CITY OF BELLINGHAM
RESIDENTIAL SURVEY REPORT
CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS RESEARCH

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Prepared for

The City of Bellingham

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Overview

The 2020 City of Bellingham Residential Survey (Survey) and the corresponding survey of Peer Cities (National Study) is a collaboration between the City of Bellingham and the Center for Economic and Business Research (The Center) to collect information regarding City residents' views about issues facing the community.

This Survey is modeled after similar surveys administered by the City of Bellingham. Results from previous surveys (2008, 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2018) are used in a historical analysis of most questions. Each question is also analyzed to determine whether any significant response differences exist based on demographic subgroups.

About the Authors

The Center for Economic and Business Research is an outreach center at Western Washington University located within the College of Business and Economics. In addition to publishing the Puget Sound Economic Forecaster, the Center connects the resources found throughout the University to assist for-profit, non-profit, government agencies, quasi-government entities, and tribal communities in gathering and analyzing data to respond to specific questions. We use a collaborative approach to help inform our clients so that they are better able to hold policy discussions and craft decisions.

The Center employs students, staff, and faculty from across the University as well as outside resources to meet the individual needs of those we work with. Our work is based on academic approaches and rigor that not only provide a neutral analytical perspective but also provide applied learning opportunities. We focus on developing collaborative relationships with our clients and not simply delivering an end product.

The approaches we utilize are insightful, useful, and are all a part of the debate surrounding the topics we explore; however, none are fail-safe. Data, by nature, is challenged by how it is collected and how it is leveraged with other data sources. Following only one approach without deviation is ill-advised. We provide a variety of insights within our work – not only on the topic at hand but also on the resources (data) that inform that topic.

We are always seeking opportunities to bring the strengths of Western Washington University to fruition within our region. If you are looking for analysis work or have comments on this report, we encourage you to contact us at 360-650-3909 or by email at cebr@wwu.edu.

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The Center for Economic and Business Research is directed by Hart Hodges, Ph.D. and James McCafferty.

About the Survey

The Center for Economic and Business Research, located within the College of Business and Economics at Western Washington University, conducted the research and analysis services for this survey.

The purpose of this study is to seek feedback from Bellingham residents about their experience as citizens of the city of Bellingham. In addition to the Bellingham survey, this year a few questions were also posed to a national sample that included residents from five Peer Cities as identified by the The Center's "Peer Cities: 2020 Update" report – Flagstaff, AZ; Santa Cruz, CA; Fort Collins, CO; Asheville, NC; and Burlington, VT. A combination of multiple choice, rank order, and open-ended questions aim to gather information from respondents about their demographic details, quality of life, satisfaction with City services, opinions on budget priorities, views on challenges facing the community, and ideas for the future. The Survey is designed in reference to previous residential surveys conducted by the City of Bellingham. Questions aim to gather information surrounding and related to each of the nine Legacies and Strategic Commitments adopted by the Bellingham City Council, including:

- Clean, safe drinking water
- Healthy environment
- Vibrant sustainable economy
- Sense of place
- Safe and prepared community
- Mobility and connectivity options
- Access to quality of life amenities
- Quality, responsive City services
- Equity and social justice

The Center has worked with the City to make question adjustments to previous surveys that are expected to enhance readability, decrease response bias, and reflect the City's current priorities. This report includes historical analysis of most questions based on results from the previous surveys – it is noted when question or response wording differs from year to year.

Survey Methodology

Surveys were taken through an online survey form or by phone (Bellingham survey only) with a Western Washington University researcher. The survey was provided in both English and Spanish; however, no respondents opted to take the survey in Spanish. The Center sent out a letter and reminder postcard to 8,750 randomly selected Bellingham residences, including a description of the Survey purpose, as well as instructions for both phone and online response options. 7,000 addresses were selected randomly by Census Tract, with the sample size from each being primarily based on population size and with slight weighting based on income to gather more responses from lower-income areas, which often have lower response rates to surveys. Similarly, 1,750 of these addresses were a random sample of only renters in the hopes of gathering more responses.

The Bellingham survey was left open from late September to early November and the national survey ran from late October to early November. A total of 1,594 responses were obtained from Bellingham residents and 1,206 responses were received from residents of Peer Cities. With a 95 percent confidence level, the Bellingham survey has a +/- 2 percent margin of error and the Peer Cities survey has a +/- 3 percent margin of error. Respondents were able to skip questions at their discretion, so the total number of responses varies between questions.

The US Census Bureau estimates the 2019 population of Bellingham to be 92,314 based on an estimated 13.7% net migration from the 2010 census.

Executive Summary

The results from the 2020 City of Bellingham Residential Survey and National Study provide important insights about residents' opinions regarding City services and community priorities. While the quality of life in Bellingham is very high, there are notable trends regarding challenges facing the community and the City. We note the following key points and overall trends in reviewing the research.

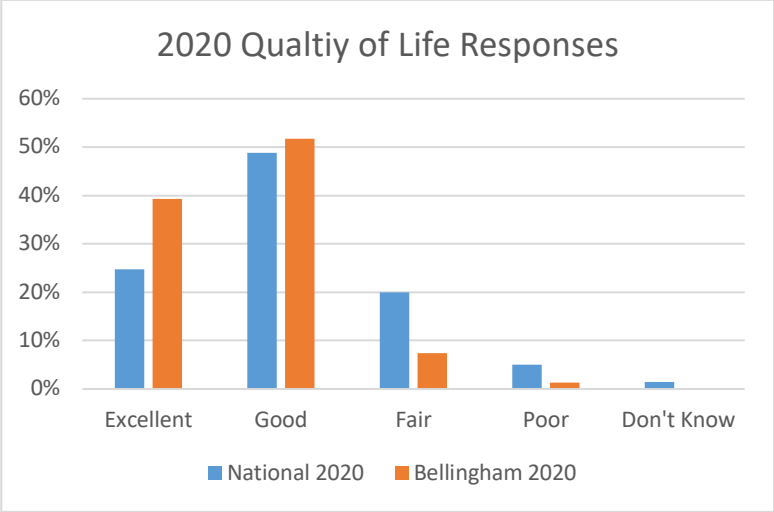
Respondent Demographics

Respondent demographics from both the Bellingham and Peer City respondents are summarized here:

Demographics	Bellingham Census Demographics	Bellingham Survey	Peer City Survey
Residence Type	45% Homeowners	65% Homeowners | 35% Renters	52% Homeowners | 48% Renters
Gender	50.6% Female	53% Female | 42% Male	62% Female | 37% Male
Geography	Bellingham	All Bellingham Census Tracts	Peer Cities
Length of Residency	n/a	60% more than 10 years	47% more than 10 years
Age	14% over 65 | 15% under 18	34% over 65 | 28% under 40	12% over 65 | 53% under 40
Income	$50,844 Median	59% over $50,000	45% over $50,000
Number of Respondents	35,694 Households	1,594	1,206
Timeline	Variable	September 28 – November 11	October 20 – November 4

Life in Bellingham

Respondents are **extremely positive about the overall quality of life in Bellingham**. Approximately 91 percent of respondents rated our city's quality of life positively (either *Excellent* or *Good*), while approximately 7 percent give a rating of *Fair*. Only 1 percent of respondents rated the quality of life in Bellingham as *Poor*.



In comparison, the national study showed a less positive perception of quality of life in Peer Cities. Only 74 percent of these respondents rated their city's quality of life positively, while 20 percent said the quality of life was *Fair* and 5 percent said their city's quality of life is *Poor*.

This represents a very positive conclusion that should be taken into account when considering the following results of the survey – **even though there are always ways for Bellingham to improve and grow, residents clearly appreciate and value it as a place to live**. Additionally, the thought and time that many respondents put into their open-end responses demonstrate that residents of Bellingham truly care about their city's future.

Summary of Notable Trends

Homelessness

The issue of homelessness is heavily present throughout survey responses. **Respondents rank *Homelessness* as the most important challenge facing Bellingham**. Additionally, hundreds of responses to open-end questions discuss the challenge of homelessness in Bellingham in depth. A few notable trends from these results include:

- **57 percent of respondents list that *Homelessness* is either the #1 or #2 top challenge facing Bellingham.** This is down from 61 percent in the 2018 study.
- Those who responded that the City's efforts to prevent crime and protect the community were either *Fair* or *Poor* elaborate that "**Homelessness" contributed significantly to that rating**. Many of these responses connect homelessness to other community concerns, including but not limited to topics such as:
    - Property crimes
    - Drug abuse
    - Downtown safety
    - Park/trail safety
    - Mental heath
    - Social services
    - Loitering
- When asked what positive changes respondents would make as a City leader, **homelessness is the second most mentioned topic**. People also offer their ideas for solutions related to homelessness, including but not limited to topics such as:
    - Affordability
    - Improved public healthcare, including mental health
    - Job creation
    - Community involvement, especially with social issues and policies

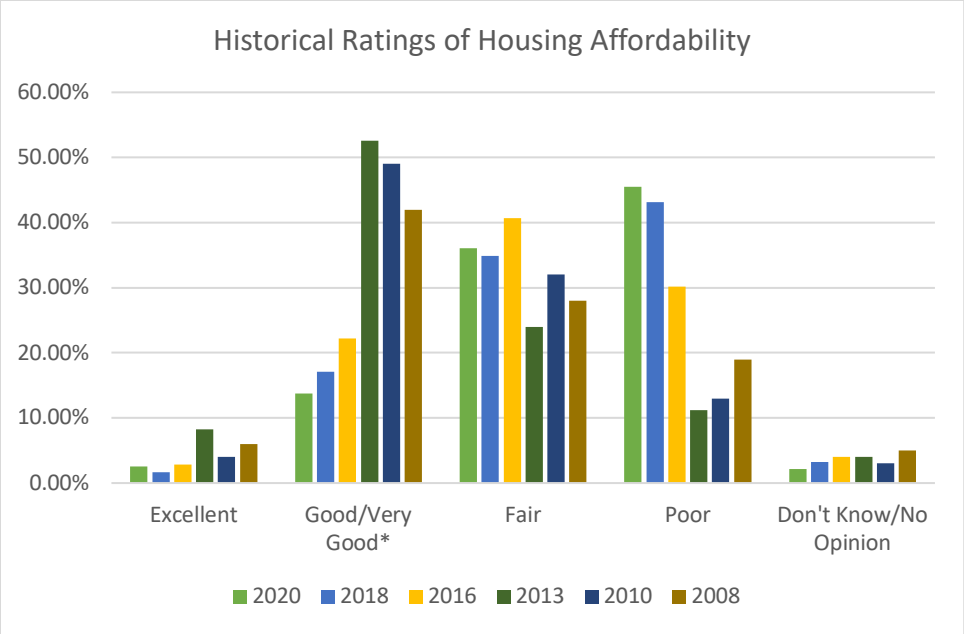
Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is rated as the **second most important challenge facing Bellingham** – 54 percent of respondents listed it as either the #1 or #2 most important challenge facing our city. This is up from 52 percent in 2018.

The current **ratings of housing affordability have dropped significantly since 2013**.

- Positive housing affordability ratings (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very Good**) have decreased to 16 percent (2020) from 19 percent (2018), 25 percent (2016), and 61 percent (2013) in prior years.
- Negative housing affordability ratings (*Fair* or *Poor*) have increased to 82 percent (2020), from 78 percent (2018), 71 percent (2016), and 35 percent (2013).

The decline in housing affordability is reflected throughout the state. In Washington State, median sales price rose to $433,400 in the Second Quarter of 2020, a 5.6 percent increase from a year before. In Whatcom County, median sales price sits at $428,900, a 5.2 percent increase from the previous year according to the Runstad Center for Real Estate Studies at the University of Washington.



*It should be noted that this year's survey only has four rating options: *Excellent, Good, Fair,* and *Poor*. Surveys prior to 2016 had five options: *Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair,* and *Poor*. Historical analysis combines previous ratings of *Very good* and *Good* into one category. Explanations of historical analysis observe the trends in the total of all positive responses (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**), and the total of all negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*).

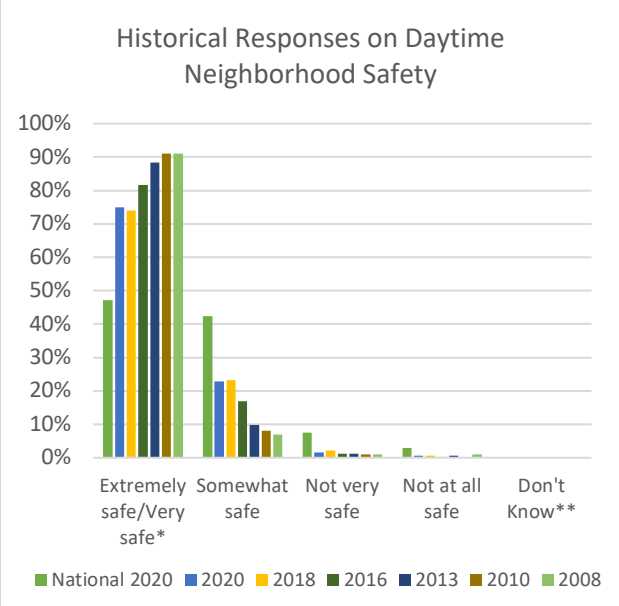
Neighborhood Safety

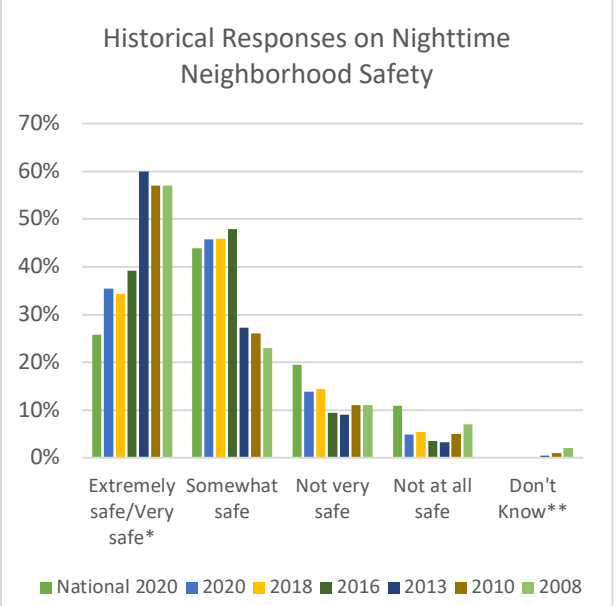
Neighborhood Safety is rated as the **fifth most important challenge facing Bellingham and the Peer Cities** – 14 percent of Bellingham respondents listed it as either the #1 or #2 most important challenge facing our city compared to 20 percent of the national sample. Among Bellingham respondents, the *Neighborhood Safety* dropped from the third most important challenge in 2018 to the fifth in 2020, with a 6-percentage point drop in those ranking it #1 or #2 – the result of *Economic Development* maintaining its rank as the fourth most important challenge and the inclusion of *Equity and Social Justice* (third most important) in this survey.

For Bellingham, 2020 respondents had similar feelings of safety to 2018 respondents. **National respondents, on the other hand, were far more likely to feel unsafe** walking alone in their neighborhood at night or during the day when compared to Bellingham respondents.

Notable **demographic differences** in responses concerning nighttime neighborhood safety include:

- Among Bellingham respondents, women feel less safe than men when walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. Only 26 percent of women feel *Extremely safe* walking alone in their neighborhoods at night compared to 44 percent of men.
- Among national respondents, women feel less safe than men when walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. Only 17 percent of women feel *Extremely safe* walking alone in their neighborhoods at night compared to 41 percent of men.





* This year the survey only offered four levels of safety as options: *Extremely safe, Somewhat safe, Not very safe,* and *Not at all safe*. Surveys prior to 2016 included a fifth option of *Very safe*, which has been included with the *Extremely safe* section in our historical analysis figures.

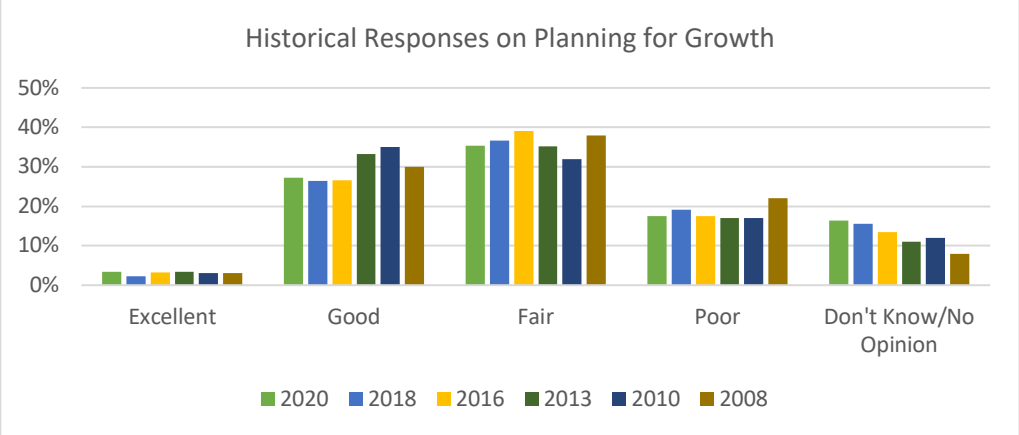
** The 2013, 2010 and 2008 Survey also offered a *Don't Know* option.

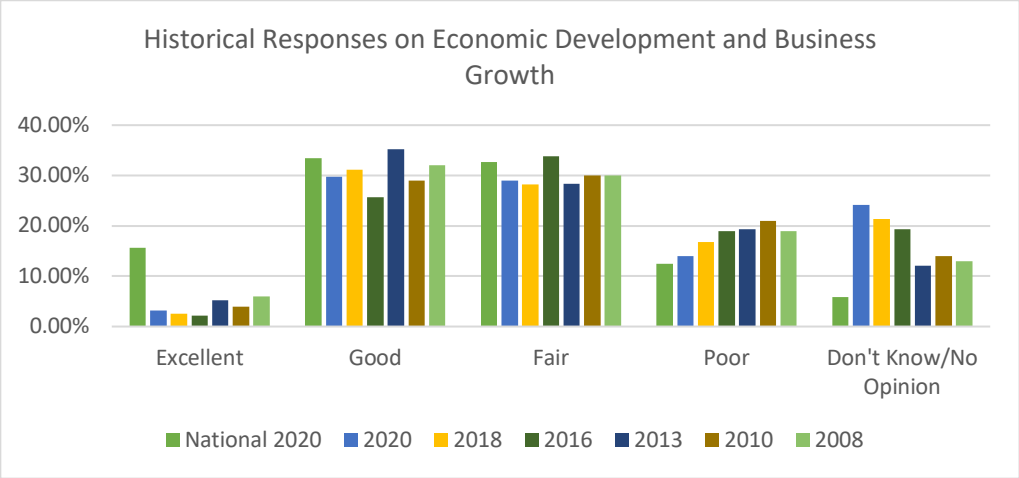
Growth and Economic Development

Economic development is notably rated as the **fourth most important challenge facing Bellingham** – 14 percent of respondents listed it as either the #1 or #2 challenge facing our city, down from 19 percent in 2018. The national sample ranked economic development third, with 19 percent ranking it #1 or #2.

Historically, there has been a negative trend concerning respondents' views of the job the City is doing to plan for future growth overall. 2020 marks an **increase to 2016 levels of approval regarding the City's efforts planning for growth**. This survey, 30 percent of respondents rate the City's efforts planning for growth as *Excellent* (3 percent), or *Good* (27 percent), up from the 29 percent positive rate in 2018, similar to the 30 percent positive response rate in 2016, and down from 36 percent in 2013, 38 percent in 2010, and 33 percent in 2008.

Additionally, many Bellingham respondents think there is **room to grow when it comes to the City's efforts encouraging economic development and business growth**. Just over 3 percent rate the City's efforts in this area as *Excellent*, 30 percent rate *Good,* 29 percent rate *Fair*, and 14 percent believe the City's efforts are *Poor*. 24 percent answered *Don't Know/No Opinion* (a sharp increase from previous years). Among national respondents, rates of *Don't Know/No opinion* were far lower (6 percent) and those who did have an opinion generally viewed their city's efforts more positively than the Bellingham respondents.





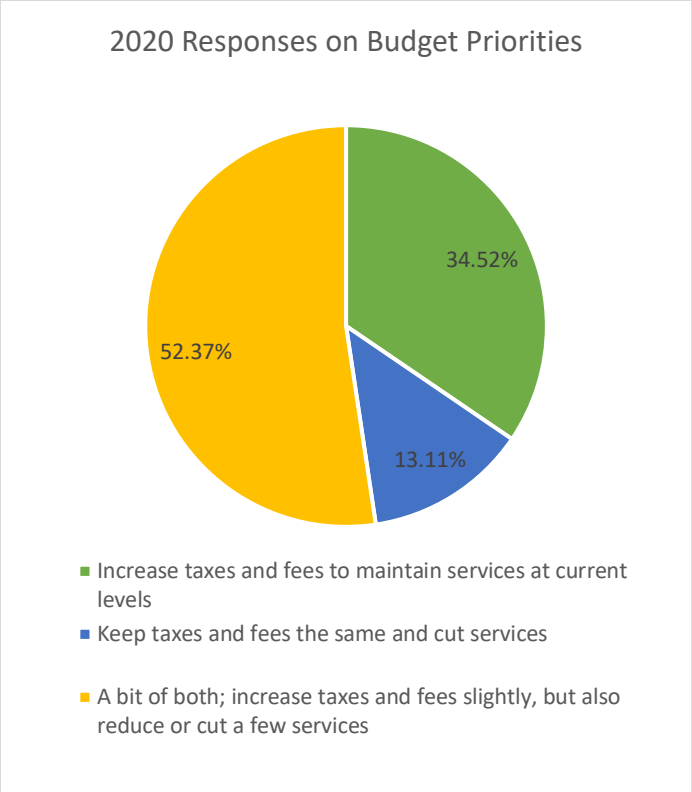
Budget Preferences

A common trend in responses to questions about the City budget is that **respondents would rather increase taxes and fees than cut services**.

