

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

**Walnut Creek, CA**  
Community Livability Report

DRAFT  
2017



**NRC**  
National Research Center Inc

2955 Valmont Road Suite 300  
Boulder, Colorado 80301  
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863



*Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*

777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20002  
icma.org • 800-745-8780

# Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Walnut Creek ..... 2

Community Characteristics ..... 3

Governance ..... 5

Participation ..... 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions ..... 13



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# About

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

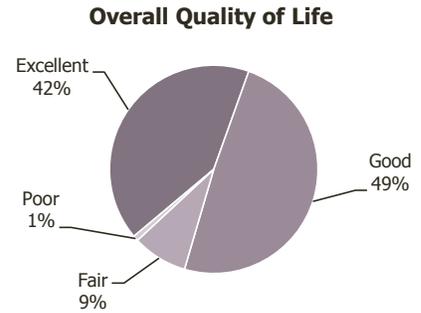
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 2,963 residents of the City of Walnut Creek. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 2% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Walnut Creek

A vast majority of residents rated the quality of life in Walnut Creek as excellent or good. This was similar to quality of life ratings seen in other communities nationwide (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.



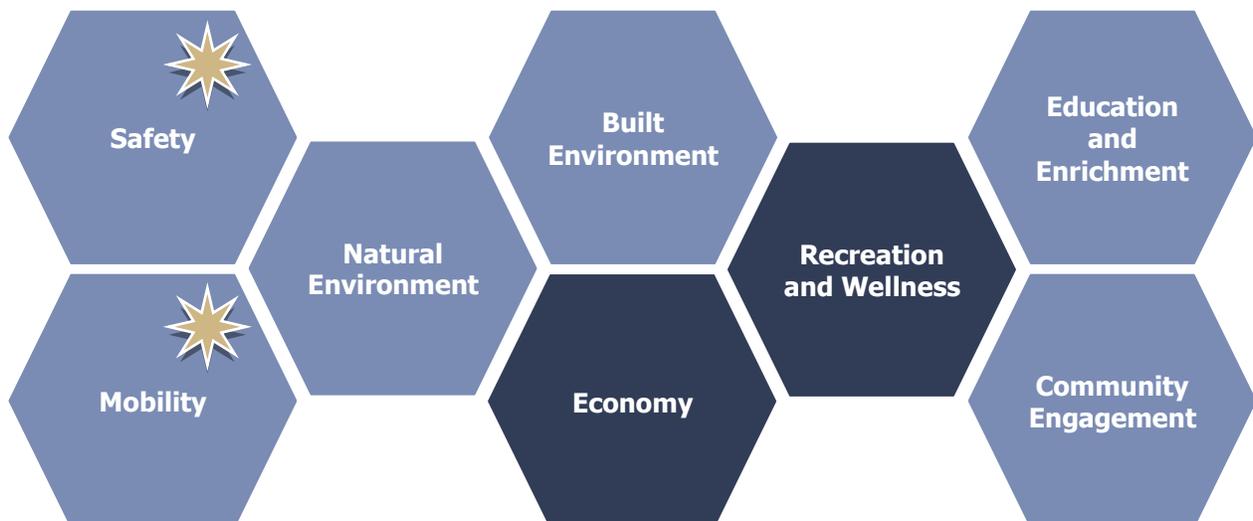
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Mobility as priorities for the Walnut Creek community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Walnut Creek residents gave exceptionally strong ratings to Economy and to Recreation and Wellness. Ratings for all other facets 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 Walnut 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 Walnut Creek, 94% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Walnut Creek 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 Walnut Creek as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Walnut Creek and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 survey participants gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image of the City, their neighborhood as a place to live, Walnut Creek as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the City, while about 7 in 10 positively rated Walnut Creek as a place to retire. Ratings for Walnut Creek as a place to raise children and the overall image and overall appearance of the City were higher than the national benchmark comparisons. Residents' ratings of the overall image of the City and Walnut Creek as a place to retire declined from 2012 to 2017 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover for more detail).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Ratings within the pillar of Community Characteristics varied widely, but were generally similar to or higher than the national benchmark comparisons. About 9 in 10 residents gave high marks to the overall feeling of safety in Walnut Creek, and a similar proportion reported feeling safe in their neighborhood and in Walnut Creek's downtown/commercial area during the day. Ratings for Mobility tended to be more mixed: while about 8 in 10 respondents favorably rated the availability of paths and walking trails (which was higher than the national benchmark), less than half awarded excellent or good ratings to ease of travel by car, public parking and traffic flow (which were lower than the benchmark). Additionally, ratings for traffic flow, ease of travel by car, travel by bicycle, travel by public transportation, ease of walking and the availability of paths and walking trails declined from 2012 to 2017. Within Built Environment, more than four in five respondents positively rated public places where people want to spend time, which was higher than ratings seen in comparison communities; however, fewer than one in five participants gave high marks to the availability of affordable quality housing, which was lower than the benchmark. Within Economy, about 8 in 10 residents or more awarded positive marks to the overall economic health of Walnut Creek, the City as a place to work and to

