

# **The National Citizen Survey™**

## **Weston, 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 Weston. 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 selected from 1,100 residents of the Town of Weston. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample (404 completed surveys). The methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.

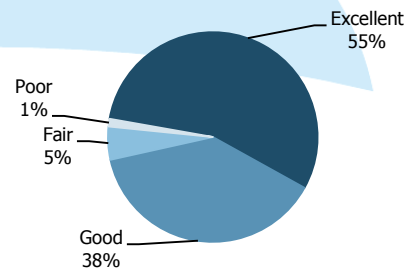


# Quality of Life in Weston

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

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.

**Overall Quality of Life**

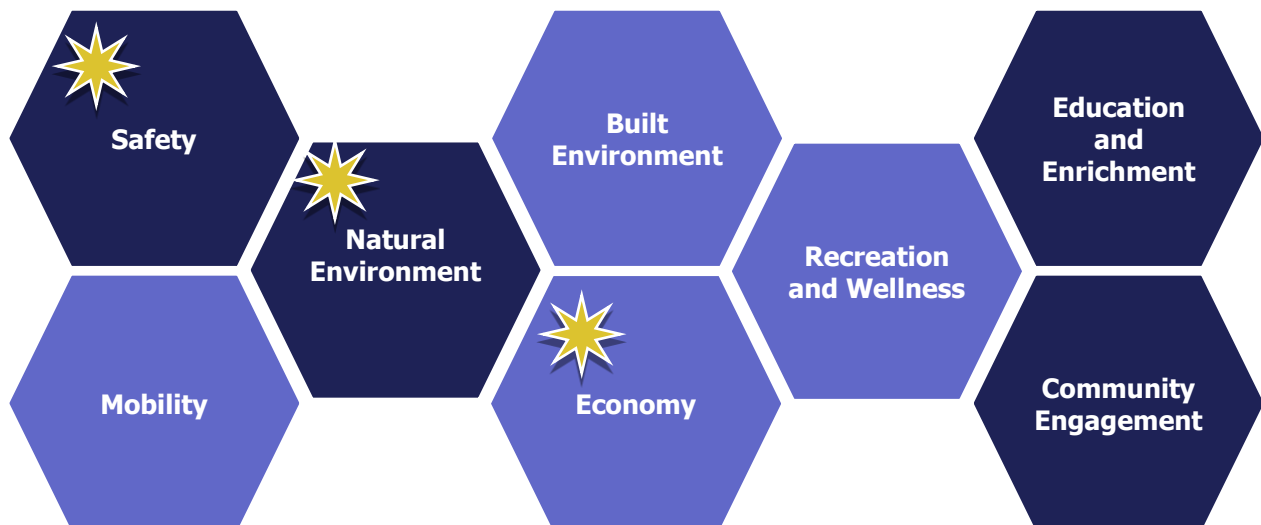


In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes three stars to indicate which community facets were the most important to residents' overall quality of life. Residents identified these facets of community life (Safety, Natural Environment and Economy) as the most central to what makes Weston their home. It is noteworthy that Weston residents gave high ratings to Safety and Natural Environment as well as to Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. Ratings for Economy, Mobility, Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness 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 Weston's unique questions.

## Legend

- Higher than national benchmark
- Similar to national benchmark
- Lower than national benchmark
- Benchmark comparison not available
- ★ Most important to quality of life



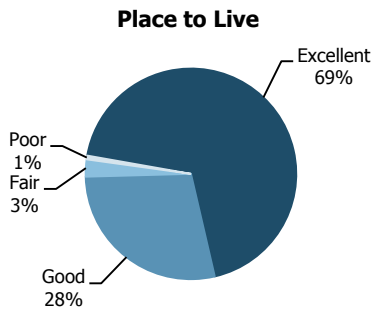
# Community Characteristics

*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 Weston, 97% rated the Town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Weston as a place to live were higher than ratings in other communities across the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

