

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

La Plata, MD

Community Livability Report

2016



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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.

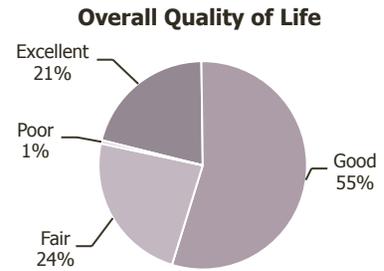
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 369 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 vast majority of residents rated the quality of life in La Plata as excellent or good. This was similar to quality of life ratings seen in other jurisdictions nationwide (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.

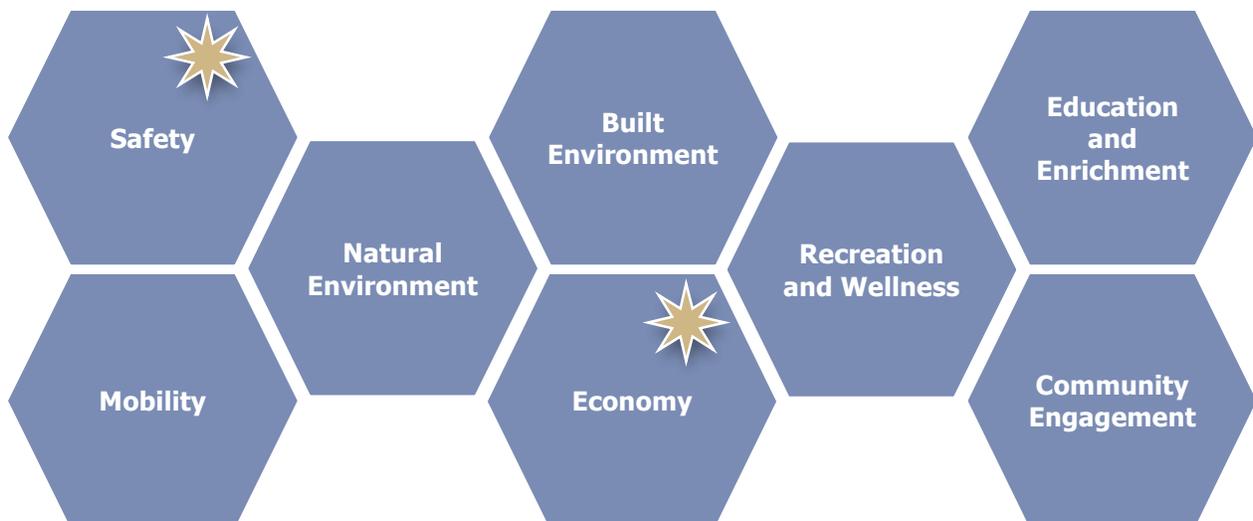
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the La Plata community in the coming two years. La Plata residents gave favorable ratings that were similar to the national benchmarks to both of these facets of community as well as to all other facets of community livability. 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

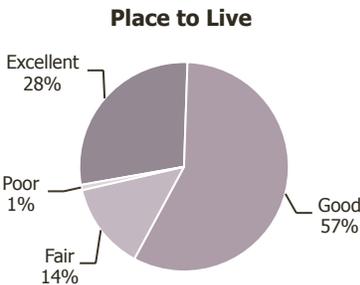
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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, 86% 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. About three-quarters of residents or more gave excellent or good ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, La Plata as a place to raise children and the overall image and overall appearance of the Town; all of these ratings were similar to ratings reported in comparison communities. About 4 in 10 respondents favorably rated La Plata as a place to retire, which was lower than the benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Ratings in the pillar of Community Characteristics tended to be strong and similar to the national benchmark comparisons; however, ratings for the availability of paths and walking trails and the Town as a place to visit were lower in La Plata than in other communities across the country. All aspects of Safety and Natural Environment received favorable ratings from about three-quarters of respondents or more. Within the facet of Mobility, ratings ranged from a low of 40% excellent or good for traffic flow to a high of 68% for the overall ease of travel in La Plata. It is noteworthy that ratings improved from 2014 to 2016 for three aspects of Mobility: ease of travel by bicycle, ease of travel by walking and the availability of walking paths and trails (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under a separate cover for more detail). Within Built Environment, about 4 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to new development in La Plata and to the availability of affordable quality housing, while around 6 in 10 favorably rated public places where people like to spend time; ratings for these aforementioned aspects increased from 2014 to 2016. About 6 in 10 respondents

awarded high marks to the overall economic health of La Plata, the quality of business and service establishments and La Plata as a place to work; several aspects of Economy also improved from 2014 to 2016. Almost all aspects within the facets of Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were favorably rated by a majority of survey participants. Additionally, ratings for several aspects within these facets improved from 2014 to 2016, including health and wellness opportunities overall, the availability of affordable quality healthcare, the availability of affordable quality childcare and the openness and acceptance of the community towards people of diverse backgrounds.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



