



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

New Braunfels, TX

Community Livability Report

2019



2955 Valmont Road Suite 300
Boulder, Colorado 80301
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863



777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
icma.org • 800-745-8780

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

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About

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

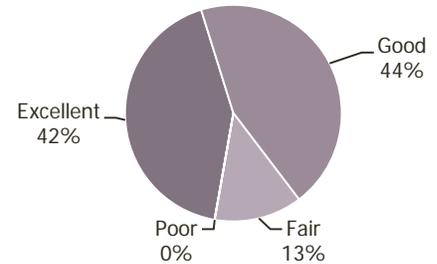
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 636 residents of the City of New Braunfels. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in New Braunfels

More than 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in New Braunfels as excellent or good. This rating declined since 2017, but was similar to ratings seen in national comparison communities (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Overall Quality of Life



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.

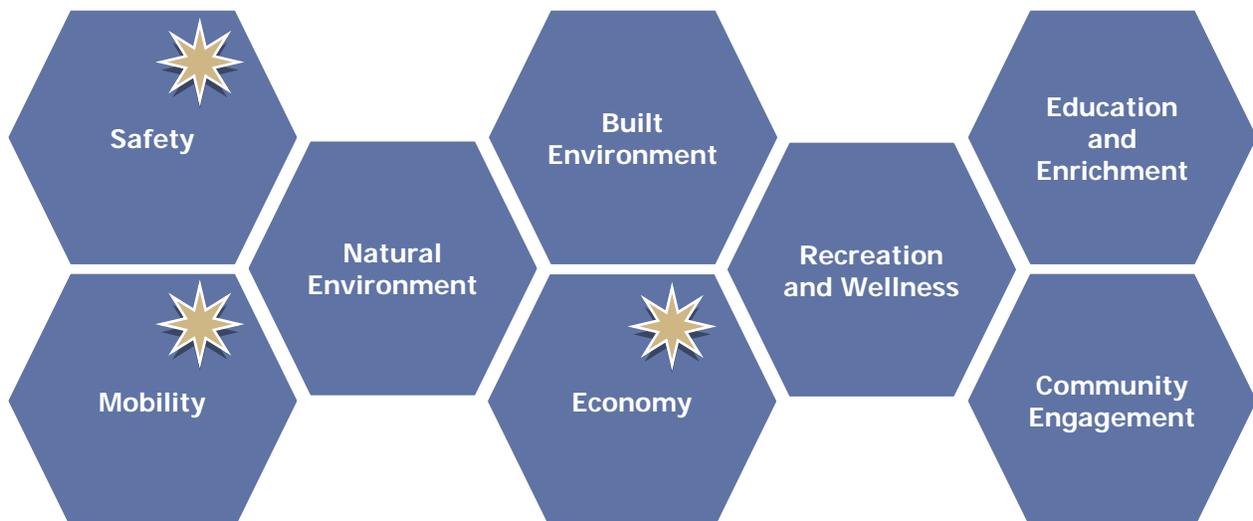
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2017, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the New Braunfels community in the coming two years, and in 2019 they also identified Mobility as a focus area. Ratings for all facets were positive and similar to the national benchmarks. 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 New Braunfels’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



Community Characteristics

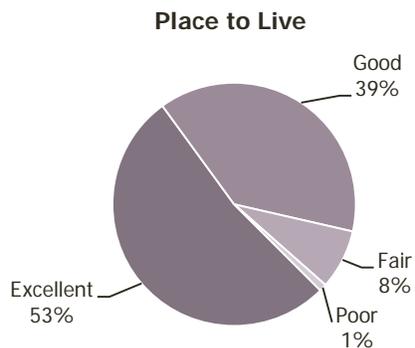
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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 New Braunfels, 91% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of New Braunfels as a place to live were similar to ratings in comparison communities nationwide.

In addition to rating the city as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including New Braunfels as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of New Braunfels and its overall appearance. All aspects were rated as excellent or good by at least 8 in 10 respondents. Most ratings were similar over time and to benchmark comparisons, but respondents were less pleased with their neighborhoods as places to live in 2019. Scores for the overall image of New Braunfels and the city as a place to retire exceeded the national benchmarks.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, most aspects of Community Characteristics tended to be scored positively at levels similar to comparison communities. Residents indicated they felt safe in New Braunfels overall, as well as in their neighborhoods and the city's downtown/commercial area, with at least 9 in 10 awarding high marks. Similarly, about 8 in 10 or more were pleased with aspects of the Natural Environment, such as cleanliness and air quality; however, scores for the overall natural environment were lower than 2017 levels.

