

THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Walnut Creek, CA

Community Livability Report

2019



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About

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

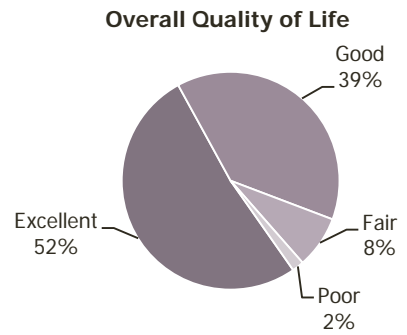
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 561 residents of the City of Walnut Creek. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% 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 Walnut Creek

Most residents (90%) rated the quality of life in Walnut Creek as excellent or good. This rating was higher 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.

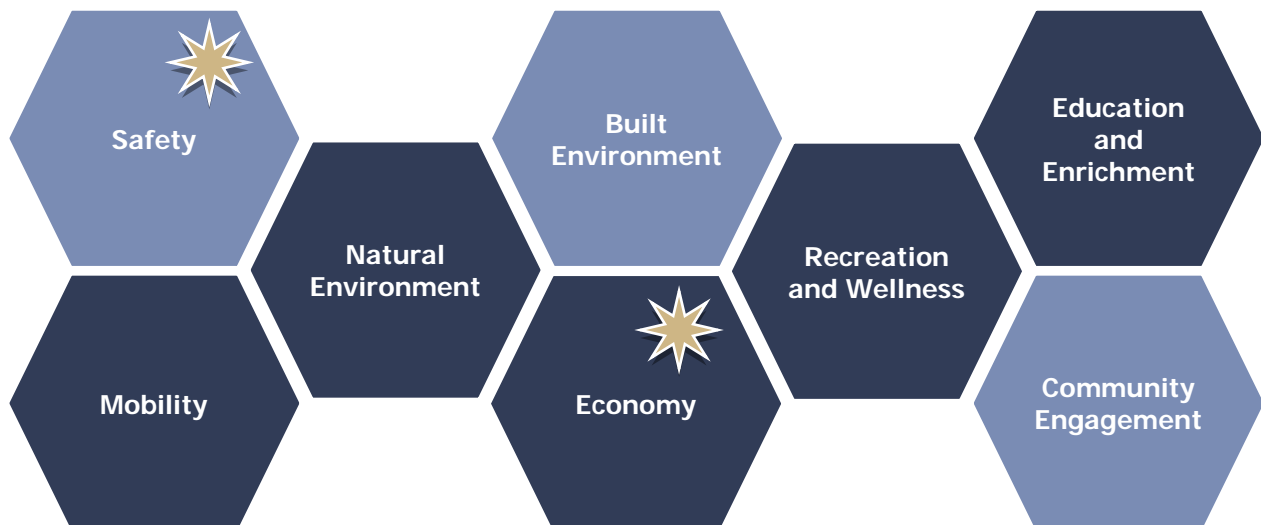
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Walnut Creek community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that evaluations for Economy, as well as Mobility, Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment exceeded those awarded in other communities nationwide. Ratings for Safety, Built Environment and Community Engagement were on par with national benchmarks. 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 Walnut Creek's unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



Community Characteristics

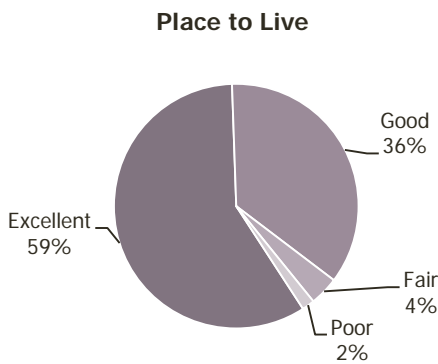
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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. More than 9 in 10 rated the city of Walnut Creek as an excellent or good place to live. Survey respondents' reviews of Walnut Creek as a place to live outshined other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the city as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Walnut Creek as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Walnut Creek and its overall appearance. Nearly all Walnut Creek residents rated four of the five aspects as excellent or good and each were scored higher than the national benchmark. The city as a place to retire was similar to the national average, with about three-quarters of respondents awarding top marks.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, ratings for most aspects of Community Characteristics were positively reviewed by at least 6 in 10 participants and were either similar or higher than national benchmarks.

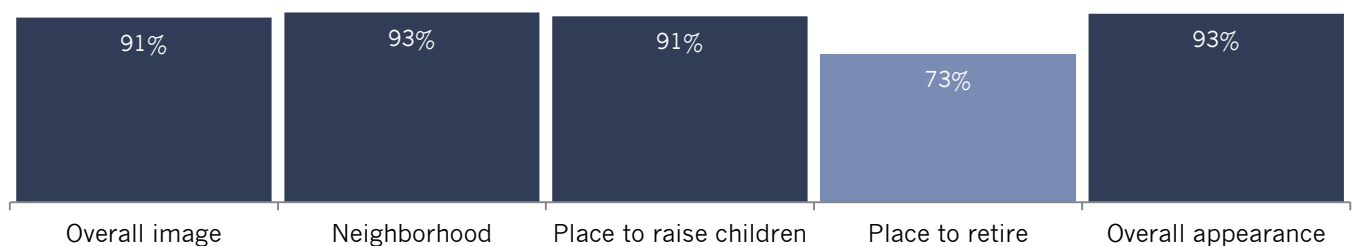
Within the facet of Safety, all aspects were rated positively by 9 in 10 or more survey participants and were on par with nationwide averages. Most aspects of Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement received top marks from at least three-quarters of respondents, with ratings that tended to be higher than the benchmarks. Moreover, scores for overall health and wellness and the neighborliness of Walnut Creek residents improved in 2019 (see the *Trends over Time* report for more details).



