



Oak Park, IL

Community Livability Report

2019



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The National Community Survey™
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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About

The National Community 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).

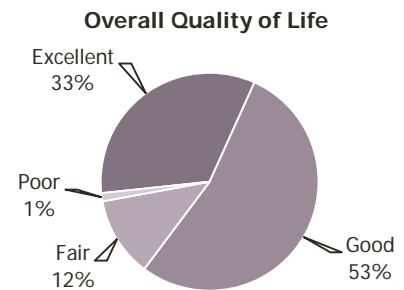
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 696 residents of the Village of Oak Park. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Oak Park

About 9 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Oak Park as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark (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.



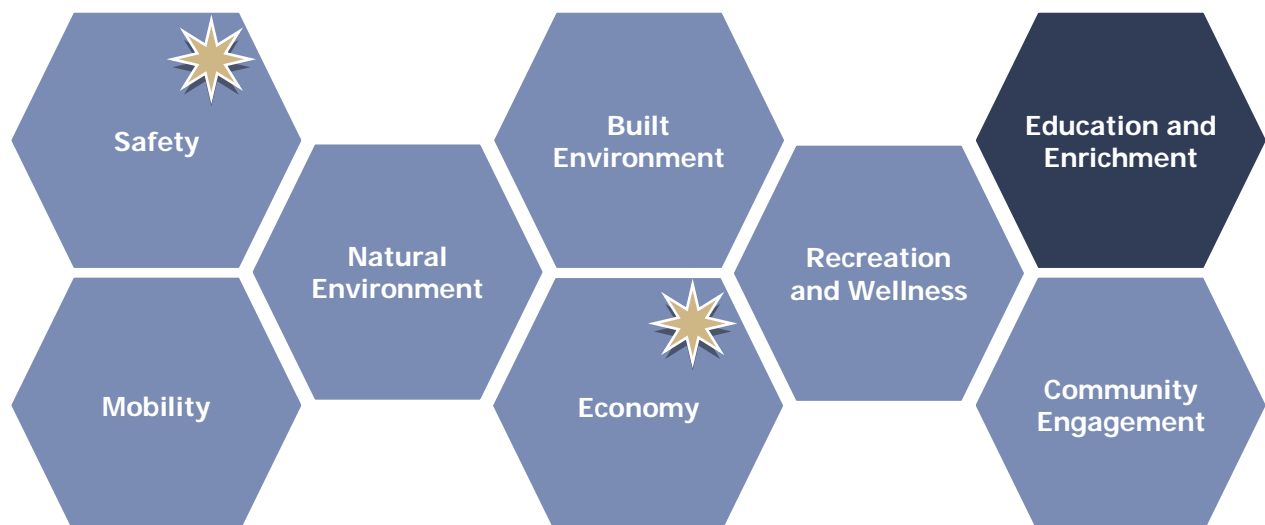
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Oak Park community in the coming two years. Ratings within the facet of Education and Enrichment tended to be higher than the national averages, while evaluations for the remaining facets were on par with national comparison 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



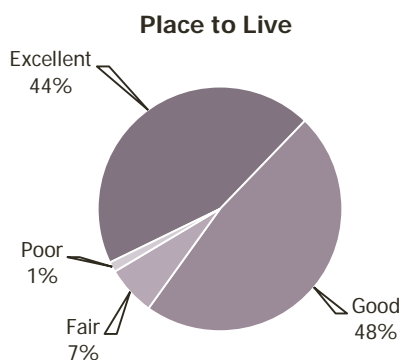
Community Characteristics

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, 92% 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. About 9 in 10 residents favorably assessed Oak Park as a place to raise children, the overall image or reputation of the village, and its overall appearance; these ratings were strong and higher than the national benchmarks. Similar to comparison communities, about 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to their neighborhood as a place to live. Evaluations of Oak Park as a place to retire were lower than average, with less than half rating this as excellent or good.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, at least half of respondents reviewed most aspects of Community Characteristics positively and ratings tended to be similar to or higher than other benchmark communities.



Assessments for the majority of aspects within the facets of Education and Enrichment (such as overall education and enrichment opportunities) and Community Engagement (such as opportunities to participate in community matters) were outstanding and higher than the national benchmarks. Scores also were above average for ease of travel by walking and by bicycle, vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, Oak Park as a place to visit, and availability of affordable quality health care, among others.

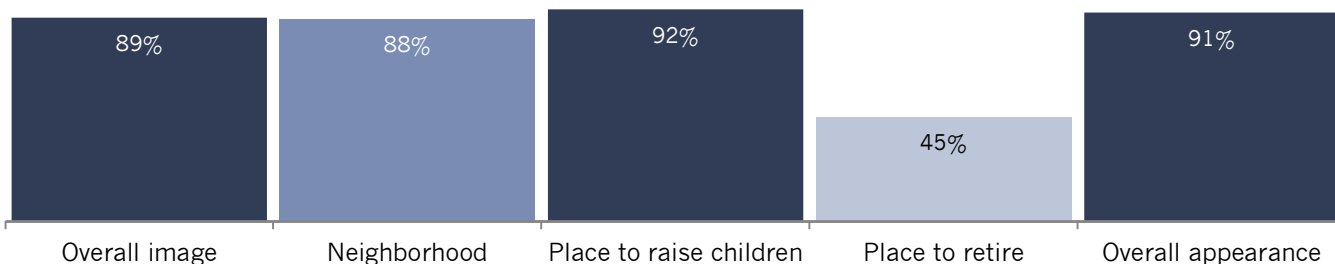
However, survey participants' ratings for ease of travel by car, public parking, and cost of living were lower than observed in other municipalities across the country.

