

Concord Finance Department

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Date: January 6, 2015

RE: 2014 Town Government Survey Results

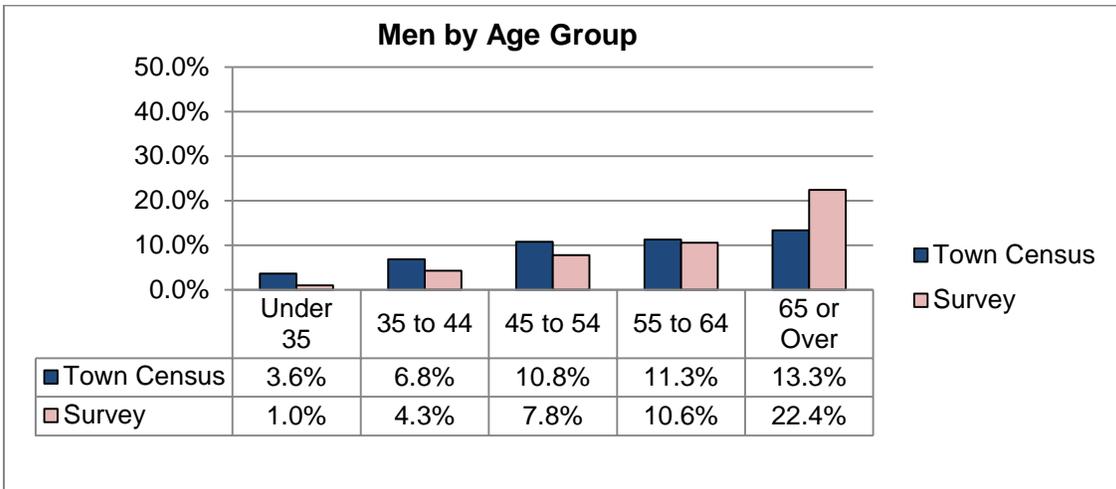
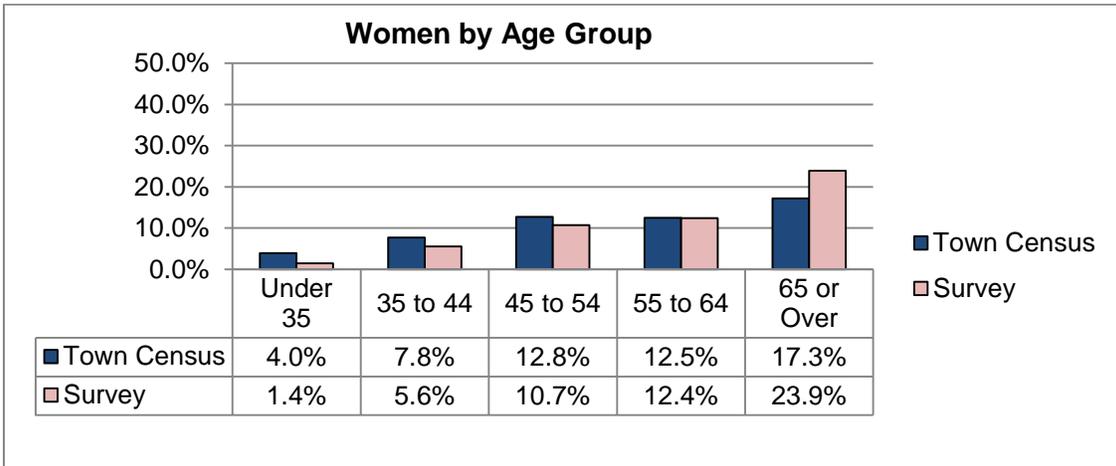
During the period from October 23, 2014 to November 7, 2014, the Town with the assistance from Pacific Market Research, a survey research firm, conducted a survey of Concord residents. For past surveys in years 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012, the method used for sampling residents' opinions was a telephone survey: randomly selected Concord residents were called on their land-line telephones and were 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 would no longer accurately capture the opinions of all Concord residents in a statistically meaningful way.

Accordingly, to adapt with the times, the Town has changed its method of sampling residents' opinions. This year, the Town mailed out a paper questionnaire to all 6,953 residences in Concord and requested that one respondent per residence complete the survey in one of the three following ways:

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

From the 6,953 mailed out, a total of 1,337 completed surveys were received. That is, just about 1 in 5 households took the time to answer the 41 question survey. The majority of residents, 57.5% (769 responses), used the online method of response. Other residents, 38.0% (508 responses) filled out the paper questionnaire and delivered it to the Town House. A smaller group, 4.5% (60 responses) phoned the call center.

The characteristics of the surveyed population differ slightly from those of the true Concord population. On the graphs on the next page are the percentages in terms of the total population of the cohorts of women by age group and men by age group as measured by the 2014 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 of these cohorts. Younger residents with families may not have the discretionary time to take a 41 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 for a longer time and may be more invested in how the Town government functions.

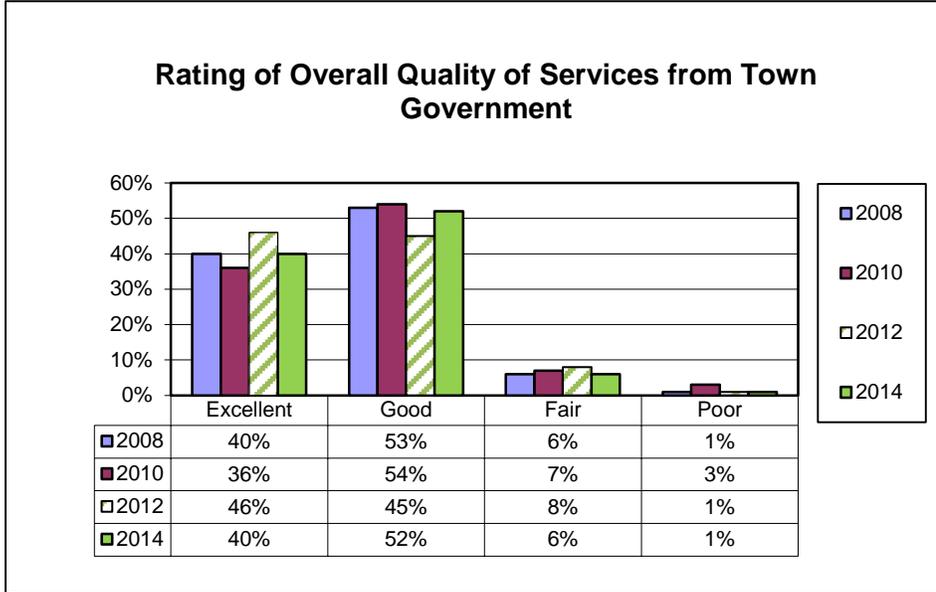
The method used to equalize these demographic groups is to weight the responses of each cohort by a specific factor, so that, for example, the cohort of women between the ages of 45 and 54 represents 12.8% of the results instead of 10.7% in the survey sample. Accordingly, a response from a woman between ages 45 and 54 would be increased by a factor of 1.19. The analysis below represents the weighted results. Complete weighted and un-weighted cross-tabulation data can be found under the name "2014 Resident Survey" on the Town website, www.concordma.gov/finance.

With this methodology, the overall 2014 survey results of a sample of 1,337 completed questionnaires are accurate 95% of the time within a confidence interval of +/- 2.7%. The margin of error for the weighted tables is the same as for the unweighted tables. The margin of error is larger for sub-groups within the sample.

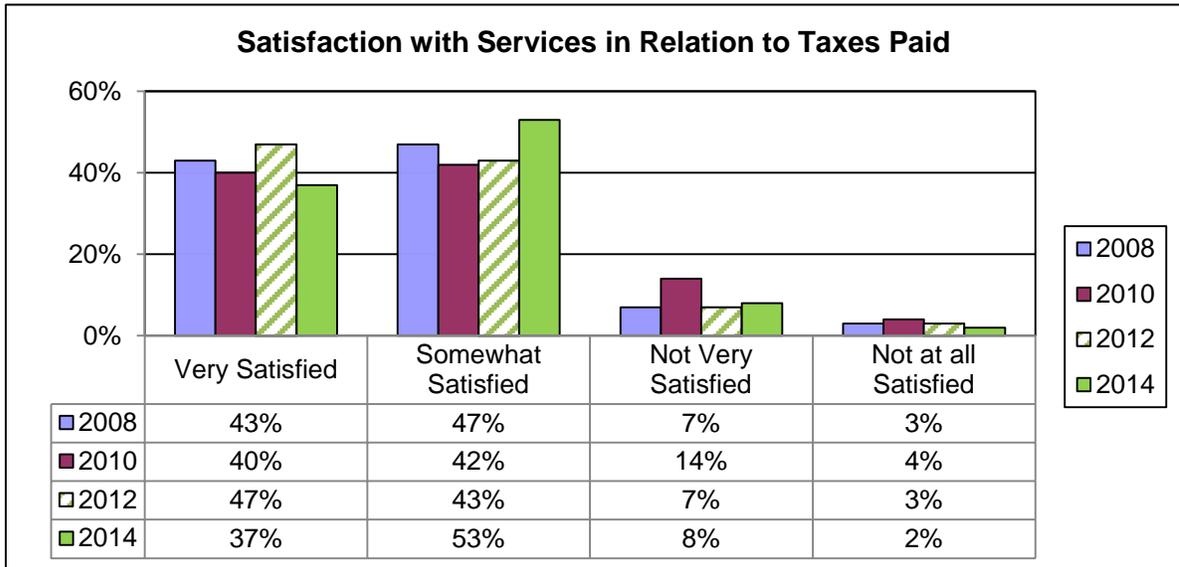
Town Services

The baseline question that was asked in the 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 surveys is: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Town Government in Concord?”

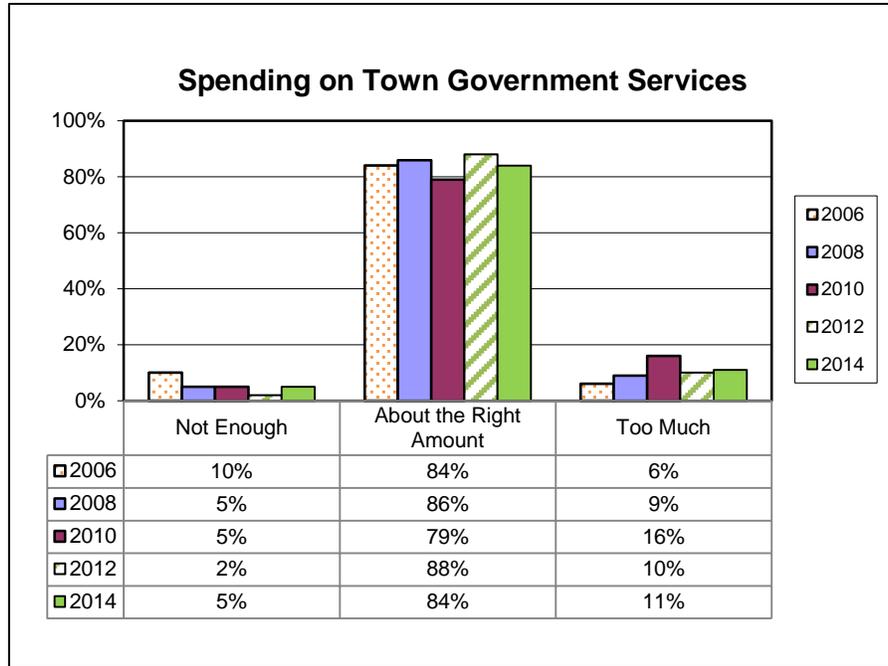
Compared to 2012, there is a slight shift from those respondents who feel that Town services are “good” instead of “excellent”. Nevertheless, 92% of respondents thought that Town services were “excellent” or “good” in 2014 as compared with 91% in 2012.



Correspondingly, when asked: “In relation to the property taxes you pay, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of Town Services?”, fewer respondents chose the “very satisfied” response.



