

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Toland and City Council

FROM: Raymond French, Management Analyst

DATE: September 8, 2015

TITLE: **2015 Citizen Survey Results**

RECOMMENDED ACTION

None at this time. This memorandum and the attached materials are for your information only and are to supplement a presentation on this topic at the September 8, 2015, meeting.

BACKGROUND

The City of River Falls completed its first comprehensive citizen survey in 2013. The City partnered with the National Research Center (NRC) to conduct the National Citizen Survey (NCS), which they developed in conjunction with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Additional information and results on the 2013 and 2015 surveys can be found on the City's website at <http://www.rfcity.org/citizensurvey>.

As part of the 2013-2015 Work Plan, the City conducted its second comprehensive citizen survey in the summer of 2015 and again partnered with the National Research Center to conduct the NCS. In the two years since the last survey was conducted, the survey instrument was refocused around the concept of community livability. Many of the questions remained the same, which has allowed the City to measure trends from 2013 to 2015. The City is again able to evaluate benchmarks against other communities around the country who also use the NCS.

DISCUSSION

Survey Administration and Responses

Surveys were sent to 1,400 randomly selected households within the City limits. Households received three mailings, each one week apart: one pre-survey postcard announcing the upcoming survey and two survey instrument mailings.

Roughly 7 percent of the 1,400 surveys mailed were returned because the housing unit was vacant or the postal service was unable to deliver the survey as addressed. Of the remaining 1,306 households that received the survey, 410 completed the survey, providing an overall response rate of 31 percent. Households were also given the option of completing the survey

online, and 29 surveys were completed by that means. The response rate of 31 percent is consistent with other communities completing the survey.

The margin of error in this survey is plus or minus five percentage points for any given percent reported for a question answered by the nearly the entire sample of 410 households. For questions with responses having closer to only 100 respondents the margin of error increases to plus or minus 10 percentage points. Therefore, with our margin of error, we can conclude that when 60 percent of survey respondents report a particular service is “excellent” or “good”, somewhere between 55-65 percent of all residents are likely to think that way.

Results Reports

Attached to this memorandum are the 2015 National Citizen Survey Results contained in four reports: (1) Community Livability Report; (2) Dashboard Summary; (3) Trends over Time; and (4) Technical Appendices. Please use the bookmarks to assist in navigating among the reports.

Most of the charts and tables in these reports present the “percent positive” for each question. The percent positive is the combination of the top two most positive response options (i.e. “excellent” and “good,” “very safe” and somewhat safe”). Additionally, the “don’t know” responses have been excluded from the analyses shown in these reports. Removing the “don’t know” responses allows for a better percentage comparison of the answers.

Also contained throughout the reports are comparisons to the national benchmark. A complete review of the benchmark comparisons can also be found in the technical appendices. See that report for the list of over 500 communities with data comparable to that found in the NCS. Generally speaking, municipalities that invest in a citizen survey are more likely to be high-performing communities. Most of our benchmark comparisons are similar to other communities, which mean we should take note of the areas that sets us apart.

Community Livability Report

This updated report is focused on the “livability” of River Falls, that is to say, what makes River Falls a place people want to live. The NCS measures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community: Community Characteristics, Governance, and Participation. The three pillars evaluate what makes our community a place where people want to live, how well the City government meets the needs and expectations of its residents, and whether residents are connected to the community and each other.

The quality of life in River Falls and the three pillars of community are also measured across the eight facets of community: Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment, and Community Engagement. The three areas residents identified as of greatest importance for the City in the next two years are Safety, Economy, and the Natural Environment. These areas serve as an update to the key drivers from the 2013 survey, and more discussion on these items will follow.

Dashboard Summary of Results

This report summarizes residents' ratings of the eight facets of community livability across the three pillars of a community. The detailed dashboard identifies the features of community grouped in each area, the trend in responses, a comparison to the benchmark, and the percent positive. Residents of River Falls gave exceptionally high ratings to the facets of Natural Environment and Education and Enrichment within the pillar of Community Characteristics, and to the facet of Mobility within the pillar of Participation.