In addition to rating the Town as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Weston as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Weston and its overall appearance. At least 9 in 10 respondents gave "excellent" or "good" ratings to the overall image or reputation of Weston, their neighborhood as a place to live, Weston as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of Weston. All of these ratings were higher than the benchmark comparisons. Weston as a place to retire received "excellent" or "good" ratings by about half of the survey respondents; this rating was similar to the benchmark comparison.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Most of these ratings were similar to the benchmark, several were higher, and a handful were lower than the benchmark comparison. Safety and Natural Environment saw the highest ratings, with at least 95% of residents rating aspects of Safety and Natural Environment as "excellent" or "good."



A majority rated most of the aspects of Mobility positively; however only 16% rated travel by public transportation as "excellent" or "good," and this rating was lower than the benchmark comparison. Ratings for Built Environment were mixed; less than one-third of residents rated affordably quality housing or housing options positively. However, over three-quarters gave favorable ratings to the overall built environment in Weston, which was higher than the benchmark comparison. Ratings for Economy were also mixed; the overall economic health of Weston received high ratings while 26% or less gave positive ratings to vibrant downtown/commercial area, cost of living, shopping opportunities and employment opportunities.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

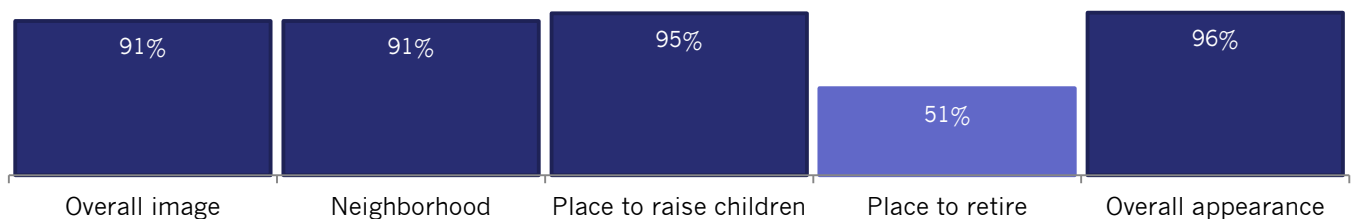
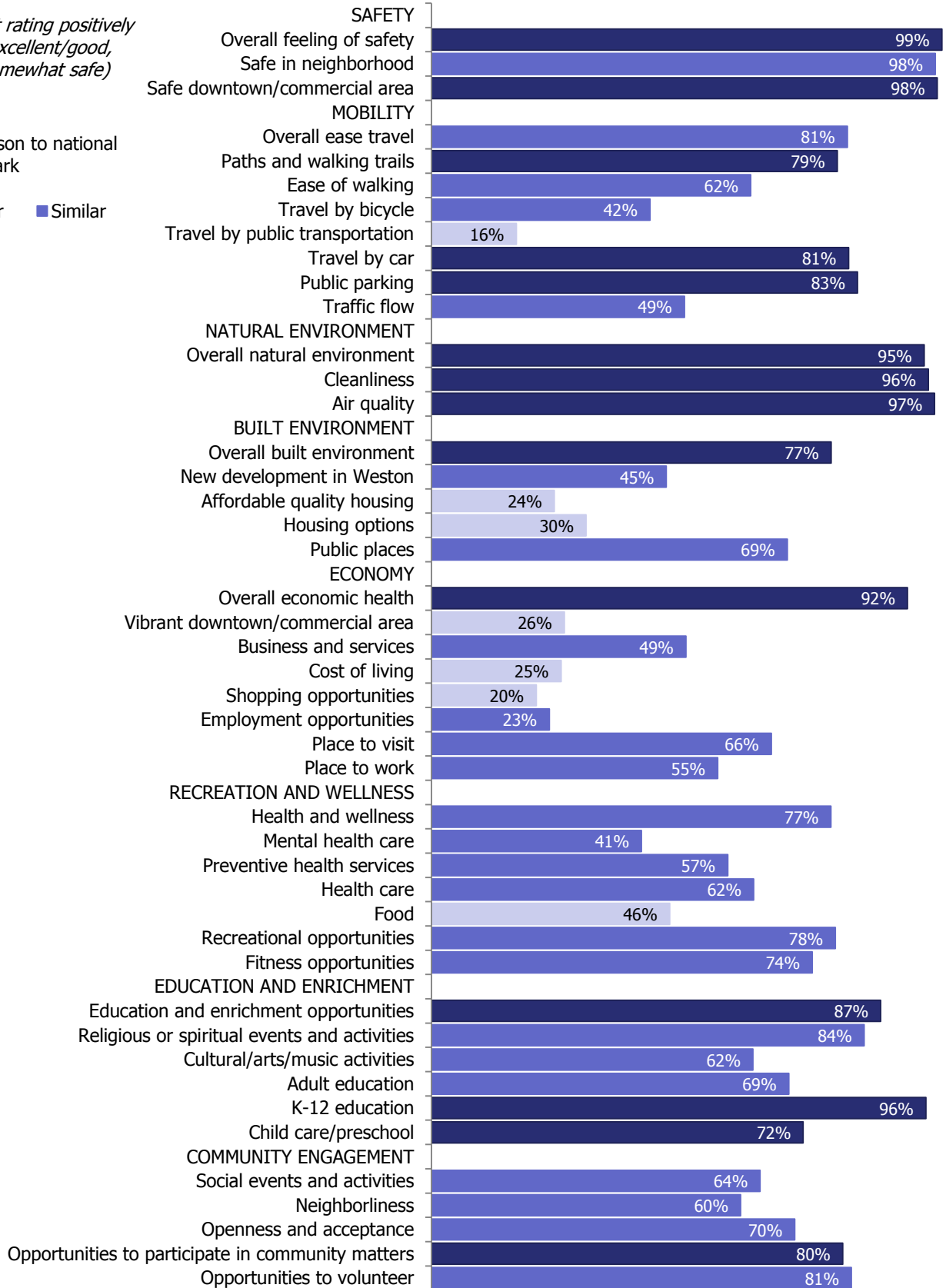


