



Golden, CO

Community Livability Report

2019



NRC
National Research Center Inc.

2955 Valmont Road Suite 300
Golden, Colorado 80301
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
icma.org • 800-745-8780

Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Golden 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 11



The National Community Survey™
© 2001-2019 National Research Center, Inc.

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 Golden. 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 701 residents of the City of Golden. 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 Golden

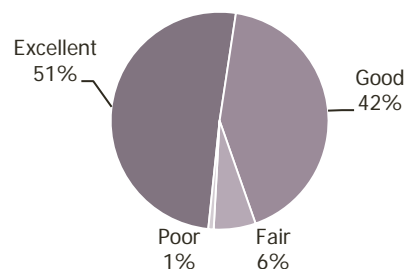
Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Golden as excellent or good. This rating was higher than the national benchmark comparison (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

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. Ratings across all facets tended to be positive and were rated similarly to comparison communities. Residents identified Safety, Natural Environment and Built Environment as priorities for the Golden community in the coming two years. 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 Golden's unique questions.

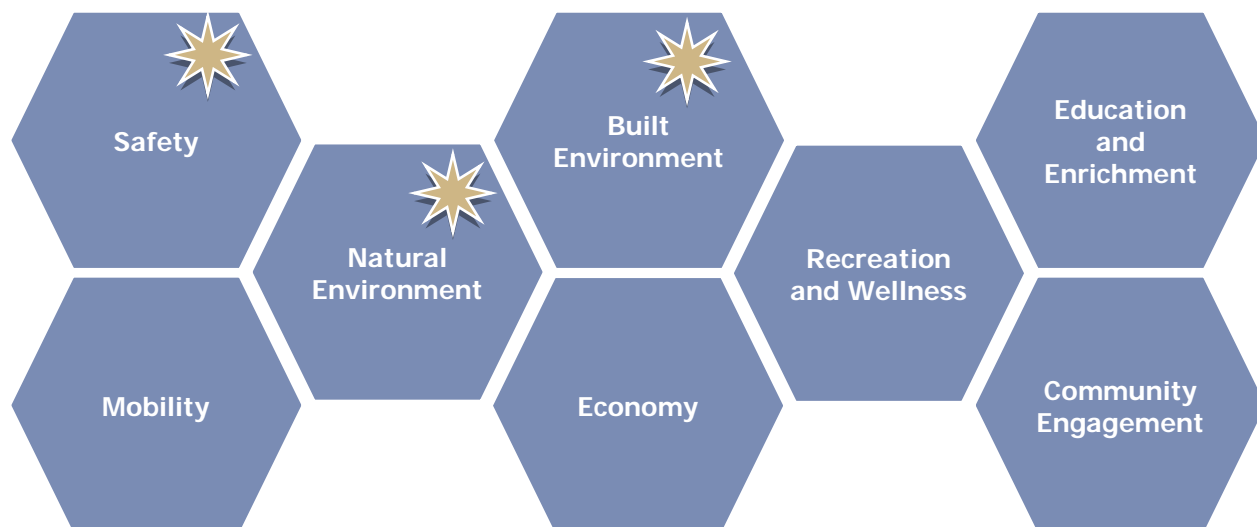
Overall Quality of Life



Legend

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

- Most important



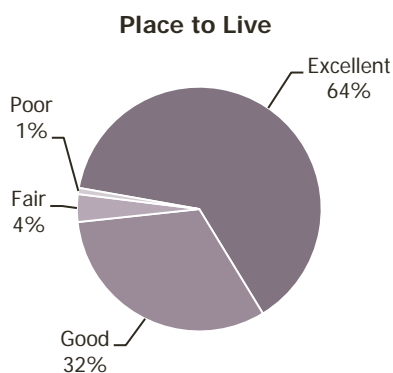
Community Characteristics

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 Golden, 96% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Golden as a place to live were higher than 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 Golden as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Golden and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the overall image of Golden, their neighborhoods, Golden as a place to raise children and to the overall appearance of the city. About 7 in 10 gave high marks to the City as a place to retire, this ratings was higher than the national average but decreased from 2016 to 2019 (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. At least 9 in 10 residents gave high marks to each aspect of Safety and these ratings were similar to those in comparison communities. Within Mobility, all ratings were higher than or similar to the benchmarks; while ratings were strong and tended to be positive, ratings decreased for traffic flow, ease of travel by car, travel by public transportation and public parking. About 9 in 10 respondents gave high marks to the quality of the overall natural environment in Golden and to its cleanliness; these ratings were higher than ratings observed in comparison communities and remained stable over time. About three-quarters of respondents gave positive assessments to air quality, this rating was similar to the benchmark but decreased from 2016 to 2019. Residents assessments of Golden's Built environment were a mix of positive and negative. Fewer than 2 in 10 gave positive marks to the availability of affordable quality housing in Golden and about 3 in 10 positively rated housing options; these ratings were lower than other communities across the nation. Further, ratings for housing options decreased in 2019. About half or more gave high marks to the overall quality of new development and to the overall quality of the built



