



# Clearwater, FL

## Community Livability Report

2017



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The National Citizen Survey™  
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# About

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

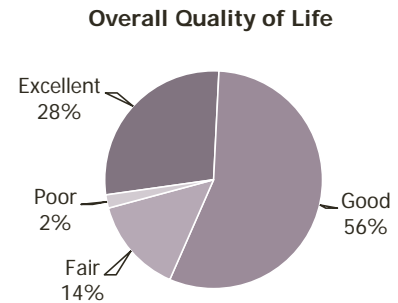
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 580 residents of the City of Clearwater. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Clearwater

A vast majority of residents rated the quality of life in Clearwater as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national and peer community benchmarks (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.



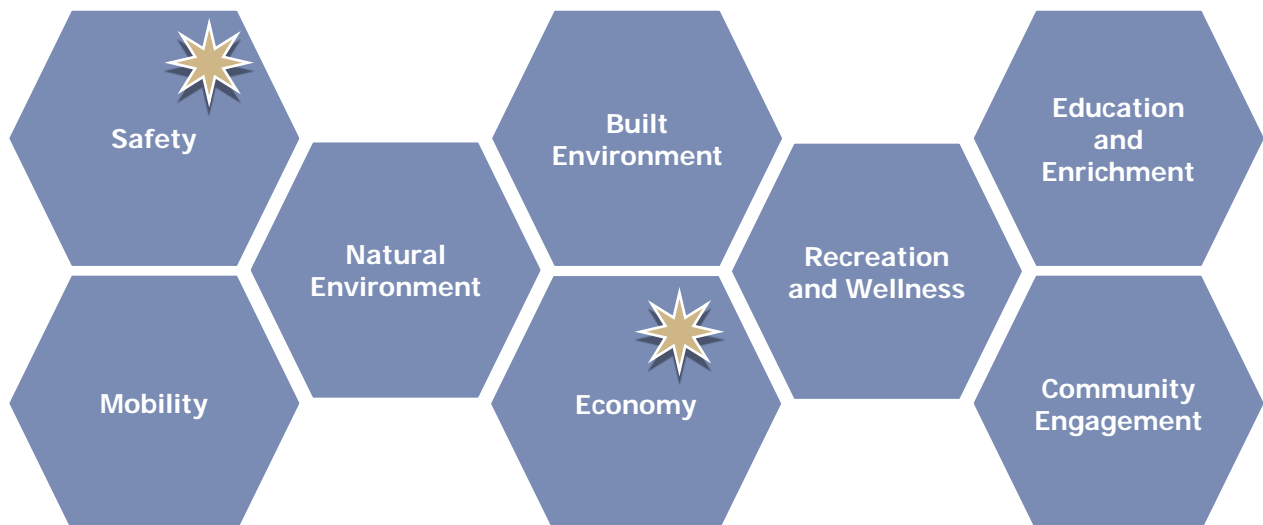
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2014, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Clearwater community in the coming two years. Ratings for 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 Clearwater's unique questions.

## Legend

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

- ★ Most important



# Community Characteristics

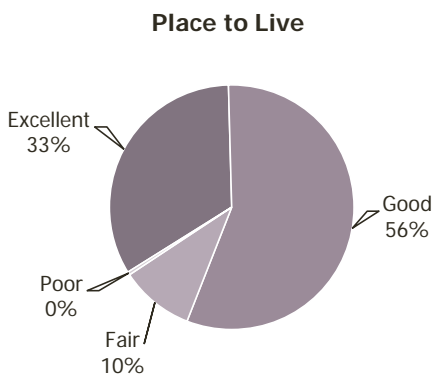
*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

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 Clearwater, about 9 in 10 rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Clearwater 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 Clearwater as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Clearwater and its overall appearance. Overall, at least two-thirds of residents felt favorably about each of these aspects of the community, providing ratings that tended to be similar to benchmark comparisons. However, about 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to Clearwater as a place to retire, which were higher than evaluations provided in communities across the U.S. Additionally, residents' scores for their the quality of neighborhoods increased in 2017 (see *Trends over Time* report provided under a separate cover for more details).

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 reviewed most aspects of Community Characteristics positively and ratings tended to be similar to the benchmark communities.

Evaluations of Safety tended to be similar to comparison communities with about 9 in 10 residents indicating they felt safe in their neighborhood and roughly 7 in 10 felt safe overall and in the downtown/commercial area. While about three-quarters of respondents reported feeling safe overall, this rating was lower than the national average. Aspects of Mobility also saw ratings that were mostly similar and were awarded excellent or good evaluations by about two in five or more; however, ease of travel by car and public parking were lower than communities across the nation.

