

2020 Town Government Survey Report

January 22, 2021

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2020 Town Government Survey

Report

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During the period from November 24, 2020 to December 18, 2020, the Town with the assistance from Pacific Market Research conducted a survey of Concord residents. For the biennial surveys from 2006 to 2012, the method used for sampling residents' opinions was a telephone poll: randomly selected Concord residents were called on their land-line telephones and guided through the process over the phone. Depending on the year, the total sample size was between 300 and 375 residents. Since residents were selected randomly, this sample could be generalized to the population as a whole within a certain margin of error. However, with the rapid increase of the use of cellular phones as the main household phone, this method no longer accurately captures the opinions of all Concord residents in a statistically meaningful way.

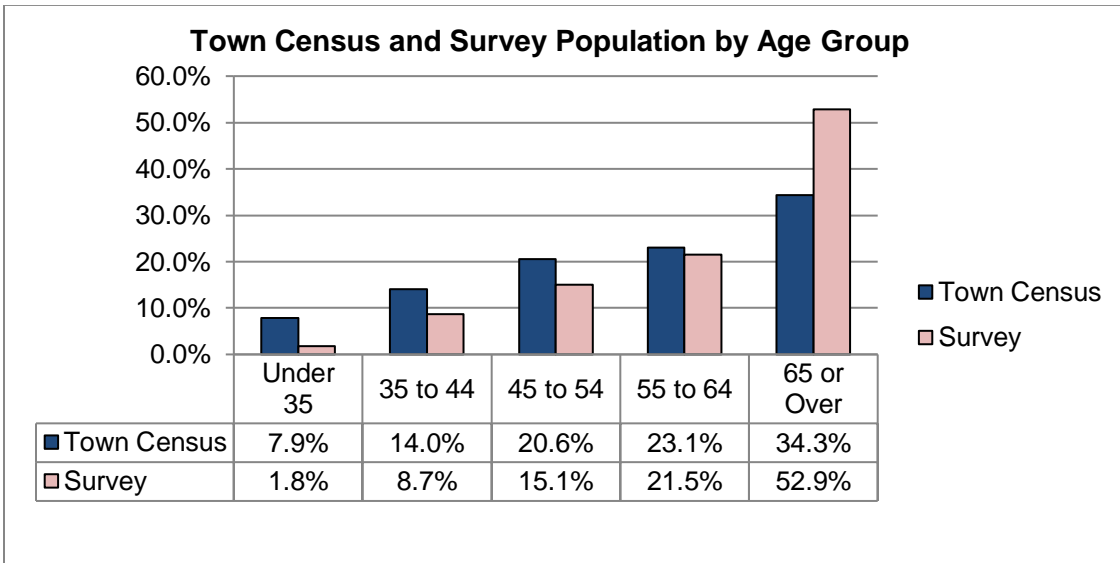
Accordingly, for the biennial surveys beginning in 2014, the Town has changed its method of sampling residents' opinions. With the new methodology, the Town mailed out a paper questionnaire to all 7,065 residences in Concord and requested that one respondent per residence complete the survey in one of three ways:

1. By visiting a website and taking the survey online,
2. By completing the paper questionnaire and mailing it to the Town House or dropping it in a Town drop box, or
3. By calling a toll-free number and taking the survey over the phone.

Of the 7,065 mailed out, 1,189 completed surveys were received. That is, 16.8% of Concord households took the time to answer the 46-question survey. The majority of residents (79.8% or 948 responses) used the online method of response. Other residents (20.2% or 241 responses) filled out the paper questionnaire and mailed it in or delivered it to a Town drop box. No residents phoned the call center.

The demographic distribution of the survey sample differs slightly from that of the Town's true population. On the graphs on the next page are the percentages of cohorts grouped by age as measured by the 2020 Town Census and as self-identified in this survey. As a note, in the Town Census, the cohort identified as Under 35 represents the

number of residents between the ages of 27 and 34 in order to exclude dependents from this category.



There may be several reasons for the differences in percentages between the true population and the survey sample. Younger residents with families may not have the discretionary time to take a 46-question survey. In a household, older family members may be more inclined to take the survey than the younger ones. In addition, older residents may have lived in Concord longer, may have more knowledge of how the Town government operates, and may be more willing to answer the questions.

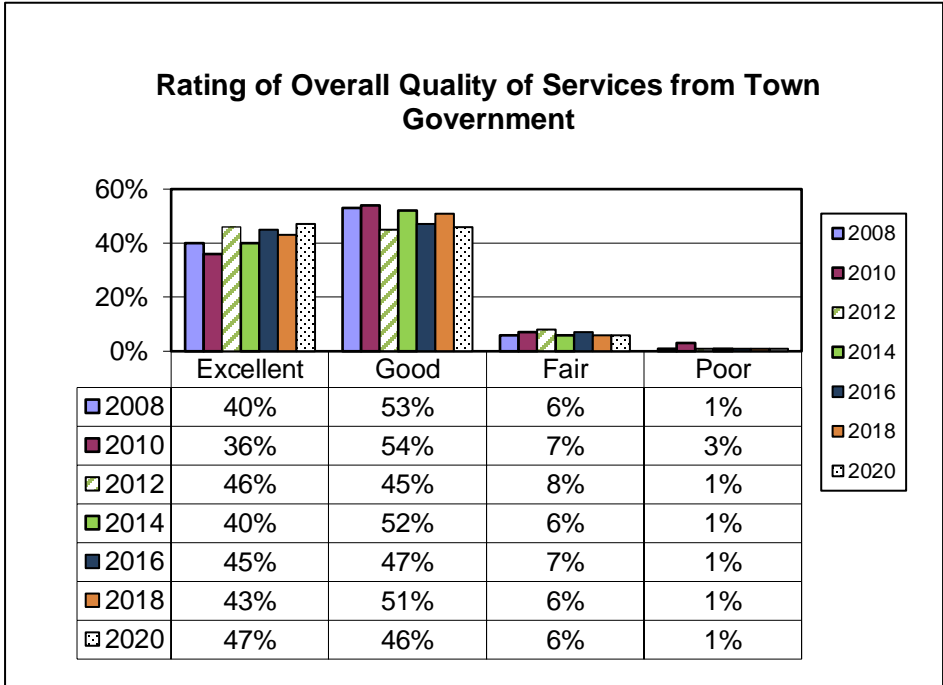
The method used to equalize these demographic groups is to weight the responses of each cohort by a specific factor. For example, the cohort between the ages of 45 and 54 represents 20.6% of the population but is 15.1% in the survey sample. Accordingly, a response from an individual between ages 45 and 54 would be increased by a factor of 1.36. The analysis below represents the weighted results.

With this methodology, the overall 2020 survey results of a sample of 1,189 completed questionnaires are accurate 95% of the time within a confidence interval of +/- 2.71%. The margin of error is larger for sub-groups within the sample.

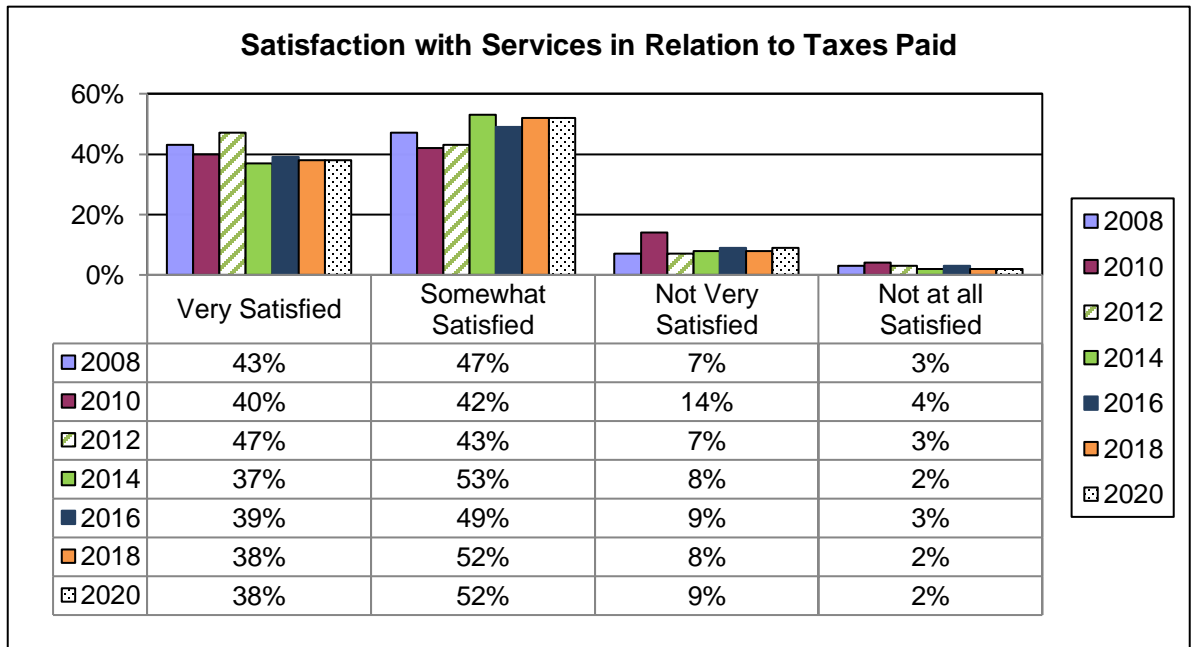
Town Services

The baseline question that has been asked since the 2008 Survey is: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Concord Town Government?”

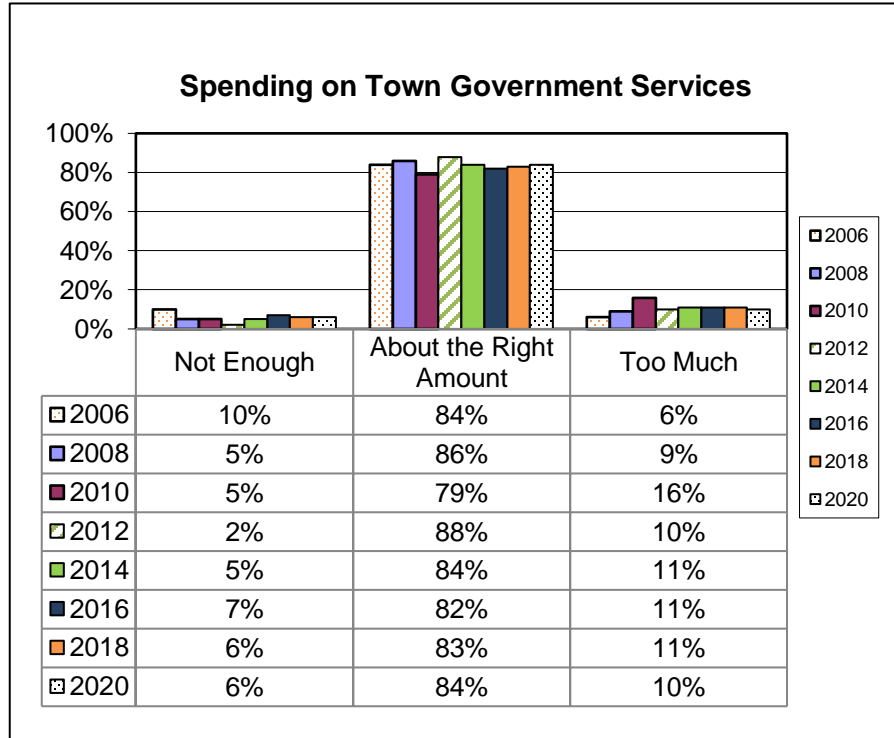
There is a trend in the responses that shows residents increasingly view Town Services being “Excellent”. In 2008, 40% of respondents felt that Town services are “Excellent”. This year, the percentage has jumped to 47%. Only 7% of respondents feel that these services are “Fair” or “Poor”.



When asked: “In relation to the property taxes you pay, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of Town Services?”, 90% of respondents feel “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied”.



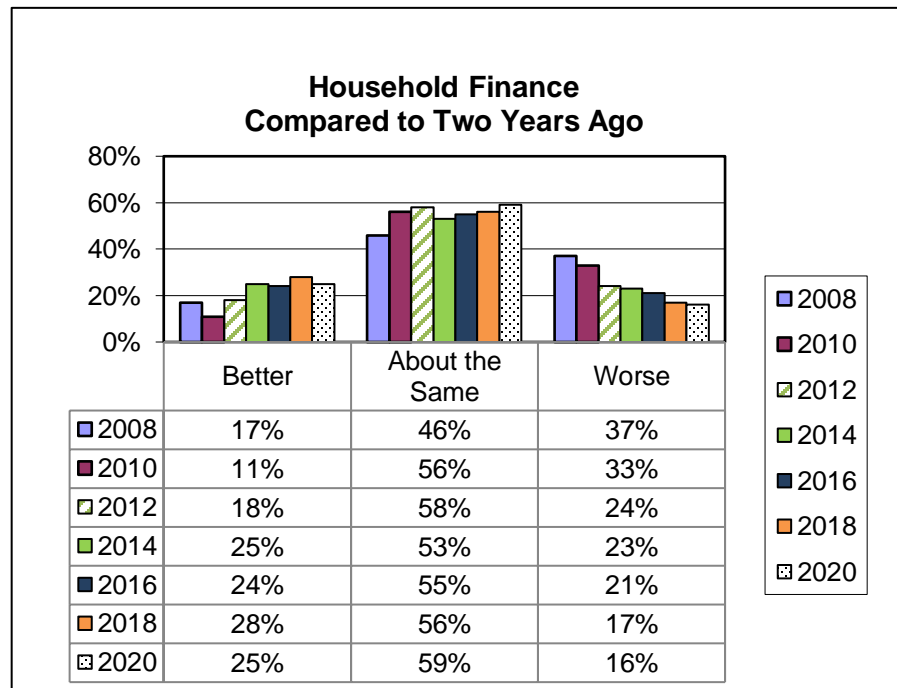
There continues to be a general consensus that the Town spends about the right amount of money on Town government services. For the last eight surveys, the “About the Right Amount” response has tracked between 79% and 88%. The low point was in 2010 as the effects of the recession were being felt by Concord residents. In 2020, 84% of respondents feel that the Town spends about the right amount on Town governmental services.



Household Finances

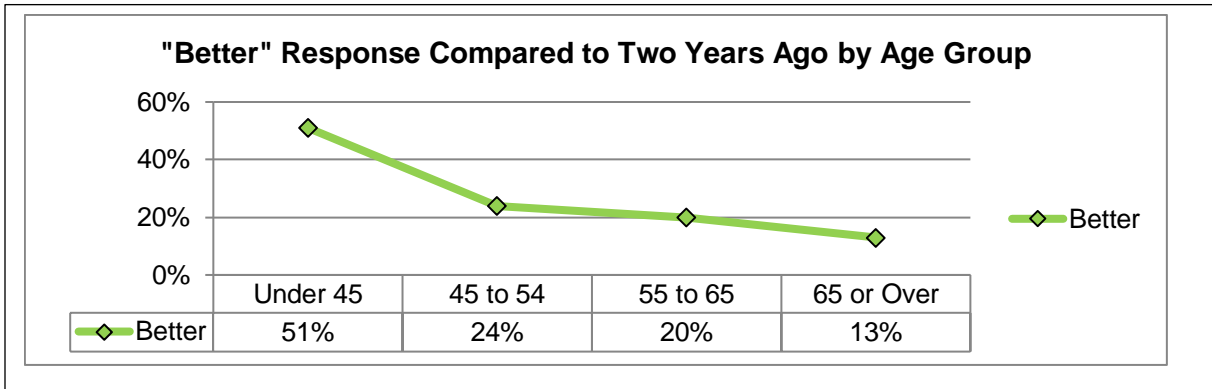
It is useful for the Town to have a fuller understanding of how Concord residents are doing financially, so to better guide the Town in providing services.

