



**The National Community Survey™**

# Grand Traverse County, MI

*Community Livability Report*  
**2020**



POWERED BY POLCO

National Research Center, Inc.  
2955 Valmont Road Suite 300  
Boulder, Colorado 80301  
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863



*Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*

International City/County Management Association  
777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20002  
icma.org • 800-745-8780

# Contents

About The NCS™ ..... 3

Overview of Results ..... 4

Facets of Livability ..... 5

Quality of Life ..... 7

Governance ..... 8

Economy..... 10

Mobility..... 12

Community Design ..... 14

Utilities..... 16

Safety ..... 17

Natural Environment..... 19

Parks and Recreation ..... 20

Health and Wellness..... 21

Education, Arts, and Culture ..... 23

Inclusivity and Engagement ..... 25



The National Community Survey™  
© 2001-2020 National Research Center, Inc.

The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

# About The NCS™

The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of Grand Traverse County. 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 considering ten central facets of a community:

- Economy
- Mobility
- Community Design
- Utilities
- Safety
- Natural Environment
- Parks and Recreation
- Health and Wellness
- Education, Arts and Culture
- Inclusivity and Engagement



The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 561 residents of Grand Traverse County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents and the response rate for the 2020 survey was 34%. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.

# Overview of Results

## **Grand Traverse County residents enjoy a positive quality of life.**

Residents' ratings for the livability of Grand Traverse County and the County's quality of life were strong and tended to be similar to the national benchmarks. More than 8 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life in the County and to Grand Traverse County as a place to live, and similar proportions indicated they planned to remain in Grand Traverse County for the next five years and would recommend living in the County to someone who asked.

## **Residents praise the County as a place to visit as well as its natural environment and outdoor amenities.**

Grand Traverse County as a place to visit (94% excellent or good), the vibrancy of the County's downtown/commercial area (85%), and overall quality of business and service establishments (85%) were rated higher or much higher than national averages. About 9 in 10 County residents gave positive ratings to water resources, air quality, and the availability of paths and walking trails, and about three-quarters were pleased with County open space; these scores were also higher than those given elsewhere. Further, Grand Traverse County residents were more likely than those who lived in other communities to rate the overall quality of the natural environment in the County as essential or very important.

## **Challenges exist in the areas of affordability and housing.**

As is often the case in tourist destination communities, residents tended to give lower-than-average ratings to aspects of affordability in Grand Traverse County. These included cost of living, variety of housing options, availability of affordability quality housing, affordable high-speed internet access, and availability of affordable quality child care/preschool. County residents were also less likely than those who lived in other communities across the country to have a positive economic outlook on the future.

## **Health and wellness are community priorities.**

Residents in Grand Traverse County were more likely than those living in other jurisdictions nationwide to rate overall health and wellness opportunities in the County as essential or very important. Ratings within this facet of livability tended to be on par with those given elsewhere: about three-quarters of residents or more gave excellent or good ratings to overall health and wellness opportunities and health services in Grand Traverse County. Additionally, about 9 in 10 respondents gave favorable marks to recreational opportunities and fitness opportunities, and both of these ratings were above average.

# Facets of Livability

Ratings of importance were compared to ratings of quality to help guide County staff and officials with decisions on future resource allocation and strategic planning areas. When competition for limited resources demands that efficiencies or cutbacks be instituted, it is wise not only to know what facets are deemed most important to residents' quality of life, but which among the most important are perceived to be of relatively lower quality in your community. It is these facets of community livability – more important facets perceived as being of lower quality – to which attention needs to be paid first.

		QUALITY		
		LOWER	SIMILAR	HIGHER
IMPORTANCE	HIGHER		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Environment</li> <li>• Health and Wellness</li> </ul>	
	SIMILAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Utilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy</li> <li>• Community Design</li> <li>• Parks and Recreation</li> <li>• Education, Arts and Culture</li> </ul>	
	LOWER		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Inclusivity and Engagement</li> </ul>	

**FIGURE 1: QUALITY OF FACETS OF LIVABILITY- SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall economic health of Grand Traverse County	↔	59%
Overall quality of the transportation system in Grand Traverse County	↓	57%
Overall design or layout of Grand Traverse County's residential and commercial areas	↔	56%
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Grand Traverse County	↓	47%
Overall feeling of safety in Grand Traverse County	↔	87%
Overall quality of natural environment in Grand Traverse County	↔	89%
Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities	↔	88%
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Grand Traverse County	↔	83%
Overall opportunities for education, culture, and the arts	↔	70%
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	↔	66%

**FIGURE 2: IMPORTANCE OF FACETS OF LIVABILITY- SUMMARY**

Percent essential or very important	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall economic health of Grand Traverse County	↔	91%
Overall quality of the transportation system in Grand Traverse County	↔	74%
Overall design or layout of Grand Traverse County's residential and commercial areas	↔	74%
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Grand Traverse County	↔	92%
Overall feeling of safety in Grand Traverse County	↓	85%
Overall quality of natural environment in Grand Traverse County	↑	90%
Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities	↔	82%
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Grand Traverse County	↑	80%
Overall opportunities for education, culture, and the arts	↔	72%
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	↓	70%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

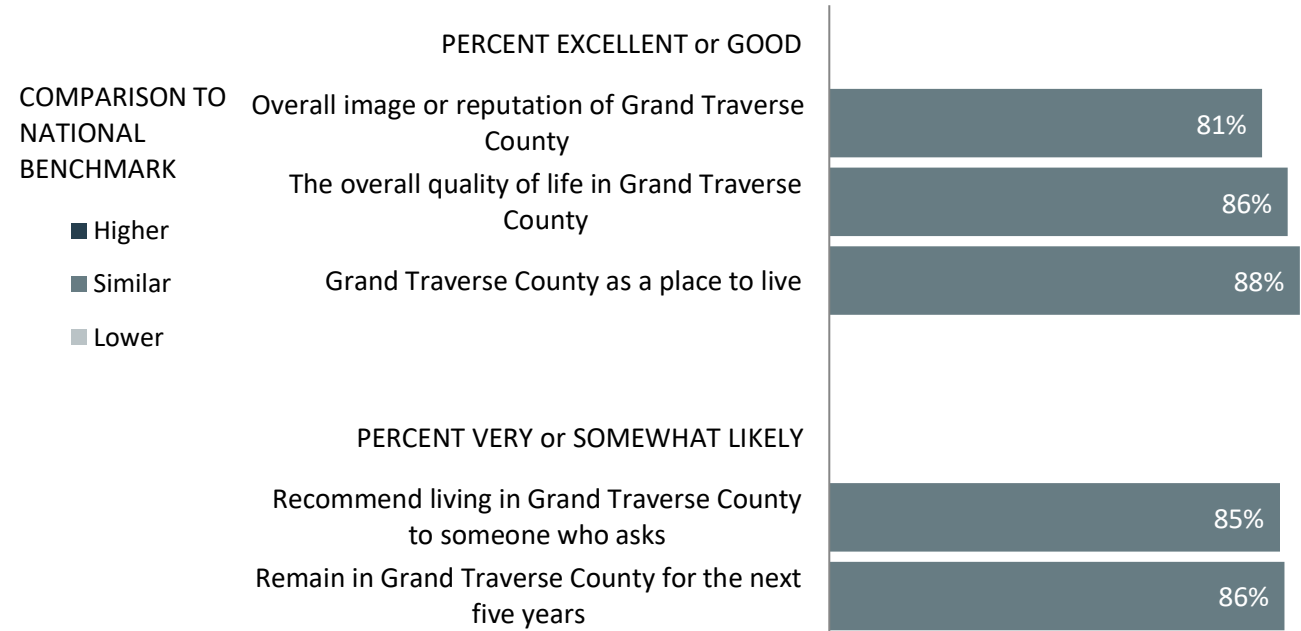
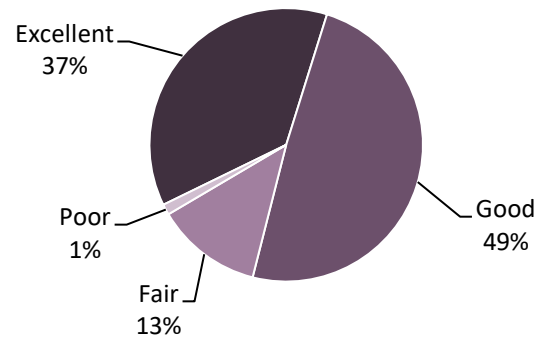
\* Not available

