

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

# Dover, NH

## Community Livability Report

2019



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# About

The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of Dover. 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).

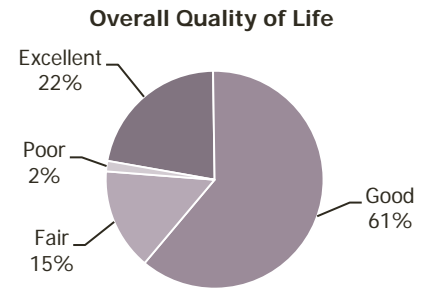
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 450 residents of the City of Dover. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Dover

About 8 in 10 residents rated the quality of life in Dover as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.



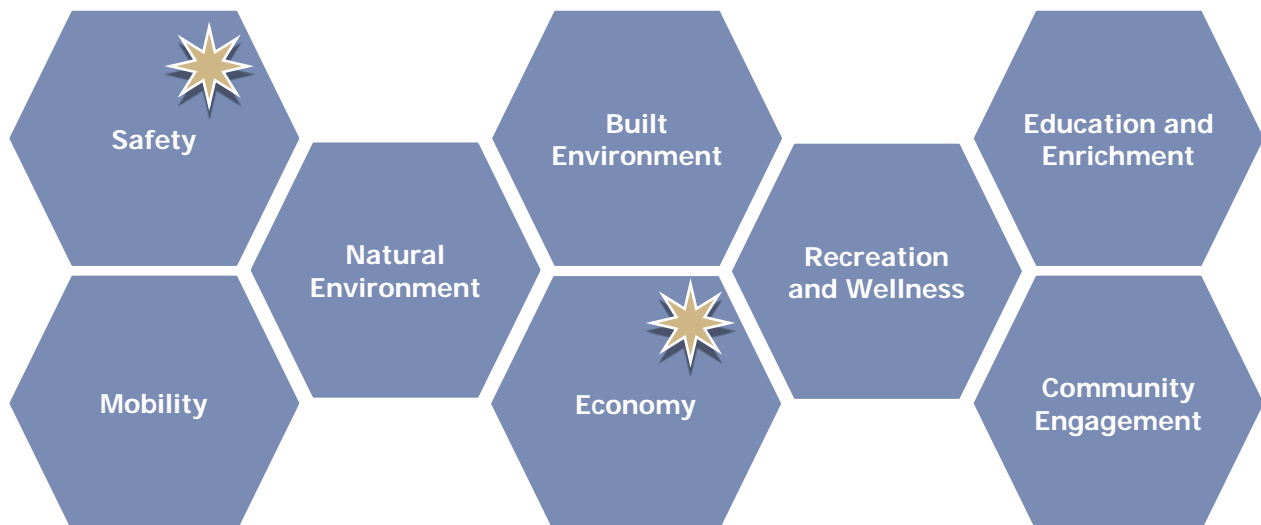
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Dover community in the coming two years. Ratings for all eight facets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

## Legend

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

- Most important



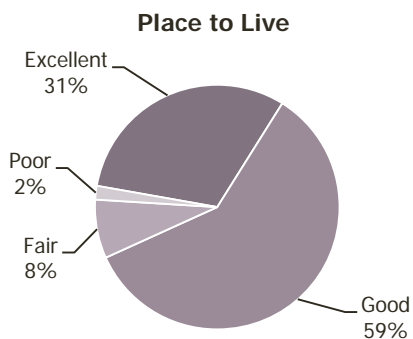
# Community Characteristics

*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 Dover, 90% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Dover 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. About 8 in 10 residents favorably rated their neighborhood as a place to live and Dover as a place to raise children, while about half of residents assigned positive scores to the city as a place to retire. About 7 in 10 residents gave high marks to the overall image or reputation of Dover and its appearance; this rating decreased from 2017 to 2019 (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover for more details). These ratings were on par with national averages.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, at least half of respondents positively scored a majority of aspects of Community Characteristics; ratings tended to be similar to the benchmark. About 9 in 10 residents felt safe in their neighborhood and the downtown/commercial area.

