



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

# Sioux Falls, SD

Community Livability Report

2019



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# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Sioux 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 674 residents of the City of Sioux Falls. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.

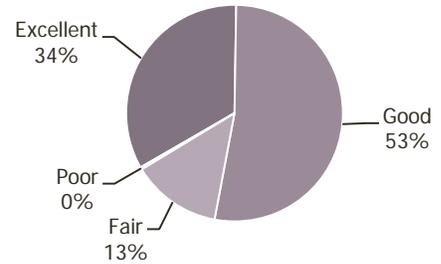


# Quality of Life in Sioux Falls

More than 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Sioux Falls as excellent or good. This was similar to 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.

Overall Quality of Life



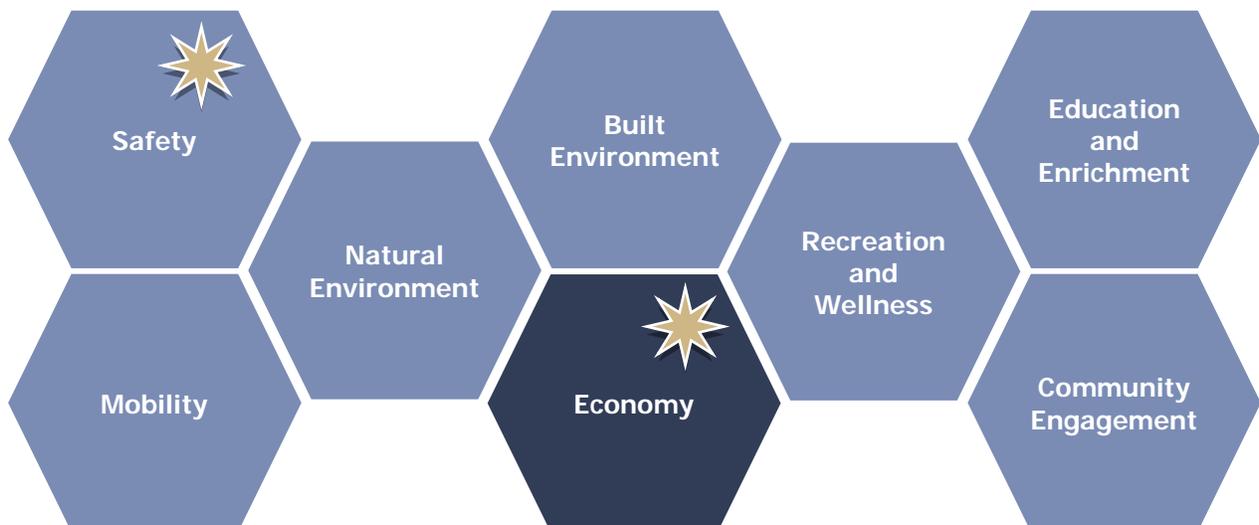
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2017, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Sioux Falls community in the coming two years. Ratings within the facet of Economy were overall rated higher than national benchmarks, while all other facets were rated similar. 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 Sioux Falls' unique questions.

## Legend

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

- Most important



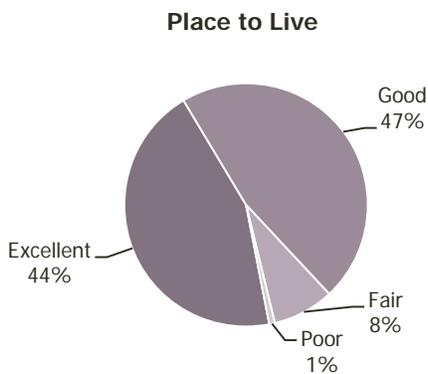
# Community Characteristics

*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 Sioux Falls, 91% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Sioux 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 Sioux Falls as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Sioux Falls and its overall appearance. At least 8 in 10 residents scored the overall image and appearance of Sioux Falls, their neighborhood as a place to live, and Sioux Falls as a place to raise children as excellent or good. Sioux Falls as a place to retire was rated positively by more than 7 in 10 residents. These evaluations were similar to the national benchmarks.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, ratings for these features were strong and similar to or higher than national benchmark ratings. In the facet of Safety, virtually all residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and at least 8 in 10 gave positive marks to the overall feeling of safety in the city and feeling safe in Sioux Falls' downtown/commercial area. Within Mobility, at least 7 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall ease of travel, availability of paths and walking trails, ease of walking and ease of travel by car; further, paths and walking trails had higher ratings than those seen in comparison communities.



Ratings of most aspects of Economy were especially strong and higher than those given in other communities across the nation. About 8 in 10 residents awarded positive scores for the overall economic health of Sioux Falls, vibrant downtown/commercial area, business and service establishments, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities and Sioux Falls as a place to work and all of these ratings were above average. The cost of living in Sioux Falls was positively rated by 6 in 10 residents, a higher level

than seen in comparison communities. Further, the rating for vibrant downtown/commercial area increased from 2017 to 2019 (for more information see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover).