# Quality of Life

*Measuring community livability starts with assessing the quality of life of those who live there, and ensuring that the community is attractive, accessible, and welcoming to all.*

**FIGURE 3: QUALITY OF LIFE IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY**

## OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY



**FIGURE 4: QUALITY OF LIFE IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall image or reputation of Grand Traverse County	↔	81%
The overall quality of life in Grand Traverse County	↔	86%
Grand Traverse County as a place to live	↔	88%

**FIGURE 5: RECOMMEND GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY - SUMMARY**

Percent very or somewhat likely	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Recommend living in Grand Traverse County to someone who asks	↔	85%
Remain in Grand Traverse County for the next five years	↔	86%

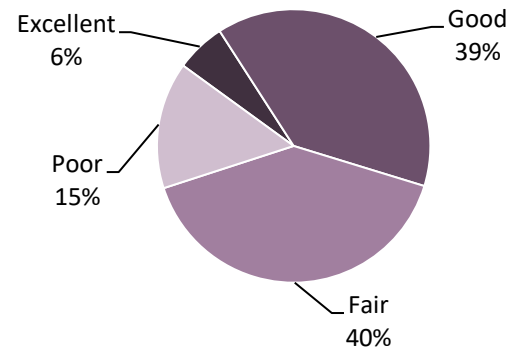
### Legend

↑↑ Much higher    ↑ Higher    ↔ Similar    ↓ Lower    ↓↓ Much lower    \* Not available

# Governance

*Strong local governments produce results that meet the needs of residents while making the best use of available resources, and are responsive to the present and future needs of the community as a whole.*

## OVERALL CONFIDENCE IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY GOVERNMENT



**FIGURE 6: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND SERVICES**





**FIGURE 7: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND SERVICES - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall confidence in Grand Traverse County government	↔	45%
The overall direction that Grand Traverse County is taking	↔	51%
The value of services for the taxes paid to Grand Traverse County	↔	51%
Generally acting in the best interest of the community	↔	51%
Being honest	↔	51%
Being open and transparent to the public	↓	44%
Informing residents about issues facing the community	↔	47%
The job Grand Traverse County government does at welcoming resident involvement	↔	46%
Treating all residents fairly	↔	48%
Treating residents with respect	↔	57%
Overall customer service by Grand Traverse County employees	↔	78%
Public information services	↔	66%
Quality of services provided by the County of Grand Traverse County	↔	69%
Quality of services provided by the Federal Government	↔	34%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

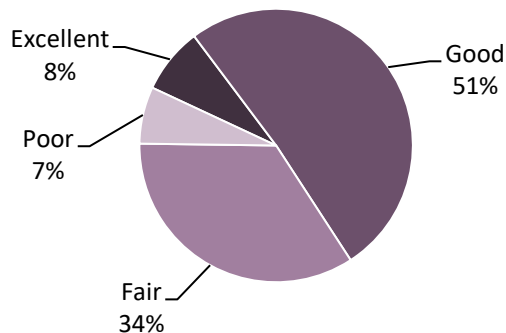
↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

# Economy

*Local governments work together with private and nonprofit businesses, and with the community at large, to foster sustainable growth, create jobs, and promote a thriving local economy.*

OVERALL ECONOMIC HEALTH OF GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY



What impact, if any, do you think the economy will have on your family income in the next 6 months?

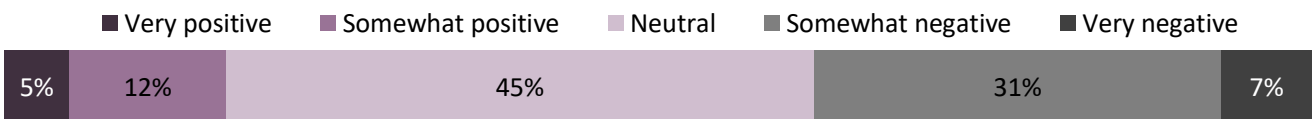
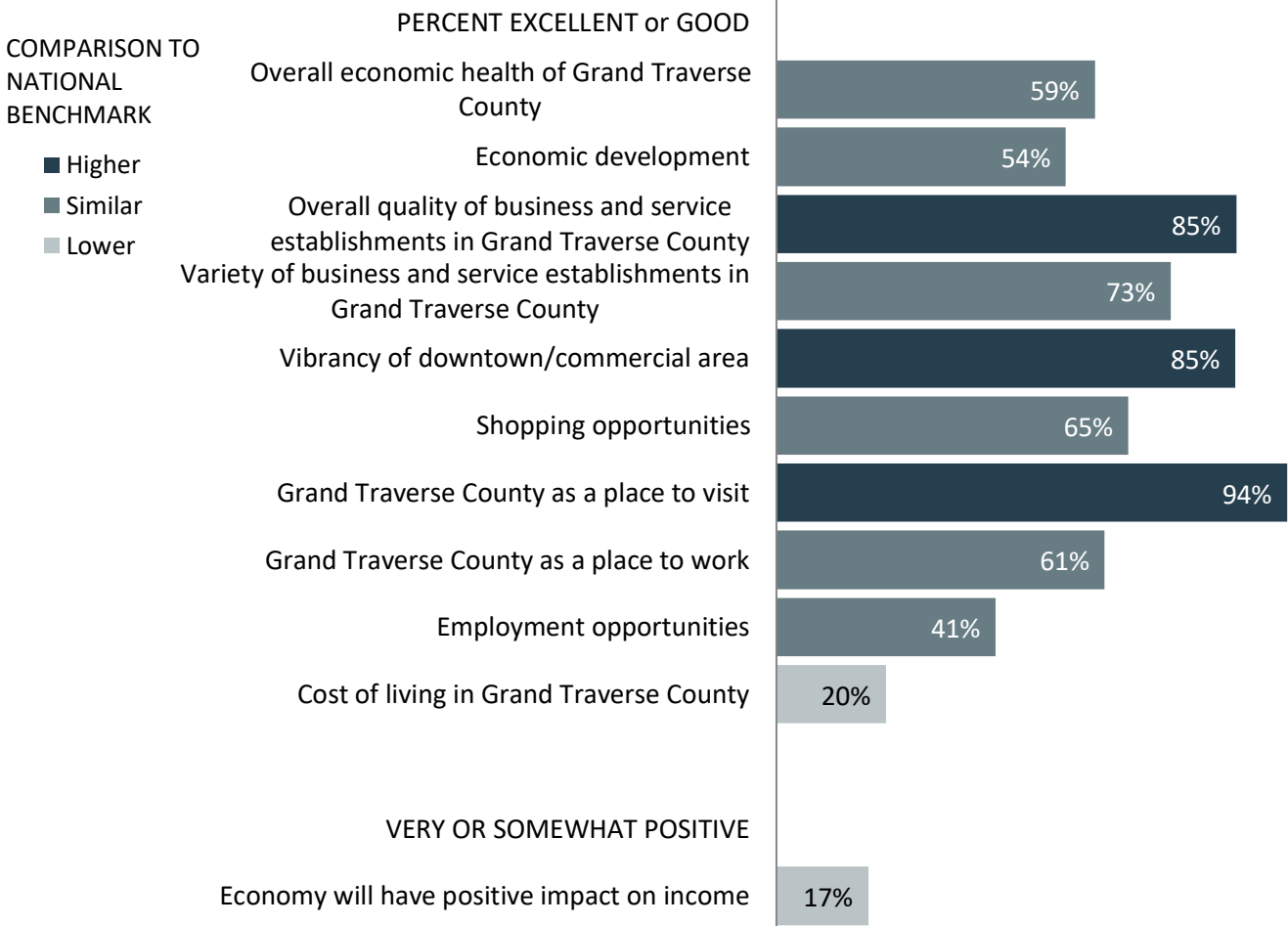


