

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Unincorporated Jefferson County, CO

Community Livability Report

2015



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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 Jefferson 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 892 residents of unincorporated Jefferson County. 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 Jefferson County

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Jefferson County as excellent or good. This was similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation and higher than ratings given in peer communities with populations 300,000-1,000,000 (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.

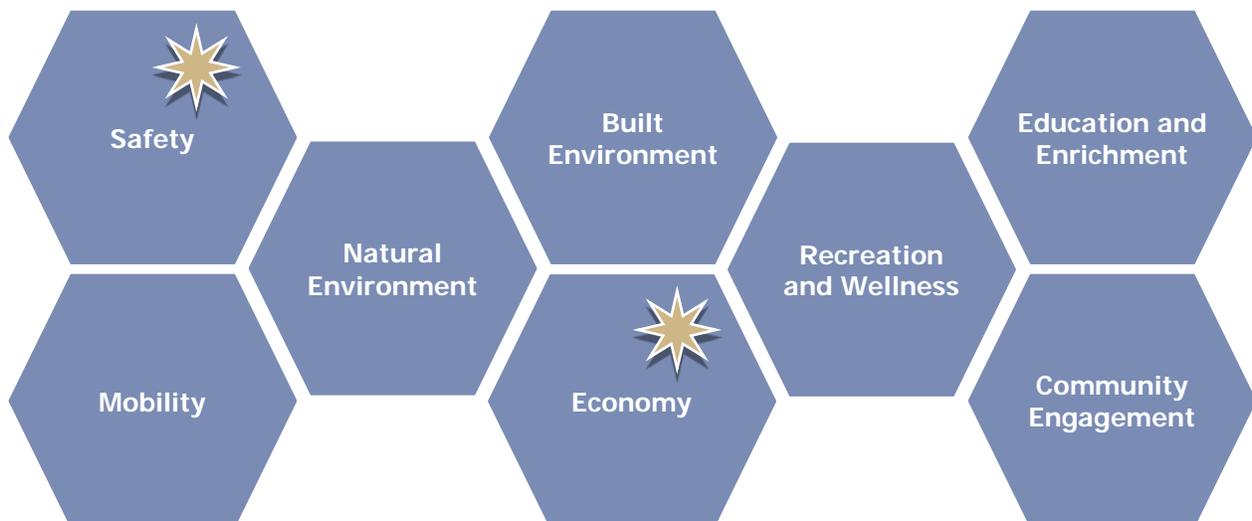
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Jefferson County community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that unincorporated Jefferson County residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community. Ratings for all other facets of Community Livability 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 Jefferson 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 Jefferson County, 94% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Jefferson County as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation and higher than ratings in peer communities.

In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Jefferson County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Jefferson County and its overall appearance. At least 8 in 10 respondents rated their neighborhood as a place to live, Jefferson County as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of Jefferson County as excellent or good, and at least 7 in 10 positively rated Jefferson County as a place to retire and the overall image of the County. These ratings were generally similar to the national benchmark and higher than the peer communities benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Most residents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Safety, and at least a majority positively rated all aspects of Mobility and Community Engagement; all aspects within these facets received ratings similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation. In Natural Environment, all aspects were favorably rated by about 8 in 10 respondents or more, and the quality of the overall natural environment received ratings higher than the national benchmark. Ratings were generally also strong within the facet of Economy: at least 7 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall economic health of Jefferson County, the overall quality of business and service establishments, Jefferson County as a place to work and as a place to visit. All aspects of Economy were rated similar to the national benchmark except employment opportunities and Jefferson County as a place to visit, which were both rated higher than the national benchmark.

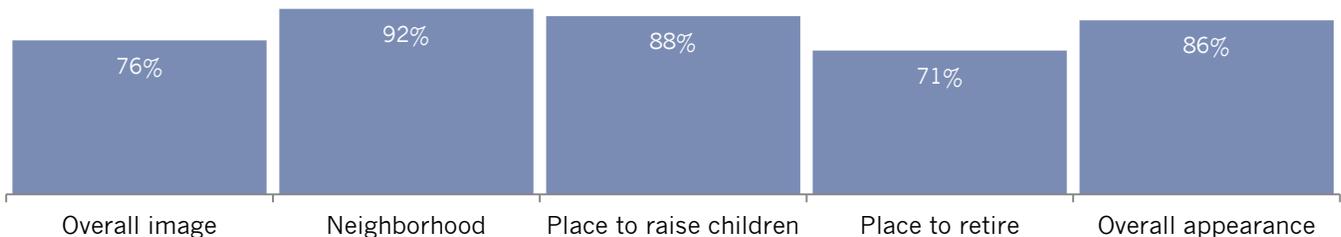
Ratings were more varied within Built Environment. About 7 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall built environment and to public places where people want to spend time, and about half favorably rated the overall quality of new development and the variety of housing options. About one-quarter of respondents gave positive ratings to the availability of affordable quality housing, which was the only aspect of Community Characteristics rated lower than the national benchmark.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



