



THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Middletown, RI

Community Livability Report

2019



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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About

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

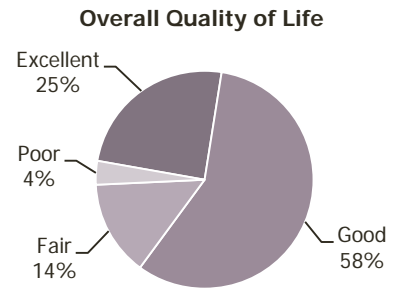
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 470 residents of the Town of Middletown. 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 Middletown

About 8 in 10 residents rated the overall quality of life in Middletown as excellent or good. This rating was similar to 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.

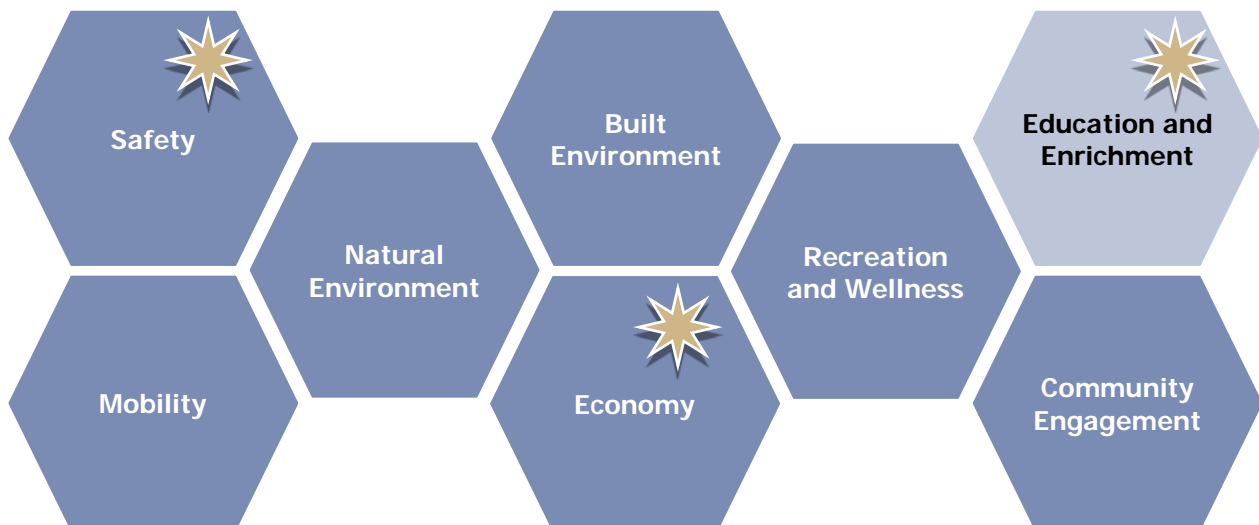
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Economy, and Education and Enrichment priorities for the Middletown community in the coming two years. Ratings within the facet of Education and Enrichment tended to be lower than the national averages, while evaluations for the remaining facets were on par with national 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 Middletown’s unique questions.

Legend

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

★ Most important



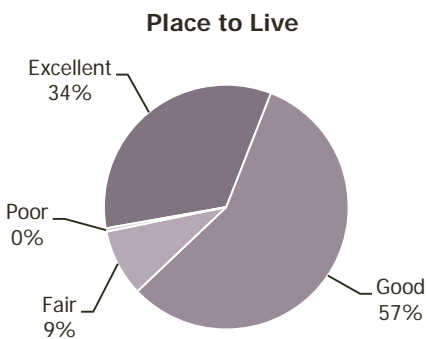
Community Characteristics

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 Middletown, 91% rated the town as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' evaluations of Middletown as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

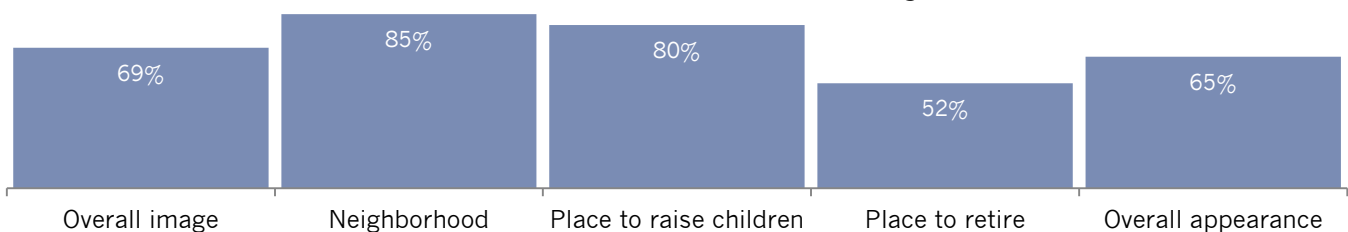
In addition to rating the town as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality. About 8 in 10 residents favorably reviewed their neighborhood as a place to live and Middletown as a place to raise children, while two-thirds of residents gave high marks to the overall image or reputation of Middletown and its overall appearance. About half of residents positively rated Middletown as a place to retire. These ratings were on par with national averages.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. About 9 in 10 respondents rated the overall feeling of safety as excellent or good and reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. Additionally, at least 7 in 10 residents assigned positive scores to aspects related to Natural Environment, including overall natural environment, cleanliness, and air quality.