Within the area of Mobility, respondents' ratings were more mixed. While most aspects of Mobility were scored positively by at least 4 in 10 residents and were similar to national averages, ratings for ease of travel by bicycle and by public transportation received favorable scores from less than one-third of residents. Additionally, the overall ease of travel and travel by car, as well as public parking declined in 2019, returning to levels previously noted in 2014.

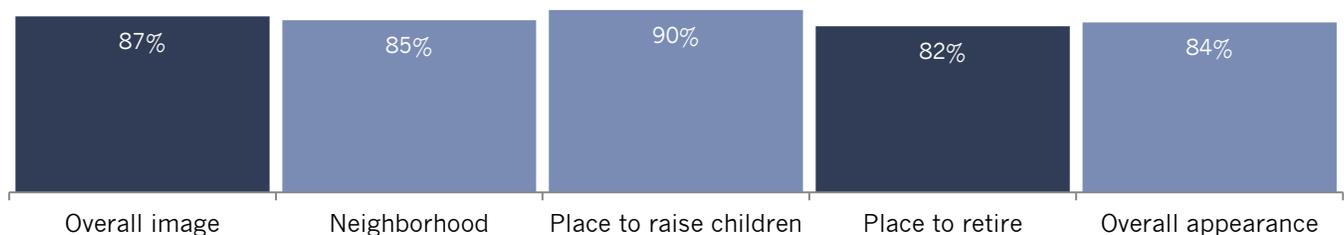


Strengths were seen within the areas of Built Environment, Economy and Recreation and Wellness, with evaluations for public places where people want to spend time, the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities, the City as a place to visit and the availability of affordable quality food eclipsing other national comparisons. Conversely, some measures of affordability had decreased since 2017, such as the variety of housing options and cost of living, though these items were still on par with municipalities nationwide.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



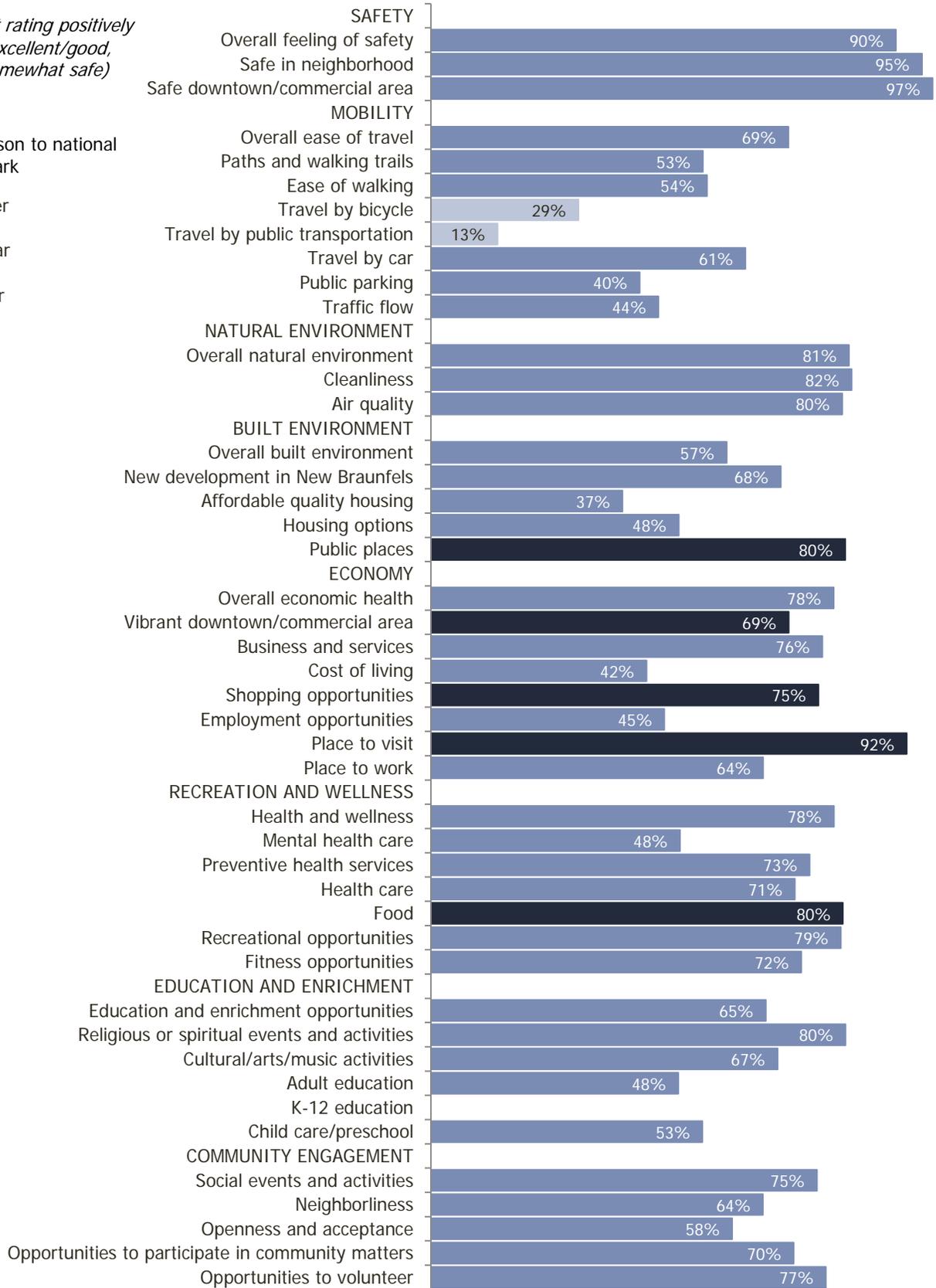
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