Trends over Time

The trends data in this report contains important comparisons for evaluating the facets of community livability across the years between surveys. Because the NRC and ICMA redesigned the survey to focus on livability since 2013, not all elements of each facet includes a trend measurement. However, where available are comparisons of the 2015 ratings to the 2013 ratings, and also a comparison of the 2013 and 2015 national benchmarks.

Technical Appendices

Lastly, this report includes the complete survey responses, both with the "don't know" responses removed and included, the benchmark comparisons, and detailed discussion of the survey methods, and the survey materials themselves.

Key Areas of Importance for Livability

The 2013 Citizen Survey results, as analyzed by NRC, produced a key driver analysis (KDA). The KDA examined the statistical relationships between ratings of each service and ratings of the City's overall services. Those key driver services that correlated most highly with residents' perception about overall City service quality included (1) Economic Development; (2) Preservation of natural areas; and (3) Public Schools.

As a result of the refocus toward community livability, the key driver analysis was replaced for the 2015 Citizen Survey. Instead, a question on the survey directly asked residents how important, if at all, they thought it was for the River Falls community to focus on each of the following areas in the coming two years. As stated earlier, the eight facets of community livability they could rate included: Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment, and Community Engagement.

Residents identified (1) Safety, (2) Economy, and (3) the Natural Environment as the areas of greatest importance for the City in the next two years. It is interesting to note the similarity of residents' ratings of importance in 2015 with the key drivers identified in 2013. There is a consistent trend in River Falls to focus on our economy and natural environment. It should also be noted that safety and economy are frequently rated as most important in this survey across communities; however, it is less common for the natural environment to be rated as important.

Memorandum to Mayor and City Council

September 8, 2015

Page 4

This finding reaffirms our community's unique commitment to sustainability, and enhancing and preserving our natural spaces.

Please review the information contained in these reports and send me any questions you may have. I will be presenting the results in greater depth at the meeting on September 8, and also providing context to align the results with the City's Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSION

Thank you to the Council for your continued commitment to making River Falls an exceptional place to live. The Citizen Survey is a useful investment for measuring residents' thoughts and opinions on the community characteristics, city services, and their engagement in the community. The results will be used to further guide decision making and continue to help improve our service delivery.