As for their own financial situation, less residents are feeling worse about their personal finances. With the beginning of the recession in the fall of 2008 and continuing through the fall of 2010, Concord residents had been greatly affected by the national economy. The attitude associated with the improvement in the economy is reflected in the response to the question: “In terms of your household finances, would you say that you are doing better than you were two years

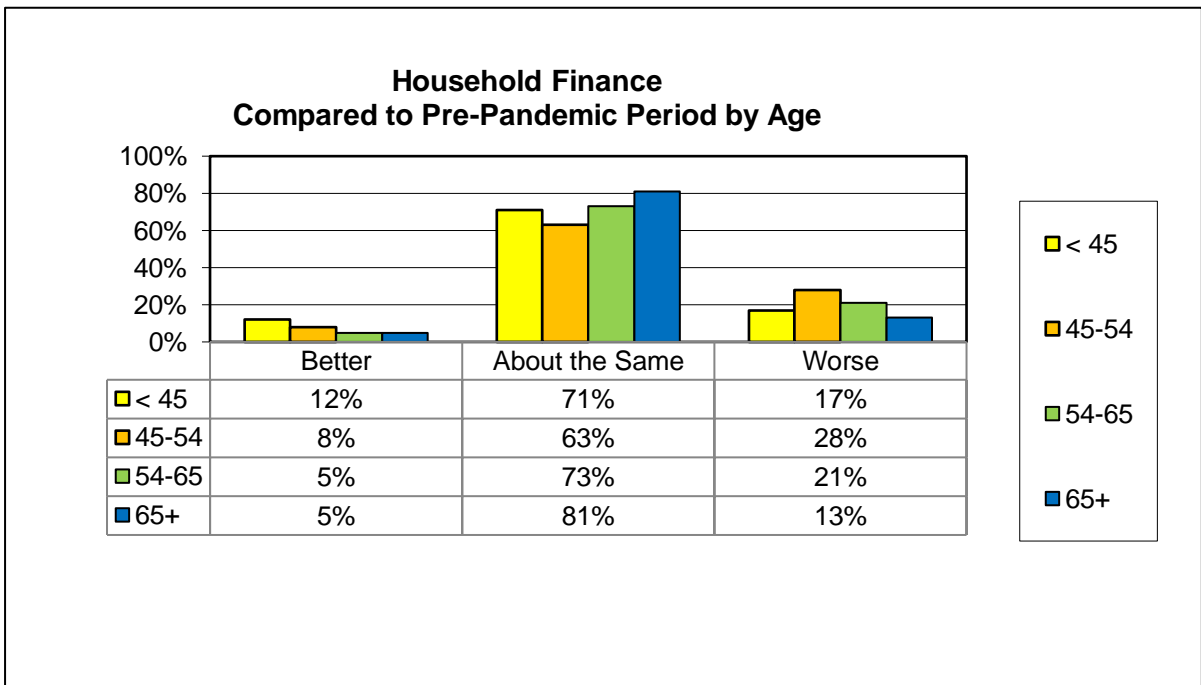


ago, worse, or about the same.” In 2020, 84% of respondents feel that they are doing “Better” or “About the Same” financially.

The 2020 survey results also show that there is a trend in terms of age group as to whether respondents feel like they are doing better than they were two years ago. Younger respondents are more likely to feel “Better” about how they are doing.

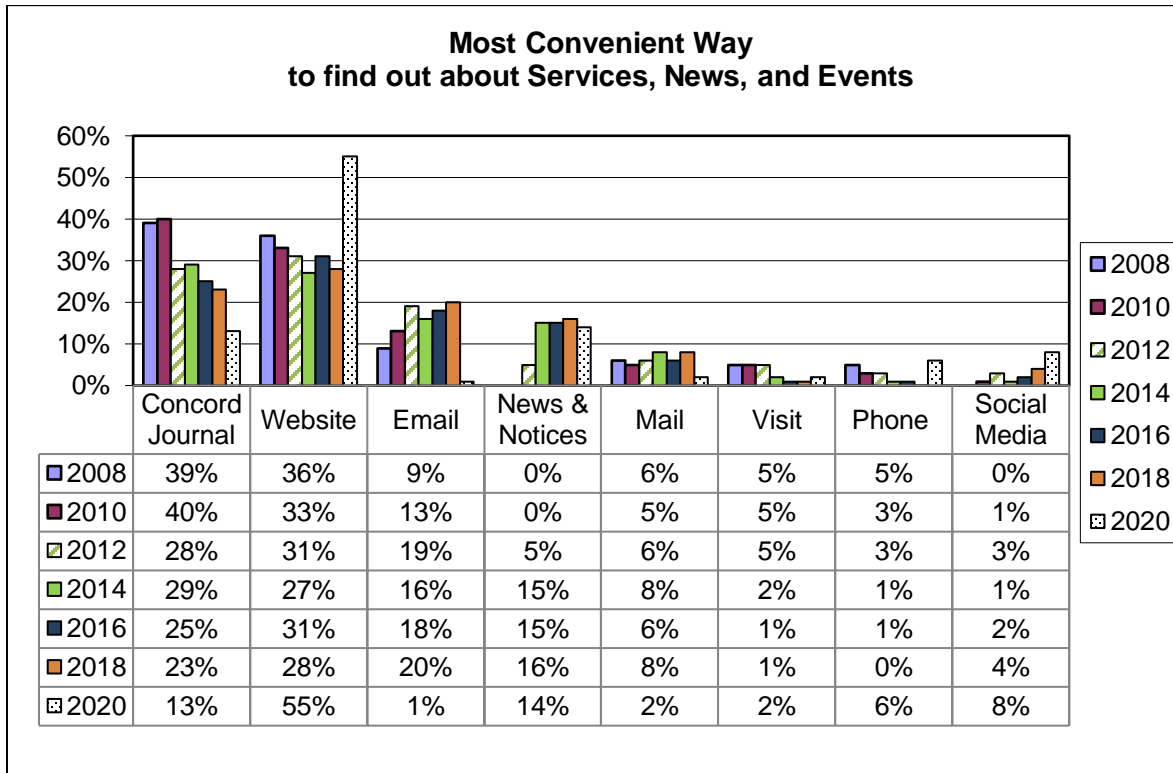


The impact on personal finances during the pandemic has had the most effect on those ages 45 to 54, possibly due to the demands of remote schooling from those who have children. For households with children, 25% feel that their personal finances are worse than before the pandemic, whereas only 15% of those without children feel this way. Financially, seniors seem to be the least impacted by the pandemic as 81% say their finances are the same as compared to 63% of the age group 45 to 54.



Communications

The Survey asked Concord residents their opinion on a variety of issues. Since communication with the public is very important for the Town, the following question was asked: “What would be the most convenient way for you to find out about Town services, news, and events?”

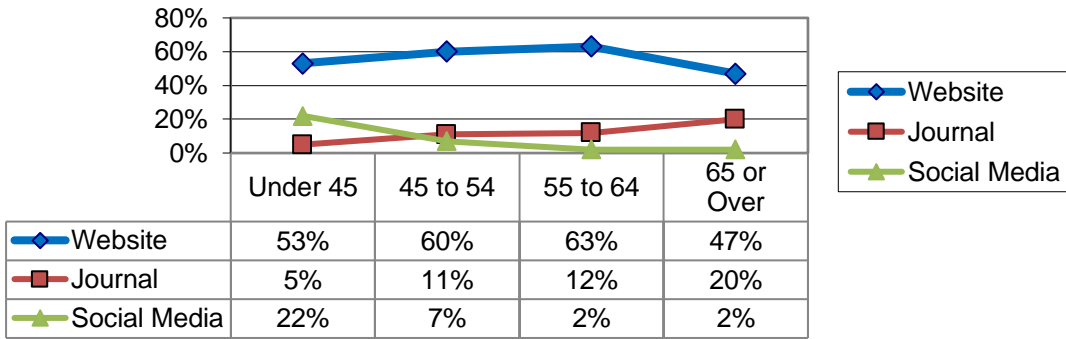


The major shift between 2018 and 2020 is in the number of respondents who say “Browsing the Town’s website” is most convenient with 55% choosing this method. If all of the digital media (e.g., Website, Email, News & Notices and Social Media) are combined, 78% of residents in 2020 are on a computer, tablet or phone to receive information from the Town, as compared to 68% in 2018.

It should be noted that the wording of the one of the response categories changed from 2018 to 2020. The Email response was revised from “By email” in 2018 to become “Email to Town Staff or committees directly” in 2020. This wording change could explain why 20% of respondents chose the Email response in 2018, while only 1% chose this response in 2020.

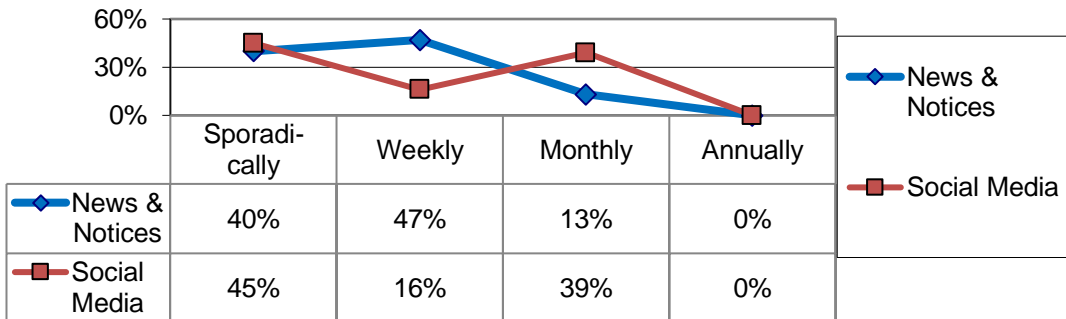
Various age cohorts prefer different methods of receiving Town information. Although a consistent 14% of respondents among all age groups prefer “Subscribing to News & Notices on the Town’s website”, a greater percentage of residents between the ages of 45 and 64 (as compared with other age groups) prefer going to the website, partially because 22% of younger residents choose social media and 20% of older respondents the Journal.

Preference of Website, Journal and Social Media by Age

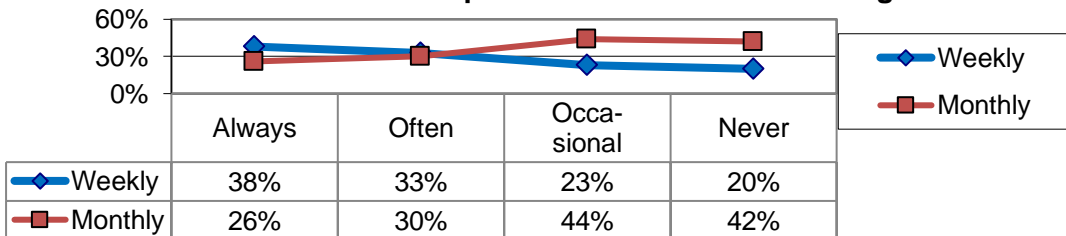


When asked, “What do you believe to be the ideal frequency for receiving communications from the Town?”, 40% respond “Monthly summary document with relevant news”, 34% “Sporadically; no specific schedule, news sent out as it happens”, 24% respond “Weekly, Similar to a condensed report with news/information from all departments” and 1% “The Town’s Annual Report only”.

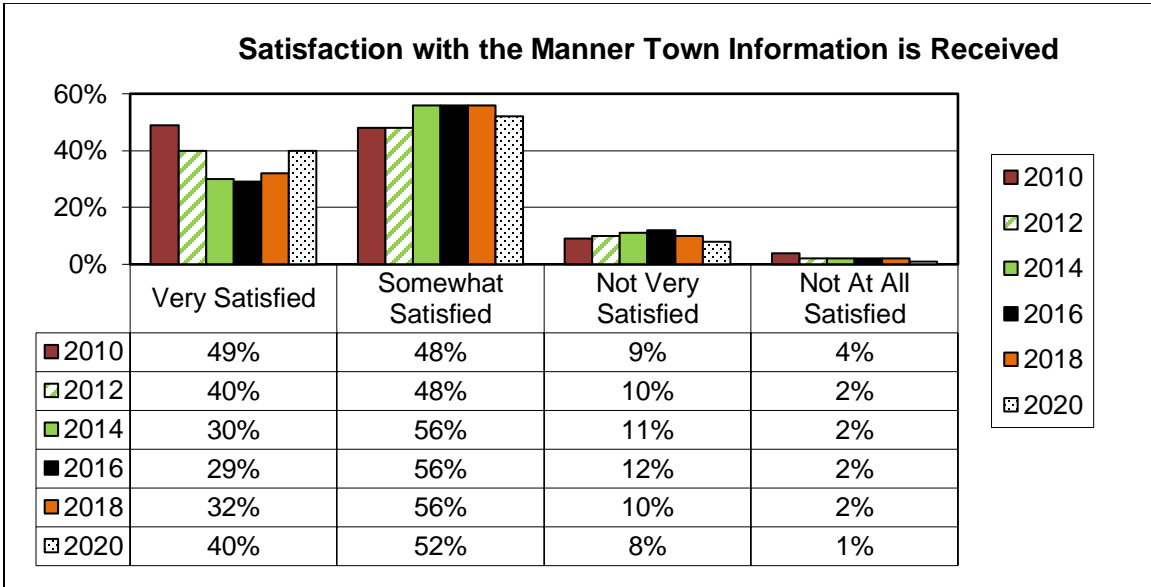
Ideal Frequency of Receiving Town Info by for those who prefer News & Notices and Social Media



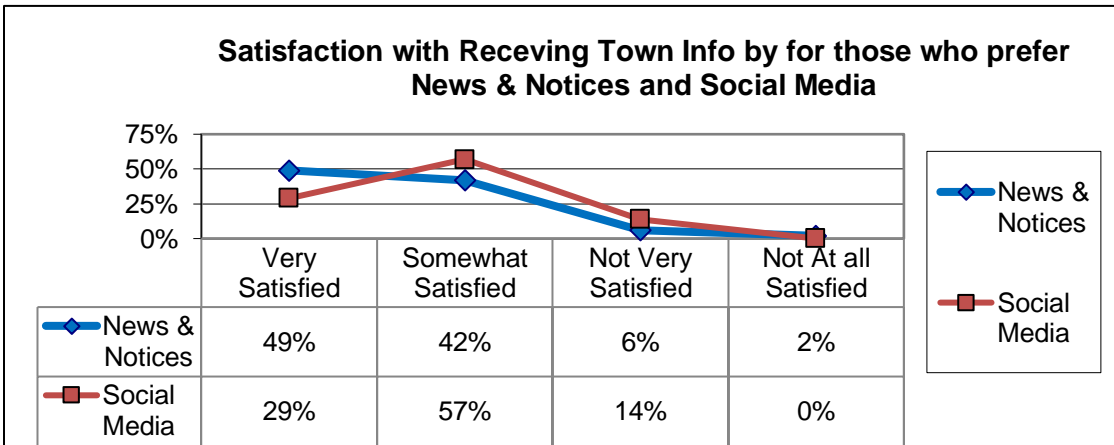
Ideal Frequency of Receiving Town Info by the Frequency of how often the Respondent attends Town Meeting



As shown in the graph below, during that last four years, respondents have been increasingly “Very Satisfied” when asked, “How would you rate your satisfaction with the manner in which you receive information from the Town?”