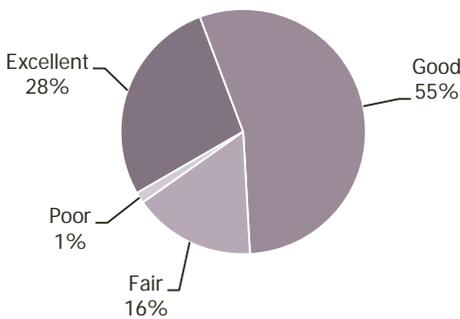
How well does the government of New Braunfels meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by New Braunfels as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Around 8 in 10 residents scored the quality of City services as excellent or good, compared to services provided by the Federal government, which were awarded positively by 4 in 10 residents. Both of these levels are similar to other communities across the nation.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of New Braunfels’s leadership and governance. Generally at least half of residents gave positive marks to these aspects, levels which were similar to the national benchmarks. However, a number of measures for government performance decreased from 2017 to 2019, including the overall direction the City is taking, the value of services for the taxes paid, the City welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of the community and treating all residents fairly.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in New Braunfels. Broadly, a majority of residents rated these services and amenities as excellent or good, and mostly similar to benchmark communities. Some of the highest scored services were fire, ambulance/EMS, garbage collection, city parks and public libraries, with about 9 in 10 survey participants praising each of these services. Another highlight was noted within the area of Recreation and Wellness, as recreation centers were scored as excellent or good by more than 8 in 10 respondents, which was higher than all previous years, and outmatched national comparisons.

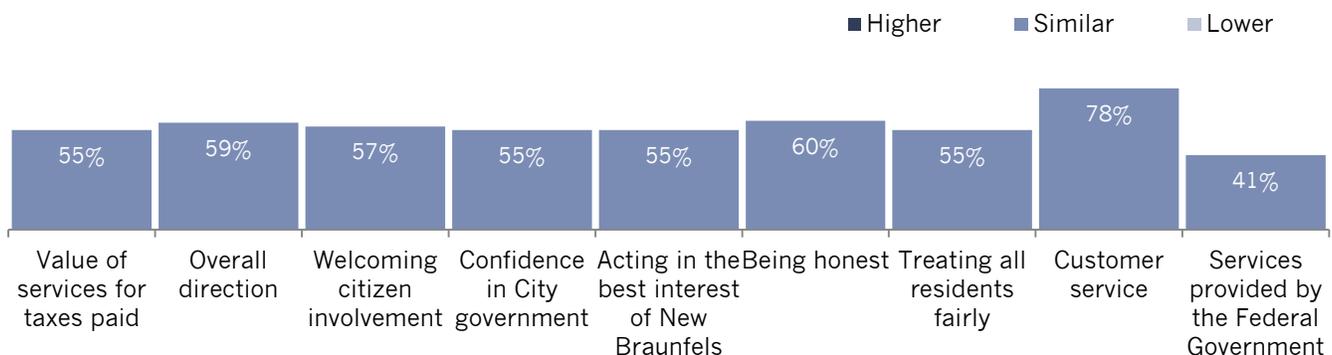
Overall Quality of City Services



The lowest rated services tended to be concentrated within Mobility, with residents’ ratings for street repair and bus or transit services assessed at levels lower than the benchmarks, with less than one-third awarding positive evaluations. However, New Braunfels’ respondents awarded higher marks to both of these ratings in 2019, revealing the highest scores since the first survey of resident opinion in 2012.

