

THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Jackson County, MI

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 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 5.5% 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 Jackson County

About half of residents 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).



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.

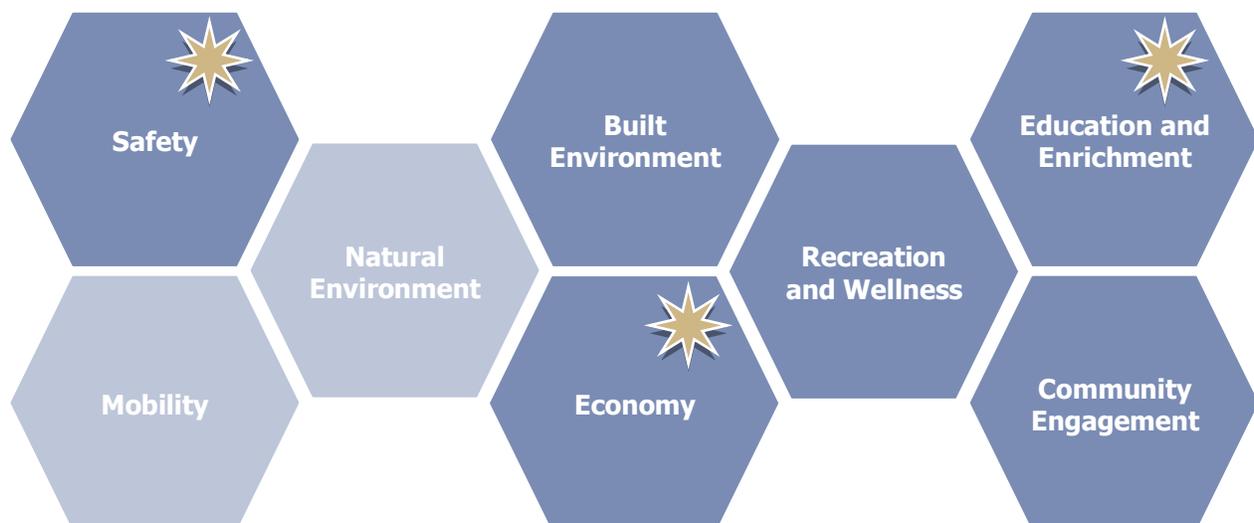
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Economy and Education and Enrichment as priorities for the Jackson County community in the coming two years. These facets, as well as most other facets of community livability, were rated similar to the 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 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, 56% 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 three-quarters of survey respondents gave favorable ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, which was similar to the national benchmark. About half of residents were pleased with the County as a place to raise children, about 4 in 10 gave positive scores to Jackson County as a place to retire and to the overall appearance of the County, and 2 in 10 gave excellent or good marks to the County's overall image. These ratings were stable from 2017 to 2019 with the exception of the overall appearance of the County, which declined (for more information see the *Trends Over Time* report under separate cover).

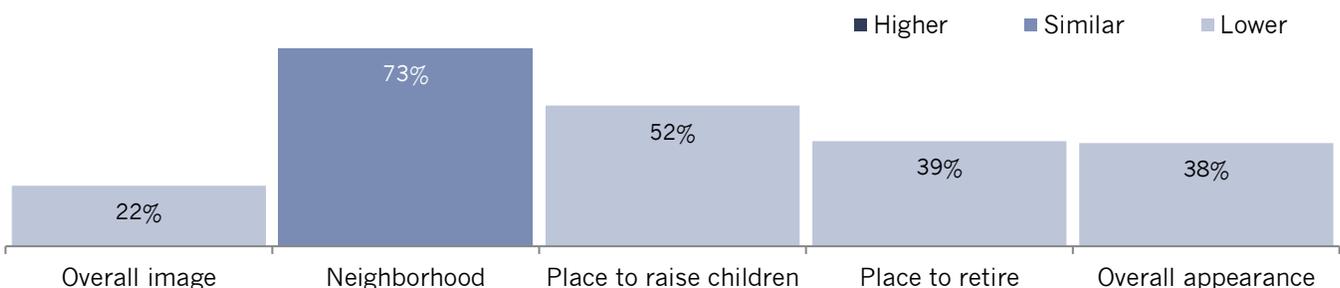


Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Generally, ratings tended to be similar to or lower than those given in other communities across the country. About 6 in 10 residents or more gave positive reviews to feeling safe in their neighborhood, the overall ease of travel in the County, paths and walking trails, ease of travel by car, religious or spiritual events and activities, 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 2017, ratings for most aspects of Community Characteristics remained stable. Ratings increases since 2017 included safe downtown/commercial area, ease of travel by car, the overall ease of travel in Jackson County, employment opportunities, cultural/arts/music activities. Only one rating within this pillar, the overall appearance of the County, decreased since 2017.

