



THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Bethlehem Township, PA

Community Livability Report

2018



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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 Bethlehem Township. 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).

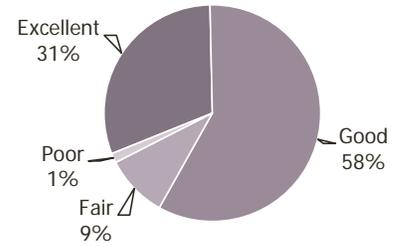
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 493 residents of Bethlehem Township. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Bethlehem Township

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Bethlehem Township as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Overall Quality of Life



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.

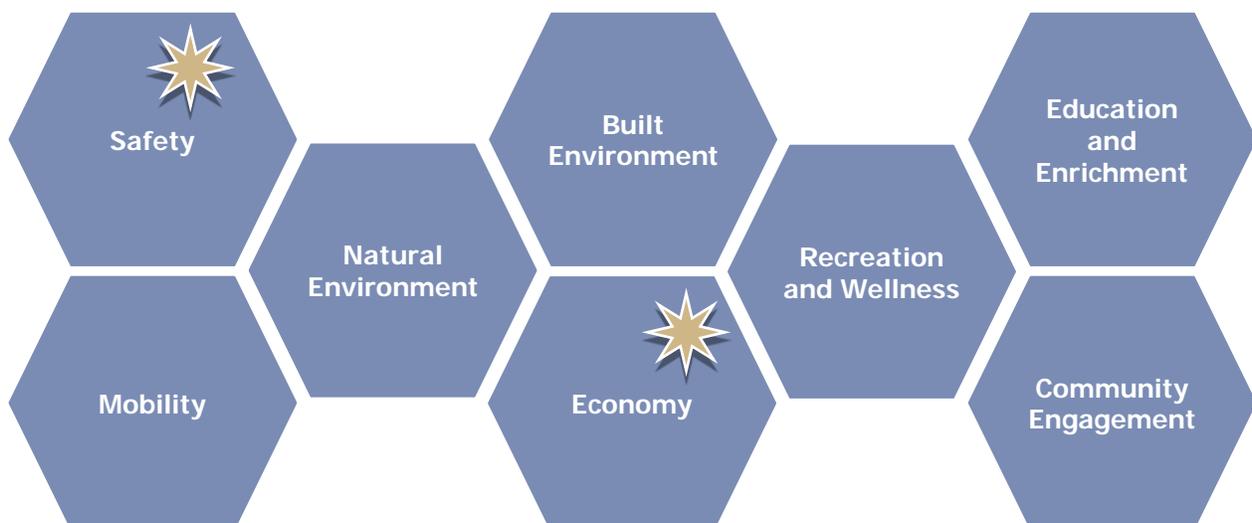
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Bethlehem Township community in the coming two years. Ratings for all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

Legend

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

- Most important



Community Characteristics

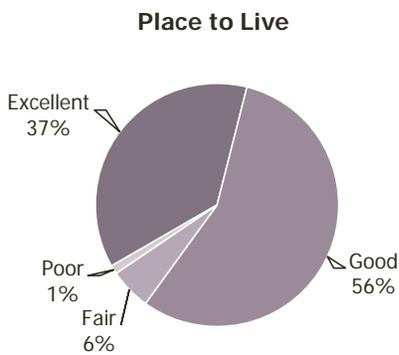
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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 Bethlehem Township, 93% of survey participants rated the township as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Bethlehem Township as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the township as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Bethlehem Township as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Bethlehem Township and its overall appearance. Overall, about three-quarters or more of residents felt favorably about each of these aspects of the community, providing ratings similar to those of other communities across the U.S.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Broadly, at least half of survey respondents favorably evaluated most aspects of Community Characteristics; ratings tended to be similar to national benchmarks.

Nearly all residents reported they felt safe in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area of Bethlehem Township; a similar proportion awarded high marks to safety overall. Within Mobility, resident's ratings for travel by bicycle and walking were lower than national averages.

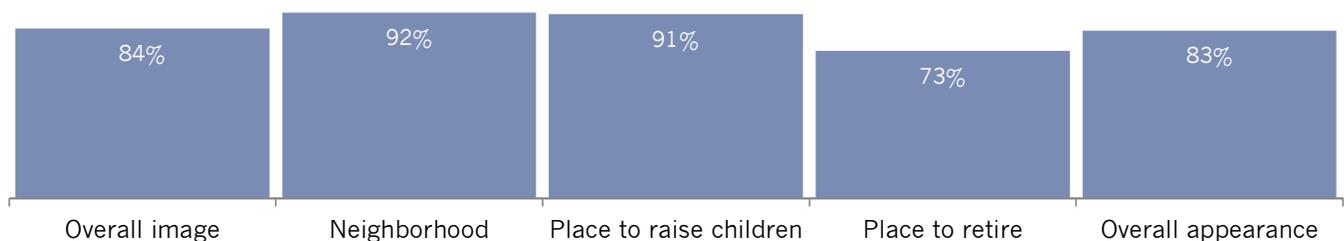


Strengths were seen within the areas of Built Environment (availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing), Recreation and Wellness (availability of affordable general and mental health care) and Education and Enrichment (adult education) where ratings outshined communities nationwide.

