



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Albemarle County, VA

Community Livability Report

2017



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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 Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Albemarle County. 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 382 residents of Albemarle County. 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 Albemarle County

About 9 in 10 residents rated the overall quality of life in Albemarle County as excellent or good, a rating similar to 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.



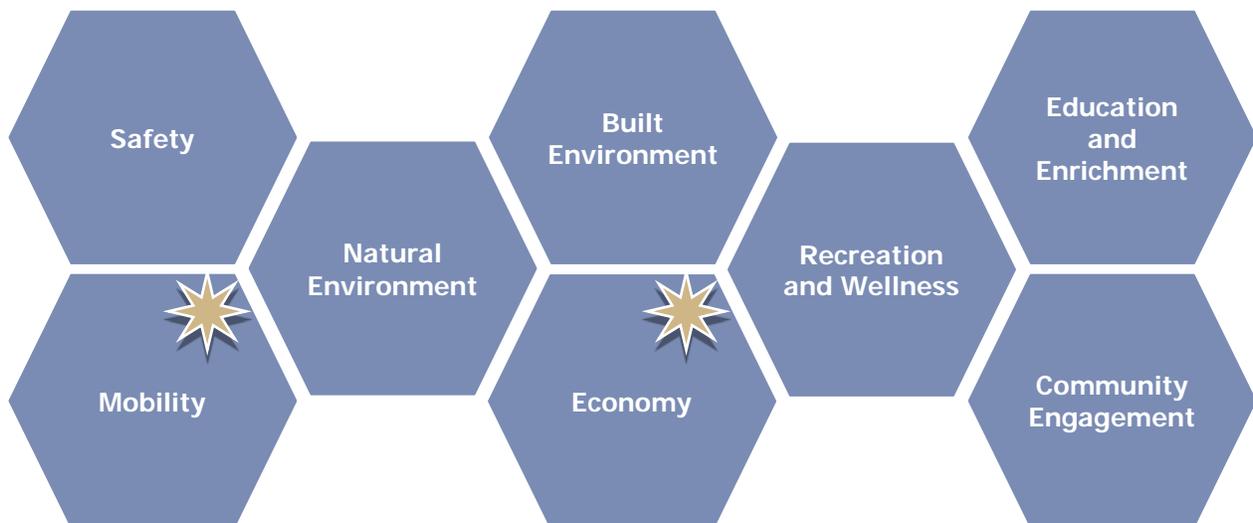
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community in the coming two years. Residents identified Mobility and Economy as priorities for the Albemarle County community. County residents rated all facets of community similar to other communities across the nation. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of ratings. 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 Albemarle County’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 Albemarle County, 91% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Albemarle County as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including: Albemarle County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Albemarle County and its overall appearance. At least 8 in 10 respondents were pleased with these aspects of community and the County performed better than its national peers in the areas of the community as a place to raise children, retire and overall appearance. Between 2015 and 2017, all of these items remained stable with the exception of the County's overall image which declined (please see the *Trends Over Time Report* under separate cover for more details).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Respondents gave high praise to many aspects of Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment. Overall, a majority of residents rated favorably most items within these facets, resulting in performance at or above national averages.



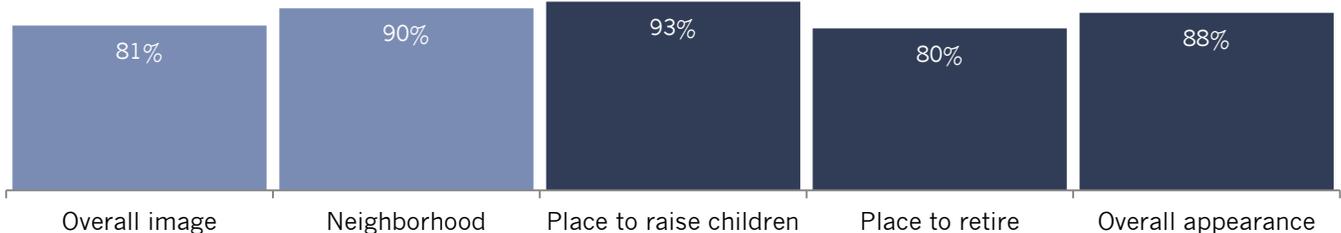
Natural Environment fared well, too, with at least 8 in 10 viewing all aspects within the facet favorably; the overall natural environment received above average marks.

Residents were critical of Mobility in the community. The overall ease of travel and ease of travel by walking, biking and public transportation were all lower in Albemarle County than in comparison communities. When compared to 2015 ratings, residents felt traffic flow had improved while the ease of walking had worsened.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



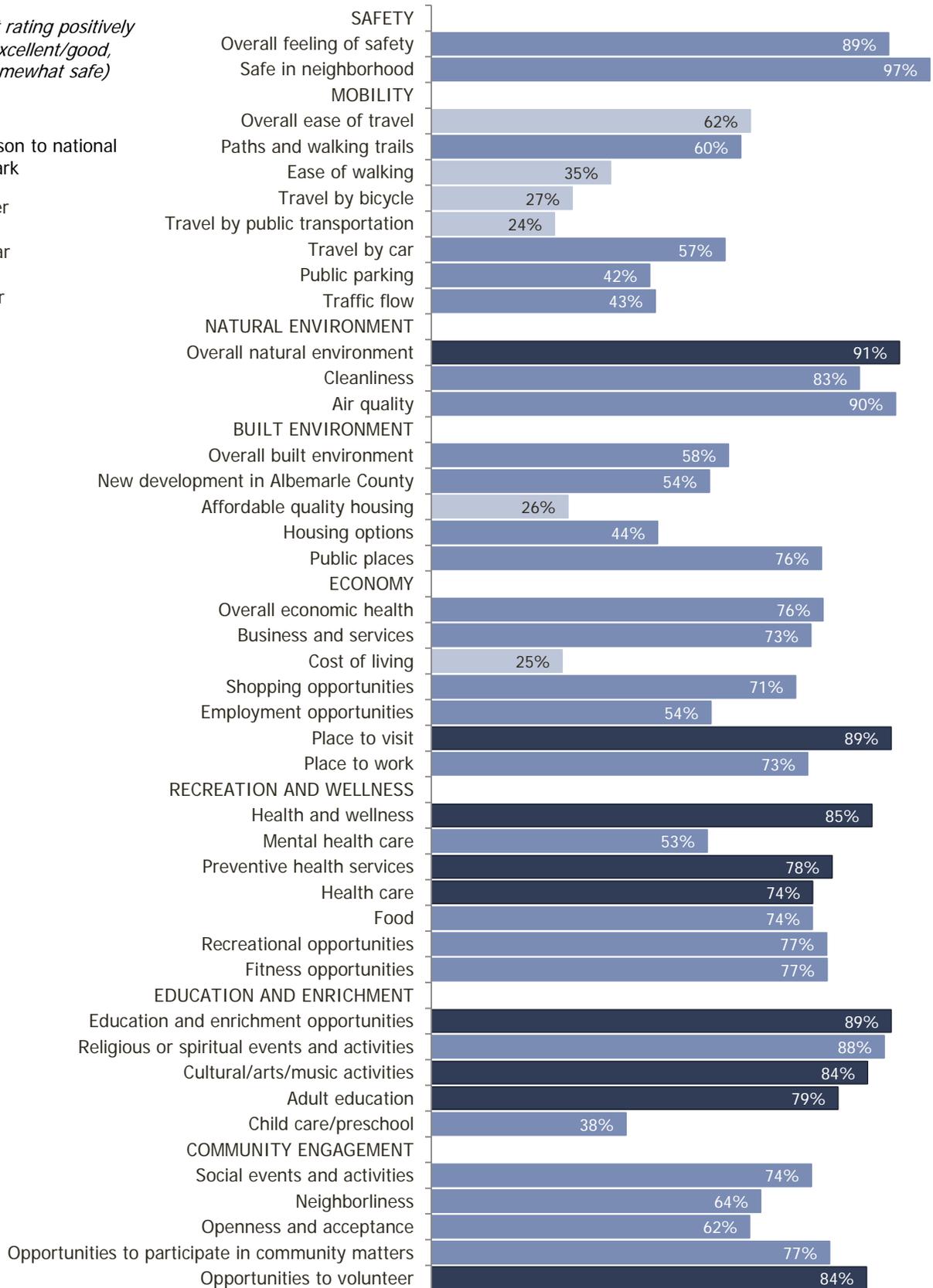
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



