

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Marin County, CA
Community Livability Report

2018



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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Marin 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 695 residents of Marin County. 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 Marin County

About 9 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Marin County as excellent or good. This rating is 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.

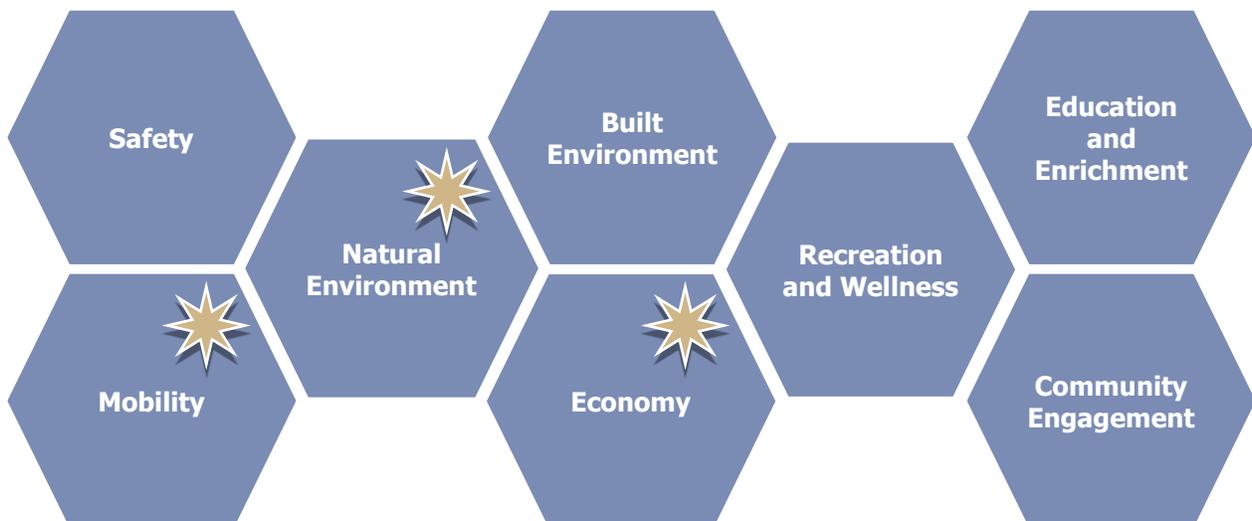
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Economy, Mobility and Natural Environment as priorities for the Marin County community in the coming two years. Marin County’s ratings, when summarized by facet, were similar to the nation in all areas. 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 Marin 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 Marin County, about 9 in 10 residents rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Marin 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 Marin County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Marin County and its overall appearance. More than half of residents rated Marin County positively as a place to retire, a level similar to that in other communities. At least 4 in 5 residents rated the overall image of Marin County as excellent or good, and other rated aspects of community quality were highly rated by about 9 in 10 residents. These levels were all similar to the national benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Safety ratings were high with over 9 in 10 residents giving positive ratings to the overall feeling of safety and indicating that they felt safe in their neighborhoods. Natural Environment also received strong ratings with at least 80% of respondents giving excellent or good ratings to each aspect.



Other Community Characteristics rated favorably by at least 8 in 10 residents included health and wellness opportunities, fitness opportunities, recreation opportunities, education and enrichment, religious/spiritual opportunities, K-12 education, volunteer opportunities and Marin County as a place to visit. The lowest rated aspects were cost of living, affordable quality housing, housing options and travel by public transportation. Each of these characteristics was rated as excellent or good by fewer than one-fourth of residents.

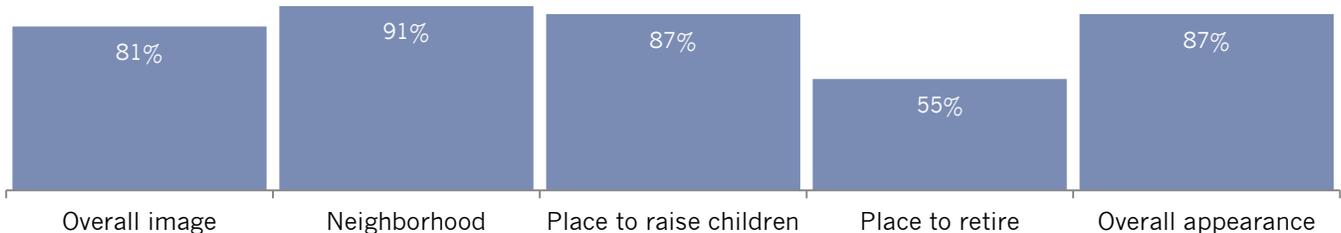
When compared to the benchmarks, Marin County scored higher than the nation for 8 aspects, below for 10 and similar to national averages for 25 Community Characteristics.

