

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Jackson County, MI
Community Livability Report

2017



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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 Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Jackson 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).

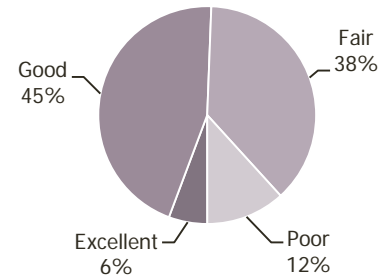
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 316 residents of Jackson County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Jackson County

About half of residents (51%) rated the quality of life in Jackson County as excellent or good. This was lower than ratings given in other communities across the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Overall Quality of Life



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.

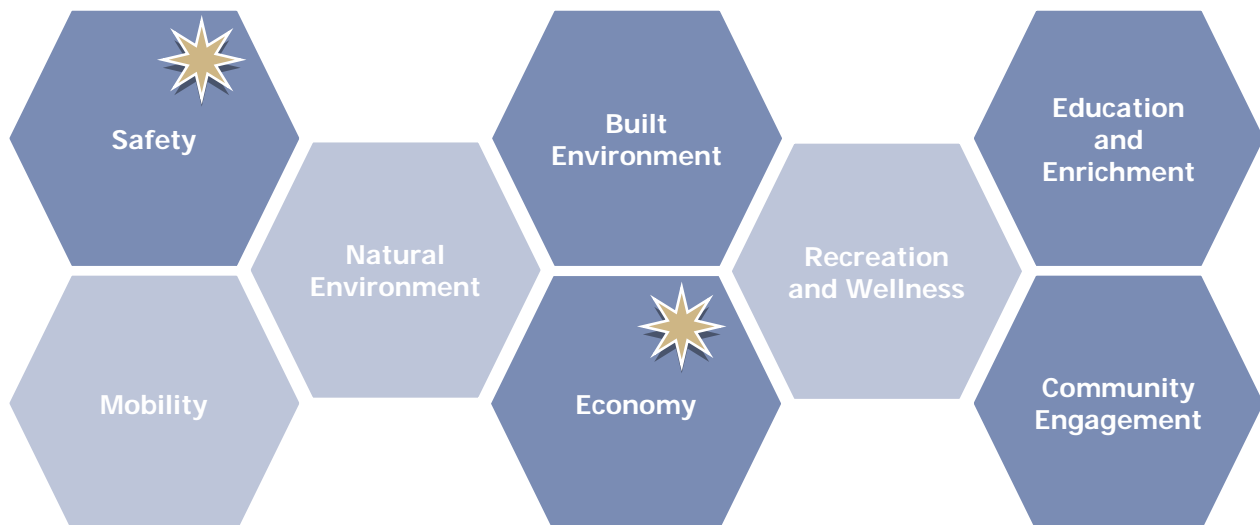
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2015, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Jackson County community in the coming two years. These facets as well as Built Environment, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement received ratings similar to those given elsewhere, while Mobility, Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness were rated lower. 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 Jackson County’s unique questions.

Legend

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

- Most important



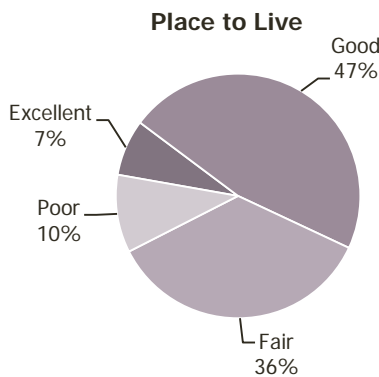
Community Characteristics

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 Jackson County, 54% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Jackson County as a place to live were lower than ratings in other communities across the nation.

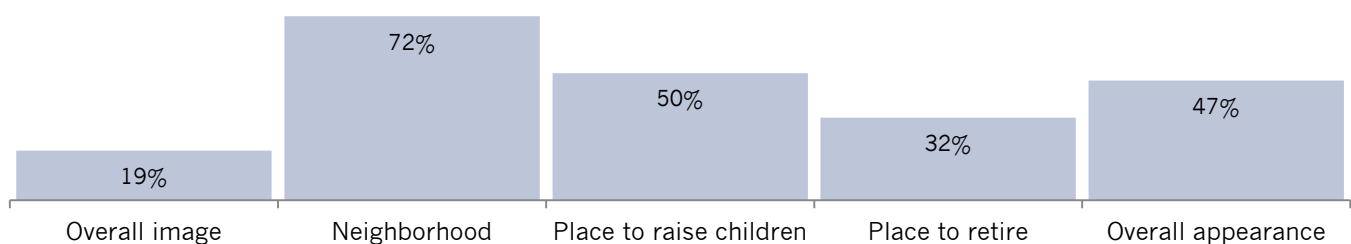
In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Jackson County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Jackson County and its overall appearance. About 7 in 10 residents gave positive marks to their neighborhood as a place to live and half were pleased with the overall appearance of the County and Jackson County as a place to raise children. About one-third or less gave favorable ratings to the overall image of the County and Jackson County as a place to retire; these ratings were all lower than the national benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Generally, ratings tended to be similar to or lower than those given in other communities across the country. About half of residents or more gave positive reviews to feeling safe in their neighborhood, paths and walking trails, ease of travel by car, air quality, preventive health services, availability of affordable quality health care and affordable quality food, religious or spiritual events and activities, adult educational opportunities, opportunities to participate in community matters and opportunities to volunteer; these ratings were all similar to the national benchmark. Residents' ratings of most aspects of Economy, Built Environment and Education and Enrichment tended to be lower than average.