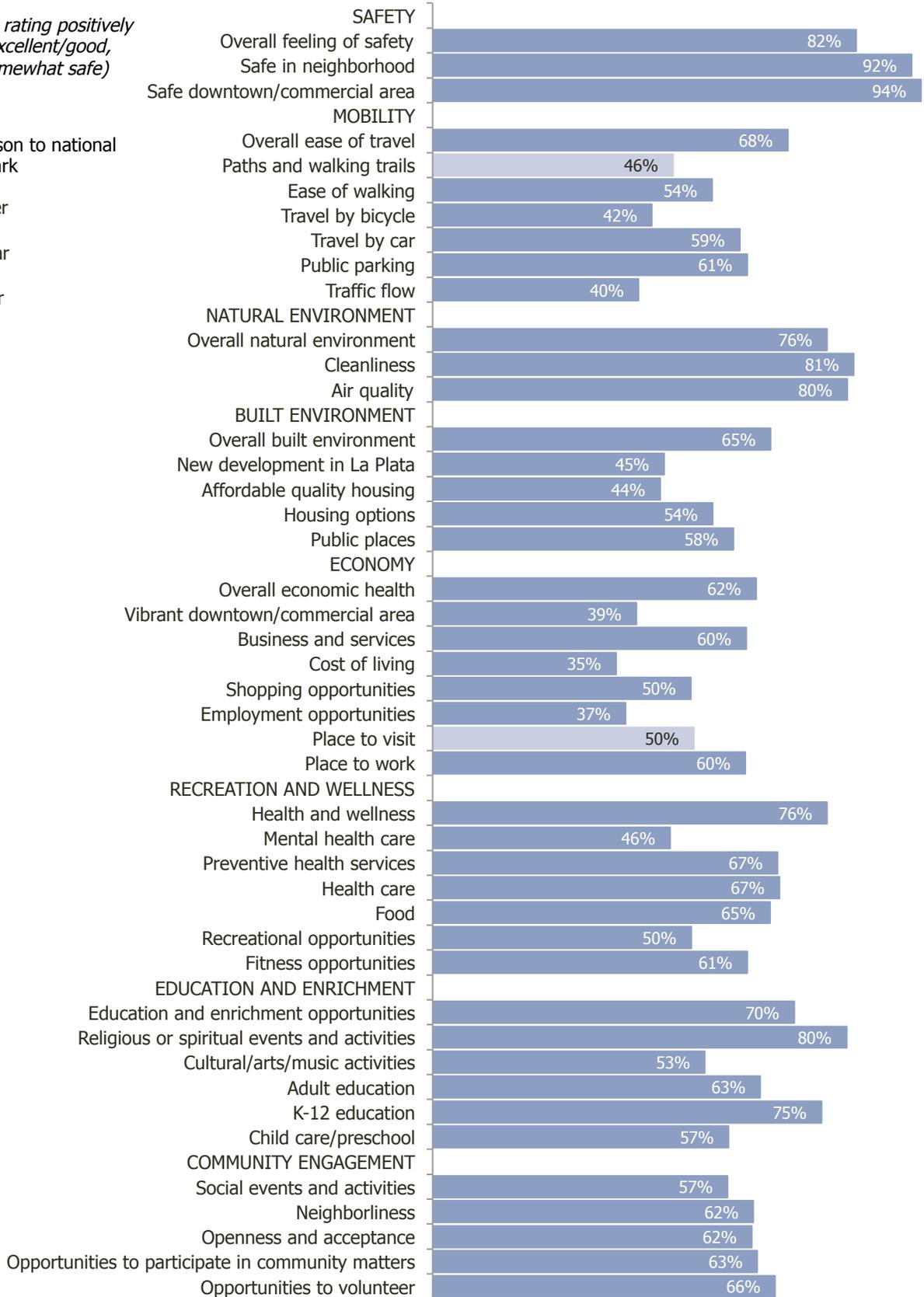
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



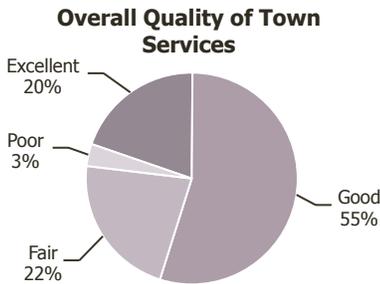
Governance

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 three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the Town of La Plata, while about half of respondents favorably rated services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmarks.

