

**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Citizen Survey<sup>TM</sup>

**Eau Claire, WI**  
Community Livability Report

2016



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# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Eau Claire. 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 1,496 residents of the city of Eau Claire. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.

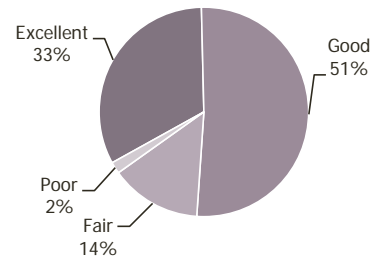


# Quality of Life in Eau Claire

Most residents rated the quality of life in Eau Claire as excellent or good. This rating was similar to 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.

Overall Quality of Life



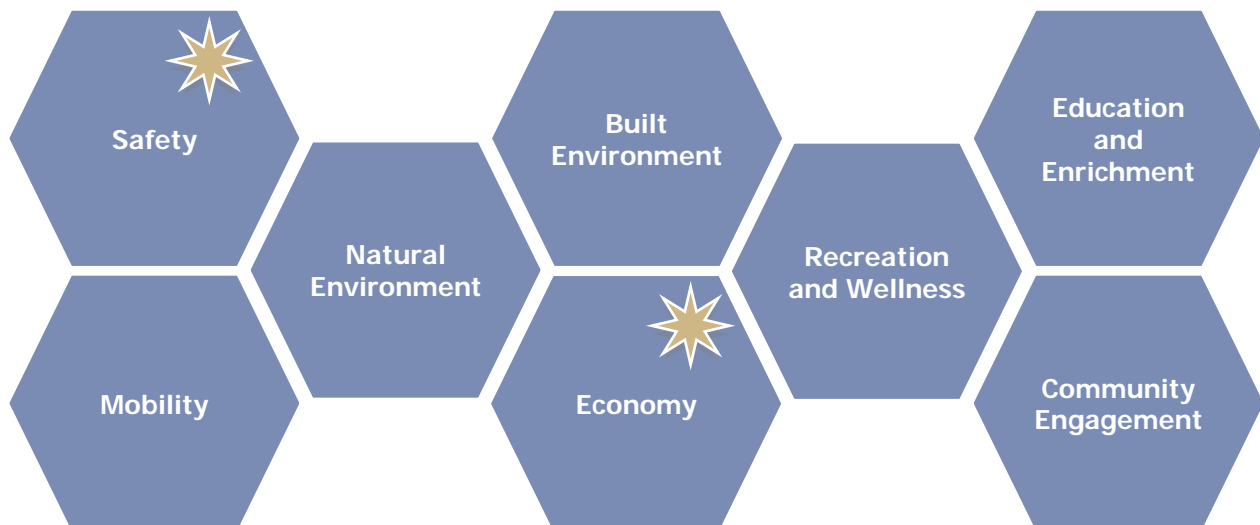
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Eau Claire community in the coming two years. Ratings for all facets were positive and similar to other communities. 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 Eau Claire’s unique questions.

## Legend

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

- \* Most important



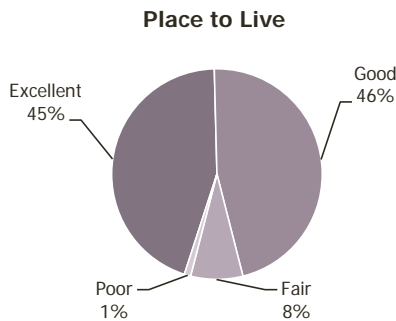
# Community Characteristics

*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 Eau Claire, 91% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Eau Claire as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the city as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Eau Claire as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Eau Claire and its overall appearance. About 8 in 10 or more residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image of Eau Claire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the city as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the city. Eau Claire as a place to retire was given positive ratings by about two-thirds of residents. All of these ratings were similar to the national benchmark comparisons. Ratings for the overall appearance of Eau Claire and resident neighborhoods as a place to live increased from 2012 to 2016 (for more information on trends 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. Ratings across all facets tended to be strong and similar to or higher than the national benchmark comparisons. A vast majority of residents gave high marks to the overall feeling of safety in Eau Claire (85%) and to the feeling of safety in their neighborhood (96%). Ratings within Mobility were similarly strong: about 8 in 10 survey participants gave excellent or good ratings to the overall ease of travel in Eau Claire, the availability of paths and walking trails, ease of walking and ease of travel by car.