FIGURE 8: ECONOMIC HEALTH



**FIGURE 9: ECONOMIC HEALTH - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall economic health of Grand Traverse County	↔	59%
Economic development	↔	54%
Overall quality of business and service establishments in Grand Traverse County	↑	85%
Variety of business and service establishments in Grand Traverse County	↔	73%
Vibrancy of downtown/commercial area	↑↑	85%
Shopping opportunities	↔	65%
Grand Traverse County as a place to visit	↑↑	94%
Grand Traverse County as a place to work	↔	61%
Employment opportunities	↔	41%
Cost of living in Grand Traverse County	↓	20%

**FIGURE 10: ECONOMIC IMPACT - SUMMARY**

Percent very or somewhat positive	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Economy will have positive impact on income	↓	17%

**FIGURE 11: HOUSING COST - SUMMARY**

Percent for whom housing costs are NOT 30% or more of household income	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
NOT experiencing housing costs stress	↔	59%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

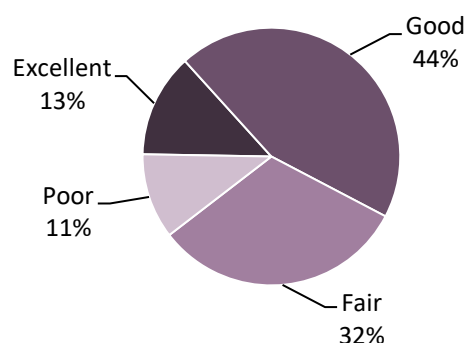
↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

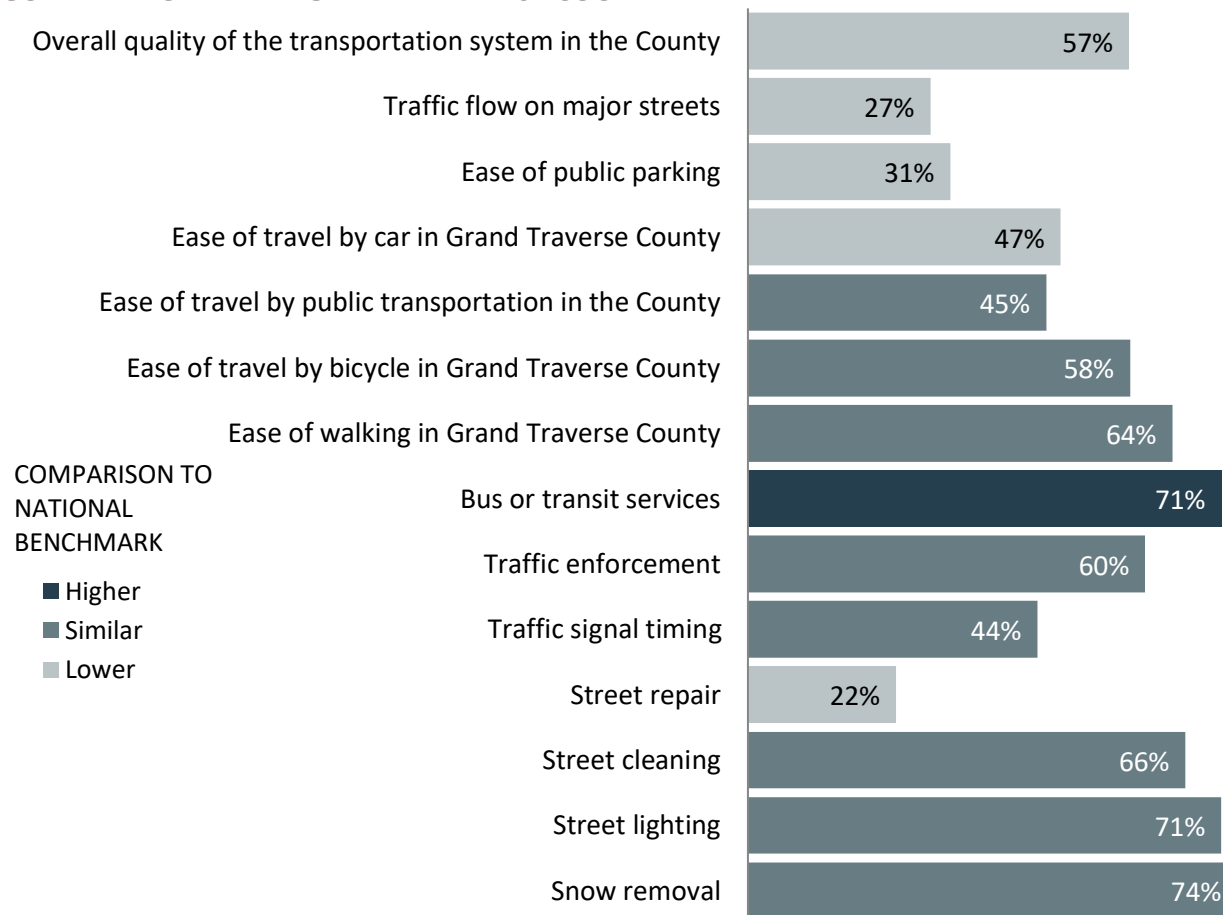
# Mobility

*The ease with which residents can move about their communities, whether for commuting, leisure, or recreation, plays a major role in the quality of life for all who live, work and play in the community.*

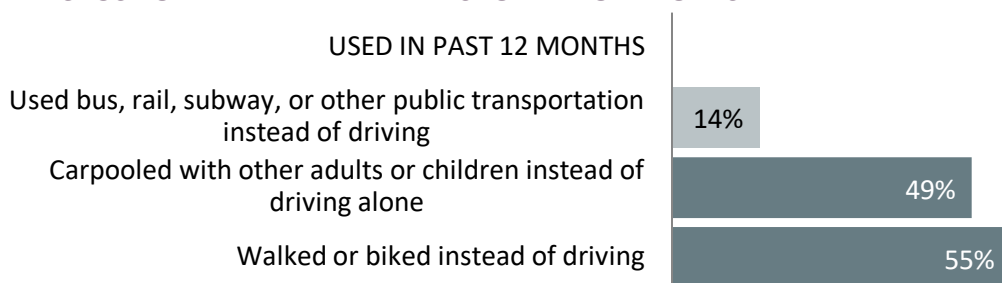
## OVERALL QUALITY OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM



**FIGURE 12: MOBILITY IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY**



**FIGURE 13: USE OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION MODES**



**FIGURE 14: MOBILITY IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of the transportation system in Grand Traverse County	↓	57%
Traffic flow on major streets	↓	27%
Ease of travel by car in Grand Traverse County	↓	47%
Ease of travel by public transportation in Grand Traverse County	↔	45%
Ease of travel by bicycle in Grand Traverse County	↔	58%
Ease of walking in Grand Traverse County	↔	64%
Ease of public parking	↓	31%
Bus or transit services	↑	71%
Traffic enforcement	↔	60%
Traffic signal timing	↔	44%
Street repair	↓	22%
Street cleaning	↔	66%
Street lighting	↔	71%
Snow removal	↔	74%
Overall quality of the transportation system in Grand Traverse County	↓	57%

**FIGURE 15: USE OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION MODES - SUMMARY**

Percent who did this in past 12 months	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Used bus, rail, subway, or other public transportation instead of driving	↓	14%
Carpooled with other adults or children instead of driving alone	↔	49%
Walked or biked instead of driving	↔	55%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

# Community Design

*A well-designed community enhances the quality of life for its residents by encouraging smart land use and zoning, ensuring that affordable housing is accessible to all, and providing access to parks and other green spaces.*

OVERALL DESIGN OR LAYOUT OF GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY'S RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS

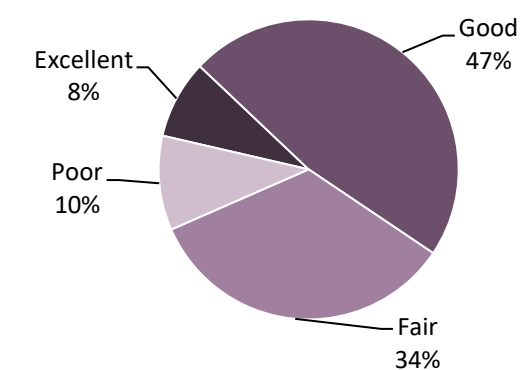
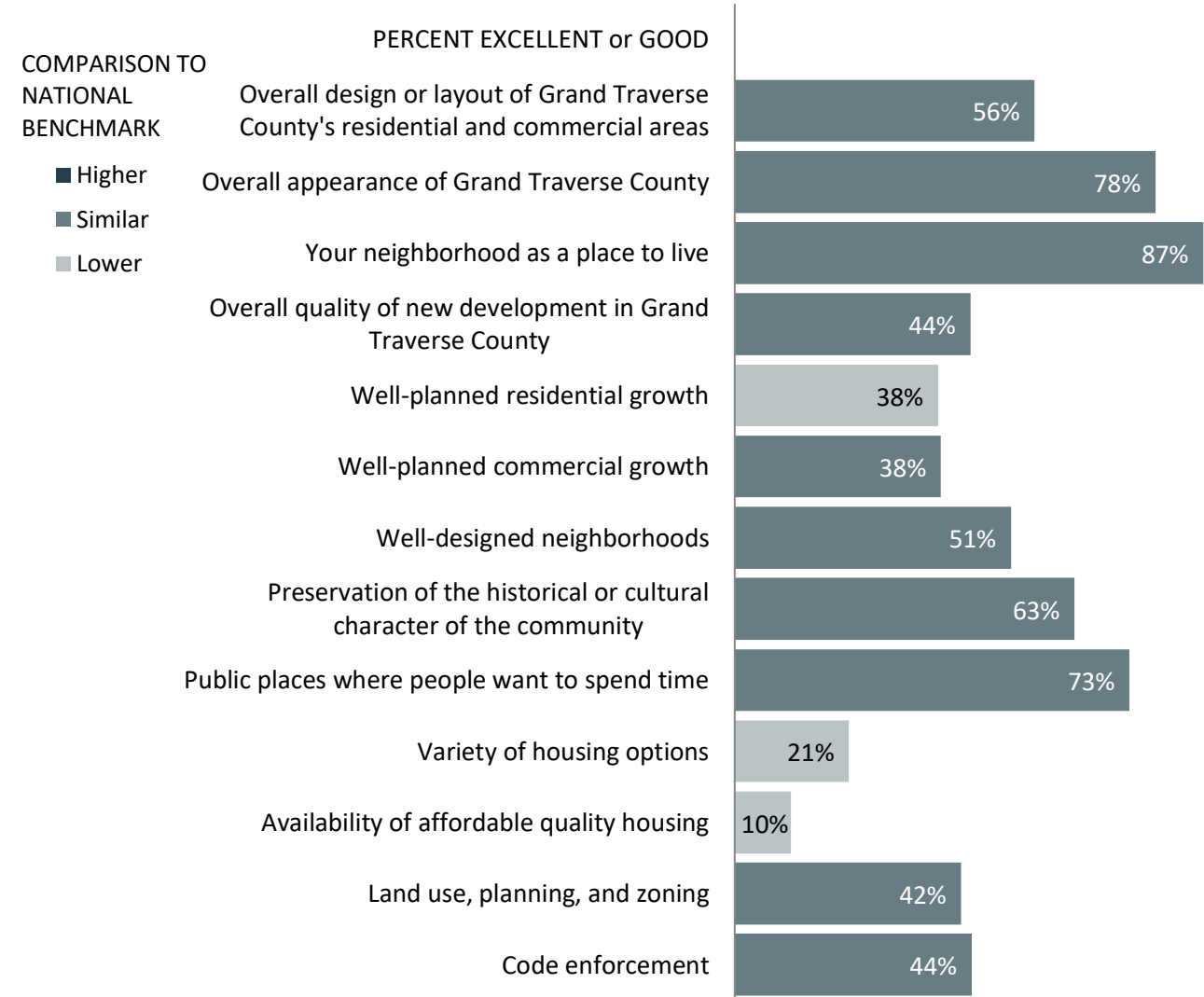


FIGURE 16: COMMUNITY DESIGN



**FIGURE 17: COMMUNITY DESIGN - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall design or layout of Grand Traverse County's residential and commercial areas	↔	56%
Overall appearance of Grand Traverse County	↔	78%
Your neighborhood as a place to live	↔	87%
Overall quality of new development in Grand Traverse County	↔	44%
Well-planned residential growth	↓	38%
Well-planned commercial growth	↔	38%
Well-designed neighborhoods	↔	51%
Preservation of the historical or cultural character of the community	↔	63%
Public places where people want to spend time	↔	73%
Variety of housing options	↓↓	21%
Availability of affordable quality housing	↓↓	10%
Land use, planning, and zoning	↔	42%
Code enforcement	↔	44%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

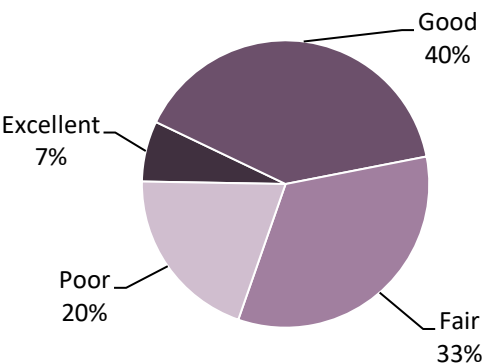
↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

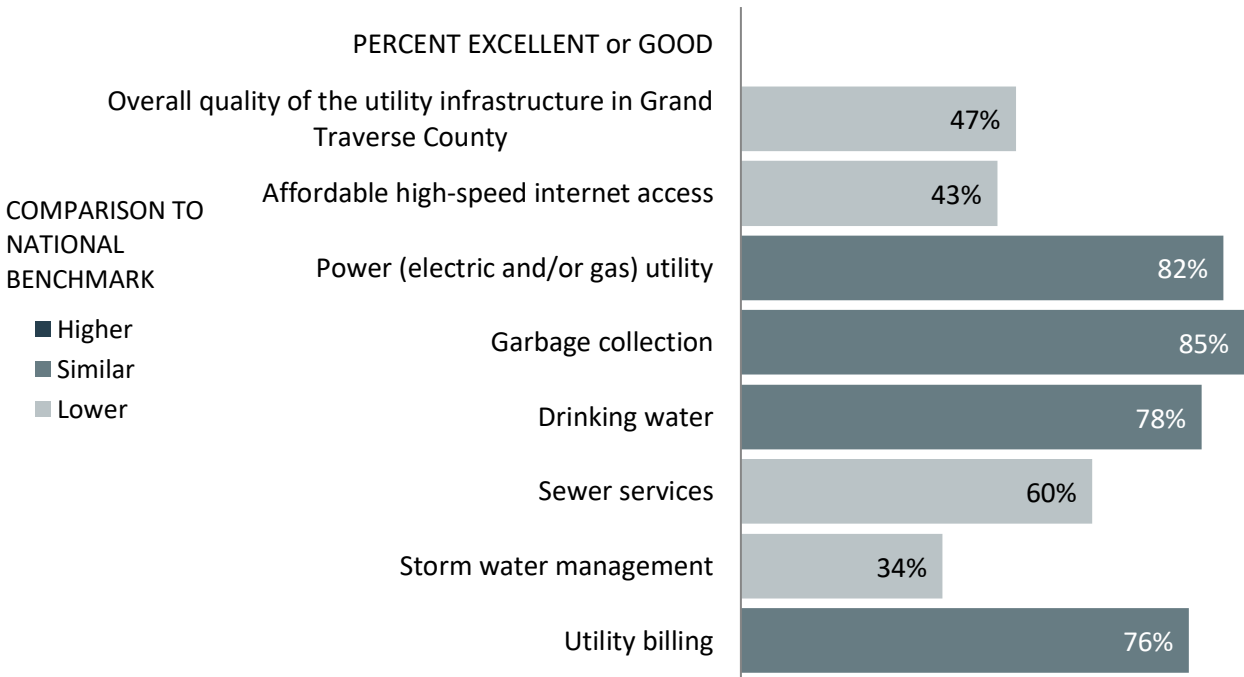
# Utilities

*Services such as water, gas, electricity, and internet access play a vital role in ensuring the physical and economic health and well-being of the communities they serve.*

