

THE NCS™

The National Citizen Survey™

Oak Park, IL

Community Livability Report

2017



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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Oak Park. 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 476 residents of the Village of Oak Park. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



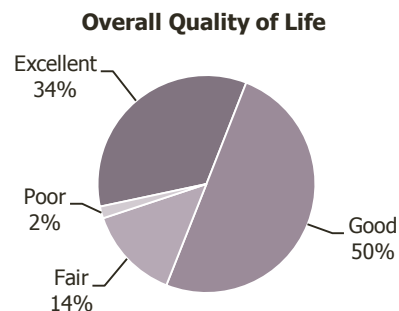
Quality of Life in Oak Park

Most residents rated the quality of life in Oak Park 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 Oak Park community in the coming two years. Ratings for all 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.

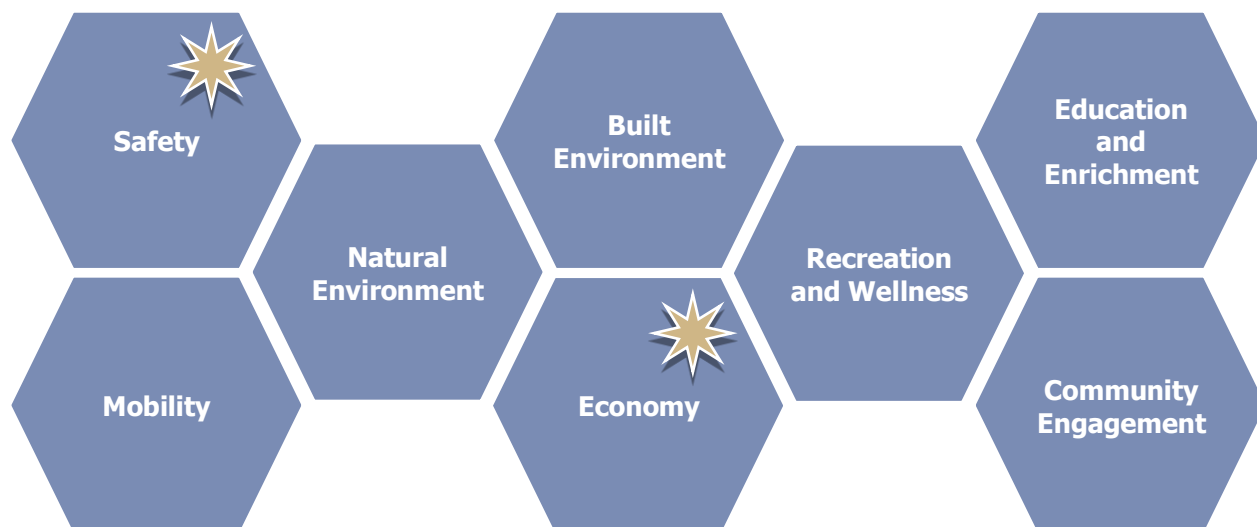
Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for Oak Park's unique questions.



Legend

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

- Most important



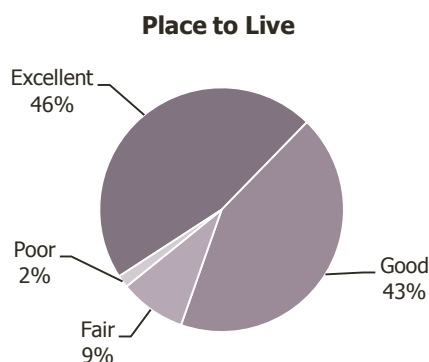
Community Characteristics

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 Oak Park, 9 in 10 residents rated the Village as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Oak Park as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the Village as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Oak Park as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Oak Park and its overall appearance. About 85% of respondents or more gave excellent or good ratings to Oak Park as a place to raise children, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall appearance and the overall image of Oak Park; these ratings were either similar to or higher than the national averages. Just under half of respondents offered these same evaluations to Oak Park as a place to retire, which was a rating lower than the national average and lower when compared to ratings given in 2015 (see *The NCS Trends over Time – Oak Park 2017* report under separate cover).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. While most Community Characteristics tended to be rated similar to the national comparisons, residents praised eight characteristics as being higher than the national average and



three of the eight were within the facet of Community Engagement (social events and activities, openness and acceptance and opportunities to participate in community matters). Four characteristics were given ratings that were lower than the national comparisons (ease of travel by car, public parking, affordable quality housing and cost of living). Ratings within Mobility varied with 26% of residents offering positive evaluations to public parking to 87% offering these same evaluations to ease of walking (a rating higher than the national comparison). Each aspect of Recreation and Wellness was strong and similar to the national comparisons with at least 6 in 10 residents offering positive evaluations.