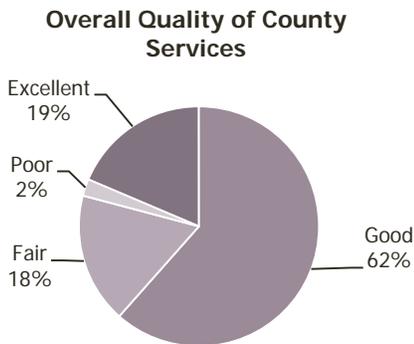
Governance

How well does the government of Albemarle County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Albemarle County as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 residents rated favorably the overall quality of services provided by the County, and about half as many rated favorably the services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for County and Federal government services were similar to national averages and 2015 results.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Albemarle County's leadership and governance. Three-quarters of respondents felt positively about the customer service provided by the County, which was similar to the national benchmark. Around half of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the remaining aspects of the County's governance, which were all similar to nationwide communities. Further, these ratings remained stable between survey administrations.

Respondents evaluated nearly 30 individual services and amenities available in Albemarle County. At least half of residents rated most services provided by the County highly. All services received ratings similar to the national benchmarks. Across all services evaluated by residents, the top rated services included those provided by first responders (police, fire and ambulance/EMS), as well as County parks and public libraries. All these services received excellent or good ratings by about 9 in 10 residents.

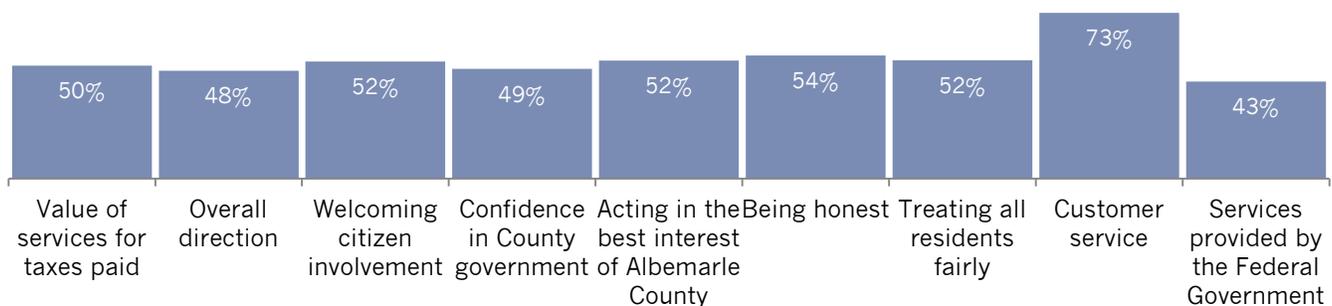


When compared to 2015, evaluations of emergency preparedness and public information increased while bus or transit services and natural areas preservation decreased.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



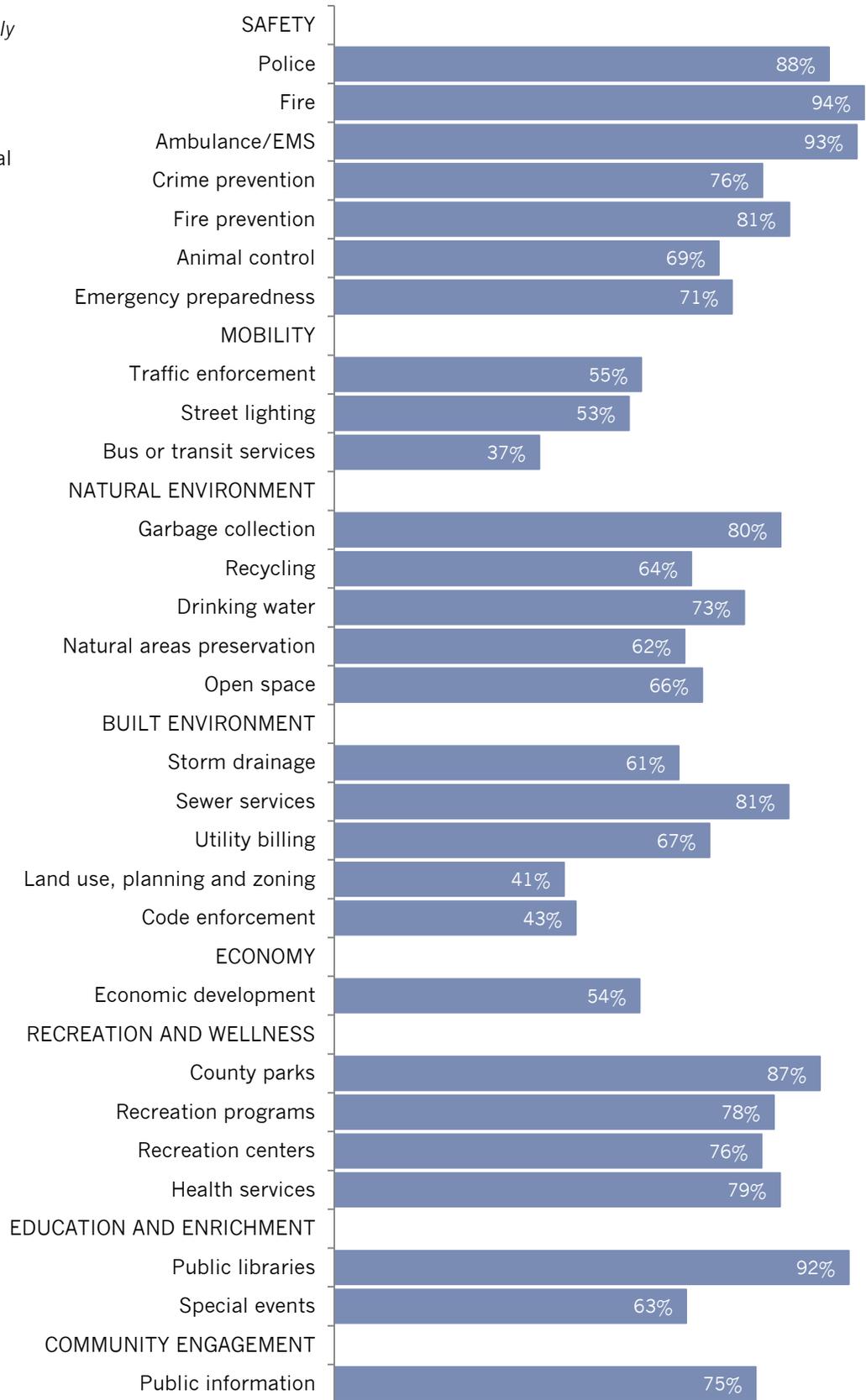
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

Are the residents of Albemarle County connected to the community and each other?