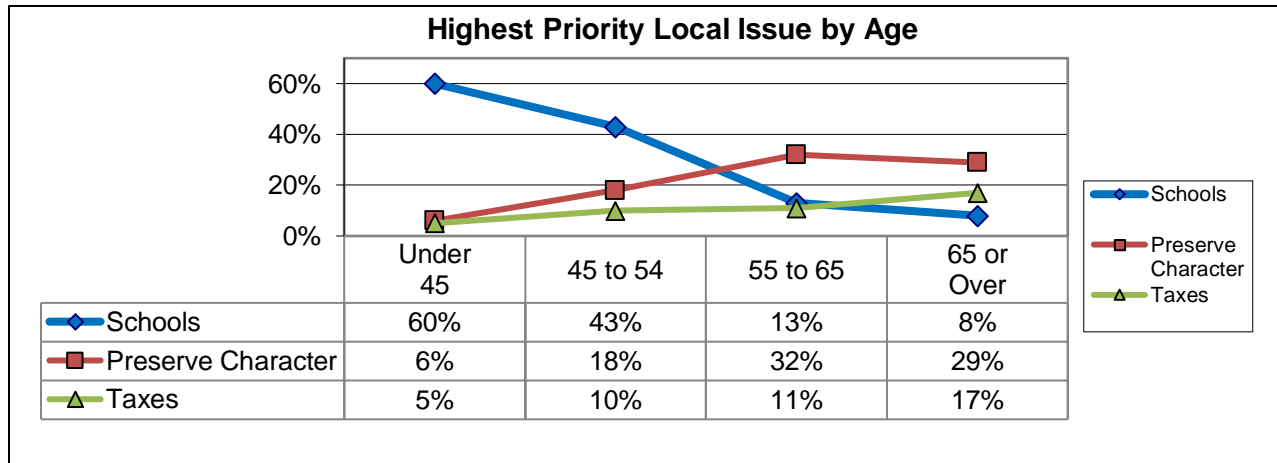
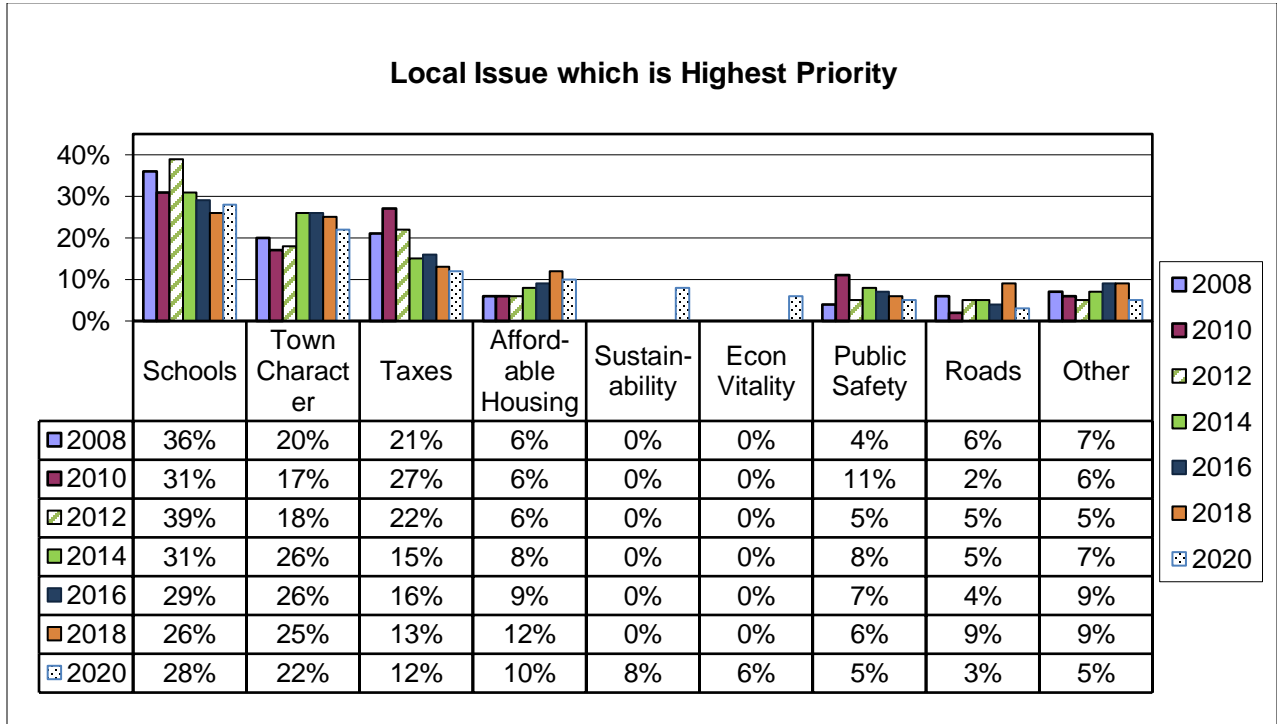


For the two types of media that the Town controls, News & Notices and Social Media, forty-nine (49%) percent are “Very Satisfied” with receiving information from News & Notices and twenty-nine (29%) are “Very Satisfied” with receiving information from Social Media.



Local Issues

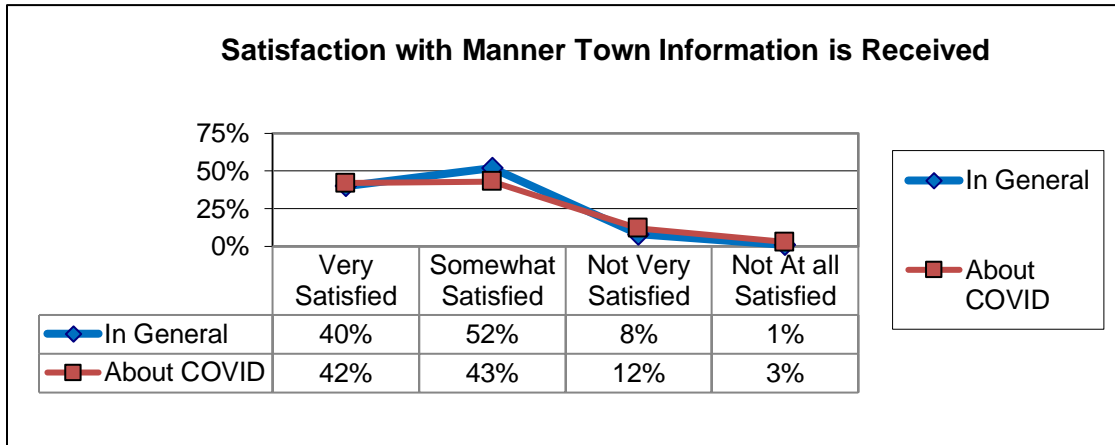
Concord residents continue to place the schools as their highest priority local issue. When asked “What local issue would you say is the highest priority for you?”, 28% of residents said “Schools”, 22% “Town Character”, and 12% “Taxes. It should be noted that starting in 2020, two additional responses were added: Sustainability (8%) and Economic Vitality (6%).



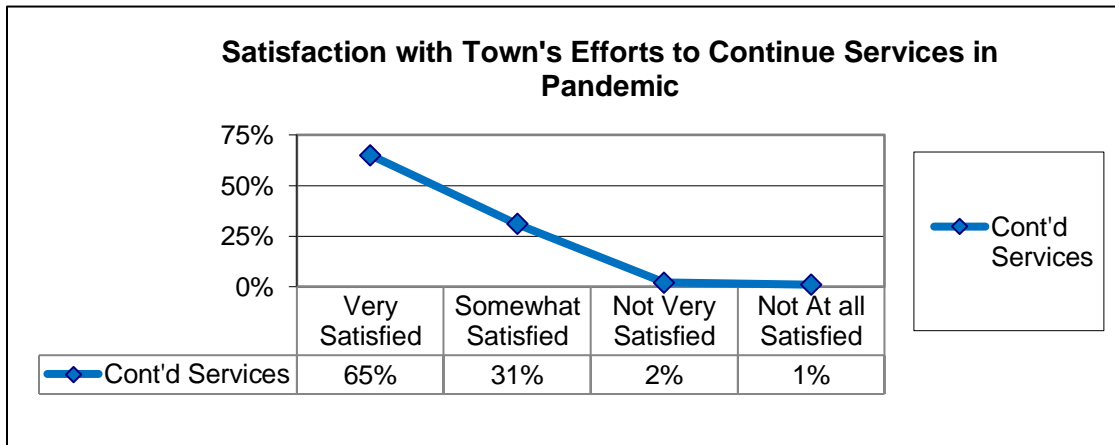
As could be expected, a majority of younger respondents prioritize the schools. For those households with children, 59% identified “Schools” as the highest priority. In the weighted sample population, 38% of the respondents identify themselves as having children in the household. With older respondents, “Preservation of Town’s character” and “Taxes” are more important.

COVID-19 – Related Questions

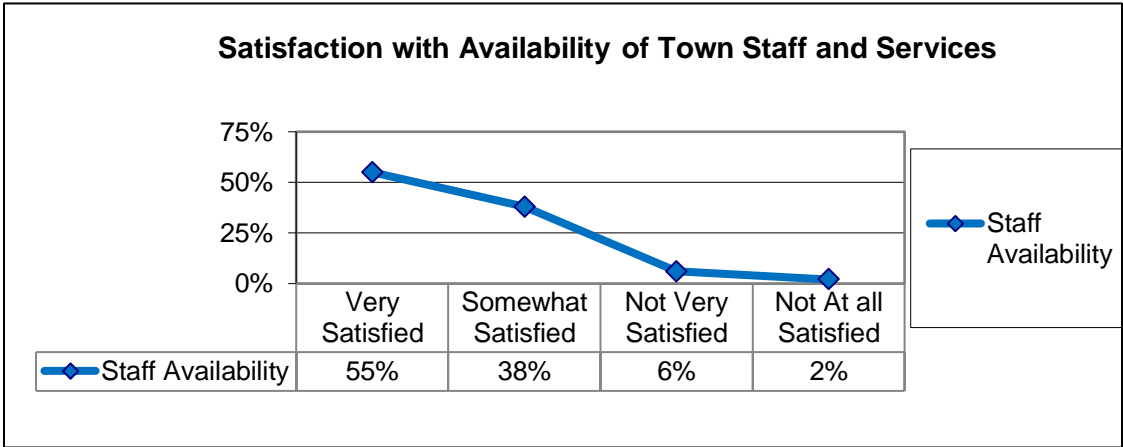
Due to the unprecedented pandemic, this year’s survey asked several questions related to COVID-19. One question was, “How satisfied have you been with Town communications related to COVID19?” The graph below compares the responses with the question that was asked, “How would you rate your satisfaction with the manner in which you receive information from the Town?”



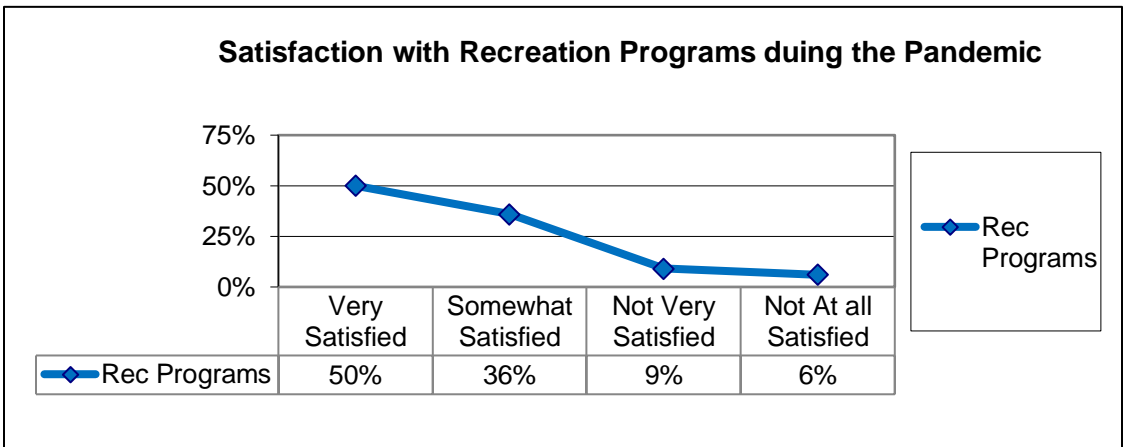
Another question that was asked was, “Given the current health climate, how satisfied have you been with the Town’s efforts to continue essential services for the public?”



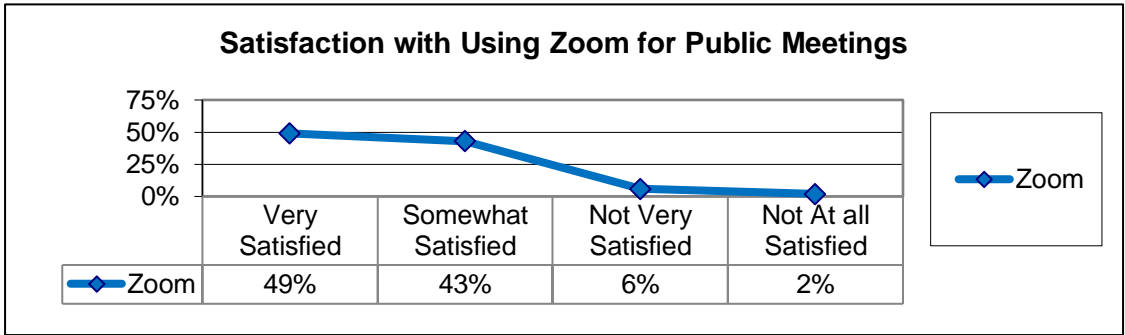
The 2020 Survey asked, “How satisfied are you with the availability of Town staff and services throughout the pandemic?”



