

The National Citizen Survey™

Bedford, MA

Community Livability Report

2014

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The National Citizen Survey™
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About

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

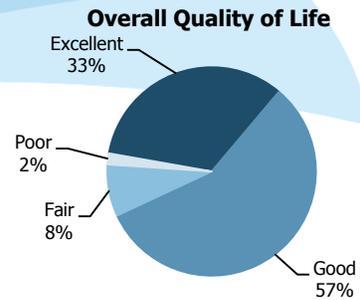
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 459 residents of the Town of Bedford. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Bedford

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Bedford as excellent or good. This rating was similar to comparison communities (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.



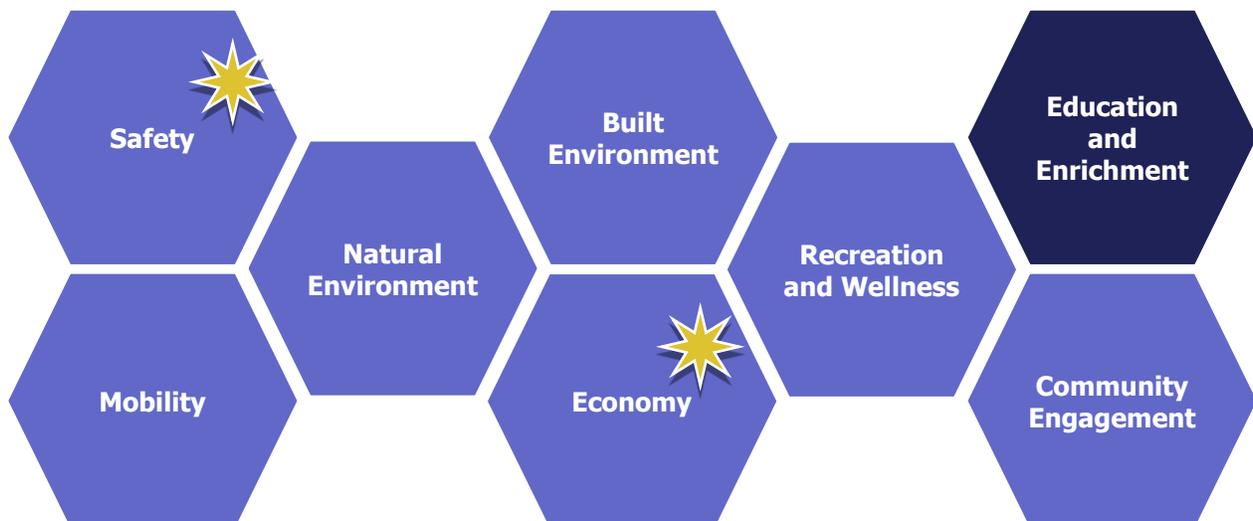
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Bedford community in the coming two years. Ratings for Safety, Mobility,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

Legend

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

★ Most important



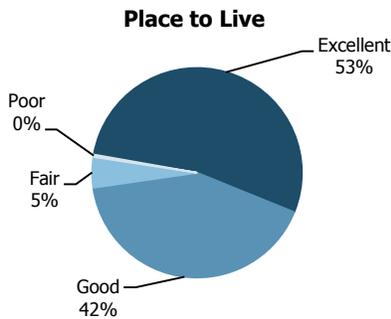
Community Characteristics

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 Bedford, 95% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Bedford as a place to live were similar to 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 Bedford as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Bedford and its overall appearance. Ratings for Bedford as a place to raise children were exceptionally high; 92% gave excellent or good ratings and this rating was higher than ratings in comparison communities. A majority gave positive ratings to Bedford as a place to retire and about 8 in 10 gave ratings of excellent or good to the overall appearance, overall image and their neighborhoods. These ratings were similar to the benchmark and had remained stable from 2009 to 2014 (see *Trends over Time* report, under separate cover).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Most facets of Community Characteristics tended to be similar to the benchmark, only two (travel by public transportation and traffic flow) were lower than in comparison communities. Several aspects received ratings that were higher than those in comparison communities, these were within the facets of Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Economy and Education and Enrichment. A majority of respondents gave ratings of excellent or good to all aspects of Safety, Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement.