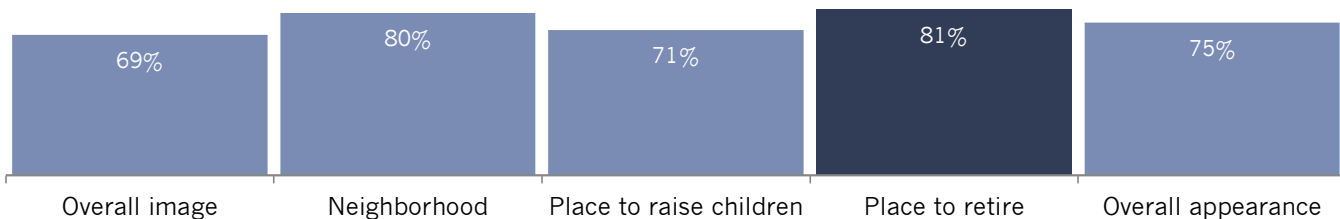


Respondents saw Clearwater's strengths within the facet of Economy, with at least 6 in 10 participants giving high marks to the overall economic health, business and service establishments, shopping opportunities and Clearwater as a place to visit and work. Additionally, scores for overall economic health, employment opportunities and the City as a place to work increased from 2014 to 2017 and evaluations for shopping opportunities and the City as a place to visit were higher than national comparisons. Residents were less pleased with the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, which was rated lower than the benchmarks.

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

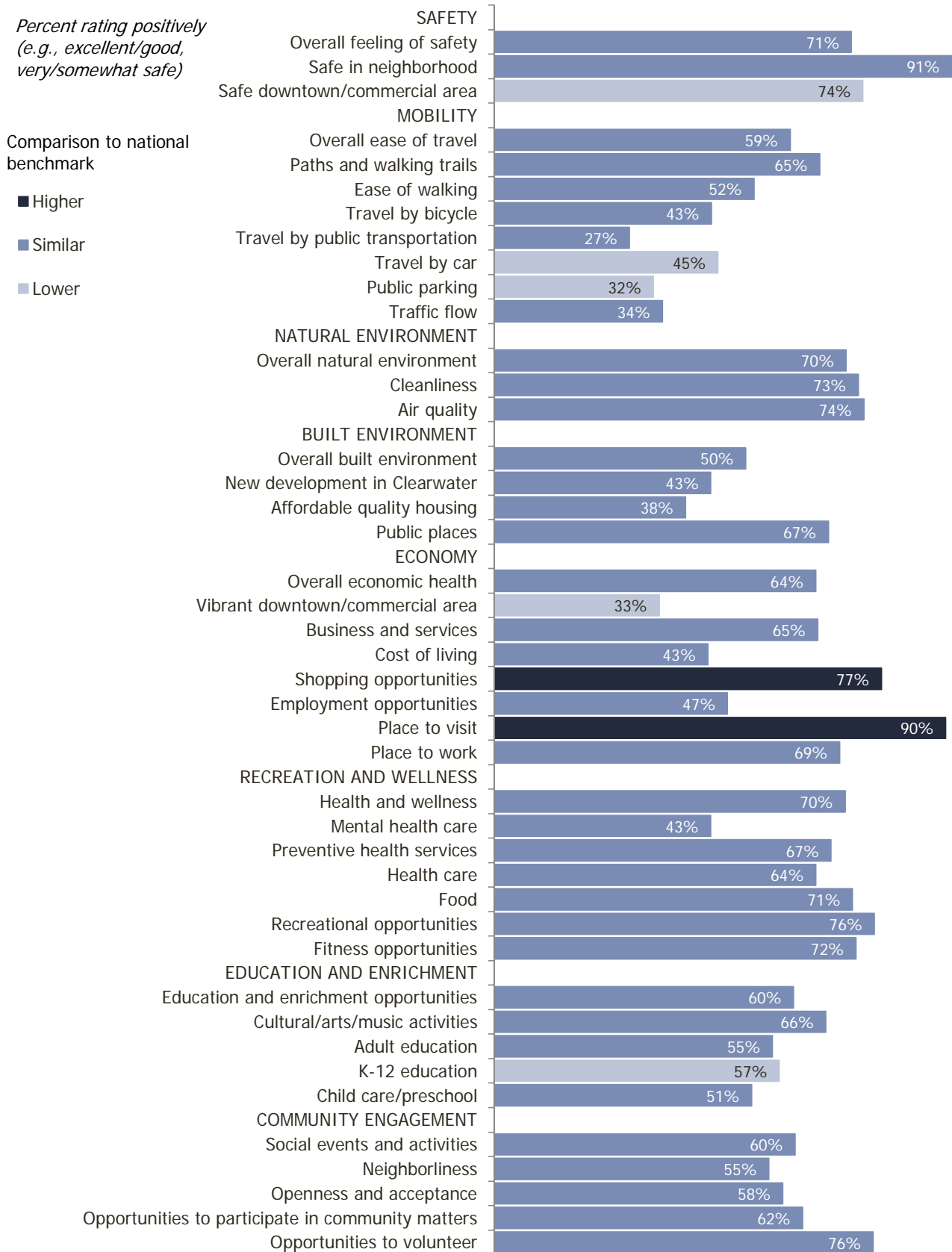
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