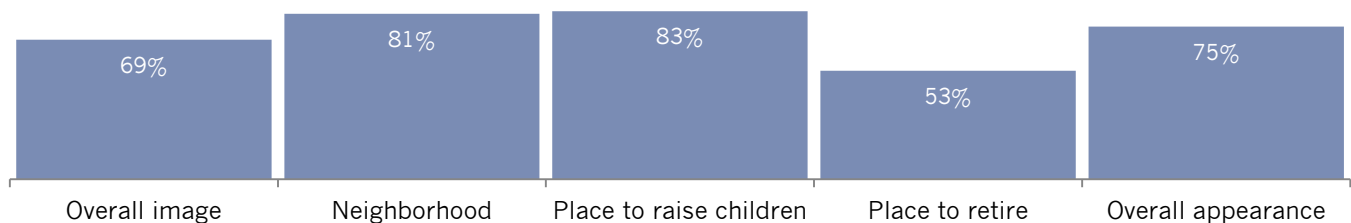


Compared to other municipalities across the country, fewer residents favorably rated the availability of affordable quality housing in Dover. From 2017 to 2019, most aspects of Community Characteristics remained stable, yet there were decreases seen within Economy (overall economic health, cost of living, vibrancy of downtown/commercial area and overall quality of businesses and services) and Built Environment (overall quality of new development in Dover, the availability of affordable quality housing, variety of housing options and overall built environment), among others.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