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

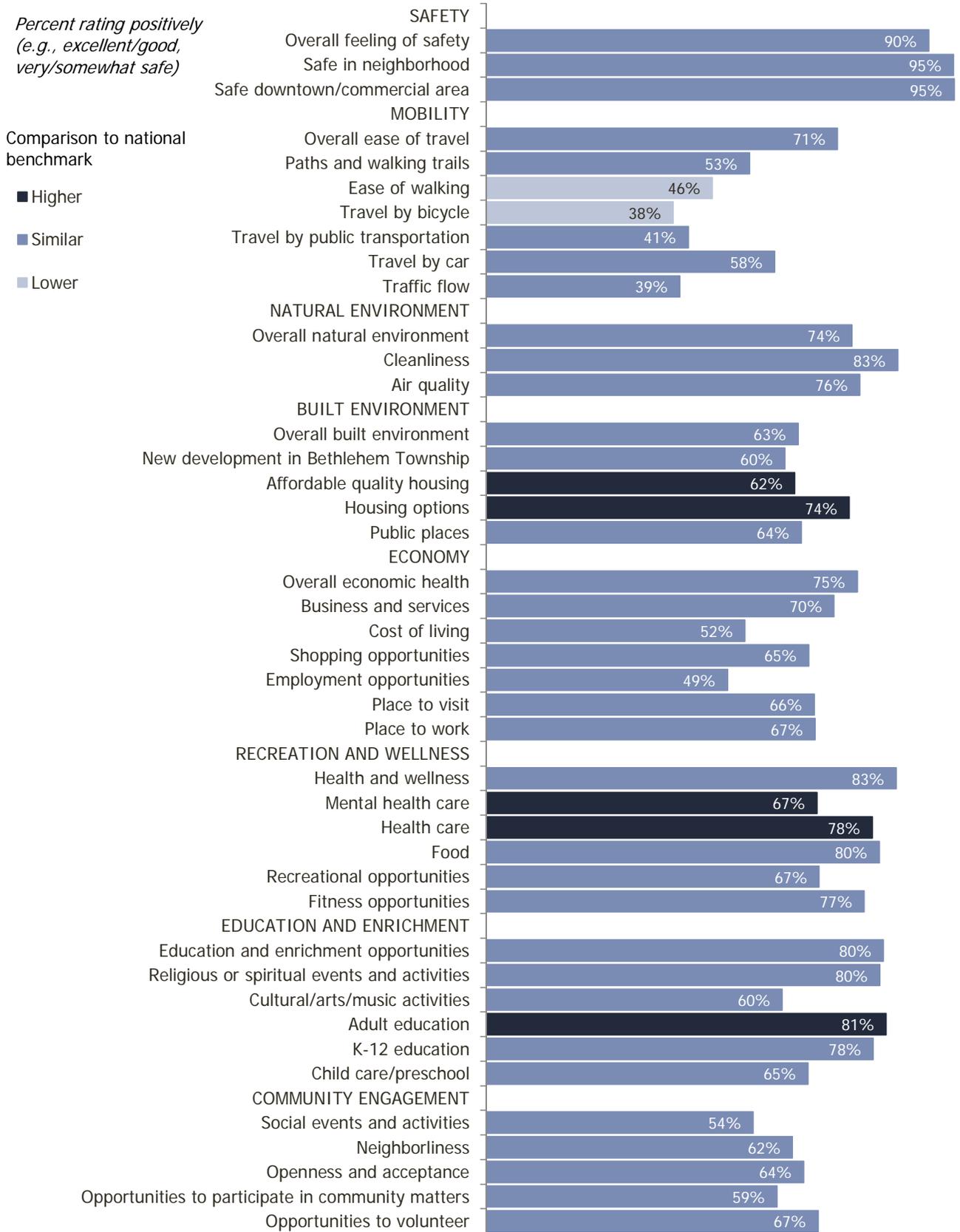
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



Governance

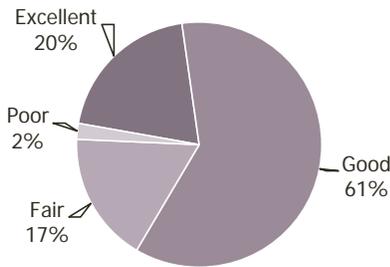
How well does the government of Bethlehem Township meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Bethlehem Township 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 survey participants gave excellent or good reviews to the overall services provided by the Township. Ratings for Township services, as well as services provided by the Federal Government, were similar to municipalities elsewhere.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Bethlehem Township’s leadership and governance. At least two in five residents rated each aspect positively, similar to those in other communities nationwide. Most residents were pleased with the customer service provided by Township employees; about three-quarters gave excellent or good reviews.

Respondents evaluated over 25 individual services and amenities available in Bethlehem Township. Overall, a majority of residents assessed these services and amenities as excellent or good and similar to national averages with two exceptions. Less than half of respondents favorably scored natural areas preservation, lower than average ratings, while over 8 in 10 participants positively reviewed health services which received higher than average ratings.