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

Comparison to national benchmark



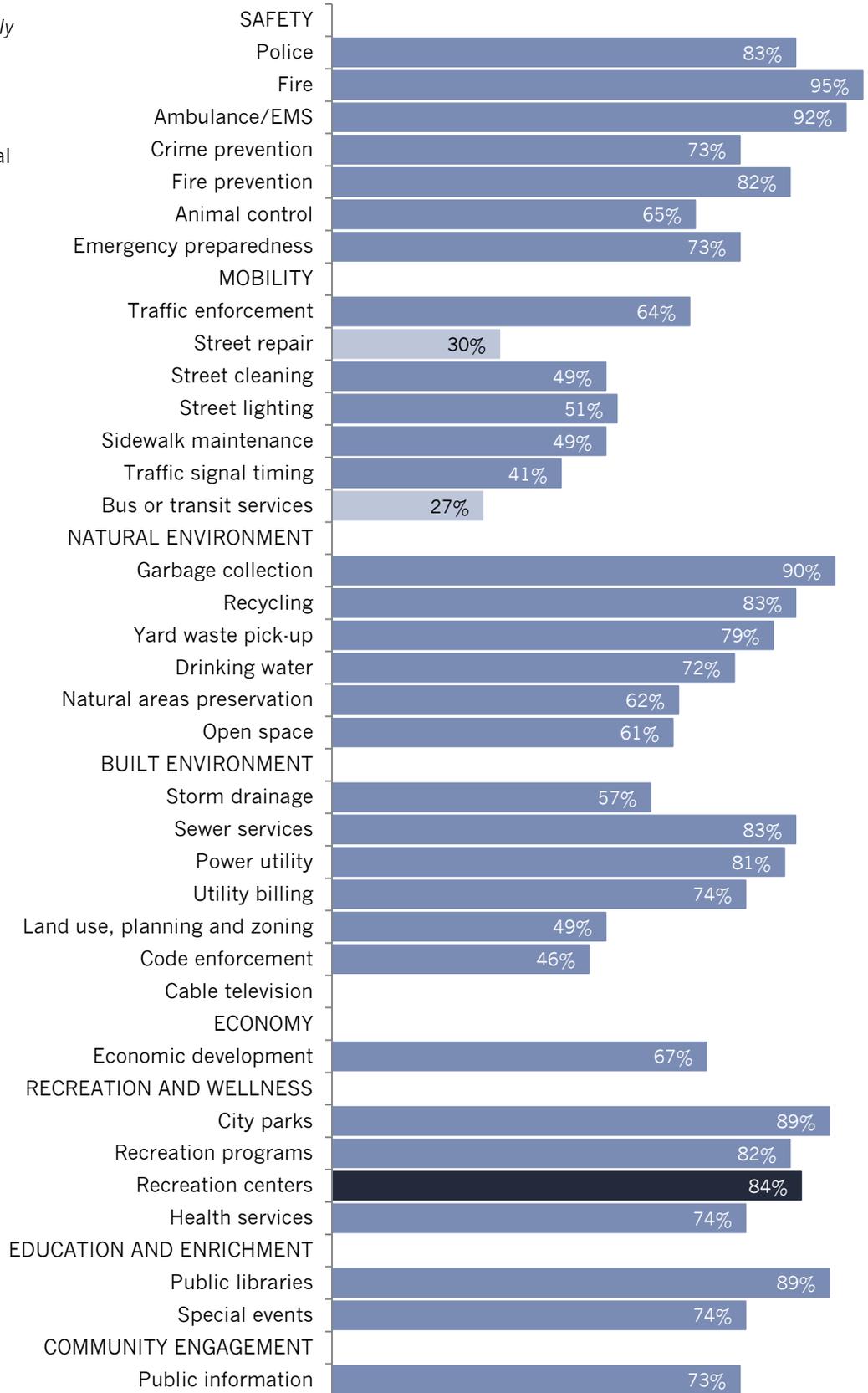
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

