

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Brookline, MA
Community Livability Report

2018



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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 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.

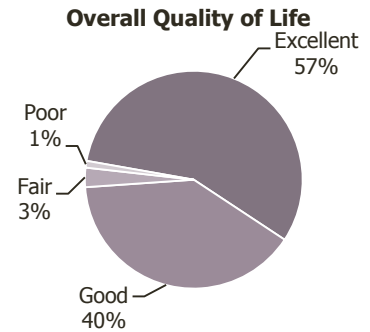
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 440 residents of the Town of Brookline. 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 Brookline

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

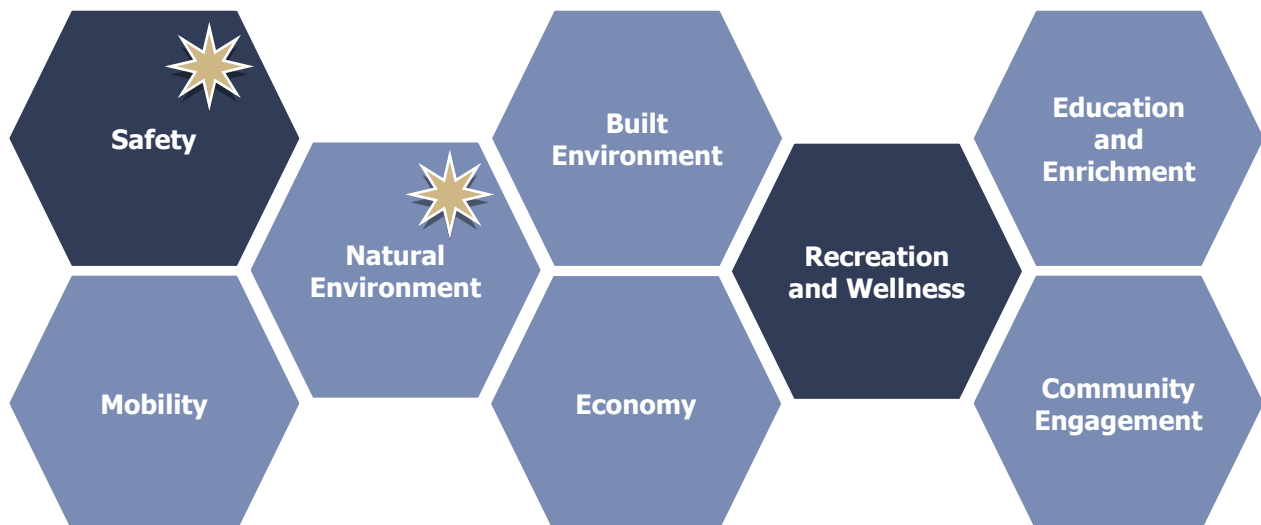
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Natural Environment as priorities for the Brookline community in the coming two years. Ratings for Safety and Recreation and Wellness tended to be higher than the national benchmarks; while ratings within the other facets tended to be positive and similar to the 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 Brookline’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



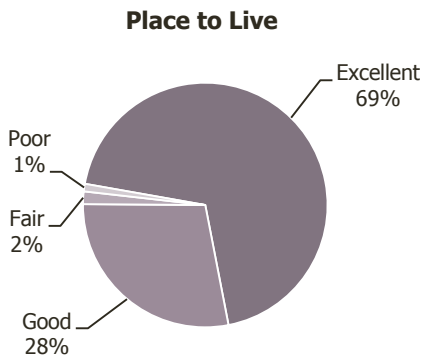
Community Characteristics

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, 97% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Brookline as a place to live were higher than those 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. Almost all residents gave high marks to the overall image, their neighborhoods, Brookline as a place to raise children and to the overall appearance of Brookline. These ratings were all higher than the national averages. About three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good reviews to Brookline as place to retire and this rating was similar to the national comparison.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. More than 9 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to each aspect in the facet of Safety. Ratings for overall safety and safety in Brookline's downtown/commercial area were higher than ratings in comparison communities. Brookline residents tended to give high marks to almost all aspects of Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement; all ratings were similar to or higher than the benchmarks.