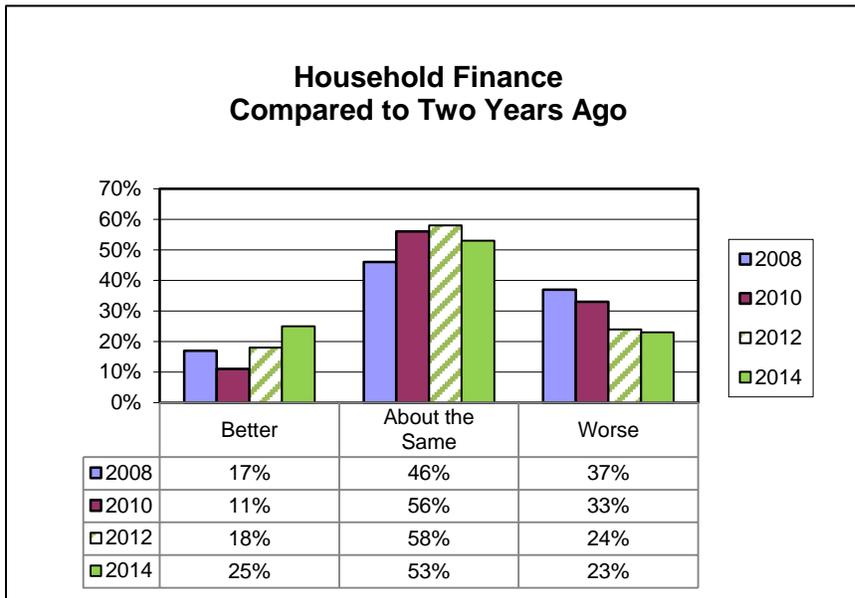
Despite the shift in feeling among residents that Town services in terms of the property tax paid are less satisfactory, there is a general consensus that the Town spends about the right amount of money on Town government services. For the last five surveys, the “about the right amount” response has tracked between 79% and 88%. The low point was in 2010 as the effects of the recession were being felt by Concord residents



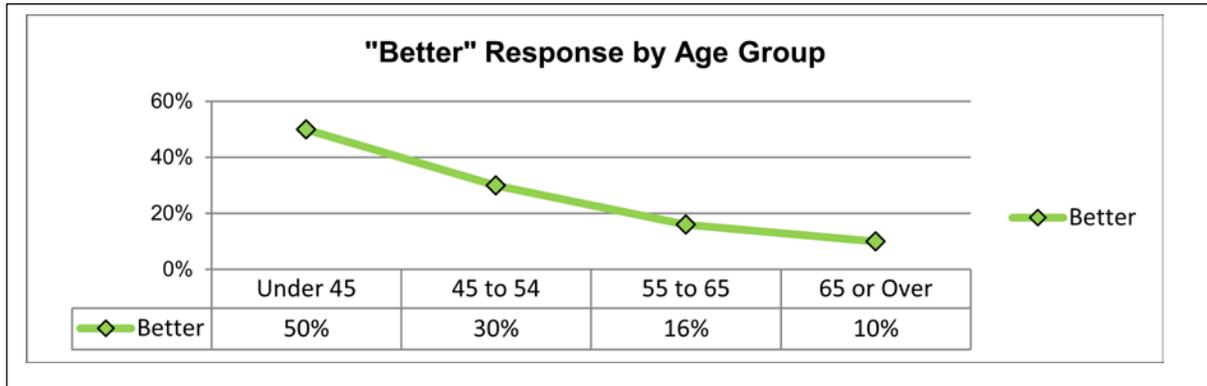
Household Finances

It is useful for the Town to have a fuller understanding of how Concord residents are faring economically, so as to better know how to provide Town services.

As for their own economic situation, more residents are feeling better about their personal finances. With the beginning of the recession in the fall of 2008 and continuing through the fall of 2010, Concord residents have 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 2014, a quarter of the respondents felt that they are doing “better” financially.

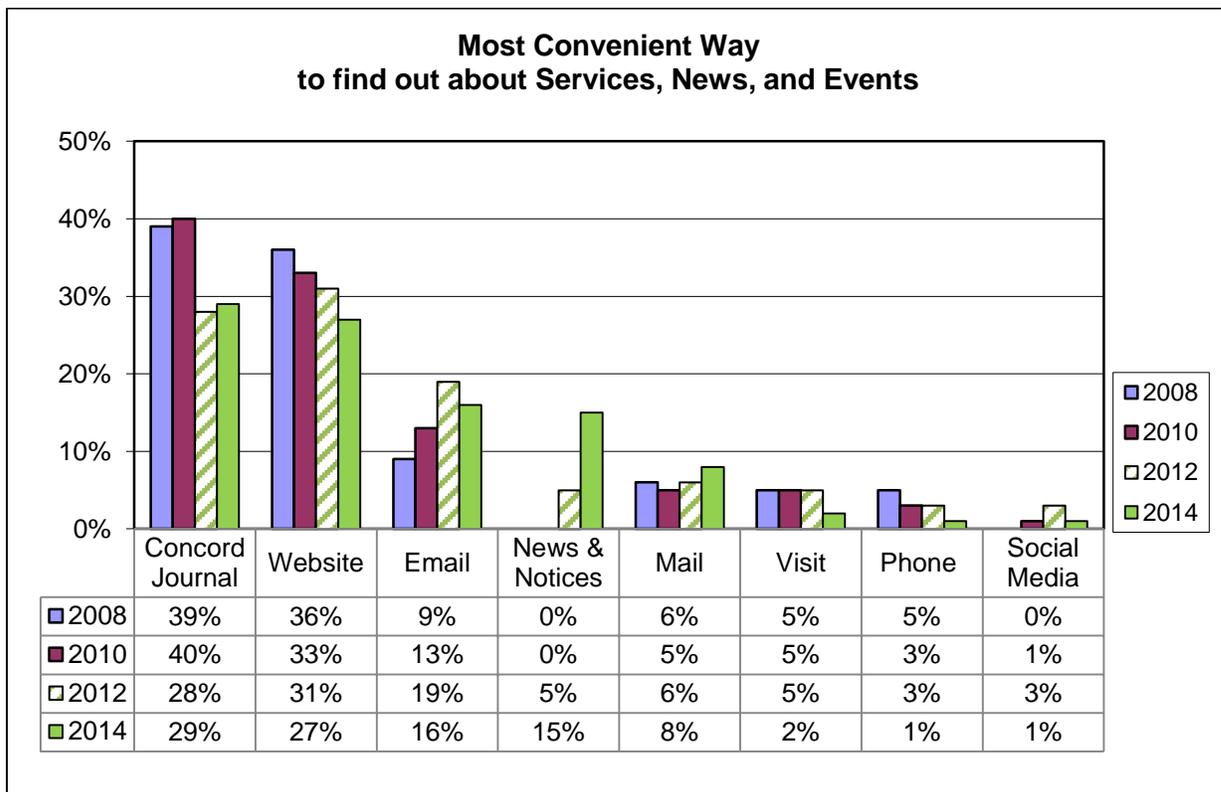


The survey results also show that there is a trend in terms of age group as to whether respondents feel like they are doing “better” than they were two years ago.

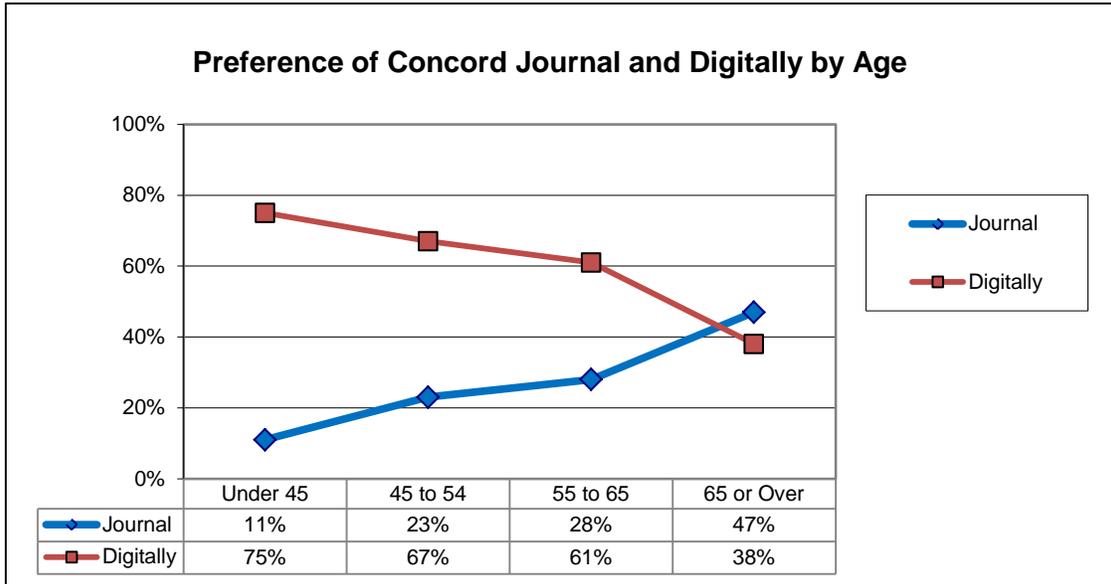


Communication

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?” Most respondents chose the “Concord Journal” or “Town website”.

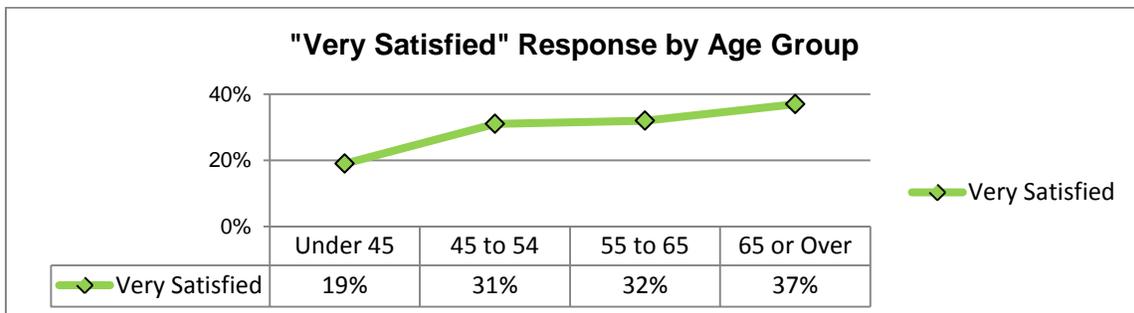


As could be expected, there is movement over the last four years toward digital media as a means of receiving information from and about the Town. If the categories of website, email, and emailed News & Notices are combined, a total of 58% of respondents prefer to receive their information through the use of a computer, tablet or smart phone.



In the graph above, the trend in preference for receiving Town information is correlated by age. The two lines show this preference as determined by a resident's age as to whether he/she prefers finding out about Town news from the Concord Journal or by digital means from the Town.

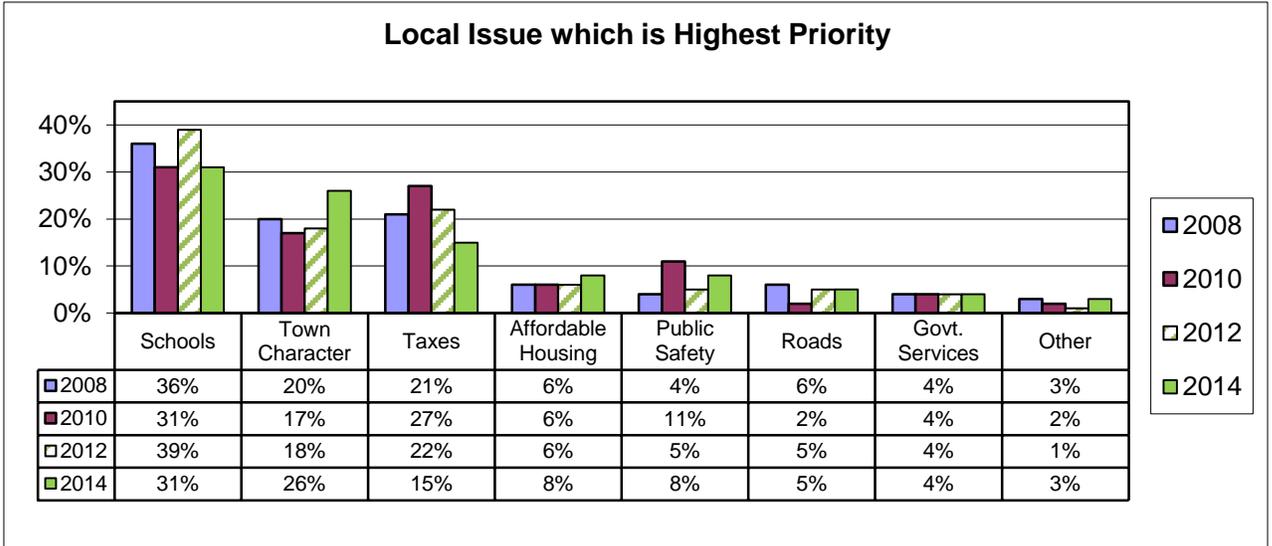
In terms of satisfaction with the way residents receive information from the Town, respondents are generally satisfied: 30% are "very satisfied", 56% "somewhat satisfied", 11% "not very satisfied", and 2% "not at all satisfied". When broken down by age, respondents in the younger age categories are less satisfied with the way they receive information from the Town as those in the older age categories.