## The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



# Governance

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

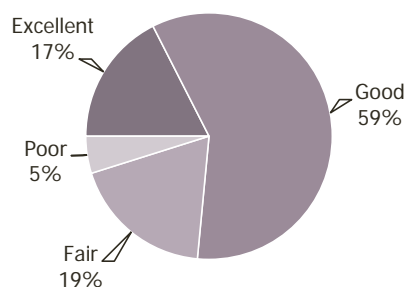
The overall quality of the services provided by Clearwater as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Seventy-seven percent of residents gave favorable ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Clearwater, whereas only about 38% assigned excellent or good reviews to the Federal Government. Ratings for both sets of services were similar to national averages.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Clearwater's leadership and governance. In general, about half of residents rated each aspect positively and scores for customer services provided by Clearwater employees was a highlight. All ratings were similar to other communities nationwide.

Respondents evaluated 30 individual services and amenities available in Clearwater. In general, at least half of residents favorably rated many services and amenities and most were similar to communities elsewhere. The highest rated services included police, fire, ambulance/EMS, City parks and public libraries, with about 8 in 10 or more awarding excellent or good marks to each.

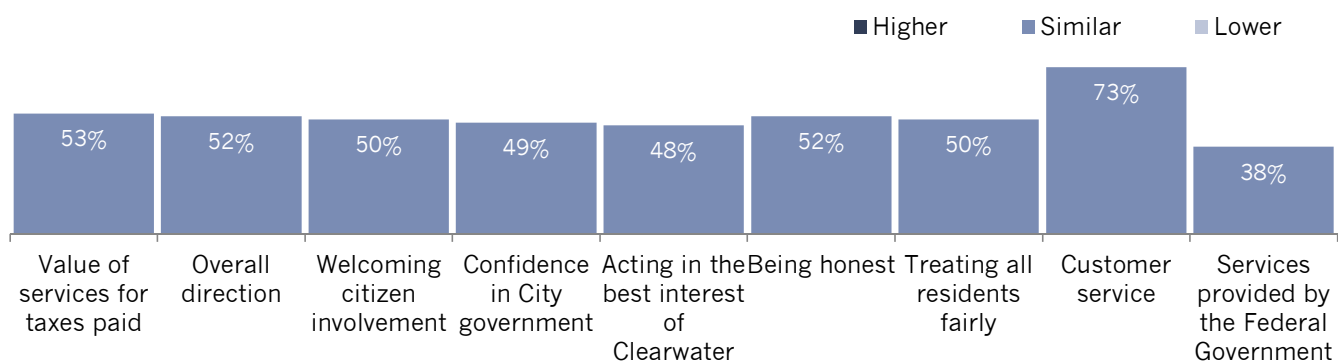
Residents gave below average assessments to services within Natural Environment (drinking water) and Built Environment (power utility). Additionally, evaluations of yard waste pick-up, storm drainage, Clearwater Gas utility and cable television decreased from 2014 to 2017. However, more residents were pleased with utility billing and code enforcement services in 2017 than in 2014. Respondents also gave more positive reviews to fire prevention, street cleaning, economic development and public information in 2017.