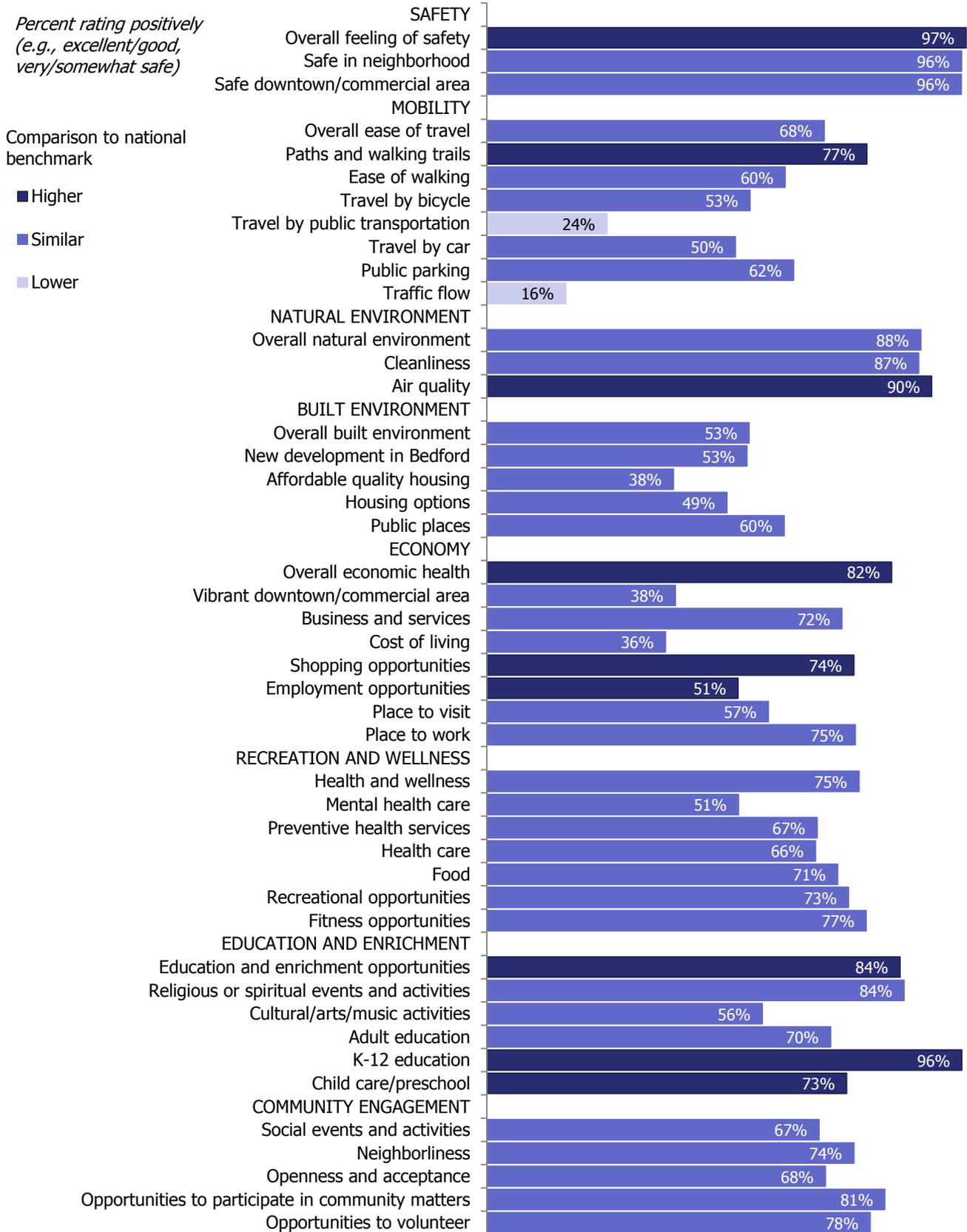
Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



