

THE NCS™

The National Citizen Survey™

Battle Creek, MI



Community Livability Report

2018



NRC
National Research Center Inc



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

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

Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Battle Creek 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 12



The National Citizen Survey™
© 2001-2018 National Research Center, Inc.

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 Battle Creek. 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 568 residents of the City of Battle Creek. 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 Battle Creek

Most residents rated the quality of life in Battle Creek as fair or better. This rating was much lower than the 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.

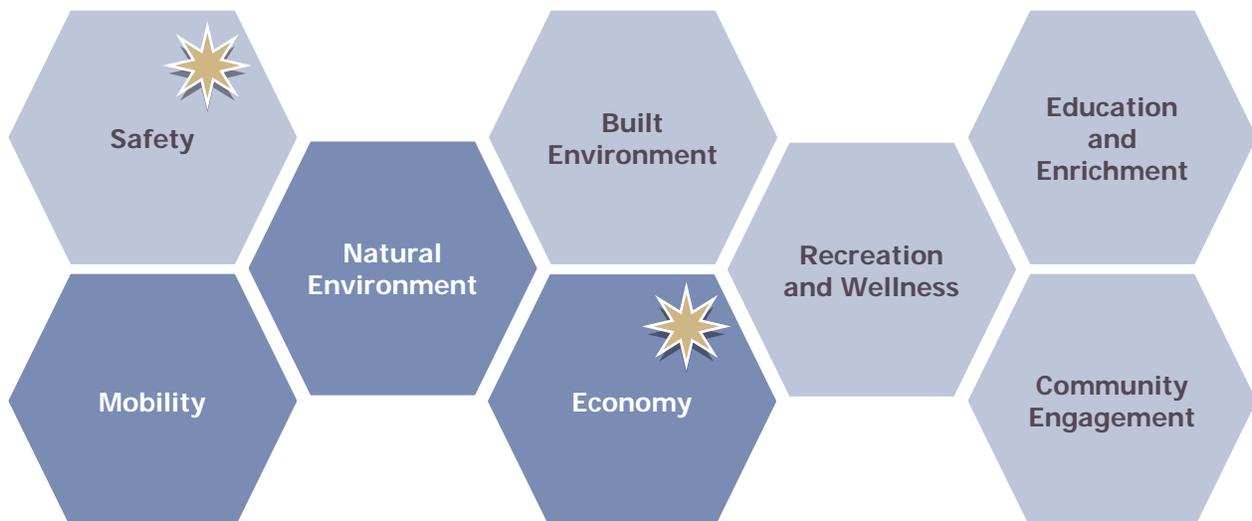
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2015, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Battle Creek community in the coming two years. Battle Creek residents gave ratings on par with the national average to Economy, as well as to Mobility and Natural Environment. Ratings for the remaining facets were lower than other 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 Battle Creek’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 Battle Creek, about 4 in 10 residents rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Battle Creek as a place to live were lower than 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 Battle Creek as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Battle Creek and its overall appearance. About 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, while one-third or fewer gave favorable marks to the remaining general aspects.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Generally, ratings in Battle Creek tended to be lower than or similar to those given in other communities across the nation. While most facets tended to receive marks that were lower than the national benchmark, all Mobility-related items were similar to the benchmark, including overall ease of travel and various modes (walking, bicycling, public transit), public parking and traffic flow. Moreover, assessments for the ease of travel by public transportation, public parking and availability of paths and walking trails increased since 2015 (see the report, *Trends over Time*, provided under separate cover). Aspects related to the affordability of Battle Creek also tended to be on par with national averages, including availability of affordable housing, cost of living and employment opportunities. However, affordable housing did decrease since the last survey administration.

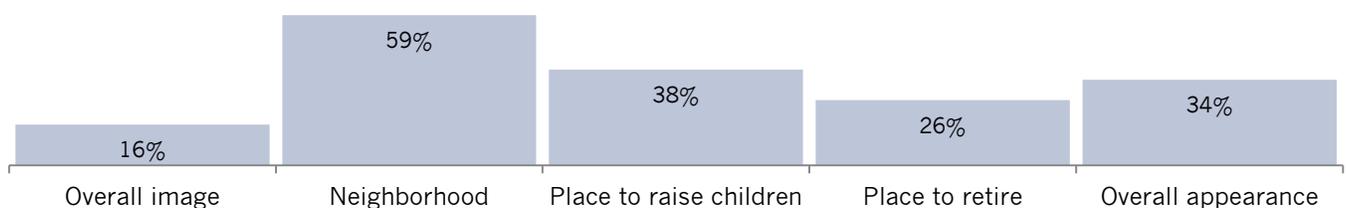


Aspects related to the affordability of Battle Creek also tended to be on par with national averages, including availability of affordable housing, cost of living and employment opportunities. However, affordable housing did decrease since the last survey administration.