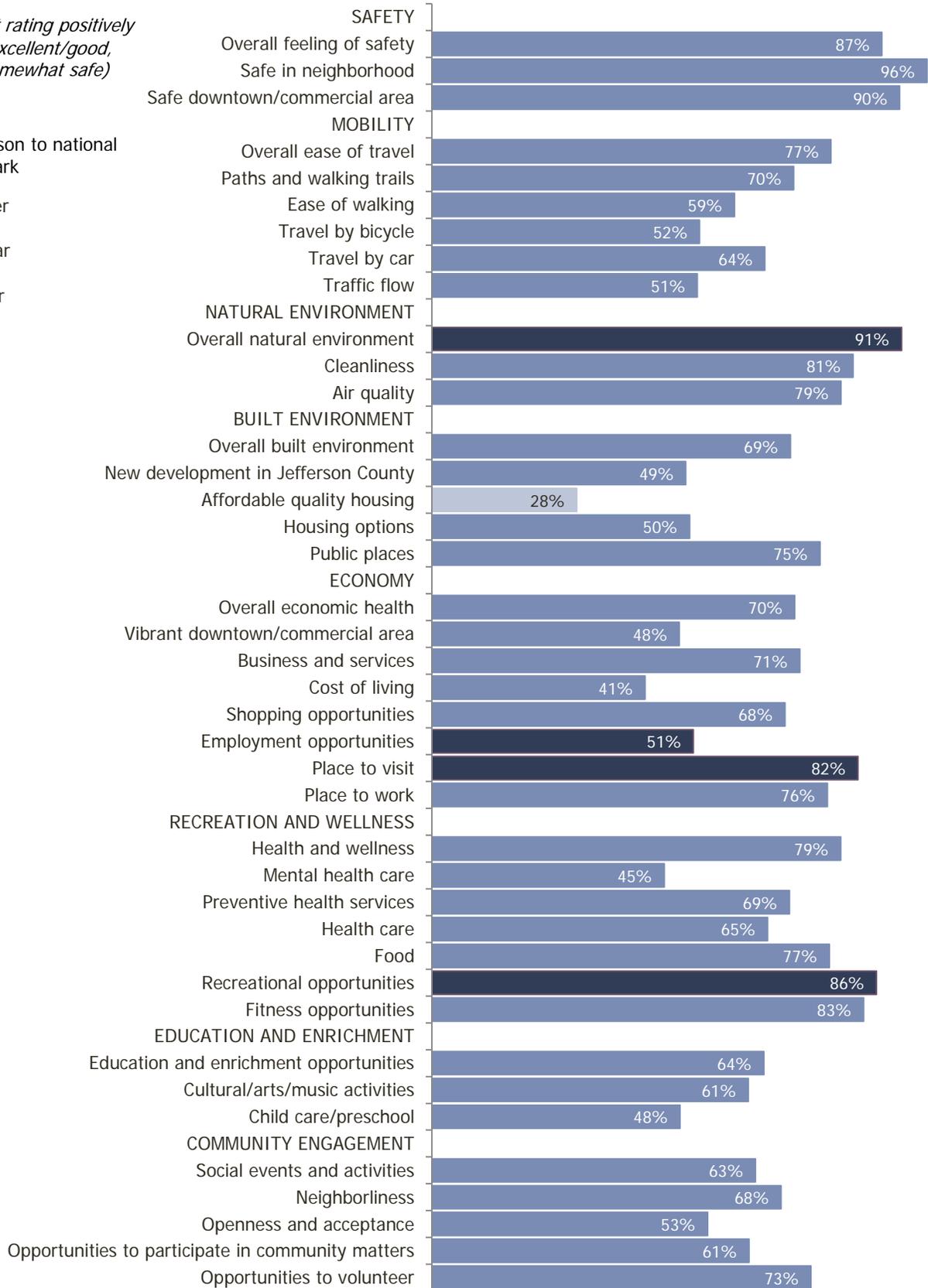
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