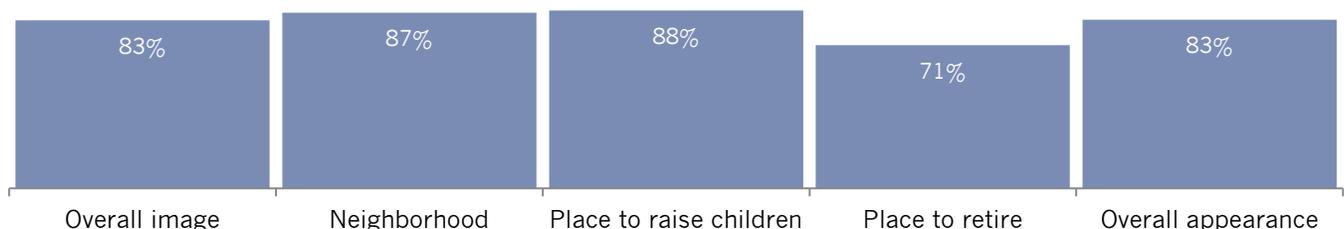
Residents' ratings within the facet of Recreation and Wellness were also strong. About 8 in 10 residents gave positive grades to health and wellness opportunities, availability of affordable mental health care and preventive health services, and fitness opportunities. These levels were higher than those observed in other jurisdictions.

Other aspects of community livability for which ratings were higher than the national average were overall quality of new development, education and enrichment opportunities, cultural/arts/music activities, social events and activities and opportunities to volunteer.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



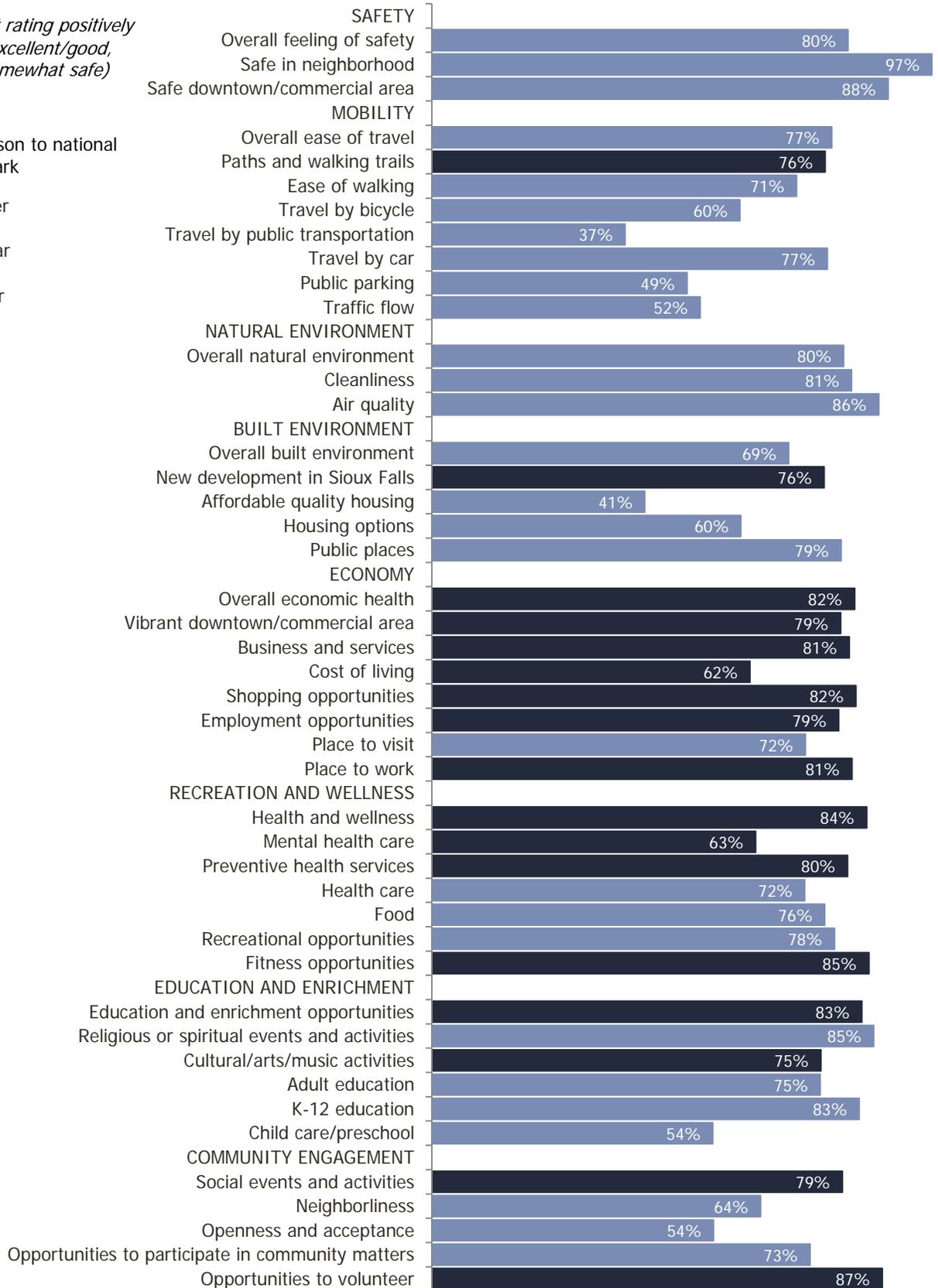
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Governance