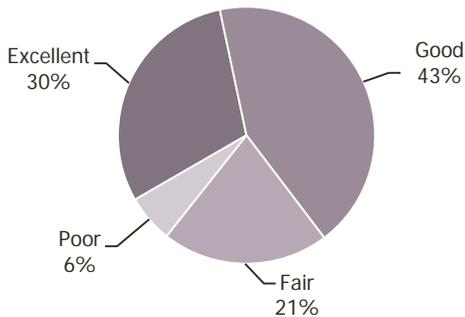
Are the residents of New Braunfels connected to the community and each other?

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. Nearly three-quarters of residents rated the sense of community in New Braunfels as excellent or good, a proportion which is similar to benchmark communities, but had declined since 2017. Similarly, around 9 in 10 residents would recommend New Braunfels as a place to live and planned to remain in the community for the next five years, though respondents were less likely to recommend the community in 2019 than in previous years.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Participation rates among New Braunfels' residents varied, but tended to be on par with peer communities overall. Survey participants were particularly engaged in green behaviors, such as conserving water (a level that surpassed national levels) and recycling at home. Respondents also reported high rates of City park visitation and interacting with their neighbors. Further, more respondents indicated they had voted in a local election and had used the recreation center in 2019 than in 2017.

New Braunfels residents were less likely to use public transportation or walk or bike instead of driving (a level that decreased since 2017) than their national peers. In 2019, community members also reported lower levels of taking steps to make their homes more energy efficient or being optimistic that the local economy will have a positive impact on their income in the next six months. They also indicated higher levels of housing cost stress compared to 2017.

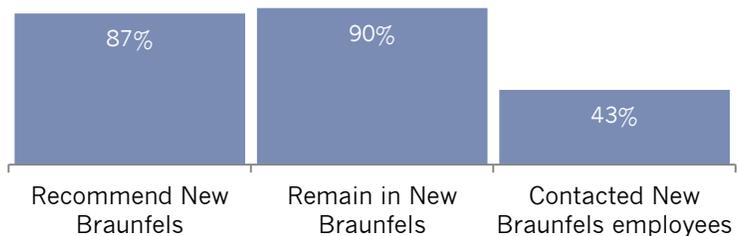
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



