

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Albert Lea, MN
Community Livability Report
2015



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About

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

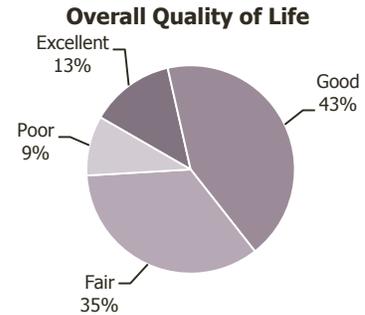
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 448 residents of the City of Albert Lea. 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 Albert Lea

More than half of residents rated the quality of life in Albert Lea as excellent or good. The overall quality of life in Albert Lea was rated lower than 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.

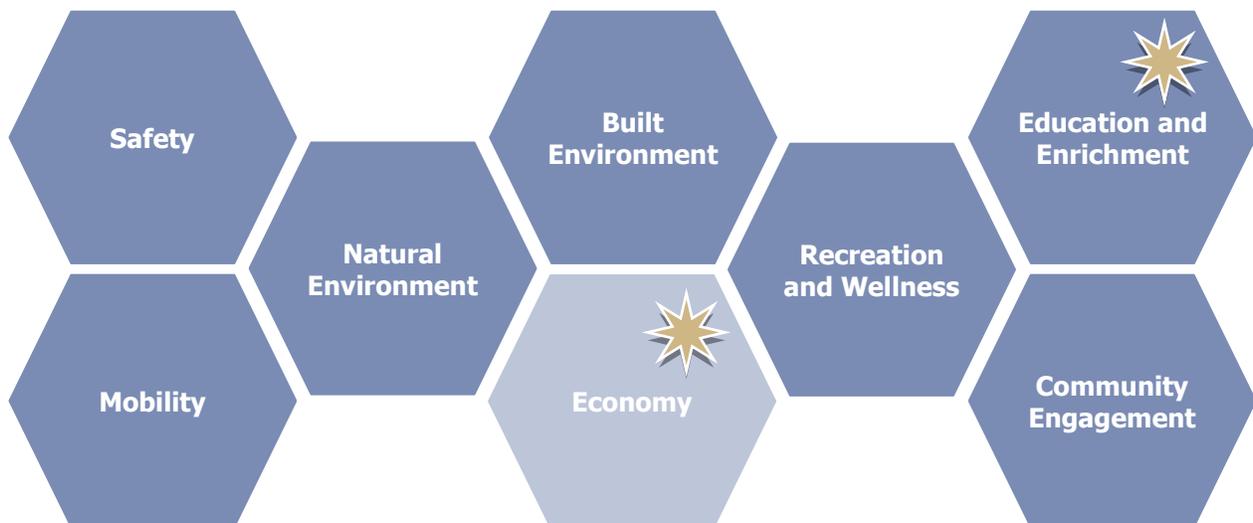
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Economy and Education and Enrichment as priorities for the Albert Lea community in the coming two years. Ratings for Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive and similar to other communities. Residents’ ratings for Economy were lower than the national benchmark. 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 Albert Lea’s unique questions.

Legend

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

★ Most important



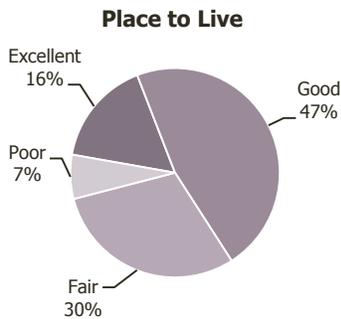
Community Characteristics

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 Albert Lea, 63% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Albert Lea as a place to live were lower than 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 Albert Lea as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Albert Lea and its overall appearance. More than 6 in 10 residents rated their neighborhood as a place to live and Albert Lea as a place to retire as excellent or good, ratings that were similar to the national benchmark. Positive ratings for Albert Lea's overall appearance were also similar to the benchmark while ratings for overall image and Albert Lea as a place to raise children were lower than the national benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Within the facet of Safety, ratings for feeling safe in neighborhood and safe downtown/commercial area were similar to the national benchmark and ratings for overall feeling of safety were lower than the national benchmark. Over 80% of respondents rated paths and walking trails and ease of walking in Albert Lea as excellent or good, ratings that were both higher than in comparison communities. Most other aspects of Mobility were rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to the national benchmark. All ratings within Natural Environment were also similar to the national benchmark. Within Built