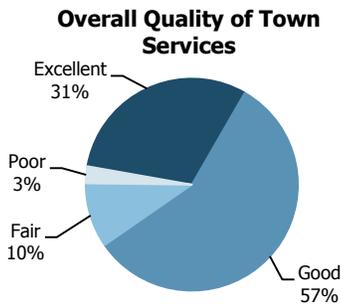
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Bedford as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. The overall quality of Town services was rated as excellent or good by 88% of respondents, while the overall quality of services provided by the Federal Government was rated excellent or good by 48% of respondents. Both of these ratings were similar to ratings in comparison communities. Ratings for the overall quality of Town services declined from 2009 to 2014, while Federal Government ratings remained stable.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Bedford’s leadership and governance. At least two-thirds of the respondents gave positive ratings to the General aspects of Governance. These ratings were all at least similar to the national benchmark. About 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in Town government, acting in the best interest of Bedford, being honest and treating all residents fairly. Ratings for these aspects were all higher than the national average.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Bedford. These ratings tended to be similar to the benchmark, none were lower than the benchmark and several were higher. All aspects of Safety were rated as excellent or good by 75% to 97% of respondents; ratings for police services and crime prevention were higher than in comparison communities. Mobility was the only facet that had service ratings that weren’t rated as excellent or good by a majority of survey respondents; ratings within this facet ranged from 42% to 82%. Ratings for bus or transit services and street repair received the lowest ratings; however these ratings were similar to the national benchmark comparison. About 8 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings for snow removal, which was rated higher than the benchmark.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

