



**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Citizen Survey<sup>TM</sup>

## Surprise, AZ

Community Livability Report

2018



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# About

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

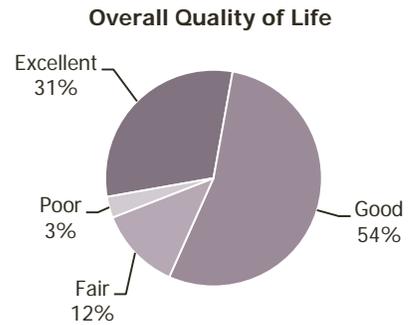
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 335 residents of the City of Surprise. 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 Surprise

More than 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Surprise as excellent or good. This was similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation (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.

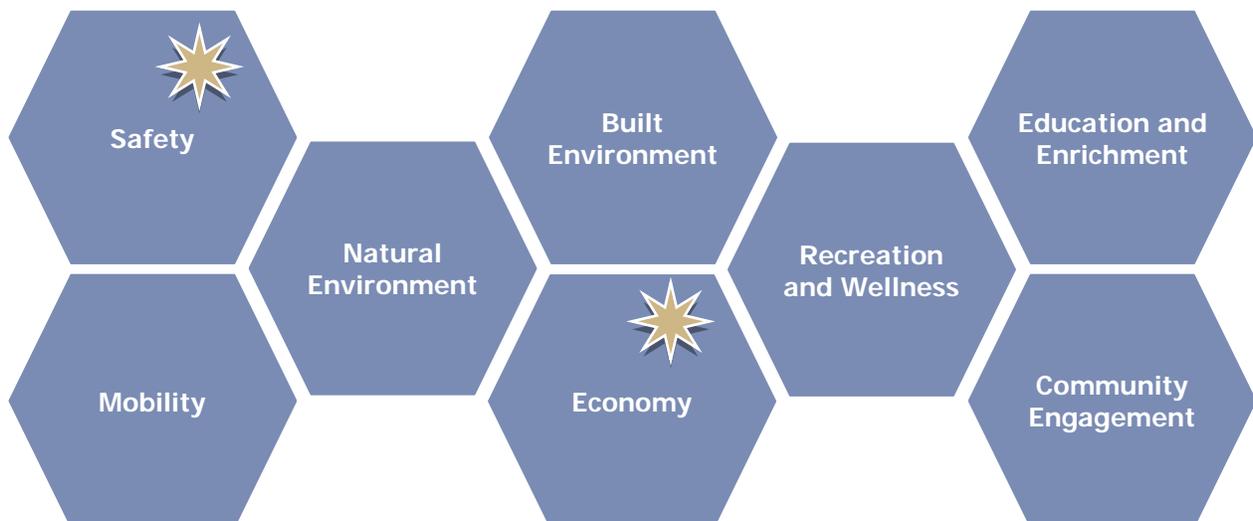
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Surprise community in the coming two years. These facets, as well as all other facets of community livability, received ratings similar to those given in other communities across the country. 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 Surprise’s unique questions.

## Legend

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

- Most important



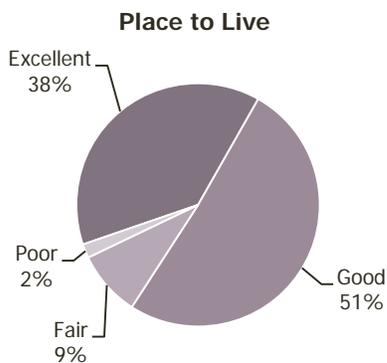
# Community Characteristics

*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 Surprise, 89% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Surprise as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the City as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Surprise as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Surprise and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 residents rated Surprise as a place to retire as excellent or good, which was higher than the national benchmark. The remaining aspects of community quality were rated positively by at least 7 in 10 residents and were similar to ratings given in other communities.

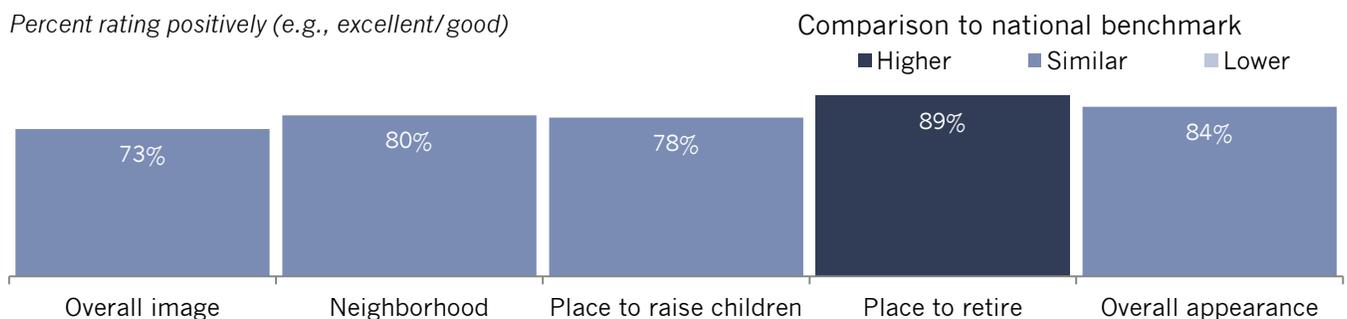
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. A majority of residents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Safety, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Community Engagement. All of the aspects within these facets were rated similarly to the benchmark except for availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing options, which were higher, and air quality, which was lower. Within Economy and Mobility, all items were rated similarly to the benchmark except for cost of living (which was above average) and ease of travel by public transportation (which was below average and decreased since 2015; see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover). Ratings within the facet of Education and Enrichment were less positive: 6 in 10 residents or less gave positive marks to overall opportunities for education and enrichment, cultural/arts/music activities, adult education and K-12 education and these ratings were lower than those given elsewhere.



