

The National Citizen Survey™

Needham, MA

Community Livability Report

2014

Contents

About.....	1
Quality of Life in Needham	2
Community Characteristics	3
Governance	5
Participation	7
Special Topics.....	9
Conclusions	11

The National Citizen Survey™
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National Research Center, Inc.
2955 Valmont Road, Suite 300
Boulder, CO 80301
www.n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863

International City/County Management Association
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
www.icma.org • 202-289-ICMA

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).

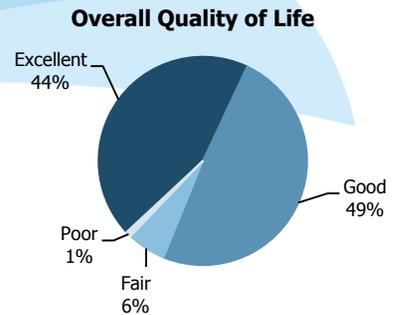
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 546 residents of the Town of Needham. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* 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 similar to 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.



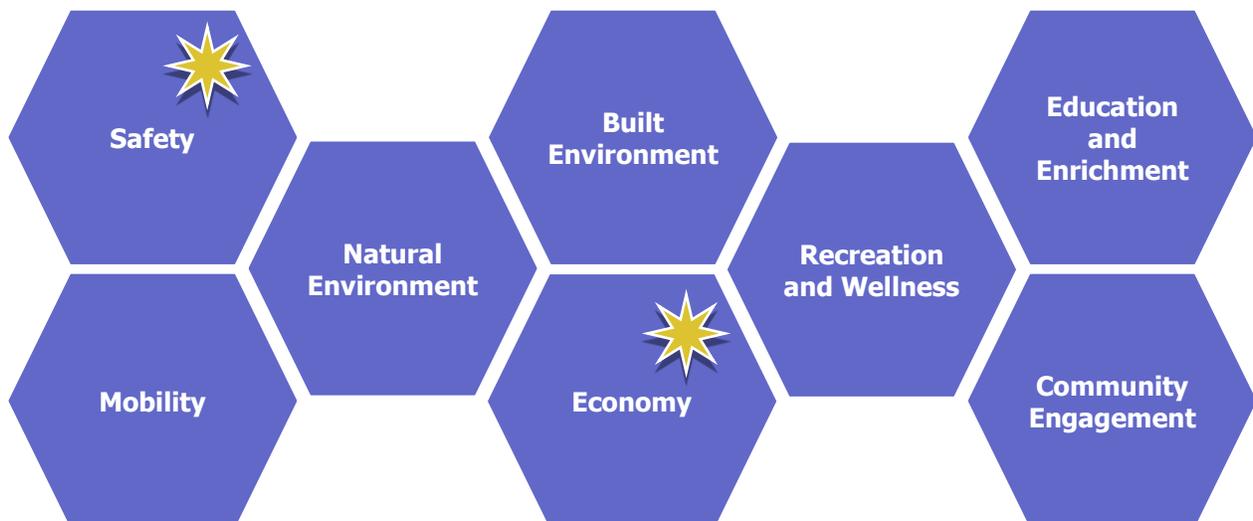
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Needham community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Needham residents gave favorable ratings to all of the facets of community. 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, 96% 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. At least 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image of Needham, their neighborhoods and Needham as a place to raise children. These ratings were all higher than the national benchmark comparisons and all had remained stable from 2012 to 2014 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover). About half of the survey respondents gave positive ratings to Needham as a place to retire; this was similar to the benchmark and decreased from 2012 to 2014. Ratings for Needham's overall appearance were positive, stable over time and were rated similar to the benchmark comparison.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, most aspects of Community Characteristics were similar to the national benchmark comparisons; however 11 were above the national benchmark and three were below the benchmark. Almost all respondents gave high ratings to their overall feeling of safety in Needham and almost all felt safe in their neighborhoods and downtown. A majority of respondents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Mobility, and these ratings tended to be similar to the national benchmark. Ratings for ease of walking were higher than those in comparison communities.



