



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Athens-Clarke County, GA

Community Livability Report

2018



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

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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Athens-Clarke County. 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.

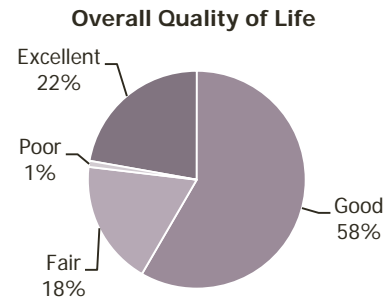
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 251 residents of Athens-Clarke County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% 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 Athens-Clarke County

About 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Athens-Clarke County as excellent or good. This was similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation (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.

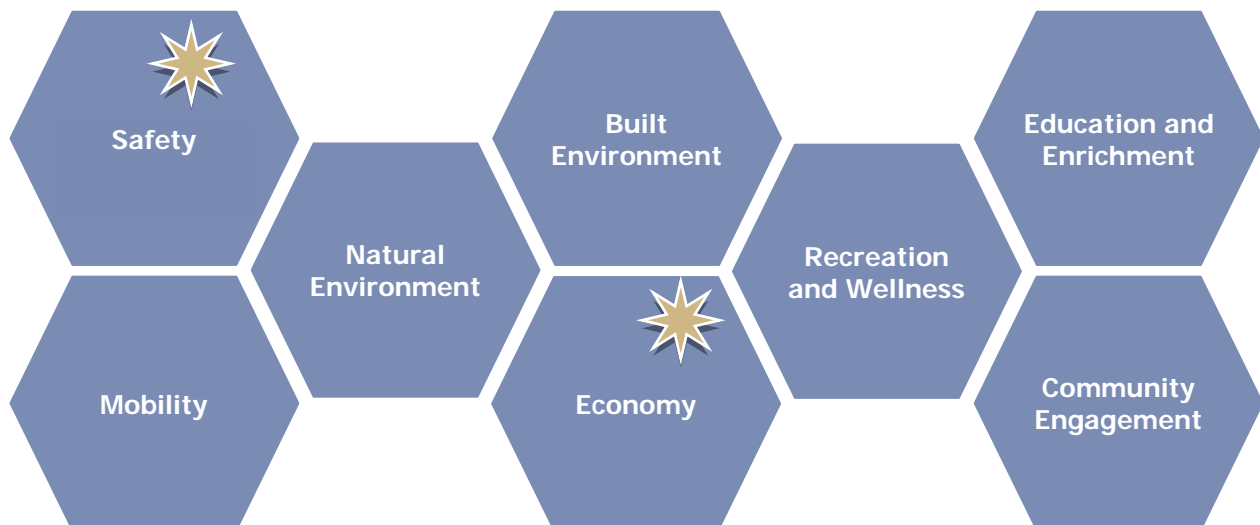
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2016, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Athens-Clarke County community in the coming two years. These facets, as well as all other facets of community livability, were positive and similar to the national benchmark. 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 Athens-Clarke County’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



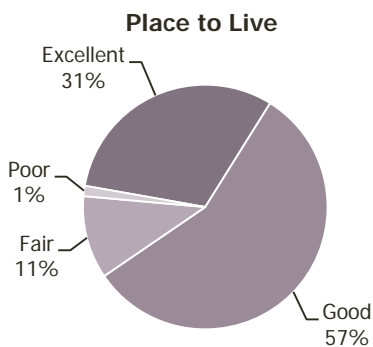
Community Characteristics

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 Athens-Clarke County, 88% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Athens-Clarke County as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Athens-Clarke County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Athens-Clarke County and its overall appearance. About 7 in 10 residents gave positive assessments to the overall image and overall appearance of the County, their neighborhood as a place to live and the County as a place to retire, and these ratings were similar to those observed in other communities across the U.S. About 6 in 10 respondents gave favorable marks to the County as a place to raise children and this rating was lower than those given elsewhere.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Within the facet of Safety, while about 9 in 10 residents gave positive reviews to feeling safe in their neighborhood and in the County's downtown/commercial area, only about two-thirds favorably rated the overall feeling of safety in the County. While this rating was lower than average, it was an increase since 2016 (see the *Trends over Time* report for more details).



