Denver, CO
Community Livability Report
2015
Contents

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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Denver. 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 772 residents of the City of Denver. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for the entire sample. 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 Denver

Most residents rated the quality of life in Denver as excellent or good. These ratings were higher than the custom benchmark (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. Residents identified Safety, Economy and Mobility as priorities for the Denver community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that ratings for Economy were particularly strong, and tended to be higher than in comparison communities. Ratings for all other facets were positive and similar to comparison communities. 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 Denver's unique questions.

Legend
- Higher than custom benchmark
- Similar to custom benchmark
- Lower than custom benchmark

Most important

- Safety
- Natural Environment
- Mobility
- Built Environment
- Recreation and Wellness
- Community Engagement
- Education and Enrichment
- Economy
Community Characteristics

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

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Denver, 89% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents’ ratings of Denver as a place to live were higher than ratings in comparison communities with populations over 300,000.

In addition to rating the City as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Denver as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Denver and its overall appearance. At least 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image and appearance of Denver, to their neighborhoods, Denver as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of Denver. A majority of residents also gave favorable ratings to Denver as a place to retire. Ratings for the overall image of Denver were higher than ratings in comparison communities.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated nearly 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. About 9 in 10 respondents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods, and this rating was similar to the benchmark. A majority of respondents felt safe downtown and gave positive ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Denver; however, these ratings were also similar to the benchmarks. Ratings for the overall feeling of safety in Denver decreased from 2014 to 2015 (for more information see the Trends over Time report under separate cover). Ratings within Mobility were mixed: at least 7 in 10 residents positively rated the availability of paths and walking trails, as well as ease of walking in Denver. Less than one third of respondents, however, rated travel by car, public parking, and traffic flow positively, and ratings for travel by car were lower than the benchmark. Within Built Environment, at least 6 in 10 gave positive ratings to the overall built environment, and this rating was similar to those given in comparison communities. However, ratings for housing options and the availability of affordable quality housing were rated positively by less than one-third of respondents; these ratings were lower than the benchmarks and decreased from 2014 to 2015. Most aspects of Economy, the highest rated facet for Denver, were higher than those in comparison communities and were rated positively by a majority of respondents. Ratings for cost of living in Denver decreased from 2014 to 2015 and were similar to the ratings in other communities with populations over 300,000.
Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

- SAFETY
  - Overall feeling of safety: 66%
  - Safe in neighborhood: 78%
  - Safe downtown/commercial area: 90%

- MOBILITY
  - Overall ease of travel: 58%
  - Paths and walking trails: 75%
  - Ease of walking: 70%
  - Travel by bicycle: 57%
  - Travel by public transportation: 45%
  - Travel by car: 32%
  - Public parking: 21%
  - Traffic flow: 23%

- NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
  - Overall natural environment: 76%
  - Air quality: 50%

- BUILT ENVIRONMENT
  - Overall built environment: 64%
  - New development in Denver: 57%
  - Affordable quality housing: 15%
  - Housing options: 31%

- ECONOMY
  - Overall economic health: 74%
  - Vibrant downtown/commercial area: 68%
  - Cost of living: 24%
  - Shopping opportunities: 64%
  - Employment opportunities: 82%
  - Place to visit: 64%
  - Place to work: 92%

- RECREATION AND WELLNESS
  - Health and wellness: 78%
  - Mental health care: 41%
  - Preventive health services: 60%
  - Health care: 56%
  - Food: 68%
  - Recreational opportunities: 83%
  - Fitness opportunities: 80%

- EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT
  - Education and enrichment opportunities: 70%
  - Cultural/arts/music activities: 83%
  - Adult education: 62%
  - K-12 education: 43%
  - Child care/preschool: 42%

- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
  - Openness and acceptance: 62%
  - Opportunities to participate in community matters: 57%