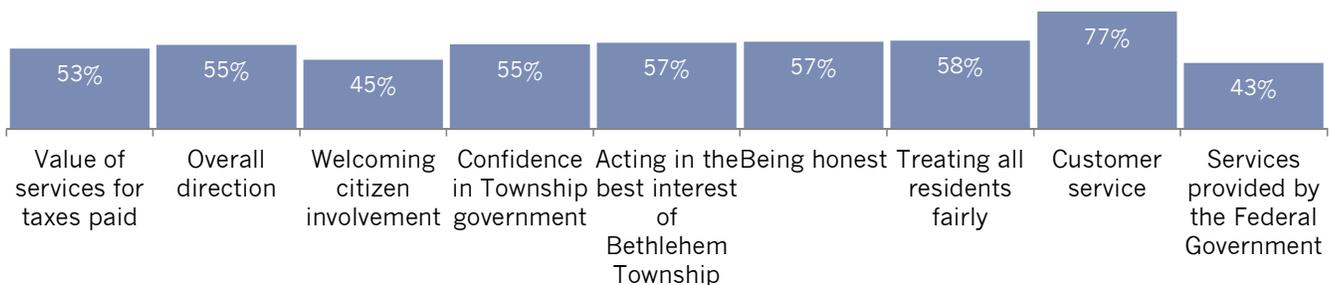
Overall Quality of Township Services



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

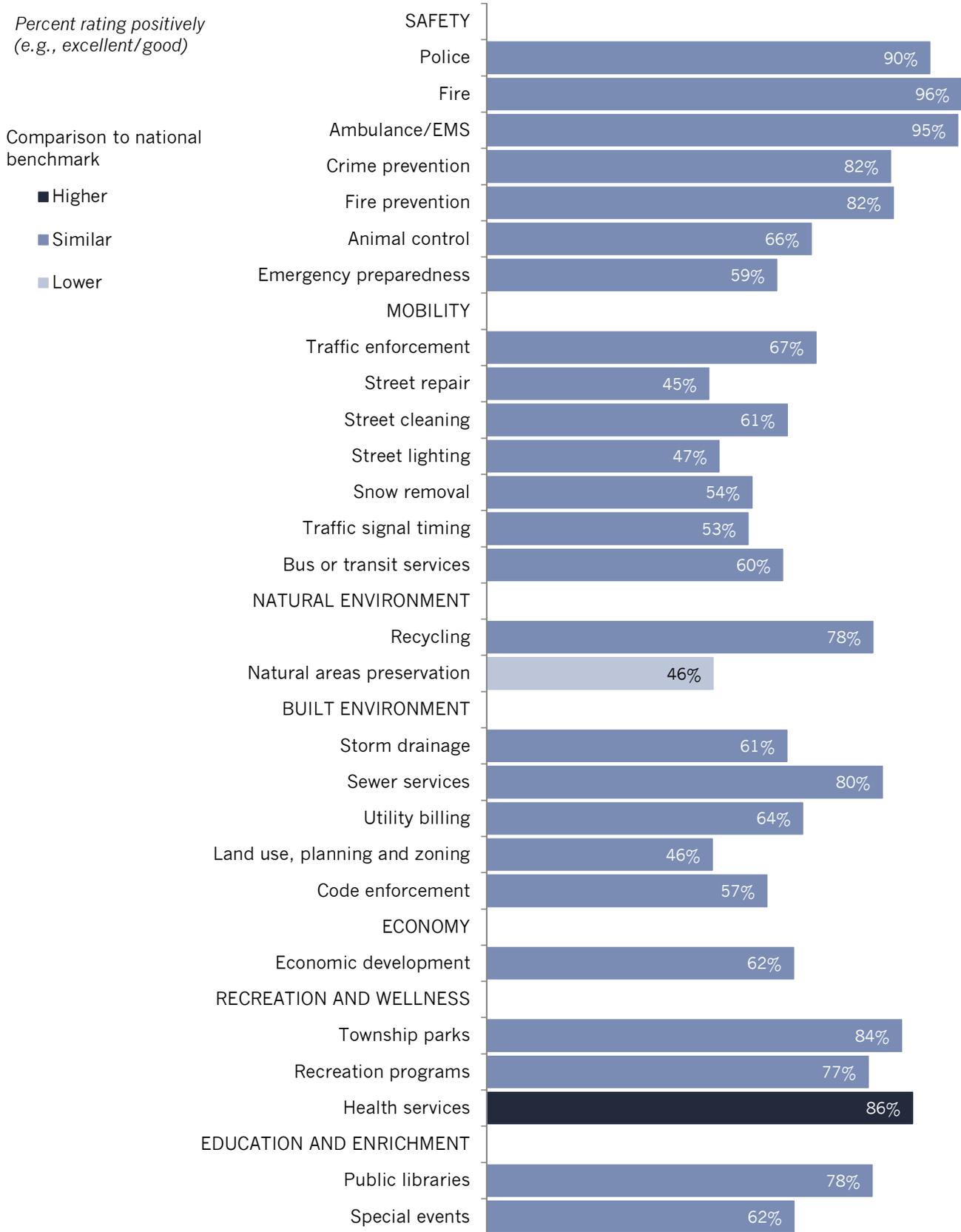
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance



Participation

Are the residents of Bethlehem Township connected to the community and each other?

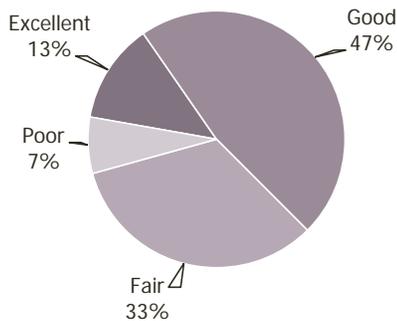
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Similar to comparison communities, about 6 in 10 respondents felt positively about the sense of community in Bethlehem Township.

Around 9 in 10 survey respondents reported they would recommend living in Bethlehem Township to someone who asked and planned to remain in the community for the next five years. These rates of recommendation and remaining in the community were similar to rates elsewhere.

The survey included 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Residents' rates of Participation tended to be on par with national averages with some exceptions. While most Township respondents engaged in neighborly activities talked or visited or done a favor for a neighbor, read or watched the local news and voted in local elections at rates similar to the national average, they volunteered at a rate lower than the average. Bethlehem Township survey participants were more likely to recycle and less likely to have observed a code violation than their national peers.

Township residents walked or used public transportation (instead of driving) at rates that lagged behind communities nationwide. Attendance of Township-sponsored events and working in the community were also lower than the national benchmark.