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

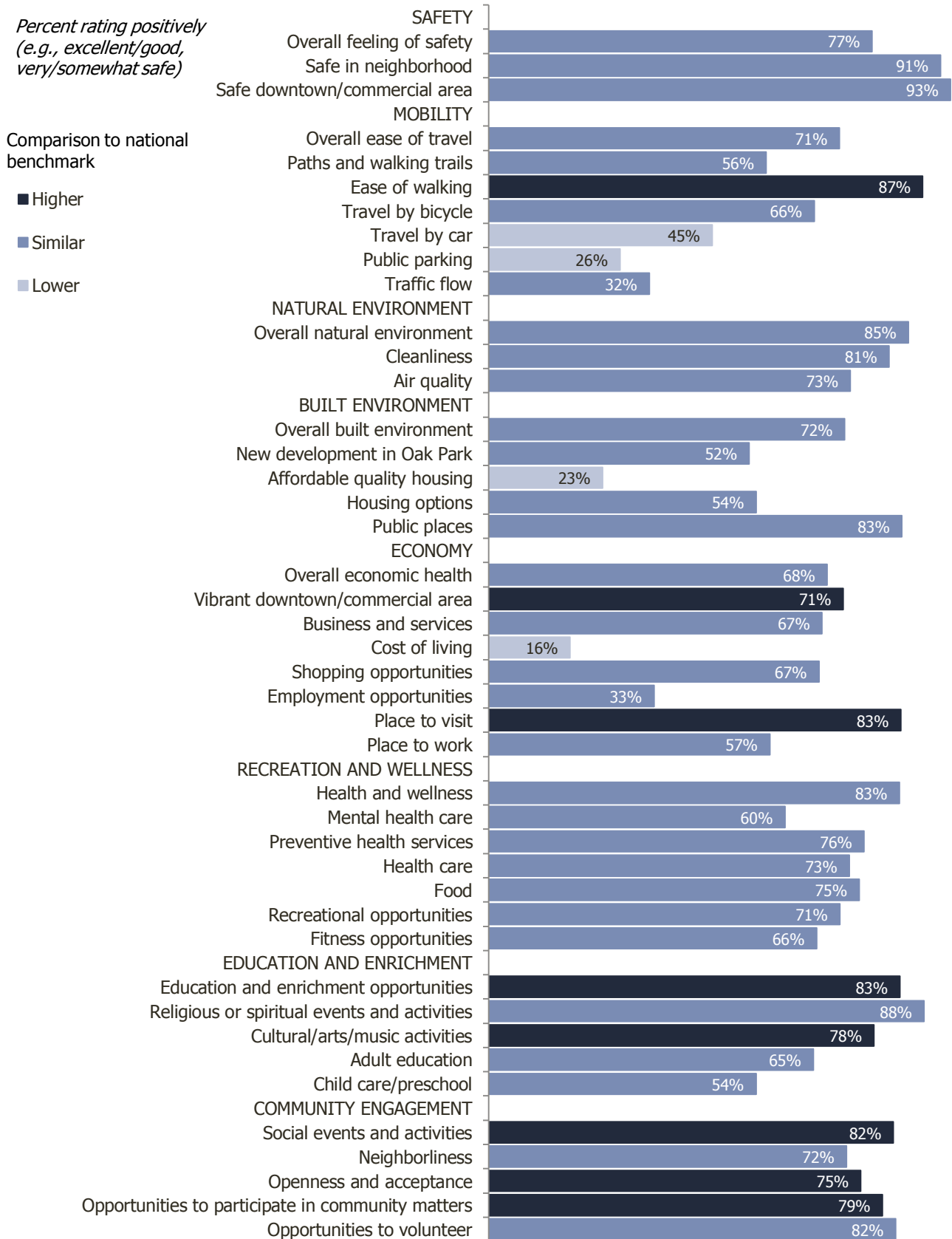
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



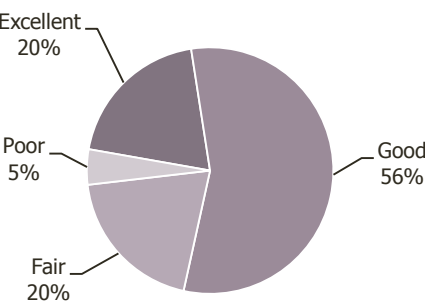
Governance

How well does the government of Oak Park meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Oak Park as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Residents' ratings for Oak Park's quality of services were similar to the national benchmark with three-quarters of respondents rating them as excellent or good.