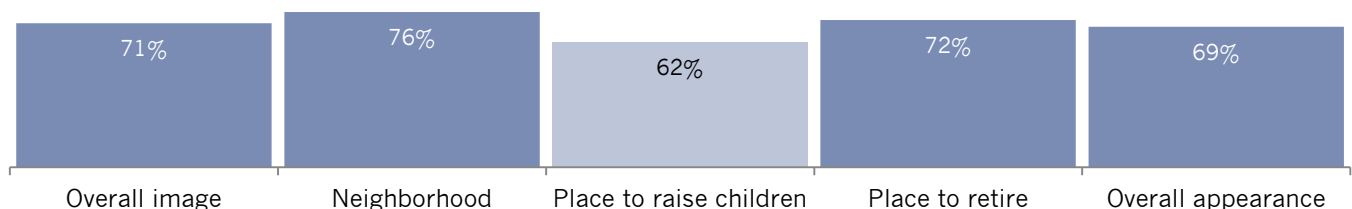
Several Economy-related items received strong ratings higher than the benchmark: vibrant downtown/commercial area, cost of living, shopping opportunities and Athens-Clarke County as a place to visit. Further, resident assessments of employment opportunities, the County as a place to work and business and service establishments improved since the previous survey iteration. However, resident opinion regarding the overall economic health of the County was lower than observed elsewhere.

Ratings for Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement also tended to be strong; cultural/arts/music activities, adult educational opportunities, social events and activities and opportunities to volunteer all received ratings higher than those seen in other communities across the nation.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



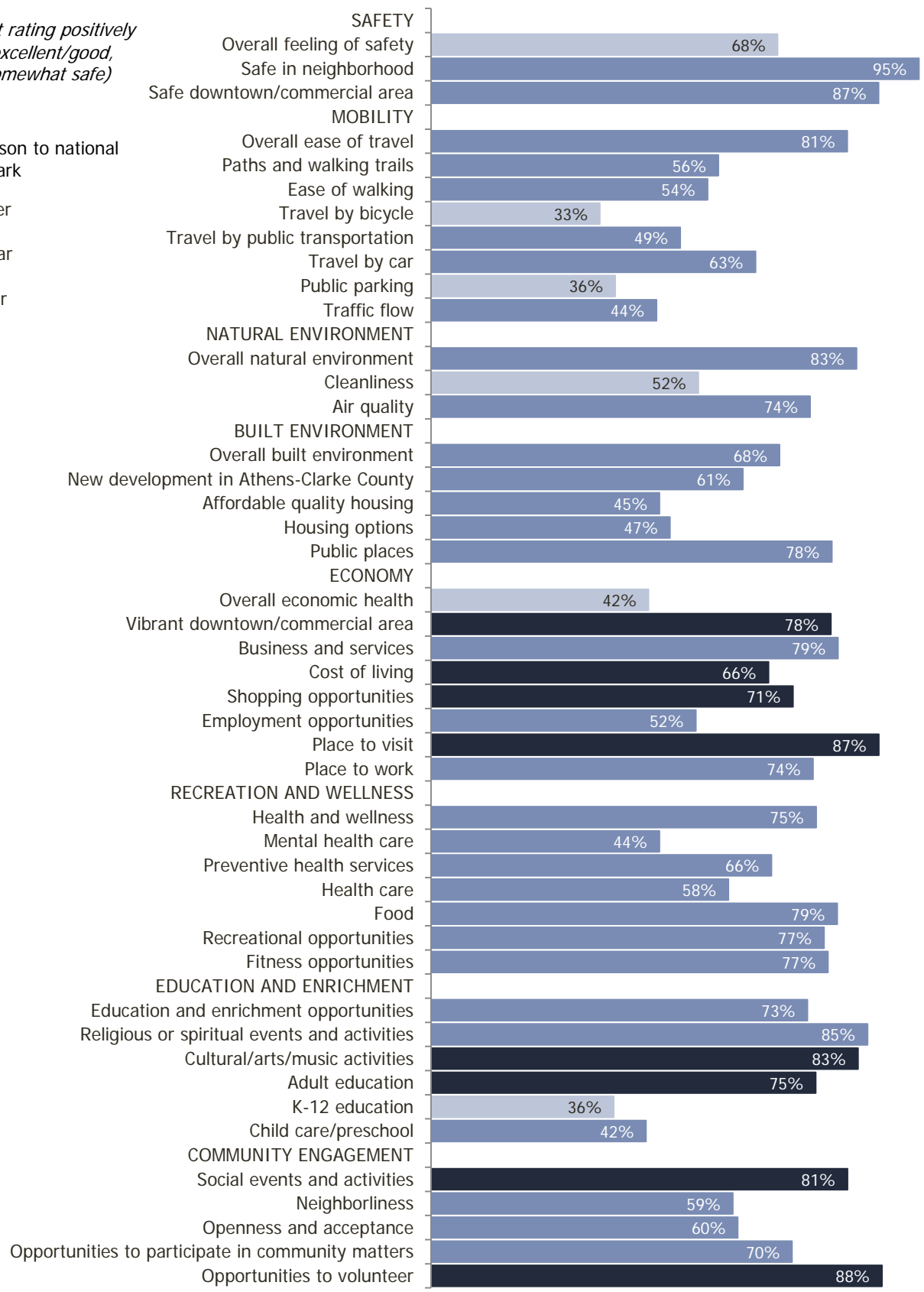
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