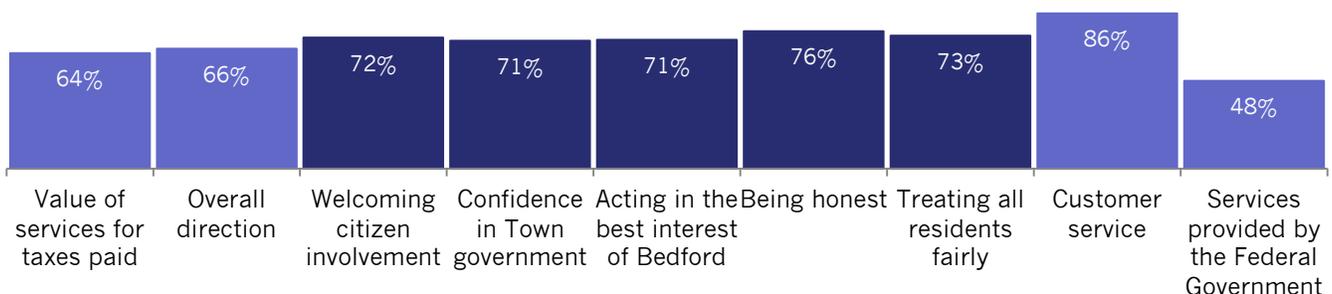
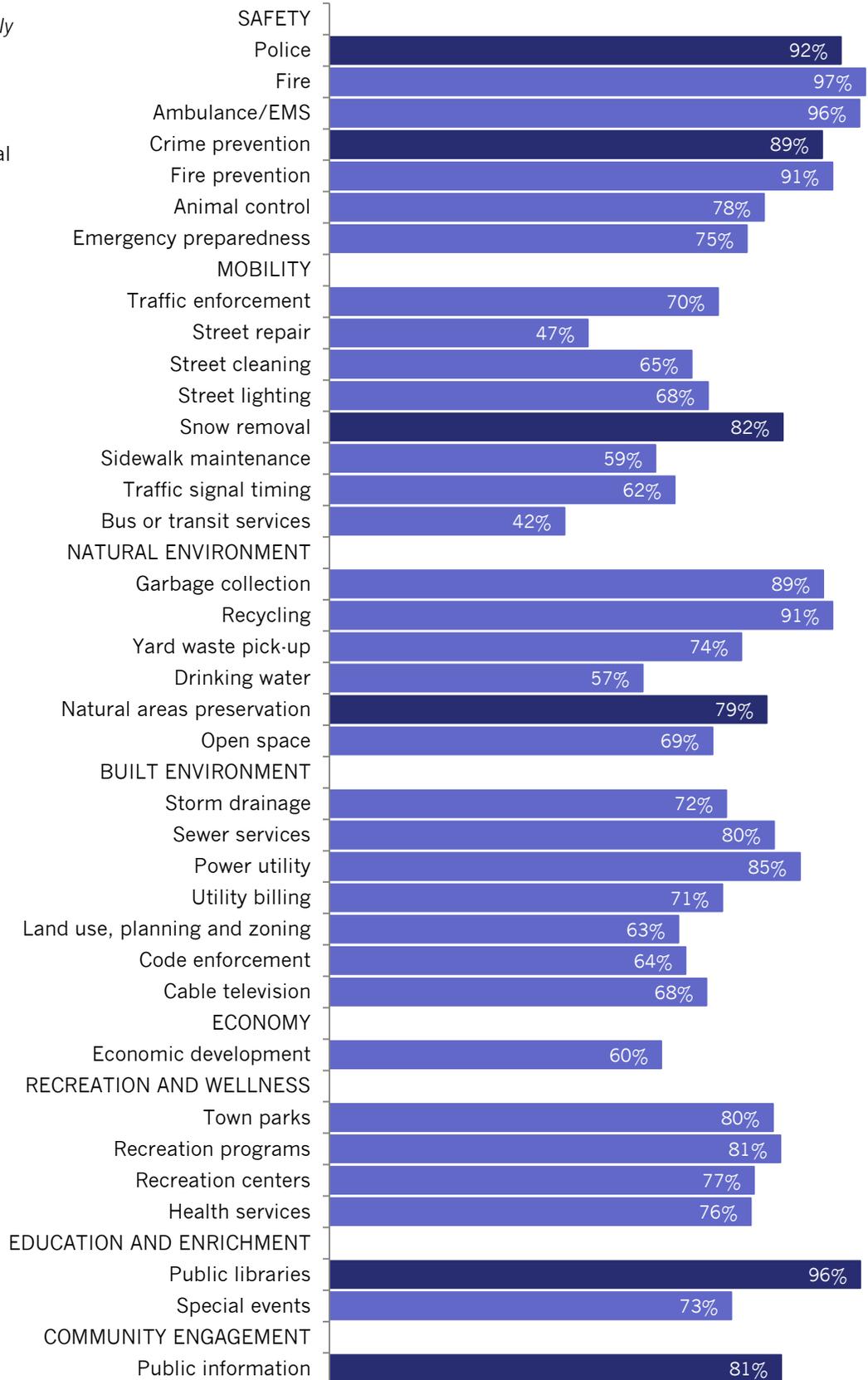


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

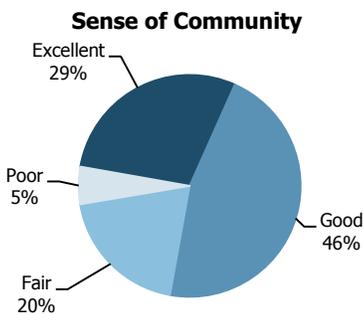


Participation

Are the residents of Bedford 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 three-quarters of respondents rated the sense of community in Bedford as excellent or good, this was similar to the national benchmark. Almost all residents would recommend living in Bedford and about 4 in 5 plan to remain in Bedford.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Rates of participation were mostly similar to national averages, and a handful were higher. More residents in Bedford recycled at home, used Bedford public libraries, attended a Town-sponsored event and attended a local public meeting than residents in comparison communities. About three-quarters of respondents conserved water and made their homes more energy efficient, while almost all reported recycling at home. At least 6 in 10 respondents used Bedford recreation centers or visited a Town park.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