Respondents' evaluations of availability of paths and walking trails, overall built environment, Oak Park as a place to work, fitness and recreational opportunities, and adult educational opportunities improved from 2017 to 2019 (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover for more details). Additionally, positive reviews of employment opportunities improved in 2019, with a total increase of 21% since 2008.

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

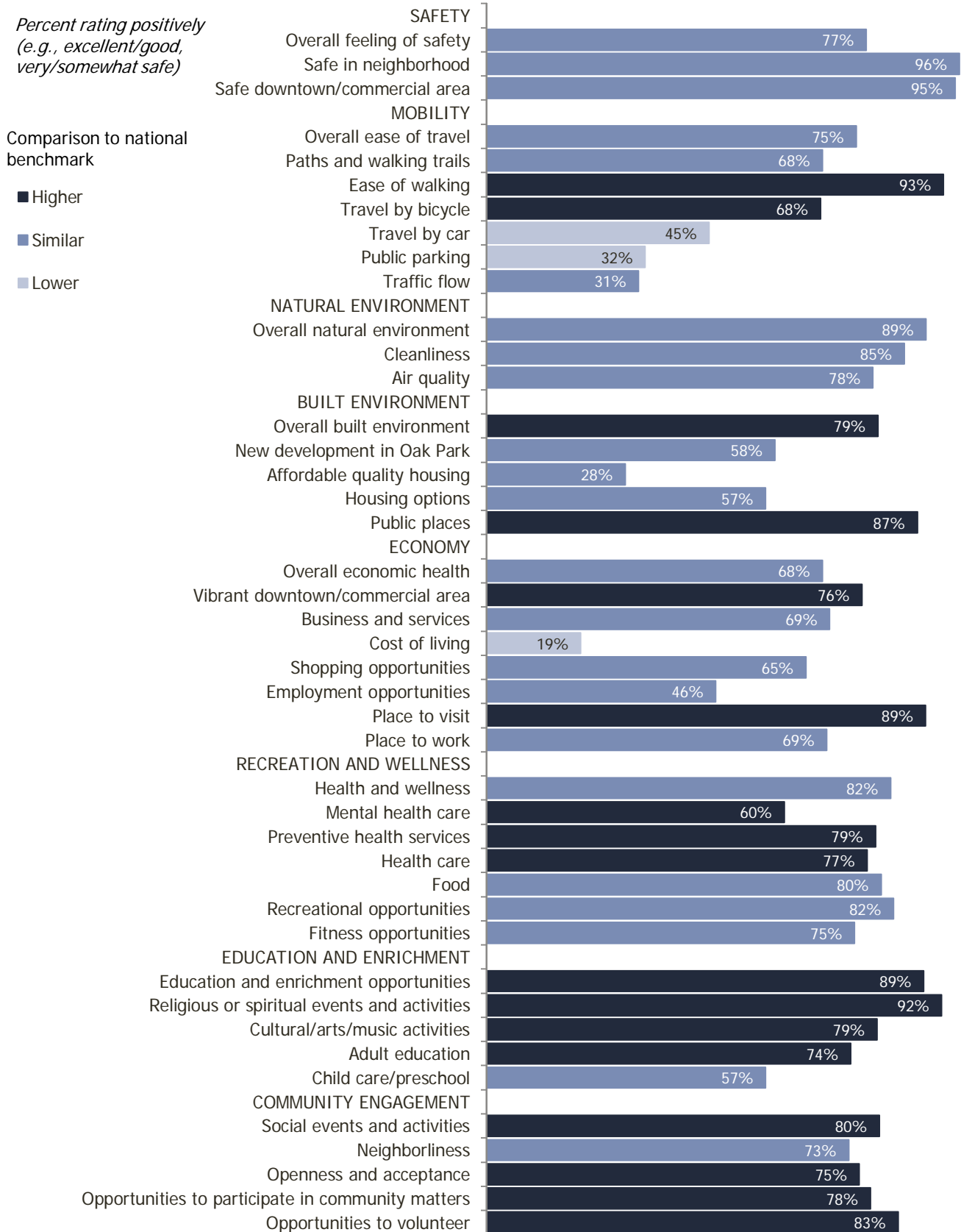
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

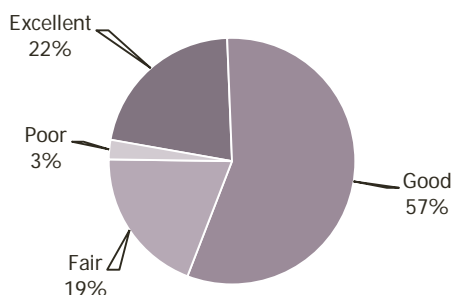
How well does the government of Oak Park meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

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. About 8 in 10 residents gave favorable evaluations to the overall quality of services provided by the Village, while 3 in 10 gave high marks to services provided by the Federal Government. Both ratings were similar to national averages.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Oak Park's leadership and governance. In general, at least 4 in 10 residents rated each aspect positively. About 8 in 10 residents favorably assessed the customer service provided by Oak Park employees, an improvement from scores in 2017; while 6 in 10 gave high marks to the Village welcoming resident involvement. All ratings were similar to those given in other communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Oak Park. Broadly, at least 6 in 10 respondents reviewed most government services positively and ratings tended to be similar to those observed in other communities nationwide. The highest-rated services included police, fire, ambulance or emergency medical services, Village parks, recreation centers, and public libraries, with about 9 in 10 residents assigning positive scores. Additionally, Village parks, recreation centers, and libraries were assigned ratings that exceeded the national benchmark, and libraries receiving the second highest rating among comparison communities nationwide.

