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CITY OF ASHEVILLE, NC
2008



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C O N T E N T S

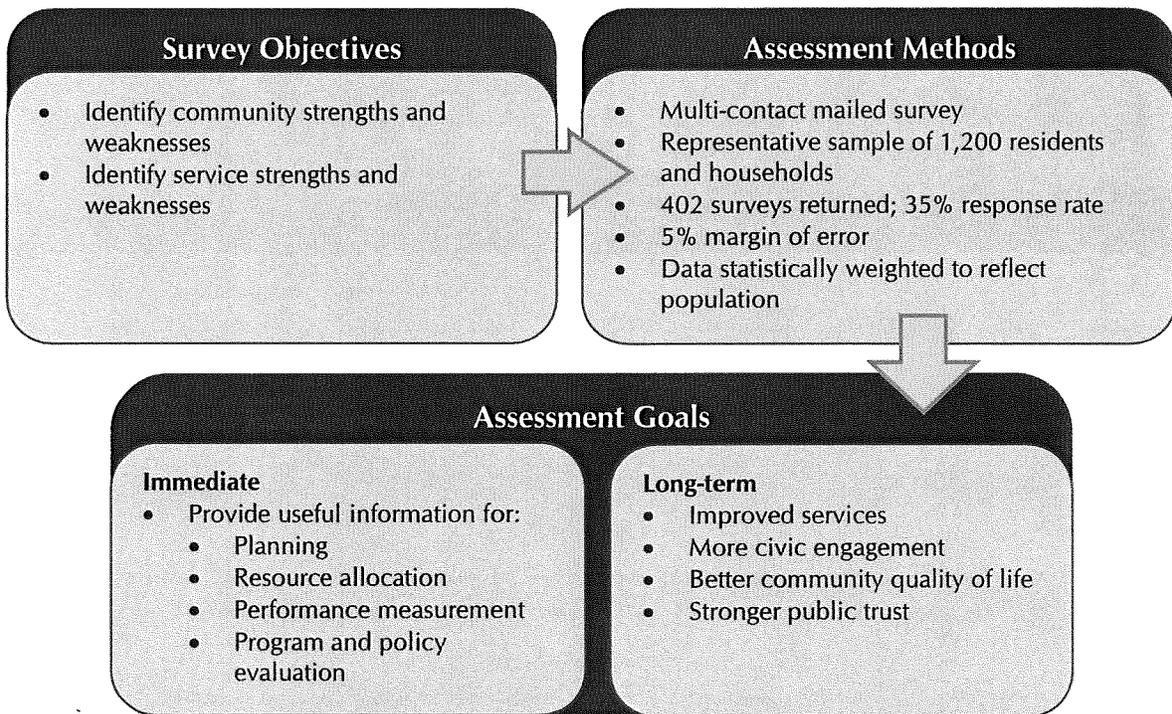
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SURVEY BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™

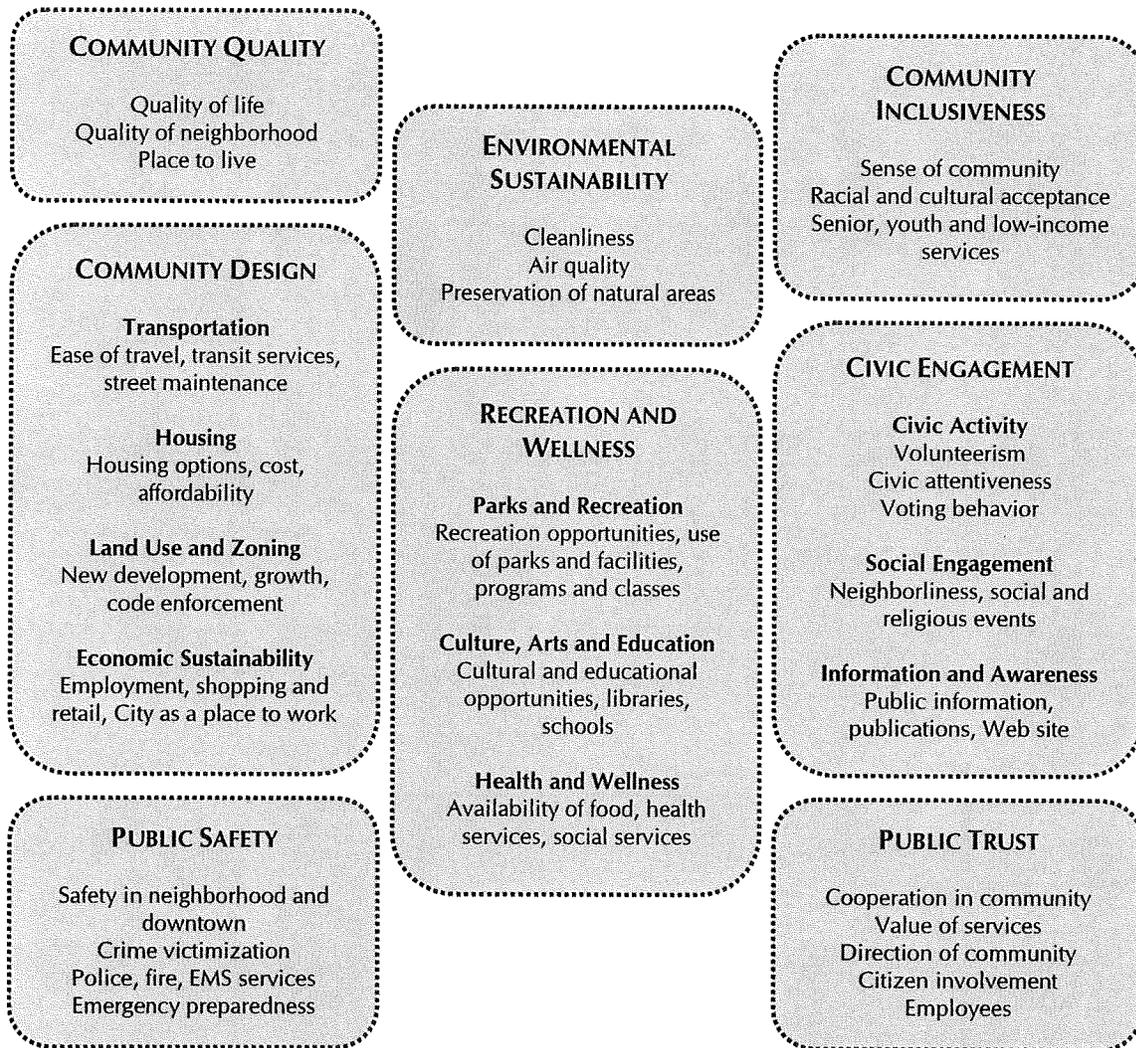
The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) is a collaborative effort between National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The NCS was developed by NRC to provide a statistically valid survey of resident opinions about community and services provided by local government. The survey results may be used by staff, elected officials and other stakeholders for community planning and resource allocation, program improvement and policy making.