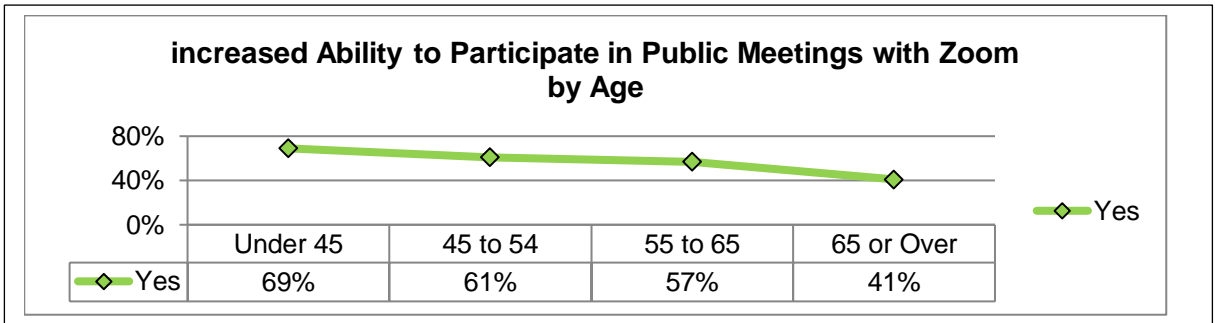
In an effort to determine how residents feel about Recreation programs offered during the pandemic, the question was asked, “If you have children under the age of 18 living in your home: How satisfied have you been with the programs offered by Concord Recreation including afterschool, childcare, and summer camps made available throughout the pandemic?” It should be noted that, out of the 1,189 sample population, 214 respondents answered this question, while 671 didn’t have children under the age of 18 and 303 chose the “Don’t Know / No Answer” response.



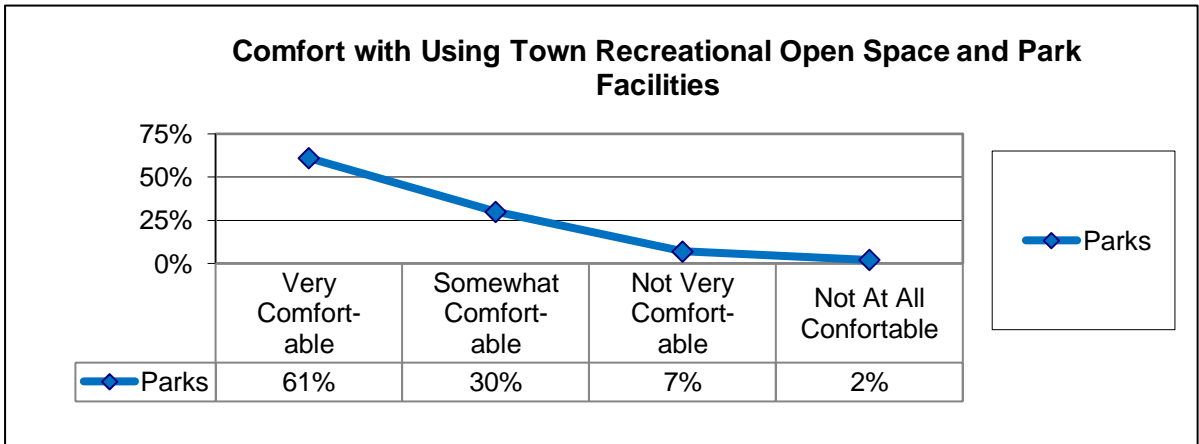
Given the reality that it is difficult to meet in person during the pandemic, the question was asked, “How satisfied are you with the experience of using Zoom meetings for public meetings, public forums and other community input sessions?”



In addition, the question was asked, “Has your ability to participate in Town government public meetings, public forums and other community input sessions increased with the online Zoom format?” As show in the graph below, ability to participate is influenced by age.

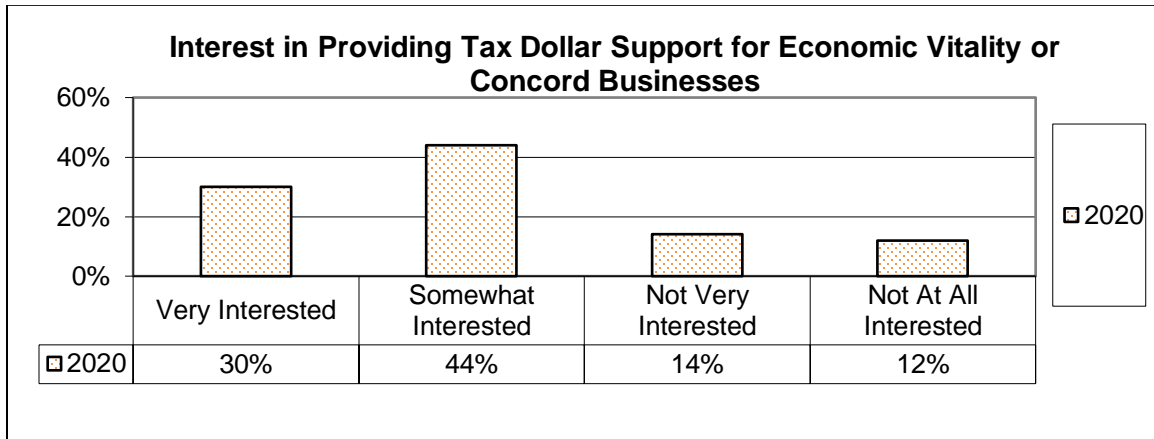


Outdoor activity is important during the pandemic. The question was asked, “Given the current health climate, are you comfortable using or accessing the Town recreational open space and park facilities?” Ninety-one (91%) of respondents feel they are “Very Comfortable” or “Somewhat Comfortable”.

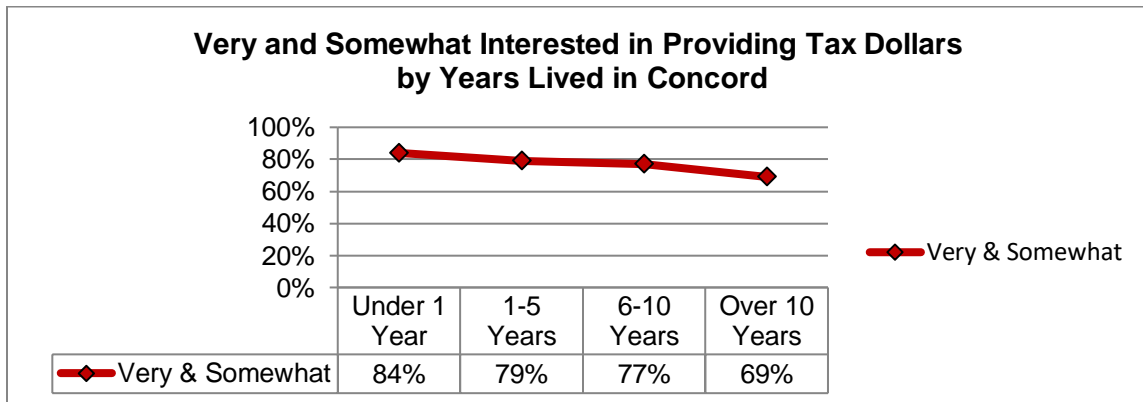


Tax Dollars Support for Economic Vitality or Concord Business

In the 2020 Survey, the question was asked, “How interested are you in providing General Fund (tax dollars) support for economic vitality or Concord businesses? Seventy-four percent of respondents are either “Very Interested” or “Somewhat Interested”.

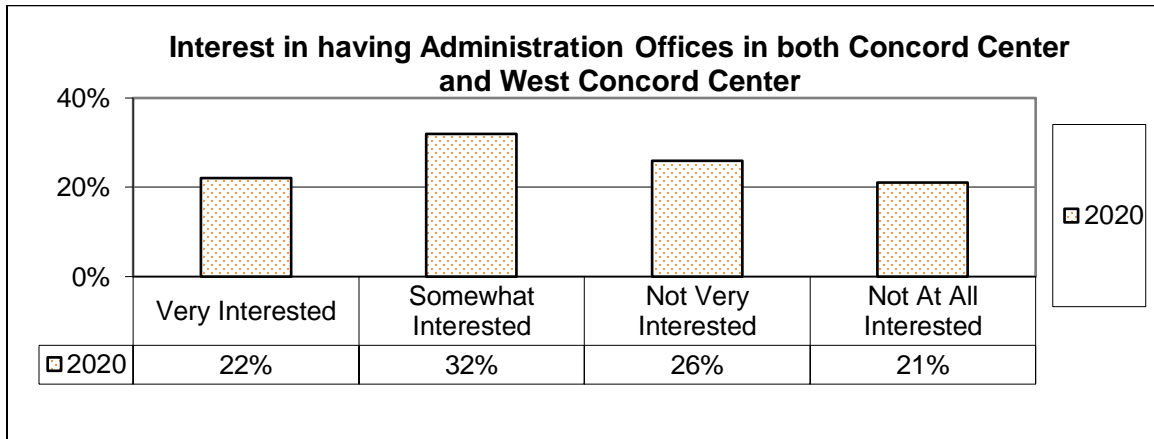


Interest in providing tax dollars for economic vitality or Concord businesses is slightly dependent on how long the resident has lived in Concord.

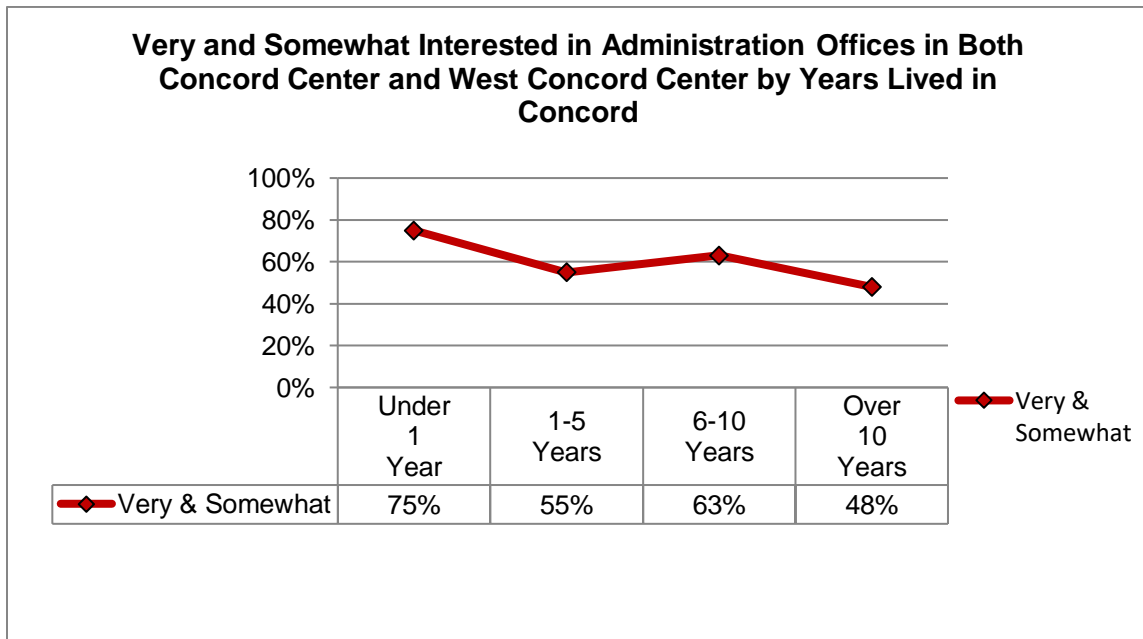


Administration Offices in Both Concord Center and West Concord Center

The 2020 Survey asked the question, “How interested would you be in having Administration offices open to the public for general business in both Concord Center and West Concord Center?” Sixty-two percent (62%) of respondents who identify that they vote at the Harvey Wheeler Community Center are “Very Interested” or “Somewhat Interested” in having both Administrative offices, as compared to 41% to 46% who vote at the other polling places.

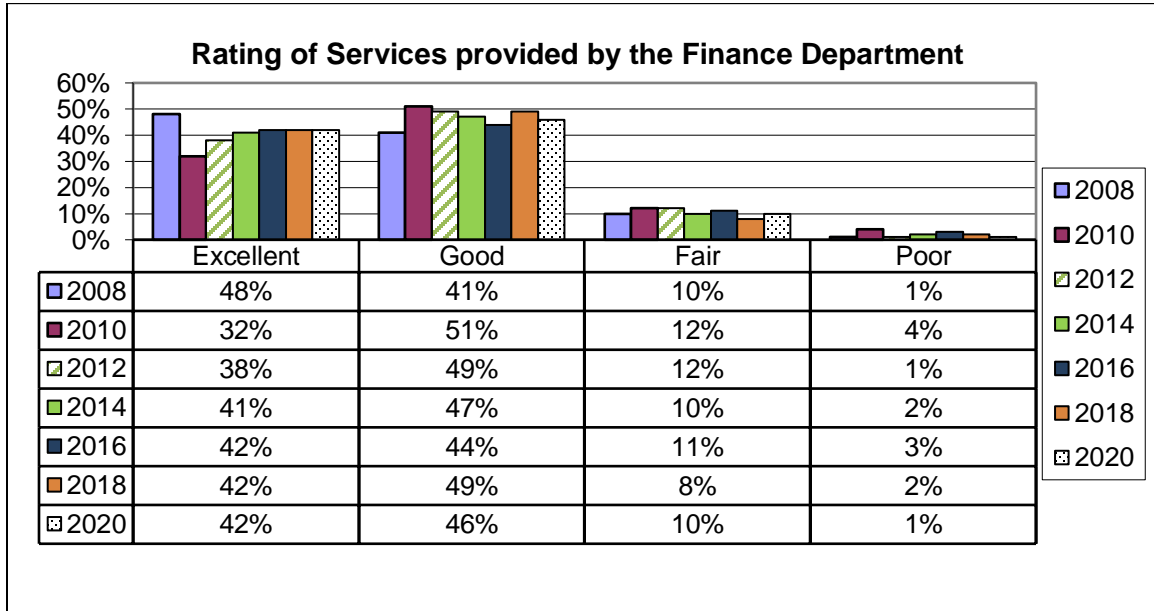


The graph below shows the percent Interest in having Administration offices in both Concord Center and West Concord Center by Years Lived in Concord.

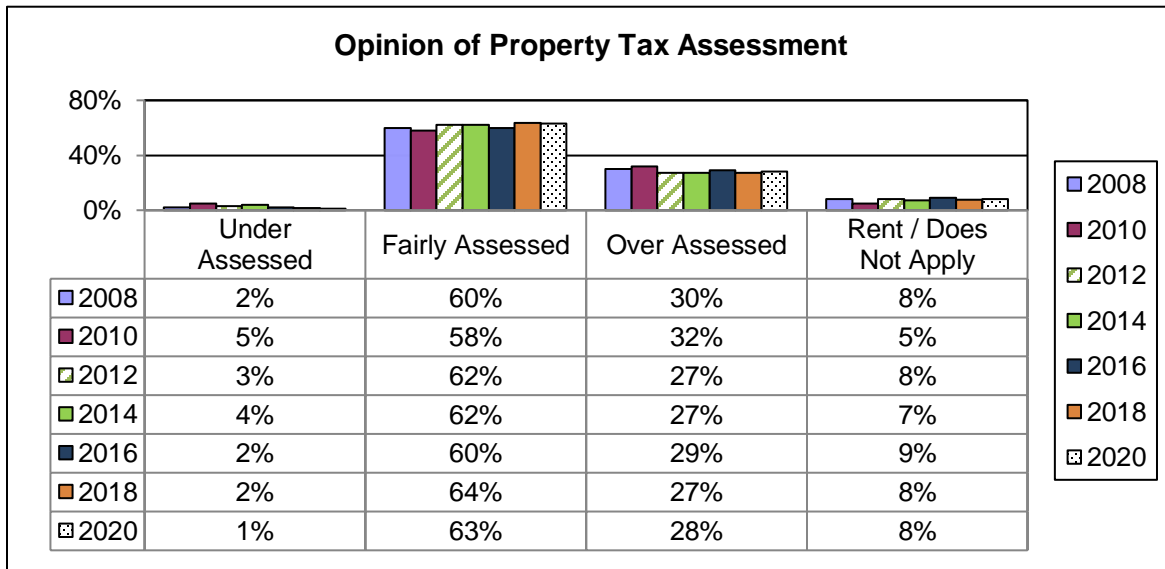


Finance Department

Two specific questions were asked about issues related to the Finance Department. For the last seven polls, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Finance Department, which includes services of the Town Clerk, Town Collector, and Town Assessor?”