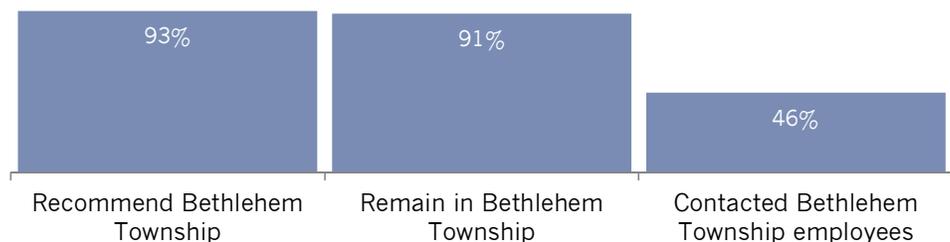
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



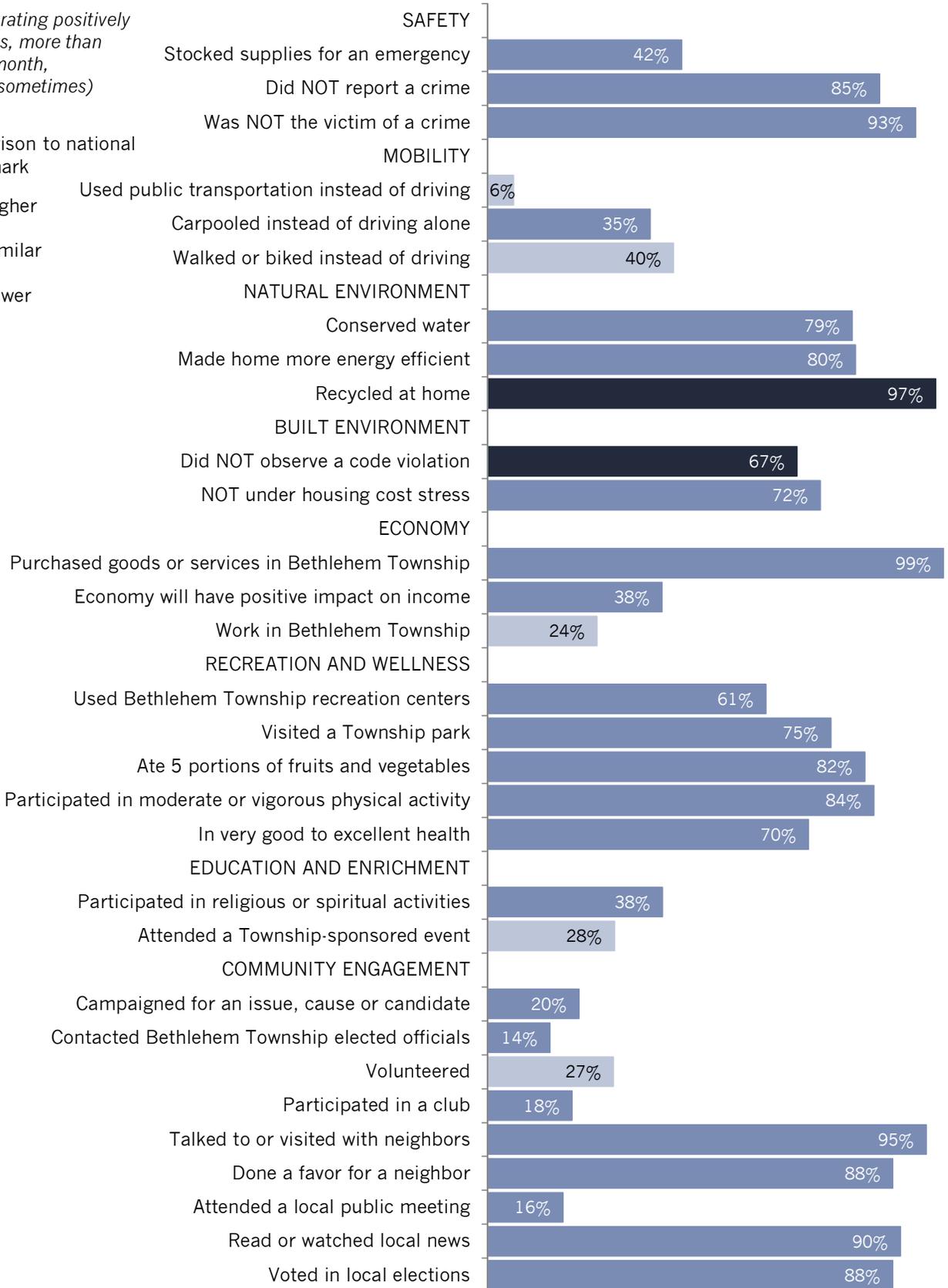
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Special Topics