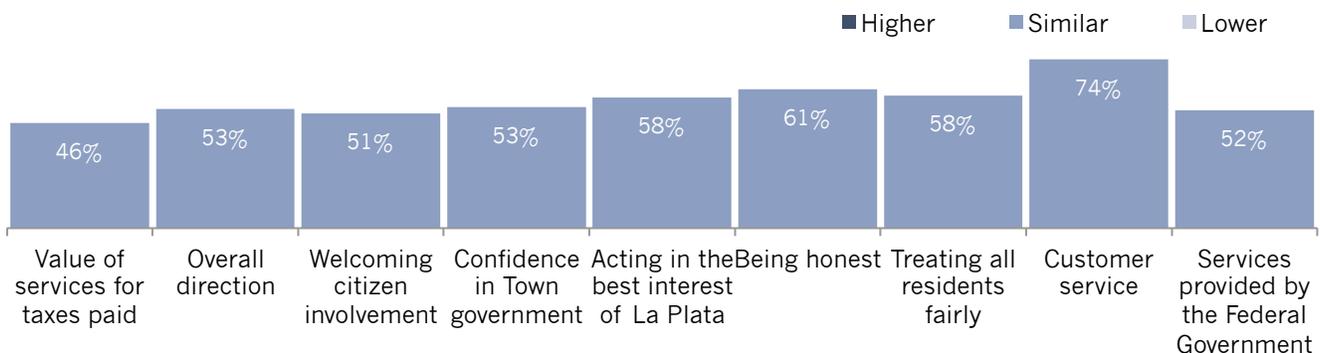
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of La Plata’s leadership and governance. About three-quarters of participants gave excellent or good ratings to the customer service provided by Town of La Plata employees, and about 6 in 10 favorably rated the job the Town does at acting in the best interest of the community, being honest and treating all residents fairly. All other aspects of La Plata’s leadership and governance were given positive ratings by about half of respondents. Ratings for all of these aspects were similar to the national benchmark comparisons. It is noteworthy that ratings for several aspects of La Plata’s leadership and governance increased over time. Ratings for the value of services for taxes paid, confidence in the Town government, the job the Town does at acting in the best interest of the community and treating all residents fairly were all trending upward this year.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in La Plata. Ratings for all La Plata services and amenities were strong and similar to the national benchmark comparisons. Top-rated La Plata services included police, ambulance/EMS, fire prevention, garbage collection, yard waste pick-up, drinking water and Town-sponsored special events; about three-quarters of respondents or more gave excellent or good ratings to all of these La Plata services. Ratings for La Plata services and amenities tended to be stable over time; however, ratings declined from 2014 to 2016 for street cleaning, traffic signal timing, garbage collection, recycling and Town parks.