When compared to 2015, ratings for most aspects of Community Characteristics remained stable; evaluations for 12 items within this pillar decreased and six items increased (for more information see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover).

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



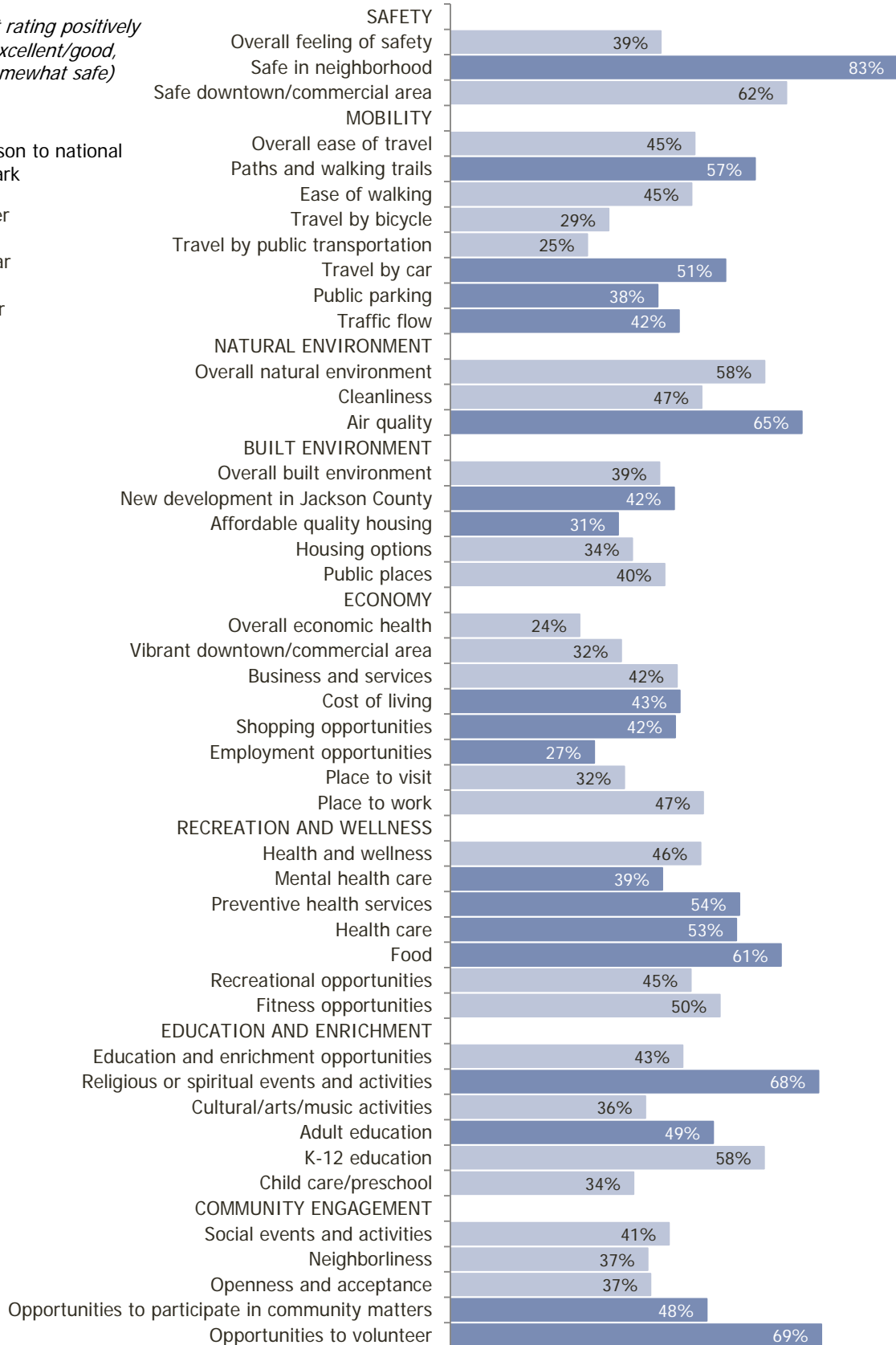
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



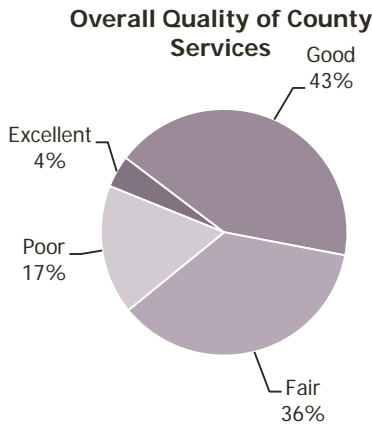
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Jackson 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 half of residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of services provided by Jackson County, which was lower than ratings observed in other communities. About one-third of residents gave favorable marks to the services provided by the Federal Government and this rating was similar to the national average.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Jackson County's leadership and governance. Roughly half of survey respondents gave excellent or good marks to the overall quality of customer service provided by the County and the overall direction the County is taking, while about 3 in 10 gave favorable marks to the remaining aspects of government performance. These ratings were all lower than the benchmark except for the overall direction of the County, which was similar.