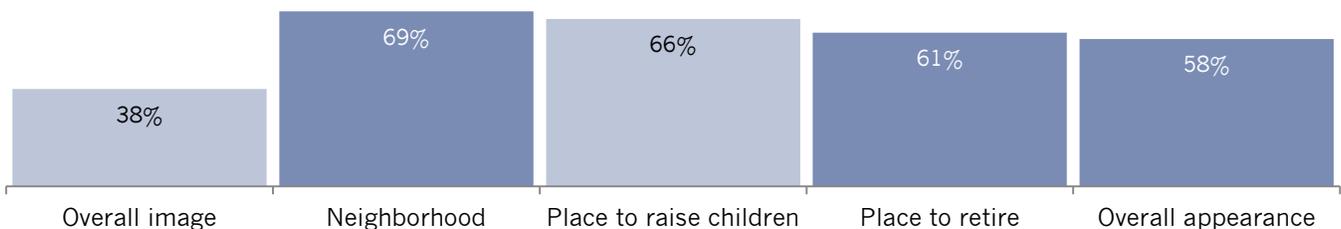
Environment, ratings for new development in Albert Lea and housing options were lower than the national benchmark. Ratings for aspects of Economy including overall economic health, vibrant downtown/commercial area, business and services, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities, Albert Lea as a place to visit and Albert Lea as a place to work were also lower than the national benchmark. All aspects of Recreation and Wellness were rated positively by residents and were similar to ratings in comparison communities. Within the facet of Education and Enrichment, all aspects were rated positively and were similar to the national benchmark with the exception of education and enrichment opportunities, which received ratings that were lower than the national

benchmark. Ratings for social events and activities and openness and acceptance were lower than the national benchmark but neighborliness, opportunities to participate in community matters and opportunities to volunteers received ratings similar to those in comparable communities.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



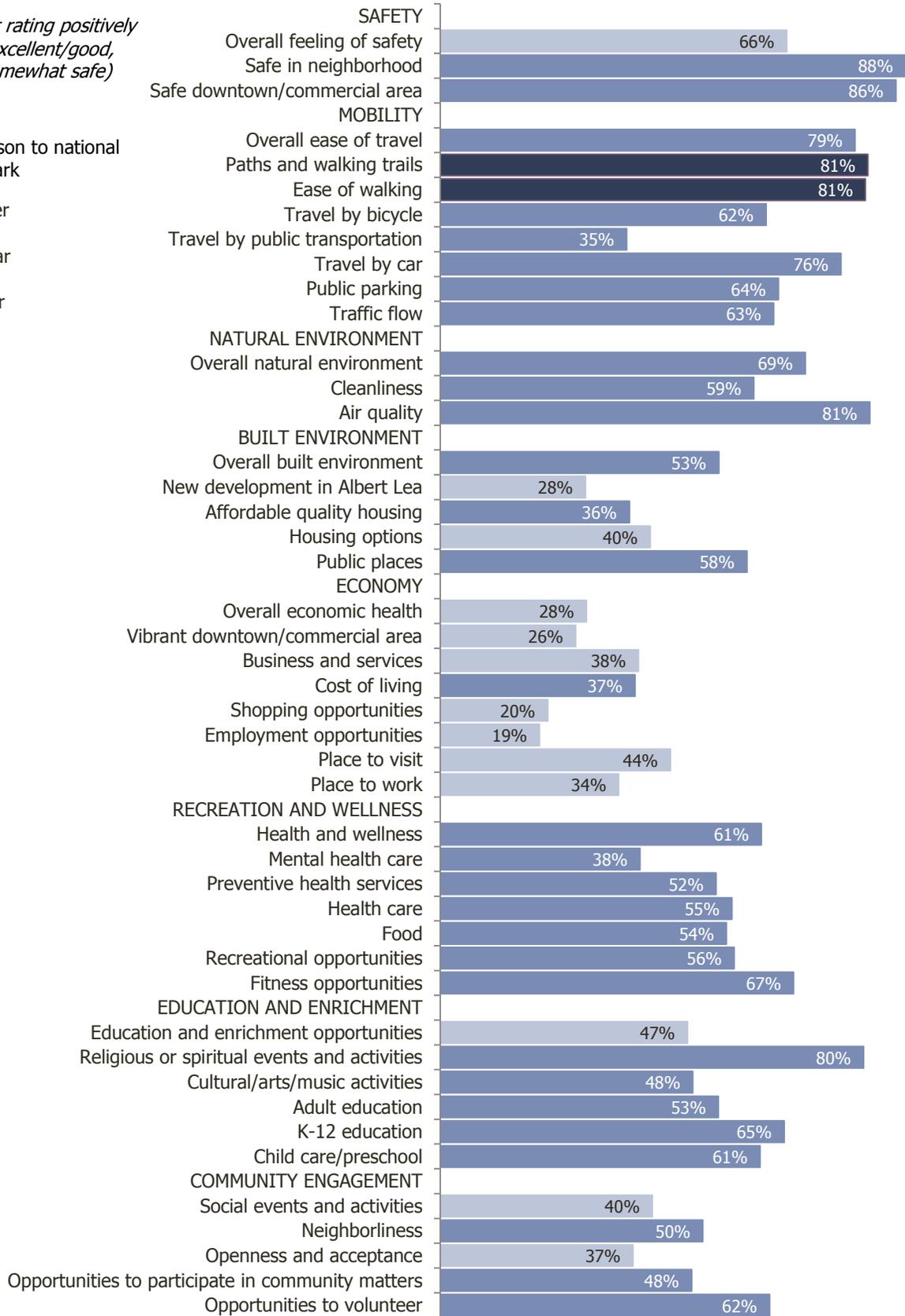
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