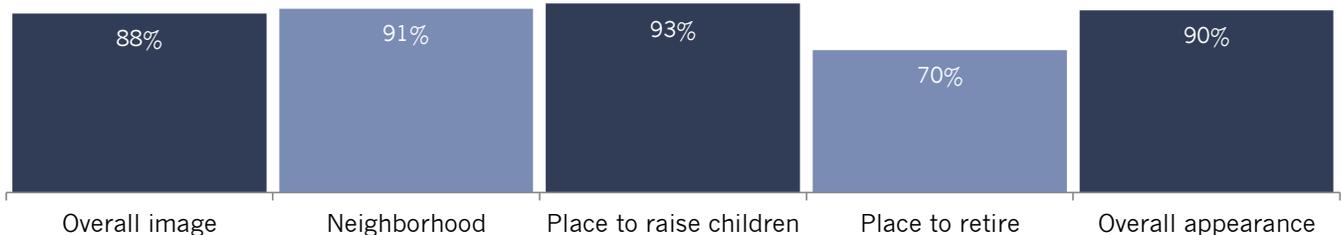
visit, the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities and the overall quality of business and service establishments in the City; all of these ratings were higher than ratings seen in comparison communities. Only the cost of living in Walnut Creek, which was rated positively by about one-quarter of residents, received a rating that was lower than the benchmark. At least half of residents positively rated all aspects of Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment, and a majority of items in these facets received ratings that were higher than the national comparisons. Additionally, it is noteworthy that ratings increased over time for air quality, the availability of affordable quality childcare and the availability of preventive health services in Walnut Creek.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



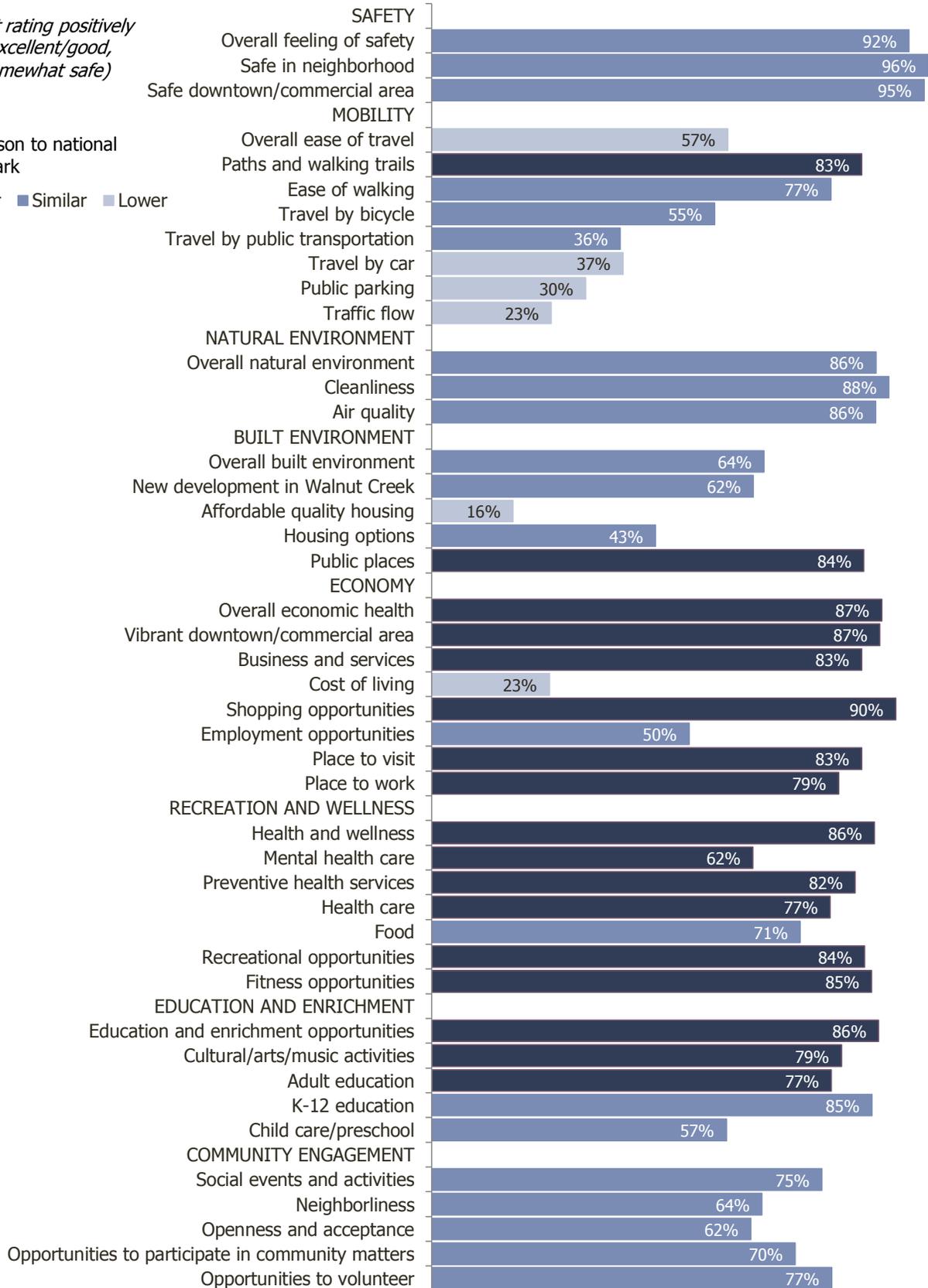
# The National Citizen Survey™

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 Walnut Creek meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

