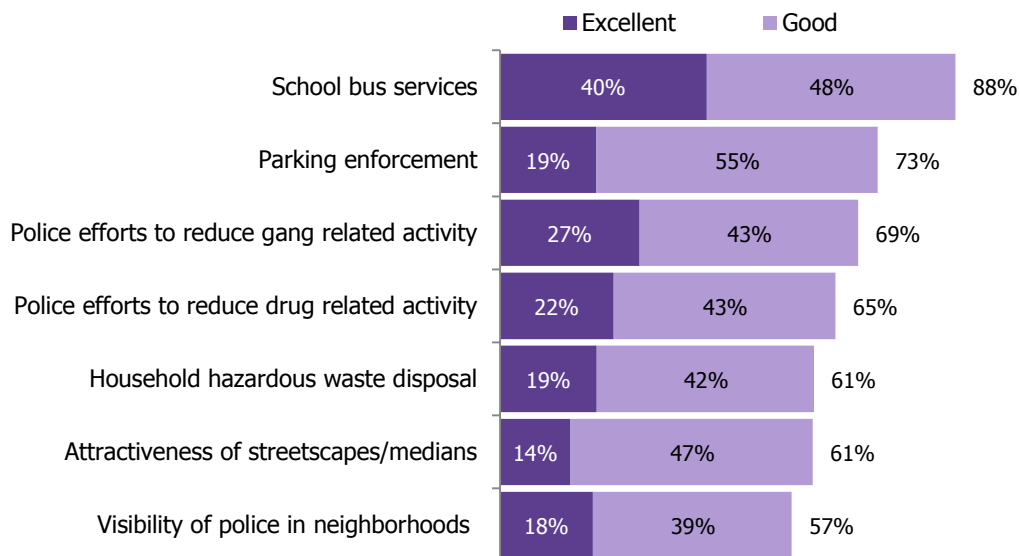
*Please rate the following categories of Harrisonburg’s parks and recreation:*



Survey respondents were given another group of questions that asked them to rate the quality of specific aspects of the community as well as services offered. School bus services received the highest rating of the group with 88% excellent or good following by parking enforcement with 73% excellent or good. The lowest rated item was visibility of police in neighborhoods with 57% rating this as excellent or good.

Figure 6: Aspects of the Community

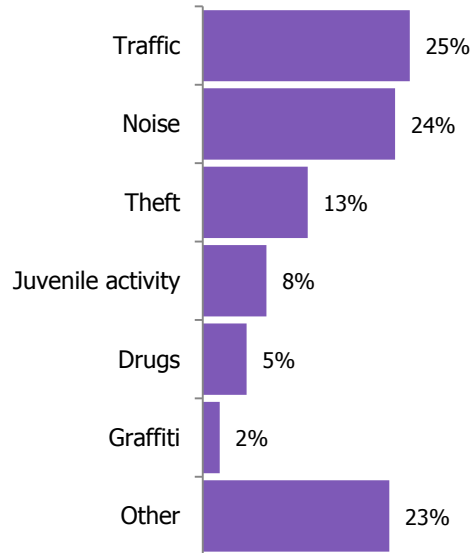
*Please rate the quality of the following aspects of the community and services offered:*



When asked what to rate the single biggest police matter in their neighborhood, survey respondents rated both traffic and noise at the top with about one-quarter of respondents selecting each. Each of the remaining 4 items listed received less than 13% rating it as the biggest problem, aside from the option to select other, which was selected by about one-quarter of the respondents.

Figure 7: Police Matters

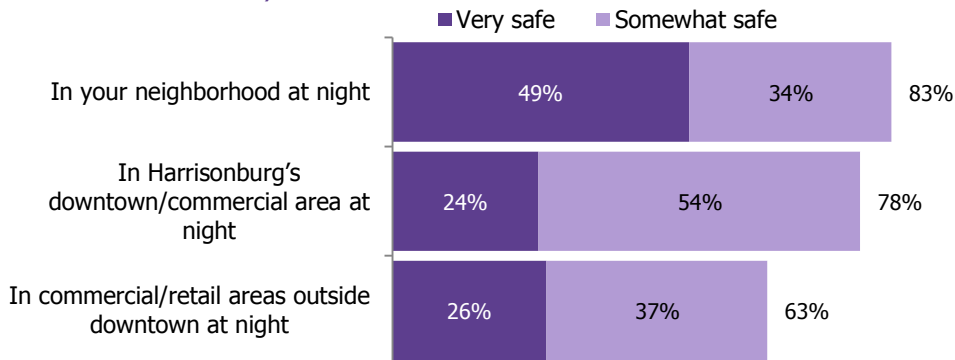
*The biggest police matter in my neighborhood is:*



When asked about feelings of safety at night, survey respondents felt most safe in their neighborhood with 83% reporting feeling very or somewhat safe. Commercial/retail areas outside downtown received the lowest ratings, 63% reported feeling very or somewhat safe in these areas at night.

Figure 8: Safety at Night

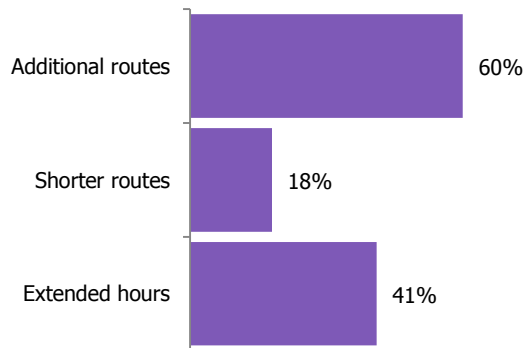
*Please rate how safe or unsafe you feel:*



Respondents were given three options to choose from regarding potential ways Harrisonburg should expand public transportation. Additional routes was selected by about two-thirds of respondents, and about 4 in 10 selected extended hours.