Residents felt that Economy was a strength as well, with all but one aspect receiving ratings surpassing national averages; further, reviews for employment opportunities and the city as a place to work exceeded 2017 levels. In fact, marks for the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities and Walnut Creek as a place to work ranked the city as top 10 in the nation for each of these aspects. Aspects of affordability (cost of living and availability of affordable quality housing) tended to be some of the lowest rated characteristics of Walnut Creek, with less than 2 in 10 assigning excellent or good scores.

While respondents' evaluations for Mobility-related aspects tended to be similar to communities elsewhere, scores for a number of items had improved since 2017, including overall ease of travel, traffic flow, ease of travel by most modes of transportation (car, walking and biking) and public parking.

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



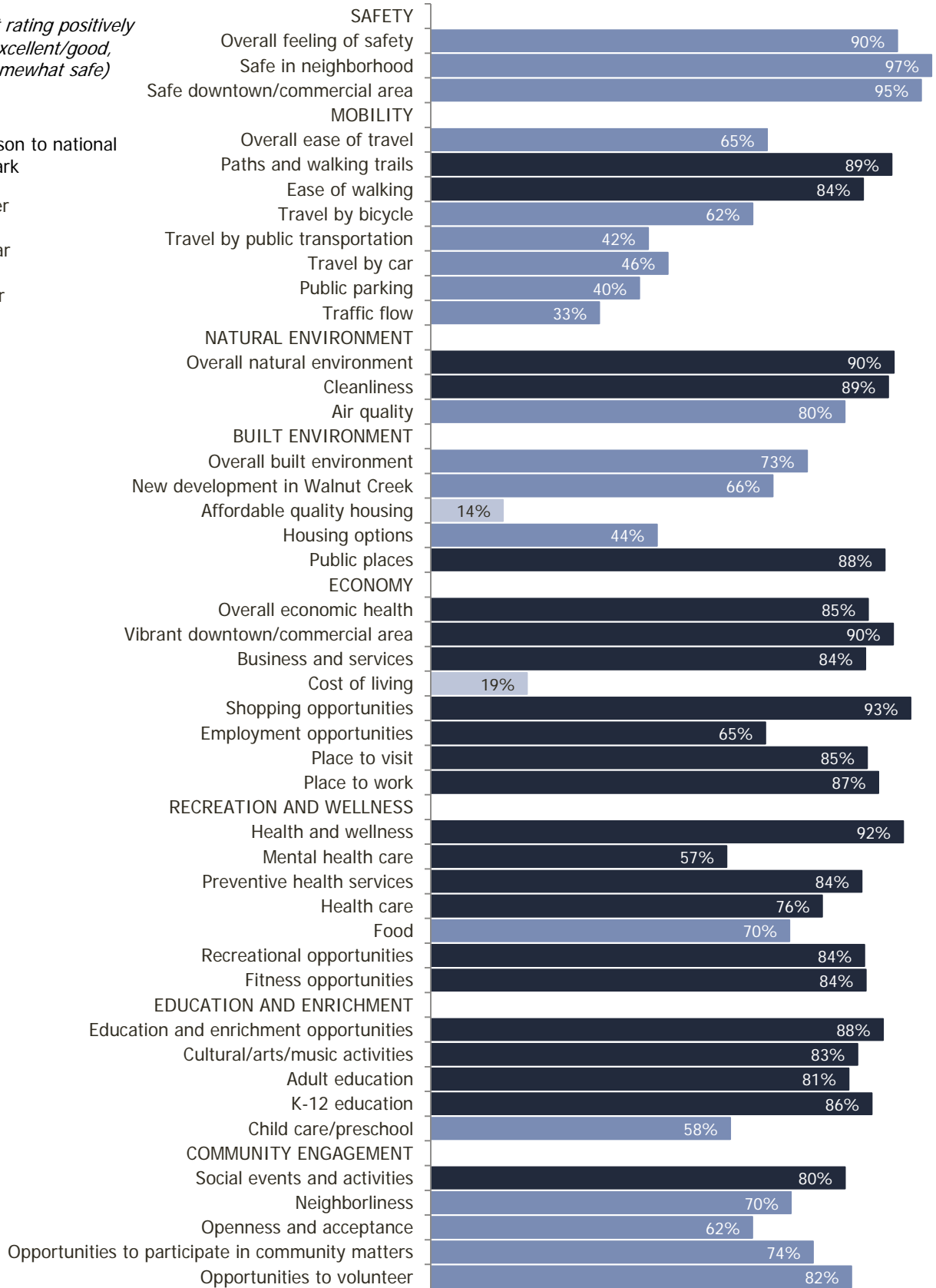
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

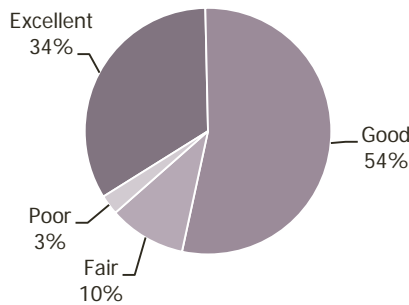
How well does the government of Walnut Creek meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Walnut Creek as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. The overall quality of services provided by the City of Walnut Creek was rated as excellent or good by more than 8 in 10 residents, while services provided by the Federal Government were rated favorably by close to 4 in 10 respondents. Ratings for the services provided by Walnut Creek were higher than the national benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Walnut Creek’s leadership and governance. At least 6 in 10 community members assigned positive ratings to all aspects of government leadership and about 8 in 10 thought highly of the customer services provided by City employees. Residents’ reviews for the value of services for the taxes paid exceeded national averages. Further, respondents’ gave more positive ratings to the City welcoming resident involvement and acting in the best interest of the community, as well as their confidence in leadership and the overall direction the City is taking compared to 2017.

Respondents evaluated 20 individual services and amenities available in Walnut Creek. Ratings for all of these services were similar to or higher than the national benchmarks. Residents tended to give a mix of solid and strong ratings within Safety, Mobility and Built Environment; most services were on par with other communities (e.g., police, emergency preparedness, traffic enforcement, traffic signal timing and land, use planning and zoning), scores for crime prevention, streets (repair, cleaning and lighting), sidewalk maintenance and code enforcement eclipsed national averages. Further, residents’ reviews for crime prevention, street repair, street lighting and traffic signal timing increased since the last survey iteration.