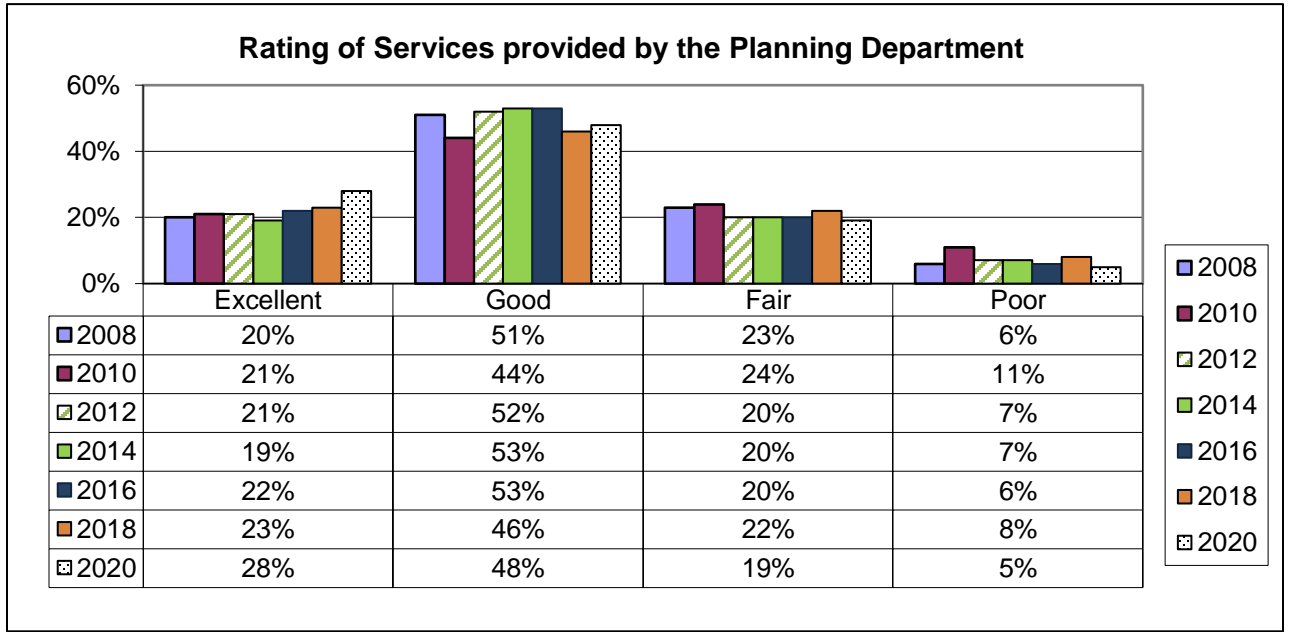


In addition, the following tax assessment question was asked: “In terms of the assessment of your property, do you believe that your property is over-assessed, under-assessed, or fairly assessed relative to others in Town?”

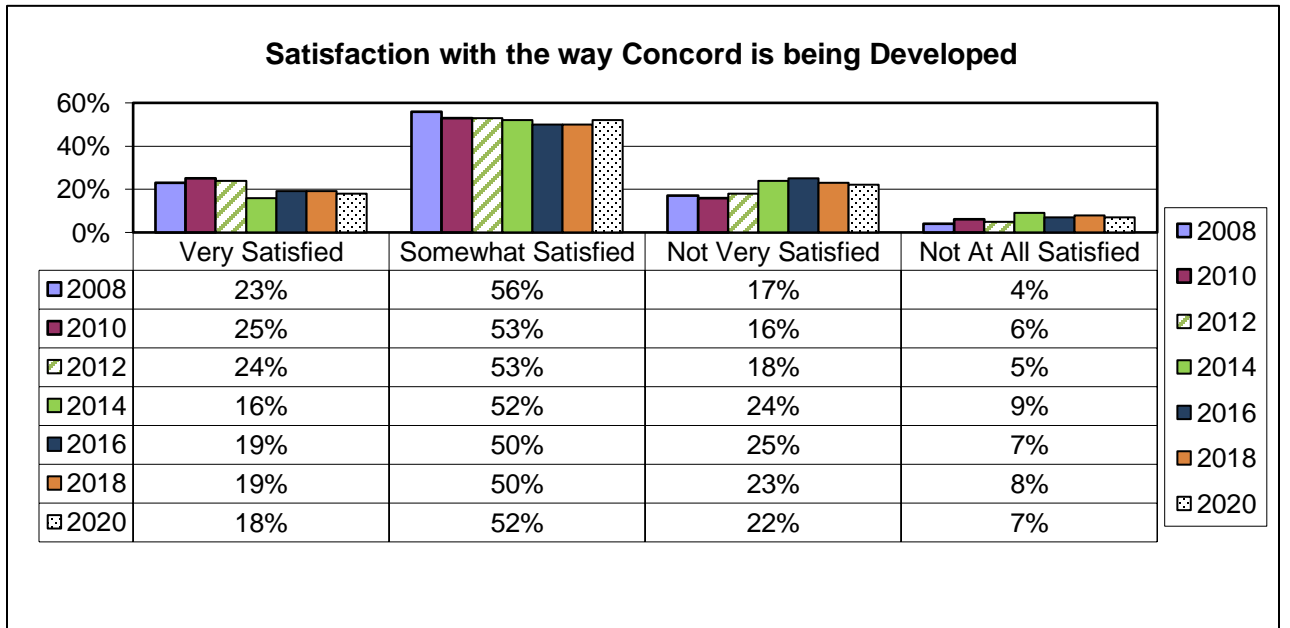


Department of Planning and Land Management

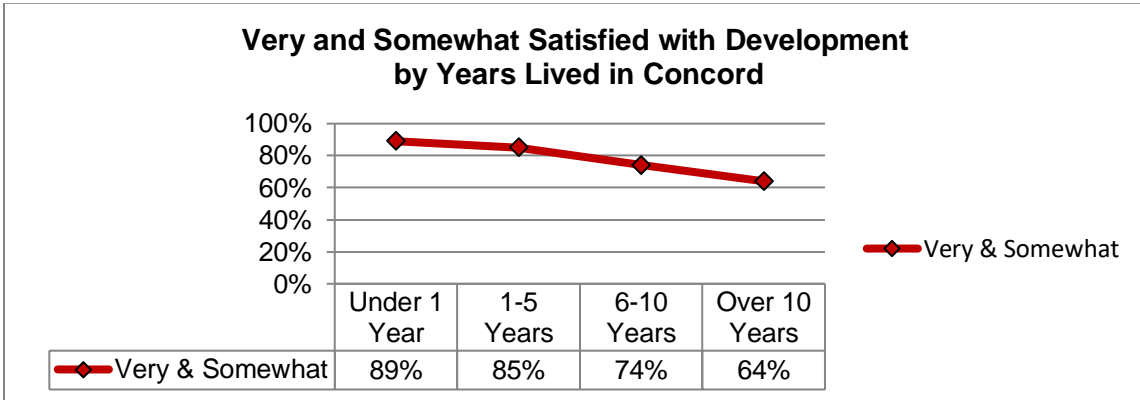
In the last seven Surveys, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services that you receive from the Department Planning and Land Management, which regulates matters related to buildings, zoning, health, natural resource protection, and historic preservation.”



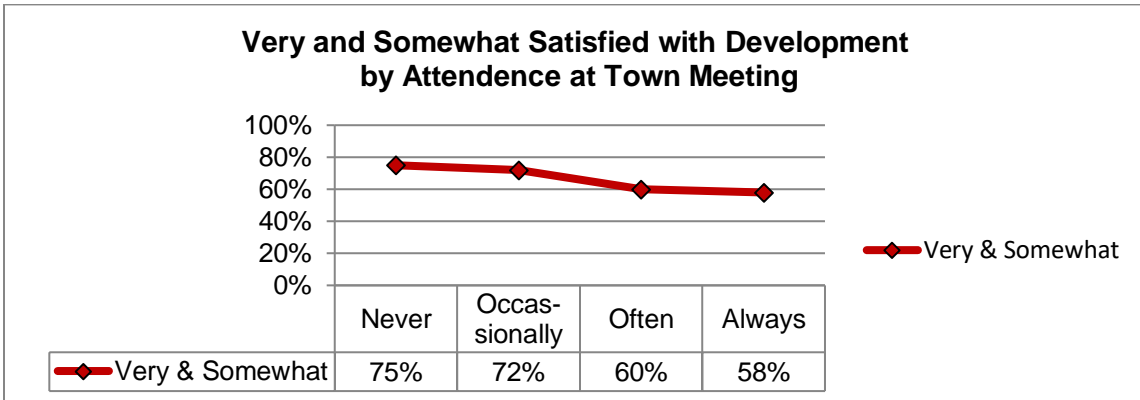
Satisfaction with the way Concord is developed is very important for the Town. Accordingly, the question was asked: “In terms of land-use and development, how would you rate your satisfaction with the way that Concord is being developed?”



There are slight differences in satisfaction level from respondents who live in general neighborhoods as determined by polling place. The percentage of respondents who are “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied” by location are as follows: Harvey Wheeler Community Center (67%), 141 Keyes Road (67%), Ripley Gym (72%), and Hunt Gym (75%). In addition, residents who have lived in Concord longer seem to be a little less satisfied.

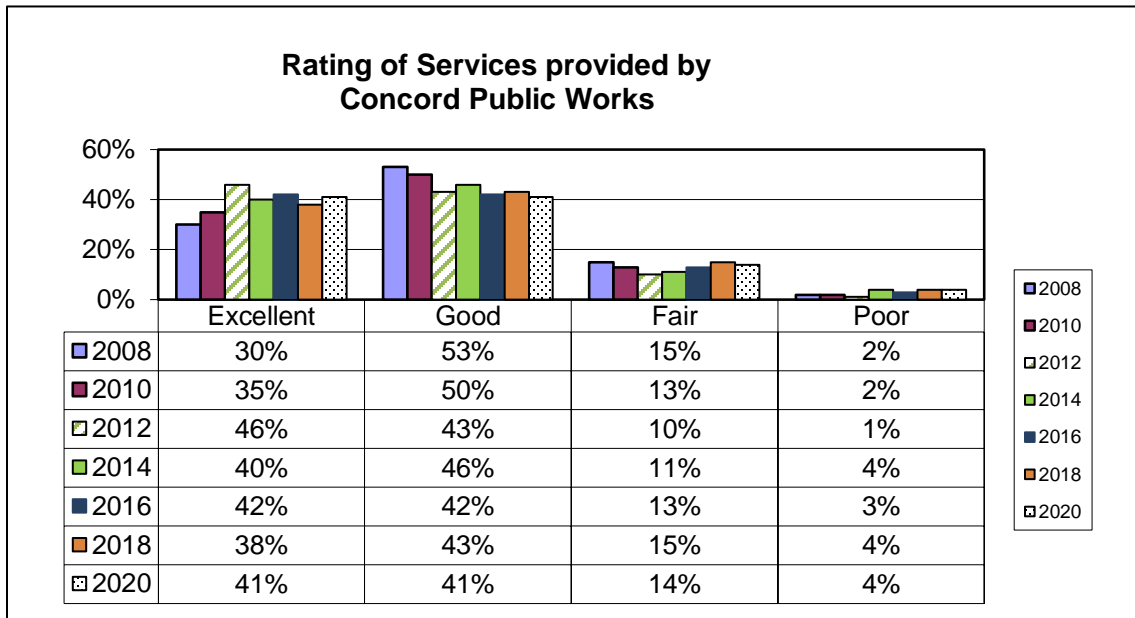


As a proxy for political involvement in the Town, the survey asked respondents: “How often do you attend Town Meeting?” When this question is cross-tabulated with the question on satisfaction with development, the results seem to show that the more one is politically involved, the less satisfied that person is. This trend is similar to that in previous surveys.