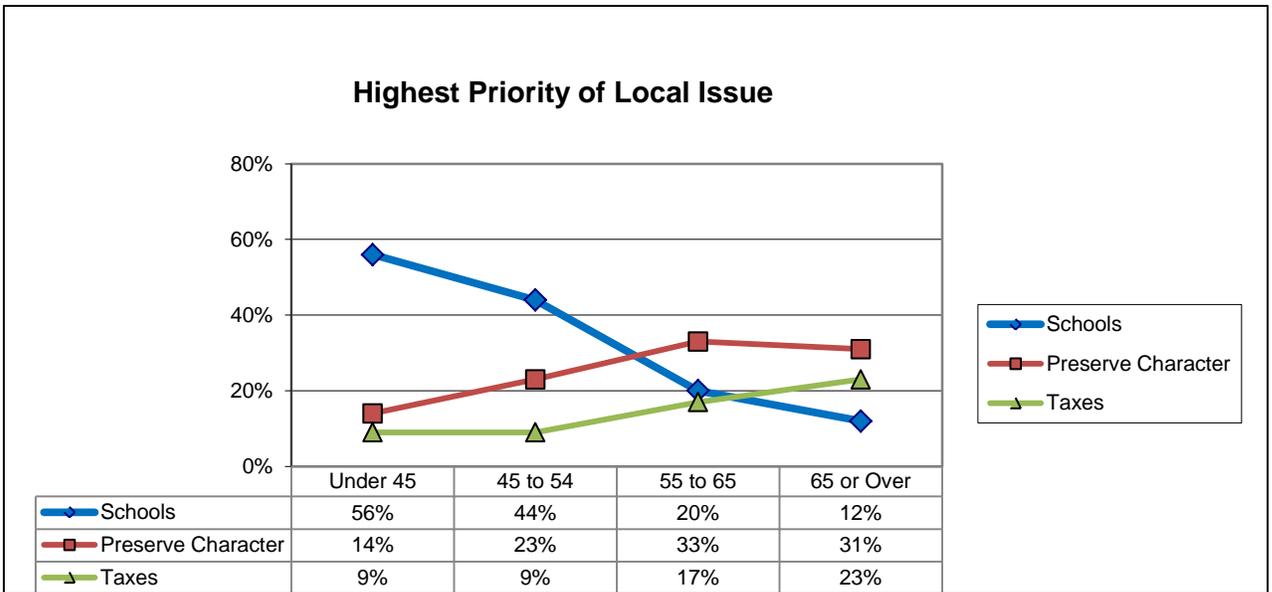
These results combined with the low level of respondents receiving information from social media may point toward the need for the Town to better provide information to residents through contemporary digital media, such as Twitter and Facebook.

Priority 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?”, 31% of residents said “schools”, 26% “town character”, and 15% “taxes”. Of interest in the 2014 survey is the uptick in respondents identifying “town character” as their highest priority.



As could be expected, younger respondents place “schools” as a priority. With older respondents, “preservation of Town’s character” and “taxes” become more important.

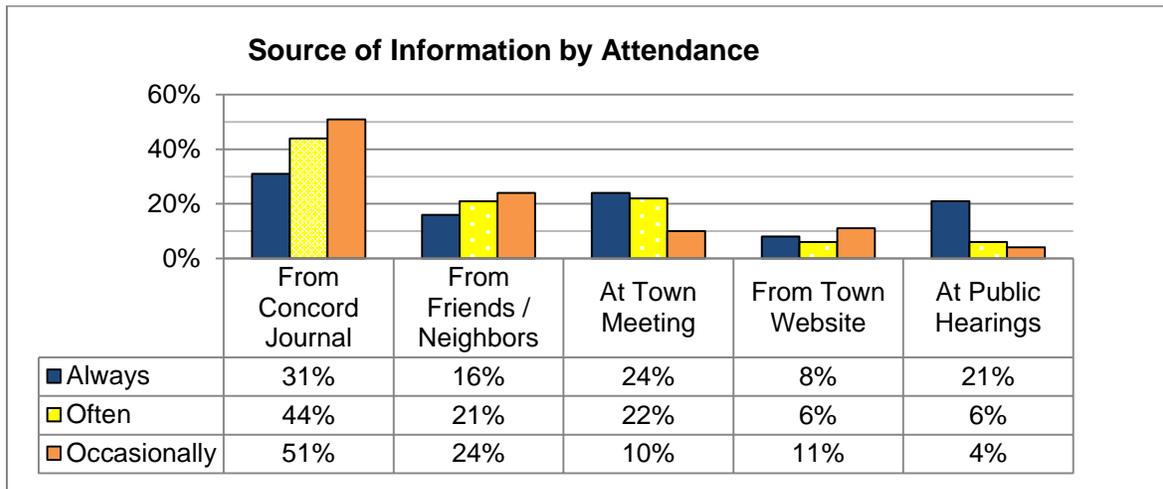


Town Meeting

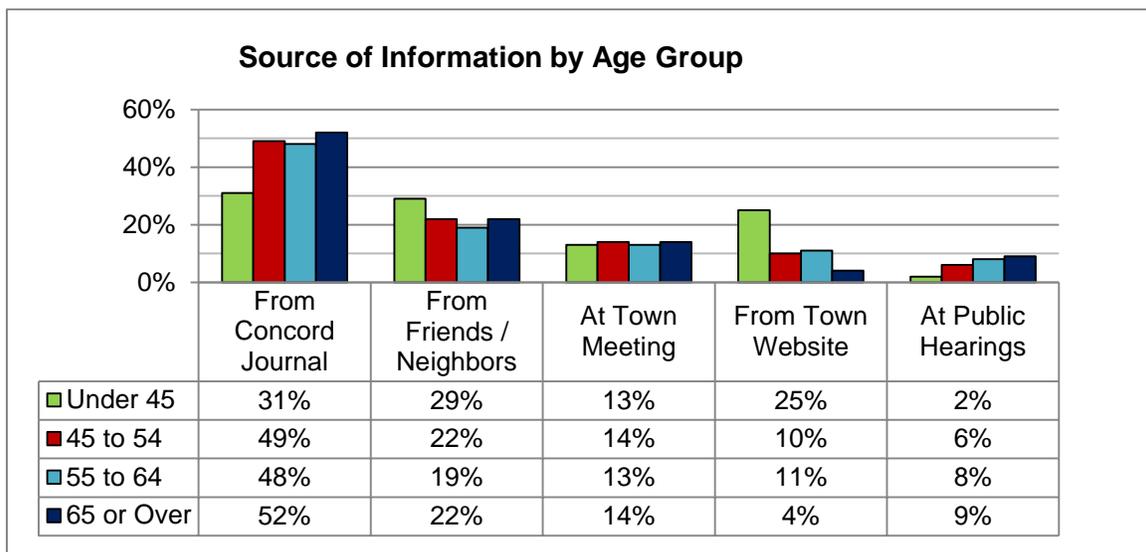
Of specific interest this year, the Town sought out additional information about residents' opinion about Town Meeting by asking the following questions.

First, how is the best way to get information to Town Meeting Members so that they can make an informed vote? The question was asked, "Where do you get most of your information to make decisions on how to vote at Town Meeting?"

The chart below separates respondents of this question by how often they attend Town Meeting.

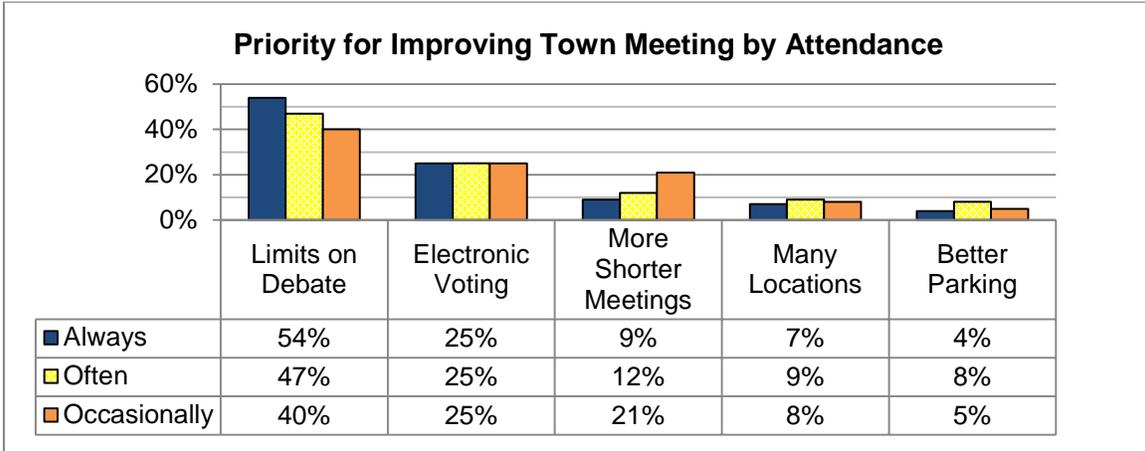


The next chart separates respondents of the question by age group.

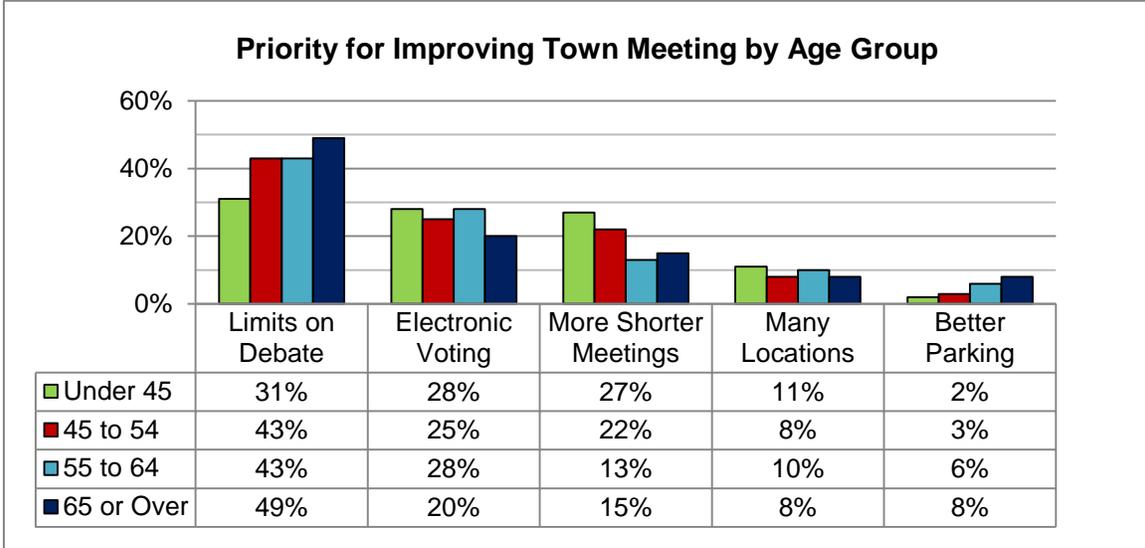


Second, what can the Town do to improve Town Meeting? The question was asked, “What is your top priority for improving Town Meeting?” Forty-three percent of all respondents chose “have stricter time limits on debate”.

