

Decatur, GA

The National Community Survey

Report of Results
2024

Report by:



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National Research Center at Polco 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 Decatur. A livable community is 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. The survey was developed by the experts from National Research Center at Polco.

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



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The report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 596 residents of the City of Decatur collected from January 30th, 2024 to March 8th, 2024. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 21% for all respondents and the response rate for the 2024 survey was 4%. Survey results were weighted so that the demographic profile of respondents was representative of the demographic profile of adults in Decatur.



How the results are reported

For the most part, the percentages presented in the following tabs represent the “percent positive.” Most commonly, the percent positive is the combination of the top two most positive response options (i.e., excellent/good, very safe/somewhat safe, etc.). 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 the tab “Complete data.” However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in most of the tabs. In other words, the tables and graphs display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item.

Comparisons to benchmarks

NRC’s database of comparative resident opinion is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in surveys from over 500 communities whose residents evaluated the same kinds of topics on The National Community Survey. The comparison evaluations are from the most recent survey completed in each community in the last five years. NRC adds the latest results quickly upon survey completion, keeping the benchmark data fresh and relevant. The communities in the database represent a wide geographic and population range. In each tab, Decatur’s results are noted as being “higher” than the benchmark, “lower” than the benchmark, or “similar” to the benchmark, meaning that the average rating given by Decatur residents is statistically similar to or different (greater or lesser) than the benchmark. Being rated as “higher” or “lower” than the benchmark means that Decatur’s average rating for a particular item was more than 10 points different than the benchmark. If a rating was “much higher” or “much lower,” then Decatur’s average rating was more than 20 points different when compared to the benchmark.

Trends over time

Trend data for Decatur represent important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines.¹ Deviations from stable trends over time represent opportunities for understanding how local policies, programs, or public information may have affected residents’ opinions. Changes between survey years have been noted with an arrow and the percent difference. If the difference is greater than six percentage points between the 2022 and 2023 surveys, the change is statistically significant.

1. In 2020, The NCS survey was updated to include new and refreshed items. Consequently, some of the trends may be impacted due to wording modifications that could have potentially altered the meaning of the item for the respondent.

Methods

Selecting survey recipients

All households within the City of Decatur were eligible to participate in the survey. A list of all households within the zip codes serving Decatur was purchased from Polco's mailing vendor, Go-Dog Direct, based on updated listings from the United States Postal Service. Since some of the zip codes that serve the City of Decatur households may also serve addresses that lie outside of the community, the exact geographic location of each housing unit was compared to community boundaries using the most current municipal boundary file. Addresses located outside of the City of Decatur boundaries were removed from the list of potential households to survey. From that list, addresses were randomly selected as survey recipients, with multi-family housing units (defined as those with a unit number) sampled at a rate of 5:3 compared to single family housing units.

An individual within each household was randomly selected using the "birthday method". The birthday method selects a person within the household by asking the "person who most recently had a birthday" to complete the questionnaire. The underlying assumption in this method is that day of birth has no relationship to the way people respond to surveys. This instruction was contained in the introduction of the survey.

Conducting the survey

The 3,000 randomly selected households received mailings beginning on January 30th, 2024 and data collection for the survey remained open for 6 weeks. The first mailing was a postcard inviting the household to participate in the survey. The next mailing contained a cover letter with instructions, the survey questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope. Both mailings included a web link to give residents the opportunity to respond to the survey online, as well as QR codes to further encourage participation. All follow-up mailings asked those who had not completed the survey to do so, and those who had already done so to refrain from completing the survey again.

The survey was available in English and Spanish. All mailings contained paragraphs in both languages instructing participants on how to complete the survey in their preferred language.

About 3% of the 3,000 mailed invitations or surveys were returned because the household address was vacant or the postal service was unable to deliver the survey as addressed. Of the remaining 2,920 households that received the invitations to participate, 596 completed the survey, providing an overall response rate of 20%. The response rate was calculated using AAPOR's response rate #2 for mailed surveys of unnamed persons.²

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a "level of confidence" and accompanying "confidence interval" (or margin of error). A traditional level of confidence, and the one used here, is 95%. The 95% confidence interval can be any size and quantifies the sampling error or imprecision of the survey results because some residents' opinions are relied on to estimate all residents' opinions. The margin of error for the City of Decatur survey is no greater than plus or minus 4 percentage points around any given percent reported for all respondents (596 completed surveys).

In addition to the randomly selected "probability sample" of households, a link to an online open-participation survey was publicized by the City of Decatur. The open-participation survey was identical to the random sample survey, with two small updates; it asked a question to confirm the respondent was a resident of Decatur and also a question about where they heard about the survey. The open-participation survey was open to all city residents and became available on February, 27th, 2024. The survey remained open for two weeks. The data presented in the following tabs exclude the open participation survey data, but a tab at the end provides the complete frequency of responses to questions by the open-participation respondents.

Analyzing the data

Responses from mailed surveys were entered into an electronic dataset using a "key and verify" method, where all responses are entered twice and compared to each other. Any discrepancies were resolved in comparison to the

original survey form. Range checks as well as other forms of quality control were also performed. Responses from surveys completed on Polco were downloaded and merged with the mailed survey responses.

The demographics of the survey respondents were compared to those found in the 2020 Census and 2022 American Community Survey estimates for adults in the City of Decatur. The primary objective of weighting survey data is to make the survey respondents reflective of the larger population of the community. The characteristics used for weighting were age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, housing type, and housing tenure. No adjustments were made for design effects. Weights were calculated using an iterative, multiplicative raking model known as the ANES Weighting Algorithm.³ The results of the weighting scheme for the probability sample are presented in the following table.

NRC aligns demographic labels with those used by the U.S. Census for reporting purposes, when possible. Some categories (e.g., age, race/Hispanic origin, housing type, and length of residency) are combined into smaller subgroups.

		Unweighted	Weighted	Target ⁴
Age	18-34	9%	21%	21%
	35-54	38%	44%	45%
	55+	53%	35%	35%
Hispanic origin	No, not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	96%	95%	94%
	Yes, I consider myself to be of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	4%	5%	6%
Housing tenure	Own	79%	64%	64%
	Rent	21%	36%	36%
Housing type	Attached	44%	48%	48%
	Detached	56%	52%	52%
Race & Hispanic origin	Not white alone	19%	29%	29%
	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	81%	71%	71%
Sex	Man	38%	45%	45%
	Woman	62%	55%	55%
Sex/age	Man 18-34	2%	9%	9%
	Man 35-54	16%	21%	21%
	Man 55+	20%	15%	15%
	Woman 18-34	7%	12%	12%

Woman 35-54	23%	24%	24%
Woman 55+	32%	20%	20%

The survey datasets were analyzed using all or some of a combination of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), R, Python and Tableau. For the most part, the percentages presented in the reports represent the “percent positive.” The percent positive is the combination of the top two most positive response options (i.e., excellent/good, very safe/somewhat safe, essential/very important, etc.), or, in the case of resident behaviors/participation, the percent positive represents the proportion of respondents indicating “yes” or participating in an activity at least once a month.

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 the tab “Complete data”. However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in the reports. In other words, the tables and graphs display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item.

Contact

The City of Decatur funded this research. Please contact Meredith Roark of the City of Decatur at Meredith.Roark@decaturga.com if you have any questions about the survey.

Study Limitations

All public opinion research is subject to unmeasured error. While the methodologies employed for this survey were designed to minimize this error as much as possible, these other sources of potential error should be acknowledged. **Non-response error** arises when those who were selected to participate in the survey did not do so, and may have different opinions or experiences than those who did respond. **Coverage error** refers to the possibility that some respondents that should have been included in the surveyed population were not (e.g., for a general resident survey, USPS mailing lists may exclude certain types of housing units, such as multi-family buildings where mail is delivered to a common area rather than to a specific unit (though this is rare), or where mail is received at a PO box instead of the at household's physical location. Finally, **recall bias** occurs when respondents may not perfectly remember their experiences in the past year (such as participation in social or civic events), and **social desirability bias** may cause respondents to answer in ways they think cast their responses in a more favorable light.

Survey Validity

See the Polco Knowledge Base article on survey validity at <https://info.polco.us/knowledge/statistical-vali>

2. See AAPOR's Standard Definitions for more information at [https://aapor.org/standards-and-ethics/standard-definitions/..](https://aapor.org/standards-and-ethics/standard-definitions/)

Key Findings

Decatur residents continue to enjoy a high quality of life and strong sense of safety.

Virtually all residents applauded Decatur as a place to live, and about 9 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life. A similar proportion of respondents indicated they would recommend living in Decatur to someone who asks and planned to remain in the city for the next five years. The city as a place to raise children was also highly regarded (93% excellent or good) and ranked higher than both the national and custom subset of comparison communities (other municipalities with a population between 15,000 and 40,000). About two-thirds positively reviewed Decatur as a place to retire.

A strong sense of safety likely contributes to the high quality of life experienced in Decatur. Roughly 8 in 10 residents offered favorable marks to the overall feeling of safety in the city. A strong majority (96%) indicated that they felt very or somewhat safe in their neighborhood during the day, and 9 in 10 also felt safe in Decatur's downtown/commercial area during the day. About 9 in 10 reported feeling safe from violent crime, while 8 in 10 felt safe from property crime. All of these ratings held steady with 2022 survey results, indicating consistent approval.

Decatur's economy is strong but poses challenges to community affordability.

Ratings related to Decatur's economy tended to be positive and higher than both the national and custom benchmarks, showcasing the community's strength in this area. About 8 in 10 residents positively rated both Decatur as a place to work and the City's overall economic health. Similarly, the overall quality of business and service establishments received excellent or good ratings from about 9 in 10 participants. The variety of business and service establishments and vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area also garnered favorable marks from roughly 8 in 10 respondents.

While many ratings related to Decatur's economy were favorable, residents identified affordability as a potential area for growth. About 2 in 10 participants expressed satisfaction with the cost of living and the availability of affordable quality housing, both presenting opportunities for additional focus. Relatedly, in a unique question posed by the City, most residents supported the use of tax incentives or tax abatements to preserve Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) in the City of Decatur. However, when residents were asked about the impact the economy would likely have on their family income in the next 6 months, nearly 40% of respondents felt that the impact would be positive; this figure increased significantly since the City's 2022 survey results and scored higher ..

Residents continue to recognize mobility as an area of priority.

Residents offered high ratings of importance (85% essential or very important) and moderate ratings of quality (65% excellent or good) to the overall quality of the transportation system in Decatur, suggesting that mobility is a priority and opportunity for growth for the community. Reviews related to travel by personal vehicles tended to be lower, including ease of travel by car (50%), ease of public parking (34%), and traffic flow on major streets (38%). In a custom question, residents were asked to rate their level of support for establishing a 25-mph speed limit on most Decatur roadways. About three-quarters indicated that they supported instituting this policy.

When considering alternate modes of transportation, ratings tended to be positive. The ease of walking (85% excellent or good), bus or transit services (64%), and ease of travel by public transportation (55%) all scored higher than the national and custom comparison communities. Additionally, about 6 in 10 appreciated the ease of travel by bicycle, in line with benchmarks.

Decatur's parks and natural environment are assets to the community.

Ratings for survey items related to Decatur's natural environment tended to be positive and on par with national averages. About 8 in 10 residents gave excellent or good reviews to the overall quality of natural environment in Decatur. Roughly 7 in 10 offered positive evaluations of Decatur's open space and preservation of natural areas, while about 8 in 10 residents favorably rated the city's air quality and cleanliness. Water resources received the lowest score among natural environment survey items, with only one-third of reviewers offering excellent or good marks. This may merit additional investigation.

A strong majority, roughly 8 in 10, praised the overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities and were pleased with the city parks. A similar proportion approved of Decatur's fitness opportunities, recreational opportunities, recreation program or classes, and recreation centers or facilities. The availability of paths and walking trails received high marks from about 7 in 10 participants. Each of these items remained stable with the City's prior survey results.