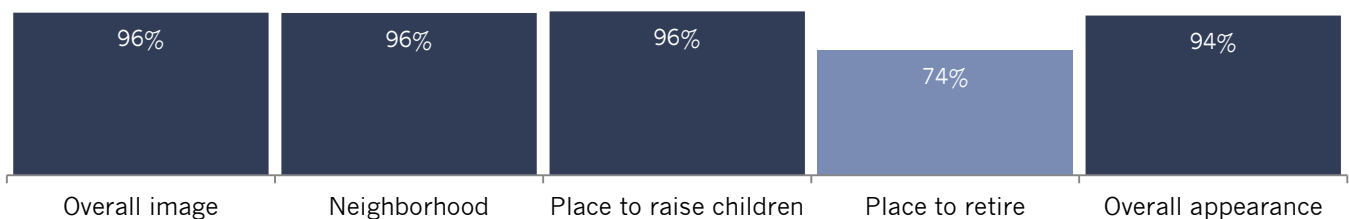


Evaluations within Mobility, Built Environment and Economy were a mix of positive and negative. About one-third of respondents or fewer gave positive marks to public parking, affordable quality housing, housing options and to the cost of living. All of these ratings were lower than ratings in comparison communities. However, there were also several aspects within these facets with well above average ratings. Some of these included the overall ease of travel, ease of walking, overall built environment, overall economic health and employment opportunities.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



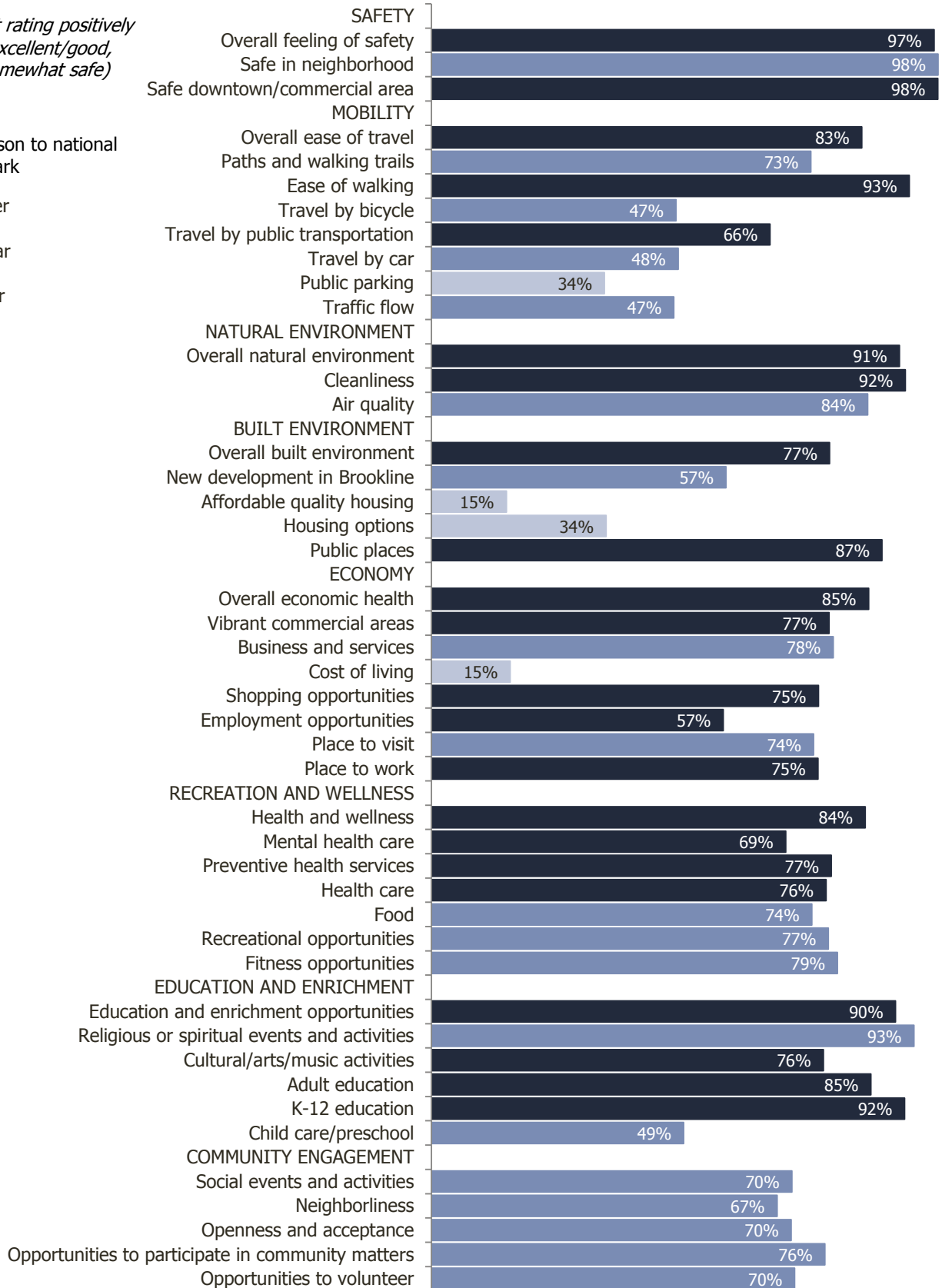
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