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



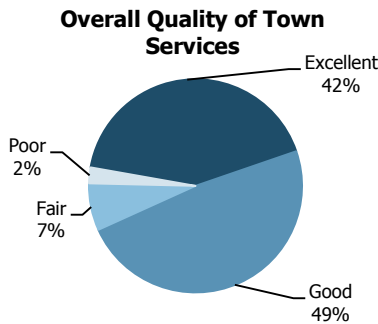
# Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Weston 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 Weston as “excellent” or “good,” while only 37% gave ratings of “excellent” or “good” to the services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for the overall quality of services provided by Weston were higher than in comparison communities, while ratings of the Federal government were similar to those in comparison communities.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Weston’s leadership and governance. The Town of Weston’s employees received high marks; about 9 in 10 respondents rated the overall customer service provided by Town employees as “excellent” or “good.” At least two-thirds gave high ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction of Weston, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in Town government, acting in the best interest of Weston, being honest and treating all residents fairly. All of these ratings were higher than those in comparison communities, except the overall direction of Weston which was similar to the benchmark.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Weston. Most of the ratings for aspects of Governance were higher than the benchmark, a handful were similar, and none were lower than ratings in comparison communities. Aspects of Safety ranged from 80%-98% “excellent” or “good,” and all were higher than the benchmark comparison. All aspects of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated as “excellent” or “good” by 87%-97% and were higher than the benchmark. Recreation and Wellness and Natural Environment also had high ratings across all facets. Ratings for Mobility were mixed, with most residents giving favorable ratings – of the seven aspects of Mobility four were similar to the benchmark and three were higher than the benchmark.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