Concerning overall budget priorities, more than half (52 percent) of respondents would prefer a *combination* of increasing taxes/fees and reducing services. 34 percent would prefer to *increase taxes/fees* and keep services at current levels, and 13 percent would prefer to *reduce services* and keep taxes/fees the same.

In a following question, respondents rank services (that rely on taxpayer dollars) based on budget priority. It is worth noting that *Preventing Crime* was frequently cited as a #1 priority as well as a #11 (lowest) priority.

- **High priority services** include *Emergency Response Services* (30 percent rated #1), *Environmental Protection* (22 percent rated #1), and *Crime Prevention* (21 percent rated #1).
- **Low priority services** include *Culture and arts experiences* (22 percent rated last), *Recreational programs* (18 percent rated last), *Pedestrian/bicyclist safety* (14 percent rated last), and *Crime Prevention* (13 percent rated last).

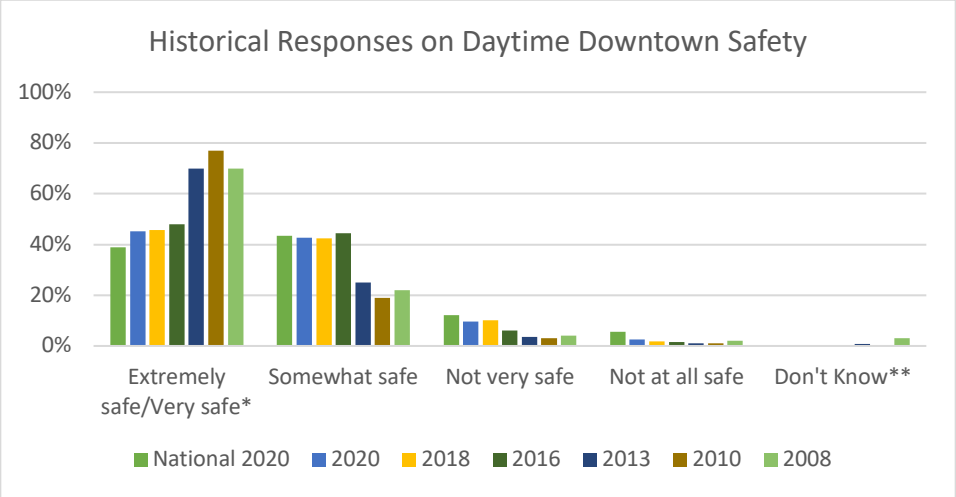


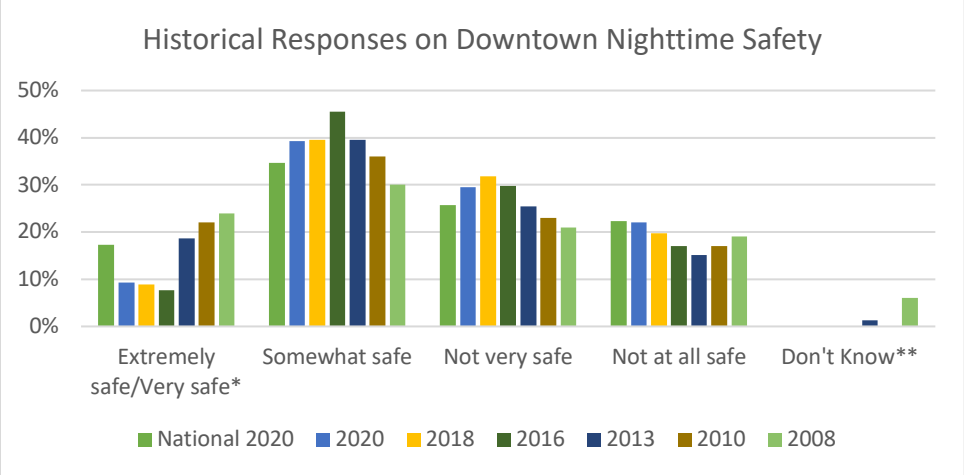
Feelings of Safety Downtown

Bellingham respondents report feeling **less safe downtown during the day and night** than in any previous survey. In comparison, the national respondents were *more likely* than Bellingham respondents to feel *unsafe during the day* and *more likely to feel safe at night*.

Notable **demographic differences** in responses concerning nighttime downtown safety include:

- Among Bellingham respondents, women feel less safe than men when walking alone downtown at night. When walking alone downtown at night, 56 percent of men feel safe downtown (*Extremely safe* or *Somewhat safe)* as opposed to 41 percent of women.
- Similarly, among national respondents, women feel less safe than men when walking alone downtown at night. When walking alone downtown at night, 69 percent of men feel safe downtown (*Extremely safe* or *Somewhat safe)* as opposed to 42 percent of women.





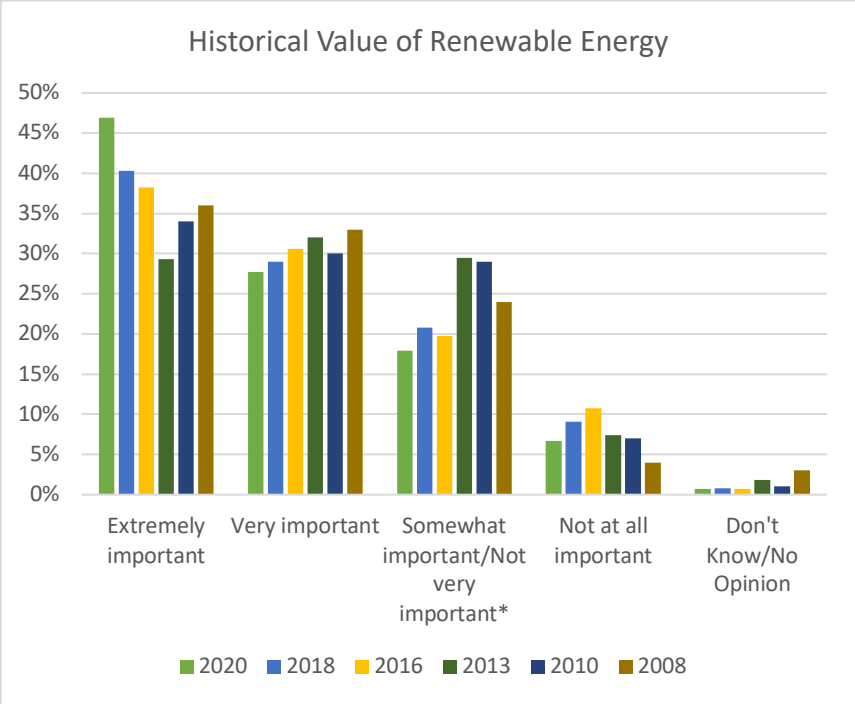
* Since 2016, the survey includes only four levels of safety as options: *Extremely safe, Somewhat safe, Not very safe,* and *Not at all safe*. Previous surveys included a fifth option of *Very safe*, which has been included with the *Extremely safe* section in our historical analysis figures. The 2013 and 2008 Survey also offered a *Don't Know* option.

Renewable Energy

Promoting the use of renewable energy (such as green and solar power) is viewed by current respondents as more important than in any other survey year.

75 percent of respondents think it is *Extremely* (47 percent) or *Very* (28 percent) *important* for the City to promote the use renewable energy, such as green and solar power.

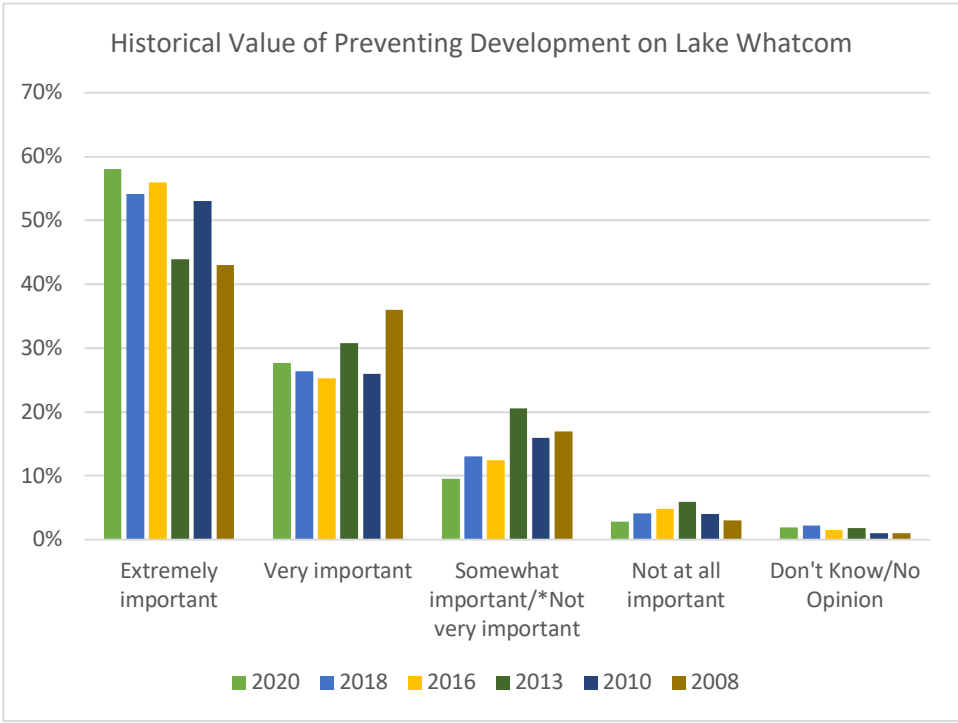
However, 7 percent of respondents consider promoting renewable energy use to be *Not at all important*, which is a continuation of the decrease seen since the 2016 peak of 11 percent.



Lake Whatcom Watershed

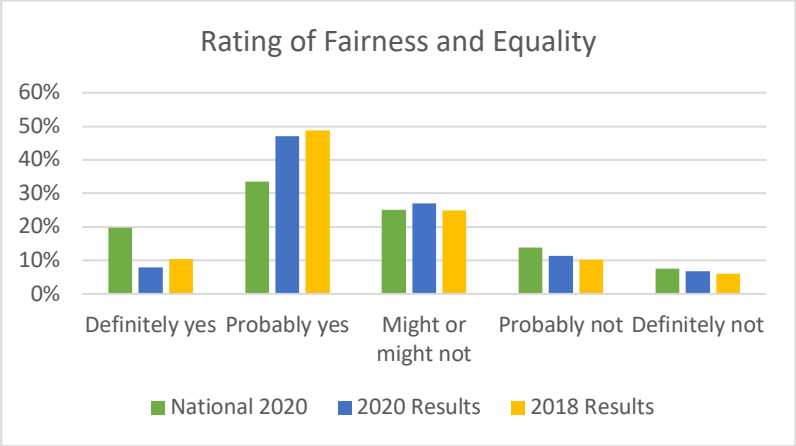
Historically, views of the importance of preventing development on Lake Whatcom have varied – this survey, respondents view this environmental action as more important than their 2018 counterparts.

A distinguished majority of respondents (86 percent) think it is *Extremely* or *Very important* for the City to prevent further development in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Only 3 percent of respondents think this action is *Not at all important*.



Equitability of City Resources

The 2020 study was the second to include a section regarding public perception of fairness and equality in the City of Bellingham, as well as the first to include *Equity and Social Justice* on a variety of questions.



Equity and Social Justice was ranked 7th out of 15 things that respondents value about Bellingham. It was also ranked as the 3rd most important challenge (out of 12) facing Bellingham and the 5th most important challenge according to respondents in Peer Cities.

55 percent (down from 59 percent in 2018) of Bellingham respondents think their city *Definitely* or *Probably* treats all residents and visitors equally and fairly compared to 54 percent of national respondents.

However, 18 percent (up from 16 percent in 2018) of Bellingham respondents consider the City's treatment of residents and visitors to *Probably* or *Definitely* not be fair and equal compared to 22 percent of national respondents.

When asked how the City of Bellingham was doing in terms of equitability in different aspects of support and services offered, respondents felt that the City of Bellingham was least equitable with regard to:

- *Housing options and affordability*
- *Racial/Cultural diversity*
- *Racial/Cultural integration*

Respondents felt that the City of Bellingham was most equitable with regard to:

- *Providing physical access to public facilities*
- *Supporting community celebration and events*
- *Providing adequate inclusive services for diverse sexual orientations*

Possible Limitations

In analyzing the results and processes used for this survey we note several items of importance:

- Possible **survey fatigue** is an issue for all surveys fielded. With the advent of inexpensive and easy to field surveys, nearly all publicly involved businesses and organizations are sending requests for opinions throughout the developed world. In general, this reduces overall participation. Survey fatigue also increases the opportunities for respondent bias as specific demographics with certain opinions are more likely to continue to take surveys beyond that of other demographics. Surveys, such as this one, may have a higher response rate among demographics of citizens with deep convictions about the ways their city or neighborhood should be managed.

- This respondent bias can also be referred to as **Self-Selection Bias –** households that actually respond to the survey may have different characteristics as a group than the entirety of households that received an invitation to the survey, which was randomized.

- Respondents put a **significant amount of time and effort** into this survey – with 69 total questions, and 6 unlimited open-end questions, the survey is lengthy and in-depth. Some respondents did not complete the entire survey but their answers, as they stand, are still considered. The median duration of the survey for both complete and incomplete surveys was approximately 23 minutes.

- **Survey language,** used in past studies and this one, may vary in both how questions are expressed and the answer choices provided. While every effort has been made to reduce this, multiple edits were made to help reduce survey bias from word choice within the instrument. This has been noted in the relevant questions within this report.

Survey Results

Demographics

In order to fully digest the data presented from the survey questions, it is paramount to understand who the respondents are and how that might influence the results of this research. Given the overall statistical sample parameters of the study there is little concern that these demographics have led to significant sampling error. We have every reason to believe that the data provided within this report are a statistically representative sample of Bellingham residents.

Where appropriate, the following demographic data points have been used to further analyze questions throughout the survey.

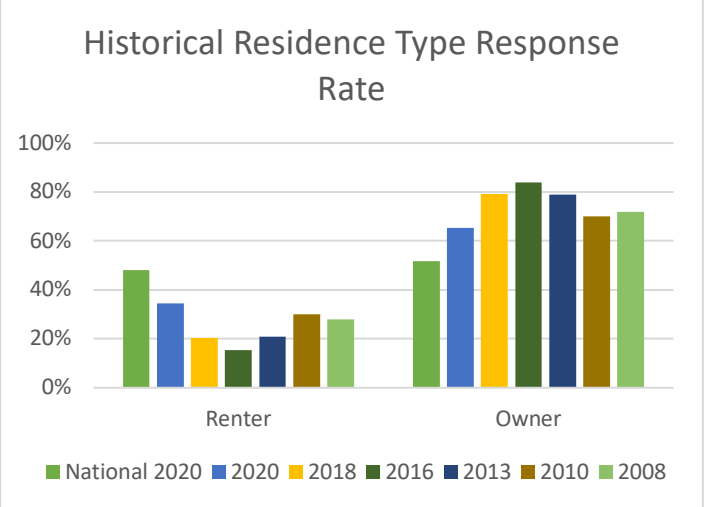
Residence Type

Q: In thinking about your residence in Bellingham, how would you classify your household?

Answer	2020 National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Renter	48.19%	572	34.59%	541
Owner	51.81%	615	65.22%	1020
Non-Resident			0.19%	3
Total	100%	1187	34.59%	541

65 percent of households classify themselves as homeowners, and approximately 35 percent classify themselves as renters. Less than 1 percent reported as non-residents and were directed to the end of the survey because they did not live in Bellingham.

In this study, there were fewer homeowners and more renters than in any prior iteration of this survey. This suggests a much more representative sample than in previous survey years.



With that being said, the US Census Bureau estimates that within Bellingham 45% of housing units are occupied by the owner, indicating that the response rate for renters is still far lower than is ideal. The Census collects this data through an annual statistical sample over a 6-year period with the option of a residence being occupied by the owner or non-owner. Non-owners are assumed to be renters.

The national sample was more evenly split, with 52 percent of respondents being homeowners and 48 percent renting.

Gender

Q: Which gender do you prefer to identify as?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Male	37.23%	414	41.67%	565
Female	61.96%	689	52.80%	716
Other:	0.36%	4	1.33%	18
Prefer not to say	0.45%	5	4.20%	57
Total	100%	1112	100%	1356

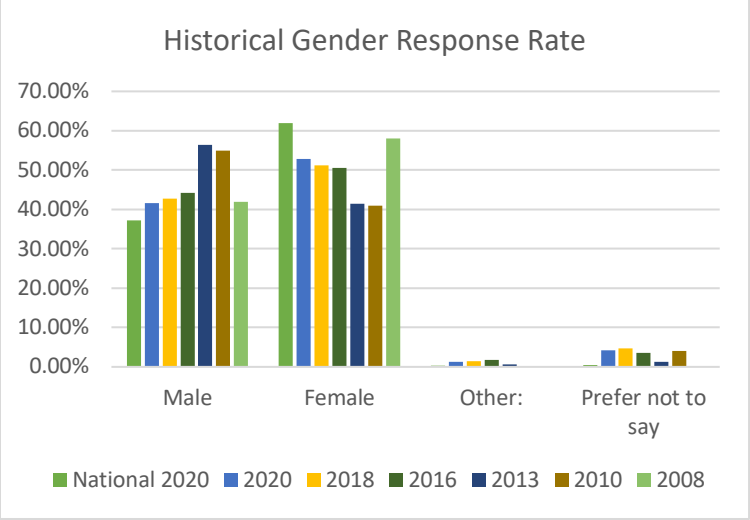
A greater proportion (53 percent) of Bellingham respondents identify as female, 42 percent identify as male, and 1 percent identify as neither male nor female. 4 percent of respondents prefer not to report their gender.

In comparison, the national sample was much more skewed toward female respondents (62 percent), with a smaller portion identifying as male (37 percent), and less than 1 percent chose not to report their identity or identified as neither male nor female.

Other surveys also garner higher response rates from females. According to the coverage rates reported by US Census Bureau, females have had a higher response rate to the American Community Survey every year since 2000.

The 1 percent of Bellingham respondents identifying as *Other* were primarily nonbinary. Within the table, "Other" encompasses responses that were potentially identifying or likely intended to critique the fact that the survey provided space for those who identify as neither male nor female.

Historically, there has been some fluctuation in response rates by gender – 2020, 2018, 2016, and 2008 surveys garnered more than 50 percent female respondents, while the 2013 and 2010 samples were comprised of more than 50 percent male respondents.



Gender Identity: Other		
National	**Bellingham**	
None	Nonbinary (6)	Womxn
Agender gender or humanoid	Other (6)	Prefer not to volunteer
Genderqueer	Cis couple	Gender fluid
Other (1)		

Location of Residence

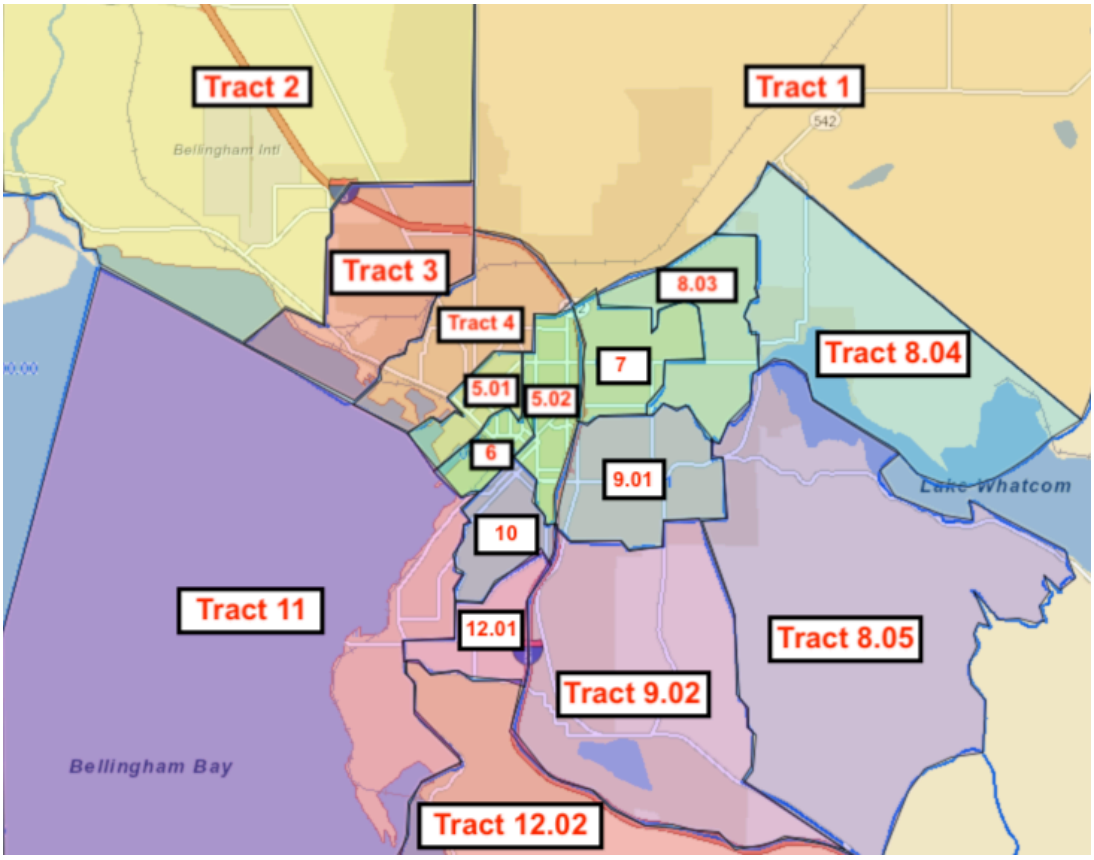
Q: Using the map below, please click a location close to your home

Census Tract	Count	Percent of Sample	Percent of Bellingham Households
1	71	5%	9%
2	106	7%	9%
3	76	5%	8%
4	113	8%	6%
5.01	104	7%	5%
5.02	46	3%	2%
6	26	2%	2%
7	68	5%	6%
8.03	107	7%	6%
8.04	84	6%	6%
8.05	77	5%	5%
9.01	101	7%	6%
9.02	86	6%	5%
10	117	8%	7%
11	115	8%	6%
12.01	96	7%	6%
12.02	42	3%	4%
Total	1435	100%	100%

Responses were collected from all Census Tracts within Bellingham. For the most part, the sample was representative of the overall Bellingham population (based on Census data). The largest variation between the population and sample geographies was for Tract 1 (-4 percentage points) and Tract 3 (-3 percentage points). For the remaining Census Tracts, the sample was within +/- 1 or two percentage points.