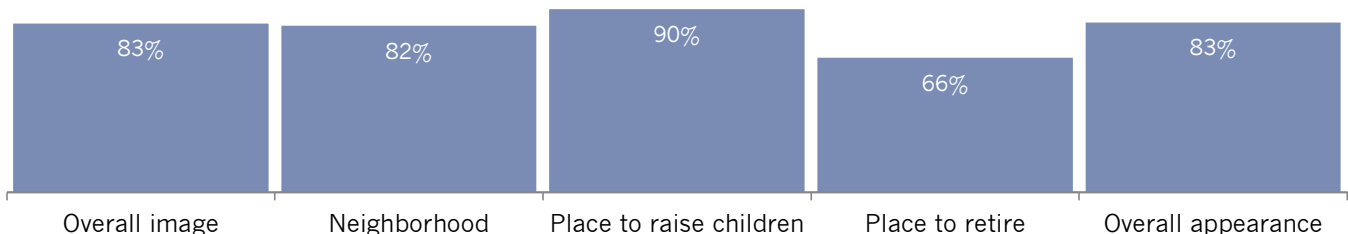
Ratings for ease of travel by car and by public transportation increased from 2012 to 2016. About 8 in 10 or more respondents gave high marks to all aspects of Natural Environment, including air quality and cleanliness of the city. At least a majority of residents gave excellent or good ratings to all aspects in the facets of Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness. Ratings for the quality of new development in the city, public places where people like to spend time, recreational opportunities and fitness opportunities were higher in Eau Claire than in comparison communities. However, it is noteworthy that ratings for the availability of affordable quality housing and housing options declined between

2012 and 2016. About 6 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to the overall economic health of the city and to Eau Claire as a place to work, while about three-quarters gave high marks to the city as a place to visit and the quality of local businesses and services. The cost of living in the city, the vibrancy of Eau Claire's downtown/commercial area and shopping opportunities were rated higher than the national benchmarks. More than 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to education and enrichment opportunities and to opportunities to participate in religious or spiritual events in Eau Claire. Opportunities to attend cultural, music and art activities, opportunities for adult education and overall opportunities for education and enrichment were rated higher in Eau Claire than in comparison communities. A majority of residents gave favorable ratings to all aspects of Community Engagement; all of these aspects were rated similar to or higher than the national benchmarks.