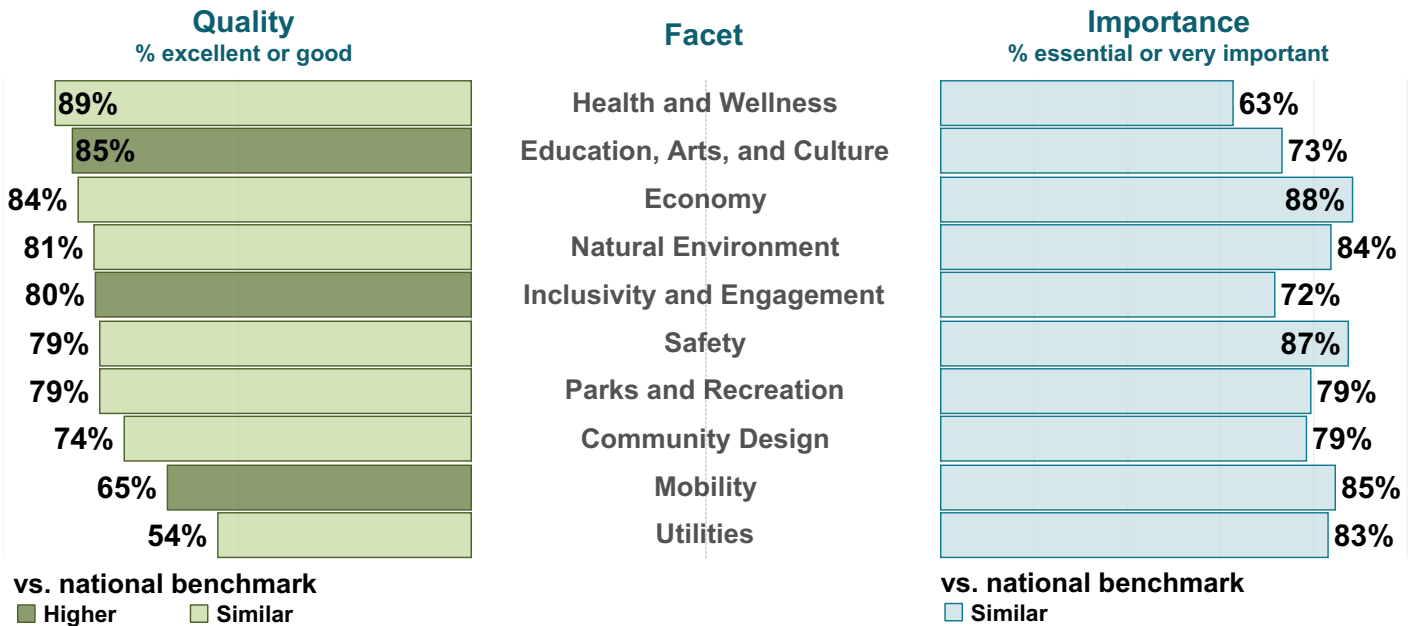
Facets of livability



Every jurisdiction must balance limited resources while meeting resident needs and striving to optimize community livability. To this end, it is helpful to know what aspects of the community are most important to residents and which they perceive as being of higher or lower quality. It is especially helpful to know when a facet of livability is considered of high importance but rated as lower quality, as this should be a top priority to address.

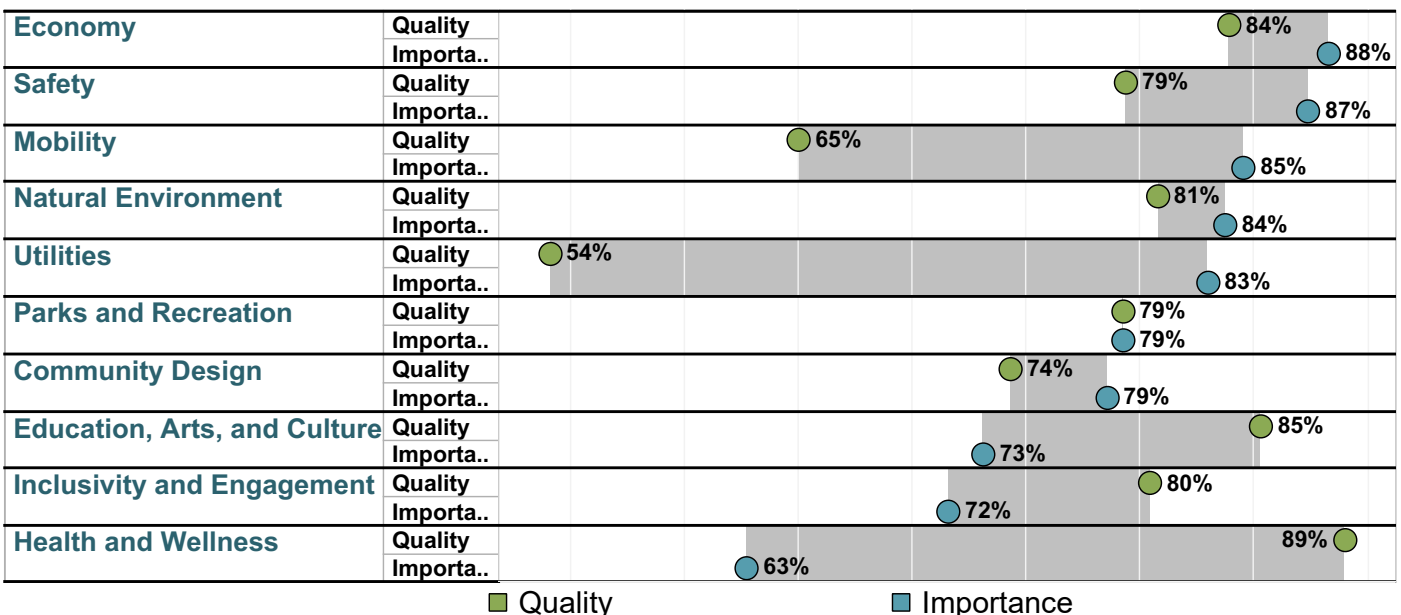
Quality and Importance by the Numbers

The table below shows the proportion of residents who rated the community facets positively for quality and the priority (importance) placed on each. Also displayed is whether local quality ratings were lower, similar, or higher than communities across the country (the national benchmark).



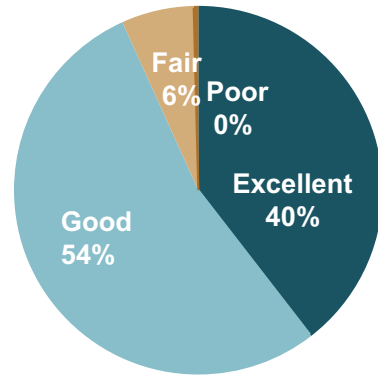
Quality/Importance Gap Analysis

The gap analysis chart below shows the same data as above; however, this chart more clearly illustrates the comparative differences in quality and importance ratings for each facet, as well as the absolute ratings for each.

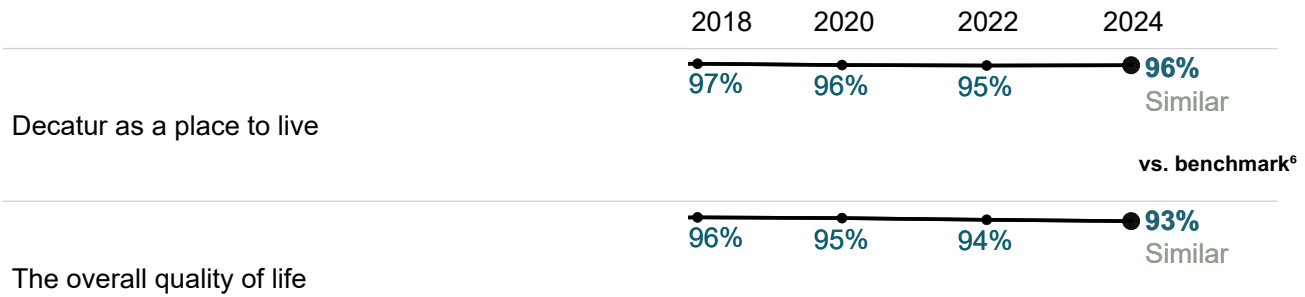


Quality of Life

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.



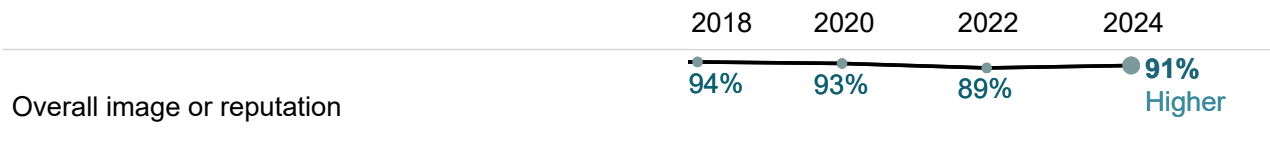
Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Decatur. (% excellent or good)



Please indicate how likely or unlikely you are to do each of the following. (% very or somewhat likely)



Please rate each of the following in the Decatur community. (% excellent or good)



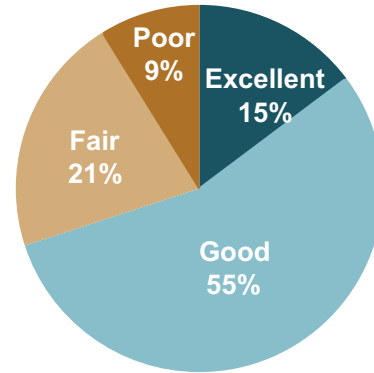
6. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.



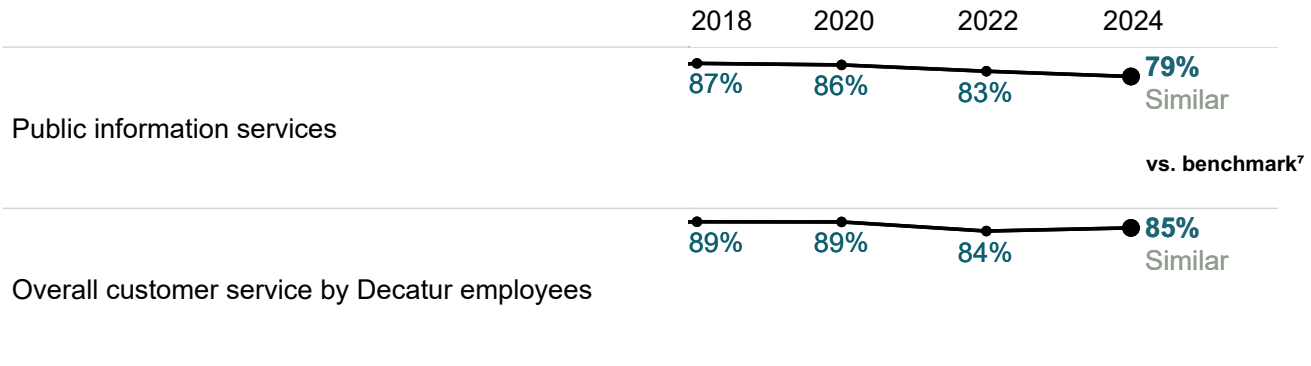
Governance

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.

