

The National Citizen Survey™

Peoria, IL

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 Peoria. 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.

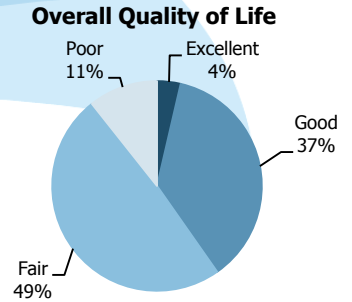
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 286 residents of the City of Peoria. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% 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 Peoria

About 4 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Peoria as excellent or good, much lower than the national benchmark (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



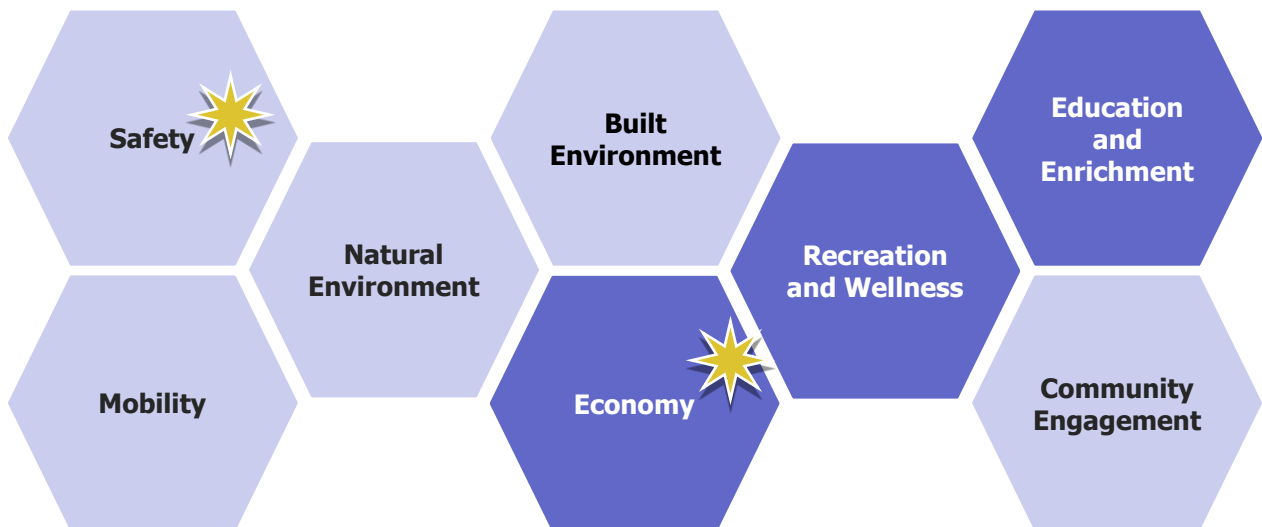
Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were 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 and Economy as priorities for the Peoria community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Peoria residents gave ratings that were positive and on par with other communities to Economy as a facet of the community as well as Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment. 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 Peoria’s unique questions.

Legend

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



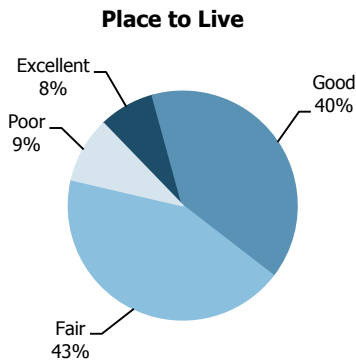
Community Characteristics

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 Peoria, 48% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. However, this rating was lower than the average 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 Peoria as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Peoria and its overall appearance. Although these measures were not as high as national averages, a majority of Peoria residents felt positively about their neighborhoods as a place to live.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Respondents tended to give higher ratings to Recreation and Wellness than other areas, with most items receiving ratings of excellent or good from more than half of residents. Most ratings in the facets of Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment were similar to the benchmark, whereas ratings for Natural Environment, Built Environment and Community Engagement were viewed somewhat less favorably; less than a majority of residents gave favorable ratings in many of the items in these areas. Aspects of community life with more positive ratings (and similar to the national averages) included overall ease of travel; ease of travel by car; religious or spiritual events and activities; and opportunities to volunteer.