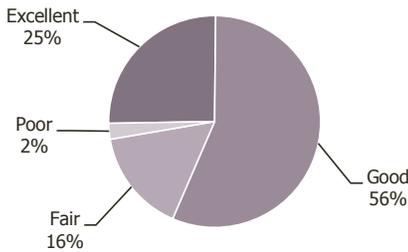
The overall quality of the services provided by Walnut Creek as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by Walnut Creek; in comparison, about 4 in 10 residents positively rated the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were strong and similar to the national benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Walnut Creek’s leadership and governance. Ratings for aspects of Walnut Creek’s leadership and governance tended to be similar to ratings seen in comparison communities. About 8 in 10 respondents awarded high marks to the customer service provided by Walnut Creek employees, and about 6 in 10 favorably rated the value of services for taxes paid to the City and the job the City does at treating all residents fairly. All other aspects of the City’s leadership and governance received excellent or good ratings from about half of survey participants. A decrease in ratings was noted from 2012 to 2017 for the overall direction the City is taking, the value of services for taxes paid and the job the City does at welcoming citizen involvement.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Walnut Creek. Ratings for Walnut Creek’s services and amenities tended to be similar to ratings seen in other communities nationwide. However, seven services received ratings that were higher than the national benchmark comparisons: drinking water, natural areas preservation, Walnut Creek open space, code enforcement, economic development, recreation programs and health services. About 9 in 10 survey participants favorably rated ambulance/EMS, fire services and City parks. Other top-rated Walnut Creek services included police, garbage collection, recycling, yard waste pick-up, sewer services, power utility, recreation centers and public libraries; about 8 in 10 respondents or more favorably rated all of these services.

Ratings increased over time in the pillar of Governance for public information services, but decreased for several services including traffic enforcement, street repair, recycling and land use, planning and zoning.