Residents' evaluations within the facet of Education and Enrichment were lower than those observed in other communities, such as assessments of overall education and enrichment opportunities, adult educational opportunities, and K-12 education. Other areas where scores were lagging behind the national benchmarks were availability of paths and walking trails, affordable quality housing, cost of living, recreational opportunities, and opportunities to participate in social events and activities, among others.

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



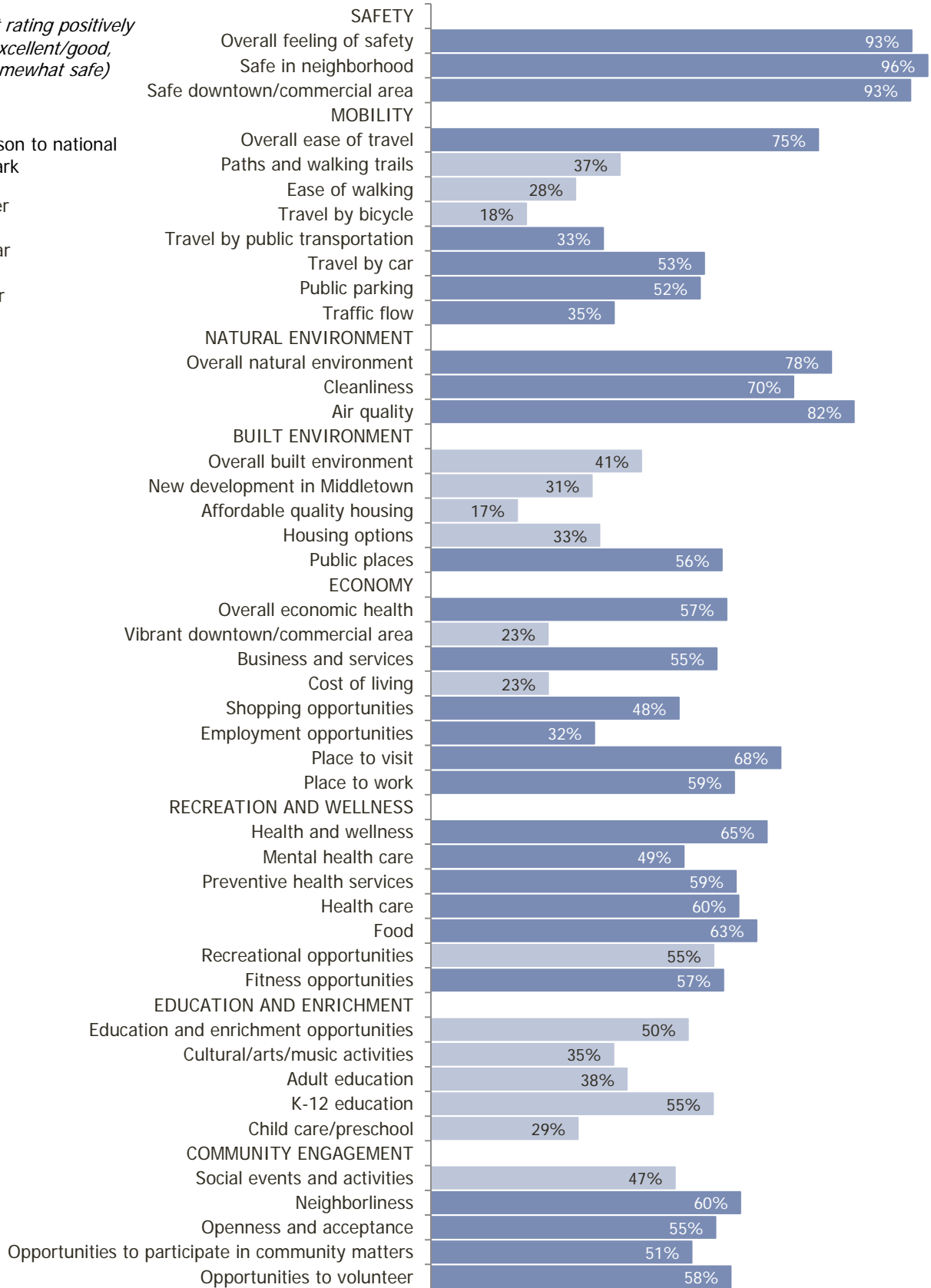
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

