



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

River Falls, WI

Community Livability Report

2015



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

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About

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

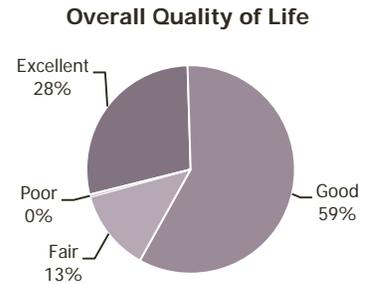
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 410 residents of the City of River Falls. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% 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 River Falls

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

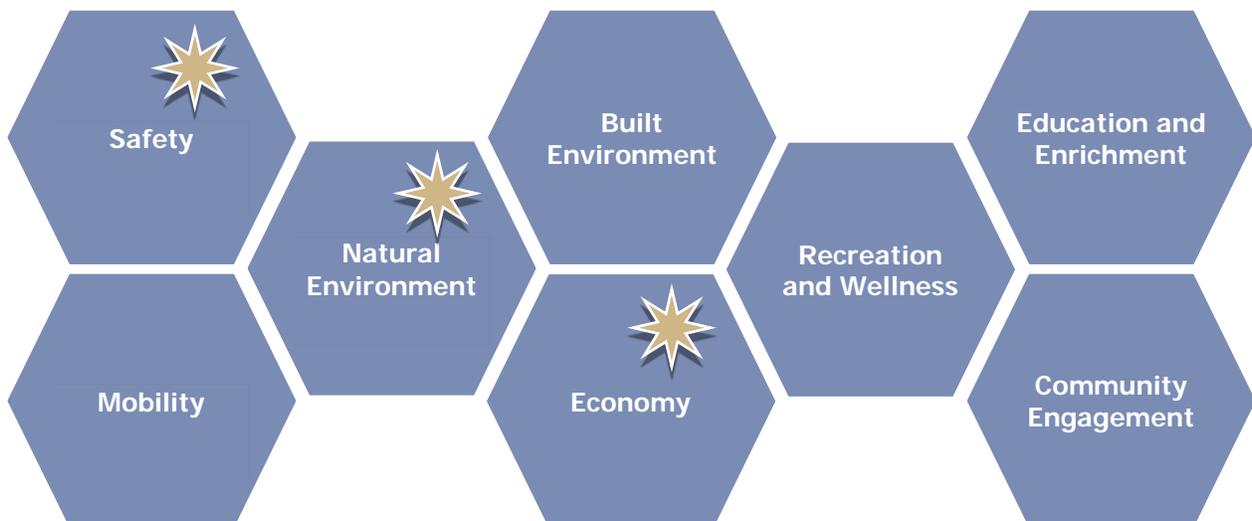
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Economy and Natural Environment as priorities for the River Falls community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that River Falls residents gave favorable ratings to all of these facets of community. Ratings for the facets of Mobility, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were also 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 River Falls' 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 River Falls, 92% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of River Falls 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 River Falls as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of River Falls and its overall appearance. More than 8 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings to River Falls as a place to raise children and to the overall image and overall appearance of River Falls. About three-quarters of respondents positively rated their neighborhood as a place to live and about 7 in 10 were pleased with River Falls as a place to retire.