marks to the quality of the overall natural environment in Golden and to its cleanliness; these ratings were higher than ratings observed in comparison communities and remained stable over time. About three-quarters of respondents gave positive assessments to air quality, this rating was similar to the benchmark but decreased from 2016 to 2019. Residents assessments of Golden's Built environment were a mix of positive and negative. Fewer than 2 in 10 gave positive marks to the availability of affordable quality housing in Golden and about 3 in 10 positively rated housing options; these ratings were lower than other communities across the nation. Further, ratings for housing options decreased in 2019. About half or more gave high marks to the overall quality of new development and to the overall quality of the built

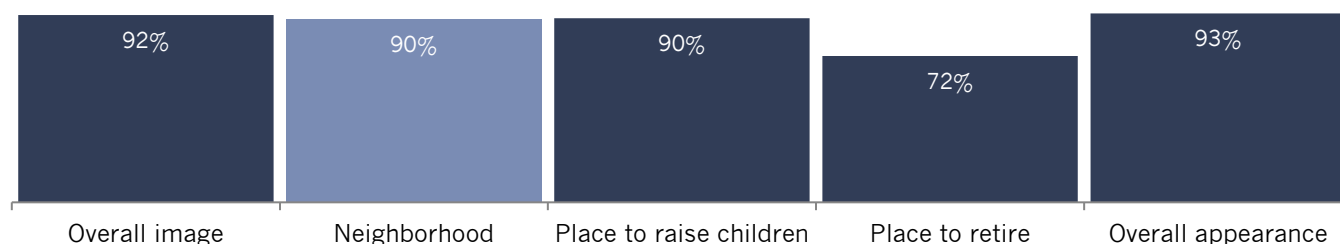
environment in Golden; these were similar to the national benchmarks but decreased over time. Close to 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to public places where people want to spend time; this rating was higher than the national average and remained stable from 2016 to 2019. Half of the assessed aspects of Economy received high marks from 73% (Golden as a place to work to) 91% (Golden as a place to visit) and were higher than the national benchmarks. About 19% gave positive ratings to the overall cost of living in Golden; this rating decreased over time and was lower than in comparison communities nationwide. Ratings within Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement tended to be positive and similar to the benchmarks. Assessments of recreational opportunities, fitness opportunities and social events and activities were higher than those observed elsewhere.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