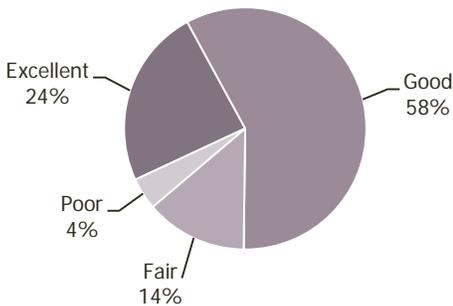
*How well does the government of Sioux Falls meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Sioux Falls as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Eight in ten residents rated the quality of City services as excellent or good, a level which was similar to comparison communities. About half of residents positively scored the services provided by the Federal Government, which was also on par with the national average.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Sioux Falls' leadership and governance. The overall direction of the City and customer service were evaluated as excellent or good by about three-quarters of respondents, and the rating for overall direction was higher than the national benchmark. Approximately 6 in 10 residents positively appraised the value of services for the taxes paid, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of Sioux Falls, being honest and treating all residents fairly and these ratings were on par with those given elsewhere. Further, ratings for overall confidence in City government, government acting in the best interest of Sioux Falls and being honest improved from 2017 to 2019.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Sioux Falls. Overall, most City services were rated positively by a majority of residents and were similar to the national benchmarks. All aspects of Safety were rated positively by at least 7 in 10 residents, and in Mobility, traffic enforcement, street lighting and snow removal were scored as excellent or good by about 7 in 10 residents. Additionally, ratings for street repair, sidewalk maintenance and snow removal improved since 2017.

Overall Quality of City Services



Aspects of Natural Environment were positively rated by at least two-thirds of respondents, and the rating for drinking water, at 86% excellent or good, was higher than the benchmark.

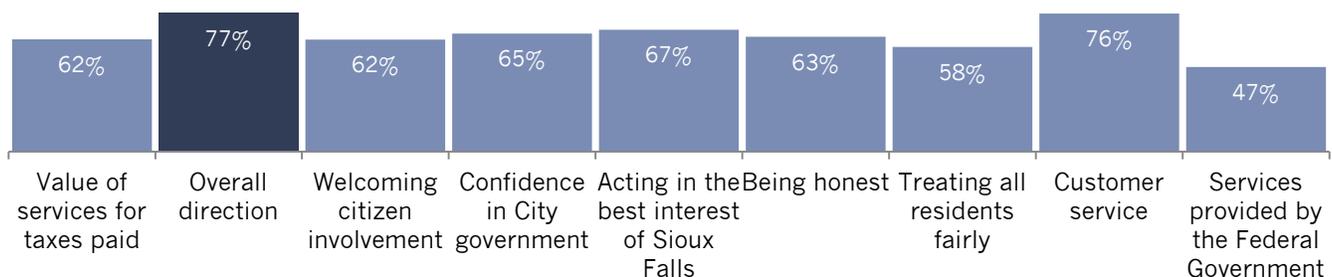
Within Recreation and Wellness, all aspects were positively scored by at least 8 in 10 residents, levels which were mostly similar to national benchmarks with the exception of health services, which was higher. Public libraries were seen as excellent or good by 9 in 10 residents, a rating similar to the national average.

Other services which received above-average ratings included land use, planning and zoning and economic development. Compared to 2017, ratings in 2019 decreased for fire prevention, but increased for natural areas preservation; land use, planning and zoning; recreation programs; and public information.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



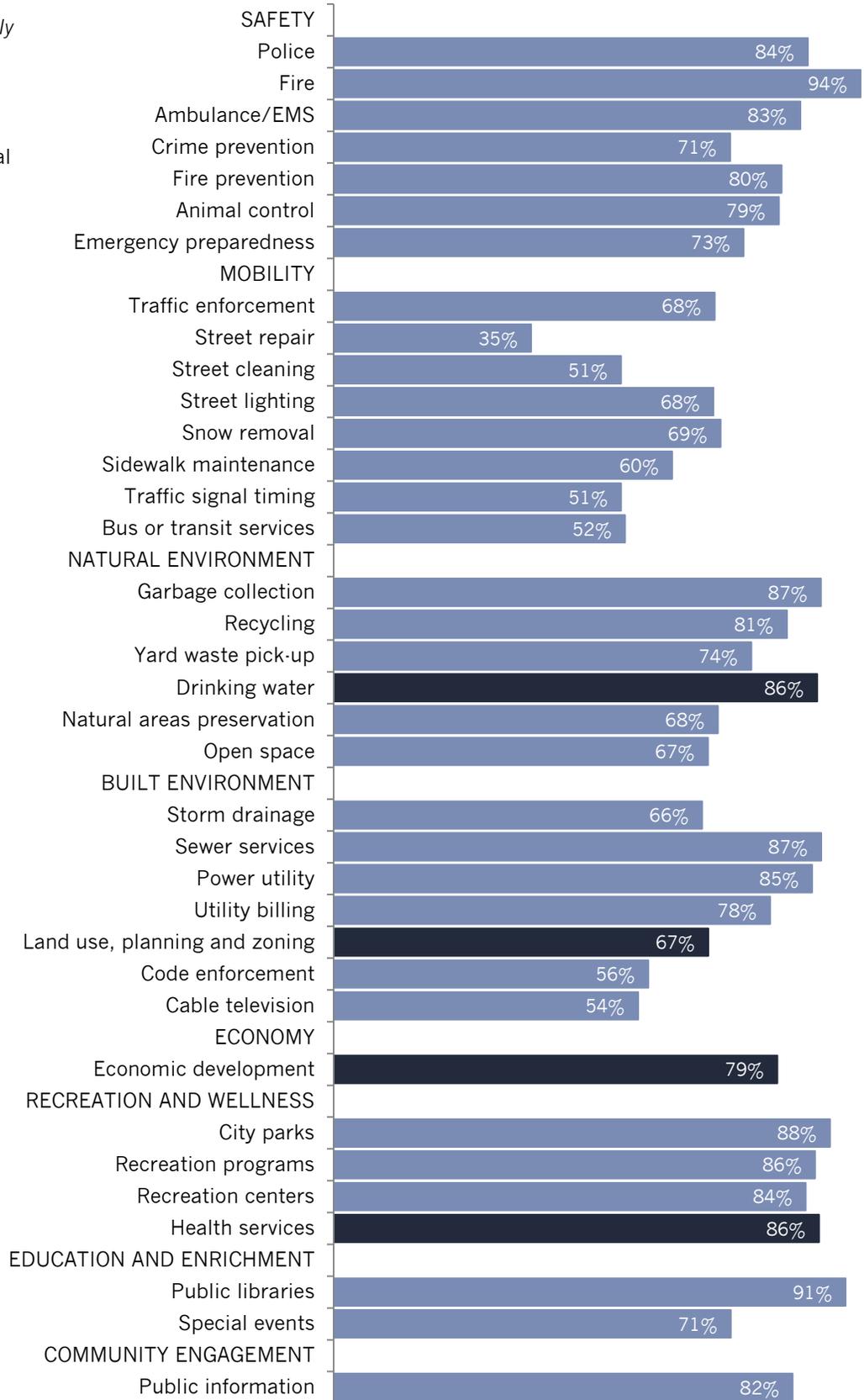
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