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

Comparison to national benchmark



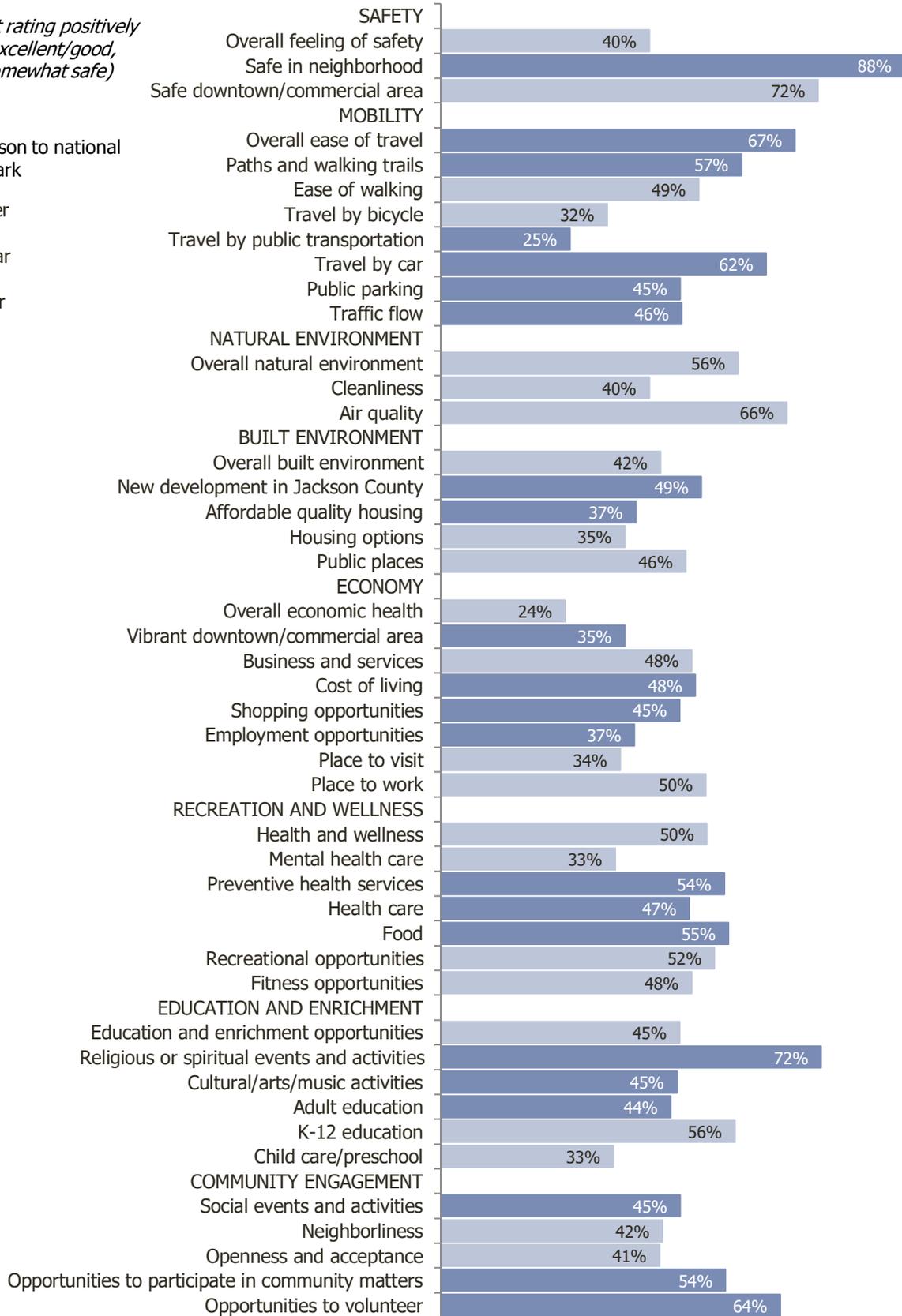
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



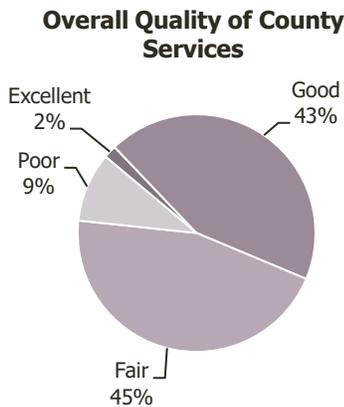
Governance

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. In Jackson County, roughly half of residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of County services (which was lower than the national comparison), while about one-quarter were pleased with the services provided by the Federal Government (which was similar).

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Jackson County’s leadership and governance. About half of residents gave favorable marks to the customer service provided by the County and 4 in 10 gave positive scores to the overall direction of the County. Roughly 3 in 10 residents were pleased with the remaining aspects of government performance; these ratings were all lower than those observed in other communities nationwide.

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 fire, ambulance/EMS, sewer services, power utility, utility billing, County parks, health services, 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, and Natural Environment.

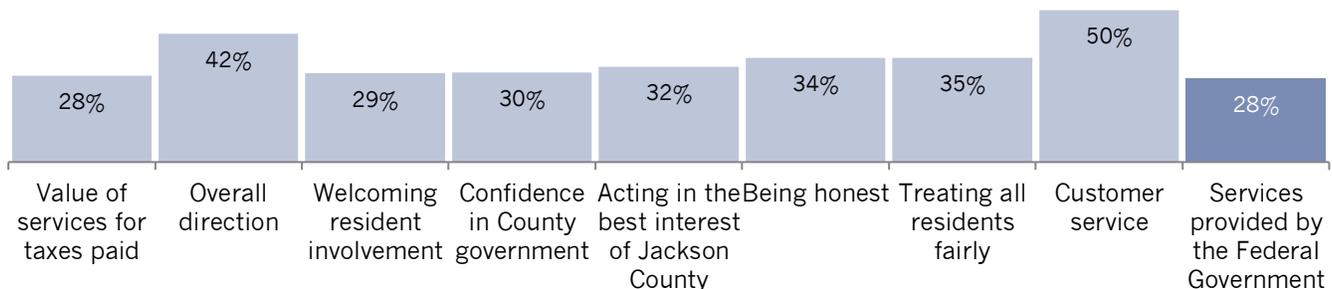


When compared to 2017, ratings in 2019 increased for crime prevention and for land use, planning and zoning, but decreased for traffic enforcement, recycling, open space, natural areas preservation, recreation centers and recreation programs.