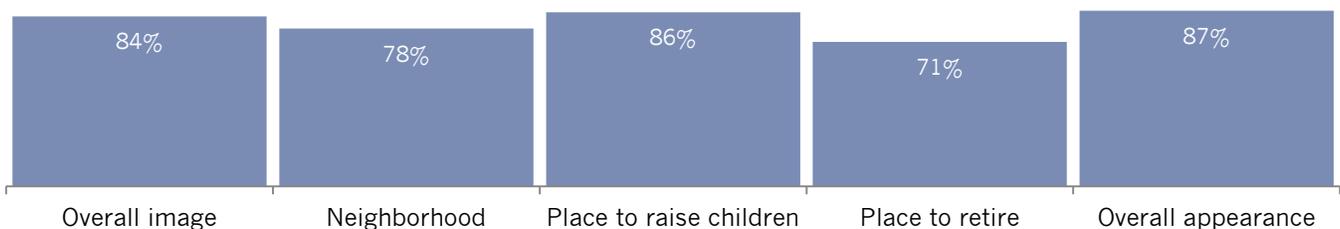
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Nearly all residents gave positive ratings to aspects of Safety, with at least 9 in 10 rating these measures as excellent or good. A majority of respondents gave favorable ratings to aspects of Built Environment, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. A majority of residents were also pleased with most aspects of Mobility and Recreation and Wellness. Within the facet of Economy, ratings varied; about three-quarters of respondents gave favorable ratings to the overall economic health of River Falls, and about two-thirds were pleased with River Falls as a place to visit. Six in 10 residents positively rated River Falls' vibrant downtown area and the overall quality of business and service establishments, and about half gave positive ratings to the cost of living and River Falls as a place to work; all of these ratings were similar to the benchmark. About one-third of residents were pleased with shopping opportunities and employment opportunities. Generally, most aspects were rated similar to the benchmark with the exception of certain aspects of Mobility (paths and walking trails and ease of walking), Natural Environment (overall natural environment and air quality) and Education and Enrichment (education and enrichment opportunities, cultural/arts/music activities, adult education and K-12 education), which were rated higher than the benchmark. Almost all ratings for Community Characteristics were similar to ratings in 2013 (see the *Trends Over Time* report under separate cover).



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



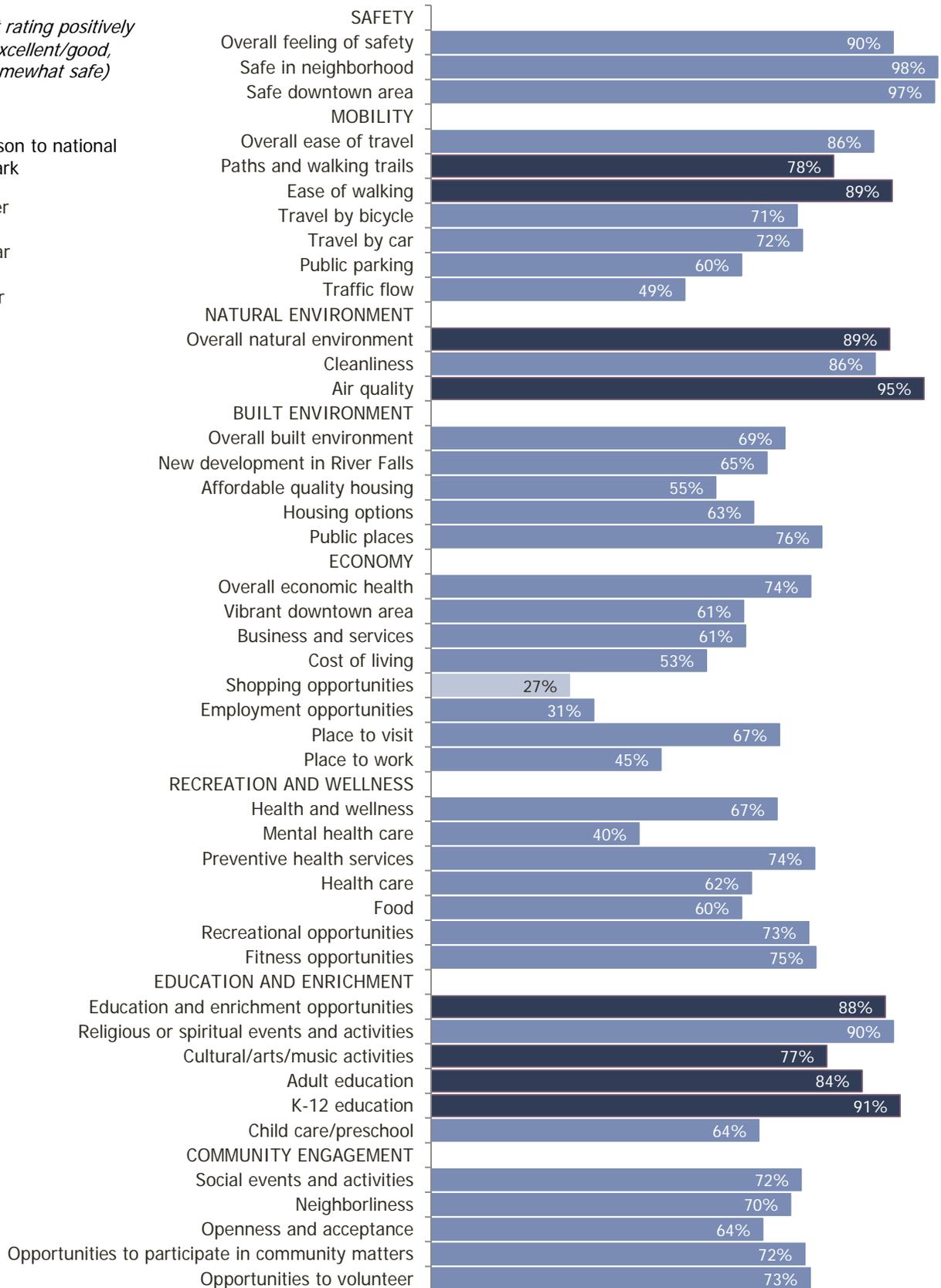
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