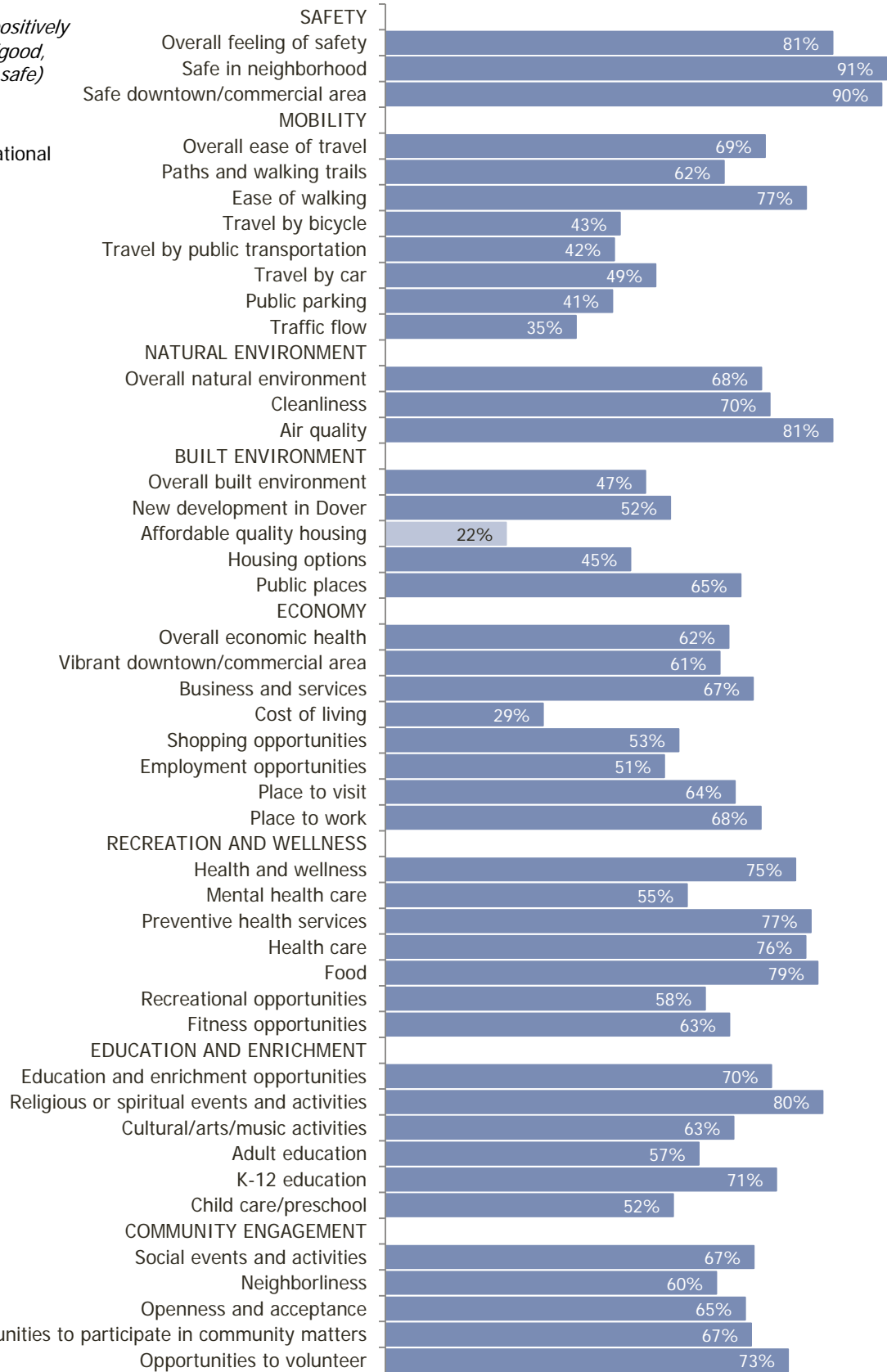
# The National Community Survey™

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 Dover meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

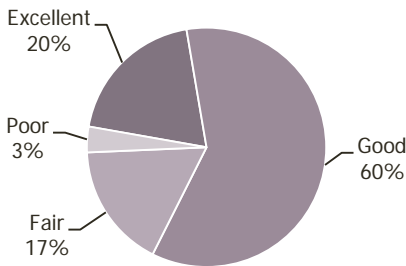
The overall quality of the services provided by Dover as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Dover; while 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.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Dover’s leadership and governance. About 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall customer service provided by the City. Roughly half of respondents reviewed most government services positively. Compared to 2017, respondents gave lower marks in 2019 to the overall direction of Dover, the job the government does at welcoming resident involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of Dover and treating all residents fairly.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Dover. Broadly, at least half of respondents reviewed most government services positively and ratings tended to be similar to those observed in other benchmark communities. The highest-rated services included police, fire, ambulance/EMS and fire prevention, with about 9 in 10 residents assigning positive scores.

Compared to municipalities across the country, respondents gave lower ratings to yard waste pick-up in Dover. In 2019, residents were less pleased with crime prevention; emergency preparedness; animal control; sewer services; utility billing and land use, planning and zoning compared to 2017. Additionally, fewer residents gave high marks to recycling, open space, natural areas preservation and City parks in 2019.