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

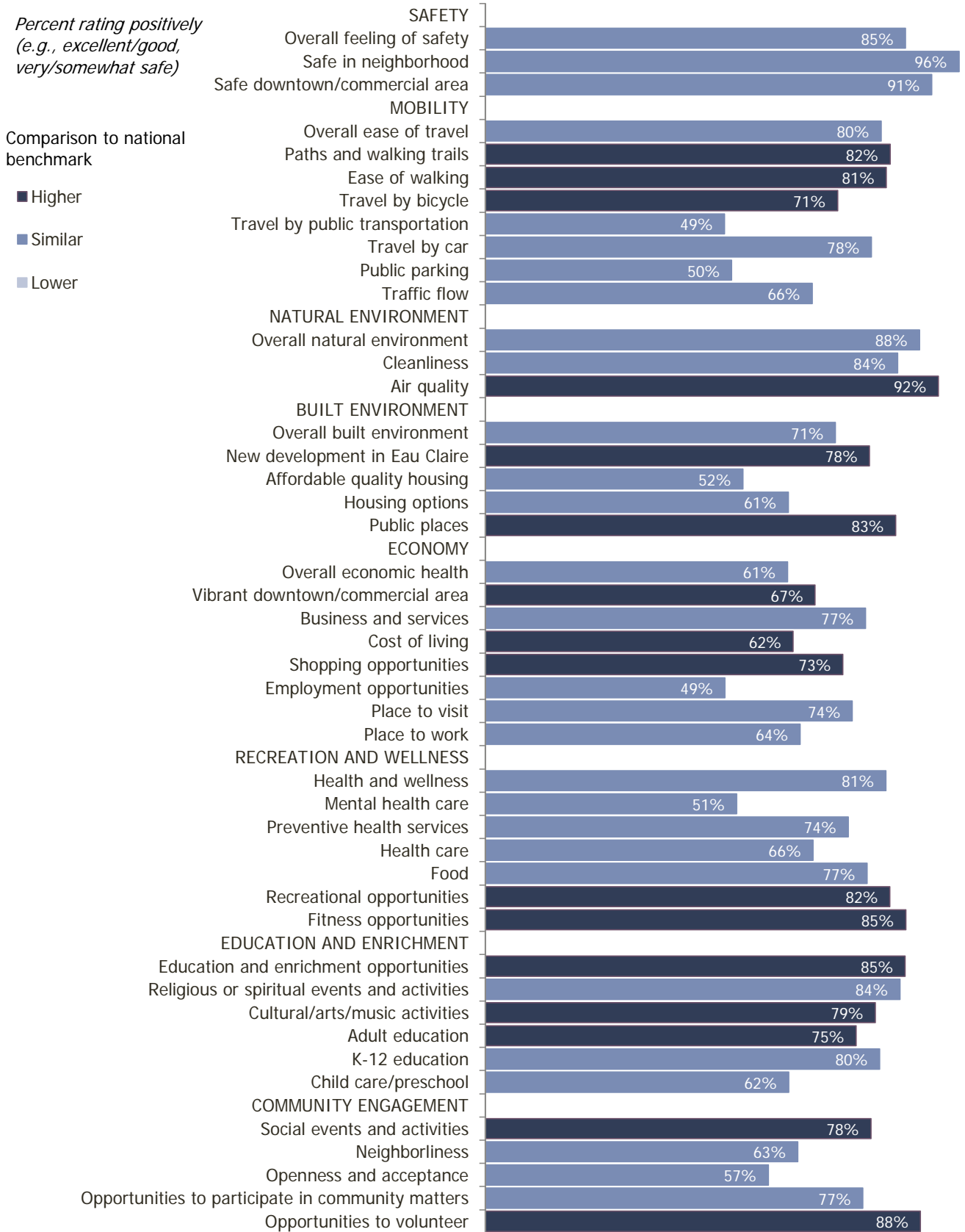
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



# Governance

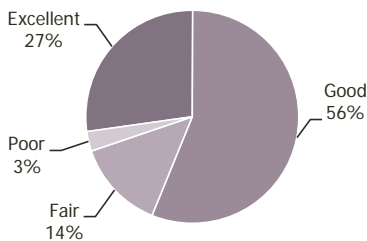
*How well does the government of Eau Claire meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Eau Claire as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. A vast majority of residents (83%) gave excellent or good ratings to the services provided by the City of Eau Claire, while only about half (46%) gave high ratings to services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for services provided by the City and services provided by the Federal Government were both similar to the national benchmarks. Ratings for the services provided by the Eau Claire City government increased from 2012 to 2016.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Eau Claire’s leadership and governance. The overall direction the City is taking, the job the City does at acting in the best interest of Eau Claire, being honest, treating all residents fairly and the overall customer service provided by City employees were given favorable ratings by about 6 in 10 survey respondents or more. A majority of residents gave high marks to all other aspects of Eau Claire’s leadership and governance. Ratings of the City’s leadership and governance tended to be similar to ratings seen in other communities nationwide; however, the rating for the overall direction of the City was higher than the benchmarks.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Eau Claire. Generally, ratings within the Pillar of Governance were strong and similar to the national benchmark comparisons. Yard-waste pick-up and cable television (which are both services provided by non-municipal vendors), received ratings that were lower than the benchmarks, and drinking water was rated more positively in Eau Claire than in comparison communities. The highest-rated government services included fire services, ambulance/EMS services, public libraries, City parks, sewer services and fire prevention services, with at least 85% or more residents giving excellent or good ratings to each of these aspects. The services with some of the lowest ratings were street repair (37% excellent or good), cable television (38%), and traffic signal timing (46%).