Aspects where Marin County exceeded the nation related to health: health and wellness, recreation and fitness opportunities, the natural environment and paths and walking trails. Economic aspects of Marin County also outscored the nation including shopping opportunities and the County as a place to visit. Community aspects falling below the national benchmark clustered in the areas of the Built Environment and Mobility.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



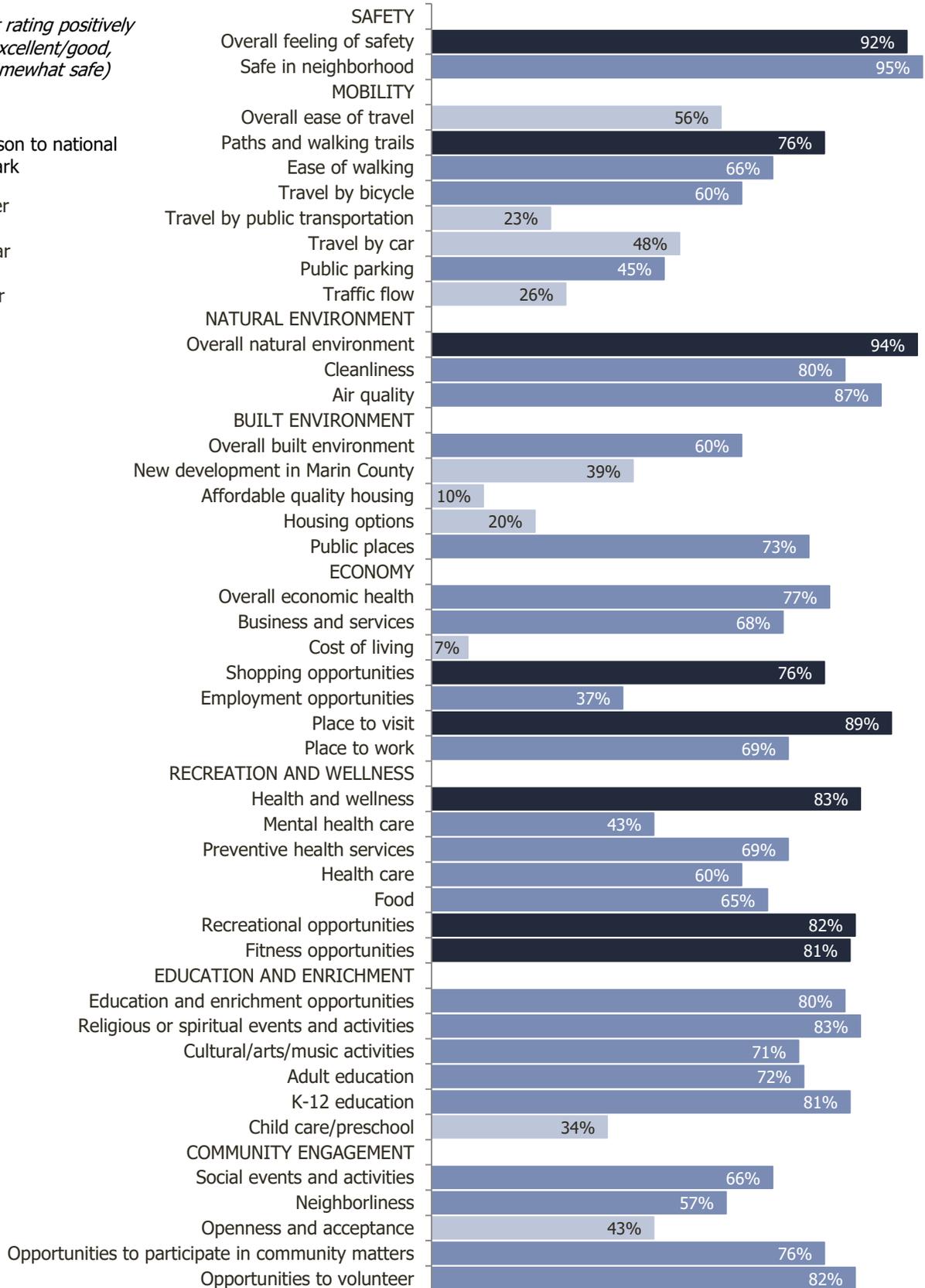
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



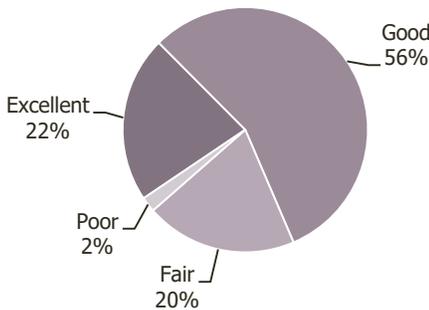
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Marin County as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Nearly 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of County services as excellent or good, a level which was similar to that in comparison communities. Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Marin County’s leadership and governance. Most aspects were positively rated by about half of residents. Customer service was positively rated by nearly 8 in 10 residents, and services provided by the Federal Government by about 1 in 3 residents. All of these aspects were rated similarly to comparison communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Marin County. Most services and amenities were positively evaluated at levels similar to the national benchmarks. The highest rated services fell into the facets of Safety, Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness. Street repair and sidewalk maintenance were rated at levels lower than the national averages (by 30% and 40% of residents, respectively). Approximately 85% of residents positively evaluated all aspects of Natural Environment. Drinking water, natural areas preservation, and open space were each scored higher than the national benchmarks.