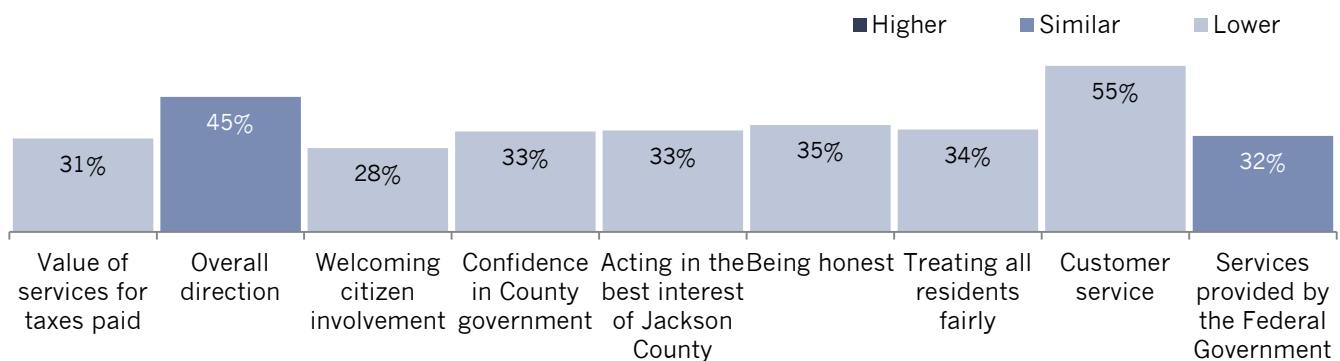
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Jackson County. All service ratings were similar to or lower than the benchmark. A majority of residents gave favorable evaluations to police, fire, ambulance/EMS, traffic enforcement, garbage collection, natural areas preservation, sewer services, power utility, utility billing and public libraries and all of these were similar to the national average. However, many other aspects were rated lower than the benchmark, particularly within the facets of Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment and Recreation and Wellness.



When compared to 2015, ratings decreased for crime prevention and fire prevention, but increased for animal control, bus or transit services, economic development, recreation centers, overall direction of the County, overall confidence in County government and being honest.

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

Comparison to national benchmark



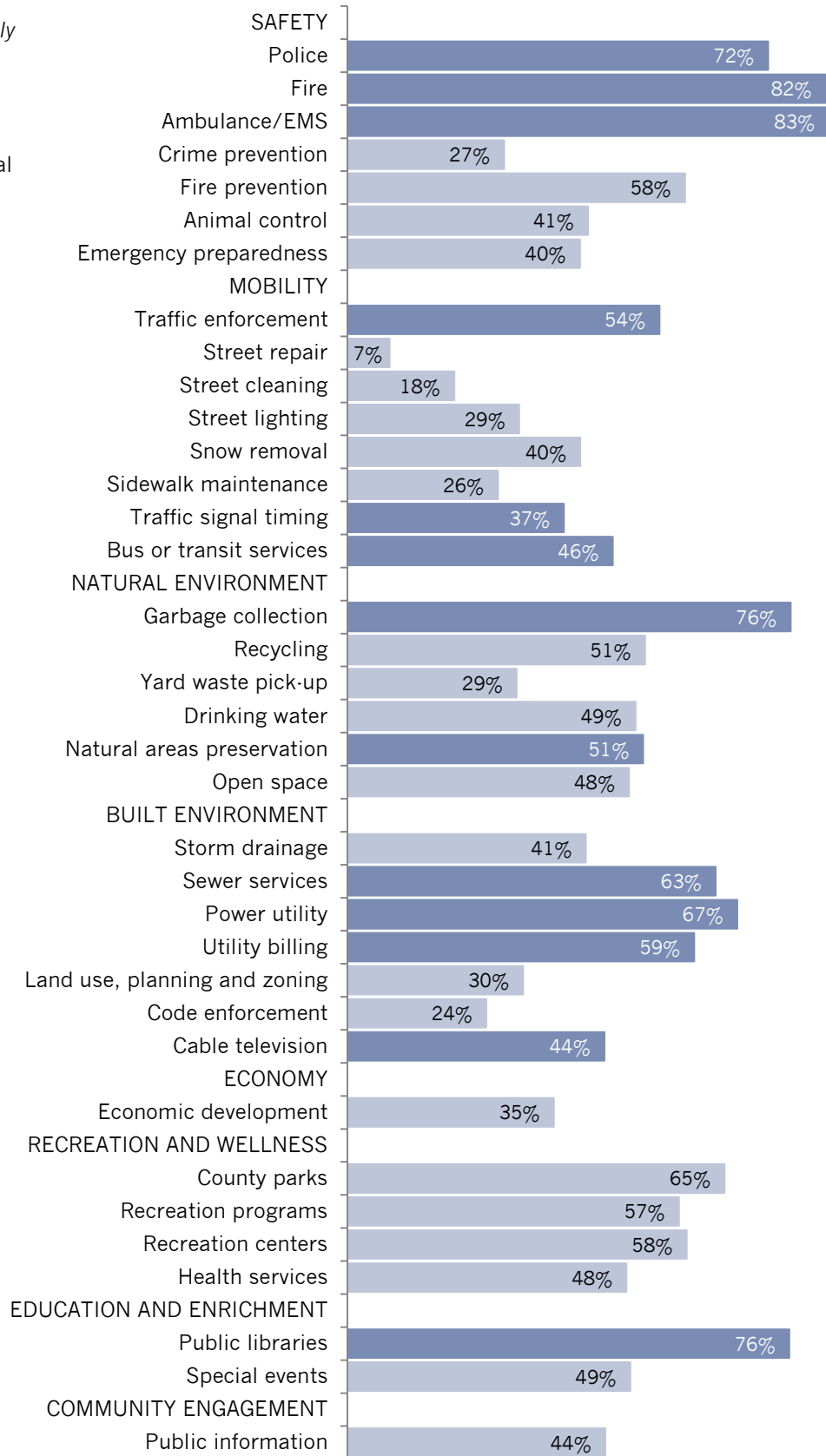
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