Overall Quality of City Services



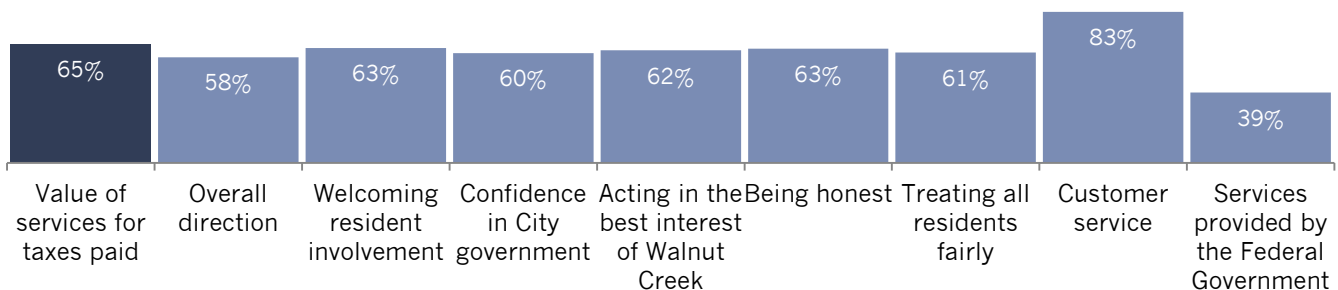
Services that were especially well-received included Walnut Creek open space (7th in the country out of 234 communities), City parks and recreation centers and programs, with around 9 in 10 awarding top marks and each outpacing national levels. Other notable ratings with at least 7 in 10 participants expressing appreciation were natural areas preservation (ranked 4th out of 246 municipalities), economic development, health services and City-sponsored special events; each of these also outperformed comparison communities.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



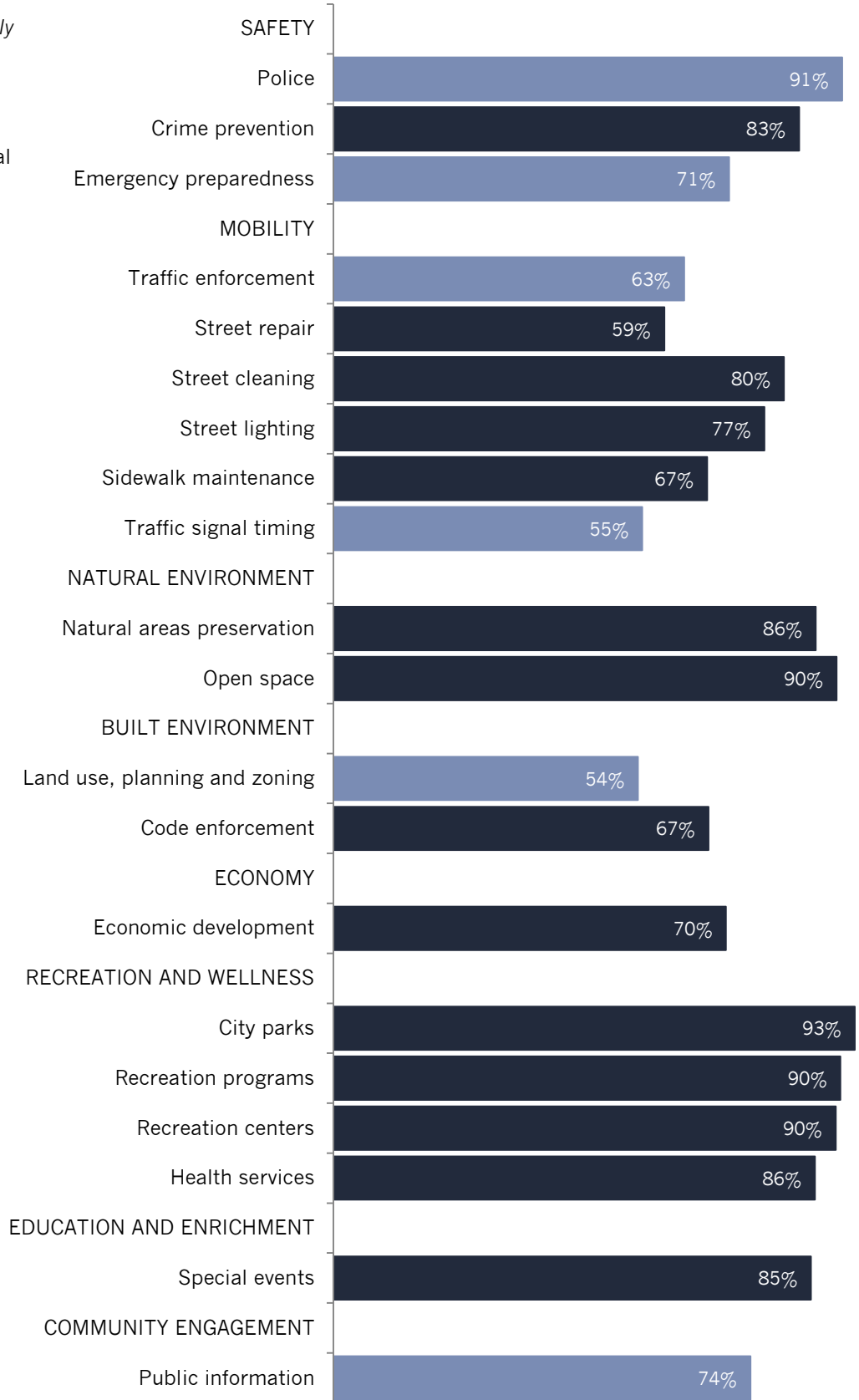
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Participation

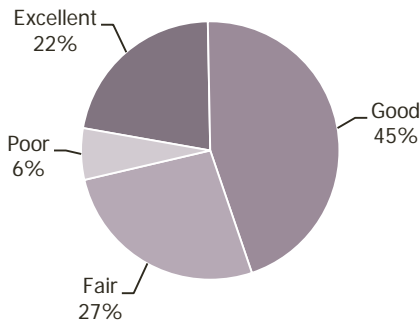
Are the residents of Walnut Creek connected to the community and each other?