When compared to 2015, ratings for several aspects of Community Characteristics declined over time, including ease of travel by car, overall natural environment and overall built environment.

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



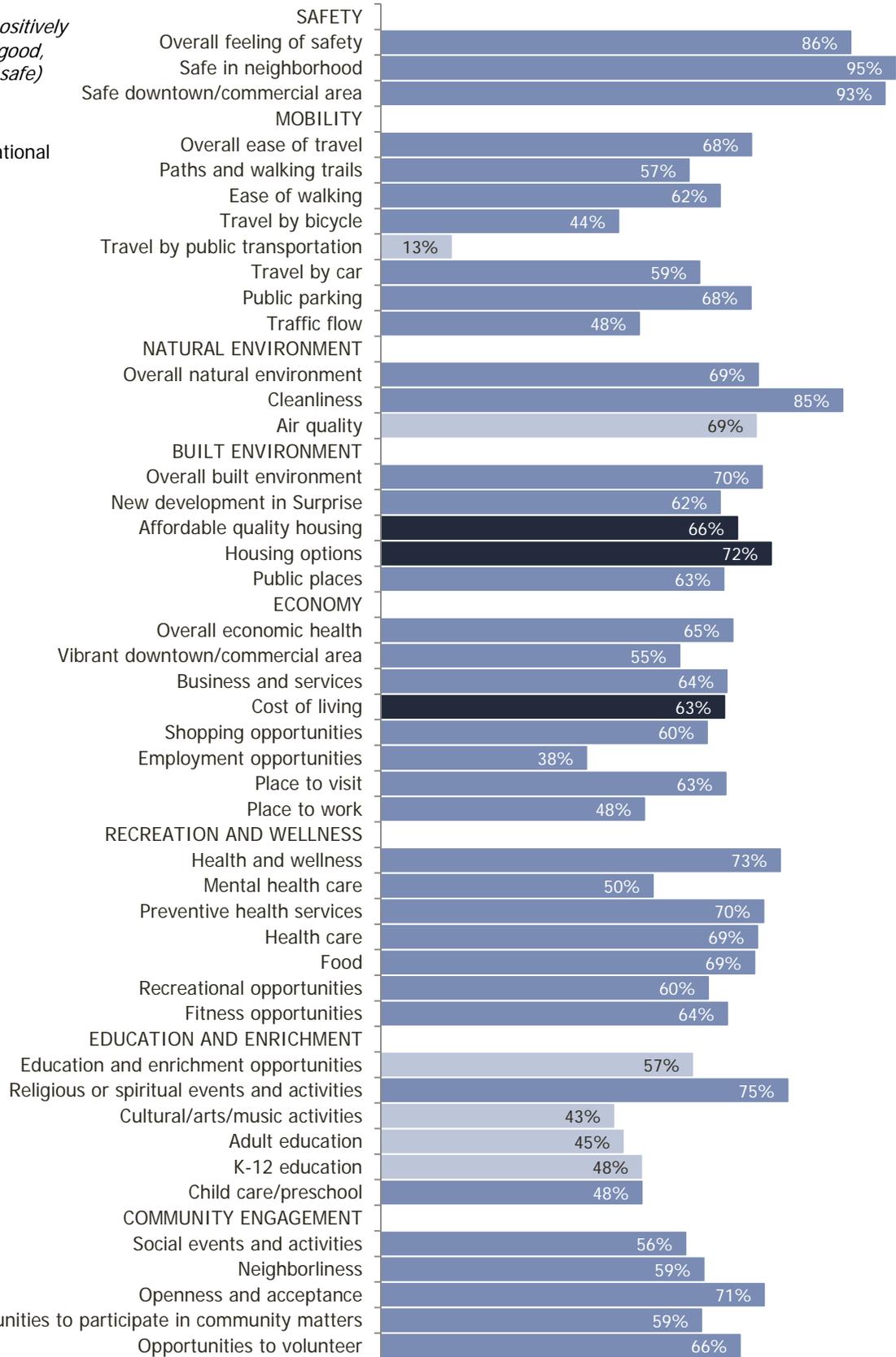
# The National Citizen Survey™

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 Surprise meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