Overall Quality of Village Services

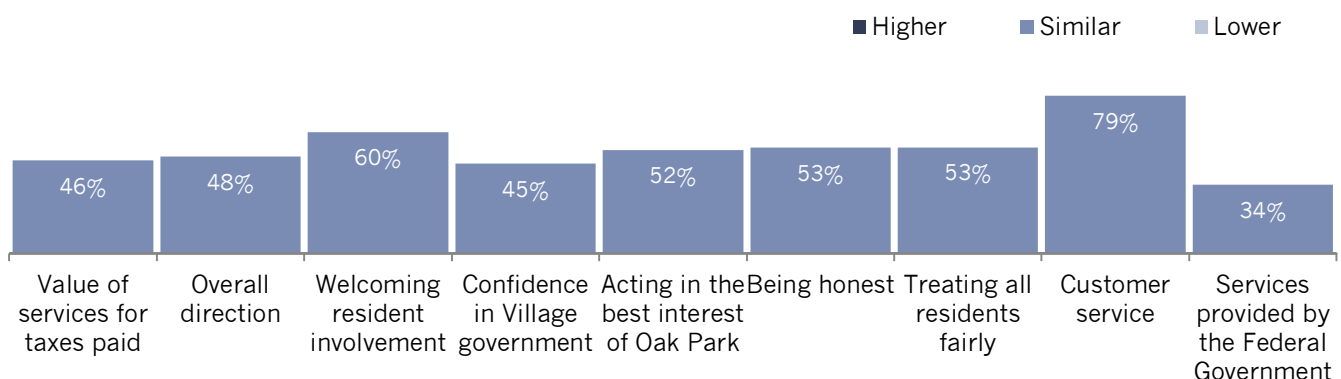


Reviews for animal control, bus or transit services, health services, and public information also were strong and higher than the national benchmarks. Evaluations for all other aspects of Governance were on par with the national averages.

Respondents' evaluations of 12 aspects of Governance improved from 2017 to 2019, with most increases occurring within the facets of Natural Environment, Built Environment, and Community Engagement. Some of the largest increases in 2019 compared to 2017 were for emergency preparedness, natural areas preservation, and open space (with increases of 13%, 12%, and 10%, respectively).

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

Comparison to national benchmark



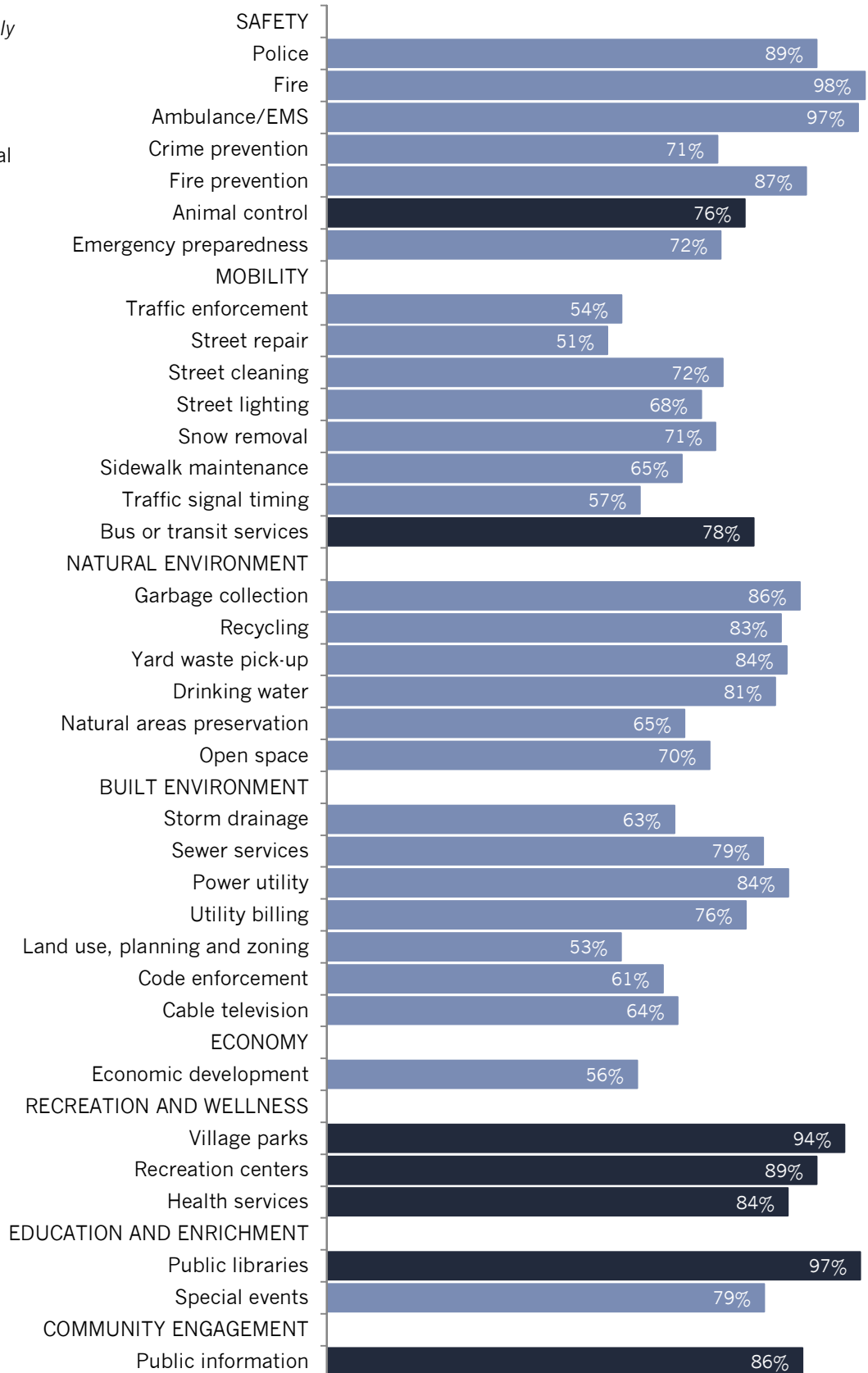
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