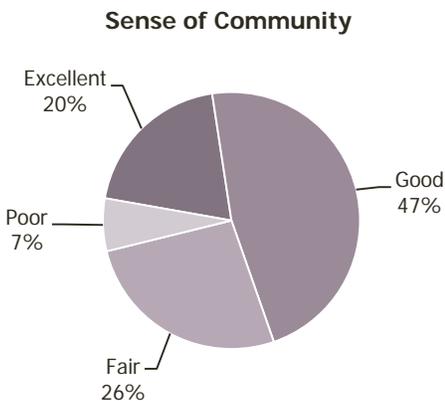
# Participation

*Are the residents of Sioux 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. Two-thirds of residents appraised the sense of community in Sioux Falls as excellent or good, and 9 in 10 respondents plan to remain in Sioux Falls for the next five years and would recommend Sioux Falls to someone who asked. One-third of residents contacted a Sioux Falls employee in the last twelve months. These proportions were similar to those seen in comparison communities across the nation.

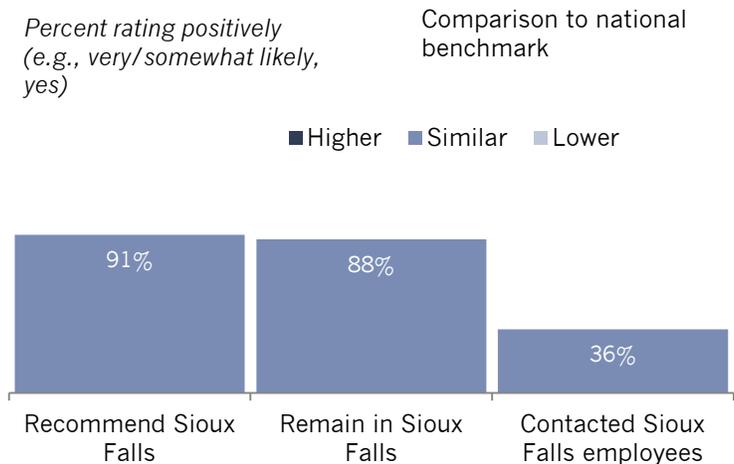
The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of participation varied widely across the eight facets, making the benchmark comparisons, as well as comparisons to Sioux Falls over time, useful for interpreting the results. About 4 in 10 respondents had carpooled instead of driving (which was similar to the national average) or walked or biked instead of driving (which was lower). Further, about 1 in 10 residents used public transportation instead of driving, which was also below average.

In Economy, virtually all residents had purchased goods or services in Sioux Falls (which was on par with other communities nationwide), and about three-quarters worked in Sioux Falls (which was higher). At least half of residents had participated in aspects of Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment, levels which were mostly similar to comparison communities. Two-thirds of residents participated in religious or spiritual activities and this level was higher than in other communities.



Levels of participation varied with Community Engagement; however, most rates were similar to those observed elsewhere. Sioux Falls residents were less likely than others to have attended a local public meeting, but more likely to have watched a local public meeting (online or on television) or volunteered.

While residents in 2019 were less likely than in 2017 to have participated in a club, all other participation rates in Sioux Falls were stable since the previous survey administration.