## OVERALL QUALITY OF THE UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY



**FIGURE 18: UTILITES**



**FIGURE 19: UTILITES - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Grand Traverse County	↓	47%
Affordable high-speed internet access	↓	43%
Power (electric and/or gas) utility	↔	82%
Garbage collection	↔	85%
Drinking water	↔	78%
Sewer services	↓	60%
Storm water management	↓↓	34%
Utility billing	↔	76%

**Legend**  
 ↑↑ Much higher    ↑ Higher    ↔ Similar    ↓ Lower    ↓↓ Much lower    \* Not available



# Safety

*Public safety is often the most important task facing local governments. All residents should feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods and in the greater community, and providing robust Safety-related services is essential to residents' quality of life.*

OVERALL FEELING OF SAFETY IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

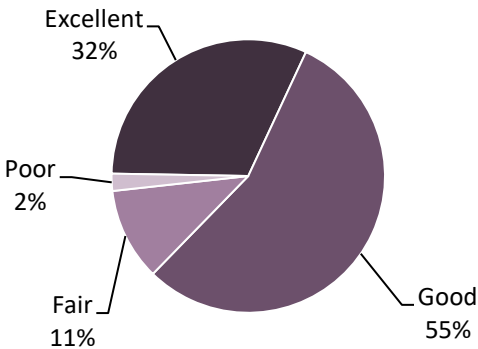
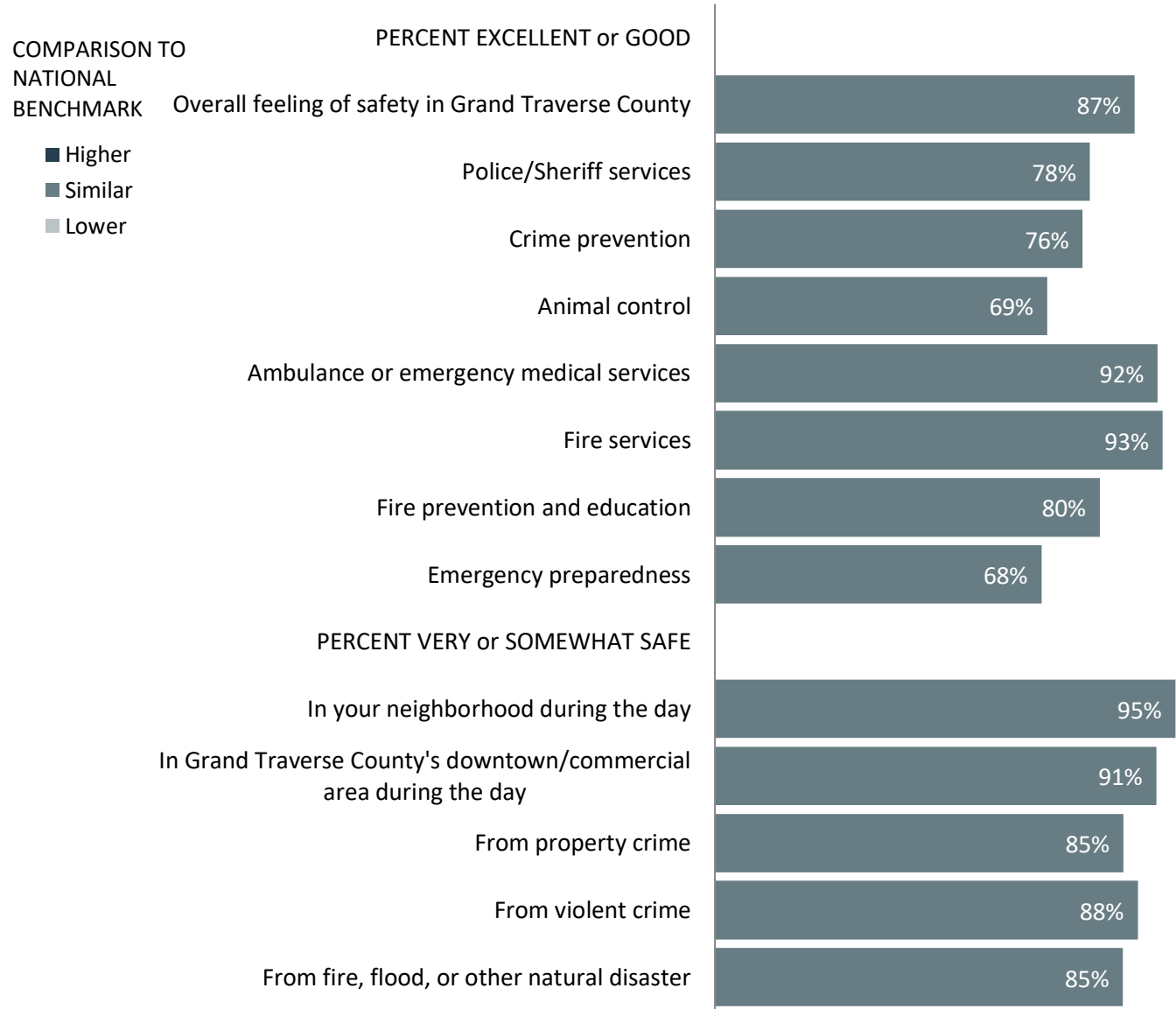


FIGURE 20: SAFETY IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY



**FIGURE 21: SAFETY-RELATED SERVICES - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall feeling of safety in Grand Traverse County	↔	87%
Police/Sheriff services	↔	78%
Crime prevention	↔	76%
Animal control	↔	69%
Ambulance or emergency medical services	↔	92%
Fire services	↔	93%
Fire prevention and education	↔	80%
Emergency preparedness	↔	68%

**FIGURE 22: FEELINGS OF SAFETY- SUMMARY**

Percent who feel very or somewhat safe	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
In your neighborhood during the day	↔	95%
In Grand Traverse County's downtown/commercial area during the day	↔	91%
From property crime	↔	85%
From violent crime	↔	88%
From fire, flood, or other natural disaster	↔	85%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

# Natural Environment

*The natural environment plays a vital role in the health and well-being of residents. The natural spaces in which residents live and experience their communities has a direct and profound effect on quality of life.*