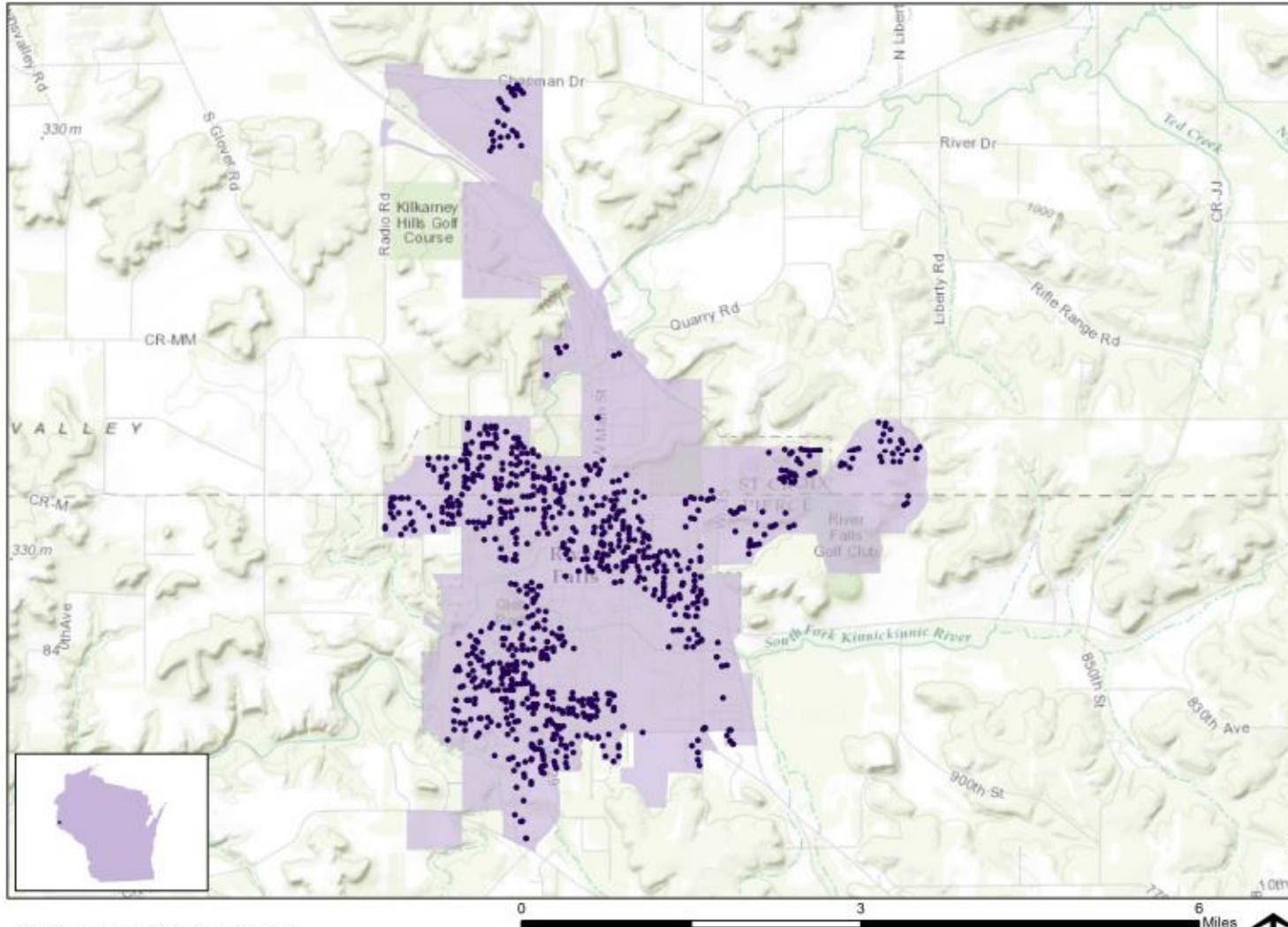
2015 Citizen Survey Results Presentation

September 8, 2015

Background – Survey Overview

- City's second comprehensive Citizen Survey
- 1,400 surveys mailed, 410 responses
 - 31% response rate
- Representative sample
 - Margin of Error: +/- 5%
- Timeline – data collected in June, 2015