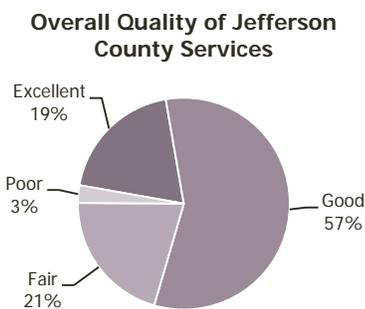
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Jefferson County as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About three-quarters of respondents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of services in Jefferson County and one-third positively rated the services provided by the Federal Government, which were similar to ratings given in other communities nationwide and higher than or similar to ratings given in peer communities with populations 300,000-1,000,000.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Jefferson County's leadership and governance. About three-quarters of survey participants positively rated the overall customer services by Jefferson County employees, while around half gave favorable ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction that Jefferson County is taking, the job County government does at welcoming citizen involvement, generally acting in the best interest of the community and treating all residents fairly, all of which were rated similar to the national benchmark.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Jefferson County. Within the facet of Safety, about 8 in 10 or more respondents favorably rated police, fire, fire prevention and ambulance/EMS services, while at least 6 in 10 gave positive ratings to crime prevention, animal control and emergency preparedness; all of these were rated similar to the national benchmark. At least two-thirds of residents gave positive ratings to all aspects of Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment, and all aspects within these facets received ratings similar to the national benchmark except natural areas preservation, open space and recreation centers, which were rated higher than the national benchmark. Aspects of Built Environment and Economy were rated favorably by about half of respondents or more and were similar to the national benchmark. Within the facet of Mobility, traffic enforcement and snow removal were given positive ratings by about 6 in 10 residents, while street cleaning, sidewalk maintenance and traffic signal timing received positive ratings from about half of respondents. Street repair, with a positive rating of 24%, was the only aspect of Governance to receive a rating lower than the national benchmark.

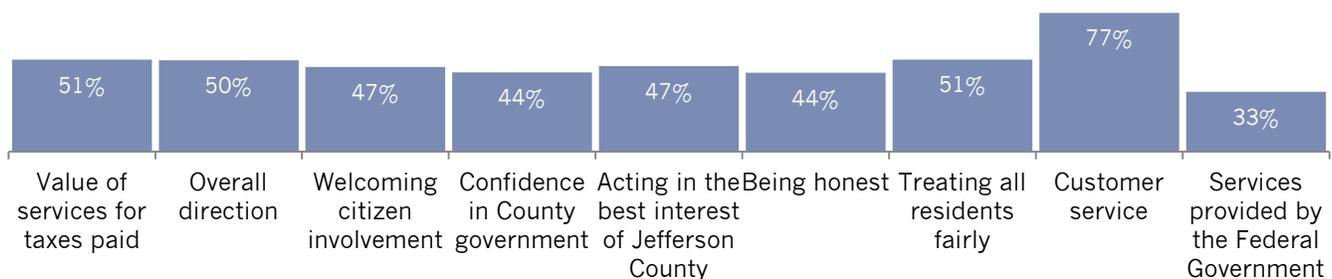


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Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



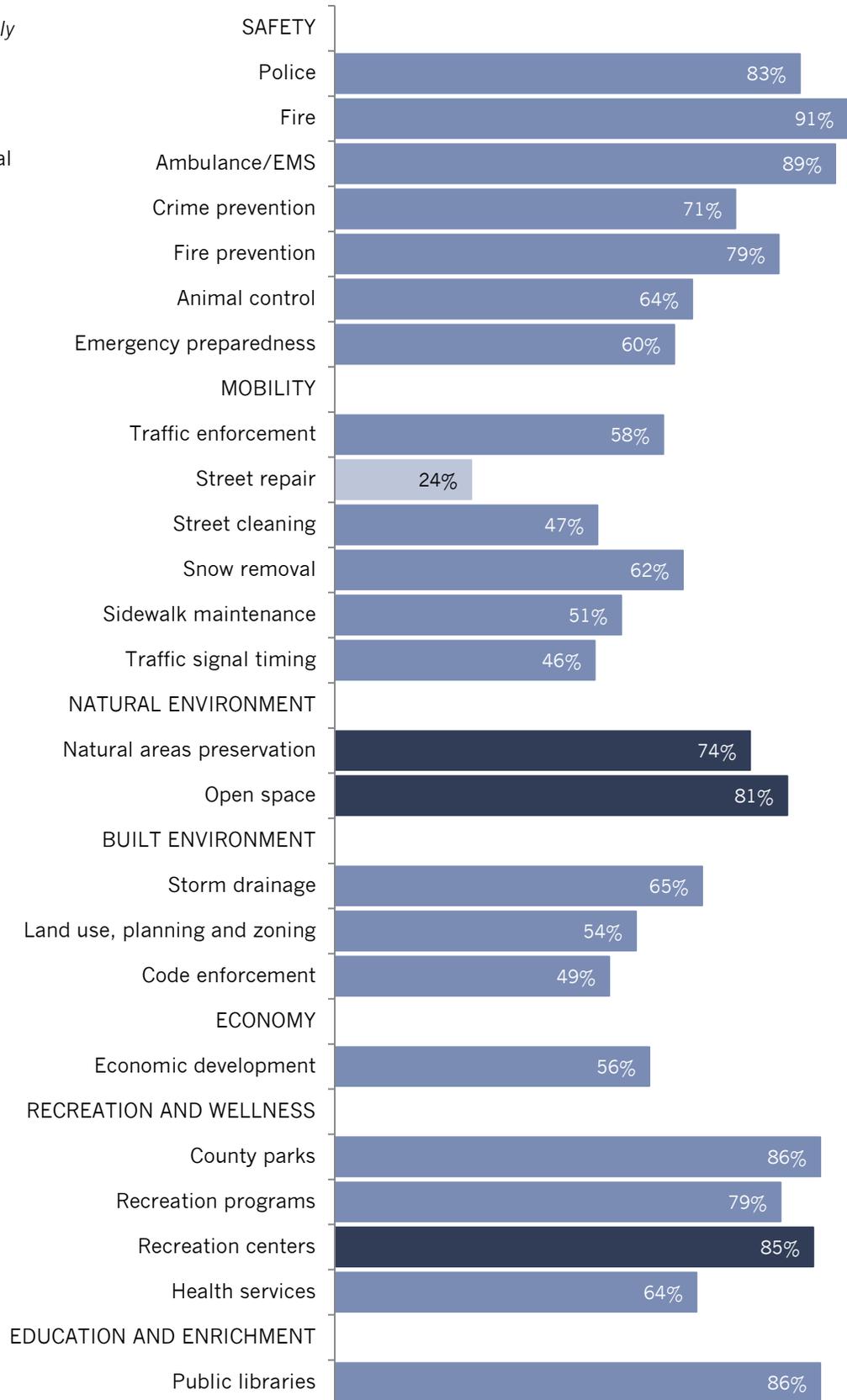
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