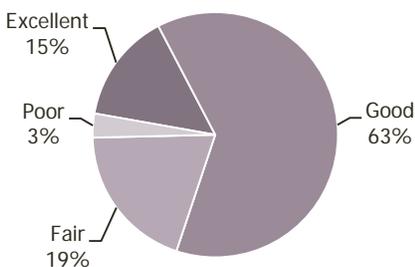
The overall quality of the services provided by Surprise as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About three-quarters of residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of City services and half were pleased with the services provided by the Federal Government; both of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Surprise’s leadership and governance. Three-quarters of residents gave favorable marks to the customer service provided by the City and at least half of participants were pleased with all remaining aspects of government performance. Although ratings for several of these aspects declined from 2015 to 2018, these ratings were similar to those given elsewhere across the country.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Surprise. For nearly all facets, a majority of residents gave positive ratings to all aspects and almost all were similar to the national benchmark. The one exception was the facet of Mobility: street repair and sidewalk maintenance received above average ratings while the rating for bus or transit services was lower than average.

When compared to 2015, decreases in ratings were noted for several City services, primarily within the facets of Safety, Mobility and Built Environment.

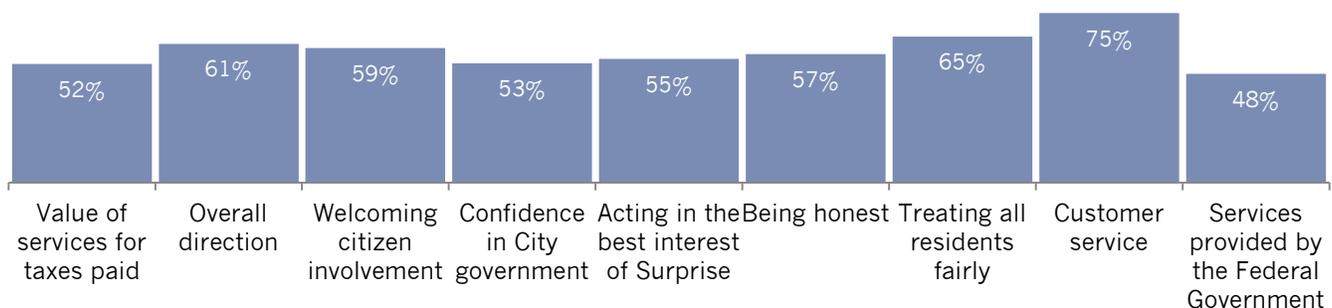
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



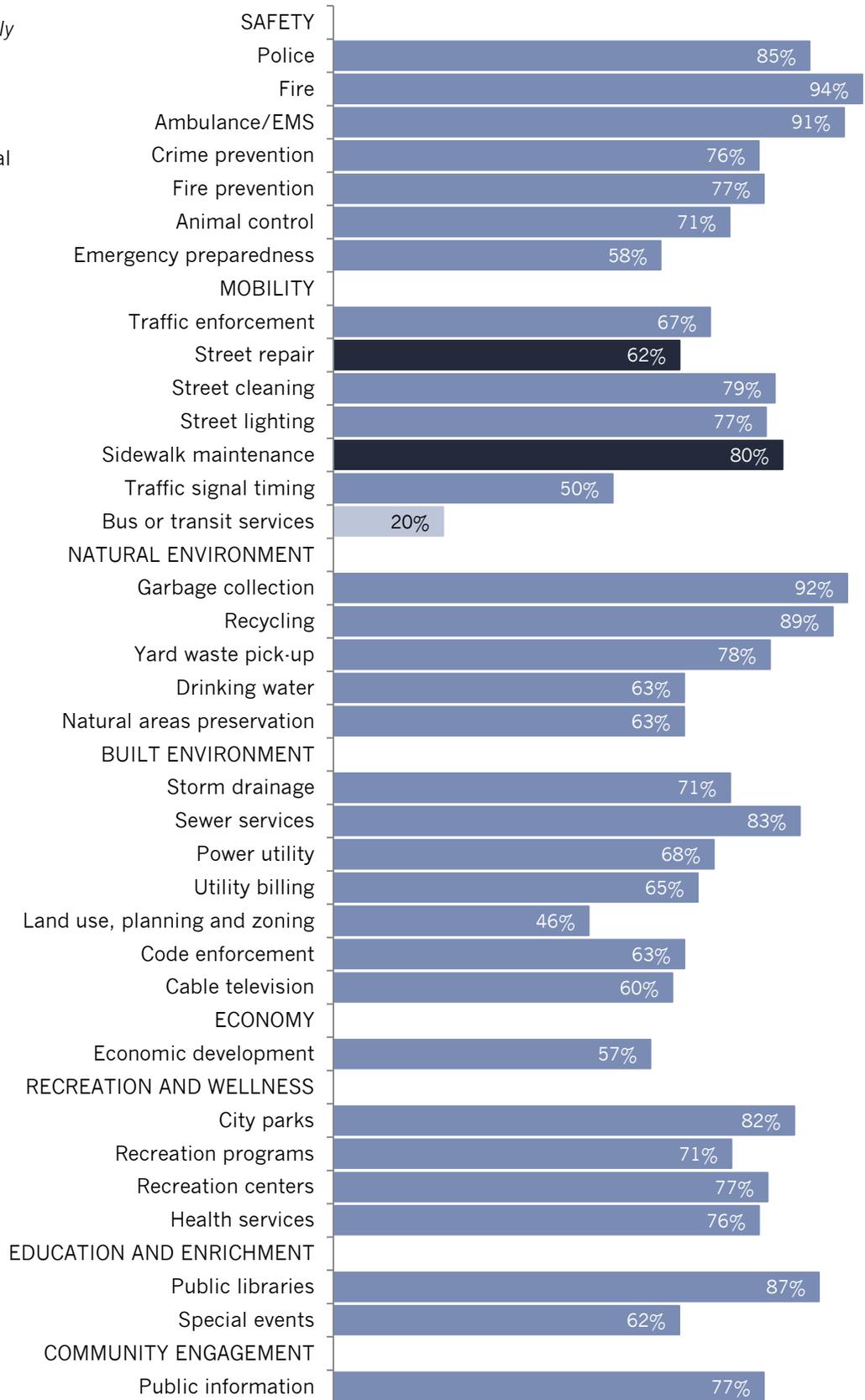
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Participation