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 municipalities across the U.S., about two-thirds of residents gave excellent or good reviews to the sense of community in Walnut Creek. About 9 in 10 survey participants said they would recommend Walnut Creek to someone who asked and 8 in 10 reported that they planned to remain in the community for the next five years.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Participation rates within Walnut Creek varied widely and tended to be commensurate with peer municipalities. Around 9 in 10 or more respondents reported they had participated in green behaviors (conserving water and recycling at home), maintained a healthy diet and exercise regimen, and interacted with their neighbors. Walnut Creek residents demonstrated a dedication to alternative modes of transportation with at least half indicating they had used public transit, walked or biked instead of driving; these rates outpaced levels seen nationwide. Survey respondents were also less likely to have observed a code violation than those in comparison communities. Conversely, community members reported below-average rates of working in Walnut Creek.

In 2019, residents were less likely to have used public transportation as an alternative for driving, utilized recreation centers and public libraries or reported being in good health, among others.

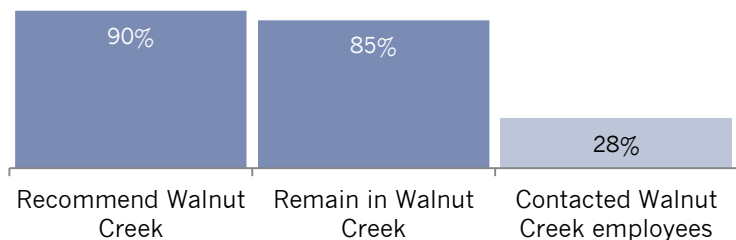
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



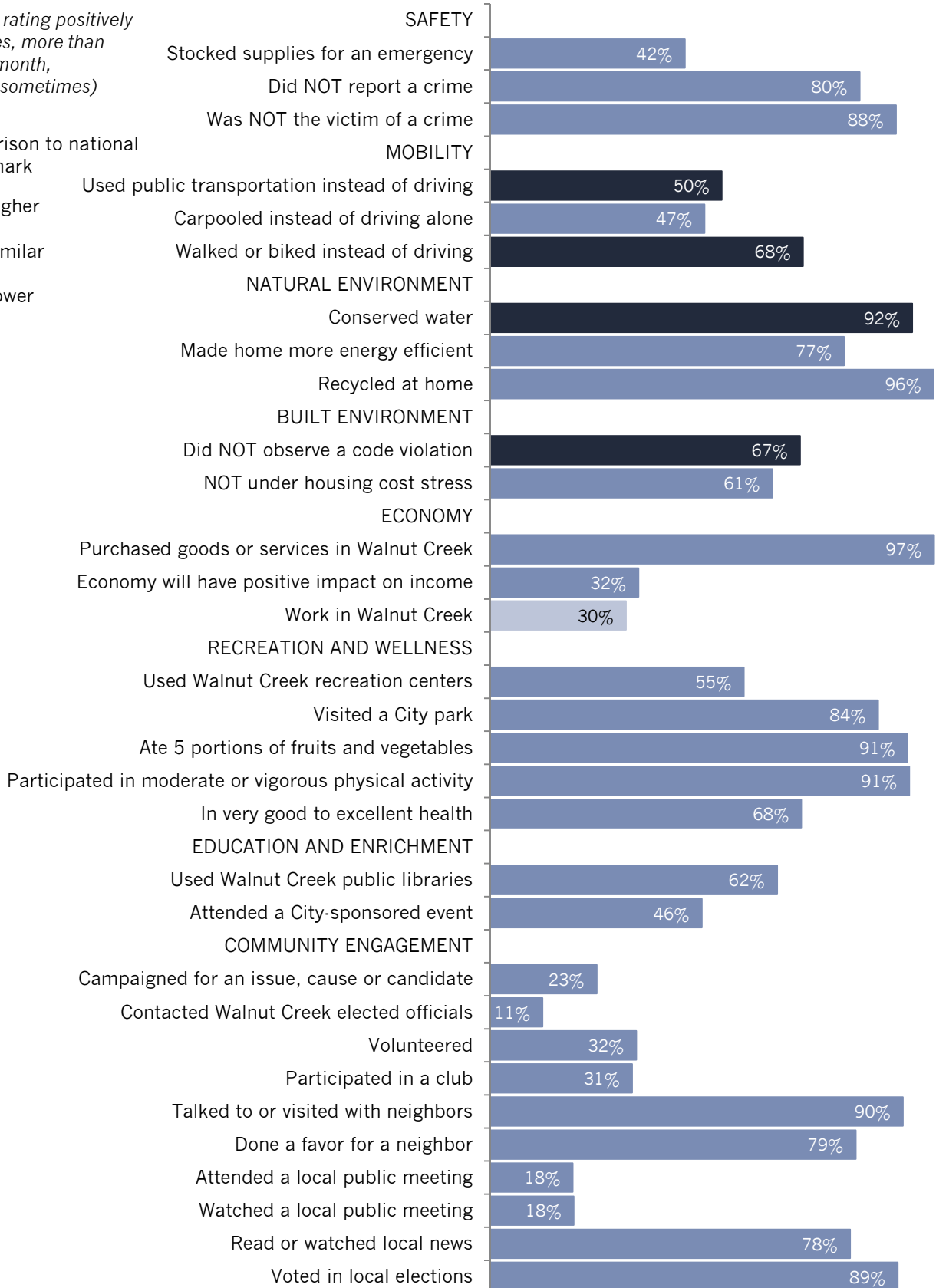
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