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

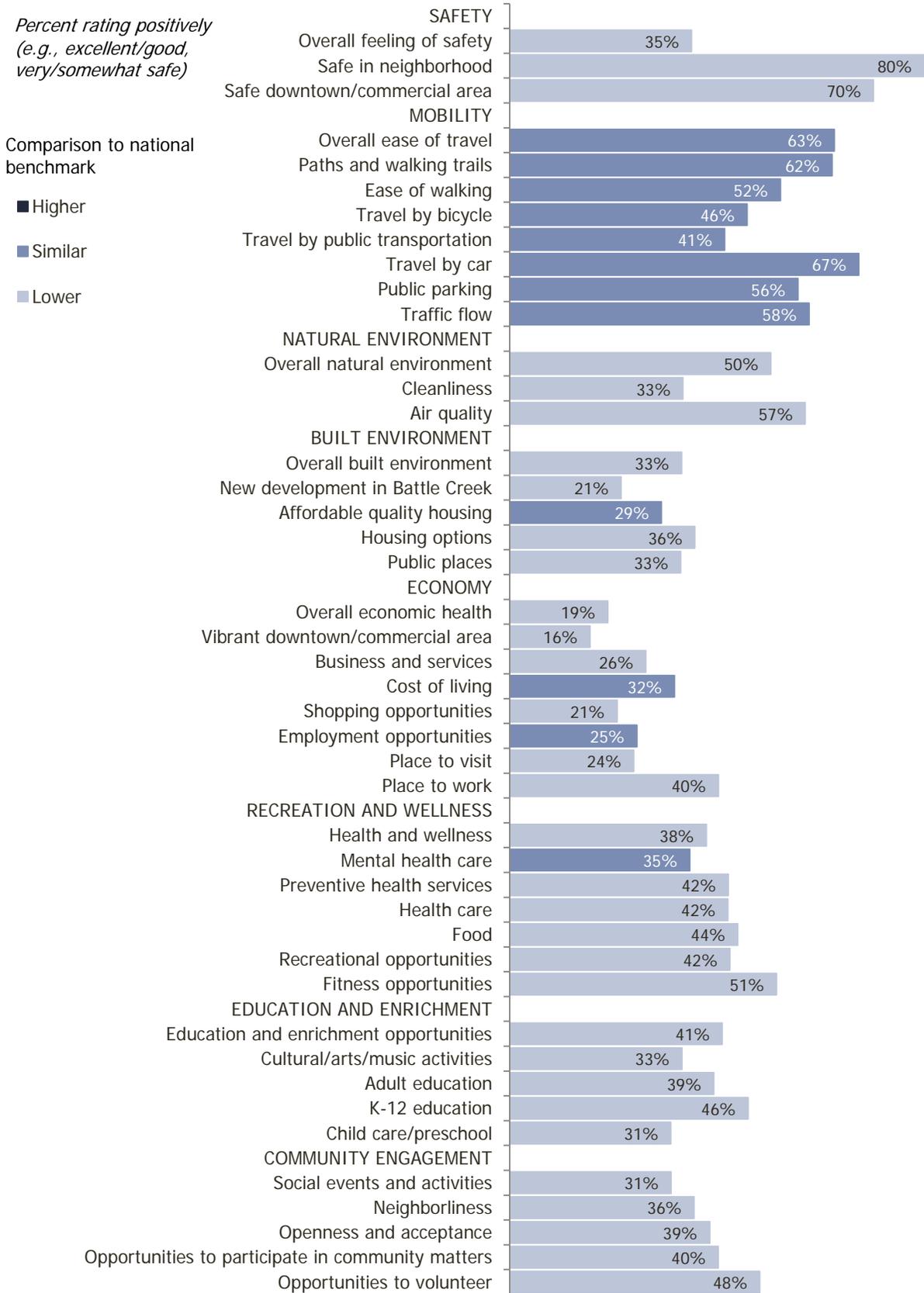
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

