

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

La Plata, MD

Community Livability Report

2014



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About

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

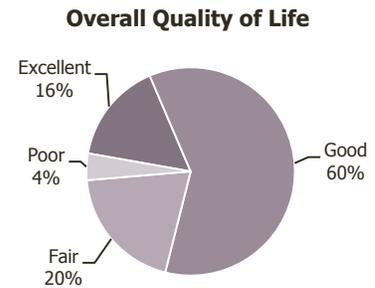
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 331 residents of the Town of La Plata. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in La Plata

A majority of residents rated the quality of life in La Plata as excellent or good. This rating was similar to ratings in comparison communities (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.



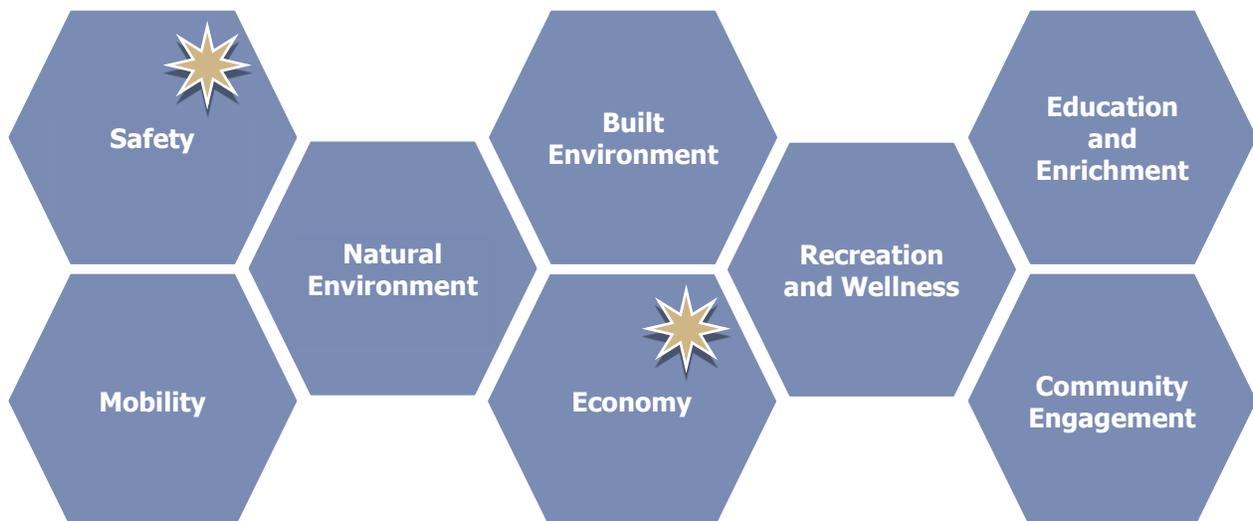
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the La Plata community in the coming two years. Ratings for all eight facets 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 La Plata’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 La Plata, 85% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of La Plata as a place to live were similar to 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 La Plata as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of La Plata and its overall appearance. A majority of respondents gave positive ratings to the overall image, neighborhoods, overall appearance and La Plata as a place to raise children. These ratings were all similar to ratings in comparison communities. Ratings for La Plata as a place to retire were less positive and were lower than the benchmark comparison.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Ratings within the facets of Safety, Natural Environment and Education and Enrichment tended to be rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to the benchmark comparisons. Mobility ratings were missed, less than half gave positive ratings to paths and walking trails, ease of walking, travel by bicycle and travel by public transportation and these ratings were lower than ratings in comparison communities. Ratings were also a mix of negative and positive within Built Environment and Economy.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



