

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Brookline, MA
Community Livability Report

2016



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Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Brookline..... 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 12

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About

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

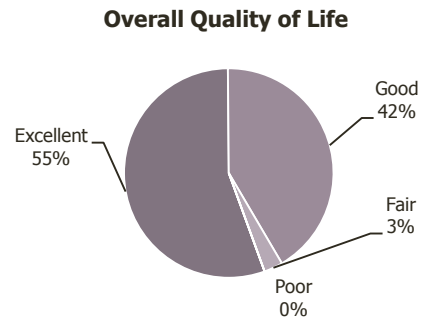
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 464 residents of the Town of Brookline. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Brookline

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Brookline as excellent or good. This rating was higher than 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.



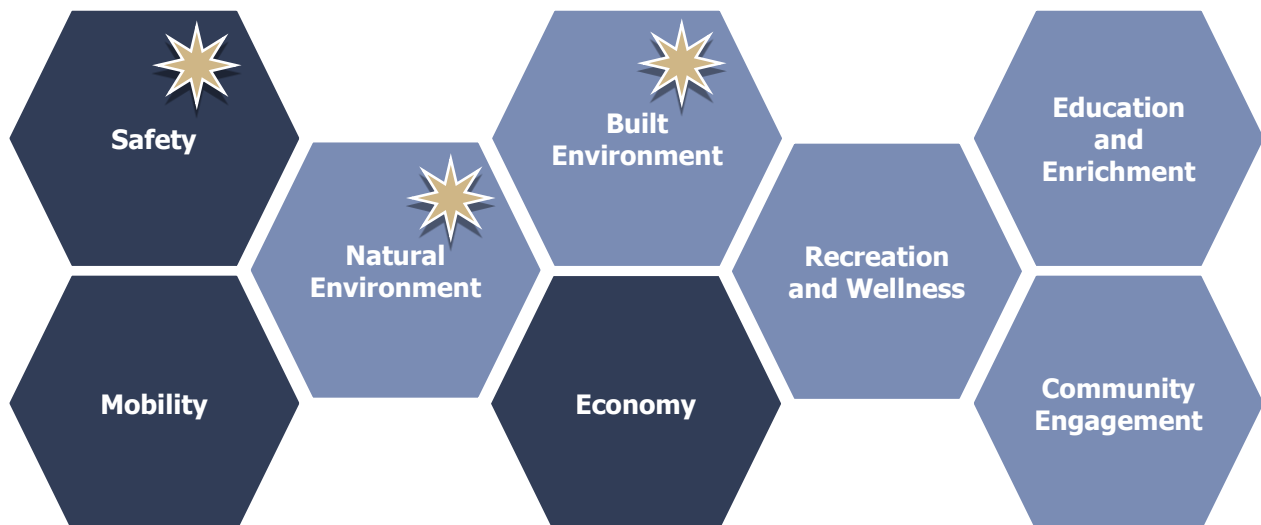
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Natural Environment and Built Environment as priorities for the Brookline community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Brookline residents gave strong ratings to the facet of Safety as well as to Mobility and Economy. Ratings for Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment, and Community Engagement were positive and similar to 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 Brookline’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



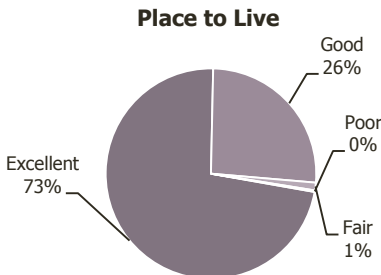
Community Characteristics

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 Brookline, 99% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Brookline as a place to live were higher than ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the Town as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Brookline as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Brookline and its overall appearance. Nearly all residents gave positive ratings to the overall image of the Town, their neighborhoods as places to live, Brookline as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of Brookline. All of these ratings were higher than the national benchmark. More than 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to Brookline as a place to retire. This aspect of community quality was similar to ratings given in other communities.