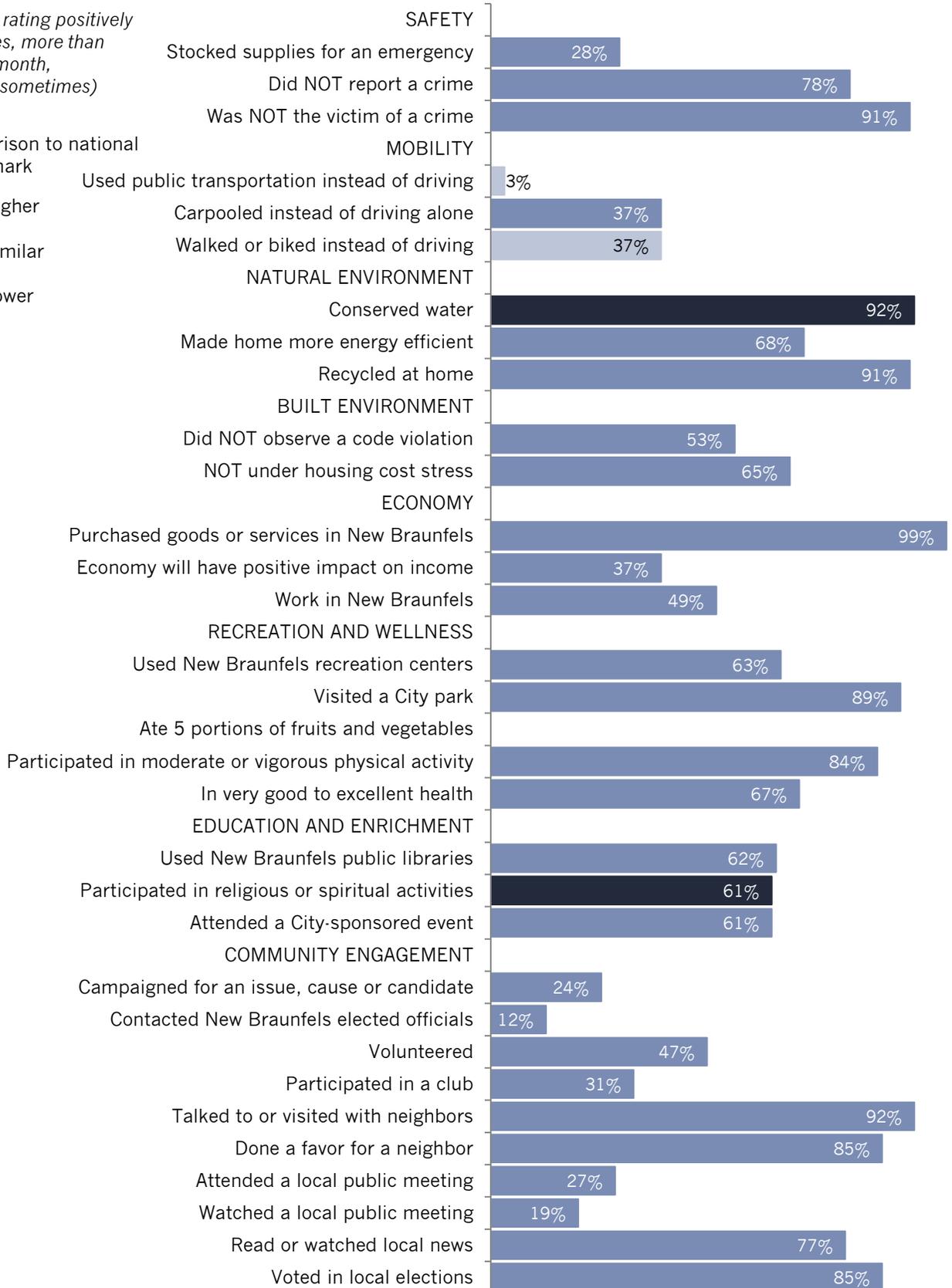
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