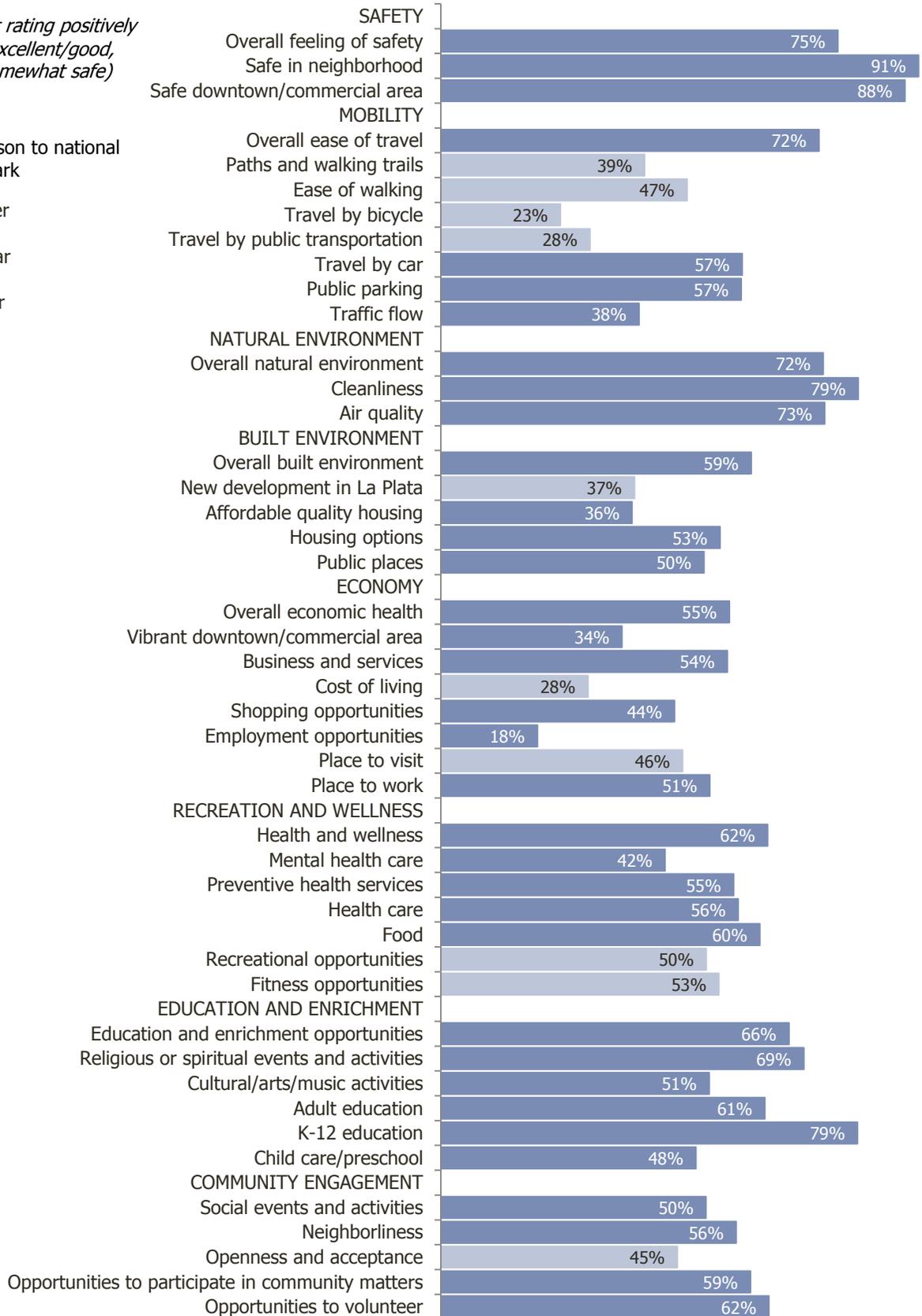
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



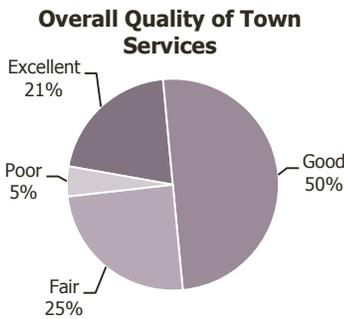
Governance

How well does the government of La Plata meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by La Plata as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the Town of La Plata while only about 3 in 10 gave positive ratings to the Federal Government.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of La Plata’s leadership and governance. All of these ratings were similar to comparison communities except the value of services for taxes paid, which was lower than other communities. More than three quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of customer service provided by Town employees.