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)

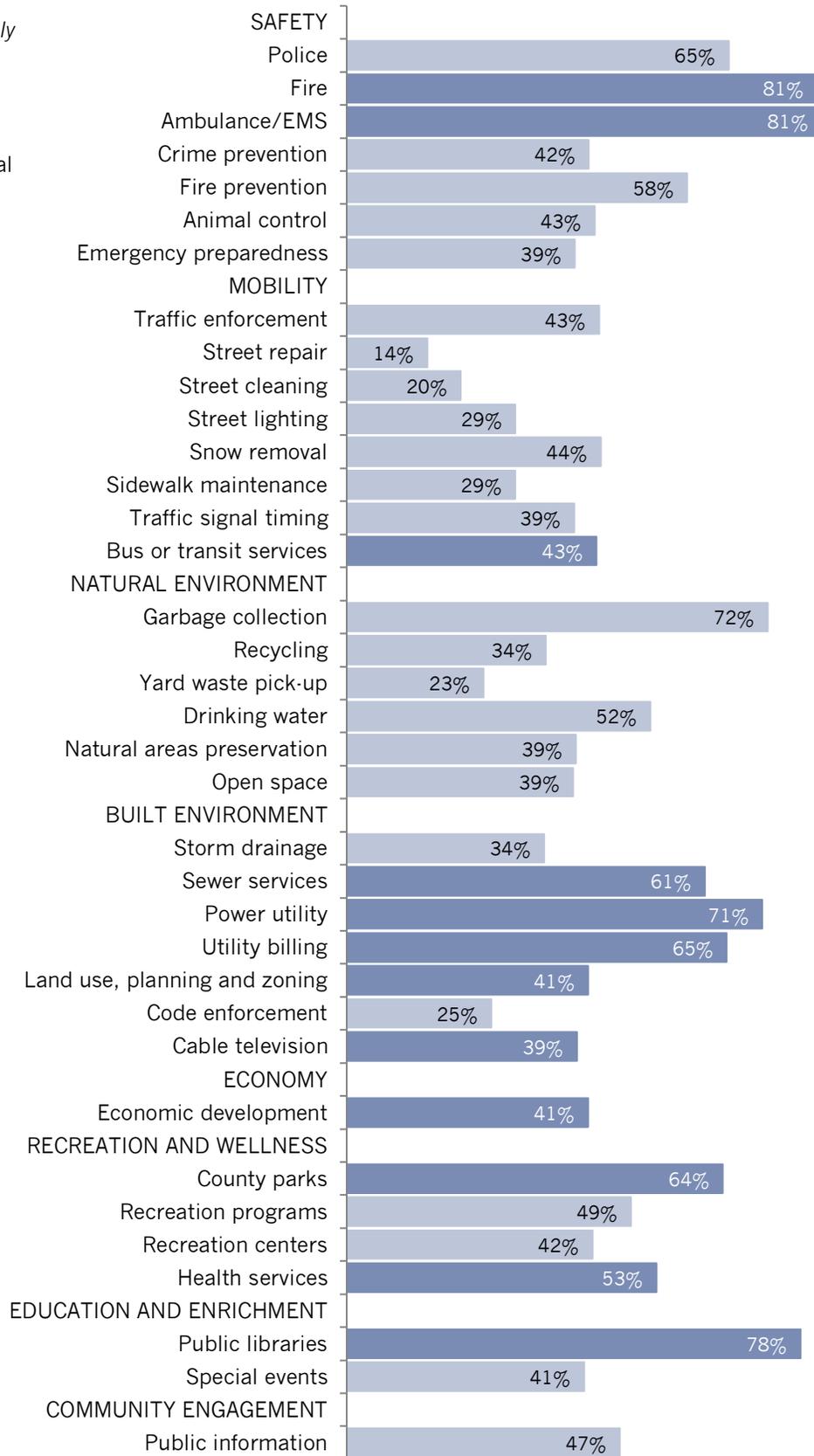
Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher

■ Similar

■ Lower

■ Not available

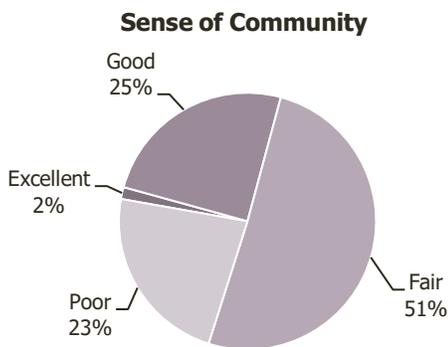


Participation

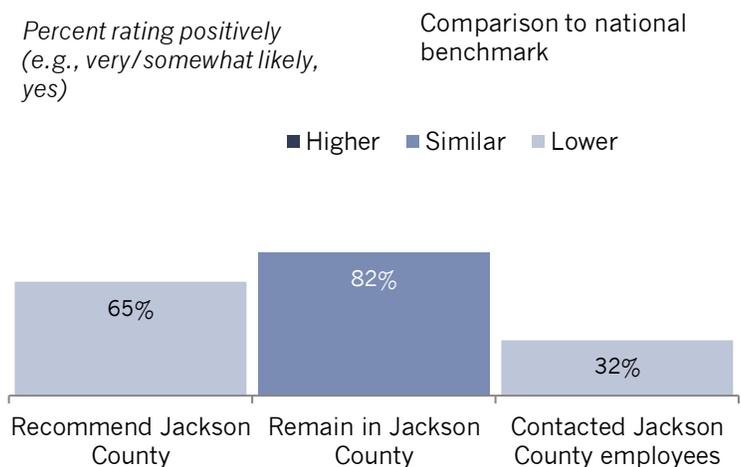
Are the residents of Jackson County connected to the community and each other?

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. Twenty-six percent of Jackson County residents gave positive ratings to the sense of community in the County, which was lower than ratings given in other communities across the nation. Jackson County residents were equally as likely as others to remain in Jackson County for the next five years (82% very or somewhat likely), but less likely than others to recommend living in Jackson County to someone who asked (65%) or to have contacted County employees in the 12 months prior to the survey (32%).

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 those found in other communities across the country. For example, about three-quarters of residents had not reported a crime and about 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. On a positive note, Jackson County residents were less likely than those who lived in other communities to be under housing cost stress. At least three-quarters of residents reported making their homes more energy efficient, purchasing goods or services in the County, visiting a County park, engaging in healthy behaviors, interacting with neighbors, reading or watching local news, or voting in local elections; these levels were all similar to the benchmark.



Jackson County residents in 2019 were less likely than in 2017 to work in Jackson County or to have observed a code violation, but more likely to have used County recreation centers, participated in religious or spiritual activities, volunteered, or to have done a favor for a neighbor.



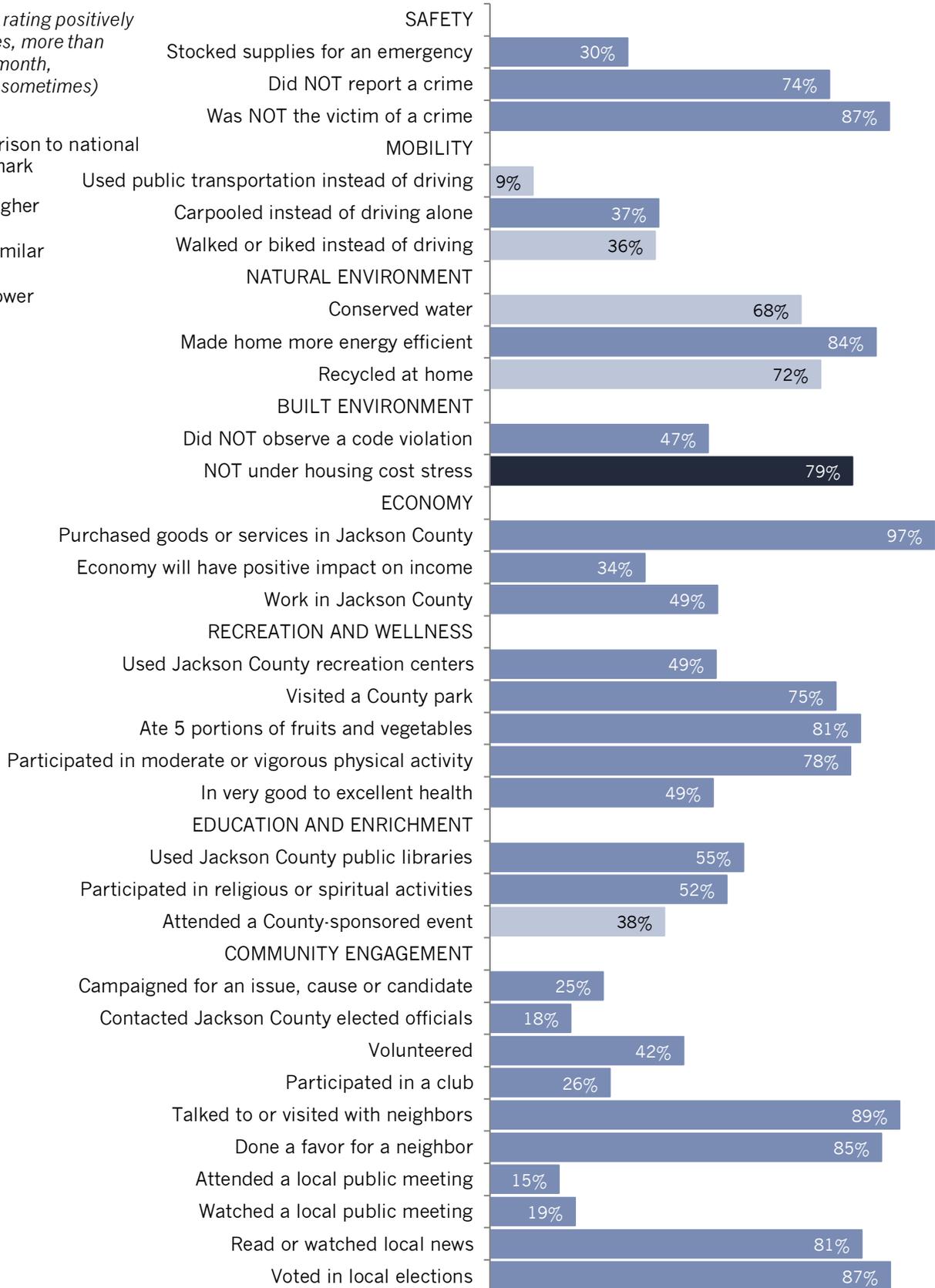
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