The national sample drew from five Peer Cities, as identified by the Center's "Peer Cities: 2020 Update" report. The majority of these respondents came from California (38 percent) while the fewest came from Vermont (5 percent).

Peer Cities	Count	Percent of Sample
Flagstaff, AZ	145	13%
Santa Cruz, CA	436	38%
Fort Collins, CO	180	16%
Asheville, NC	332	29%
Burlington, VT	53	5%
Total	1146	100%

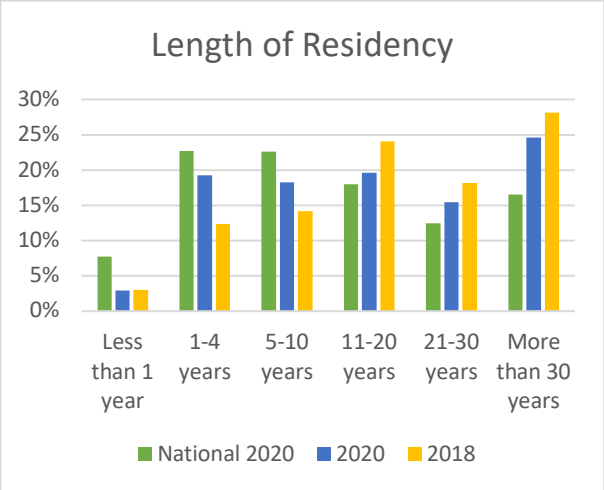


Length of Bellingham Residency

Q: How long have you lived in Bellingham?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Less than 1 year	7.69%	85	2.91%	40
1-4 years	22.69%	251	19.23%	264
5-10 years	22.60%	250	18.21%	250
11-20 years	17.99%	199	19.59%	269
21-30 years	12.48%	138	15.44%	212
More than 30 years	16.55%	183	24.62%	338
Total	100%	1106	100%	1373

For the most part, the Bellingham survey respondents are seasoned residents of the city of Bellingham – almost 60 percent of respondents have lived in Bellingham for more than 10 years. This demonstrates that the responses from the Survey largely capture the opinions of residents who have been involved in the community for a significant amount of time, have seen the city of Bellingham grow and change, and are likely invested in its future. Improvements have been made to the share of respondents who have been in Bellingham for 1-4 years, thus hopefully better capturing the significant presence of college-aged students who would have shorter-term residency.



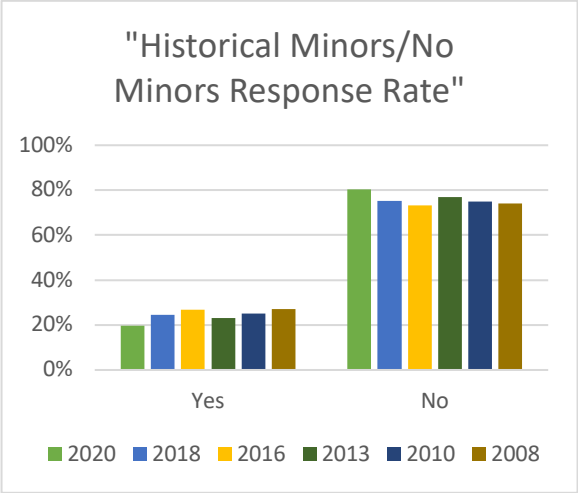
Among the national respondents, 30 percent have lived in their city for less than 4 years and 47 percent have lived in their city for more than 10 years.

According to the article "Non-Response in Student Surveys: The Role of Demographics, Engagement, and Personality", those with high levels of community involvement (for the general population as well as the student population specifically) are more likely to respond to a survey regarding current community issues (Porter and Whitcomb, *Research in Higher Education*, 2005).

Minors in Household

Q: Do you have any children under the age of 18 living in your household?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Yes	19.72%	271
No	80.28%	1103
Total	100%	1374



Approximately 20 percent of households report having children under the age of 18. This could include not only parents, but also guardians of minors and other household arrangements.

Historically, the amount of respondents with at least one minor in their household has remained stable.

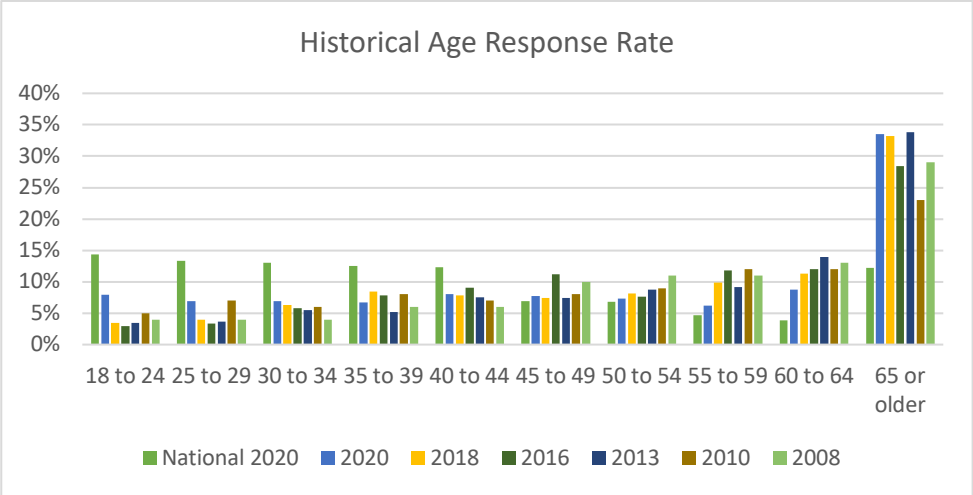
Age

Q: Which of the following best describes your age?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
18 to 24	14.38%	160	7.95%	107
25 to 29	13.30%	148	6.91%	93
30 to 34	13.03%	145	6.91%	93
35 to 39	12.49%	139	6.76%	91
40 to 44	12.31%	137	8.02%	108
45 to 49	6.92%	77	7.73%	104
50 to 54	6.83%	76	7.28%	98
55 to 59	4.67%	52	6.17%	83
60 to 64	3.86%	43	8.77%	118
65 or older	12.22%	136	33.51%	451
Total	100%	1113	100%	1346

While we obtained responses from large range of age groups, more than half (48 percent) of Bellingham survey respondents are at least 55 years old. Approximately 15 percent of responses came from people between 18 and 30 years old. This is the highest rates of responses from those under 30 to date. The national respondents, on the other hand, skewed much younger than the Bellingham respondents.

This is disproportionate to Bellingham's overall demographics – according to the Census, only 14 percent of the total population is 65 or older. This should be kept in mind when considering the results of the survey.



Household Income

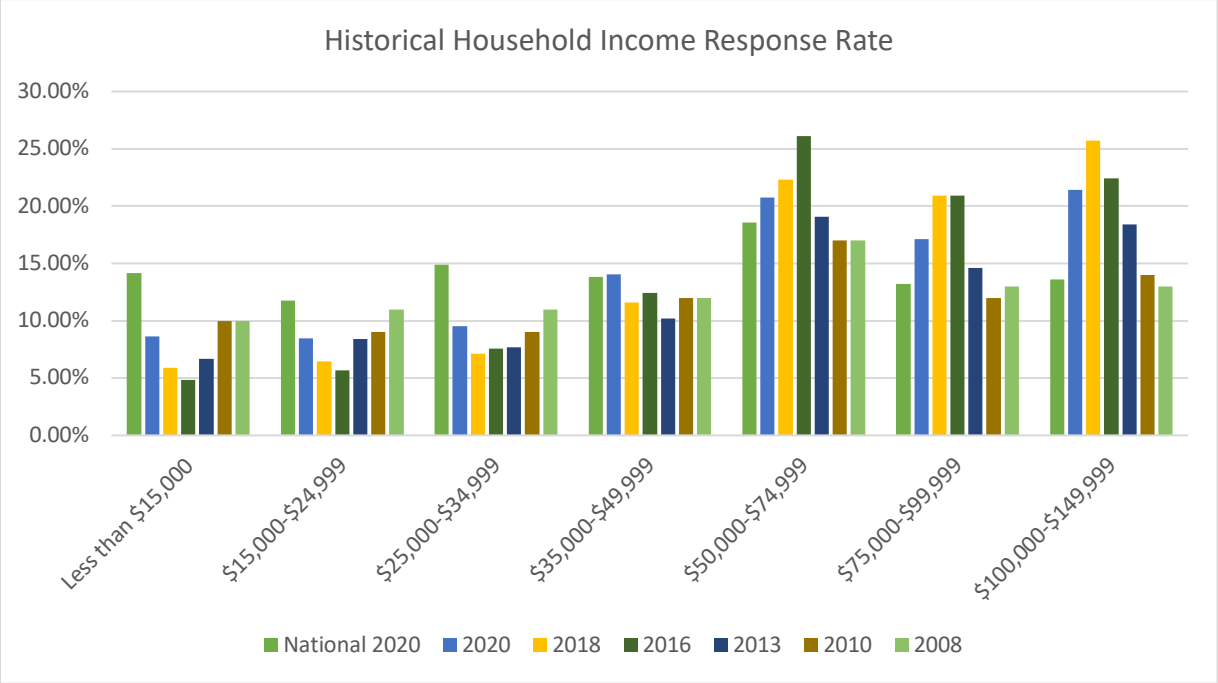
Q: What is your annual household income before taxes?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Less than $15,000	14.14%	137	8.66%	93
$15,000-$24,999	11.76%	114	8.47%	91
$25,000-$34,999	14.86%	144	9.50%	102
$35,000-$49,999	13.83%	134	14.06%	151
$50,000-$74,999	18.58%	180	20.76%	223
$75,000-$99,999	13.21%	128	17.13%	184
$100,000-$149,999	13.62%	132	21.42%	230
Total	100%	969	100%	1074

27 percent of Bellingham respondents report annual household incomes less than *$35,000*, 35 percent report household incomes between *$35,000* and *$75,000*, and 39 percent report household incomes over *$75,000*. In general, the national sample was skewed toward a lower median wage.

Historically, the respondents of this year's Bellingham survey have lower household incomes than those in 2016 and 2018.

The US Census Bureau estimates the median household income in Bellingham to be $50,844 ($60,293 US average), indicating a possible self-selection bias. According to the article "Non-Response in Student Surveys: The Role of Demographics, Engagement, and Personality", in the general population more affluent or educated individuals are more likely to participate in surveys (Porter and Whitcomb, *Research in Higher Education*, 2005).



General Observations

This section is designed to gain a view of how residents feel about life in Bellingham overall, with a combination of multiple choice, rank order, and open-ended questions concerning the quality of life, values, and the challenges of life in Bellingham.

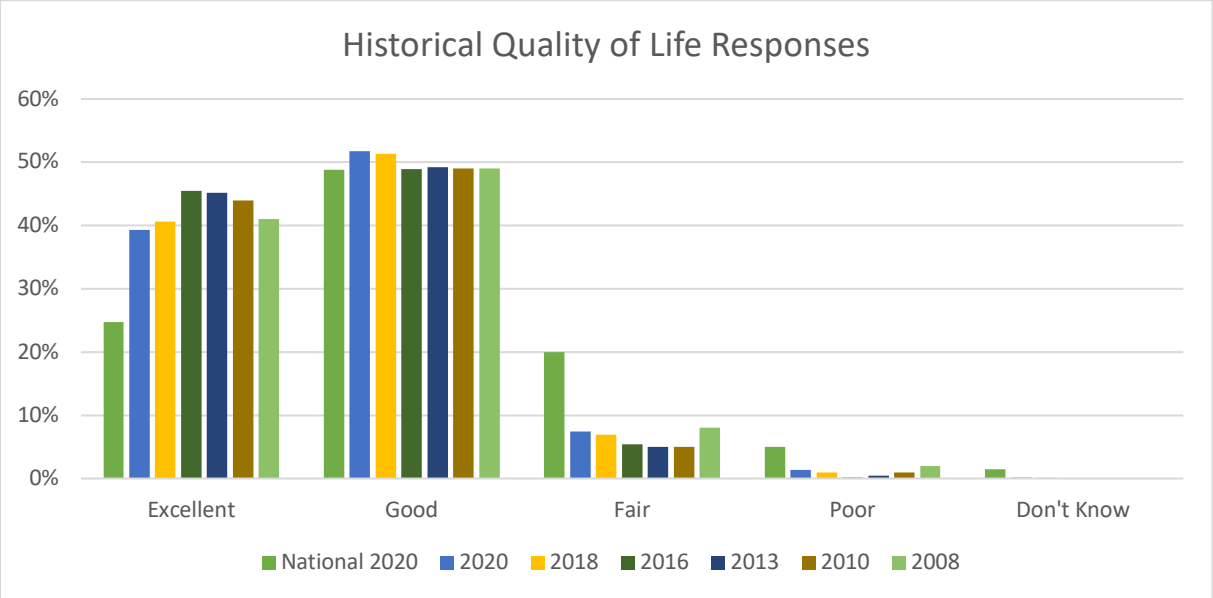
Quality of Life

Q: Overall, how would you rate the quality of life in Bellingham?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	24.73%	294	39.31%	605
Good	48.78%	580	51.72%	796
Fair	20.02%	238	7.47%	115
Poor	5.05%	60	1.36%	21
Don't Know	1.43%	17	0.13%	2
Total	100%	1189	100%	1539

More than 91 percent of Bellingham respondents rate the quality of life in Bellingham as at least *Good* (52 percent), if not *Excellent* (39 percent). Less than 9 percent rate the quality of life in Bellingham as either *Fair* (7 percent) or *Poor* (1 percent). In comparison, 75 percent of the national respondents viewed the quality of life in their city positively and 25 percent viewed it as *Fair* or *Poor*.

For the second time since 2008, the reported quality of life decreased overall, 39 percent of respondents rated the quality of life in Bellingham as *Excellent*, compared to 41 percent in 2018. While a relatively small effect this marks a departure from the upward trend in resident's reported quality of life and may be something to consider moving forward.



Bellingham Values

Q: What do you value most about Bellingham as a place to live? Drag and drop the answer choices in order of preference, from the attributes that you value most to those you value the least.

This question asks respondents to rate the following from most to least important:

- *Education options*
- *Safety of neighborhoods*
- *Infrastructure quality*
- *Arts and culture*
- *Economic environment*
- *Quality of emergency services*
- *Nightlife*
- *Sense of community*
- *Public transportation*
- *Housing affordability*
- *Shopping*
- *Recreation programs and opportunities*
- *Public involvement in city decisions*
- *Environmental friendliness*
- *Equity and social justice*

The top-rated values about Bellingham as a place to live include:

1. Sense of community (18 percent rated #1, 13 percent rated #2)
2. Recreational programs and opportunities (18 percent rated #1, 12 percent rated #2)
3. Environmental friendliness (15 percent rated #1, 17 percent rated #2)
4. Safety of neighborhoods (15 percent rated #1, 14 percent rated #2)

The least valued aspects of Bellingham (rated last) include:

1. Nightlife (32 percent rated last)
2. Housing affordability (26 percent rated last)
3. Shopping (12 percent rated last).

Bellingham Values	2020 Weighted Average Ranking (1-15)
Environmental Friendliness	5.0
Sense of Community	5.5
Recreation Programs and Opportunities	5.5
Safety of Neighborhoods	5.5
Education Options	7.0
Arts and Culture	7.2
Equity and Social Justice	7.7
Quality of Emergency Services	8.0
Infrastructure Quality	8.3
Public Transportation	9.1
Economic Environment	9.1
Public Involvement in City Decisions	9.3
Housing Affordability	10.4
Shopping	10.6
Nightlife	12.0

Q: Is there another aspect of Bellingham that you value that was not included in this list?

This is an open-ended question requiring a text entry from respondents. It should be noted that some respondents expressed confusion with this particular question – many interpreted it to be asking about their general values, instead of existing aspects of Bellingham that they value.

The following table contains a count of topics that are mentioned. One response may contain multiple topic tags, so total count of topics exceeds total responses. To view the full text responses see appendix.

Values	Count
Parks, Trails, Greenways	67
Natural Beauty	45
Bike/Walkability	34
Location	29
Cost of Living/Affordability	24
Outdoors	22
Air/Water Quality	21
Food and Dining	20
Community	19
Town Size	18
Climate	14
Social Services/Nonprofits/Volunteering	14
Diversity/Equity	14
Education	14
Environmental Friendliness/Stewardship	14
Safe/peaceful	14
Traffic	11
Healthcare	10
Marina/Bay Access	10
Business	9
Library	8
Religious Tolerance/Organizations	6
Government Services	5
Job Opportunities	5
Cleanliness	3
Uniqueness	2

Bellingham Challenges

Q: What do you think is the most important challenge facing Bellingham today that City leaders can do something about? Drag and drop the answer choices in order of preference, from most to least important.

This question asks respondents to rate 12 potential challenges from most to least important. Responses were similar between the Bellingham and national samples, with housing affordability, homelessness, equity and social justice, economic development, and neighborhood safety all being important. It is also worth noting that equity and social justice also appears as one of the challenges most frequently rated as least important. This suggests a wider distribution of views on this challenge.

	Bellingham	Peer Cities
Top-ranked challenges	1. Housing affordability (33 percent rated #1, 21 percent rated #2) 2. Homelessness (29 percent rated #1, 28 percent rated #2) 3. Equity and social justice (9 percent rated #1, 10 percent rated #2) 4. Economic development (6 percent rated #1, 8 percent rated #2) 5. Safety of neighborhoods (6 percent rated #1, 8 percent rated #2)	1. Housing affordability (24 percent rated #1, 16 percent rated #2) 2. Homelessness (13 percent rated #1, 14 percent rated #2) 3. Economic development (11 percent rated #1, 9 percent rated #2) 4. Equity and social justice (10 percent rated #1, 9 percent rated #2) 5. Safety of neighborhoods (9 percent rated #1, 11 percent rated #2)
Lowest-ranked challenges	1. Recreation programs and opportunities (19 percent rated last) 2. Education Options (16 percent rated last) 3. Public transportation (10 percent rated last) 4. Equity and social justice (10 percent rated last)	1. Recreation programs and opportunities (14 percent rated last) 2. Public transportation (12 percent rated last) 3. Public involvement in City decisions (10 percent rated last) 4. Equity and social justice (9 percent rated last)

Bellingham Challenges - 2020 Weighted Average Rank		Peer Cities Challenges - 2020 Weighted Average Rank	
Homelessness	3.2	Housing Affordability	4.5
Housing Affordability	3.7	Homelessness	5.7
Equity and Social Justice	5.9	Economic Development	6.0
Economic Development	6.1	Safety of Neighborhoods	6.0
Safety of Neighborhoods	6.3	Equity and Social Justice	6.4
Safety of Roads and Infrastructure	6.5	Education Options	6.5
Environmental Friendliness	6.9	Safety of Roads and Infrastructure	6.7
Public Involvement in City Decisions	7.2	Quality of Emergency Services	6.8
Quality of Emergency Services	7.4	Environmental Friendliness	7.1
Public Transportation	7.7	Public Involvement in City Decisions	7.3
Education Options	8.5	Public Transportation	7.3
Recreation Programs and Opportunities	8.6	Recreation Programs and Opportunities	7.7

Q: Is there another challenge facing Bellingham that was not included in this list?

This is an open-ended question requiring a text entry from respondents. The following table contains a count of topics that are mentioned. One response may contain multiple topic tags, so total count of topics exceeds total responses. To view the full text responses see appendix.

Challenges	Count
Housing	33
Homelessness	30
Mental Health	27
Defund/Reform Police	26
Community	20
Diversity and Equity	17
Zoning Laws/Development	16
City Government	15
Public Safety	15
Education/Childcare	15
Infrastructure	14
Drugs	13
Growth	13
Bikes	13
Climate Change	13
Traffic	12
Taxes	12
Healthcare	12
Cost of Living	8
Parks and Libraries	8
Native American Populations	6
City Jail	5
Pollution	4
Emergency Services	3
Political Differences	3
Crime	2
Arts	2

Concluding Remarks

Q: We greatly value feedback and ideas from community members like you. If you were a City leader, would there be any additional positive changes you would make in our community?

This is an open-ended question asked at the conclusion of the survey, once respondents have had a chance to gauge the subject matter of all survey questions. The following table contains a count of topics that are mentioned. One response may contain multiple topic tags, so total count of topics exceeds total responses. To view the full text responses see appendix.

Concluding Remarks	Count
Bike/Walkability	152
Homelessness	144
Roads/Infrastructure/Parking	109
Safety	103
Law Enforcement	100
Affordability	92
Healthcare (Including Mental Health)	88
Creates Jobs	68
Parks, Greenways, Trails, and Public Areas	58
Schools	45
Community Involvement	33
Public Transportation	31
Improve Government Management	29
Equity, Inclusion, Social Justice, and Diversity	27
Economic Development	27
Density Management	25
Waterfront	22
Crime	15
Libraries	13
Protect Drinking Water	13
Jail System	13
Zoning	11
Train/Railroad	11
Improve Waste Management	9
Small Businesses	6
Raise Minimum Wage	5
Less Regulation and Taxation	3

City Services

This section asks respondents to rate the City's efforts to achieve a number of general community priorities – livability of neighborhoods, planning for growth, protecting the environment, using tax dollars responsibly, and providing public safety services. The questions in this section were presented in a randomized order help eliminate possible consistent biases resulting from framing.

Respondents to these questions have high rates of *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses which may indicate either a lack of exposure to the topics or a feeling of not having enough information to have an informed opinion. This may represent an opportunity for the City to further educate the public regarding these areas of operations.