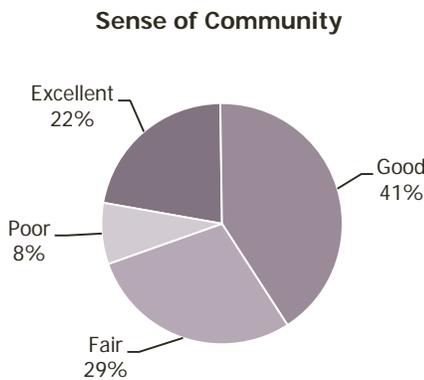
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About two-thirds of survey respondents evaluated the sense of community in Albemarle County positively, which was similar to assessments in comparison communities. Almost 9 in 10 residents reported they would remain in the County for the next five years and would recommend it to someone who asked. While ratings for both of these aspects of the community were similar to the national benchmark, the number of residents who would recommend living in the County declined since 2015. While only about 4 in 10 respondents said they had contacted Albemarle County employees in the 12 months prior to the survey, this level of contact was similar to that of other communities in the U.S.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Engagement by County residents tended to be on par with other communities nationwide. The vast majority of residents said they had not been the victim of a crime and more County residents than in comparison communities said they had not reported a crime. Additionally, nearly all residents reported they purchased goods or services in the County and more respondents worked within Albemarle County than what was reported across the nation.

Within the facet of Education and Enrichment, fewer residents in the County than in peer communities reported attending a County-sponsored event. Attendance of these events as well as participation in religious or spiritual activities declined between 2015 and 2017.

More residents in 2017 than 2015 reported campaigning for an issue, cause or candidate while fewer engaged with the community by watching a local public meeting or participating in a club.

Mobility continued to be an area with opportunities for improvement. Ratings for public transportation use and walking or biking instead of driving trailed comparison communities.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



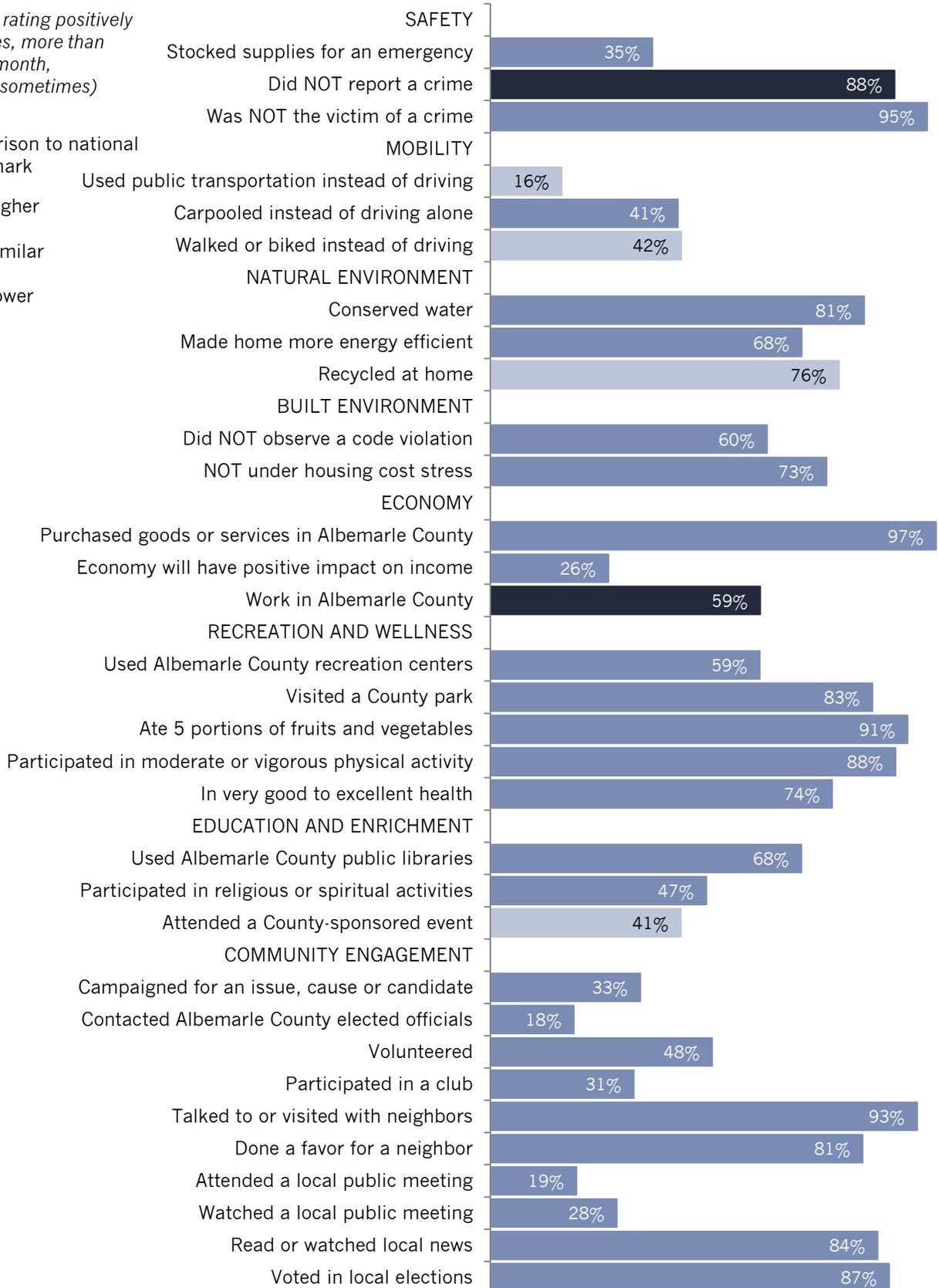
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



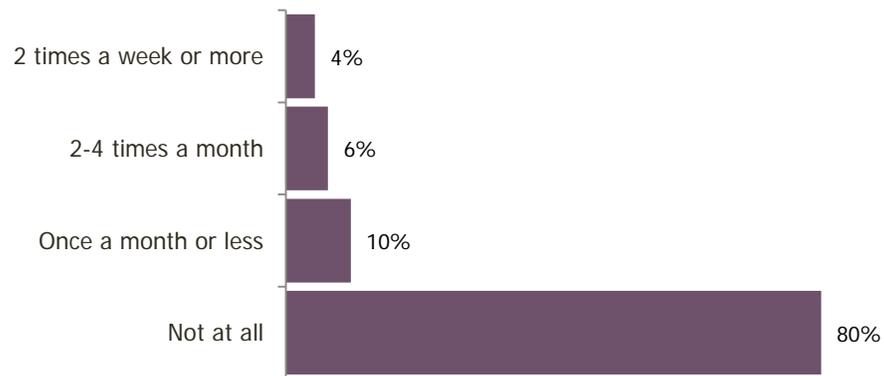
Special Topics

Albemarle County included more than a dozen questions of special interest on The NCS. These questions explored public schools, recycling, importance of services and communication with the County.