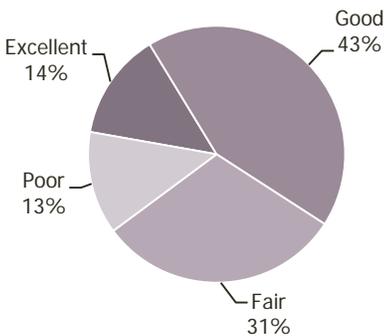
*Are the residents of Surprise connected to the community and each other?*

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 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in Surprise and 4 in 5 residents would recommend living in Surprise to someone who asked and planned to remain in the city for the next five years. These ratings were similar to those given elsewhere across the country.

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 varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparison and comparisons to the City's 2015 ratings helpful for understanding the results. For example, virtually all residents had purchased goods or services in the city, which was similar to the benchmark, but only one-third worked in Surprise, which was lower. Generally, however, most participation levels across the different facets of community livability were similar to those seen in other communities.

When compared to 2015, residents were less likely in 2018 to have read or watched local news, but more likely to have carpooled instead of driving alone. They were also more likely in 2018 to believe that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in the next six months.

Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



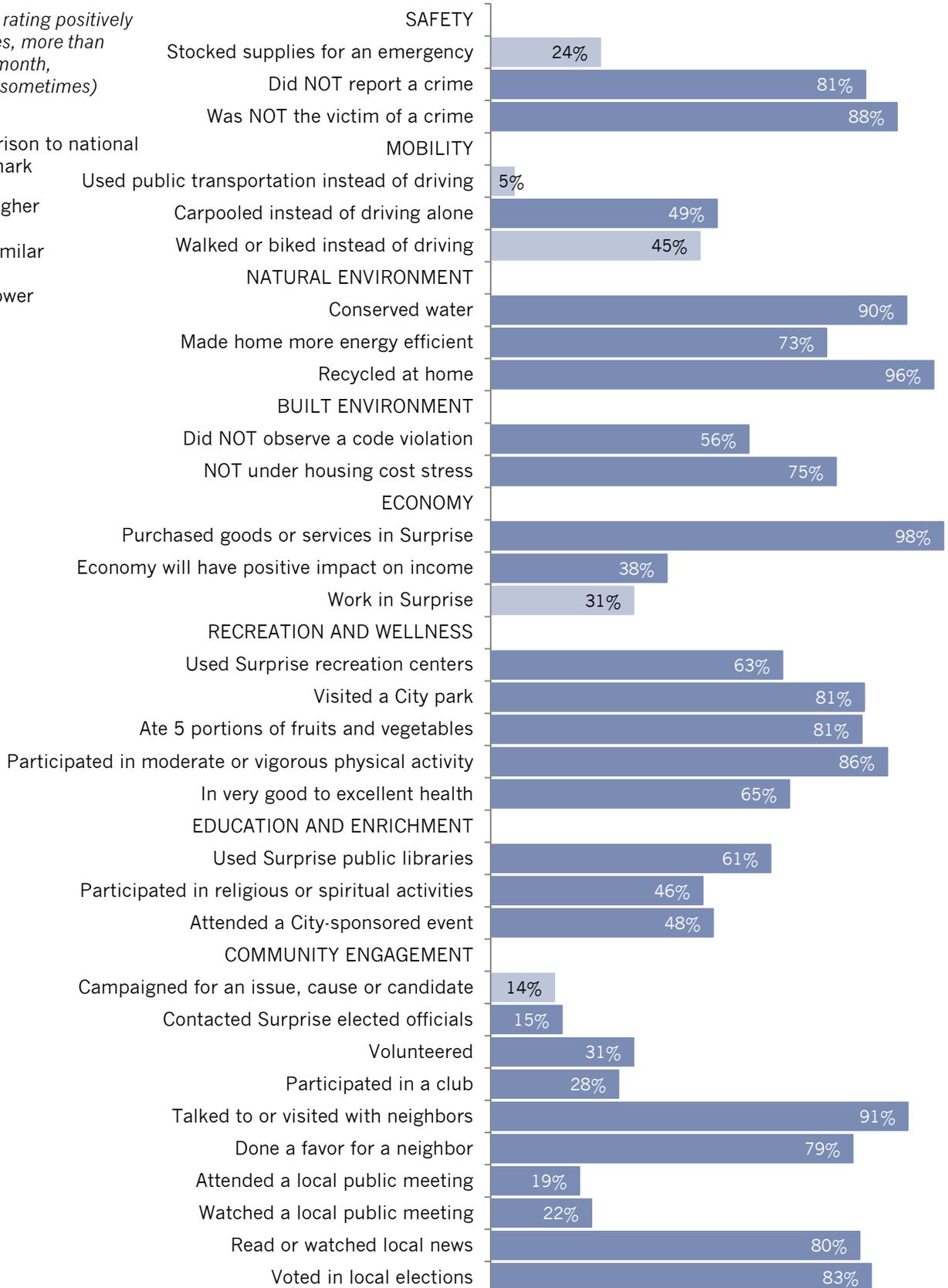
## The National Citizen Survey™

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



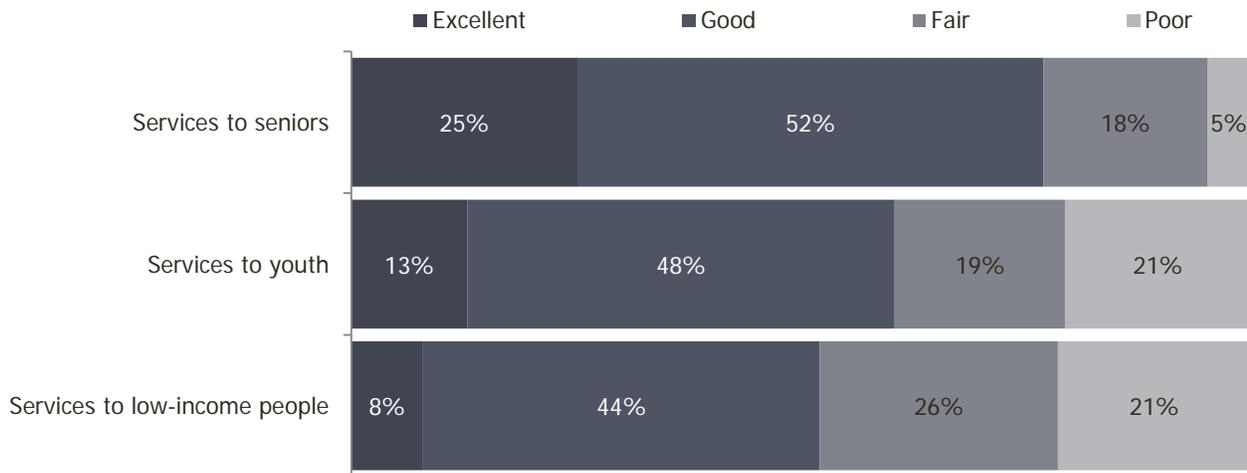
# Special Topics

The City of Surprise included four questions of special interest on The NCS as well as several line additions to a standard question. Topic areas included City priorities, funding for a citywide transit system and sources of City information.

When asked to rate the quality of various City services, about three-quarters of residents gave excellent or good marks to services to seniors and about 6 in 10 were pleased with services to adults. About half gave positive ratings to services to low-income people. It is important to note that between 44% and 70% of residents responded “don’t know” to these questions.