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

Comparison to national benchmark
 ■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

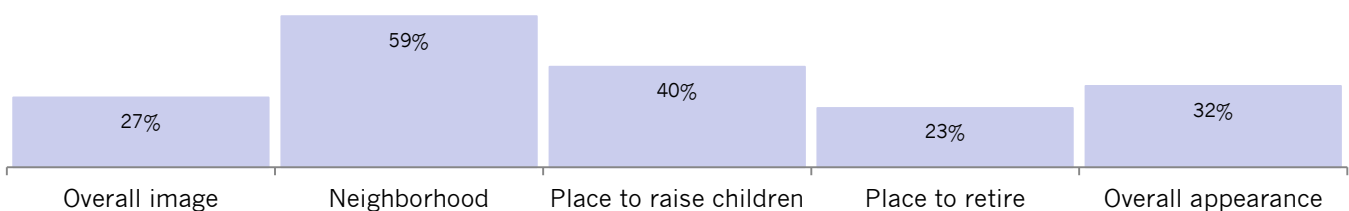
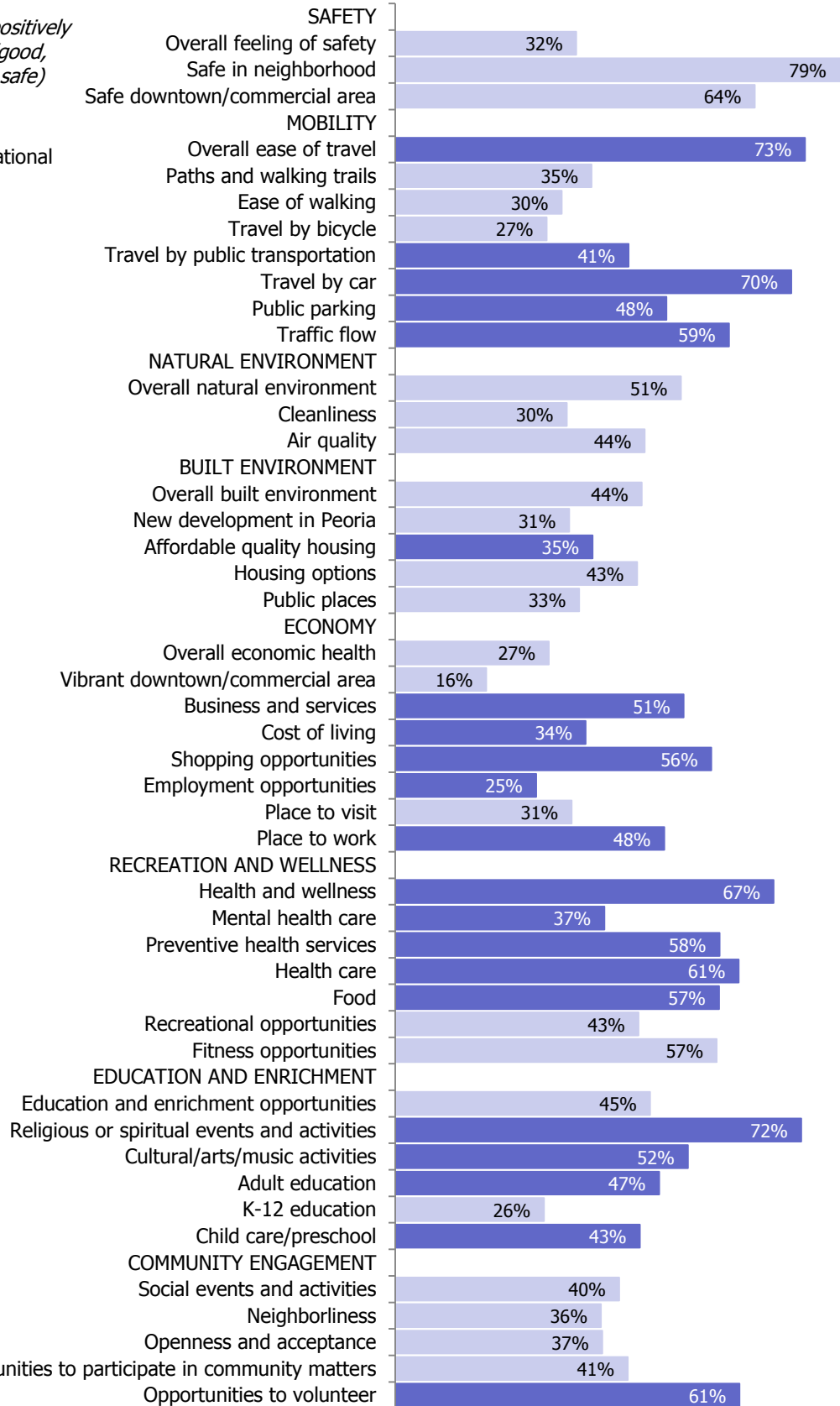


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

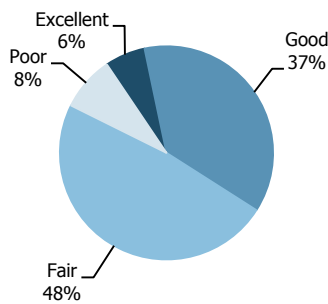
How well does the government of Peoria meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Peoria as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Over 4 in 10 Peoria residents (43%) rated the overall quality of services in Peoria favorably and this was more favorable than ratings of services provided by the Federal Government.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Peoria’s leadership and governance. About one-quarter of respondents rated most overall aspects of the City’s governance as excellent or good and the City’s customer service received positive ratings from about half of residents.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Peoria. For the most part, ratings for Safety, Recreation and Wellness and Community Engagement services were rated positively by half or more of respondents. Within Safety, about 8 in 10 respondents rated the individual services of fire and emergency medical services as excellent or good. Within Natural Environment, garbage collection, recycling and yard waste pick-up received high ratings from at least two-thirds of residents. Public libraries were rated as excellent or good by 8 in 10 respondents. Mobility and Economic Development services did not rate as favorably compared to other community facets; most items in these categories received high ratings from less than half of respondents. Many aspects of the Built Environment were rated lower by respondents, particularly land use, planning and zoning and code enforcement. However, the power utility was considered excellent or good by about two-thirds of respondents, and this rating was similar to the national benchmark.