Figure 9: Public Transportation Expansion

*Which of the following are ways you feel Harrisonburg should expand public transportation?*



When asked about the types of phones survey respondents have, one-third reported having a land line home phone and nearly all reported having a cellular phone.

Figure 10: Respondents with Land Line Home Phone

*Do you have a land line home phone?*

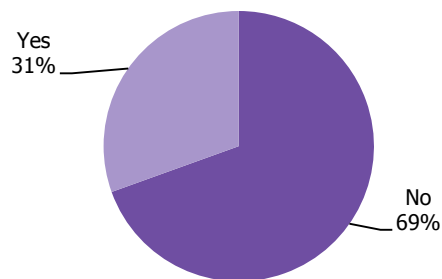
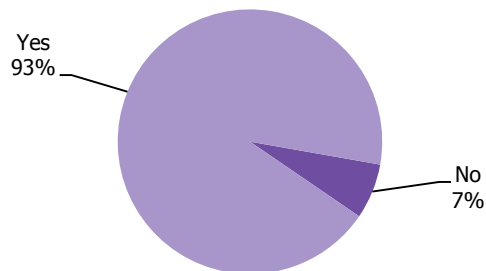


Figure 11: Respondents with Cellular Phone

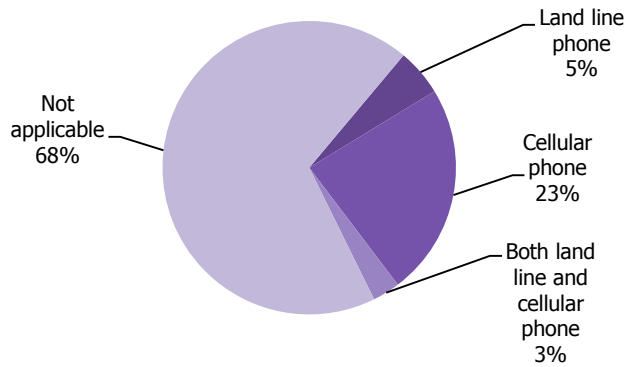
*Do you have a cellular phone?*



Almost 70% of survey respondents reported not applicable when asked what type of phone they used if they have dial 9-1-1 in the past year. Nearly one-fourth of respondents reported using a cellular phone.

Figure 12: Type of Phone Used for Dialing 9-1-1

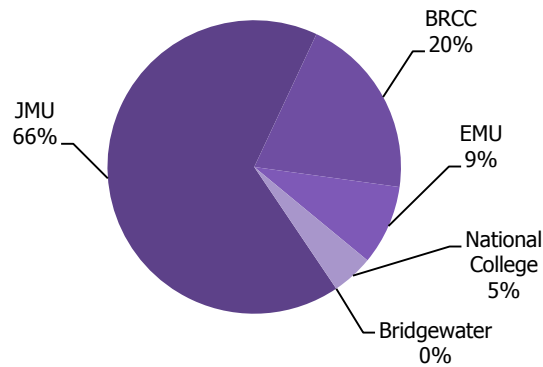
*If you have dialed 9-1-1 for emergency assistance in the past year what type of phone did you use?*



An additional demographic question was included in the survey questionnaire asking respondents to indicate if they were a student at any of the listed schools. Of the 236 survey respondents, 53 elected to answer this question. Of the 53, 66% (35 respondents) reported being a student at JMU and none reported being a student at Bridgewater. The remaining three listed schools received 20% or less of those who answered this question reporting each as the school they attend.

Figure 13: Student Status

*Are you a student at any of the following schools?*



# Conclusions

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

Almost all residents rated their overall quality of life as excellent or good and 90% of residents would be very or somewhat likely to recommend Harrisonburg as a place to live to someone who asks. Harrisonburg's overall image and overall appearance along with neighborhoods and the City as a place to live and raise children received high ratings by at least 7 in 10 residents and were similar to the benchmark comparison. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and were at least similar to national benchmark comparisons.

## **Safety is a top priority for the quality of life in Harrisonburg.**

Safety was identified as a top priority for the community to focus on and was also the topic of a variety of special interest questions included in the survey. Nearly all survey respondents felt all aspects of Safety within Community Characteristics and Governance were excellent or good and saw ratings that were similar to ratings in comparison communities. At least 6 in 10 respondents felt that police efforts to reduce gang and drug activity and the visibility of police in neighborhoods was excellent or good. Most residents felt safe in their neighborhood at night and at least 6 in 10 felt safe at night in commercial/retail areas in downtown and outside of downtown. Nearly all residents felt safe in their neighborhood and downtown during the day.

## **Education and Enrichment received high ratings.**

Four of the six Education and Enrichment Community Characteristics received ratings higher than comparison communities including adult education and overall education and enrichment. In the pillar of Governance, the aspect of public libraries received a rating similar to the benchmark but was a high rating; higher than all the other governance ratings across each facet except for Safety ratings. More Harrisonburg residents had attended religious or spiritual activities compared to the benchmark and a similar number had attended city-sponsored event or used the public libraries.