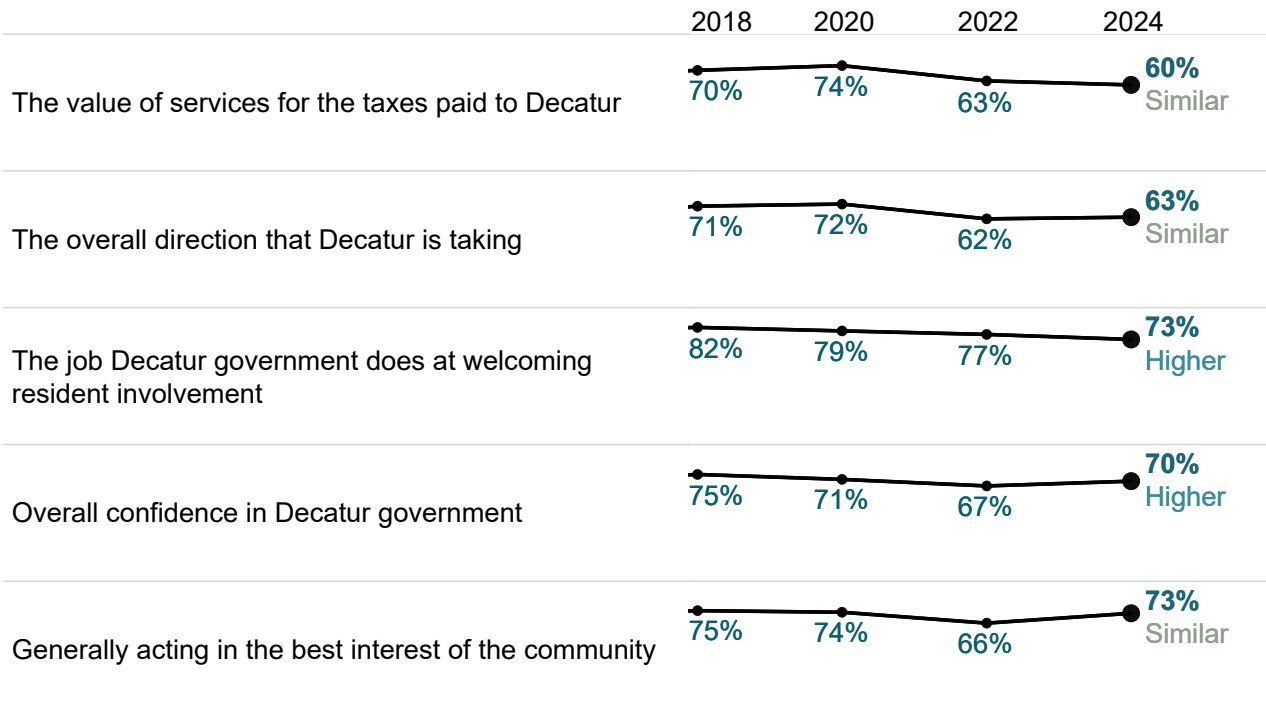
Overall confidence in Decatur government, 2024

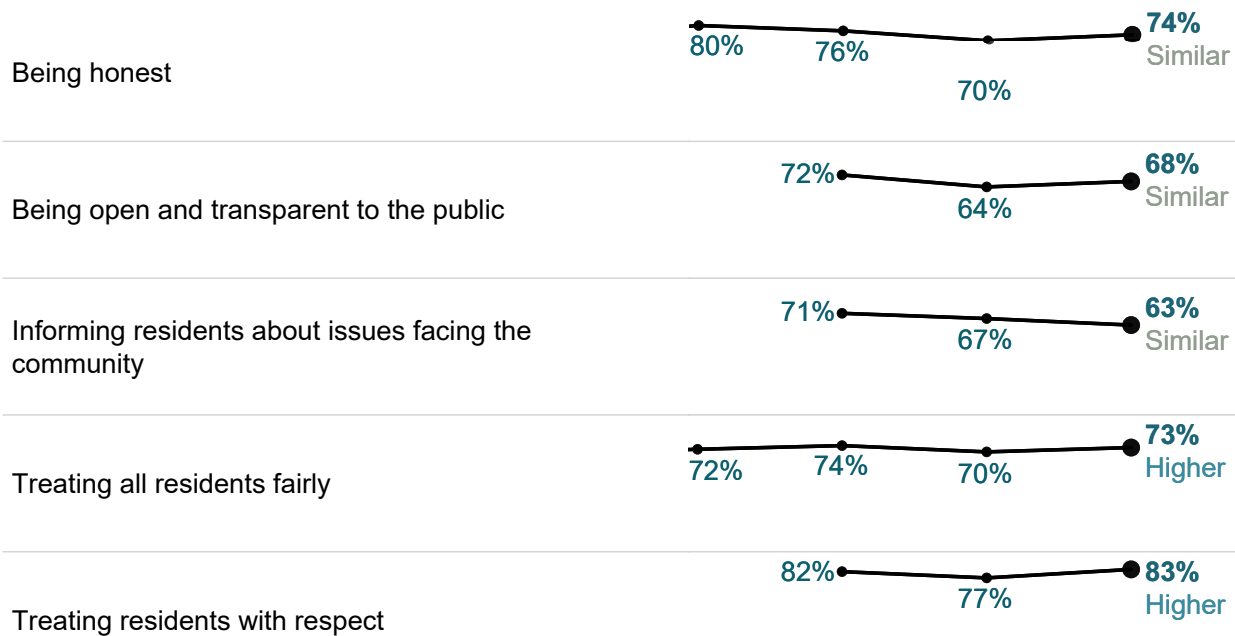


Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur. (% excellent or good)

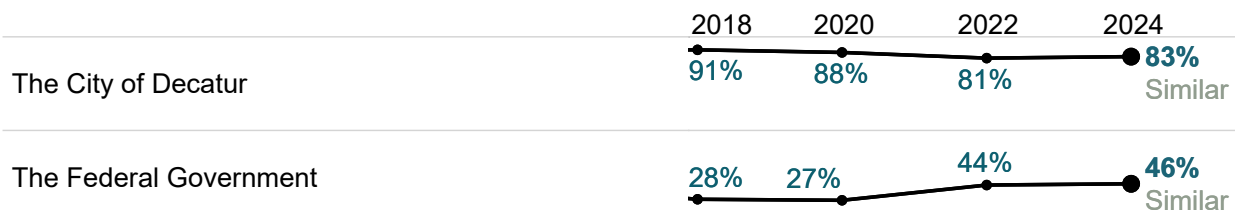


Please rate the following categories of Decatur government performance. (% excellent or good)





**Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?
(% excellent or good)**



7. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

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.

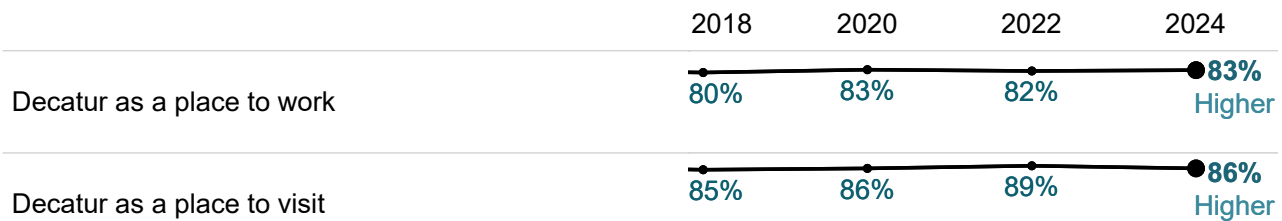
Overall economic health of Decatur, 2024



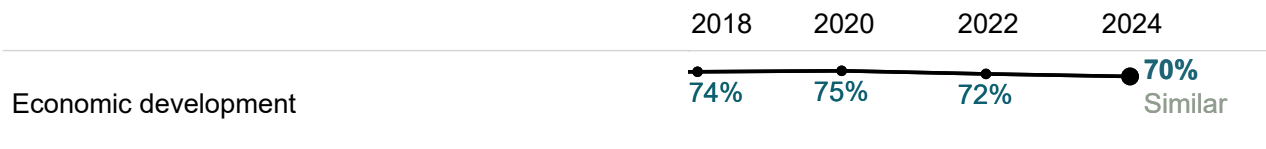
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



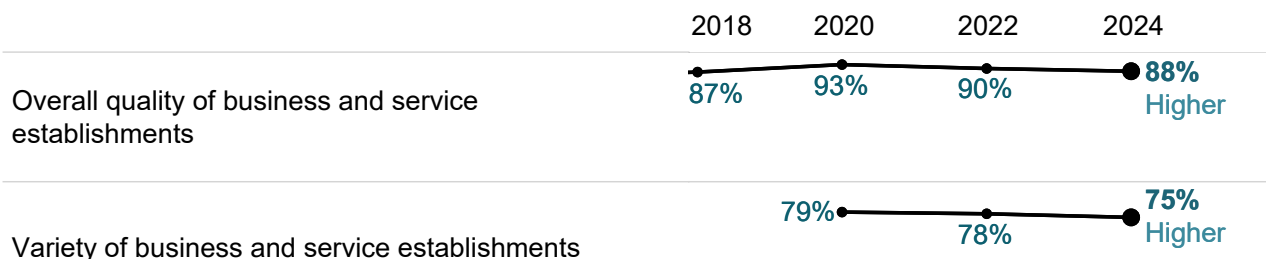
Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)

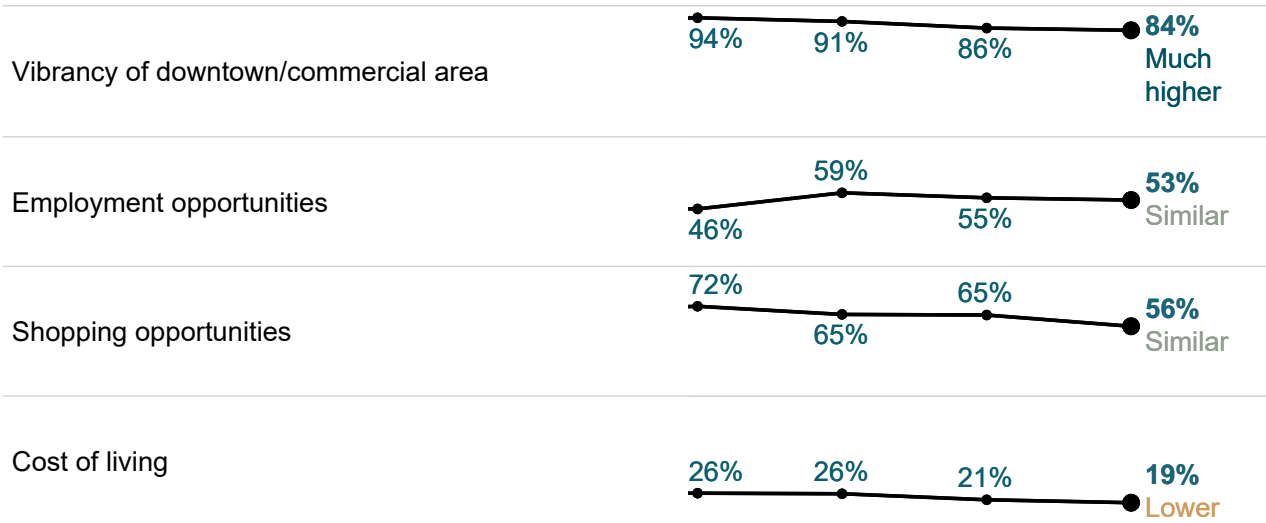


Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)

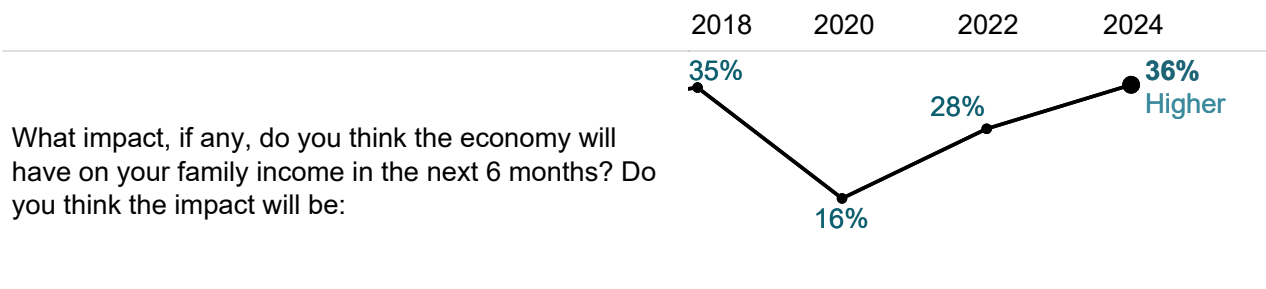


Please rate each of the following in the Decatur community.
(% excellent or good)





What impact, if any, do you think the economy will have on your family income in the next 6 months? Do you think the impact will be:
 (% very or somewhat positive)

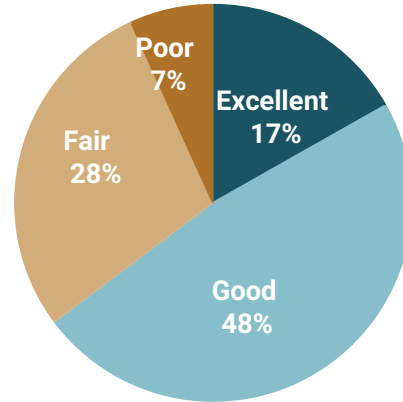


8. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

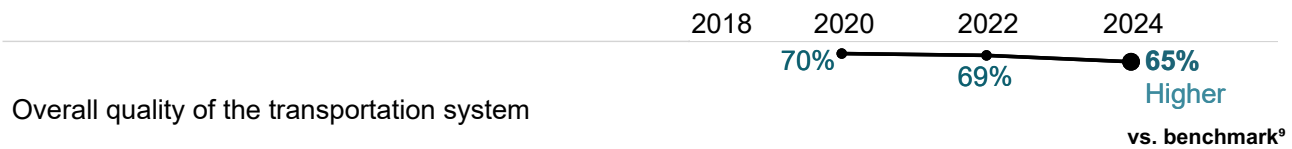
Overall quality of the transportation system in Decatur, 2024