Figure 4: Line Additions to Question 10

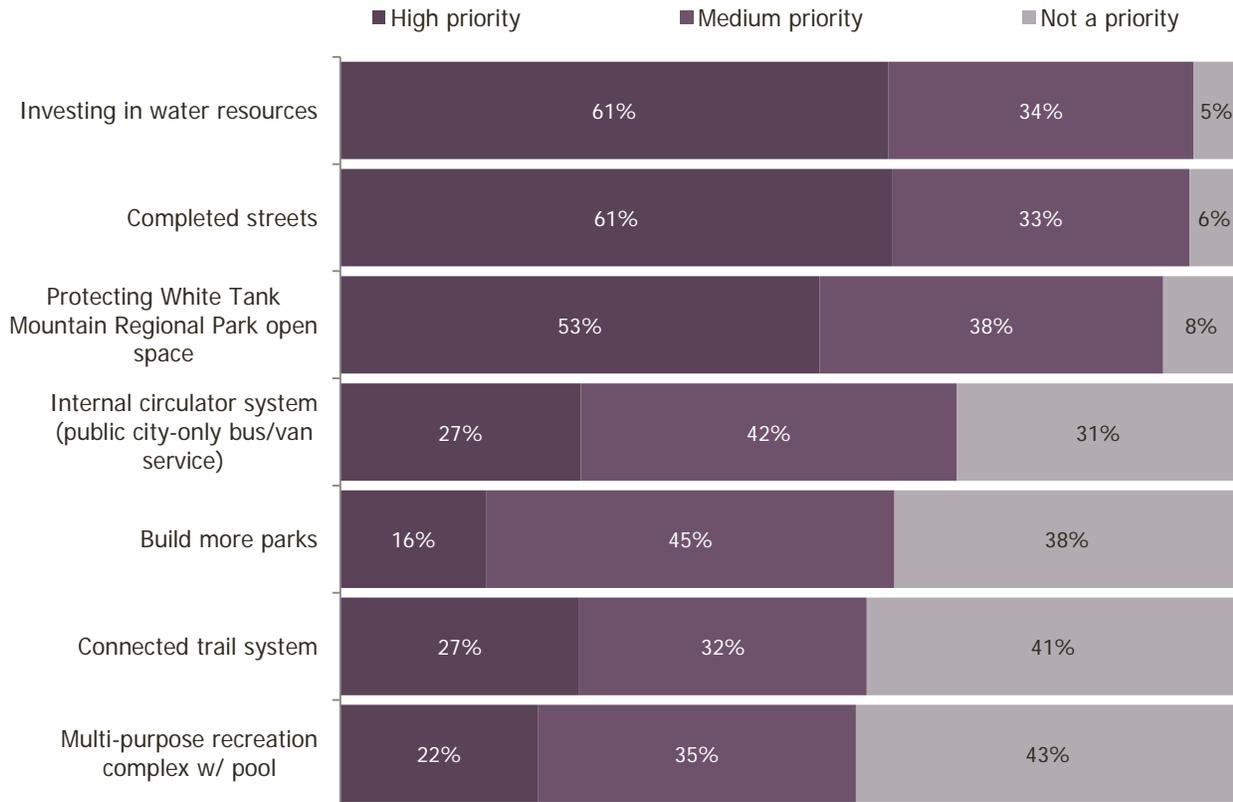
*Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Surprise:*



Thinking about potential projects for the City to address in the next three years, about 9 in 10 residents felt that investing in water resources, completed streets, and protecting White Tank Mountain Regional Park open space should be a high or medium priority for the City to address. Between 6 in 10 and 7 in 10 residents felt that the any of the remaining projects should be a priority for the City; residents were least likely to indicate that building more parks should be a high priority.

Figure 5: City Priorities

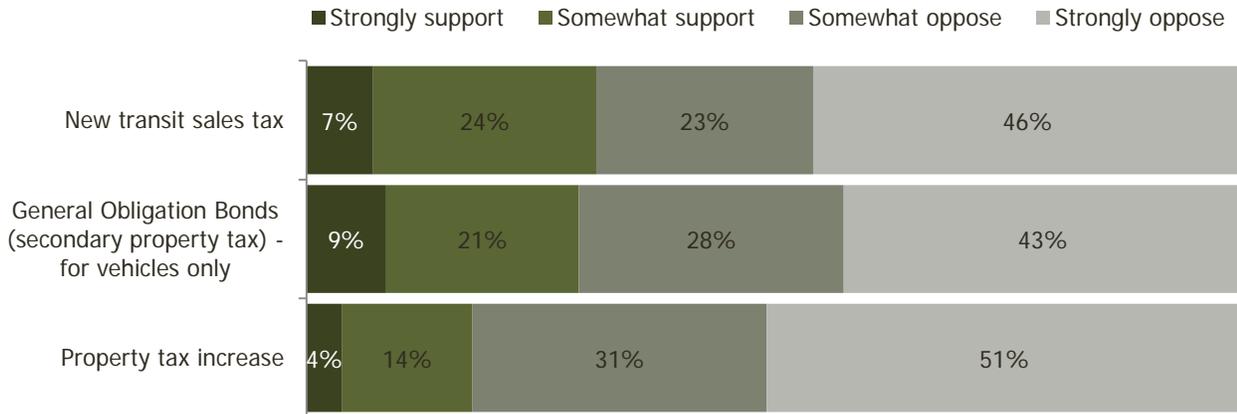
*How much of a priority, if any, should the following projects be for the city to address in the next 3 years?*



When asked to rate their level of support for different types of funding for a citywide transit system, a strong majority of residents opposed all three types of funding. A new transit sales tax (31% strongly or somewhat support) and General Obligation Bonds (30%) were somewhat more popular than a property tax increase (18%).