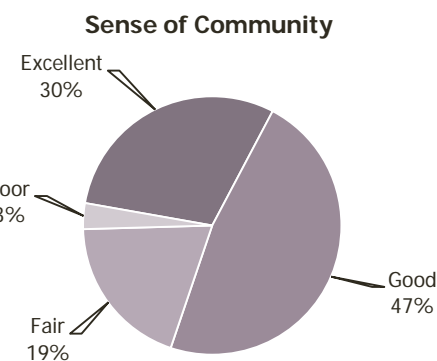
Participation

Are the residents of 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. About three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in Oak Park; this rating was higher than the national benchmark.

About 9 in 10 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Oak Park to someone who asked and 8 in 10 planned to remain in the community for the next five years, both of which were on par with national averages. More Oak Park residents (67%) reported contacting Village employees than residents in other 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. Levels of Participation varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparisons, as well as comparisons to Oak Park over time, useful for interpreting the results. About 9 in 10 respondents had recycled at home, purchased goods or services in Oak Park, visited a Village park, talked to or visited with neighbors, or voted in local elections. Fewer than 2 in 10 had contacted Oak Park elected officials or watched a local public meeting. Each of these ratings were all on par with communities nationwide.



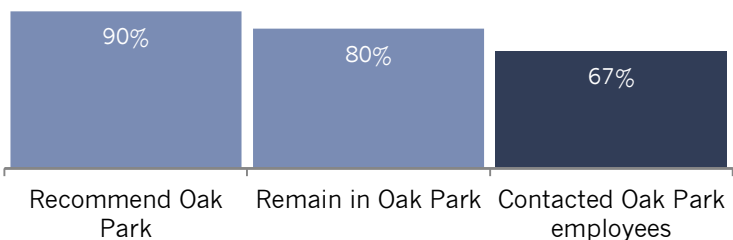
Compared to municipalities across the country, more Oak Park residents had used Oak Park public libraries, walked or biked instead of driving, and used public transportation instead of driving. Fewer residents in Oak Park had stocked supplies in preparation for an emergency, worked in Oak Park, or believed the economy would have a positive impact on their income than in comparison communities.

In 2019, fewer respondents had reported a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey than in 2017. Additionally, in 2019, fewer residents reported volunteering or doing a favor for a neighbor than in 2017.

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



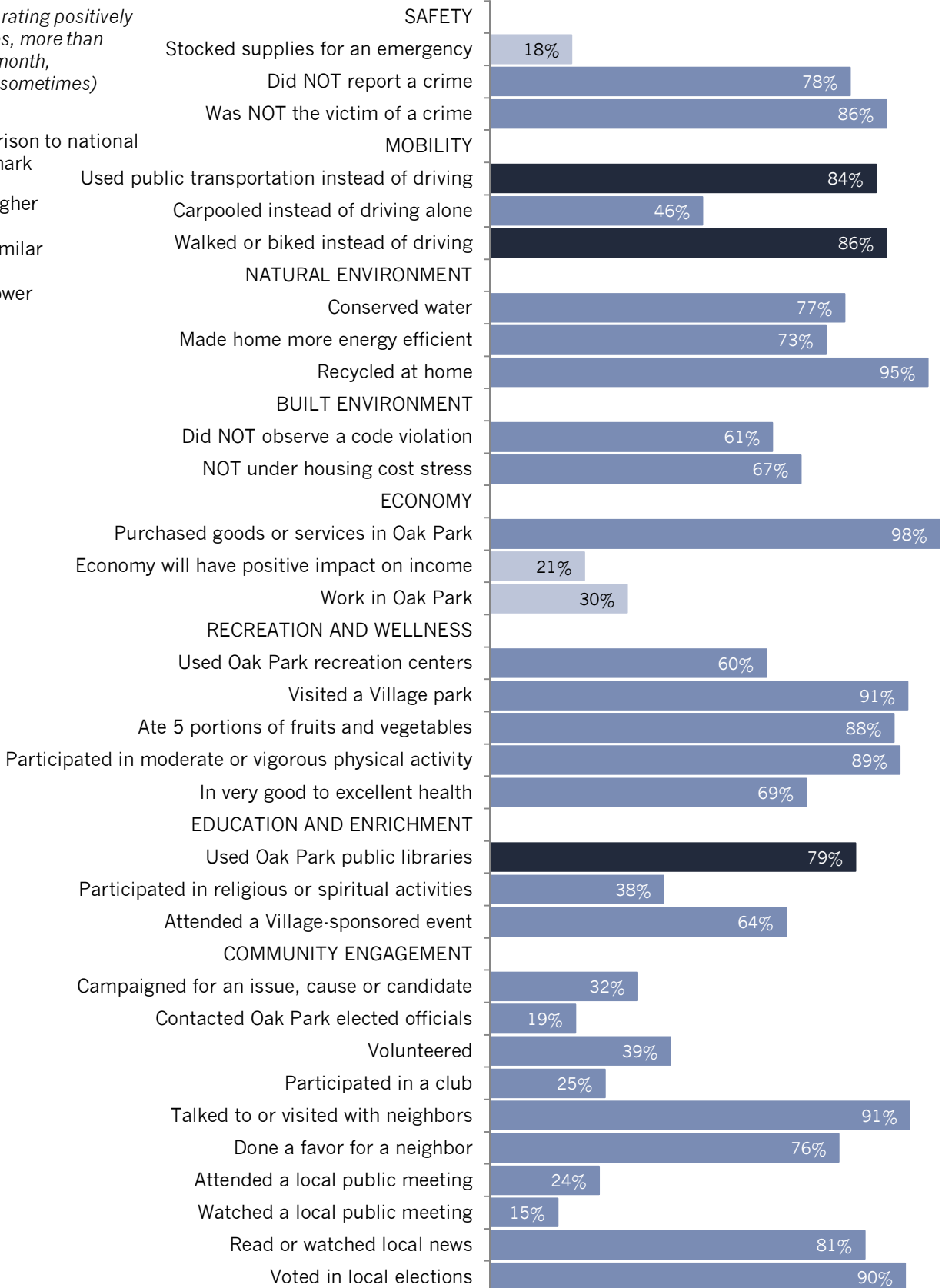
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