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

Comparison to national benchmark



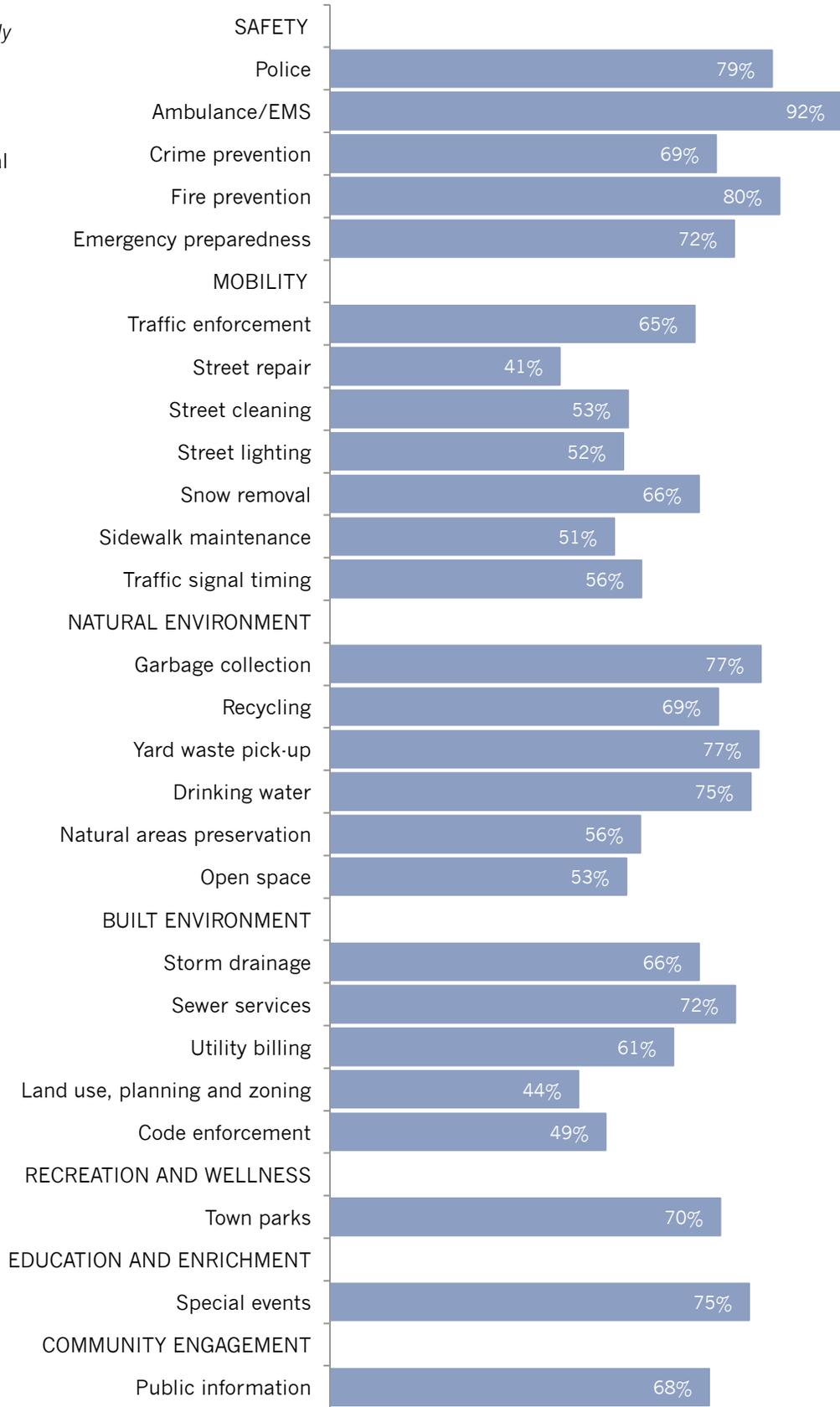
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



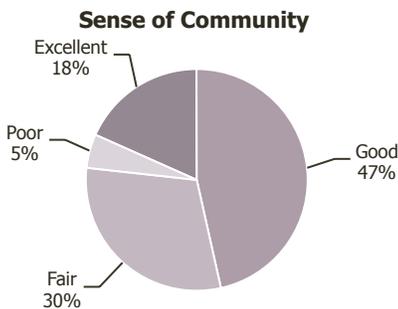
Participation

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. A majority of respondents (65%) gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in La Plata, a rating that was similar to the national benchmarks and improved from 2014 to 2016. About 8 in 10 participants would recommend living in La Plata to someone who asked (which was higher than the benchmark), while about 7 in 10 indicated that they planned to remain living in La Plata for the coming five years (which was lower than the benchmark). Around half of residents had contacted a Town of La Plata employee in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Reported levels of Participation in La Plata tended to be similar to levels seen in other communities nationwide. Within the facet of Safety, about 8 in 10 respondents did not report a crime and around 9 in 10 residents were not the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey, which were both strong and similar to the national benchmark comparisons. About half of respondents had walked or biked instead of driving, a rate that was lower than rates seen in comparison communities. Within Built Environment about two-thirds of respondents were not under housing cost stress and did not observe a code violation in the 12 months prior to the survey; the level of residents who did not observe a code violation was higher than the national benchmark. Within the facet of Economy, about 9 in 10 participants indicated that they had purchased goods or services in La Plata, a level that was similar rates seen elsewhere.