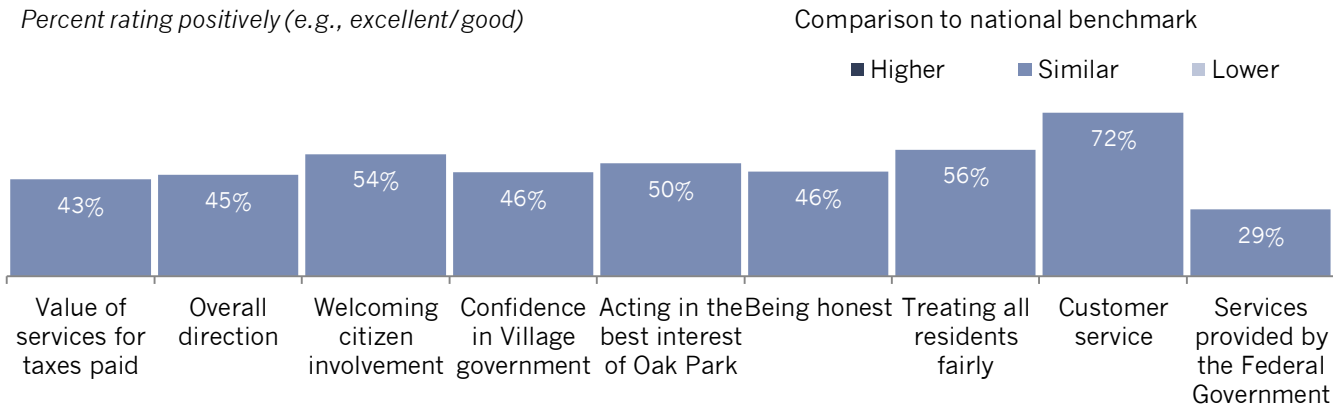
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Oak Park's leadership and governance, which tended to be evaluated similar to the national benchmark. Roughly 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good marks to the customer service provided by Village employees, while between 4 in 10 and 5 in 10 residents felt positively about each of the other aspects of leadership and governance included on the survey. For a number of the leadership questions there was a decline in resident ratings since the survey was last administered in 2015: overall direction, welcoming resident involvement, confidence in Village government, working in residents' best interest and being honest. While these may be one time 'blips' in the trend, they are worth watching.

Overall Quality of Village Services



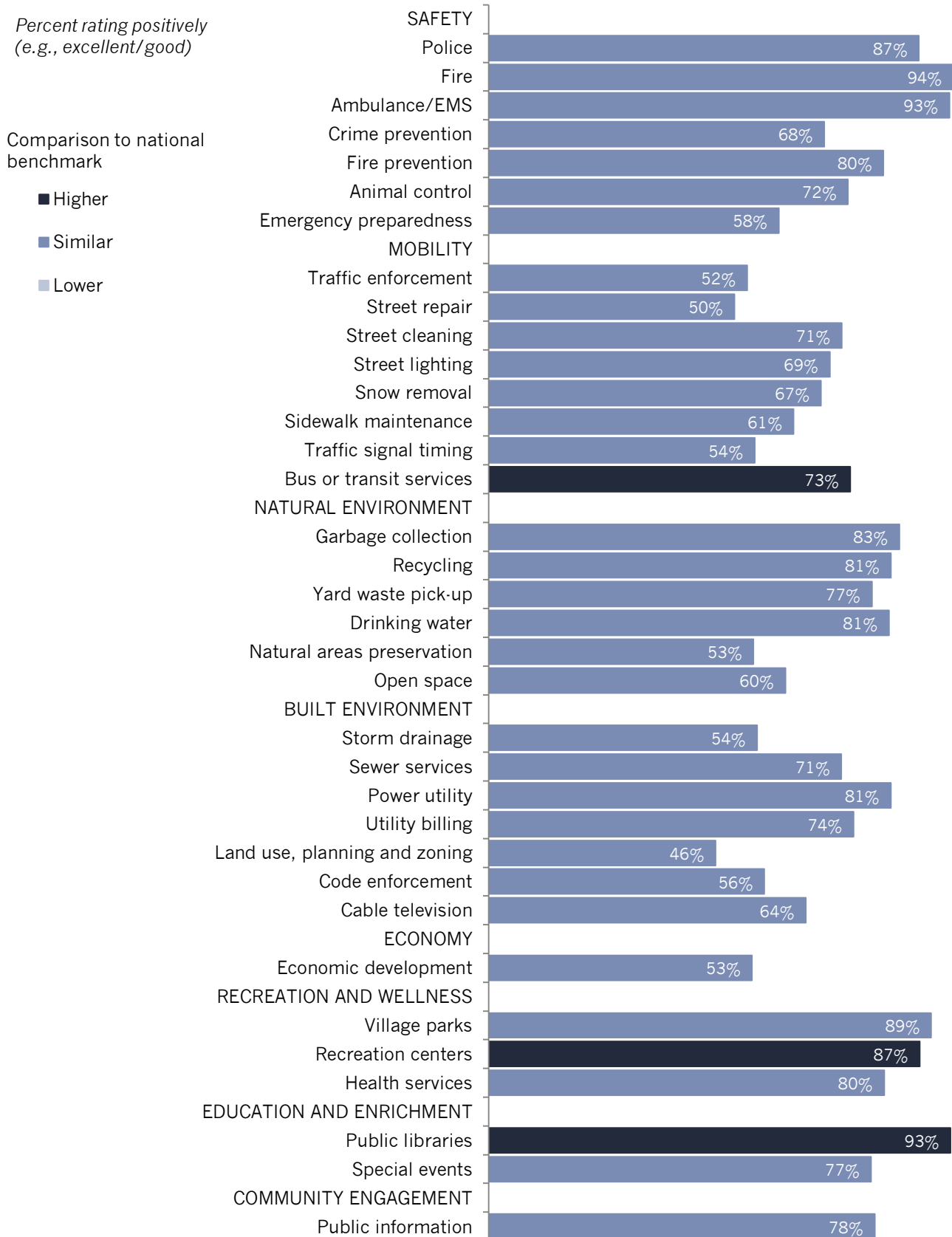
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Oak Park. Governance ratings were largely similar to the national comparisons but three services and amenities were rated higher than the national comparisons (bus or transit services, recreation centers and public libraries). While all seven Safety services were similar to the national averages, police services, fire services and EMS services topped the list with about 9 in 10 residents offering positive reviews and emergency preparedness was at the bottom of the list with 6 in 10 residents offering positive reviews. Ratings of Natural Environment services were generally strong with the highest ratings going to garbage collection, recycling, yard waste pick-up and drinking water and the lowest ratings going to natural areas preservation and open space. Land use, planning and zoning within Built Environment was the only service that received an excellent or good rating from fewer than half of residents. Nevertheless this rating was similar to