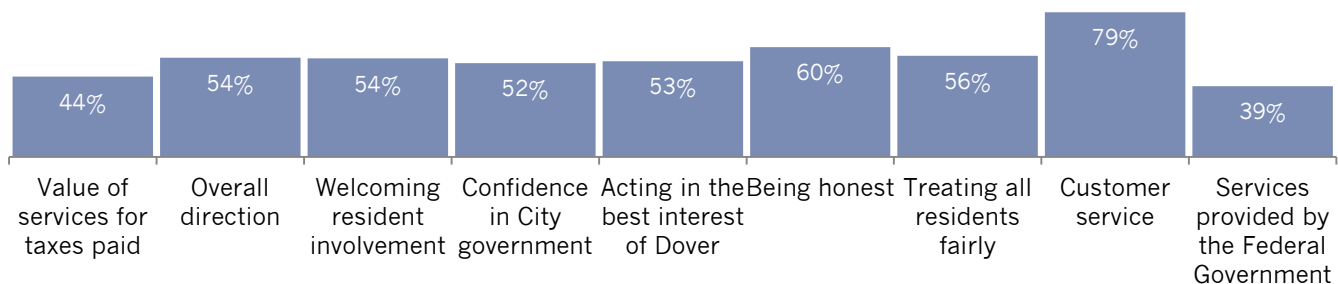
Overall Quality of City Services



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



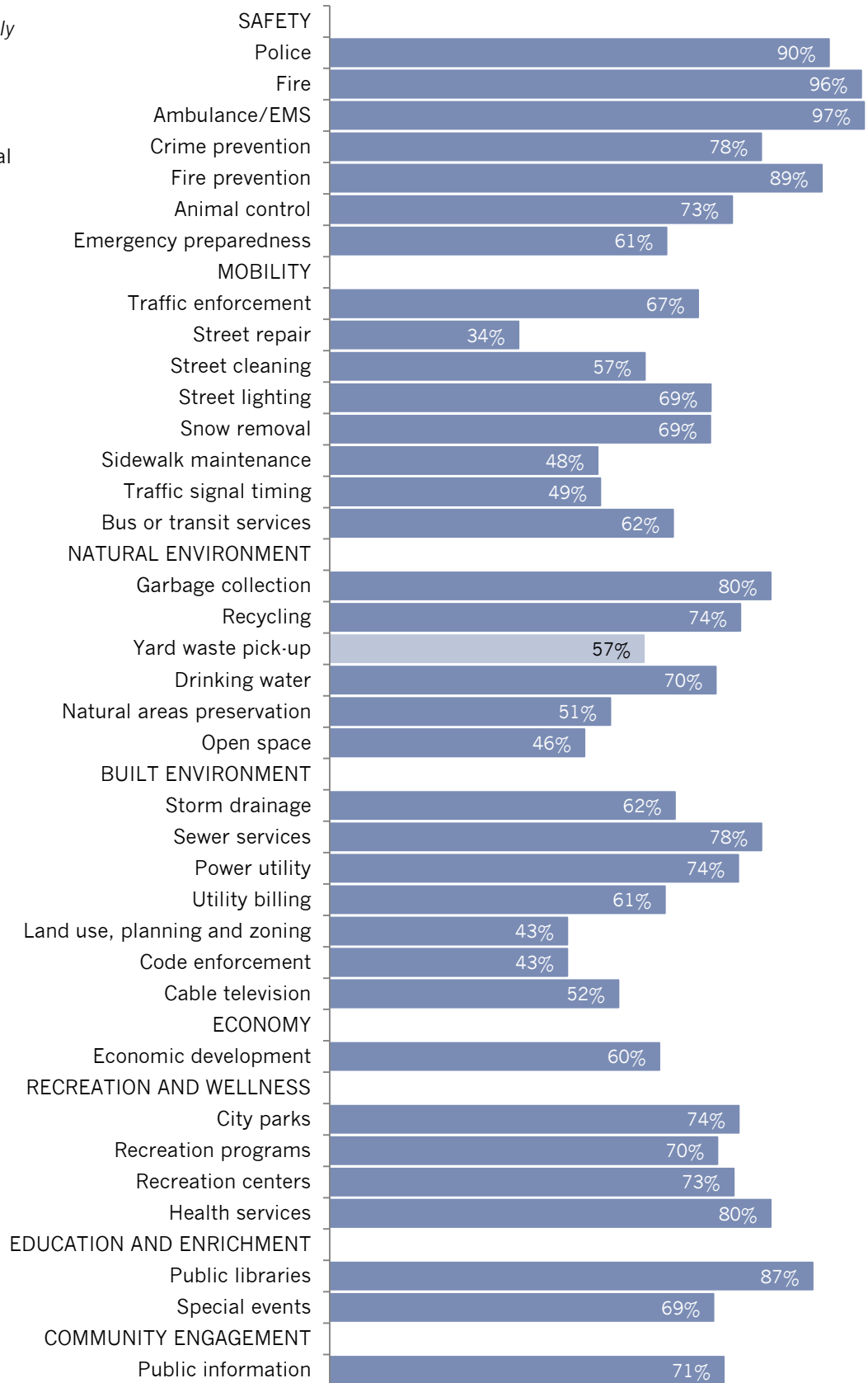
## The National Community Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower