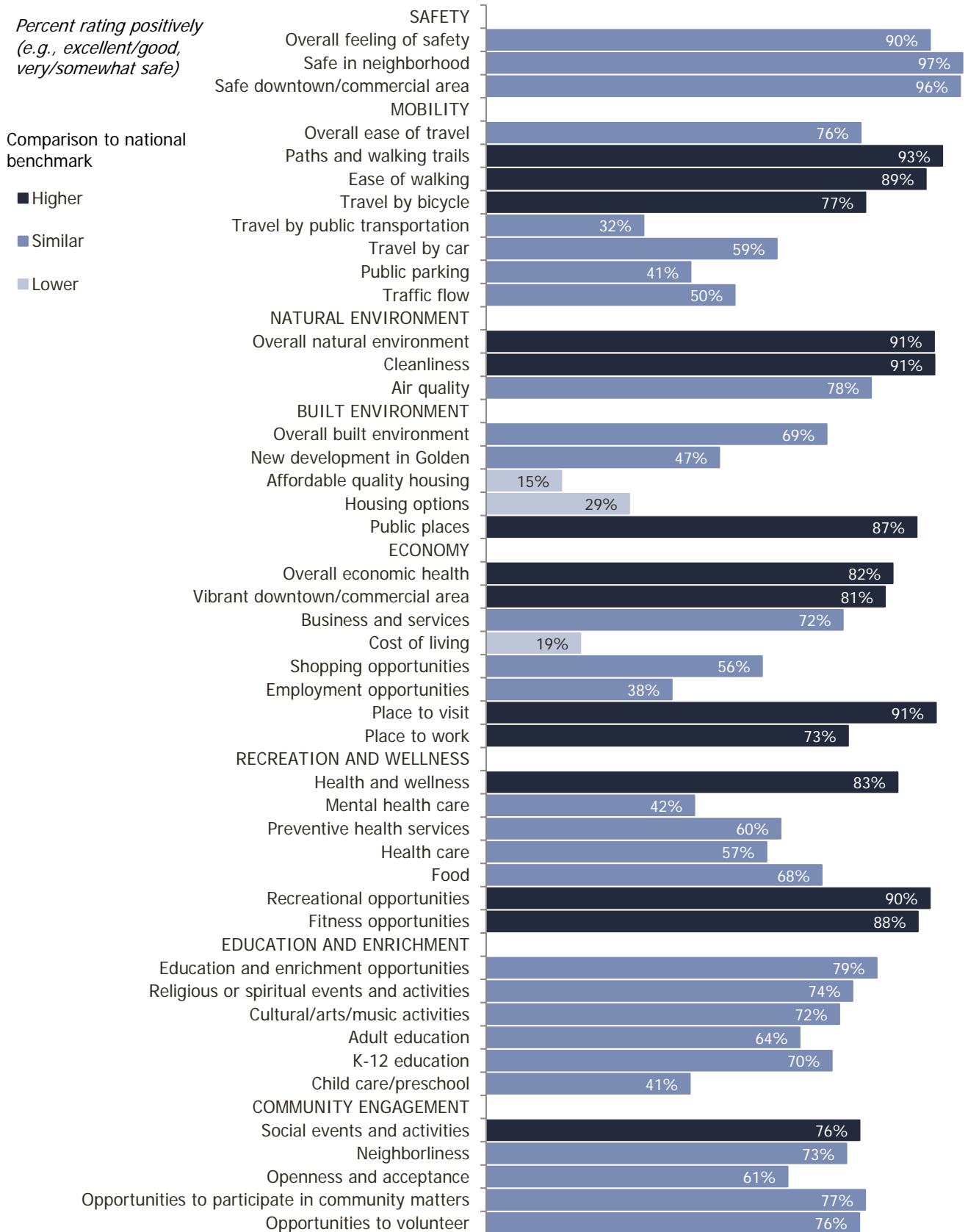
■ Higher

■ Similar



The National Community Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

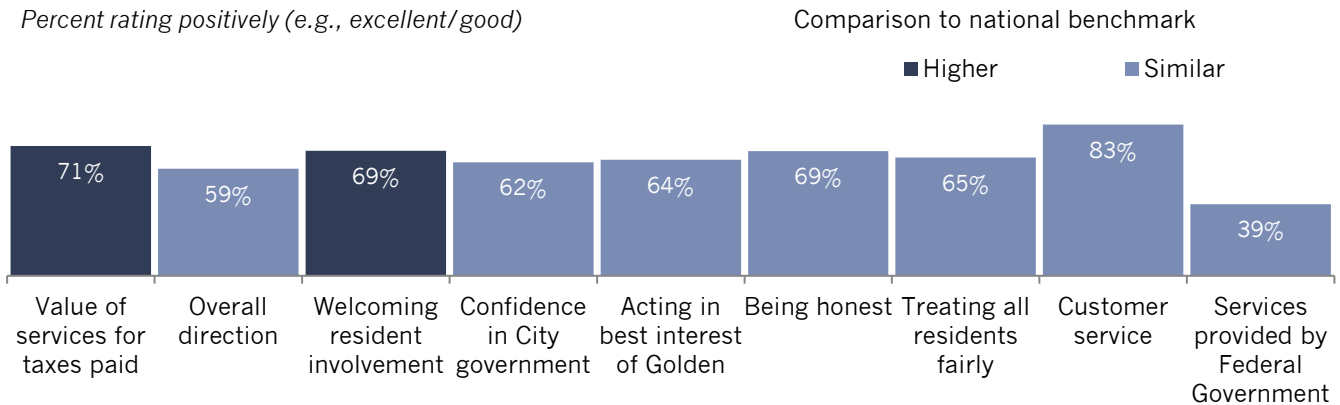
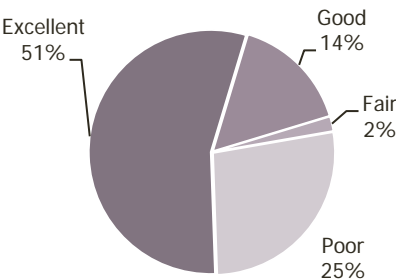
How well does the government of Golden meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Golden as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Golden; while about 4 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the Federal Government. Both assessments were on par with comparison communities; and ratings for the Federal Government decreased from 2016 to 2019.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Golden's leadership and governance. All aspects received high marks from about 6 in 10 respondents or more. Ratings for the value of services for taxes paid and for the job City government does at welcoming citizen involvement eclipsed ratings in comparison communities; all other ratings were on par with peers. While these ratings were strong; several aspects decreased from 2016 to 2019.