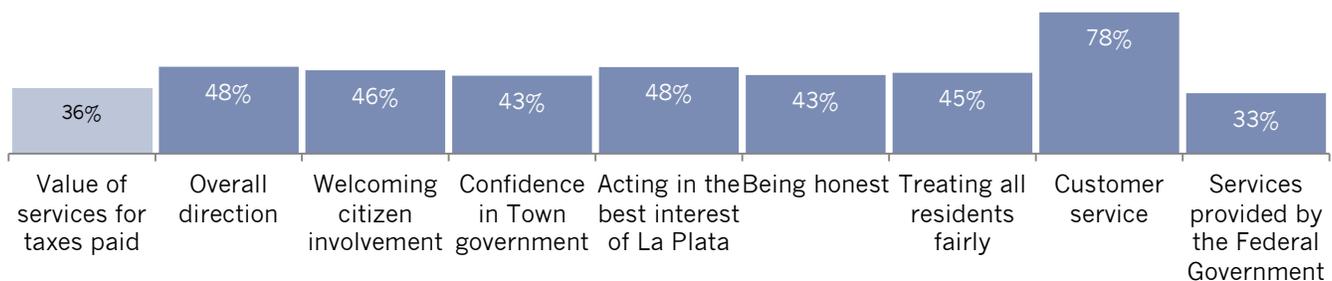
Respondents evaluated over 20 individual services and amenities available in La Plata. Most of these services were rated excellent or good by a majority of respondents and all were similar to ratings in comparison communities. The highest rated services were police services, ambulance/EMS, garbage collection, recycling, yard waste pick-up and Town parks. The lowest rated services were street repair, open space, land use and code enforcement.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



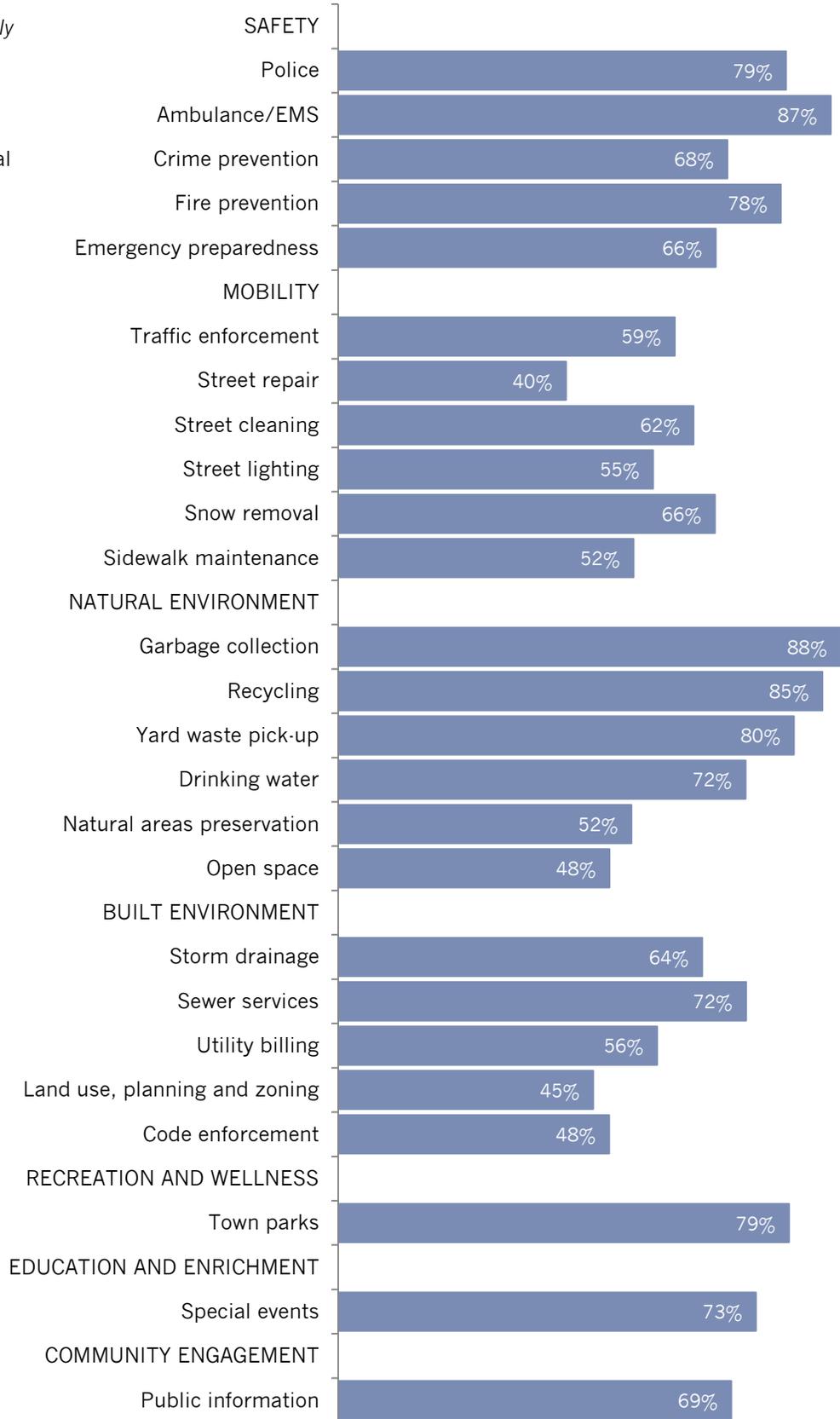
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