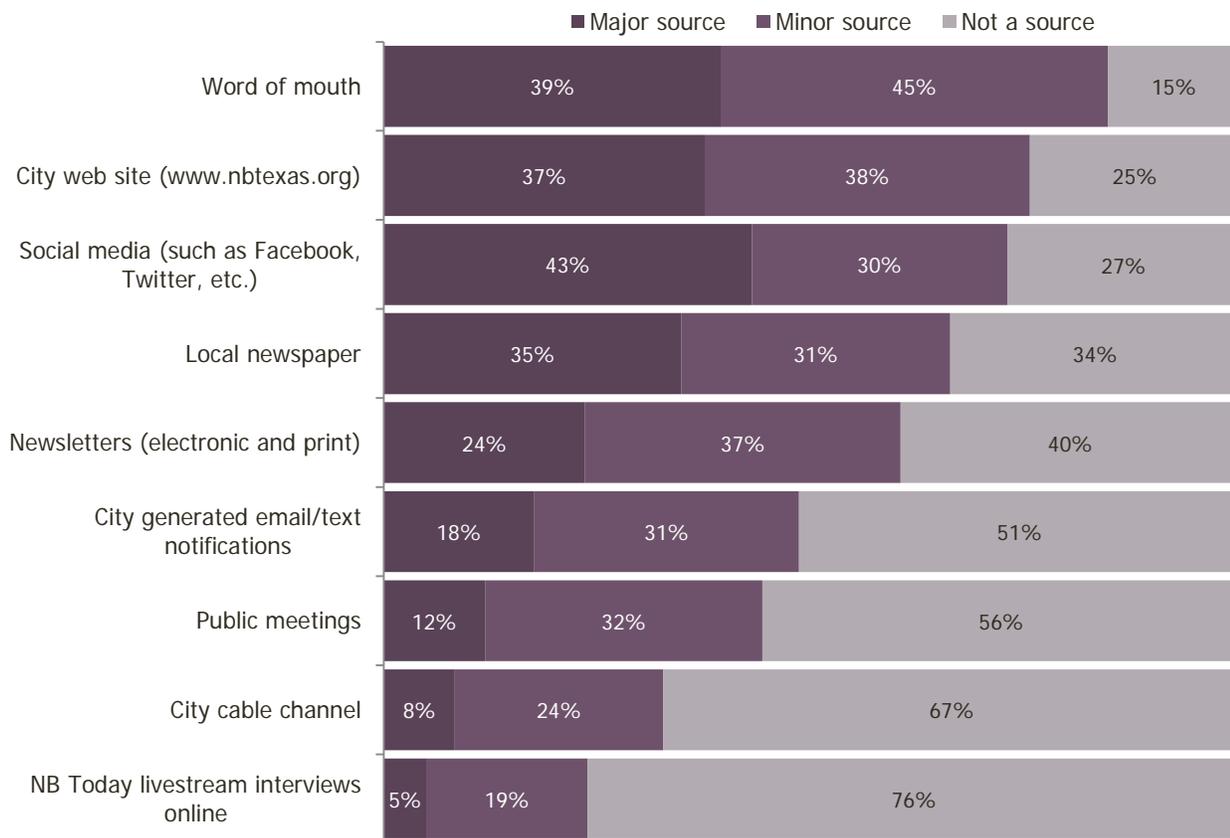
Special Topics

The City of New Braunfels included two questions of special interest on The NCS, asking residents about their preference for obtaining information about the City and priorities for the community to maintain a high quality of life.

About 8 in 10 residents stated they relied on word of mouth to obtain information about the City of New Braunfels, and at least 7 in 10 used the City web site and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Less than 4 in 10 community members indicated they used the City cable channel or NB Today livestream interviews online as a major or minor source of information.