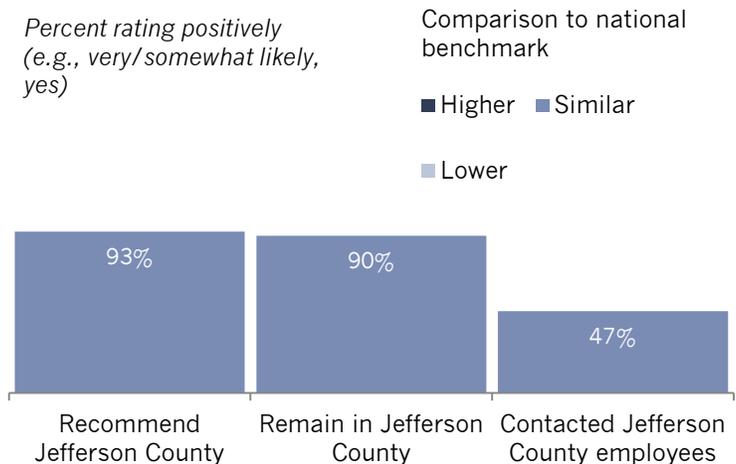
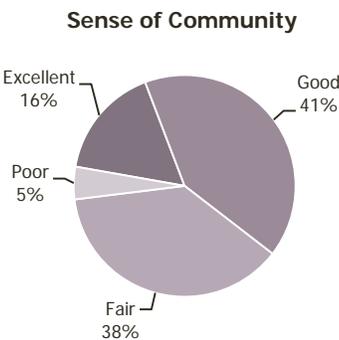


Participation

Are the residents of Jefferson 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. About 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the sense of community in Jefferson County, which was similar to ratings given in communities nationwide and in peer communities with similar populations. Almost all residents would recommend Jefferson County to others and plan to remain in Jefferson County for the next five years, and about half had contacted Jefferson County employees in the past year.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Generally, rates of participation in Jefferson County were similar to or higher than rates in other communities across the nation and in peer communities. In Safety, more than 9 in 10 residents reported not being the victim of a crime and more than 8 in 10 did not report a crime; in Natural Environment, at least 8 in 10 respondents had conserved water, made their home more energy efficient, or recycled at home. Virtually all residents had purchased goods or services in Jefferson County and about 4 in 10 worked in Jefferson County. In the facet of Recreation and Wellness, about 7 in 10 residents had used Jefferson County recreation centers and almost all residents had visited a neighborhood park or a County open space park, both of which were rated higher than the national benchmark. Rates of Participation varied most widely in the facet of Community Engagement: nearly all residents had talked to or visited with neighbors and more than 8 in 10 had read or watched local news. More than 9 in 10 had done a favor for a neighbor or voted in local elections, both of which were higher rates of participation than seen in other communities nationwide. About 4 in 10 respondents had volunteered in the 12 months prior to the survey and about 3 in 10 had participated in a club or watched a local public meeting. About a quarter of residents had campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate or attended a local public meeting, and 15% had contacted Jefferson County public officials. All aspects of Participation were rated similar to or higher than the national benchmark comparison.