Overall Quality of City Services



Environment were rated lower by respondents, particularly land use, planning and zoning and code enforcement. However, the power utility was considered excellent or good by about two-thirds of respondents, and this rating was similar to the national benchmark.

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

Comparison to national benchmark
 ■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

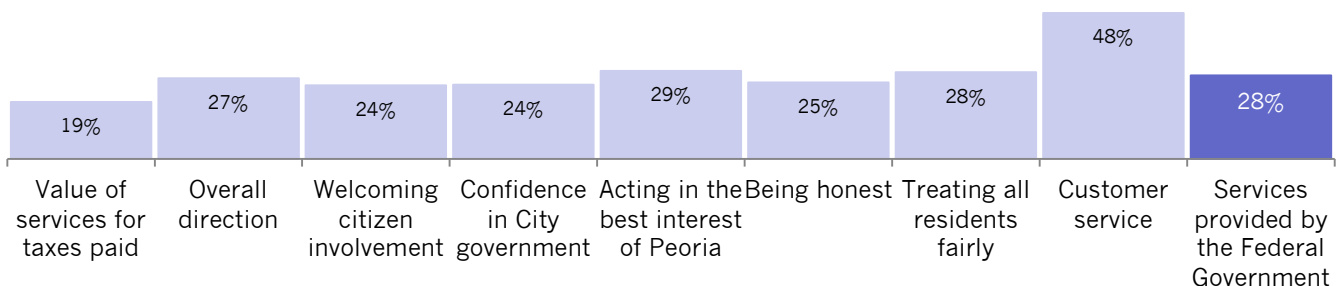
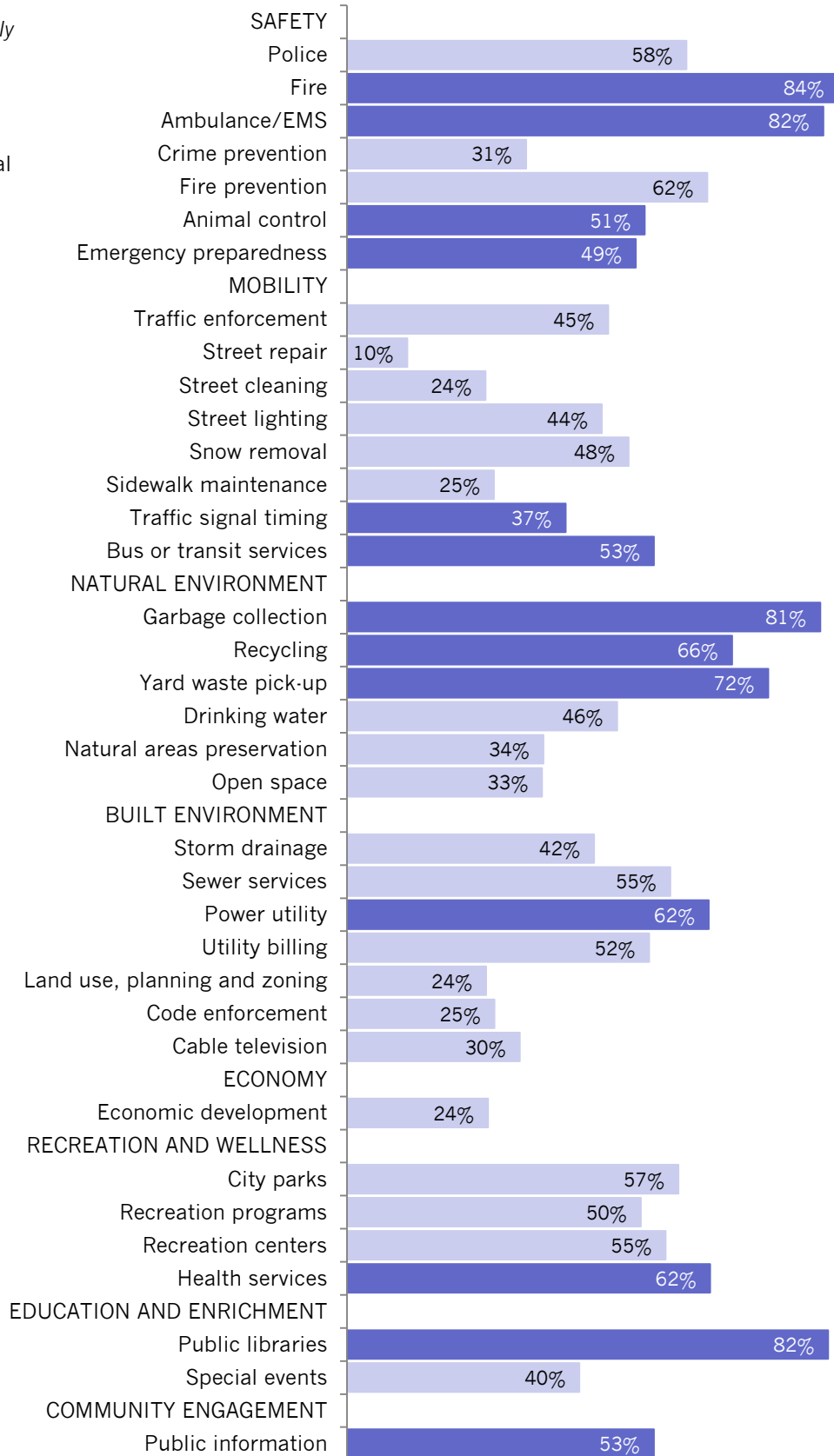