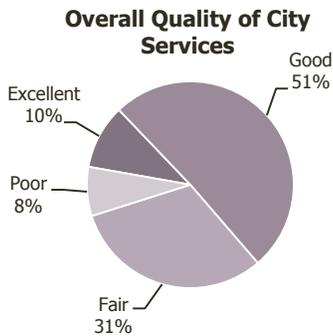
How well does the government of Albert Lea meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Albert Lea as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. The quality of services provided by the City of Albert Lea was rated positively by 61% of residents which is similar to the national benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Albert Lea’s leadership and governance. More than 6 in 10 respondents positively rated Albert Lea’s customer service, a rating that was higher than in comparison communities. The remaining aspects of leadership and governance were rated positively by one-third or fewer of respondents and were rated lower than the benchmark, including values of services for taxes paid, overall direction and acting the best interest of Albert Lea.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Albert Lea. Ratings for all aspects of Safety were similar to the national benchmark with the exception of animal control, which was lower than the benchmark. Within Mobility, ratings varied; more than half of respondents positively rated traffic enforcement, street lighting and snow removal. Ratings for street repair and street cleaning were lower than the national benchmark. Garbage collection and recycling were rated as excellent or good by more than 80% of residents, ratings that were both similar to the national benchmark. All other aspects of Natural Environment were rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to the national benchmark. Residents’ ratings for land use, planning and zoning, code enforcement and cable television in Albert Lea were lower than the benchmark. Ratings for economic development in Albert Lea were lower than in comparable communities. Within the facet of

Recreation and Wellness, more than 80% of residents positively rated City parks and around 6 in 10 positively rated recreation programs, recreation centers and health services, all ratings that were similar to the national benchmark. Ratings for all aspects of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were similar to those found in other communities across the nation.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