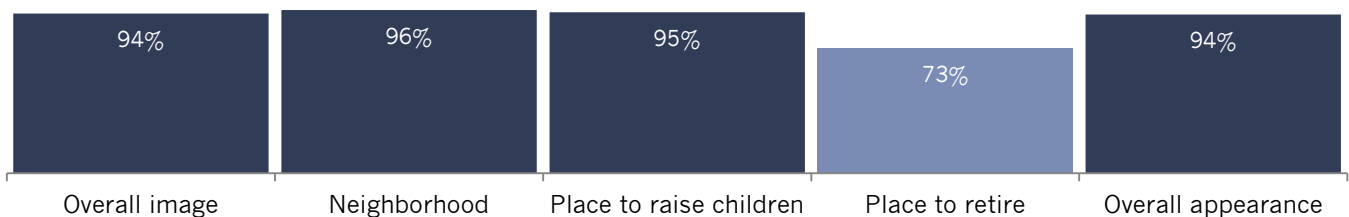
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Generally, ratings received in the pillar of Community Characteristics were similar to or higher than the national benchmark. Nearly all Brookline residents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Safety; similarly, at least 8 in 10 respondents gave favorable ratings to aspects of Natural Environment. Both the overall quality of the natural environment and cleanliness were rated higher in Brookline than in other comparison communities. Within the facet of Economy, all aspects received ratings that were higher than the national benchmark except for the cost of living in Brookline, which was rated lower than the benchmark. Ratings were also quite strong within the facets of Education and Enrichment, Mobility and Recreation and Wellness, with most aspects receiving ratings that were similar to or higher than ratings given in other communities across the nation. The only aspect of these facets to be rated lower than the benchmark was public parking. Ratings were fairly mixed within the facet of Built Environment, with both affordable quality housing and variety of housing options receiving ratings lower than the benchmark. However, some ratings within this facet were higher than the benchmark, including overall built environment and public places where people want to spend time. Ratings within the facet of Community Engagement were also positive and similar to the national benchmark.



Trends between 2014 and 2016 tended to be stable within the pillar of Community Characteristics (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover).

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

Comparison to national benchmark
 ■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



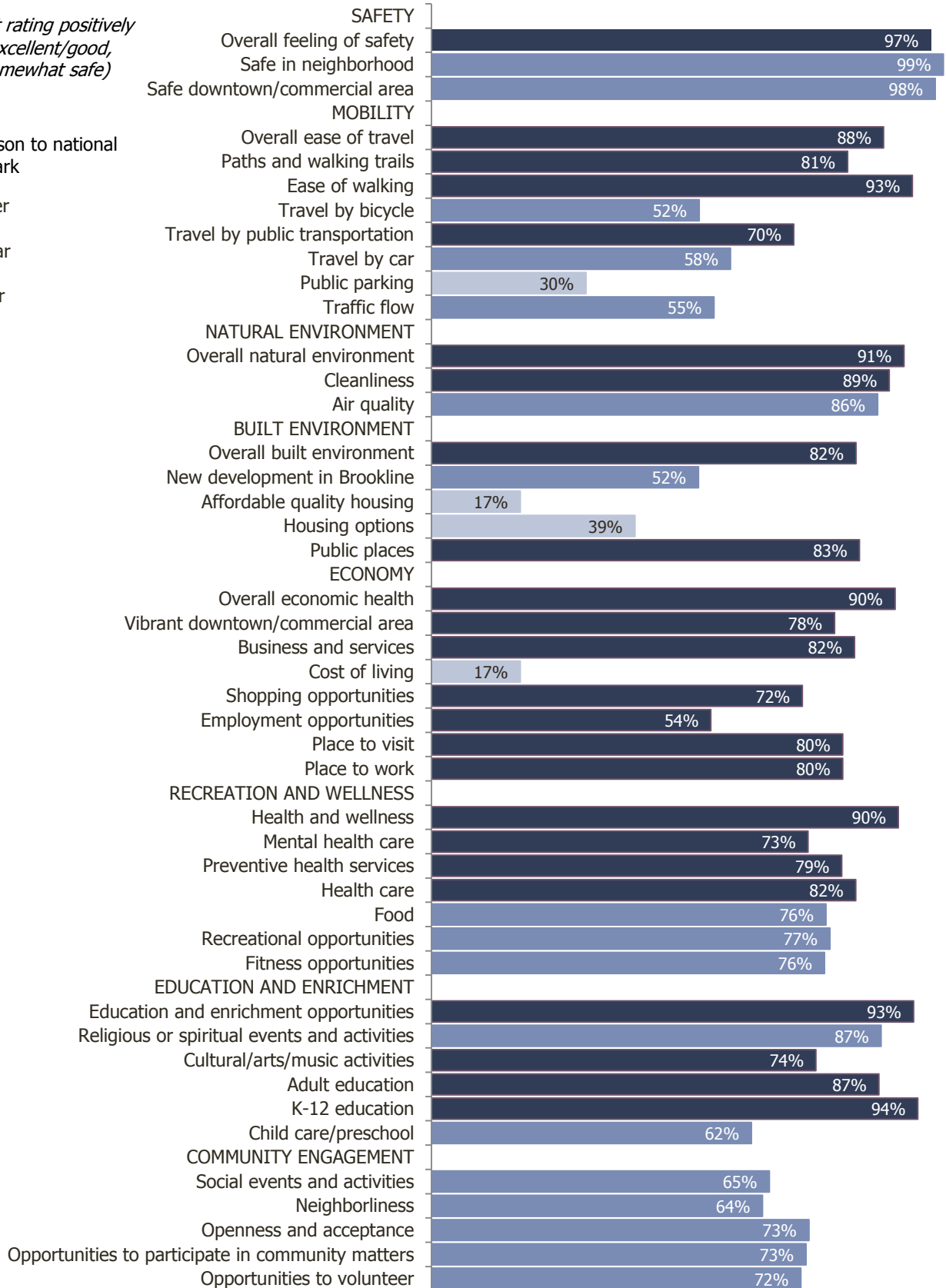
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