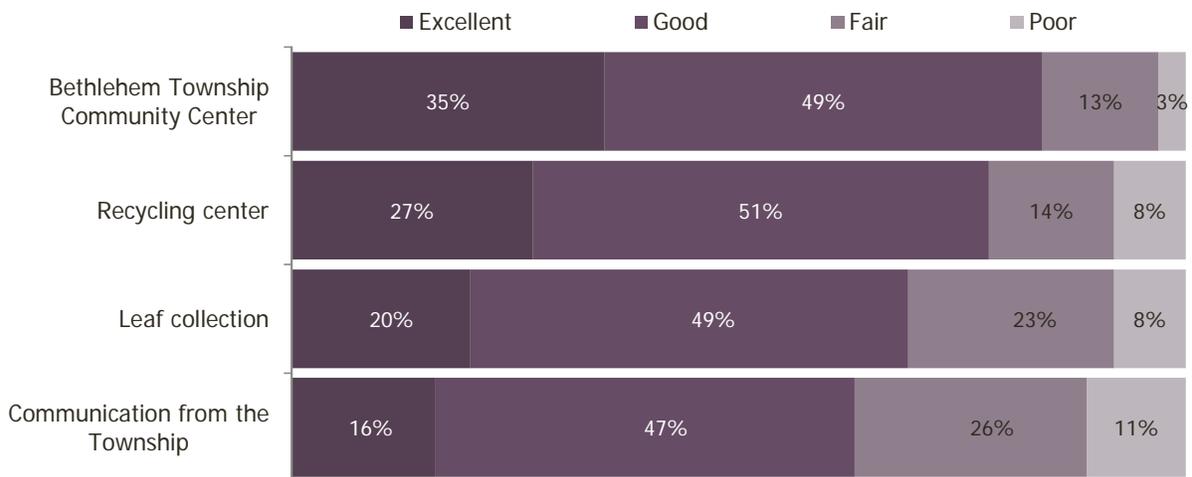
Bethlehem Township included several questions of special interest on The NCS. Township leaders sought resident feedback regarding Township services, services provided by the state and county, use of library services and interest regarding building a library in Bethlehem Township. The Township also asked residents to indicate their level of concern for environmental issues, familiarity with Memorial Park, support for restoring The Johnston Mansion, use of recreation programs and their reliance on various sources of information.

Xx Custom line Item to add: Read the agenda or minutes online or on television

Residents rated four additional services provided by the Township, the Community Center, the recycling center, leaf collection services and communication from the Township. Between 60% and 80% of survey respondents thought favorably of each of these services.

Figure 4: Bethlehem Township Services

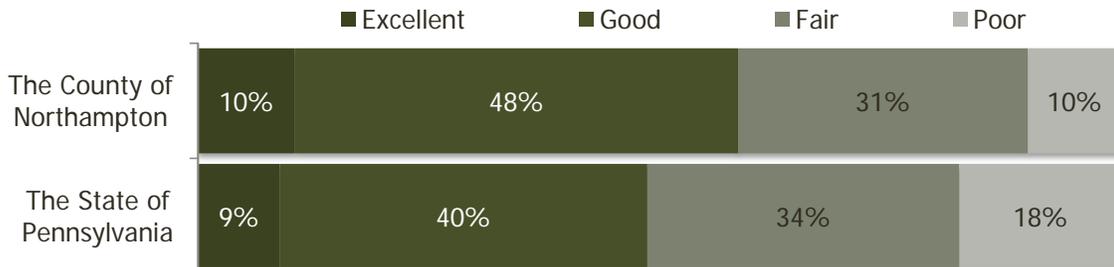
Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Bethlehem Township:



Residents rated the overall quality of services provided by the County of Northampton and State of Pennsylvania. Close to half of respondents positively evaluated the services provided by both entities, which were lower than reviews given to Bethlehem Township (see *Governance*, page 5).

Figure 5: County and State Services

Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?



Bethlehem Township survey included four questions about library services. About 4 in 10 or fewer residents reported they used the Bethlehem Area Public Library building, the bookmobile service or e-book/audiobook services at least once a month. Almost half of Township respondents were active cardholders for the public library (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 6: Resident Use of Library Services

In the last 12 months, about how many times, if at all, have you or other household members used each of the following?

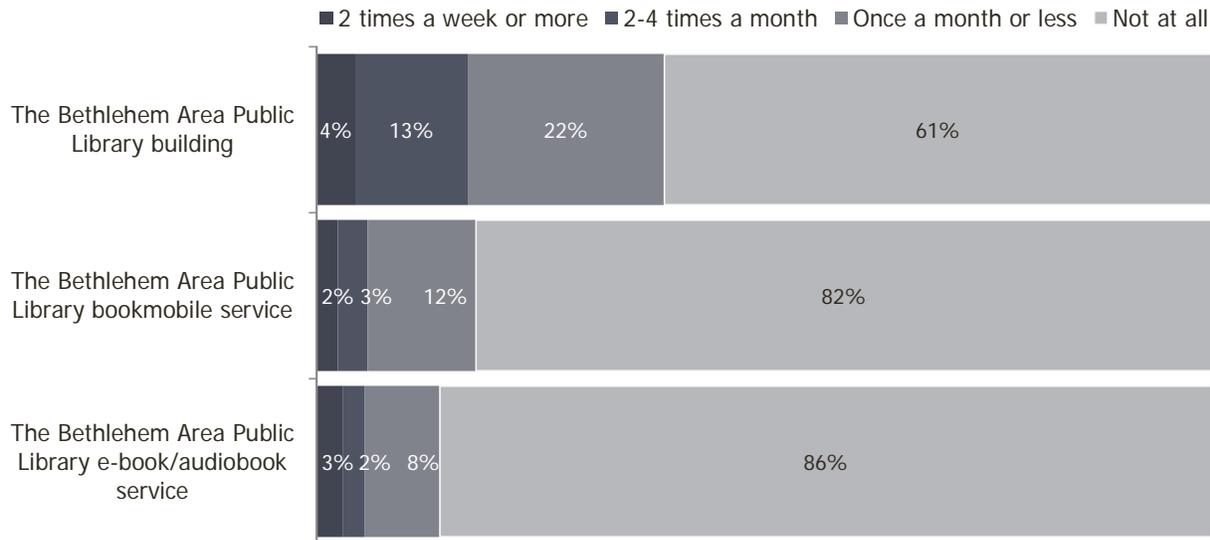
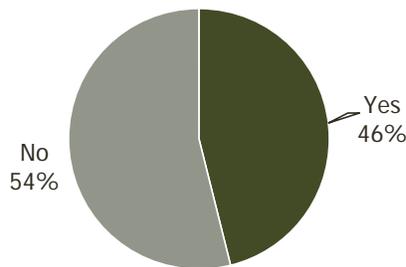


Figure 7: Public Library Cardholder

Are you currently an active cardholder for the Bethlehem Area Public Library?