At least 4 in 5 residents gave excellent or good ratings to aspects of Needham's Natural Environment; ratings for the cleanliness of and air quality in Needham were higher than the national benchmarks. Further, ratings for air quality increased from 2012 to 2014. Ratings within the facet of Built Environment tended to be a mix of positive and negative; less than half gave positive ratings to housing options and affordable quality housing in Needham and these ratings were lower than ratings in comparison communities. Ratings within the

facet of Economy were also mixed. The overall economic health of Needham was rated excellent or good by 84% of respondents and was higher than the national benchmark; a majority gave positive ratings to businesses and services in Needham, Needham as a place to visit and Needham as a place to work. Less than 40% gave positive ratings to employment opportunities, shopping opportunities and the cost of living in Needham. Ratings within the facets of Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were all rated as excellent or good by a majority of respondents and were all at least similar to the national benchmarks.

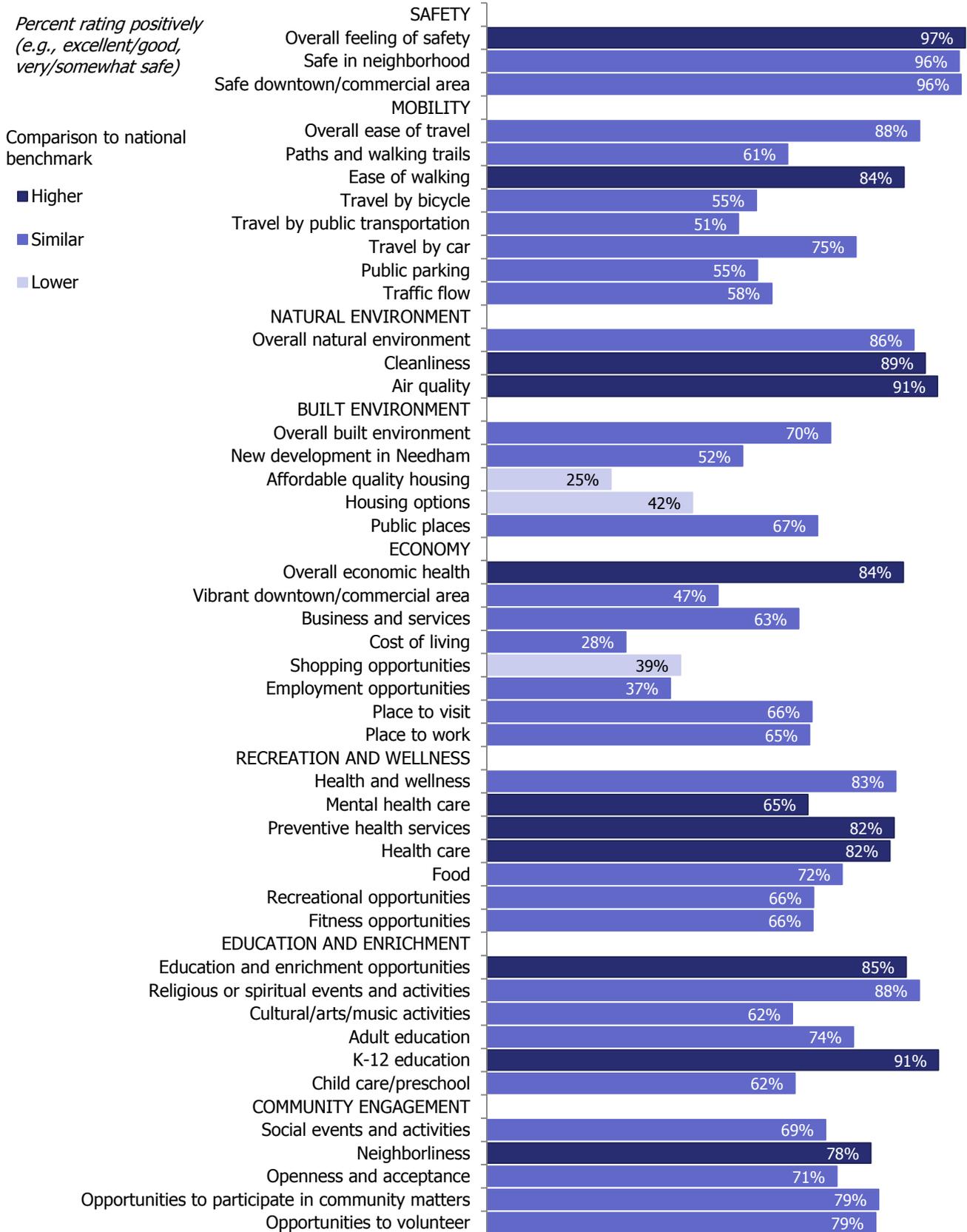
Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