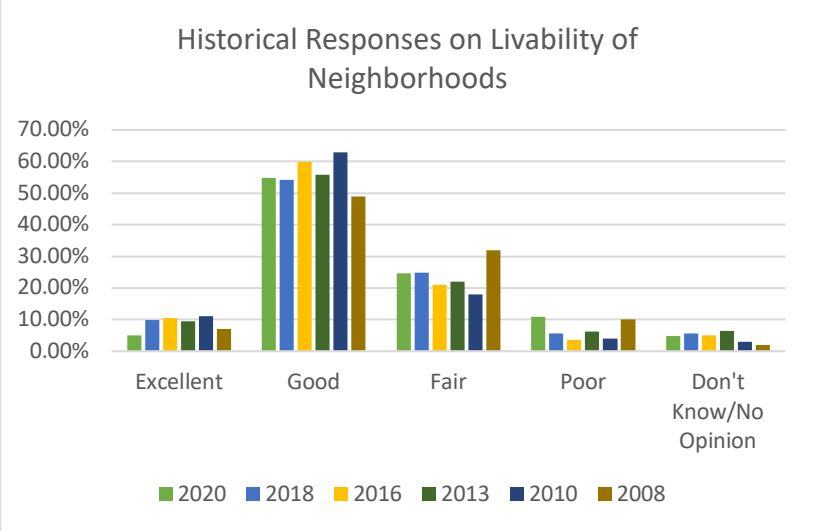
Livability of Neighborhoods

Q: In regard to the livability of neighborhoods, the City's efforts are…

Answer	2018 Results	Count
Excellent	4.93%	71
Good	54.75%	789
Fair	24.71%	356
Poor	10.83%	156
Don't Know/No Opinion	4.79%	69
Total	100%	1441

Most respondents (60 percent) believe the City's efforts are at least *Good* (55 percent), if not *Excellent* (5 percent), when it comes to the livability of neighborhoods.

Historically, residents' perceptions of the livability of neighborhoods have been trending upwards. In 2008, 42 percent of respondents rated the livability of neighborhoods negatively (*Fair* or *Poor*), compared to only 36 percent of respondents in 2020. Reasons for this shift are unclear and out of the scope of this survey.



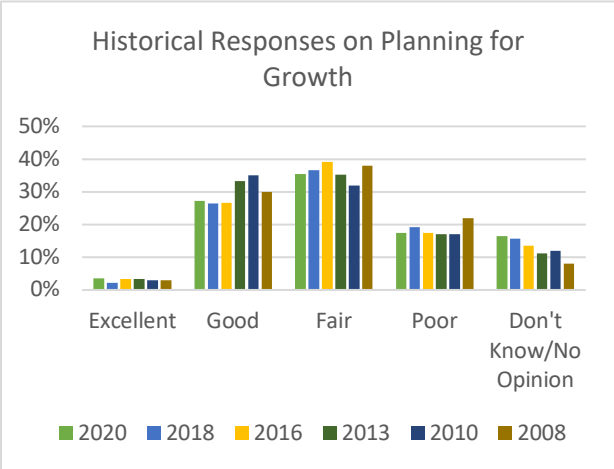
Regional Influence

Some Census Tracts rated the City's efforts to ensure the livability of neighborhoods significantly higher or lower than average. Respondents from Tracts 2, 4, 5.01, 8.04, 8.05, 9.02, and 12.02 rated the livability of neighborhoods more positively than average. Respondents from Tracts 1, 3, 6, 9.01, 10, and 12.01 rated the livability of neighborhoods more negatively than average.

Planning for Growth

Q: In regard to planning for growth, the City's efforts are…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	3.47%	50
Good	27.25%	393
Fair	35.37%	510
Poor	17.48%	252
Don't Know/No Opinion	16.44%	237
Total	100%	1442



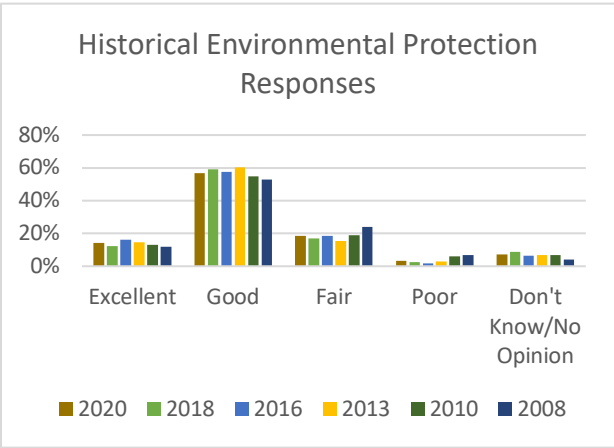
More than half (53 percent) of respondents think the City's efforts planning for growth are *Fair* or *Poor*. 27 percent responded that the City's efforts are *Good,* and only 3 percent believe the efforts to plan for growth are *Excellent*.

2020 reports one of the lowest proportion of positive responses regarding the City's efforts planning for growth since 2008. In this study, only 31 percent of respondents rated planning for growth as *Excellent* (3 percent), or *Good* (27 percent), compared to a 29 percent positive response rate in 2018, 30 percent in 2016, 36 percent in 2013, 38 percent in 2010, and 33 percent in 2008.

Protecting the Environment

Q: In regard to protecting the environment, the City's efforts are…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	14.37%	207
Good	56.74%	817
Fair	18.33%	264
Poor	3.47%	50
Don't Know/No Opinion	7.08%	102
Total	100%	1440



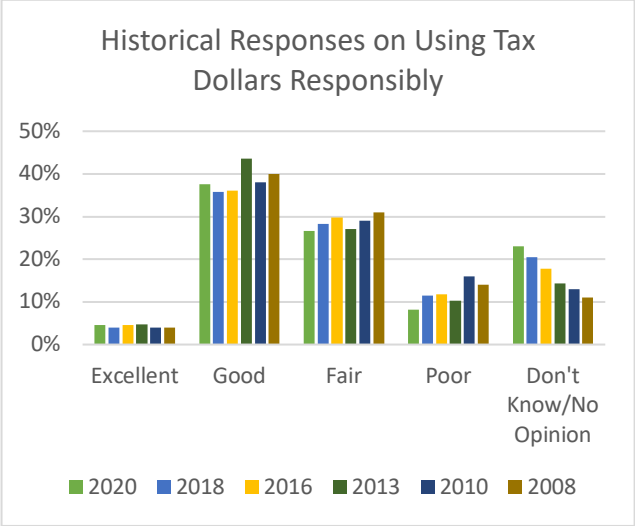
Many respondents believe that the City's efforts to protect the environment are at least *Good* (57 percent), if not *Excellent* (14 percent). As discussed later in the Survey, Bellingham residents consider the environmental protection and remediation efforts to be quite important.

Historically, respondent's views of the City's environmental protection have been steadily more positive since 2008. In 2018, the number of *Excellent* responses dropped to the lowest it has been since 2008 (12 percent), with 2020 increasing back toward 2013 levels. *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses are one of the highest thus far at 7 percent, but down slightly from 9 percent in 2018 – indicating that respondents are less informed about the City's environmental protection efforts.

Using Tax Dollars Responsibly

Q: In regard to using tax dollars responsibly, the City's efforts are…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	4.52%	65
Good	37.53%	540
Fair	26.69%	384
Poor	8.20%	118
Don't Know/No Opinion	23.07%	332
Total	100%	1439



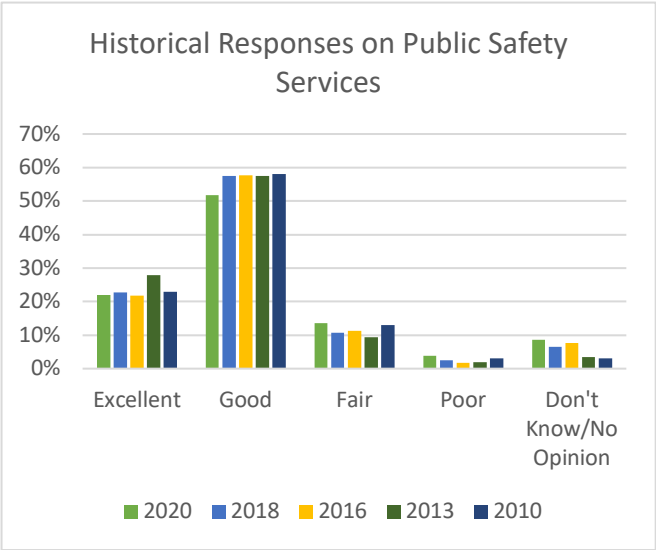
The majority of respondents are more neutral about this subject – 38 percent of respondents rated the City's efforts to use tax dollars responsibly as *Good*, and 27 percent rated the City's efforts as *Fair.*

Historically, views of the City's efforts to use tax dollars responsibly have fluctuated. In this survey, the total positive response rate (*Excellent* or *Good*) was 42 percent, an increase from 40 percent in 2018. Also, the rates of *Don't Know/No Opinion* have been steadily increasing over the years, from 11 percent (2008) to 23 percent (2020).

Public Safety Services

Q: In regard to providing public safety services (such as police, fire, and emergency medical services), the City's efforts are…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	22.03%	317
Good	51.84%	746
Fair	13.62%	196
Poor	3.89%	56
Don't Know/No Opinion	8.62%	124
Total	100%	1439



With regard to providing public safety services, the majority (74 percent) of respondents rate the City's efforts as *Good* (52 percent), if not *Excellent* (22 percent). Less than 4 percent of respondents rate the City's efforts as *Poor*.

Since the 2016 survey, *Excellent* responses have been fairly consistent. Since 2010, *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses have increased from 3 percent (2010 and 2013) to 9 percent (2020). Data from 2008 is not available for this question.

Services relying on taxpayer dollars

This section focuses specifically on City services which rely on taxpayer dollars. Respondents are asked to rate the quality of the City's efforts providing each of these services. The questions in this section were presented in a randomized order to eliminate possible bias.

Respondents have high rates of *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses for particular questions in this section – economic development and business growth (24 percent), emergency medical services (22 percent), recreational programs (20 percent), fire protection services (20 percent), involving the public (16 percent), and reducing human impact on the environment (15 percent). This result may indicate that these are sections that respondents either don't have experience with, or do not feel opinionated about.

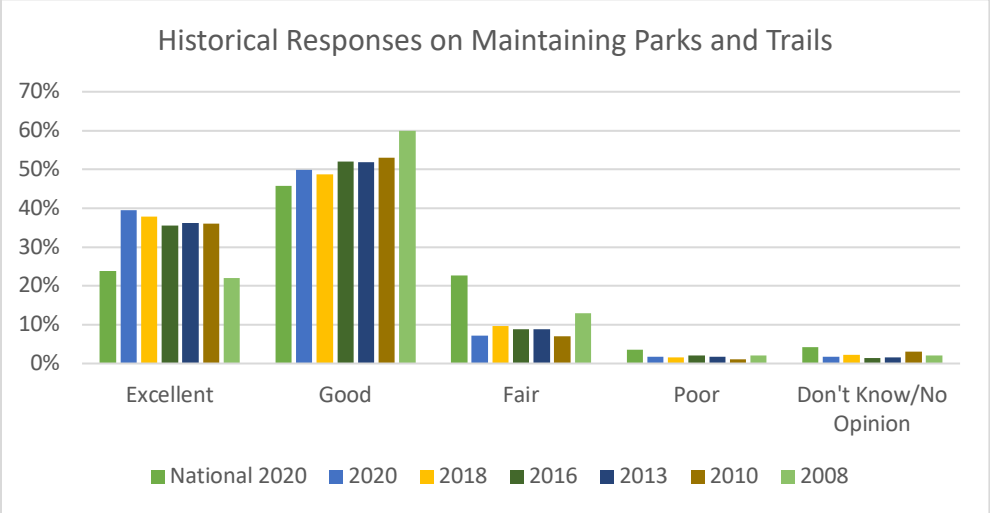
Maintaining Parks and Trails

Q: In regard to maintaining parks and trails, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	23.81%	271	39.54%	567
Good	45.78%	521	49.86%	715
Fair	22.67%	258	7.11%	102
Poor	3.51%	40	1.74%	25
Don't Know/No Opinion	4.22%	48	1.74%	25
Total	100%	1138	100%	1434

Park and trail maintenance is recognized by respondents as one of the City's strong points. 50 percent responded that the City's efforts to maintain parks and trails are *Good*, and almost 40 gave an *Excellent* rating. In comparison, 24 percent of the national sample rated their city's park and trail maintenance as *Excellent* and 46 percent rated it as *Good*.

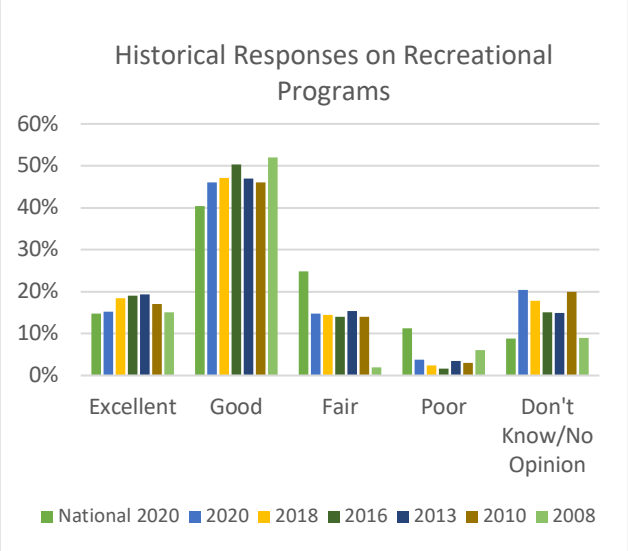
Historically, ratings of park and trail maintenance have remaining relatively steady from 2010 to 2020.



Recreational Programs

Q: In regard to providing recreational programs for youth and adults, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	2020 Results
Excellent	15%	15%
Good	40%	46%
Fair	25%	15%
Poor	11%	4%
Don't Know/No Opinion	9%	20%
Total	100%	100%



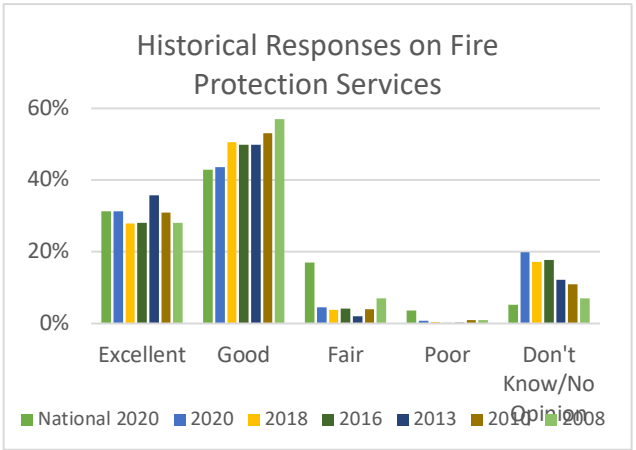
In regard to providing recreational programs, respondents rate the City's efforts quite positively – 46 percent give a rating of *Good*, and 15 percent give a rating of *Excellent.*

This survey represents a slight decrease on the positive response rate regarding recreational programs, with a total of 61 percent rating *Excellent* or *Good,* compared to 69 percent in 2016.

Fire Protection Services

Q: In regard to providing fire protection services, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	2020 Results
Excellent	31%	31%
Good	43%	44%
Fair	17%	4%
Poor	4%	1%
Don't Know/No Opinion	5%	20%
Total	100%	100%



The City's efforts providing fire protection services are recognized as a positive aspect of our community – 44 percent of respondents rate the City's efforts as *Good*, and another 31 percent gave a rating of *Excellent*, similar to the national respondents. In the national sample, 21 percent rated fire protection services as *Fair* or *Poor* compared to 5 percent of Bellingham respondents.

Historically, fire protection services have always been rated quite positively – the highest rate of negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor)* came in 2008, which was a low 8 percent. As is seen in many questions, *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses have been increasing over time and now sit at approximately one-fifth of respondents.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

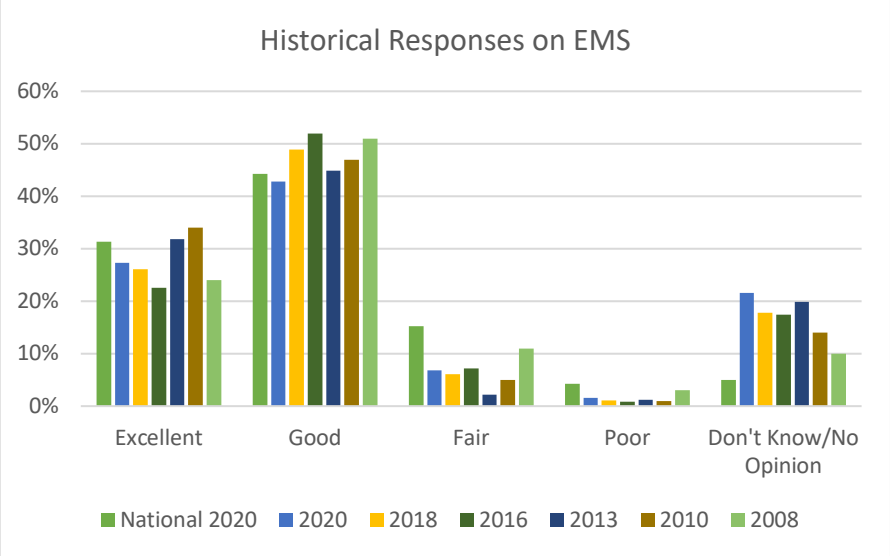
Q: In regard to providing Emergency Medical Services (EMS), the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	31.32%	357	27.29%	390
Good	44.30%	505	42.83%	612
Fair	15.18%	173	6.79%	97
Poor	4.21%	48	1.54%	22
Don't Know/No Opinion	5.00%	57	21.55%	308
Total	100%	1140	100%	1429

Bellingham respondents also recognize the City's efforts providing EMS – 43 percent rate EMS services as *Good*, and 27 percent give an *Excellent* rating. Only 2 percent believe the City is doing a *Poor* job providing EMS. In comparison, 31 percent of the national respondents rated their city's EMS as *Excellent,* 44 percent as *Good*, and 4 percent as *Poor*. It should be noted that the national sample had a much smaller share of respondents choose *Don't Know/No Opinion* – 5 percent compared to 22 percent of the Bellingham respondents.

Historically, this survey showed an increase in *Excellent* responses, and a decrease in *Good* responses compared to the previous survey. Residents' opinions seem to be skewing upward with regards to EMS services.

A similar percent of respondents replied in the *Don't Know/No Opinion* category as the previous question regarding general fire services, possibly indicating a lack of overall knowledge of the particular services available. These responses have been trending upward over time.



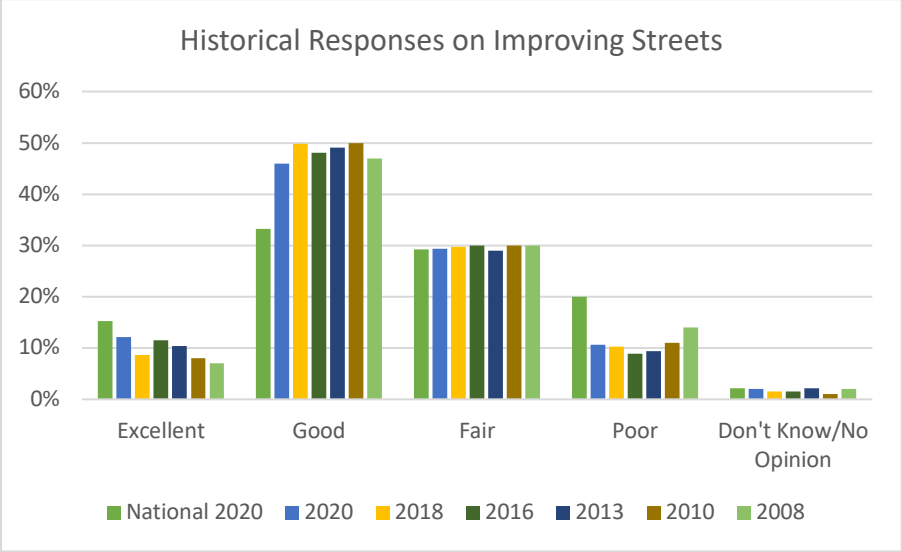
Improving Streets

Q: In regard to improving streets (such as fixing potholes, signage, bike lanes, sidewalks, and traffic lights), the City's efforts are...

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	15.26%	173	12.08%	173
Good	33.25%	377	45.95%	658
Fair	29.28%	332	29.33%	420
Poor	20.02%	227	10.61%	152
Don't Know/No Opinion	2.20%	25	2.03%	29
Total	100%	1134	100%	1432

In regard to improving streets (for example, fixing potholes, signage, bike lakes, sidewalks, and traffic lights), 12 percent of Bellingham respondents rated the City's efforts as *Excellent*, 46 percent rated *Good,* 29 percent rated *Fair*, and 11 percent rated *Poor*. The national sample was skewed more negatively with 20 percent saying their city was doing a poor job of improving streets.

This survey, *Excellent* responses increased from 9 percent (2018) to 12 percent (2020), and *Good* responses decreased from 50 percent (2018) to 46 percent (2020). This marks a return to approximately 2016 levels.