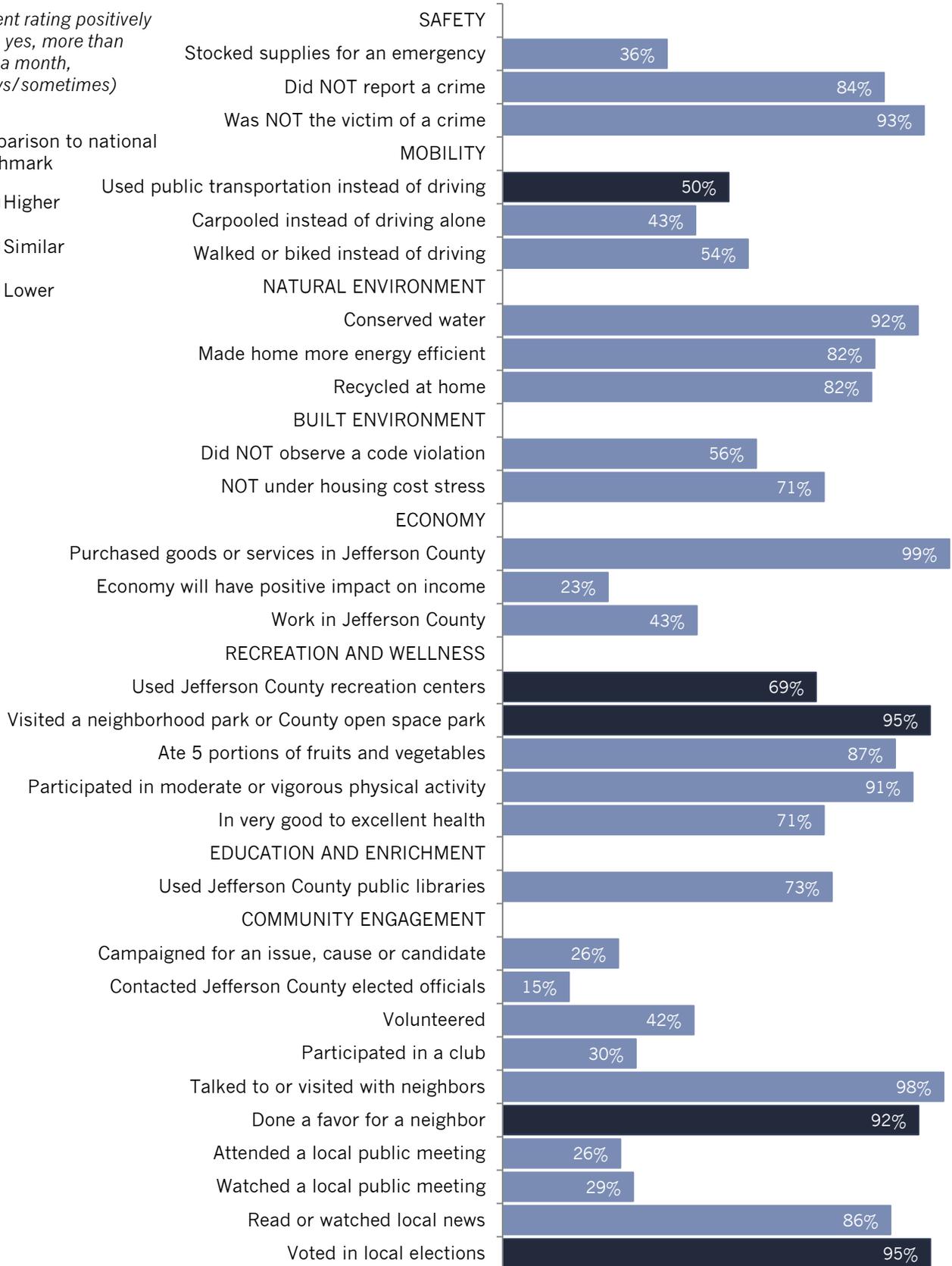
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