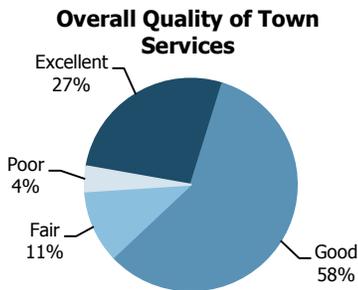
Governance

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 85% of residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the Town, while only 50% gave positive ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark and remained stable from 2012 to 2014.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Needham’s leadership and governance. About two-thirds of respondents or higher rated the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction of Needham, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in Town government, acting in the best interest of Needham, being honest and treating all residents fairly as excellent or good. About four out of five residents rated the quality of the customer service provided by Town employees as excellent or good. These ratings were all similar to the benchmark and remained stable from 2012 to 2014 (when comparisons were available).

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Needham. Most aspects of Governance were similar to the national benchmark, none were lower than the benchmark and four were higher. Ratings for police services, crime prevention, and drinking water and health services were all higher than in comparison communities. Ratings within the facet of Safety were particularly high; about 9 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to police, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention and fire prevention. Further, at least three-quarters of respondents gave positive ratings to animal control and emergency preparedness. A majority of residents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. Ratings within Mobility were somewhat mixed; ratings declined for 5 of the 8 aspects from 2012 to 2014.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