Overall Quality of City Services



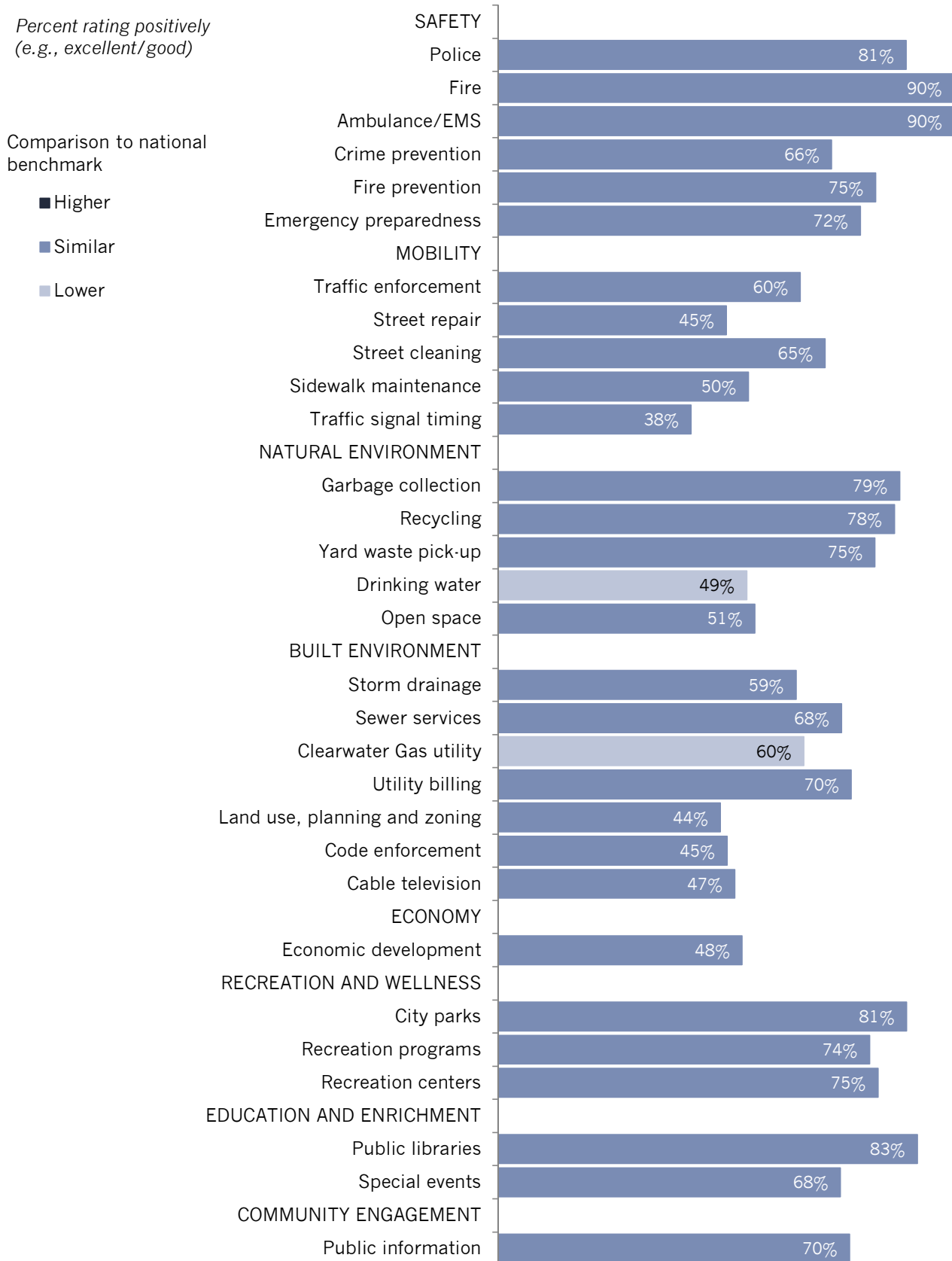
Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark



## The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance





# Participation

*Are the residents of Clearwater connected to the community and each other?*

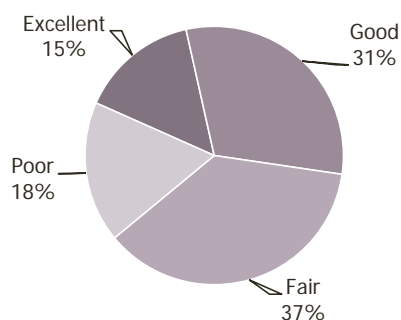
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Less than half of residents gave excellent or good marks to the sense of community in Clearwater, although this was similar to comparison communities.

At least 8 in 10 participants reported that they would recommend living in Clearwater to someone who might ask and planned to remain in the community for the next five years. Slightly less than half indicated they had contacted Clearwater employees in the 12 months prior to the survey, but this was higher than in 2014. These ratings were similar to national and peer communities.

The survey included 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Generally, Clearwater's residents tended to participate on similar levels seen in comparison communities. Residents were particularly engaged in green initiatives, such as conserving water or recycling, and reported high levels of neighborliness, reading or watching local news and voting behaviors. Close to half of survey respondents indicated they had stocked supplies in case of an emergency, which was higher than national and peer averages, although this rate decreased since 2014.

Clearwater residents exhibited lower than national levels of public library visitation, which also decreased since the last survey iteration. On a positive note, compared to 2014, more participants were optimistic that the economy would positively impact their incomes and fewer had observed a code violation in 2017.