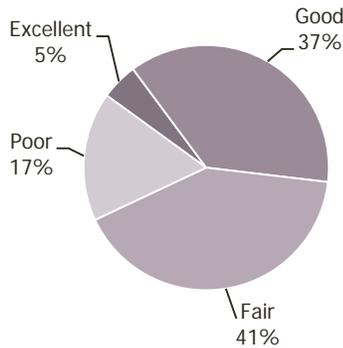
How well does the government of Battle Creek meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Battle Creek as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 4 in 10 residents gave favorable evaluations to the overall quality of City services, which was lower than the benchmark, but increased from 2015 to 2018.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Battle Creek’s leadership and governance. About half of residents awarded positive reviews to the customer service provided by Battle Creek employees; while this aspect was rated lower compared to other municipalities nationwide, it improved since 2015 by ten points. Survey participants also gave higher scores to the City being honest and treating all residents fairly in 2018.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Battle Creek. Ratings for services and amenities provided by the City were similar to or lower than those observed in other communities. A majority of residents gave positive reviews to fire, garbage collection, recycling, yard waste pick-up, sewer services, power utility, utility billing and public libraries and each of these were similar to national comparisons. About half of the assessments for Battle Creek services increased over time; those with the largest increases since 2015 included police, snow removal, traffic signal timing, recycling and utility billing, as each improved between 10-15%. None of the Battle Creek government services were rated lower in 2018 compared to 2015

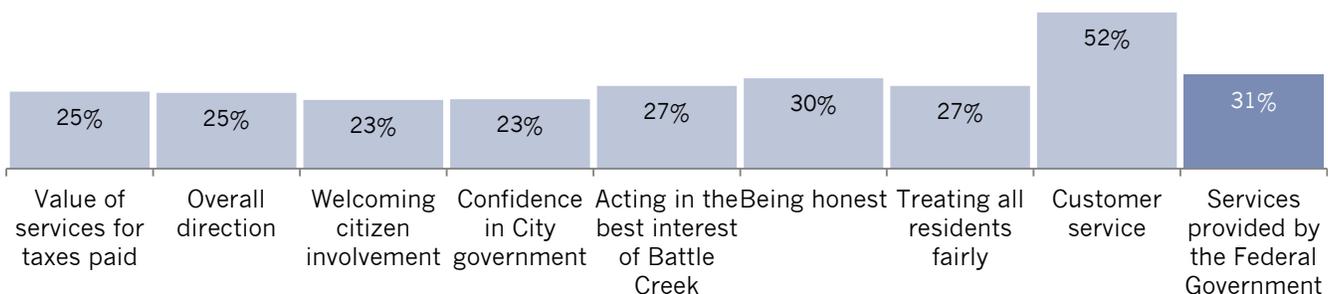
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



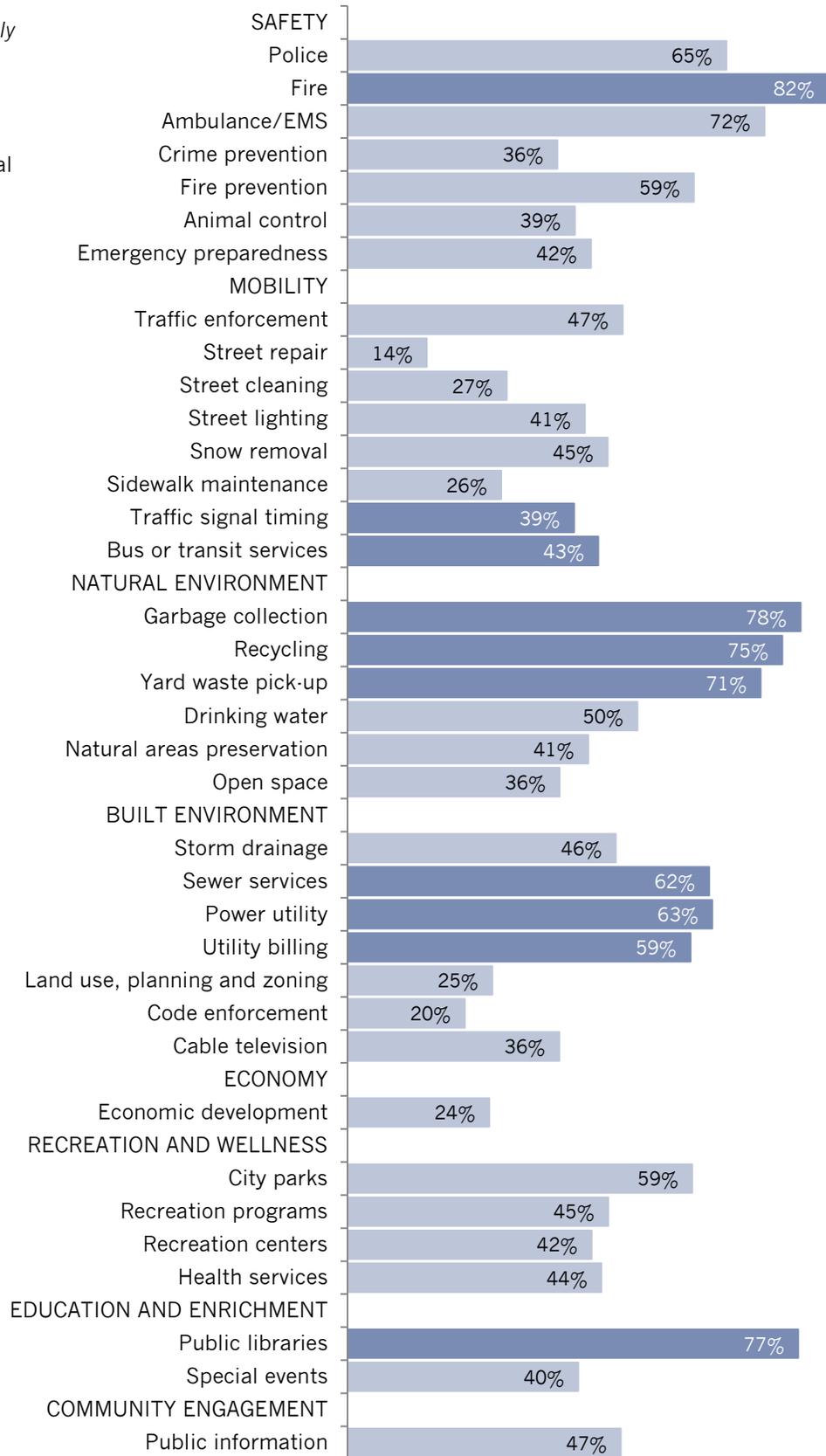
The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