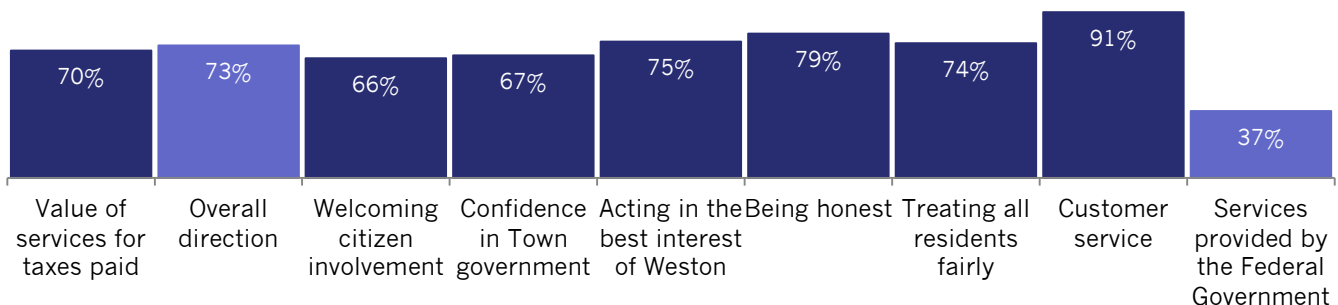
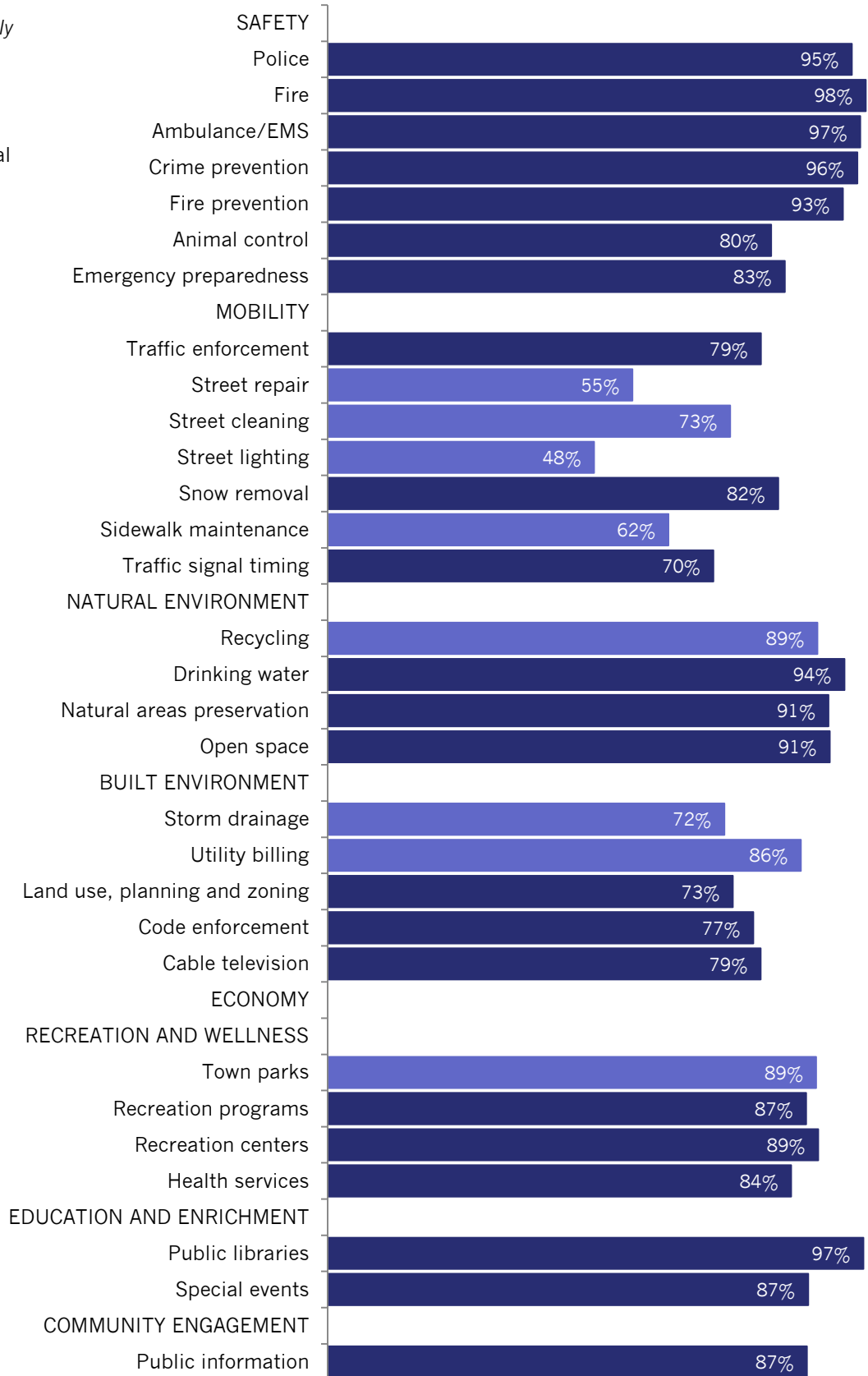