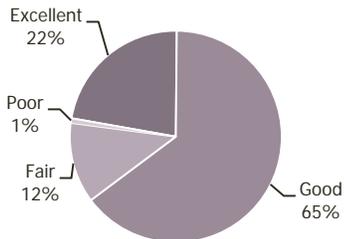
How well does the government of River Falls meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by River Falls as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. In River Falls, 87% of respondents rated the overall quality of City services as excellent or good and 30% rated the services provided by the Federal Government as excellent or good. These ratings were similar to ratings given in other communities.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of River Falls' leadership and governance. About 7 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings for the overall direction that River Falls is taking and for being honest, and at least 6 in 10 favorably rated the job River Falls government does at welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of River Falls and treating all residents fairly. About half of residents were pleased with the value of services for taxes paid.

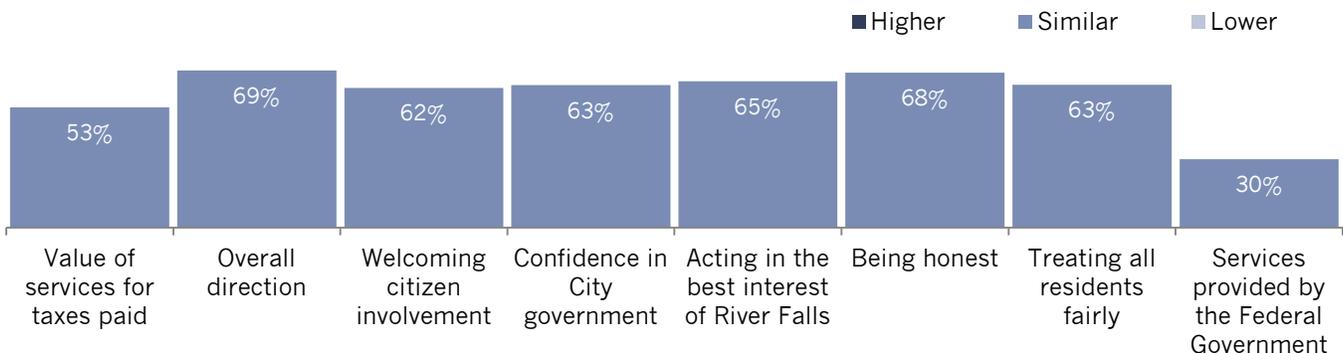
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in River Falls. Ratings were generally positive across all facets of Governance and a majority or more of respondents gave positive ratings for all aspects. The highest rated aspects included fire and ambulance/EMS services, sewer services, power utility, and public libraries; at least 9 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to these services. All ratings within the pillar of Governance were similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation. Most ratings remained stable since 2013, with a few exceptions: emergency preparedness, cable television, and recreation programs were all rated lower in 2015 than in 2013, while snow removal was rated higher in 2015.