Mobility

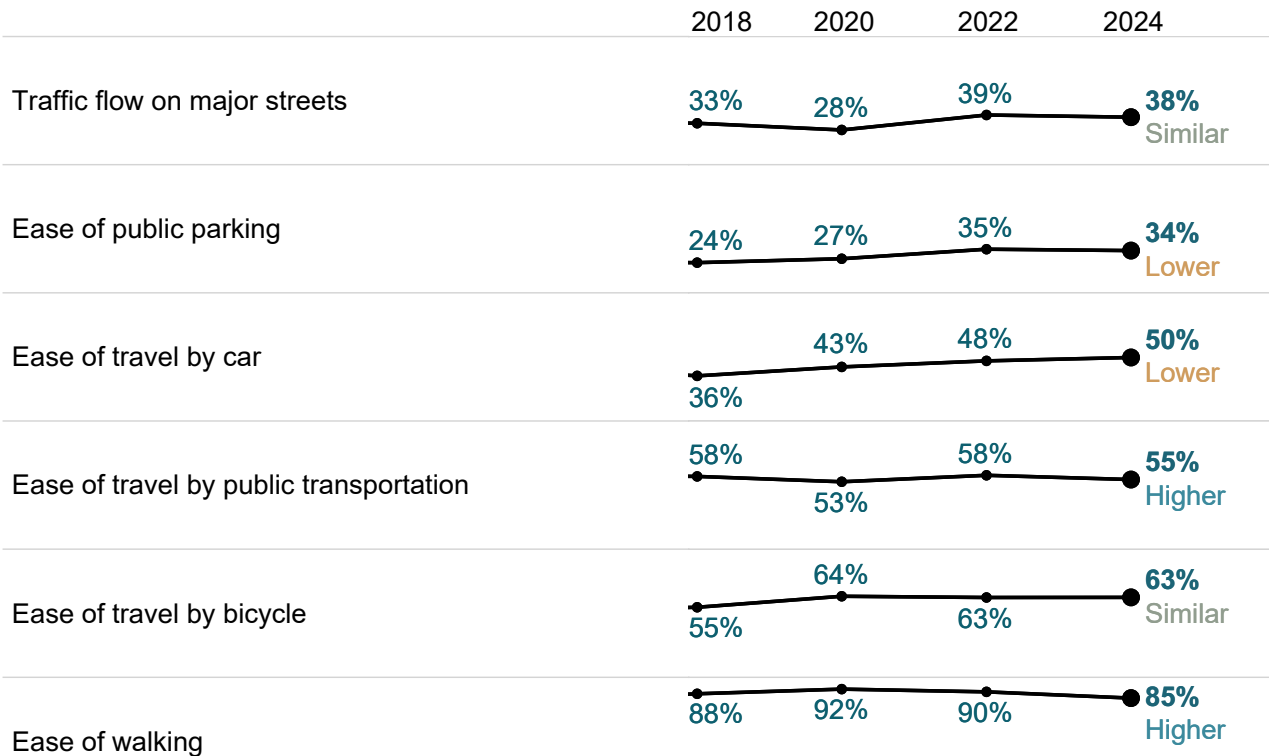
The ease with which residents can move about their communities, whether for commuting, leisure, or recreation, plays a major role in the quality of life for all who live, work, and play in the community.



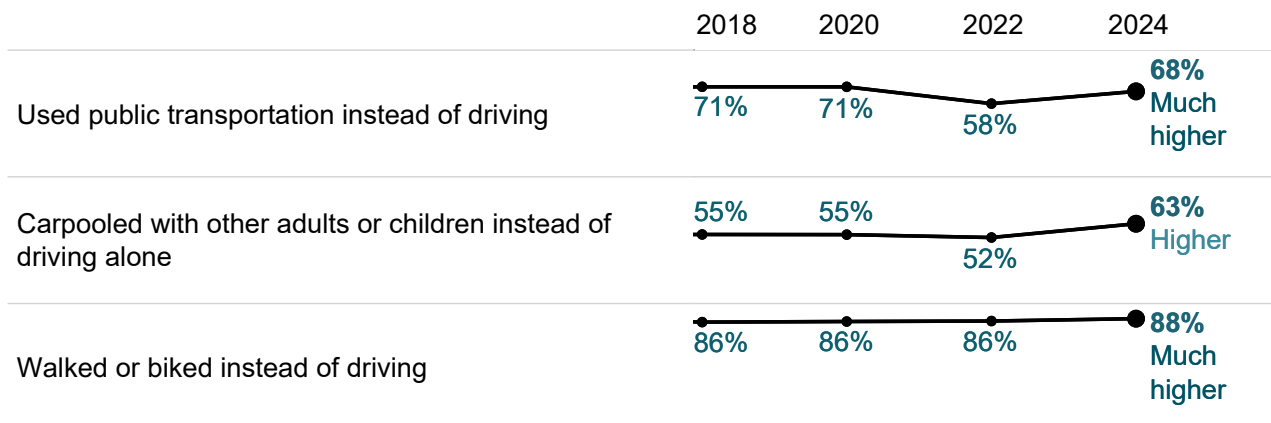
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



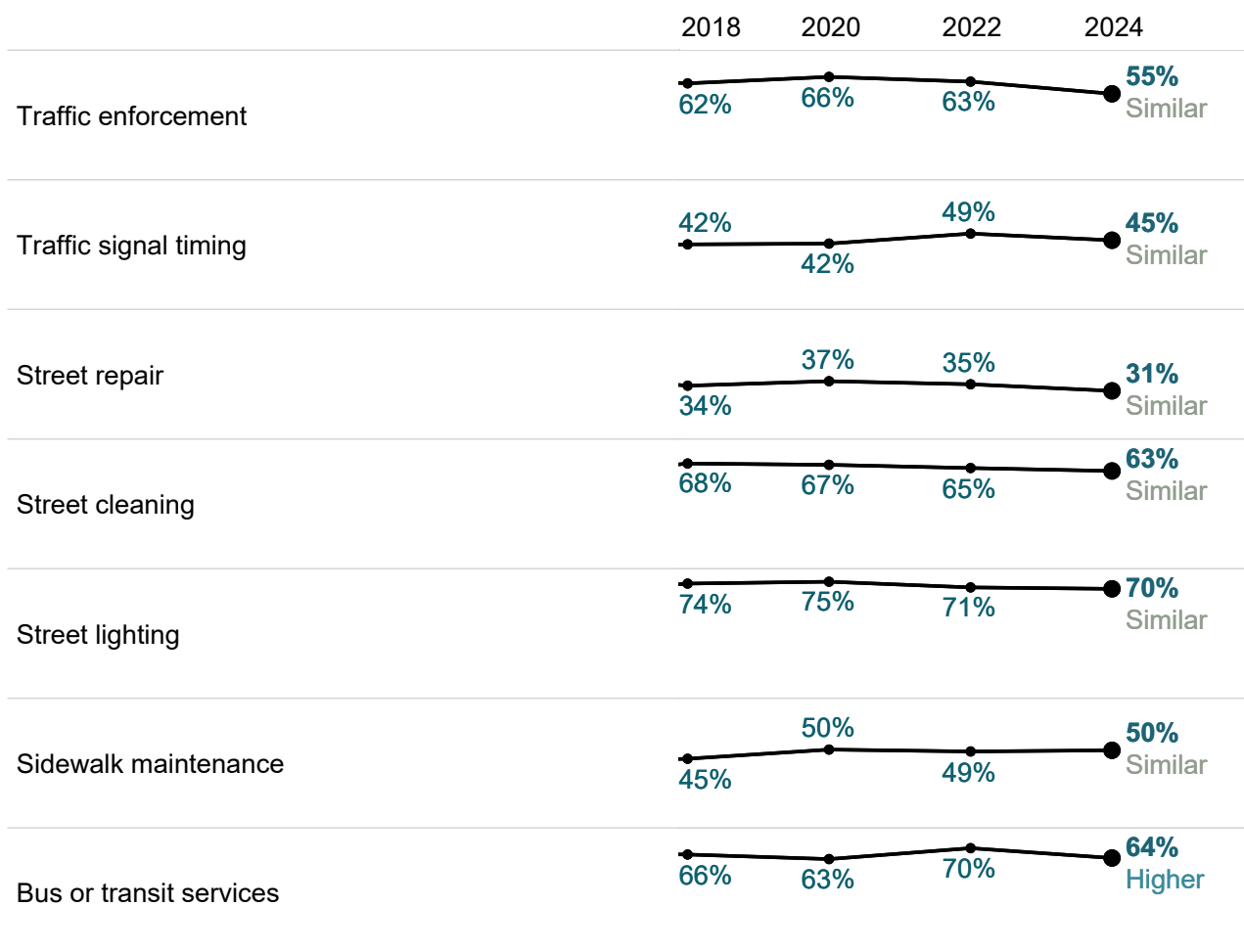
Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community.
(% excellent or good)



**Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.
(% yes)**



**Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)**

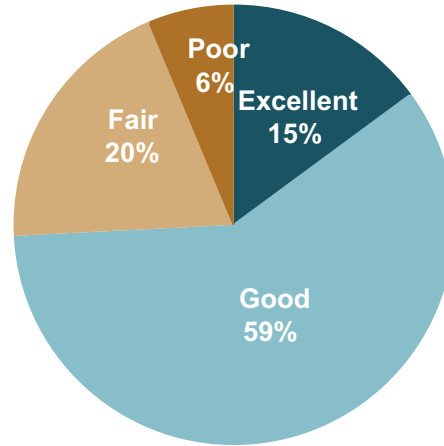


9. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

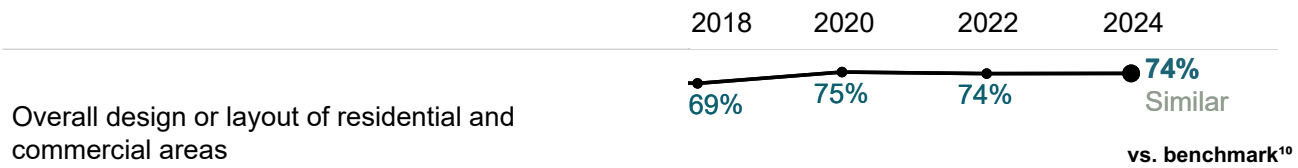
Overall design or layout of Decatur's residential and commercial areas, 2024

Community Design

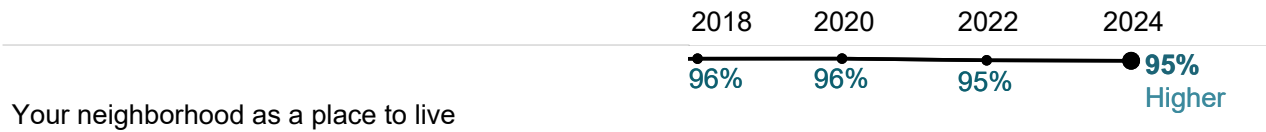
A well-designed community enhances the quality of life for its residents by encouraging smart land use and zoning, ensuring that affordable housing is accessible to all, and providing access to parks and other green spaces.