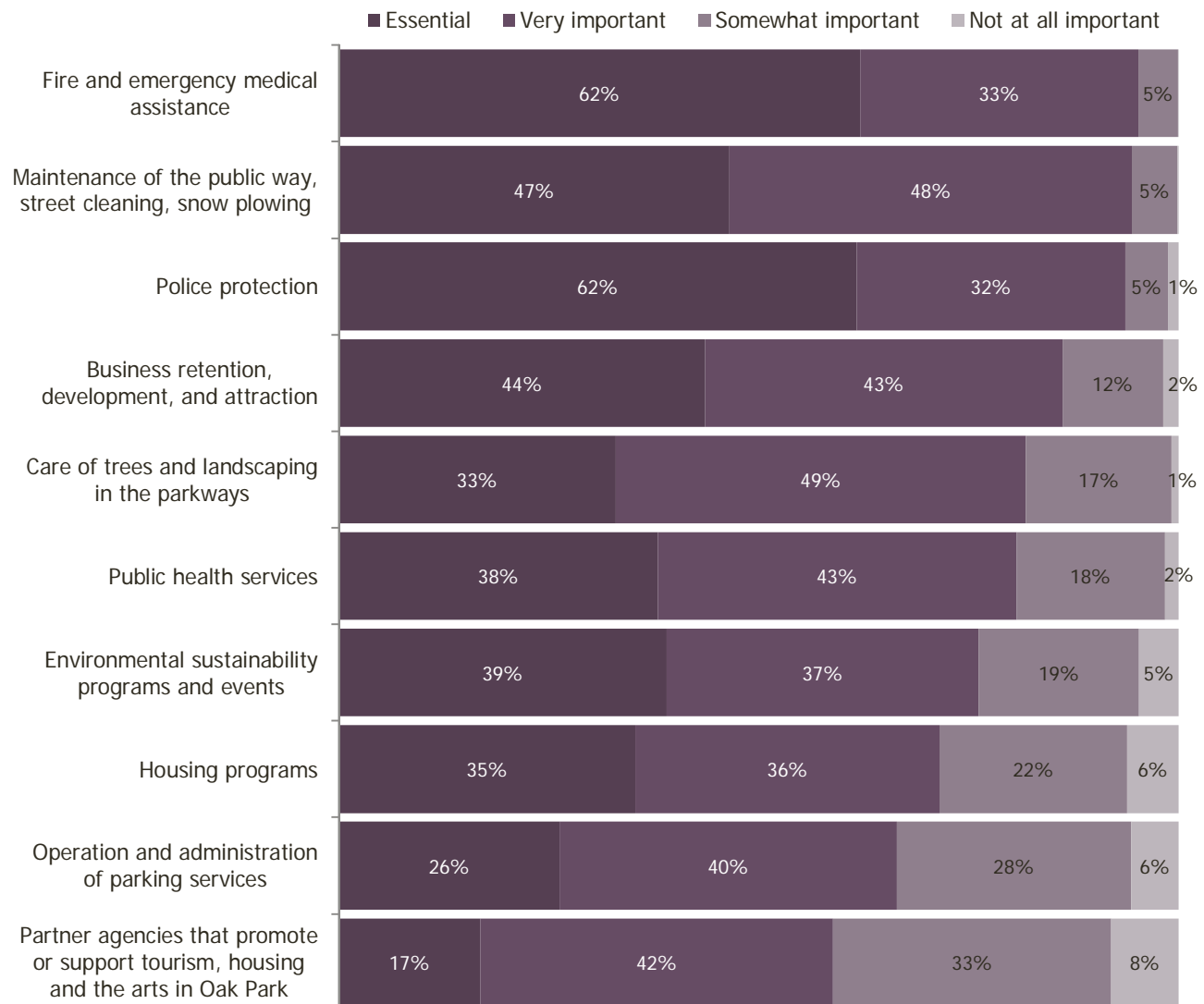
Special Topics

The Village of Oak Park included four questions of special interest on The NCS, with topics related to the importance of Village services, problems in Oak Park, sources of Village information, and the value of services for taxes paid.

