Denver, CO
Community Livability Report
2016
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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 1,254 residents of the City of Denver. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% 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. This was similar to quality of life ratings seen in other jurisdictions with populations over 300,000 (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 and Economy as priorities for the Denver community in the coming two years. Ratings for all 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

Built Environment

Economy

Recreation and Wellness

Education and Enrichment

Community Engagement

Overall Quality of Life

- Excellent: 31%
- Good: 50%
- Fair: 16%
- Poor: 3%

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

Most important

Safety

Natural Environment

Built Environment

Economy

Recreation and Wellness

Education and Enrichment

Community Engagement
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, 85% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents’ ratings of Denver as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities with large populations.

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. About three-quarters of survey participants favorably rated the overall image of Denver and their neighborhood as a place to live. About 7 in 10 residents positively rated the overall appearance of Denver and the City as a place to raise children while about half gave high marks to the City as a place to retire. Ratings for all of these measures of community quality were similar to the benchmark comparisons; however, ratings for the overall image of Denver were higher than ratings in comparison communities.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. About 4 in 5 respondents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods, which was similar to the benchmark. Around 6 in 10 residents favorably rated the overall feeling of safety in Denver and the feeling of safety in the City’s downtown/commercial area; these ratings were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities. Ratings in the facet of Mobility tended to be mixed: while about 7 in 10 respondents awarded high marks to the availability of walking paths and trails, less than half positively rated the overall ease of travel in Denver, travel by car, public parking and traffic flow, and ratings for these four aspects were lower than the benchmark and declined over time. Ratings for paths and walking trails, ease of walking and travel by public transportation were rated positively by a majority of respondents and were higher than ratings in other communities with large populations. About 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall natural environment and a majority positively rated the overall built environment; ratings in these facets tended to be similar to or lower than the benchmark comparisons, however ratings for public places where people like to spend time were higher than ratings in other communities. Within the facet of Economy, ratings for the overall economic health of Denver, employment opportunities and Denver as a place to visit were higher than the benchmarks. About three-quarters of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to overall opportunities for recreation and wellness, and ratings for recreational opportunities and fitness opportunities were higher than the benchmarks. Within the facet of Education and Enrichment, about three-quarters of respondents favorably rated opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities (which was higher than the benchmark), while about 4 in 10 positively rated K-12 education and about 3 in 10 favorably rated the availability of affordable quality childcare/preschool.
Table 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Percent Rating Positively (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SAFETY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall feeling of safety</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe in neighborhood</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe downtown/commercial area</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOBILITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall ease of travel</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paths and walking trails</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of walking</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel by bicycle</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel by public transportation</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel by car</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public parking</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic flow</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATURAL ENVIRONMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall natural environment</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air quality</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BUILT ENVIRONMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall built environment</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New development in Denver</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable quality housing</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing options</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECONOMY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall economic health</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibrant downtown/commercial area</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping opportunities</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to visit</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to work</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RECREATION AND WELLNESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and wellness</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health care</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventive health services</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational opportunities</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness opportunities</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and enrichment opportunities</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/arts/music activities</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 education</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care/preschool</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness and acceptance</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to participate in community matters</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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. A majority of respondents (64%) positively rated the overall quality of City Services, while about 4 in 10 positively rated services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for both of these measures were similar to the custom benchmark comparisons.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Denver’s leadership and governance. Sixty-four percent of participants gave excellent or good ratings to the overall customer service provided by City employees, while about half favorably rated the overall direction the City is taking and acting in the best interest of Denver. All other aspects of Denver’s leadership and governance received positive ratings from about 4 in 10 residents or more.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Denver. Broadly, ratings for Denver’s services and amenities were generally strong and similar to the benchmark comparisons. Within the facet of Safety, at least 4 in 5 participants awarded high marks to ambulance/EMS and fire services. All Safety ratings were similar to ratings given in other communities with populations over 300,000. Within Mobility, ratings for snow removal were lower than ratings reported in comparison communities, while all other aspects were similar to the benchmark. Ratings for Natural Environment-related services were positive and similar to the custom comparisons. Within the facet of Built Environment, about half of respondents favorably rated storm drainage and about one-third gave high marks to land use, planning and zoning and code enforcement. A majority of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to all aspects of Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. Ratings for City parks were higher than ratings seen in comparison communities.
Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to custom benchmark
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
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. About half of residents positively rated the sense of community in Denver, which is similar to ratings reported in other communities. About 4 in 5 residents indicated that they planned to remain in the City for the coming five years, and about three-quarters would recommend living in Denver to someone who asked; these rates were similar to the benchmarks. About half of respondents had contacted a City of Denver employee for help or information in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The survey included over 20 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Denver residents’ reported levels of Participation were generally similar to those reported in comparison communities; however, there were a few noteworthy exceptions. Survey participants reported higher levels of using public transportation instead of driving and of walking or biking instead of driving than residents in comparison communities. Further, more Denver residents reported that they had visited a City park or attended a City-sponsored event than residents elsewhere. Residents reported their lowest levels of Participation for contacting Denver elected officials, attending a local public meeting and watching a local public meeting.