About 3 in 10 respondents reported working in La Plata; although this level was lower than the benchmark, the proportion of residents who reported working in La Plata increased from 2014 to 2016. About 8 in 10 respondents reported eating 5 portions of fruits and vegetables a day and participating in moderate or vigorous physical activity, and rates of residents who reported being in excellent or good health increased from 2014 to 2016. Around 6 in 10 respondents had used La Plata public libraries or their services and attended a Town-sponsored special event in the 12 months prior to the survey, which were both similar to levels seen in other communities. Within Community Engagement, about 8 in 10 or more respondents had talked to or visited with neighbors, done a favor for a neighbor, read or watched local news and voted in local elections.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



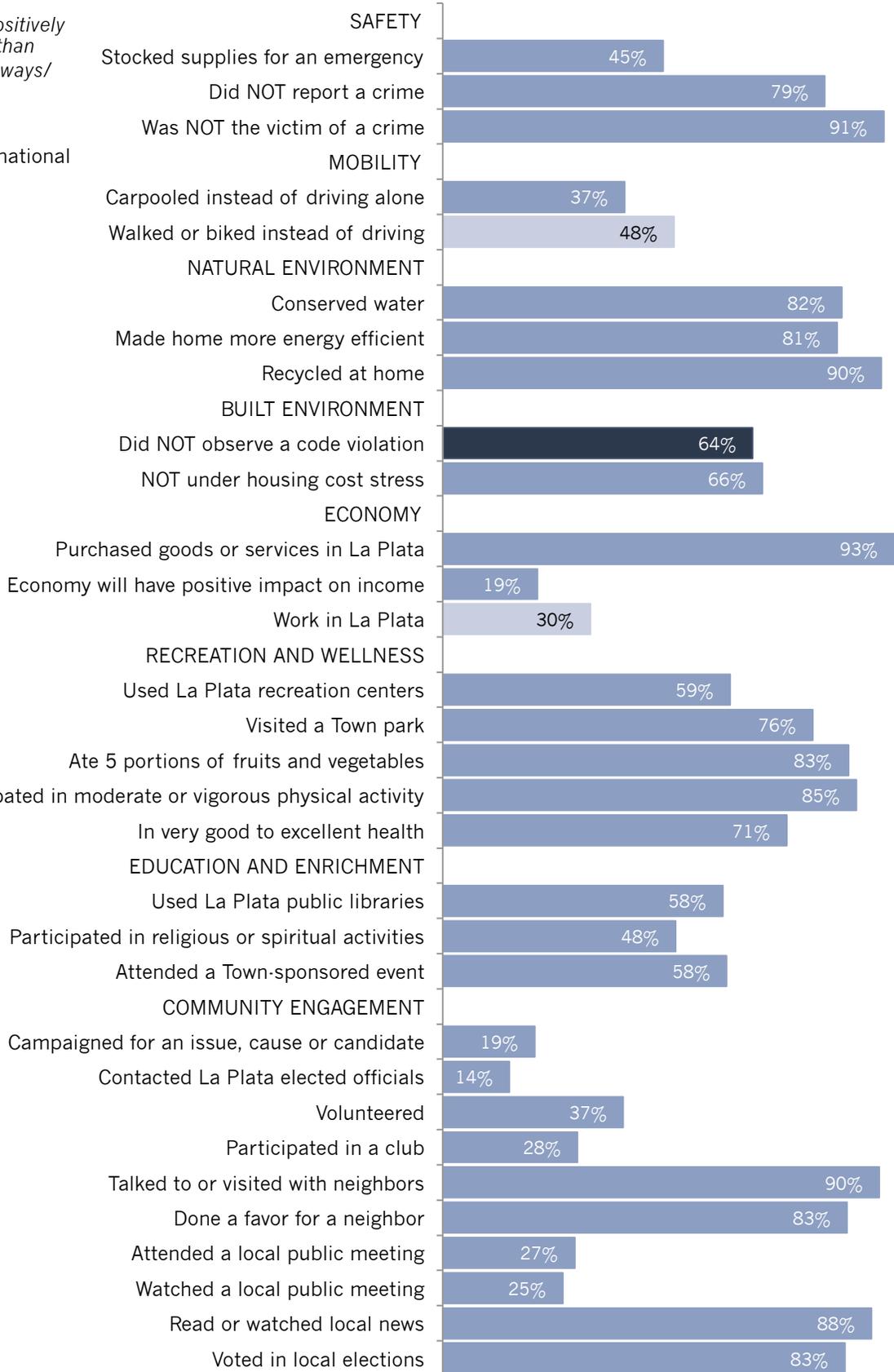
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