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

Are the residents of Peoria 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. One-third of residents rated the sense of community in Peoria as excellent or good. A majority of residents would recommend living in Peoria and three-quarters planned to remain in in the community.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. For the most part, participation rates were similar to national benchmark comparisons and a majority of respondents had participated. Some individual Participation items, including working in the city, participating in religious or spiritual activities and volunteering, occurred at a higher rate in Peoria than elsewhere. In contrast, some activities and experiences related to Natural Environment and Built Environment, such as recycling and having not observed a code violation happened less in Peoria than elsewhere. Despite having lower participation rates than the benchmark, 7 in 10 Peoria residents reported recycling from home or conserving water.

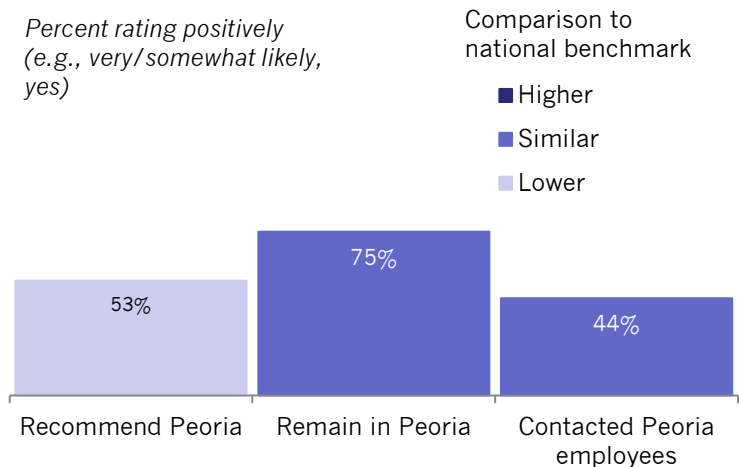
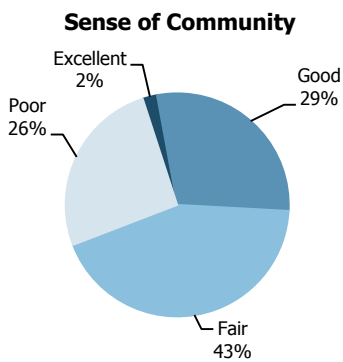
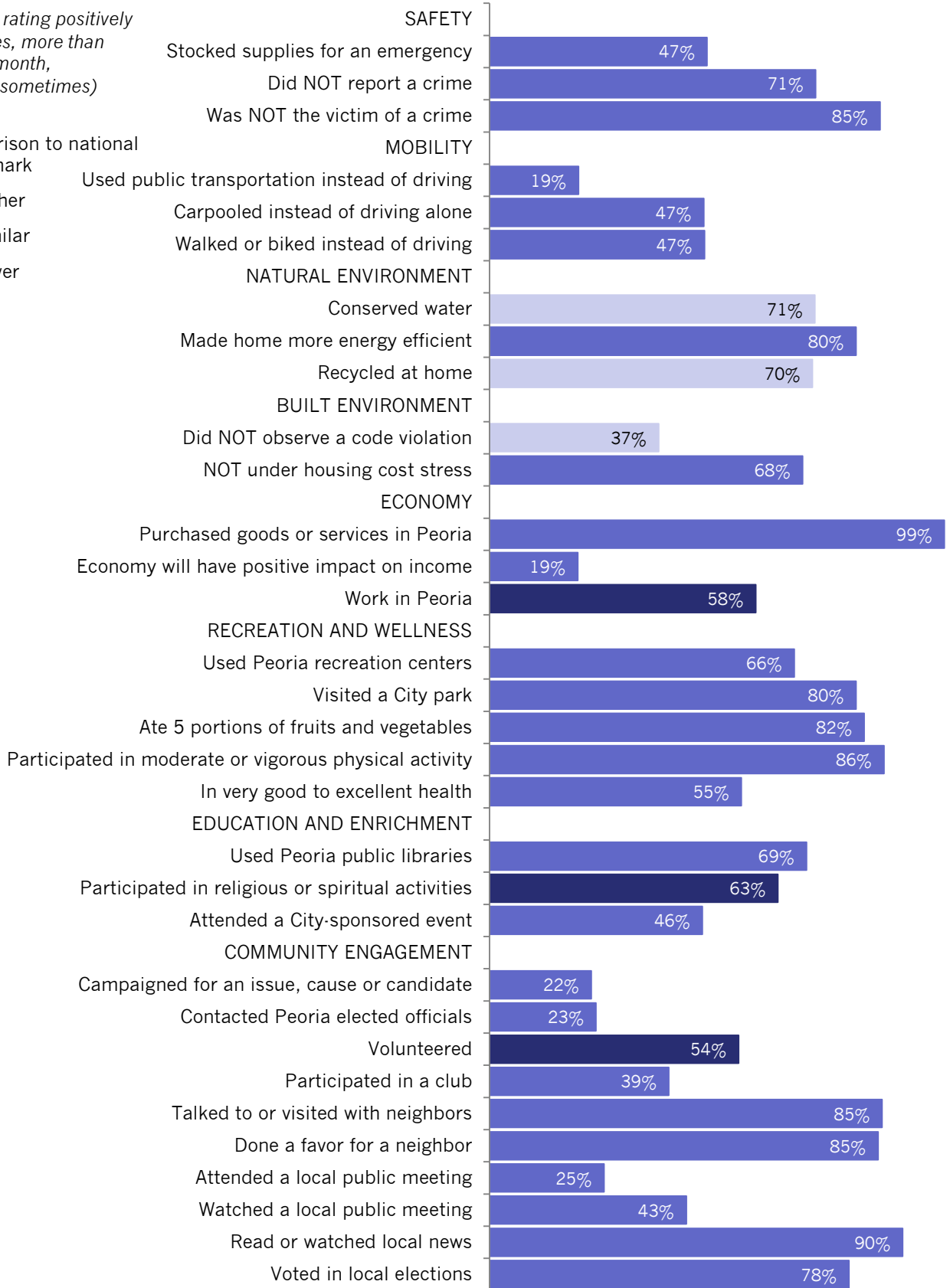