those given across the U.S.



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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

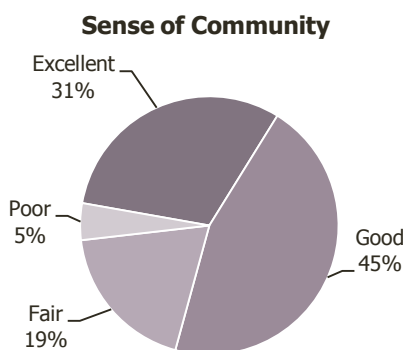


Participation

Are the residents of Oak Park 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 rated the sense of community in Oak Park as excellent or good, a rating higher than the benchmark comparison. About 9 in 10 residents recommended living in Oak Park and 8 in 10 residents reported they were somewhat or very likely to remain in the village. Recommending the community and the likelihood of remaining in the community were both similar to ratings given in communities across the nation.

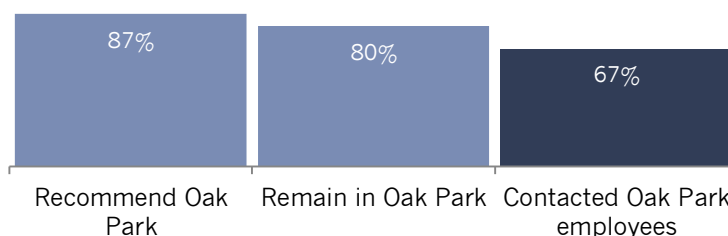
The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. While various participation rates were higher than the national averages or lower than the national averages, those related to Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Community Engagement were all similar. Within Mobility, more Oak Park residents than residents of other communities across the county used public transportation instead of driving and walked or biked instead of driving. Oak Park residents were also more likely to have used public libraries and indicated lower rates of observing code violations; however, lower rates of participation were seen for stocking supplies for an emergency and working in Oak Park compared to other communities across the nation. Community Engagement ratings varied with 2 in 10 respondents having contacted elected officials or watched a local public meeting while 9 in 10 had talked to or visited with neighbors, read or watched local news and voted in local elections. Within Natural Environment, about three-quarters of residents had conserved water or made their home more energy efficient while 9 in 10 residents had recycled at home (all rates of participation were similar to national averages).