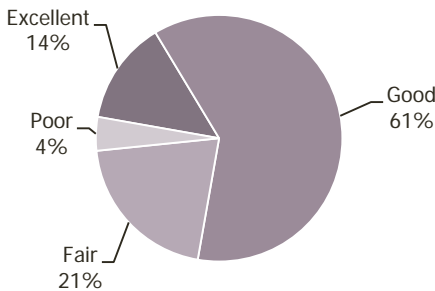
How well does the government of Athens-Clarke County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Athens-Clarke County 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 respondents rated the overall quality of services provided by the County as excellent or good (an increase since 2016), while about 4 in 10 gave positive assessments to the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these ratings were similar to those observed in other communities across the country.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Athens-Clarke County’s leadership and governance. About two-thirds of residents were pleased with the customer service provided by the County and half gave favorable reviews to the value of services for taxes paid and treating all residents fairly. Six in 10 residents positively rated the remaining aspects of government performance and all of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark. Further, ratings for overall confidence in County government and government acting in the best interest of Athens-Clarke County improved since 2016.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Athens-Clarke County. Almost all services received ratings similar to the benchmark except for bus or transit services, which was higher, and yard waste pick-up, which was lower. No County services declined in ratings since 2016, but several increased: natural areas preservation, economic development, recreation programs and special events.

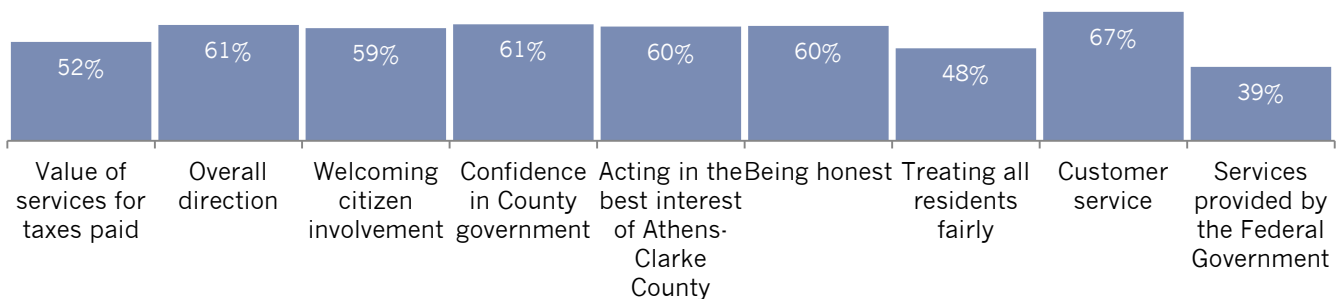
Overall Quality of County Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



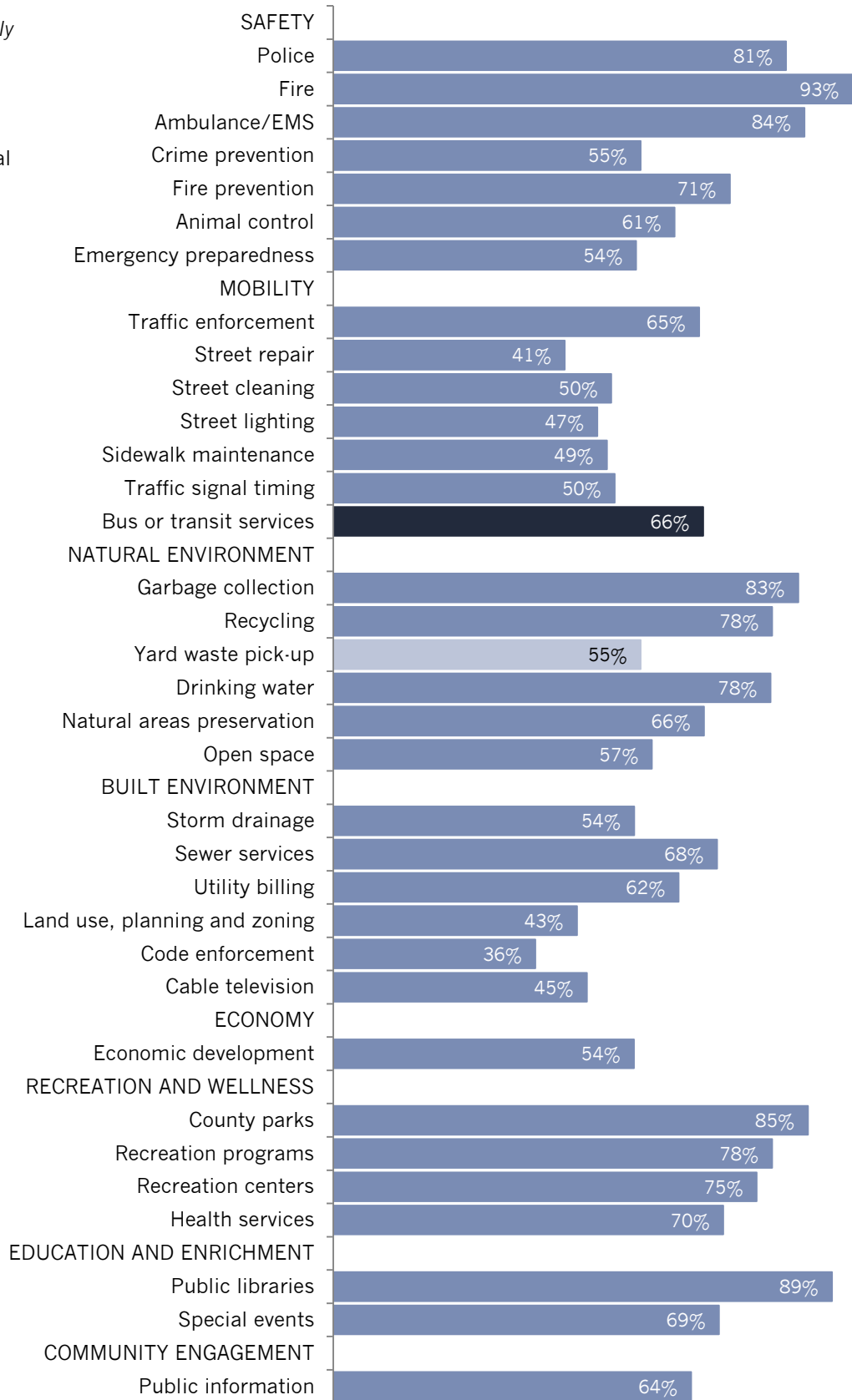
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