The Village asked residents to rate how important it was for Oak Park to maintain various services at least at current levels. Almost all residents indicated it was essential or very important to maintain fire and emergency medical services (95%), maintenance of the public way, street cleaning, and snow plowing (95%), and police protection (94%). At least half of residents indicated that it was essential or very important to maintain the remaining services at least at current levels, but about 4 in 10 residents said it was somewhat important or not at all important to maintain partner agencies that promote or support tourism, housing, and the arts in Oak Park.

Figure 4: Importance of Maintaining Village Services

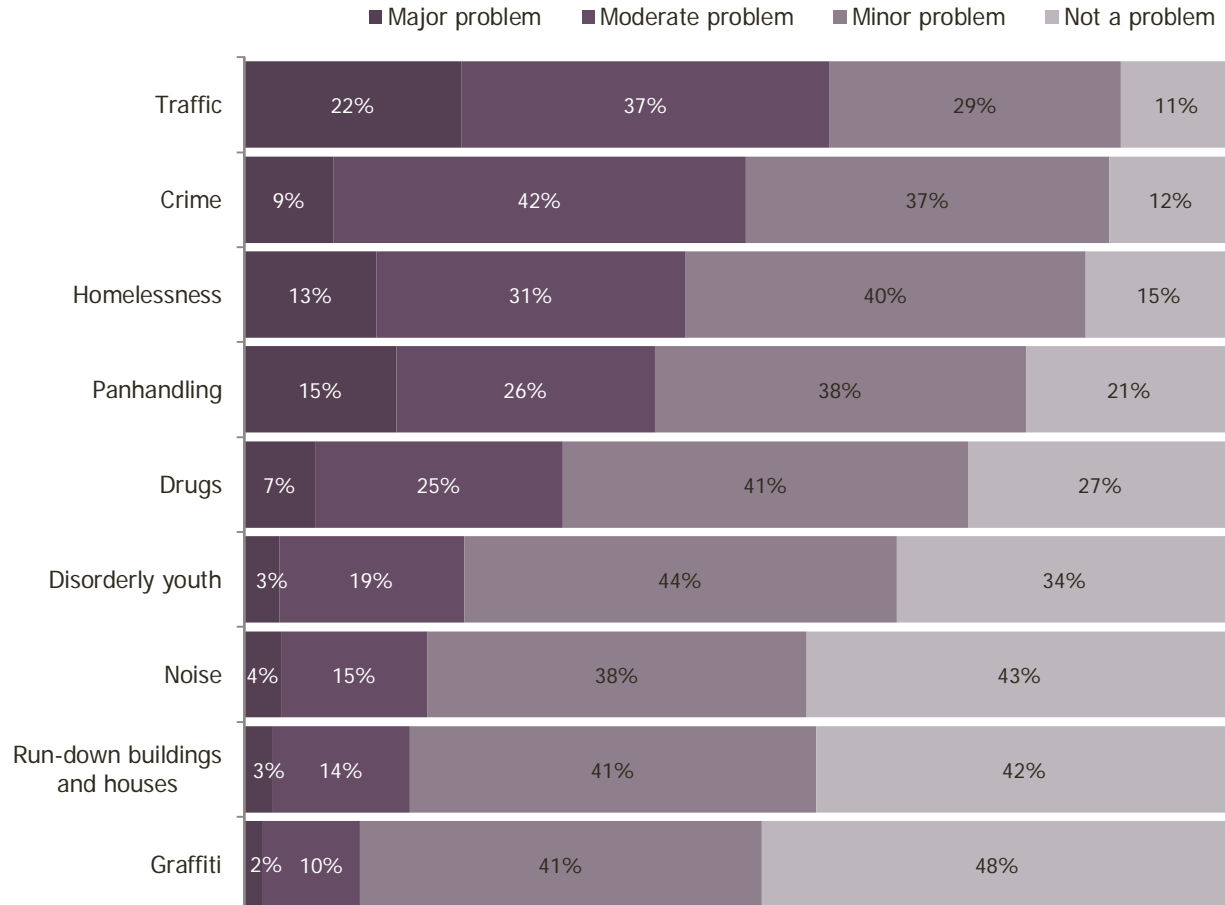
Please rate how important, if at all, it is for the Village of Oak Park to maintain each of the following services at least at current levels (as compared with cutting the levels of service):



At least half of community members indicated that traffic and crime were a moderate or major problem in Oak Park. Conversely, at least one-third of residents thought disorderly youth, noise, run-down buildings and houses, and graffiti were not a problem in Oak Park.