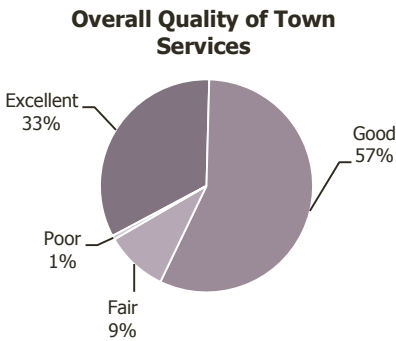
How well does the government of Brookline meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Brookline as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 9 in 10 residents rated the overall quality of services provided by Brookline as excellent or good, while 56% of residents gave positive ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were higher than those given in other communities across the nation.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Brookline’s leadership and governance; generally these ratings were strong. Over 8 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to the overall customer service by Town government, a rating that was similar to the national benchmark. At least 7 in 10 citizens of Brookline gave favorable ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction that Brookline is taking, confidence in Town government, government acting in the best interest of Brookline, being honest and treating all residents fairly. Most of these ratings were higher than the national benchmark.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Brookline. Most aspects of Governance received strong ratings; indeed, no aspect within the pillar of Governance received ratings that were lower than the national benchmark. Brookline residents gave particularly positive ratings to aspects of Safety, Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness. Within the facet of Safety, five of seven aspects, including police, crime prevention and fire prevention, received ratings higher than those given in other communities.

Within Natural Environment, at least three-quarters of survey respondents gave favorable ratings to yard waste pick-up, drinking water, natural areas preservation and open space, all of which were rated higher than in other communities nationwide. Similarly, about 9 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to aspects of Recreation and Wellness including Town parks, recreation programs, and health services; all three of these aspects were rated higher than the benchmark. The facet of Mobility also saw strong ratings, with many aspects having ratings that were higher than the benchmark. Over three-quarters of residents gave positive ratings to street cleaning, street lighting and snow removal. Street repair and traffic enforcement received ratings similar to the benchmark; however, both of these aspects were rated more highly in 2016 than in 2014. The facets of Built Environment and Education and Enrichment also received positive responses: a majority of residents gave favorable ratings to all aspects of Governance in these areas.

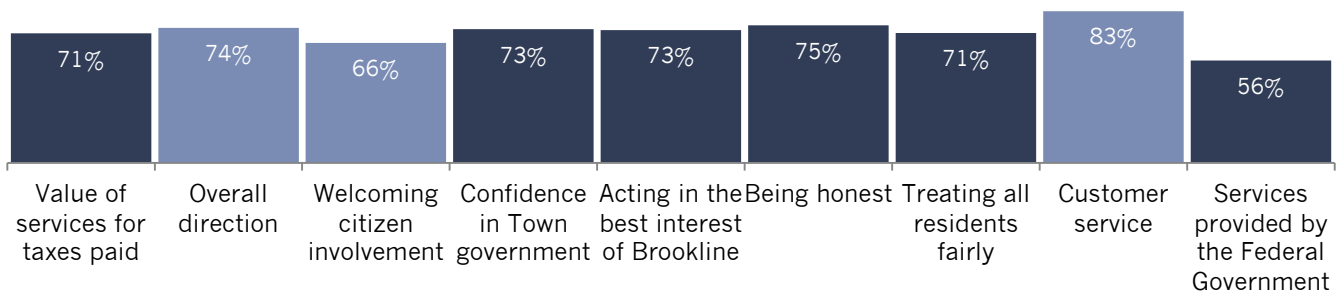


Ratings in 2016 tended to be similar to or higher than those in 2014. One aspect of Governance, economic development, trended downward in 2016. Despite this downward trend, Brookline continued to rate higher than the benchmark for economic development.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