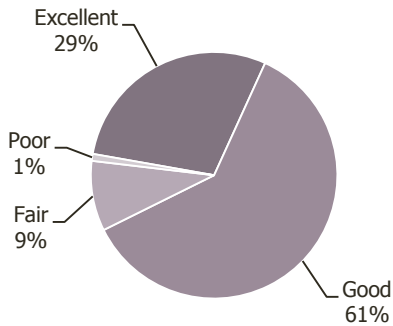
How well does the government of Brookline meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Brookline as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 90% of respondents gave high marks to the overall quality of services provided by the Town while about half as many gave high marks to the overall quality of services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings of Town services were higher than the national benchmark and ratings of Federal Government services were similar to the benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Brookline’s leadership and governance. About 7 in 10 gave excellent or good evaluations to the value of services for taxes paid, acting in the best interest of Brookline and being honest; these ratings were all higher than ratings in comparison communities across the nation. The remaining aspects all received high marks from at least 6 in 10 residents and ratings were similar to national averages.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Brookline. A majority of Brookline residents tended to rate most items positively and all aspects received ratings that were at least similar to the benchmarks. When compared to other communities across the nation, many aspects of Safety, Mobility and Natural Environment were higher than the benchmarks. It was noteworthy that all aspects of Recreation and Wellness received higher ratings than those observed elsewhere. Ratings for Built Environment, Economy and Education and Enrichment tended to be similar to ratings in comparison communities.

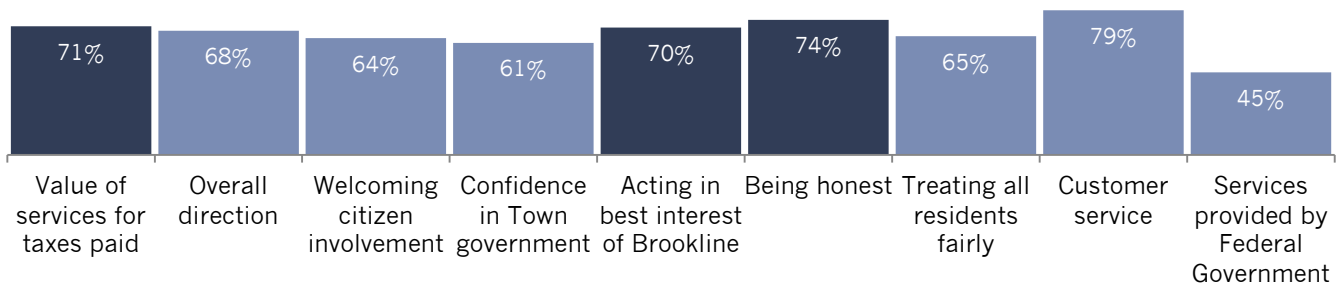
Overall Quality of Town Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