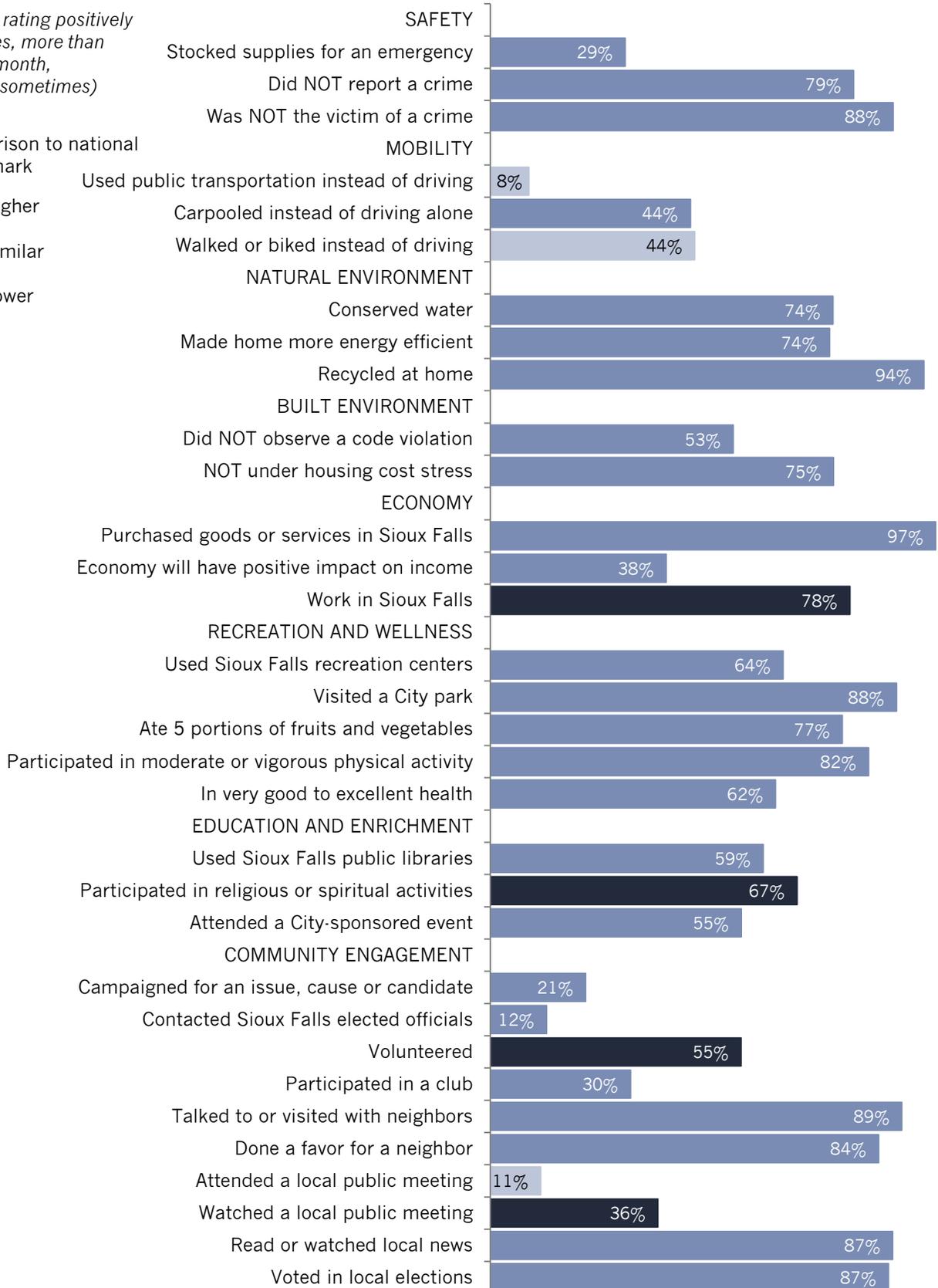
## The National Citizen Survey™

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



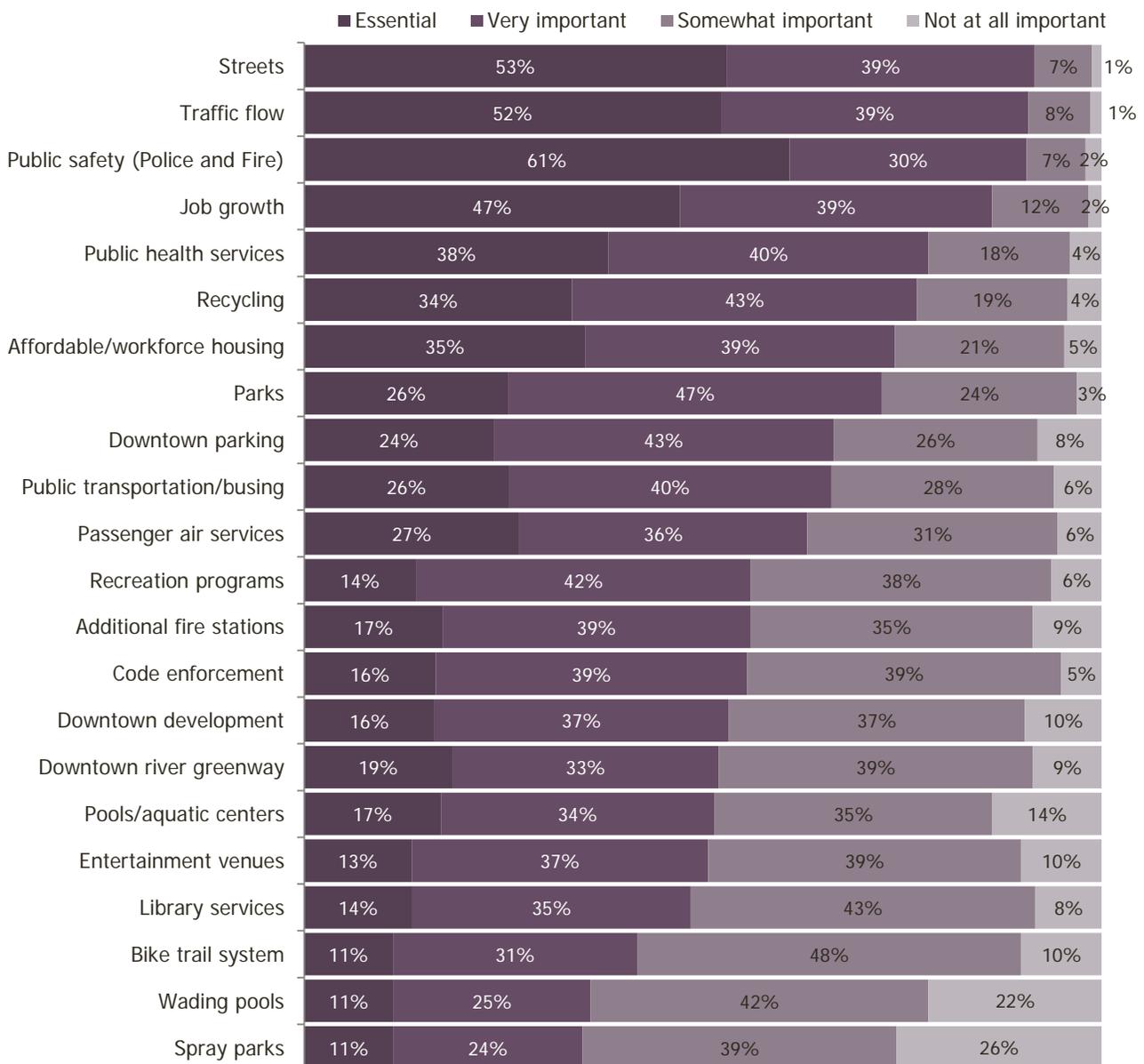
# Special Topics

The City of Sioux Falls included four questions of special interest on The NCS as well as one open-ended question. Topic areas included the importance of investing tax dollars, support for increased funding for services and health behaviors and issues, among others.

Residents were asked to rate the level of importance of investing existing tax dollars in various City services in the next two years. About 9 in 10 residents rated streets, traffic flow, and public safety (Police and Fire) as essential or very important and more than 8 in 10 felt that job growth was important. Less than half of residents rated the bike trail system, wading pools or splash parks as essential or very important.