The chart below presents the results of the priority for improving Town Meeting question by attendance.

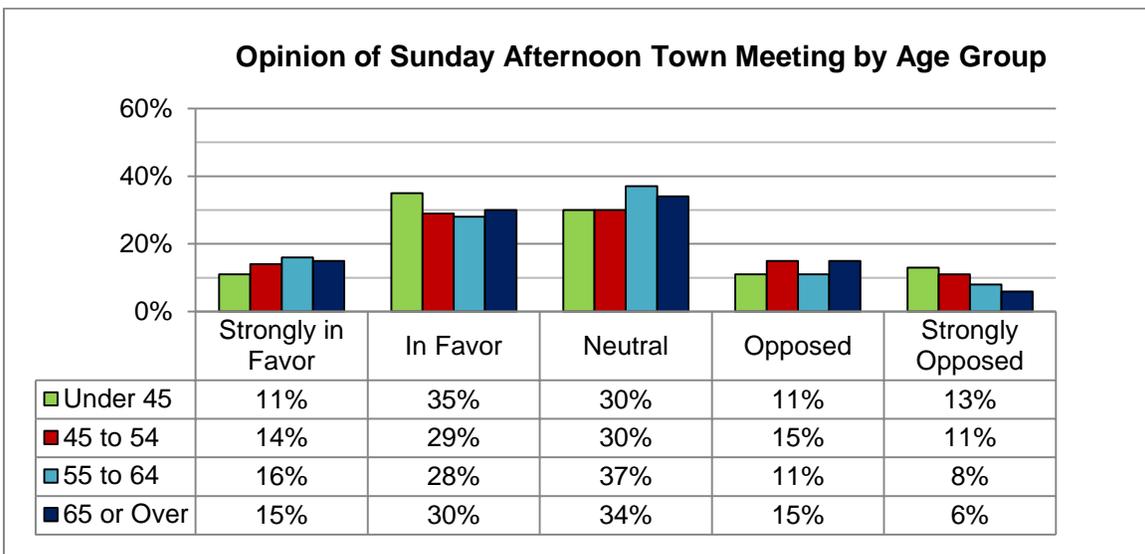
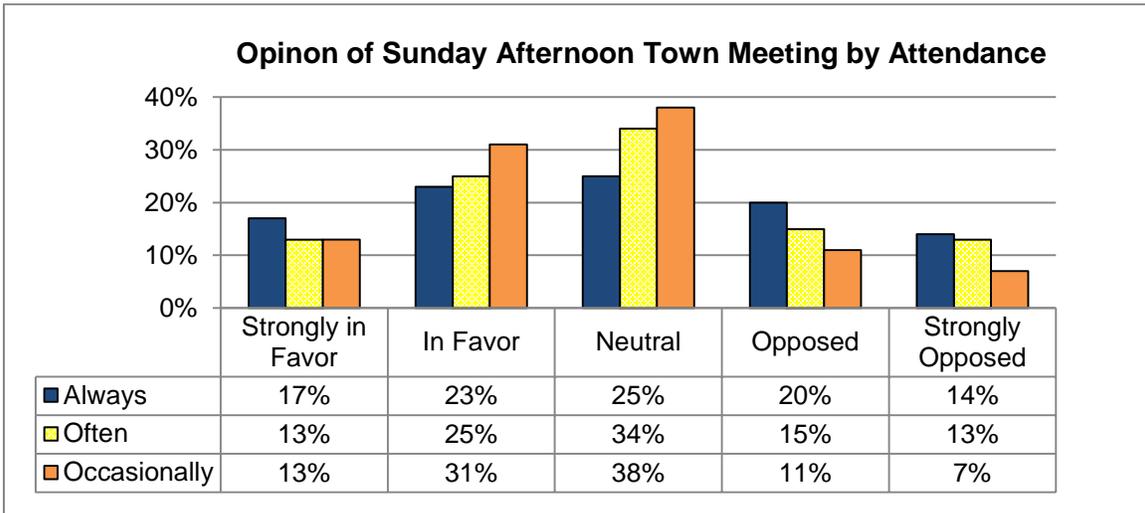


In addition, this priority question is disaggregated by age group.

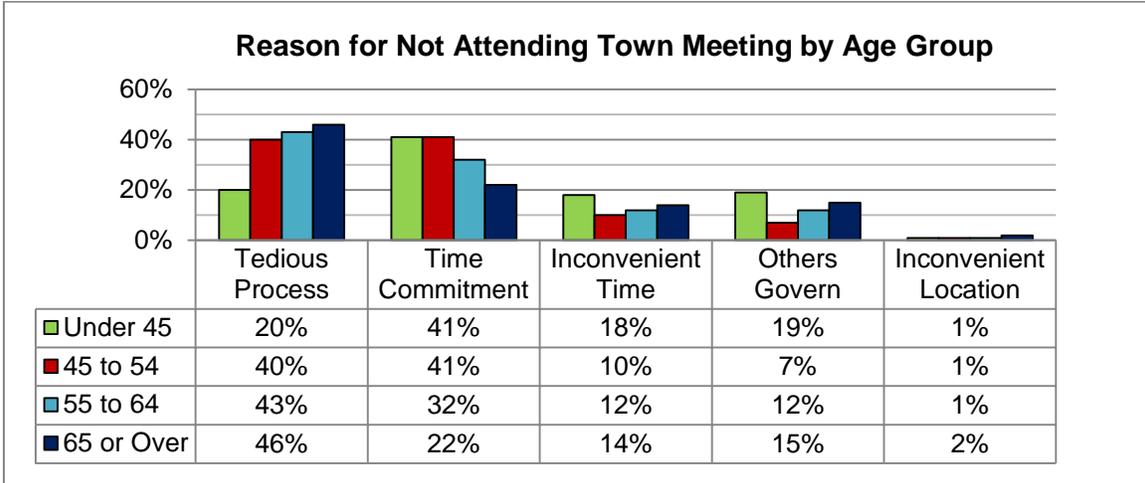


Next, what is the opinion of Sunday afternoon Town Meeting? The question was asked, “Last year, Town Meeting started on a Sunday afternoon instead of a Monday evening. How do you feel about this change?”

The following two charts show the response information by attendance at Town Meeting and age group.

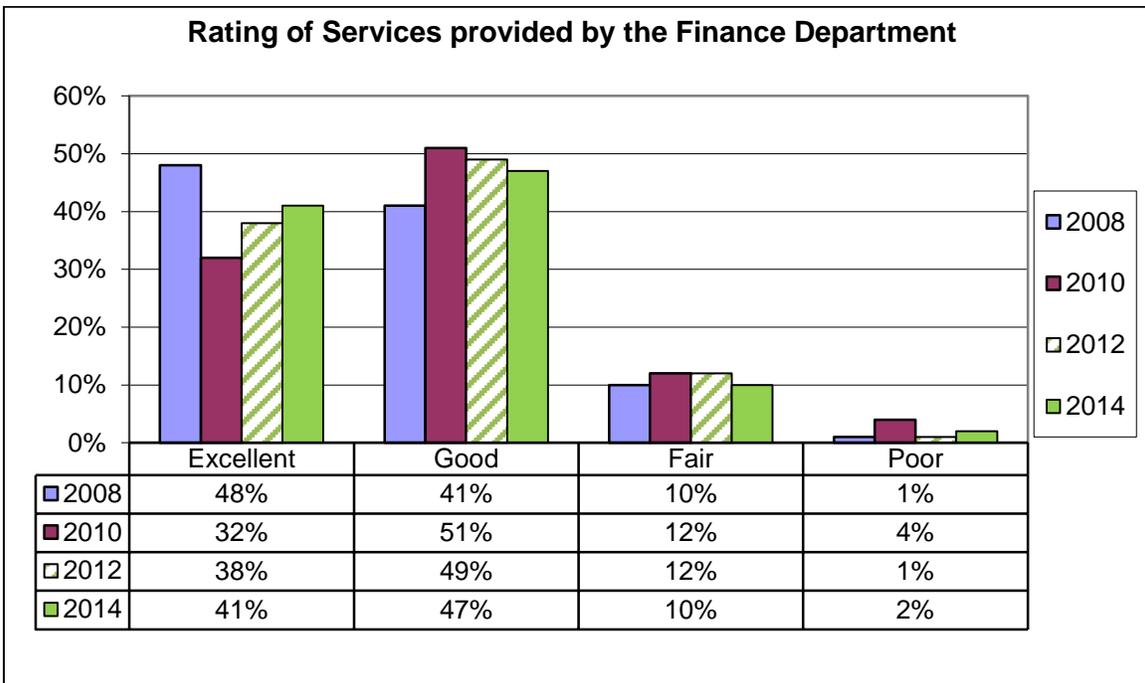


Finally, why don't people attend Town Meeting? The question was asked, "If you don't regularly attend Town Meeting, why not? Younger respondents feel the time commitment is the reason for non-attendance, whereas older respondents are more likely to feel that the process is too tedious and/or frustrating.