Economic Development and Business Growth

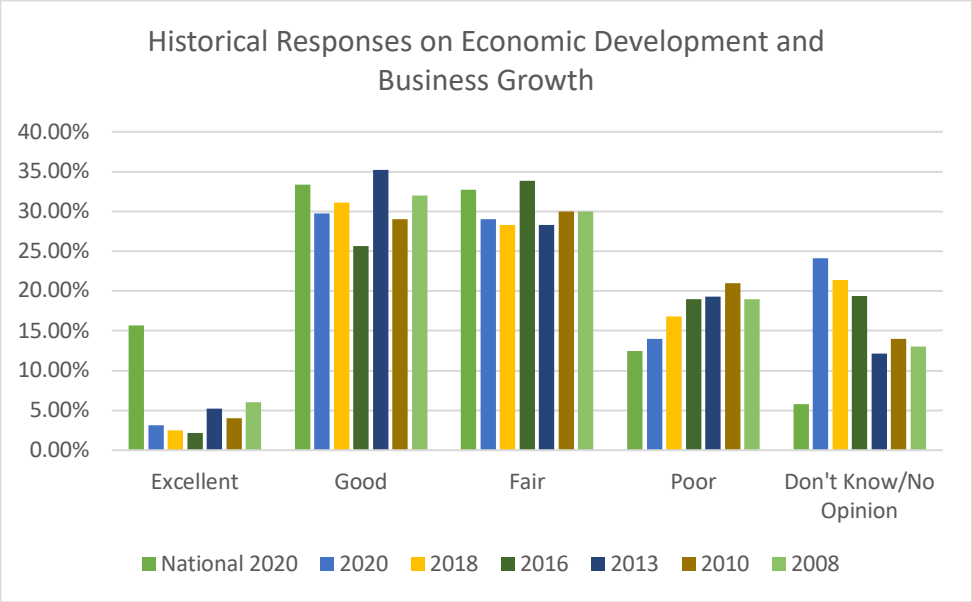
Q: In regard to encouraging economic development and business growth in Bellingham, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	15.68%	178	3.14%	45
Good	33.39%	379	29.77%	426
Fair	32.69%	371	29.00%	415
Poor	12.42%	141	13.98%	200
Don't Know/No Opinion	5.81%	66	24.11%	345
Total	100%	1135	100%	1431

Many respondents think there is room to grow when it comes to the City's efforts encouraging economic development and business growth. Only 3 percent rated the City's efforts as *Excellent*, 30 percent rated *Good,* 29 percent rated *Fair*, and 14 percent believe the City's efforts are *Poor*. Among the national respondents – who had a far lower *Don't know/no opinion* response rate – 17 percent rated their city's efforts as *Excellent*, 33 percent rated *Good*, 33 percent rated *Fair*, and 12 percent rated *Poor*.

Historically, this represents the lowest rate of negative responses (*Poor* or *Fair*). The rate of *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses has spiked to 24 percent (2020) from a steadier rate between 12 and 14 percent from 2008 and 2013.

It should be noted that the term "economic development" is open to fairly wide interpretation based on a person's background and experiences.



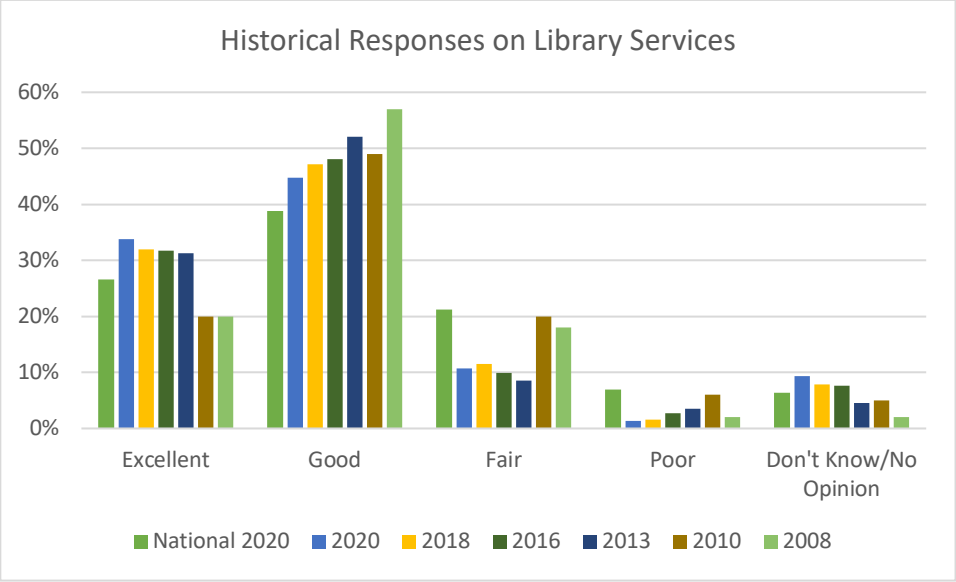
Library Services

Q: In regard to providing library services for the community, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	26.57%	301	33.78%	483
Good	38.83%	440	44.76%	640
Fair	21.27%	241	10.77%	154
Poor	6.97%	79	1.33%	19
Don't Know/No Opinion	6.35%	72	9.37%	134
Total	100%	1133	100%	1430

Regarding library services, Bellingham respondents rated the City's efforts very positively – 34 percent rated *Excellent*, and 45 percent rated *Good*. Only 11 percent rated the City's efforts as *Fair*, and 1 percent rated *Poor*. The national sample viewed their city's library services somewhat more negatively – 27 percent rated *Excellent*, 39 percent rated *Good*, 21 percent rated *Fair*, and 7 percent rated *Poor*.

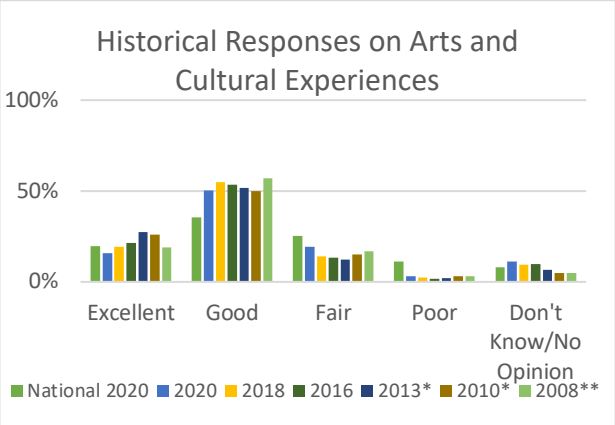
Historically, *Excellent* responses have remained steady around 32 percent since 2013; however, they increased to 34 percent in 2020. In this study, as well as the 2018, 2016, and 2013 studies have seen a significant increase in total positive responses (*Excellent* or *Good*) and a decrease in total negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*) compared to the 2010 and 2008 views of community library services.



Arts and Cultural Experiences

Q: In regard to fostering arts and cultural experiences, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	2020 Results
Excellent	20%	16%
Good	36%	50%
Fair	25%	19%
Poor	11%	3%
Don't Know/No Opinion	8%	11%
Total	100%	100%



Bellingham respondents feel positive about the City's efforts fostering arts and cultural experiences – 16 percent rated *Excellent,* and 50 percent rated *Good*. Only 21 percent rated the City's efforts negatively – 19 percent rated *Fair*, and 3 percent rated *Poor*. Among the national sample, 56 percent rate their city's arts and culture as *Excellent* or *Good* and 36 percent rate it as *Fair* or *Poor*.

Compared to 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2018, this study's *Excellent* and *Good* response rate has decreased. The pandemic has likely impacted arts and cultural experiences within the City and shifted responses more negatively.

Follow-Up

The Survey follows up with respondents who rate the City's efforts fostering arts and cultural experiences as either *Fair* or *Poor* (234 respondents) by asking them to elaborate on their choice in an open-end text entry. The following table contains a count of some of the most popular topics that are mentioned. One response may contain multiple topic tags, so total count of topics exceeds total responses. To view the full text responses see appendix.

	Count
More public art needed	51
More diversity	41
More venues	36
Increase arts funding	28
COVID-19	26
Public Awareness	24
Too expensive	23
Cultural events	23
Not high priority	17
Opportunities for youth	11
Music	8
Public involvement	5
Decrease arts funding	4

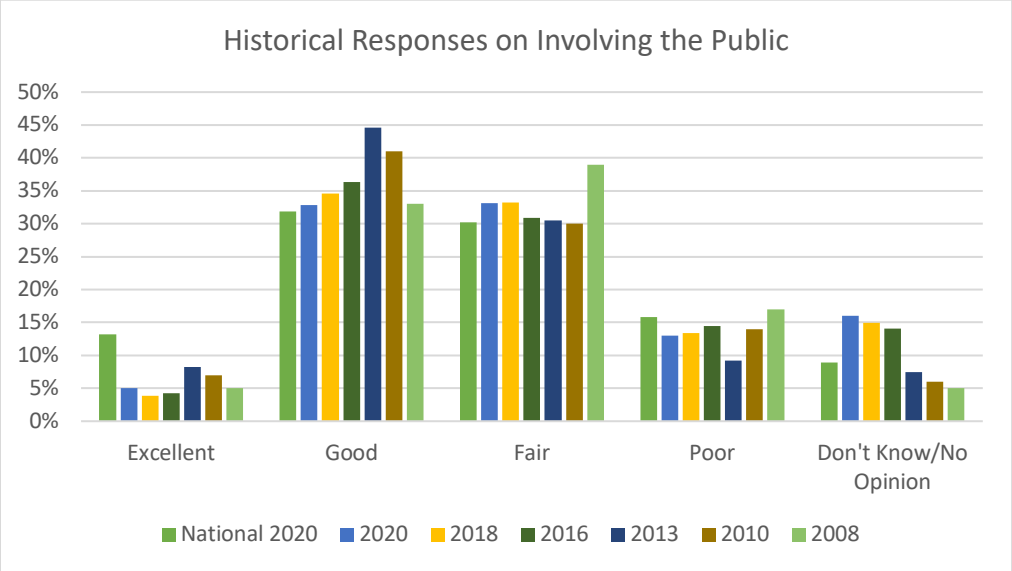
Involving the Public

Q: In regard to involving the public in making decisions that affect the community, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	13.16%	148	5.03%	72
Good	31.91%	359	32.80%	469
Fair	30.22%	340	33.15%	474
Poor	15.82%	178	13.01%	186
Don't Know/No Opinion	8.89%	100	16.01%	229
Total	100%	1125	100%	1430

Bellingham responses regarding the City's efforts involving the public in community decision-making are generally moderate. 5 percent rate the City's efforts as *Excellent*, 33 percent rate *Good*, 33 percent rate *Fair*, and 13 percent rate *Poor*. In comparison, the national sample has higher *Excellent* responses (13 percent) and a lower rate of unsure respondents – 9 percent compared to 16 percent in Bellingham

Compared to previous years, positive responses (*Excellent* or *Good*) regarding "involving the public" have decreased significantly. The positive response rate is 38 percent in 2020 and 2018, compared to 40 percent in 2016, 48 percent in 2010, and 53 percent in 2013. The rate of *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses has been steadily increasing from 5 percent in 2008 to 16 percent in 2020.



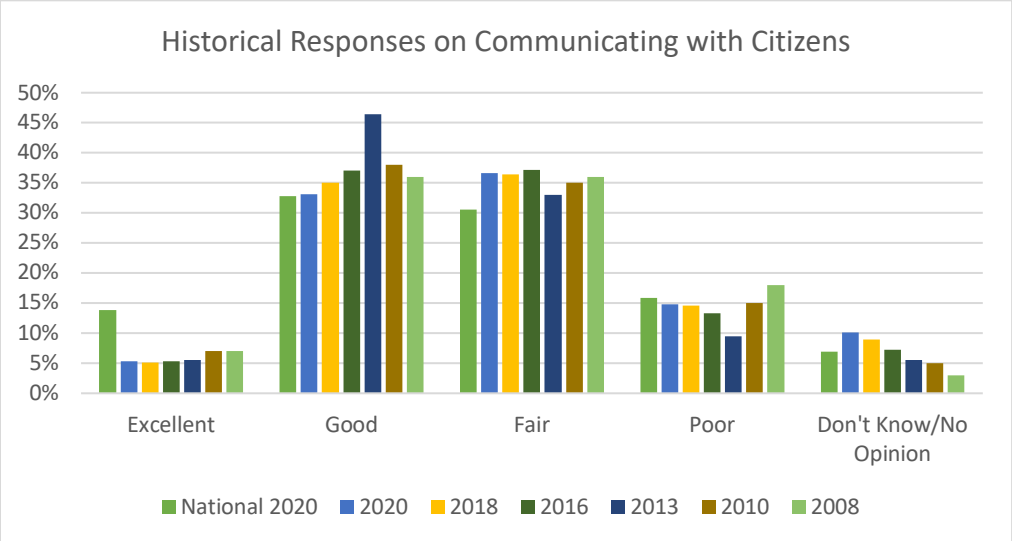
Communicating with Citizens

Q: In regard to communicating with citizens about City issues, decisions, and services, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	13.85%	156	5.31%	76
Good	32.77%	369	33.08%	473
Fair	30.55%	344	36.64%	524
Poor	15.90%	179	14.83%	212
Don't Know/No Opinion	6.93%	78	10.14%	145
Total	100%	1126	100%	1430

Bellingham respondents are also generally moderate in their opinions about the City's efforts to communicate with citizens about City issues, decisions, and services. 5 percent rate the City's efforts as *Excellent,* 33 percent rate *Good,* 37 percent rate *Fair*, and 15 percent rate *Poor*. In comparison, the national sample rated their city's efforts to communicate with citizens about City issues, decisions, and services more positively. 14 percent rate the City's efforts as *Excellent,* 33 percent rate *Good,* 31 percent rate *Fair*, and 16 percent rate *Poor*.

This Bellingham survey's responses have been trending more negative since 2013 responses. Since 2013, positive responses (*Excellent* or *Good*) have decreased from 52 percent (2013) to 38 percent (2020), and negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*) have increased from 43 percent (2013) to 51 percent (2020).



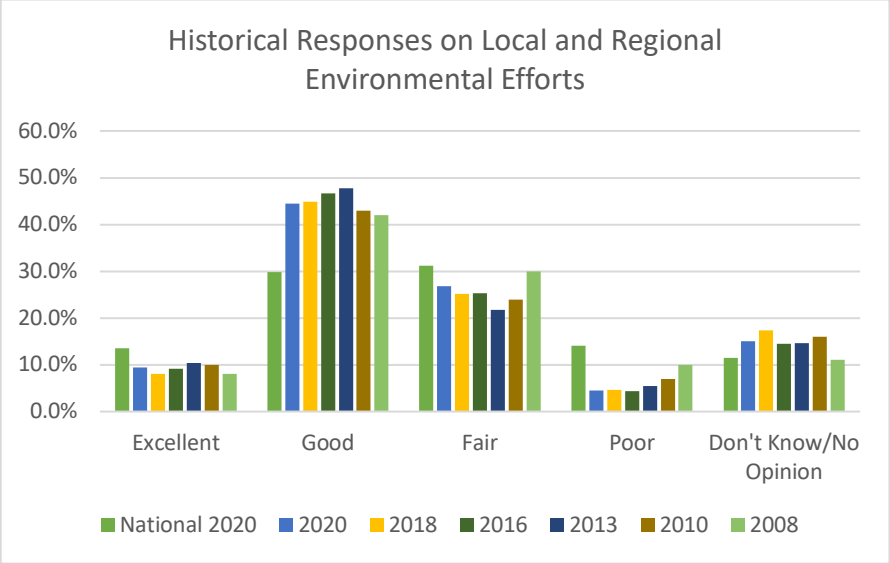
Reducing Human Impact on the Environment

Q: In regard to leading local and regional efforts to reduce human impact on the environment, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	13.50%	152	9.37%	134
Good	29.84%	336	44.41%	635
Fair	31.17%	351	26.78%	383
Poor	14.03%	158	4.48%	64
Don't Know/No Opinion	11.46%	129	14.97%	214
Total	100%	1126	100%	1430

Concerning local and regional efforts to reduce the human impact on the environment, most Bellingham respondents' rate the City's efforts positively – 9 percent rate *Excellent*, and 44 percent rate *Good*. Over a quarter (27 percent) of respondents rate the City's efforts as *Fair*, and 5 percent rate *Poor*. Among the national sample, 14 percent rate *Excellent*, 30 percent rate *Good,* 31 percent rate *Fair*, and 14 percent rate *Poor.*

Responses to this question have become slightly more positive over the years. There has been a steady decrease in *Poor* responses, from 10 percent (2008) to 5 percent (2020). Among the national responses, 45 percent viewed their city's efforts as *Fair* or *Poor*, compared to only 31 percent of Bellingham respondents.



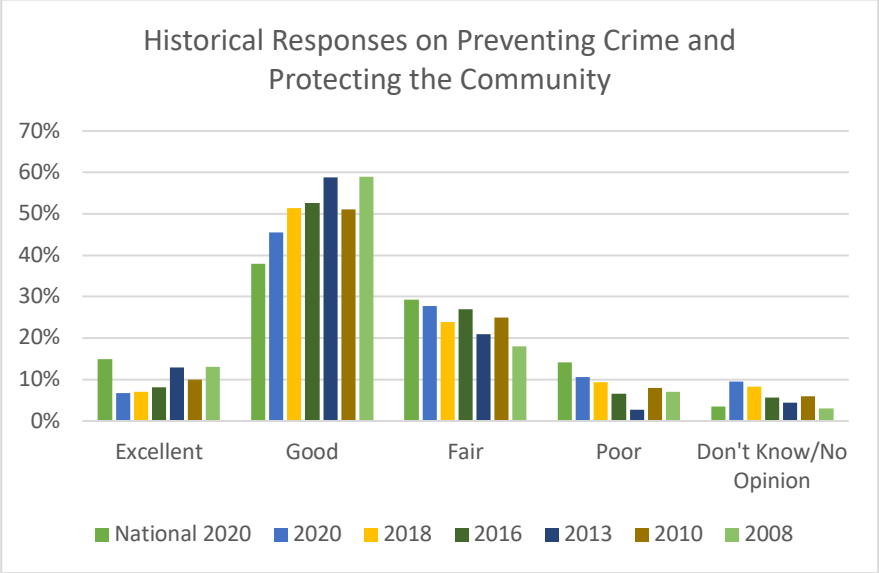
Preventing Crime and Protecting the Community

Q: In regard to preventing crime and protecting the community, the City's efforts are…

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	15.00%	169	6.70%	96
Good	37.98%	428	45.46%	651
Fair	29.37%	331	27.72%	397
Poor	14.11%	159	10.61%	152
Don't Know/No Opinion	3.55%	40	9.50%	136
Total	100%	1127	100%	1432

When it comes to preventing crime and protecting the community, 7 percent of Bellingham respondents rate their City's efforts as *Excellent*, compared to 15 percent of the national sample. 51 percent of Bellingham respondents rate the City's efforts as *Good*, 24 percent rate *Fair,* and 10 percent rate *Poor*. Among the national sample, 38 percent rated their city's efforts as *Good*, 29 percent rate *Fair*, and 14 percent rate *Poor*.

Historically, positive responses (*Excellent* or *Good*) have slightly decreased, from 72 percent (2008) to 52 percent (2020). Also, negative responses (*Fair* or Poor) have increased, from 25 percent (2008) to 39 percent (2020). Among the national sample, 53 percent rated their city's efforts positively and 44 percent rated it negatively. A much smaller fraction (4 percent) of the national sample chose *Don't know/no opinion* compared to the Bellingham sample (10 percent).



Follow-Up

The Survey follows up with respondents who rate the City's efforts preventing crime and protecting the community as either *Fair* or *Poor* (549 respondents) by asking them to elaborate on their choice in an open-end text entry. The following table contains a count of some of the most popular topics that are mentioned. One response may contain multiple topic tags, so total count of topics exceeds total responses. To view the full text responses see appendix.

	Count
Homelessness	149
Decrease/Defund/Reform Police Department	85
Mental Health Options/Social Services	71
Property Crimes	70
Quality of Police	64
Drugs	59
Unsafe Downtown	59
Concern for Marginalized Populations	24
Unsafe Trails/Parks	23
Community Efforts	20
Increase Police Budget	19
Police Visibility	19
Police Response Time	17
Politicized Police	16
Traffic/Parking Enforcement	14
Sexual Crimes/Abuse/Domestic Violence	13
Jail Overcrowding/Alternatives	12
Loitering	4
Violent Crime	3

Media Services

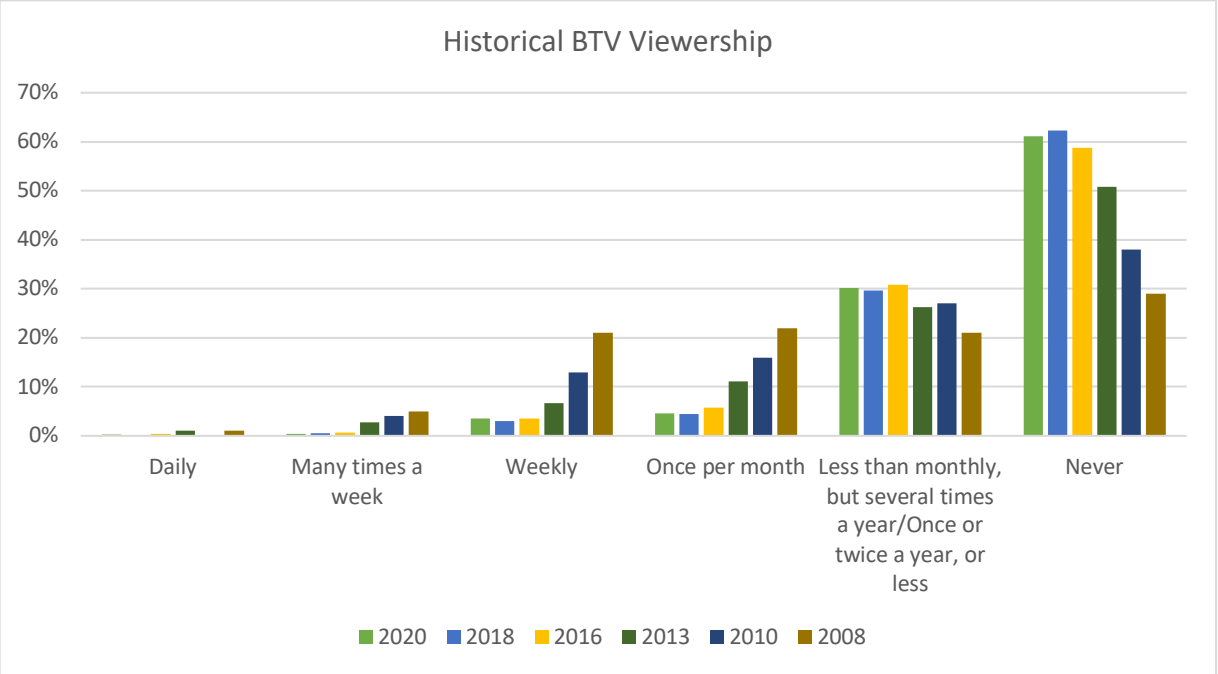
BTV Viewing Frequency

Q: Which statement best describes your typical viewing of BTV?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Daily	0.22%	3
Many times a week	0.45%	6
Weekly	3.56%	48
Once per month	4.53%	61
Less than monthly, but several times a year	8.61%	116
Once or twice a year, or less	21.53%	290
Never	61.10%	823
Total	100%	1347

Approximately 9 percent of respondents view BTV *at least* once per month (*Daily, Many times a week, Weekly,* or *Once per month*). Almost 30 percent of respondents view BTV occasionally during the year (*Less than monthly, but several times a year,* or *Once or twice a year, or* less), and 61 percent report *Never* having watched BTV.