Overall Quality of City Services



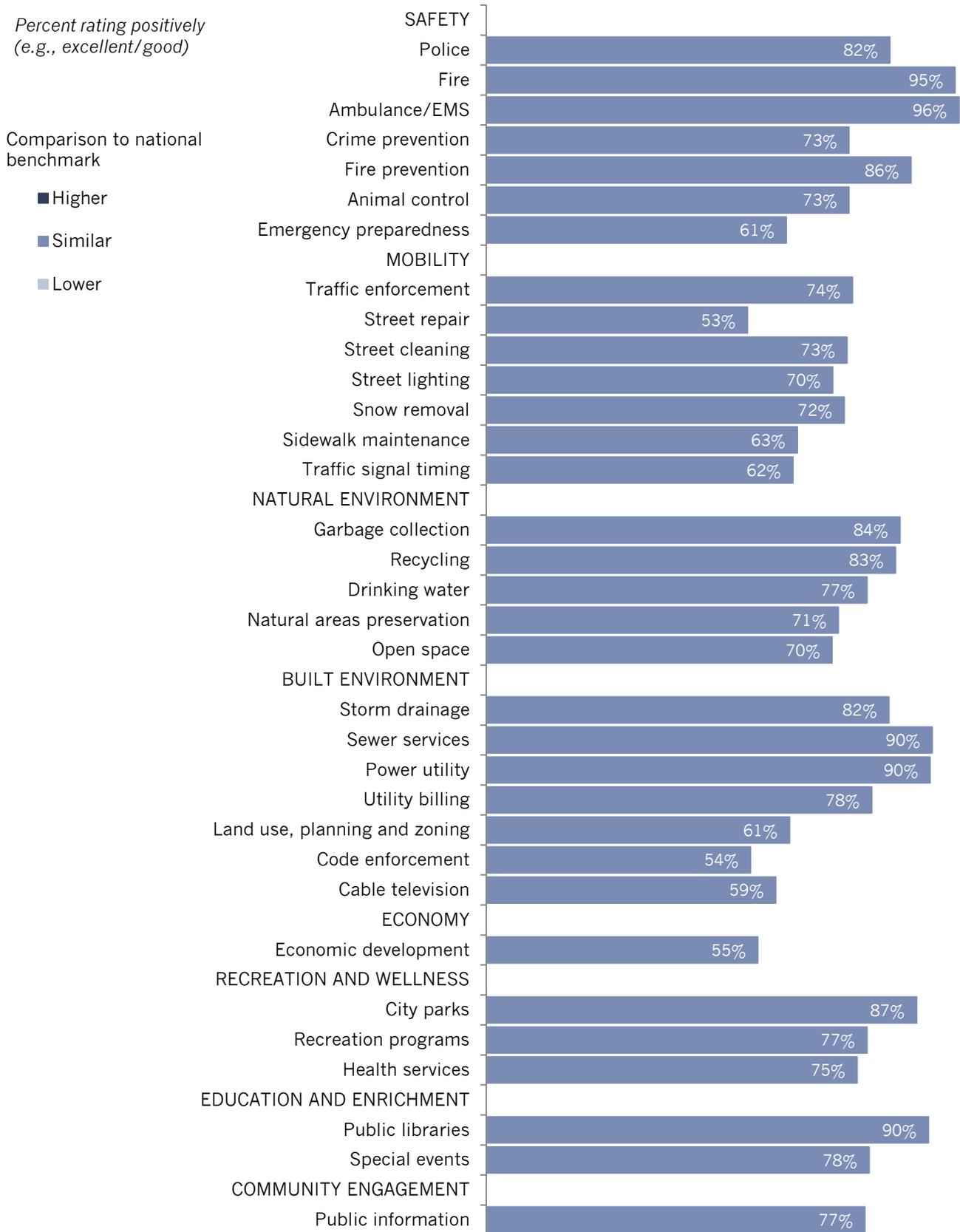
Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark



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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance



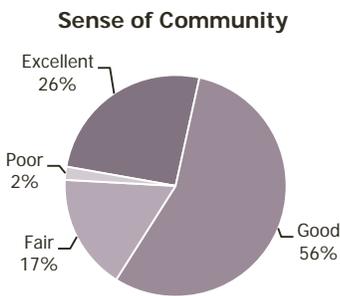
Participation

Are the residents of River Falls 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 8 in 10 residents of River Falls rated the sense of community as excellent or good, which was higher than ratings given in other communities. Virtually all residents reported that they would recommend River Falls to others and about 8 in 10 stated they planned to remain in River Falls 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. Ratings across the facets of Participation varied. Within the facets of Natural Environment, Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness, positive ratings were given by at least a majority of respondents and all aspects were rated similar to the benchmark. In the facet of Safety, almost all residents reported they had not been the victim of a crime and 8 in 10 had not reported a crime, but only 17% had stocked supplies for an emergency, which was a rating lower than those seen in other communities. In Mobility, nearly 8 in 10 had walked or biked instead of driving, which was a rate higher than the benchmark. Ratings varied most widely within the facet of Community Engagement: almost all residents had talked to or visited with neighbors and about three-quarters had done a favor for a neighbor, read or watched local news (a measure lower than the national benchmark) and voted in local elections. More than half of respondents had volunteered (a rating higher than the benchmark), and one-third had participated in a club. About 2 in 10 or fewer had campaigned for an

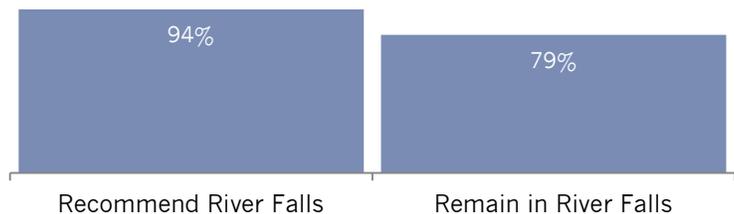
issue, cause or candidate, contacted River Falls elected officials or attended or watched a local public meeting. Rates of participation in 2015 for using River Falls' public libraries, voting in local elections and attending a local public meeting decreased since 2013.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



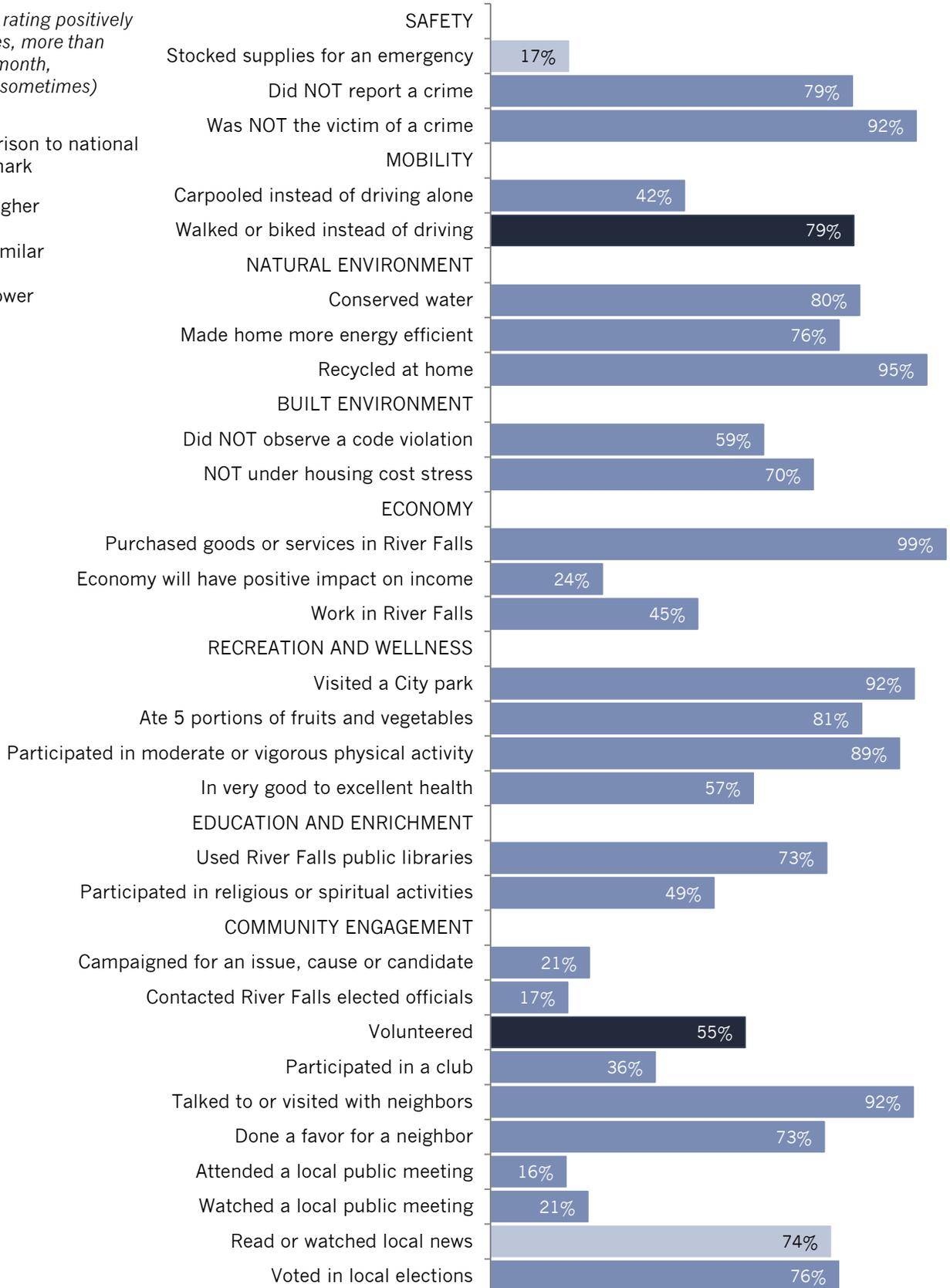
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