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



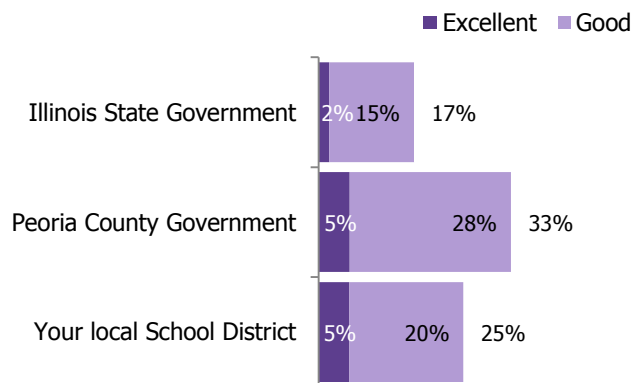
Special Topics

The City of Peoria included four questions of special interest on The NCS. These questions aimed to gauge the quality of services and approaches to managing the budget for the City of Peoria and overall priorities for City Council.

When considering the quality of services provided by the State and County Government and local School District, the services provided by the County Government were evaluated more positively, with one-third of respondents giving excellent or good ratings. Slightly fewer (25% of respondents) gave high ratings to the quality of services provided by respondents' local School District and by the State Government (17%).

Figure 4: Quality of Services

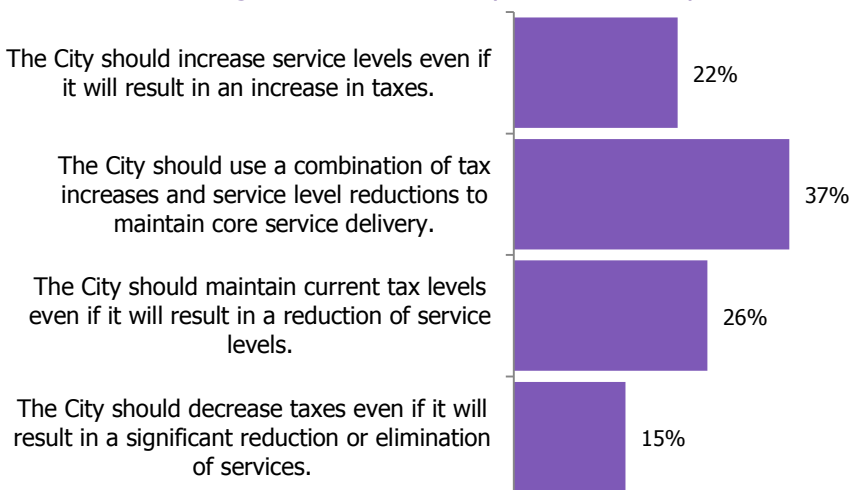
Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?