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



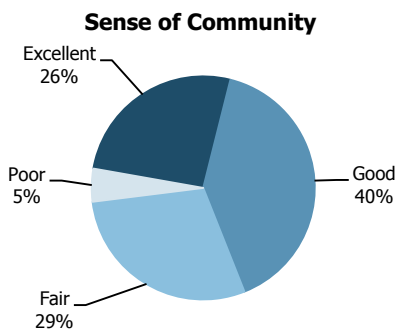


# Participation

*Are the residents of Weston connected to the community and each other?*

An engaged community is a livable community. 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 respondents rated the overall sense of community in Weston as “excellent” or “good.” This rating was similar to ratings in comparison communities. Almost all respondents were likely to recommend living in Weston and about 89% said they were likely to remain in Weston for the next five years. A majority of residents reported having contact with a Town employee in the last 12 months; this rate of contact was higher than rates of contact 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. Of the 32 aspects of Participation, 12 were higher than the benchmark, 16 were similar and four were lower than the benchmark. The aspects of participation that were lower than the benchmark included: purchased goods or services in Weston, work in Weston, visited a Town park and participated in religious or spiritual activities. Residents in Weston showed high rates of participation for many aspects including recycling, using Weston public libraries and voting in local elections.



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

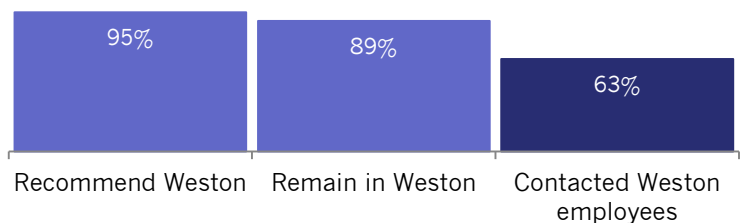
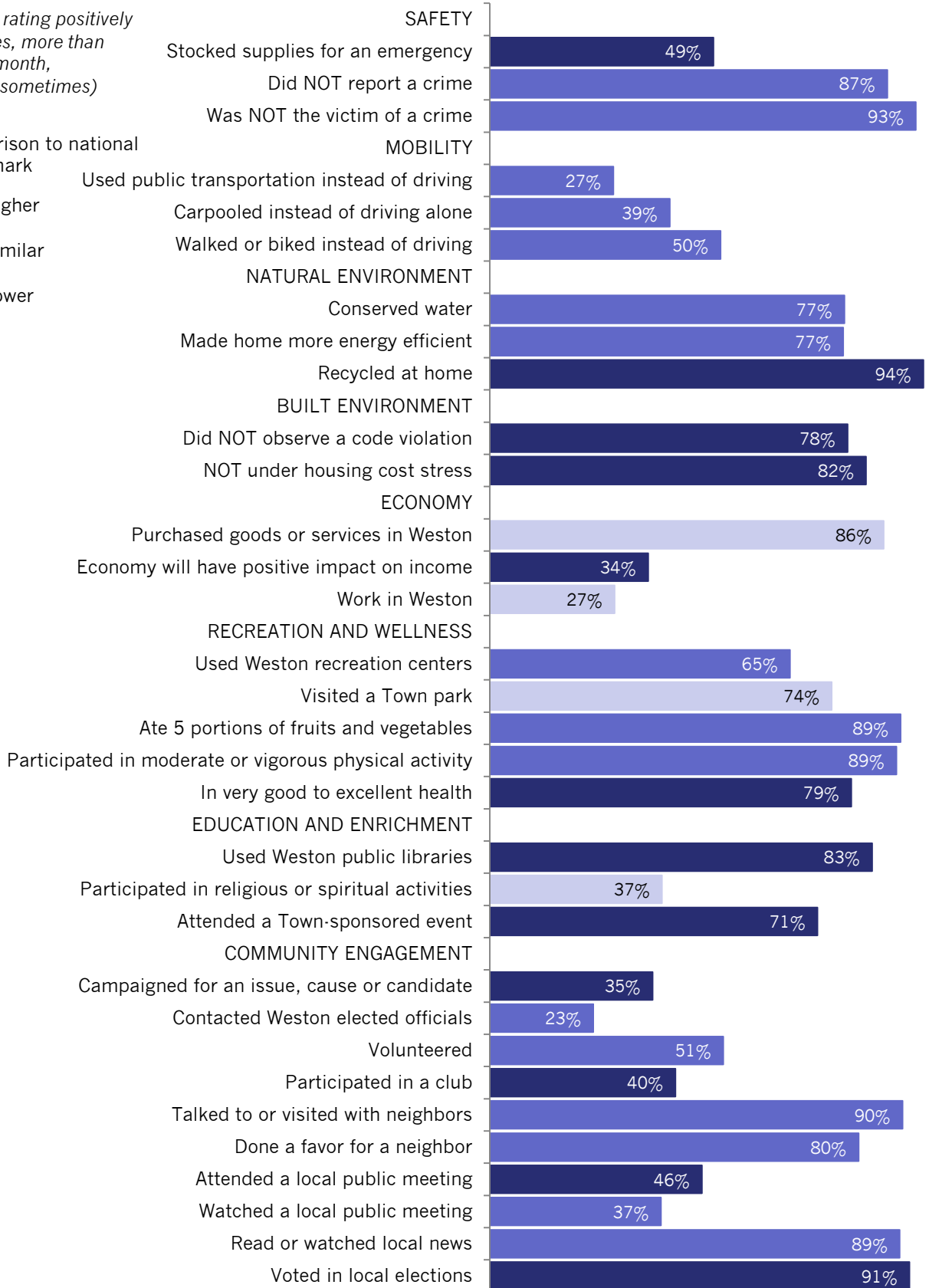