Overall Quality of City Services

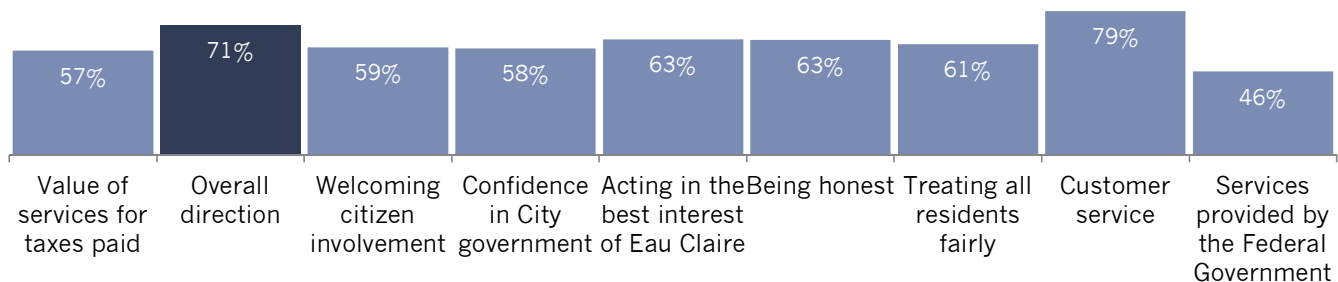


Ratings increased for several Mobility-related City services from 2012 to 2016, including street cleaning, snow removal and sidewalk maintenance. Ratings also increased for natural areas preservation, storm drainage and economic development, but decreased for bus or transit services. Ratings also decreased for several services that are provided by non-municipal vendors including recycling, yard waste pick-up and cable television services.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



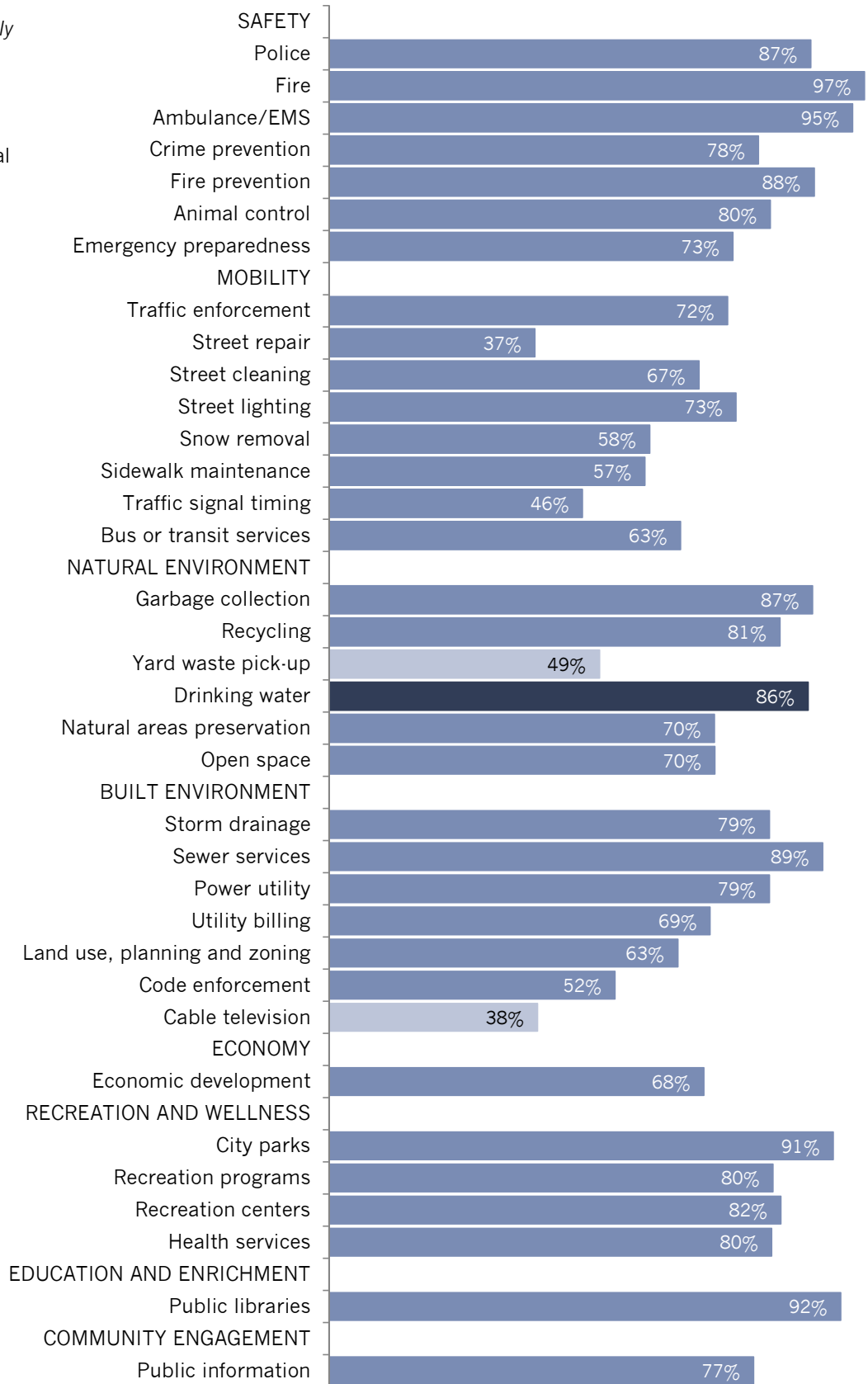
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