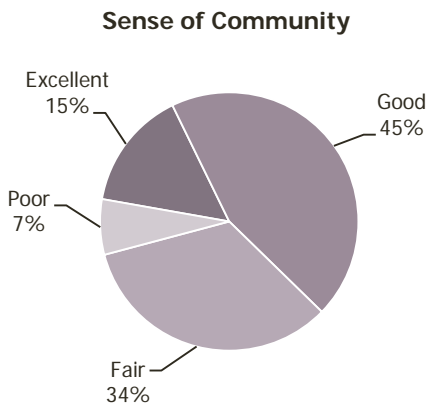
# Participation

*Are the residents of Dover 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. Similar to other communities in the U.S., about 6 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in Dover.

About 4 in 5 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Dover to someone who asked and planned to remain in the community for the next five years. These rates were similar to those reported across the nation. About half of residents reported they had contacted Dover employees, which was higher than the national benchmark.

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 Dover over time, useful for interpreting the results. About 9 in 10 respondents had recycled at home and purchased goods or services in Dover. In 2019, more residents reported working in Dover than in 2017.

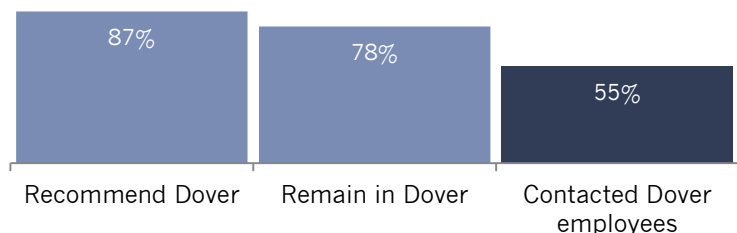


Fewer residents participated in religious or spiritual activities in Dover than in other comparison communities. In 2019, more residents were under housing cost stress and had observed a code violation compared to 2017. Additionally, fewer residents reported using public transportation instead of driving; campaigning for an issue, cause or candidate; or gave favorable ratings to the sense of community in Dover in 2017.