Figure 4: Importance of Investing Existing Tax Dollars

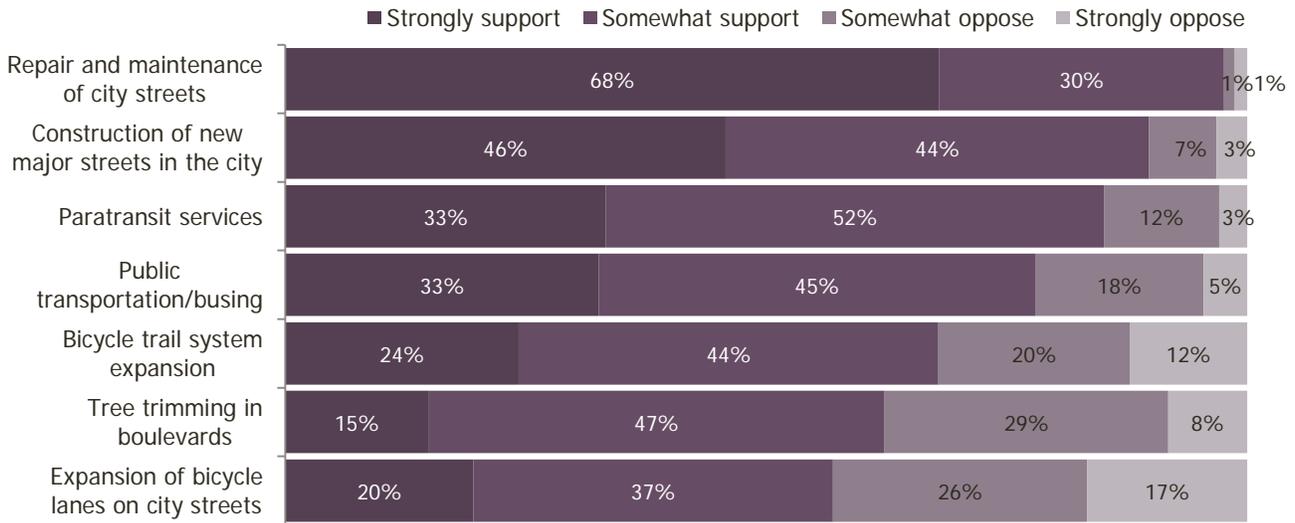
Please rate the importance of the City of Sioux Falls investing existing tax dollars over the next two years in the following:



Respondents rated their support for increased local public funding for various City services. Nearly all respondents (98%) expressed they would strongly or somewhat support an increase in funding for repair and maintenance of city streets, and 9 in 10 residents would support an increase in public funding for construction of new major streets in the city. Residents were least likely to support increased funding for the expansion of bicycle lanes on city streets; however, it is noteworthy that a majority of residents supported increased funding for all of the listed services.