Background – Survey Distribution



Survey Recipients in River Falls, WI

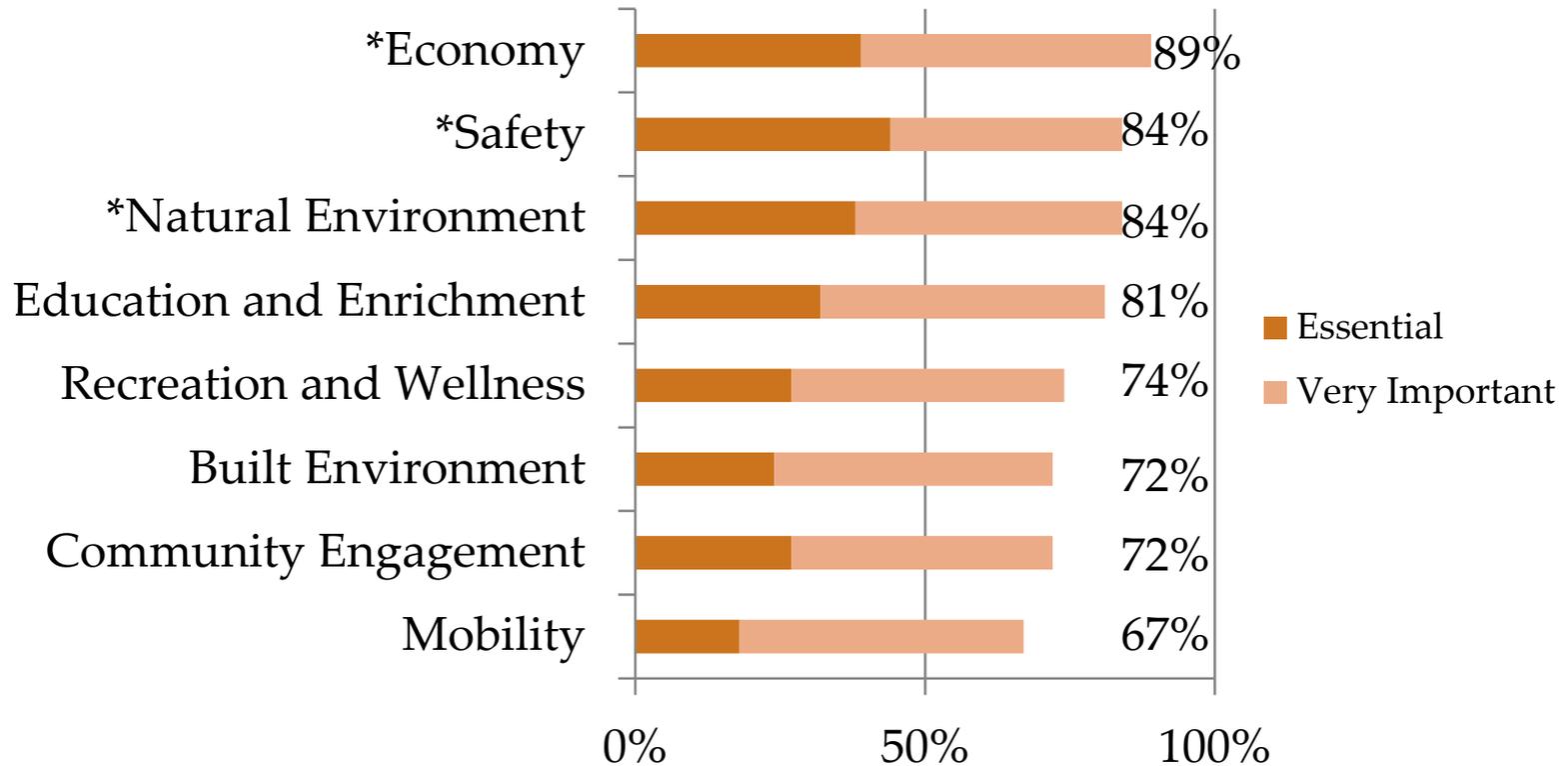
- Survey Recipients

Results Reports

1. Community Livability Report
 2. Dashboard Summary of Results
 3. Trends over Time
 4. Technical Appendices
- Charts and tables present “percent positive”
 - The combination of the top two most positive response options (“excellent” and “good”)

Community Livability

Please rate how important, if at all, it is for the River Falls community to focus on each of the following in the next two years:



Community Livability

87% positive for the Overall Quality of Life

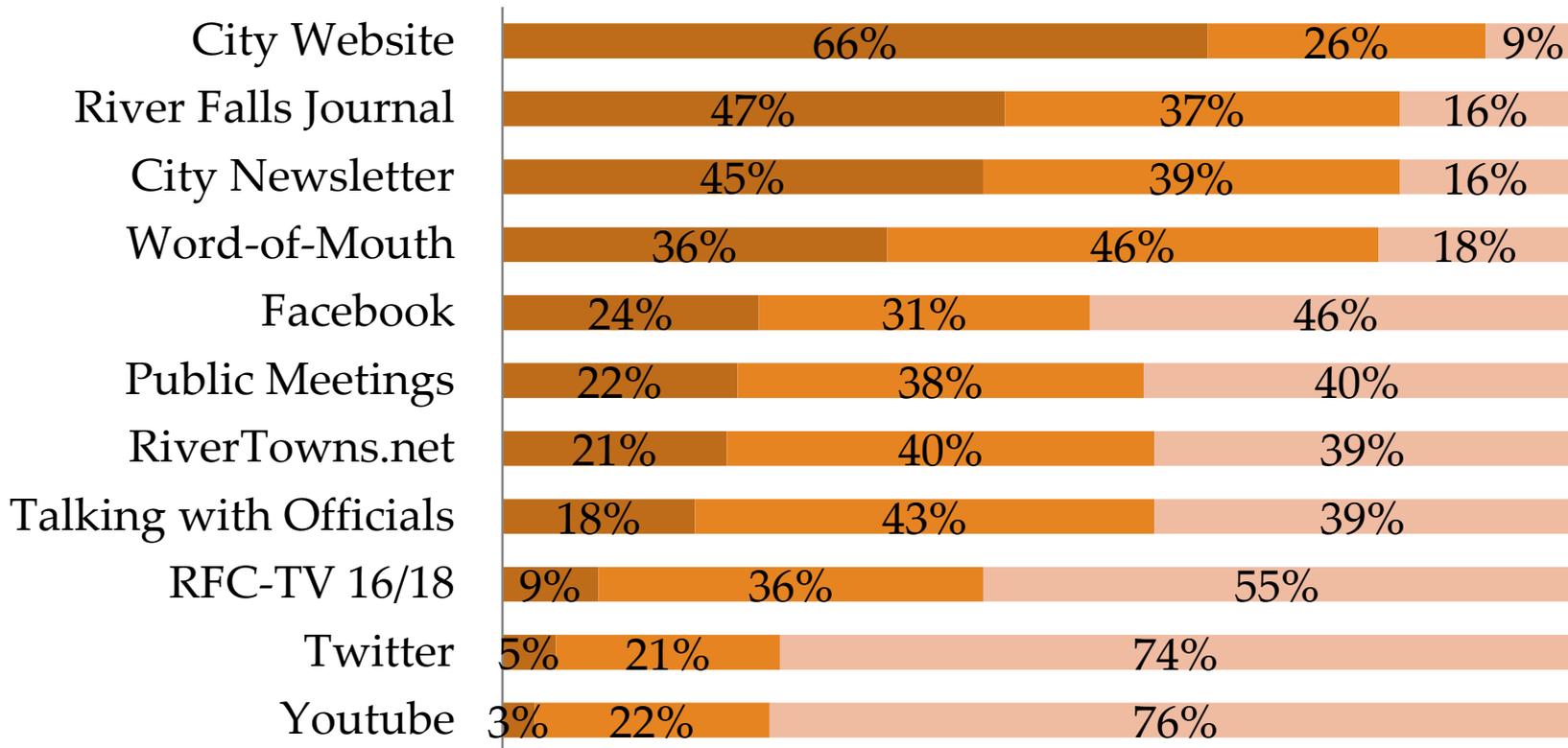
Three Pillars of a Community

- Community Characteristics:
 - 92% positive for the City as a place to live
- Governance:
 - 87% positive for the overall quality of City services
- Participation:
 - 82% positive for the sense of community

Special Topics - Information

How much of a source of information about the City are the following:

■ Major Source ■ Minor Source ■ Not a Source



Dashboard Summary

	Community Characteristics	Trend	Benchmark	Percent positive
General	Overall appearance	↔	↔	87%
	Overall quality of life	↔	↔	87%
	Place to retire	↔	↔	71%
	Place to raise children	↔	↔	86%
	Place to live	↔	↔	92%
	Neighborhood	↔	↔	78%
	Overall image	↔	↔	84%
Safety	Overall feeling of safety	*	↔	90%
	Safe in neighborhood	↔	↔	98%
	Safe downtown/commercial area	↔	↔	97%
Mobility	Traffic flow	↔	↔	49%
	Travel by car	↑	↔	72%
	Travel by bicycle	↔	↔	71%
	Ease of walking	↔	↑	89%
	Overall ease travel	*	↔	86%
	Public parking	*	↔	60%
	Paths and walking trails	↔	↑	78%
Natural Environment	Overall natural environment	↔	↑	89%
	Air quality	↔	↑	95%
	Cleanliness	↔	↔	86%

Trends over Time

- Ratings in River Falls for 2015 generally remained stable
- 70 of the 83 items were rated similarly in 2015 to what they were in 2013