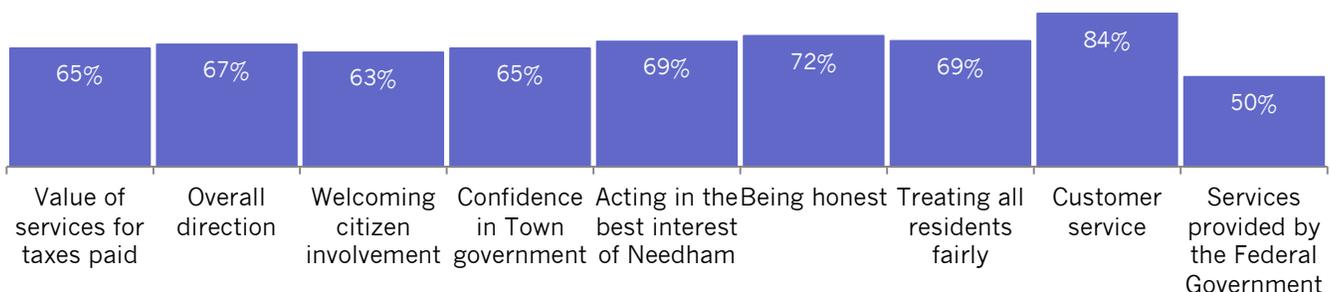
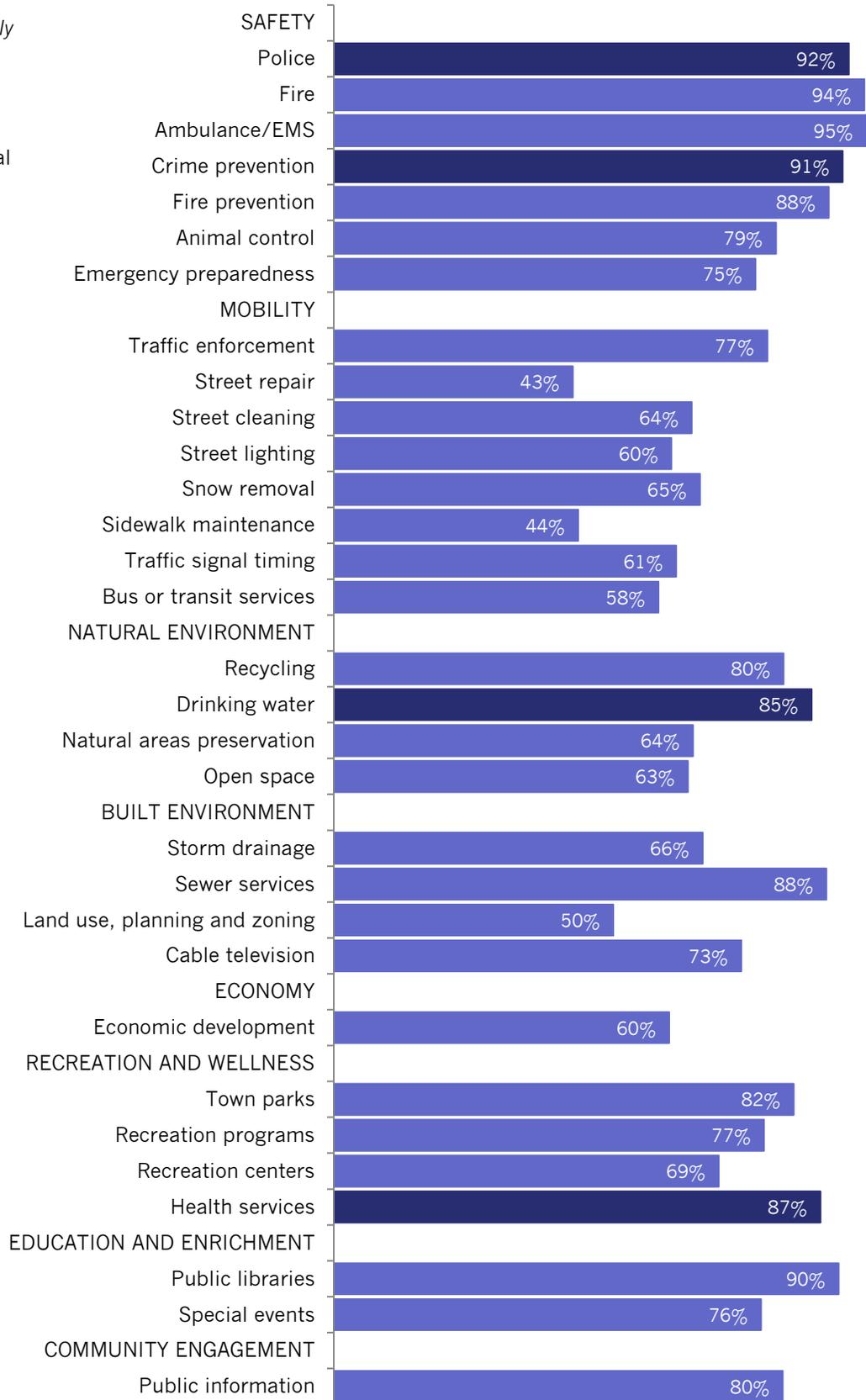