When asked to indicate their preference for how the City should manage its budget, the option preferred by the greatest proportion of respondents was using a combination of tax increases and service level reductions to maintain core service delivery (37%). Around one-quarter of respondents preferred the City to maintain current tax levels, even if it required reducing service levels and 15% said that the City should decrease taxes even if it resulted in a significant reduction or elimination of services. About one quarter of residents supported increasing service levels, even if it required increasing taxes.

Figure 5: Budget Approach

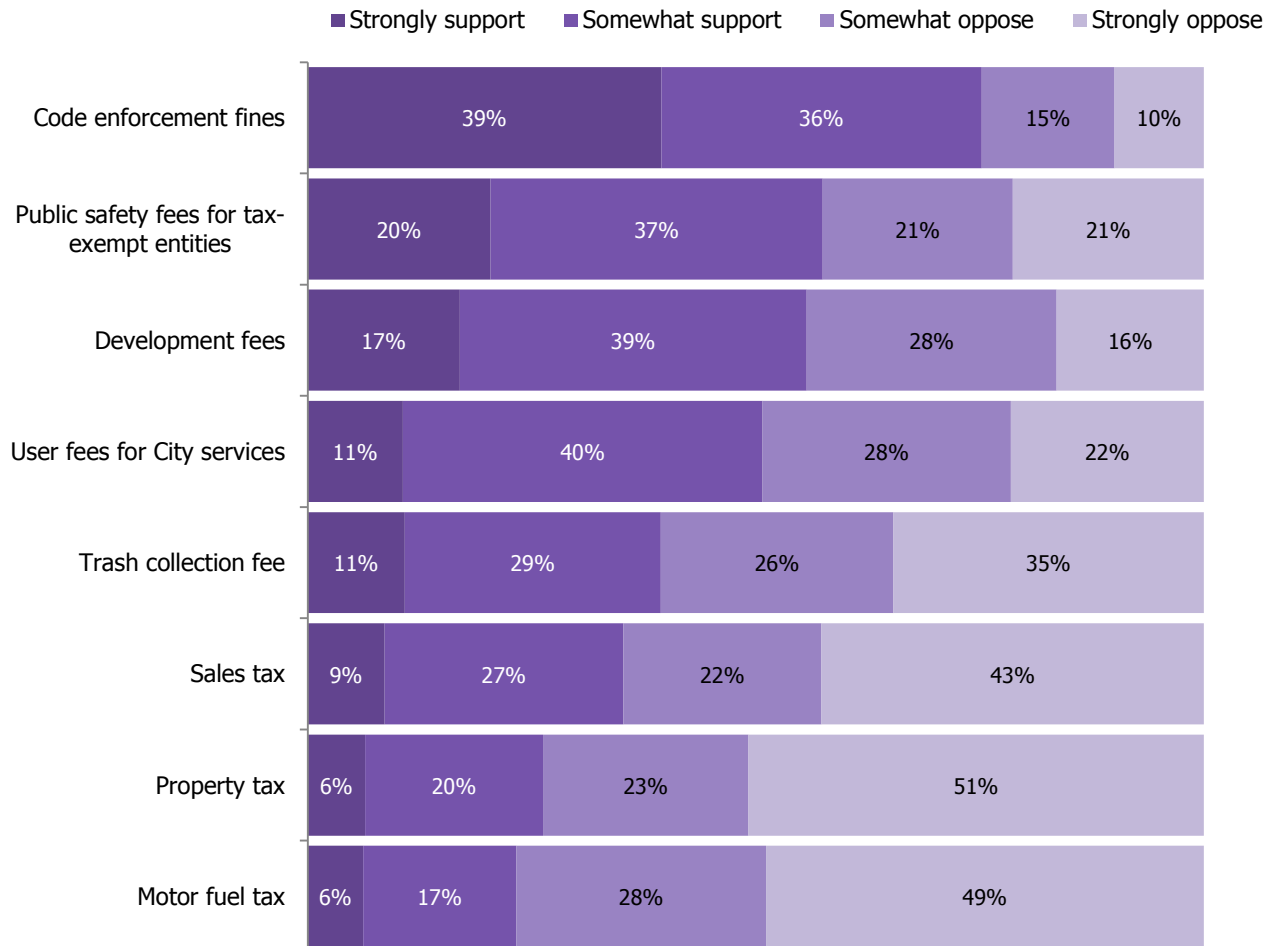
Which of the following best describes how you think the City should manage its budget for the future?