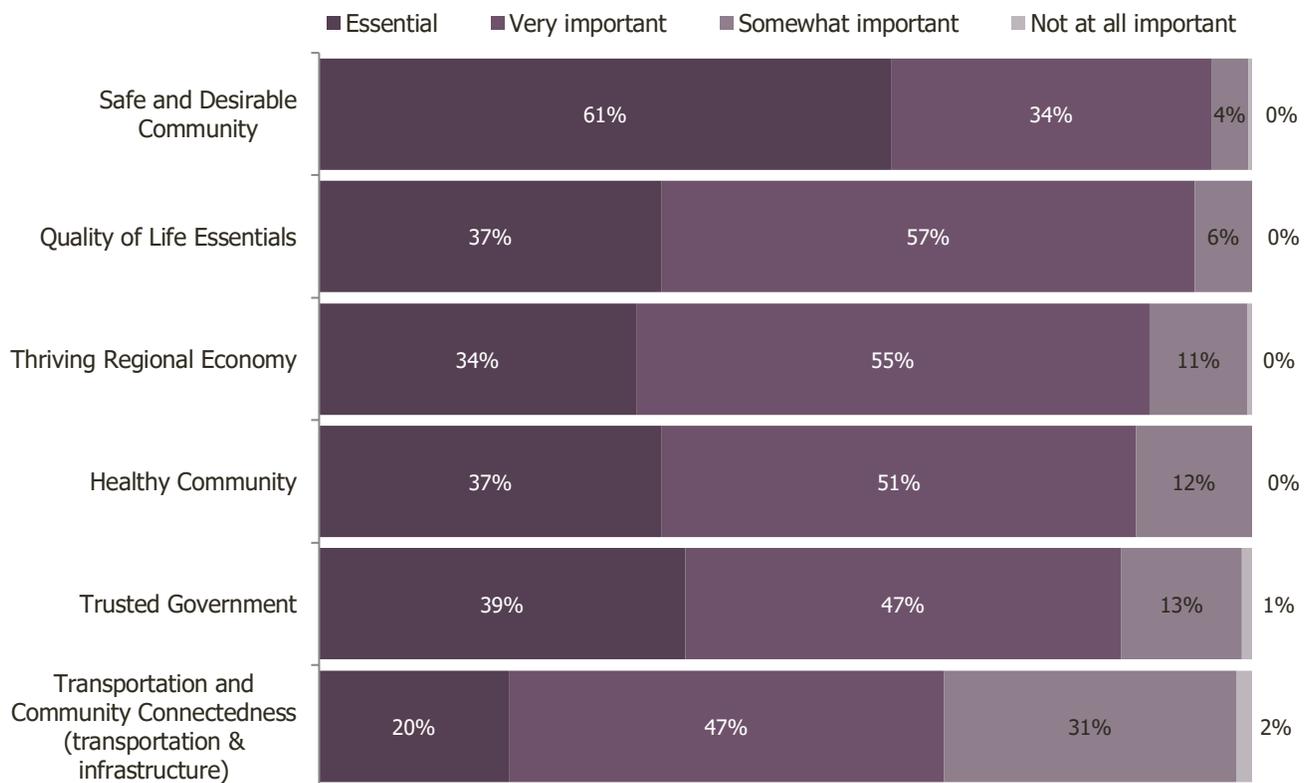
Special Topics

Jackson County included seven questions of special interest on The NCS. Topic areas included strategic planning areas, older adult services, County Health Department programs and services and contact with the Sheriff's Office, among others.

When asked to rate the importance of various County strategic planning areas, residents were most likely to rate Safe and Desirable Community and Quality of Life Essentials as essential or very important, with more than 9 in 10 residents doing so. Slightly less rated Thriving Local Economy, Healthy Community, and Trusted Government as important. Only about two-thirds of residents rated Transportation and Community Connectedness as essential or very important.