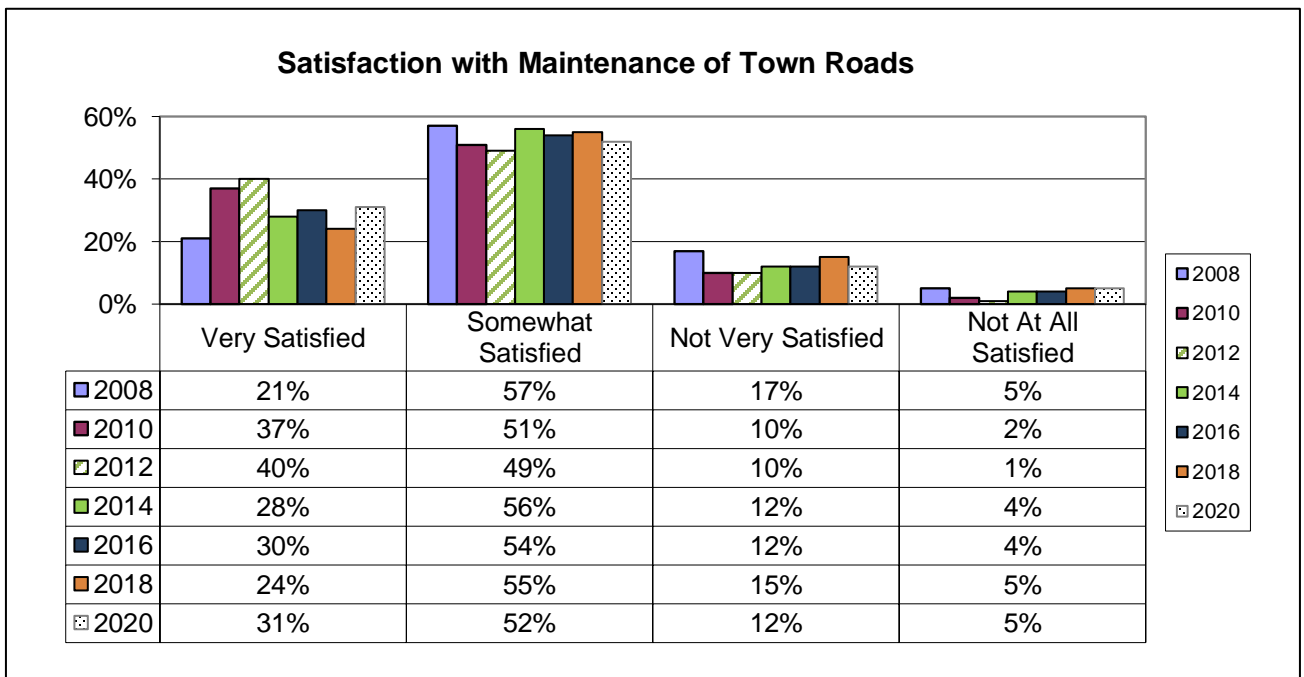


Public Works

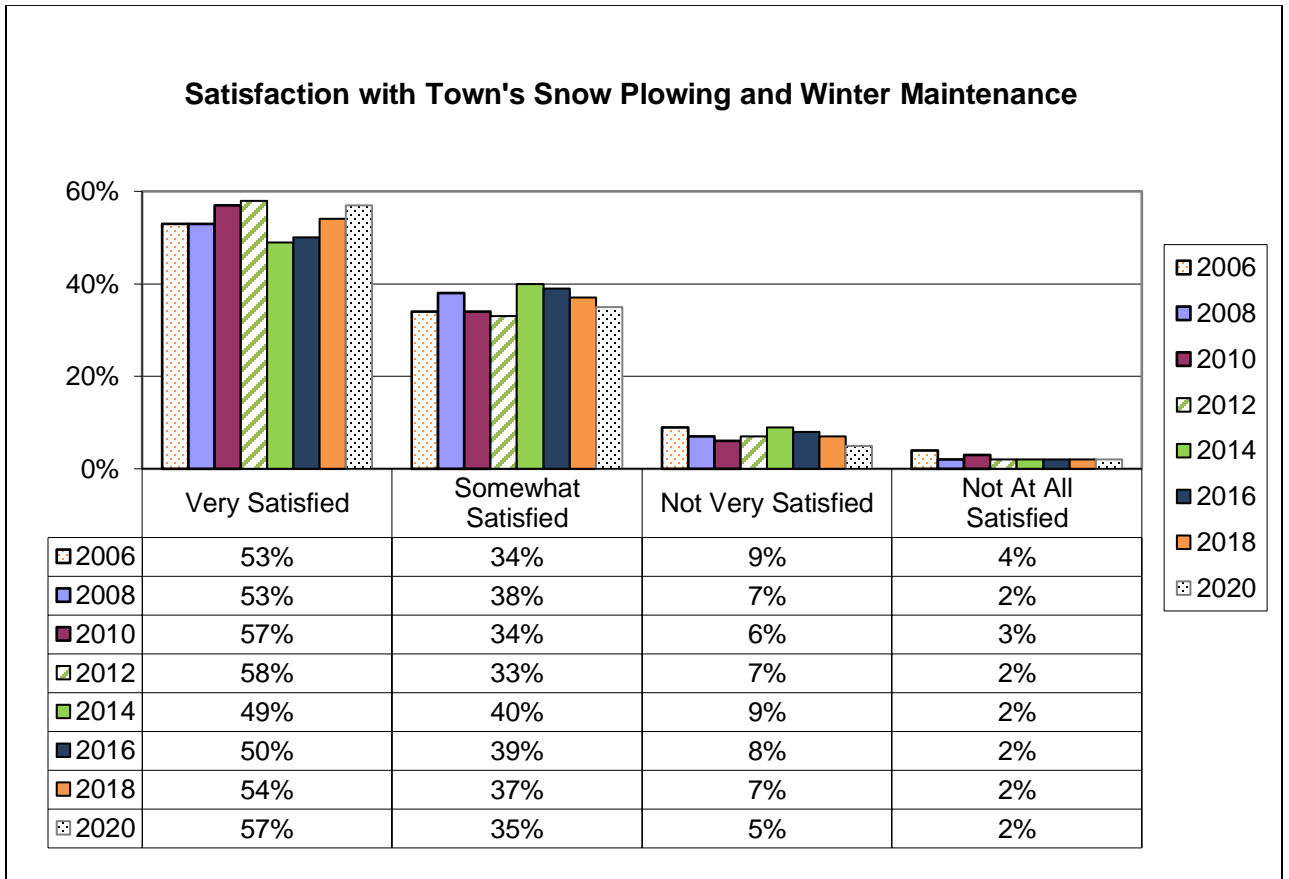
With the Surveys conducted in over a decade, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by Concord Public Works?”



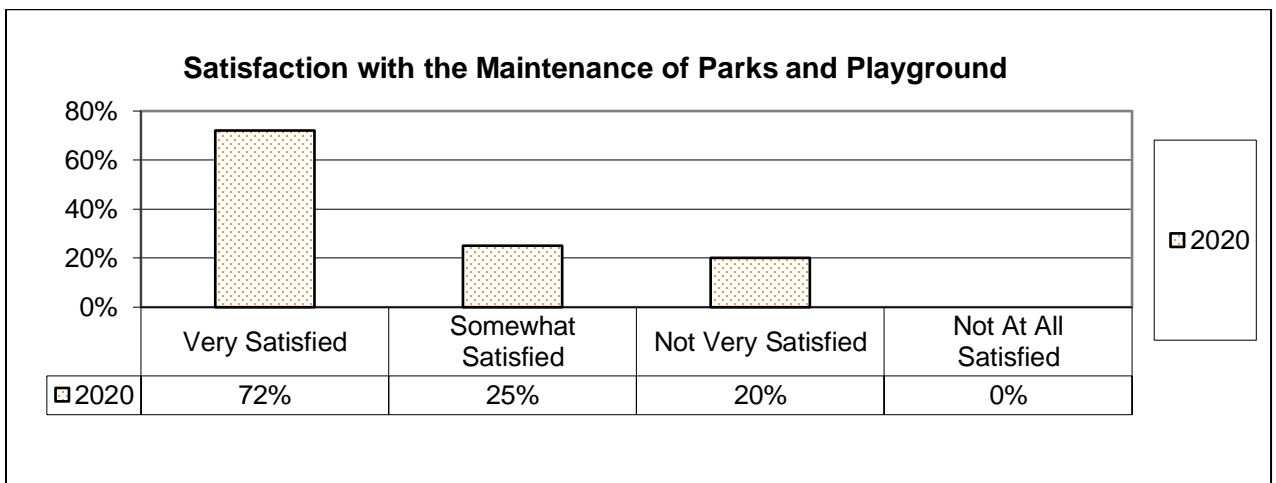
Only 3% of respondents in 2020 stated that “roads” are their highest local priority, down from 9% in 2018.



For the last eight surveys, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate your satisfaction with the Town’s snow plowing and winter maintenance?”

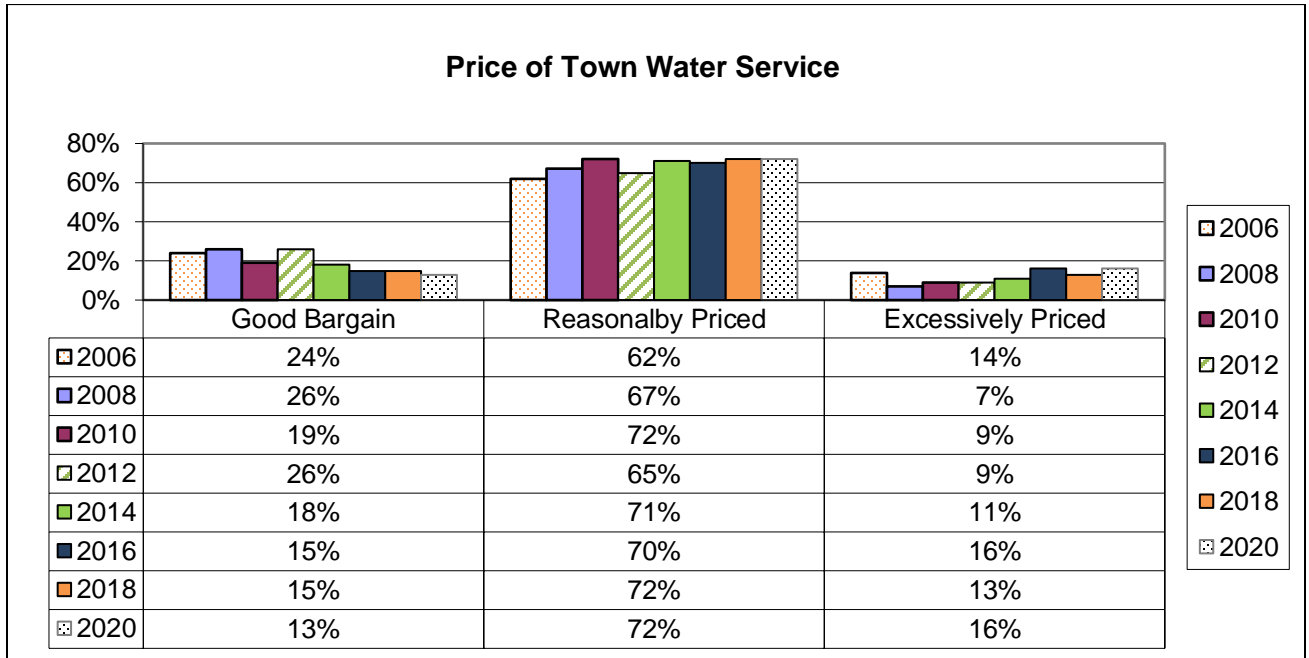


In the 2020 Survey, the question was asked, “How would you rate your satisfaction with the Town’s maintenance of parks and playgrounds?”

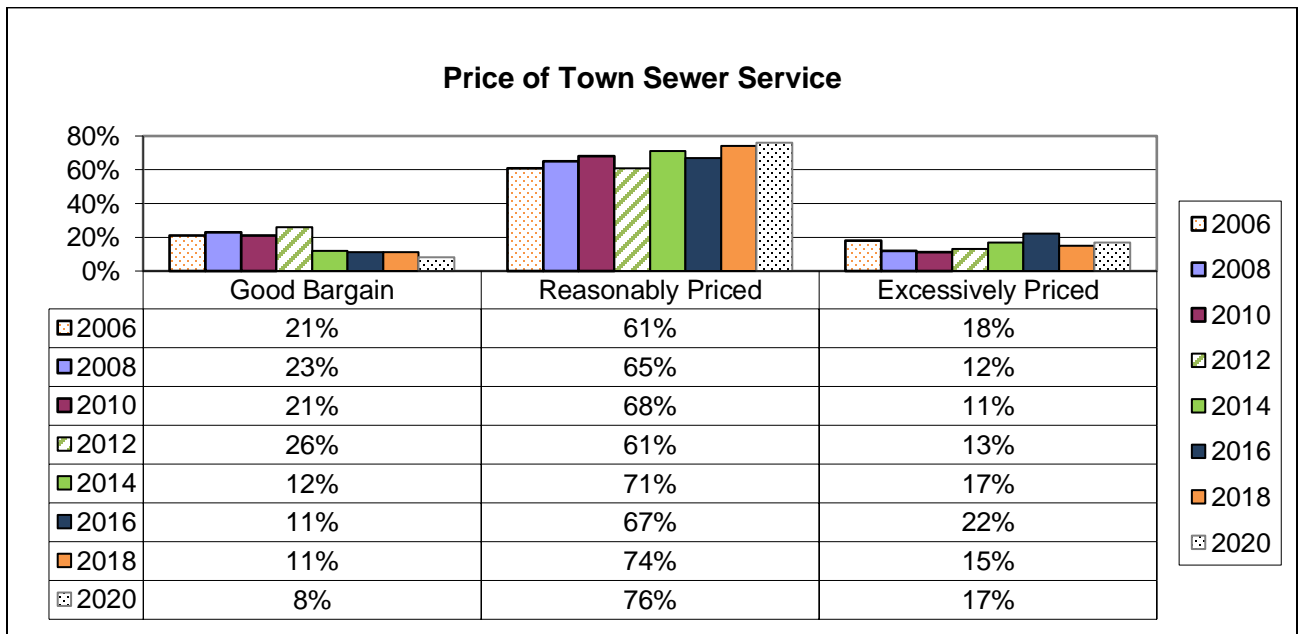


Water and Sewer Division

The Town is interested in how residents perceive the cost for service of its Enterprises. The last eight surveys included the question “With Town water service, please tell me whether you consider the price to be a Good Bargain, Reasonably Priced, or Excessively Priced?”

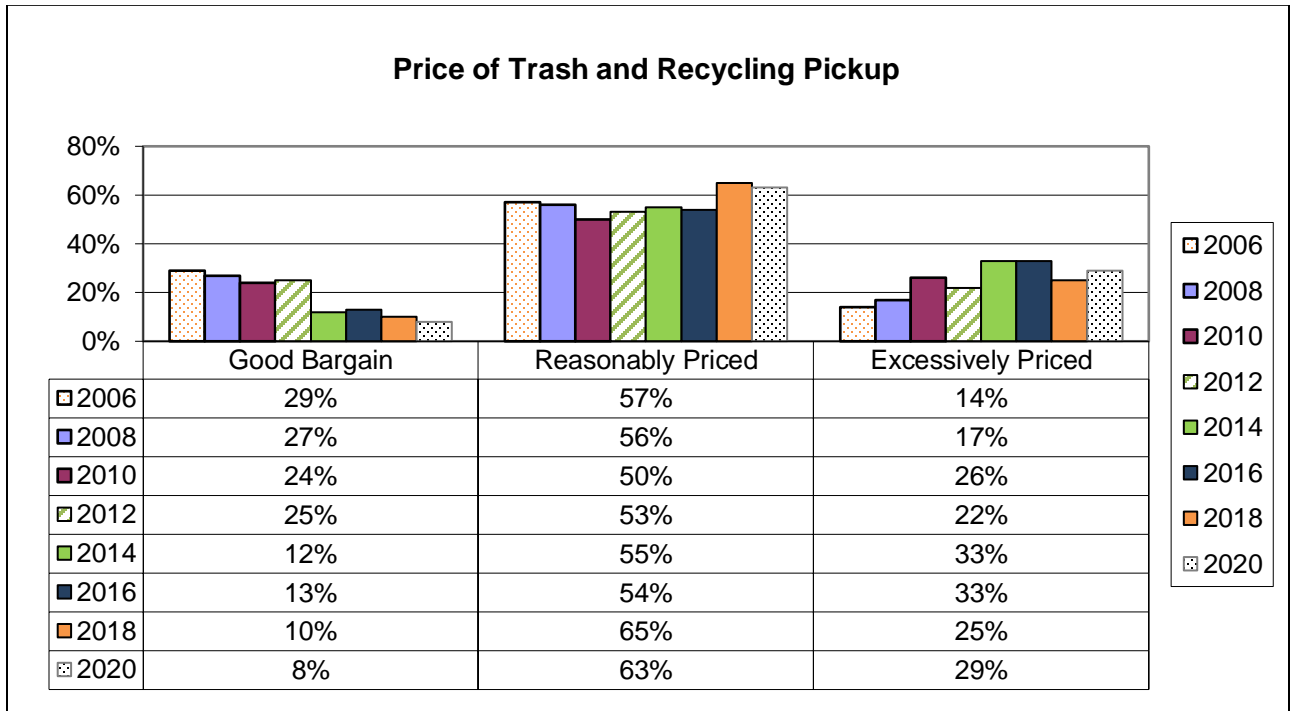


Of a total of 1,189 in the sample, 485 respondents said they use the Town sewer service and expressed an opinion. Eighty-four percent think that the price is a “Good Bargain” or “Reasonably Priced”.