Levels of Participation were generally stable over time. However, in 2016 fewer residents did NOT observe a code violation and fewer thought that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in the coming six months.
Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

- **SAFETY**
  - Did NOT report a crime: 70%
  - Was NOT the victim of a crime: 81%

- **MOBILITY**
  - Used public transportation instead of driving: 67%
  - Carooled instead of driving alone: 52%
  - Walked or biked instead of driving: 74%

- **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**
  - Conserved water: 87%
  - Made home more energy efficient: 74%
  - Recycled at home: 86%

- **BUILT ENVIRONMENT**
  - Did NOT observe a code violation: 45%
  - NOT under housing cost stress: 58%

- **ECONOMY**
  - Purchased goods or services in Denver: 96%
  - Economy will have positive impact on income: 30%
  - Work in Denver: 63%

- **RECREATION AND WELLNESS**
  - Used Denver recreation centers: 54%
  - Visited a City park: 91%
  - Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables: 84%
  - Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity: 89%
  - In very good to excellent health: 67%

- **EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT**
  - Used Denver public libraries: 66%

- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
  - Contacted Denver elected officials: 20%
  - Attended a local public meeting: 22%
  - Watched a local public meeting: 24%
  - Read or watched local news: 85%
  - Voted in local elections: 91%

Comparison to custom benchmark:
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
Special Topics

The City of Denver included seven questions of special interest on The NCS as well as an open-ended question, where respondents could write down a response in their own words. The first special interest question asked respondents if they had any contact with a City of Denver employee in the 12 months prior to the survey. About half of respondents reported having contact with a City of Denver employee.

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)?*

Next, residents who reported having contact with a City of Denver employee were asked to rate various aspects of their impression of the City of Denver employees they had interacted with in their most recent contact. About 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to each aspect of their impression of the City employee(s).

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.)*
The third special-interest question asked residents to what extent they would support or oppose the City adopting a program that would waive fees for recycling and composting, and instead charge households based on the amount of waste they send to the landfill. About 8 in 10 residents reported that they would strongly or somewhat support this type of program.

Figure 6: Reducing Landfill Waste
To encourage composting and recycling, some cities provide free composting and recycling and charge for landfill waste. Some charge based upon the amount of waste households send to the landfill: lower fees or free for very little and higher fees for larger amounts. To what extent would you support or oppose the City adopting a similar program with the goal of reducing the amount of waste that is being delivered to landfills?
Residents were next asked to rate how important various aspects of City customer service should be when considering ways to improve its current customer services. About 8 in 10 indicated that ease of getting questions answered was essential or very important and said clearer information on the City website was at least very important.

Figure 7: Improvements to Customer Service

As the City considers ways to improve its customer service, how important, if at all, should the following be?
The fifth special interest question asked residents to what extent they agreed that the City of Denver government does a good job managing police officer conduct. About 7 in 10 respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that the City does a good job, while about 3 in 10 strongly or somewhat disagreed.