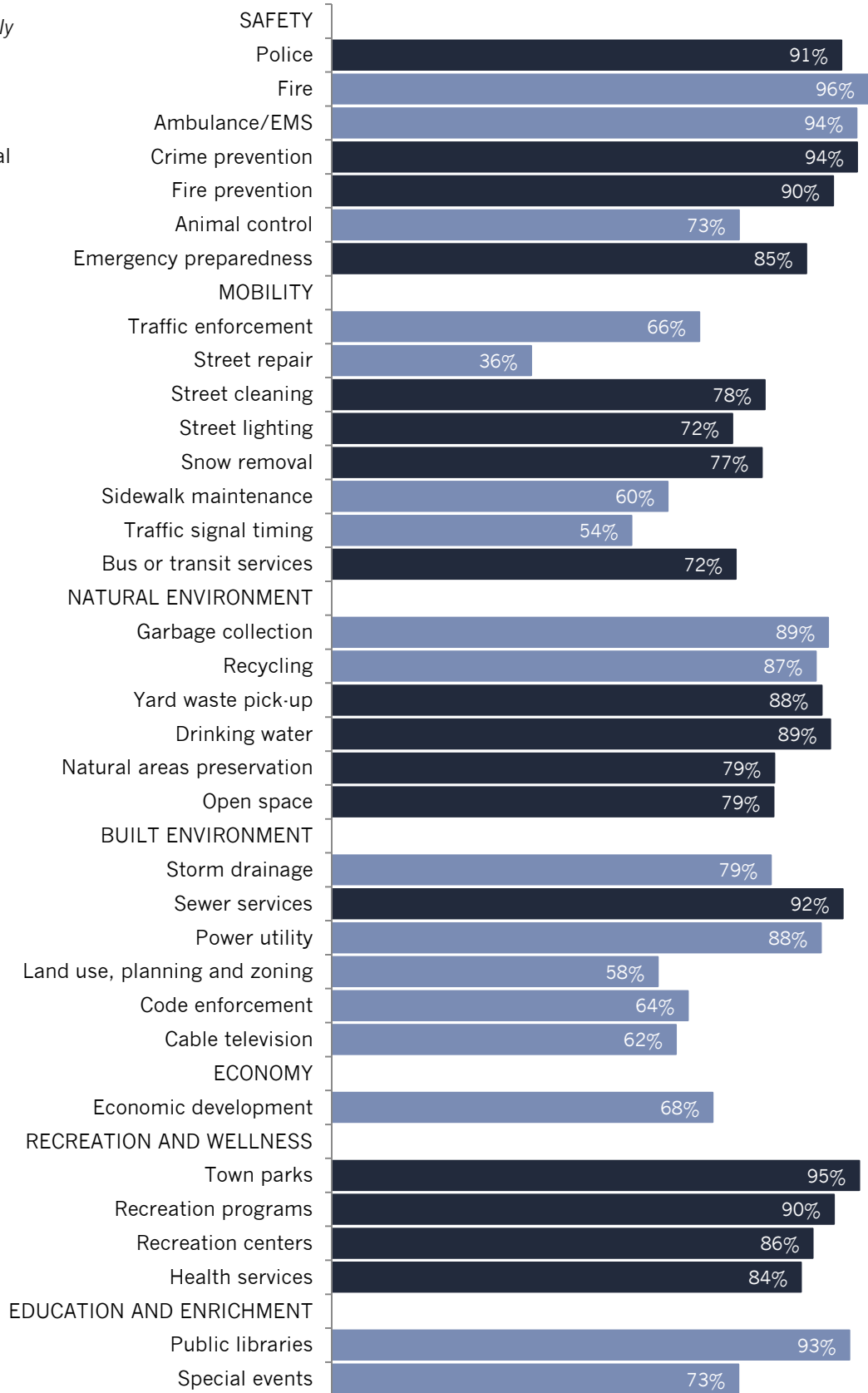
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

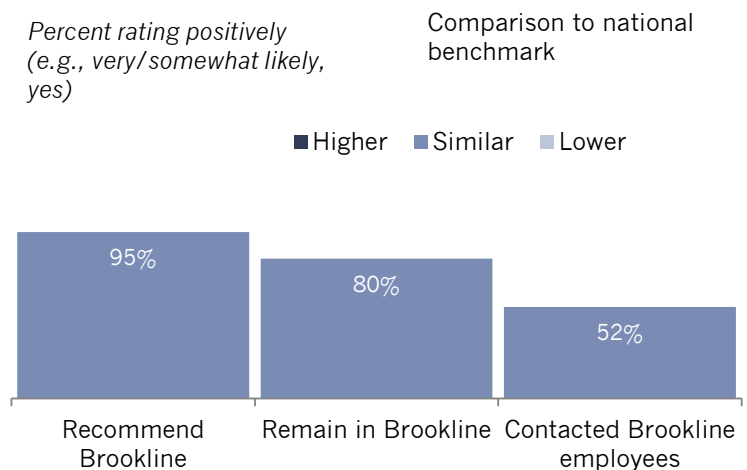
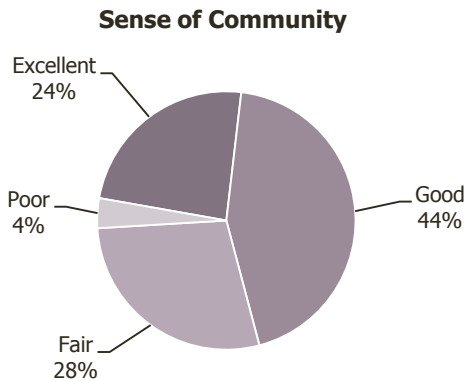