More than half of respondents indicated they would like to the Township to continue paying to use BAPL services. However, about two-thirds of respondents agreed that the Township should consider building its own library if the services were less than the amount paid to the BAPL.

Figure 8: Continue to Use Bethlehem City Library
The Bethlehem Area Public Library (BAPL), located in downtown Bethlehem City, offers traditional library services, as well as offsite services such as bookmobile and online lending of e-books and audio books. Bethlehem Township has an agreement with the BAPL to pay \$17.55 per person per year, which is an annual cost in Bethlehem Township tax dollars of \$416,462 per year. Should Bethlehem Township continue to pay \$416,462 per year to the Bethlehem Area Public Library?

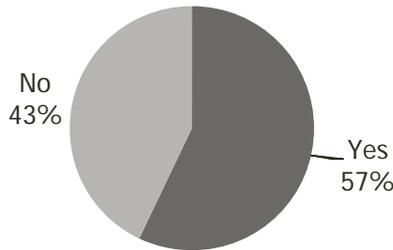
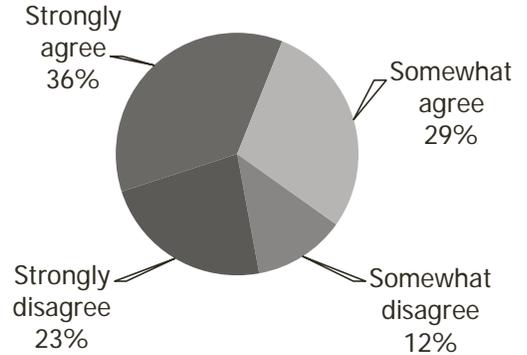
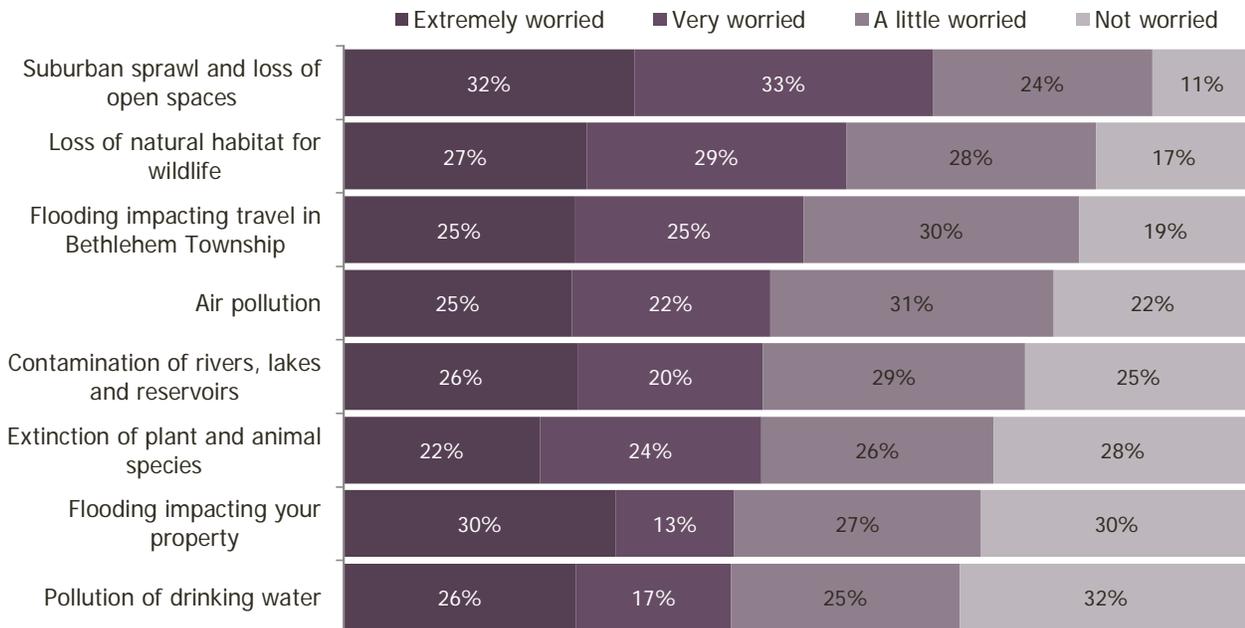


Figure 9: Support for Building a Township Library
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that Bethlehem Township should consider establishing its own public library if the same services were provided for less than the amount paid to maintain membership in the Bethlehem Area Library:



Survey participants indicated their level of concern about various environmental issues. Residents were most concerned about suburban sprawl and loss of natural habitat for wildlife, with about 6 in 10 respondents indicating they were extremely or very worried. Township respondents were least concerned about flooding and pollution of drinking water.

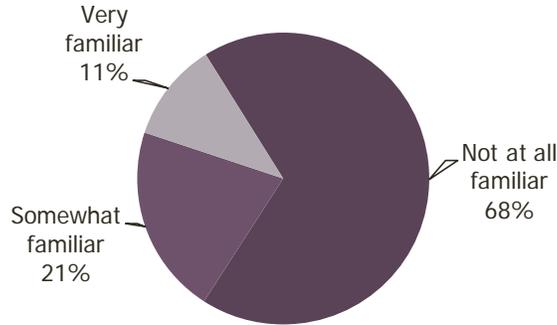
Figure 10: Concern for Environment Issues
To what extent, if at all, are you worried personally about each of the following environmental issues in Bethlehem Township?



About one-third of residents were familiar with Janet Johnston & William Housenick Memorial Park in Bethlehem Township.