Figure 5: Support for Increased Local Public Funding for Services

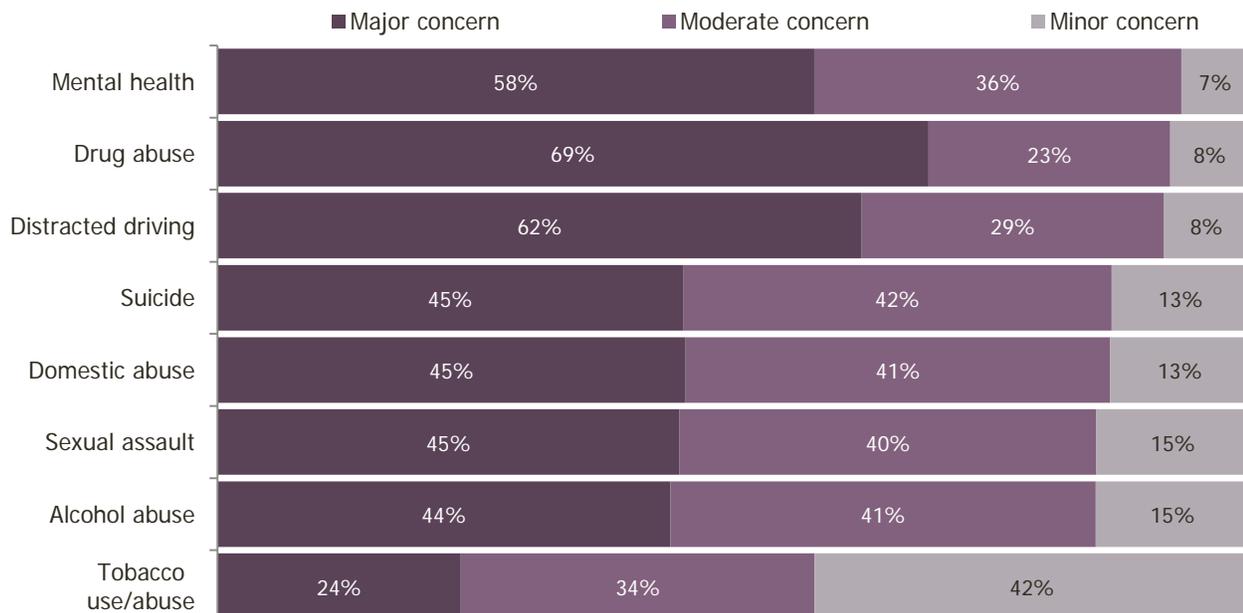
Please rate to what extent you would support or oppose increased local public funding for the following services paid for by either program cuts in other areas or increased fees:



Residents were asked which health behaviors and issues they thought were a concern in Sioux Falls. The top three concerns were mental health, drug abuse and distracted driving; about 6 in 10 residents or more felt that each of these issues were a major concern. Only one-quarter of residents thought tobacco use/abuse was a major concern.

Figure 6: Concern for Health Behaviors and Issues

To what extent, if at all, do you think each of these health behaviors and issues is a current concern in Sioux Falls?

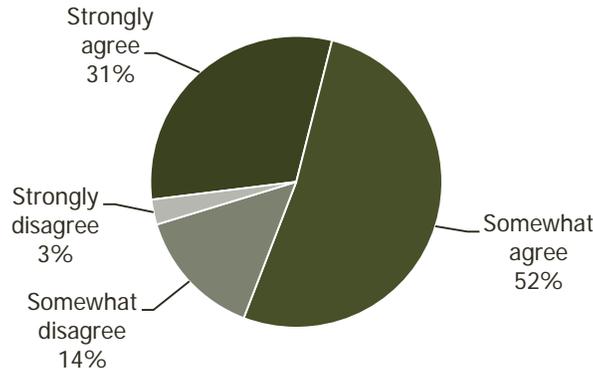


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When asked how much they agreed or disagreed with placing a higher priority on investing taxpayer resources to promote job growth and workforce development, more than 8 in 10 residents strongly or somewhat agreed a higher priority should be placed on investing taxpayer resources on job growth and workforce development.