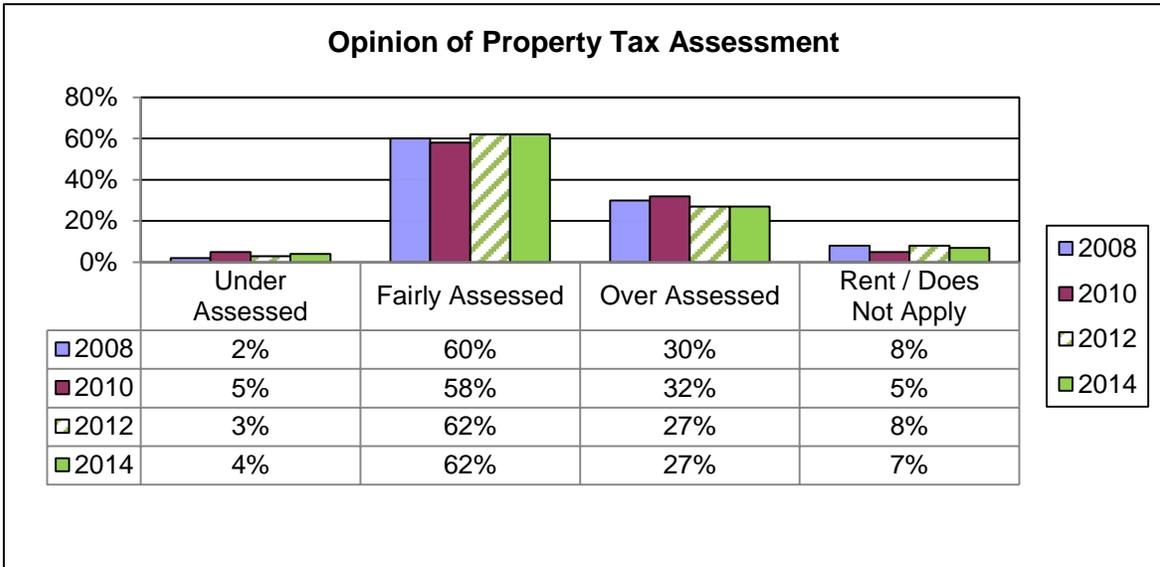


Finance Department

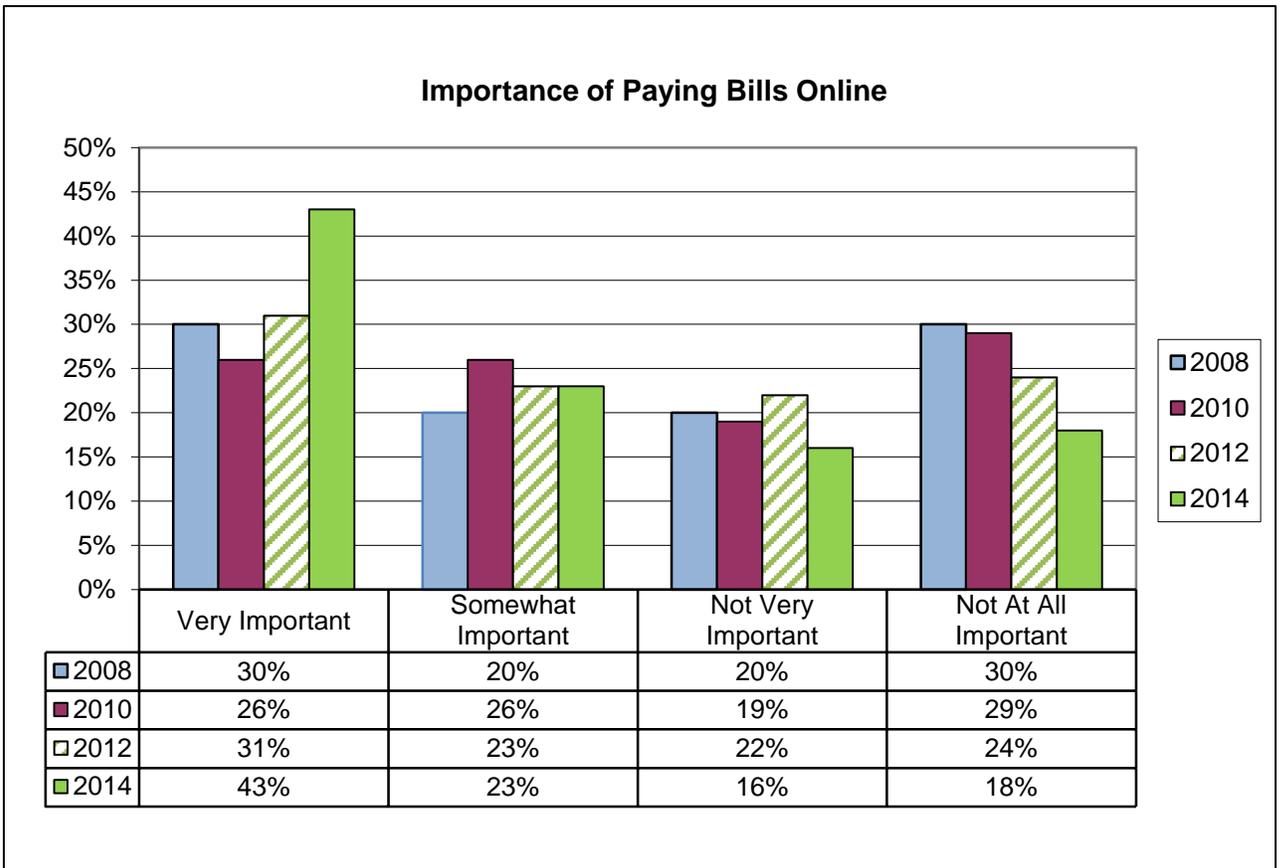
Three specific questions were asked about issues related to the Finance Department. For the last four polls, the following question has been asked: "How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Finance Department, which includes services of the Town Clerk, Town Collector, and Town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



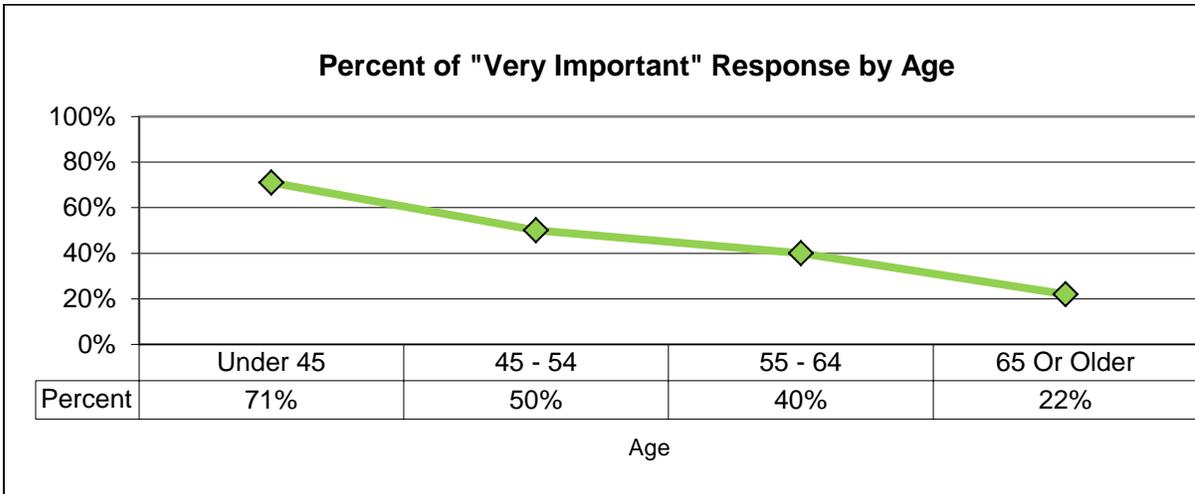
In addition, the following tax assessment question was asked: “In terms of the assessment of your property, do you believe that your property is over-assessed, under-assessed, or fairly assessed relative to others in Town?”



When asked, “How important is it for you to be able to pay bills online?”, an increasing plurality think that it is “very important”.

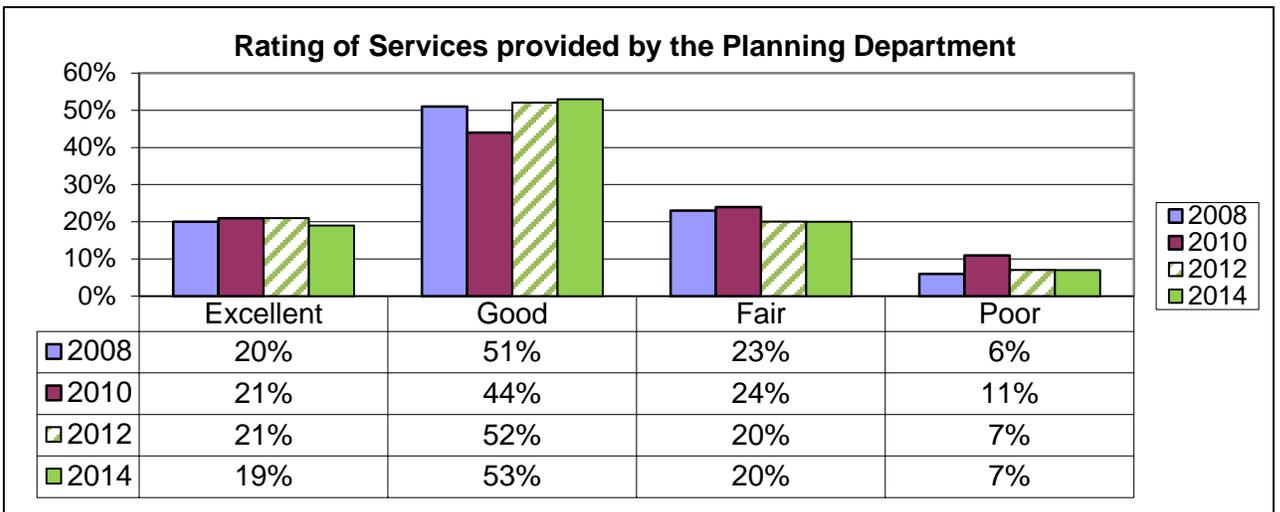


As could be expected, there is a generational preference in the 2014 survey in which the younger residents place a greater importance on paying bills online than older residents.

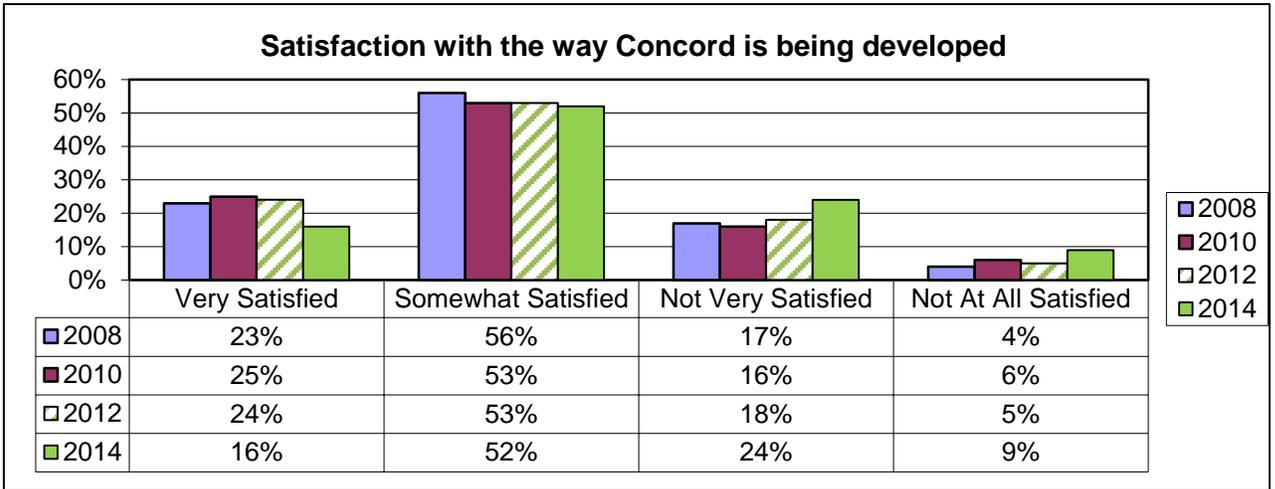


Department of Planning and Land Management

In the 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014 surveys, the question was asked: "How would you rate the overall quality of services that you receive from the Planning Department, which regulates matters related to buildings, zoning, health, and environmental protection."

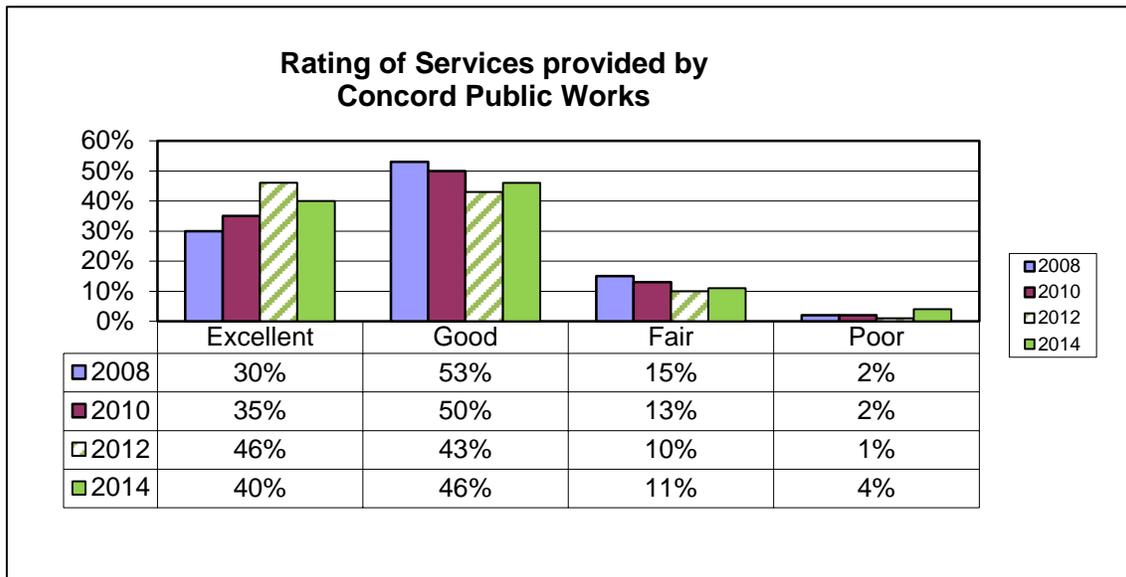


Satisfaction with the way Concord is developed is very important for the Town. Accordingly, the question was asked: "In terms of land-use and development, how would you rate your satisfaction with the way that Concord is being developed?"