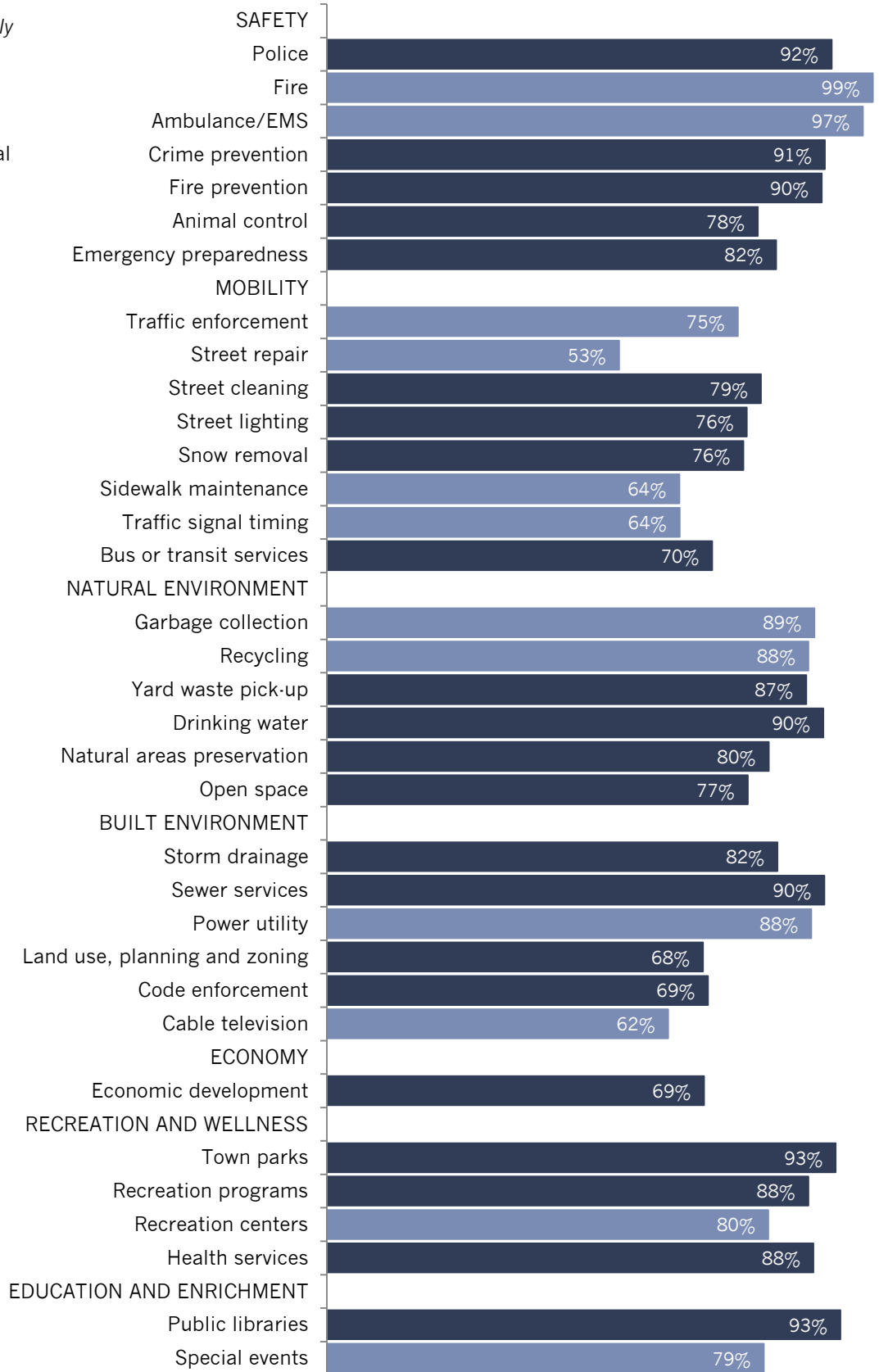
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

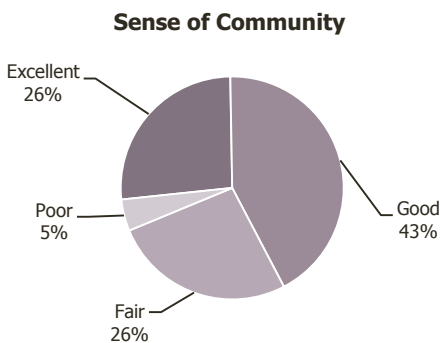
Are the residents of Brookline connected to the community and each other?