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



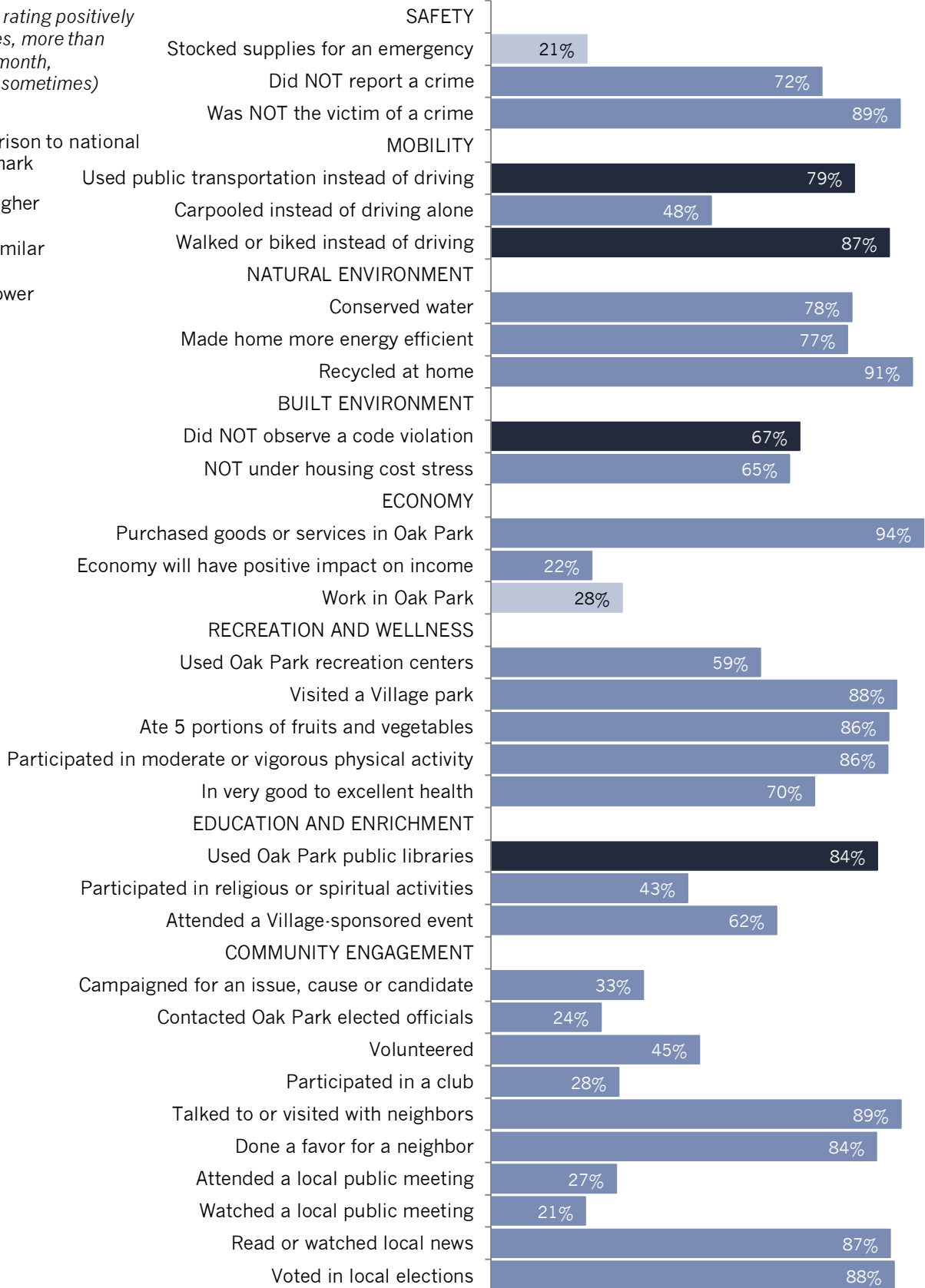
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