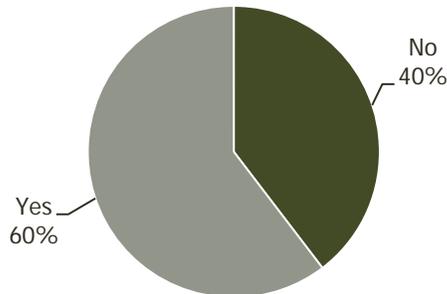


Special Topics

The City of River Falls included seven questions of special interest on The NCS. The first special-interest question asked respondents whether they had had any contact with City employees in the 12 months prior to the survey. Sixty percent of respondents had contacted employees of the City, while 40% had not.

Figure 4: Contact with City Employees

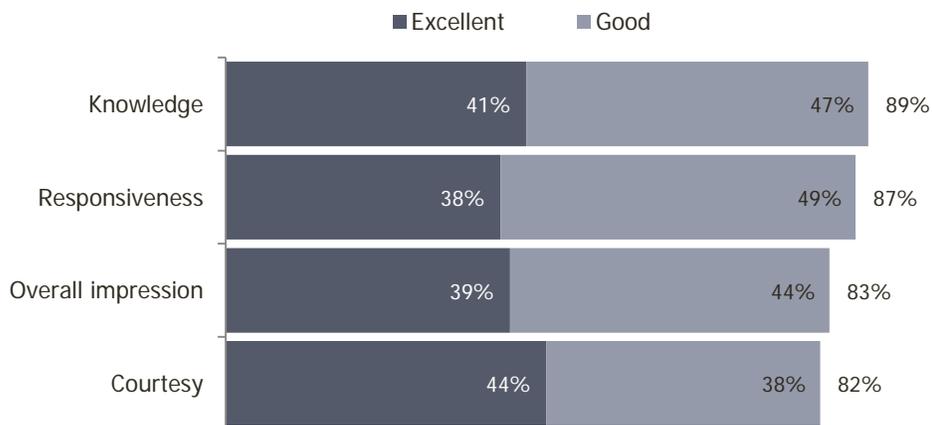
Have you had any in-person, phone, or email contact with an employee of the City of River Falls within the last 12 months (including police, utility, receptionists, or any others)?



The second special-interest question was only asked of survey participants who indicated they had contacted City employees in the previous question. About 9 in 10 respondents reported that the knowledge or responsiveness of the employee with whom they had made contact was excellent or good, while about 8 in 10 reported that the overall impression or courtesy of the employee was excellent or good.