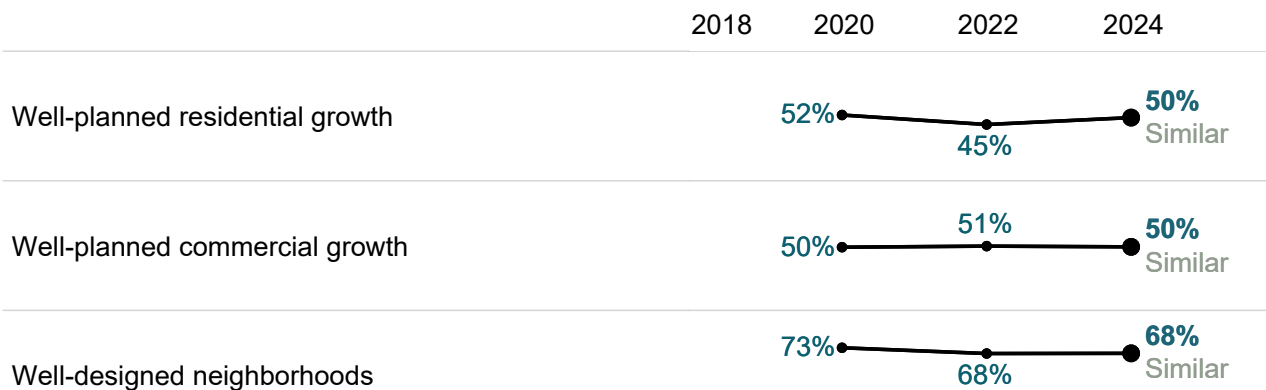
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole. (% excellent or good)



Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Decatur. (% excellent or good)

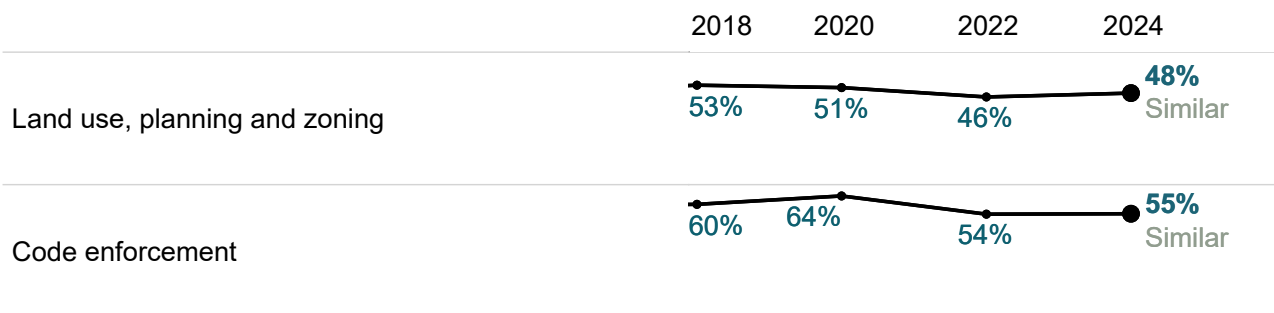


Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community. (% excellent or good)





**Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)**

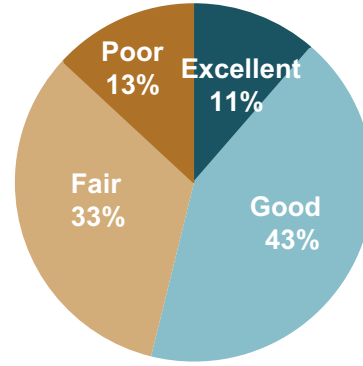


10. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

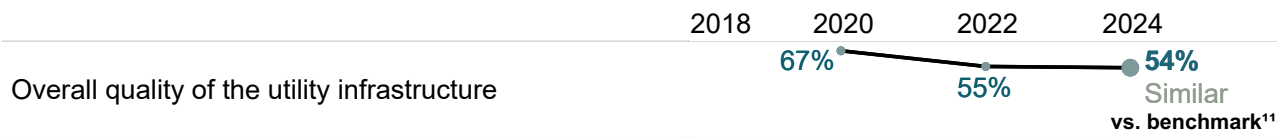
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Decatur, 2024

Utilities

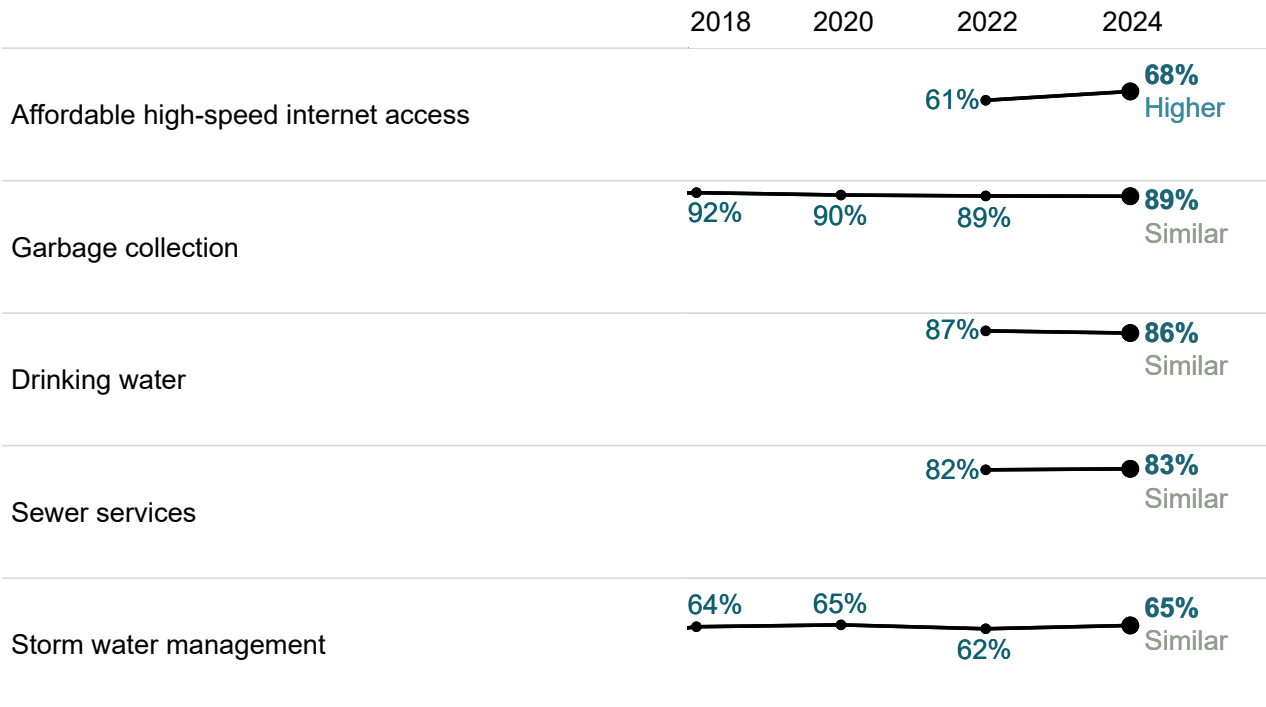
Services such as water, gas, electricity, and internet access play a vital role in ensuring the physical and economic health and well-being of the communities they serve.



Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole. (% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur. (% excellent or good)

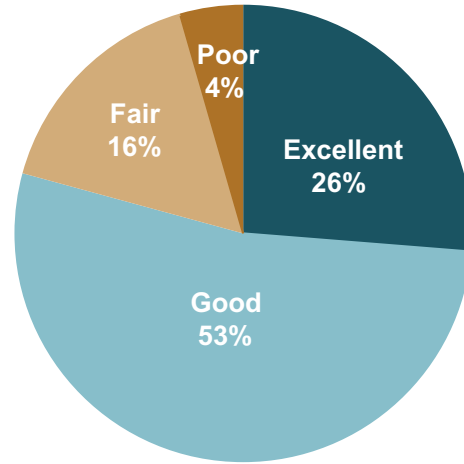


11. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

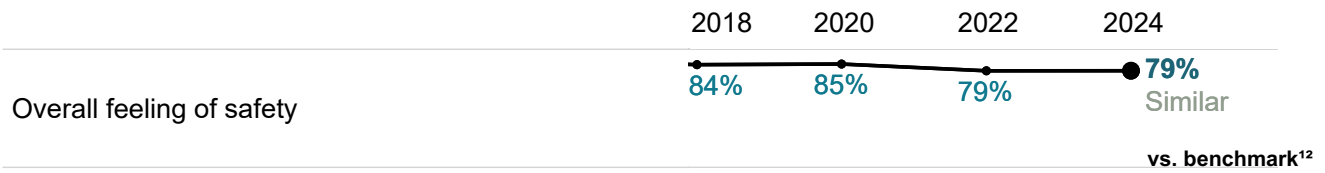
Overall feeling of safety in Decatur, 2024

Safety

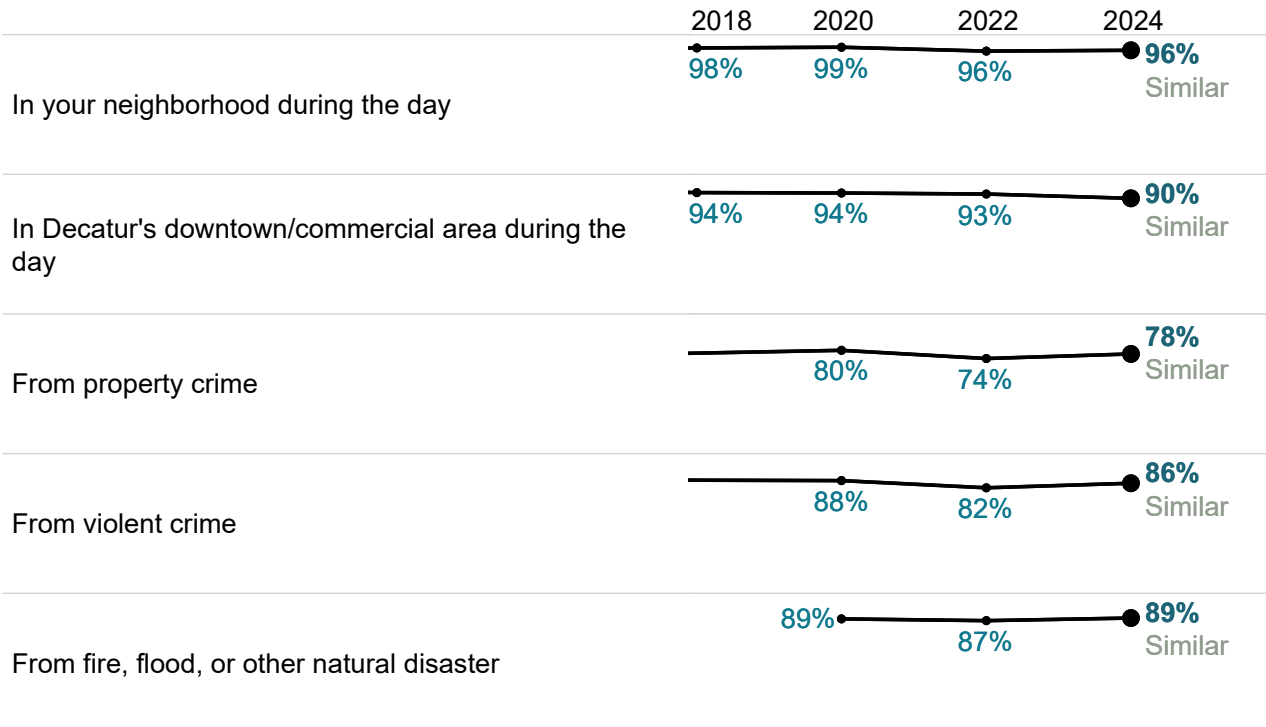
Public safety is often the most important task facing local governments. All residents should feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods and in the greater community, and providing robust safety-related services is essential to residents' quality of life.