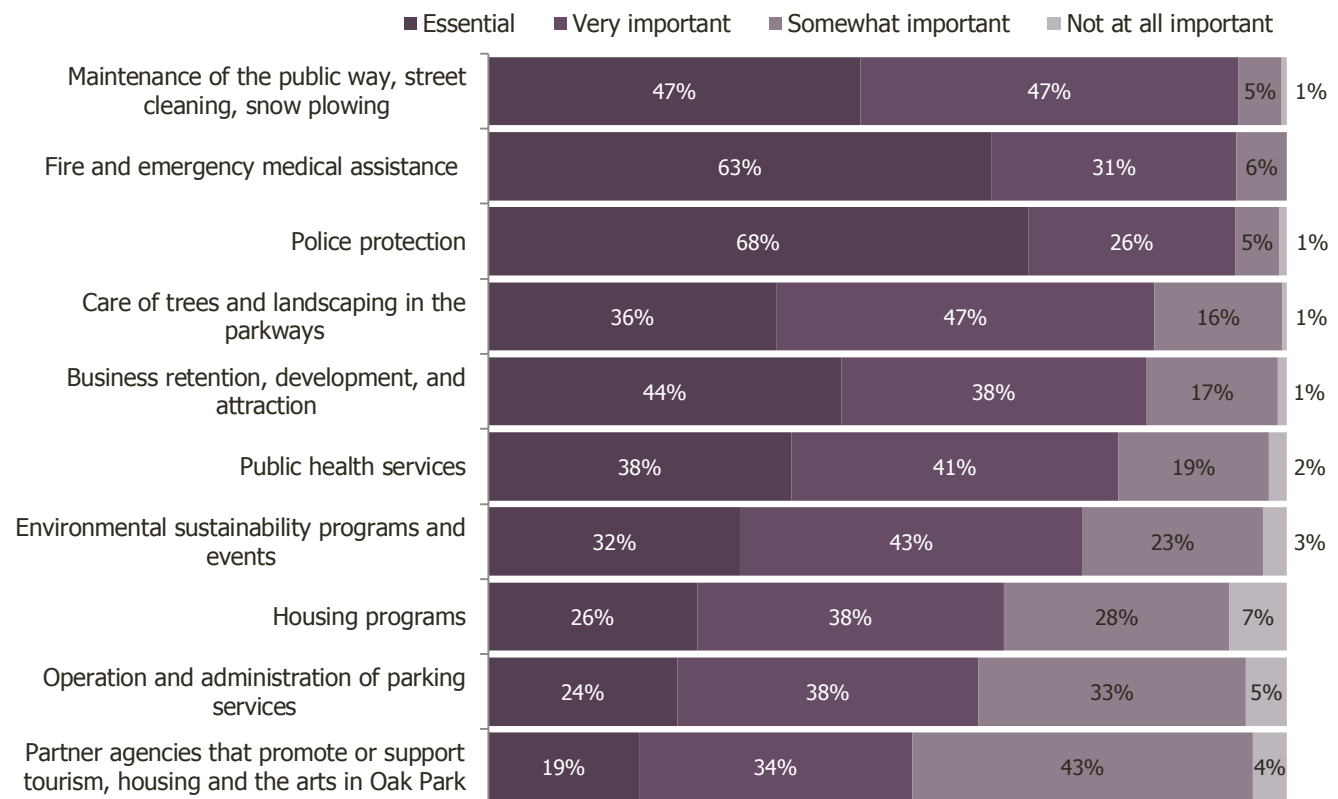
Special Topics

The Village of Oak Park included four questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked respondents to rate the importance of Oak Park to maintain several different services at least at current levels. All of the services were rated as essential or very important to be maintained by at least half of residents. At least 9 in 10 residents rated police protection, fire and emergency medical services and maintenance of the public way, street cleaning, and snow plowing as essential or very important.

In part, the data confirm the importance of core services – roads, fire/EMS and police - but they also give insight into priorities for the other (non- core) services which range in importance from landscaping and business support to parking service and partnerships.

Figure 4: Importance of Maintaining Current Service Levels

Please rate how important, if at all, it is for the Village of Oak Park to maintain each of the following services at least at current levels (as compared with cutting the levels of service):