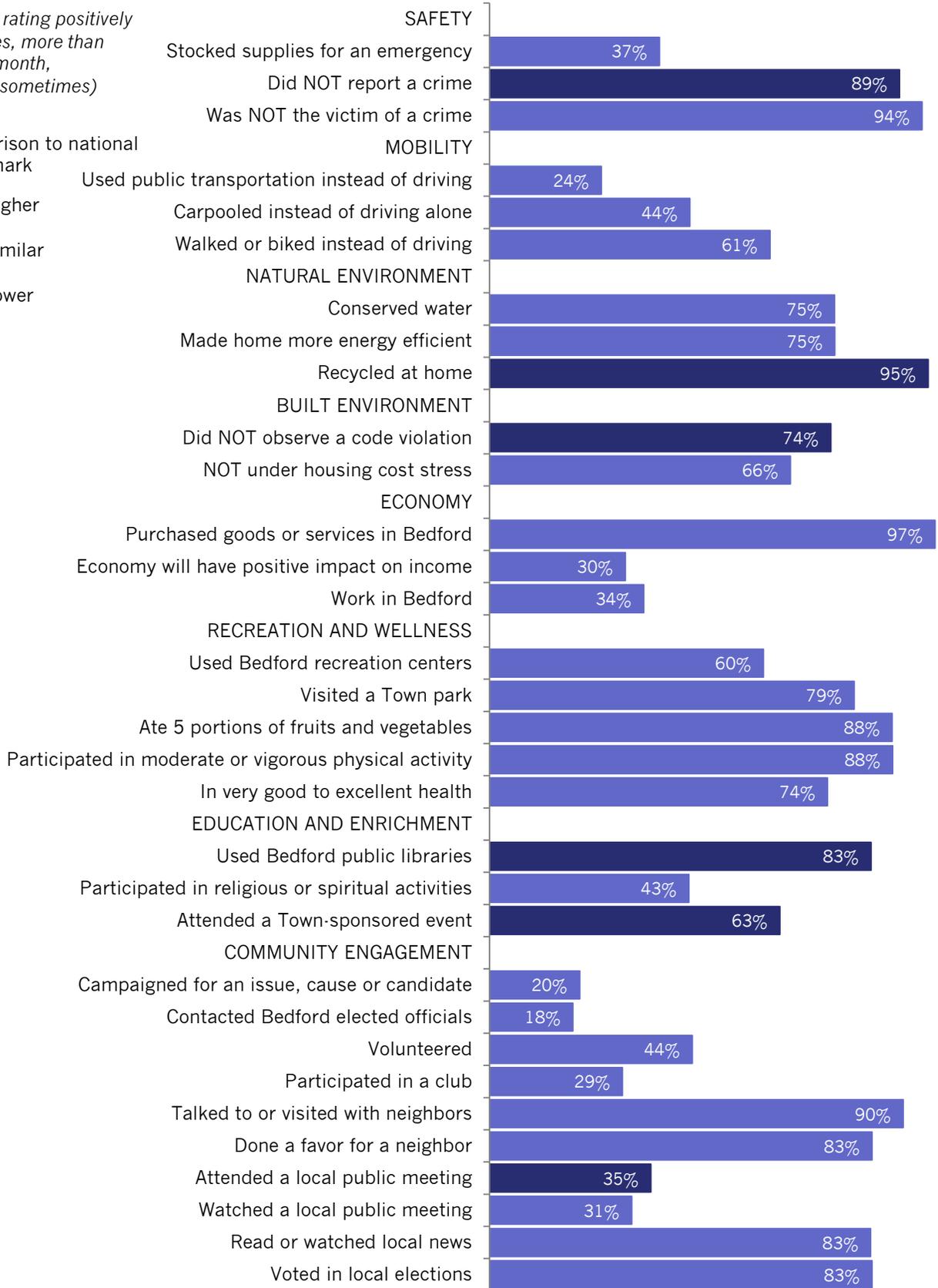


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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 Bedford included five questions of special interest on The NCS. The first four questions asked residents about different features, types and annual passes for potential pools in Bedford.