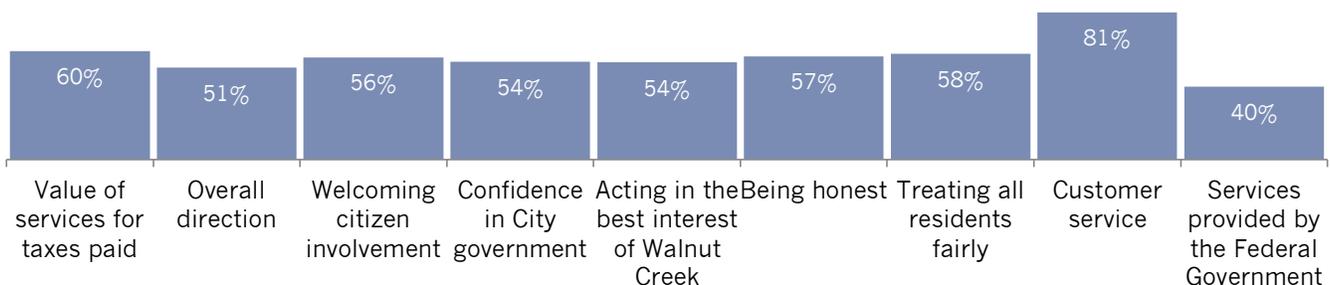
**Overall Quality of City Services**



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



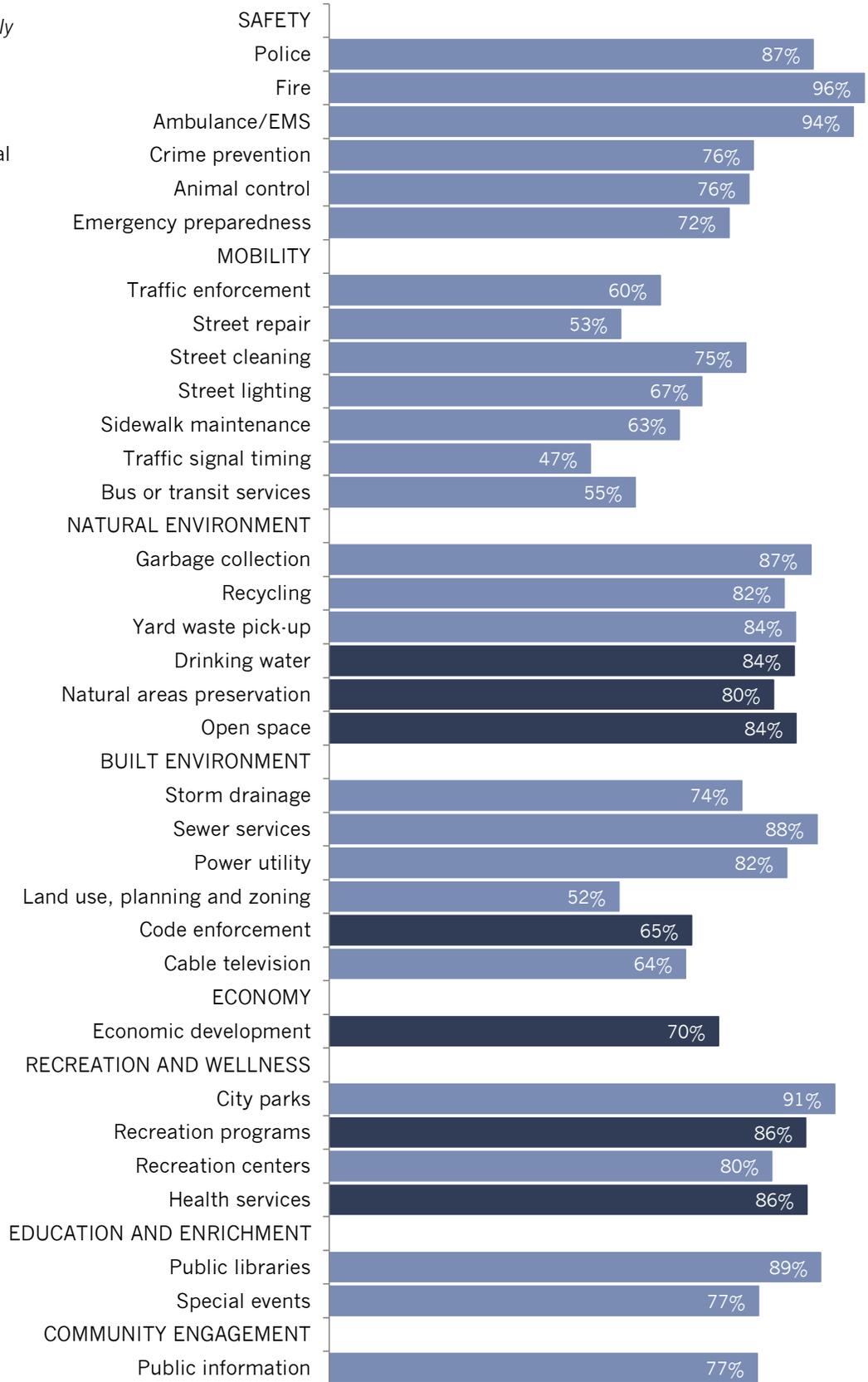
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



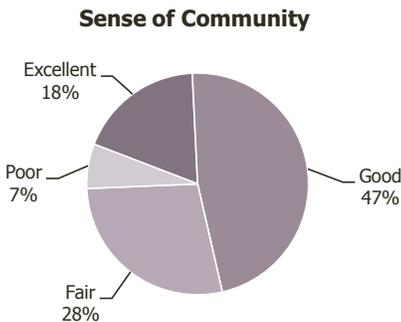
# Participation

## *Are the residents of Walnut 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. About two-thirds of residents awarded excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in Walnut Creek; this rating was similar to ratings seen in other communities and declined from 2012 to 2017. About 9 in 10 survey participants would recommend living in Walnut Creek to someone who asked, and a similar proportion of respondents planned to remain in the City for the coming five years. Both of these measures were similar to the national benchmark comparisons but declined over time. Thirty-seven percent of respondents had contacted a Walnut Creek employee in the 12 months prior to the survey, which was a proportion similar to those observed elsewhere.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Residents' reported levels of participation tended to be strong and similar to or higher than levels seen in comparison communities. Within the facet of Safety, about 8 in 10 respondents or more did not report a crime and were not the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey, and close to half had stocked supplies in preparation for an emergency (a rate that was higher than the national benchmark comparison). Walnut Creek residents' reported rates of using public transportation instead of driving and walking or biking instead of driving were higher than levels reported in other communities nationwide. Almost all residents had made efforts to conserve water (95%) and recycled at home (97%) in the 12 months prior to the survey; both of these rates were higher than the national benchmarks. Within Built Environment, about two-thirds of respondents had not observed a code violation, which was higher than levels seen elsewhere, and a similar proportion of respondents were not under housing cost stress. Almost all residents had purchased goods

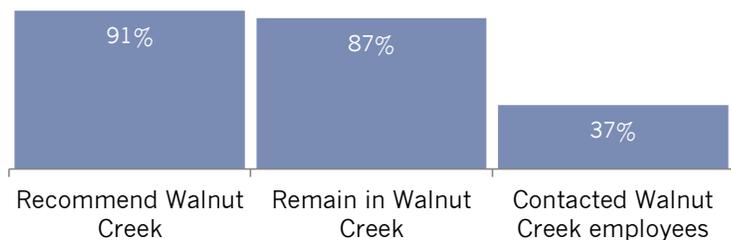
or services in Walnut Creek, and the proportion of respondents who reported that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in the coming six months increased from 2012 to 2017. Within Recreation and Wellness, 87% of residents had visited a City park in the 12 months prior to the survey, and more residents reported using Walnut Creek recreation centers in 2017 than in 2012. Participation levels in Community Engagement also tended to be strong: at least 8 in 10 residents had talked to or visited with neighbors, done a favor for a neighbor and read or watched local news in the 12 months prior to the survey, and residents' rates of campaigning for an issue, cause or candidate, participating in a club and voting in local elections were higher than the national benchmark comparisons.