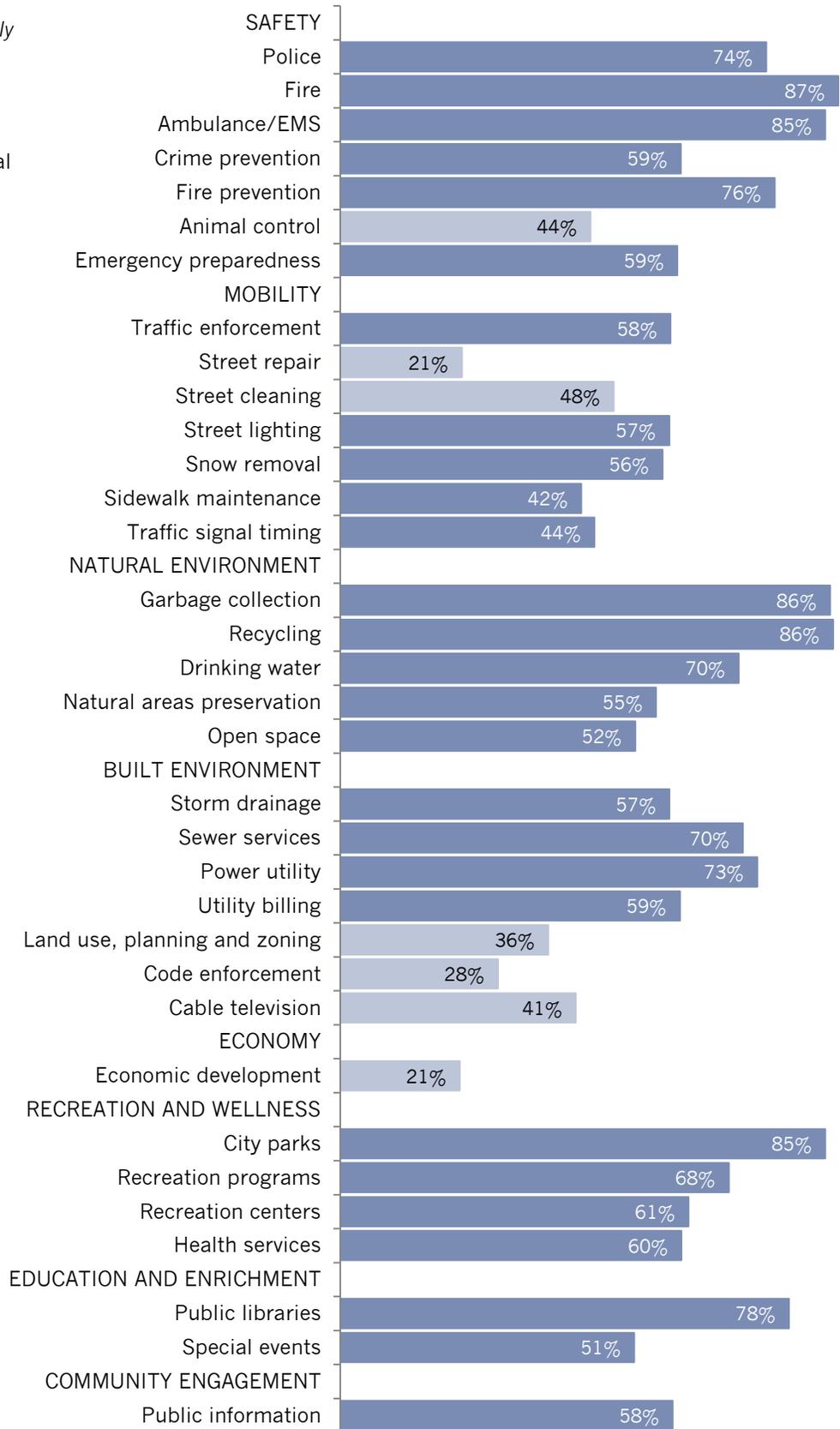
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

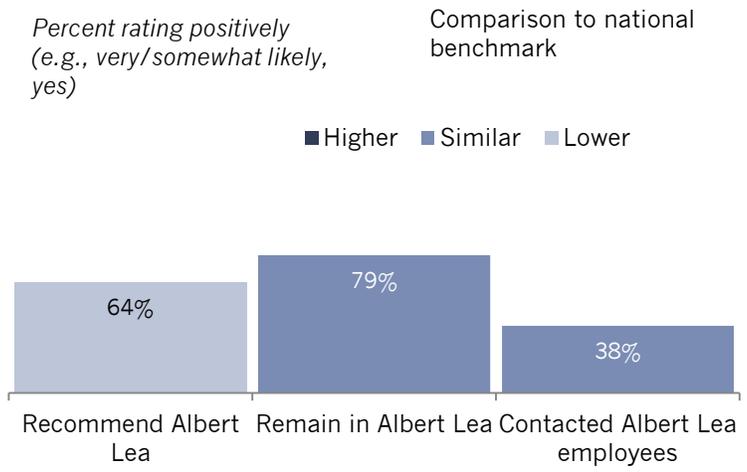
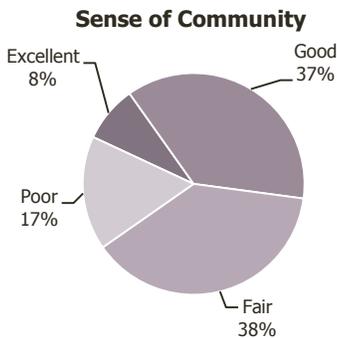