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)		2015 rating compared to 2013	Comparison to benchmark	
		2013	2015		2013	2015
Safety	Overall feeling of safety	NA	90%	NA	NA	Similar
	Safe in neighborhood	98%	98%	Similar	Much higher	Similar
	Safe downtown/commercial area	98%	97%	Similar	Much higher	Similar

The E's of Action

- Using Results To...
 - Envision: for goal setting and planning
 - Earmark: for budgeting and investing in key areas
 - Educate: for getting the word out about city services
 - Engage: for partnerships and additional citizen input
 - Enact: for new policies, programs, or initiatives
 - Evaluate: for comparing results with past and future surveys

Starts now...

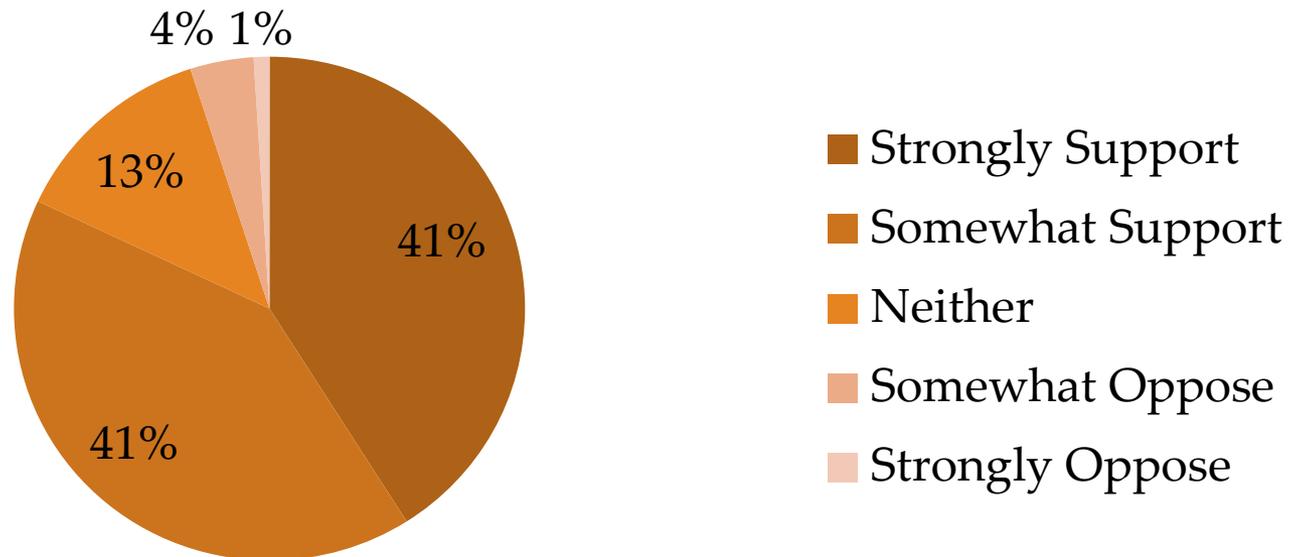
Opportunities to Envision

Strategic Plan Goals:

1. Ensuring Financial Sustainability
2. Consistently Delivering Quality Municipal Services
3. Promoting Economic Vitality
4. Connecting Community Members
5. Considering Future Generations