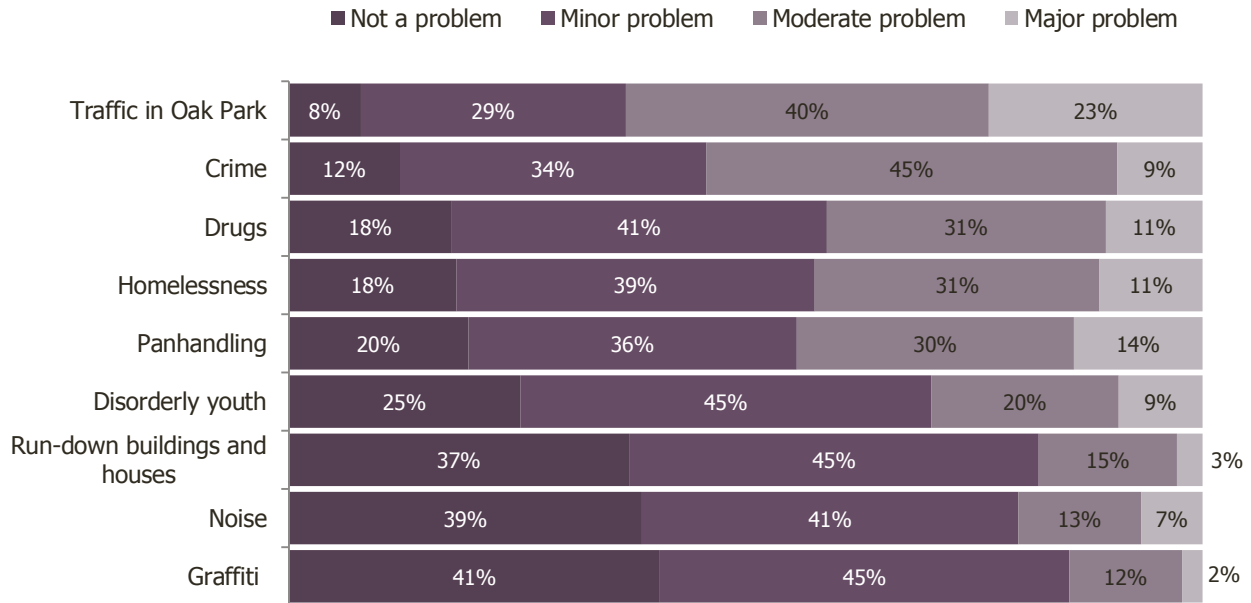


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The second question asked residents to indicate how much of a problem, if at all, several issues were in Oak Park. A majority rated all of the items as at least a minor problem but for none did even a quarter of residents conclude there was a major problem. About 9 in 10 residents indicated that traffic and crime were at least minor problems in Oak Park.

Figure 5: Problems in Oak Park

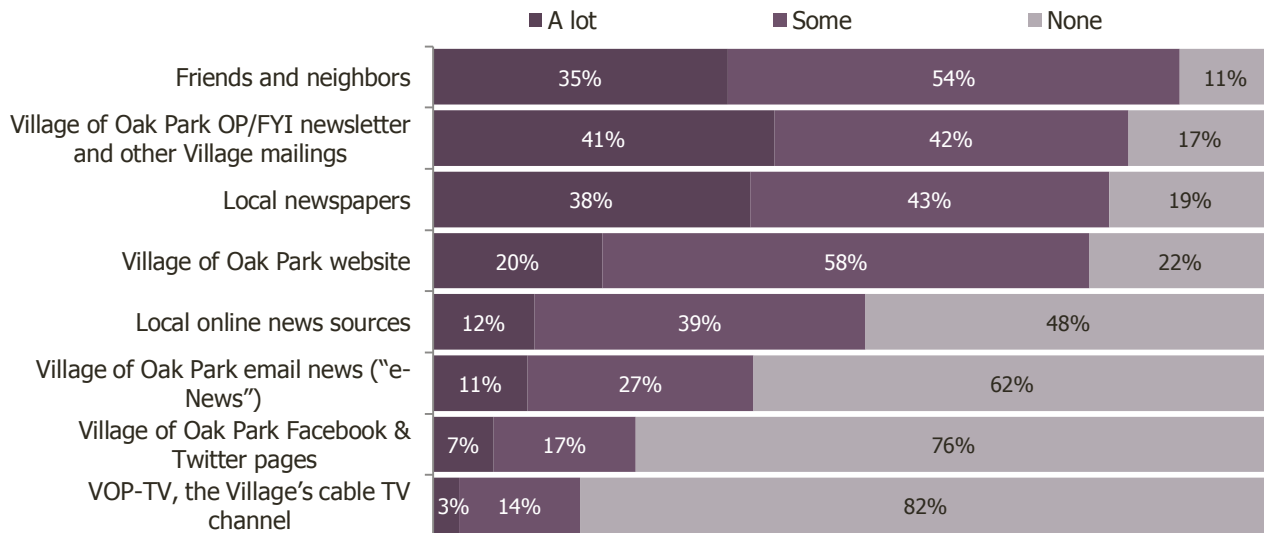
To what degree, if at all, is each of the following a problem in Oak Park?



The third question asked respondents to rate how much they used different information sources to get information about Oak Park. Most respondents got at least some of their information from the Village of Oak Park website, local newspapers, Village of Oak Park newsletter and other Village mailings and friends and neighbors. Fewer residents indicated that local online news sources, the Village of Oak Park email news, the Village's Facebook and Twitter pages and VOP-TV were information sources for them.

Figure 6: Information Sources

How much information about Oak Park, if any, do you get from each of the following sources?