A majority of residents support a community swimming pool in Bedford. A pool with indoor and outdoor features for year-round use received the most support, with an indoor pool for year-round use a close second. At least half of the respondents indicated that their household would be likely to use an outdoor pool, indoor pool or pool with indoor and outdoor features in Bedford.

Figure 4: Support for Potential Features of Community Swimming Pool

Please indicate how much you would support or oppose each of the following potential features of a community swimming pool in Bedford:

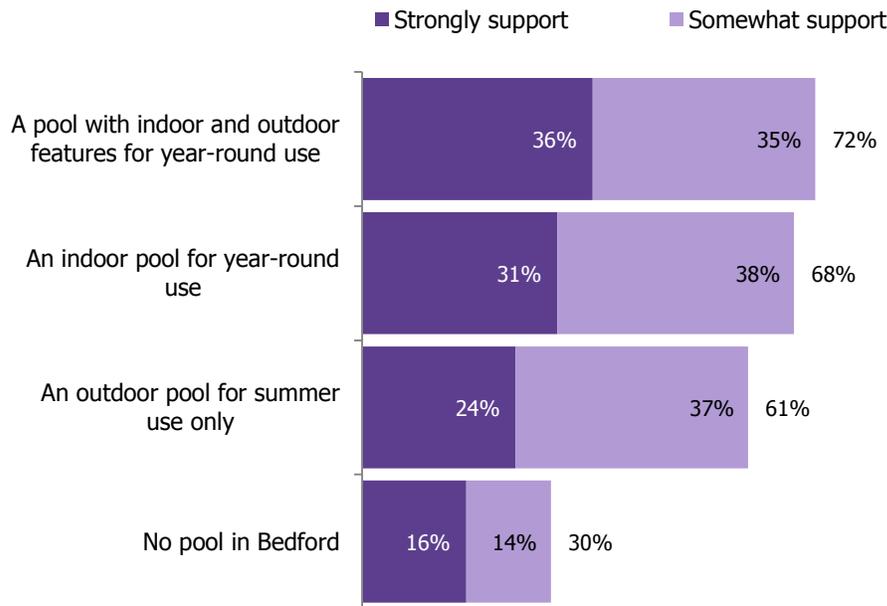
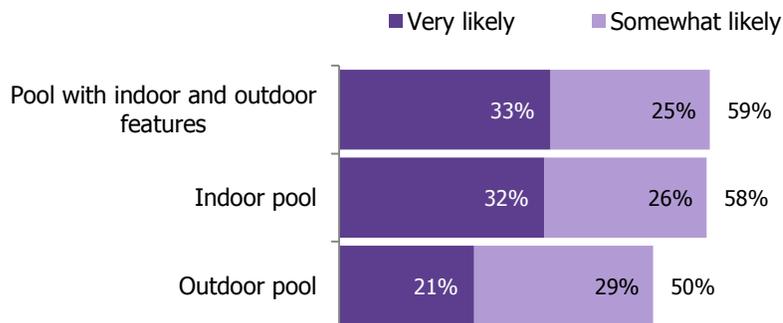


Figure 5: Likelihood of Using Types of Pools in Bedford

How likely or unlikely would you or members of your household be to use each of the following types of pools in Bedford?



When asked about the likelihood of purchasing an annual pass for different types of pools in Bedford, the most popular choice was an annual pass that costs \$500-\$999 per year for a pool with indoor and outdoor features. However, only 31% indicated they'd be likely to do so. About 29% said they were likely to purchase a pass for \$500-\$999 for an indoor pool, and about 1 in 10 for an outdoor pool. When given the same pool options and a pass price of \$1,000-\$1,500 per year, very few respondents were likely to purchase this pass.

Figure 6: Likelihood of Purchasing Annual Pass (\$500 to \$999) for Types of Pools in Bedford
How likely or unlikely would your household be to purchase an annual pass that costs \$500-\$999 per year for each of the following?