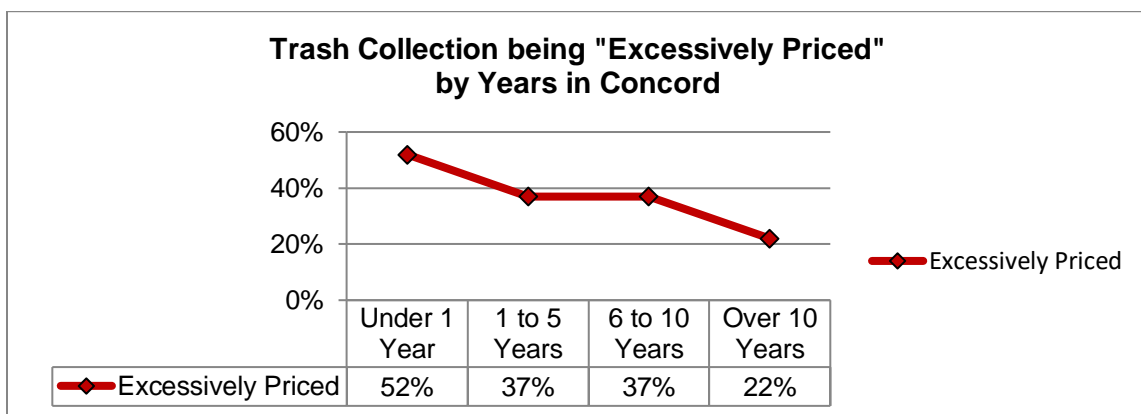


Solid Waste Division

The 2018 Survey amended this question about the price of trash and recycling collection to include the phase “provided by the Town”. Previous surveys did not have this language and the question may have been confusing with respondents who have collection services from outside haulers possibly responding.

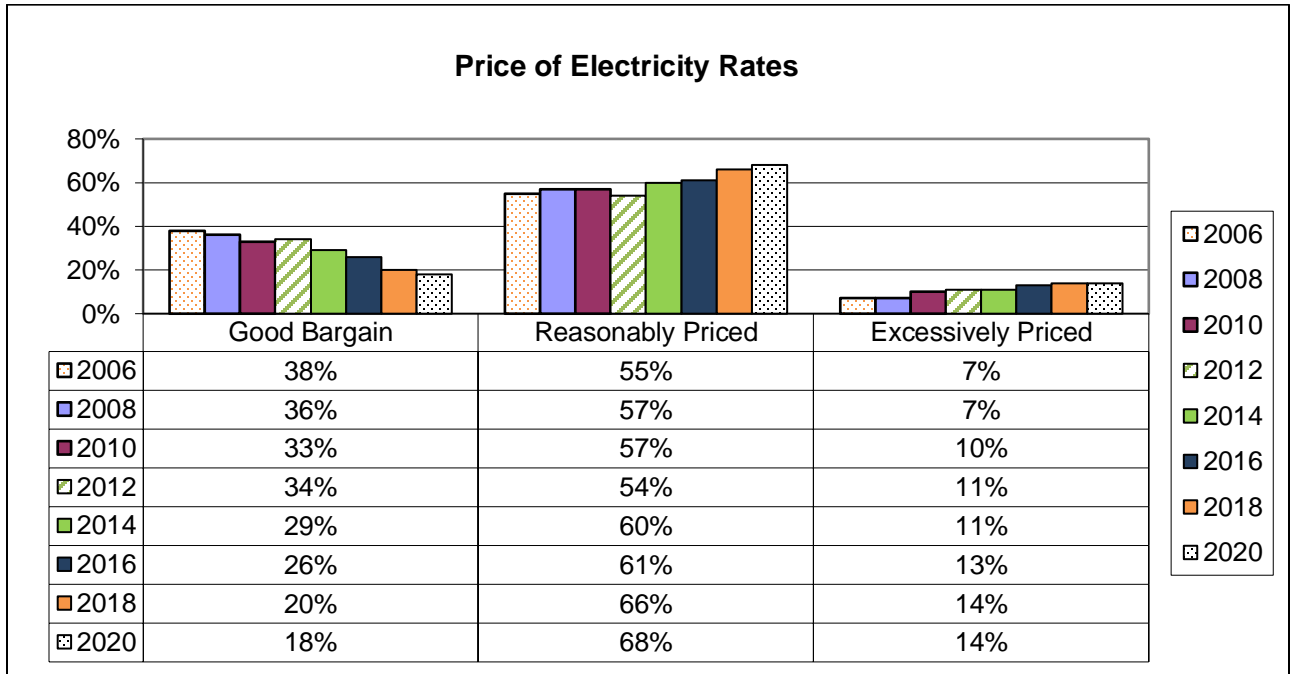


The graph below suggests that respondents who have recently moved from another community are more likely to feel that the trash collection fee is “excessively priced”.

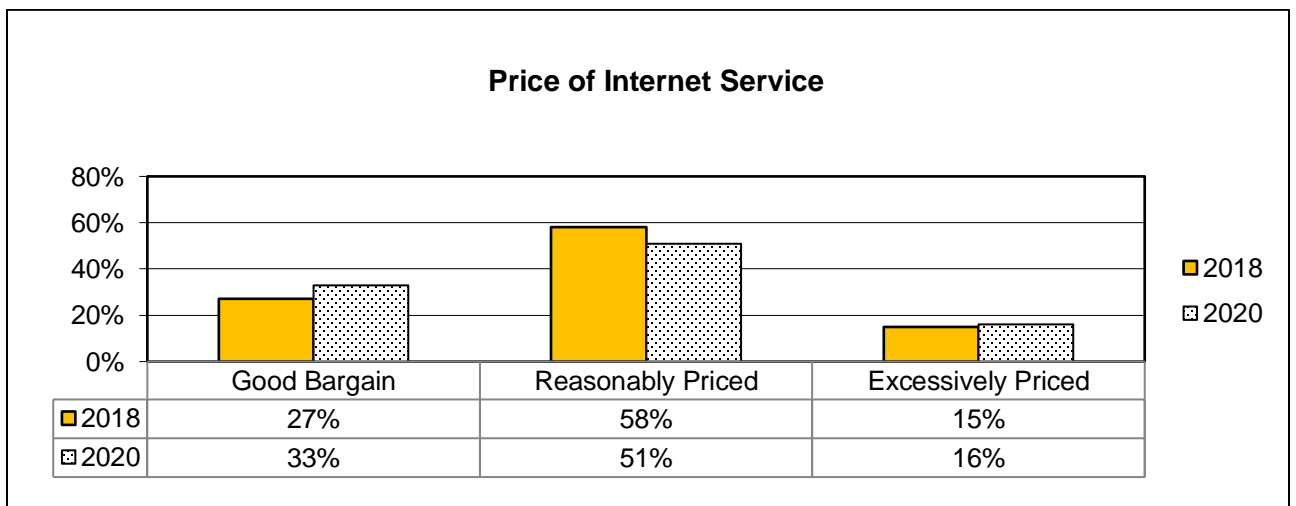


Light Plant

For the last eight Surveys, the question was asked about the price of electricity rates from the Light Plant.

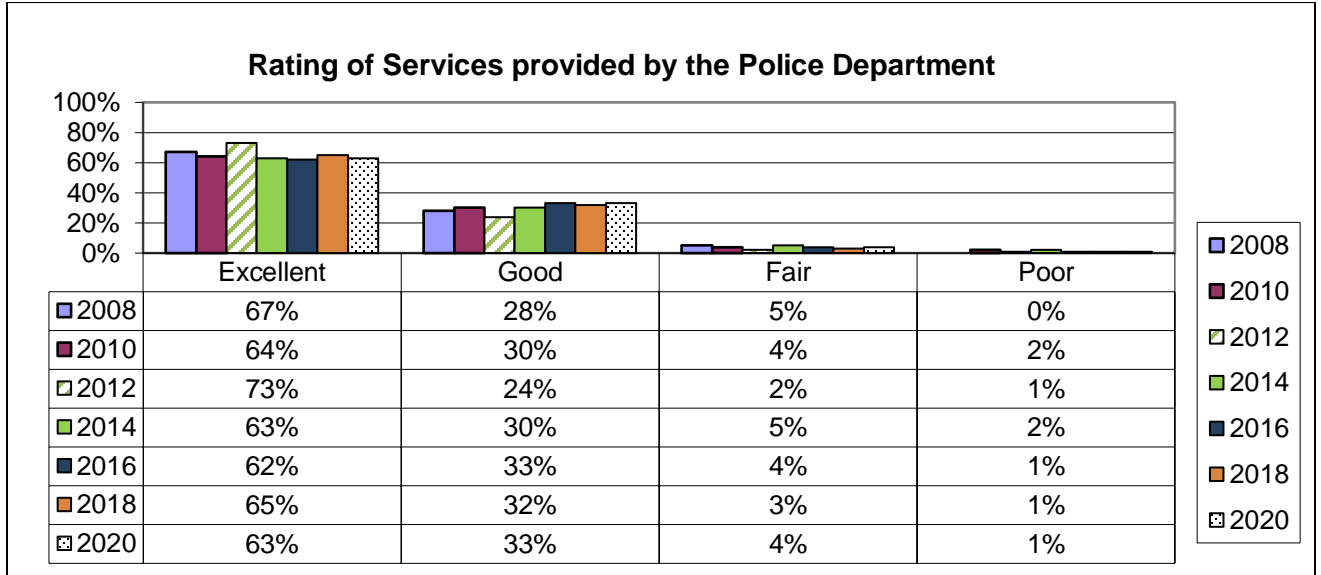


With the initiation of the Town providing telecommunication services to residents, a question was asked starting in 2018 about the fees for internet service provided by the Town through the Light Plant. Of the 1,189 respondents in 2020, 435 responded that they used the services and had an opinion about it.



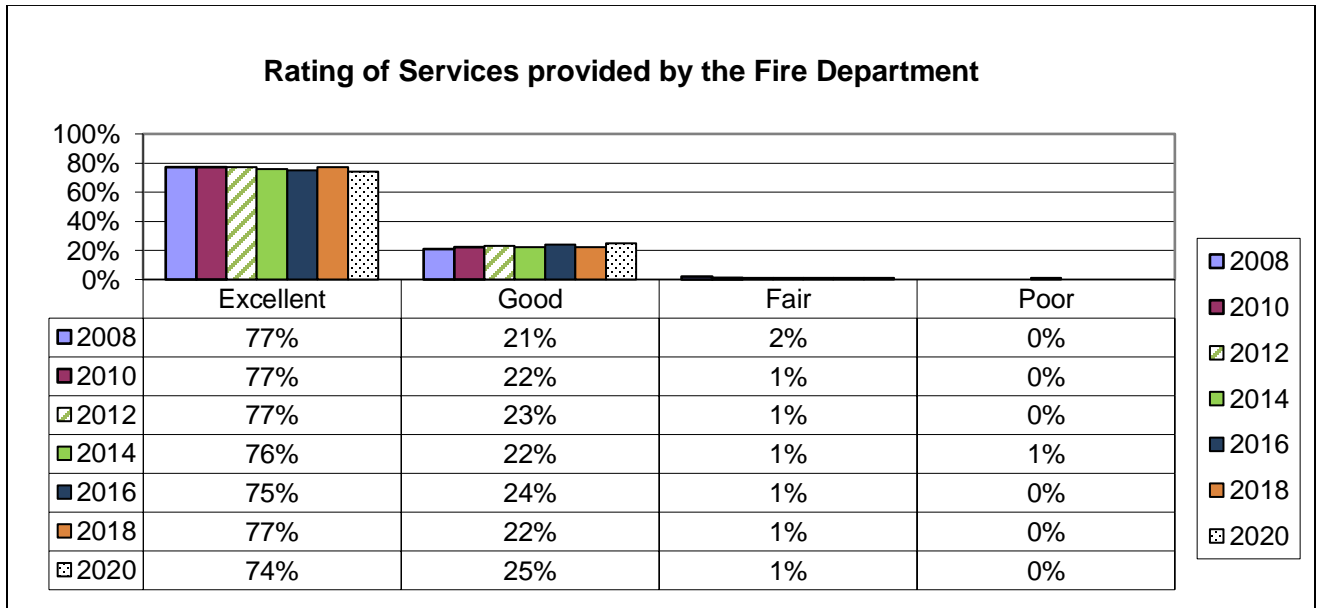
Police Department

For the Police Department, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Concord Police Department, which provides Police services, as well as Community Policing programs, School Resource Officer initiatives, and 911 Dispatching?”



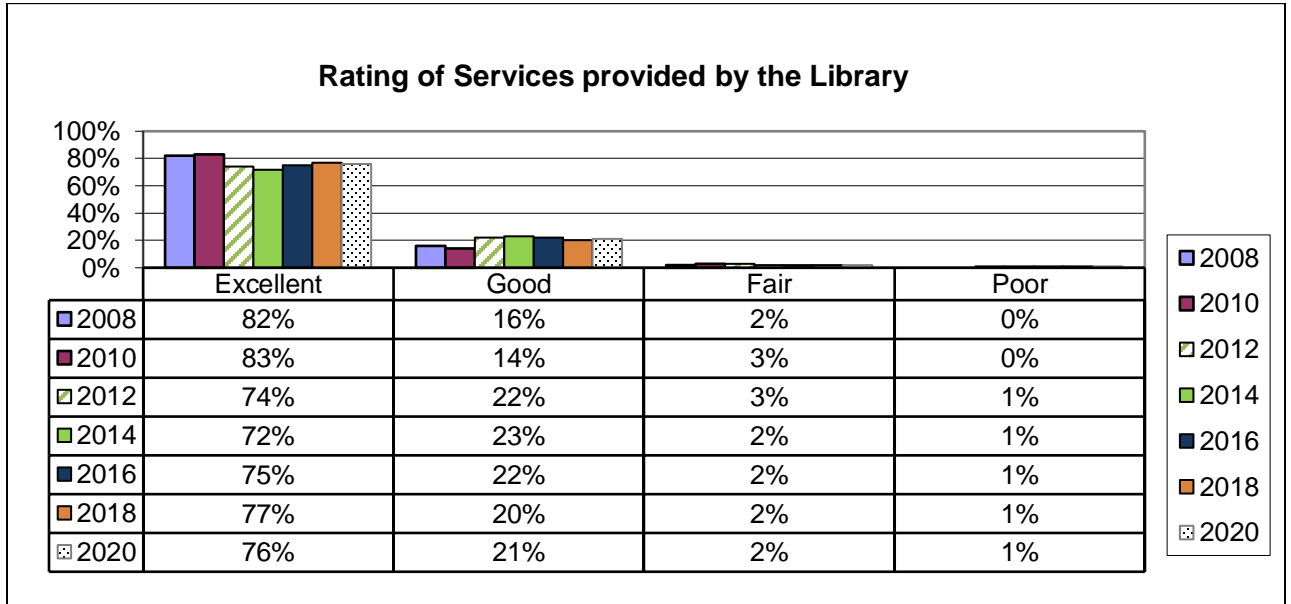
Fire Department

For the Fire Department, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Concord Fire Department, which provides Fire as well as Emergency Ambulance Service?”