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

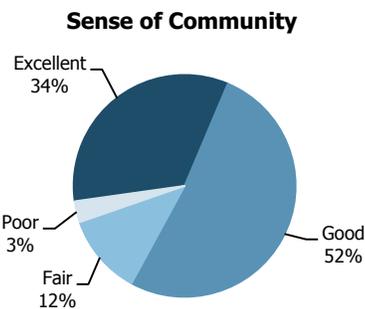


Participation

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 85% of residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall sense of community in Needham, this rating is higher than the national benchmark and remained stable from 2012 to 2014. About 89% of residents planned to stay in Needham for the next five years, and almost all would recommend living in Needham. A majority reported contacting a Town employee in the last 12 months. All of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark and remained stable from 2012 to 2014.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Reported rates of participation by Needham residents tended to be similar to or higher than rates of participation in comparison communities. More Needham residents than in comparison communities had used public transportation instead of driving, walked or biked instead of driving, recycled at home, felt the economy would have a positive impact on their income, used the Needham Public library, attended a Town sponsored event, and voted in local elections; also, more had not reported a crime or observed a code violation. At least 9 in 10 respondents had recycled at home, purchased goods or services in Needham, talked to or visited with neighbors and read or watched local news; a similar number had not reported a crime or been the victim of a crime.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

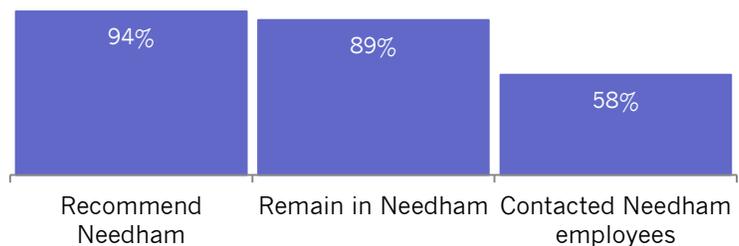
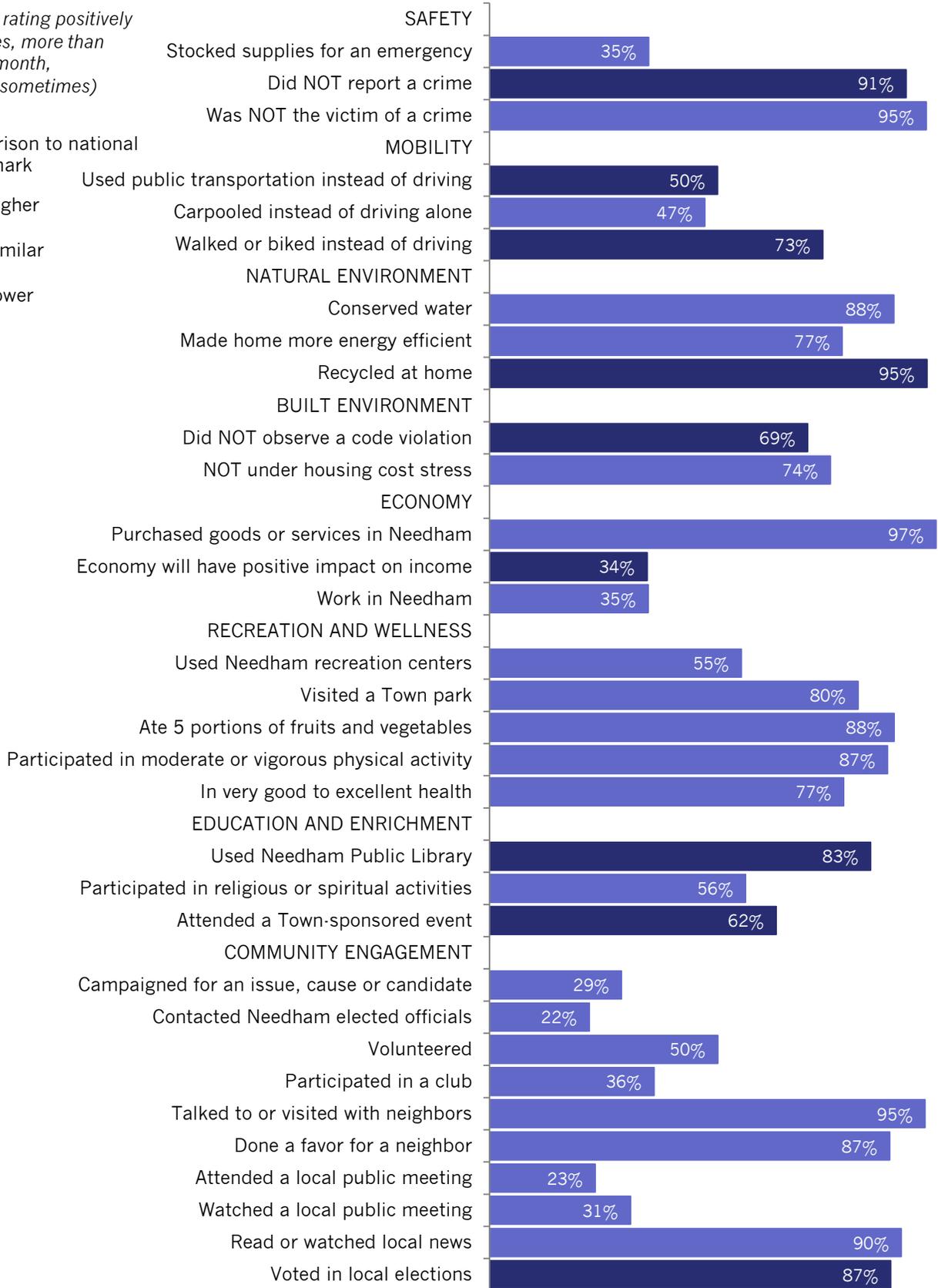