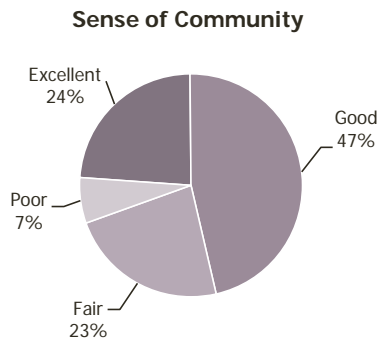


# Participation

*Are the residents of Eau Claire 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. About 7 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings to the sense of community in Eau Claire, which was similar to the national benchmark comparison. About 9 in 10 respondents indicated that they would recommend living in Eau Claire to someone who asked, and about 8 in 10 reported that they plan on remaining in Eau Claire for the coming five years. About 1 in 3 respondents had contacted the City of Eau Claire within the past 12 months.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Rates of participation in the facets of Safety and Mobility tended to be mixed. At least 8 in 10 respondents had not reported a crime and had not been the victim of a crime in the past 12 months, and about 6 in 10 participants reported that they had walked or biked instead of driving during this period. However, fewer than 1 in 5 respondents reported that they had stocked supplies for an emergency or used public transportation instead of driving; these participation rates were both lower than the benchmarks. Participation rates within the facet of Natural Environment varied from a high of 97% of residents reporting that they recycled at home (which is higher than the benchmark) to a rate of 69% who reported making efforts to conserve water (which is lower than the benchmark). Within Built Environment, about three-quarters of residents were found to not be under housing cost stress and about half had not observed a code violation. Almost all residents indicated that they had purchased goods or services in Eau Claire in the previous 12 months, and more than 6 in 10 reported



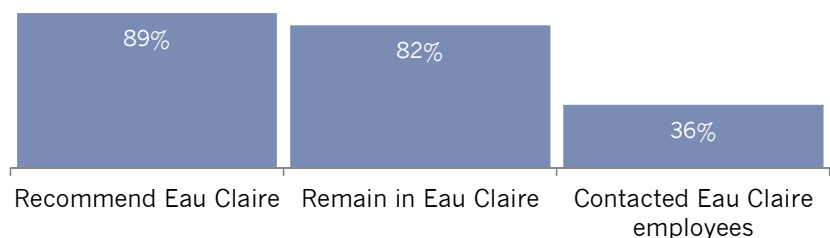
that they work in Eau Claire; the rate of residents reporting that they work in Eau Claire was higher than the national benchmark. At least half of respondents had participated in all aspects of Recreation and Wellness; reported rates of visiting a City park were higher in Eau Claire than in other communities across the nation. Rates of participation in the facets of Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were strong and similar to or higher than the national benchmarks. About 6 in 10 or more residents reported that they had used Eau Claire public libraries, attended a City-sponsored event, talked or visited with a neighbor, done a favor for a neighbor, read or watched the local news and voted in local elections. Rates of residents who volunteered and had attended a City-sponsored event were higher in Eau Claire than in comparison communities.