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



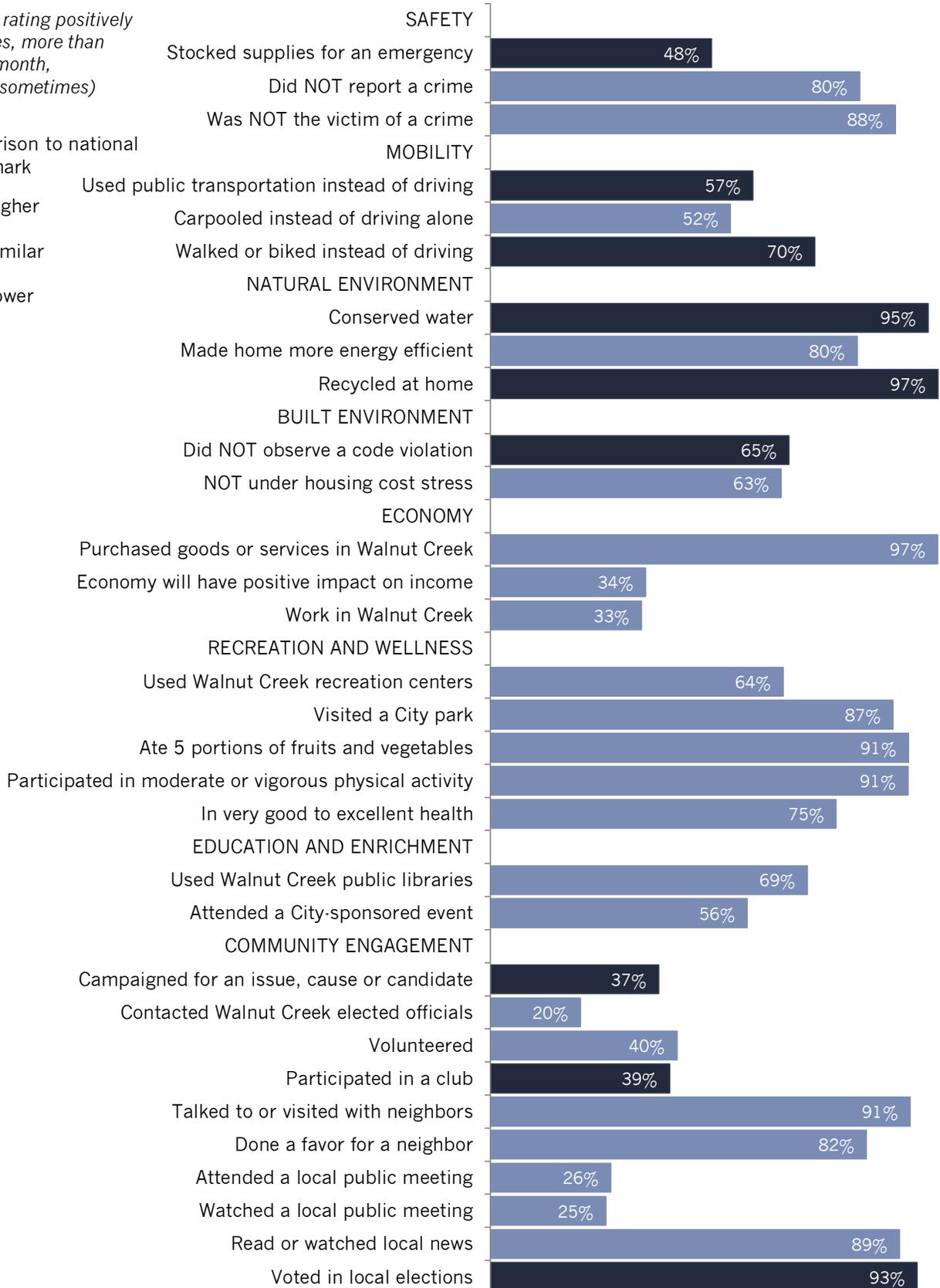
# The National Citizen Survey™

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

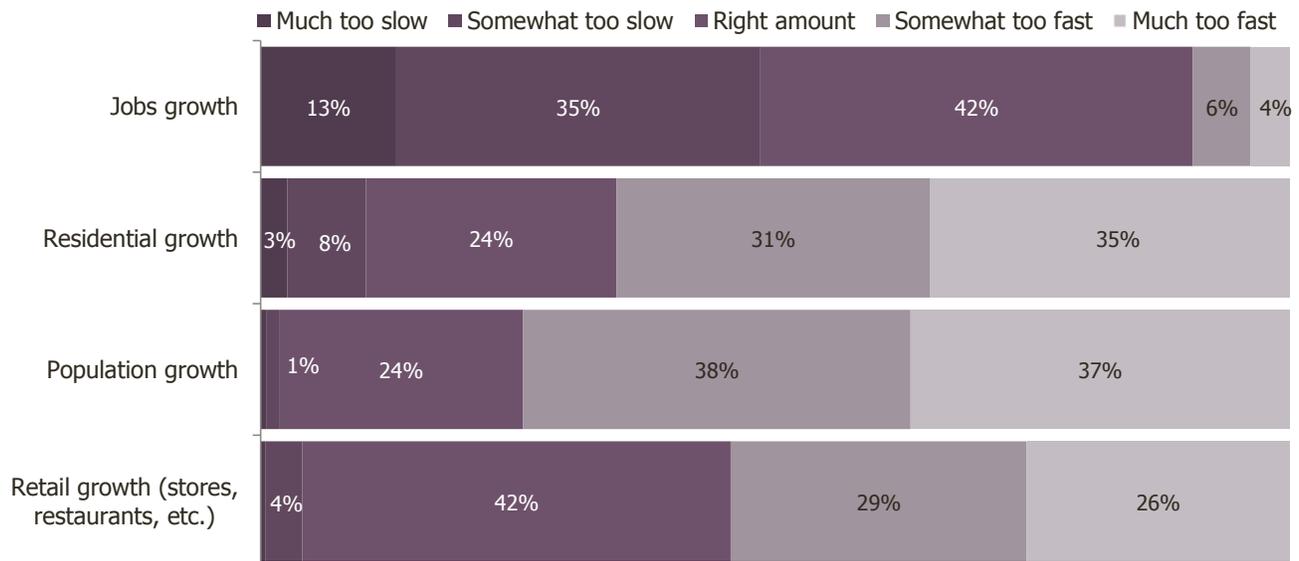


# Special Topics

The City of Walnut Creek included four questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special-interest question asked residents about the speed of growth of jobs, residential development, retail development and population growth. About half of respondents (48%) indicated that jobs growth was somewhat or much too slow, while about 4 in 10 said that jobs were growing at the right amount. Residential growth was seen as somewhat or much too fast by about two-thirds of respondents, and roughly three-quarters reported that population growth in Walnut Creek was somewhat or much too fast. A majority of residents (55%) indicated that retail growth was somewhat or much too fast, while about 4 in 10 reported that retail was growing at the right pace.