Figure 4: Jackson County Strategic Planning Areas

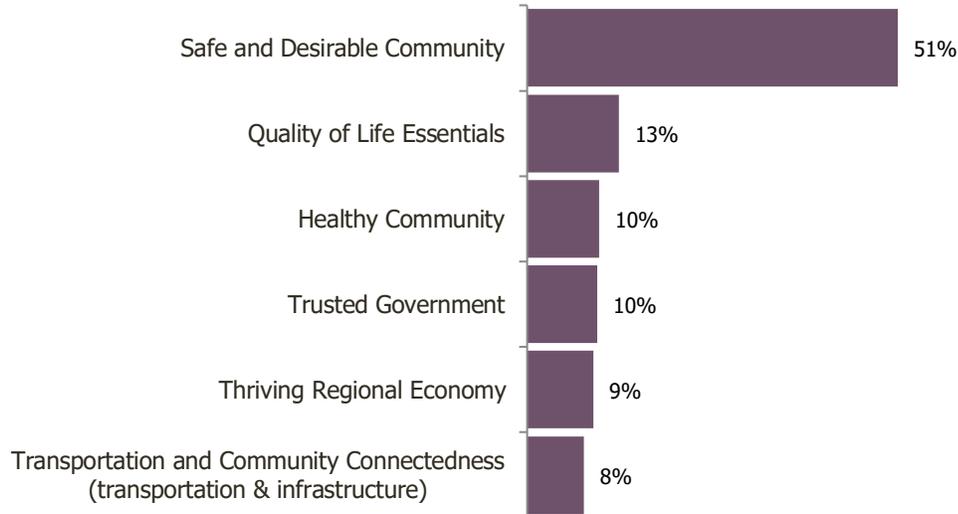
First, please rate how important, if at all, each of the following strategic planning areas are to the overall quality of life in Jackson County.



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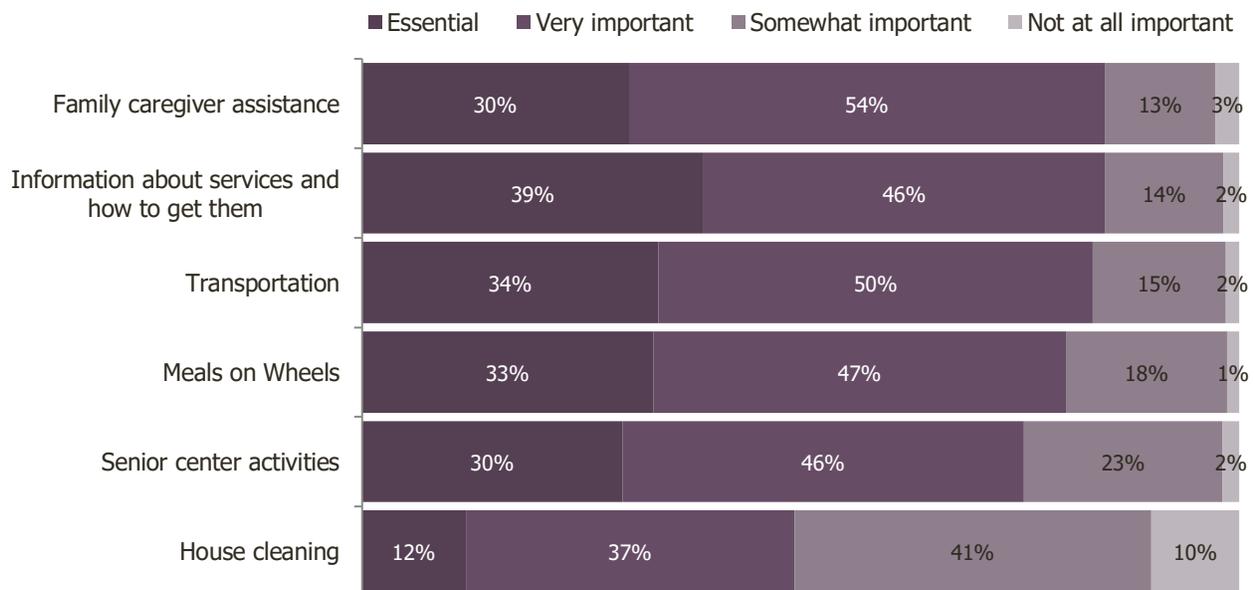
Thinking about the single most important strategic planning area, about half of residents identified Safe and Desirable Community as the most important, while about 1 in 10 residents selected each of the other planning areas.

Figure 5: Jackson County Strategic Planning Areas - Most Important
Then, please check which ONE is the most important.



When asked to rate the importance of the County providing various older adult services, roughly 8 in 10 rated family caregiver assistance, information about services, transportation, and Meals on Wheels as essential or very important, while three-quarters rated senior center activities as important. Only about half of residents that house cleaning for older adults was essential or very important for the County to provide.

Figure 6: Importance of Providing Older Adult Services
Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following older adult services are for the County to provide:

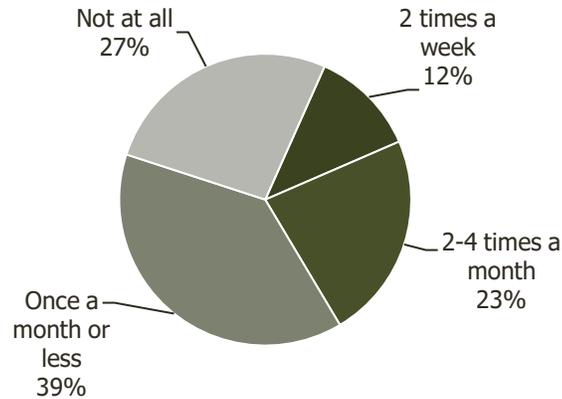


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Thinking about their use of County parks and/or trails in the 12 months prior to the survey, residents were most likely to have used parks or trails once a month or less often (39%). About one-quarter reported using County parks or trails either not at all or 2-4 times a month, while 1 in 10 used them twice a week.