FIGURE 1: THE NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™ METHODS AND GOALS



The NCS focuses on a series of community characteristics and local government services, as well as issues of public trust. Resident behaviors related to civic engagement in the community also were measured in the survey.

FIGURE 2: THE NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™ FOCUS AREAS



The survey and its administration are standardized to assure high quality research methods and directly comparable results across The National Citizen Survey™ jurisdictions. Participating households are selected at random and the household member who responds is selected without bias. Multiple mailings give each household more than one chance to participate with self-addressed and postage-paid envelopes. Results are statistically weighted to reflect the proper demographic composition of the entire community. A total of 402 completed surveys were obtained, providing an overall response rate of 35%. Typically, response rates obtained on citizen surveys range from 25% to 40%.

The National Citizen Survey™ customized for the City of Asheville was developed in close cooperation with local jurisdiction staff. Asheville staff selected items from a menu of questions about services and community problems and provided the appropriate letterhead and signatures for mailings. City of Asheville staff also augmented The National Citizen Survey™ basic service through a variety of options including demographic crosstabulation of results and several policy questions, including an open-ended question..

UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS

As shown in Figure 2, this report is based around respondents' reports about eight larger categories: community quality, community design, public safety, environmental sustainability, recreation and wellness, community inclusiveness, civic engagement and public trust. Each section begins with residents' ratings of community characteristics and is followed by residents' ratings of service quality. For all evaluative questions, the percent of residents rating the service or community feature as "excellent" or "good" is presented. To see the full set of responses for each question on the survey, please see Appendix A: Complete Survey Frequencies.

Margin of Error

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a "level of confidence" (or margin of error). The 95% confidence interval quantifies the sampling error or precision of the estimates made from the survey results. A 95% confidence interval can be calculated for any question and indicates that for every 100 random samples of this many residents, the population response to that question would be within the stated interval 95 times. The 95% confidence level for the City of Asheville survey is generally no greater than plus or minus five percentage points around any given percent reported for the entire sample (402 completed surveys).

Comparing Survey Results

Certain kinds of services tend to be thought better of by residents in many communities across the country. For example, public safety services tend to be received better than transportation services by residents of most American communities. Where possible, the better comparison is not from one service to another in the City of Asheville, but from City of Asheville services to services like them provided by other jurisdictions.

Benchmark Comparisons

NRC's database of comparative resident opinion is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in citizen surveys from approximately 500 jurisdictions whose residents evaluated local government services and gave their opinion about the quality of community life. The City of Asheville chose to have comparisons made to the entire database. A benchmark comparison (the average rating from all the comparison jurisdictions where a similar question was asked) has been provided when a similar question on the City of Asheville Survey was included in NRC's database and there were at least five jurisdictions in which the question was asked. For most questions compared to the entire dataset, there were more than 100 jurisdictions included in the benchmark comparison.

Where comparisons were available, the City of Asheville results were noted as being "above" the benchmark, "below" the benchmark or "similar to" the benchmark. This evaluation of "above," "below" or "similar to" comes from a statistical comparison of the City of Asheville's rating to the benchmark.

"Don't Know" Responses and Rounding

On many of the questions in the survey respondents may answer "don't know." The proportion of respondents giving this reply is shown in the full set of responses included in Appendix A. However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in the body of the report. In other words, the tables and graphs display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item.

For some questions, respondents were permitted to select more than one answer. When the total exceeds 100% in a table for a multiple response question, it is because some respondents did select

more than one response. When a table for a question that only permitted a single response does not total to exactly 100%, it is due to the customary practice of percentages being rounded to the nearest whole number.

For more information on understanding The NCS report, please see Appendix B: Survey Methodology.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report of the City of Asheville survey provides the opinions of a representative sample of residents about community quality of life, service delivery, civic participation and unique issues of local interest. A periodic sounding of resident opinion offers staff, elected officials and other stakeholders an opportunity to identify challenges and to plan for and evaluate improvements and to sustain services and amenities for long-term success.

Most residents experience a good quality of life in the City of Asheville and believe the City is a good place to live. The overall quality of life in the City of Asheville was rated as "excellent" or "good" by 80% of respondents. Most report they plan on staying in the City of Asheville for the next five years.

A variety of characteristics of the community were evaluated by those participating in the study. The four receiving the most favorable ratings were opportunities to volunteer, opportunities to participate in religious or spiritual events and activities, opportunities to attend cultural activities, and the overall image or reputation of Asheville. The three characteristics receiving the least positive ratings were availability of affordable quality housing, employment opportunities, and the amount of public parking.

All of the community characteristics rated were able to be compared to the benchmark database. Of the 27 characteristics for which comparisons were available, 12 were above the benchmark comparison, 2 were similar to the benchmark comparison and 13 were below.

Residents in the City of Asheville were somewhat civically engaged. While only 30% had attended a meeting of local elected public officials or other local public meeting in the previous 12 months, 96% had provided help to a friend or neighbor. A majority had volunteered their time to some group or activity in the City of Asheville.

In general, survey respondents demonstrated mild trust in local government. Less than half rated the overall direction being taken by the City of Asheville as "good" or "excellent." This was lower than the benchmark. Those residents who had interacted with an employee of the City of Asheville in the previous 12 months gave high marks to those employees. Nearly all rated their overall impression as excellent or good.

On average, residents gave somewhat favorable ratings to local government services. Many of the City services rated were able to be compared to the benchmark database. Of the 32 services for which comparisons were available, none were above the benchmark comparison, nine were similar to the benchmark comparison and 23 were below.

A Key Driver Analysis was conducted for the City of Asheville which examined the relationships between ratings of each service and ratings of the City of Asheville's services overall. Those key driver services that correlated most strongly with residents' perceptions about overall City service quality have been identified. By targeting improvements in key services, the City of Asheville can focus on the services that have the greatest likelihood of influencing residents' opinions about overall service quality. Services found to be influential in ratings of overall service quality from the Key Driver Analysis were:

- Land use, planning and zoning
- City parks
- Street cleaning
- Public schools

We recommend that key driver services below benchmark comparisons form the center of your focus for improvement including: land use, planning and zoning, city parks, street cleaning, and public schools.