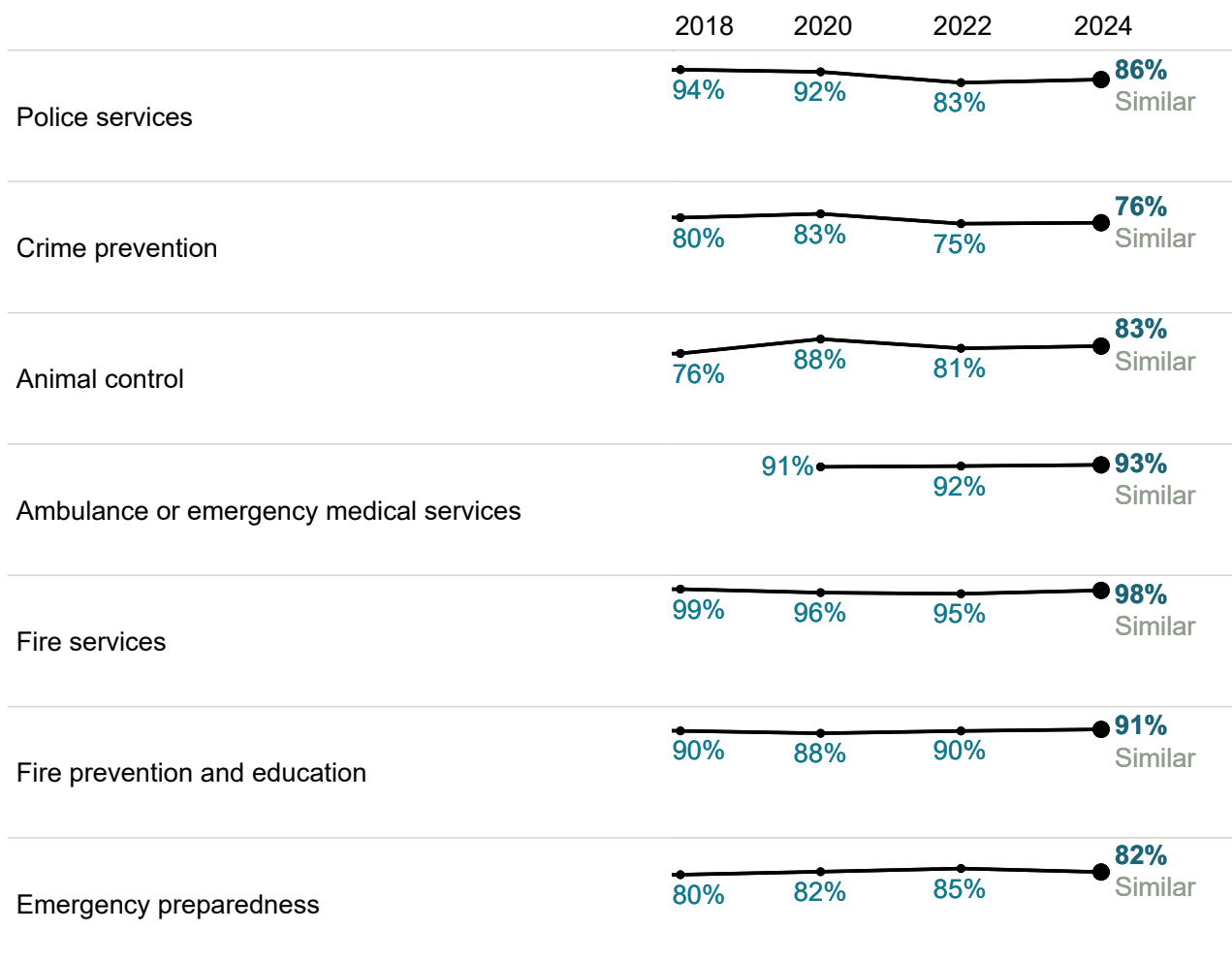
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate how safe or unsafe you feel:
(% very or somewhat safe)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
 (% excellent or good)

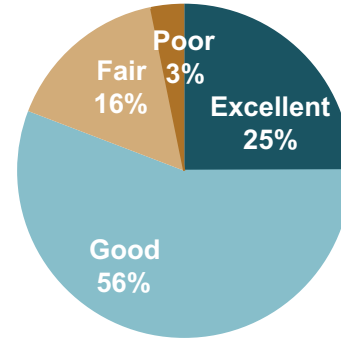


12. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

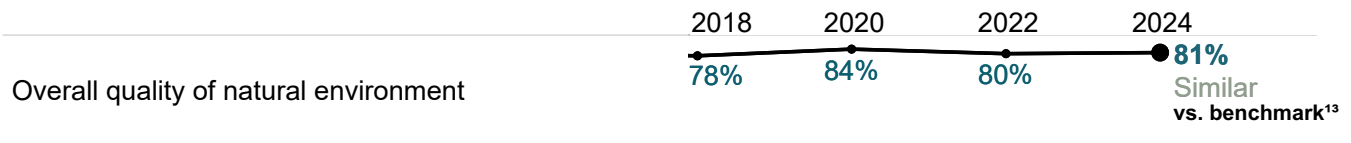
Overall quality of natural environment in Decatur, 2024

Natural Environment

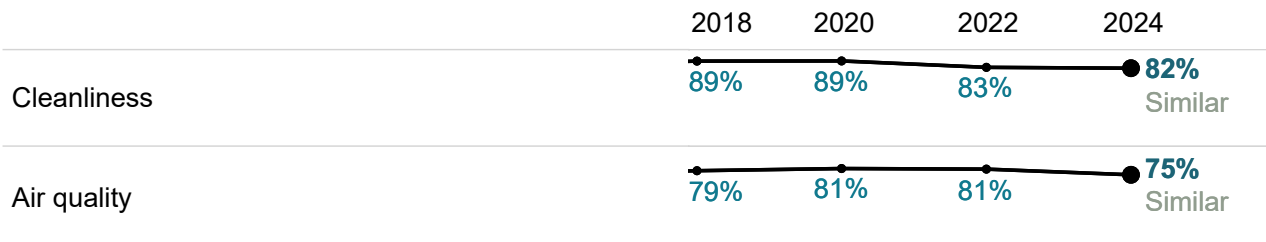
The natural environment plays a vital role in the health and well-being of residents. The natural spaces in which residents live and experience their communities has a direct and profound effect on quality of life.



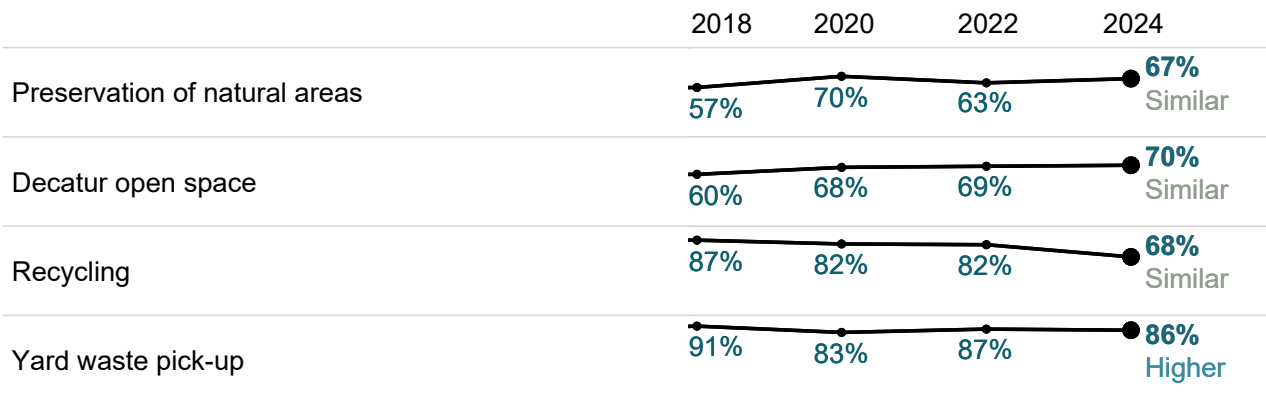
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole. (% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community. (% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur. (% excellent or good)



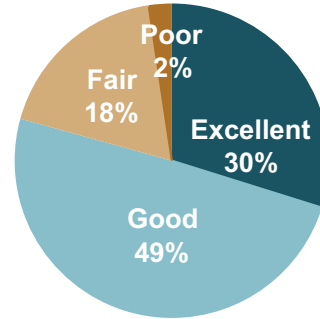
13. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities, 2024

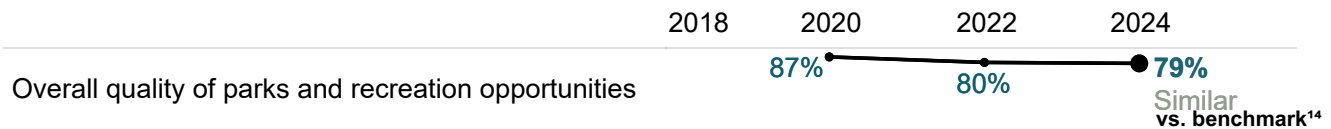
Parks and Recreation

"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."

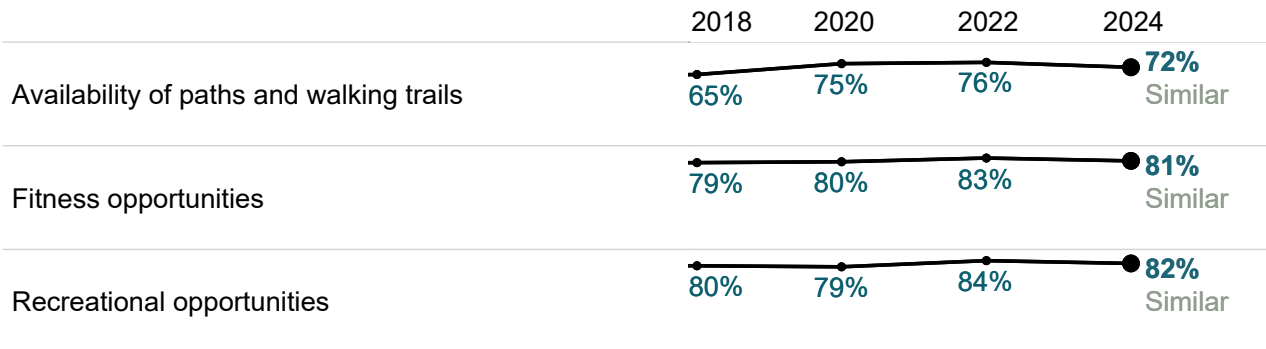
- National Recreation and Park Association



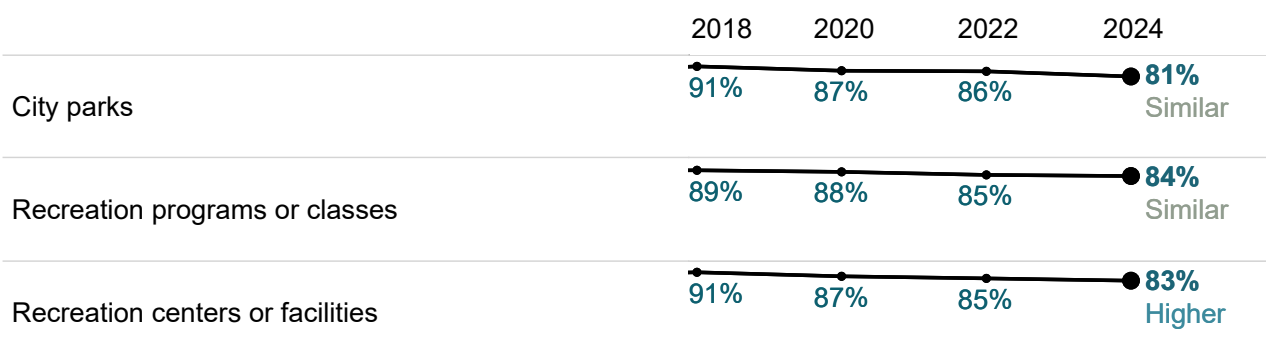
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)

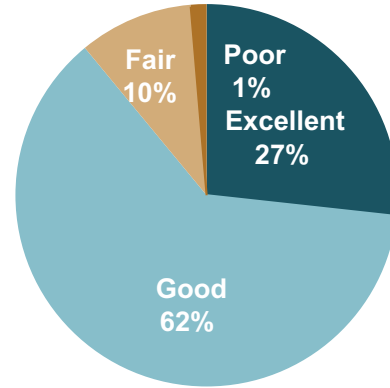


14. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

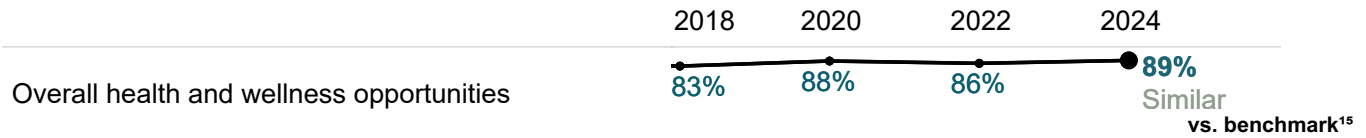
Polco
Health and Wellness

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.