In the first question, residents indicated how frequently they volunteered at a public school. About two in five residents had ever volunteered, the vast majority of residents did not volunteer at a public school at all.

Figure 4: Volunteered at a Public School

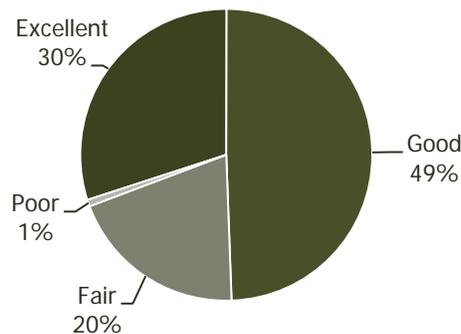
In the last 12 months, about how many times, if at all, have you or other household members volunteered at a public school?



Albemarle County sought public opinion on the quality of public schools and nearly 8 in 10 residents rated schools as excellent or good. It is important to note the data presented in this chart are only those who had an opinion as nearly one-third said “don’t know” when asked this question (for full frequencies including “don’t know”, please see the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Figure 5: Quality of Public Schools

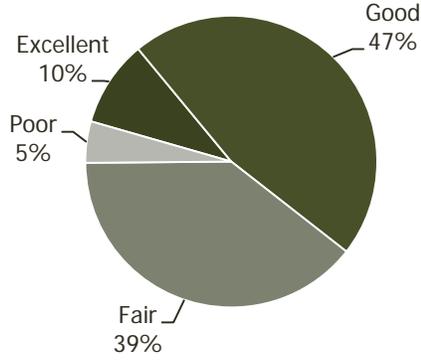
Please rate the quality of public schools in Albemarle County:



In addition to rating the services provided by the County and Federal governments (see *Governance*, page 5), residents rated the services provided by the State of Virginia. Overall, a slight majority of residents rated the services provided by the State as excellent or good.

Figure 6: Quality of Services Provided by the State of Virginia

Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?: State of Virginia



Albemarle County asked a series of questions related to recycling including its importance as a service, the likelihood of recycling if another center was available and preferences of location for the potential new recycling center. Nearly all residents felt recycling was at least somewhat important with about 4 in 10 saying it was an “essential” service. When asked about their likelihood of recycling if another “do it yourself” facility existed, nearly equal numbers said there were very likely as were not likely to use it. Around one-quarter said they were somewhat likely to recycle in this way (see Figure 8, page 11). Overall, of the five potential areas for the recycling center to be built, residents did not indicate a clear preference (Figure 9, page 12). Of those likely to recycle, about two in five respondents strongly preferred the Crozet area and about half at least somewhat preferred the 29 North – Hydraulic/Rio area tended to be the preferred options. Scottsville was the least preferred location regardless of the likelihood of recycling.

Figure 7: Importance of Recycling Services
How important a service, if at all, do you consider recycling to be for County residents?

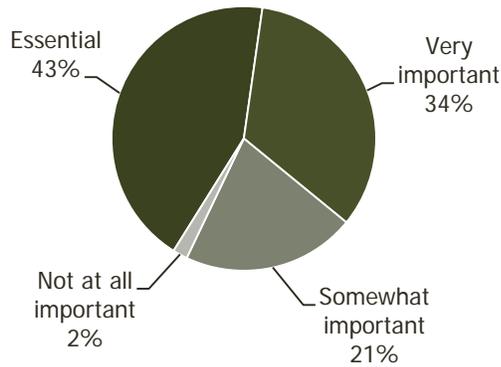
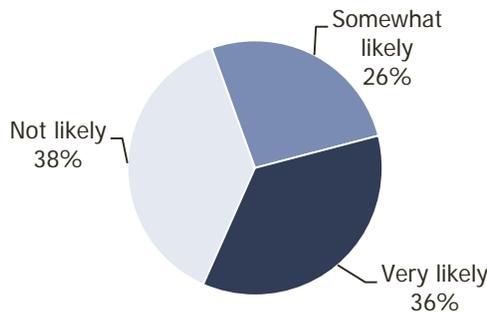
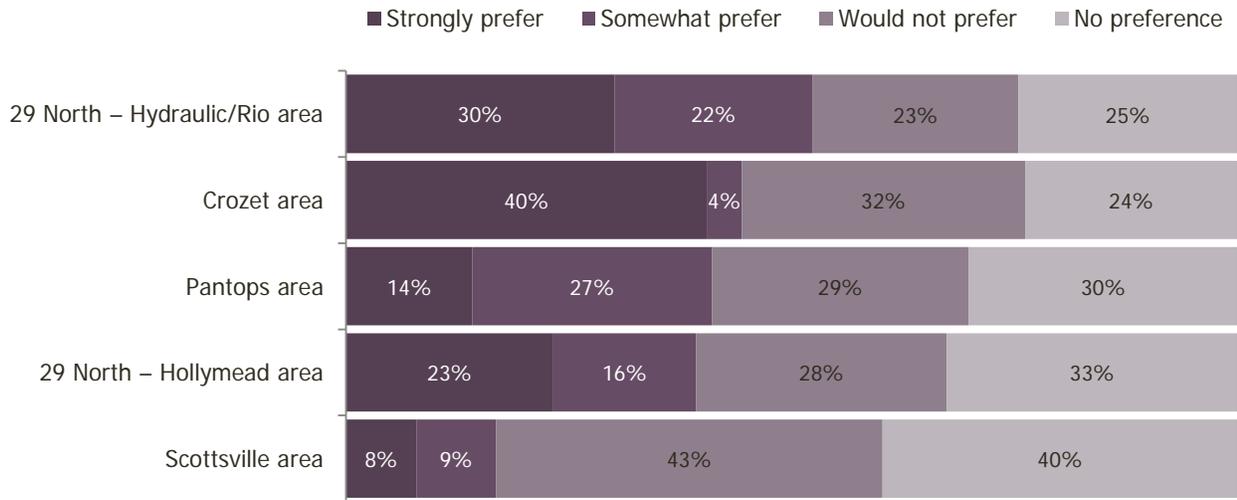


Figure 8: Likelihood of Using a “Do It Yourself” Recycling Center
The McIntire Recycling Center currently provides a “do it yourself” separation of recyclables by type (aluminum, cardboard, glass, etc.). If another “do it yourself” source separation recycling center was conveniently located, how likely would you be to bring your recyclables to the center?