OVERALL QUALITY OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

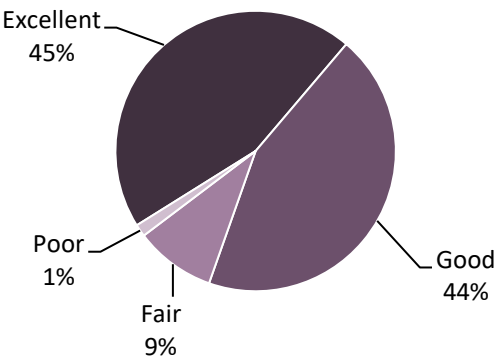


FIGURE 23: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

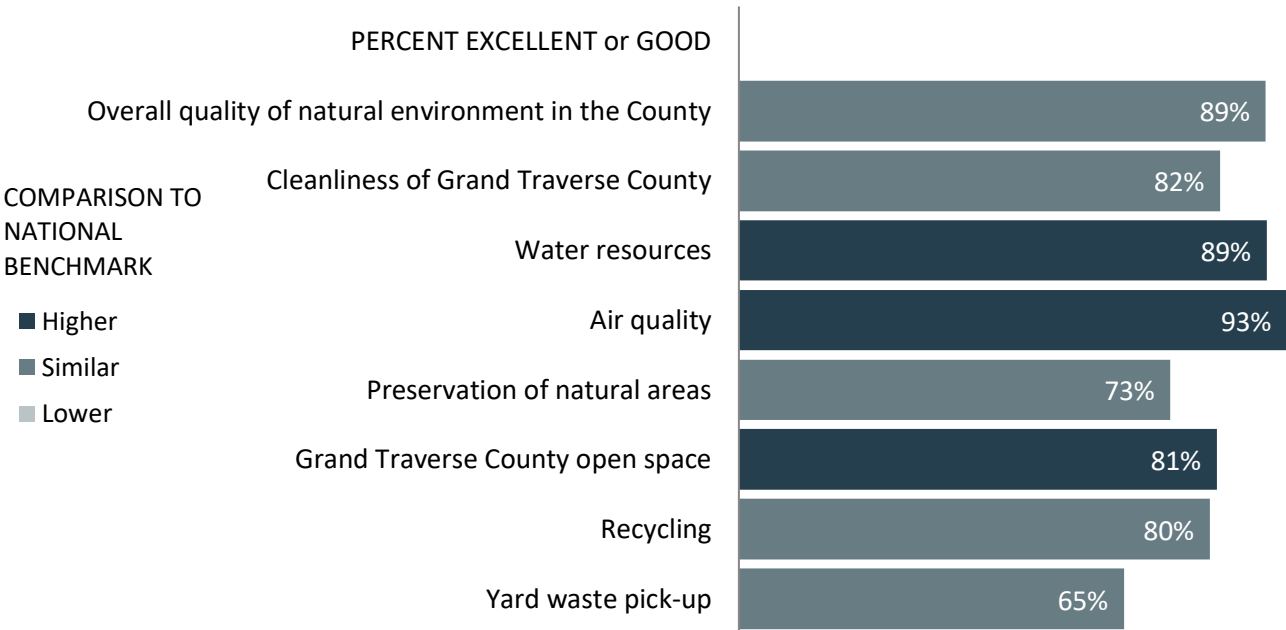


FIGURE 24: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT - SUMMARY

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of natural environment in Grand Traverse County	↔	89%
Cleanliness of Grand Traverse County	↔	82%
Water resources	↑↑	89%
Air quality	↑	93%
Preservation of natural areas	↔	73%
Grand Traverse County open space	↑	81%
Recycling	↔	80%
Yard waste pick-up	↔	65%

# Parks and Recreation

*"There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment."*  
 - National Recreation and Park Association

## OVERALL QUALITY OF PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

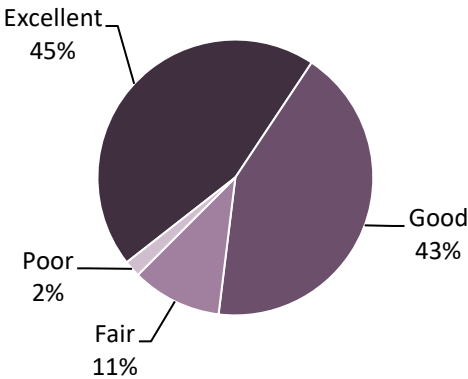


FIGURE 25: PARKS AND RECREATION



FIGURE 26: PARKS AND RECREATION - SUMMARY

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities	↔	88%
Availability of paths and walking trails	↑	90%
County parks	↔	84%
Recreational opportunities	↑	87%
Recreation programs or classes	↔	71%
Recreation centers or facilities	↔	67%
Fitness opportunities	↑	90%

# Health and Wellness

*The characteristics of and amenities available in the communities in which people live has a direct impact on the health and wellness of residents, and thus, on their quality of life overall.*

HEALTH AND WELLNESS OPPORTUNITIES IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

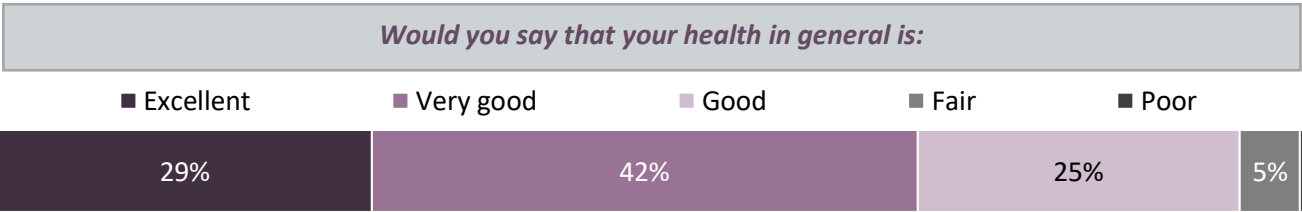
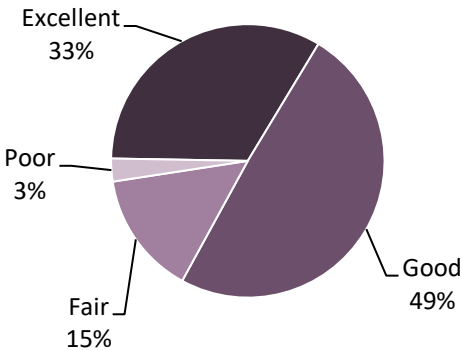
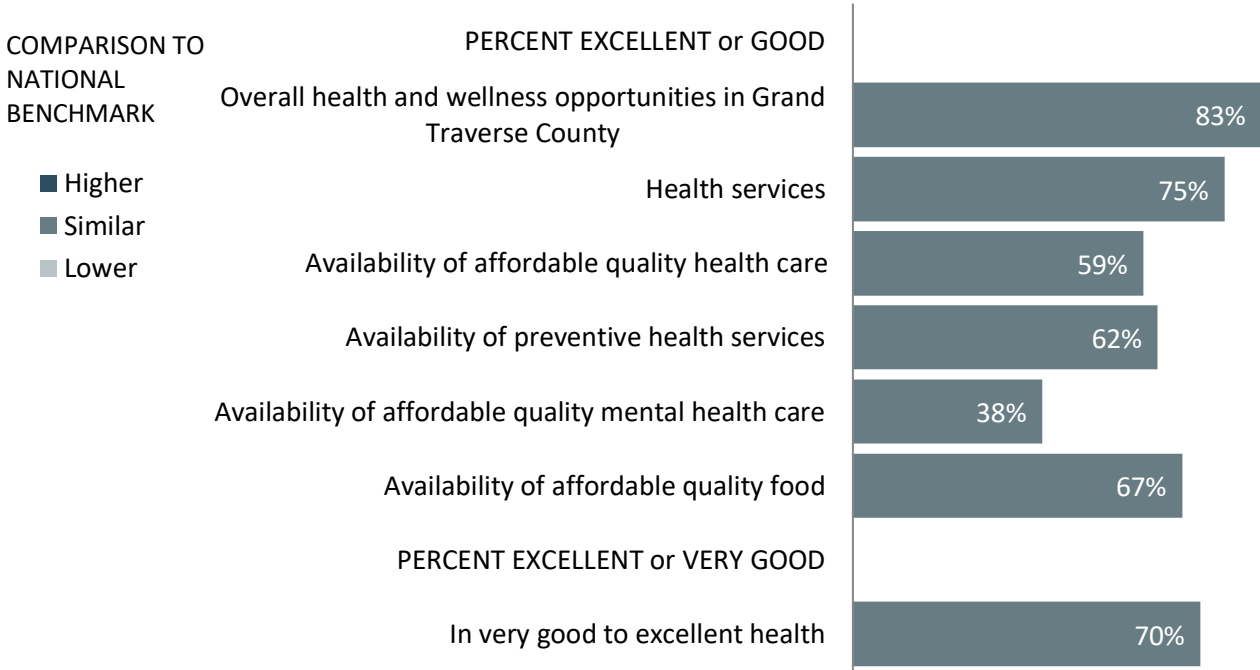