COMMUNITY RATINGS

OVERALL COMMUNITY QUALITY

Overall quality of community life may be the single best indicator of success in providing the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. The National Citizen Survey™ contained many questions related to quality of community life in the City of Asheville – not only direct questions about quality of life overall and in neighborhoods, but questions to measure residents’ commitment to the City of Asheville. Residents were asked whether they planned to move soon or if they would recommend the City of Asheville to others. Intentions to stay and willingness to make recommendations provide evidence that the City of Asheville offers services and amenities that work.

Most of the City of Asheville’s residents gave favorable ratings to their neighborhoods and the community as a place to live. Further, a majority reported they would recommend the community to others and plan to stay for the next five years.

FIGURE 3: RATINGS OF OVERALL COMMUNITY QUALITY

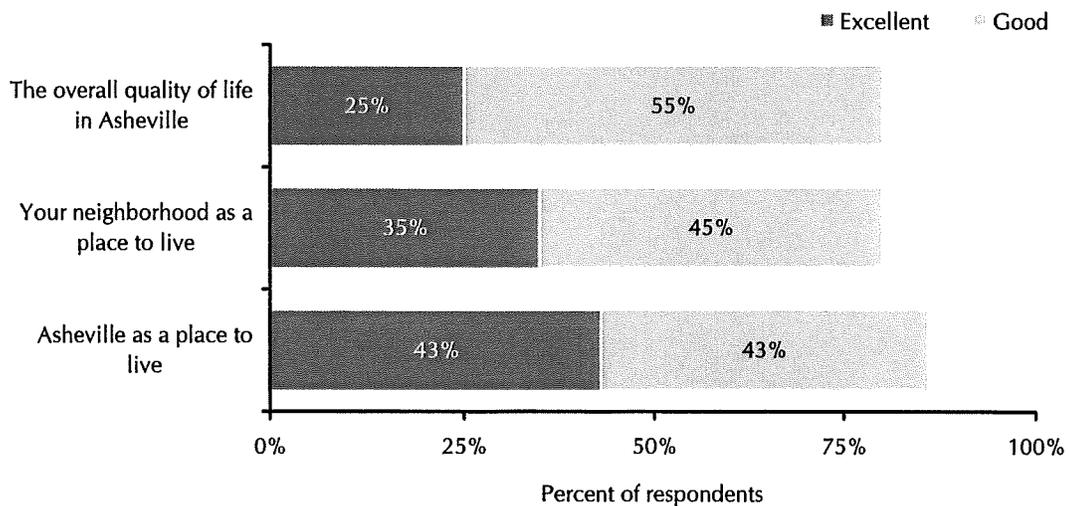


FIGURE 4: LIKELIHOOD OF REMAINING IN COMMUNITY AND RECOMMENDING COMMUNITY

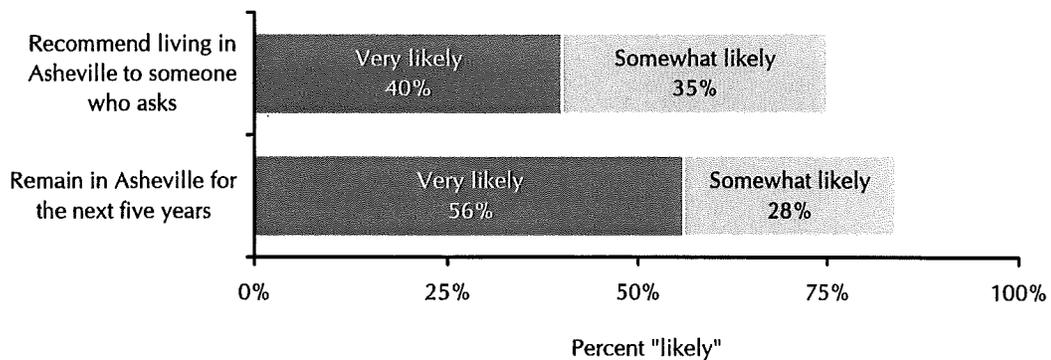


FIGURE 5: OVERALL COMMUNITY QUALITY BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Overall quality of life in Asheville	Similar
Your neighborhood as place to live	Similar
Asheville as a place to live	Above
Remain in Asheville for the next five years	Similar
Recommend living in Asheville to someone who asks	Below

COMMUNITY DESIGN

Transportation

The ability to move easily throughout a community can greatly affect the quality of life of residents by diminishing time wasted in traffic congestion and by providing opportunities to travel quickly and safely by modes other than the automobile. High quality options for resident mobility not only require local government to remove barriers to flow but they require government programs and policies that create quality opportunities for all modes of travel.

Residents responding to the survey were given a list of six aspects of mobility to rate on a scale of "excellent," "good," "fair" and "poor." Ease of car travel was given the most positive rating, followed by ease of walking in Asheville.

FIGURE 6: RATINGS OF TRANSPORTATION IN COMMUNITY

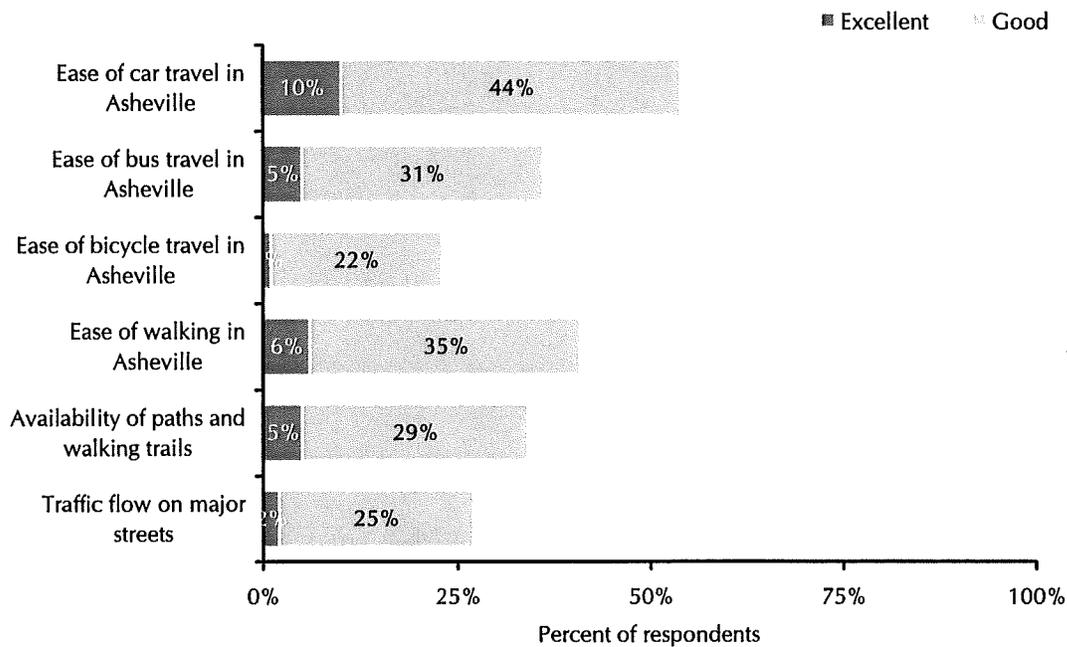


FIGURE 7: COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Ease of bus travel in Asheville	Below
Ease of car travel in Asheville	Similar
Ease of walking in Asheville	Below
Ease of bicycle travel in Asheville	Below
Availability of paths and walking trails	Below
Traffic flow on major streets	Below

Eight transportation services were rated in Asheville. As compared to other communities across America, ratings tended to be negative. None were above the benchmark, seven below the benchmark and one was similar to the benchmark.