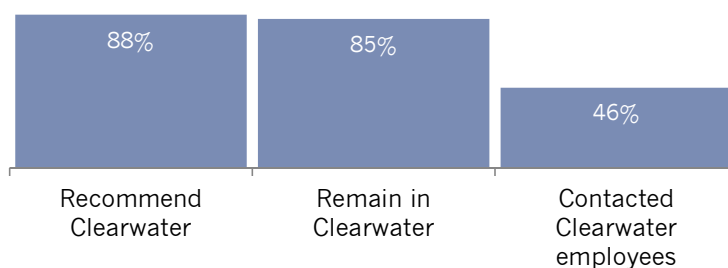
Sense of Community



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



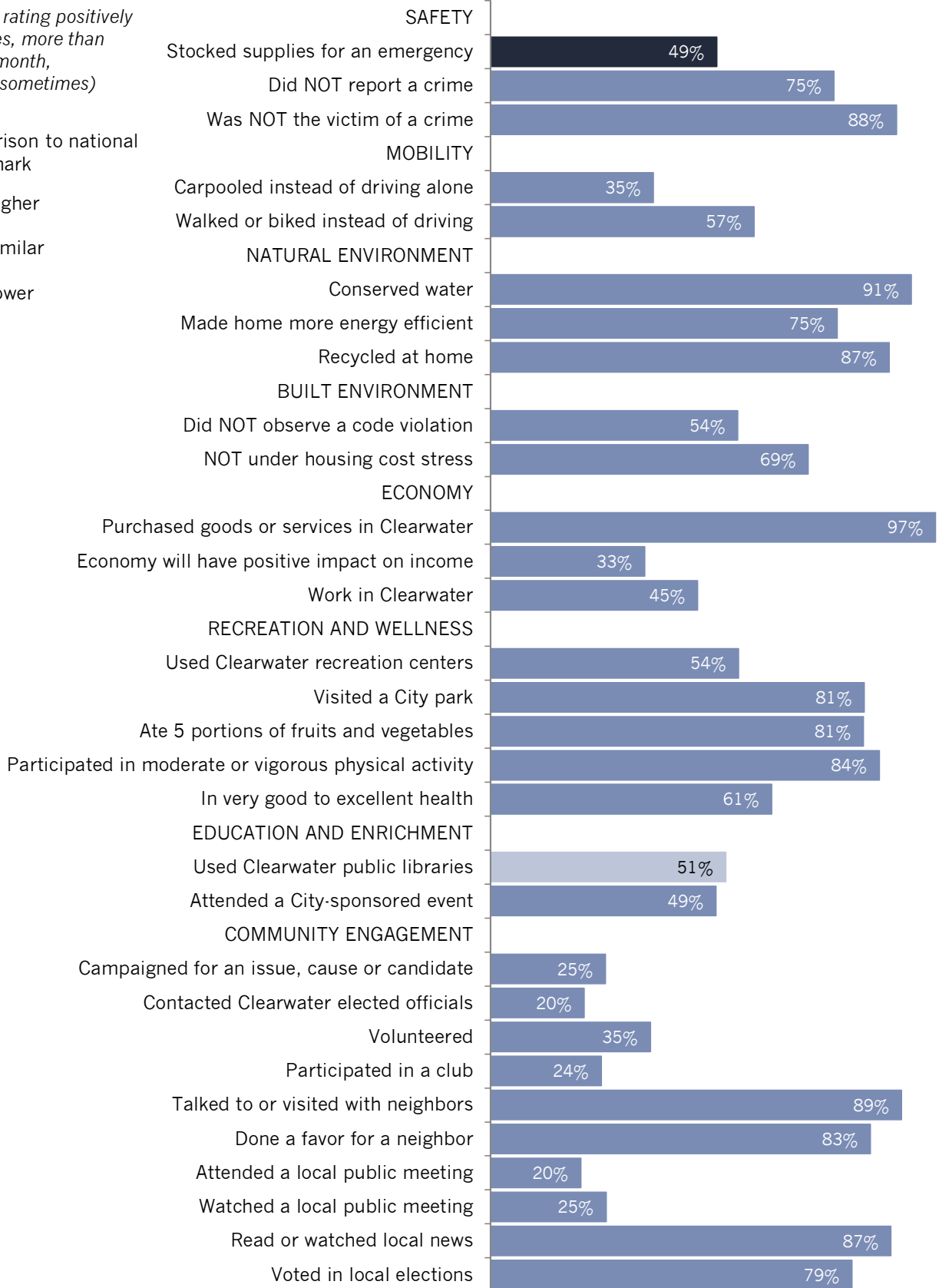
## The National Citizen Survey™

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



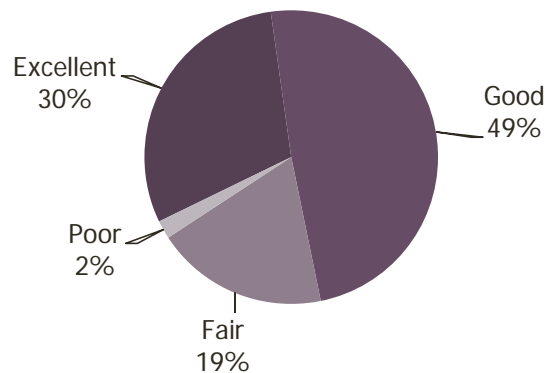
# Special Topics

The City of Clearwater included several questions of special interest on The NCS. City leaders sought feedback from residents on recreation trails, sources of information about the City, Coachman Park improvements, downtown amenities and the Imagine Clearwater Plan.