Comparison to custom benchmark:
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Denver as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About two-thirds of residents gave favorable ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Denver; this rating was similar to those given in other communities with populations over 300,000. Services provided by the Federal Government were rated positively by about 4 in 10 respondents and were similar to the benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Denver’s leadership and governance. About half rated the value of services for taxes paid, the overall direction, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of Denver, being honest and overall customer service as excellent or good. All of these ratings were similar to the benchmark.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Denver. Most aspects of Governance were rated as excellent or good by a majority of respondents and tended to be similar to the benchmark. At least 8 in 10 residents rated fire and ambulance/EMS as excellent or good, while about 6 in 10 gave positive ratings to police services, a rating lower than in comparison communities. All aspects of Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated positively, with at least 6 in 10 residents giving ratings of excellent or good. These ratings tended to be similar to those given in comparison communities; however, ratings for City parks and recreation centers were higher than those in communities elsewhere. About two-thirds of respondents rated economic development positively, a rating higher than the benchmark. Ratings within the facet of Mobility and Built Environment were mixed, but tended to be similar to the benchmarks. Ratings for bus or transit services were higher than ratings in other communities with populations over 300,000.
### Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFETY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance/EMS</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime prevention</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire prevention</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal control</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency preparedness</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBILITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic enforcement</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street repair</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street cleaning</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street lighting</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow removal</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk maintenance</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic signal timing</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus or transit services</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATURAL ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garbage collection</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard waste pick-up</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural areas preservation</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILT ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm drainage</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use, planning and zoning</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code enforcement</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECONOMY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECREATION AND WELLNESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City parks</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation programs</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation centers</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public libraries</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public information</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation

Are the residents of Denver 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. The overall sense of community in Denver received positive ratings from 55% of residents, a rating that was similar to other communities with populations over 300,000.

About 4 in 5 residents were likely to recommend living in Denver and remain in the city for the next five years; these ratings were similar to other communities. About half reported they had contacted a City employee, a level similar to those reported in comparison communities.

The survey included over 20 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of Participation tended to be mixed across the different facets, but overall reported rates were similar to or higher than those in comparison communities. Within the facet of Natural Environment, at least 7 in 10 residents reported that they had conserved water, made their homes more energy efficient or recycled at home, all rates similar to the benchmark. Reported rates of Participation within Safety, Built Environment and Community Engagement were also similar to those given in comparison communities.

Within Mobility, more than half of respondents reported that they had used public transportation instead of driving, carpooled instead of driving alone or walked or biked instead of driving. More Denver residents reported that they had used public transportation or walked or biked instead of driving than residents in comparison communities. Within Recreation and Wellness, almost all residents reported that they had visited a City park, which was also higher than the benchmark. Rates of Participation within the facet of Economy were also very positive; over 9 in 10 residents reported purchasing goods or services in Denver, while at least 6 in 10 residents work in Denver. About 37% of respondents thought the economy would have a positive impact on their personal economic future; this level of optimism was also higher than in comparison communities.
Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to custom benchmark
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

MOBILITY
- Used public transportation instead of driving: 68%
- Carpoled instead of driving alone: 53%
- Walked or biked instead of driving: 77%

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
- Conserved water: 86%
- Made home more energy efficient: 74%
- Recycled at home: 84%

BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- Did NOT observe a code violation: 50%
- NOT under housing cost stress: 61%

ECONOMY
- Purchased goods or services in Denver: 97%
- Economy will have positive impact on income: 37%
- Work in Denver: 61%

RECREATION AND WELLNESS
- Used Denver recreation centers: 56%
- Visited a City park: 94%
- Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables: 85%
- Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity: 85%
- In very good to excellent health: 91%

EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT
- Used Denver public libraries: 70%

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- Contacted Denver elected officials: 21%
- Attended a local public meeting: 20%
- Watched a local public meeting: 25%
- Read or watched local news: 85%
- Voted in local elections: 88%
Special Topics

The City of Denver included nine questions of special interest on The NCS. About half of the survey respondents reported being in contact with a City employee in the last 12 months. Those who had been in contact were then asked to rate that contact; at least two-thirds of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to City employees.

Figure 4: Contact with City of Denver Employee

*Have you had any in-person, phone or email contact with an employee of the City of Denver within the last 12 months (including police, receptionists, planners or any others)?*

![Pie chart showing 51% Yes and 49% No]

Figure 5: Impression of Contact with City of Denver Employee(s)

*What was your impression of the employee(s) of the City of Denver in your most recent contact? (Rate each characteristic below.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall impression</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third question asked residents about their likelihood of using different types of payment in financial transactions with the City. Almost all respondents reported they were very or somewhat likely to use a credit or debit card. About 58% of residents would be very or somewhat likely to use a check, and 46% would use cash.