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

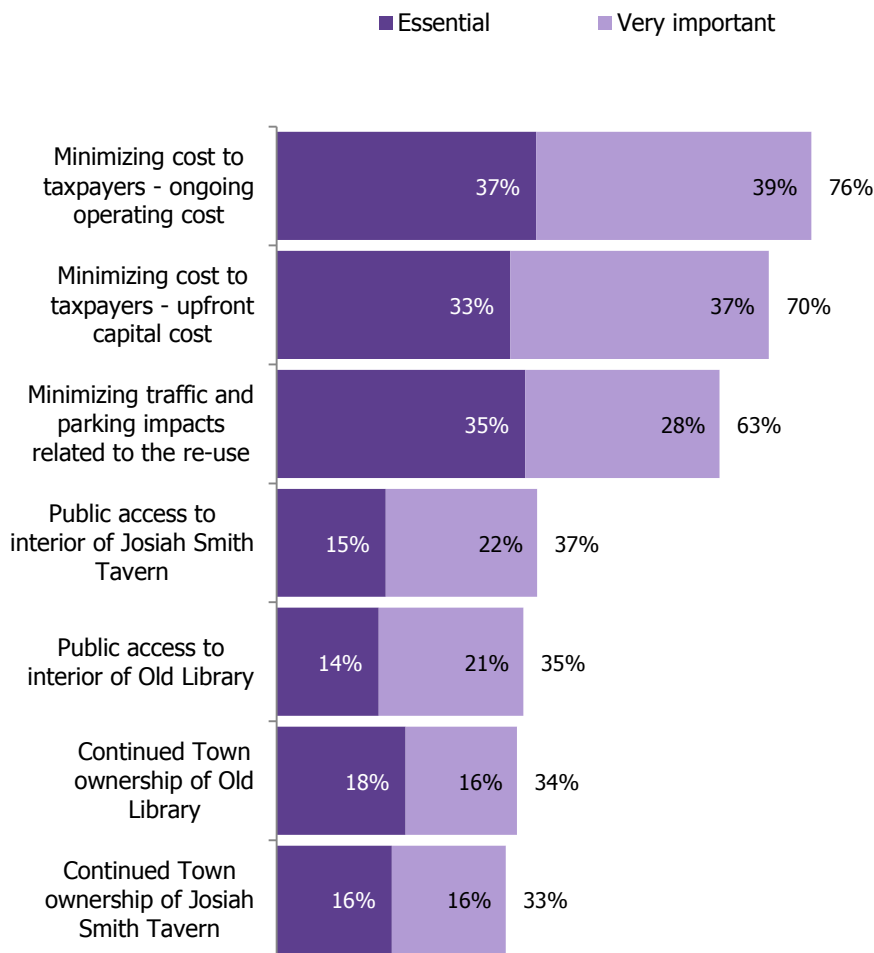


# Special Topics

The Town of Weston included two questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents to rate the importance of potential future plans for the Old Library and the Josiah Smith Tavern buildings. Residents rated minimizing cost to taxpayers (either via ongoing operating cost or upfront capital cost) as most important. A majority also rated minimizing traffic and parking impacts as important. Only about a third of residents rated public access to the buildings and continued Town ownership of the buildings as important.