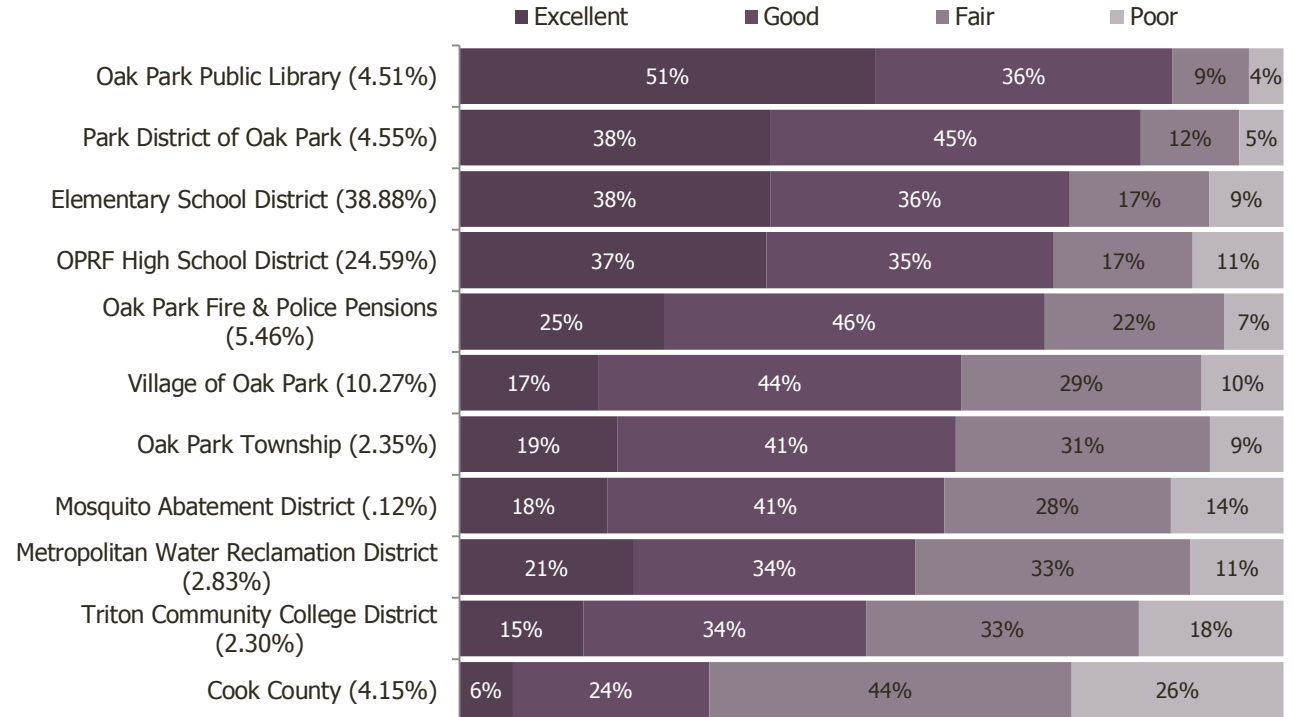


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The final custom questions asked residents to rate the value of services received for property taxes paid. Most services received positive ratings by a majority of respondents. Oak Park Public Library and the Park District of Oak Park received the most positive ratings, while the value of services for the taxes paid to Cook County received the lowest ratings.

Figure 7: Value of Services for Property Taxes Paid

Please rate the value of services for the taxes paid to each of the following (percent of your property tax bill):



Conclusions

Oak Park residents continue to enjoy a high quality of life and feel safe.

Most Oak Park residents feel their overall quality of life was excellent or good and would be likely to remain in Oak Park for the next five years. Additionally, about 9 in 10 residents would be likely to recommend the community to others. About 9 in 10 residents rated Oak Park as an excellent or good place to live and at least three-quarters of respondents rated Oak Park as a place to raise children, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Oak Park and its overall appearance positively; all ratings that were similar to or higher than the national benchmarks.

Survey participants not only prioritized the facet of Safety for Oak Park to focus on in the coming years, but also rated aspects of this facet positively and similar to the national averages. Residents feel safe in general, as well as in their neighborhood and in the downtown/commercial area. Safety service ratings were strong and similar to the national averages and about 7 in 10 residents indicated they had not reported a crime and 9 in 10 had not been the victim of a crime.

Oak Park residents appreciate opportunities to participate in community matters but ratings for local leadership and governance are declining.

Oak Park residents continued to be active and engaged in their community. About 9 in 10 residents reported that they had talked to or visited with neighbors, read or watched local news and voted in local elections and more residents in 2017 compared to 2015 reported that they had campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate. At least three-quarters of residents offered positive evaluations of opportunities to participate in social events and activities, opportunities to participate in community matters and the openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds; each of these aspects was rated higher than the national averages. Ratings were generally similar to the national averages for Oak Park's overall direction, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in Village government, acting in the best interest of Oak Park, being honest, however, these ratings were lower in 2017 when compared to ratings given in 2015.

Oak Park's Economy continues to be a top priority.

As in 2015, Economy was rated as a top priority for the Oak Park community to focus on in the next two years. Ratings within the facet of Economy tended to be positive and similar to ratings in comparison communities. The highest rated aspects of Economy were Oak Park as a place to visit (83%) and Oak Park's vibrant downtown/commercial area (71%); these ratings were higher than the national benchmarks. Ratings for cost of living in Oak Park (16%) were lower than the national benchmark, meaning that costs were perceived to be high. Most Economy ratings remained stable from 2015 to 2017; however, ratings decreased for employment opportunities, cost of living, Oak Park as a place to work from 2015 to 2017.