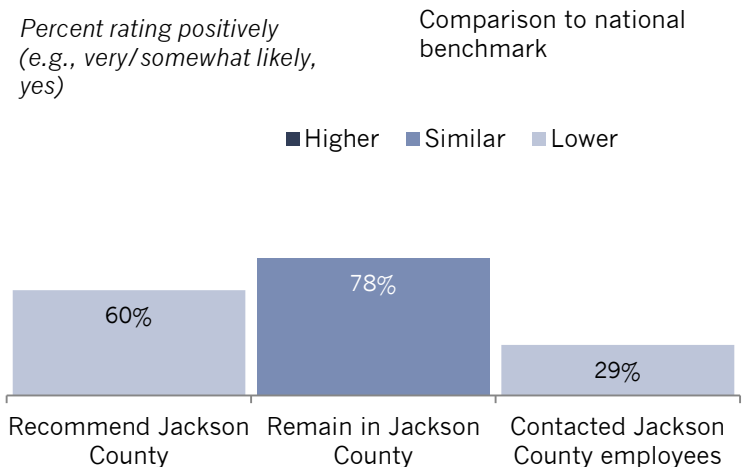
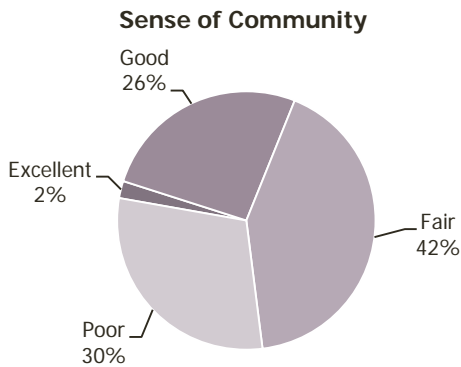
Participation

Are the residents of Jackson 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. In Jackson County, 28% of residents gave positive ratings to the sense of community, which was lower than ratings given elsewhere. Six in 10 residents would recommend living in Jackson County to someone who asked, which was lower than the benchmark, and three-quarters planned to remain in Jackson County for the next five years, which was similar to the benchmark.

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 varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparison (and comparison to Jackson County over time) helpful for understanding the results. Overall, Jackson County residents participated in most activities at rates similar to or lower than those found in other communities across the country. For example, about 8 in 10 residents had not reported a crime and 9 in 10 had not been the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey, on par with the rest of the country. Jackson County residents were more likely than those who lived in other communities to work in the County. At least three-quarters of residents reported conserving water, making their homes more energy efficient, not being under housing cost stress, purchasing goods or services in the County, visiting a County park, talking to or visiting with neighbors or voting in local elections; these levels were all similar to the benchmark.

Jackson County residents in 2017 were less likely than in 2015 to have stocked supplies for an emergency, walked or biked instead of driving, participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity, participated in religious or spiritual activities, talked to or visited with neighbors, read or watched local news and done a favor for a neighbor. They were also less likely to report being under housing cost stress.