**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"?*
Residents were next asked if anyone in their household had contacted 311 in the 12 months prior to the survey. About one-third of residents had contacted 311.

Figure 9: Contact with 311
In the past 12 months have your or anyone in your household contacted 311?

![Pie chart showing 34% Yes and 66% No.]

Next, residents who reported having contacted 311 were asked to rate various aspects of their impression of the 311 agent they had spoken with their most recent contact. Eighty-seven percent of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the courtesy provided by 311 agents, while about three-quarters favorably rated their overall impression, responsiveness and knowledge.

Figure 10: Impression of Contact with 311
What was your impression of the 311 agent in your most recent contact? (Rate each characteristic below.)

![Bar chart showing ratings for Courtesy, Overall impression, Responsiveness, and Knowledge. Excellent and Good ratings are provided for each aspect.]
Denver’s open-ended question asked residents to write down the single most pressing issue currently facing the City and County of Denver. 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 frequently cited issues were related to affordable housing and cost of living (for the full verbatim responses, see the Open End Report under separate cover).

Figure 11: City/County of Denver’s Most Pressing Issue
What do you think is the single most pressing issue facing the City and County of Denver today and why?
Conclusions

Denver residents continue to enjoy a good quality of life.

A vast majority of survey respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life in Denver and the City as a place to live as a place to live; these ratings were similar to the benchmark comparisons and stable over time. More than 4 in 5 respondents indicated that they planned to remain in the City for the coming five years, and about three-quarters would recommend living in Denver to someone who asked; however, in 2016 fewer residents indicated that they would recommend living in Denver to someone who asked than in 2015. Ratings for features that enhance quality of life, such as Denver as a place to raise children, the overall appearance of the City, and residents' neighborhoods as places to live were given positive ratings by about 7 in 10 respondents, and were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities.

Safety and Economy continue to be top priorities for the community.

Safety was again identified as a key focus area for the Denver community in the coming two years. Almost 9 in 10 respondents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods, while about two-thirds reported feeling safe in Denver's downtown/commercial area; ratings for the feeling of safety in the downtown/commercial area were similar to rating seen elsewhere but decreased from 2015 to 2016. About 4 in 5 or more participants awarded high marks to ambulance/EMS and fire services, which were strong and similar to the ratings seen elsewhere. Denver residents’ ratings of police, crime prevention and fire prevention services tended to be similar to ratings seen in other communities; ratings for police services increased from 2015 to 2016. About 7 in 10 respondents did NOT report a crime and about 8 in 10 were NOT the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Economy was also identified as a key focus area for the community in the coming two years. Ratings for Economy tended to be similar to or higher than ratings in comparison communities. About 7 in 10 respondents awarded high marks to the overall economic health of Denver and Denver as a place to work, and ratings for the overall economic health of Denver, employment opportunities and Denver as a place to visit were higher than the benchmark comparisons. Additionally, almost all residents reported purchasing goods or services in Denver. Despite these strong ratings, there were a few declines in the facet of Economy this year: ratings declined from 2015 to 2016 for the cost of living, the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, and economic development, and fewer residents thought that they economy would have a positive impact on their income in the coming six months.

Ratings for Denver’s Built Environment were generally strong, but residents see room for improvement in affordable housing.

Ratings within the facet of Built Environment were generally strong and similar to ratings reported in other communities. About half or more of residents gave high marks to the overall quality of the built environment in Denver, the quality of new development, and to the City’s storm drainage services. However, ratings for affordable housing were comparatively low: only about 1 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the availability of affordable quality housing in Denver and about one-quarter favorably rated housing options, which were lower than ratings seen in comparison communities. Further, only about 6 in 10 respondents were not under housing cost stress. As in 2015, residents again identified affordable housing and the cost of living in Denver as the single most pressing issue currently facing the City and County.