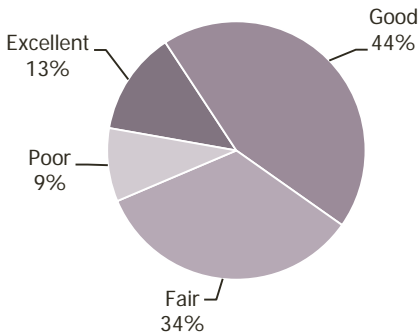
Are the residents of Athens-Clarke County connected to the community and each other?

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. Roughly 6 in 10 residents favorably rated the sense of community in Athens-Clarke County (which was similar to the benchmark) and indicated they planned to remain in the County for the next five years (which was lower than the benchmark). Both of these ratings decreased since 2016. More than 8 in 10 residents would recommend living in the County to someone who asked and this level was on par with other communities nationwide.

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 tended to vary across the different facets, making the comparison to the benchmark (and Athens-Clarke County over time) useful for evaluating the results. County residents were more likely than those who lived elsewhere to have used public transportation instead of driving, carpooled instead of driving alone, work in Athens-Clarke County, or have participated in religious or spiritual activities, but less likely to have made their home energy efficient, done a favor for a neighbor, read or watched local news or voted in local elections.

Compared to 2016, residents were less likely in 2018 to have made efforts to make their homes more energy efficient, volunteered or read or watched local news, but were more likely to have contacted County employees.

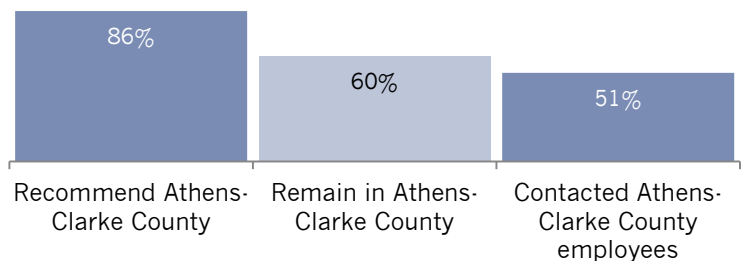
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