Participation

Are the residents of 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. About two-thirds of residents gave positive ratings to the overall sense of community in Brookline and this rating was similar to the national benchmark comparison. At least four in five respondents planned to remain in Brookline and would recommend living in Brookline.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. While reported rates of Participation varied widely, most were similar to those reported in comparison communities. For instance, 95% reported that they had recycled and 19% reported that they had contacted Brookline elected officials and both of these rates were similar to the national benchmarks. However, more Brookline residents reported that they had used public transportation, walked or biked instead of driving, had NOT observed a code violation or had used Brookline public libraries than residents in other communities across the nation. Conversely, fewer survey respondents in Brookline reported that they had conserved water, worked in Brookline, participated in religious or spiritual activities, attended a Town-sponsored event, had done a favor for a neighbor or watched a local public meeting compared to residents in other communities.



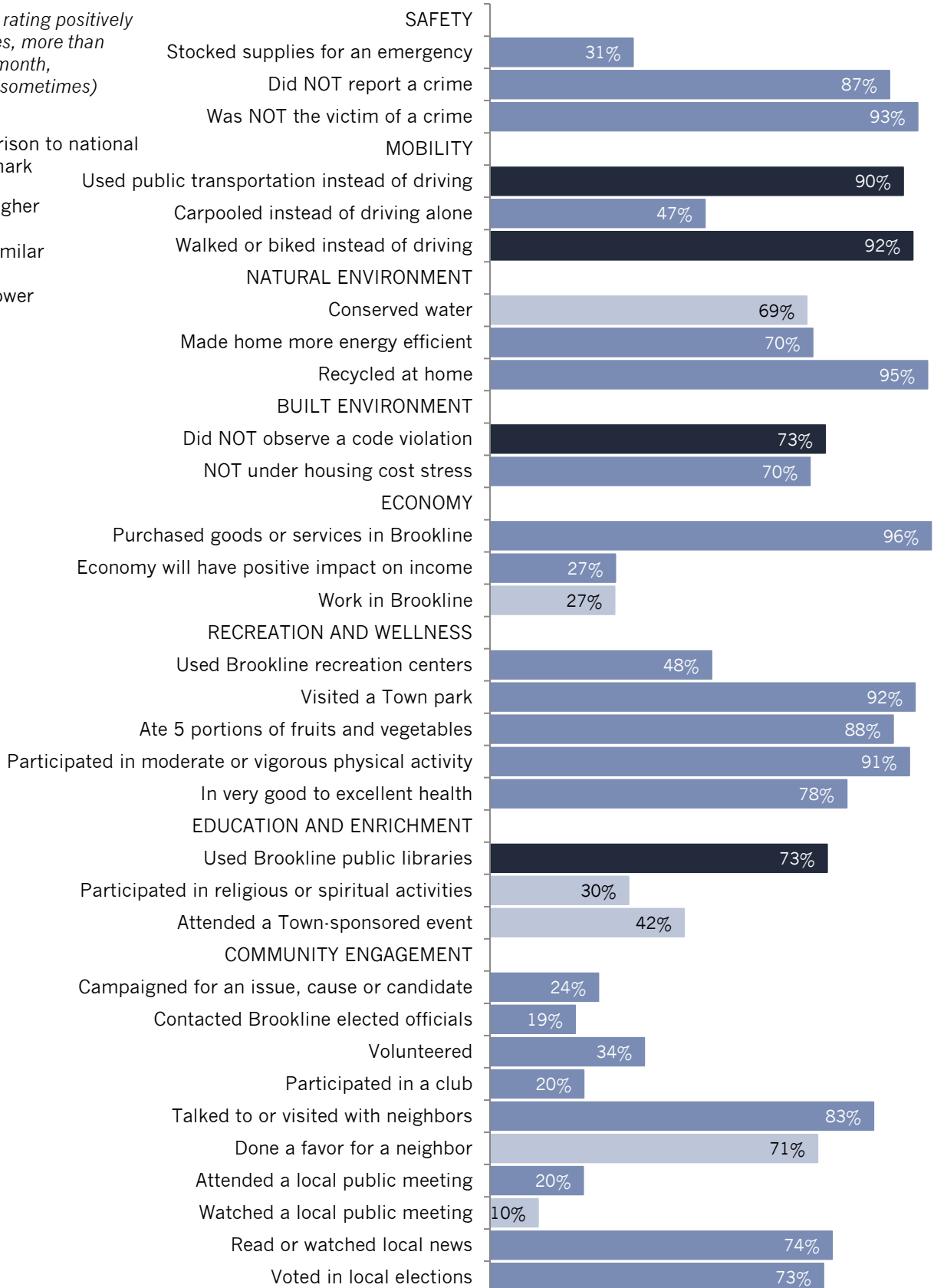
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