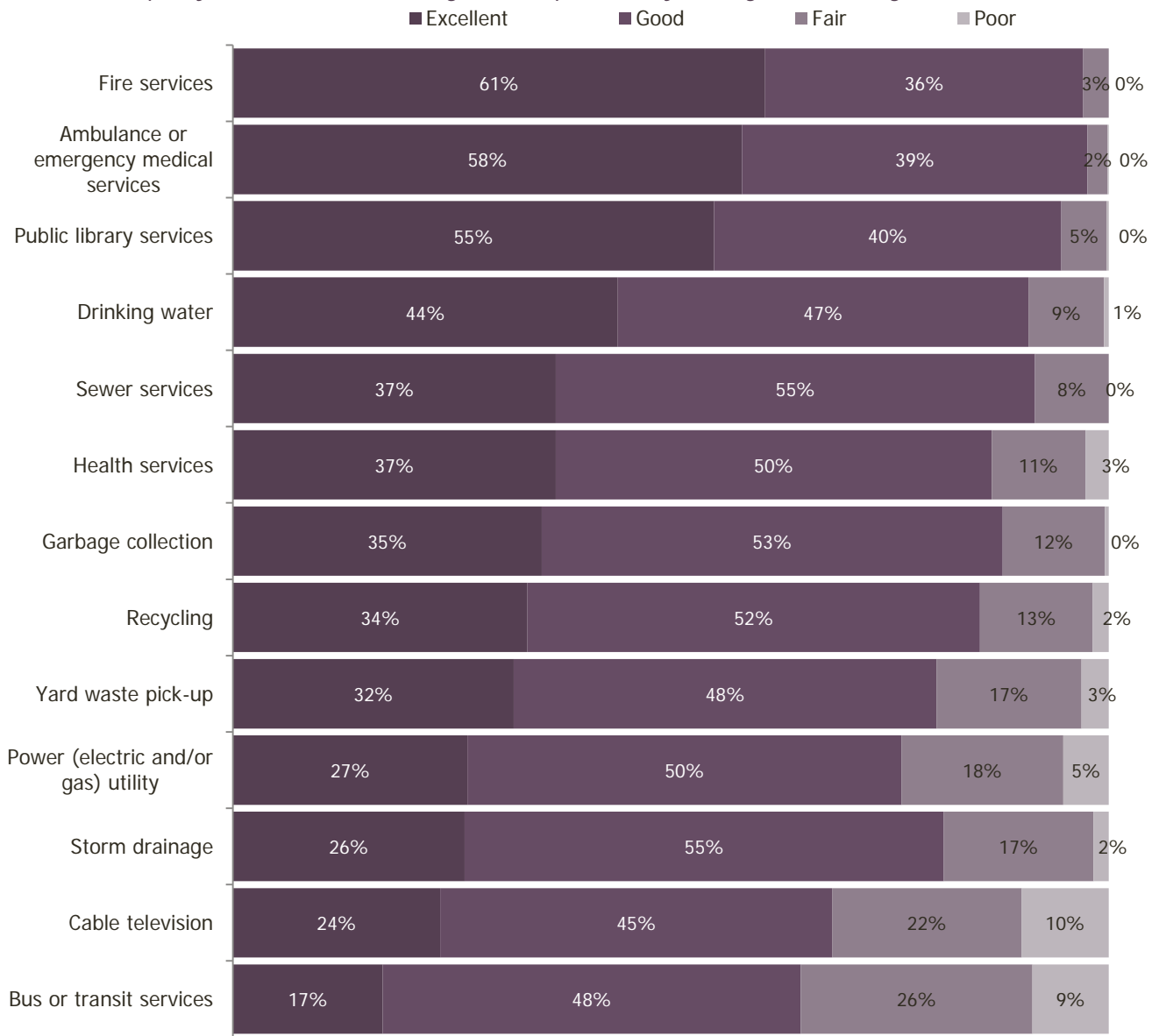
Special Topics

The City of Walnut Creek included several questions of special interest on The NCS. The City sought feedback concerning residents' opinions on services provided by government agencies outside of Walnut Creek, perceptions of growth, reliance on various information sources, future focus areas for Walnut Creek and project priorities for one-time City funds.

Nearly all residents awarded top scores to fire, ambulance/EMS and public library services and around 9 in 10 were pleased with drinking water and sewer services. Other top ranked services that are provided by agencies other than Walnut Creek included garbage collection (88% excellent or good) health services (86%) and recycling (85%). The lowest rated services were cable television and bus or transit services; however, both of these services were still positively reviewed by at least two-thirds of respondents.

Figure 4: Quality of Services Provided by Other Government Agencies

Please rate the quality of each of the following services provided by other government agencies:

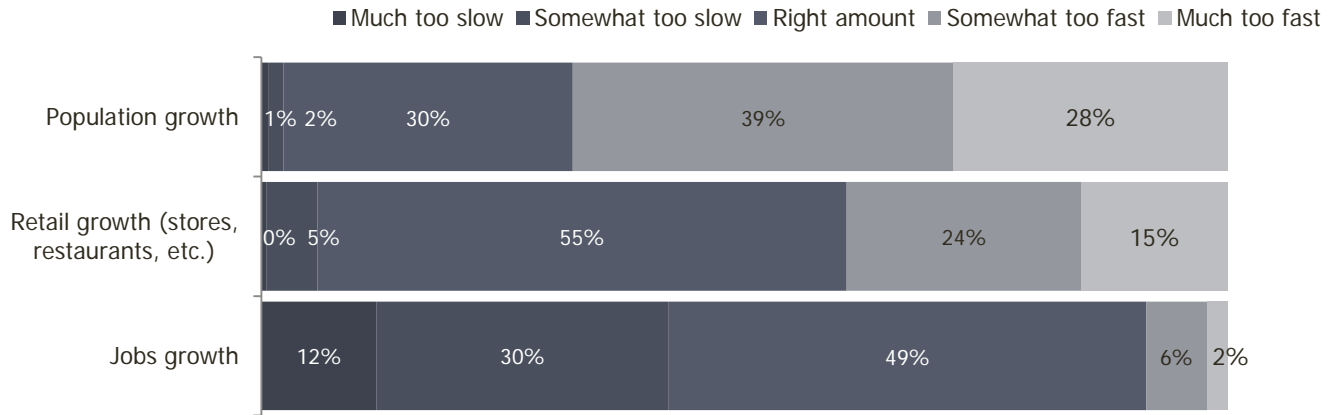


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In terms of growth of different aspects of Walnut Creek, residents felt less favorably about population growth, with about 3 in 10 stating they felt the rate of growth was appropriate, and two-thirds expressing views that growth was somewhat or much too fast. Around half of survey respondents felt that jobs growth was on the right track and 4 in 10 still felt employment growth was too slow, while a majority of residents indicated that retail growth was neither too slow nor too fast, but just right.

Figure 5: Perceptions of Growth

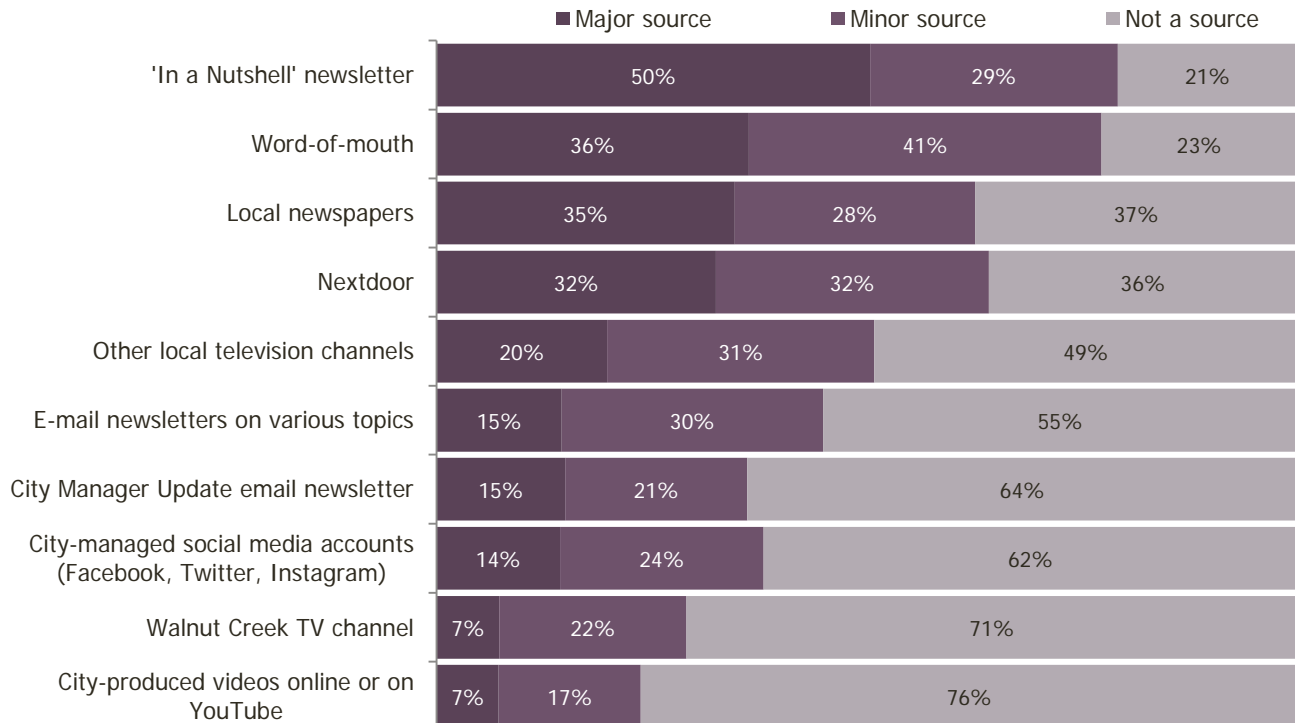
Please rate the speed of growth in the following categories in Walnut Creek over the past 2 years:



When asked about their communication preferences, around 8 in 10 community members reported they rely on the *In the Nutshell* newsletter or word-of-mouth as their major or minor sources of information about the City, its activities, events and services. About two-thirds of participants utilized local newspapers or Nextdoor and close to half relied on local television channels that were not sponsored by the City, as residents were least likely to use the Walnut Creek TV channel or City-produced videos online or on YouTube.