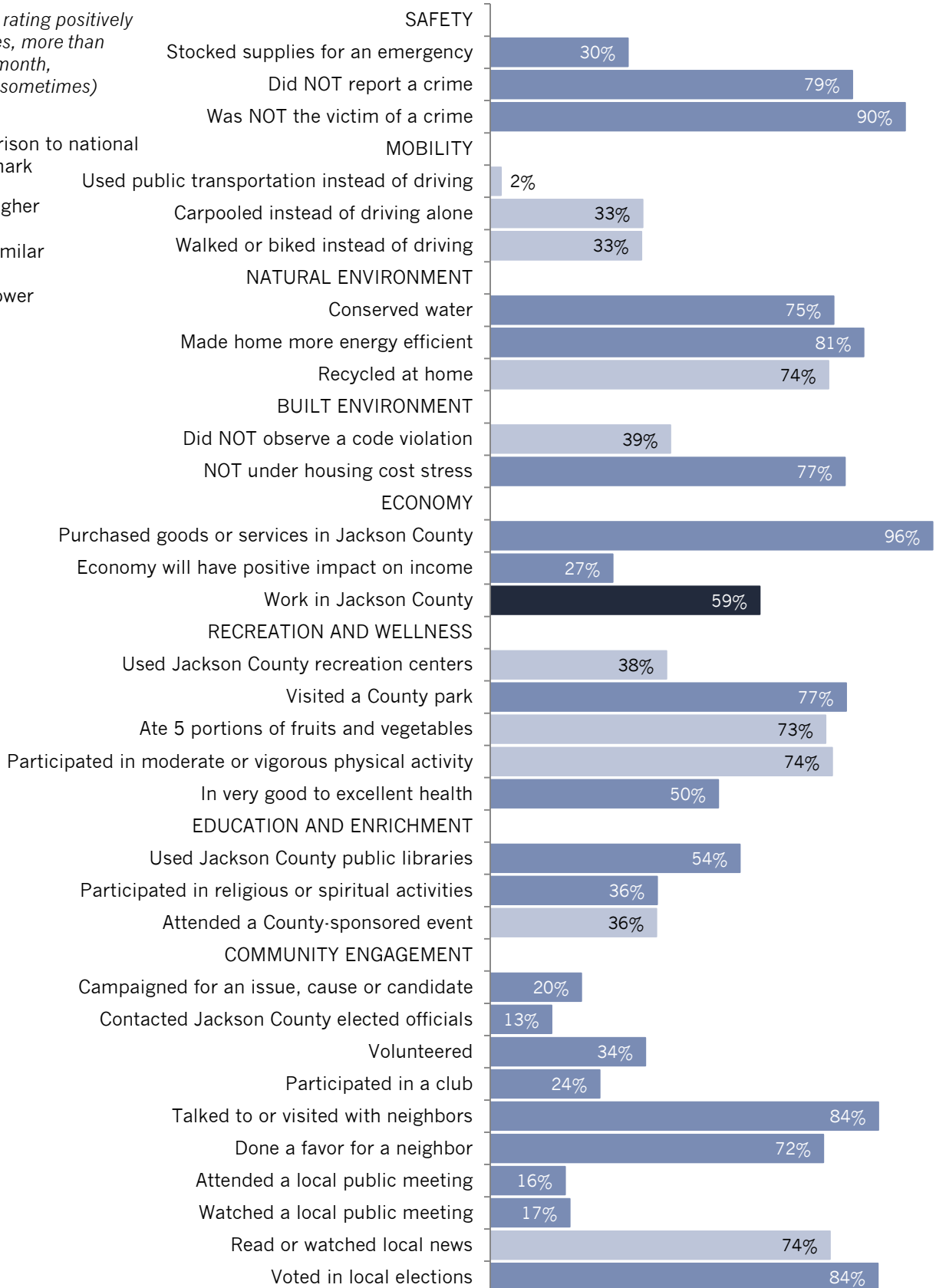
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



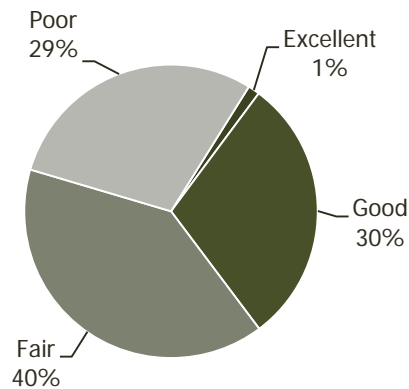
Special Topics

Jackson County included seven questions of special interest on The NCS as well as two custom additions to standard question sets. Topic areas included strategic planning areas, services for older adults, emergency services and contact with the Sheriff's Department, among others.

Residents were asked to rate the quality of the services provided by the State Government; about 3 in 10 rated it as excellent or good, 4 in 10 rated it as fair and 3 in 10 rated it as poor.

Figure 4: Line Addition to Question 11

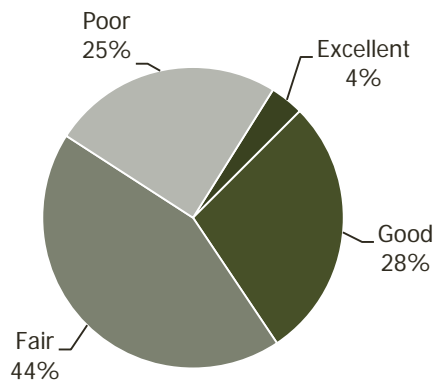
Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following: The State Government



Thinking about the level of coordination between the County and other units of government, about 3 in 10 rated this as excellent or good, about 4 in 10 thought it was fair and one-quarter rated it at poor.

Figure 5: Custom Addition to Question 12

Please rate the following categories of Jackson County government performance: The level of coordination between Jackson County and other units of government (e.g. Federal, State, City, Township and Village)