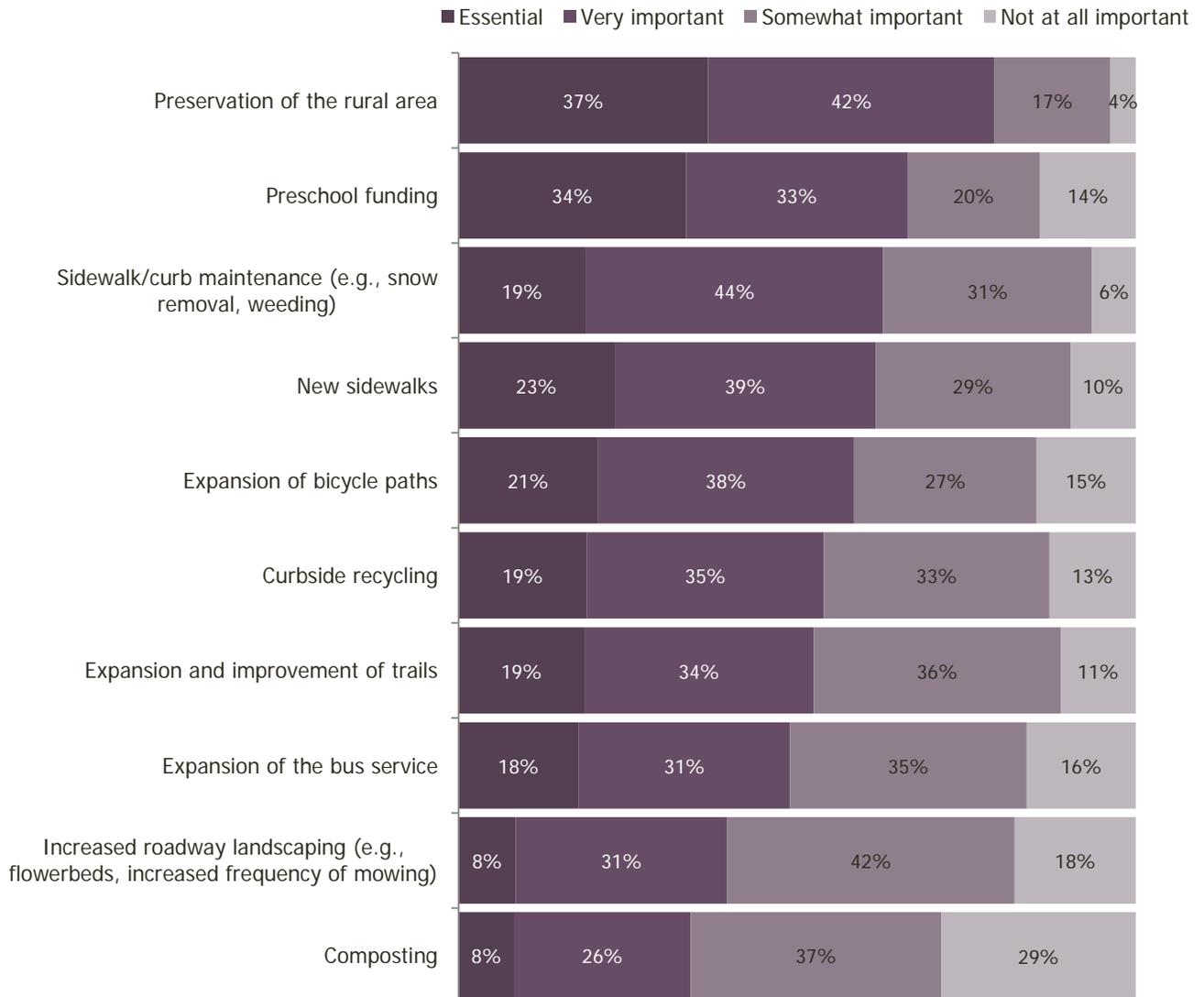
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Figure 9: Preferred Recycling Center Location of those Very or Somewhat Likely to Use It



Two questions on the survey County garnered feedback, first, about the importance of 10 specific services for the County to provide, and, second, to what extent residents would support a tax increase to pay for those services. Residents identified preservation of the rural area as the most important service with about 8 in 10 saying it was very important or essential. About two-thirds gave similar ratings to preschool funding, sidewalk/curb maintenance and new sidewalks. Among the least-important services were composting (34% very important or essential) and increased roadway landscaping (40%). In the second question, support for the tax increase mirrored the perceived level of importance with preservation of the rural area receiving the highest support for a tax increase followed by preschool funding, sidewalk curb/maintenance, and new sidewalks (see Figure 11 on page 14 for more details).

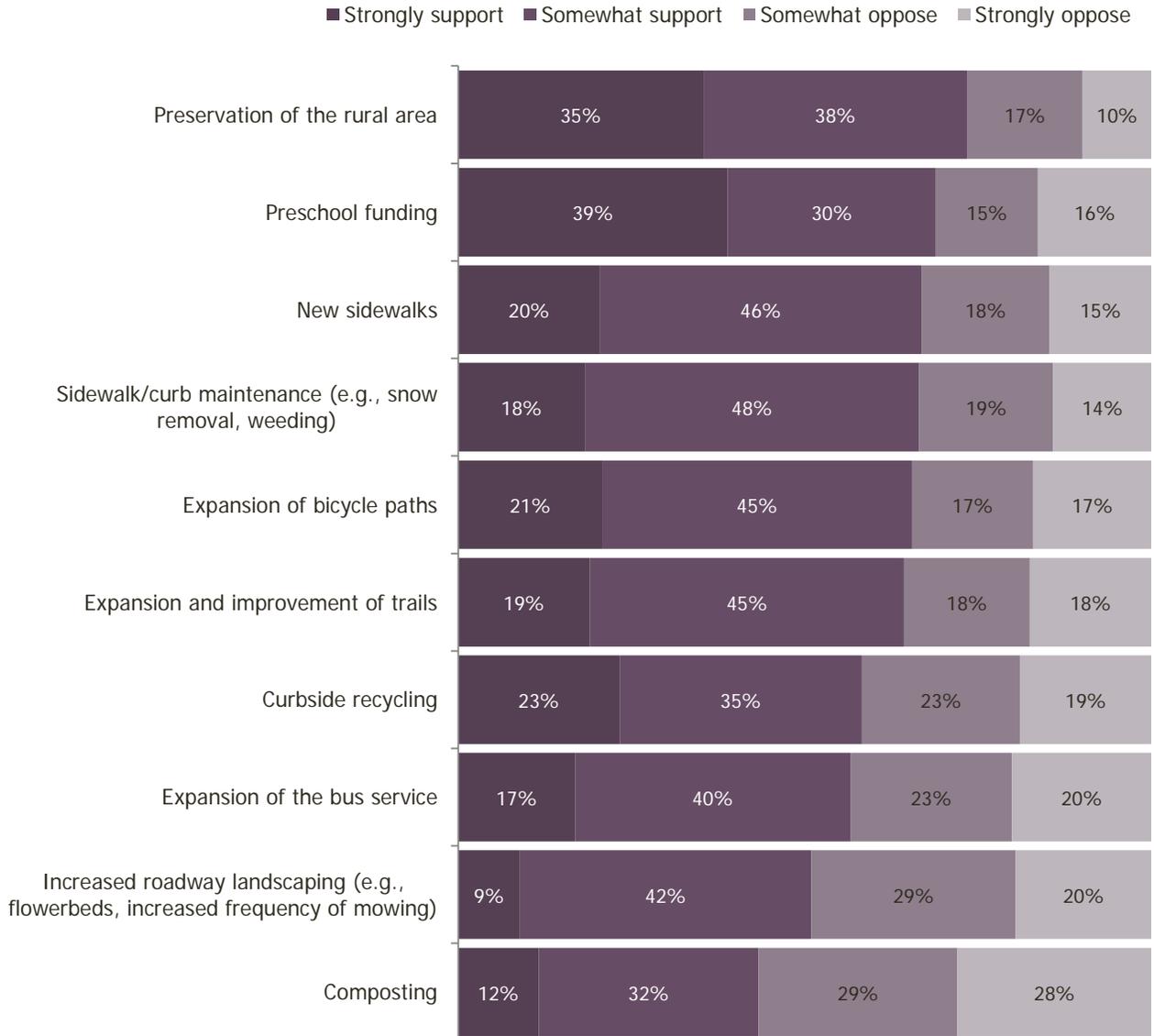
Figure 10: Importance of Services Provided by the County
How important, if at all, are the following services for Albemarle County to provide?