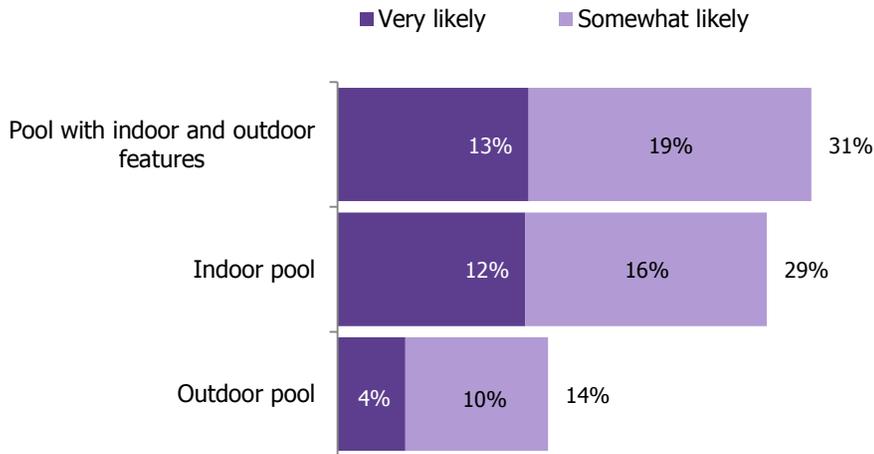
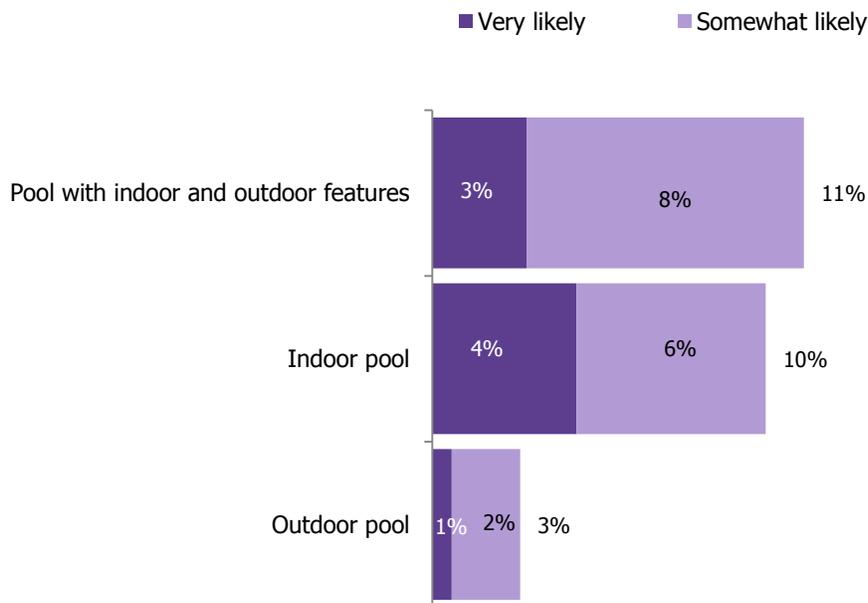


Figure 7: Likelihood of Purchasing Annual Pass (\$1,000 to \$1,500) for Types of Pools in Bedford