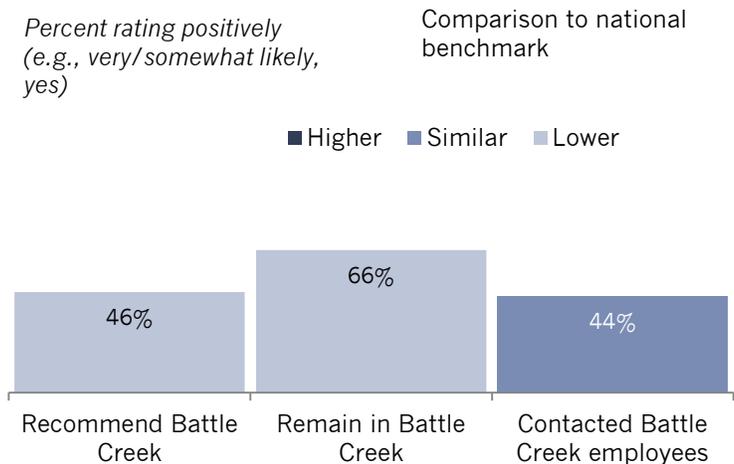
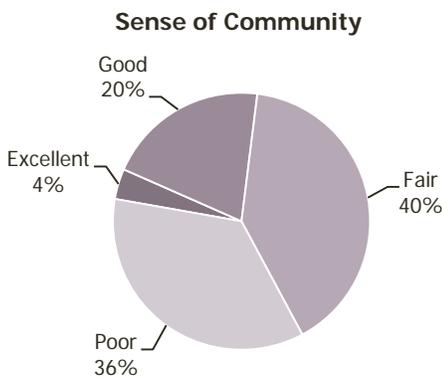
Participation

Are the residents of Battle Creek 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. In Battle Creek, about one-quarter of residents felt positively about the sense of community in the city, which was lower than observed in other communities. Around two-thirds of residents planned to remain in Battle Creek for the next five years (which decreased over time) and about half would recommend living in the city to someone who asked.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Broadly, rates of Participation tended to be similar to those reported in communities elsewhere. Residents participated most in activities related to the Natural Environment and Community Engagement; at least 7 in 10 indicated they had conserved water, made their homes energy efficient, recycled (a rate that increased since 2015), read and watched local news and voted in local elections. Battle Creek respondents were also neighborly, often visiting with or doing favors for each other; in fact, more residents reported they had visited with their neighbors in 2018. Additionally, Battle Creek participants worked within the community at higher than average levels.

Respondents' rates for Recreation and Wellness activities tended to be more mixed; at least three-quarters maintained healthy diet and exercise habits, at rates similar to those seen elsewhere, but were less likely to have visited a City park, used Battle Creek's recreation centers or report being in good health (which declined in 2018). Battle Creek residents' rates for walking or biking instead of driving alone, code violations and City-sponsored event attendance lagged behind national averages.