Figure 7: Use of Jackson County Parks and Trails

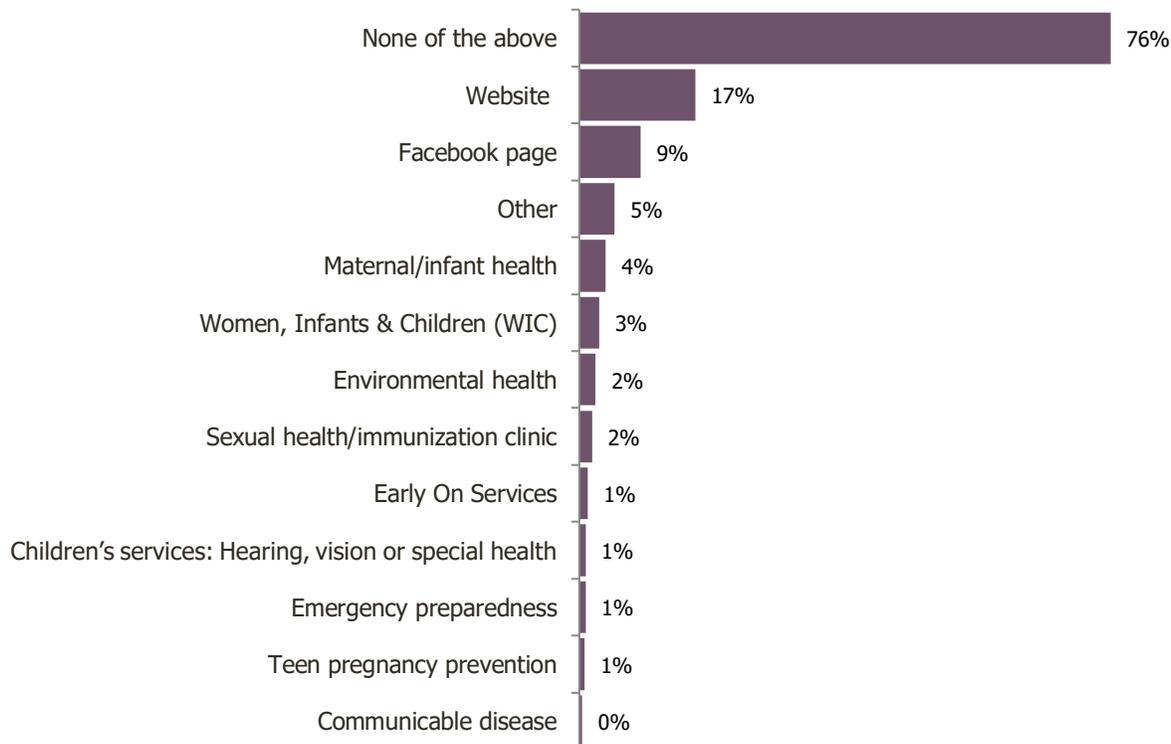
On average, about how often did you use Jackson County parks and/or trails in the past 12 months?



Residents were asked which Jackson County Health Department programs or services they had used in the 12 months prior to the survey. Most respondents (76%) had not used any of the listed programs. About 2 in 10 had used the County Health Department website, 10% had used the County Facebook page, and 5% or less had used any of the other listed programs or services.

Figure 8: Use of Jackson County Health Department Programs and Services

Have you utilized any of the following programs or services provided by the Jackson County Health Department in the last 12 months? (Please select all that apply.)



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

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About three-quarters of residents reported they were not aware of the Emergency Management Department's mass notification system, Code Red, while almost all residents (91%) reported not being aware of the County smartphone app.

Figure 9: Awareness of Code Red System

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

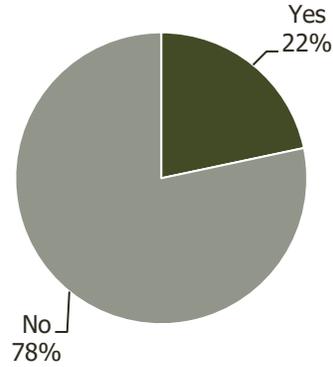
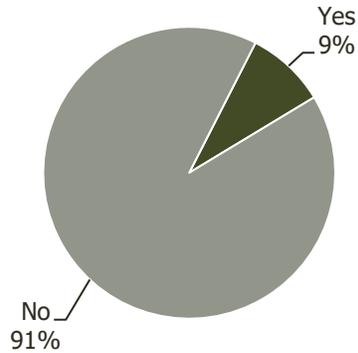


Figure 10: Awareness of Jackson County Smartphone App

Are you aware of the Jackson County smartphone app (MIJacksonCounty)?