FIGURE 8: RATINGS OF TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING SERVICES

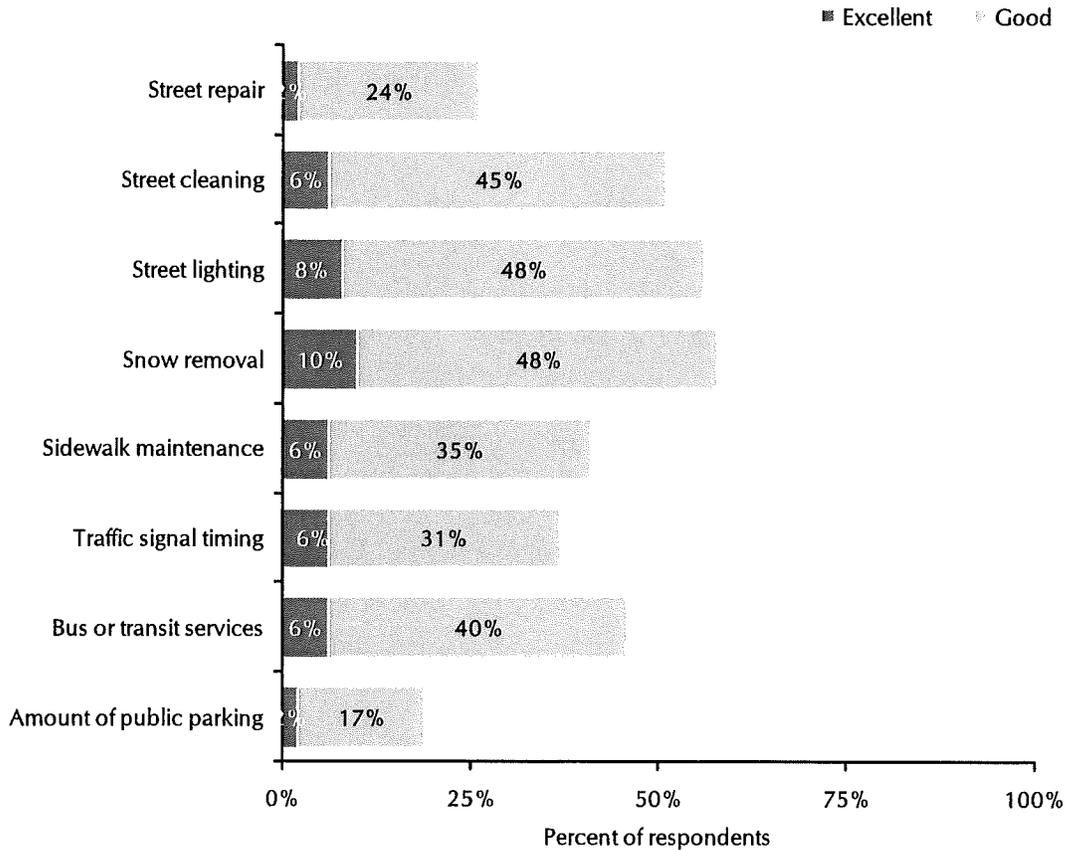


FIGURE 9: TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING SERVICES BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Street repair /maintenance	Below
Street cleaning	Below
Street lighting	Similar
Snow removal	Below
Sidewalk maintenance	Below
Light timing	Below
Bus or transit services	Below
Amount of public parking	Below

By measuring choice of travel mode over time, communities can monitor their success in providing attractive alternatives to the traditional mode of travel, the single-occupied automobile. When asked how they typically traveled to work, single-occupancy (SOV) travel was the overwhelming mode of use. However, 4% of work commute trips were made by transit, 3% by bicycle and 5% by foot.

FIGURE 10: FREQUENCY OF BUS USE IN LAST 12 MONTHS

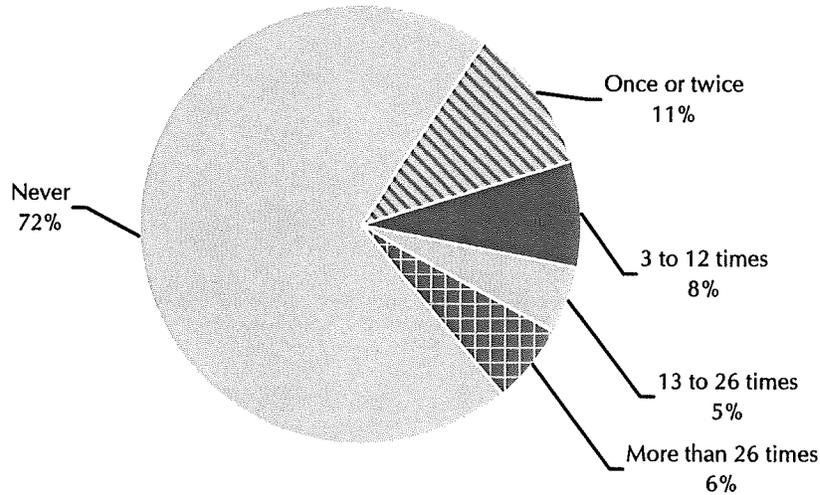
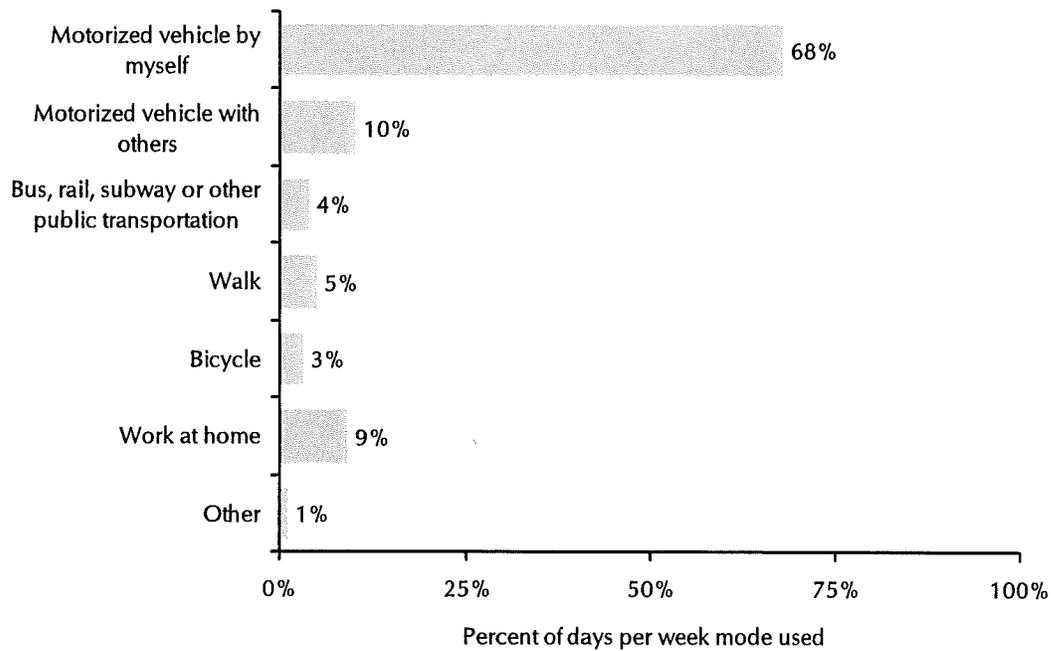