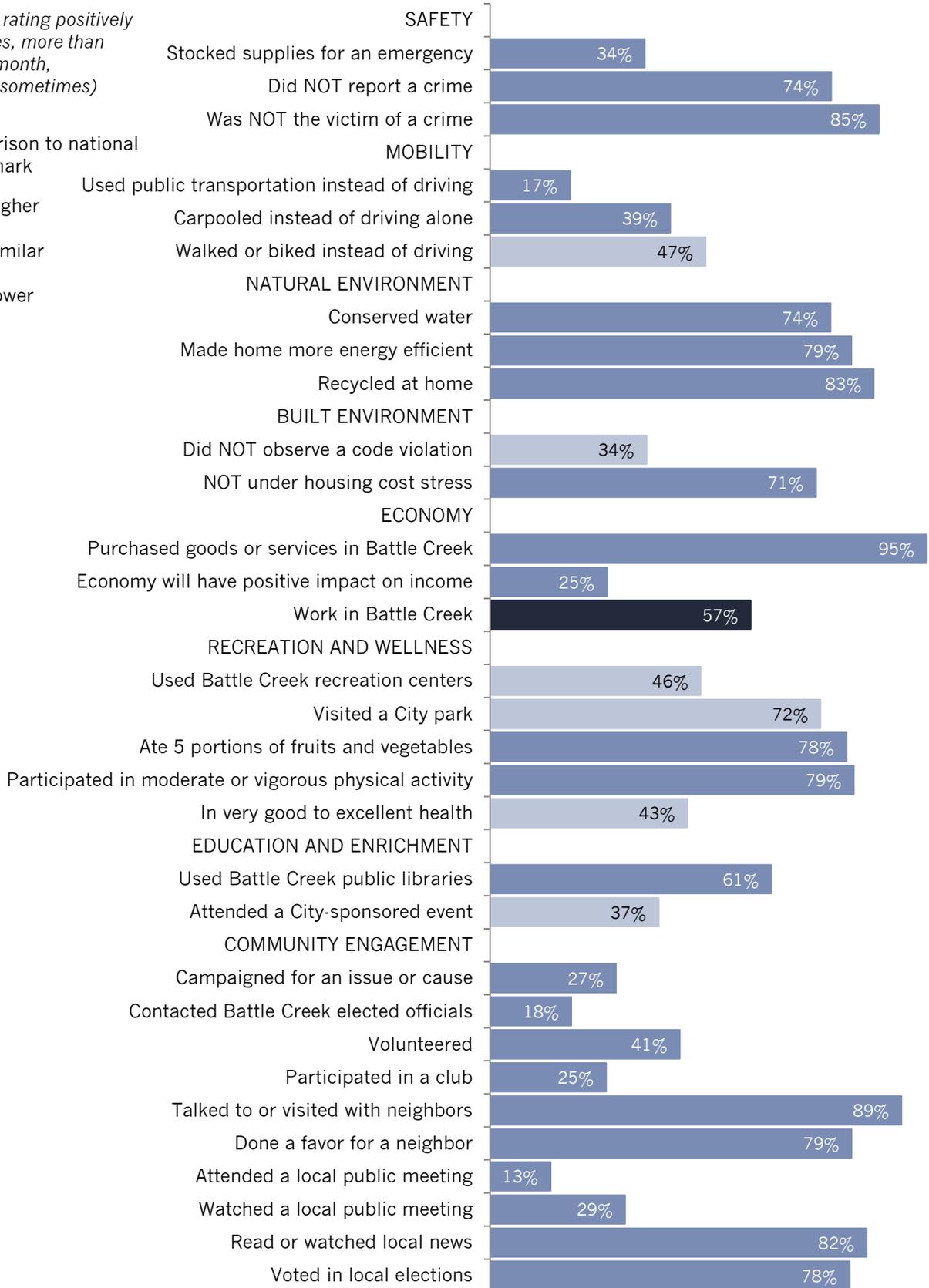
The National Citizen Survey™

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 Battle Creek included several questions of special interest on The NCS. City leadership sought to obtain resident feedback concerning the group BCVision and their mission, interactions with Battle Creek police officers and the police department's performance as a whole.

The first set of questions asked residents about their familiarity and opinions regarding BCVision. About 4 in 10 respondents stated that they were very or somewhat familiar with the work being done by BCVision and about one-third felt the impact was positive or somewhat positive. Additionally, around three-quarters of participants agreed that BCVision is promoting positive community development, while only 10% strongly disagreed.