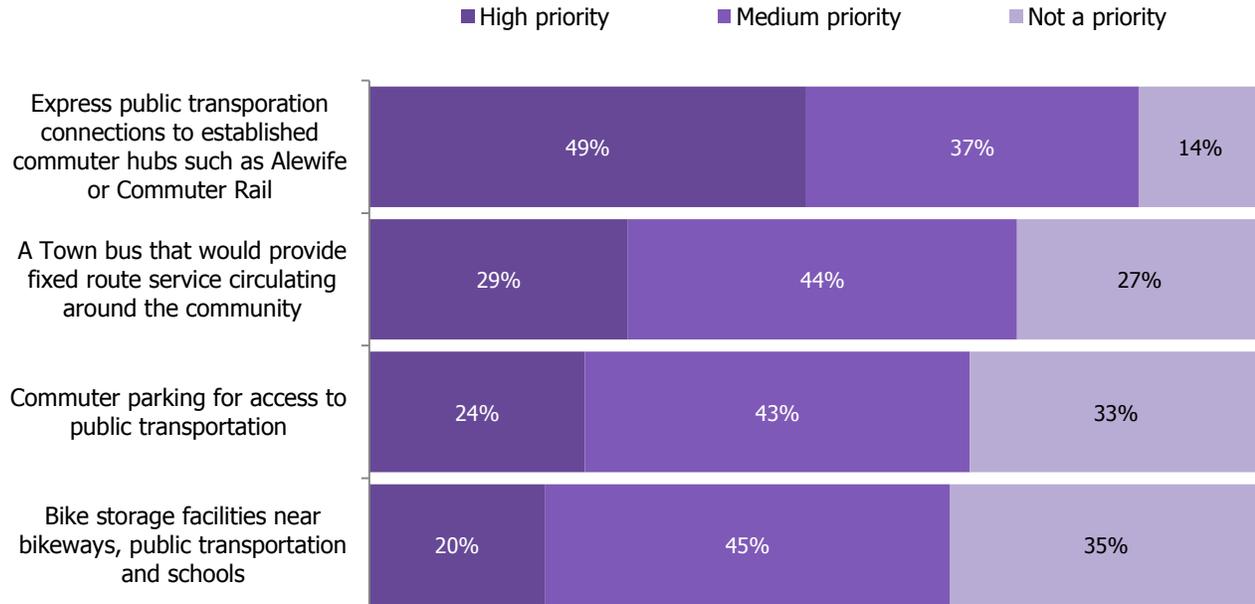
How likely or unlikely would your household be to purchase an annual pass that costs \$1,000-\$1,500 per year for each of the following?



In the final special topic, respondents were asked to rate the priority of potential Town projects. A majority rated all four items as at least a medium priority for the Town in the next two years. Express public transportation connections to established commuter hubs was the highest priority, with 86% saying it was as least a medium priority (and about half indicating it was a high priority).

Figure 8: Town of Bedford Priorities

How much of a priority, if any, should it be for the Town of Bedford to address each of the following in the next two years?



Conclusions

Bedford residents continue to enjoy an exceptional quality of life.

Almost all residents rate their overall quality of life as excellent or good and at least 9 in 10 would be likely to recommend Bedford as a place to live to someone who asks. Bedford as a place to live and as a place to raise children received high ratings from about 9 in 10 respondents. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and remained stable from 2009 to 2014.

Residents feel safe in Bedford.

Safety was an important feature of the community for residents and most residents want the Town to continue to provide excellent safety services and amenities. At least 9 in 10 respondents feel safe overall, in their neighborhoods and in downtown/commercial areas. Residents rate safety services highly (all ratings were similar to or higher than the national benchmark) and most participants were not a victim of a crime or did not report a crime. Safety ratings remained stable from 2009 to 2014.

The Economy is important to the community.

Residents believe that the economy is an important community feature to focus on over the next two years. Participants felt very positive about the overall economic health of the community and also gave high ratings to business and services in Bedford and to Bedford as a place to work. Shopping opportunities were rated highly, ratings increased from 2009 to 2014, and were above the benchmark. Ratings of optimism for personal economic future increased from 2009 to 2014. About half of participants felt that employment opportunities were excellent or good, a rating that is higher than comparison communities.

Residents would like to see increased public transportation.

When asked to rate how high of a priority some potential project should be for the Town, 86% said express public transportation connections to established commuter hubs were a priority. About three-quarters of respondents indicated that a Town bus that would provide fixed route service was a priority. A majority also indicated that commuter parking for access to public transportation and bike storage facilities was a priority for the Town. Ratings for Mobility in Bedford were generally positive; however ratings for traffic flow and for bus or transit services declined from 2009 to 2014. Ratings for travel by public transportation and traffic flow were the only two items on the entire survey that were rated lower than the benchmark comparisons.