Figure 11: Familiarity with Housenick Memorial Park

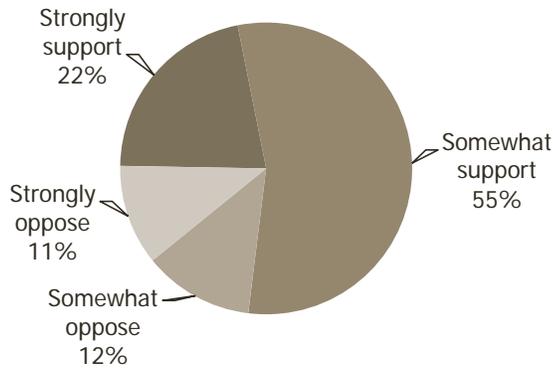
Please rate how familiar you are, if at all, with the Janet Johnston Housenick & William D. Housenick Memorial Park in the Township of Bethlehem:



The City asked survey participants to indicate their level of support or opposition to restoring The Johnston Mansion as a possible venue for events, programs and other purposes. Around three-quarters of respondents were supportive of the renovation and only 1 in 10 strongly opposed this project.

Figure 12: Support for Restoring Johnston Mansion

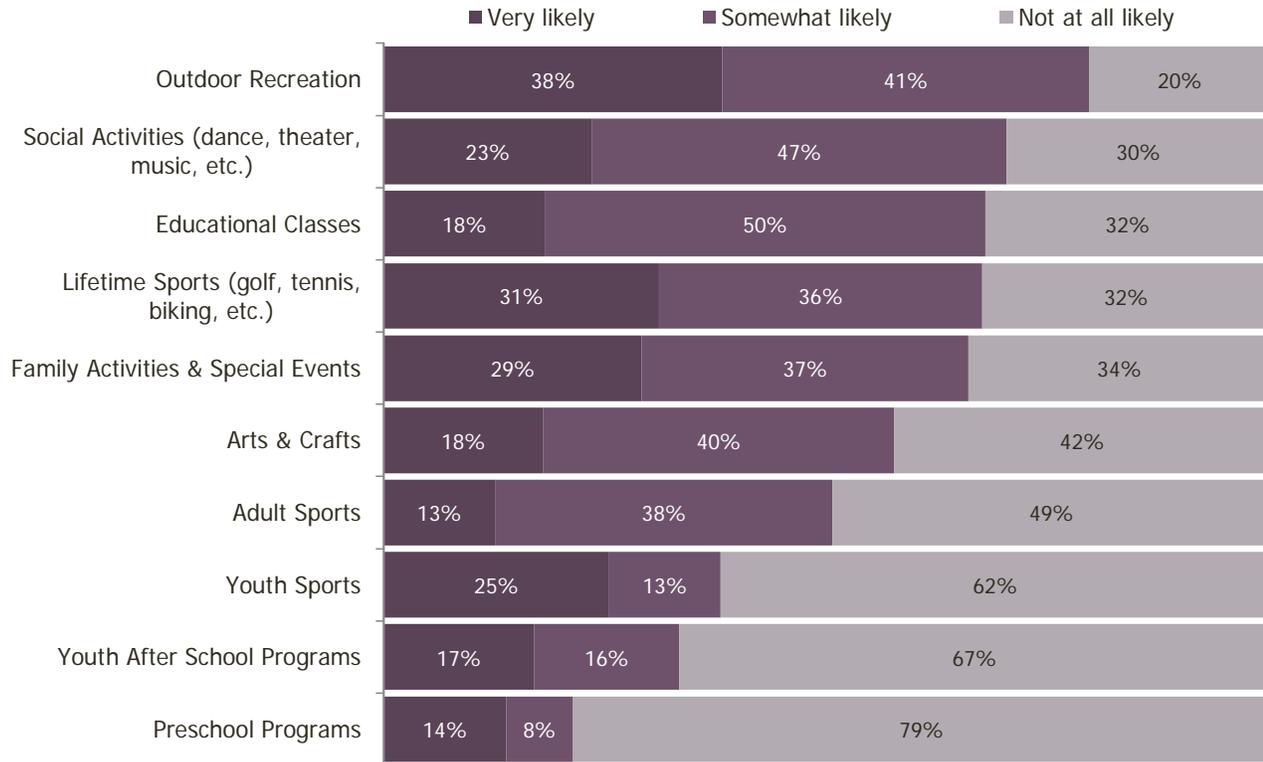
The Johnston Mansion was left to the Township and is in need of repair. Please indicate your level of support for restoring the mansion as a possible venue for event rentals, Township programs, etc.?



Bethlehem Township also wanted to gauge if residents would be likely to use 10 different types of recreation programs. Participants reported they were most likely to use outdoor recreation offerings, followed by social activities, educational classes, lifetime sports and activities and events for the family. They reported the least interest in preschool programs, afterschool programs and youth sports.

Figure 13: Likelihood of Participating in Recreation Programs

Please indicate how likely, if at all, you and/or members of your household would be to participate in each of the following types of recreation programs?