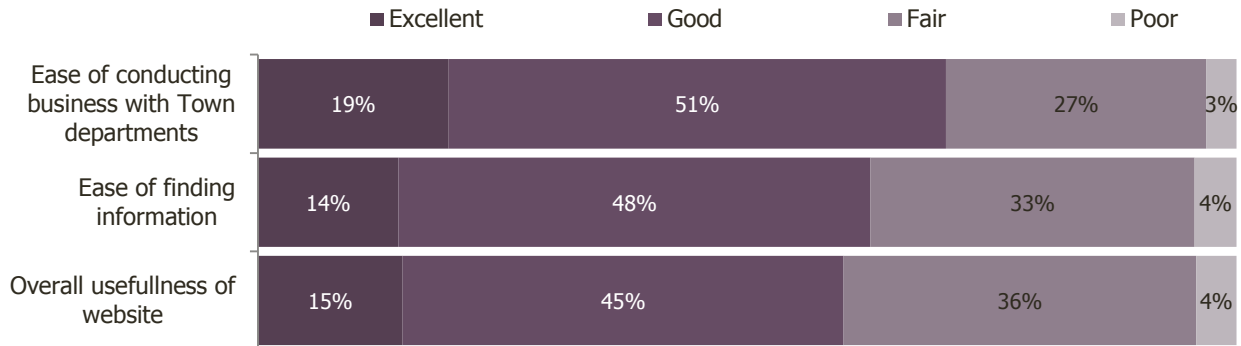
Special Topics

The Town of Brookline included six questions of special interest on The NCS. The questions covered a wide range of topics including the Town’s website, preferred information sources and some sociodemographic questions.

Survey respondents rated different aspects of the Town of Brookline’s website. At least 6 in 10 rated each aspect as excellent or good.