Historically, the proportion of respondents who report *Never* watching BTV has increased **significantly** each year – rising from 29 percent (2008) to 61 percent (2020). The rate of regular BTV viewing (*Daily, Many times a week, Weekly,* or *Once per month*) has been steadily decreasing since 2008, and the rate of occasional BTV viewing (*Less than monthly, but several times a year,* or *Once or twice a year, or less*) has increased since 2008.



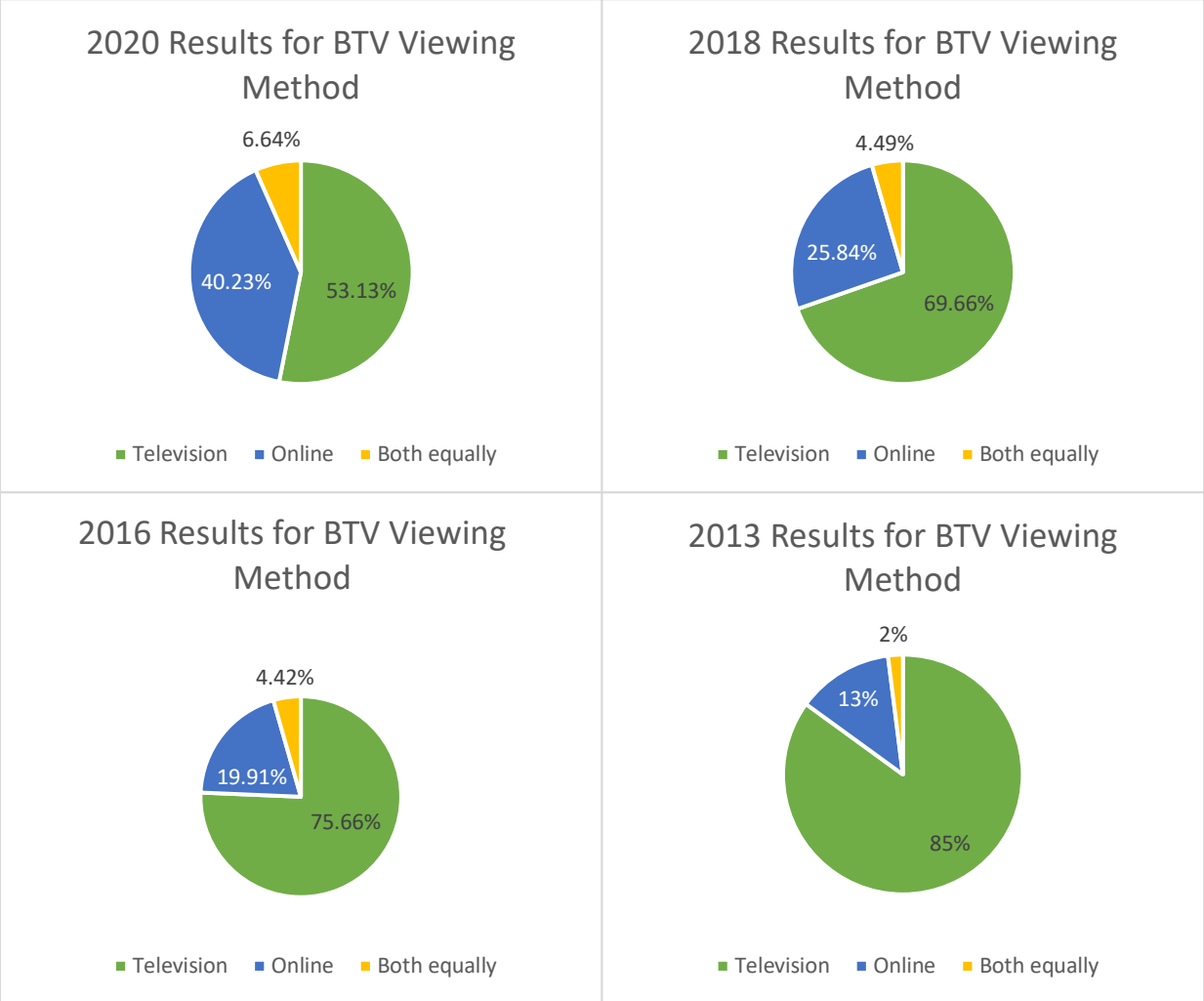
BTV Viewing Method

Q: When you watch BTV programs, do you usually watch on television or online?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Television	53.13%	272
Online	40.23%	206
Both equally	6.64%	34
Total	100%	512

Among the respondents who watch BTV programs (all who did **not** answer *Never* or *Don't Know* to previous question), most report watching on television, about 53 percent), many report watching online (40 percent), and some report watching both equally (7 percent).

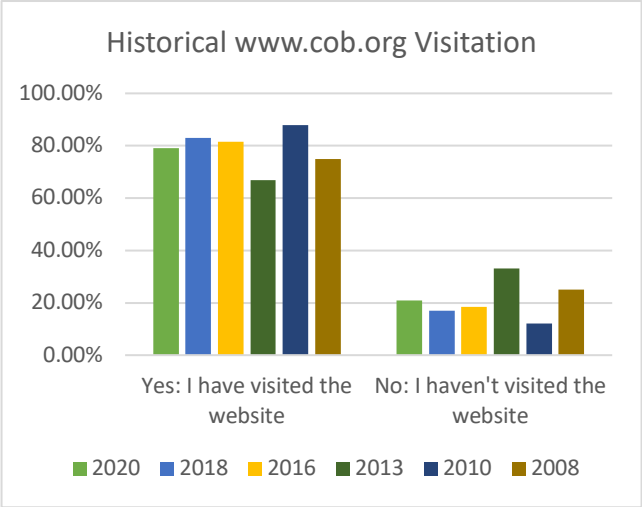
Since 2013, the rate of television viewing has decreased from 85 percent (2013) to 53 percent (2020), and the rate of online viewing has increased from 13 percent (2013) to 40 percent (2020). Data from 2008 and 2010 is not available for this question.



COB Website Visitation

Q: Have you ever visited www.cob.org?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Yes	79.07%	1107
No	20.93%	293
Total	100%	1400



Over 79 percent of respondents report having visited www.cob.org. This is within the range of responses observed over the last few years.

Demographic Influence

Historical rates of COB website visitation vary from year to year. This may be a result of survey methodology – in 2008, the survey was administered solely by phone, the 2010 survey introduced an online response option (80 percent of responses) in addition to phone responses (20 percent), the 2013 survey offered online (59 percent) and phone (41 percent) options. 2016's survey was taken predominantly online: 94 percent online responses and 6 percent phone responses. This survey 97 percent of responses were taken online, with only 3 percent being taken on the phone. Respondents who choose to take the survey by phone most likely have different computer habits than those who chose to take the survey online, which could account for the variation in responses to this question.

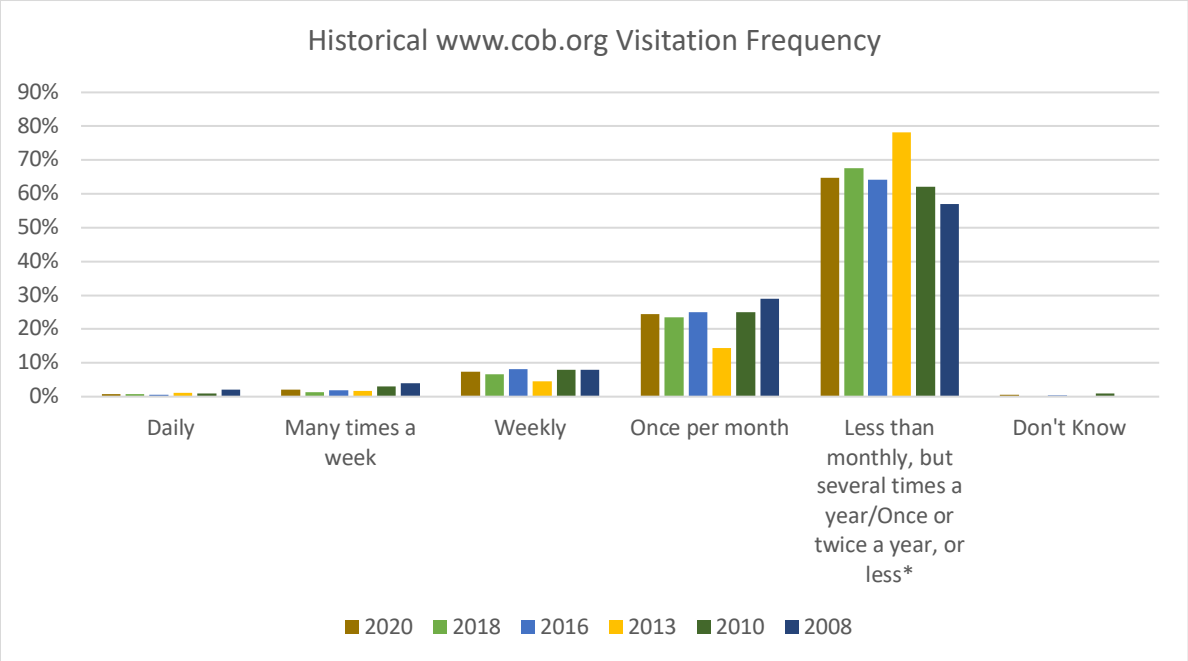
COB Website Viewing Frequency

Q: How often do you visit www.cob.org?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Daily	0.73%	8
Many times a week	1.99%	22
Weekly	7.34%	81
Once per month	24.48%	270
Less than monthly, but several times a year	40.53%	447
Once or twice a year, or less	24.30%	268
Don't Know	0.63%	7
Total	100%	1103

Of respondents who report having visited the COB website in the previous question, almost 35 percent report visiting *at least* once per month (*Daily, Many times a week, Weekly,* or *Once per month*), and 65 percent report visiting occasionally during the year (*Less than monthly, but several times a year*, or *Once or twice a year, or less*).

Of those who have visited the COB website, the rate of regular visitation (*Daily, Many times a week, Weekly,* or *Once per month*) has generally been decreasing over time, and the rate of occasional visitation (*Less than monthly, but several times a year*, or *Once or twice a year, or less*) has generally been increasing. 2020 respondents were visited the website slightly more often than 2018 respondents, potentially due to looking for pandemic-related updates.



Budget

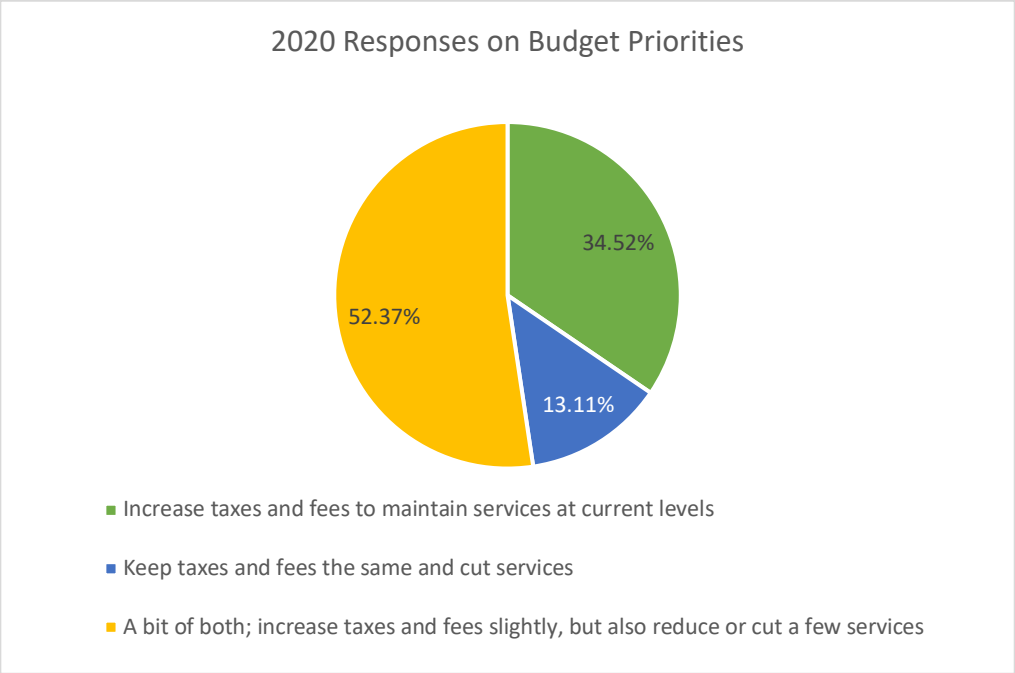
The following questions ask residents to put themselves in the shoes of City leaders, and choose priorities for the future City budget.

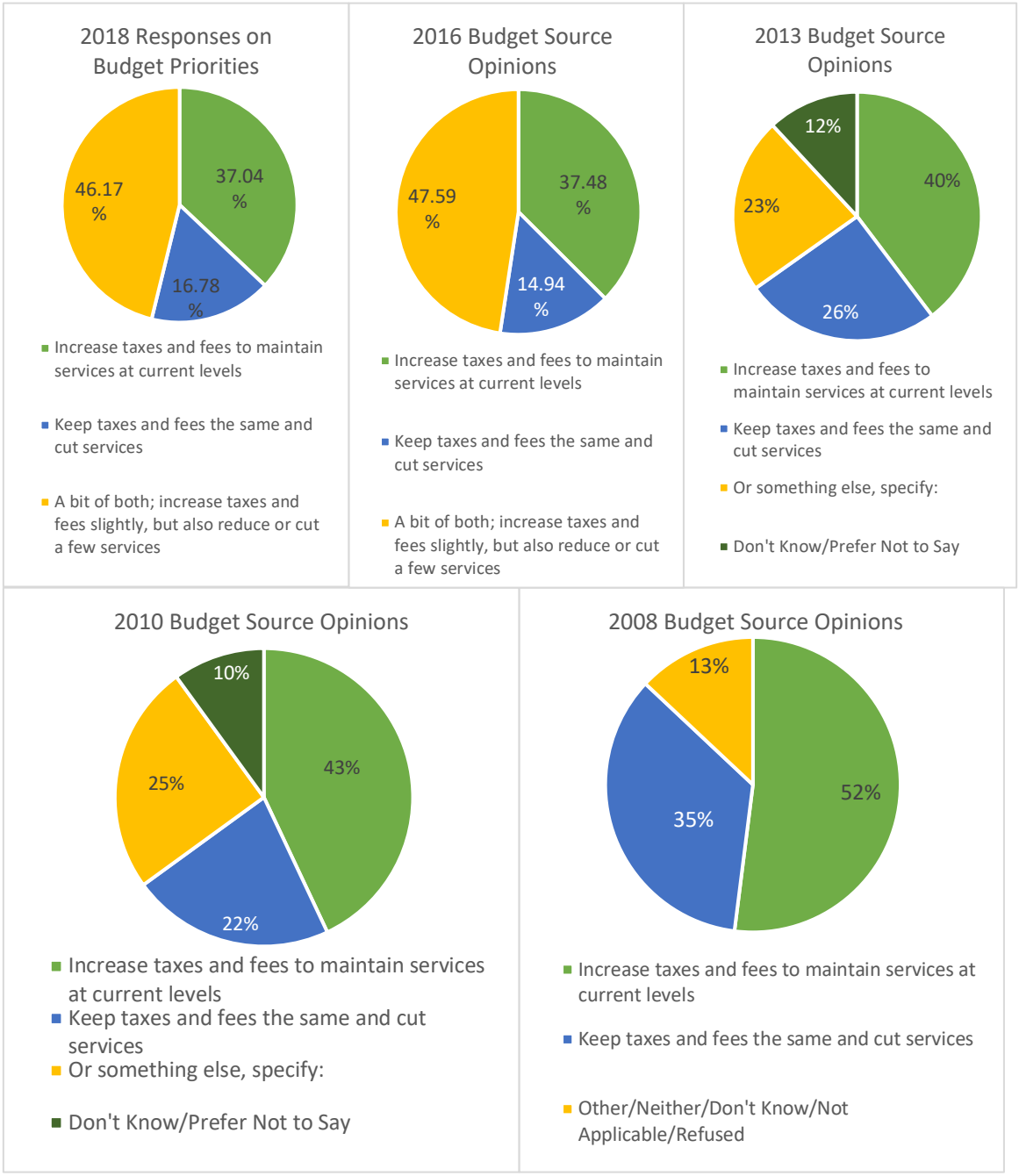
Budget Priorities

Q: City leaders must carefully choose budget priorities. If you had to choose only one, which of the following would you choose for the City?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Increase taxes and fees to maintain services at current levels	34.52%	445
Keep taxes and fees the same and cut services	13.11%	169
A bit of both; increase taxes and fees slightly, but also reduce or cut a few services	52.37%	675
Total	100%	1289

Concerning budget priorities, more than half (52 percent) of respondents would prefer a combination of increasing taxes/fees and reducing services. 35 percent would prefer to increase taxes/fees and keep services at current levels, and 13 percent would prefer to reduce services and keep taxes/fees the same.



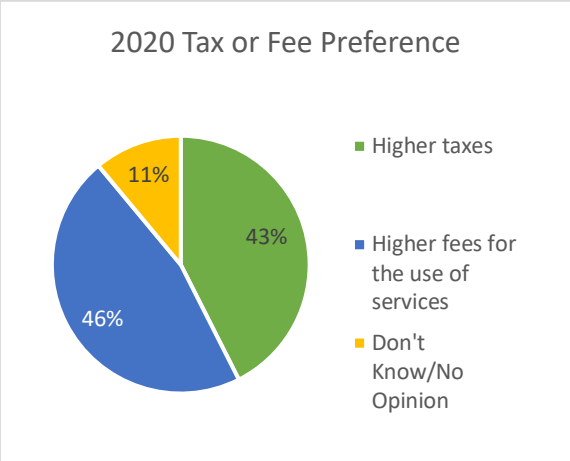


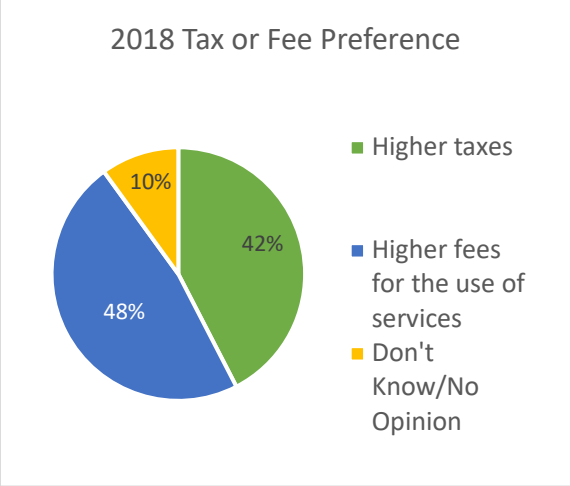
Historically, it should be noted that this question varies in methodology, making it difficult to draw comparisons between survey results. However, it can be seen that in **every** year, respondents prefer to *Increase taxes and fees to maintain services at current levels* over *Keep taxes and fees the same and cut services*.

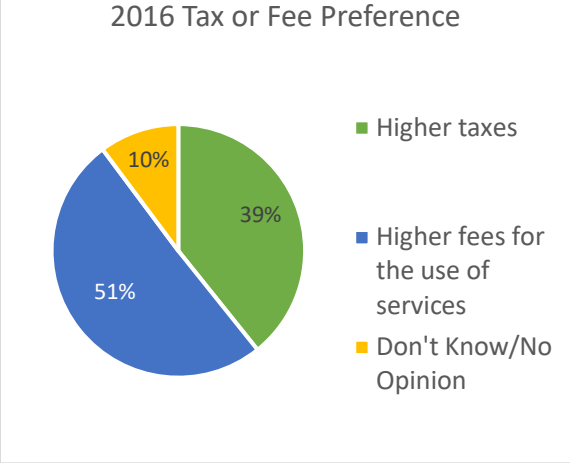
Tax or Fee Preference

Q: What would you be more likely to support?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Higher taxes	42.55%	474
Higher fees for the use of services	46.41%	517
Don't Know/No Opinion	11.04%	123
Total	100%	1114







Only respondents who selected *Increase taxes and fees to maintain services at current levels* or *A bit of both* in the previous question (445 respondents total) were asked this question.

43 percent of these respondents would be more likely to support *Higher taxes*, and 46 percent would be more likely to prefer *Higher fees for the use of services*.

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question – the percentage of respondents who would prefer "*Higher taxes"* increased from 39 percent in 2016 to 43 percent in 2020. The percentage of *Don't Know/No Opinion* responses have been fairly steady while the share of those preferring "*Higher fees for the use of services"* has decreased from 51 percent in 2016 to 46 percent in 2020.