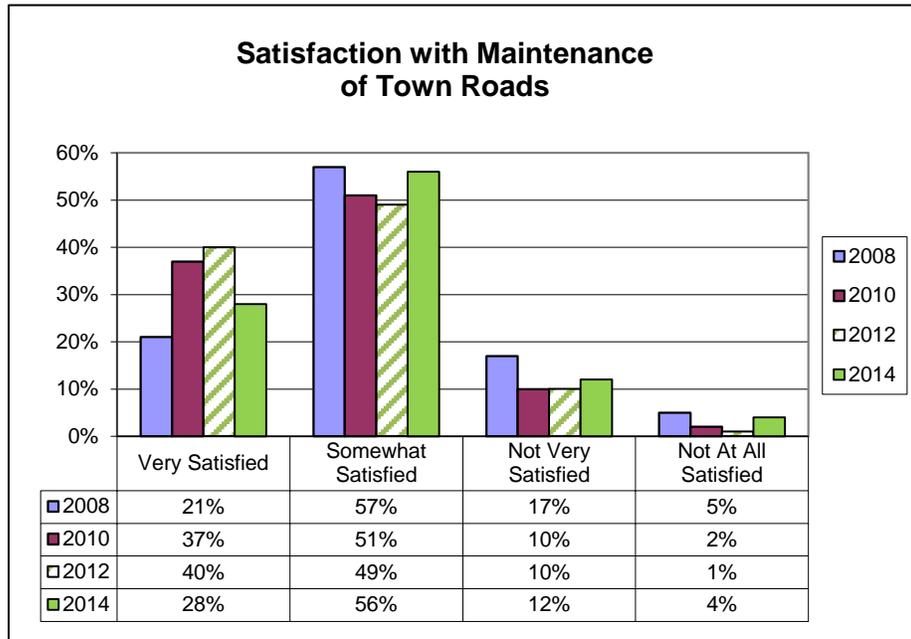
Public Works

With the surveys conducted in 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014, the question was asked: "How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by Concord Public Works?"

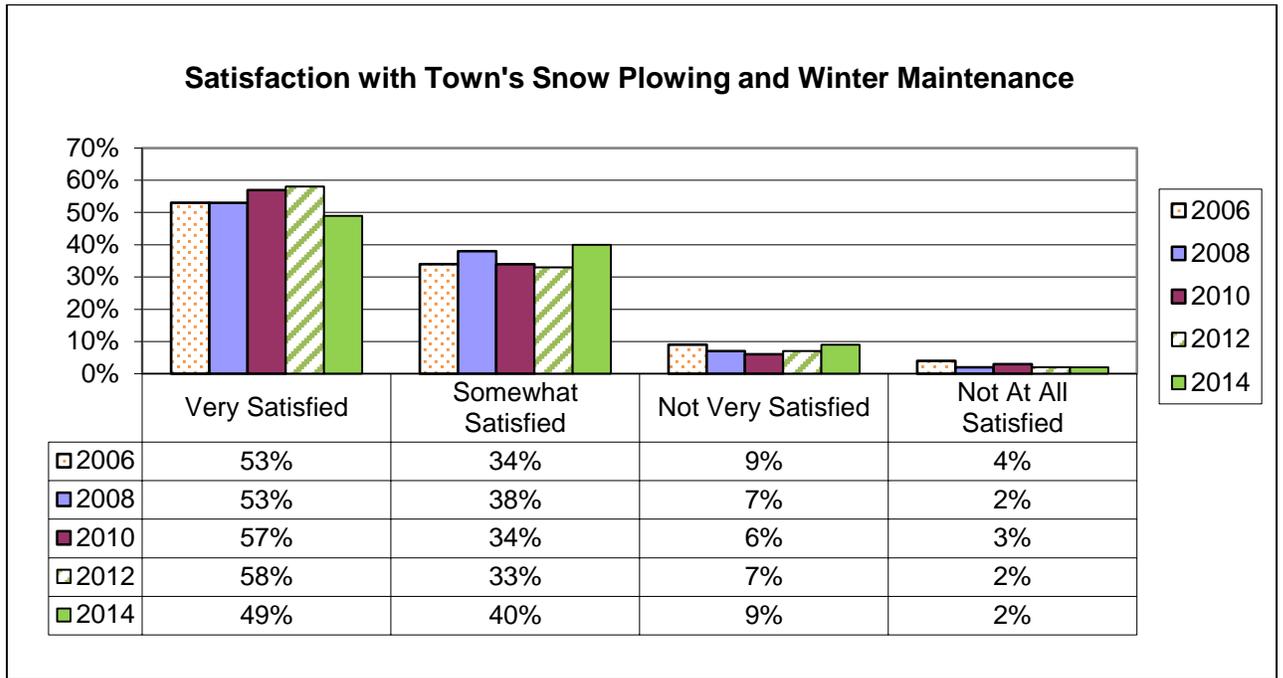


Approximately 5% of respondents stated that “roads” are their highest priority.

Although the number of residents who responded that they are “very satisfied” with the maintenance of Town roads has decreased in the last two years, respondents’ opinions are at average levels. When asked about satisfaction with the maintenance of Town roads, 84% percent are either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied”.

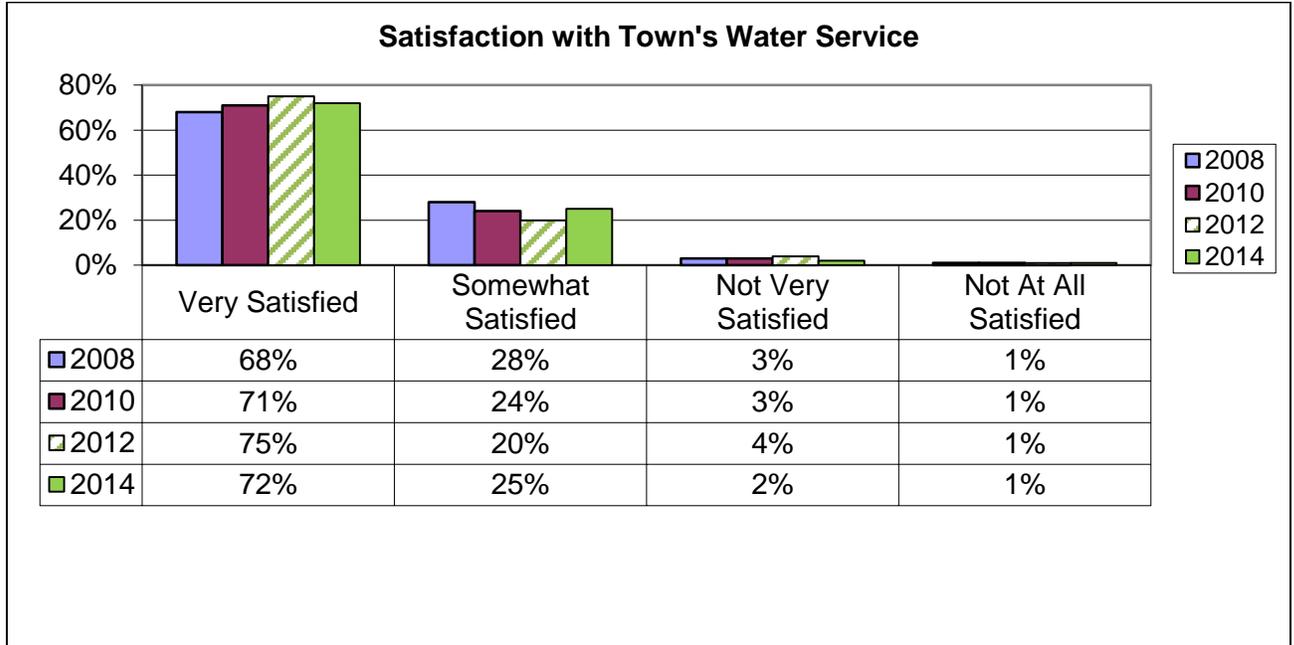


For the last five surveys, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate your satisfaction with the Town’s snow plowing and winter maintenance?”

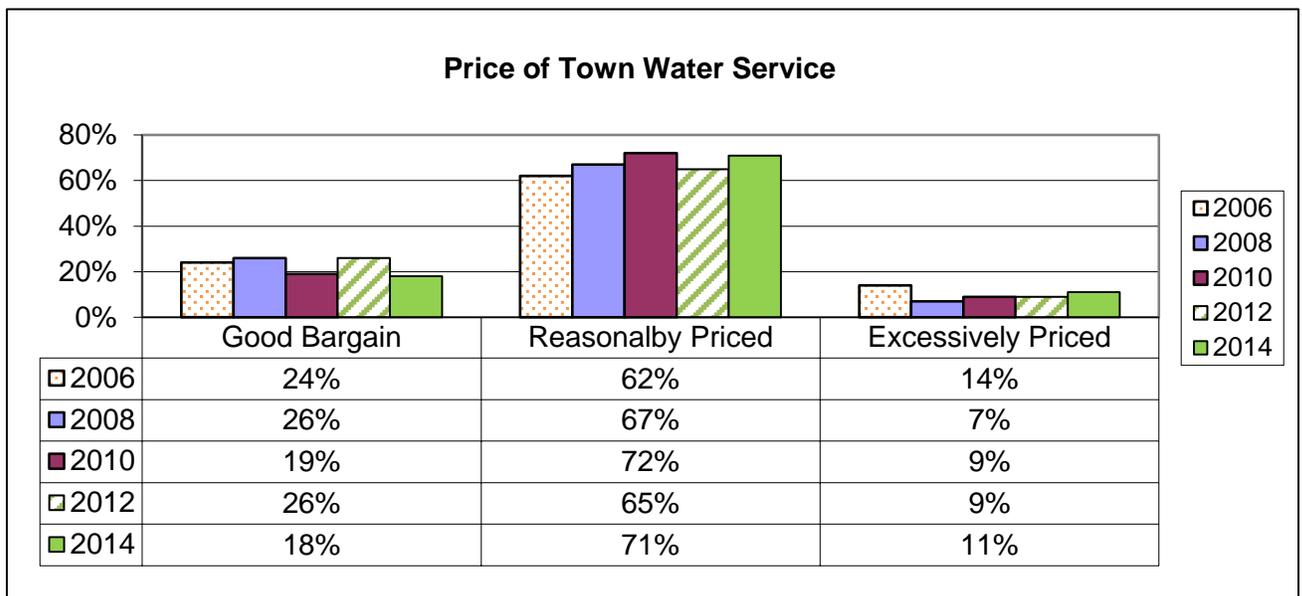


Water Division

Satisfaction with the Town’s water service remains strong. In all four surveys, 5% or less of residents responded “not very satisfied” or “not at all satisfied” when asked “How would you rate your satisfaction with the Town’s water service?”

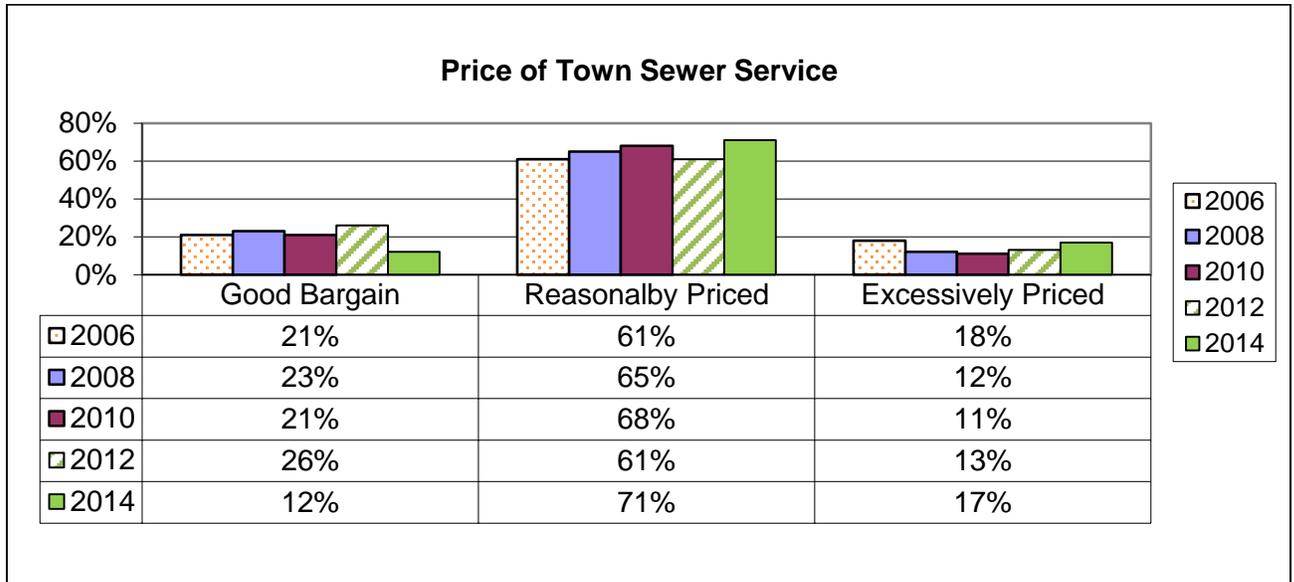


In addition, the five surveys included the question “With Town water service, please tell me whether you consider the price to be a Good Bargain, Reasonably Priced, or Excessively Priced?”