Figure 4: Speed of Growth in Walnut Creek

*Please rate the speed of growth in the following categories in Walnut Creek over the past 2 years:*

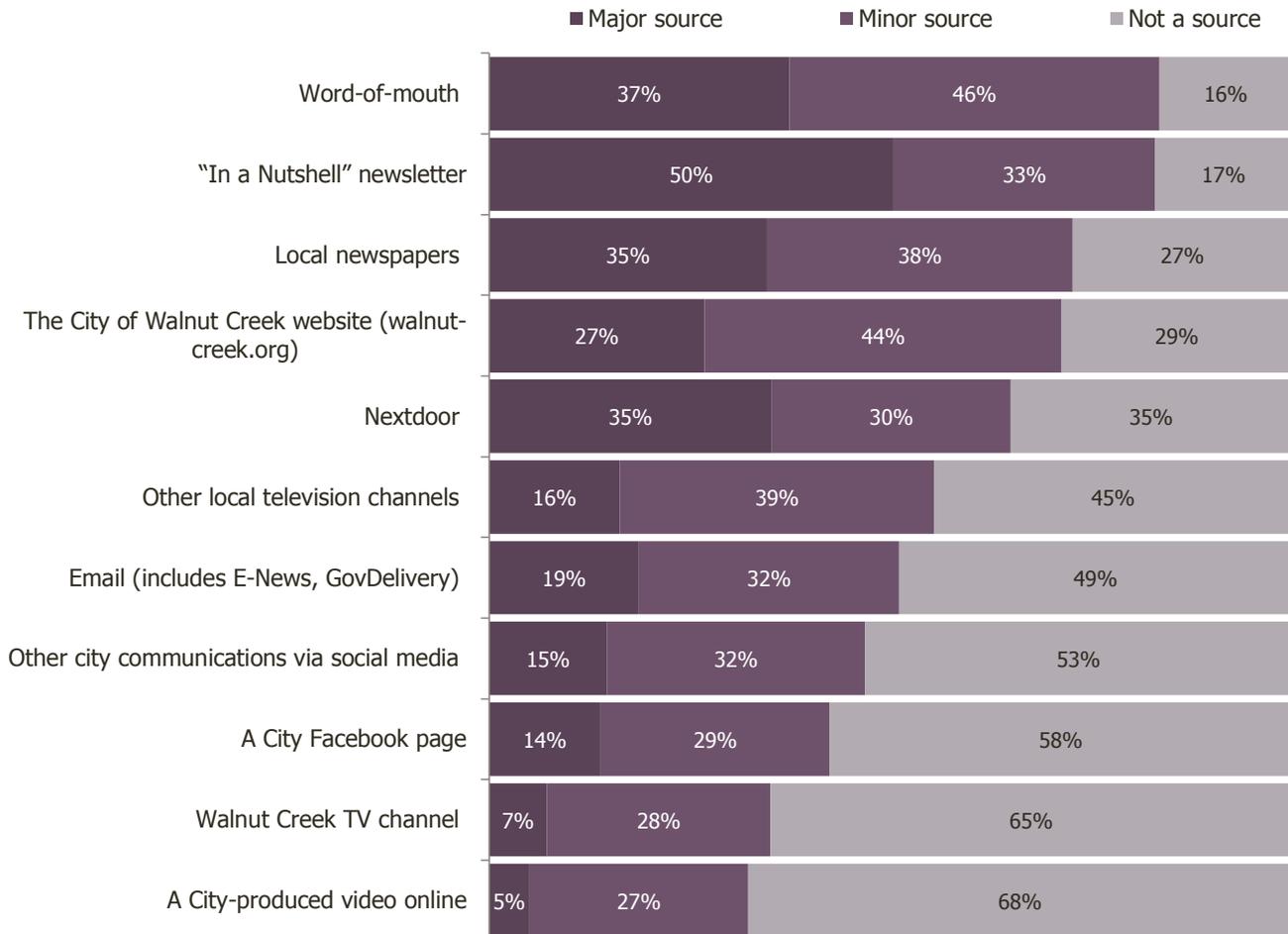


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Survey participants were next asked about sources they used to obtain information about the City government and its activities, events and services. About 8 in 10 residents indicated that word-of-mouth and the “In a Nutshell” newsletter were major or minor sources of City information for them. At least half of respondents said that local newspapers, the City of Walnut Creek website, Nextdoor, local television channels other than the Walnut Creek channel and email were at least of minor source of information.