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Special Topics

The Town of Needham included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked respondents to indicate how much they used different social media sources to obtain news. About 85% indicated that online news sites were a major or minor source of news, while about half indicated that they used Facebook as a news source. About one-third indicated that blogs were a news source, and less than one-quarter of respondents indicated that Twitter was a news source.

Respondents were then asked to indicate how likely they would be to use different types of social media to obtain news about the Town of Needham. About 4 in 5 said they would be likely to use the Town website. About one-third were likely to use the Town Facebook page or Town blogs to obtain news. Only about 17% said they would be likely to use the Town Twitter feed as a news source.

Figure 4: Current Social Media Information Sources

Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, each of the following types of social media is for you to obtain news:

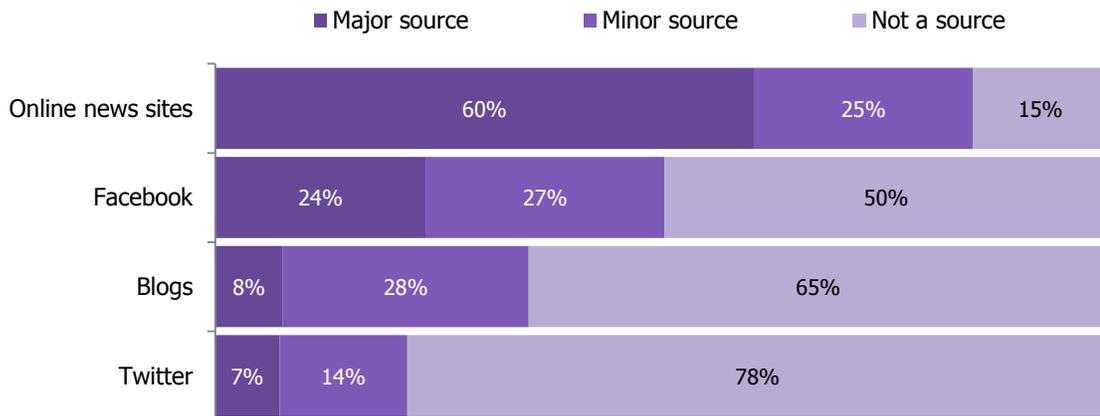
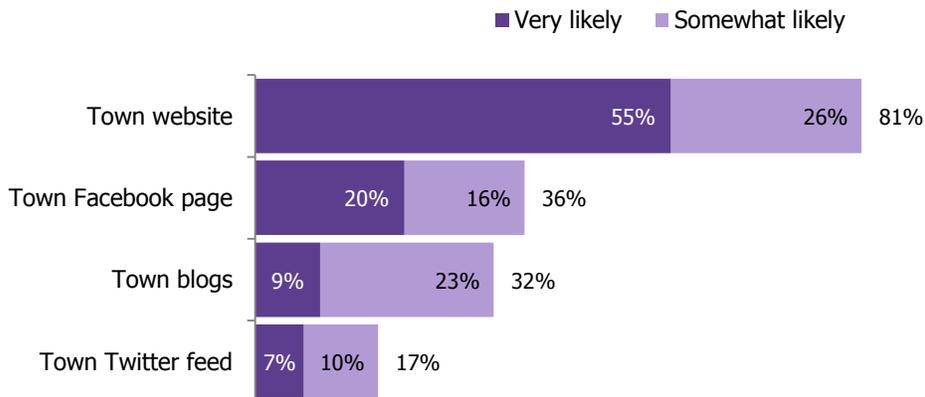