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Figure 11: Support for Higher Taxes

Please indicate to what extent you would support or oppose paying higher taxes for the following services:



Albemarle County included a series of questions on the survey to better understand how residents preferred to interact and communicate with the County. The first in the series asked residents about potential inhibitors to attending an in-person meeting to make a public comment (see Figure 12, page 16). At least 7 in 10 respondents cited the meeting location being too far and the time the meeting was held as potential inhibitors to attendance. Lack of transportation was least likely to prevent residents from attending to make a public comment on an issue.

The next question asked residents about ways in which residents preferred to provide comments to the County. Residents preferred email communication with the Board of Supervisors or staff and an online comment form and did not prefer social media as a communication method (see Figure 13, page 16).

Residents were then asked, more specifically, their preference for providing online commentary. Respondents suggested that an online survey would be their preferred choice followed by direct email to a County staff member or the Board of Supervisors. Around half said they would not prefer to comment on an online forum with a required log-in (see Figure 14, page 17).

The County then requested insight into the sources of information used by residents to obtain information about activities events and services. Most respondents indicated they favored local media outlets such as radio and local TV. Charlottesville Tomorrow and County “A-mail” were the least used sources of information; about two-thirds of respondents did not use these sources (see Figure 15 on page 17 for more details).

In separate, but related questions, County staff wished to understand how frequently residents used the County’s website and for what purposes. About two-thirds of respondents rarely or never used the website and only 6% used it frequently. Generally, at least half of residents said they had never used the website for nearly all of the 14 listed uses. If residents did use the website, they used it to find information about a property in the County (37% sometimes or frequently) or to download a form or to pay a bill on a regular basis (see Figure 17 on page 18).

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Figure 12: Potential Preventions of Attending an In-Person Meeting

If you were interested in learning more about or making public comment on an issue, to what extent might each of the following prevent you from attending an in-person meeting?

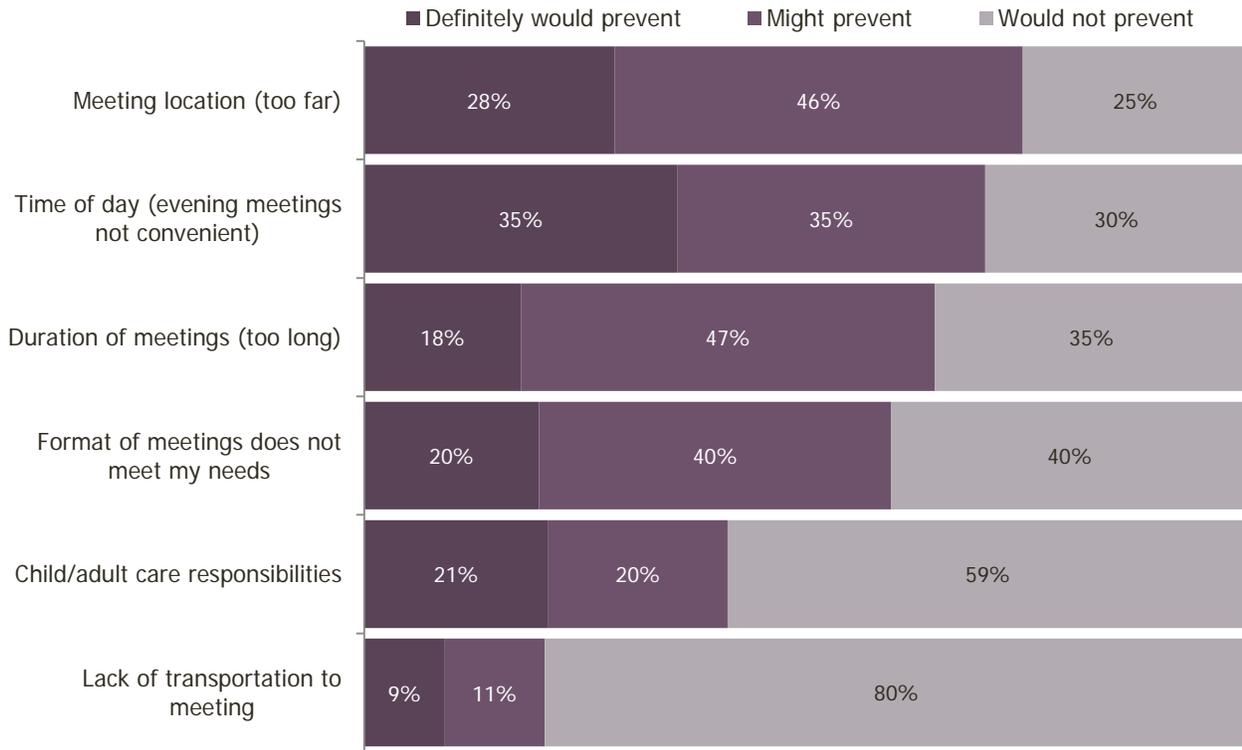
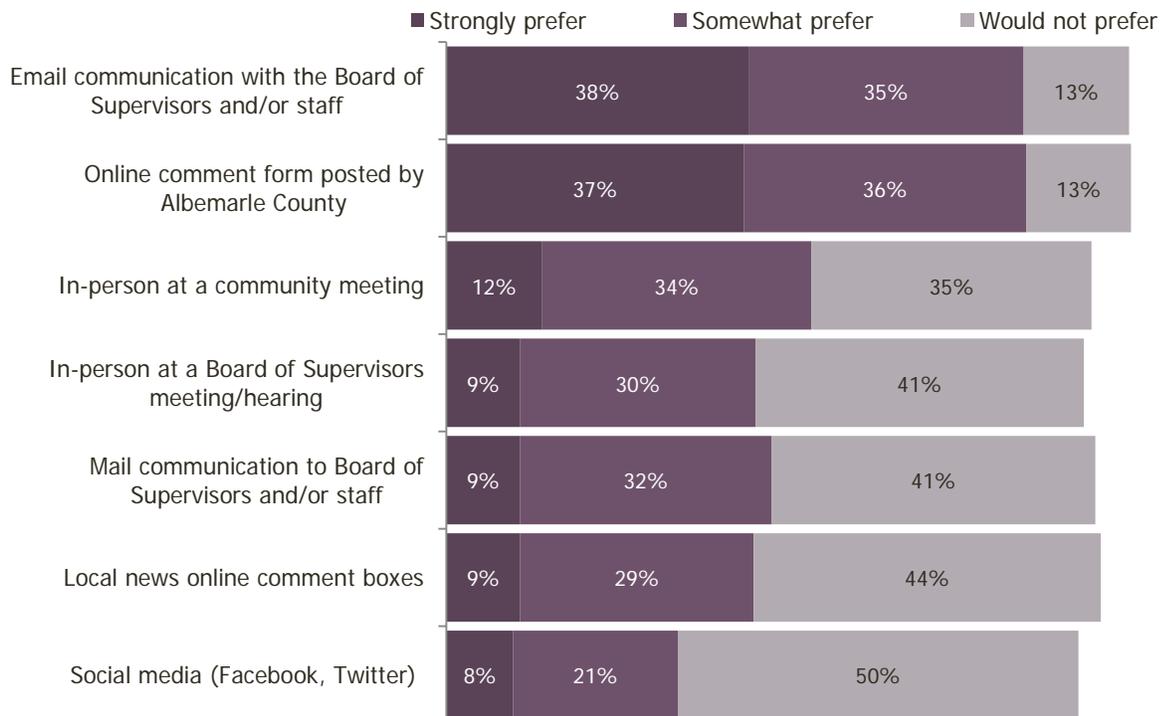