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. Seven in ten Brookline residents rated their overall sense of community as excellent or good, a rating that was similar to the national benchmark. About half of residents reported that they had contacted the Town in the past year, while 8 in 10 residents said that they would remain in Brookline for the next five years. Nearly all survey respondents reported that they would recommend living in Brookline to others, a proportion that that was higher than in other communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. In general, rates of Participation across the facets tended to vary widely. The most commonly-reported behaviors were recycling at home, using public transportation and walking or biking instead of driving, which were performed by a large majority of survey participants (90% or higher). Brookline had strong rates of participation in the facets of Safety and Mobility: fewer than 1 in 10 Brookline residents had reported a crime or had been a victim of a crime in the past year. In the facet of Education and Enrichment, citizens' rates of participating in a religious or spiritual activity (34%) and attending a Town-sponsored event (37%) were both lower than the national benchmark. Survey respondents reported rates of conserving water and making their homes more energy efficient that were also lower than rates seen in other communities. In the facet of Community

Engagement, the proportions of residents who had talked or visited with a neighbor or read/watched the local news were on par with other communities. However, rates of citizens reporting that they had volunteered or watched a local public meeting were lower than the benchmark.

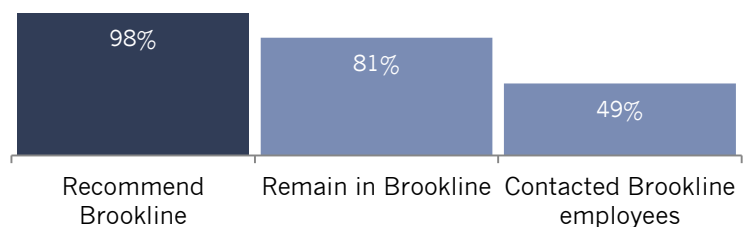
Several rates of Participation declined from 2014 to 2016, including the proportion of residents who had stocked supplies for an emergency, conserved water or made efforts to make their homes more energy-efficient. However, more Brookline residents reported participating in a club in 2016 than in 2014.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



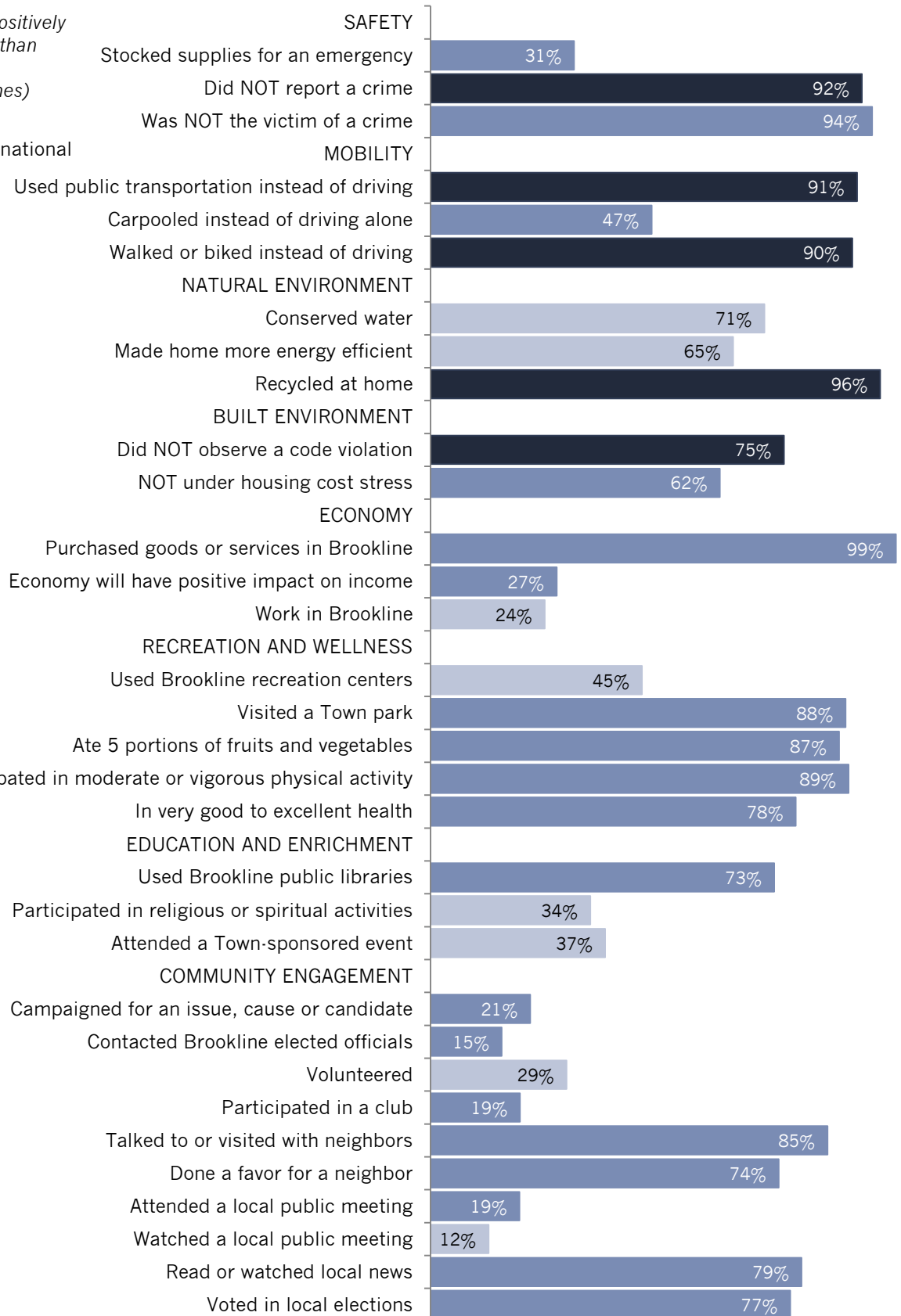
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