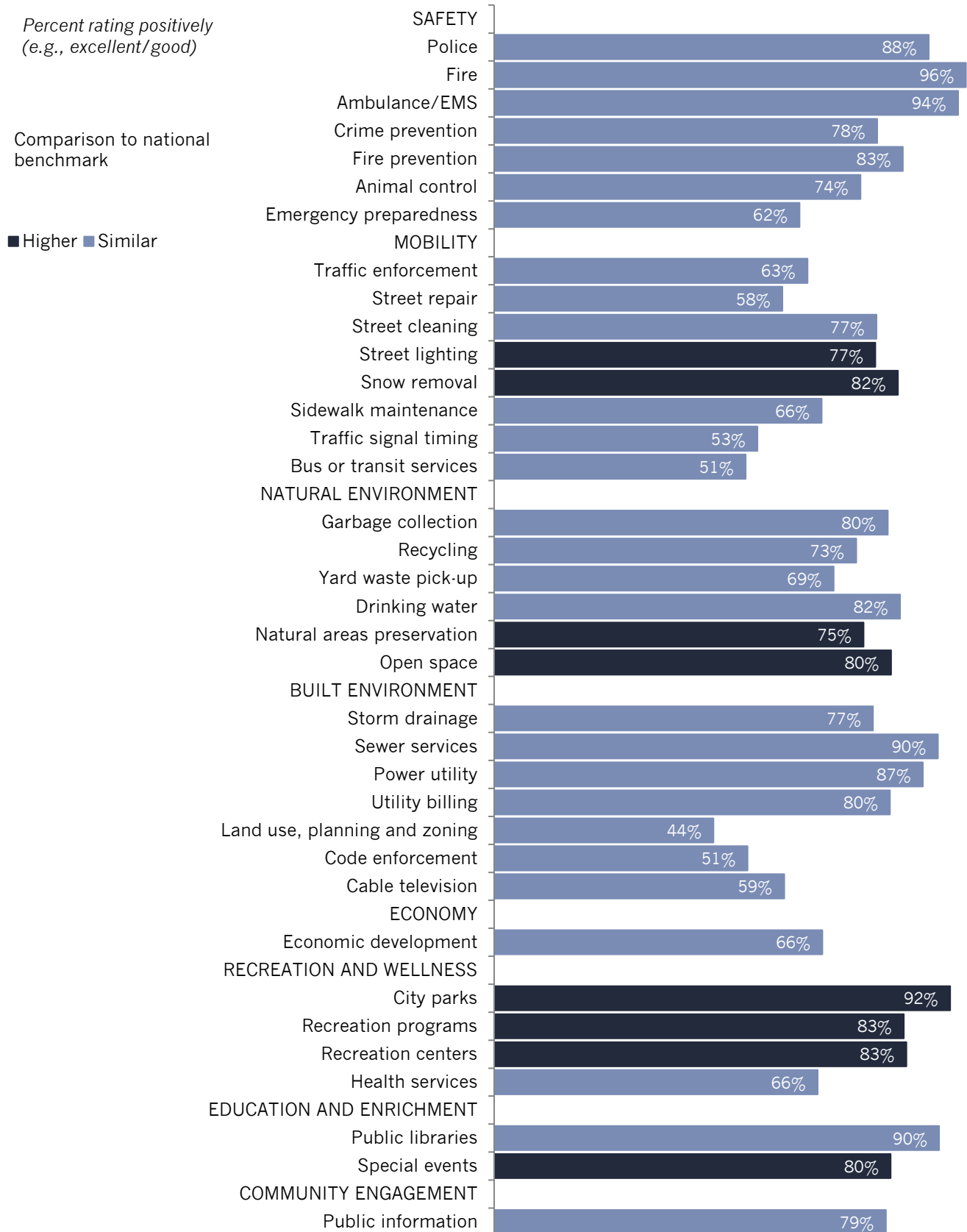
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Golden. Broadly, Golden residents gave positive marks to almost all aspects of Governance and these ratings were all similar to or higher than the national benchmarks. At least three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to street lighting, snow removal, natural areas preservation and open space and these ratings eclipsed national averages. Ratings for snow removal and drinking water increased from 2016 to 2019. Most aspects of Recreation and Wellness were also higher than the national benchmarks, and respondents also gave notably high marks to special events in Golden. However, many of these above average marks were trending down from 2016 to 2019.