Looking at potential sources of revenue for maintaining current service levels, residents most commonly supported increasing revenue from some fees and fines than from taxes. Increasing revenue from code enforcement fines was supported by three-quarters of survey respondents, more than any other revenue source. Nearly 6 in 10 respondents supported increasing public safety fees of tax-exempt entities or development fees. About half supported and half opposed increasing revenue through user fees for City services. A trash collection fee was supported by only 4 in 10 respondents, with 6 in 10 opposing it. A sales tax increase was supported by only one-third of respondents, while only one-quarter of those completing the survey supported raising property taxes or taxes for motor fuel.

Figure 6: Revenue Sources

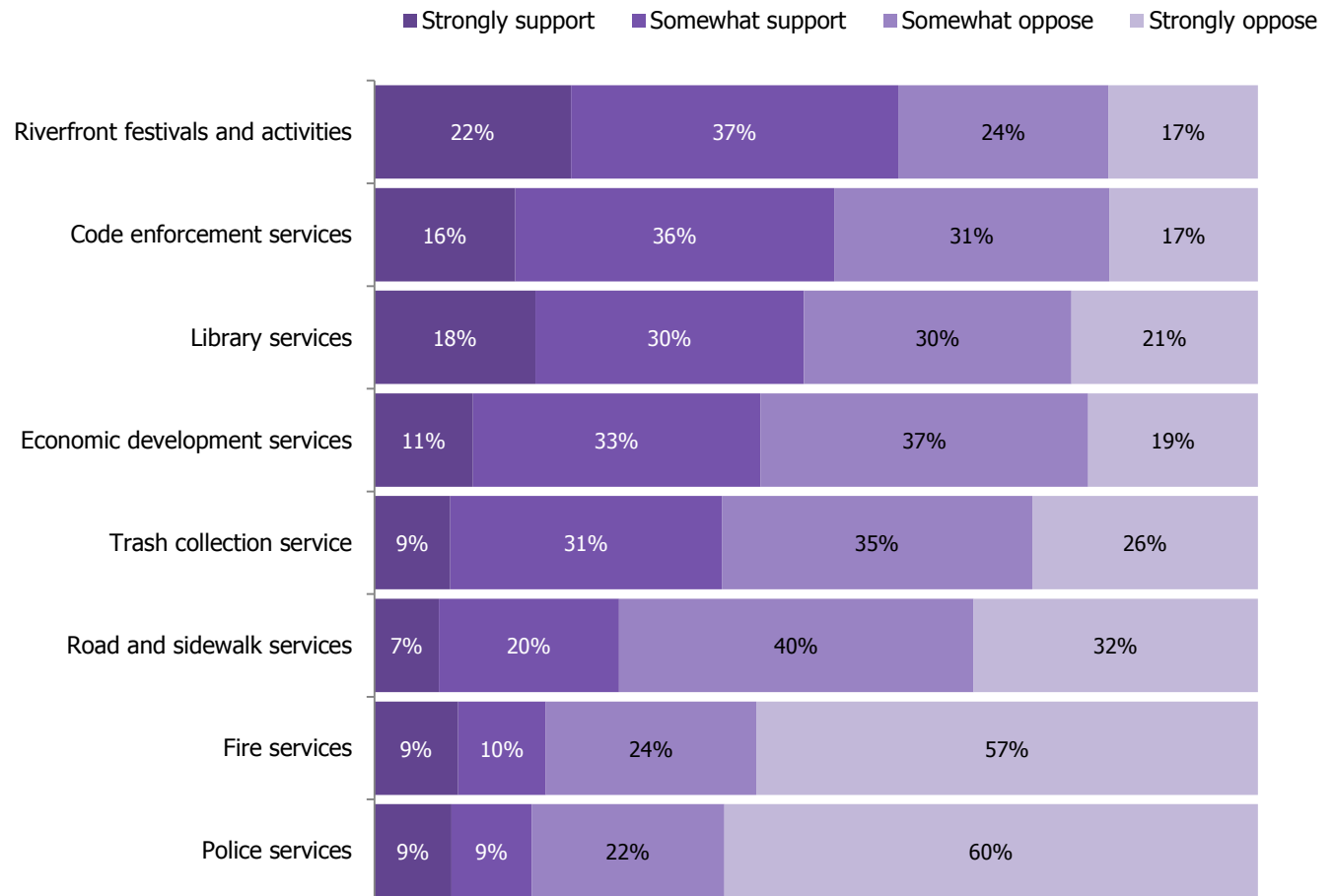
If the City had to increase revenues in order to maintain current service levels, indicate to what extent you would support or oppose increasing each of the following revenue sources:



When asked to rate their support for potential service reductions for the purpose of balancing the City budget, in general the options presented received lightly less support overall than proposed sources for increased revenue. Of the options presented, respondents were more likely to support reducing services related to Riverfront festivals and activities (59% strongly or somewhat support) and code enforcement services (52%). Respondents opposed reducing the other services listed in the survey, with especially strong opposition to reducing fire or police services.