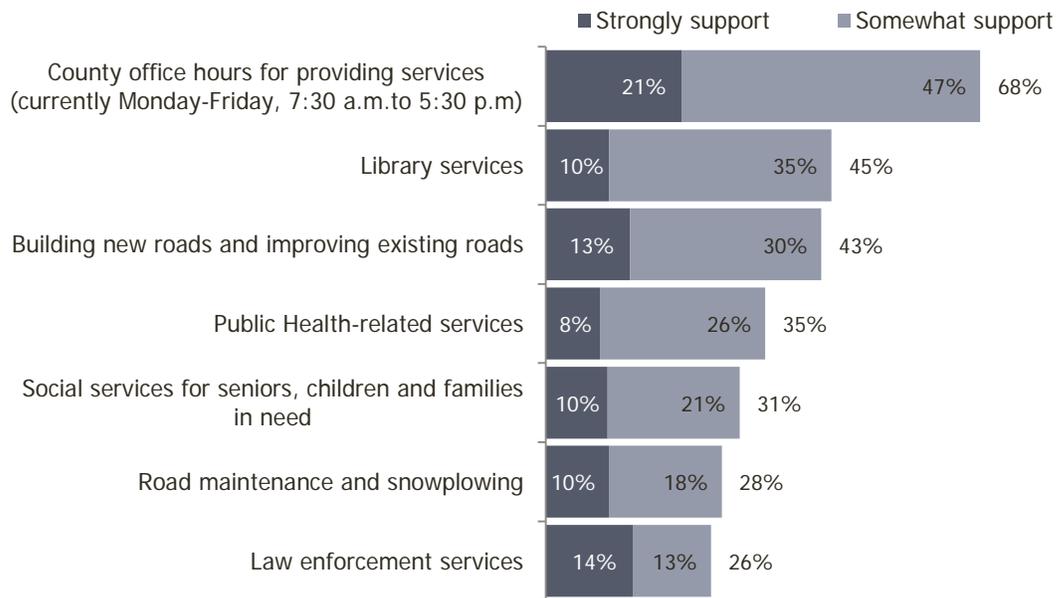


Special Topics

Jefferson County included five questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents to rate their level of support for reducing different services in the event of reduced revenues. About two-thirds of residents supported reducing County office hours, and about 4 in 10 supported reducing library services or building or improving new or existing roads. Only about one-quarter of residents supported reducing road maintenance and snowplowing or law enforcement services.

Figure 4: Support for Service Reductions

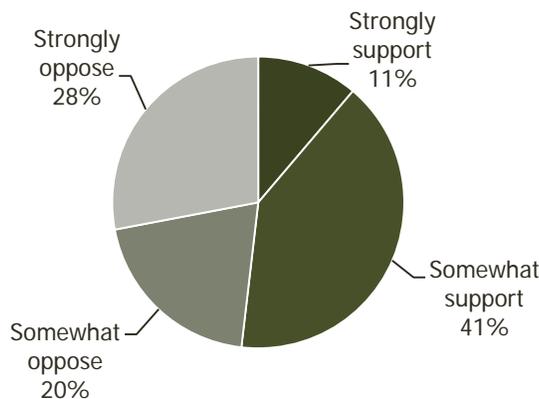
If the County had to reduce spending due to reduced revenues, to what extent would you support or oppose service reductions in each of the following areas?



The next question on the survey asked residents to indicate their level of support for increasing property taxes to improve law enforcement services. Slightly more than half reported that they strongly or somewhat supported a property tax increase, while slightly less than half reported opposing an increase. It is important to note that while 11% strongly supported an increase, nearly 3 in 10 residents strongly opposed an increase.

Figure 5: Support for Property Tax Increase for Law Enforcement

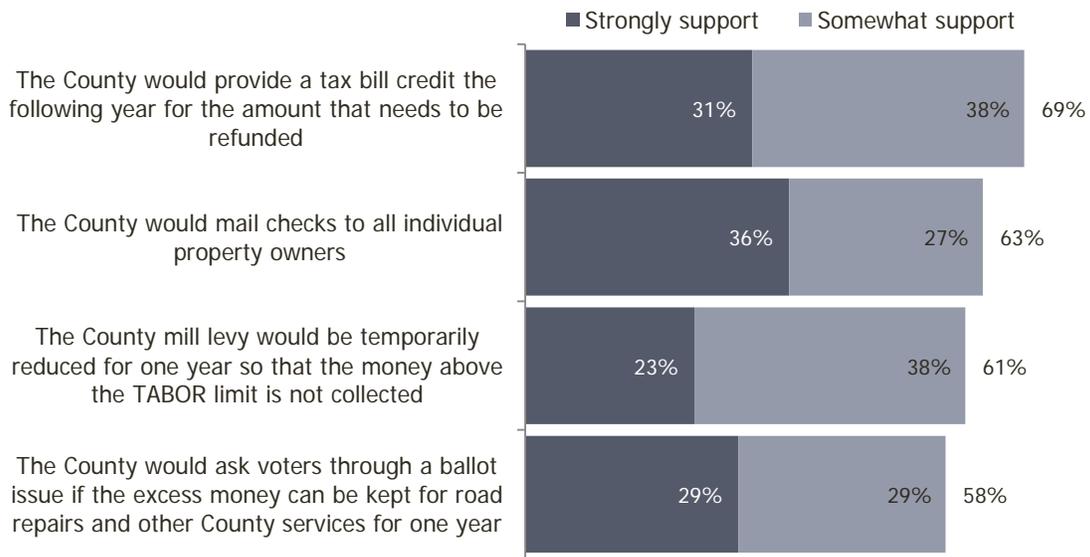
To what extent would you support or oppose a property tax increase to enhance law enforcement services (e.g., responses to calls for assistance, substation construction, new equipment) in unincorporated Jefferson County?