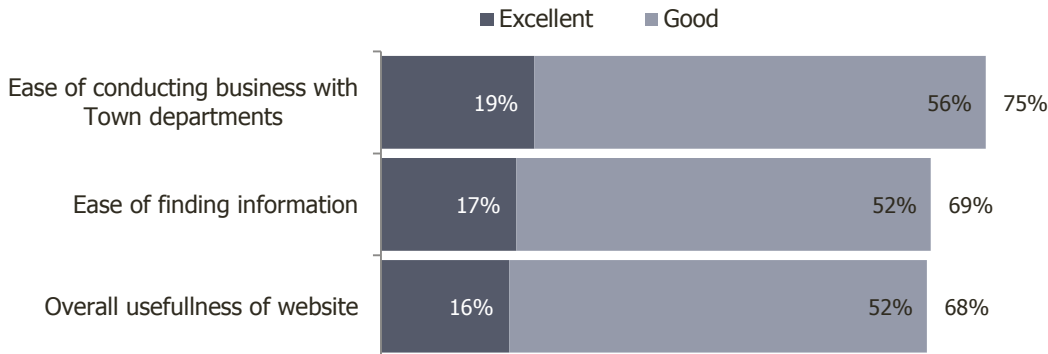
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Special Topics

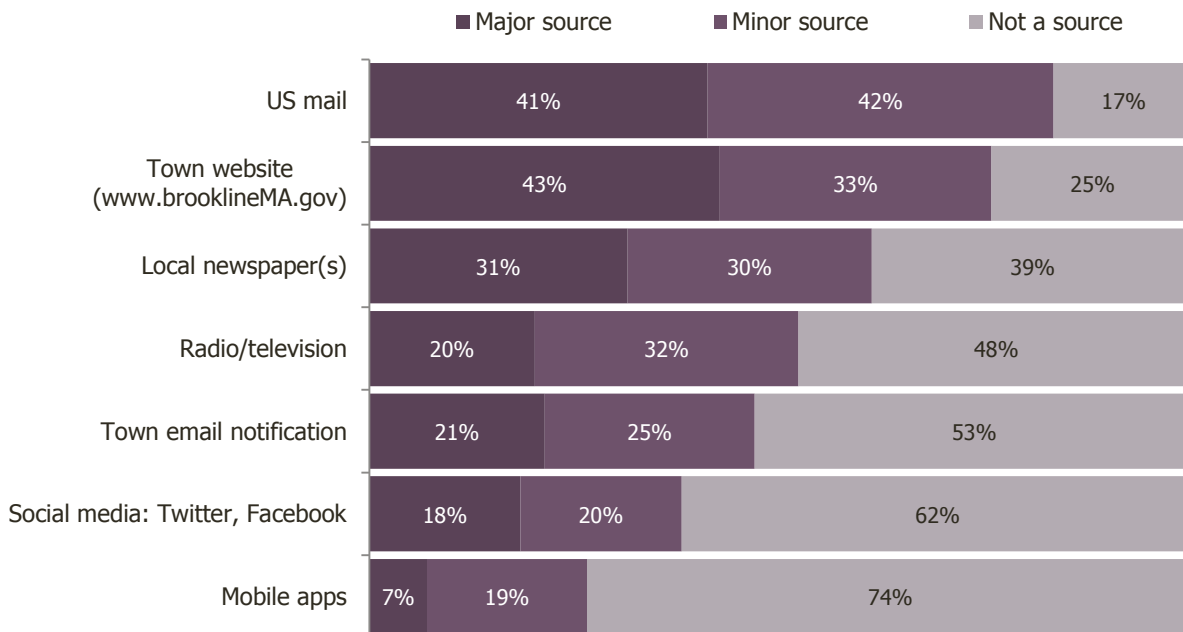
The Town of Brookline included six questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked survey participants to rate different aspects of the Brookline website. About three-quarters of residents rated the ease of conducting business with Town departments as either excellent or good. About 7 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the ease of finding information and the overall usefulness of the Town website.