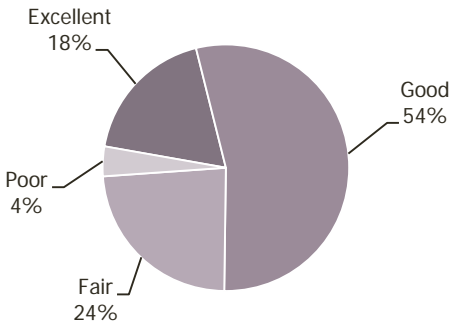
How well does the government of Middletown meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Middletown as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About three-quarters of residents gave favorable evaluations to the overall quality of services provided by the Town, while 4 in 10 were pleased with the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these evaluations were similar to those observed elsewhere.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Middletown's leadership and governance. About three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall customer service provided by the Town. About half of residents gave positive reviews to the overall direction the Town is taking, acting in the best interest of Middletown, being honest, and treating all residents fairly, while less than half favorably rated all other aspects of government performance. These assessments were similar to those given in other communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Middletown. Broadly, at least half of respondents reviewed the majority of government services positively and ratings tended to be similar to those observed in other benchmark communities. The highest-rated services were safety related, including police, fire, and ambulance or emergency medical services, with about 9 in 10 residents assigning positive scores and each being on par with averages nationwide. Assessments of crime prevention were exceptional and higher than the national benchmark.

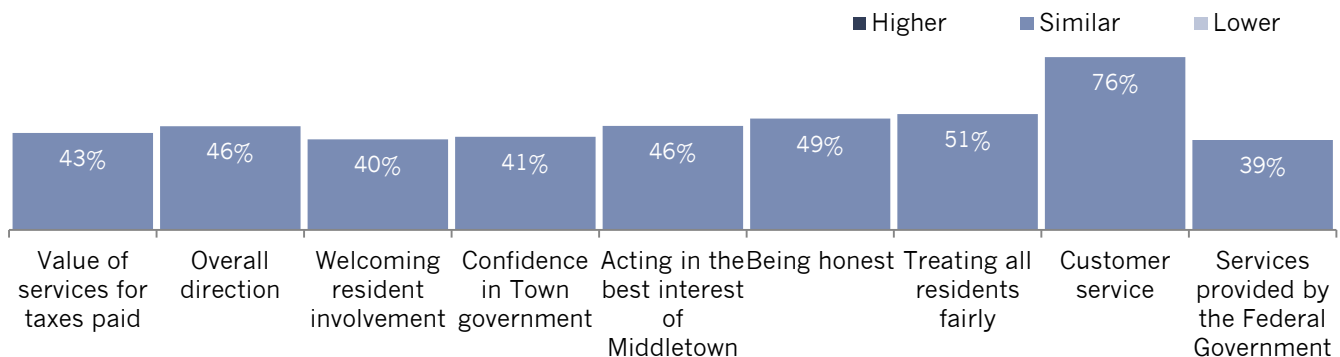
Overall Quality of Town Services



Respondents were less pleased with assessments of street repair; sidewalk maintenance; land use, planning and zoning; economic development; recreation programs or classes; and recreation centers or facilities, with half or fewer residents favorably evaluating these. These ratings also were lower than comparison communities across the nation.