Figure 5: Problems in Oak Park

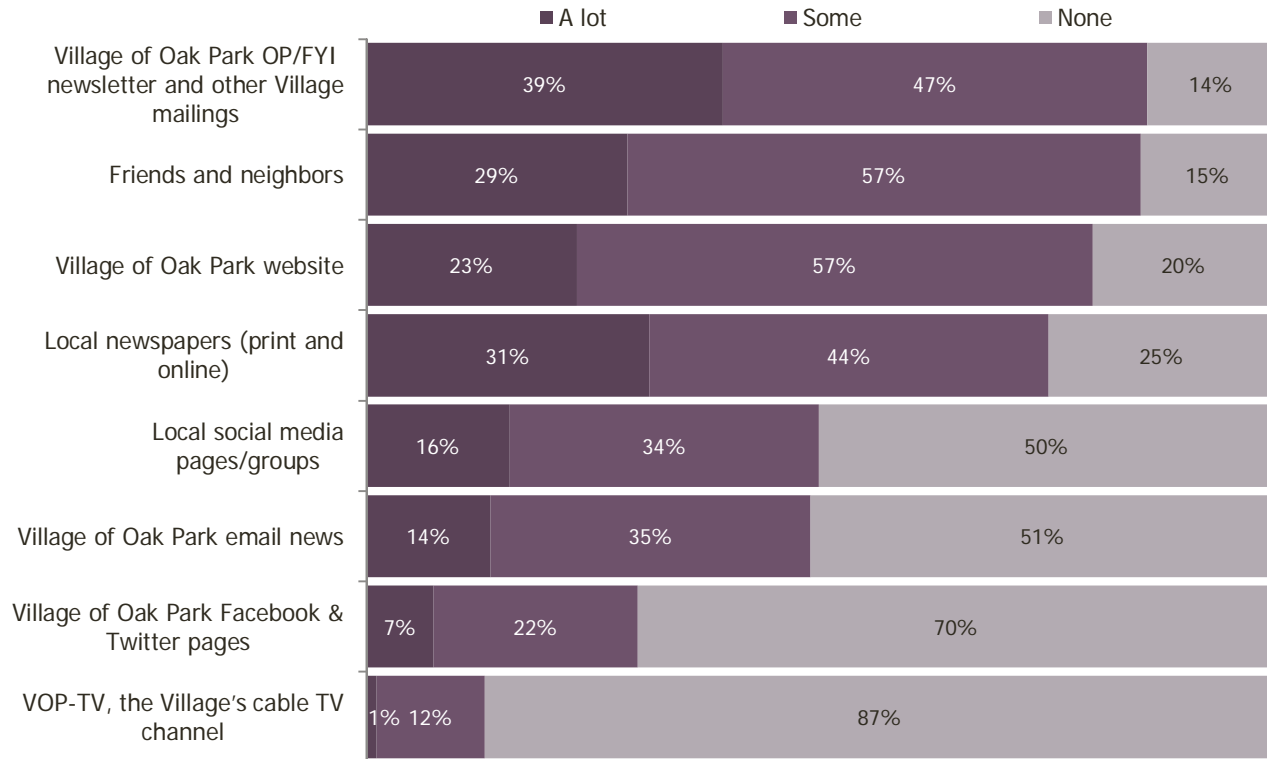
To what degree, if at all, is each of the following a problem in Oak Park?



When asked about sources utilized for obtaining information about the Village, about three-quarters of residents said they get a lot or some information from the Village of Oak Park OP/FYI newsletter and other Village mailings, friends and neighbors, the Village Park website, and local newspapers (print and online). About half of residents indicated they get a lot or some information from local social media pages/groups and the Village of Oak Park email news. About 3 in 10 residents indicated they get information about Oak Park from the Village of Oak Park Facebook and Twitter pages, and about 1 in 10 get information from the Village's cable TV channel (VOP-TV).