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

*Comparison to national benchmark*

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



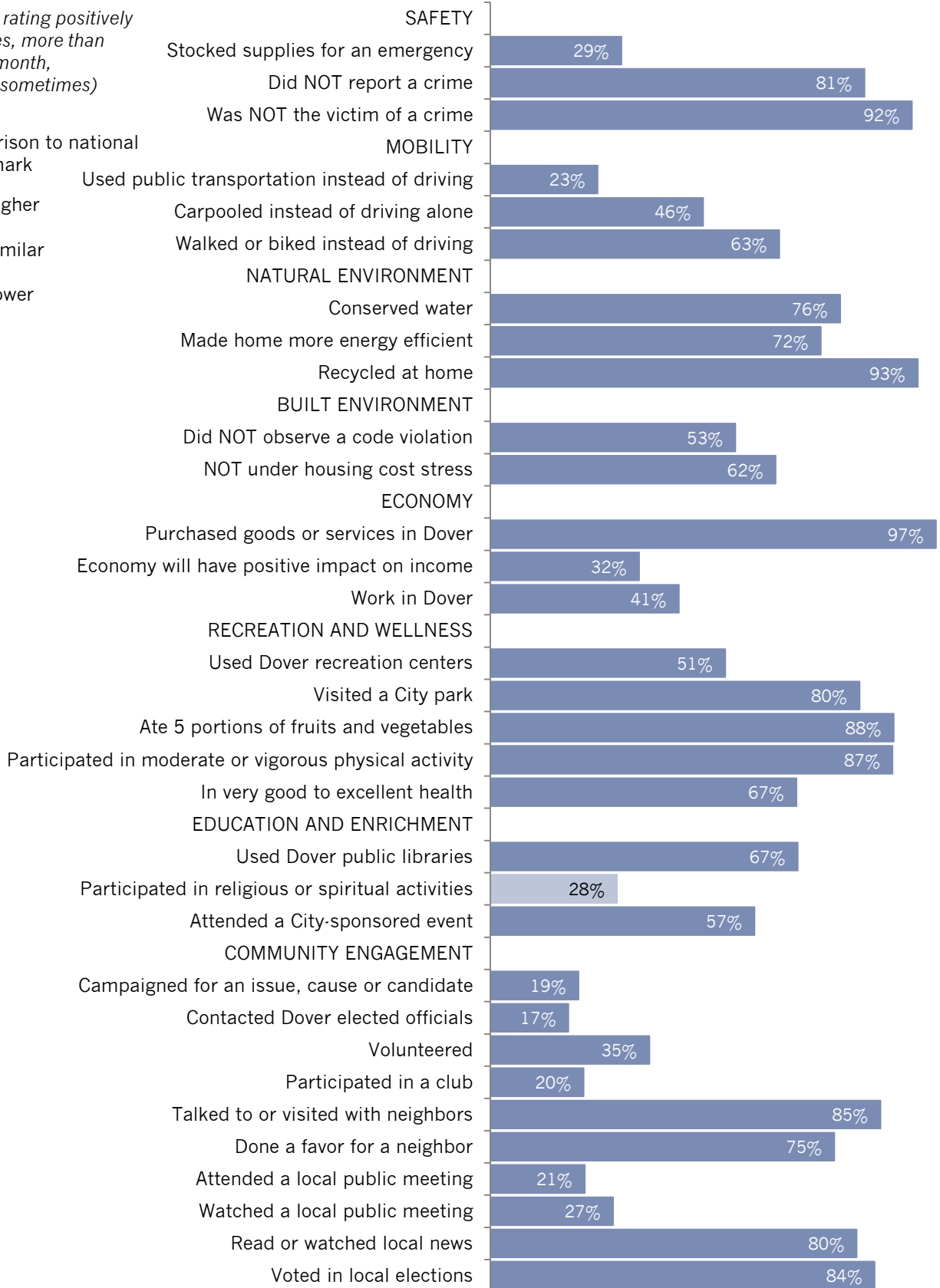
# The National Community Survey™

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

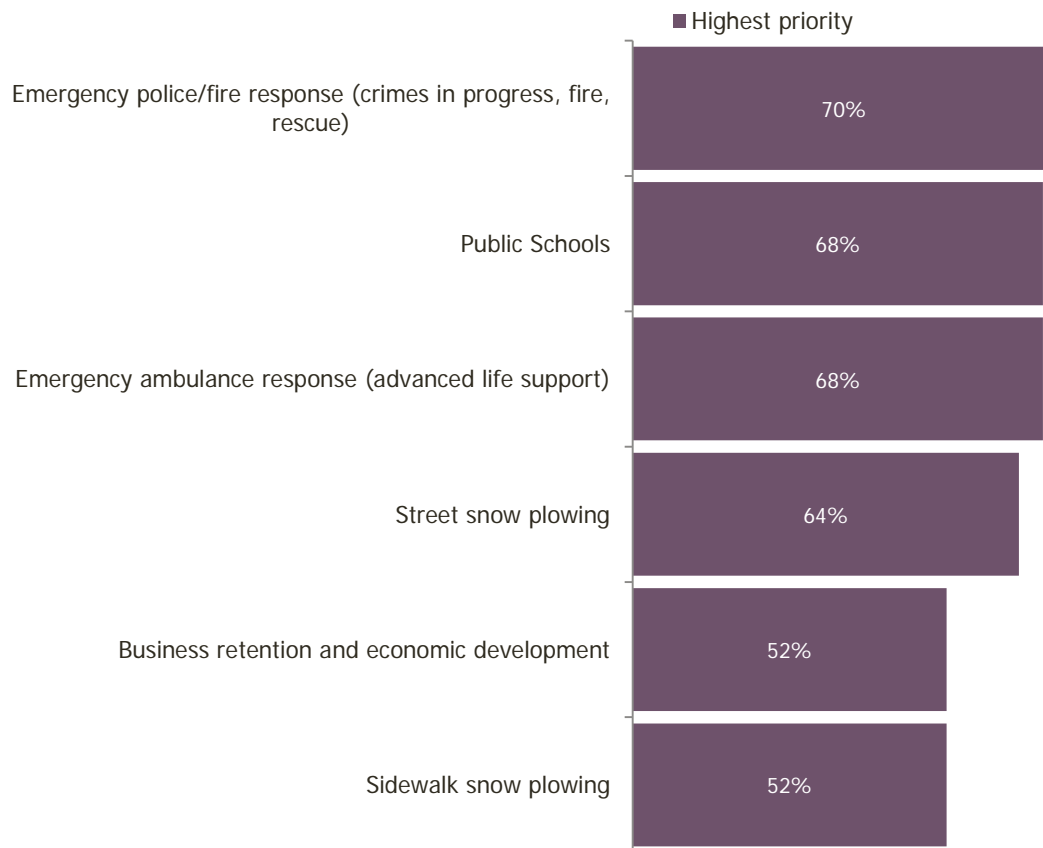


# Special Topics

The City of Dover included one question of special interest on The NCS. Residents were asked to indicate how much of a priority it was for 42 services to receive budget dollars. Overall, at least half of respondents rated each services as a medium or highest priority. About 7 in 10 respondents assigned emergency police/fire response, public schools and emergency ambulance response with the highest priority. Other services that topped the list of priorities included street snow plowing, business retention and economic development, and sidewalk snow plowing, where at least half of residents indicated these were the highest priorities. The services that residents rated as the lowest priorities for public dollars included public meeting space, animal control, community fitness center/gymnasium, recycling center hours and library computer availability (see Figure 6, page 10).

Figure 4: Highest Priorities for Budget Dollars

*Cities are faced with difficult choices. If you were a member of City Council, which of the services listed below would you give high priority for receiving budget dollars, and which of them would you give low priority?*



The National Community Survey™

Figure 6: Priorities for Budget Dollars

Cities are faced with difficult choices. If you were a member of City Council, which of the services listed below would you give high priority for receiving budget dollars, and which of them would you give low priority?	Highest priority	Medium priority	Lowest priority
Emergency police/fire response (crimes in progress, fire, rescue)	70%	28%	2%
Public Schools	68%	26%	5%
Emergency ambulance response (advanced life support)	68%	28%	4%
Street snow plowing	64%	32%	4%
Business retention and economic development	52%	42%	6%
Sidewalk snow plowing	52%	41%	7%
Health inspections (restaurants, housing standards, disease control)	47%	44%	9%
Street, sidewalk and curb maintenance	45%	47%	8%