Participation

Are the residents of Albert Lea 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. Close to 80% of respondents reported they were very or somewhat likely to remain in Albert Lea for the next five years around 6 in 10 said they would recommend Albert Lea.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Rates of participation within the facet of Safety were all similar to those in comparable communities. Within Mobility, about 1 in 10 respondents reported they had used public transportation instead of driving, a rate that is lower than the national benchmark. Rates of participation for carpooling instead of driving alone and walking or biking instead of driving were similar to the national benchmark. Residents' rates of recycling at home and making their home more energy efficient were similar to those in comparison communities whereas rates for conserving water were lower. Within the facet of Built Environment, residents reported lower rates of not observing a code violation than in other communities. Almost all participants purchased goods or services in Albert Lea (a rate similar to the benchmark) and more than half work in Albert Lea (a rate higher than the benchmark). All rates of participation within Recreation and Wellness were similar to those found in other communities with the exception of eating 5 portions of fruits and vegetables, which was done less often in Albert Lea than in comparable communities. Close to 70% of residents participated in religious or spiritual activities, which is higher than the national benchmark. More residents in Albert Lea participated in a club than residents in other communities across the nation.



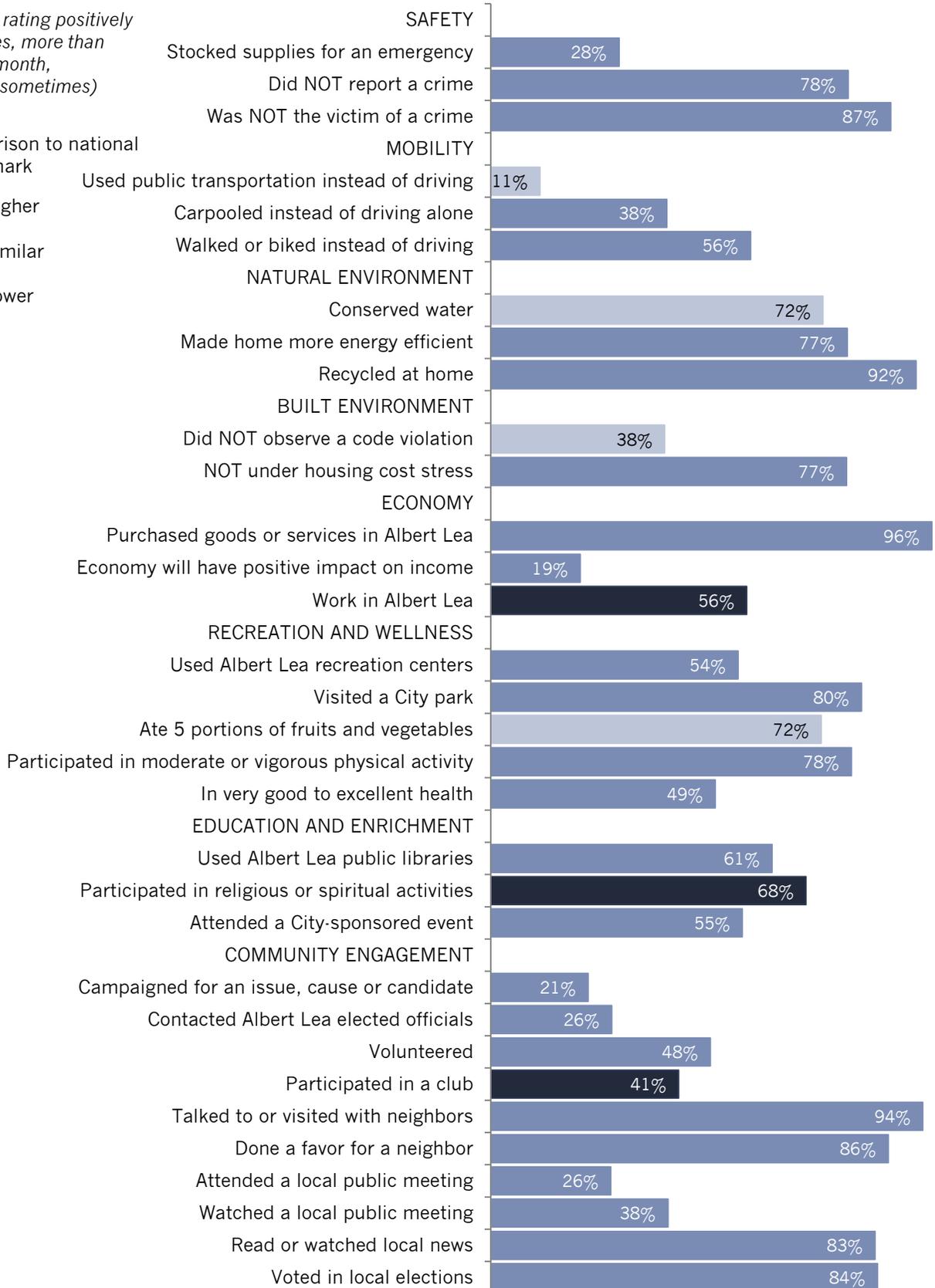
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