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

Comparison to national benchmark



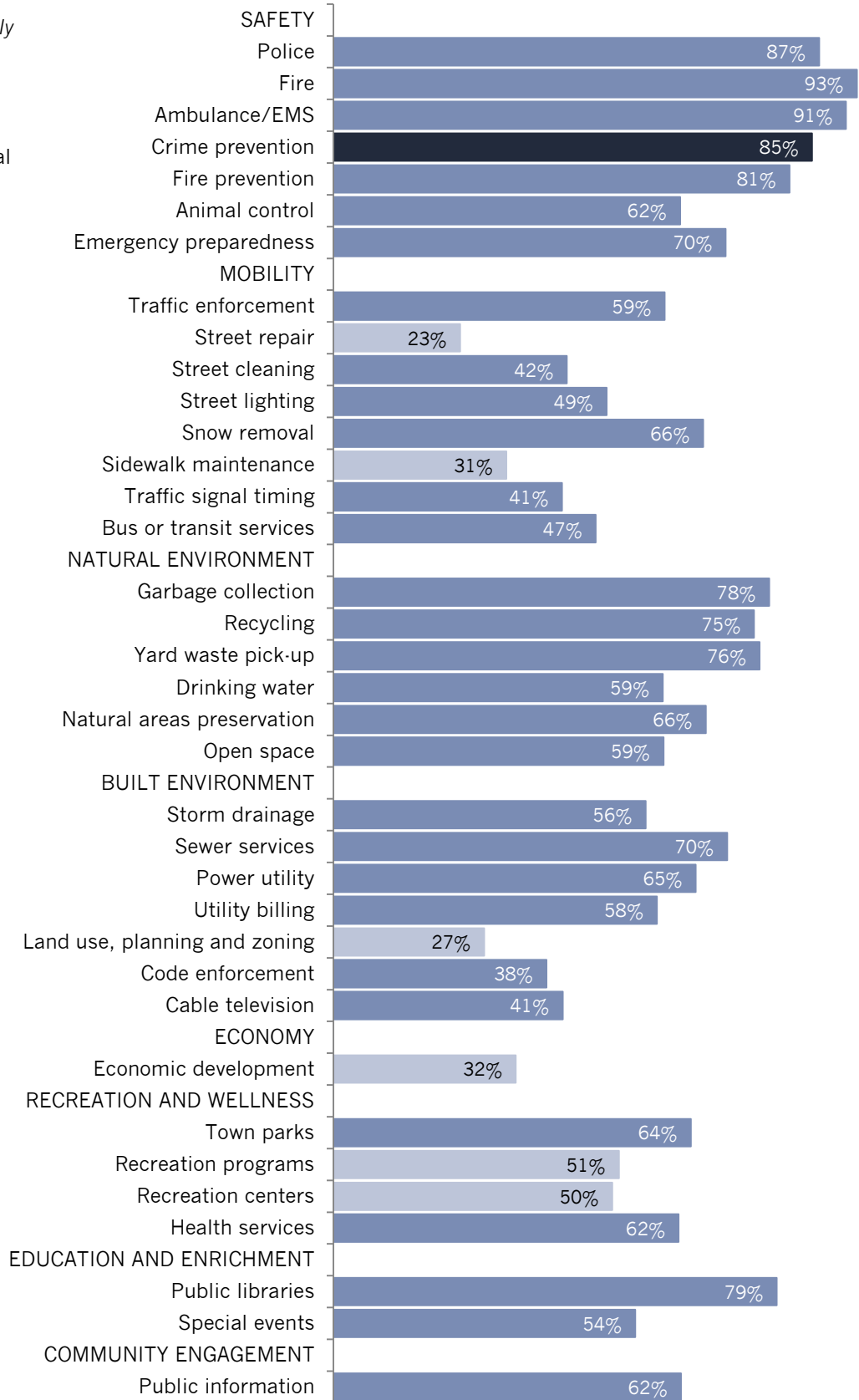
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



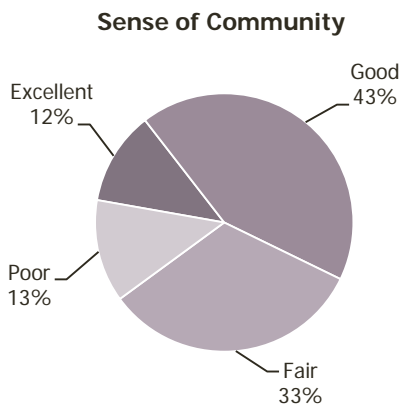
Participation

Are the residents of Middletown 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. Similar to other communities in the U.S., about half of respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in Middletown.

Roughly 8 in 10 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Middletown to someone who asked and planned to remain in the community for the next five years. About half of residents reported they had contacted Middletown employees. These ratings were similar to those reported across the nation.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of Participation varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparisons useful for interpreting the results. About 9 in 10 respondents had recycled at home, purchased goods or services in Middletown, or talked to or visited with a neighbor, which was on par with communities nationwide. Only about one-quarter of respondents had contacted a Middletown elected official, participated in a club, or attended or watched a local public meeting. These rates of participation were similar to those in other communities across the nation.