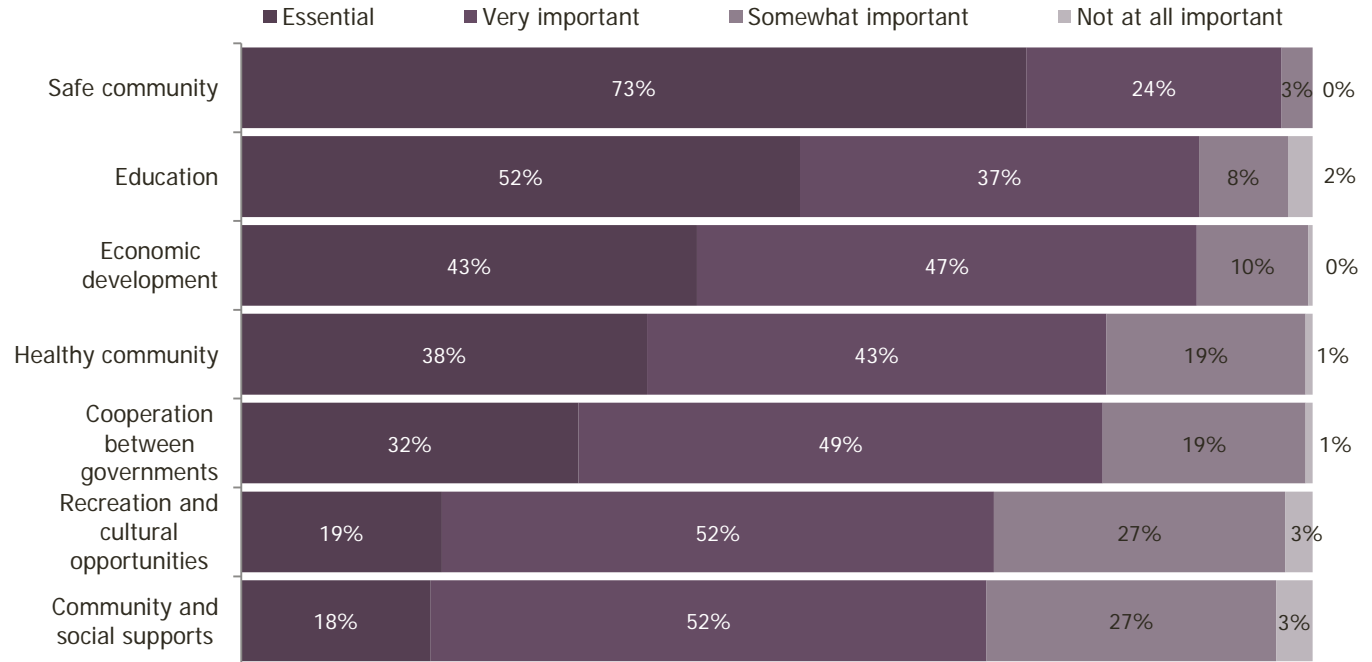


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When asked to rate the importance of several different strategic planning areas relative to overall quality of life in the County, virtually all residents (93%) rated safe community as essential or very important and about 9 in 10 rated education and economic development as important. Eight in 10 rated healthy community and cooperation between governments as important and about 7 in 10 thought recreation and cultural opportunities and community and social supports were essential or very important.

Figure 6: Importance of Strategic Planning Areas

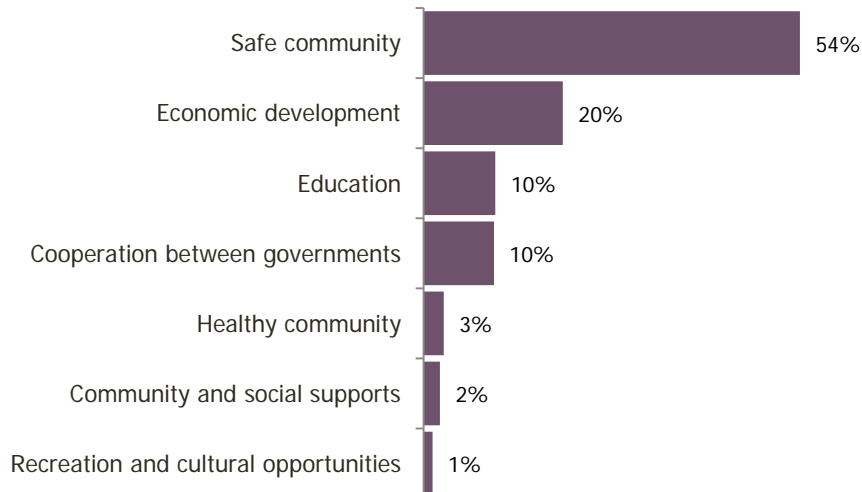
Please rate how important, if at all, each of the following strategic planning areas are to the overall quality of life in Jackson County:



About half of residents indicated safe community was the most important strategic planning area, while 2 in 10 thought economic development was the most important. About 1 in 10 indicated education or cooperation between governments was the most important, and 3% of respondents or less thought any of the remaining strategic planning areas were the most important.

Figure 7: Most Important Strategic Planning Area

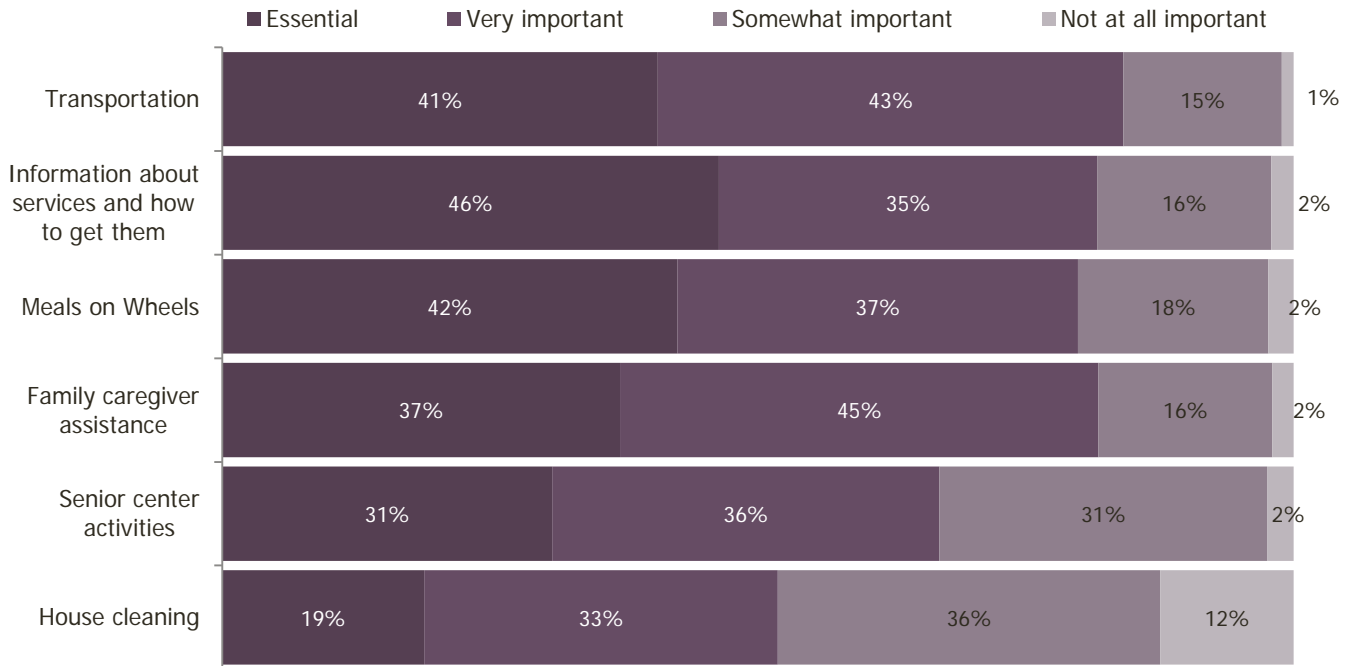
Please check which ONE of the following strategic planning areas is the most important:



Thinking about the importance of different types of older adult services, about 8 in 10 Jackson County residents felt that transportation, information about services, Meals on Wheels and Family caregiver assistance were essential or very important for the County to provide. About two-thirds thought that senior center activities were essential or very important for the County to provide and about half felt that house cleaning was important to provide.

Figure 8: Importance of Older Adult Services

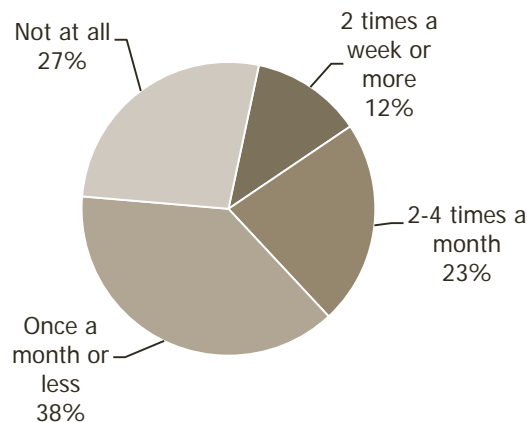
Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following older adult services are for the County to provide:



About one-third had used Jackson County parks and/or trails in the 12 months prior to the survey, roughly 4 in 10 had used them at least once and one-quarter had not used them at all.

Figure 9: Park and Trail Use

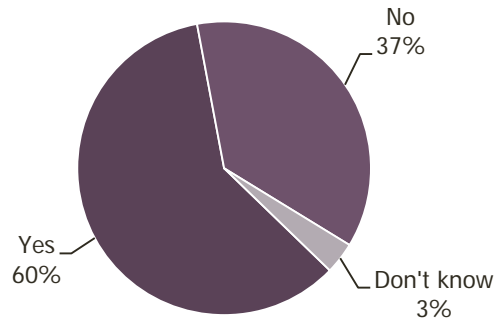
On average, about how often did you use Jackson County parks and/or trails in the past 12 months?



A majority of residents (60%) indicated that they had a three-day supply of water and food in their home for emergencies, while roughly one-third did not. Three percent of residents did not know whether they had a three day supply for emergencies.

Figure 10: Presence of Emergency Supplies

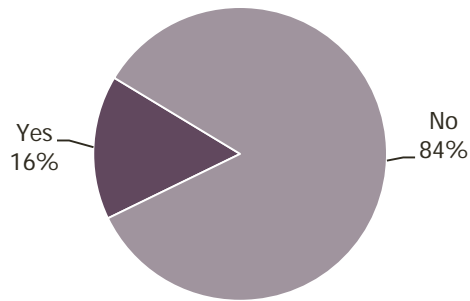
Do you have a 3 day supply of water and food in your home in the event of an emergency?



About 8 in 10 Jackson County residents were not aware of Code Red, the Sheriff Department's emergency notification system; only 16% were aware of it.

Figure 11: Code Red Awareness

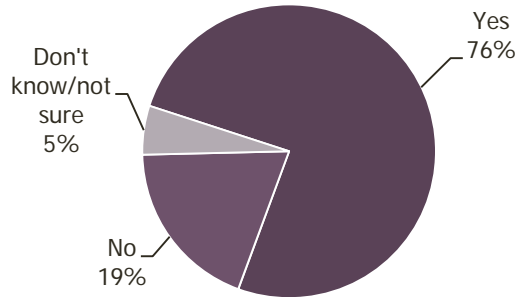
Are you aware of the Sheriff Department's mass emergency notification system, Code Red?



About three-quarters of residents indicated that all members of their household were aware of escape routes and a meeting location in the event of a fire. About 2 in 10 noted that their household members were not aware of these and 5% did not know.