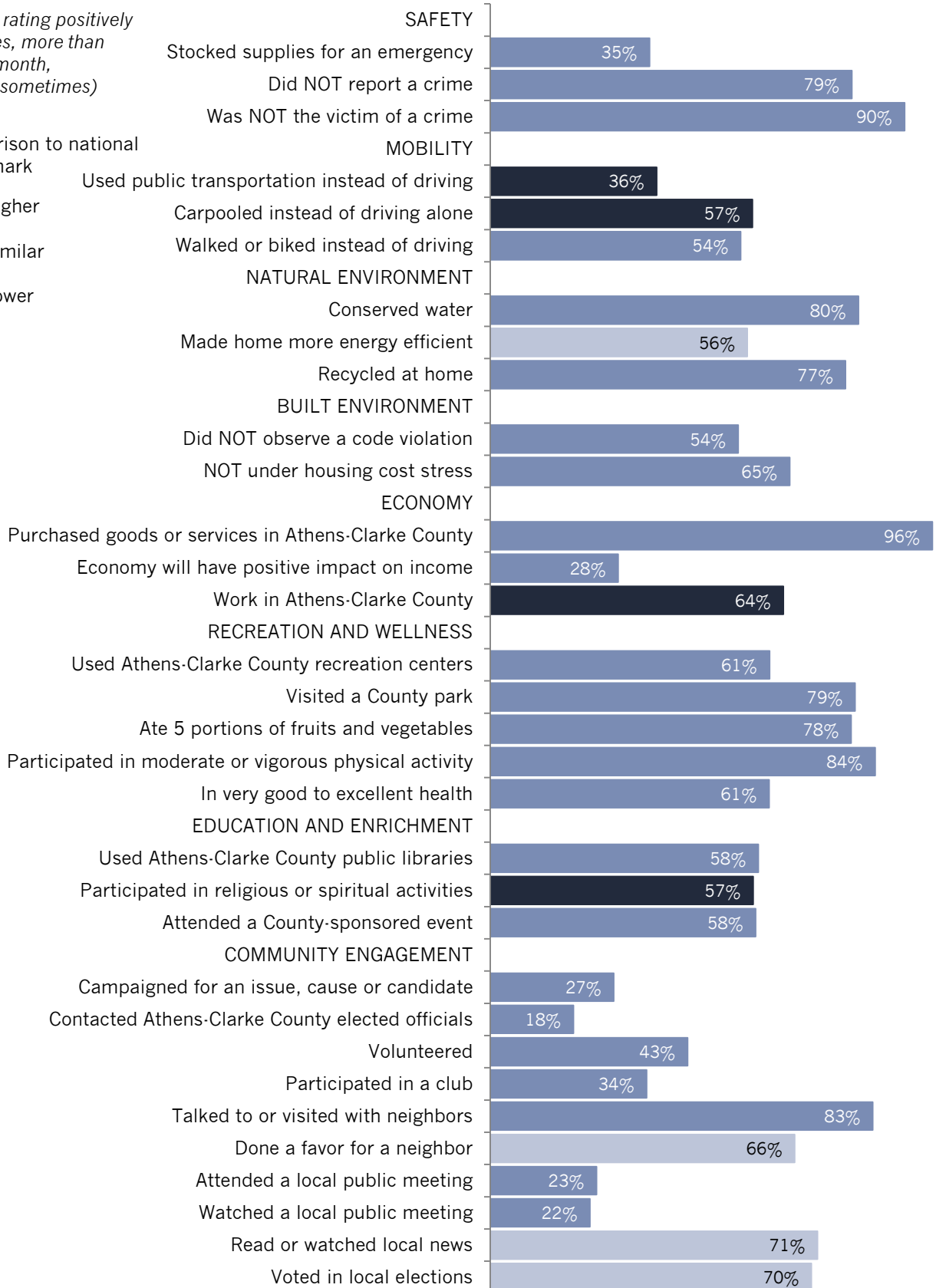
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



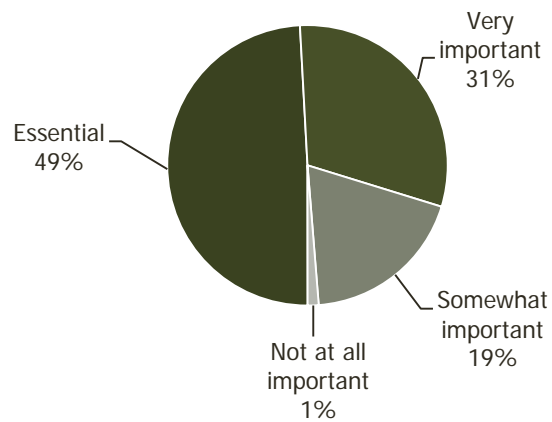
Special Topics

Athens-Clarke County included five questions of special interest on The NCS as well a line addition to one standard question. Topic areas included transportation corridor plans, regional partnerships, greenbelt development and Athens Transit.

When asked about the importance of the County to create a long-range vision/strategy, about 8 in 10 thought it was essential or very important and 2 in 10 thought it was somewhat important. Very few residents thought that creating a vision or strategy for the County was not at all important.