Services to Reduce or Cut

Q: What services would you reduce or cut? Select all that apply

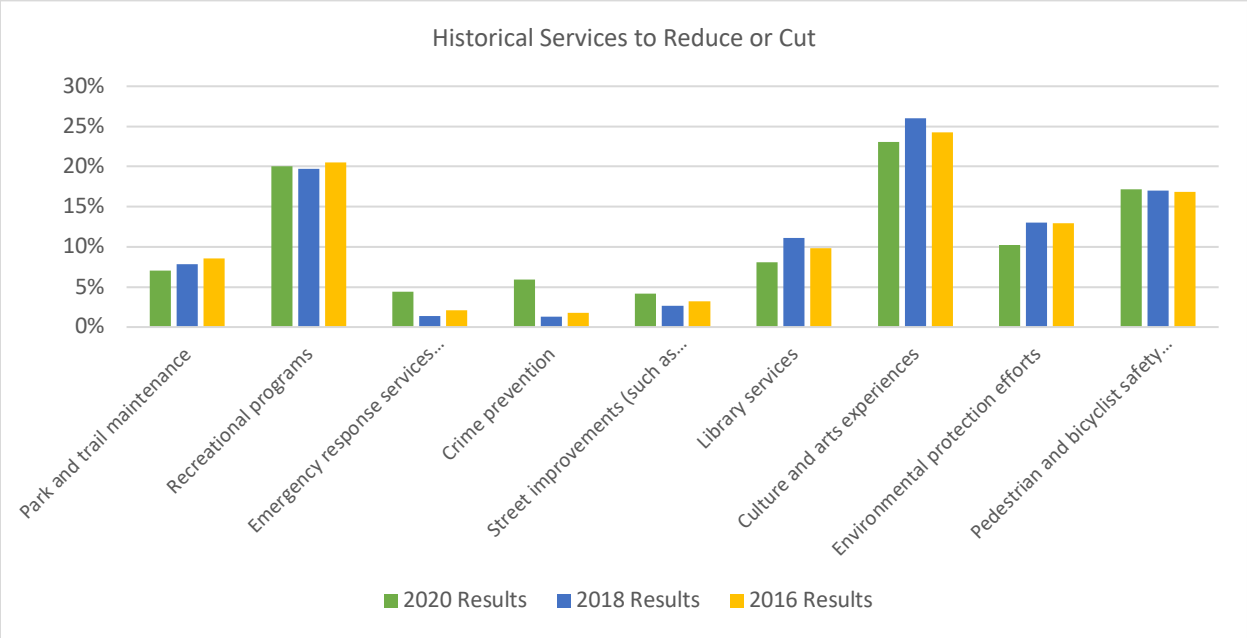
Answer	2020 Results	Count
Culture and arts experiences	23.07%	385
Recreational programs	20.01%	334
Pedestrian and bicyclist safety (such as sidewalks or bike lanes)	17.20%	287
Environmental protection efforts	10.19%	170
Library services	8.09%	135
Park and trail maintenance	7.01%	117
Crime prevention	5.93%	99
Emergency response services (such as fire, police, EMS)	4.37%	73
Street improvements (such as fixing potholes, signage, and traffic lights)	4.13%	69
Total	100%	1669

Only respondents who answered that they would prefer to either *Keep taxes and fees the same and cut services* or *A bit of both* in the budget priorities question (844 respondents) were asked this question. They are able to select all that apply, so the total response count exceeds the number of respondents.

Many responded that they would reduce the following services: *Culture and arts experiences* (385 responses), *Recreational Programs* (334 responses), or *Pedestrian and bicyclist safety* (287 responses).

Few indicated that they would reduce the following services: *Crime prevention* (99 responses), *Emergency response services* (73 responses), and *Street improvements* (69 responses).

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question. Responses increased notably for cutting *Emergency response services* and *Crime prevention*, likely as a response to the discourse surrounding defunding the police.



Service Priorities

Q: As a community member, how would you prioritize the following services? Please drag and drop the answers below into a rank order, from your top priority to your lowest priority.

This question asks all respondents to rate the following services that rely on taxpayer dollars, from most to least important:

- Park and trail maintenance
- Recreational programs
- Emergency response services
- Crime prevention
- Street improvements
- Library services
- Culture and arts experiences
- Environmental protection efforts
- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety

Respondents feel the most important services that rely on taxpayer dollars are:

1. Emergency response services (30 percent rated #1)
2. Environmental Protection Efforts (22 percent rated #1)
3. Crime prevention (21 percent rated #1)

The least important services that rely on taxpayer dollars, according to respondents, are:

1. Culture and arts experiences (22 percent rated last)
2. Recreational programs (18 percent rated last)
3. Pedestrian and bicyclist safety (14 percent rated last)
4. Crime prevention (13 percent rated last)

It is worth noting that crime prevention fell from the second most important service in 2018 to the third more important in 2020 and is also ranked as the fourth least important service. This is likely a result of the current discourse surrounding defunding the police.

Important Services	Average Rank
Emergency response services (such as fire, police, EMS)	3.5
Crime prevention	4.2
Environmental protection efforts	4.3
Street improvements (such as fixing potholes, signage, and traffic lights)	4.6
Park and trail maintenance	4.8
Pedestrian and bicyclist safety (such as sidewalks or bike lanes)	5.3
Library services	5.5
Recreational programs	6.4
Culture and arts experiences	6.5

Environmental Actions

The following questions ask respondents to report the importance of current environmental actions the City is taking. The questions in this section are presented in a randomized order to eliminate possible bias.

Importance of Reducing Automobile Use

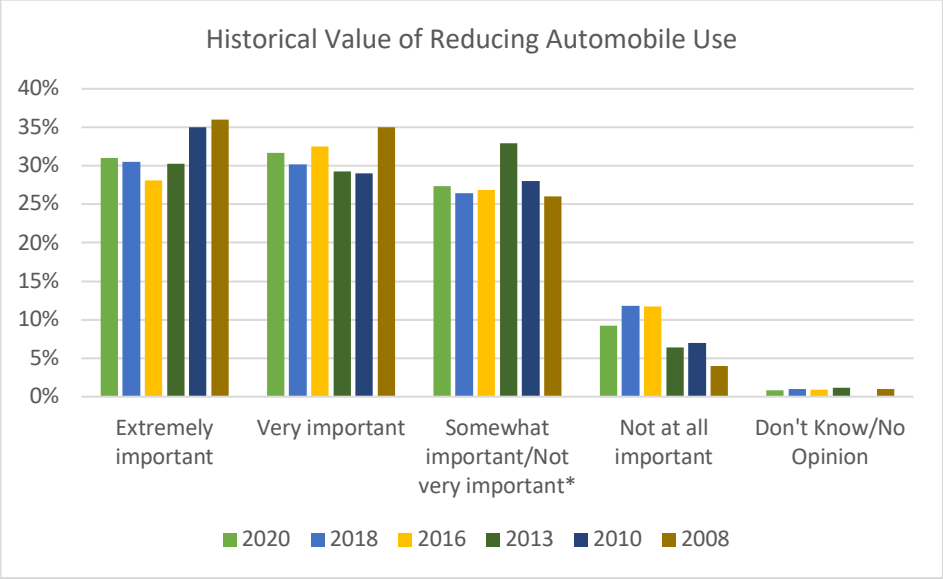
Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Reducing automobile trips by improving public transit, bicycle and pedestrian choices…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	31.01%	431
Very important	31.65%	440
Somewhat important	27.34%	380
Not at all important	9.21%	128
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.79%	11
Total	100%	1390

63 percent of respondents think it is *Extremely* (31 percent) or *Very* (32 percent) *important* for the City to reduce automobile trips by improving public transit, bicycle and pedestrian choices. Only 9 percent of respondents consider this action to be *Not at all important.*

Historically, reducing automobile use has become less important to respondents (2016 and 2018), however this has shifted slightly in 2020. The rate of *Extremely important* responses has decreased from 36 percent (2008) to 31 percent (2020), and the rate of *Not at all important* responses has increased from 4 percent (2008) to 9 percent (2020).

One possible explanation for this trend, although outside the scope of this study, is that past success with trip reduction, both real and perceived, has led fewer people to believe that it remains a high priority focus.



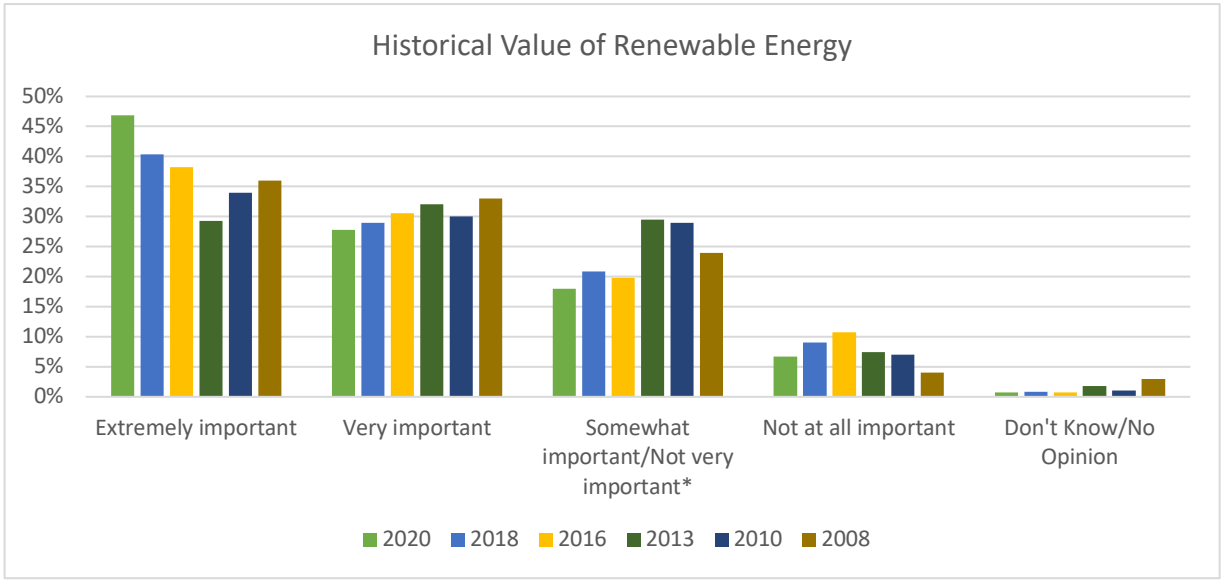
Importance of Renewable Energy

Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Promoting the use of renewable energy such as green and solar power…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	46.90%	651
Very important	27.74%	385
Somewhat important	17.94%	249
Not at all important	6.70%	93
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.72%	10
Total	100%	1388

75 percent of respondents think it is *Extremely* (47 percent) or *Very* (28 percent) *important* for the City to promote the use of renewable energy, such as green and solar power. Approximately 7 percent of respondents consider promoting renewable energy use to be *Not at all important*.

Between 2008 and 2013, the historical trend indicates that promoting renewable energy had been becoming less important to respondents as an environmental action (decreasing rates of *Extremely important*, increasing rates of *Not at all important*). In 2016 respondents seemed to be polarized in their opinions about the importance of renewable energy – there is an increase in the rate of responses for both *Extremely important* and *Not at all important*, and a decrease in the rate of *Somewhat important/Not very important** responses. Since then, *Extremely important* responses have steadily increased and *Not at all important* responses have steadily decreased.



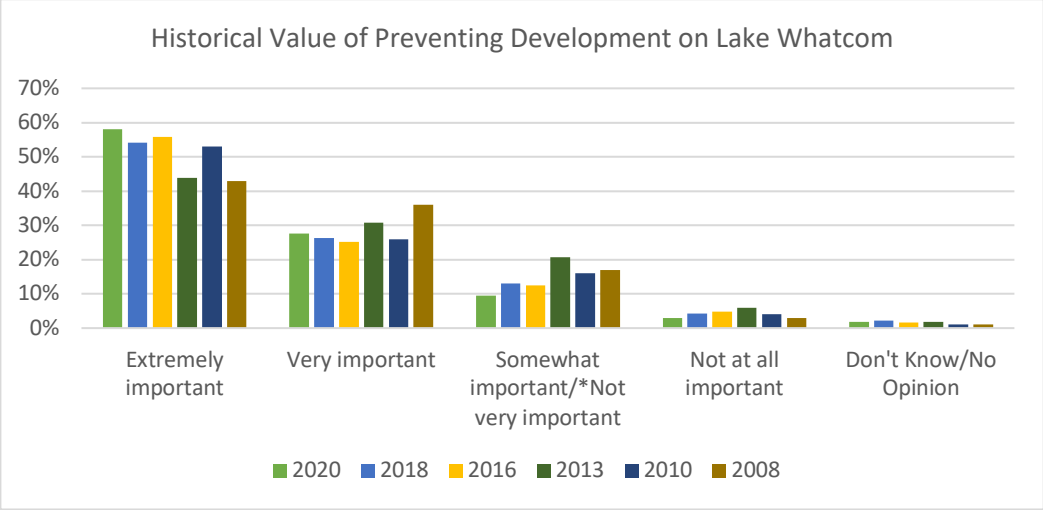
Lake Whatcom Watershed

Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Preventing further development in the Lake Whatcom watershed, Bellingham's primary source of drinking water…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	58.05%	808
Very important	27.66%	385
Somewhat important	9.55%	133
Not at all important	2.87%	40
Don't Know/No Opinion	1.87%	26
Total	100%	1392

A distinguished majority of respondents (86 percent) think it is *Extremely* or *Very important* for the City to prevent further development in the Lake Whatcom watershed – more than half (58 percent) rate this environmental protection action as *Extremely important*, and over a quarter (28 percent) rate it as *Very important.* Only 3 percent of respondents think this action is *Not at all important*.

The historical results concerning the importance of preventing further development on Lake Whatcom show that the 2020 respondents view preventing further development similarly, if not as slightly more important, than the 2018 and 2016 surveys.



Regional Influence

69 percent of respondents from Census Tract 8.04, 77 percent of respondents from Tract 8.03, and 80 percent of respondents from Tract 8.05, think it is either *Extremely* or *Very important* for the City to prevent further development in the Lake Whatcom watershed (compared to 86 percent of all respondents).

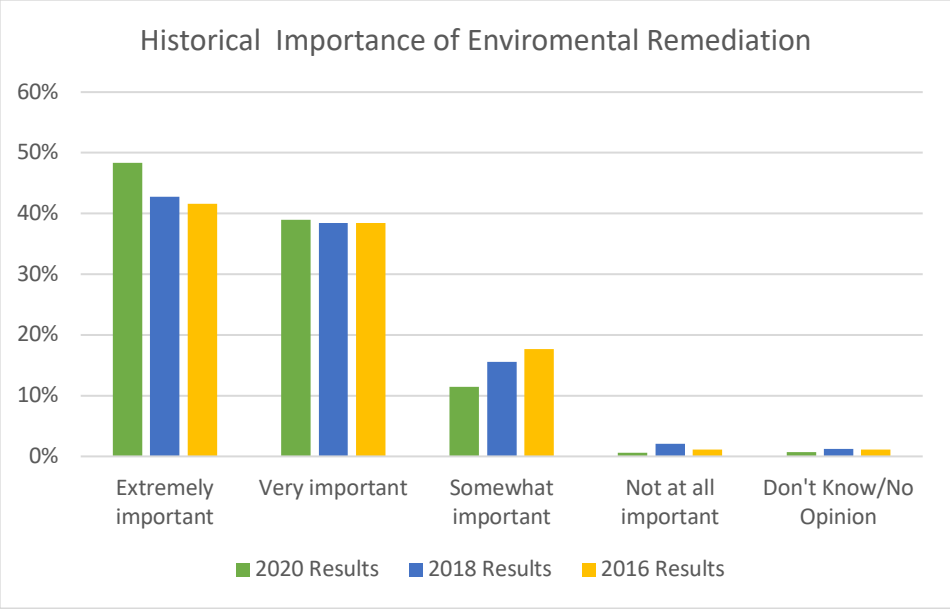
Environmental Remediation

Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Environmental remediation and cleanup of contaminated sites…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	48.38%	672
Very important	38.80%	159
Somewhat important	11.45%	9
Not at all important	0.65%	539
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.72%	10
Total	100%	1389

87 percent of respondents think that it is *Extremely* (48 percent) or *Very* (39 percent) *important* for the City to conduct environmental remediation and cleanup of contaminated sites. Only 0.7 percent of respondents believe that this environmental protection action is *Not at all important*.

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question – the number of *Extremely important* responses have been on the rise while *Somewhat* and *Not at all important* responses both have been decreasing, indicating a trend toward viewing the issue of environmental remediation as more important.



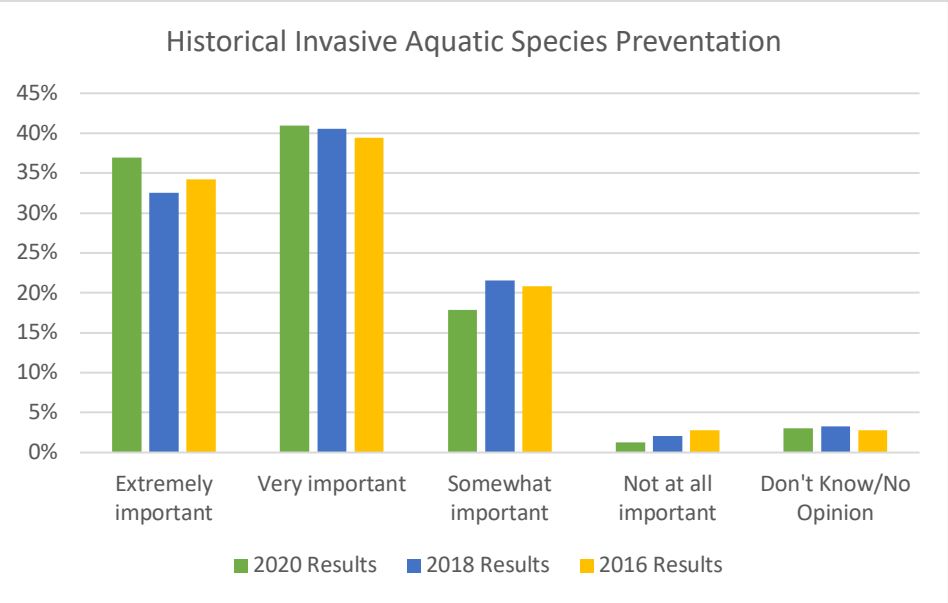
Preventing the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species

Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	36.91%	513
Very important	40.94%	569
Somewhat important	17.84%	248
Not at all important	1.29%	18
Don't Know/No Opinion	3.02%	42
Total	100%	1390

78 percent of respondents think that it is *Extremely* (37 percent) or *Very* (41 percent) *important* for the City to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Only 1 percent of respondents believe that this environmental protection action is *Not at all important*.

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question. The number of *Extremely and Very important* responses has increased, while the number of Somewhat and *Not at all important* responses have decreased. This indicates that the community is viewing preventing the spread of invasive aquatic species as more important than they have in past years.



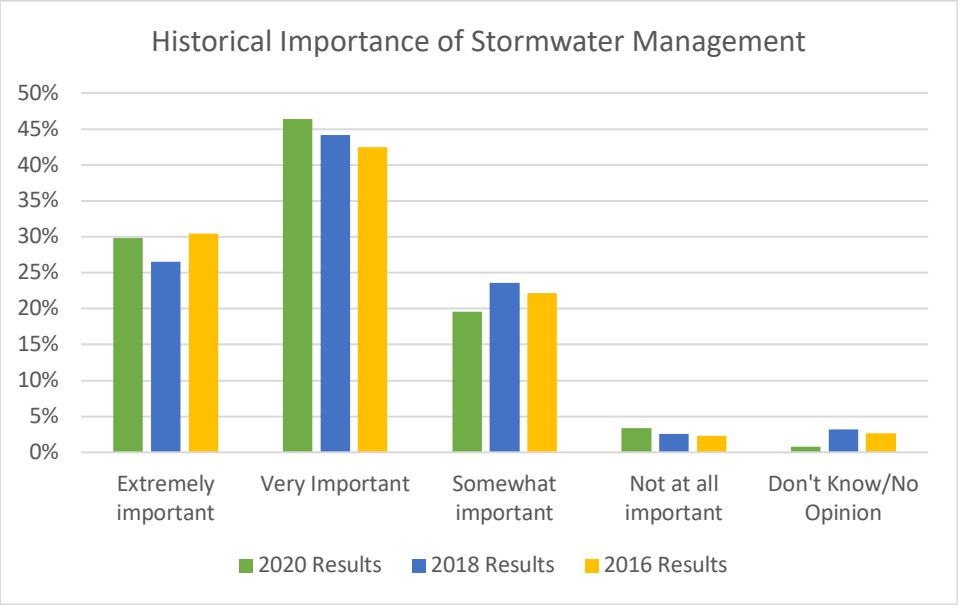
Stormwater Management

Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Stormwater management…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	29.86%	415
Very Important	46.40%	645
Somewhat important	19.57%	272
Not at all important	3.38%	47
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.79%	11
Total	100%	1390

76 percent of respondents think that it is *Extremely* (30 percent) or *Very* (46 percent) *important* for the City to manage storm water. Only 3 percent of respondents believe that this environmental protection action is *Not at all important*.

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question – the number of *Extremely important* responses returned to 2016, while the number of *Very important* has increased steadily and *Somewhat important* responses have decreased. While this indicates that the community is viewing storm water management in 2020 as more important than they did in 2016, this year also saw an increase in those who believed it was *Not at all important* compared to the last two surveys.



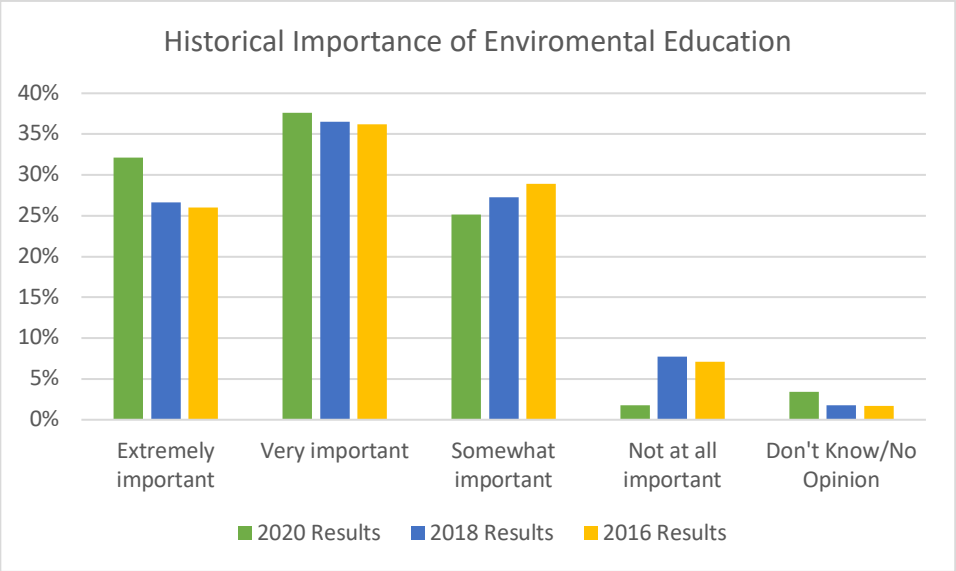
Environmental Stewardship Education

Q: Tell us how important this action is to you: Educating community members to foster environmental stewardship…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Extremely important	32.11%	446
Very important	37.58%	522
Somewhat important	25.13%	349
Not at all important	1.80%	25
Don't Know/No Opinion	3.38%	47
Total	100%	1389

70 percent of respondents think that it is *Extremely* (32 percent) or *Very* (38 percent) *important* for the City to educate community members in order to foster environmental stewardship. 2 percent of respondents believe environmental education is *Not at all important* – the lowest level observed to date.