Figure 5: Potential Social Media Information Sources

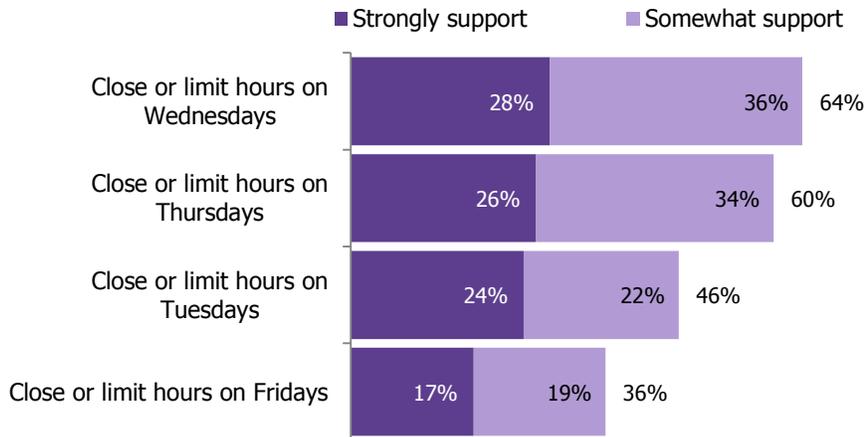
Please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to use each of the following methods to obtain news about the Town of Needham:



The final special interest question asked respondents to indicate their support for limiting or reducing hours at the Recycling Transfer Station (RTS) on Tuesdays, Wednesday, Thursdays or Fridays. A majority of respondents indicated support for closing or limiting hours on Wednesday or Thursdays. Close to half supported closing or limiting hours on Tuesdays; while only about one-third supported closing or limiting hours on Fridays.

Figure 6: Closing or Reducing Hours for the Recycling Transfer Station

The Recycling Transfer Station (RTS) is currently open to the public Tuesday-Saturday 7:30am-4pm. The Town is considering closing or reducing hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday in order to reduce costs. (Saturday hours would not be affected.) If such changes are needed to reduce costs, to what extent would you support or oppose each of the following options?



Conclusions

Needham residents continue to enjoy an exceptional quality of life.

Almost all residents rated their overall quality of life as excellent or good and about 9 in 10 would be likely to recommend Needham as a place to live to someone who asks. Needham as a place to live and as a place to raise children received high ratings from about 9 in 10 respondents. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and remained stable from 2012 to 2014.

Safety is a key focus area in Needham.

Safety was an important feature of the community for residents and most residents wanted the Town to continue to provide excellent safety services and amenities. At least 9 in 10 respondents felt safe overall, in their neighborhoods and in downtown/commercial areas. Residents rated safety services highly (all ratings were similar to or higher than the national benchmark) and most participants were not a victim of a crime or did not report a crime. The high safety ratings remained stable from 2012 to 2014.

The Economy is important to the community.

Residents believed that the economy is an important community feature to focus on over the next two years. Participants felt very positive about the overall economic health of the community and also gave favorable ratings to business and services in Needham, Needham as a place to visit and Needham as a place to work. Ratings of residents' optimism for their personal economic future were higher than those in comparison communities and increased from 2012 to 2014. Further, ratings for economic development services increased from 2012 to 2014.