FIGURE 27: HEALTH AND WELLNESS



**FIGURE 28: HEALTH AND WELLNESS - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Grand Traverse County	↔	83%
Health services	↔	75%
Availability of affordable quality health care	↔	59%
Availability of preventive health services	↔	62%
Availability of affordable quality mental health care	↔	38%
Availability of affordable quality food	↔	67%

**FIGURE 29: PERSONAL HEALTH - SUMMARY**

	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
In very good to excellent health	↔	70%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

# Education, Arts, and Culture

*Participation in the arts, in educational opportunities, and in cultural activities is linked to increased civic engagement, greater social tolerance, and enhanced enjoyment of the local community.*

OVERALL OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND THE ARTS IN GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY

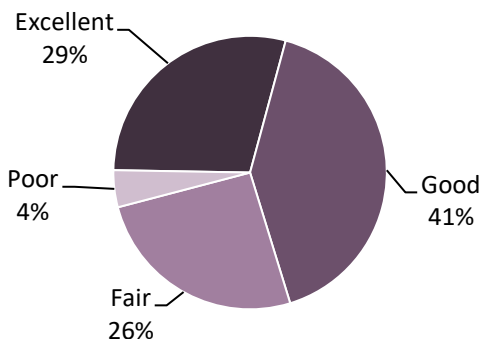
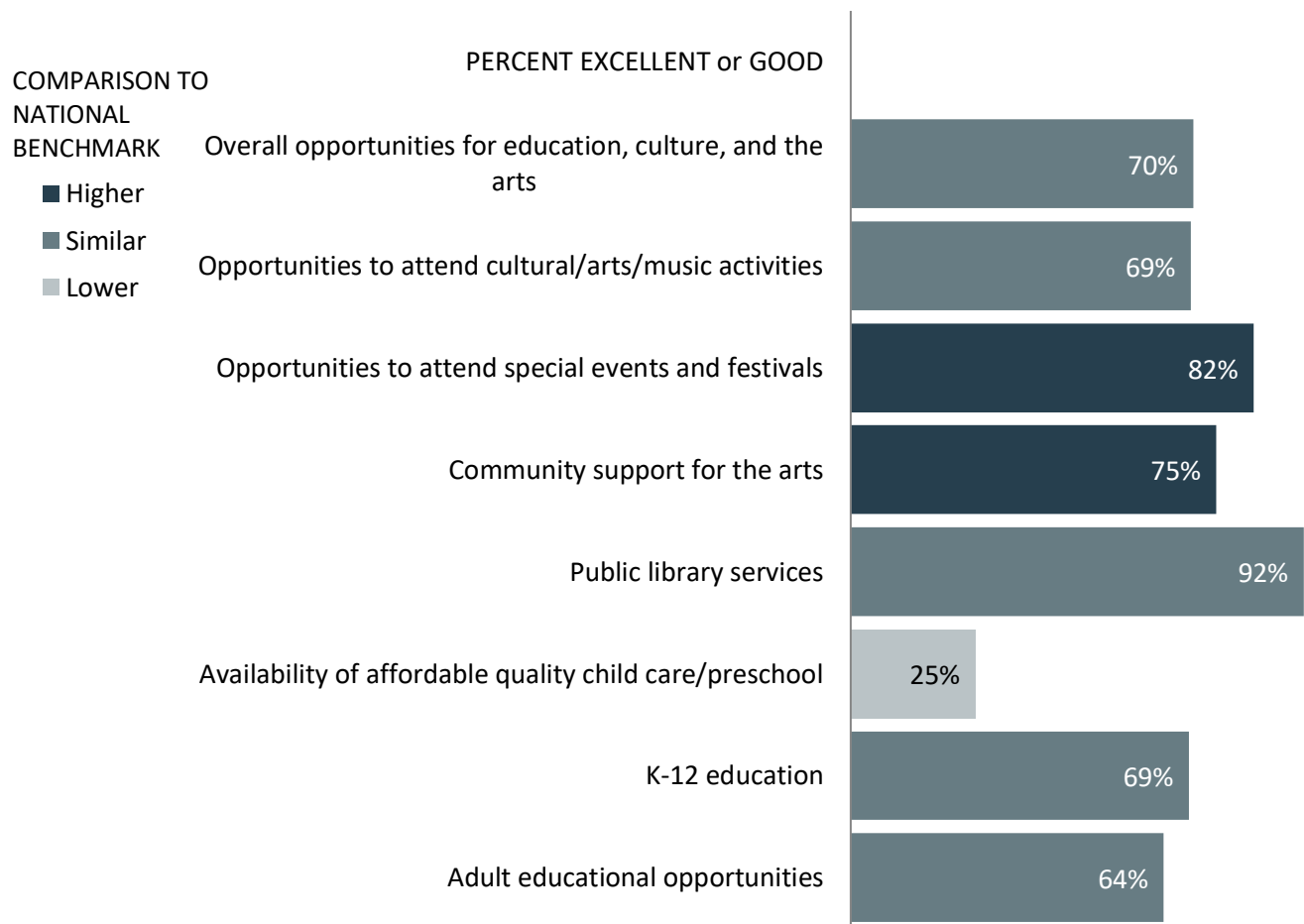


FIGURE 30: EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE



**FIGURE 31: EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Overall opportunities for education, culture, and the arts	↔	70%
Opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities	↔	69%
Opportunities to attend special events and festivals	↑	82%
Community support for the arts	↑	75%
Public library services	↔	92%
Availability of affordable quality child care/preschool	↓↓	25%
K-12 education	↔	69%
Adult educational opportunities	↔	64%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