Figure 13: Preferences for Providing Comments on Local Issues

To what extent would you prefer, if at all, to provide comments on local issues in each of the following ways:



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Figure 14: Preferences for Providing Online Feedback

To what extent would you prefer, if at all, to provide comments on local issues in each of the following ways:

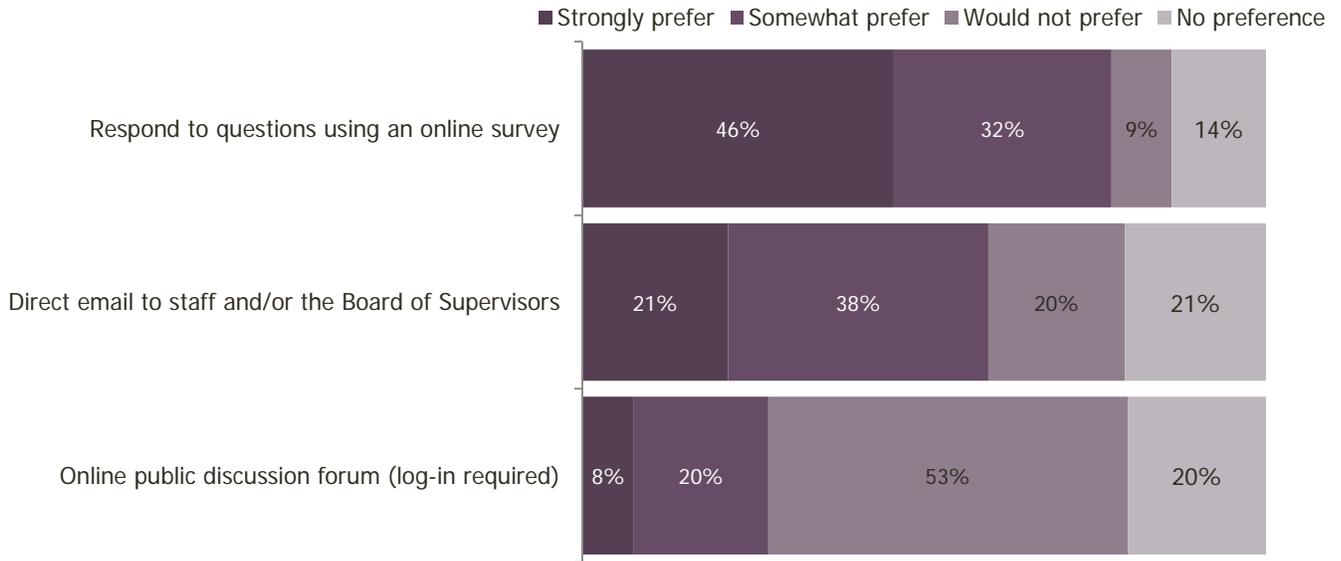
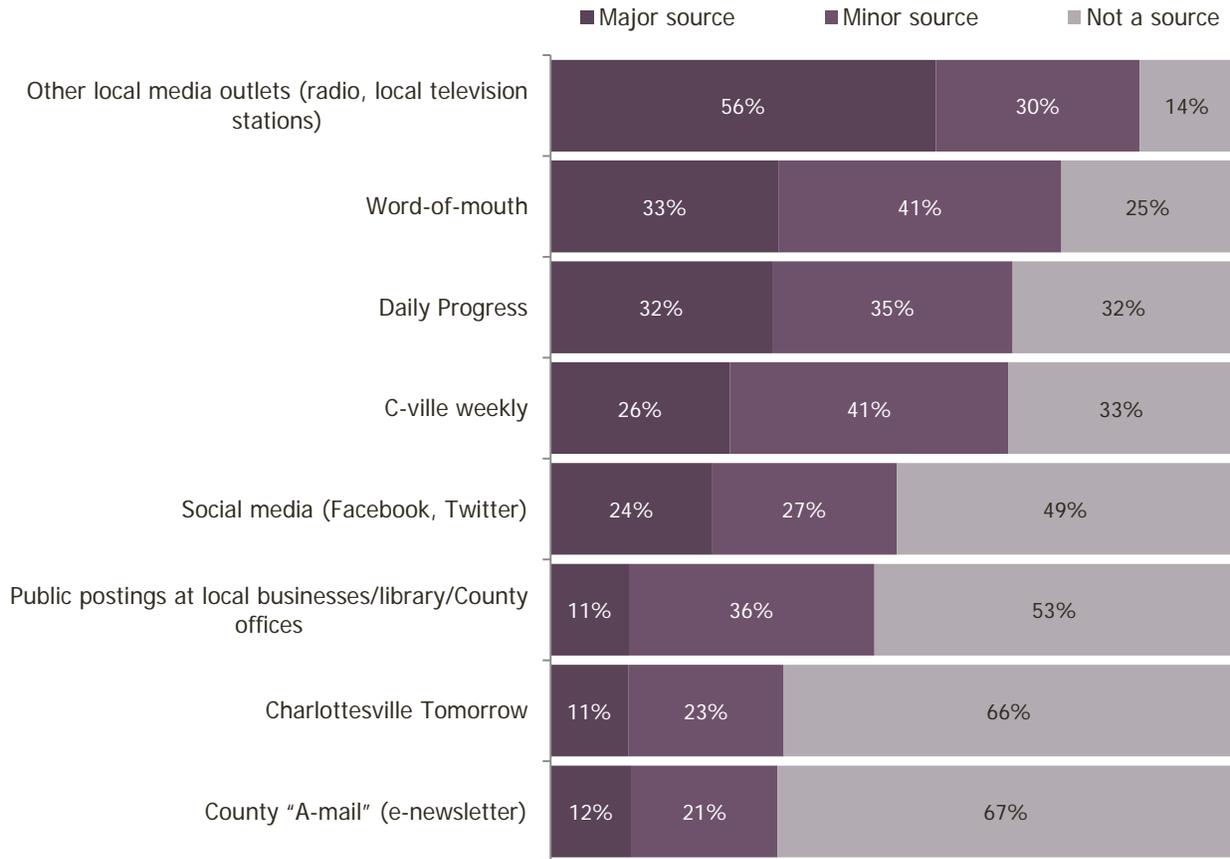


Figure 15: Source of Information

Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the County government and its activities, events and services:



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Figure 16: Frequency of Website Use

How often, if ever, in the last 12 months have you used the County's website (www.albemarle.org)?