Overall Quality of City Services



The National Community Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

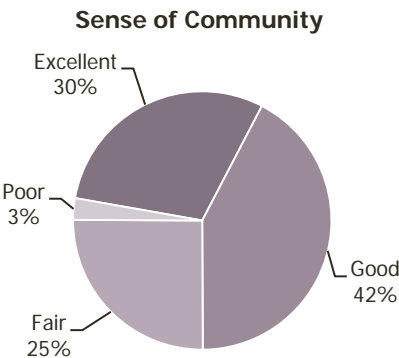


Participation

Are the residents of Golden 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 9 in 10 were likely to recommend living in Golden and planned to remain in Golden; these rates were on par with national averages and were stable over time.

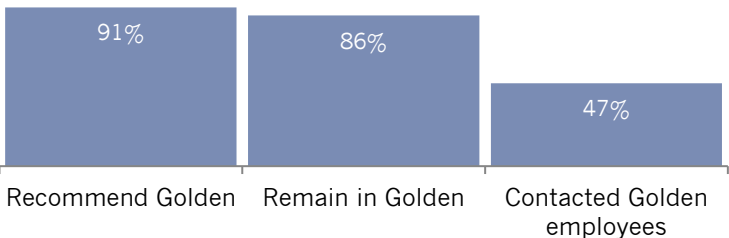
The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of Participation varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparisons, as well as comparisons to Golden over time, useful for interpreting the results. Within Mobility, Golden residents displayed higher rates of participation than their peers. Recreation and Wellness items had average participation rates except for visiting a City park, which saw higher use than others. Within Education and Enrichment, Golden residents reported lower levels of participating in religious or spiritual events or activities but higher levels of attending City-sponsored events than residents in comparison communities. Community Engagement rates were generally similar to the rest of the country. More Golden residents reported that they had participated in a club or had contacted Golden elected officials in 2019 compared to 2016.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar



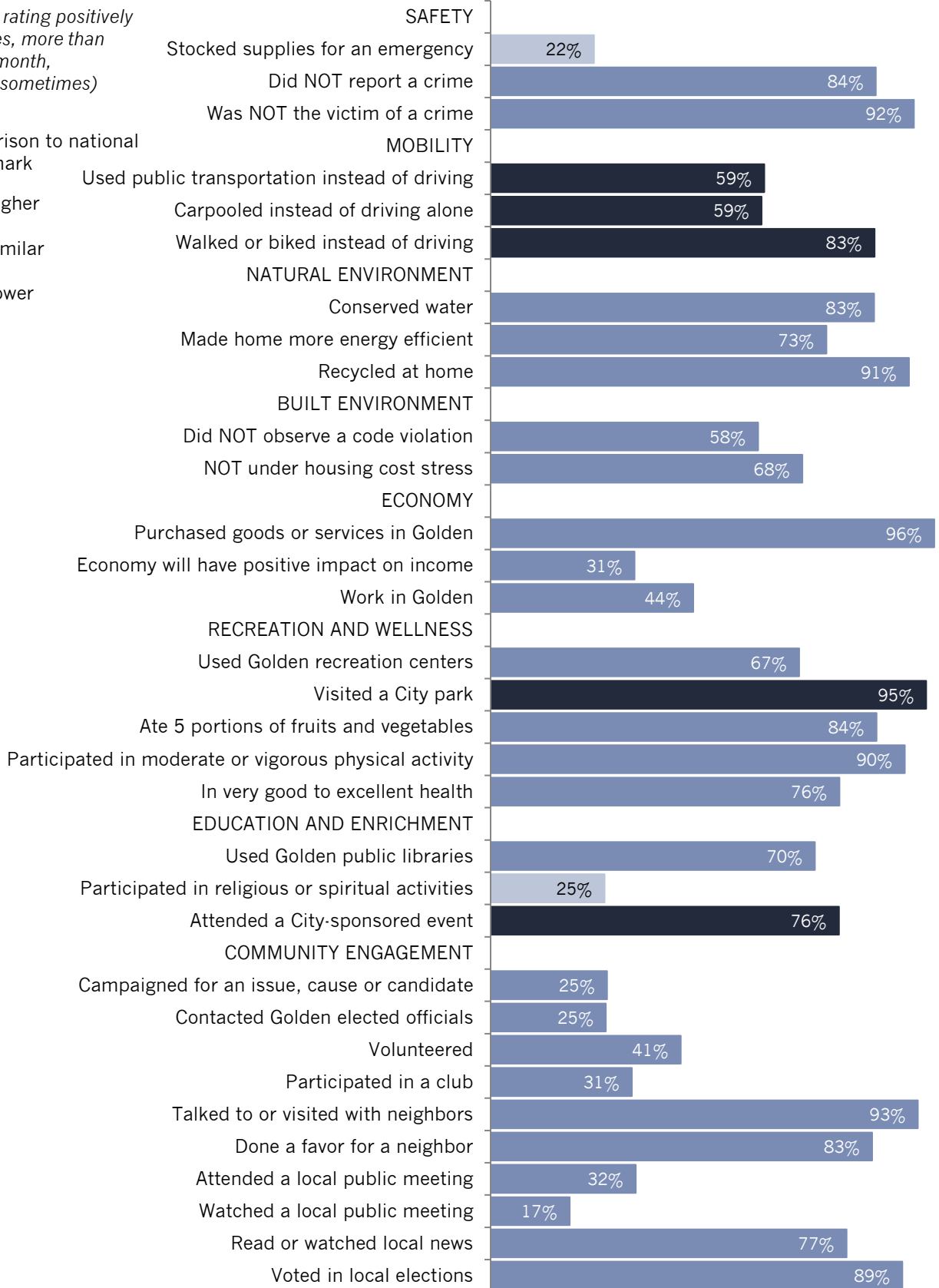
The National Community Survey™

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

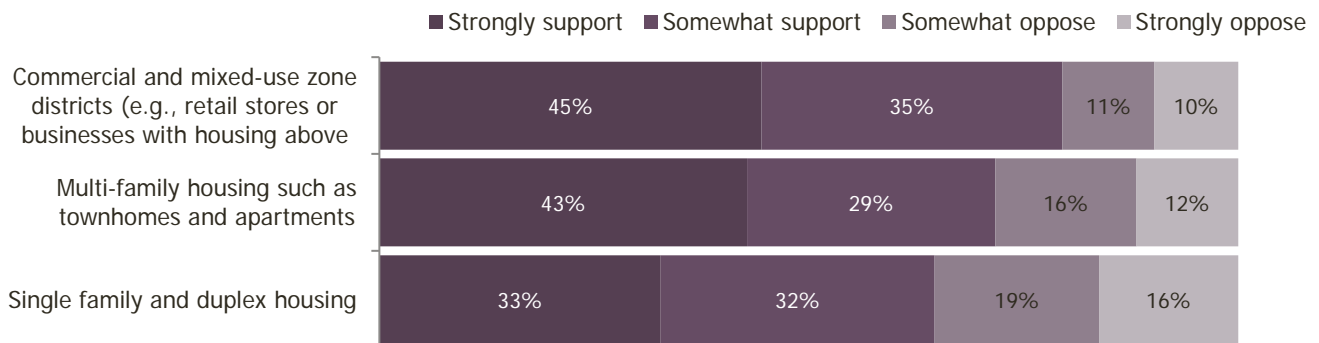


Special Topics

The City of Golden included four questions of special interest on The NCS. The questions addressed a range of topics, including building regulations, challenges in Golden, the proposed sale of the Astor house and proposed lodging taxes. A majority of Golden residents expressed support for the City adopting additional architectural design requirements for Commercial and mixed-use zone districts (80% indicating support), multi-family housing (72%) and for single family and duplex housing (65%).