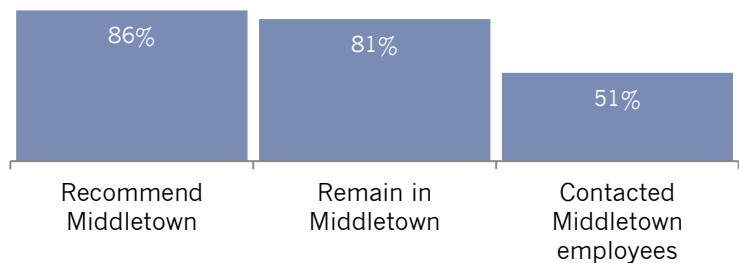


Compared to municipalities across the country, fewer Middletown residents reported using public transportation instead of driving, visiting a Town park, or attending a Town-sponsored event. Additionally, more residents were under housing cost stress in Middletown than elsewhere in the nation.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



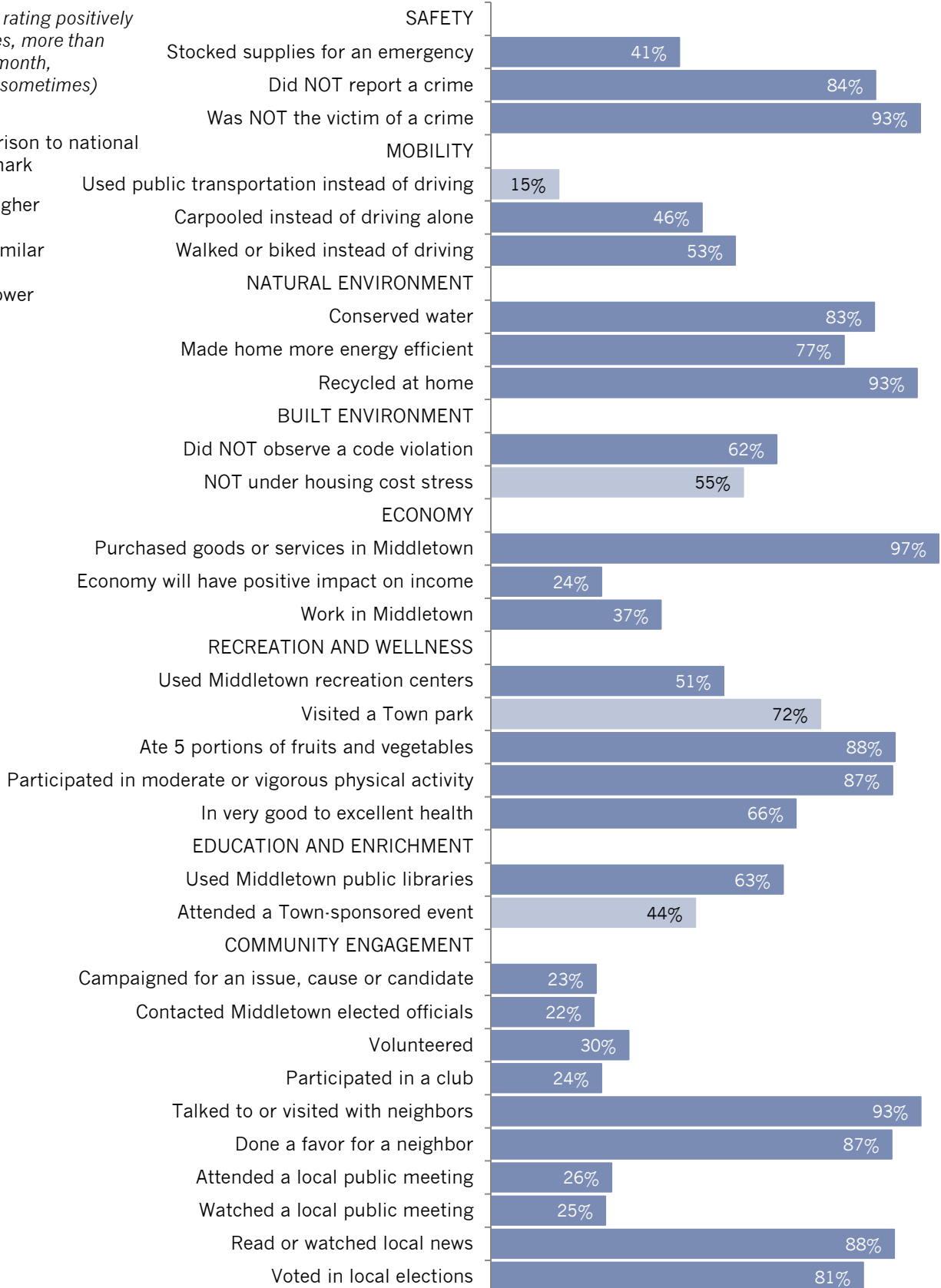
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

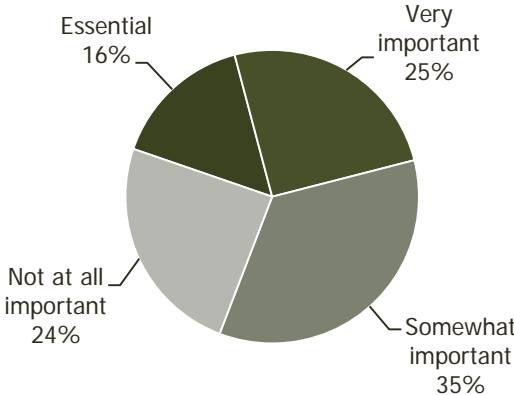


Special Topics

The Town of Middletown included five questions of special interest on The NCS, with topics related to Middletown Public Schools, the importance of adding a dog park, the education level of residents, and sources of Town information.