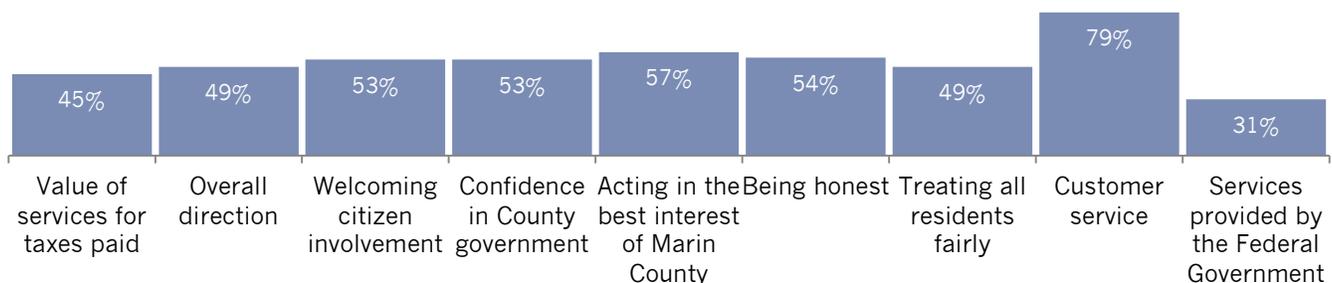
Overall Quality of County Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



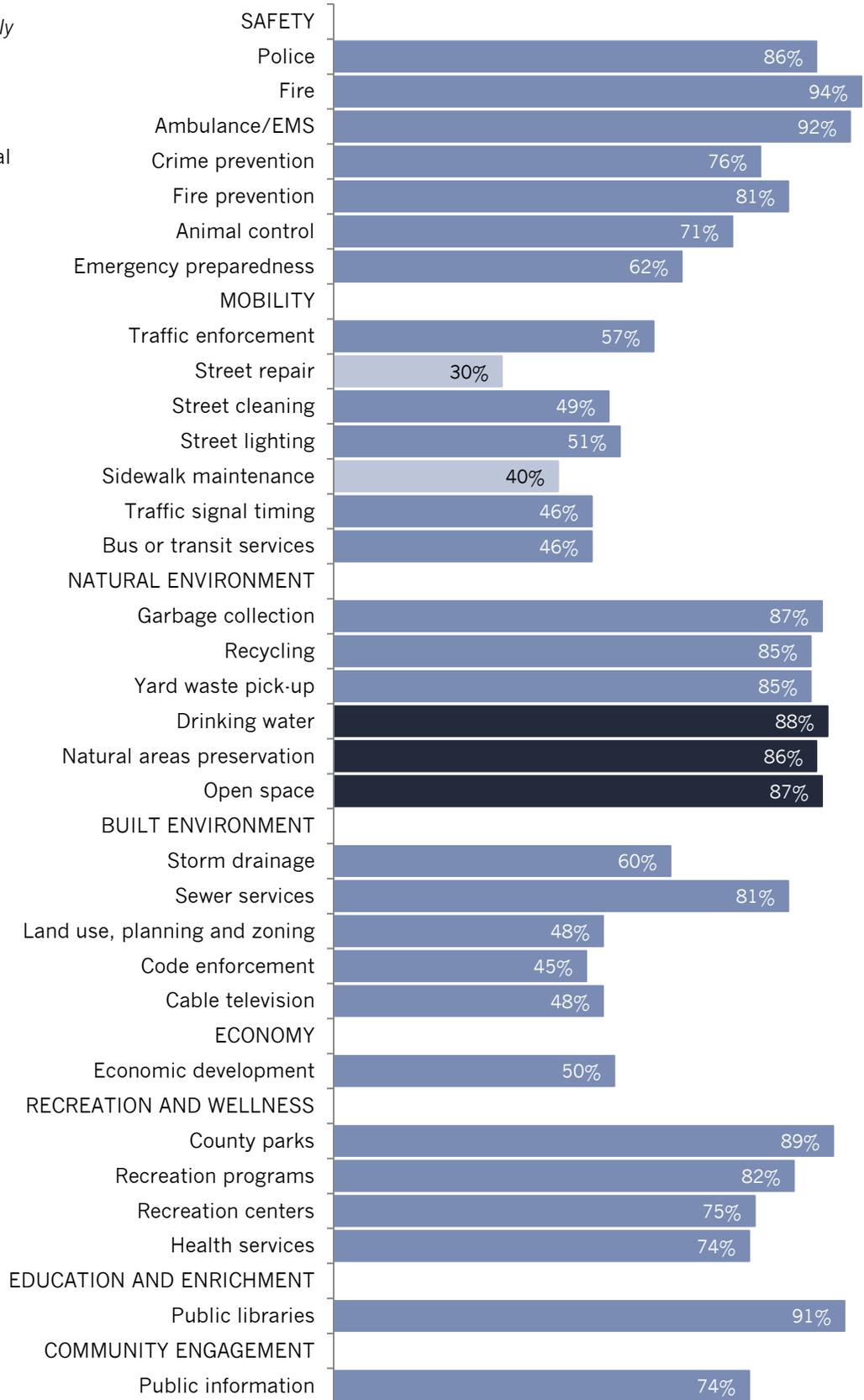
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

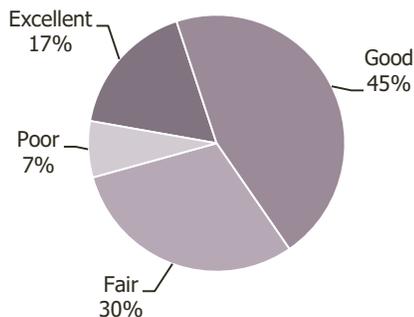
Are the residents of Marin County connected to the community and each other?