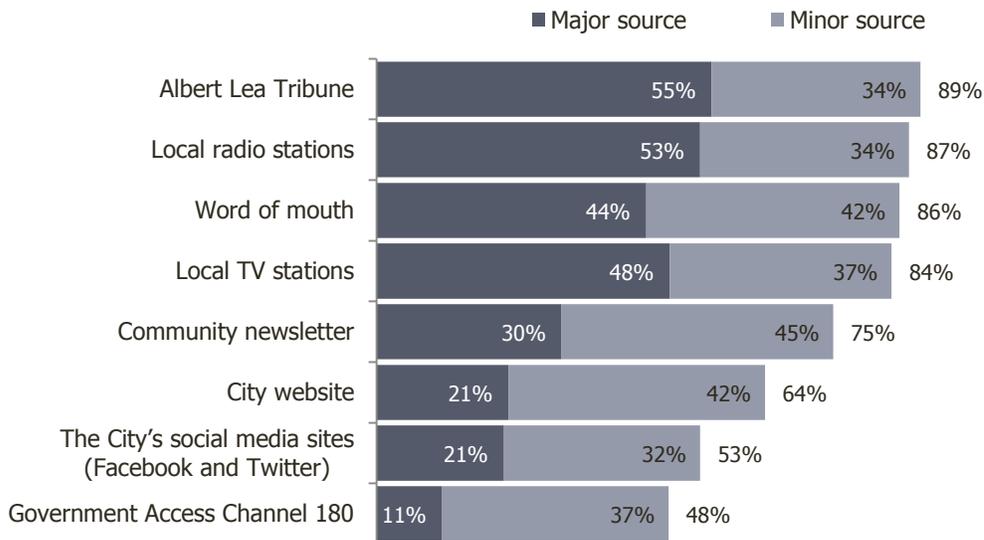


Special Topics

The City of Albert Lea included five questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents how much of a source, if at all, they considered specific sources to be for obtaining information about the City of Albert Lea. Over 8 in 10 residents considered the Albert Lea Tribune, local radio stations, word of mouth and local TV stations to be a major or minor source of information.

Figure 4: Information Sources

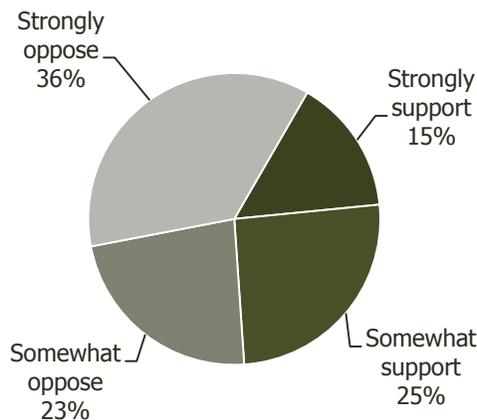
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the City of Albert Lea:



The second question asked residents to what extent they would support or oppose building a new Community Center if paying for it required a \$100 annual increase on a \$100,000 home valuation. Close to 60% of residents would strongly or somewhat oppose an annual increase to pay for a new Community Center.