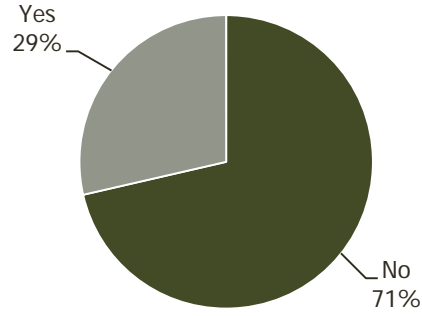
Community members rated the importance of the Town adding a dog park to Middletown. About 4 in 10 residents indicated it was essential or very important to add a dog park. Conversely, about one-quarter of residents felt it was not at all important to add a dog park to the community.

Figure 4: Importance of Adding a Dog Park to Middletown
Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Town to add a dog park to Middletown?



The Town wanted to know how many households currently had or have had students in the Middletown Public School system within the past three years. About 3 in 10 reported they did have students in the school system, while about 7 in 10 reported they did not.

Figure 5: Households with Students in Middletown Public School System
Within the past three years, have you had or do you currently have a student in the Middletown Public School system?

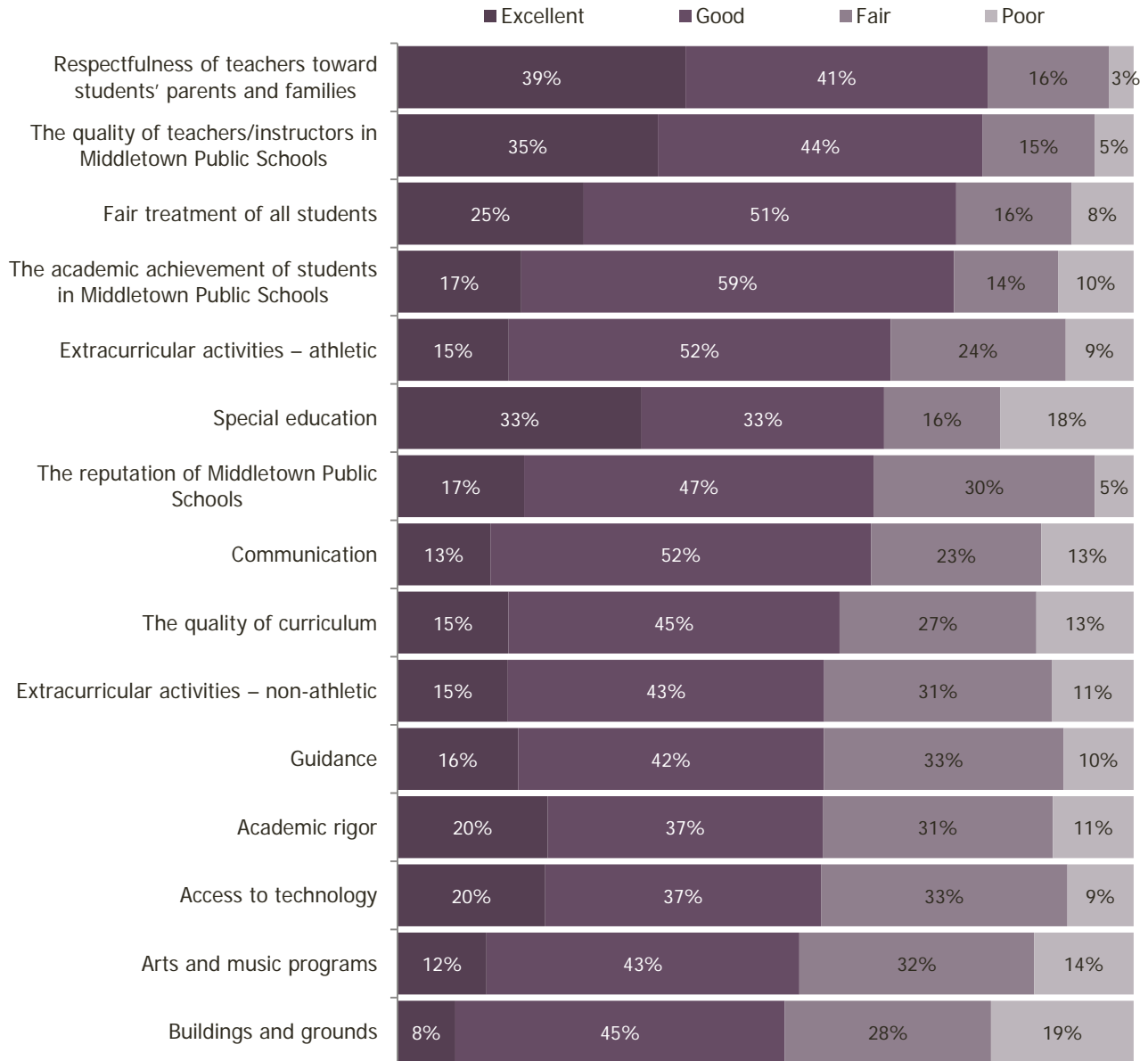