Figure 4: Town of Brookline Website
Please rate the quality of the following aspects of the Town of Brookline website (www.brooklineMA.gov):



The next question asked residents where they obtained information about the Town’s events, projects and issues. US mail and the Town website were the top two overall sources of information (either “major” or “minor” sources). Local newspaper and radio/television were also at least minor sources of information for a majority of residents. Residents were least likely to obtain information on mobile apps, with only 26% reporting apps as a major or minor source of Town information.

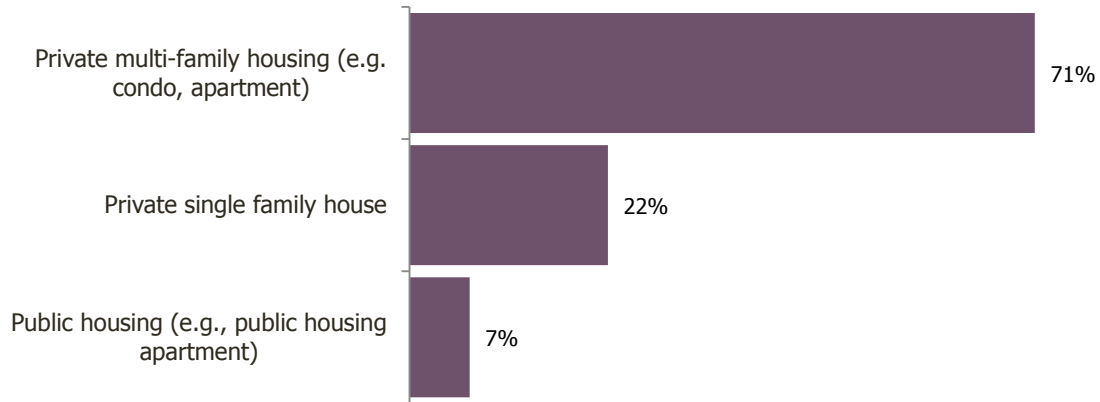
Figure 5: Information Sources
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, each of the following is for you to get information about Town events, projects or issues.



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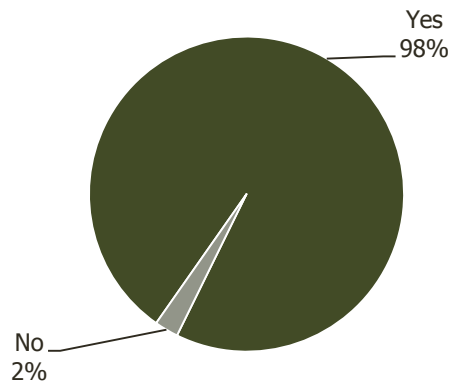
The third question asked Brookline residents to identify their housing type. About 7 in 10 Brookline citizens reported living in private multi-family housing, while about 1 in 5 residents reported living in a private single family house. Only 7% of Brookline residents reported that they were currently living in public housing.

Figure 6: Housing Type
Which best describes your housing?