Figure 4: Custom Question 1

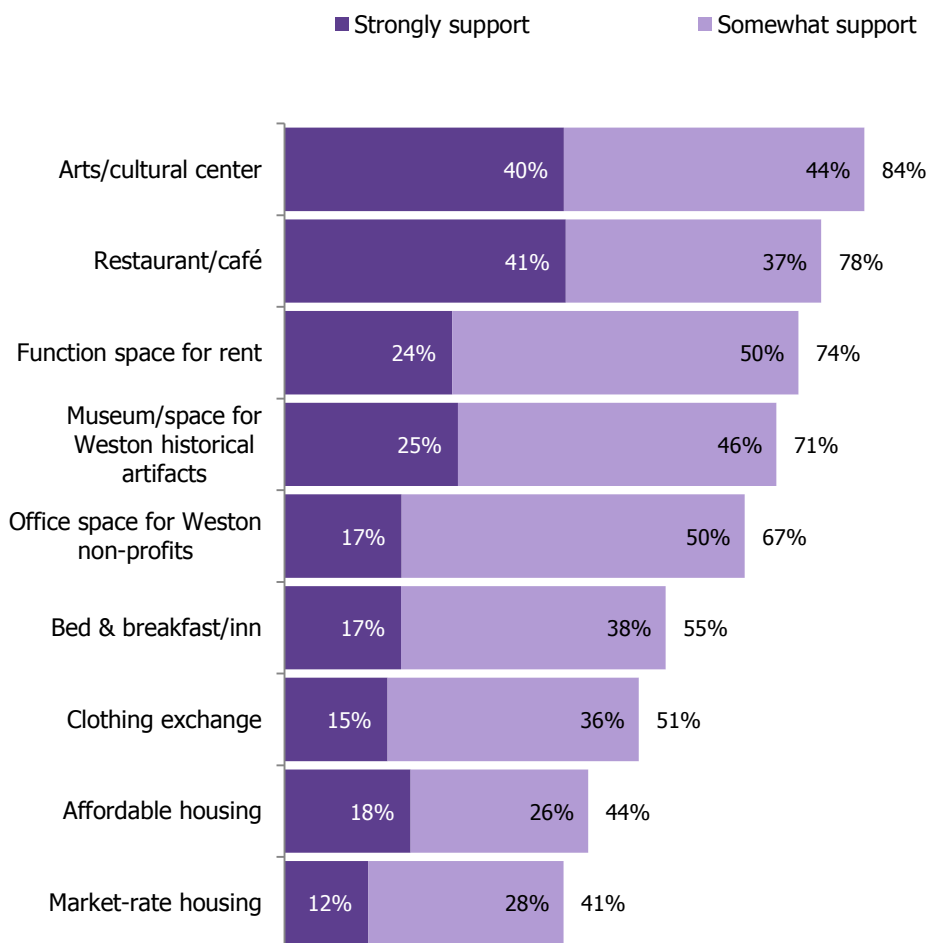
*The Town of Weston has determined that the Josiah Smith Tavern and Old Library buildings, located in Weston Center near the Town Green, are no longer needed for the operation of Town government, but should be protected by exterior historic preservation restrictions regardless of who owns them and how they are used. Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following are to you:*



The second question asked respondents to rate their support or opposition for potential uses of the Josiah Smith Tavern and the Old Library buildings. Residents demonstrated the highest level of support for an arts/cultural center, a restaurant/café, function space for rent, a museum/space for Weston historical artifacts and office space for Weston non-profits. About half of the respondents also supported a bed & breakfast/inn and a clothing exchange. Lower levels of support were shown for affordable housing and market-rate housing.

Figure 5: Custom Question 2

*Please indicate how much you support or oppose the following uses for the Josiah Smith Tavern and Old Library buildings in Weston Center, with the understanding that some uses will involve sale of the building(s) and some uses will involve continued Town ownership and potential cost to taxpayers:*



# Conclusions

## **Weston residents enjoy an exceptional quality of life.**

Almost all residents rate their overall quality of life as “excellent” or “good” and would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to recommend Weston as a place to live to someone who asks. Weston’s overall appearance and overall image along with the Town as a place to live and to raise children received favorable ratings by at least 9 in 10 residents. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and were similar to or higher than national benchmark comparisons.

## **Safety, an important facet to maintaining residents overall quality of life, received high ratings.**

Safety was identified as one of the facets most important to residents’ quality of life. Nearly all survey respondents felt aspects of Safety within Community Characteristics were “excellent” or “good.” Safety services were rated favorably by 8 in 10 respondents with ratings higher than other communities in the U.S. When asked to rate their overall feeling of safety in Weston, 99% of residents gave ratings of “excellent” or “good.” Weston ranked higher than all other comparison communities for the overall feeling of safety (see *Technical Appendices* under separate cover).

## **The Natural Environment is appreciated by participants.**

Participants gave high ratings for Weston’s overall natural environment, with 95% rating it as “excellent” or “good,” a rating that was the second highest in the benchmark database (see *Technical Appendices* under separate cover). Almost all gave high ratings to air quality and the cleanliness of Weston. When asked about government services related to Natural Environment, 9 in 10 respondents gave these services positive ratings and these ratings tended to be higher than the benchmark. Almost all participants recycled at home (94%), a rating that was higher than the benchmark.