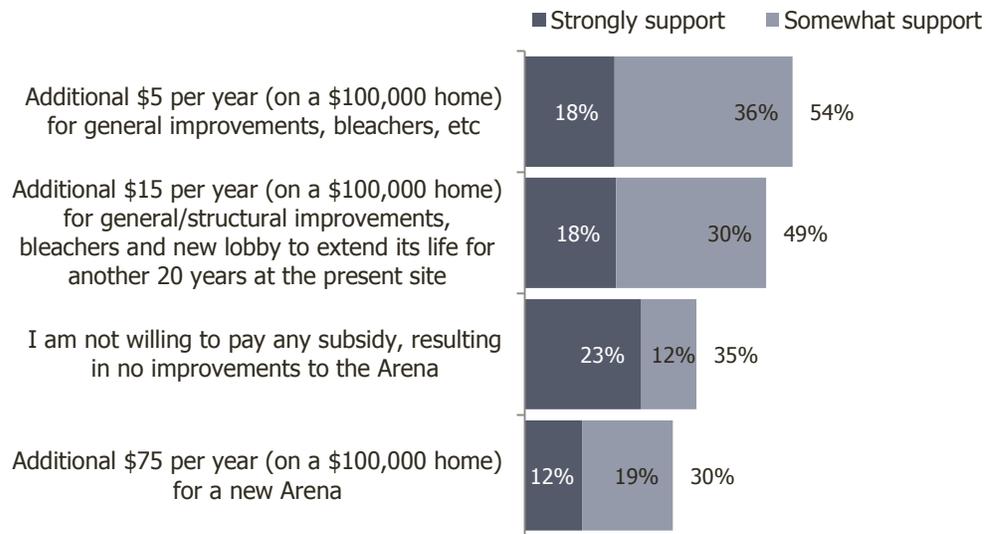
Figure 5: New Community Center Development

The City could use about one-third of the Blazing Star Landing site to build a new Community Center. To what extent would you support or oppose this facility if paying for it required a \$100 annual increase on a \$100,000 home valuation?



The third question asked to what extent residents would support or oppose specific cost options to fund the renovation or replacement of the City Ice Arena Facility. Around 5 in 10 respondents would strongly or somewhat support an additional \$5 per year for general improvements, bleachers, etc. or an additional \$15 per year for general/structural improvements to extend the facility’s life for another 20 years at the present site. Residents were least likely to support an additional \$75 per year for a new Arena.

Figure 6: City Ice Arena Facility Renovation or Replacement
The City could renovate the City Ice Arena Facility or replace it with a new facility on the Blazing Star Landing. Please indicate to what extent you support or oppose each of the following additional cost options:

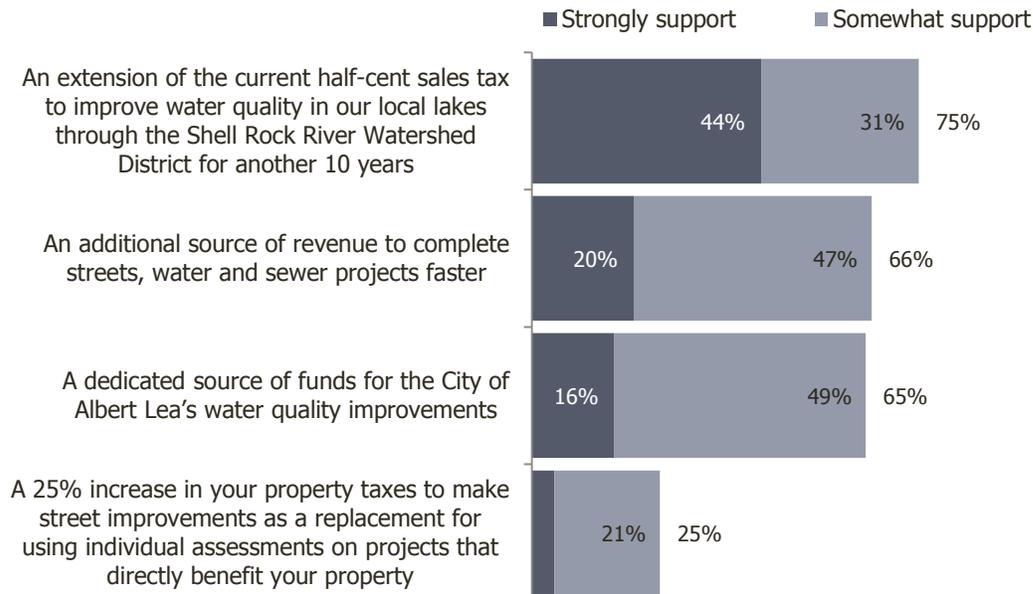


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The fourth question focused on various improvement efforts and asked residents to what extent they would support or oppose the specific efforts. Three-quarters of respondents would strongly support or somewhat support an extension of the current half-cent sales tax to improve water quality in local lakes for another 10 years. Residents were least likely to support a 25% increase in property taxes to make street improvements.

Figure 7: Support for Improvement Efforts

To what extent do you support or oppose each of the following improvement efforts:

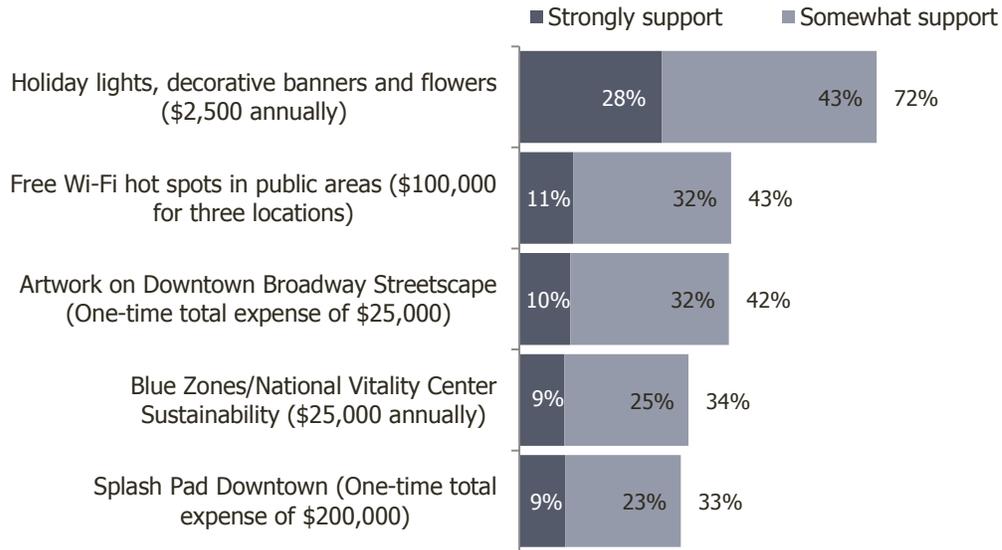


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The last question asked residents if they would support a City cost-share partnership to fund new programs/initiatives if it meant an increase in property taxes. More than 70% of residents would strongly support or somewhat support an increase in property taxes for holiday lights, decorative banners and flowers.

Figure 8: Cost-share Partnership for New Programs/Initiatives

The City is considering a cost-share partnership with other organization(s) to fund new programs/initiatives. To what extent would you support or oppose the following if a City cost-share meant an increase in property taxes?



Conclusions

Residents care about Education and Enrichment.

The facet of Education and Enrichment was identified as a potential focus area for the community. Positive ratings for cultural/arts/music activities and child care/preschool increased from 2012 to 2015, while rates of using Albert Lea public libraries decreased from the previous survey administration. Ratings for the City's adult education, K-12 education and public libraries were all similar to those found in comparable communities.

Mobility is improving in Albert Lea.

More than 8 in 10 participants rated Albert Lea's paths and walking trails and ease of walking as excellent or good. Positive ratings for traffic flow and travel by car increased from 2012 to 2015 and both ratings were similar to ratings found in other communities across the nation. Areas that may merit more attention are street repair and street cleaning, both of which received ratings that were lower than the national benchmark.

Economy may be an area for improvement.

Residents also identified Economy as a community focus area for the coming years. Ratings for overall economic health, business and services and Albert Lea as a place to work were all lower than in comparison communities. Participants' ratings for economic development were also lower than the national benchmark. Rates of residents working in Albert Lea were higher than in other communities and almost all respondents purchased goods or services in the city.