Figure 4: Town of Brookline Website

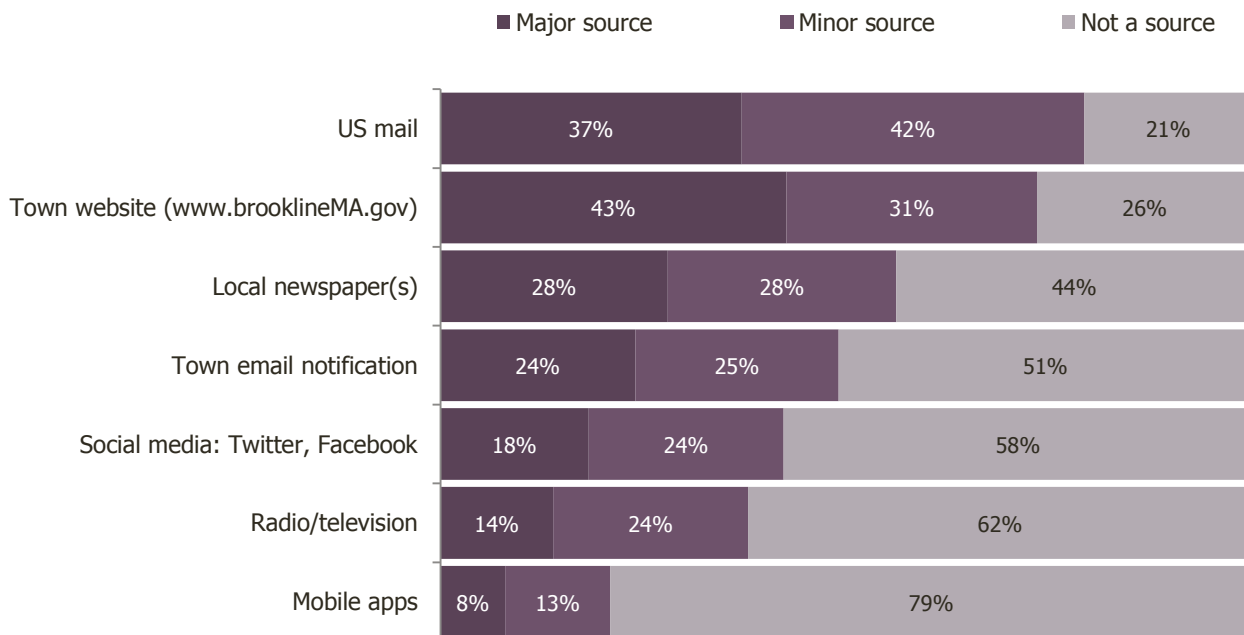
Please rate the quality of the following aspects of the Town of Brookline website (www.brooklineMA.gov):



Residents indicated if they considered various different communication tools to be major, minor or not sources of information about the Town of Brookline. A majority of residents considered the US mail, the Town website and local newspaper(s) to be major or minor sources of information. About half indicated that Town email notifications were at least a minor source of information. Fewer than half indicated that social media, radio/television or mobile apps were major or minor sources of information for them.

Figure 5: Information Sources

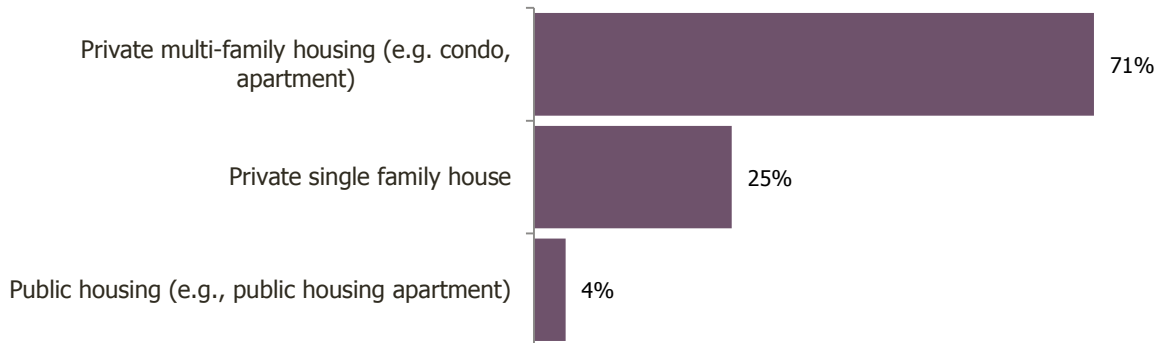
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, each of the following is for you to get information about Town events, projects or issues.



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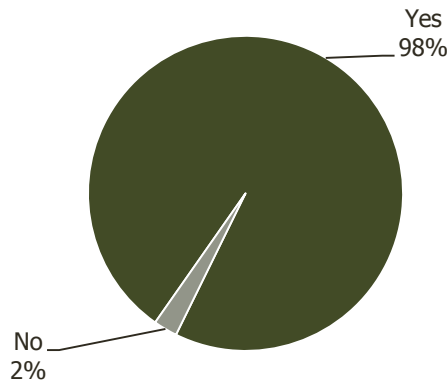
Respondents also identified the best description of their housing. A strong majority indicated that they lived in private multi-family housing, about 25% lived in private single family homes and about 4% lived in public housing.

Figure 6: Housing Type
Which best describes your housing?