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. More than 60% of residents positively scored the sense of community in Marin County, a level which was similar to 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. Broadly, reported rates Participation were similar to or higher than rates reported by residents in comparison jurisdictions. The proportion of residents experienced housing cost stress in Marin County was greater than the proportion found in other communities.

Marin County reported high levels of Community Engagement, several reported rates were higher than the national averages. About one-third of residents campaigned for an issue or participated in a club. More than half of residents volunteered, and more than 9 in 10 residents voted in a local election. More Marin County residents reported that they had stocked supplies for an emergency, used public transportation instead of driving, conserved water or visited a County park than residents in comparison jurisdictions across the nation.

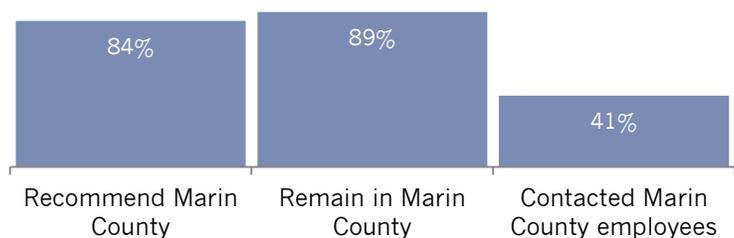
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



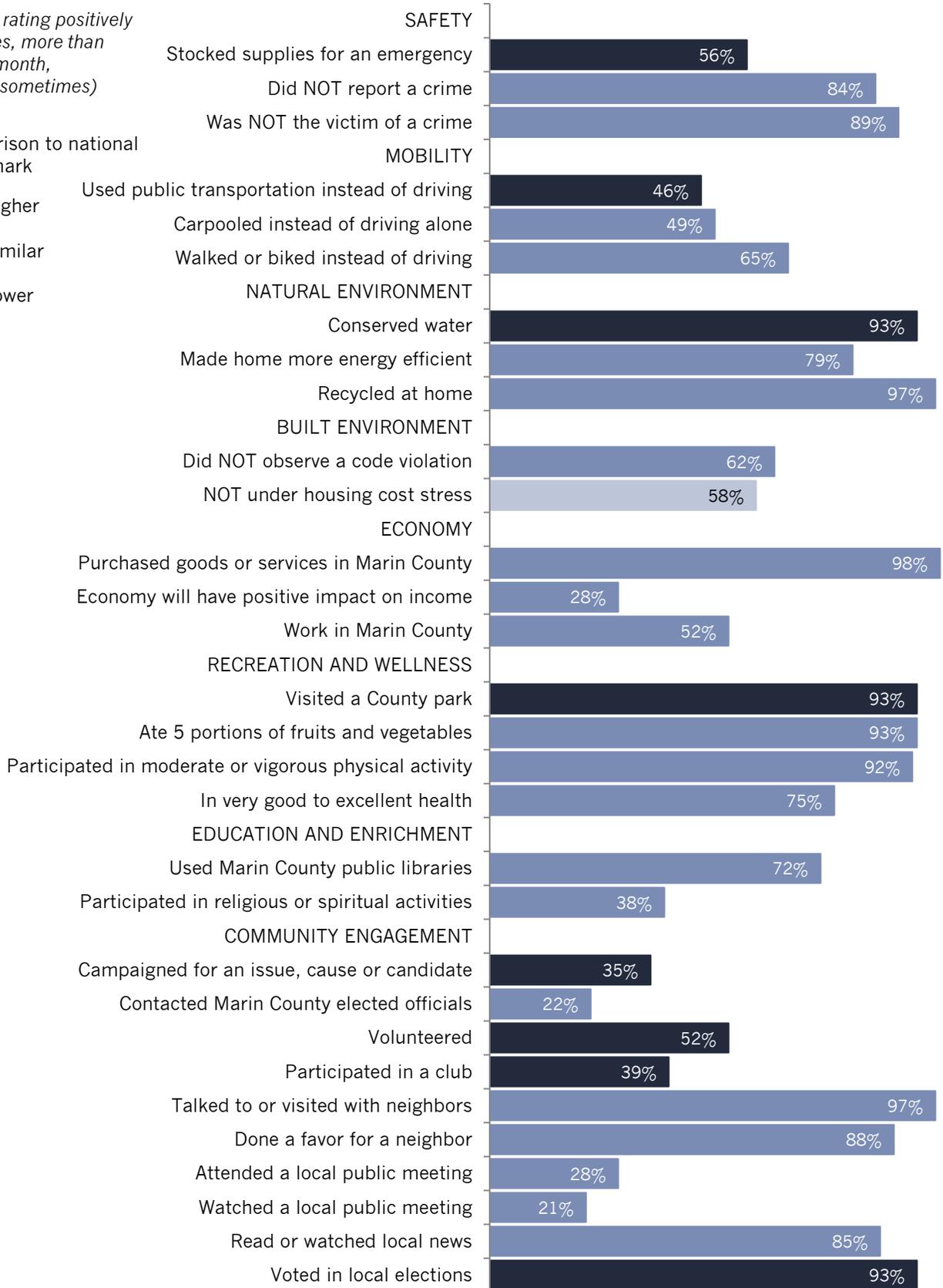
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