Figure 6: Sources of Information

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

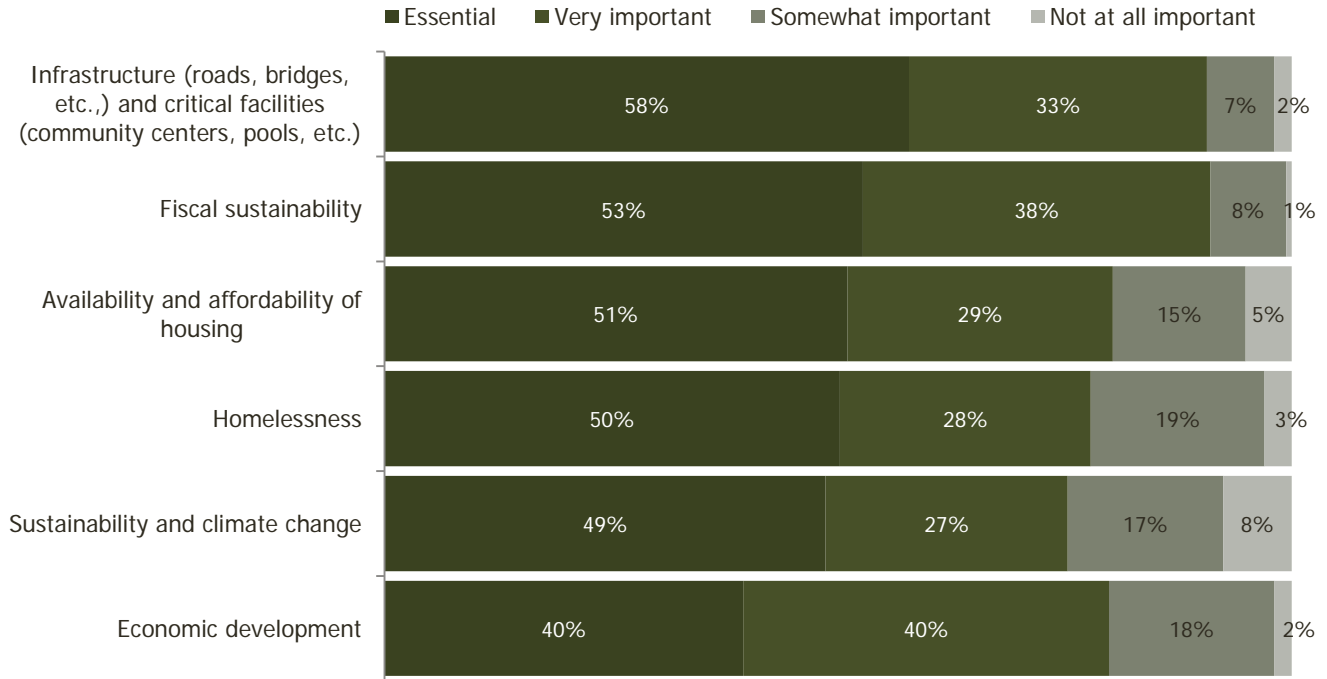


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The City asked residents to indicate how important they felt six different possible areas of focus would be for leadership to address in the next two years. About 9 in 10 residents stated that infrastructure and critical facilities and fiscal sustainability would be essential or very important. Roughly 8 in 10 survey participants felt the remaining areas should be a focus for the City.

Figure 7: Resident Focus Areas

Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the City of Walnut Creek to address the following issues in the coming two years:



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Residents also weighed their priorities in terms of one-time projects and initiatives as a result of extra money in the City budget. Around 9 in 10 community members reported they would view street and sidewalk repairs as a high or medium priority, with 58% stating it would be a high priority. Around 8 in 10 residents viewed investments in affordable housing as a priority, with nearly half also indicating it should be a high priority for Walnut Creek. About 8 in 10 residents would also prioritize investments in sustainability programs and alternative modes of transportation, as well as developing economic incentives designed to create jobs. Roughly half of participants would prioritize upgrading or replacing pool facilities. When asked to name their single highest priority out of these 10 one-time projects, about one-quarter of residents identified affordable housing and street and sidewalk repairs and 1 in 10 or less chose one of the other projects.

Figure 8: Resident Priorities for City Funds

The City of Walnut Creek operates with a balanced budget adopted every two years, and there are always more financial needs than resources available. As part of the budget process, one-time funds may be available for one-time projects and initiatives. Please rate how much of a priority, if at all, it should be for the City to use any available one-time funds for the following initiatives.

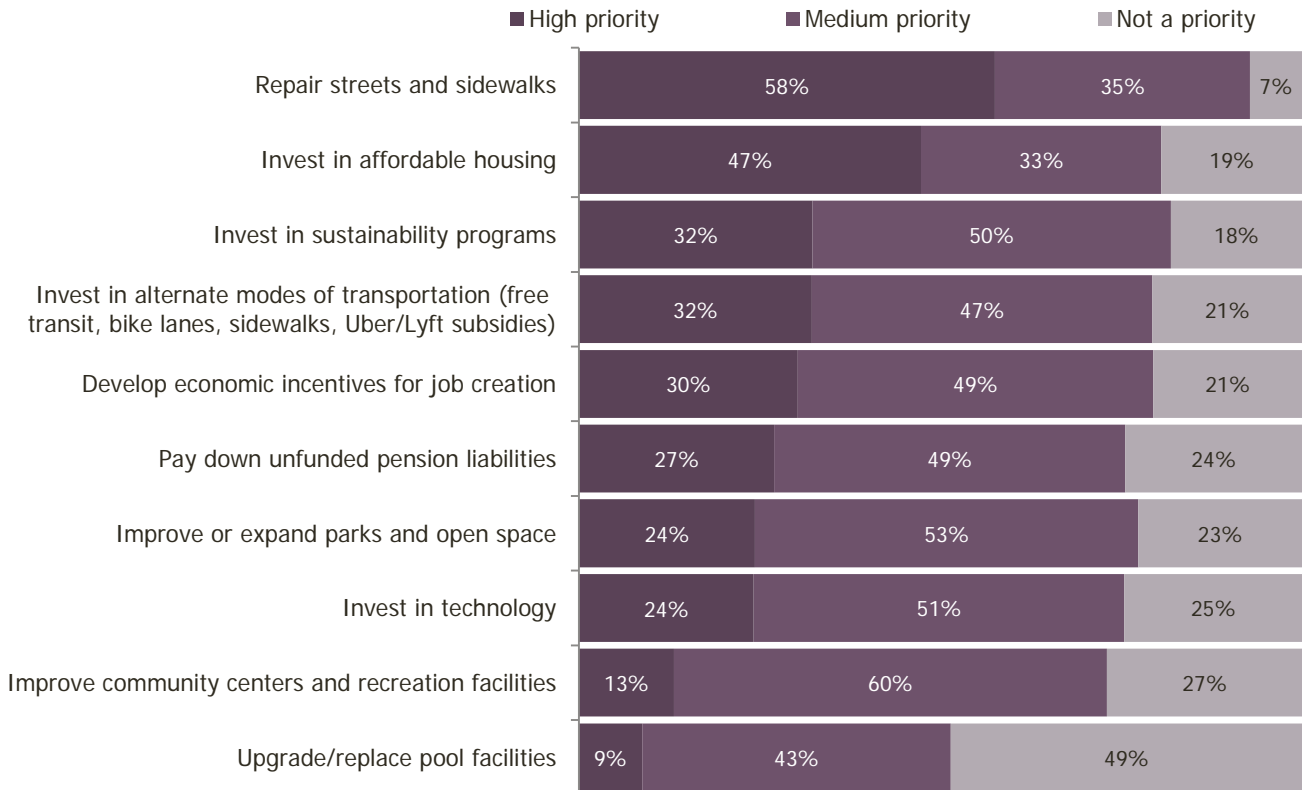
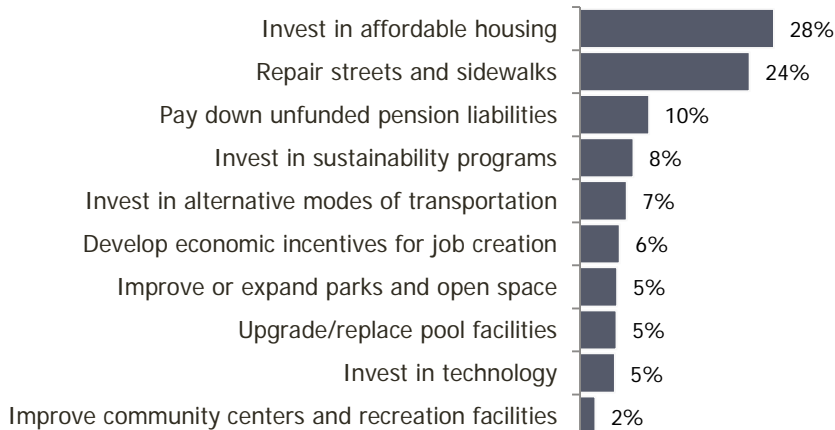