Figure 4: Familiarity with BCVision
Please rate how familiar you are, if at all, with the work being done by BCVision:

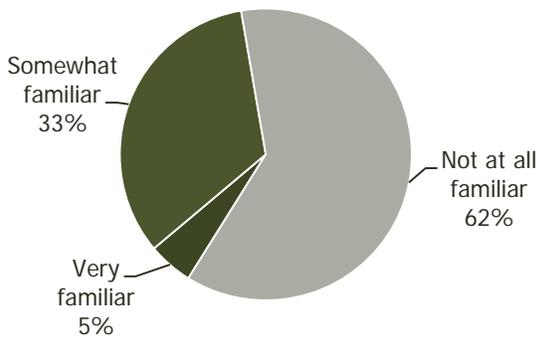


Figure 5: Opinions About Impact of BCVision's Work
Please rate the impact of the work being done by BCVision on the city:

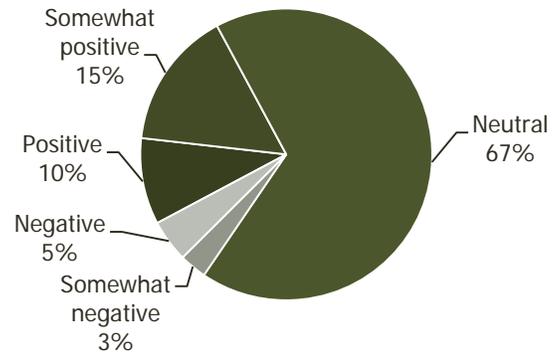
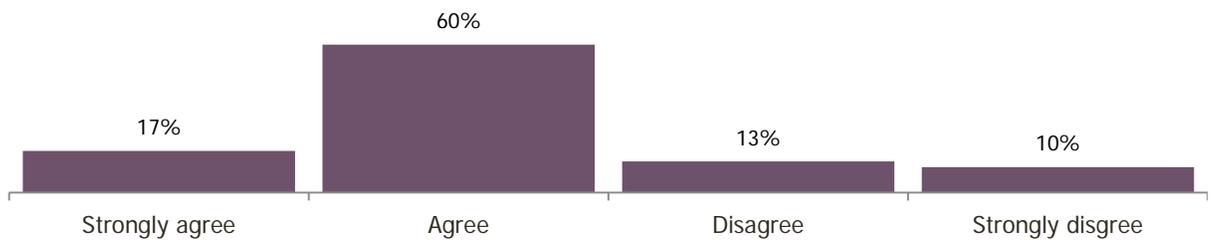


Figure 6: Agreement with BCVision Community Development
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that BCVision is promoting positive community development:



The City also wanted to learn more about residents' opinions regarding interactions with police officers in Battle Creek. Around 4 in 10 survey respondents reported that they had interacted with a police officer in the 12 months prior to the survey. Of those residents, at least 8 in 10 awarded excellent or good marks to their overall impression. Further, about 9 in 10 respondents agreed that the officer did not discriminate against them, they were treated with respect and the officer clearly explained their reasoning for their actions; less than 1 in 10 strongly disagreed with the officer's conduct.

Figure 7: Contact with Police Officer
Have you had contact with a Battle Creek police officer within the last 12 months?

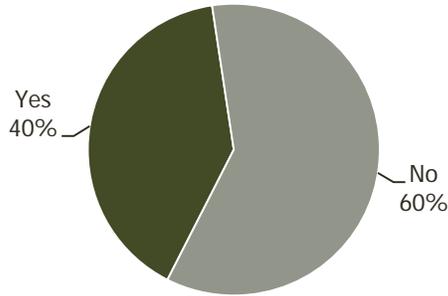


Figure 8: Overall Impression of Police Officer
Thinking about your most recent contact, how would you rate your overall interaction with the police officer?