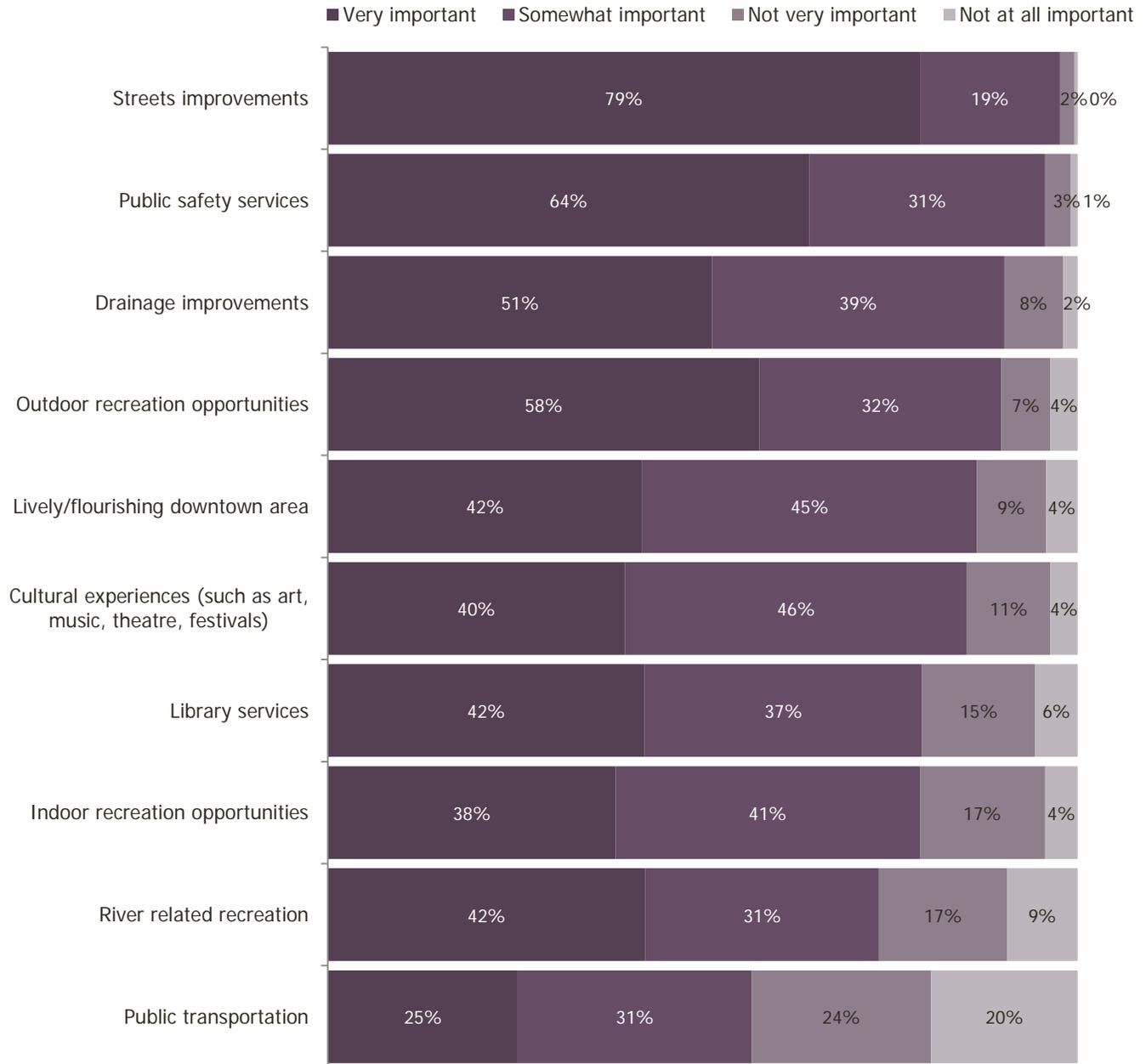
Figure 4: Sources of Information

Please indicate whether you use each of the following as a major source, a minor source or not a source of information about the City of New Braunfels:



Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of several items to their quality of life in New Braunfels. At least 9 in 10 residents indicated street improvements, public safety services and drainage improvements were very or somewhat important to their quality of life. Nearly all other areas, such as outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities, a lively/flourishing downtown area and cultural experiences, were at least somewhat important to 6 in 10 or more residents. Only one-quarter of respondents felt that public transportation was very important and another one-third felt it was somewhat important to the quality of life in the community.

Figure 5: Importance to Quality of Life
How important, if at all, are the following to your quality of life in New Braunfels?



Conclusions

Participants are generally pleased with Mobility, but see areas for continued improvement.

In 2019, residents felt that Mobility was a top focus area for the City of New Braunfels in the next two years and often gave ratings that were similar to comparison communities. Overall ease of travel was scored positively by about 7 in 10 residents and at least half were pleased with the availability of paths and walking trails, ease of walking and travel by car (though ratings for the overall ease of travel and travel by car declined since 2017). Half of respondents or more awarded high marks to traffic enforcement, street cleaning and lighting, and sidewalk maintenance services. In 2019, scores for traffic enforcement, street repair, and bus or transit services improved over time. Conversely, assessments for street repair, bus or transit services, ease travel by bicycle and by public transportation received positive ratings by less than one-third of residents, and lagged behind national averages. Use of alternative modes of transportation also tended to be lower than peers across the nation. Street improvements were identified as the most important aspect to the quality of life in New Braunfels; yet, only half of survey participants indicated public transportation was very or somewhat important, suggesting that public transit might not be a priority.

Residents identified Economy as a main focus area and applaud the opportunities to shop and visit.

Evaluations of Economy-related aspects tended to be on par or exceed scores seen in other communities; at least 7 in 10 residents awarded positive scores to the overall economic health, the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, business and service establishments, shopping opportunities, New Braunfels as a place to visit and public places where people want to spend time. Ratings for public places, the vibrant downtown, shopping opportunities and the city as a place to visit eclipsed national averages.

The results did reveal that residents may have some concerns regarding the affordability of the community. Respondents' evaluations for the cost of living, variety of housing options and the city as a place to work declined since 2017, as did scores for economic development. Fewer residents were optimistic about the impact of the local economy on their income in the next six months, while more were under housing cost stress in 2019, though these levels were still comparable to their peers nationwide. At least 8 in 10 residents felt that having a lively/flourishing downtown area and cultural experiences, such as art, music, theatre and festivals, were very or somewhat important to their quality of life. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that New Braunfels residents continue to prioritize the economy, with 9 in 10 stating this is an essential or very important area of focus for the City in the next two years.

Residents value Recreation and Wellness.

Many residents rated aspects of Recreation and Wellness positively and similarly to national comparison communities; about 8 in 10 were pleased with overall opportunities for health and wellness, recreational opportunities and the availability of affordable quality food (which exceeded averages across the country). Moreover, all recreation-related amenities, such as City parks, recreation programs and recreation centers, were assessed as excellent or good by about 8 in 10. Furthermore, participants' scores for recreation centers increased to the highest levels since the City started gathering resident feedback in 2012, surpassing national averages. Use of recreation centers also increased from 2017 to 2019. When asked about priorities for their quality of life in New Braunfels, about 8 in 10 or more respondents felt that outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities were important and around 7 in 10 felt similarly about river-related recreation.