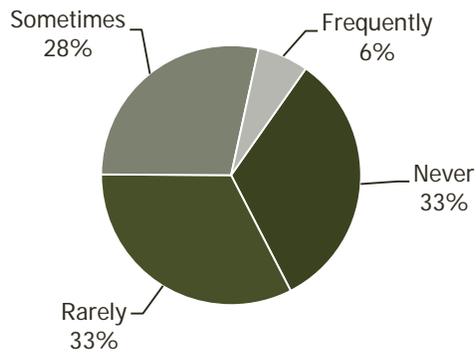
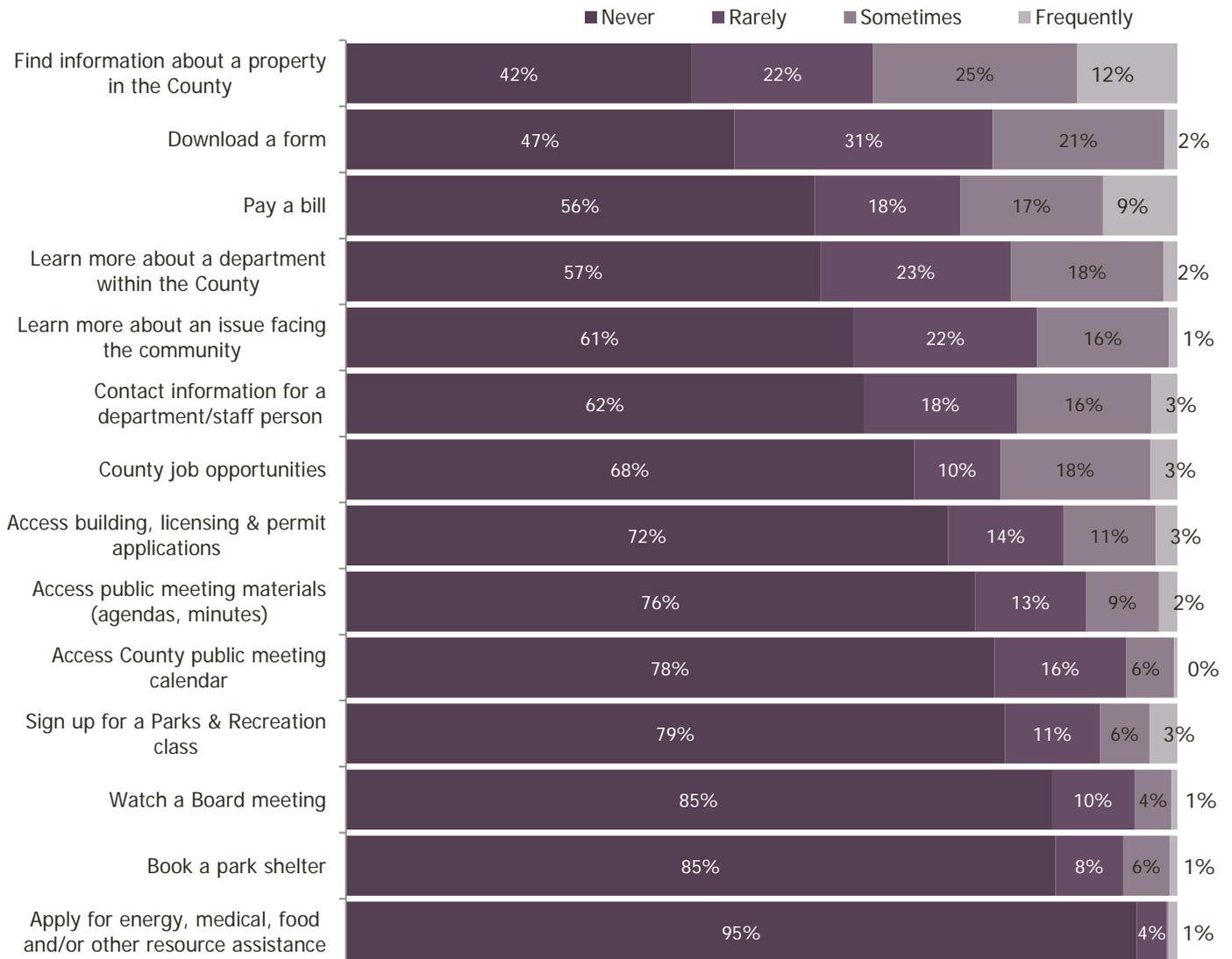


Figure 17: Uses of the County Website

How often, if ever, in the last 12 months, have you used www.albemarle.org for the following?



Conclusions

Residents desire improvements to Mobility in the community – and they're willing to pay for it.

Respondents highlighted Mobility as a focus area for the County in the coming two years. While Mobility-related services were rated similar to the nation and ratings for traffic flow increased between 2015 and 2017, the overall ease of travel and travel by alternate modes of transportation were all lower than the national average. Residents also found that the ease of walking in the community had become more difficult over the past two years. When asked about the importance of service, about 6 in 10 residents felt sidewalk/curb maintenance, new sidewalks and expansion of bicycle paths were essential or very important and half considered expansion and improvement of trails and the bus service to be important as well. Two-thirds of respondents somewhat or strongly supported paying higher taxes to fund new sidewalks, sidewalk/curb maintenance, expansion of bicycle paths and trails.

Location, location, location could be the key to improving recycling in the community.

The 2017 survey explored extensively recycling services in the County. In general, recycling received quality ratings similar to those observed across the nation, however, residents in the county recycled less frequently than their national peers. About three-quarters of residents felt recycling was an essential or very important service, and about half felt this way about curbside recycling. Residents were “lukewarm” about the prospect of paying higher taxes to fund a curbside recycling program. In regards to a new “do it yourself” recycling center, about three in five residents were very or somewhat likely to use it. Of those likely to use the new recycling center, 40% of respondents strongly preferred the Crozet area and about half at least somewhat preferred the 29 North – Hydraulic/Rio area (30% strongly preferred this area). Scottsville was the least preferred location regardless of the likelihood of using the recycling center.

County communication with residents will soar with the new wealth of information about how to connect and engage.

Residents have noticed the efforts made by the County in improving communications; ratings for public information services increased between 2015 and 2017. Yet, fewer and fewer residents are engaging with the County via public meetings; attendance of or watching a local public meeting have declined significantly since the baseline survey of 2011. Attendance of County-sponsored events is down as well. As such, Albemarle County sought greater detail about resident preference in how they interacted with County staff and Board of Supervisors.

Instead of attending in-person meetings, residents divulged they preferred to provide public comment via email communication or through an online comment form. Specific to online feedback, most residents expressed greater preference for providing comments on local issues through an online survey. Residents would not use an online public discussion forum to provide comments.

Residents relied on local media outlets for information about the County, rarely if ever using the County's website. Those who used the website tended to do so for finding information about a property, to download a form or pay a bill. Other common sources of information included the *Daily Progress* and *C-ville Weekly*, so the County may wish to expand its presence with these publications to improve communications with residents.