Figure 6: Citywide Transit System

Currently, the city pays an outside contractor to manage the Ridechoice/Paratransit transportation service for ADA, senior and income-qualified individuals and contracts with Valley Metro to provide one bus route that travels from the city to Phoenix for all customers. With limited dollars in the General Fund (the City's checking account), to what degree would you support or oppose the following additional funding sources for a citywide transit system which would include a public city-only circulator bus/van service, express bus routes that connect to the greater Phoenix region, and a city-operated Cab Subsidy Program to replace Ridechoice/Paratransit?

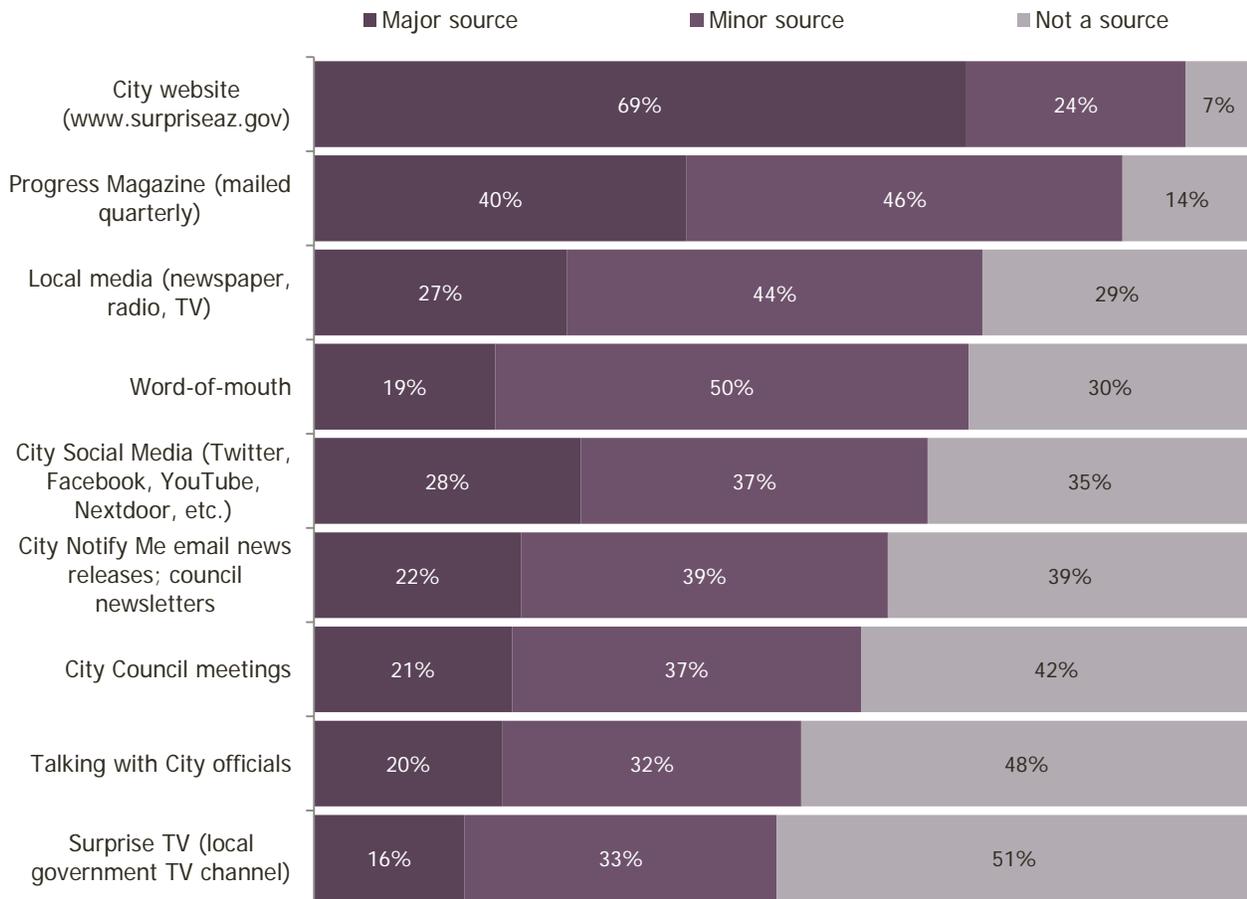


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Residents were next asked to consider a list of sources of City information and indicate how much of a source, if any, they felt each one was. About 9 in 10 residents considered the City website and Progress Magazine to be a major or minor source of information and about 7 in 10 used local media and word of mouth as a source. Only about half of residents considered talking with City officials or Surprise TV to be major or minor sources of information.