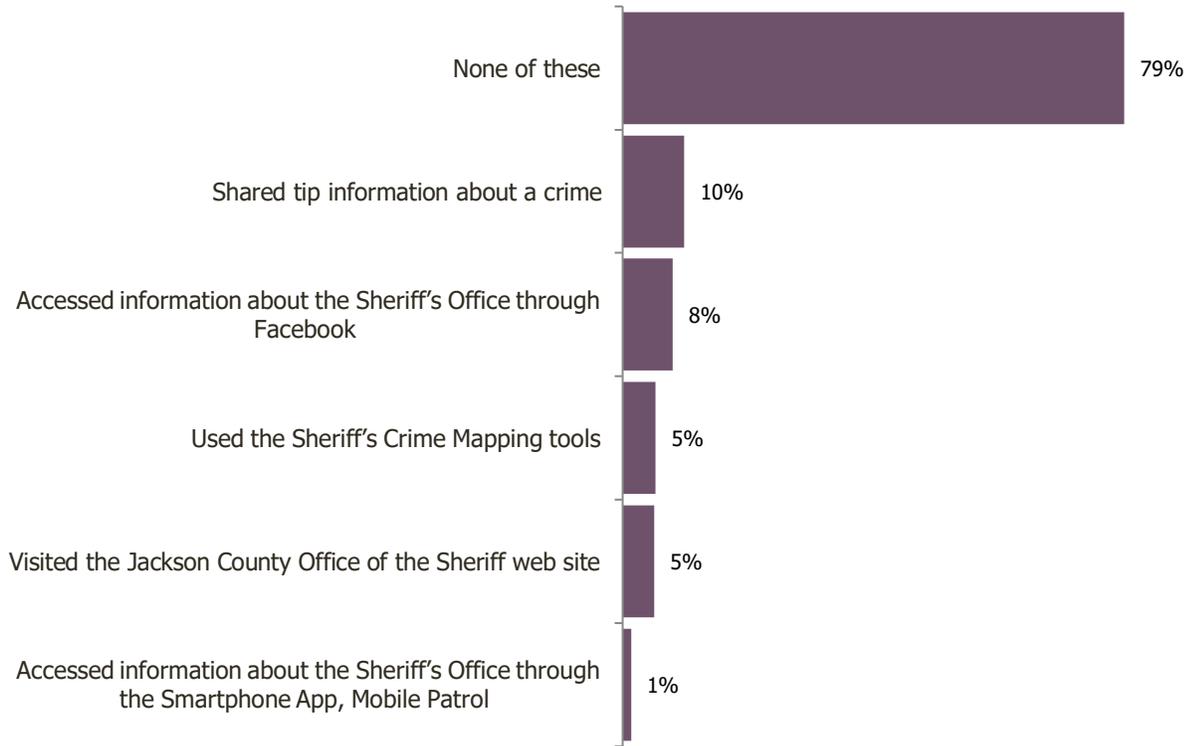


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Residents were asked whether they had contact with the Sheriff's Office in the 12 months prior to the survey and to select as many methods of contact as applied. About 8 in 10 residents had not had contact, while about 1 in 10 or less had contacted the Office of the Sheriff in each of the other listed ways.

Figure 11: Contact with Sheriff's Office in Past 12 Months

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

Safety remains a resident priority.

As in prior survey years, residents identified the facet of Safety as an important area of focus for the County in the next two years. Most ratings within this facet tended to be similar to or lower than the national benchmarks. At least 8 in 10 residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods during the day and had not reported a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey, and a similar proportion gave excellent or good ratings to fire and ambulance/EMS services; these ratings were on par with those given in other communities across the nation. While many other Safety-related ratings were lower than average (including the overall feeling of safety in Jackson County, police, fire prevention, and emergency preparedness, among others), resident scores for two aspects improved from 2017 to 2019: feeling of safety in the downtown/commercial area and crime prevention.

Jackson County also included several Safety-related special-interest questions on the 2019 survey. When asked to rate the importance of various County strategic planning areas, more than 9 in 10 residents rated Safe and Desirable Community as essential or very important, and half of respondents rated this the single most important planning area. When asked whether they were aware of the Emergency Management Department's mass emergency notification system, Code Red, 22% of residents in 2019 said they were aware (compared to 16% in 2017). Finally, thinking about whether they had contact with the Sheriff's Office in the 12 months prior to the survey, about 8 in 10 residents had not had contact, while about 1 in 10 had shared tip information about a crime or had accessed information about the Sheriff's Office through Facebook.

Economy is also important to respondents, with long-term trends on the rise.

Survey respondents also identified Economy as an important facet for the County to focus on in the coming years. Ratings in this facet also tended to be similar to or lower than those given in comparison communities across the U.S. About half of residents or more gave positive reviews to the overall quality of business and service establishments, cost of living, shopping opportunities, and the County as a place to work, while virtually all residents had purchased goods or services in the County in the past 12 months. Residents were more likely in 2019 than in 2017 to give positive marks to employment opportunities, though they were less likely to work in the County.

Looking at longer-term trends over the course of Jackson County's ten-year survey history since 2009, some Economy ratings have notably improved. Aspects for which ratings improved by at least ten percentage points from 2009 to 2019 included vibrant downtown/commercial area, employment opportunities, the County as a place to work, and economic development. Other development-related items that improved considerably in the past ten years included the overall quality of new development in the County and land use, planning, and zoning.

Education and Enrichment is another area of focus.

Residents in 2019 identified another facet of community livability, Education and Enrichment, as a third area of importance for the County in the next two years. As with Safety and Economy, most ratings within this facet were similar to or lower than those observed elsewhere. At least 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to public libraries and to religious or spiritual events and activities (about half of residents reported engaging in or using each of these, and the proportion of residents who had participated in religious or spiritual activities increased since 2017). Residents were also more likely in 2019 than in 2017 to give positive ratings to cultural/arts/music activities.