Student transportation	44%	45%	11%
Programs for low-income families (health services, housing, childcare)	43%	43%	14%
Downtown public parking	42%	44%	13%
Middle/high school assigned police officer	41%	38%	21%
Youth drug/alcohol prevention efforts (Youth to Youth, DARE)	41%	46%	13%
Extracurricular (school) activities	40%	46%	14%
Storm run-off drainage system maintenance	36%	53%	11%
Community oriented policing (downtown/neighborhood patrols)	36%	47%	17%
Victims of crime assistance (case consultation, legal system support)	34%	51%	15%
Curbside solid waste and recycling pick up	31%	55%	14%
Fire and life safety public education efforts (home and business)	30%	45%	24%
Building inspections (plumbing, electrical, safety codes)	29%	53%	18%
Parks and playground maintenance (grounds, equipment, safety upgrades)	29%	58%	13%
Roadside tree trimming and weed control	23%	51%	26%
Teen Center and related recreation activities	23%	53%	24%
Communication with citizens (newsletter, program brochures, Web site)	22%	57%	21%
Traffic related police patrols (stop sign, speed, crosswalk enforcement)	22%	47%	31%
Youth playground and summer camp programs	22%	56%	23%
Public transportation (COAST, FasTrans, Transportation center)	21%	63%	16%
Library materials (literature, audio, historical documents, museum passes)	21%	49%	30%
Library hours of operation	21%	47%	32%
Library children's room and related programming	20%	50%	29%
Senior Center and related recreation activities	20%	55%	25%
Community events/programs (4th of July, Cochecho Arts, Holidays)	20%	53%	28%
Indoor pool and related year-round recreation activities	19%	54%	27%
Library public computer availability	18%	48%	34%
Streetscape maintenance (flowers, litter, decorative lights, street signage)	17%	57%	26%
Municipal building maintenance (custodial/preventative maintenance)	16%	61%	22%
City Hall office hours (auto registration, vital records, tax assessing)	16%	58%	26%
Recycling Center hours	14%	47%	38%
Outdoor pool and related summer only recreation activities	14%	53%	33%
Community Fitness Center/Gymnasium and related recreation activities	14%	47%	39%
Animal control (investigate complaints, retrieve/shelter stray animals)	11%	48%	41%
Availability of public meeting space for organizations and non-profit groups	8%	45%	48%