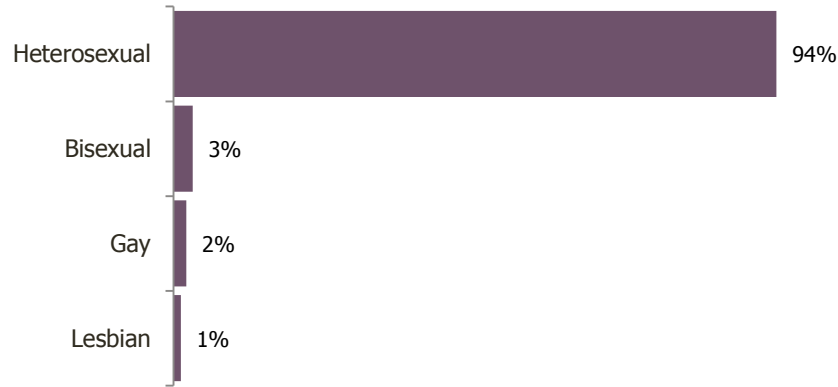
Almost all Brookline residents reported that they had health insurance. Only 2% said that they did not currently have insurance.

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



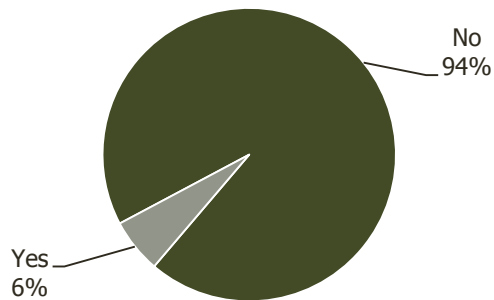
More than 9 in 10 Brookline residents reported that they were heterosexual, 3% identified as bisexual, 2% identified as gay and 1% identified as lesbian.

Figure 8: Sexual Orientation
What is your sexual orientation?



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

Brookline continues to be a highly desirable and safe place to live.

Almost all survey respondents rated the overall quality of life in Brookline and the town as a place to live as excellent or good; these ratings remained stable over time (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover) and were higher than the benchmarks. Residents remained loyal to the community, with at least four in five likely to recommend Brookline as a place to live and to remain in Brookline for the next five years. Further, at least 9 in 10 gave high marks to the overall image of Brookline, their neighborhoods, Brookline as a place to raise children and to its overall appearance. Each of these ratings was higher than the national benchmark and remained stable from 2016 to 2018.

Residents identified the facet of Safety as one of the most important focus areas for the community and the survey results showed that the Town is meeting resident expectations. Nearly all Brookline residents felt safe in their neighborhoods and in downtown/commercial areas and had a positive overall feeling of safety in the town. Safety-related services also received high marks from a majority of respondents. Ratings for Safety services such as police, fire and crime prevention were all higher than the national benchmarks and had remained stable over time.

The only community issues with quality ratings lower than the national benchmarks in 2018 related to parking, affordable housing, housing options and cost of living. Like other highly desirable communities, it is likely scarcity of these amenities or characteristics that is of concern for residents and are the key challenges confronting community livability in Brookline.

Trust in Town Government is high and Town services are well-regarded.

At least 6 in 10 Brookline residents gave high marks to each aspect of Brookline's leadership and governance and almost all ratings were similar to or higher than the benchmarks. Almost all residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of Town services and individual services were also rated highly by most residents. Many services within the facet of Recreation and Wellness scored higher than the national benchmark as did services within Natural Environment and Mobility.

Most aspects of Governance remained stable from 2016 to 2018. However, decreases in service quality were observed for traffic enforcement, street repair, traffic signal timing and land use, planning and zoning, though these ratings were on par with the national average.

The Natural Environment remains a community asset.

As observed on the 2016 survey, about four in five Brookline residents in 2018 reported that it was essential or very important for the community to focus on the Natural Environment in the coming two years. Survey respondents 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 and the overall cleanliness as excellent or good; both ratings were higher than the national averages. Services related to Natural Environment tended to be rated positively by at least four in five residents and several were higher than the national benchmark (open space, natural areas preservation, drinking water, yard waste pick-up). A similar proportion of Brookline residents reported that they had made efforts to make their homes more energy efficient or had recycled from home; however, fewer reported that they had conserved water in the last 12 months.