Figure 5: Impression of City Employees

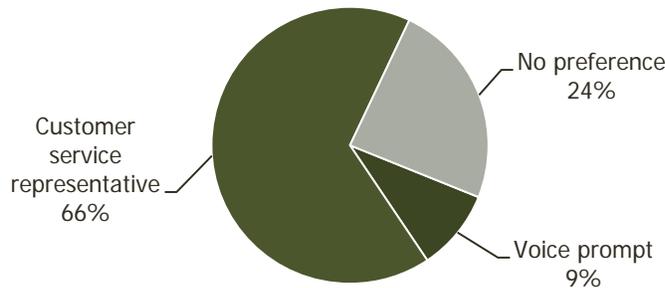
What was your impression of the employee(s) of the City of River Falls in your most recent contact?



The next special-interest question was also only asked of survey participants who indicated they had contacted City employees in the previous 12 months; in this question, residents were asked if they preferred speaking with a customer service representative immediately, beginning with a voice prompt, or if they had no preference upon calling City Hall. Two-thirds of respondents indicated they that they preferred to speak with a representative immediately, while only 9% indicated that they preferred a voice prompt. About one-quarter of respondents had no preference.

Figure 6: Preferences When Calling City Hall

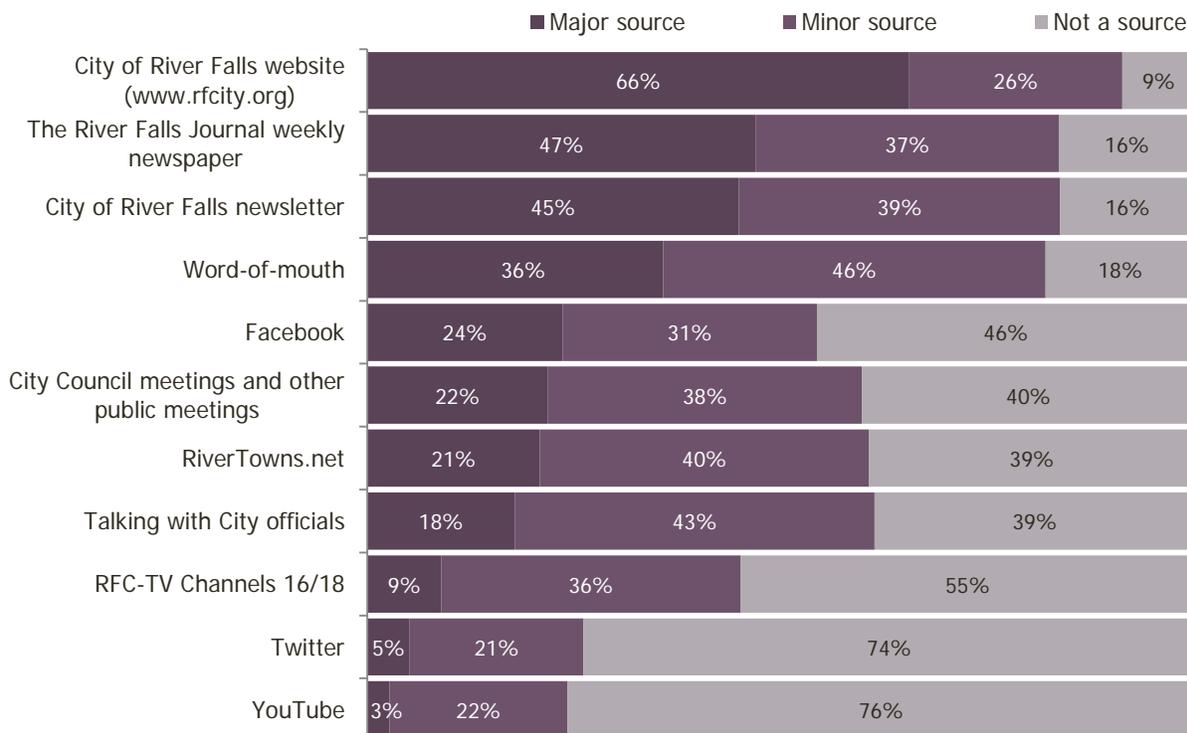
When calling City Hall, do you prefer beginning with a voice prompt to make your selection or speaking with a Customer Service Representative immediately?