The first question asked respondents about the quality of recreation trails in the City and about 8 in 10 awarded excellent or good marks, 2 in 10 felt they were fair and only 2% of residents rated them as poor.

Figure 4: Quality of Recreation Trails

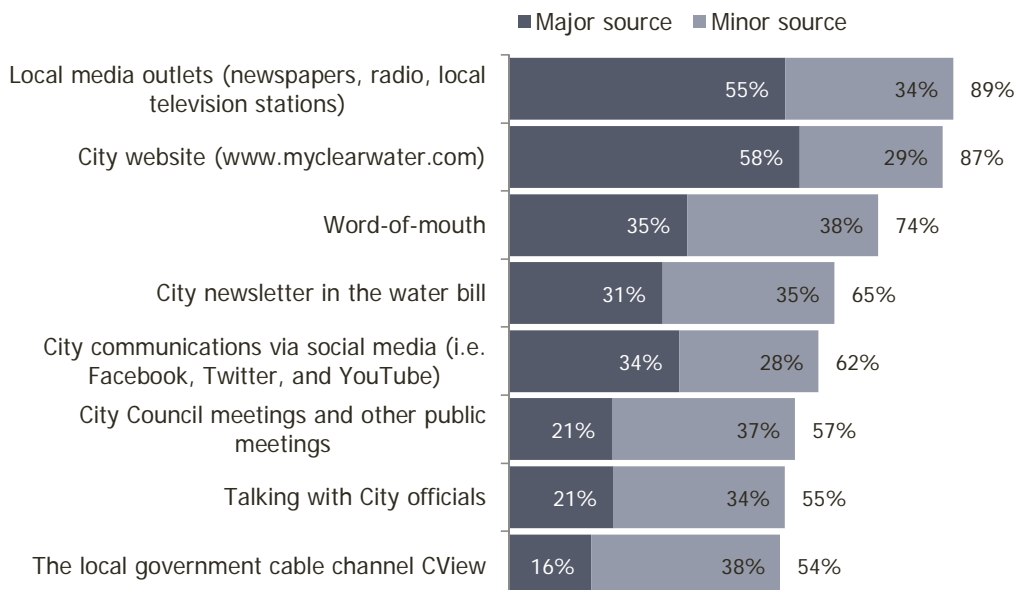
*Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Clearwater:*



City residents indicated their level of reliance on sources of information about the City by indicating how much of a source each of the eight listed items was to them. At least 8 in 10 reported using local media outlets and the City website as minor or major sources of information and about three-quarters relied on word-of-mouth. While just 16% indicated the local government cable channel CView as a major source, it was still utilized as a minor source by about one-third of respondents.

Figure 5: Sources of Information

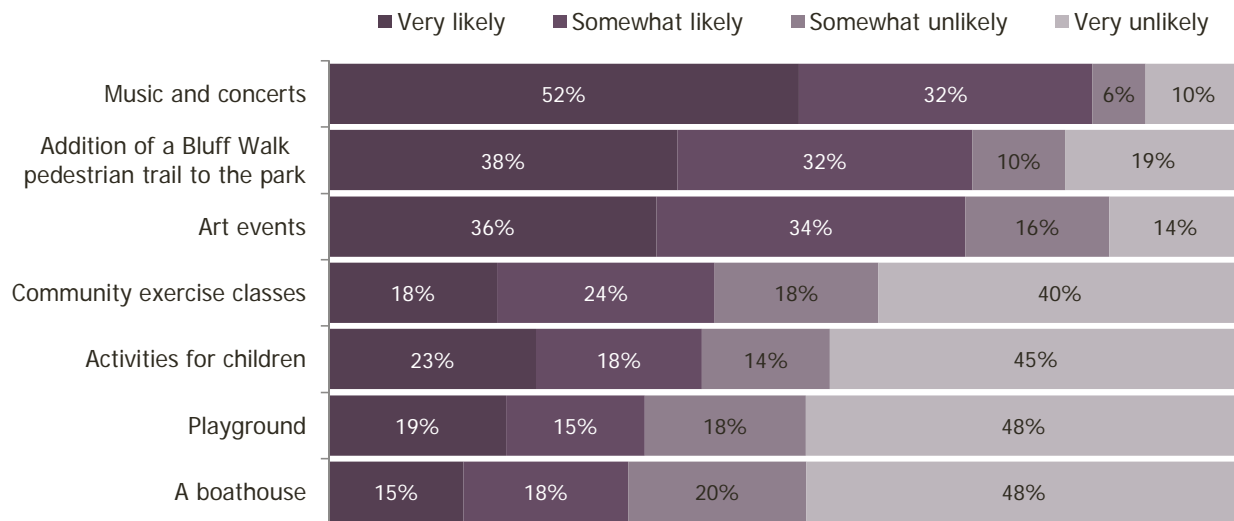
*Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the City government and its activities, events and services:*



Residents indicated that music and concerts, a Bluff Walk pedestrian trail and art events were the most likely amenities to increase the amount of time they spend in Coachman Park, with about 7 in 10 or more stating they were very or somewhat likely to do so. About one-third would be more likely to spend time in Coachman Park if a playground or boathouse were added.