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Of those respondents who had children in the Middletown Public School system, at least half evaluated all 15 qualities of Middletown Public Schools positively. The highest-rated aspects of Middletown Public Schools included the respectfulness of teachers toward students' parents and families, the quality of teachers and instructors in Middletown Public Schools, fair treatment of all students, and the academic achievement of students in Middletown Public Schools, with at least three-quarters of respondents rating these as excellent or good. Conversely, about 2 in 10 residents assessed special education and buildings and grounds as poor.

Figure 6: Quality of Middletown Public Schools

Please rate each of the following regarding Middletown Public Schools:

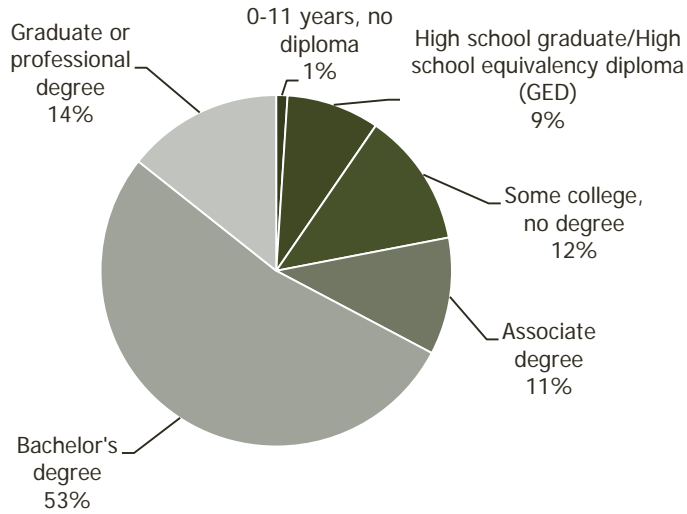


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About 1 in 10 respondents had completed a graduate or professional degree. About three-quarters of residents had completed some college, an Associate degree, or a Bachelor's degree, with about half having completed the latter. About 1 in 10 indicated they had their high school diploma/GED or less education.