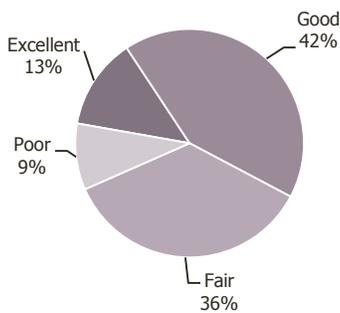
Participation

Are the residents of La Plata 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. At least three quarters of respondents were likely to remain in La Plata and were likely to recommend living in La Plata. These ratings were similar to the benchmark. A majority of respondents reported contacting a Town employee in the last 12 months; this rate of contact was higher than in comparison communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Most Participation rates were similar to rates reported in other communities. More La Plata residents reported voting in local elections than other residents across the nation. Fewer survey respondents reported that they had walked or biked instead of driving, worked in La Plata or visited a Town park. Almost all had purchased goods or services in La Plata, recycled at home and visited with neighbors in the last 12 months.

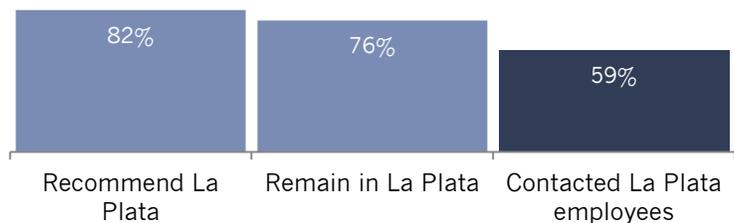
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