The third question on the survey asked residents to indicate their preference for County actions to refund excess taxes. Nearly 7 in 10 respondents supported receiving a tax bill credit for the following year. Six in 10 residents indicated that they wanted the County to mail checks to property owners or to reduce the County mill levy for one year, and slightly fewer supported the County asking voters through a ballot issue if the funds could be kept for County services.

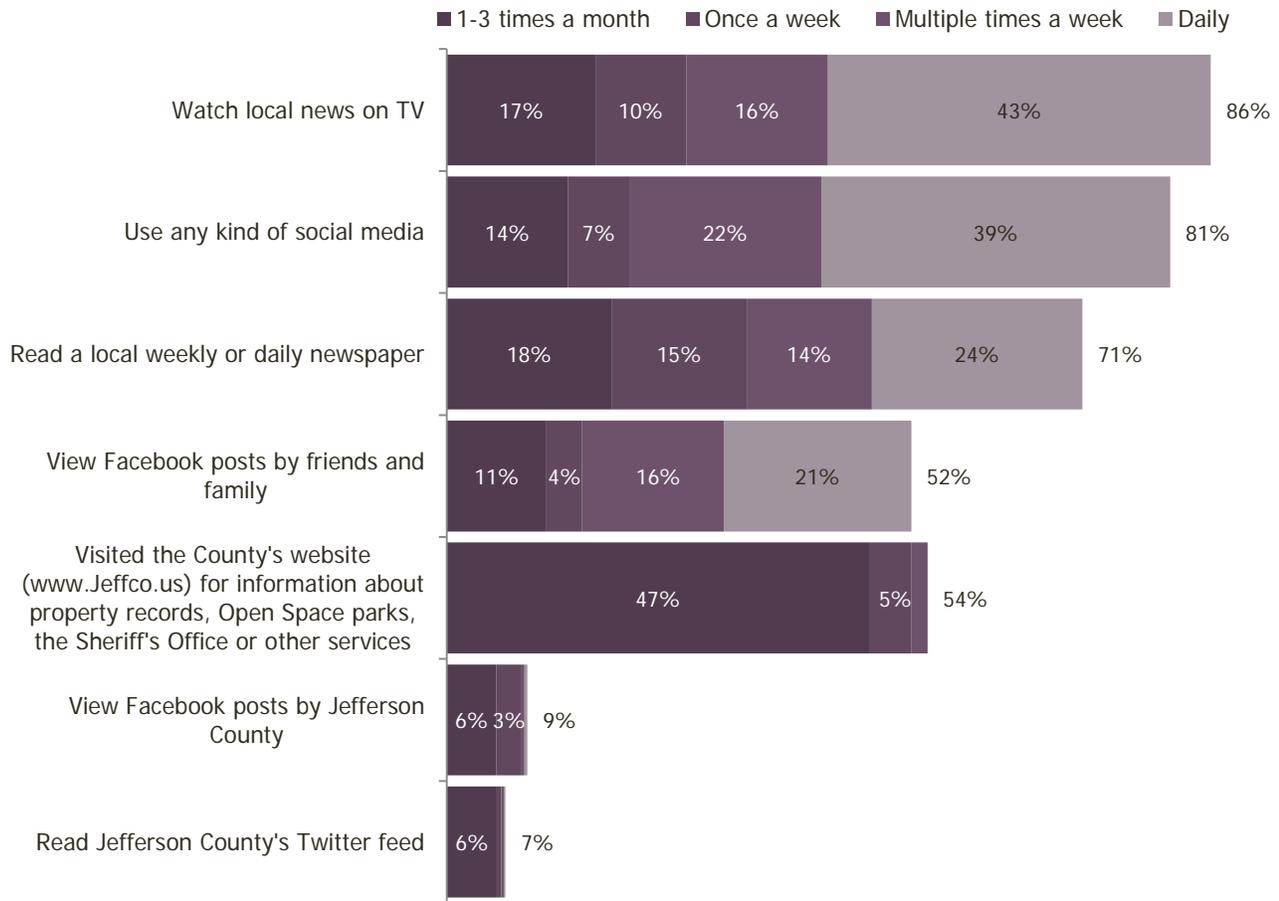
Figure 6: Uses for Excess Taxes

Jefferson County may see an increase in tax revenue in 2016 as a result of the increasing value of residential properties. If the increased tax revenue exceeds the level that is allowed in Colorado with the TABOR amendment to the State Constitution (which limits government spending), the County needs to refund the excess taxes. To what extent do you support or oppose each of the following County actions:



The next question on the survey asked residents to indicate how often they accessed County information using specific methods. More than 8 in 10 residents watched local news on TV or used any kind of social media at least once a month, and about 4 in 10 used these methods daily. About 7 in 10 read a local weekly or daily newspaper or viewed Facebook posts by friends and family at least once a month; about 2 in 10 residents performed these tasks daily. While more than half of residents used the Jefferson County website at least once a month, less than 1 in 10 viewed Jefferson County’s Facebook posts or Twitter feed at least once a month.