Figure 7: Education Level

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

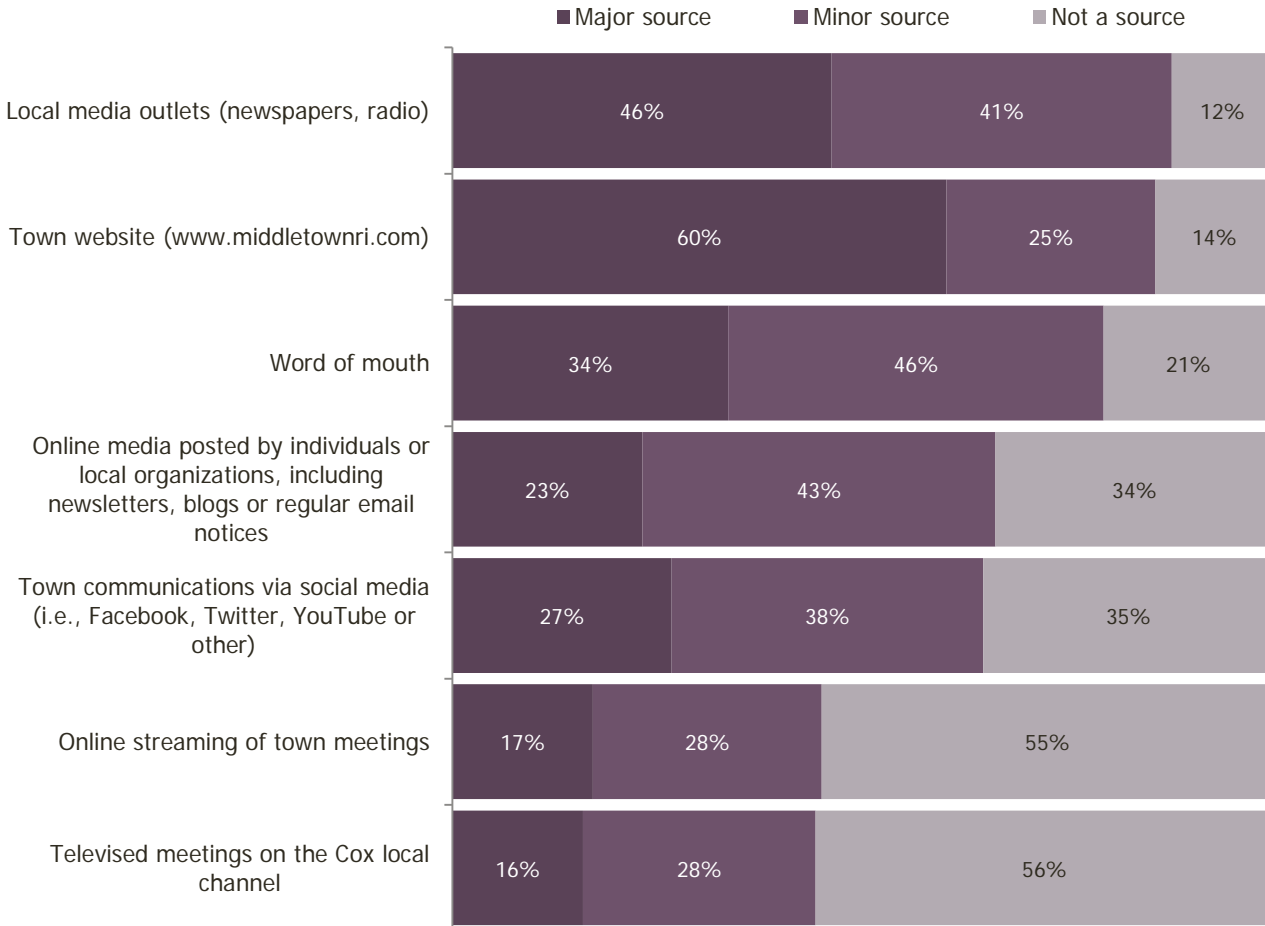


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When asked about sources utilized for obtaining information about the Town government and its activities, events, and services, at least 4 in 10 residents said they used each source as a major or minor source of information. The local media outlets and Town website were utilized most, while online streaming of town meetings and televised meetings on the Cox local channel were the least-used sources.

Figure 8: Sources of Town Information

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



Conclusions

Middletown is a desirable place to live, with safety as a feature that contributes to quality of life.

At least 8 in 10 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Middletown, the town and their neighborhoods as places to live, and Middletown as a place to raise children. About two-thirds of residents positively rated the town's overall image or reputation and its overall appearance, while about half assigned high ratings to Middletown as a place to retire. Similar to other comparison communities, about half of community members gave high marks to the sense of community in the town. About 8 in 10 respondents planned to remain in Middletown for the next five years and were likely to recommend living in Middletown to someone who asked.

Residents indicated that the facet of Safety was an important focus area for the Town to address in the coming two years. About 9 in 10 residents assigned positive scores to the overall feeling of safety and felt safe in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. Out of all Town services, police, fire, and ambulance or emergency medical services were given some of the most positive reviews. Respondents' assessments of crime prevention were exceptional and higher than the national benchmark.

The Economy is a priority for community members.

Survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the Town in the next two years. Similar to other comparison communities, at least half of residents positively rated the overall economic health of Middletown, Middletown as a place to visit and work, and the overall quality of business and service establishments. However, evaluations of cost of living, vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, economic development and new development in Middletown were below average, with less than one-third of residents providing favorable ratings. Additionally, assessments of housing-related items were lower than the national benchmarks; less than 4 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the availability of affordable quality housing and the variety of housing options in Middletown.

Middletown residents cite Education and Enrichment as an area of opportunity.

Middletown residents also selected Education and Enrichment as a key focus area for the community. Community members' ratings of public libraries and special events were positive and on par with national averages. Conversely, reviews of K-12 education, opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities, availability of affordable quality child care/preschool, adult educational opportunities and overall opportunities for education and enrichment were lower than reviews observed in comparison communities.

About 3 in 10 residents currently had or have had a student in the Middletown Public School system in the three years prior to the survey; these residents evaluated 15 qualities of the school system. At least three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good reviews to the respectfulness of teachers toward students' parents and families, the quality of teachers and instructors in Middletown Public Schools, fair treatment of all students, and the academic achievement of students in Middletown Public Schools, with. However, less than half of respondents favorably reviewed special education and buildings and grounds, with about 2 in 10 respondents assessing these as poor.