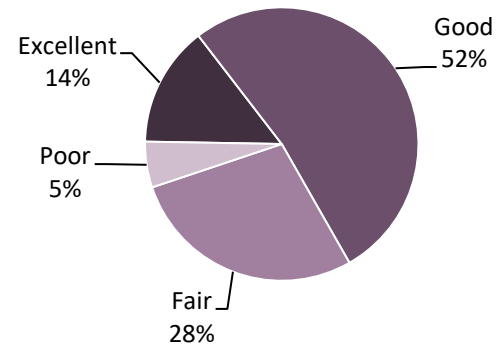
\* Not available



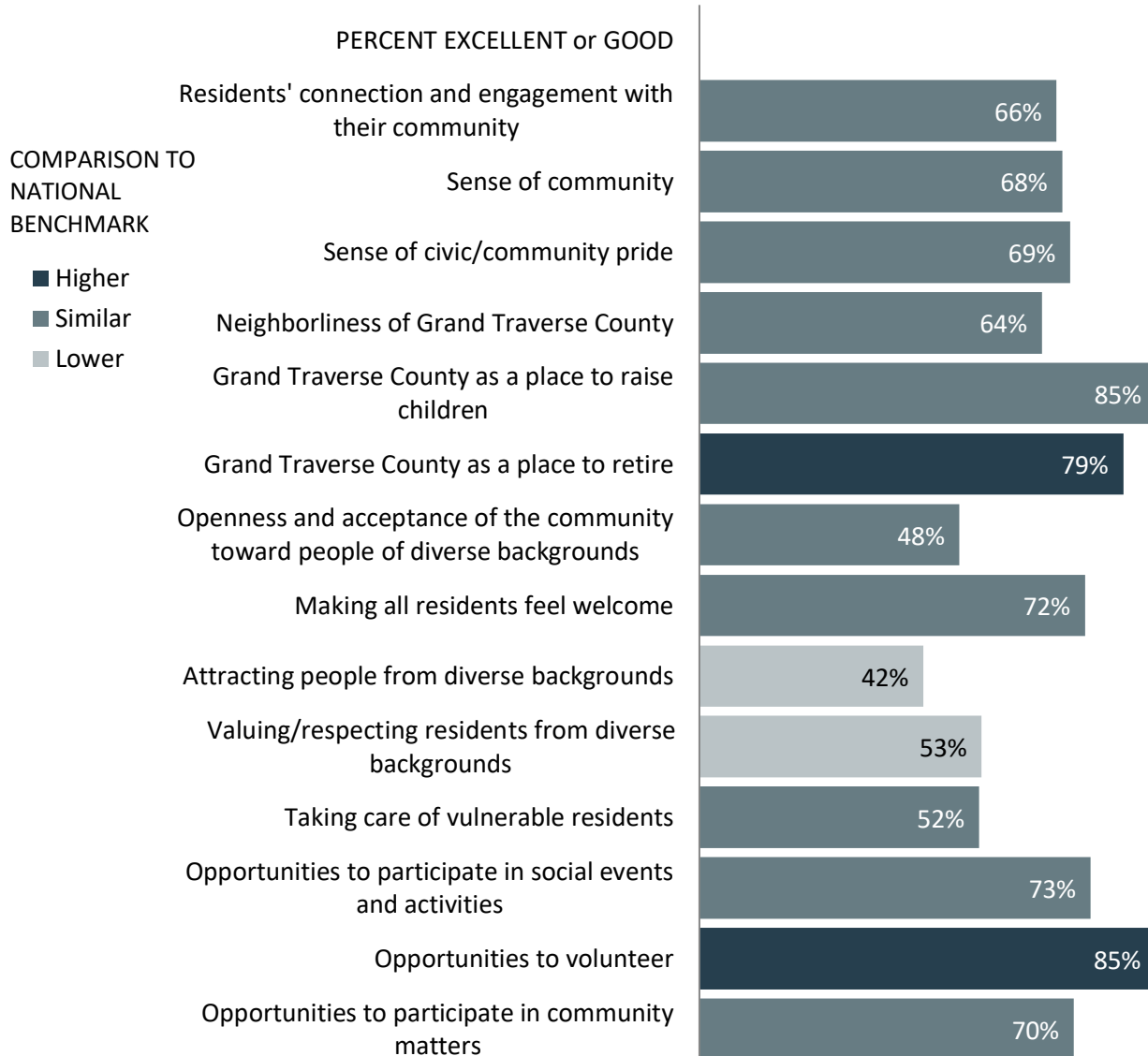
# Inclusivity and Engagement

*Inclusivity refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging; residents who feel invited to participate within their communities feel more included, involved, and engaged than those who do not.*

## RESIDENTS' CONNECTION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THEIR COMMUNITY



**FIGURE 32: INCLUSIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT**



**FIGURE 33: INCLUSIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT - SUMMARY**

Percent excellent or good	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	↔	66%
Sense of community	↔	68%
Sense of civic/community pride	↔	69%
Neighborliness of Grand Traverse County	↔	64%
Grand Traverse County as a place to raise children	↔	85%
Grand Traverse County as a place to retire	↑	79%
Openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds	↔	48%
Making all residents feel welcome	↔	72%
Attracting people from diverse backgrounds	↓	42%
Valuing/respecting residents from diverse backgrounds	↓	53%
Taking care of vulnerable residents	↔	52%
Opportunities to participate in social events and activities	↔	73%
Opportunities to volunteer	↑	85%
Opportunities to participate in community matters	↔	70%

**Legend**

↑↑ Much higher

↑ Higher

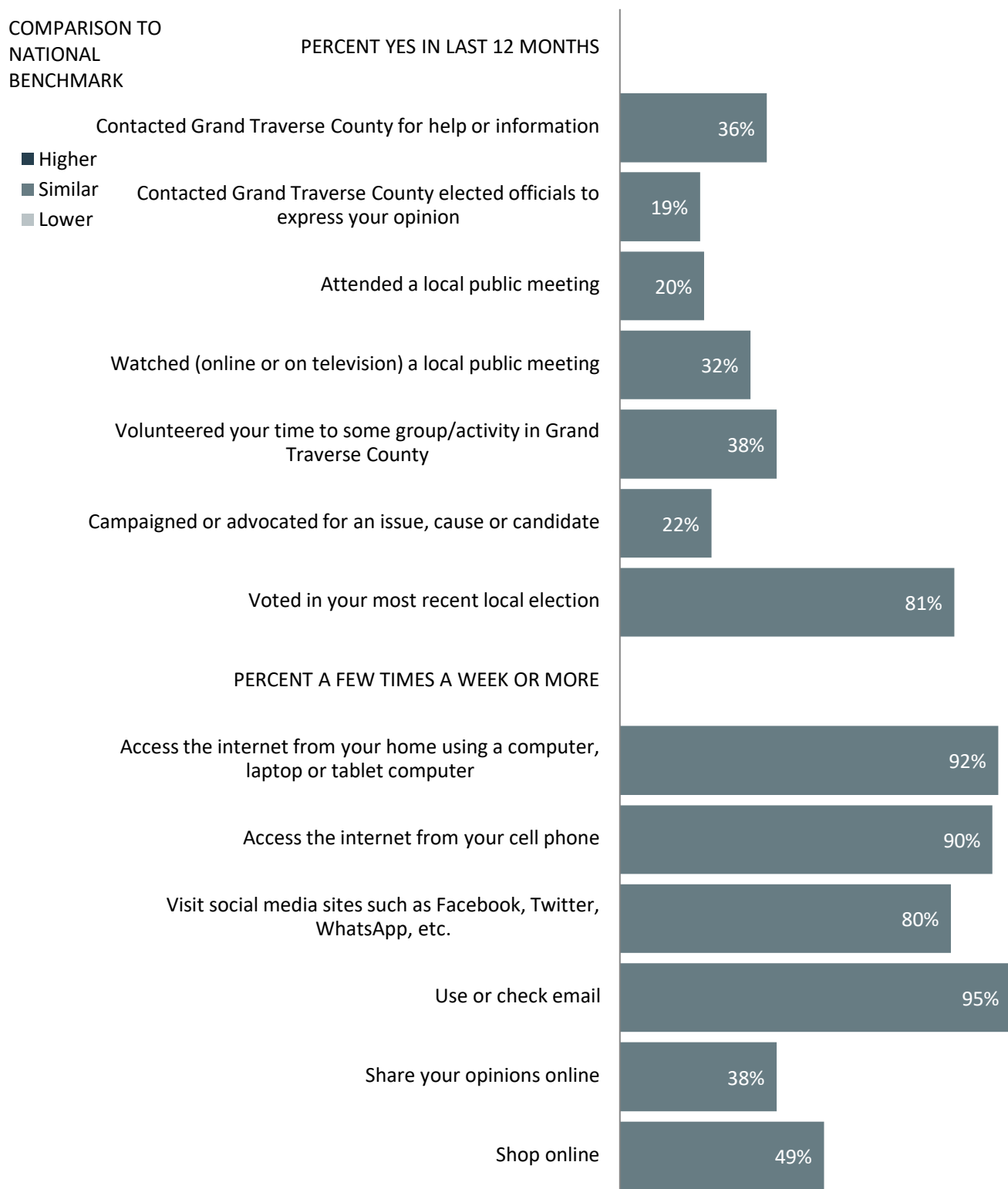
↔ Similar

↓ Lower

↓↓ Much lower

\* Not available

**FIGURE 34: RESIDENTS' PARTICIPATION LEVELS**



**FIGURE 35: RESIDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN LAST 12 MONTHS- SUMMARY**

Percent who had done each in last 12 months	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Contacted Grand Traverse County for help or information	↔	36%
Contacted Grand Traverse County elected officials to express your opinion	↔	19%
Attended a local public meeting	↔	20%
Watched (online or on television) a local public meeting	↔	32%
Volunteered your time to some group/activity in Grand Traverse County	↔	38%
Campaigned or advocated for an issue, cause or candidate	↔	22%
Voted in your most recent local election	↔	81%

**FIGURE 36: RESIDENTS' GENERAL USE OF TECHNOLOGY- SUMMARY**

Percent who report doing each at least a few times a week	Comparison to benchmark	2020 rating
Access the internet from your home using a computer, laptop or tablet computer	↔	92%
Access the internet from your cell phone	↔	90%
Visit social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.	↔	80%
Use or check email	↔	95%
Share your opinions online	↔	38%
Shop online	↔	49%