Figure 7: Sources of City Information

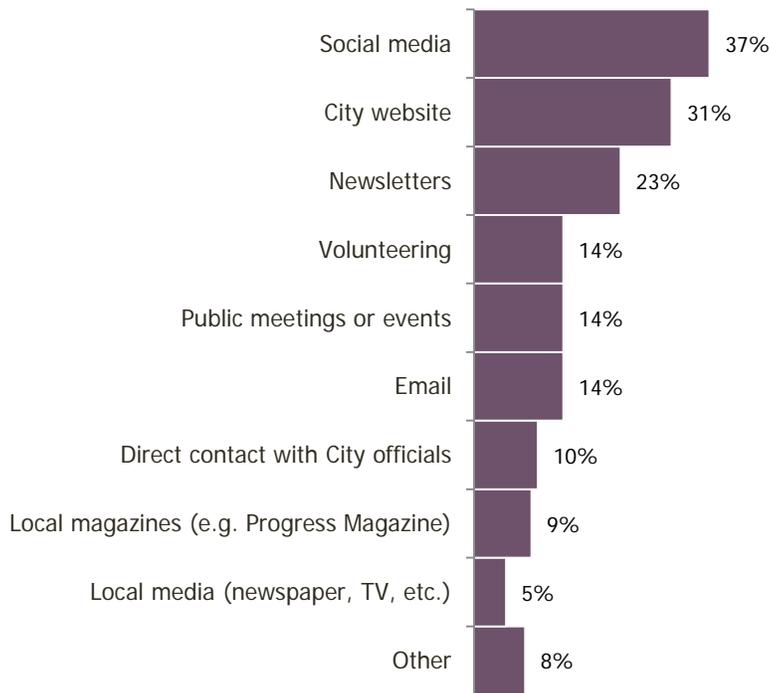
Please indicate how much of a source you consider the following to be for obtaining information about city government, services and events:



The final special interest question was an open-ended question in which residents could write in a response. A total of 335 surveys were completed by Surprise residents; of these, 153 respondents wrote in responses for the open-ended question. Thinking about their preferred methods of engaging with the City of Surprise, residents were most likely to write in a comment related to social media (37%), the City website (31%) or newsletters (23%). About 14% of respondents mentioned volunteering, public meetings or events, or email in their comment and about 1 in 10 mentioned direct contact with local officials, a local magazine or some other method of engagement (for more information see the *Open-end Report* under separate cover).

Figure 8: Preferred Methods of Resident Engagement

Residents can engage with local government in many ways (a few examples are: staying informed via the city website, newsletters or engaging with the city’s social media; communicating with staff or councilmembers; attending or watching council meetings; or participating in or volunteering for community events and committees. How would you prefer to engage with your City government?



Total may exceed 100% as respondents could write in more than one option.

# Conclusions

## Surprise residents continue to rate their quality of life positively.

As in 2015, more than 8 in 10 residents reported that their quality of life in Surprise was excellent or good and nearly 9 in 10 gave favorable ratings to the City as a place to live, would recommend living in Surprise to someone who asked and planned to remain in Surprise for the next five years. At least 7 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall appearance and overall image of Surprise, the City as a place to raise children, their neighborhood as a place to live and Surprise as a place to retire; further, Surprise as a place to retire received ratings higher than those given in other communities across the country.

## Safety remains a priority for residents.

Respondents indicated that Safety was an important issue for the City to address in the next two years and ratings within this facet tended to be strong. About 9 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Surprise and reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and in Surprise's commercial areas during the day, and more than 8 in 10 residents positively rated police, fire and ambulance/EMS services. However, resident ratings for emergency preparedness were lower than the national benchmark, and ratings for crime prevention, fire prevention and emergency preparedness declined since 2015.

## Economy is also important to residents and ratings for it are strong.

Residents also indicated that Economy would be an important area of focus in the coming years. At least 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall economic health of the city, overall quality of business and service establishments, cost of living, shopping opportunities and Surprise as a place to visit, and the rating for cost of living was higher than seen in communities elsewhere. Residents were less likely in 2015 than in 2018 to give positive marks to Surprise as a place to work and economic development, but more likely to believe that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in the next six months.

## Education and Enrichment may be an area of opportunity for the City.

Ratings within the facet of Education and Enrichment tended to be less positive than others: while three-quarters of residents gave positive marks to religious or spiritual events and activities, 6 in 10 residents or less gave favorable ratings to overall opportunities for education and enrichment, cultural/arts/music activities, adult education and K-12 education and these ratings were lower than those given elsewhere. Further, ratings for K-12 education, affordable quality child care/preschool and City-sponsored special events declined from 2015 to 2018. As such, this may be an area of opportunity for the City in the coming years.