Rates of Participation were generally stable over time. More residents reported that they voted in local elections and that economy would have a positive impact on their income in the next six months in 2016 than in 2012. However, fewer residents reported using Eau Claire public libraries, participating in religious or spiritual activities and watching a local public meeting during this period.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



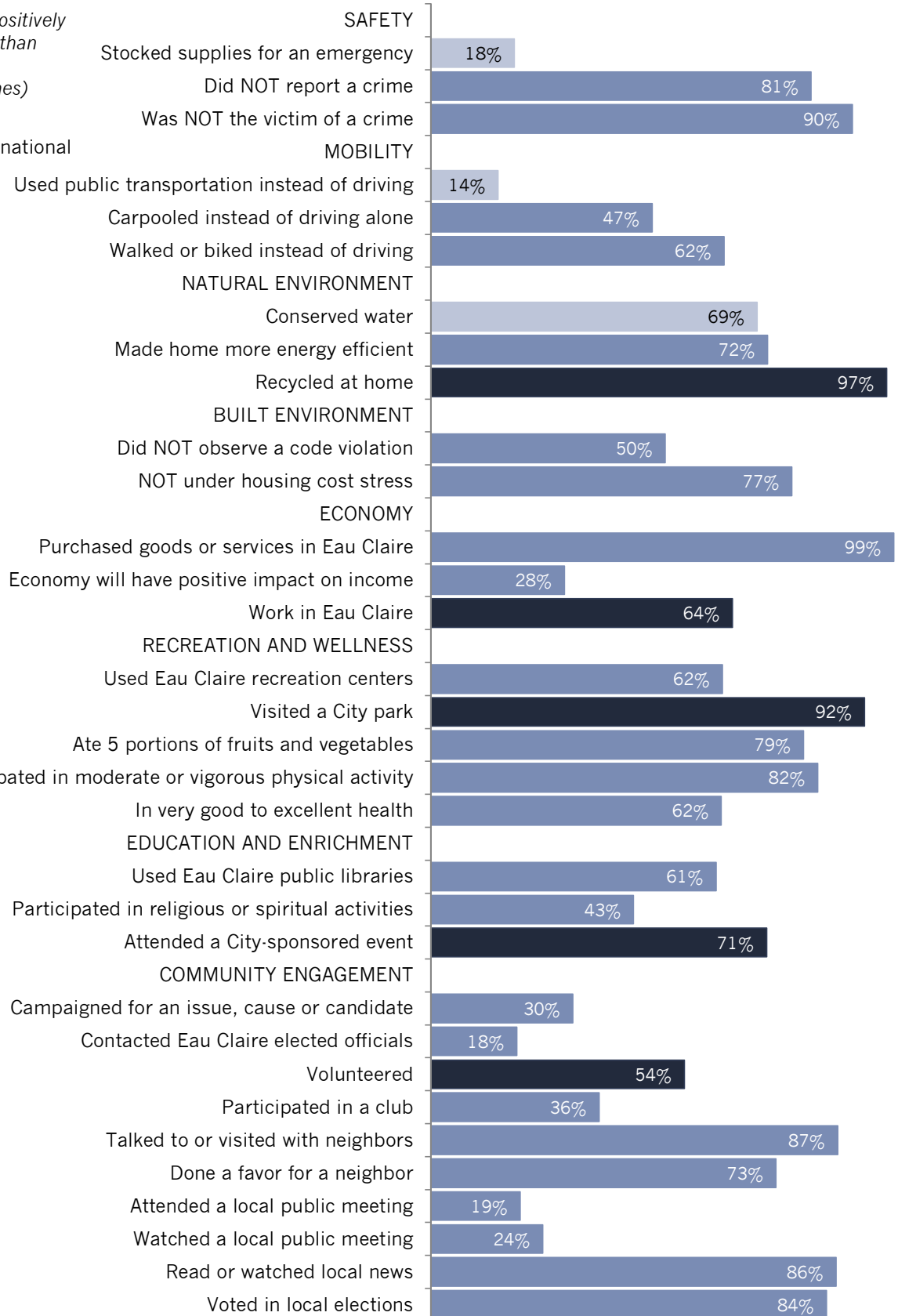
## The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