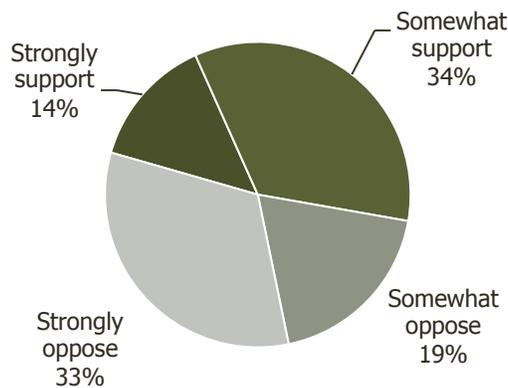


Special Topics

The Town of La Plata included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special interest question asked residents to what extent they would support or oppose an increase in property taxes to replace lost State funding for road maintenance. Fifty-three percent of residents indicated that they would somewhat or strongly oppose the proposed property tax increase.

Figure 4: Support for property tax increase to fund road maintenance:
The gasoline tax revenue that La Plata receives from the State has been reduced by up to \$400,000 for each of the last eight 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 this lost funding in order to resume road maintenance in La Plata?

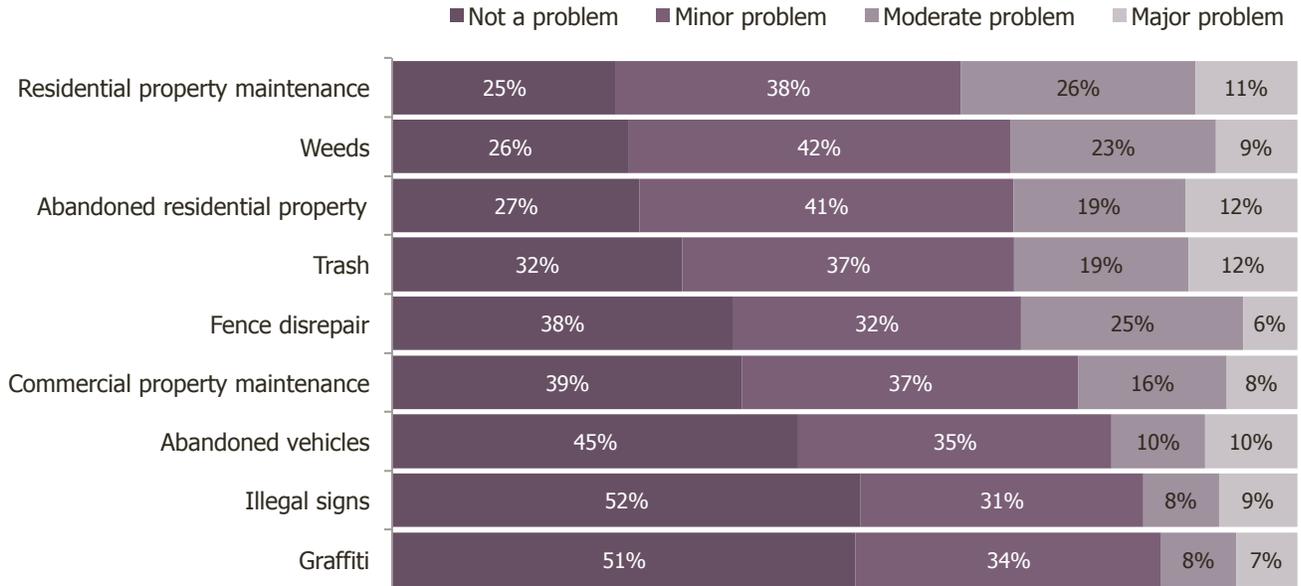


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Respondents were next asked to rate to what degree various code violations were a problem in La Plata. Thirty-seven percent of participants reported that residential property maintenance was a major or moderate problem, and about 3 in 10 respondents indicated that weeds, abandoned residential property, trash and fence disrepair were at least moderate problems. A majority of respondents indicated that illegal signs and graffiti were not a problem in La Plata.