Figure 6: Coachman Park Improvements

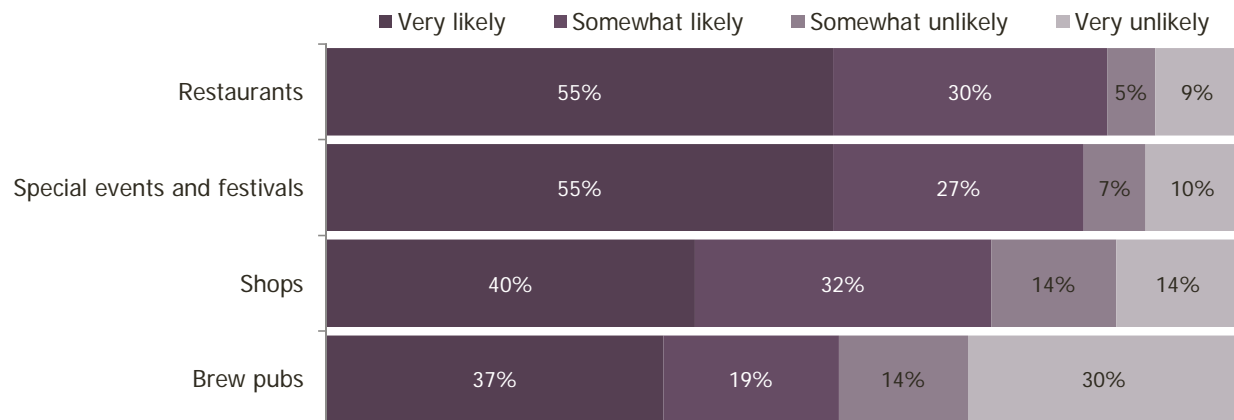
*Which of these events, activities and improvements would make you more likely to spend time in Coachman Park?*



Restaurants and special events or festivals were somewhat or very likely to attract residents downtown, as about 8 in 10 reporting these amenities would lure them. Additionally, around 7 in 10 participants would frequent the area if more shops were available and brew pubs would appeal to more than half of respondents.

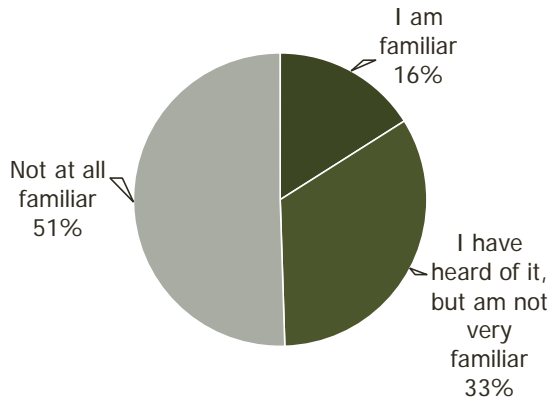
Figure 7: Downtown Clearwater Amenities

*Which of these amenities and events would make you more likely to spend time in Downtown Clearwater?*



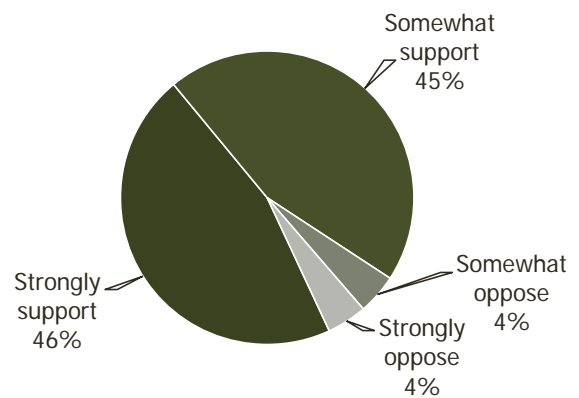
When asked about their familiarity with the Imagine Clearwater Plan, about half of survey participants indicated they were not at all familiar with the plan and 33% of residents had heard of it, but was not familiar with the details.