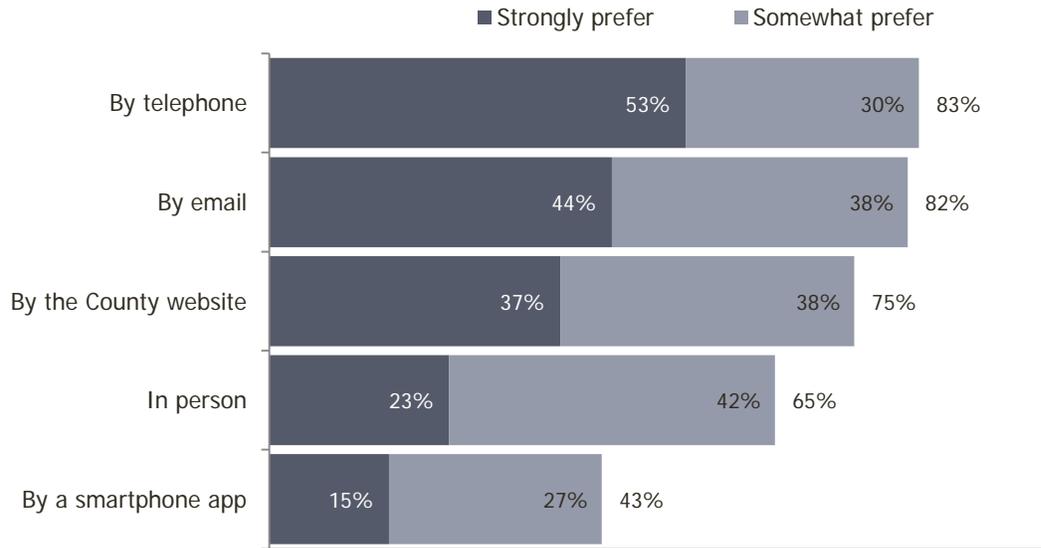
Figure 7: Accessing County Information
In a typical month, about how many times, if ever, do you do the following?



The final special-interest question on the survey asked respondents to indicate their level of preference for different methods of contacting the County. About 8 in 10 residents preferred to contact the County via telephone or email, whereas three-quarters preferred the County website and two-thirds preferred contacting the County in person. Only 4 in 10 respondents preferred a smartphone app for contacting the County.

Figure 8: Preferences for Contacting the County

Please indicate your level of preference for each of the following methods for contacting the County for services or information.



Conclusions

Residents of unincorporated Jefferson County continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

More than 9 in 10 respondents rated the overall quality of life in Jefferson County, their neighborhood as a place to live and Jefferson County as a place to live as excellent or good, ratings which were all similar to 2010 ratings and to ratings in other communities across the nation. At least 9 in 10 residents plan to remain in Jefferson County for the next five years and would recommend Jefferson County to others. Ratings for quality of life aspects in unincorporated Jefferson County tended to be higher than ratings in peer communities with populations 300,000-1,000,000.

Safety is important to 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 Jefferson County's downtown area, and at least 8 in 10 gave positive ratings for police, fire and ambulance/EMS services as well as the overall feeling of safety in Jefferson County. Most residents had not reported a crime or been the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey; all Safety ratings in Jefferson County were similar to the national benchmark and similar to or higher than ratings given in peer communities.

Economy is also a priority to residents, and ratings for it are strong.

At least 7 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings to the overall economic health of Jefferson County, the overall quality of business and service establishments, and Jefferson County as a place to work. Additionally, more than 8 in 10 residents positively rated Jefferson County as a place to visit and half favorably rated employment opportunities, ratings which were both higher than the national benchmark. Virtually all residents had purchased goods or services in Jefferson County in the past year and about 4 in 10 respondents worked in Jefferson County.

Jefferson County residents are engaged in their communities.

Virtually all residents of unincorporated Jefferson County had visited a neighborhood park or County open space park and about two-thirds had used Jefferson County recreation centers in the 12 months prior to the survey; additionally, at least 9 in 10 residents had done a favor for a neighbor or voted in local elections. All of these aspects received ratings higher than the national benchmark. In a separate special-interest question, 4 in 10 residents reported watching local news on TV daily, and about one-quarter read a local newspaper every day. About half of survey respondents reported visiting the County website at least once per month for information about County services.