FIGURE 11: MODE OF TRAVEL USED FOR WORK COMMUTE



Housing

Housing variety and affordability are not luxuries for any community. When there are too few options for housing style and affordability, the characteristics of a community tilt heavily to a homogeneous palette, often of well-off residents. While this may seem attractive to a community, the absence of affordable townhomes, condominiums, mobile homes, single family detached homes and apartments means that in addition to losing the vibrancy of diverse thoughts and lifestyles, the community loses the service workers that sustain all communities – police officers, school teachers, house painters and electricians. These workers must live elsewhere and commute in at great personal cost and to the detriment of traffic flow and air quality. Furthermore lower income residents who can sustain in a community with mostly high cost housing pay so much of their income to rent or mortgage that little remains to bolster their own quality of life or local business.

The survey of the City of Asheville residents asked respondents to reflect on the availability of affordable housing as well as the variety of housing options. The availability of affordable housing was rated as “excellent” or “good” by 12% of respondents, while the variety of housing options was rated as “excellent” or “good” by 28% of respondents. The rating of perceived affordable housing availability was worse in the City of Asheville than the ratings, on average, in comparison jurisdictions.

FIGURE 12: RATINGS OF HOUSING IN COMMUNITY

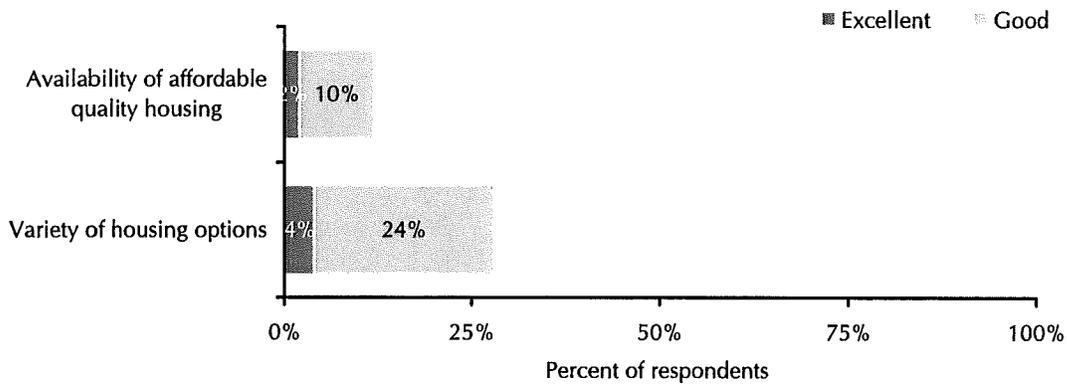
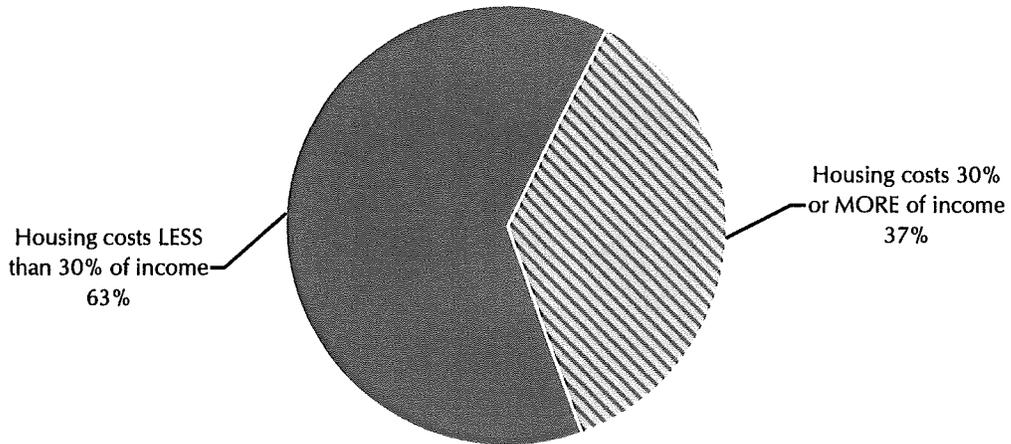


FIGURE 13: HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Availability of affordable quality housing	Below
Variety of housing options	Below

To augment the perceptions of affordable housing in Asheville, the cost of housing as reported in the survey was compared to residents' reported monthly income to create a rough estimate of the proportion of residents of the City of Asheville experiencing housing cost stress. About one-third of survey participants were found to pay housing costs of more than 30% of their monthly household income.

FIGURE 14: PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WHOSE HOUSING COSTS ARE "AFFORDABLE"



Land Use and Zoning

Community development contributes to a feeling among residents and even visitors of the attention given to the speed of growth, the location of residences and businesses, the kind of housing that is appropriate for the community and the ease of access to commerce, green space and residences. Even the community's overall appearance often is attributed to the planning and enforcement functions of the local jurisdiction. Residents will appreciate an attractive, well-planned community. The NCS questionnaire asked residents to evaluate the quality of new development, the appearance of the City of Asheville and the speed of population growth. Problems with the appearance of property were rated, and the quality of land use planning, zoning and code enforcement services were evaluated.