Figure 7: Investing in Job Growth and Workforce Development

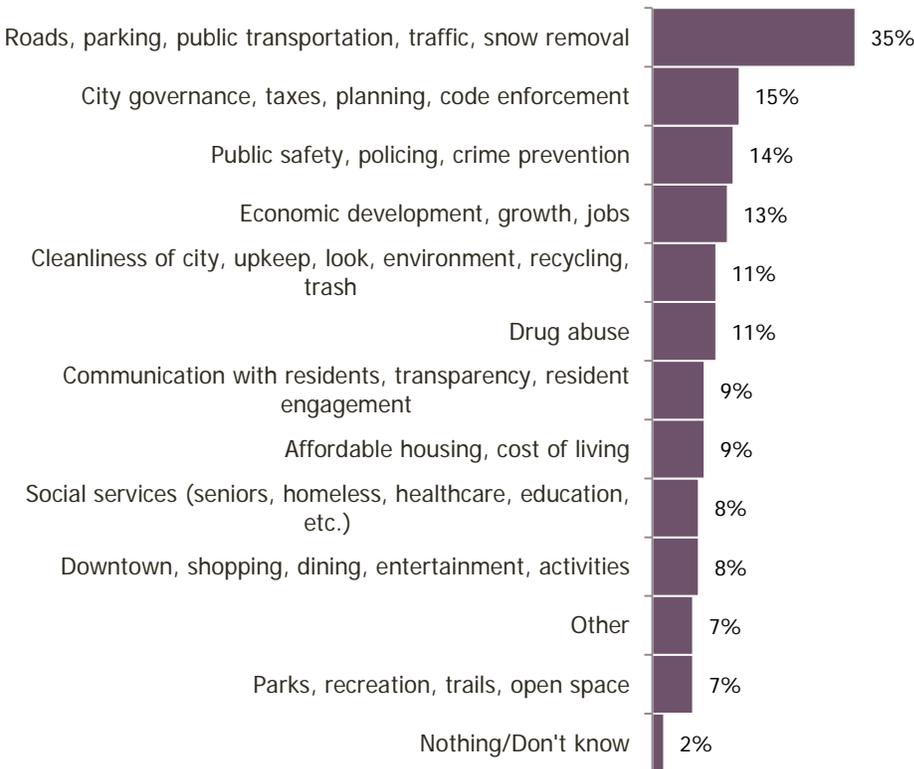
Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The City of Sioux Falls should place a higher priority on investing taxpayer resources to promote job growth and workforce development."



The survey also included an open-ended question in which residents could write in a response in their own words. A total of 674 surveys were completed by Sioux Falls residents; of these, 291 respondents wrote in responses for the open-ended question. The improvements suggested by the most residents (over one-third of comments) were related to roads, parking, public transportation, traffic, and snow removal (for more information see the *Open End Report* under separate cover).

Figure 8: Improvements to Sioux Falls

What can City government do to improve Sioux Falls? Please describe using the space below:



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

# Conclusions

## Sioux Falls residents continue to rate their community positively.

As in previous years, about 9 in 10 Sioux Falls' residents assessed their overall quality of life and Sioux Falls as a place to live as excellent or good. More than 8 in 10 residents positively scored the overall image and appearance of Sioux Falls, their neighborhood as a place to live and Sioux Falls as a place to raise children, while 7 in 10 were pleased with Sioux Falls as a place to retire. Nine in ten respondents planned to remain in Sioux Falls for the next five years and would recommend Sioux Falls to someone who asked. These ratings were all similar to the national benchmarks and remained stable from 2017 to 2019.

## Economy is an important and strong feature of Sioux Falls.

As in 2017, Economy was identified by residents as an area of focus for the City for the next two years. Most evaluations within this facet were especially strong and rated more positively than in benchmark jurisdictions. About 8 in 10 residents awarded positive scores for the overall economic health of Sioux Falls, vibrant downtown/commercial area, business and service establishments, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities and Sioux Falls as a place to work, and all of these ratings were above average. The cost of living in Sioux Falls was positively rated by 6 in 10 residents and this rating was also higher than seen in comparison communities. Further, residents were more likely to give favorable marks to the vibrancy of Sioux Falls' downtown/commercial area in 2019 than in 2017.

While residents are pleased with Economy, they would like to see the City maintain focus in this area. When asked to rate the level of importance of investing existing tax dollars in various City services in the next two years, more than 8 in 10 felt that job growth was essential or very important. Additionally, when asked about their level of agreement with placing a higher priority on investing taxpayer resources to promote job growth and workforce development, more than 8 in 10 residents strongly or somewhat agreed that this area should be a higher priority.

## Mobility ratings are strong, but residents would still like to see improvements.

Within Mobility, more than three-quarters of residents gave positive ratings to the overall ease of travel, paths and walking trails and travel by car. The availability of paths and walking trails received higher ratings than in comparison communities. Traffic enforcement, street lighting and snow removal were scored as excellent or good by nearly 7 in 10 residents. Scores for street repair, snow removal, sidewalk maintenance, and traffic signal timing all increased since the 2017 iteration of this survey.

However, only 4 in 10 residents reported having walked or biked instead of driving, and 1 in 10 residents used public transportation instead of driving; these levels were lower than seen in comparison communities. Thinking about the level of importance of investing existing tax dollars in various City services in the next two years, about 9 in 10 residents rated streets and traffic flow as essential or very important. When asked to rate their level of support for increased local public funding for various City services, nearly all respondents (98%) expressed they would strongly or somewhat support an increase in funding for repair and maintenance of city streets, and 9 in 10 residents would support an increase in public funding for construction of new major streets in the city. Finally, when asked to write in their own words what City government could do to improve Sioux Falls, the most frequent improvements suggested were related to roads, parking, public transportation, traffic, and snow removal.

## Recreation and Wellness is also a highlight of the community.

About 8 in 10 residents gave positive reviews to health and wellness opportunities, the availability of affordable mental health care and preventive health services, and fitness opportunities. These levels were higher than those observed in other jurisdictions. Further, more than 8 in 10 residents gave excellent or good reviews to City parks, recreation programs, recreation centers and health services, and the rating for health services was also above average. About three-quarters of residents thought it was essential or very important for the City to invest existing tax dollars in parks over the next two years. However, when asked which health behaviors and issues they thought were a concern in Sioux Falls, about 6 in 10 residents or more felt that mental health or drug abuse were a major concern; thus, these may comprise further areas of focus for the City in the coming years.