Figure 4: Building Regulations

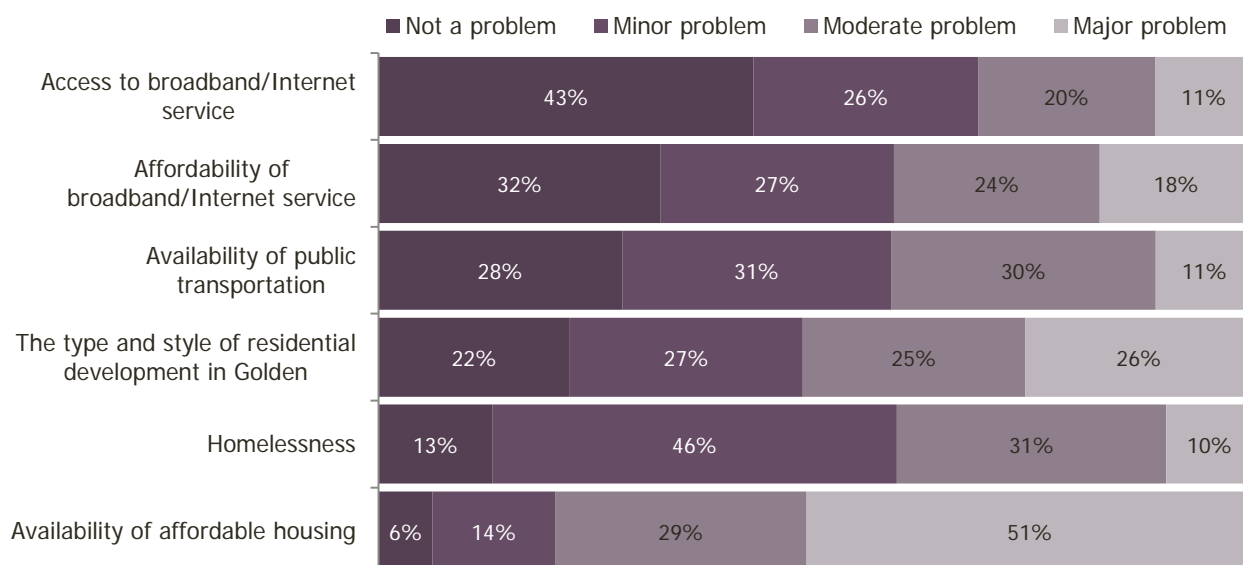
The City of Golden currently regulates the height, bulk and setback of buildings. Some cities have additional regulations regarding design, such as building materials, color and/or other architectural elements (similar to how an HOA functions). How much would you support or oppose the City of Golden adopting additional architectural design requirements for each of the following types of construction?



Golden residents assessed the extent to which various items were problematic in Golden. A majority of respondents felt that each item was at least a minor problem in Golden: the availability of affordable housing was seen as a major problem by about half of the respondents, and the type and style of residential development in Golden was also assessed as a problem.

Figure 5: Current Challenges

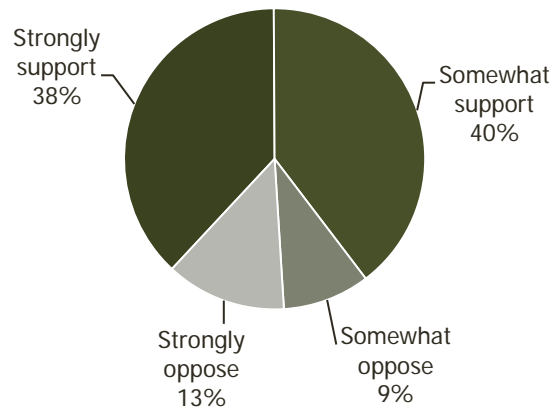
Please indicate the extent to which you think each of the following are a problem, if at all, in the City of Golden:



The City also sought resident opinion on the potential sale of the Astor House. About 78% of residents indicated support for the sale of the historic property, with 38% indicating strong support for the sale. Only about 1 in 10 residents indicated strong opposition.

Figure 6: Proposed sale of Astor House

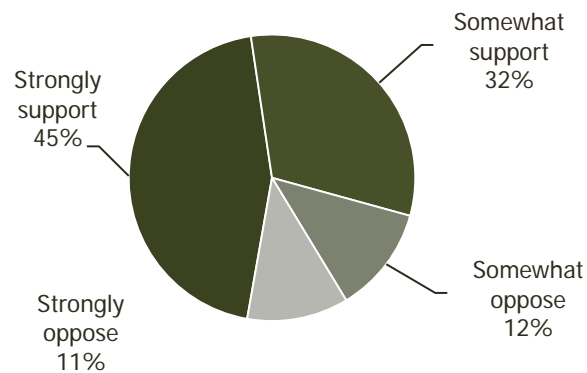
The City of Golden currently owns the Historic Astor House, located Downtown on 12th and Arapahoe, which is a 150 year-old structure previously used as a hotel and boarding house for over a century. Currently the building is unused and requires at least \$500,000 in investments to make it habitable. The City is considering placing a proposal for the sale of the Astor House property on the ballot, which would require the new owner to ensure historic preservation, require significant community use of the property, and include a large investment from the owner. However, the property would no longer be owned by the City. Knowing this tradeoff, how much would you support or oppose the sale of the property?