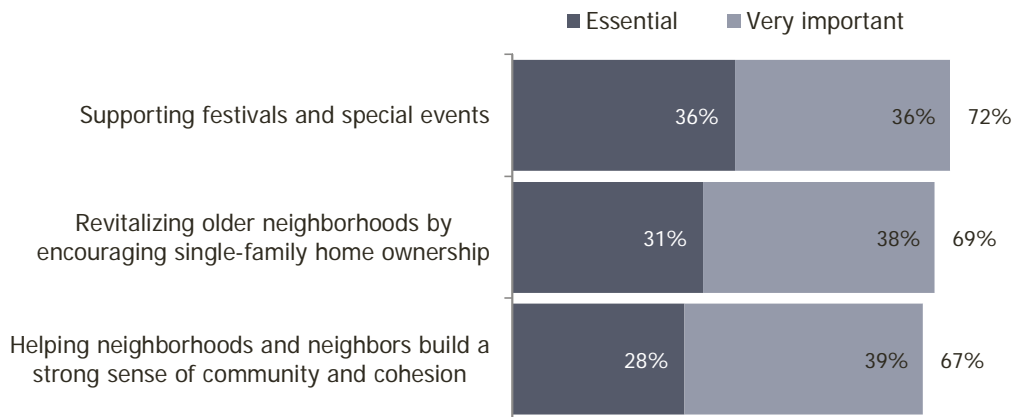
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Special Topics

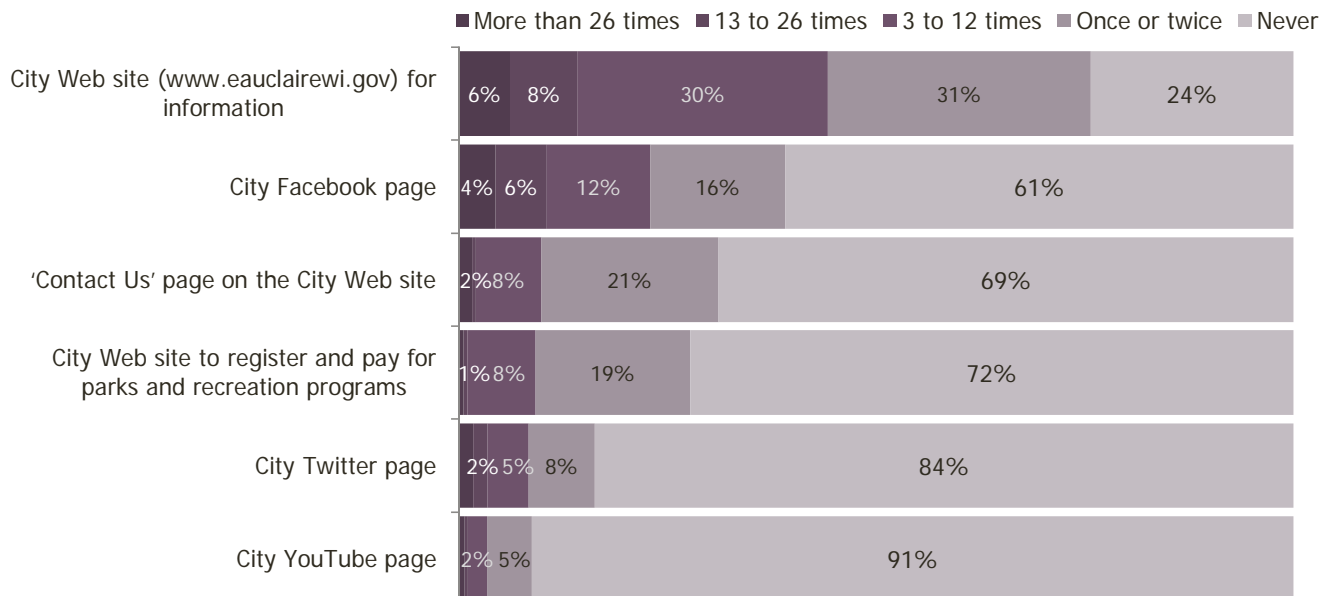
The City of Eau Claire included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special-interest question asked residents to rate the importance of several neighborhood issues. About 7 in 10 respondents indicated that it was essential or very important for Eau Claire to focus on supporting festivals and special events in the coming two years. About two-thirds of respondents felt that revitalizing older neighborhoods by encouraging single-family home ownership and helping neighborhoods and neighbors build a strong sense of community and cohesion were also important issues for the community.