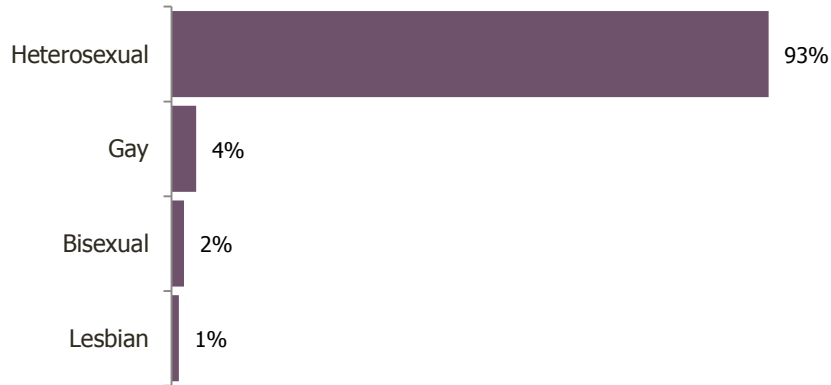
The next question asked survey participants whether they had health insurance. Almost all Brookline residents reported that they had health insurance. Only 2% reported that they did not currently have insurance.

Figure 7: Health Insurance Status
Do you have health insurance?



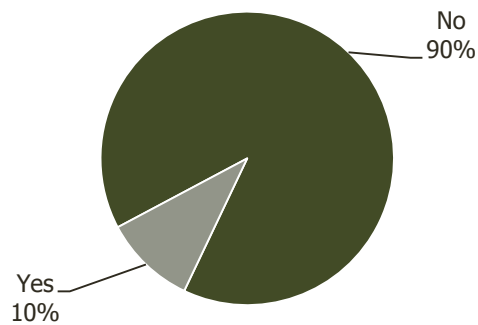
The fifth special-interest question asked survey participants to identify their sexual orientation. More than 9 in 10 Brookline residents reported that they are heterosexual, 4% reported they identify as gay, 2% identified as bisexual and 1% reported that they are lesbian.

Figure 8: Sexual Orientation
What is your sexual orientation?



The final question asked residents if any member of their household had a physical handicap or disability. Nine in 10 residents reported that they did not have a household member with a handicap or disability.

Figure 9: Household members with Physical Handicap or Disability
Does any member of your household have a physical handicap or is anyone disabled?



Conclusions

Citizens of Brookline continue to enjoy an exceptional quality of life.

Nearly all residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of life in Brookline and reported that Brookline was an excellent or good place to live. More than 9 in 10 residents favorably rated Brookline as a place to raise children, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Brookline and its overall appearance, and all of these ratings were higher than the national benchmark. Virtually all respondents indicated that they would recommend living in Brookline to others. Ratings for quality of life tended to remain stable from 2014 to 2016.

Town services consistently meet or exceed the expectations and needs of residents.

Brookline residents tended to give very high ratings to the services provided by their Town government: every facet in the pillar of Governance was rated higher than the national benchmark. Town parks, police, fire prevention, public libraries and sewer services were given positive ratings by at least 9 in 10 residents. All of these services were given higher ratings in Brookline when compared to other communities across the nation. The Town has also done an excellent job at building trust with the community. About three in four Brookline residents reported that the Town government was honest and acted in the best interest of the Town, both of which were also higher ratings than those given in other communities. Ratings for Town services also tended to remain stable from 2014 to 2016.

The Natural Environment is highly valued by Brookline residents.

A large majority (84%) of Brookline residents reported that it was essential or very important for the community to focus on the Natural Environment in the coming two years. Residents of Brookline generally gave positive ratings to aspects of Natural Environment and natural environment-related services. About 9 in 10 residents rated the overall quality of the natural environment in Brookline as excellent or good, and a similar number of residents gave positive ratings to cleanliness and air quality in the Town. Natural environment-related services, like drinking water, garbage collection and natural areas preservation were given very favorable ratings. Despite these high Natural Environment ratings in Governance and Community Characteristics, rates of Participation within this facet were fairly low. The proportion of respondents reporting that they had made efforts to conserve water and to make their homes more energy efficient declined from 2014 to 2016 and were below the national benchmark.

The Built Environment is also a priority to residents.

Residents also indicated that Built Environment would be an important focus area in the coming years. Ratings within this facet tended to vary. More than 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall built environment in Brookline and public places and both of these aspects received ratings higher than those given in other communities. However, fewer than 4 in 10 residents favorably rated affordable quality housing and variety of housing options, ratings which were lower than the national benchmark. About three quarters of residents had not observed a code violation in Brookline, which was a rate higher than seen elsewhere. Ratings for services related to Built Environment also tended to be strong: storm drainage, sewer services, land use, planning and zoning and code enforcement were all positively rated by at least two-thirds of respondents and were rated higher than the national benchmarks.