# Conclusions

## Dover continues to be a desirable place to live, with Safety as a feature that contributes to quality of life.

About 9 in 10 residents positively scored Dover as a place to live, and at least 7 in 10 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Dover, their neighborhood as a place to live, Dover as a place to raise children, the overall image or reputation of the city and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 residents were likely to recommend living in Dover to someone who asked and 8 in 10 planned to remain in Dover for the next five years. About 6 in 10 residents favorably assessed the sense of community in the city.

As in 2017, residents indicated that Safety was an important focus area for the City to address in the coming years. About 9 in 10 residents felt safe in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. Out of all City services, police, fire, ambulance/EMS and fire prevention were given the most positive reviews. Demonstrating their commitment to keeping Dover safe, almost all residents indicated that emergency police/fire response (98%) and emergency ambulance response (96%) were priorities for receiving budget dollars. At least three-quarters of respondents expressed that community oriented policing, victims of crime assistance, and fire and life safety public education efforts were priorities as well.

## Residents are pleased with Mobility and prioritize snow plowing and maintenance for streets and sidewalks.

About 7 in 10 residents positively assessed the overall ease of travel in Dover. Similar to comparison communities, at least 6 in 10 respondents gave high marks to ease of travel by walking, the availability of paths and walking trails, traffic enforcement, street lighting, snow removal and bus or transit services. About 6 in 10 residents reported they had walked or biked instead of driving, which was on par with the national benchmark. While ratings for traffic flow, ease of travel by car and public parking decreased from 2017 to 2019, these assessments were on par with national averages.

When residents were asked to indicate how much of a priority it was for various services to receive budget dollars, about 9 in 10 stated that street snow plowing; sidewalk snow plowing; street, sidewalk and curb maintenance; student transportation and downtown public parking were priorities. Additionally, at least two-thirds of respondents assigned priority to traffic related police patrols and public transportation.

## Residents give positive reviews to Economy, but a downward trend in some ratings might be an area of opportunity for Dover.

As in 2017, survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the City in the next two years. Similar to comparison communities, about 6 in 10 residents positively rated the overall economic health of Dover, the city as a place to visit and work, vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, overall quality of businesses and services, and economic development. Compared to other municipalities in the U.S., more residents reported working in Dover. However, while still on par with national averages, fewer residents assigned favorable marks to the overall economic health of Dover, cost of living, vibrancy of downtown/commercial area, overall quality of new development and overall quality of businesses and services in 2019 compared to 2017. Respondents' ratings of housing in the city also declined in 2019 (the availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing options). About 9 in 10 residents indicated that business retention and economic development should receive priority for getting budget dollars.