Figure 4: Importance of Neighborhood Issues  
Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Eau Claire community to focus on the following neighborhood issues:



Next, residents were asked how many times members of their households had accessed Eau Claire City government-related electronic media. About three-quarters of respondents had accessed the City web site at least once in the previous twelve months. All other electronic media sources had not been used by a majority of respondents in the previous 12 months.

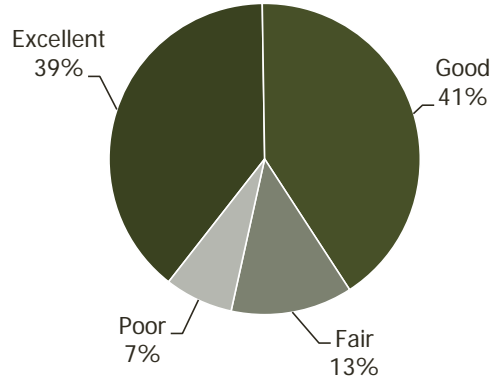
Figure 5: Use of the City's Electronic Media Sources  
In the last 12 months, about how many times, if ever, have you or other household members accessed the following electronic media?



The final special-interest question asked residents to rate the job the City has done on its redevelopment efforts in Downtown Eau Claire. About 4 in 5 respondents said that the City had done an excellent or good job in its efforts; 13% of respondents indicated the City had done a fair job and seven percent thought they had done a poor job.

Figure 6: City Performance on Downtown Redevelopment

*Please rate the job the City has done on its redevelopment efforts and activities in Downtown Eau Claire:*



# Conclusions

## Eau Claire Residents enjoy a high quality of life.

More than 4 in 5 respondents rated the overall quality of life in Eau Claire and the city as a place to live as excellent or good; these ratings remained stable over time and were similar to ratings in comparison communities. About 9 in 10 respondents would recommend Eau Claire as a place to live to someone who asked, and about 8 in 10 reported that they planned to remain in the community for the next five years. Ratings for features that enhance quality of life, such as Eau Claire as a place to raise children, the overall image of the city and the overall appearance were given positive ratings by at least 4 in 5 respondents. Ratings for the overall appearance of the city and residents' neighborhoods as a place to live increased from 2012 to 2016.

## Economy and Safety are the main focus areas for the community.

Residents identified Safety and Economy as important areas for the Eau Claire community to focus on in the next two years. Ratings for aspects of Safety tended to be similar to ratings seen elsewhere and were stable over time. About 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the feeling of safety in their neighborhoods, the feeling of safety in Eau Claire's downtown/commercial areas, and fire and ambulance/EMS services. Only the rate of residents reporting that they had stocked supplies for an emergency was lower than the national benchmark.

Aspects of Economy tended to receive ratings that were similar to or higher than ratings seen in other communities nationwide. Almost all respondents reported purchasing goods or services in Eau Claire, and about 3 in 4 gave favorable ratings to the quality of business and service establishments in the city and to Eau Claire as a place to visit. Ratings for the cost of living in the city, the vibrancy of Eau Claire's downtown/commercial area, and shopping opportunities were higher in Eau Claire than in other communities nationwide. Additionally, ratings for employment opportunities in Eau Claire and economic development increased from 2012 to 2016; the rate of residents who believed that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in the next six months also increased over time.

## Education and Enrichment is an important and positive feature of Eau Claire.

More than 4 in 5 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall education and enrichment opportunities in Eau Claire, which is higher than ratings seen in comparison communities. Ratings for adult educational opportunities and opportunities to participate in cultural, music and arts activities were also exceptionally high. Further, about 6 in 10 residents had used Eau Claire public libraries in the past 12 months and about 7 in 10 had attended a City-sponsored special event; that rate of residents who reported attending a City-sponsored special event was higher in Eau Claire than in other communities. About 8 in 10 survey participants gave excellent or good ratings to the quality of special events in the community, and about 7 in 10 think that supporting special events and festivals should be an essential or very important area of focus for the Eau Claire community.