The overall quality of new development in the City of Asheville was rated as "excellent" by 6% of respondents and as "good" by an additional 34%. The overall appearance of Asheville was rated as "excellent" or "good" by 68% of respondents and was similar to the benchmark. When rating to what extent run down buildings, weed lots or junk vehicles were a problem in the City of Asheville, 54% thought they were a "major" or "moderate" problem.

FIGURE 15: RATINGS OF THE COMMUNITY'S "BUILT ENVIRONMENT"

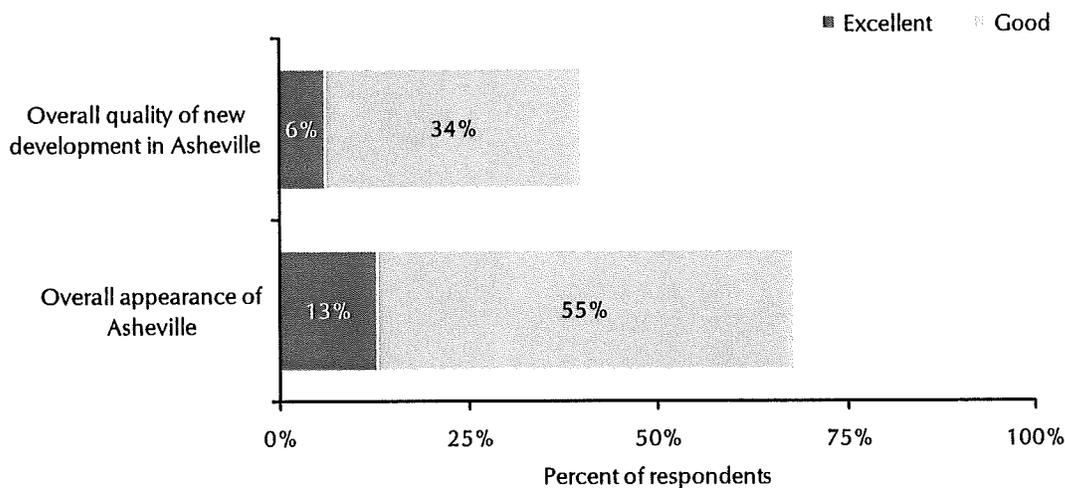


FIGURE 16: BUILT ENVIRONMENT BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Quality of new development in city	Below
Overall appearance of Asheville	Similar