In the final special interest question; residents were given the opportunity to express their opinions regarding a potential lodging tax. About 77% of respondents supported instituting a lodging tax to visitors staying in hotels, bed and breakfasts and short-term rentals in Golden.

Figure 7: Proposed Lodging Tax

The City of Golden is considering enacting a lodging tax for visitors staying in hotels, bed and breakfasts and short-term rentals. Funds from this tax would be dedicated to offsetting visitors' impact on the city by investing in projects such as: infrastructure, environmental, open space, parks, cultural and/or community resources. How much would you support or oppose the City of Golden enacting a lodging tax on visitors?



Conclusions

Golden remains a great place to visit and live

More than 9 in 10 residents rated Golden as excellent or good place to live and a similar number gave positive marks to the overall image of the City, their neighborhoods and Golden as a place to raise children. The opportunities in the city for health, recreation, fitness and social events were rated higher than those in other communities across the nation. Mobility options for cycling, walking and paths and trails also were regarded very positively and exceeded national benchmarks. Further, almost all residents felt Golden was a great place to visit. Golden's vibrant downtown, shopping and public places were rated highly and above the nation. The overall appearance of the city also received outstanding marks. Almost all Golden residents reported feeling safe in the city. These strong ratings tended to remain stable from 2016 to 2019.

Golden's economy is strong but the community faces affordability and mobility challenges

Residents gave Golden's economy high marks. About 80% of residents rated the community as excellent or good in terms of overall economic health and its vibrant downtown while 73% thought Golden was an excellent or good place to work. Golden was given especially strong marks as a place to visit (91%). All these aspects were scored above the nation. Although ratings for Golden as a place to work, shopping opportunities and economic development decreased from 2016, all other economic indicators on the survey remained stable since 2016.

With strong economies and attractive communities comes scarcity. One of the biggest challenges found in this survey was affordability. Only 19% rated the cost of living in Golden as excellent or good, a decrease from 2016. The lack of affordability was most evident in the assessments given to affordable housing with only 15% of respondents giving a positive rating, lower than the national norm. Related, the variety of housing options was rated positively by fewer than 30%, which was lower than the national benchmark comparisons and represented a decrease over time.

A thriving economy has increased growth and also has lessened mobility in the town; several aspects of Mobility trended down from 2016 to 2019. Those indicators of mobility that decreased in 2019 included perception of traffic flow, travel by car, travel by public transportation, public parking, traffic enforcement and bus or transit services. While some might argue that these types of mobility issues are a good problem to have, as they are symptomatic of a popular destination, they could also be detrimental to the overall community livability for residents.

However, many services related to Mobility were perceived positively by a majority of residents and ratings for snow removal and street lighting were higher than the national averages. Ratings for snow removal increased from 2016 to 2019. Further, ratings for the ease of travel by bicycle, ease of walking and paths and walking trails were higher than the benchmarks.

Perhaps due to the thriving economy and growth, residents prioritize the Natural Environment and Built Environment in Golden

As in 2016, Natural Environment was selected as a top item of focus for the Golden community in the next two years; about 90% of residents indicated it was essential or very important to them. Ratings for overall natural environment and natural areas preservation both received high quality scores (91% and 75% respectively) and were higher than the national norms. Other aspects of the Natural Environment that also received assessments higher than the national benchmarks included the cleanliness of Golden and open space. However, while ratings for Natural Environment were strong (and no assessments were lower than the national benchmarks), ratings declined in 2019 compared to 2016 for air quality, open space and natural areas preservation. Ratings for drinking water increased during this same time period. All other aspects of Natural Environment remained stable over time.

Survey respondents also identified Built Environment as a top community focus area. Ratings within this facet tended to be a mix of positive and negative assessments. For instance, while 87% gave high marks to public places in Golden (higher than national averages), far fewer gave positive assessments to housing options (29%) and affordably quality housing (15%) as mentioned earlier. Residents gave lower ratings to the overall quality of new development in Golden, housing options, the overall built environment, land use, planning and zoning and to code enforcement in 2016 compared to 2019. About half of respondents felt that the type and style of residential development in Golden was a problem. This may be why a strong majority of Golden residents supported the City adopting additional building regulations.