Opportunities to Earmark

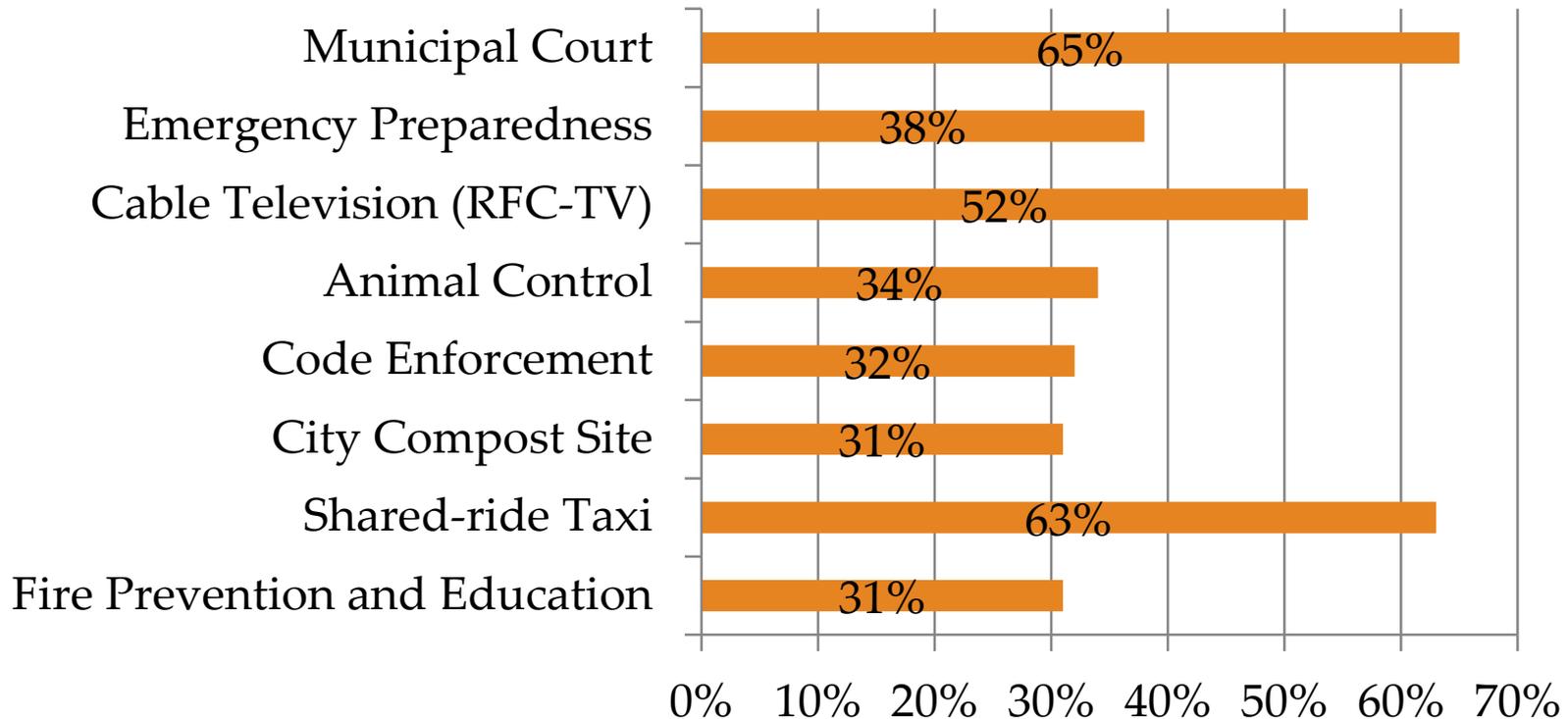
To what extent do you support, if at all, establishing a dedicated funding source for the purpose of implementing the Glen and Hoffman Park Master Plans?



Opportunities to Educate

Please rate the quality of each of the following services in River Falls:

“Don’t know” responses greater than 30%



Other Opportunities...

- To Engage
 - A majority of residents “don’t know” how to rate the quality of RFC-TV Channels 16/18 and do not find it a source of information on City activities and events
- Enact
 - A majority of respondents prefer talking with a Customer Service Representative (66%) when they call City Hall over a voice prompt (9%)

Source: Survey Questions #10 & 17

Source: Survey Question #16

Opportunities to Evaluate

Next Steps

- Strategic Plan update – October 27, 2015
- Taking the results to the departments and community partners
- Additional information sheets to be added to <http://www.rfcity.org/citizensurvey>

Survey Takeaways

1. Most residents positively rate the quality of life in River Falls
 2. Safety, Economy, and Natural Environment are highest priorities for residents in coming two years
 3. Residents are pleased with opportunities for Education and Enrichment
- Excellent response rate for representative survey
 - The priorities of the Council and community align
 - River Falls is a great place to live!