Figure 5: Code violations in La Plata:

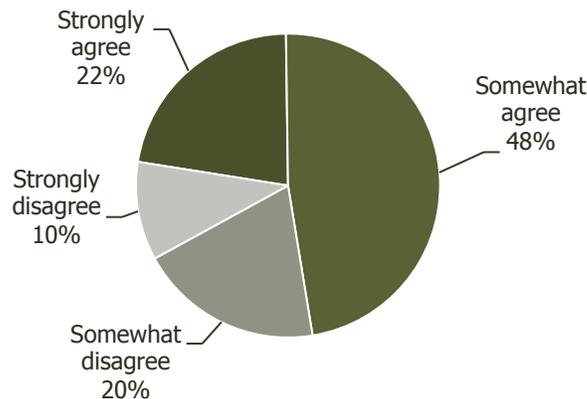
Please rate to what degree, if at all, each of the following code violations is a problem in La Plata:



The final special interest question asked participants about the effectiveness of the citizen Design Review Board. About 7 in 10 residents strongly or somewhat agreed that the citizen Design Review Board effectively fosters high-quality architecture and signage in La Plata.

Figure 6: Effectiveness of Design Review Board:

Since 2002 the Town of La Plata has had a citizen Design Review Board review new building architecture and signage of buildings within the commercial zoning districts of the Town to foster the development of high quality and innovative designs based upon established guidelines which support the collective vision of the Town. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the citizen Design Review Board effectively fosters high-quality architecture and signage within the Town?



Conclusions

La Plata residents continue to enjoy a good quality of life.

About three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life in La Plata and 85% awarded high marks to the Town as a place to live; these ratings were stable over time and similar to ratings seen in comparison communities. Ratings for several features that enhance quality of life, such as La Plata as a place to raise children, the overall image and overall appearance of the Town and their neighborhood as a place to live were given positive ratings by about 4 in 5 respondents. About 8 in 10 survey participants would recommend La Plata as a place to live, which was similar to levels seen in other communities across the country. Additionally, about two-thirds of residents awarded high marks to the sense of community in La Plata, a rating that was similar to the national benchmark comparison and improved from 2014 to 2016.

Safety continues to be a top priority for residents.

Residents identified Safety as a top priority for the La Plata community in the coming two years. About 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the overall feeling of safety in La Plata, and around 9 in 10 participants favorably rated the feeling of safety in the Town's downtown/commercial area. All Safety-related services in La Plata, including police, fire and ambulance/EMS services, were given excellent or good ratings by about 7 in 10 participants or more and tended to be similar to ratings seen in other communities nationwide. Additionally, about 8 in 10 respondents did not report a crime and about 9 in 10 participants were not the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey. Ratings for all aspects of Safety remained stable from 2014 to 2016.

The Economy is an important feature of the community, and residents noted several improvements this year.

Respondents also identified Economy as an important area of focus for the La Plata community in the coming two years. About 6 in 10 respondents awarded high marks to the overall economic health of La Plata, the quality of business and service establishments in the Town and to La Plata as a place to work, while about half of participants favorably rated shopping opportunities in the Town. Ratings for almost all aspects of Economy were strong and similar to ratings seen in other communities nationwide. It is noteworthy that ratings improved from 2014 to 2016 for the overall economic health of La Plata, employment opportunities, the cost of living and La Plata as a place to work. About 9 in 10 residents reported purchasing goods or services in La Plata, but only about 3 in 10 respondents reported working in the Town, a rate that was lower than the national benchmark comparison; however, the proportion of respondents who reported working in La Plata increased from 2014 to 2016.

Residents give high marks to La Plata's Built Environment, but still see some areas for improvement.

About two-thirds of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall built environment in La Plata. Aspects of Built Environment tended to receive ratings that were similar to or higher than ratings seen elsewhere. Ratings improved from 2014 to 2016 for the availability of affordable quality housing, public places where people like to spend time and the overall quality of new development in La Plata. About 6 in 10 respondents had not observed a code violation in the 12 months prior to the survey, a level that was higher than the national benchmark comparison. Additionally, about 7 in 10 residents strongly or somewhat agreed that the citizen Design Review Board effectively fosters high-quality architecture and signage within La Plata. However, when asked about various code violations in La Plata, about 3 in 10 respondents indicated that residential property maintenance, weeds, abandoned residential property, trash and fence disrepair were major or moderate problems in the Town.