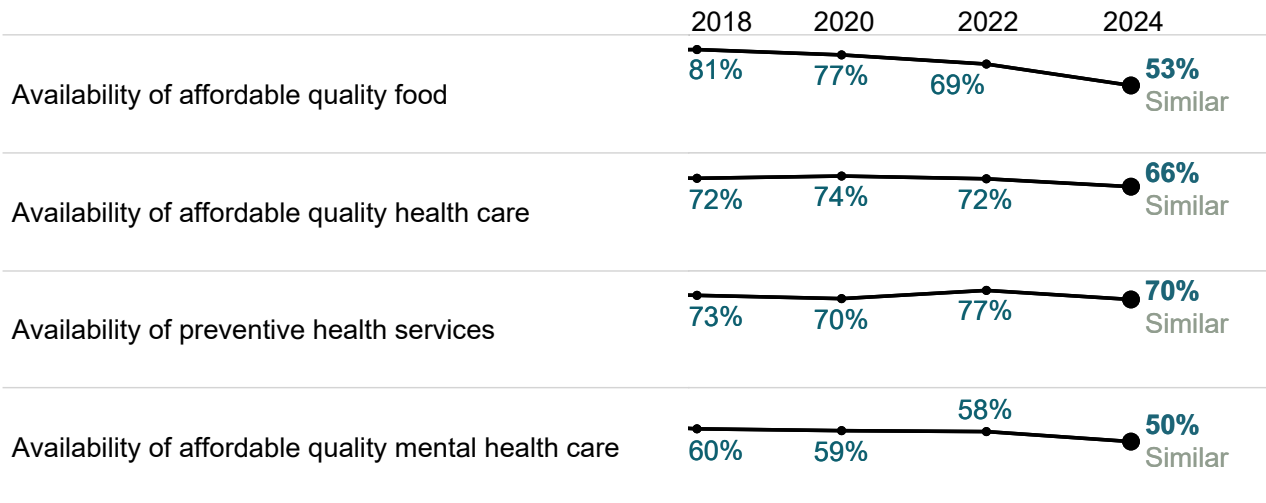
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Decatur, 2024



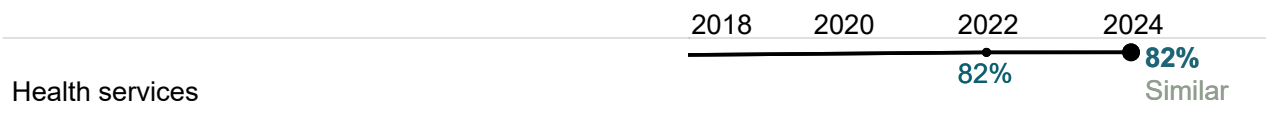
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate your overall health.
(% excellent or very good)



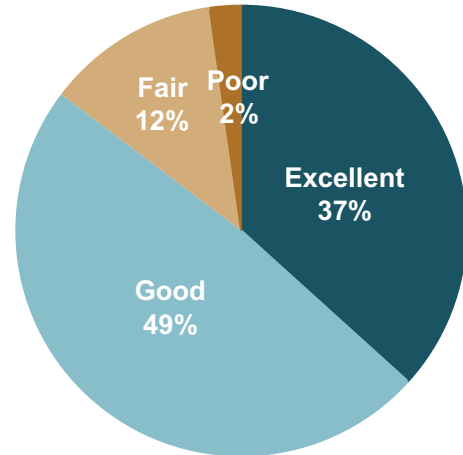
15. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.



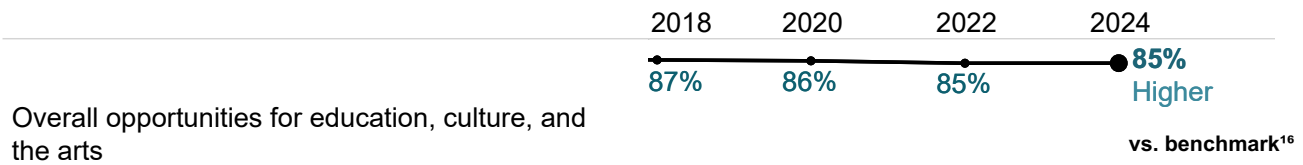
Overall opportunities for education, culture and the arts, 2024

Education, Arts, and Culture

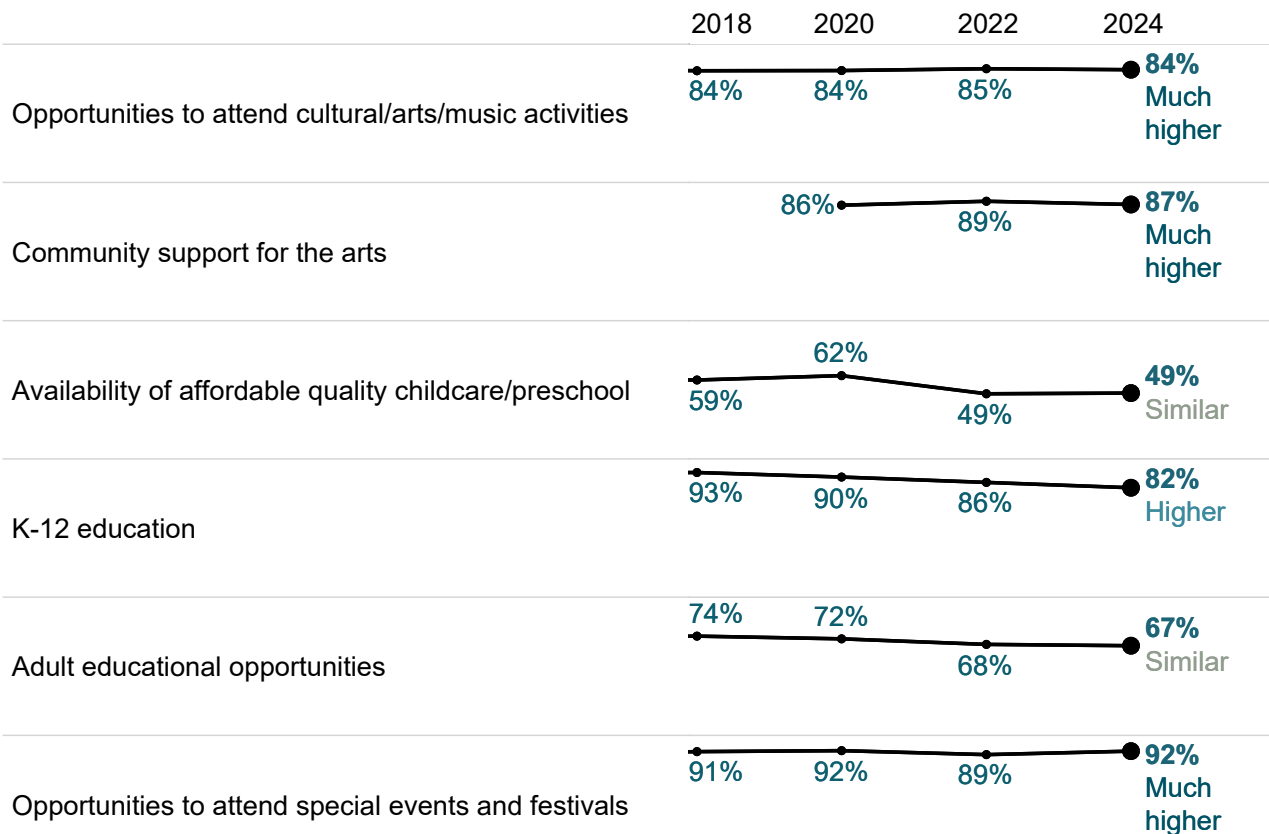
Participation in the arts, in educational opportunities, and in cultural activities is linked to increased civic engagement, greater social tolerance, and enhanced enjoyment of the local community.



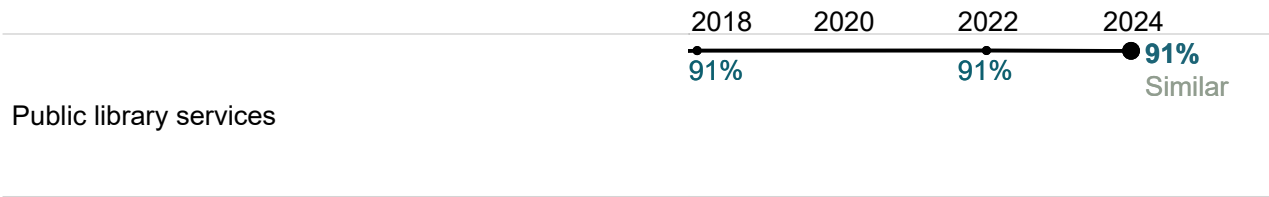
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)

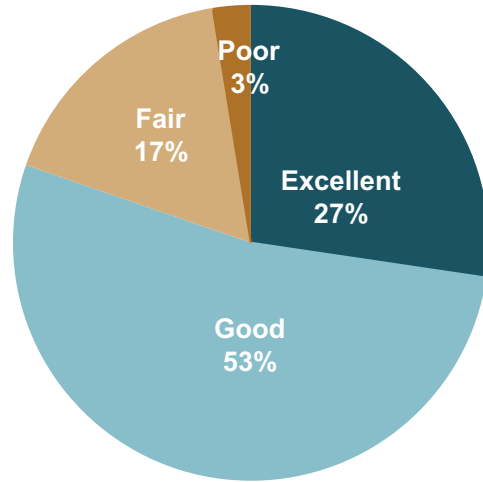


16. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

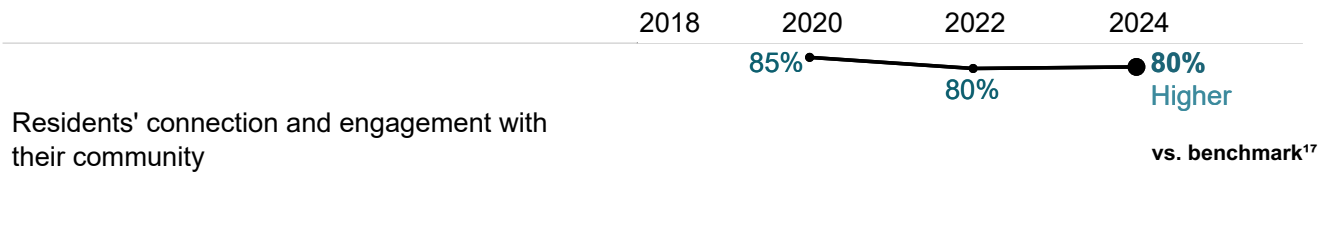
Residents' connection and engagement with their community, 2024

Inclusivity and Engagement

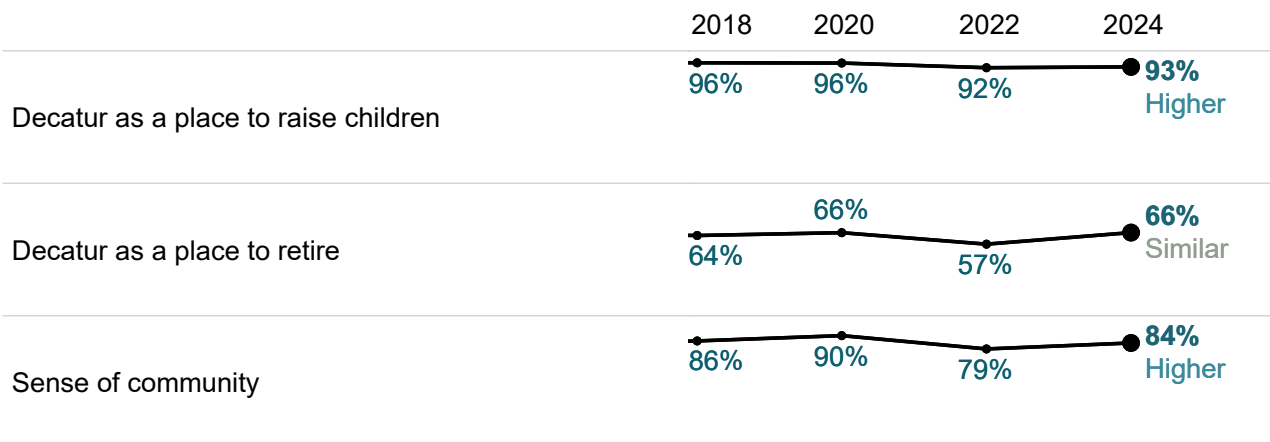
Inclusivity refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging; residents who feel invited to participate within their communities feel more included, involved, and engaged than those who do not.