Figure 6: Sources of Village Information

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

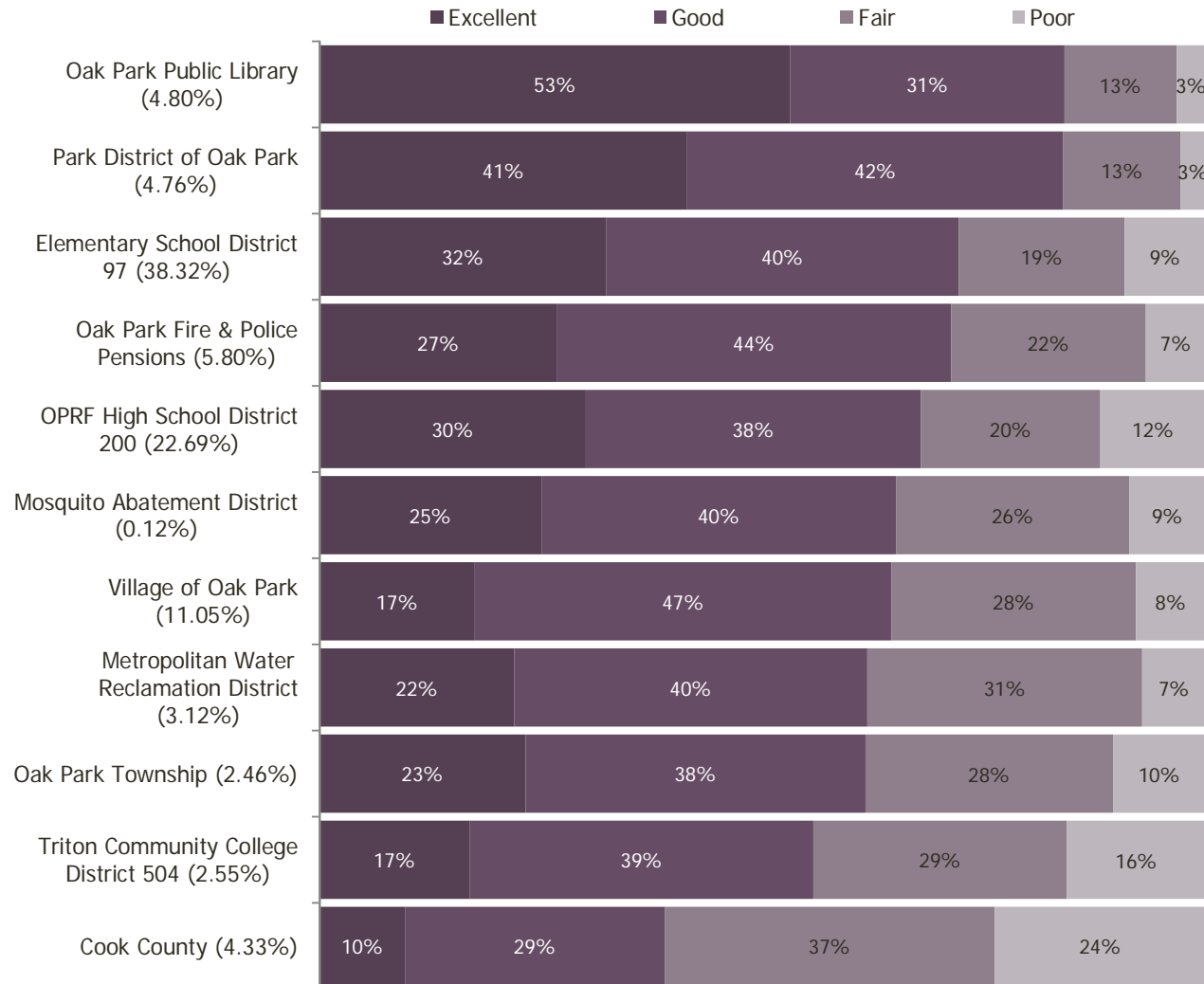


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Oak Park residents rated the value of services for taxes paid to various community entities. The highest-rated entities included Oak Park Public Library and the Park District of Oak Park, with about 8 in 10 respondents rating these as excellent or good value for the taxes paid. Of those who had an opinion, about 7 in 10 respondents gave high marks to Elementary School District 97, Oak Park Fire & Police Pensions, and OPRF High School District 200. Fewer respondents felt that they got an excellent or good value for the taxes they paid to Cook County.

Figure 7: Value of Taxes Paid

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



Conclusions

Sense of community is strong in Oak Park and residents remain loyal.

Residents' assessments of the sense of community in the village were above the national average, with about three-quarters rating this as excellent or good. About 9 in 10 respondents were likely to recommend living in Oak Park to someone who asked and about 8 in 10 planned to remain in Oak Park for the next five years. Most community members also gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Oak Park (87% excellent or good), along with the village (92%) and their neighborhoods (88%) as places to live. Ratings for Oak Park as a place to raise children, the village's overall image or reputation, and its overall appearance were exceptional and higher than average, with positive reviews from about 9 in 10 residents.

Although residents feel safe, safety remains a community priority.

About three-quarters of residents gave positive scores to the overall feeling of safety in Oak Park. Additionally, almost all residents felt safe in their neighborhoods (96%) and in the downtown/commercial area (95%). Residents indicated that Safety was an important focus for the Village to address in the coming two years; about 9 in 10 respondents said that the overall feeling of safety was an essential area of focus for the village. Additionally, about half of respondents felt that crime was a major or moderate problem in Oak Park.

Out of all Village services, police, fire, and ambulance/emergency medical services were given some of the most positive reviews. In 2019, more residents gave high marks to fire prevention and emergency preparedness than in 2017, and fewer residents had reported a crime. About 9 in 10 community members felt that it was essential or very important for the Village to maintain fire and emergency medical assistance and police protection services at least at current levels. About 7 in 10 residents positively rated the value of services for taxes paid to Oak Park Fire and Police Pensions.

Residents praise the local economy, but are concerned about cost of living.

Assessments of Oak Park as a place to visit and the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area were strong and higher than the national benchmarks. Similar to other comparison communities, about two-thirds of residents positively rated the overall economic health of Oak Park, shopping opportunities, Oak Park as a place to work, and the overall quality of business and service establishments. Furthermore, ratings of employment opportunities and Oak Park as a place to work improved from 2017 to 2019.

Survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the Village in the next two years. About 9 in 10 respondents indicated that it was essential or very important for the Village to maintain services related to business retention, development, and attraction at least at current levels. However, evaluations of cost of living in Oak Park were lower than the national benchmarks. Compared to other municipalities, fewer Oak Park residents believed the economy would have a positive impact on their income.

Education and Enrichment opportunities in Oak Park are an asset that residents appreciate.

Residents applauded aspects and services related to Education and Environment, with overall evaluations that tended to be higher than the national benchmarks. These include above-average ratings for the overall education and enrichment opportunities of Oak Park, along with opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events and activities. Respondents' assessments of public libraries were outstanding, with 97% assigning excellent or good scores, ranking second among national comparison communities. Additionally, more residents in Oak Park reported using Oak Park public libraries compared to other jurisdictions nationwide. Reviews of opportunities to participate in cultural/arts/music activities and adult educational opportunities were also higher than the national average; the latter rating improved from 2017 to 2019. Of those who had an opinion, a majority of residents gave positive ratings to the value of services for taxes paid to Oak Park Public Library (84%), Elementary School District 97 (72%), OPRF High School District 200 (68%), and Triton Community College District 504 (56%).