FIGURE 17: RATINGS OF POPULATION GROWTH

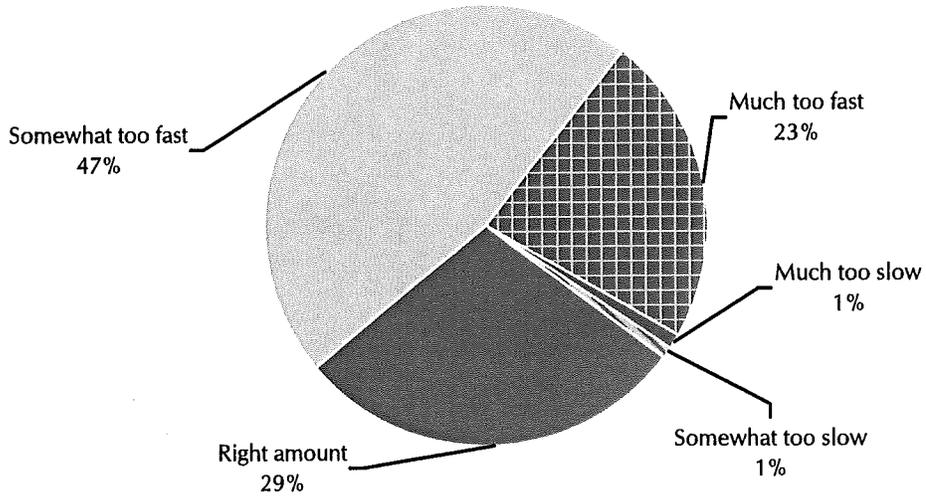


FIGURE 18: RATINGS OF NUISANCE PROBLEMS

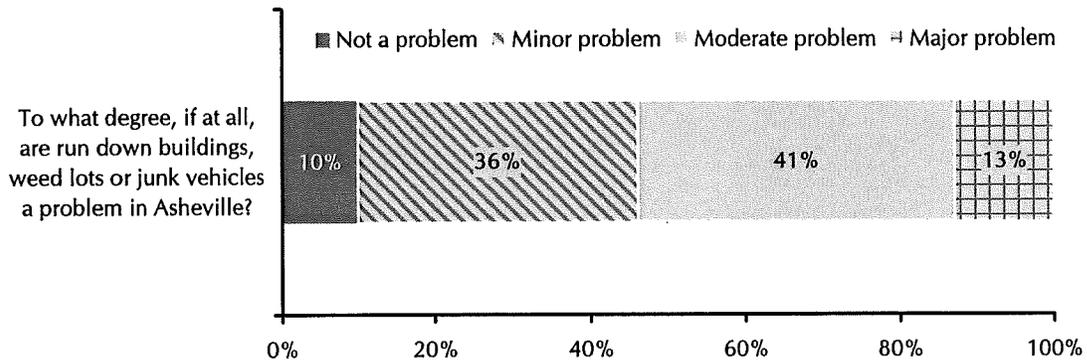


FIGURE 19: RATINGS OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY CODE ENFORCEMENT SERVICES

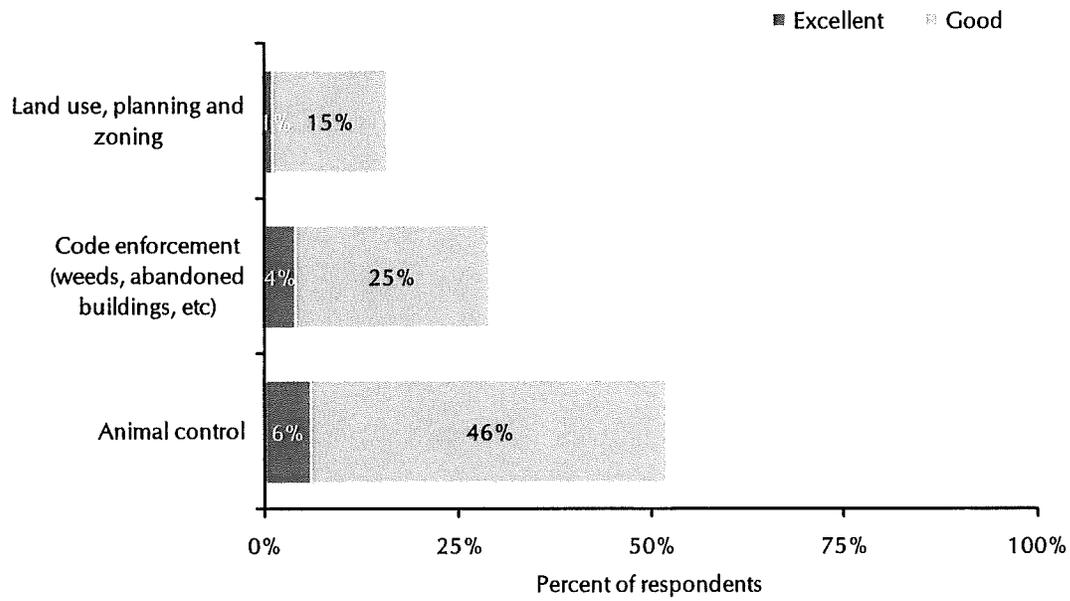


FIGURE 20: PLANNING AND COMMUNITY CODE ENFORCEMENT SERVICES BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Land use, planning and zoning	Below
Code enforcement (weeds, abandoned buildings, etc)	Below
Animal control	Below

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The health of the economy may color how residents perceive their environment and all the services that local government delivers. In particular, a strong or weak local economy will shape what residents think about job and shopping opportunities. Just as residents have an idea about the speed of local population growth, they have a sense of how fast job and shopping opportunities are growing.

Survey respondents were asked to rate a number of community features related to economic opportunity and growth. The most positively rated features were shopping opportunities and the overall quality of business and service establishments in Asheville. Receiving the lowest rating was employment opportunities.

FIGURE 21: RATINGS OF ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES

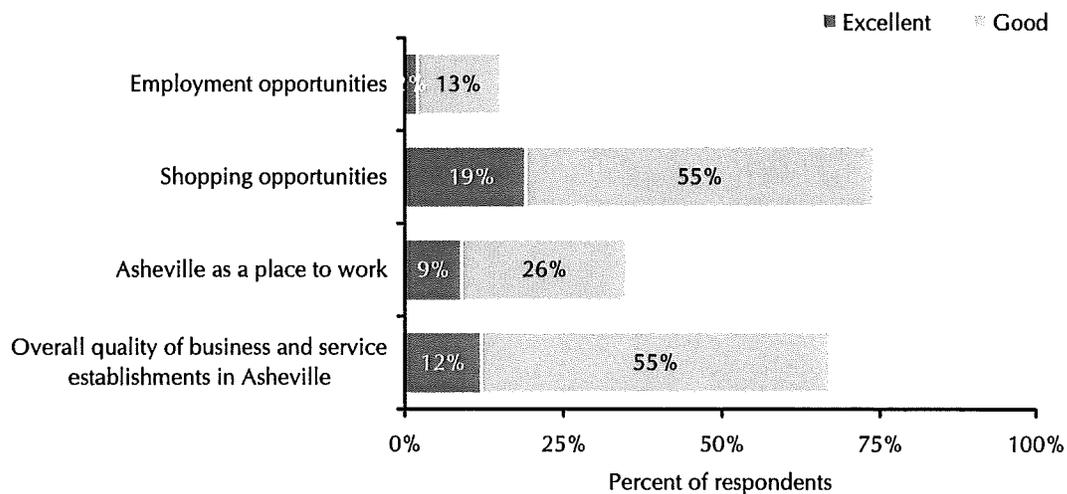


FIGURE 22: ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Employment opportunities	Below
Shopping opportunities	Above
Place to work	Below
Overall quality of business and service establishments in Asheville	Above

When asked to evaluate the rate of job growth in Asheville, 7% responded that it was the “right amount,” while 46% reported the “right amount” of retail growth was occurring in Asheville.

FIGURE 23: RATINGS OF RETAIL AND JOB GROWTH

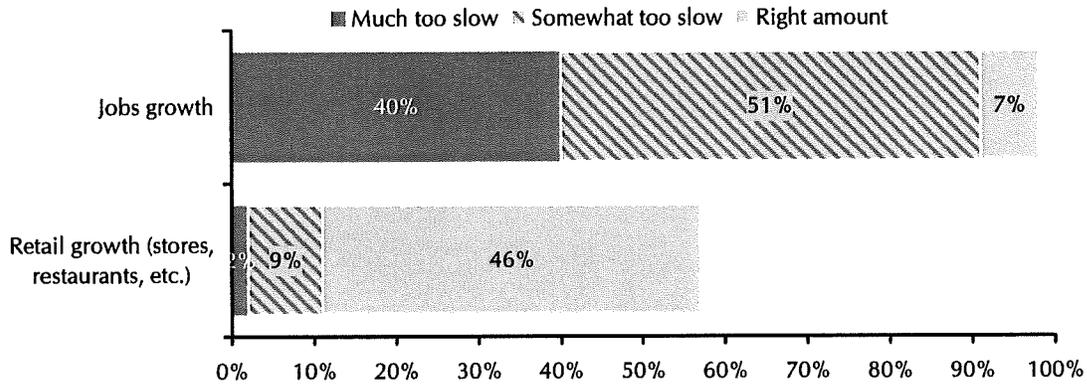


FIGURE 24: RATINGS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

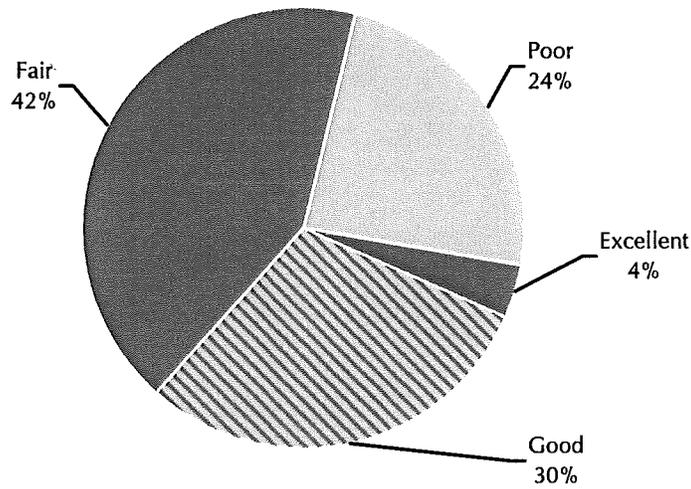
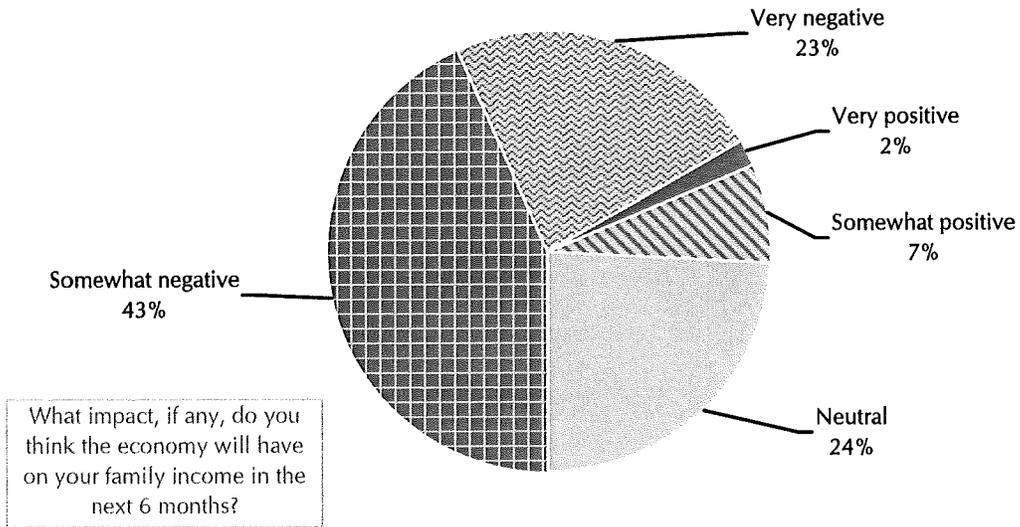