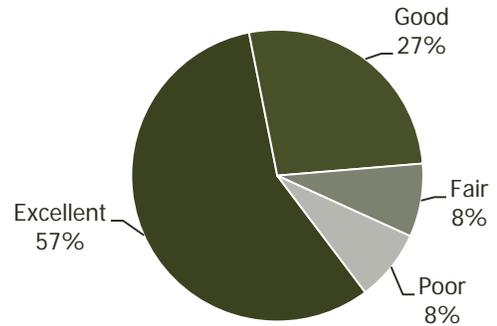
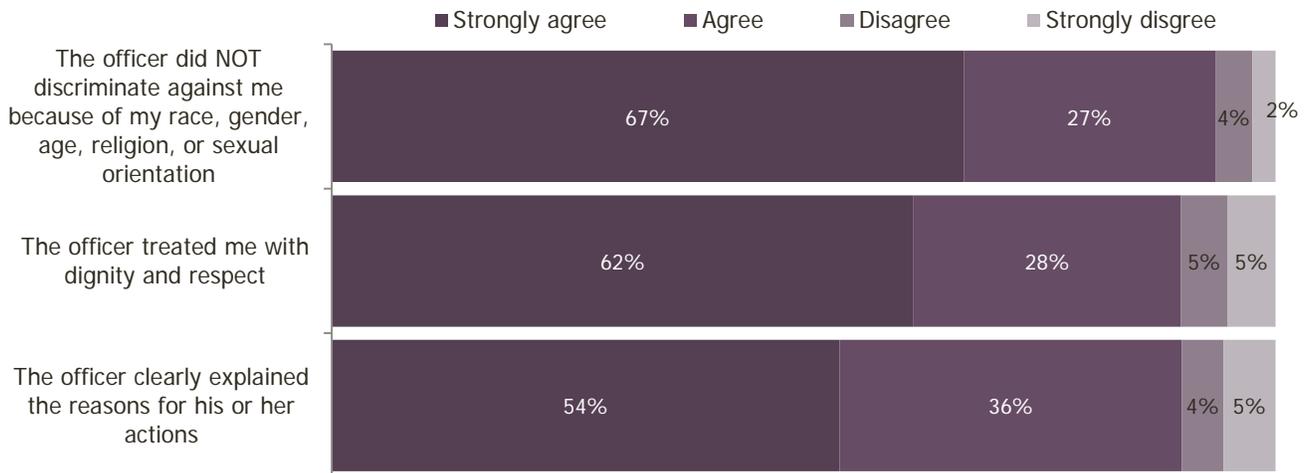
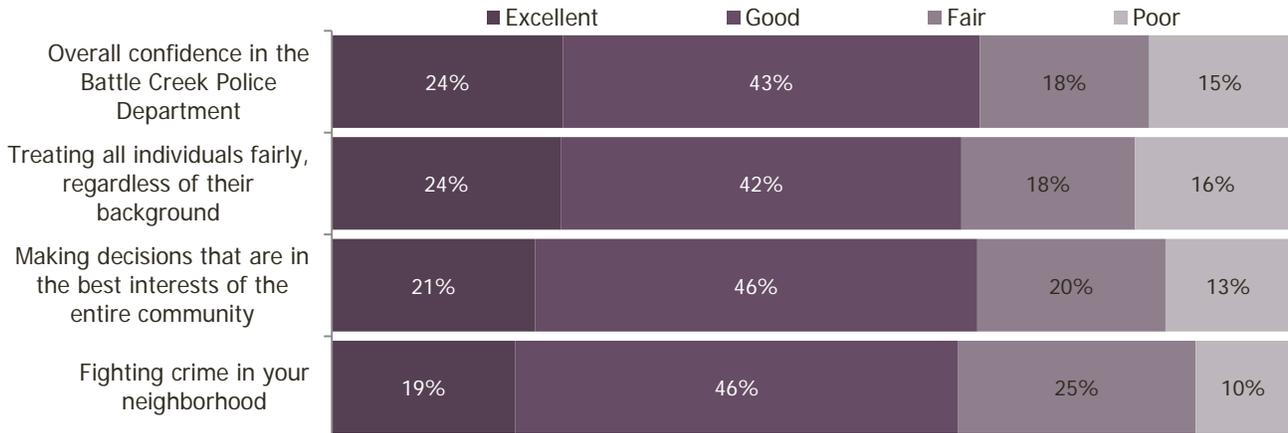


Figure 9: Impressions of Officer Conduct
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements concerning your most recent contact with a Battle Creek police officer:



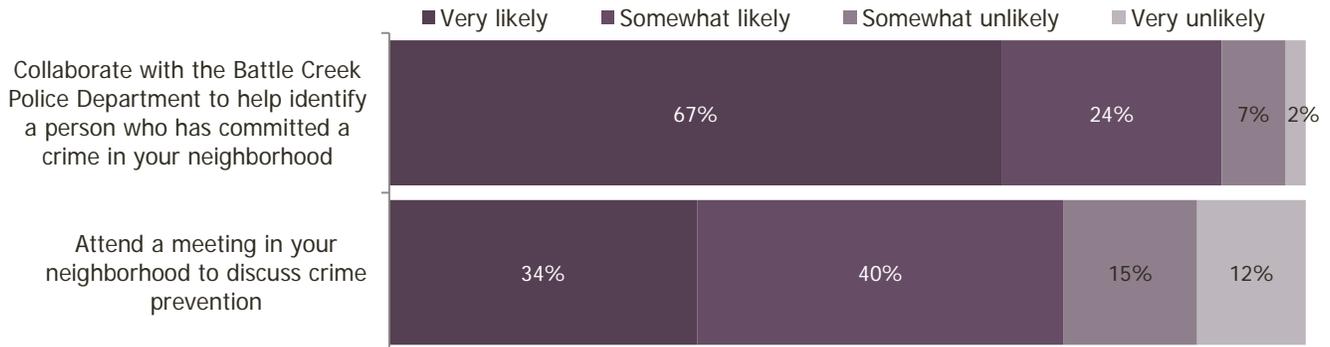
Residents were generally pleased with performance aspects of the Battle Creek Police Department as a whole. About two-thirds of respondents awarded excellent or good ratings to their confidence in the police and the department's ability to treat all residents fairly, make decisions in the best interest of the community and fight crime. Less than 2 in 10 survey participants would evaluate the police department's performance measures as poor.

Figure 10: Police Department Performance
Please rate the following categories of Battle Creek Police Department performance:



Respondents also communicated their willingness to get involved and collaborate with the Battle Creek Police Department. Approximately two-thirds of residents would be very likely to collaborate to identify a person of interest in their neighborhoods and another one-quarter stated they would be somewhat likely to help. Close to three-quarters also voiced that they would be likely to attend a meeting to address crime prevention in their neighborhoods.

Figure 11: Collaboration with Police Department
How likely or unlikely would you be to do each of the following?



Conclusions

Residents value Safety and emphasize its importance.

As in 2015, residents indicated that Safety was an important focus area for the City to address in the coming years. While less than half of residents rated positively many aspects of Safety and were frequently lower than national comparisons, including the overall feeling of safety in Battle Creek, crime prevention, animal control and emergency preparedness, some safety-related ratings have improved considerably since the baseline survey in 2015. For example, in that baseline survey, about half of residents awarded high marks to police services compared to two-thirds in 2018. Rates for crime reports in the community also improved; in 2015 only 65% stated they had not reported a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey (which was lower than national averages), but in 2018, 74% did not report a crime, similar to national levels. Evaluations for fire services also increased over time. About 4 in 10 survey participants reported they had contact with a Battle Creek police officer in the year before the survey and at least 8 in 10 would give positive assessments to their overall impressions; further, around 9 in 10 agreed that the officer maintained high standards of conduct, including not discriminating, treating residents with respect and clearly explaining their options. Concerning the department overall, about two-thirds awarded positive scores to all aspects of performance, including treating residents fairly and fighting crime. Finally, nearly all residents indicated they would be likely to collaborate with Battle Creek police to identify lawbreakers within their neighborhoods.

Affordability of Battle Creek is key and residents value a healthy economy.

Survey participants also highlighted the Economy as an area of focus for the future. Similar to national comparison communities, about 3 in 10 residents gave high marks to the cost of living and availability of affordable quality housing and a similar proportion were pleased with the variety of housing options in Battle Creek. Additionally, about 7 in 10 respondents indicated they were not under housing cost stress and over half reported working within the community, which was higher than average rates. Other Economy-related characteristics tended to be less positive. While one-quarter of participants awarded positive ratings to employment opportunities, which was similar to those seen elsewhere, residents' reviews for overall economic health, the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, business and service establishments, shopping opportunities (which decreased over time) and the City as a place to visit and work were scored favorably by 4 in 10 or less and were lower than comparison communities. About 4 in 10 residents indicated they were very or somewhat familiar with economic development services offered by Battle Creek. Since respondents reported that they relied most upon the City newsletter and website as sources of information about the City, communicating about these services via these sources could help bolster residents' awareness and feelings about Economy-related aspects. Finally, about 4 in 10 residents said they were familiar with BCVision, a group dedicated in part to improving the economy in Battle Creek, and one-quarter felt the impact of the group was positive, indicating that improved communications regarding the work being done by the City and its partners could improve residents' feelings on the local economy.

Getting around town is getting easier.

Three years ago, Battle Creek residents expressed some dissatisfaction with mobility in the community. The City listened and residents noticed. Many mobility-related ratings increased since the previous survey iteration. Residents' positive assessments of ease of travel by public transportation, public parking, access to paths and walking trails, street repair, street cleaning, snow removal, sidewalk maintenance and traffic signal timing have all increased since 2015.