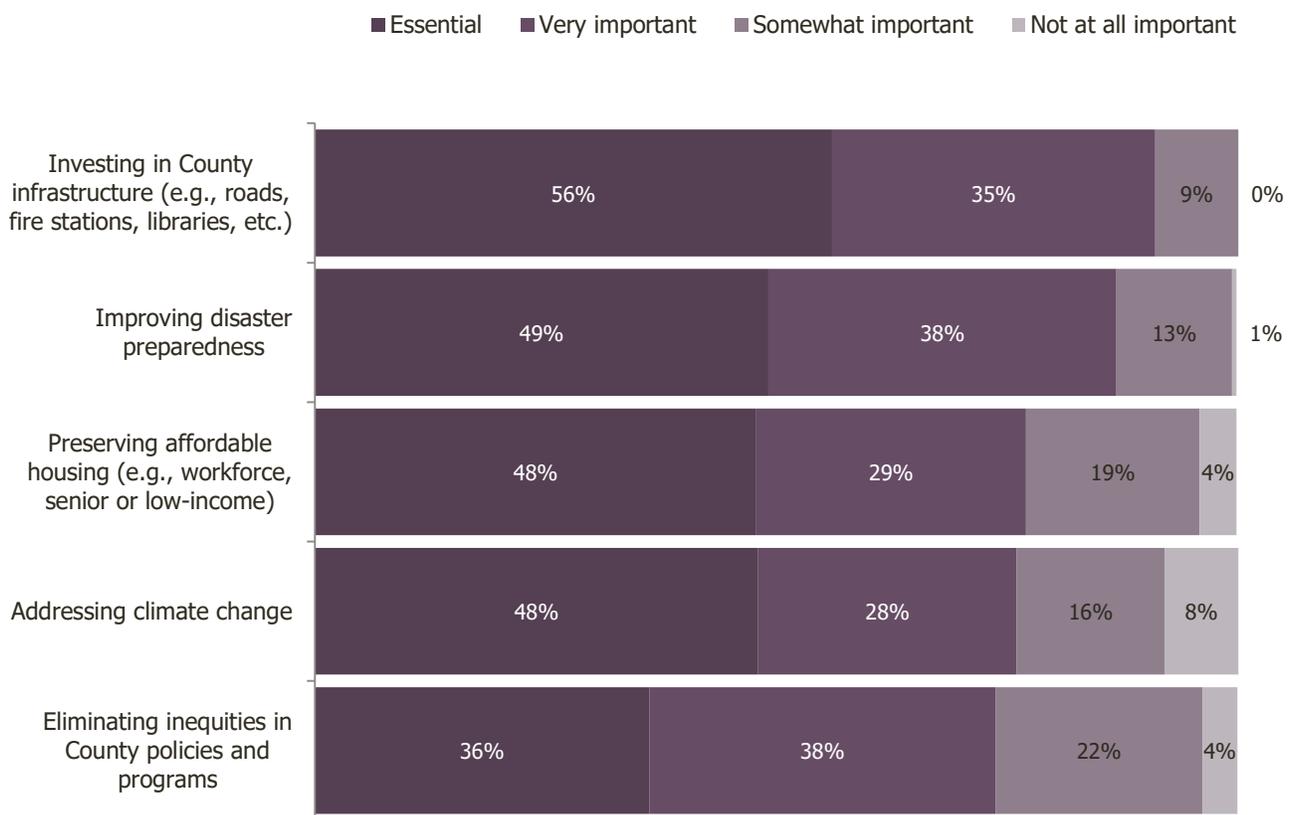
Special Topics

Marin County included five questions of special interest on The NCS. These questions included community priorities, wildfire safety, information sources and climate change action.

Residents were asked to rate the importance of several areas of community focus for the Marin County government. About 9 in 10 residents felt that investing in County infrastructure and improving disaster preparedness was essential or very important. Approximately three-quarters of residents rated preserving affordable housing, addressing climate change and eliminating inequities in County policies and programs as essential or very important.

Figure 4: Focus Areas

Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Marin County government to focus on each of the following in the coming two years:

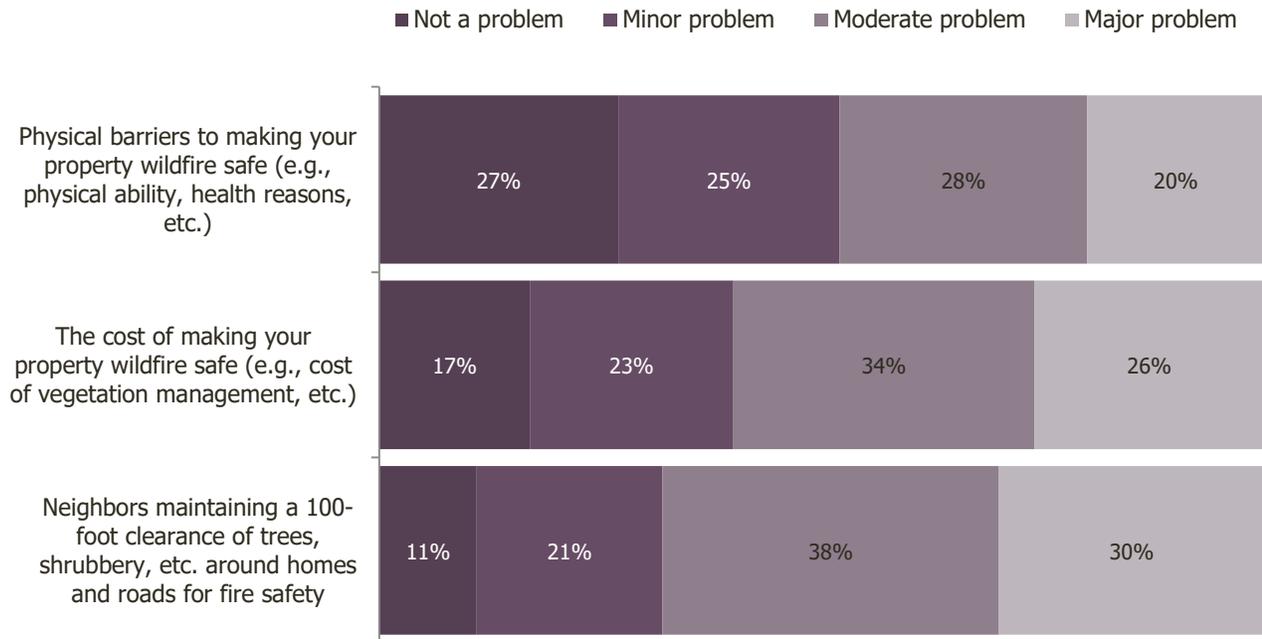


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Residents were then asked about a series of potential barriers to increasing the wildfire safety for their property. The largest barrier to wildfire safety reported by residents was vegetation in neighboring homes. About 7 in 10 residents felt their neighbors maintaining a 100-foot clearance around their homes was a major or moderate problem. Six in 10 respondents rated the cost of making their property wildfire safe as a major or moderate problem. Nearly half of residents reported physical barriers to making their property wildfire safe as problematic.

Figure 5: Barriers to Wildfire Safety

Please indicate the extent to which you think each of the following are a problem:

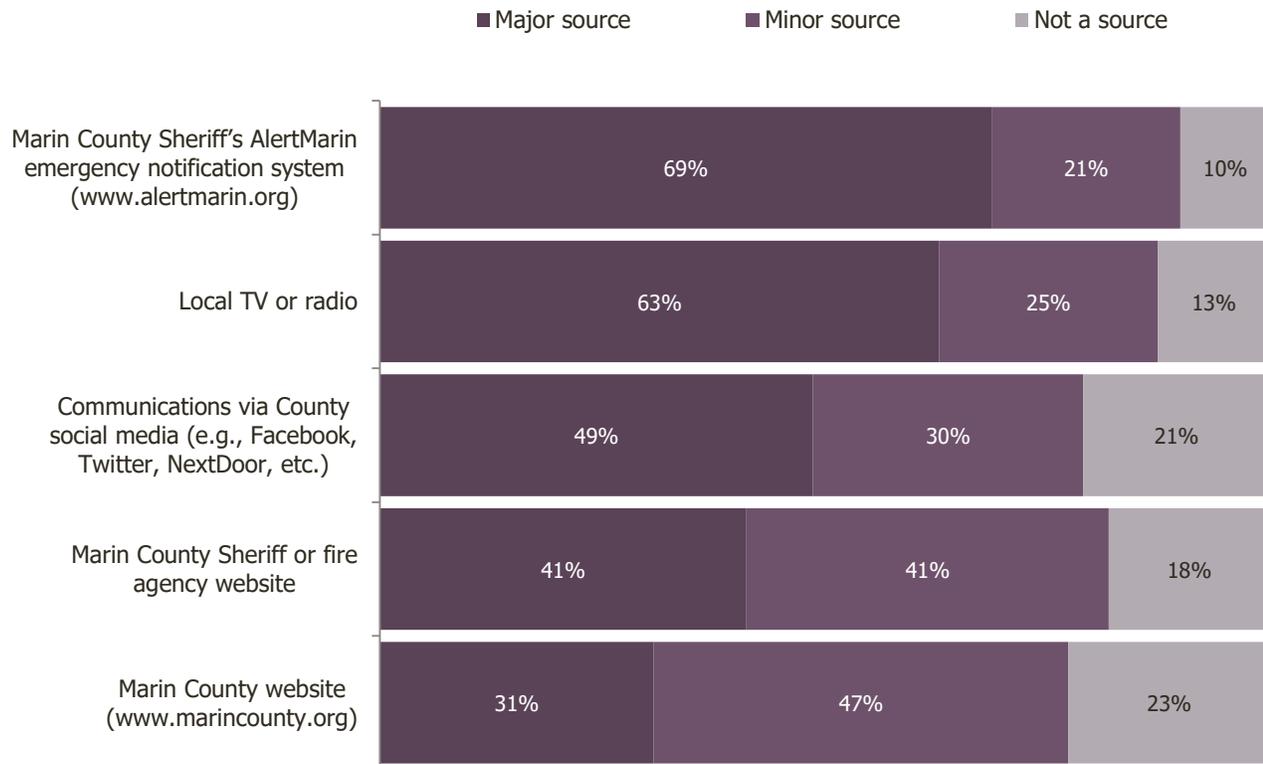


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Residents were asked about sources of information they would consider using during an emergency. The biggest source of information identified was the Marin County Sheriff’s AlertMarin emergency notification system, identified as a minor or major source by 9 in 10 residents. A similar number of residents identified local TV or radio as a source of information. Approximately 8 in 10 residents reported communications via County social media, the Marin County Sheriff or fire agency website or the Marin County website were at least minor sources of information they would turn to during an emergency.