Figure 4: Line Addition to Question 13

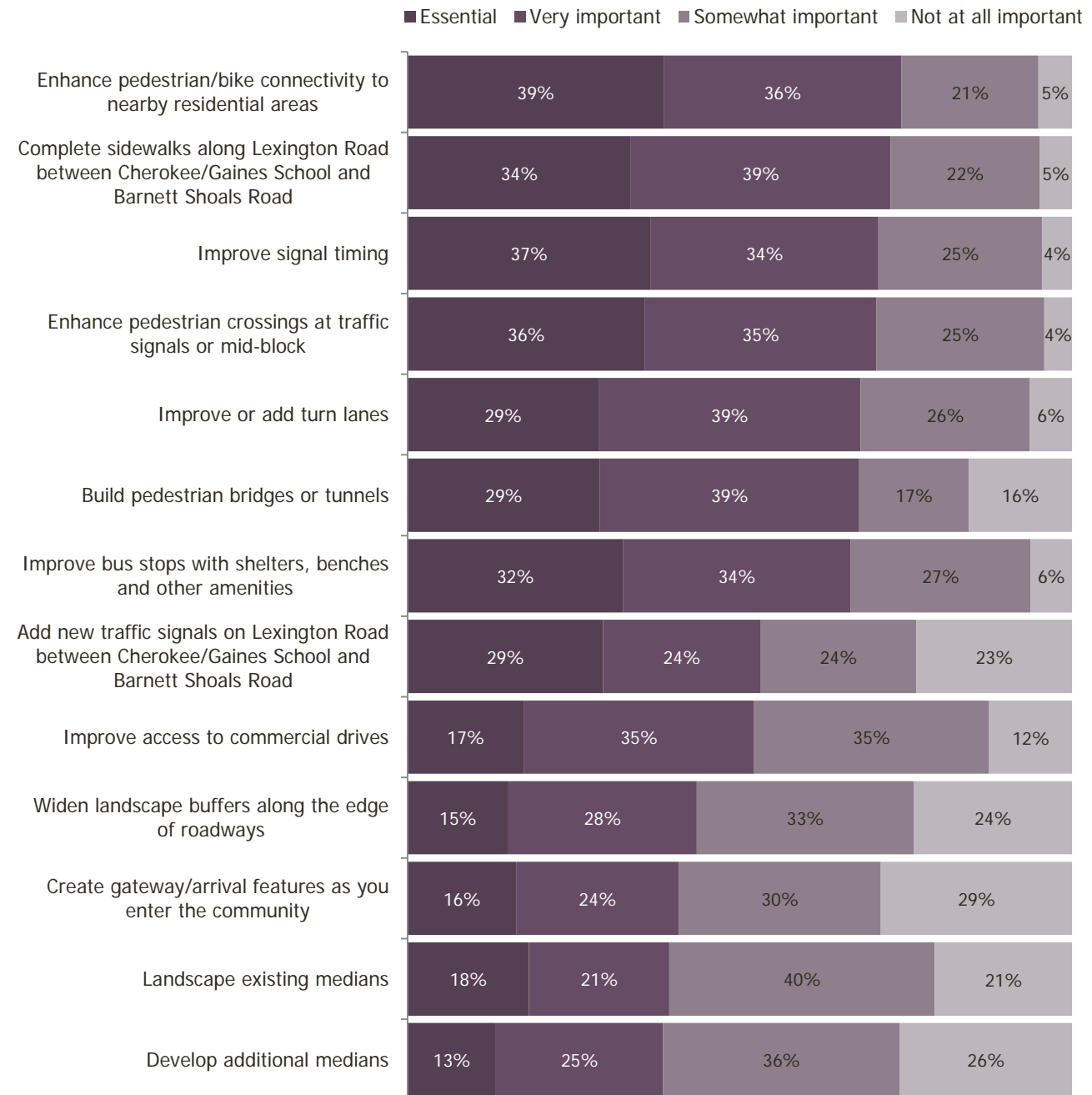
Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Athens-Clarke County community to focus on each of the following in the coming two years: Create a long-range vision/strategy for the County



Residents evaluated a list of 13 possible improvements to include in the development of transportation corridor plans in Athens-Clarke County. Roughly 7 in 10 residents thought that enhancing pedestrian/bike connectivity, completing sidewalks, improving signal timing, enhancing pedestrian crossings, improving or adding turn lanes, building pedestrian bridges or tunnels and improving bus stops were all essential or very important to address in the development of the plans. Residents were least likely to rate widening landscape buffers, creating gateway/arrival features, landscaping existing medians or developing additional medians as important.