Figure 5: Sources of City Information

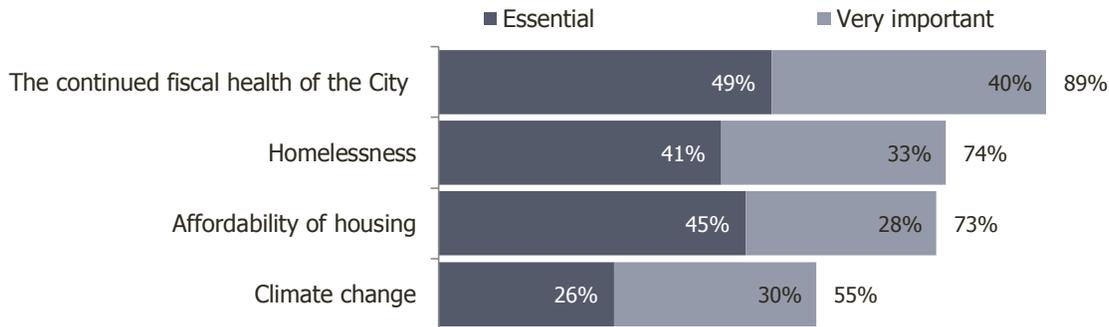
*Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the City government and its activities, events and services:*



## The National Citizen Survey™

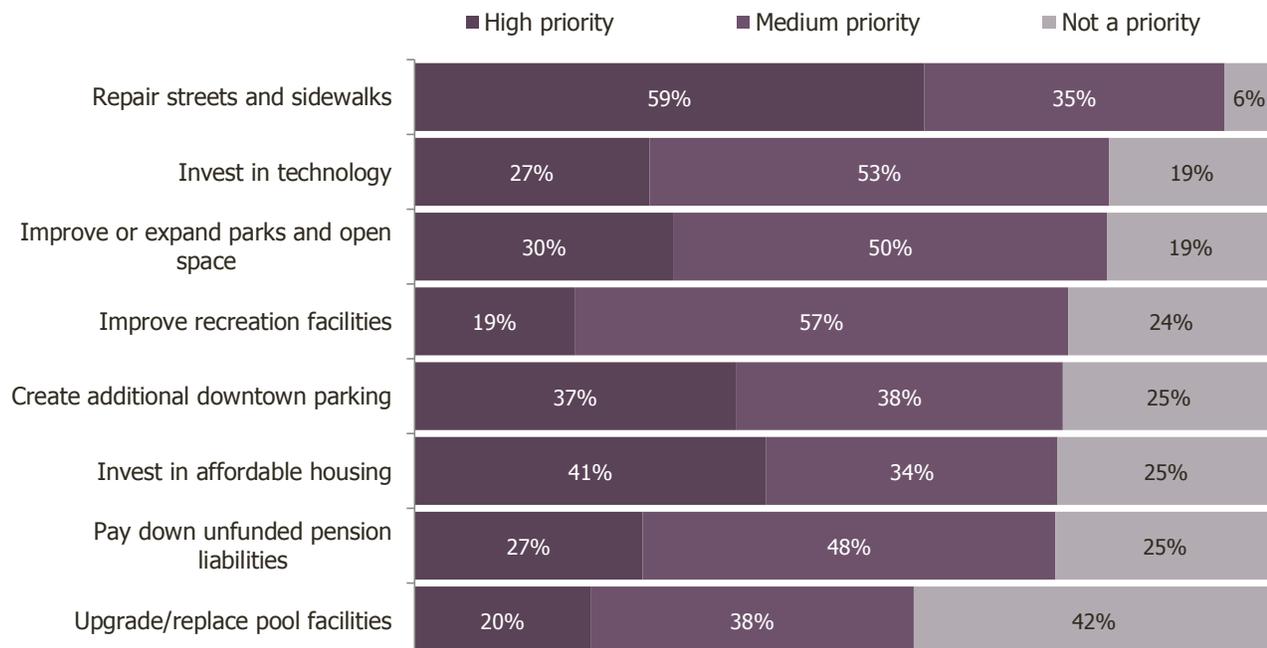
The third special-interest question asked residents to rate how important it should be for the City to address several issues in the coming two years. About 9 in 10 respondents indicated that it was essential or very important for Walnut Creek to address the continued fiscal health of the City, and about three-quarters of residents thought the City should address homelessness and the affordability of housing. About half of residents (55%) indicated that it was at least very important for the City to address climate change in the coming two years.