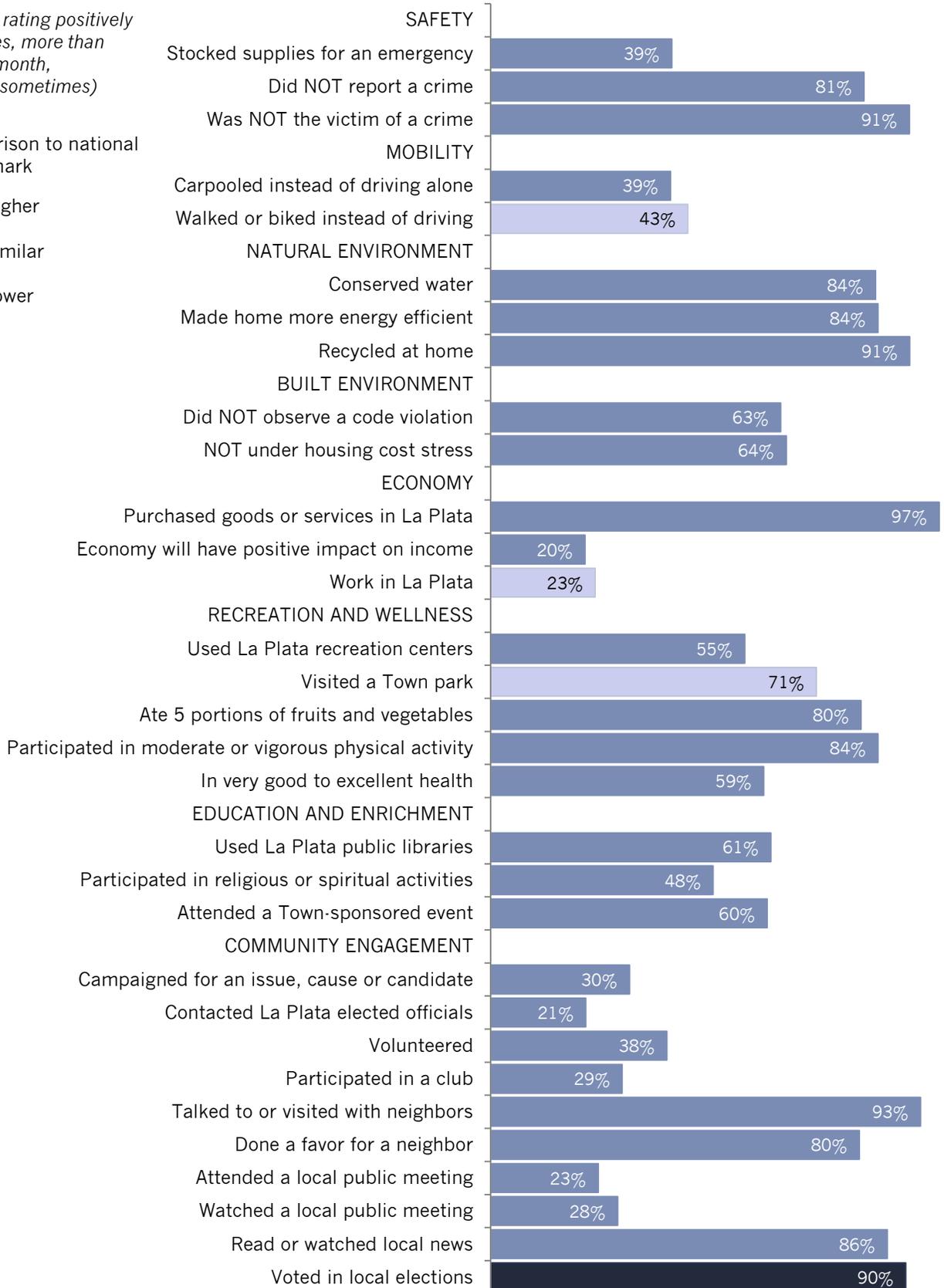
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

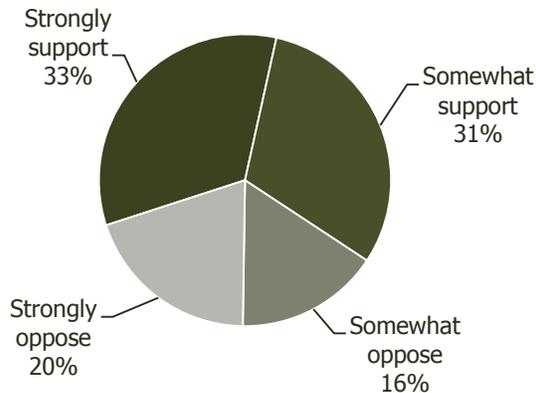


Special Topics

The Town of La Plata included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked respondents to indicate their support or opposition for installing traffic cameras to deter speeding in school zones. About two-thirds of respondents supported the instillation of traffic cameras.