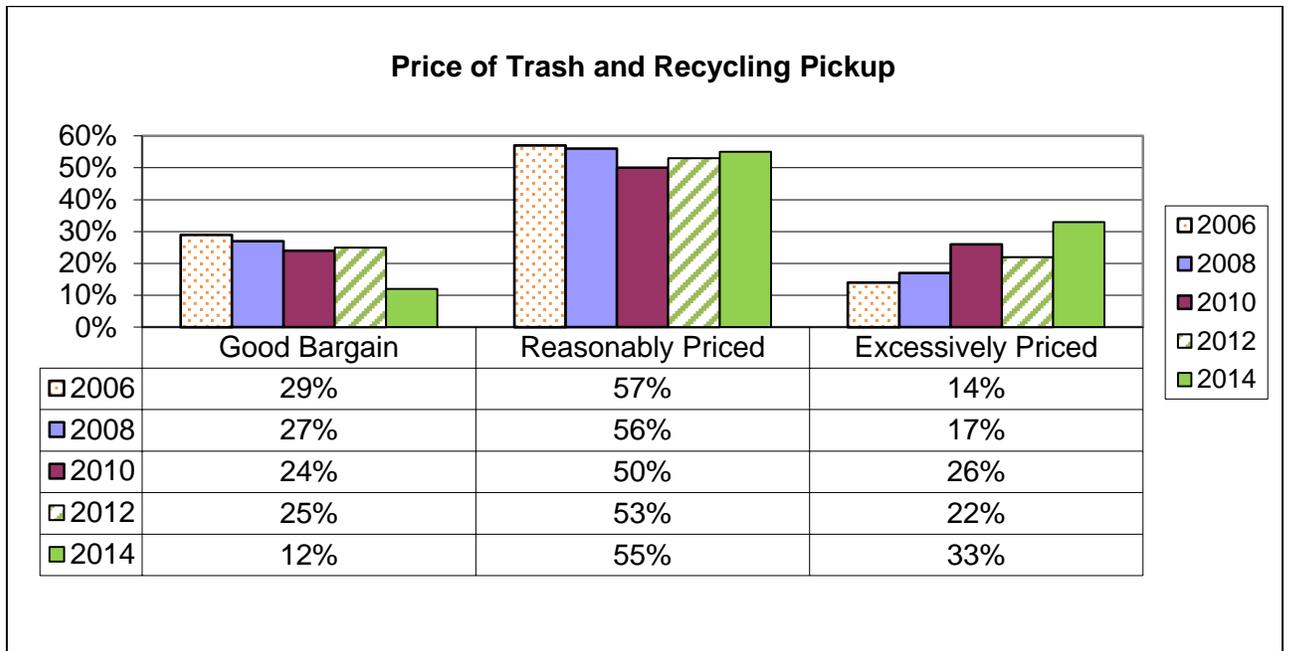
Sewer Division

Of the 530 of the 1,337 respondents who said they use the Town sewer service, eighty-three percent thought that the price was a “good bargain” or “reasonably priced”.



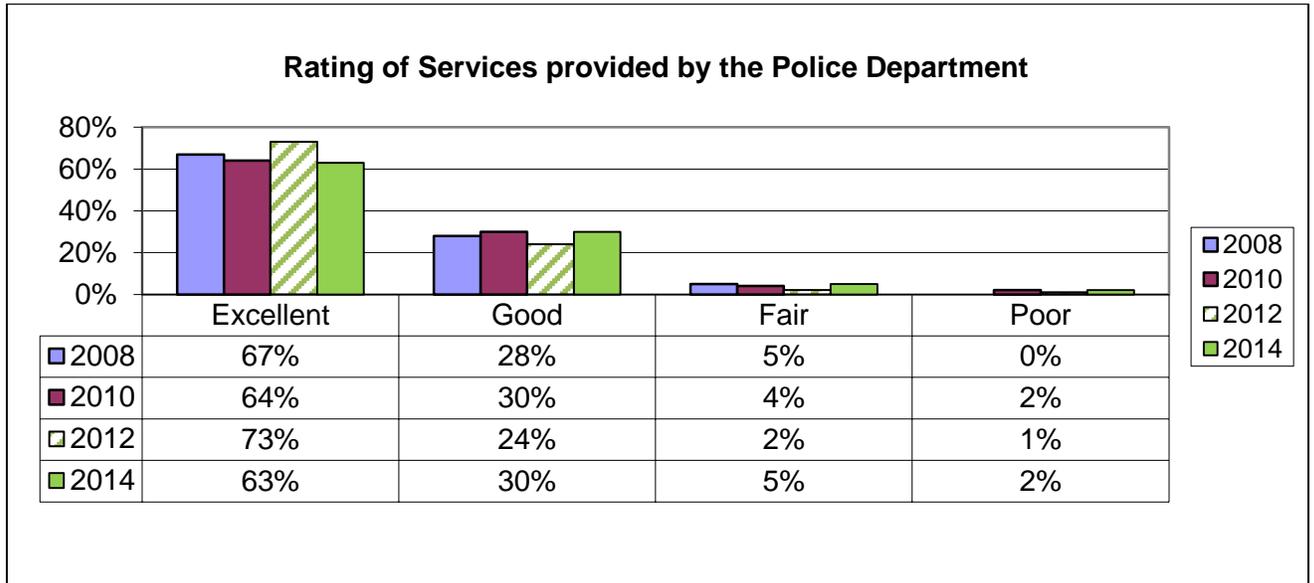
Solid Waste Division

Trends in the opinions about the price of trash and recycling collection are somewhat clearer. From 2006 to 2014, those who responded that the service is “excessively priced” have increased from 14% to 33%. Nevertheless, in 2014, two-thirds of respondents thinks that the service is a “good bargain” or “reasonably priced”.



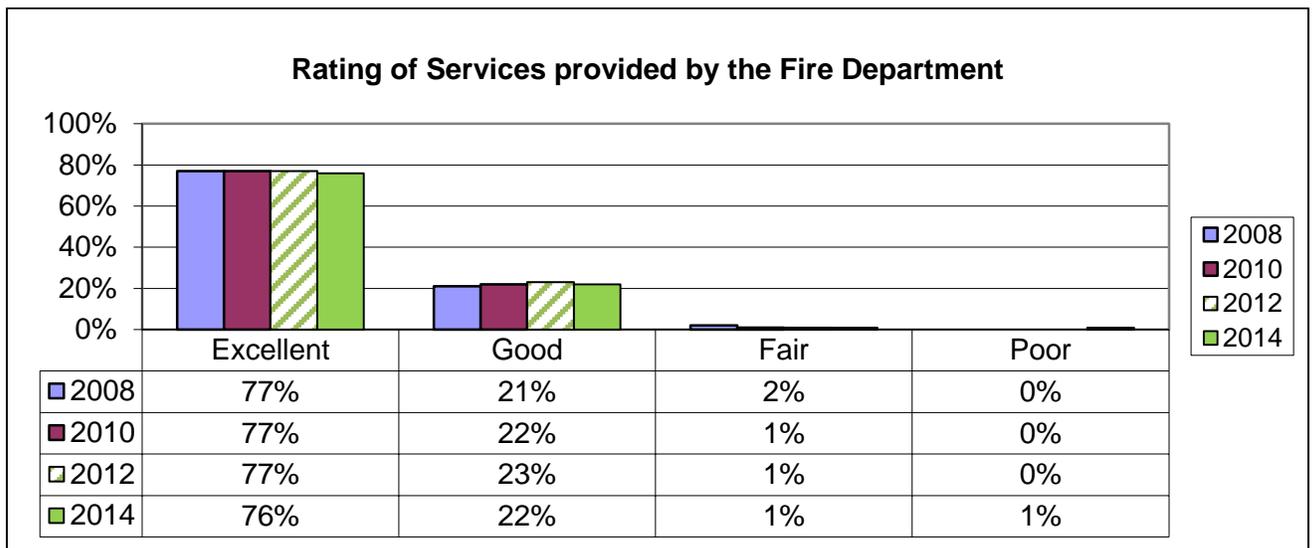
Police Department

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 Emergency Medical and 911 Dispatching?”



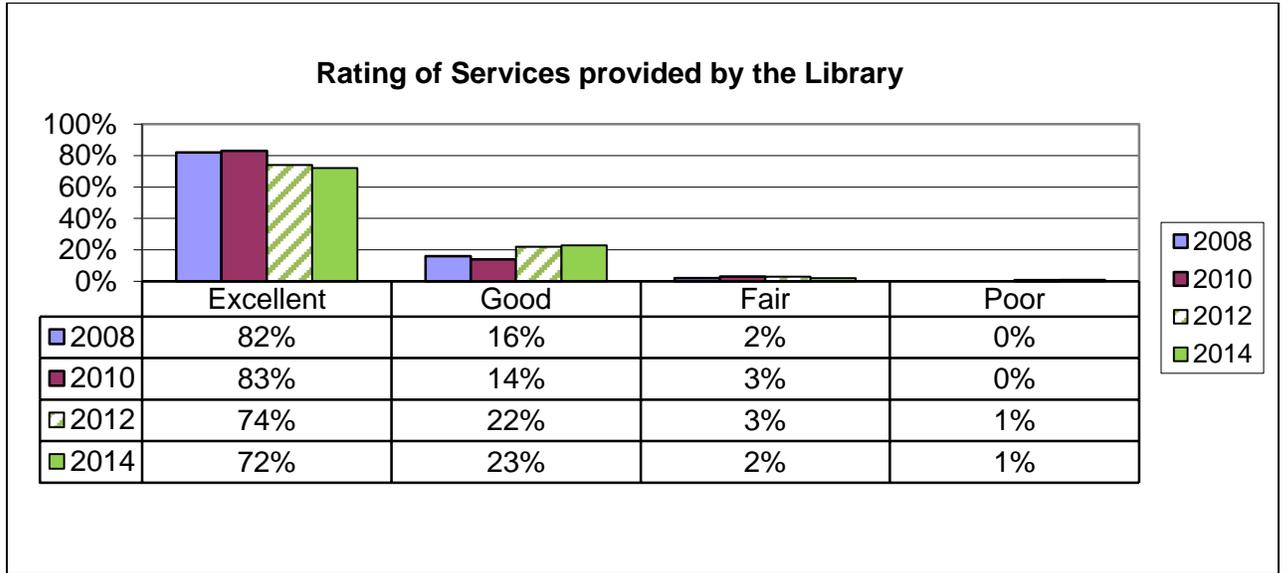
Fire Department

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?”