The fourth special-interest question on the survey asked residents to indicate how much of a source they considered specific sources to be for obtaining information about the City. Almost all residents considered the City website to be a source of information about the City, and more than 8 in 10 considered the River Falls Journal, the City of River Falls newsletter and word-of-mouth to be at least minor sources. Only about one-quarter of residents considered Twitter or YouTube to be sources of information about the City.

Figure 7: Sources of Information about the City

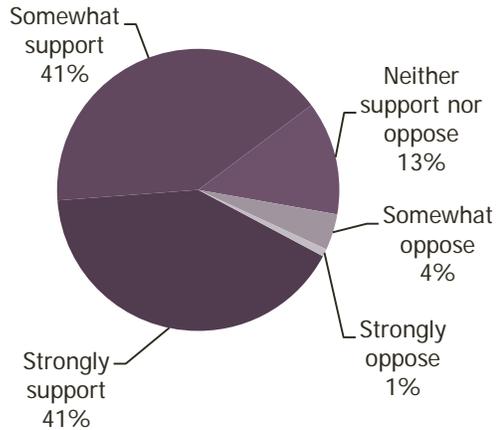
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the City government and its activities, events and services:



The next question on the survey asked respondents to indicate their level of support for establishing a dedicated source of funding for improvements to Glen and Hoffman Parks. More than 8 in 10 residents strongly or somewhat supported establishing a dedicated source of funding, while only 5% somewhat or strongly opposed it. About 1 in 10 residents neither supported nor opposed establishing a funding source.

Figure 8: Support for Funding Glen and Hoffman Parks

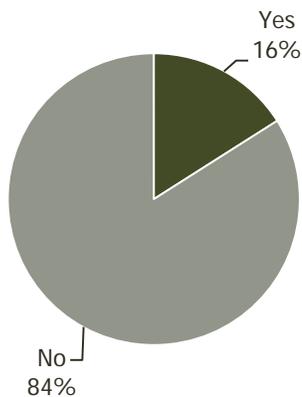
The City and community are completing the master plans for Glen and Hoffman Parks that will guide park improvements over the next 20 years. To what extent do you support, if at all, establishing a dedicated funding source that could only be used for the purpose of implementing these plans?



The final questions on the survey asked residents whether they were a student at the University of Wisconsin—River Falls or at Chippewa Valley Technical College and, if so, whether they lived in River Falls year-round. Sixteen percent of residents reported that they were students at those institutions, while 84% were not. Of the residents who reported being students, 100% indicated that they were year-round residents of River Falls.

Figure 9: College/University Students

Are you a student of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls or Chippewa Valley Technical College?



Conclusions

River Falls residents continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

Most residents rated their quality of life positively and think River Falls is an excellent or good place to live. A vast majority of survey participants gave positive ratings for the overall image and overall appearance of River Falls and most also think River Falls is an excellent or good place to raise children. About 8 in 10 survey participants plan on remaining in River Falls and almost all residents would recommend living in River Falls to others.

Safety is a priority for residents.

Safety was identified as an important area of focus in the coming years, and many aspects of Safety were rated positively by a majority of residents. Almost all respondents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and in River Falls' downtown area, and at least 8 in 10 gave positive ratings for police, fire, ambulance/EMS and fire prevention services as well as the overall feeling of safety in River Falls. Most residents reported that they had not been a victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey, although only 17% had stocked supplies for an emergency, a rating that is lower than the national benchmark and that has also decreased since 2013.

Natural Environment is important to residents and is highly rated in River Falls.

Residents also identified Natural Environment as an important area for the city to focus on and gave strong ratings for the facet. About 9 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall natural environment and to air quality, both of which were higher than ratings given in other communities. About 8 in 10 positively rated City services related to Natural Environment, including garbage collection, recycling and drinking water. When asked to indicate their level of support for establishing a dedicated source of funding for improvements to Glen and Hoffman Parks, more than 8 in 10 residents strongly or somewhat supported establishing a dedicated source of funding.

Residents are pleased with Education and Enrichment opportunities in River Falls.

A majority of respondents gave positive ratings for almost all aspects of Education and Enrichment across the three pillars of community livability. The measures for education and enrichment opportunities, opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities, adult education and K-12 education each received ratings higher than the national benchmark. Additionally, the rating for opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities increased from 2013 to 2015.