Figure 8: Familiarity with Imagine Clearwater Plan  
*How familiar are you with the Imagine Clearwater plan to redevelop Coachman Park and the Bluff area?*



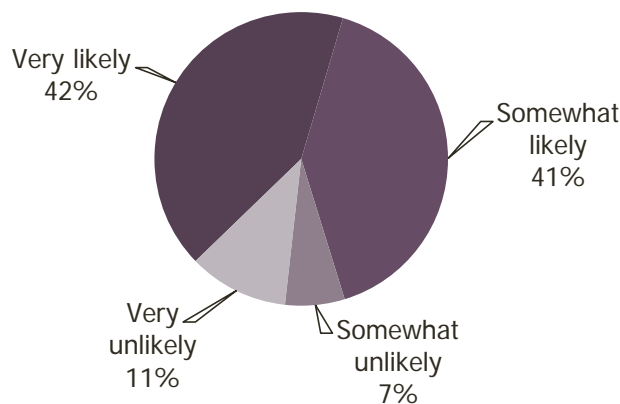
Of the roughly half of residents who were either familiar with the Imagine Clearwater Plan or those who had at least heard of it, about 9 in 10 participants strongly or somewhat supported making those improvements to Coachman Park and the Bluff area.

Figure 9: Level of Support for Imagine Clearwater Plan  
*Please indicate your level of support for the Imagine Clearwater plan:*



Finally, to gauge support for a referendum to change the charter to allow for elements of the Imagine Clearwater Plan to be implemented, City leaders asked residents how likely they would be to vote for this measure. About two in five indicated they were very likely to support and a similar proportion of residents reported they were somewhat likely to vote in favor of these improvements. Around 1 in 10 or less were either very or somewhat unlikely to vote against the plan.

Figure 10: Likelihood of Voting for Imagine Clearwater Improvements  
*The Imagine Clearwater plan includes various improvements or features (such as the playground, boathouse, and the Bluff Walk) that will require changes to the city charter. How likely are you to vote for a referendum in November 2017 that will allow these?*



# Conclusions

## Economy ratings are on the rise and investing in the downtown area can further improve the economic climate.

Overall, Clearwater respondents awarded strong ratings to Economy-related aspects of the community and most were similar to or higher than comparison communities. About two-thirds favorably scored the overall economic health of the community and Clearwater as a place to work, and around half of residents were pleased with employment opportunities and economic development. Each of these evaluations increased from 2014 to 2017. Furthermore, shopping opportunities and the City as a place to visit were evaluated at higher levels than municipalities across the nation and more residents were optimistic about the economic outlook in 2017 than in 2014.

Conversely, about one-third gave excellent or good marks to the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area of Clearwater, which was lower than the national average. Additionally, fewer residents felt safe in the downtown/commercial area than residents across the country. Over 8 in 10 survey participants indicated they would be likely to spend additional time in the downtown area if more restaurants and special events or festivals were offered. At least half of respondents would also be very or somewhat likely to increase time spent downtown if there were shops or brew pubs. These assessments indicate that improving offerings downtown could increase residents' presence in central Clearwater and positively impact the community's economy.

## Although residents enjoy Recreation opportunities and many support the Imagine Clearwater Plan, more outreach is needed.

In general, residents were pleased with aspects of Recreation offered by the City of Clearwater, with over half awarding excellent or good marks to all measures and providing ratings were similar to national and peer communities. The highest rated Recreation-related aspects were recreational opportunities, City parks, recreation programs, centers and trails, with about three-quarters evaluating each positively.

To set itself apart from neighboring communities and bolster visitation and use of the waterfront to Downtown, the City is implementing Imagine Clearwater, a plan to redevelop Coachman Park and the Bluff area, among others. About half of Clearwater residents indicated they were either familiar with or had at least heard of Imagine Clearwater. Of 49% of respondents who had heard of the plan or were familiar with it, 91% supported the redevelopment. Out of all survey participants, 8 in 10 indicated they were likely to vote in favor of the plan should there be a referendum in November. City communication efforts about Imagine Clearwater via common sources of information might help bolster support for or engagement with the issue, particularly among those who are less familiar. Survey participants relied most on local media outlets and the City website as sources of information about Clearwater.

When asked specifically about potential improvements to Coachman Park, residents indicated that music and concerts, an addition of a Bluff Walk pedestrian trail and art events were the most likely offerings to entice them to spend more time in Coachman Park. Prioritizing these amenities in the Imagine Clearwater plan could also influence decisions in November.

## Residents appreciate code enforcement efforts, but other aspects of Built Environment can be enhanced.

Compared to 2014, more Clearwater residents in 2017 were pleased with the quality of code enforcement services, with at least two in five awarding excellent or good scores. Additionally, fewer residents reported they had observed a code violation in their community across the two survey iterations. However, respondents were less satisfied with storm drainage, Clearwater Gas utilities and cable television services in 2017 than in 2014, though only Clearwater Gas utility reviews were lower than the national average. Finally, while nearly 4 in 10 participants felt positively about the availability of affordable quality housing, which was similar to peer and national comparisons, this rating has decreased since 2014.