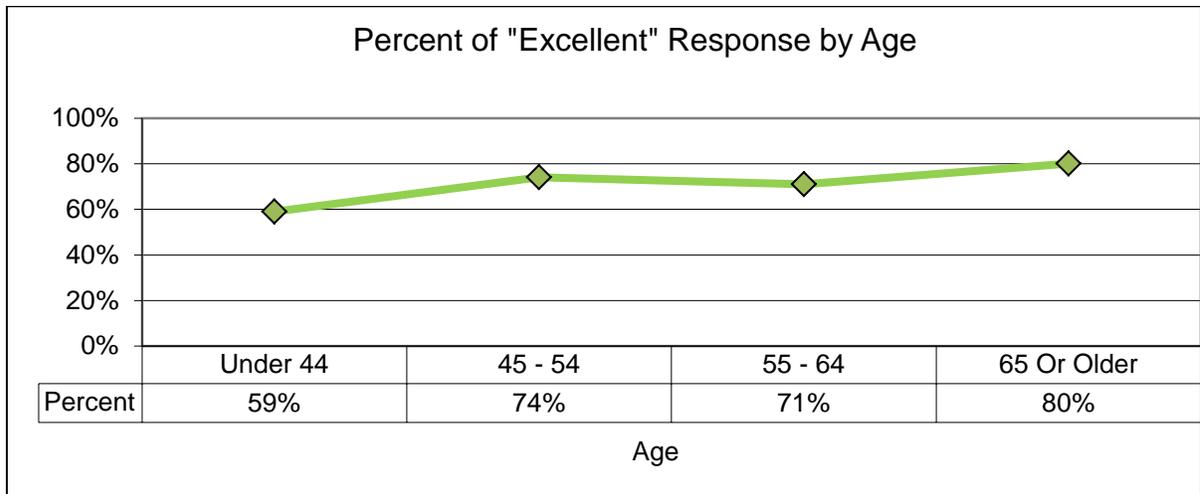


Library

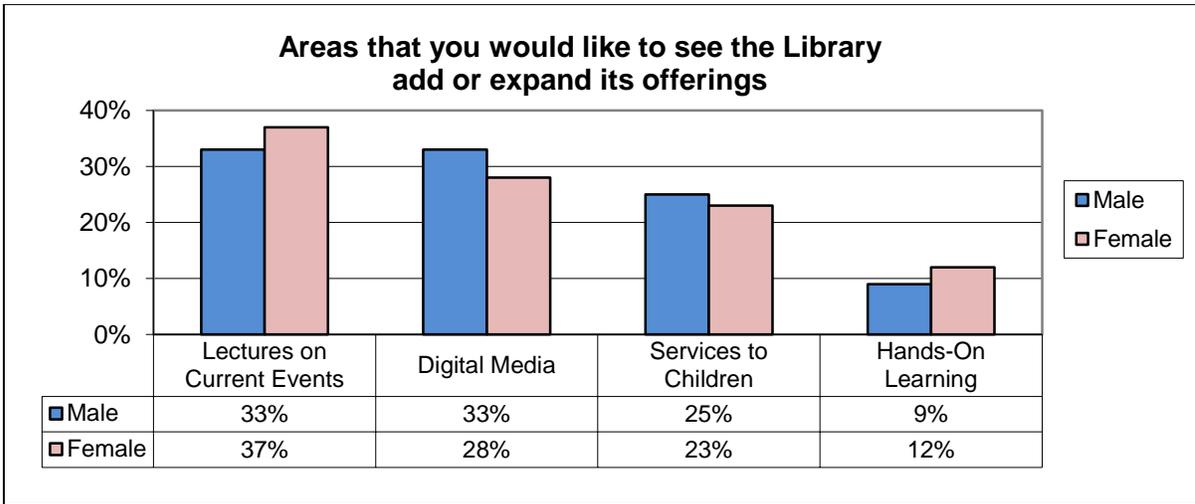
For the last four polls, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by Concord Public Libraries?” In all surveys, there is a strong opinion that the quality is “excellent” or “good”.



The graph below presents information on the percentage of each age group that responded “excellent” to the quality question in the 2014 survey. There is a slight trend which suggests that older residents perceive the Library services to be of better quality.

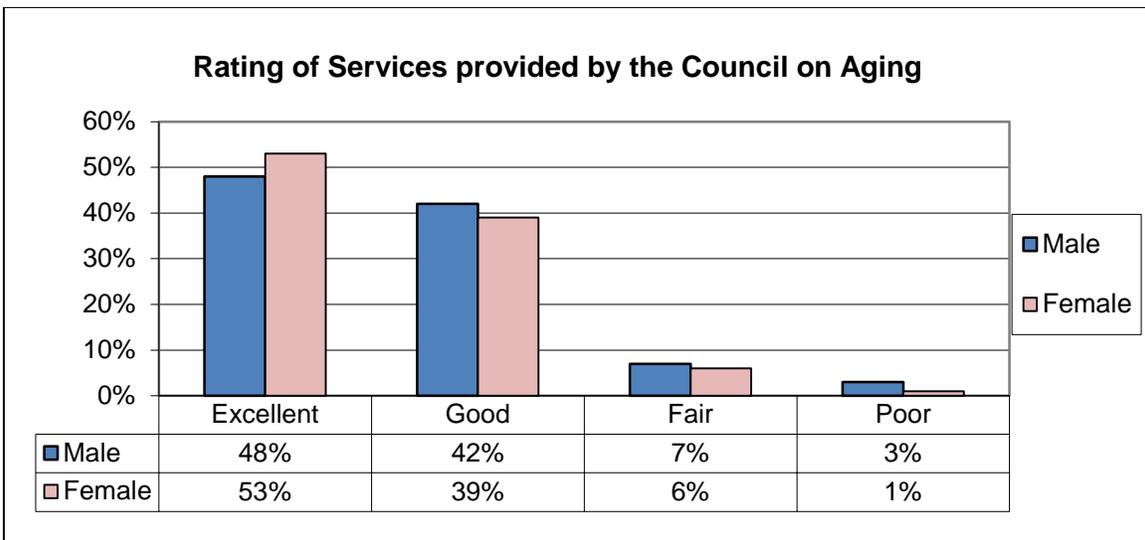


The question was asked: “In which of the following areas would you like to see the Library add or expand its offerings?” Men would like “lectures on current events” and “digital media” to be expanded while women are in favor of “lectures on current events”.



Council on Aging

In the 2014 survey, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Council on Aging?” The results below are the satisfaction percentages shown by gender.

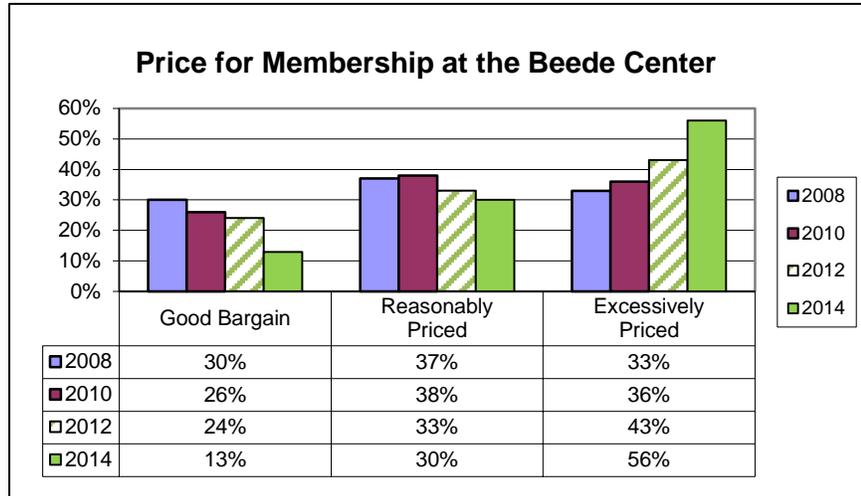


Beede Center

For the Beede Swim and Fitness Center, the following question was asked: “Please tell me whether you consider the price to be a Good Bargain, Reasonably Priced, or Excessively Priced?” There is a trend from 2008 to 2014 which shows that respondents feel that the Beede Center is becoming more expensive a place to be a member.

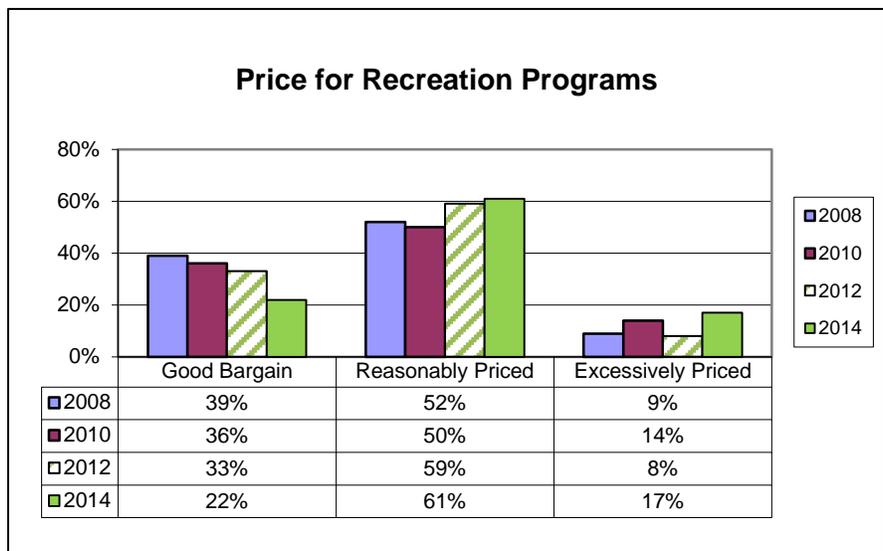
Furthermore, when the question was asked to just families with children, 3% responded “good bargain”, 28%

“reasonably priced”, and “69% “excessively priced”. Alternatively, residents with no children responded in the following way: 23% “good bargain”, 33% “reasonably priced”, and 45% “excessively priced”. Out of 1,337 residents polled, 713 residents expressed an opinion.



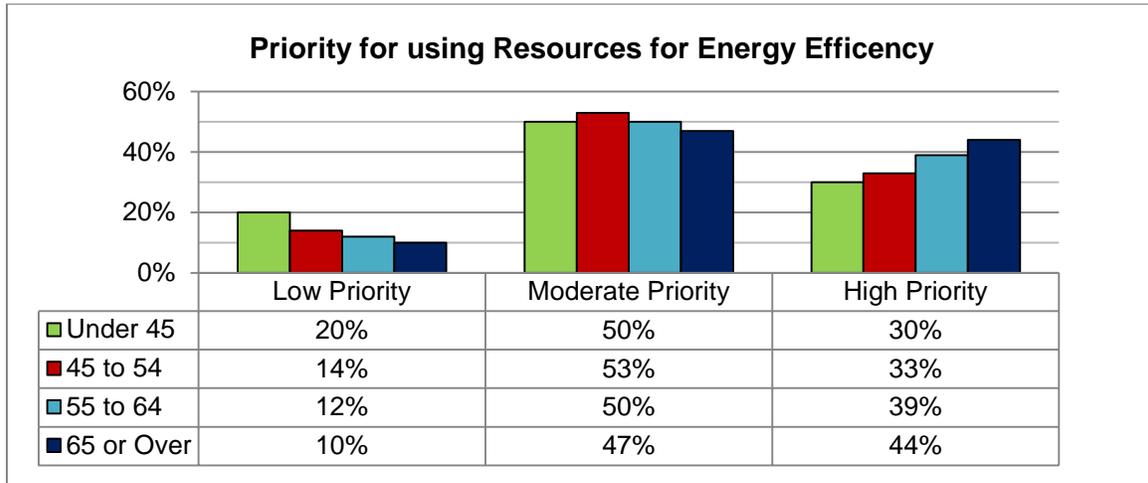
Recreation Programs

Of the 504 respondents (out of 1,337 surveyed) who expressed an opinion on the question regarding the price of Recreation Programs (like after school programs and summer camp), 83% think these programs are a “good bargain” or “reasonably priced”. If the results are limited to just those households with children, 19% think that these programs are “good bargain”, 63% that they are “reasonably priced”, and 18% that they are “excessively priced”.



Energy Efficiency

Finally, the question was asked, “For the Town Government, how much of a priority for you is it that the Town uses its financial resources to make its buildings and vehicles more energy efficient?”



In aggregate, 37% of respondents feel that it is a high priority, 50% a moderate priority, and 13% a low priority.