Figure 5: Corridor Plan Development

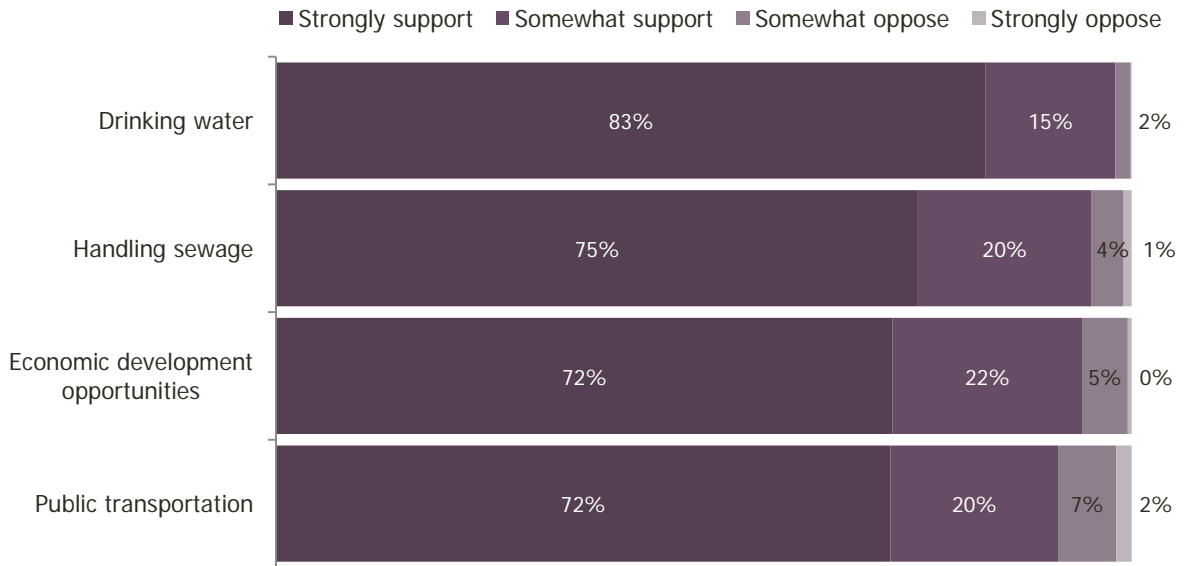
Athens-Clarke County is in the process of developing Corridor Plans for the Atlanta Highway, Lexington Road, and Prince Avenue, which aim to improve the experience and impression residents and visitors have of our community and increase understanding of the roads' impact on traffic, pedestrians, bicyclists, and commerce. How important, if at all, is it for the Athens-Clarke County government to address each of the following in the development of this plan?



Nearly all residents strongly or somewhat supported the County government working with neighboring cities and counties to address the regional issues with drinking water, sewage, economic development opportunities and public transportation. Drinking water received the strongest level of support.

Figure 6: Support for Regional Partnerships

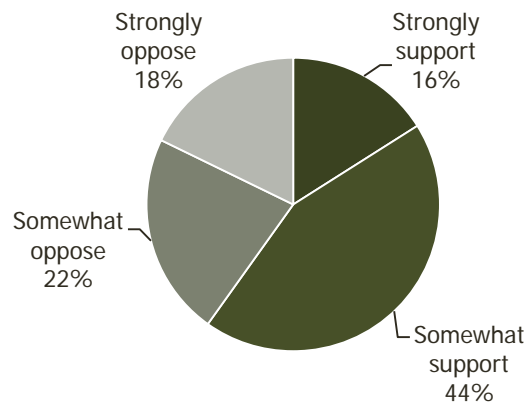
To what extent, if any, do you support or oppose the Athens-Clarke County government working with neighboring cities and counties to address the following regional issues:



Thinking about whether the County should allow residential or commercial development in the greenbelt and/or rural parts of the community, responses were mixed. A slight majority of respondents supported the development, although only 16% of these were in strong support. The proportions of residents strongly supporting and strongly opposing the development were equal.

Figure 7: Support for Controlled Rural/Greenbelt Development

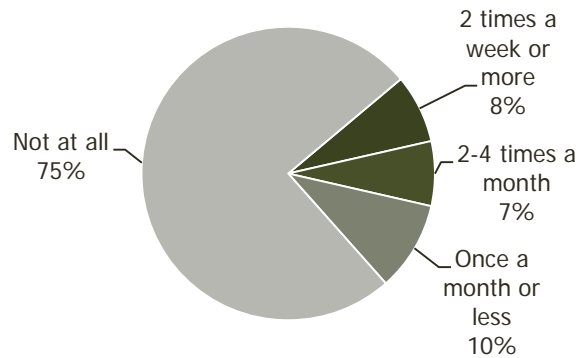
To what extent, if any, would you support or oppose the Athens-Clarke County government allowing for some controlled residential or commercial development in the greenbelt and/or rural parts of our community?



Only about one-quarter of residents had used Athens Transit in the last 12 months; three-quarters had not. About 1 in 10 residents use Athens transit twice a week or more frequently.