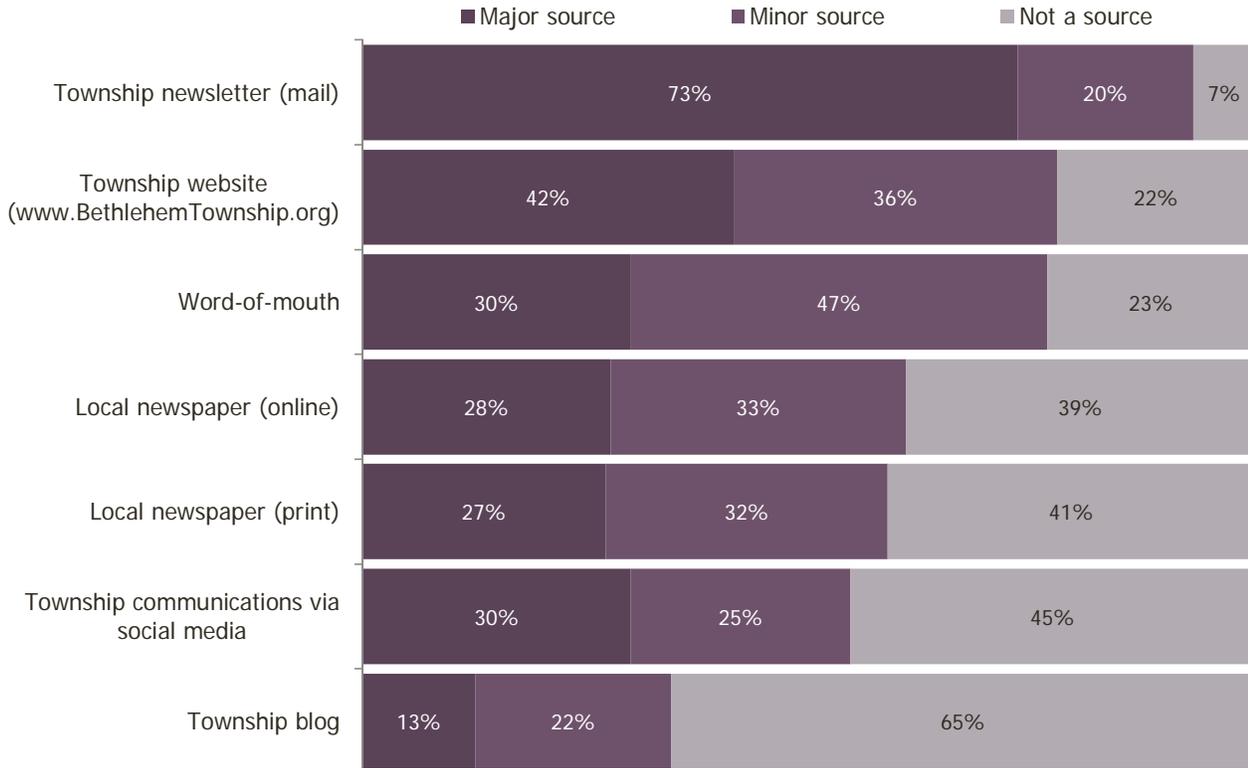


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The final special interest question on the survey asked Township residents to indicate their level of reliance on sources of information about Bethlehem Township government, its activities, events and services. About 9 in 10 participants used the Township newsletter and approximately three-quarters used the Township website and word-of-mouth as sources of information. While just 13% indicated they had used the Township blog as a major source, it was still utilized as a minor source by about 2 in 10 of respondents.

Figure 14: Sources of Information

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



Conclusions

Bethlehem Township's affordable housing compliments residents' quality of life.

Many residents highly rated several aspects related to quality of life in Bethlehem Township. These included not only the overall quality of life, but also the township as a place to live and raise children, their neighborhood as a place to live and the overall image and appearance of the Township. Strong majorities of participants awarded high marks to the variety of housing and availability of affordable quality housing, higher than national averages. These positive ratings contributed to participants' likelihood of recommending the community to someone who asks and were also reflected in residents' decision to remaining in the community for the next five years.

Residents want to protect the Township's Natural Environment.

Residents expressed appreciation for many environmental aspects and services in the community; about three-quarters or more positively assessed the overall natural environment, cleanliness, air quality and recycling services. Not only did 8 in 10 respondents indicate they felt the Natural Environment was an important Township priority, residents demonstrated their dedication by recycling at rates higher than those found in other communities across the nation. Survey participants were less pleased with the Township's efforts to preserve natural areas; less than half gave excellent or good evaluations to this service and ratings were lower than national averages. Residents identified suburban sprawl and loss of open spaces and loss of natural habitat for wildlife as the environmental issues they were most concerned about in Bethlehem Township.

Recreation and Wellness is an asset.

Many Bethlehem Township respondents highly rated aspects of Recreation and were especially pleased with measures of Wellness. About 8 in 10 participants awarded positive scores to the overall health and wellness opportunities in the community and at least two-thirds favorably reviewed both the availability of affordable quality health care and mental health care (both of which outshined national comparisons) and recreational opportunities. Residents also gave high praise to health services provided by the Township, at a level higher than national averages. Further, at least 6 in 10 survey respondents reported engaging in activities and healthy activities behaviors (eating fruits and vegetables and exercising regularly) at levels similar to their national peers. However, respondents found it difficult to walk or bike in the community, which could impact the extent to which they can engage in healthy behaviors, like exercising or walking or biking instead of driving. In a special interest question, Bethlehem Township residents indicated they would be likely to participate in outdoor recreation offerings, as well as social activities, educational classes, lifetime sports and family activities and special events if provided by the Township.

The Township has an opportunity to engage residents.

At least half of survey participants were pleased with the Township's opportunities to attend social events, volunteer and participate in community matters. However, only about one-quarter or fewer of residents reported they had volunteered or attended a Township-sponsored event (levels that lagged behind national averages) and even fewer had campaigned for an issue, participated in a club or attended local public meeting in the 12 months prior to the survey. Since a majority of respondents felt positively about communication services provided by Bethlehem Township, using the most frequently relied upon sources, such as the mailed Township newsletter and website, to engage in the community could bolster participation in Township events, libraries services and The Johnston Mansion programs (if pursued).