Figure 7: Service Levels

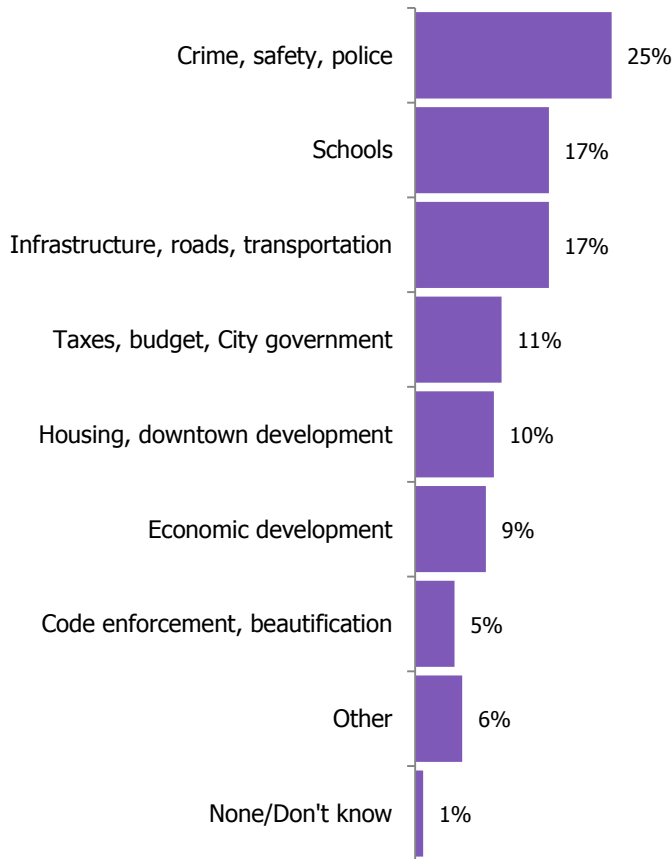
If the City had to reduce services in order to balance its budget, indicate to what extent you would support or oppose reducing each of the following services:



Respondents were asked to record their opinions about priorities for the City Council in an open-ended question (for further details see *Open Ended Responses*, under separate cover). The verbatim responses were categorized by topic area and reported in the chart below. Safety was the top concern, listed in 25% of responses to the question. Schools and infrastructure were highlighted as high priority issues by 17% each of respondents. Other issues cited by respondents related to the budget, development in the city, economic development and maintaining the appearance of Peoria.

Figure 8: Priorities for City Council

What is the single most important issue that you would like the Peoria City Council to address in 2014?



Conclusions

Peoria residents are connected to the community.

Most Peoria residents planned to stay in the City and a majority had participated in the activities or had the positive experiences measured in the survey. For the most part, participation levels were on par with other communities; respondents contacted City employees, elected officials and attended or watched public meetings at a healthy rate. Some items, including working in the city, participating in religious or spiritual activities and volunteering, occurred at a higher than average rate in Peoria. Even though Peoria's sense of community did not rate as highly as elsewhere, a majority would recommend living in Peoria to others.

Residents favor focusing on safety and Peoria's economy.

Both safety and the economy were rated as the most important areas for the community to focus on in the short term. Safety was also the most frequently mentioned item in the open-ended question about immediate City Council priorities and economic development also received mention.

On average, residents did not rate safety as highly in Peoria as residents of other communities did, including the overall feeling of safety in the city. Compared to their overall feeling of safety in Peoria, residents felt more safe in their neighborhoods. Ratings for police services lagged behind those for fire and ambulance services. Residents were most likely to oppose reducing fire and police services as a means to balance the budget. Despite the concerns in this area, a similar number of Peoria residents compared to other communities had not experienced or reported a crime.

Measures of residents' perception of Peoria's economy were generally on par with other communities. Residents felt that the quality of businesses and shopping was good, as was the cost of living in Peoria. The city's overall economic health and economic development services were not rated as favorably. The number of residents who felt that the economy would have a positive effect on their income was low but similar to other communities. Less than half of respondents supported reducing economic development services as one proposed measure to balance the budget.

Support exists for a mix of budget-balancing measures.

Residents of Peoria valued their City services and rated them favorably, yet cited budget and leadership concerns among their top immediate priorities for City Council. Peoria received modest ratings for the value of services for taxes paid. For an overall budget approach, respondents indicated that they would support a balance between tax increases and service reductions to support the provision of core services. Looking at potential sources of revenue for maintaining current service levels, residents favored increasing fees and fines residents more commonly than raising taxes. Somewhat contradictorily, code enforcement services were among the top three of the services presented in the survey that residents supported reducing for the same purpose; Riverfront festivals and activities were also deemed less critical and considered an area that could be reduced.