Figure 8: Use of Athens Transit

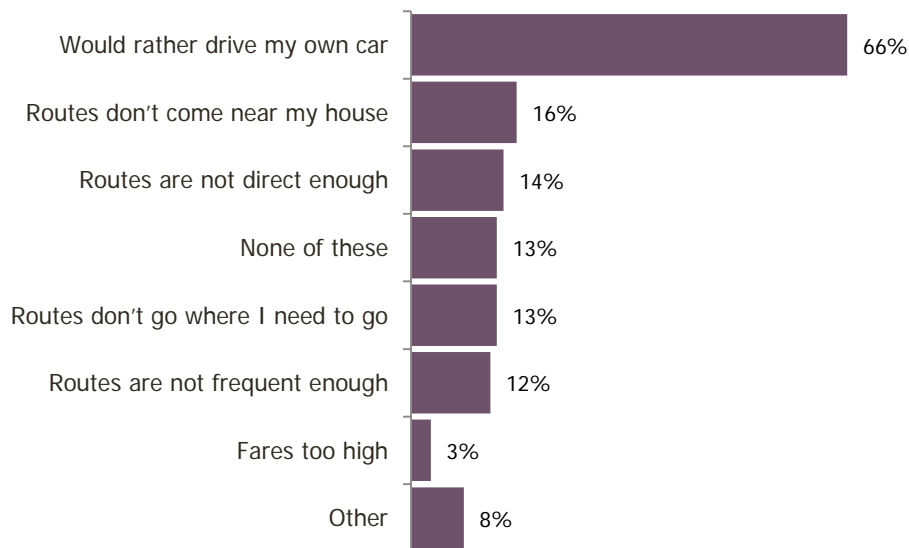
How frequently, if at all, did you use Athens Transit in the last 12 months?



Residents who had used Athens Transit infrequently or not at all were asked to indicate why not and to choose as many reasons as applied. About two-thirds of residents noted that they would rather drive their own car, an overwhelmingly popular response. About 1 in 10 residents indicated various issues with the routes and service frequency kept them from using Athens Transit more frequently.

Figure 9: Reasons for Non-use of Athens Transit

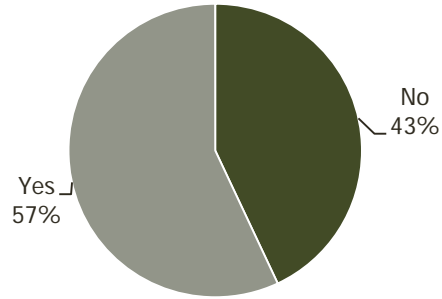
If you used Athens Transit once a month or less or not at all in the last 12 months, why? (Mark all that apply).



Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

Residents who indicated that they had children age 17 or under at home were asked whether those children attended school in the Athens-Clarke County School District. Slightly more than half did and slightly less than half did not.

Figure 10: Athens-Clarke School District Attendance
Do the children attend school in the Athens-Clarke County School District?



Conclusions

Athens-Clarke County continues to be a great place to live.

About 8 in 10 residents rated their overall quality of life in the County as excellent or good and 9 in 10 were pleased with the County as a place to live. About 7 in 10 residents gave positive assessments to the overall image and overall appearance of the County, their neighborhood as a place to live and the County as a place to retire. About 6 in 10 were pleased with the sense of community in the County and more than 8 in 10 residents would recommend living in the County to someone who asked. These ratings were all positive and on par with those given in other communities nationwide.

Economy is a priority to residents and a strength of the County.

Respondents indicated that Economy would be an important focus area for the County in the next two years, and ratings within this facet tended to be positive and similar to or higher than the national benchmark. Economy-related items that received above-average ratings included vibrant downtown/commercial area, cost of living, shopping opportunities and Athens-Clarke County as a place to visit. Further, resident assessments of employment opportunities, the County as a place to work, business and service establishments and economic development improved since 2016. Athens-Clarke County residents also were more likely than those who lived in other jurisdictions to work in the community where they lived. However, resident opinion regarding the overall economic health of the County was lower than observed elsewhere. Further, nearly all residents strongly or somewhat supported the County government working with neighboring cities and counties to address economic development opportunities.

Mobility is also important to residents and may be an opportunity for the County.

Ratings for most Mobility-related items on the survey tended to be positive and similar to the national comparison, including overall ease of travel, ease of travel by car and traffic enforcement. Bus and transit services received ratings higher than those given in other communities, and the proportions of residents who had used public transportation or carpoled instead of driving also were higher than seen elsewhere. One-quarter of residents had used Athens Transit in the past 12 months. However, residents gave below-average marks to ease of travel by bicycle and public parking.

Residents demonstrated a strong interest in the County furthering mobility in the region. Roughly 7 in 10 residents thought that enhancing pedestrian/bike connectivity, completing sidewalks, improving signal timing, enhancing pedestrian crossings, improving or adding turn lanes, building pedestrian bridges or tunnels and improving bus stops were all essential or very important to address in the development of the plans. Further, About 9 in 10 residents supported the County government working with neighboring cities and counties to address issues with public transportation.