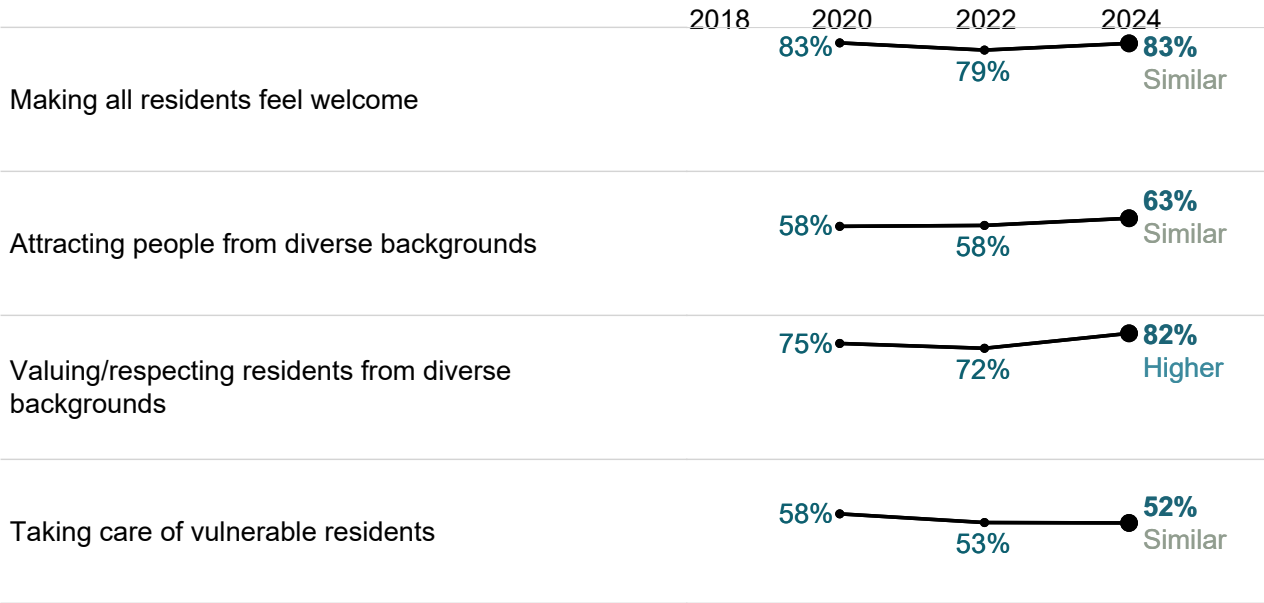
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Decatur as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



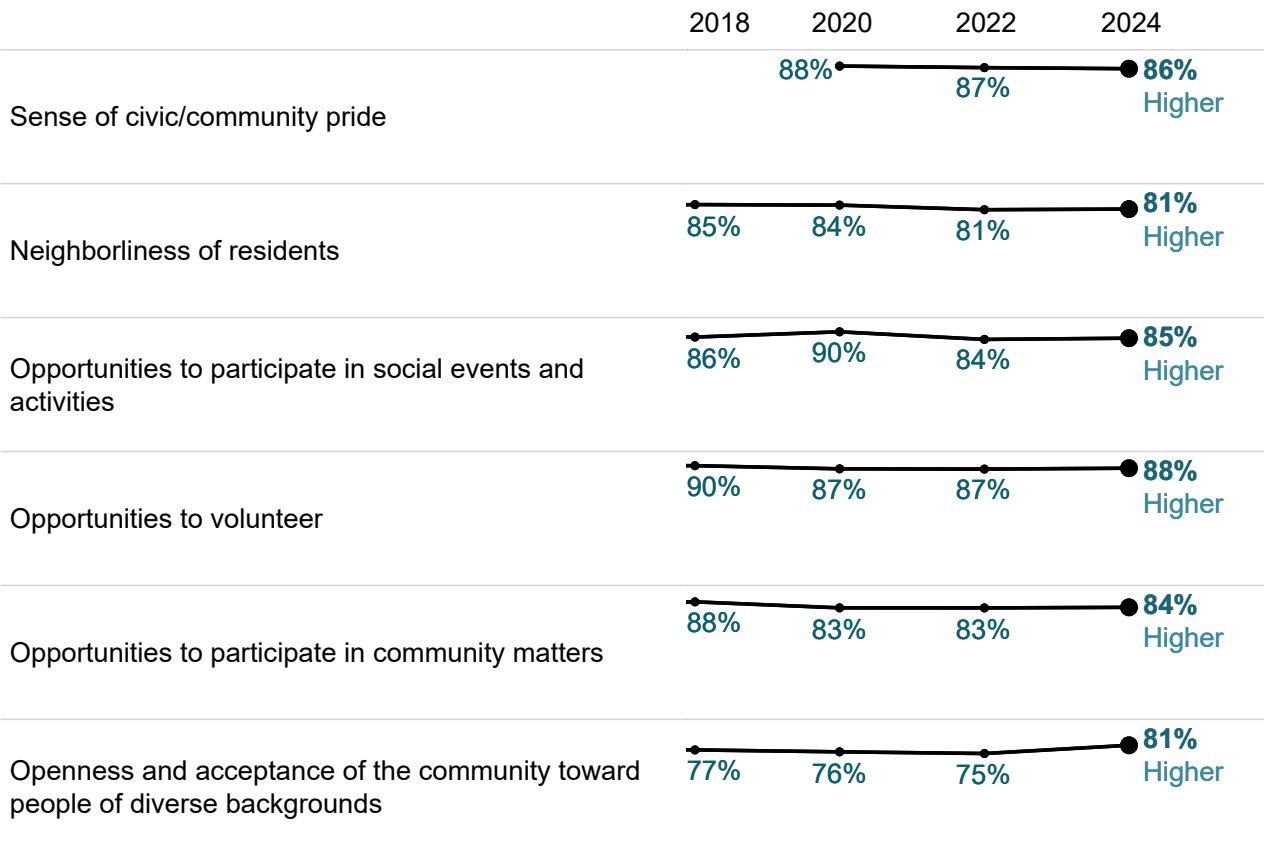
Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Decatur.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the job you feel the Decatur community does at each of the following.
 (% excellent or good)



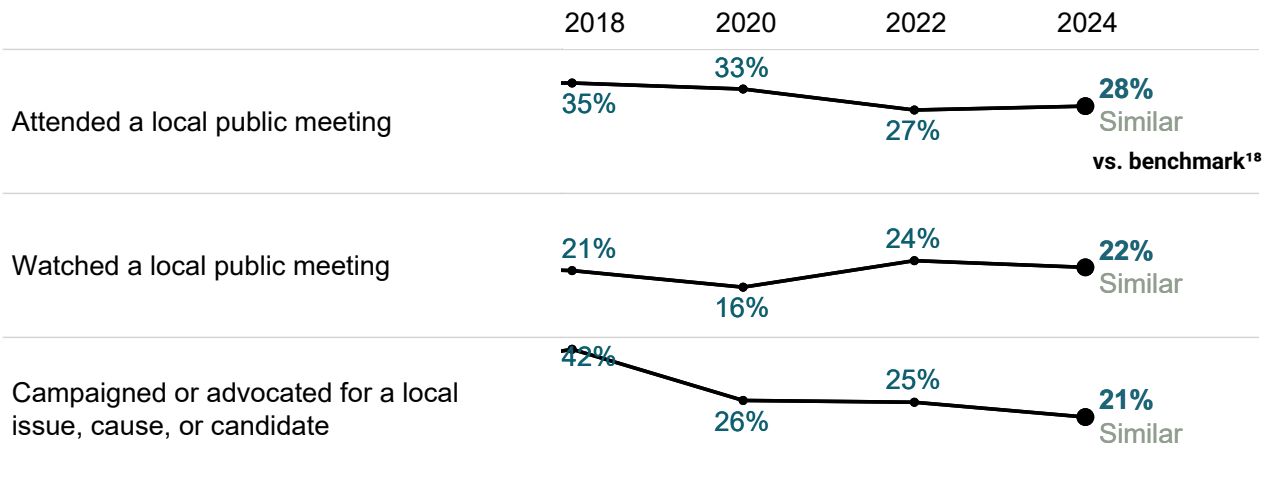
Please also rate each of the following in the Decatur community.
 (% excellent or good)



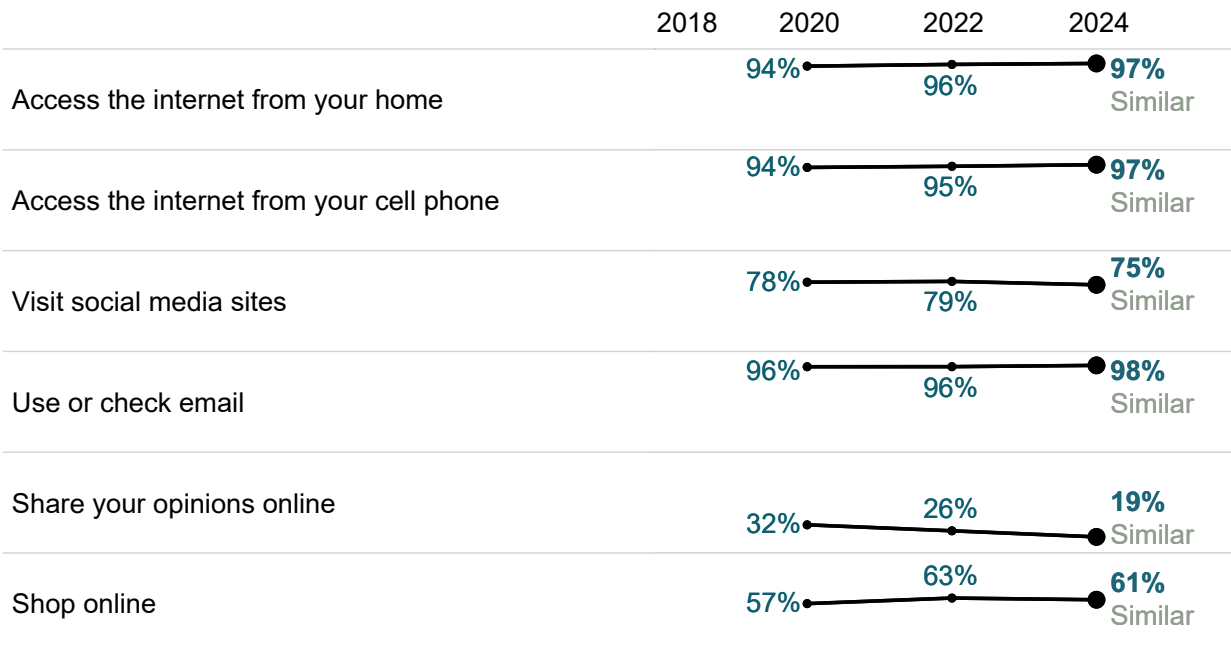
17. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

Residents' Participation Levels

Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.
(% yes)


























In general, how many times do you:
(% a few times a week or more)



18. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

Custom questions

Below are the complete set of responses to each custom question on the survey. By default, “don’t know” responses are excluded, but may be added to the table using the response filter below.

			Include "don't know" No	
To what extent would you support or oppose a policy of establishing a 25 mile per hour speed limit on most Decatur roadways?	Strongly support			39%
	Somewhat support			35%
	Somewhat oppose			18%
	Strongly oppose			8%
Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) refers to residential rental properties that maintain low rents without federal su..	Strongly support			53%
	Somewhat support			29%
	Somewhat oppose			9%
	Strongly oppose			8%
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about City-sponsored events, facility/road closures, changes to sanitation pick-up schedules, and other official notifications.	Email notifications	Major source		56%
		Minor source		26%
		Not a source		19%
	Text message	Major source		42%
		Minor source		27%
		Not a source		31%
	Nextdoor	Major source		13%
		Minor source		30%
		Not a source		58%
	Facebook	Major source		17%
		Minor source		31%
		Not a source		52%
Instagram	Major source		10%	
	Minor source		26%	
	Not a source		64%	