FIGURE 25: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES BENCHMARKS

Comparison to benchmark	
Economic development	Below

Residents were asked to reflect on their economic prospects in the near term. Nine percent of the City of Asheville residents expected that the coming six months would have a "somewhat" or "very" positive impact on their family, while 66% felt that the economic future would be "somewhat" or "very" negative.

FIGURE 26: RATINGS OF PERSONAL ECONOMIC FUTURE



PUBLIC SAFETY

Safety from violent or property crimes creates the cornerstone of an attractive community. No one wants to live in fear of crime, fire or natural hazards, and communities in which residents feel protected or unthreatened are communities that are more likely to show growth in population, commerce and property value.

Residents were asked to rate their feelings of safety from violent crimes, property crimes, fire and environmental dangers and to evaluate the local agencies whose main charge is to provide protection from these dangers. A majority gave positive ratings of safety in the City Asheville. About 63% percent of those completing the questionnaire said they felt "very" or "somewhat" safe from violent crimes and 61% felt "very" or "somewhat" safe from environmental hazards. Daytime sense of safety was better than nighttime safety and neighborhoods felt safer than downtown.

FIGURE 27: RATINGS OF COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL PUBLIC SAFETY

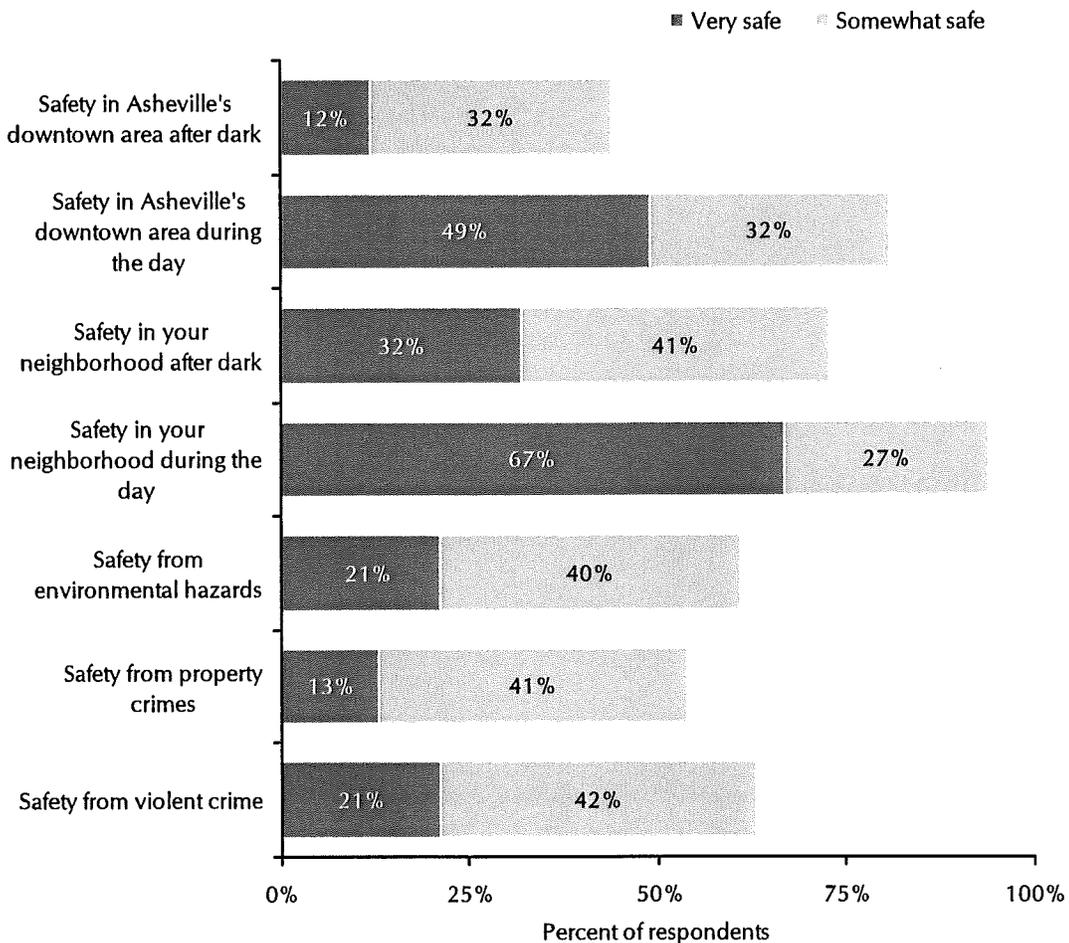


FIGURE 28: COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL PUBLIC SAFETY BENCHMARKS

	Comparison to benchmark
Safety in Asheville's downtown area after dark	Below
Safety in Asheville's downtown area during the day	Similar
Safety in your neighborhood after dark	Similar
Safety in your neighborhood during the day	Above
Toxic waste or other environmental hazard(s)	Below
Safety from property crimes (e.g., burglary, theft)	Below
Safety from violent crime (e.g., rape, assault, robbery)	Below

As assessed by the survey, 22% of respondents reported that someone in the household had been the victim of one or more crimes in the past year. Of those who had been the victim of a crime, 77% had reported it to police.

FIGURE 29: CRIME VICTIMIZATION AND REPORTING