Figure 6: Methods of Payment
How likely, if at all, would you be to use each of the following methods of payment to conduct financial transactions with the City?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very likely</th>
<th>Somewhat likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credit card/debit card</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next question asked residents about their likelihood to use certain methods to conduct financial transactions with the City. While a majority were likely to use each of the avenues listed, web and phone were the most popular choices.

Figure 7: Methods to Conduct Financial Transactions
How likely, if at all, would you be to use each of the following methods to conduct financial transactions with the City?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very likely</th>
<th>Somewhat likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile application</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the fifth custom question, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a statement about the job the City of Denver does at managing police officer conduct. About 64% agreed that the City does a good job.

**Figure 8: Managing Police Officer Conduct**
*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The City of Denver government does a good job of managing police officer conduct"?*

The next question asked respondents to rate the importance of potential improvements to aspects of City customer service. At least two-thirds rated each item as essential or very important. Ease in getting questions answered was rated as the most important, followed by clearer information on the City website and faster processing times for transactions and paperwork.

**Figure 9: Improvements to Customer Service**
*As the City considers ways to improve its customer service, how important, if at all, should the following be?*
The next question asked respondents if they or anyone in their household had been in contact with 311 in the past 12 months. About one-third of respondents indicated that they had been in contact with 311. Those who had been in contact were then asked to rate their impression of the 311 agent; at least three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the 311 agent with whom they had been in contact.

Figure 10: Contact with 311
*In the past 12 months have your or anyone in your household contacted 311?*

![Pie chart showing 32% Yes and 68% No](chart.png)

Figure 11: Impression of Contact with 311
*What was your impression of the 311 agent in your most recent contact? (Rate each characteristic)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall impression</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall:
- Courtesy: 41% Excellent, 43% Good (84% total)
- Knowledge: 31% Excellent, 48% Good (80% total)
- Responsiveness: 32% Excellent, 44% Good (76% total)
- Overall impression: 35% Excellent, 40% Good (75% total)
The final question was an open-ended question in which residents were asked to identify the single most pressing issue facing the City and County of Denver today. The verbatim responses were categorized by topic area and those topics are reported in the chart below with the percent of responses given in each category. Of the respondents who wrote in a response, the most commonly cited topics were affordable housing and cost of living, transportation and traffic and growth and development. (For the full verbatim responses, see the Open End Report under separate cover.)

Figure 4: City issues and concerns
What do you think is the single most pressing issue facing the City and County of Denver today and why?

- Affordable housing and cost of living: 26%
- Transportation and traffic: 17%
- Growth and development: 16%
- Public safety: 11%
- Homelessness: 10%
- Governance, budget and economy: 7%
- Don't know: 2%
- Other: 11%
Conclusions

Denver continues to be a great place to live.

Almost all survey respondents rated the overall quality of Denver and the City as a place to live as excellent or good; these ratings have remained stable over time and were higher than the benchmarks. Over 8 in 10 would recommend Denver as a place to live and remain in the community in the next five years. The overall image and appearance of the City and neighborhoods were rated excellent or good by over three-quarters of respondents. These high ratings remained stable from 2013 to 2015. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and remained stable from 2014 to 2015.

Denver’s Economy is a strong community feature.

Denver residents identified Economy as one of the top community focus areas. Most aspects related to Economy, including economic development, Denver as a place to work, Denver as a place to visit, vibrant downtown/commercial area, employment opportunities and the overall economic health of Denver received ratings higher than the benchmarks. Almost all aspects within Economy remained stable from 2014 to 2015; however, ratings for cost of living and vibrant downtown/commercial area were trending down. Compared to other communities with populations over 300,000, more residents in Denver were optimistic about their personal economic future.

Mobility is a top focus area, with room for improvement.

Mobility was also identified by respondents as a top focus area for the Denver community. A majority of Denver residents reported that they had used public transportation instead of driving, carpooled instead of driving alone, and walked or biked instead of driving. More Denver residents reported that they had used public transportation or walked or biked instead of driving than residents in comparable communities with populations over 300,000. While Participation rates within Mobility were high, ratings for other aspects of Mobility were mixed. Within Community Characteristics, less than half of the survey respondents gave positive ratings to traffic flow, public parking, travel by car and travel by public transportation in Denver. Ratings for travel by car and public parking decreased from 2014 to 2015.