Figure 6: Importance of Issues for the City to Address  
Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the City of Walnut Creek to address the following issues in the coming two years:



The final special-interest question asked residents to consider how much of a priority, if at all, it should be for the City to use available surplus funds for various initiatives. Almost all residents said that repairing streets and sidewalks should be a high or medium priority for Walnut Creek, and 8 in 10 indicated that investing in technology and improving or expanding parks and open space should be a high priority. It is also noteworthy that about 4 in 10 residents thought that creating additional downtown parking and investing in affordable housing should be high priorities for the City.

Figure 7: Priorities for City Surplus Funds—Part 1  
Per City directives, when the City has a budget surplus, these funds are to be used for one-time expenditures or projects. First, please rate how much of a priority, if at all, it should be for the City to use any available surplus funds for the following initiatives:

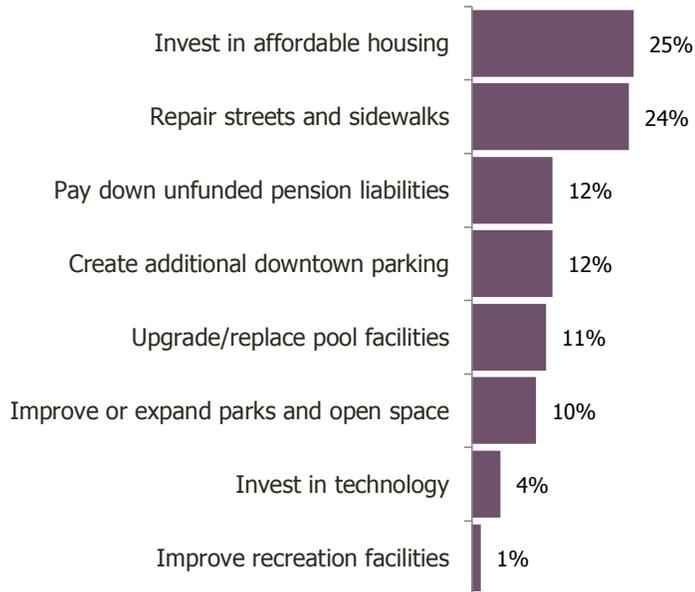


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In the final special-interest question, residents were also asked to select a single initiative that should be the City's top priority for any surplus funds. About one-quarter of respondents reported that the City's top priority should be investing in affordable housing, and another one-quarter indicated that the City's top priority should be repairing streets and sidewalks.

Figure 8: Top Priority for City Surplus Funds—Part 2

*Then, please select the single initiative you think should be the top priority for these funds:*



# Conclusions

## Walnut Creek residents enjoy a high quality of life.

About 9 in 10 survey participants awarded high marks to the overall quality of life in Walnut Creek and the city as a place to live; both of these ratings were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities and were stable over time. A vast majority of residents gave favorable ratings to Walnut Creek as a place to raise children and to the overall image and overall appearance of the City, and all three of these measures received ratings that were higher than ratings seen in other communities nationwide. About 9 in 10 respondents would recommend living in Walnut Creek to someone who asked and planned to remain in the City for the coming five years; although these ratings were similar to the national comparisons, they did decline from 2012 to 2017.

## Safety is a priority for residents.

Walnut Creek residents identified Safety as a top priority for the community in the coming two years. Ratings for Safety were generally strong and similar to ratings reported in other jurisdictions nationwide. About 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Walnut Creek, and almost all reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and in Walnut Creek's downtown/commercial area. At least 7 in 10 residents awarded high marks to all Safety services, including police, fire, ambulance/EMS and animal control services; ratings for all Safety services were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities. Additionally, a higher proportion of Walnut Creek residents had stocked supplies in preparation for an emergency than residents in other communities across the country. Ratings for all Safety-related measures were stable from 2012 to 2017.

## Mobility may be a potential area of opportunity for Walnut Creek.

Mobility was also identified as a key area of focus for the Walnut Creek community in the coming two years. Ratings for the overall ease of travel in the City, travel by car, public parking and traffic flow were all lower than ratings seen in comparison communities; however, residents' ratings of the availability of walking paths and trails were higher in Walnut Creek than in other communities across the nation. Ratings for Mobility-related services tended to be positive and similar to those seen elsewhere: about 6 in 10 or more residents positively rated traffic enforcement, street cleaning, street lighting and sidewalk maintenance. Respondents also reported levels of using public transportation and walking or biking instead of driving that were higher than levels seen in other communities nationwide. Despite some of these stronger Mobility ratings, several declines in ratings were noted in Mobility from 2012 to 2017. Ratings decreased from for traffic flow, ease of travel by car, ease of travel by bicycle, ease of walking, ease of travel by public transportation, traffic enforcement and bus or transit services, among others.

## The Economy is a positive feature of the community.

Ratings for measures related to Economy tended to be very strong in Walnut Creek, and were generally higher than ratings seen in other communities nationwide. Only the cost of living in Walnut Creek received a rating that was lower than the national comparisons. About four in five respondents or more awarded high marks to the overall economic health of Walnut Creek, the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, the overall quality of business and service establishments, shopping opportunities and Walnut Creek as a place to work and to visit; all of these measures received ratings that were higher than those seen in comparison communities. Additionally, about 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to economic development in Walnut Creek, which was higher than ratings seen elsewhere, and almost all respondents (97%) had reported purchasing goods or services in the City in the 12 months prior to the survey.