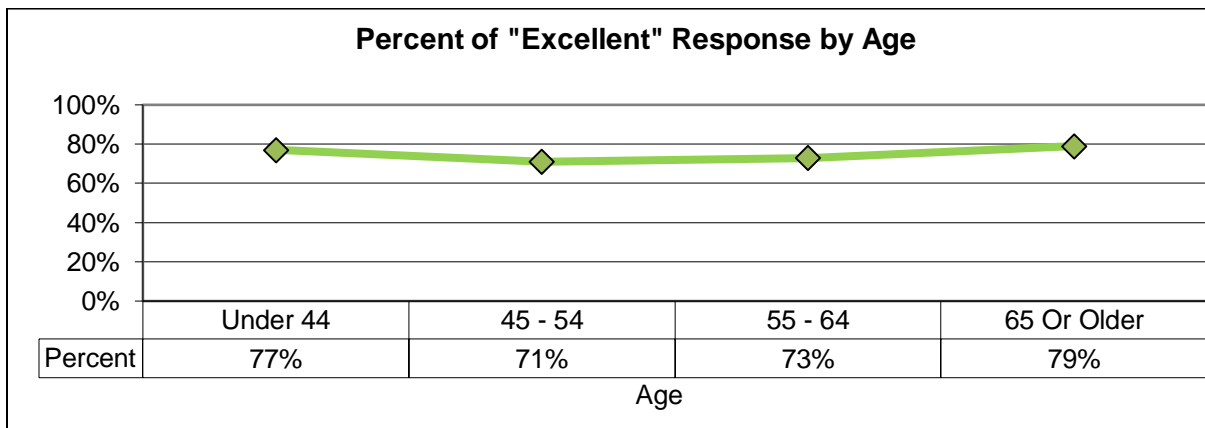


Library

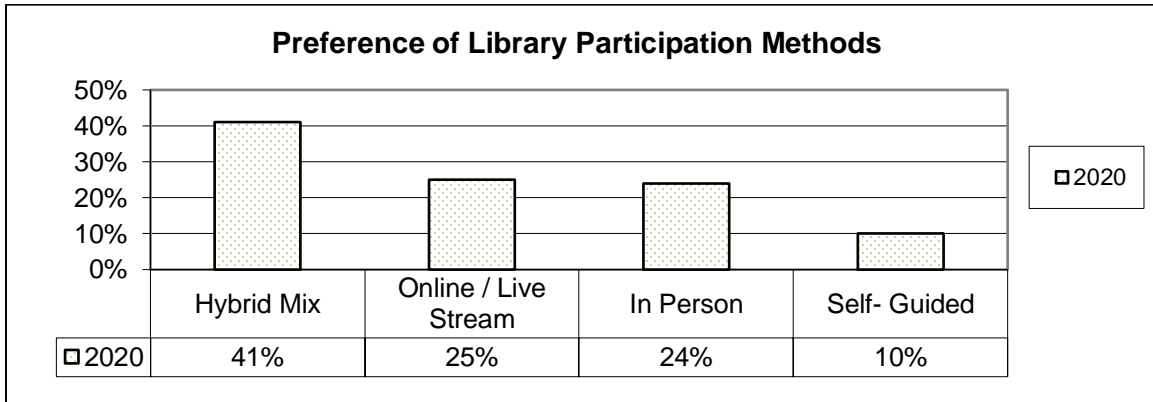
For the last seven Surveys, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by Concord Public Libraries?” In all surveys, there is a strong opinion that the quality is “excellent” or “good”.



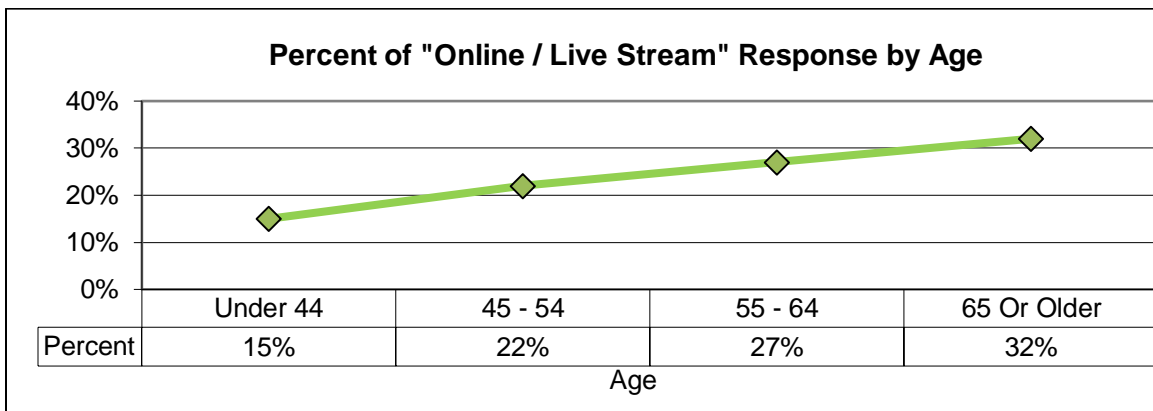
The graph below presents information on the percentage of each age group that responded “Excellent” to the quality question in the 2020 Survey. There is a slight trend which suggests that younger and older residents perceive the Library services to be of better quality. Also, it should be noted that 81% of residents who identify that they vote at Harvey Wheeler Community Center and are most likely to be patrons of the West Concord Library rate the CFPL as “Excellent”, as compared with between 72% and 75% of residents who identify that they vote at other locations.



The library-related question was asked in the 2020 Survey: “Within the next year, are you more likely to participate in programs or events that are: In Person, Online / Live Streams, Hybrid Mix, or Self-Guided (Not Live)?” Below are the results of four participation methods.

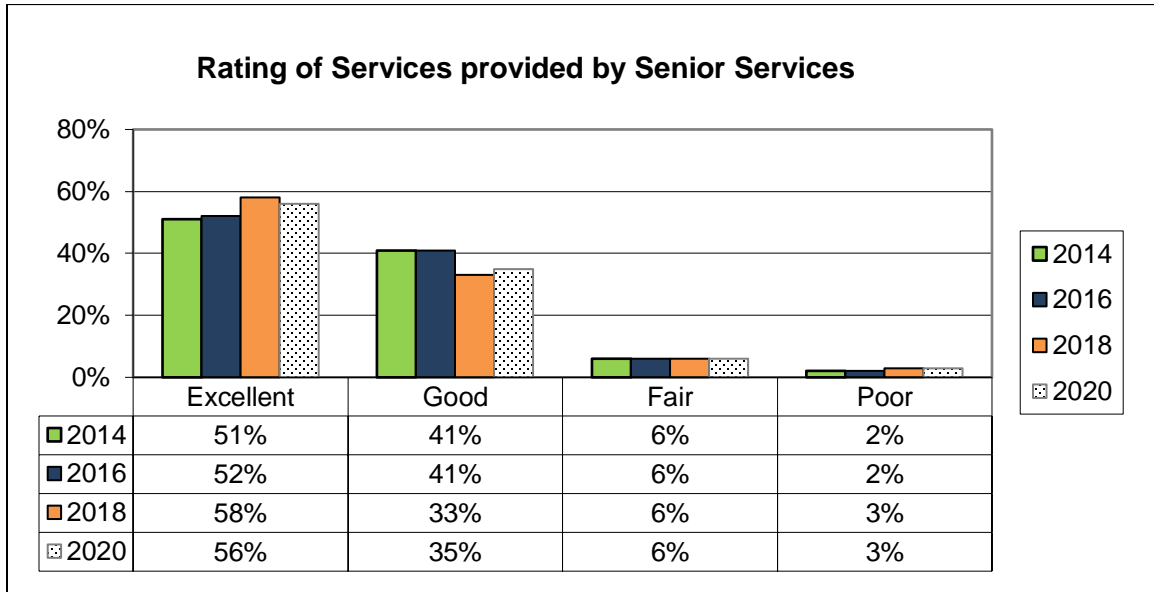


For the respondents who chose “Online / Live Stream”, there is a trend that age is a factor in the response.

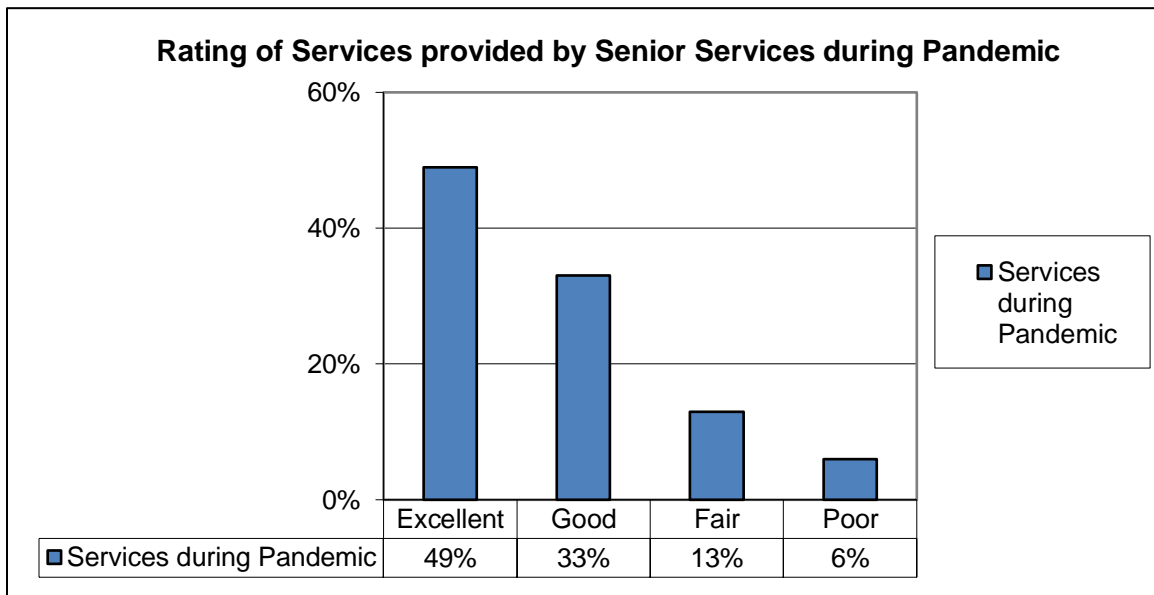


Senior Services / Council on Aging

In the last four Surveys, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Senior Service Division / Council on Aging, which includes social / recreational programming, nursing services, transportation services and clinical social work?”

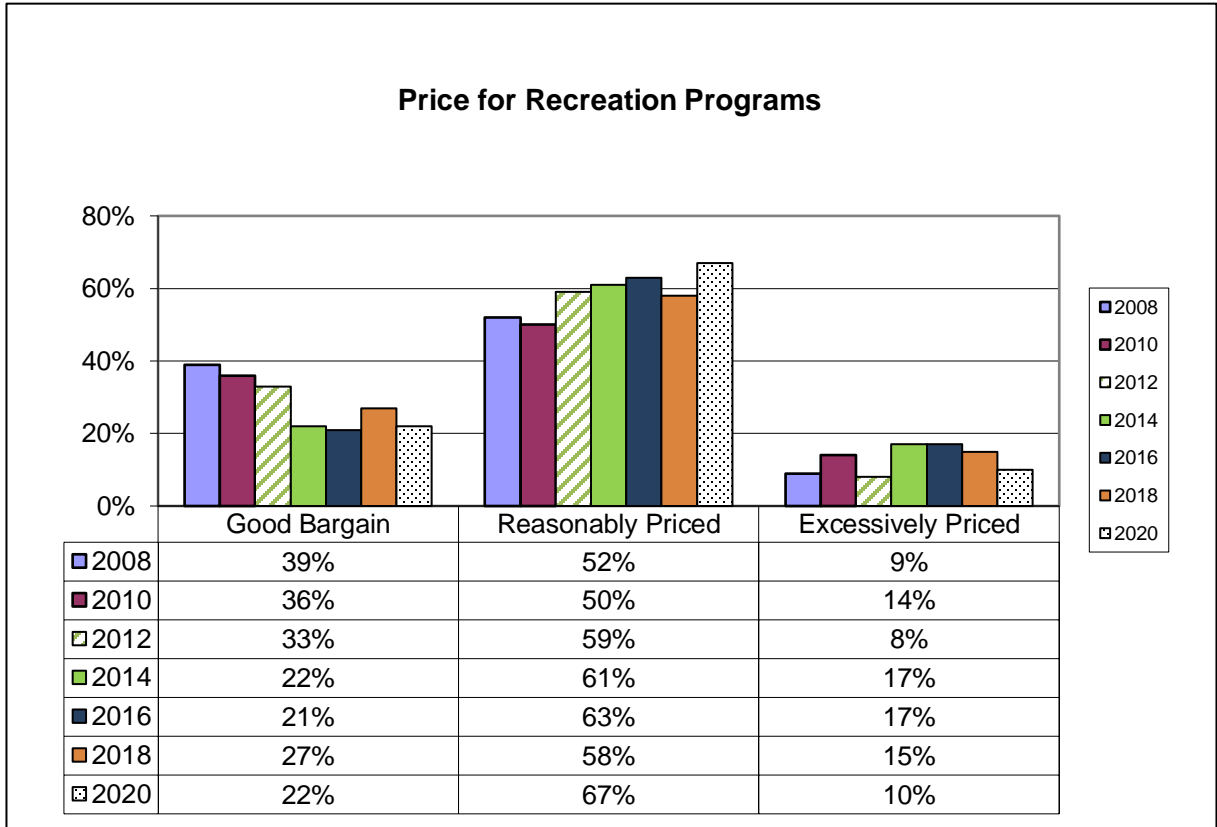


In addition, the question asked: How would you rate the amount of social, physical, or mental support provided to you by Senior Services / COA during the COVID19 Pandemic?”



Recreation Programs

Of the 426 respondents (out of 1,189 surveyed) who expressed an opinion on the question regarding the price of Recreation Programs (such as after school programs, special events, programs and summer camp), 89% think these programs are a “Good Bargain” or “Reasonably Priced”.



Beede Swim and Fitness Center

The Beede Swim and Fitness Center has made progress in lessening the perception that its fees are “Excessively Priced”. In the 2016 Survey, 64% of respondents, who expressed an opinion on Beede’s fees, thought they were “Excessively Priced. By 2020, only 42% think so. It should be noted that there were 516 respondents answering the question from a total sample size of 1,189.