Figure 6: Sources of Information During an Emergency

Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information during an emergency:

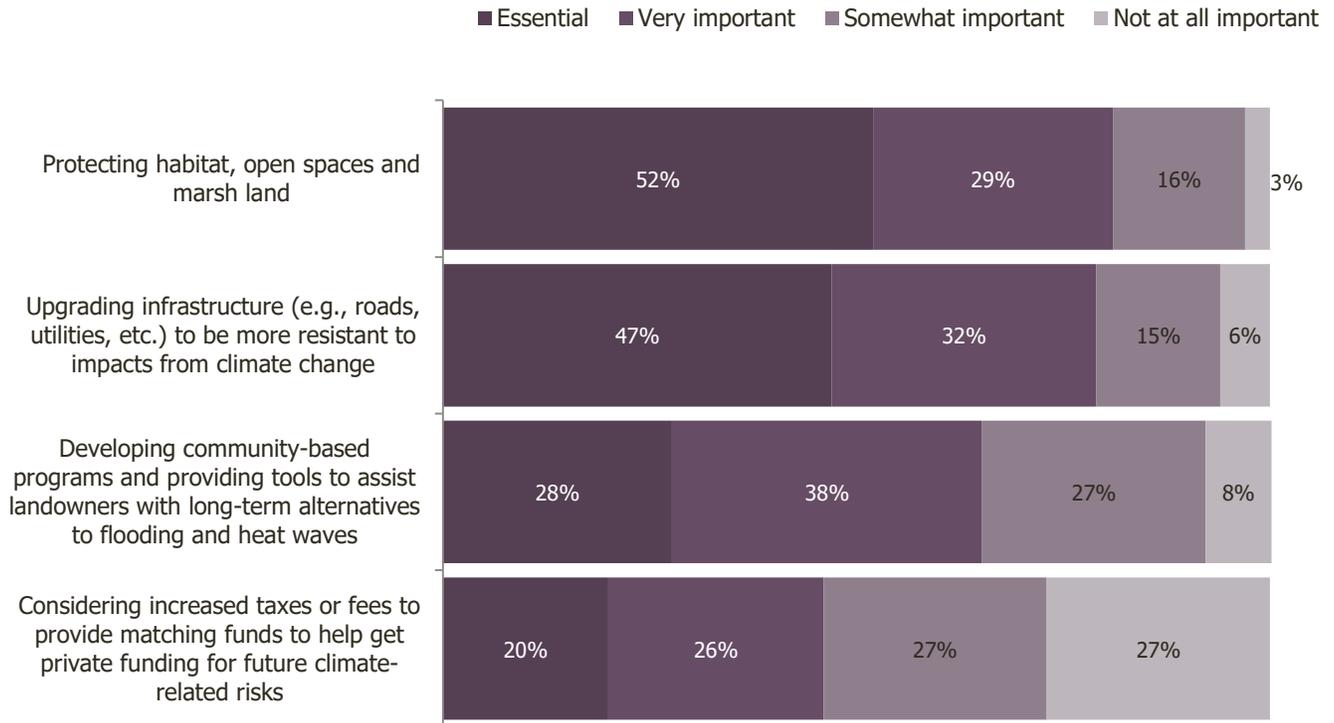


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In addition, residents were asked to rate the importance of specific actions the County could take to address climate change. About 8 in 10 residents rated protecting habitat, open spaces and marsh land and upgrading infrastructure to be essential or very important. Two-thirds of residents felt developing community-based programs was essential or very important. Slightly fewer than half of survey respondents felt considering increased taxes or fees to address climate change was essential or very important.

Figure 7: Actions to Address Climate Change

Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for Marin County to take each of the following actions to address climate change:

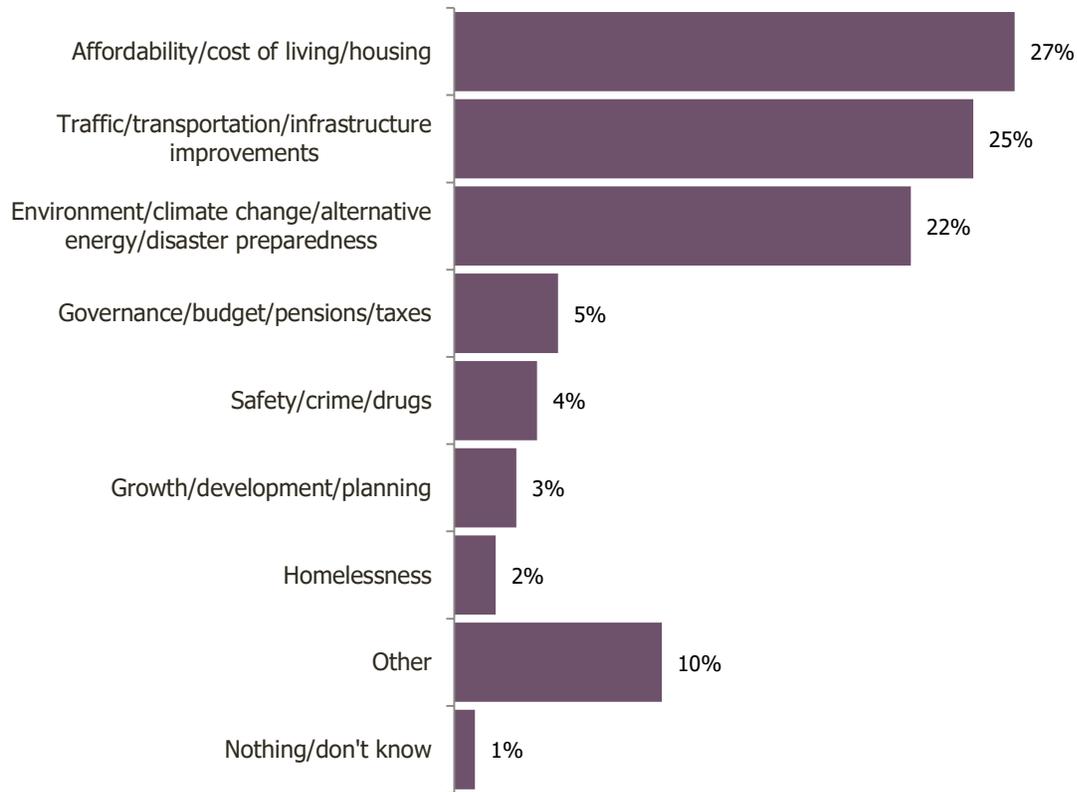


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The final custom question asked residents to say, in their own words, what they thought the single biggest priority Marin County should focus on in the next two years. Responses were open-ended and coded by topic and the frequencies of response are listed below. (Full comments are presented as they were written by respondents in *The NCS Supplemental Online Results* under separate cover). The top three priorities listed were related to cost of living, mobility (particularly traffic) and the preservation of the natural environment.

Figure 8: Biggest Priority

What do you think is the single biggest priority Marin County Government should focus on in the next two years?



Conclusions

Residents enjoy a positive and healthy quality of life in Marin County

Nearly 9 in 10 residents evaluated the overall quality of life in Marin County as excellent or good. A similar proportion of residents highly rated Marin County as a place to live, their neighborhoods as a place to live and the County as a place to raise children. More than 8 in 10 respondents would recommend Marin County as a place to live and 90% planned to remain in the county for the next five years.

Contributing to the county's quality of life, the opportunities for recreation, fitness and health were rated as excellent or good by about 8 in 10 residents, a score significantly above the national average. More than 90% of residents reported regularly participating in moderate or rigorous exercise and eating at least 5 fruits and vegetables a day. Marin County residents visited County parks more frequently than their national counterparts.

Marin County's Economy is strong but affordability is a challenge

Many aspects of the county's Economy received strong, positive assessments by residents. Marin County as a place to visit was rated as excellent or good by about 9 in 10 residents. The overall economic health of the county and shopping opportunities received favorable ratings by more than three-fourths of residents. Marin County as a place to work and the businesses and services offered were rated as excellent or good by about 70% of survey respondents. When compared to the benchmarks, shopping opportunities and Marin County as a place to visit were rated higher than the national average.

However, as with most attractive communities, one of the biggest challenges was affordability. The cost of living was rated as excellent or good by only 7% of residents, a level that was lower than other communities across the nation. Likely affecting the lower cost of living assessments was the lower ratings for affordable quality housing. Only 1 in 10 residents positively scored the availability of affordable quality housing, and 1 in 5 residents positively scored the variety of housing options. About 2 in 5 residents experienced housing cost stress, a number higher than the nation. All of these housing cost indicators were lower than found in benchmark communities. Affordability and housing was the number one topic area cited by respondents as a priority for improvement in the next two years.

Marin County's Natural Environment is highly regarded

Natural Environment was identified through this survey as an important area of focus for the County. The overall quality of the natural environment was rated as excellent or good by more than 9 in 10 residents, a proportion that was higher than seen in communities across the nation. About 90% of respondents rated the air quality positively and 8 in 10 felt the cleanliness of the county was excellent or good.

All government services related to Natural Environment were scored positively by at least 80% of survey respondents; natural area preservation, open space, and drinking water received ratings above the nation.

Additionally, a higher proportion of residents conserved water than in other communities. Nearly 8 in 10 residents reported making their home more energy efficient, and 97% of residents reported having recycled; these rates of participation were on par with peer communities.

While automobile traffic is a challenge in Marin County, pedestrian and bicycle travel shine

Residents valued walking and biking paths in Marin County. Paths and trails were rated as excellent or good by more than three-quarters of respondents, a level that was higher than in comparison communities. Ease of walking and travel by bicycle also were positively evaluated by about two-thirds of residents.

However, travel by car and public transportation poses challenges in Marin County. Travel by car was scored as excellent or good by just less than half of respondents. Traffic flow and travel by public transportation was positively scored by only about one-quarter of respondents. These ratings were all below the nation. In terms of local government services, sidewalk maintenance and street repair were positively rated by 40% or fewer residents, ratings lower than those found in peer communities.

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More than 90% of survey respondents felt it was essential or very important for the County to invest in infrastructure such as roads in the upcoming years. One of the largest priorities mentioned in the open-ended question on the survey was to make improvements made to transportation and travel in the community.