Figure 12: Awareness of Escape Routes

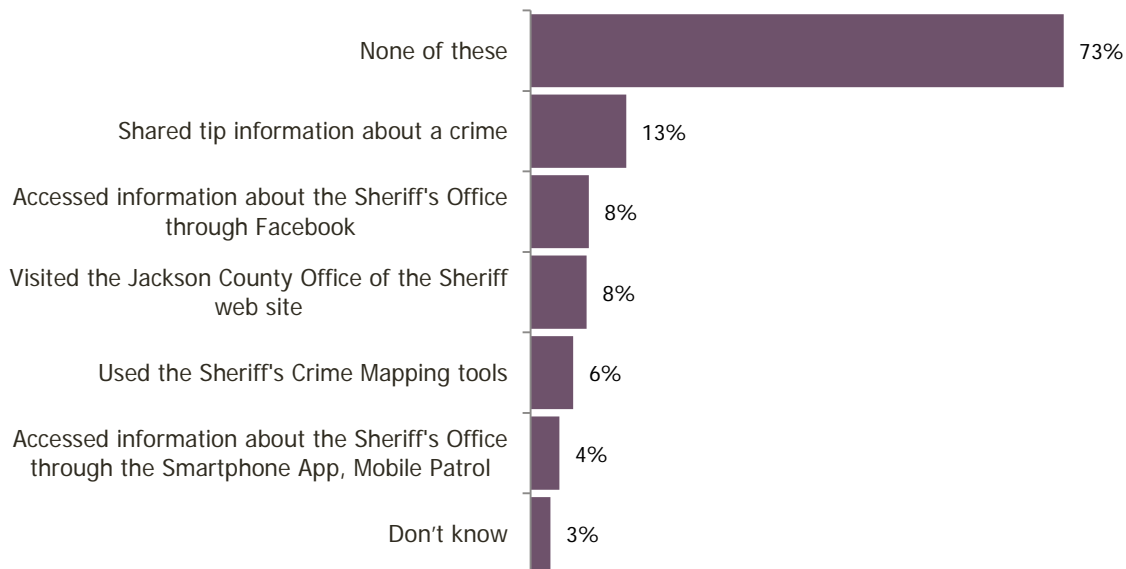
Are all members of your household aware of escape routes and the location to meet in the event of a fire?



The final special-interest question on the survey asked residents about the ways in which they had contact with the Sheriff's Office in the 12 months prior to the survey. About three-quarters of residents had not had any type of contact with the Sheriff's Office, and roughly 1 in 10 had shared tip information about a crime, accessed information through Facebook or visited the Sheriff's Office website. Fewer residents had used the Sheriff's Crime Mapping tools or accessed information about the Office through Mobile Patrol.

Figure 13: Methods of Contact with Sheriff's Office

Have you had contact with the Jackson County Office of the Sheriff in any of the following ways in the last 12 months? (Please select all that apply.)



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

Conclusions

Most quality of life ratings in Jackson County have remained stable over time.

As in 2015, about half of residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of life in the County and Jackson County as a place to live. Roughly 7 in 10 residents gave favorable reviews to their neighborhood as a place to live, and half were pleased with Jackson County as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the city. These ratings were lower than those given in other communities. About three-quarters of residents planned to remain in the County for the next five years and 6 in 10 would recommend Jackson County to someone who asked.

Safety continues to be a priority for residents.

Residents identified Safety as an important focus area for the County in the next two years. About 8 in 10 residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhood and gave positive reviews to fire and ambulance/EMS services, while 7 in 10 were pleased with police services. About 8 in 10 residents did not report a crime and 9 in 10 had not been the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey; all of these ratings were similar to the national average. However, ratings for overall feeling of safety in the County, feeling safe in the downtown/commercial area, crime prevention, fire prevention, animal control and emergency preparedness were lower than average. Further, ratings for overall feeling of safety, safe downtown/commercial area, crime prevention and fire prevention declined since 2015.

In a series of special-interest questions, nearly all residents (97%) indicated that safe community was an essential or very important strategic planning area for the County to focus on, and about half of residents thought it was the most important planning area listed. About 6 in 10 residents indicated that they had a three-day supply of water and food in their home for emergencies while roughly one-third did not. Most residents (84%) were not aware of the Sheriff Department's mass emergency notification system, Code Red. However, about three-quarters of residents indicated that all members of their household were aware of escape routes and a meeting location in the event of a fire.

Economy is also an area of focus.

Economy was also identified as an important area of focus in the coming years. As in 2015, ratings for many aspects within this facet were lower than those given elsewhere, including the overall economic health of the County, vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, quality of business and service establishments, Jackson County as a place to visit and to work, and economic development. However, ratings for Jackson County's vibrant downtown/commercial area and economic development improved since 2015. When asked to rate the importance of several different strategic planning areas relative to overall quality of life in the County, about 9 in 10 respondents rated economic development as essential or very important and about 2 in 10 thought it was the most important planning area listed.

Some government performance ratings have improved.

Jackson County residents also rated various aspects of the County's leadership and governance. Roughly half of survey respondents gave excellent or good marks to the overall quality of customer service provided by the County and the overall direction the County is taking, while about 3 in 10 gave favorable marks to the remaining aspects of government performance (value of services for taxes paid, the job County government does at welcoming citizen involvement, overall confidence in County government, government acting in the best interest of Jackson County, being honest and treating all residents fairly). These ratings were all lower than the benchmark except for overall direction of the County, which was similar. However, ratings for three aspects of government performance increased since 2015—overall direction of the County, overall confidence in County government and being honest—indicating that resident sentiment towards County government is headed in the right direction.