Figure 4: Installation of Traffic Cameras

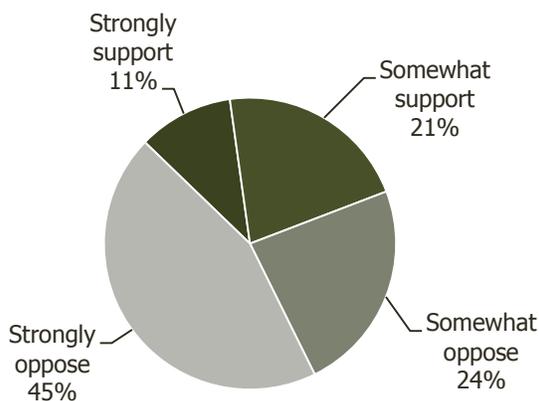
How much would you support or oppose the installation of traffic cameras to deter speeding in school zones in La Plata?



The second question asked respondents to indicate their support or opposition for an increase in the property tax rate to provide dedicated funding to improve La Plata's pedestrian access. About one-third of respondents supported the property tax increase, while the rest opposed it.

Figure 5: Question 15

To what extent would you support or oppose an increase in the property tax rate (approximately \$55 per year on a \$300,000 house) to provide dedicated funding to improve La Plata's pedestrian access throughout the community?

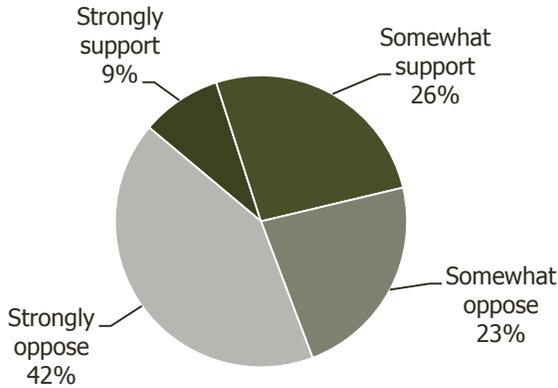


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The final question asked respondents to indicate their support or opposition for an increase in the property tax rate to resume road maintenance in La Plata. A majority of residents opposed this property tax increase.

Figure 6: Question 16

As you may know, gasoline tax revenue that La Plata receives from the State has been reduced by about \$400,000 each of the last six years. This has resulted in greatly reduced La Plata road maintenance. If the State continues the reduced funding and the Town is unable to obtain any additional funding sources for road maintenance, the roads in Town will continue to deteriorate and at some point become unrepairable. To what extent would you support or oppose an increase in the property tax rate (approximately \$105 per year on a \$300,000 house) to recover the lost funding in order to resume road maintenance in La Plata?



Conclusions

A majority of residents continue to experience positive quality of life in La Plata.

The overall quality of life in La Plata was generally seen as excellent or good by about three-quarters of the survey respondents. A majority rated the Town as a place to live, to raise children, the overall appearance and their neighborhood as a place to live as excellent or good. These ratings tended to remain stable over time [see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover]. Most residents indicated that they would recommend living in La Plata and planned to remain in La Plata for the next five years.

Residents identified Safety and Economy as main focus areas.

Survey participants indicated that the Economy and Safety are important facets to focus on over the next two years. Economy ratings tended to be similar to ratings seen in other communities. However, ratings for cost of living and La Plata as a place to visit were lower than in comparison communities. Many Economy ratings remained stable from 2012 to 2014; however ratings for shopping opportunities, employment opportunities and the overall quality of business and service establishments decreased from 2012 to 2014.

All Safety ratings were similar to ratings in comparison communities, and most remained stable from 2012 to 2014. However, ratings for police services, crime prevention and emergency preparedness decreased from 2012 to 2014.

Mobility lags, but residents don't support tax increases to repair roads or improve pedestrian access.

Gasoline tax revenue that La Plata receives from the State has been reduced by about \$400,000 each of the last six years. This has resulted in greatly reduced La Plata road maintenance. When asked if they would support a property tax increase in order to recover the lost funding and resume road maintenance in La Plata, most residents opposed this measure. Many ratings within the facet of Mobility have decreased from 2012 to 2014. Ratings for travel by bicycle, traffic enforcement, street repair, street cleaning, street lighting and snow removal all decreased. Residents were also asked if they would support a property tax increase to improve pedestrian access in La Plata, and this was also met with opposition from a majority of respondents. However, ratings for travel by bicycle, ease of walking and paths and walking trails were all lower than in comparison communities and received positive ratings from less than half of respondents.