Figure 9: Single Top Priority for City Funds

Please select the single initiative you think should be a top priority for any available one-time City funds:



Conclusions

Walnut Creek is a great place to live and residents enjoy a strong sense of safety.

Around 9 in 10 residents rated their overall quality of life as excellent or good in Walnut Creek and at least 8 in 10 reported they were likely to remain in the community for the next five years. Additionally, roughly 9 in 10 respondents awarded high marks to the City and their neighborhoods as a place to live, the City as a place to raise children, the overall image or reputation and the overall appearance. All of these measures of community livability outshined national averages. About 9 in 10 residents would be likely to recommend the community to others.

Residents felt safe overall, as well as in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. Ratings for crime prevention were exceptional, exceeding national benchmarks, and at least 8 in 10 survey participants indicated they had not reported a crime or been the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Walnut Creek's Economy is both a valued asset and a challenge.

Residents viewed the Economy as an important measure of their quality of life and identified it as a focus area for the City of Walnut Creek in the next two years. Respondents praised Economy-related aspects and nearly all ratings frequently surpassed communities nationwide. About 9 in 10 survey participants awarded top marks to the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area and shopping opportunities and around 8 in 10 positively scored overall economic health of Walnut Creek, overall quality of business and service establishments and the city as a place to visit and to work. In fact, scores for the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities and Walnut Creek as a place to work were each ranked within the top 10 in the nation. Further, reviews for employment opportunities and the city as a place to work exceeded 2017 levels. When asked about City priorities in the next two years, approximately 9 in 10 community members felt that fiscal sustainability was essential or very important and 8 in 10 felt similarly about economic development. Moreover, nearly 8 in 10 residents would view developing economic incentives to create jobs with one-time City funds as a high or medium priority.

As with many attractive and economically healthy communities, affordability can be an issue. The availability of affordable quality housing and cost of living were rated positively by less than 2 in 10 of community members, which were lower than national averages. Residents would like to prioritize housing that is affordable, with 8 in 10 stating it was an essential or very important focus area and a similar proportion would prioritize using City funds to invest in affordable housing; additionally, this initiative was seen as the single top priority in case of a budget surplus by one-quarter of respondents.

Ease of Mobility contributes to quality of life in Walnut Creek.

Across the board, Mobility-related ratings in Walnut Creek were positive and frequently exceeded ratings in comparison communities. Residents were particularly satisfied with the ease of pedestrian travel; availability of paths and walking trails and ease of walking surpassed national levels. Survey respondents also demonstrated their commitment to using alternate modes of transportation by using public transit, walking or biking instead of driving at rates higher than other communities across the nation. Furthermore, in 2019 more respondents were appreciative of the overall ease of travel, ease of travel by walking, car and bicycle, traffic flow, public parking and availability of paths and walking trails. Likewise, residents also lauded many of the Mobility-related services provided to them at levels that outmatched municipalities elsewhere, including evaluations of streets (repair, cleaning and lighting) and sidewalk maintenance; additionally, more community members were pleased with street repair, street lighting and traffic signal timing in 2019 than in 2017. Nearly all survey participants felt that infrastructure and critical facilities should be a focus for the City in the next two years and repair to streets and sidewalks was identified as a high or medium priority for more than 9 in 10 residents.

The Natural Environment makes Walnut Creek a strong community.

Residents in Walnut Creek celebrated their Natural Environment: nearly all measures eclipsed national averages. About 9 in 10 community members awarded top marks to the overall natural environment and cleanliness of the city. More than 8 in 10 respondents also commended natural areas preservation (ranked 4th out of 246 municipalities) and Walnut Creek open space (7th in the country out of 234 communities). Residents' dedication to the environment was reflected in their participation in green behaviors: at least 9 in 10 reported they conserved water and recycled at home. Further, around three-quarters of participants identified sustainability and climate change as a top focus area for the future and 8 in 10 viewed investing in sustainability programs as a priority.