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question – the community's view on the importance of environmental education appears to have increased since the 2016 and 2018 studies.



Additional Environmental Action Ideas

Q: Are there any other measures you think the City should be taking to protect the environment?

This is an open-ended question requiring a text entry from respondents. The following table contains a count of topics that are mentioned. One response may contain multiple topic tags, so total count of topics exceeds total responses. To view the full text responses see appendix.

Environmental	Count
Improve Recycling and Composting Programs	48
Create/Utilize Clean Energy	38
Protect Natural Areas	33
Encourage Non-Emission Transportation (Busing, Biking, Walking, EVs)	32
Protect Lake Whatcom/Watershed	31
Homelessness	30
Create Incentives for/Promote/Mandate Greener Business Practices	28
Address Climate Change	28
Educate Citizens	24
Banning Environmentally Hazardous Products (ex. Styrofoam and Plastic Containers)	12
Improve Roads and Infrastructure	9
Increase Density	9
Increase Community Participation in Environmental Projects	8
Reduce/Elimate/Tax Coal and Oil Trains Through Bellingham	8
Storm Water Treatment and Storage	5
Reduce Mismanaged Pet and Livestock Waste	5

Community Safety

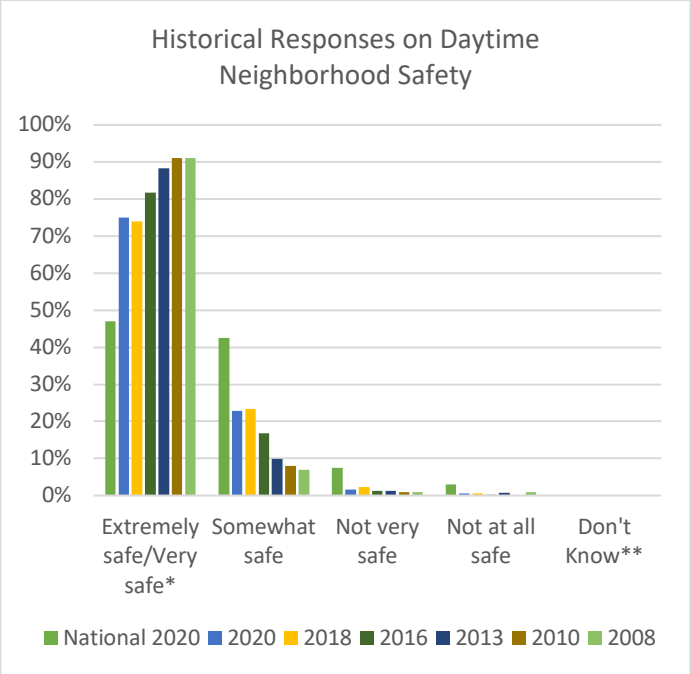
The following questions ask respondents to rate their feelings of safety when walking alone in different areas of the community, as well as their level of disaster preparedness.

*Historical comparisons are difficult to make, because starting in the year 2016, the survey only offered four levels of safety as options: *Extremely safe, Somewhat safe, Not very safe,* and *Not at all safe*. Previous surveys included a fifth option of *Very safe*, which has been included with the *Extremely safe* section in our historical analysis figures. For this reason, each historical analysis shows a lower proportion of respondents feeling *Extremely safe* compared to other years, most likely because those who previously chose *Very safe* would have been divided between *Extremely* and *Somewhat safe* when faced with only four options. For this reason, explanations of historical analysis figures are excluded.

Daytime Neighborhood Safety

Q: How safe do you feel walking alone during the day in your neighborhood?

Answer	National Results	2020 Results
Extremely safe	47%	75%
Somewhat safe	42%	23%
Not very safe	8%	2%
Not at all safe	3%	1%
Total	47%	75%



Most (75 percent) Bellingham respondents feel *Extremely safe* walking alone during the day in their neighborhood compared to just under half (47 percent) of the national sample. Approximately 3 percent of Bellingham respondents feel unsafe in their neighborhoods during the day (*Not very safe* or *Not at all safe*), while 11 percent of respondents from Peer Cities felt similarly.

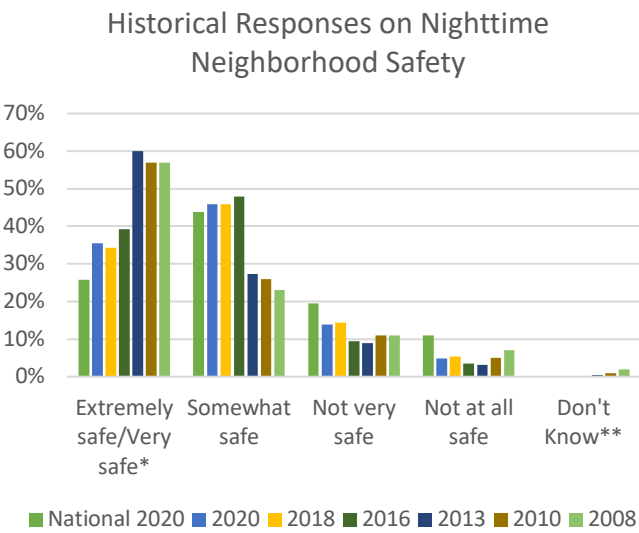
Regional Influence

Respondents in some neighborhoods feel safer walking alone during the day than respondents in other neighborhoods. Census Tracts 2, 3, 6, 8.04, 8.05, 9.02, and 12.02 feel safer than average during the day. Census Tracts 1, 7, 9.01, 10, 11, 12.01 feel less safe than average during the day.

Nighttime Neighborhood Safety

Q: How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your neighborhood?

Answer	National Results	2020 Results
Extremely safe	26%	35%
Somewhat safe	44%	46%
Not very safe	19%	14%
Not at all safe	11%	5%
Total	26%	35%



Most Bellingham respondents feel at least *Somewhat safe* (46 percent), if not *Extremely safe* (35 percent) when walking alone at night in their neighborhood. 19 percent feel unsafe alone at night in their neighborhood (*Not very safe* or *Not at all safe*). The national sample, on the other hand, is more likely to feel unsafe walking alone in their neighborhood at night.

Regional Influence

Respondents in some neighborhoods feel safer walking alone at night than respondents in other neighborhoods. Census Tracts 4, 5.02, 8.03, 8.04, 8.05, 9.02, 11, and 12.02 feel safer than average at night. Census Tracts 1, 2, 3, 5.01, 6, 7, 10, and 12.01 feel less safe than average at night.

Demographic Influence

Bellingham women feel less safe than men when walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. 49 percent of men report feeling *Extremely safe*, and 10 percent of men feel unsafe (*Not very safe* or *Not safe at all*). Only 26 percent of women feel *Extremely safe* walking alone in their neighborhoods at night, and 25 percent of women feel unsafe (*Not very safe* or *Not safe at all*).

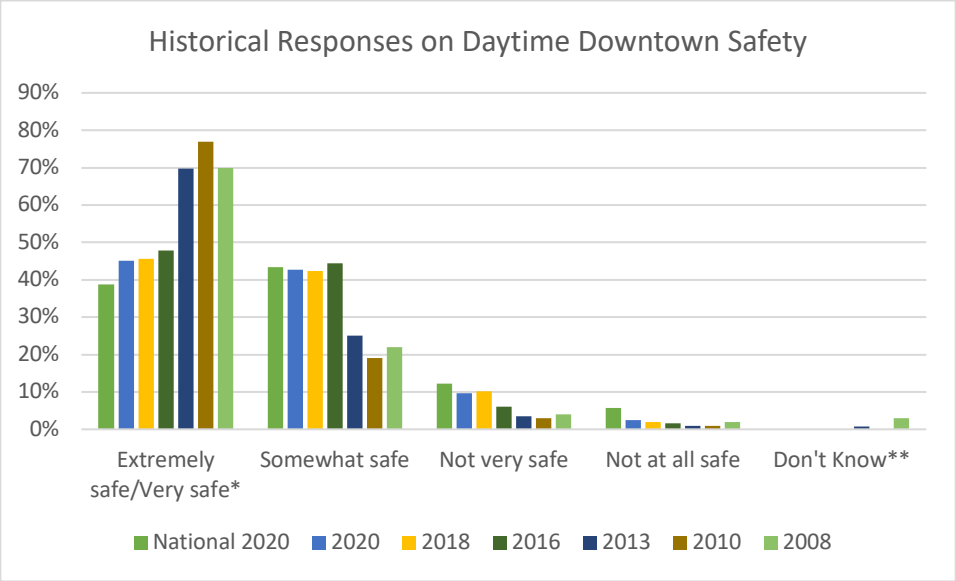
Similarly, in the national study, 41 percent of men reported feeling *Extremely safe* compare to 17 percent of women. In terms of feeling unsafe (*Not very safe* or *Not safe at all*), 39 percent of women reported feeling unsafe compare to 16 percent of men.

Daytime Downtown Safety

Q: How safe do you feel walking alone downtown during the day?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Extremely safe	38.83%	417	45.14%	622
Somewhat safe	43.30%	465	42.74%	589
Not very safe	12.20%	131	9.58%	132
Not at all safe	5.68%	61	2.54%	35
Total	100%	1074	100%	1378

Most Bellingham respondents feel either *Extremely safe* (45 percent) or *Somewhat safe* (43 percent) walking alone downtown during the day. 12 percent of respondents feel unsafe alone downtown during the day (*Not very safe* or *Not at all safe*). In comparison, national respondents are less likely to feel *Extremely* safe walking alone downtown during the day. Age and gender do not affect general feelings of safety walking alone downtown during the day.

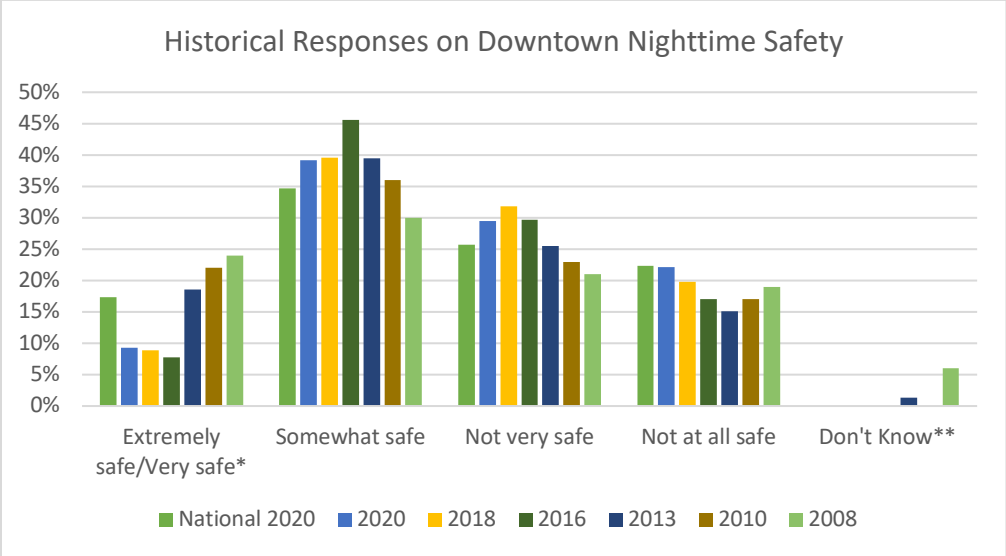


Nighttime Downtown Safety

Q: How safe do you feel walking alone downtown at night?

Answer	National Results	Count	2010 Results	Count
Extremely safe	17.34%	185	9.24%	122
Somewhat safe	34.68%	370	39.21%	518
Not very safe	25.68%	274	29.45%	389
Not at all safe	22.31%	238	22.10%	292
Total	100%	1067	100%	1321

Only 9 percent of Bellingham respondents report feeling *Extremely safe* walking alone downtown at night. While 39 percent do feel *Somewhat safe*, 29 percent feel *Not very safe*, and 22 percent feel *Not at all safe* walking alone downtown at night. The national sample is almost twice as likely to feel *Extremely safe* compared to the Bellingham respondents.



Demographic Influences

Bellingham women feel less safe than men when walking alone downtown at night. When walking alone downtown at night, 15 percent of men feel *Extremely safe*, 41 percent feel *Somewhat safe*, 2 percent feel *Not very safe*, and 15 percent feel *Not at all safe*. Concerning women, 5 percent feel *Extremely safe*, 36 percent feel *Somewhat safe,* 32 percent feel *Not very safe*, and 27 percent feel *Not at all safe* when walking alone downtown at night.

Nationally, a similar trend can be seen with 28 percent of men feel *Extremely safe*, 41 percent feel *Somewhat safe*, 22 percent feel *Not very safe*, and 9 percent feel *Not at all safe*. Concerning women, 11 percent feel *Extremely safe*, 31 percent feel *Somewhat safe,* 28 percent feel *Not very safe*, and 30 percent feel *Not at all safe* when walking alone downtown at night.

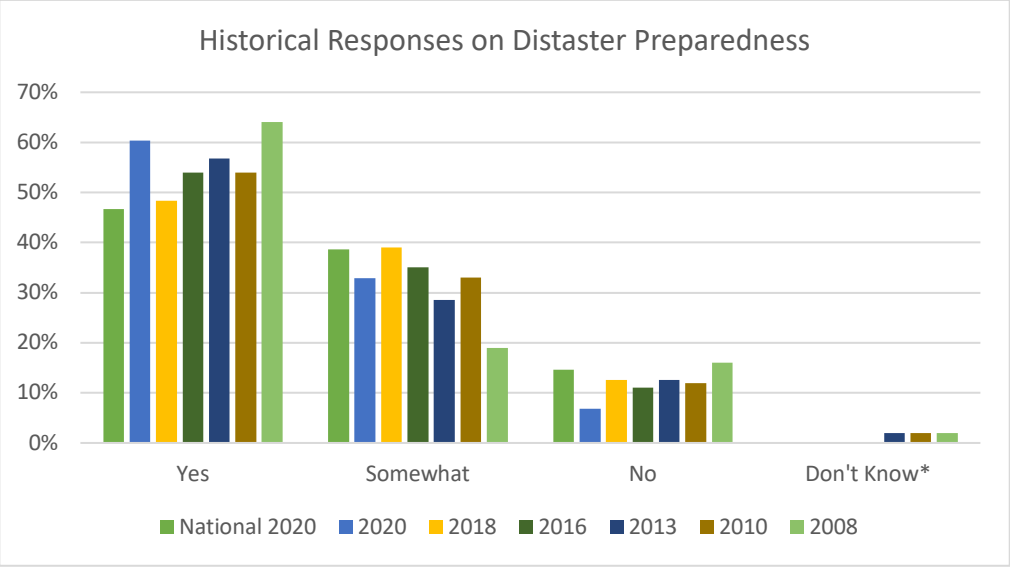
Disaster Preparedness

Q: When thinking about your household, would you say you are prepared to sustain yourselves for at least 72 hours after a major disaster?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Yes	46.69%	507	60.32%	833
Somewhat	38.67%	420	32.87%	454
No	14.64%	159	6.81%	94
Total	100%	1086	100%	1381

The majority of respondents report that they are at least *Somewhat* (33 percent), if not completely (60 percent) prepared to sustain their households for at least 72 hours after a major disaster. 7 percent of respondents don't believe they could sustain their households for 72 hours in a time of crisis. Overall, the Bellingham sample is far more prepared than the national sample.

One potential reason for the increase in preparedness – over a 10 percentage point spike in those fully prepared – compared to 2018 is the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of purchases of nonperishable supplies and food during the Spring.



Demographic Influence

Young residents are less likely to be completely prepared to sustain their households after a major disaster than older residents – only 44 percent of respondents under age 35 are completely prepared (*Yes*), and 15 percent are completely unprepared (*No*).

Mobility and Connectivity

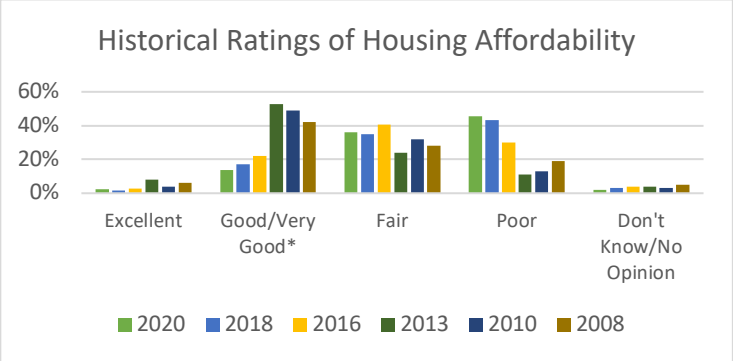
The following questions are designed to illuminate the quality of life in Bellingham neighborhoods. Respondents rate each of the following subjects in reference to their own neighborhood. The questions in this section were presented in a randomized order to eliminate possible bias.

*It should be noted that this year's survey only has four rating options: *Excellent, Good, Fair,* and *Poor*. Previous surveys have had five options: *Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair,* and *Poor*. Historical analysis combines previous ratings of *Very good* and *Good* into one category. Explanations of historical analysis observe the trends in the total of all positive responses (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**), and the total of all negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*).

Housing Affordability

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Housing affordability…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	2.52%	35
Good	13.75%	191
Fair	36.07%	501
Poor	45.50%	632
Don't Know/No Opinion	2.16%	30
Total	100%	1389



Only 16 percent of respondents give their neighborhoods' housing affordability a positive rating – 3 percent give an *Excellent* rating, and 14 percent give a *Good* rating. 36 percent of respondents rate housing affordability as *Fair*, and 46 percent rate it as *Poor*.

This survey's responses regarding housing affordability are more negative than previous results, especially those before 2013. Just in the past few years, positive housing affordability ratings (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**) have decreased from 61 percent (2013) to 16 percent (2020), and negative housing affordability ratings (*Fair* or *Poor*) have increased from 35 percent (2013) to 82 percent (2020). On the surface this appears to be following the trend of housing prices and months inventory available.

Regional Influence

Census Tracts 1, 2, 5.02, 8.05, 9.01, 9.02, and 12.02 report housing affordability to be much more positive than the city average, while Census Tracts 3, 4, 5.01, 6, 11, and 12.02 view housing affordability more negatively than the city average.

State Trends in Housing Affordability

Bellingham is not alone – the decline in housing affordability is reflected throughout the state. In Washington State, median sales price rose to $433,400 in the Second Quarter of 2020, a 5.6 percent increase from a year before. In Whatcom County, median sales price sits at $428,900, a 5.2 percent increase from the previous year according to the Runstad Center for Real Estate Studies at the University of Washington.

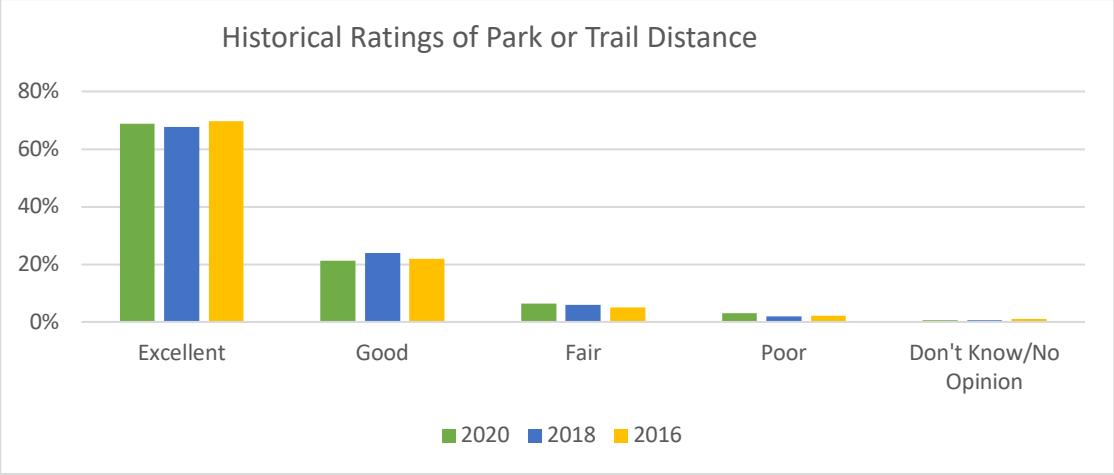
Park or Trail Distance

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Walking distance to a park or trail…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	68.73%	954
Good	21.33%	296
Fair	6.34%	88
Poor	3.03%	42
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.58%	8
Total	100%	1388

Most respondents (90 percent) rate the walking distance to a park or trail in their neighborhood positively – 69 percent rate park or trail distance as *Excellent*, and 21 percent rate it as *Good*. Only 9 percent of respondents rated their neighborhood's walking distance to a park or trail negatively (*Fair* or *Poor*).

This is the third year that the survey has asked this question – the 2020 responses are in keeping with past results.



Regional Influence

Respondents from Census Tracts 4, 5.02, 7, 8.05, and 12.02 report walking distance to a park or trail as more positive than the city average. On the other hand, respondents from Census Tracts 1, 3, 8.04, and 9.02 report walking distance to a park or trail as more negative than the city average.

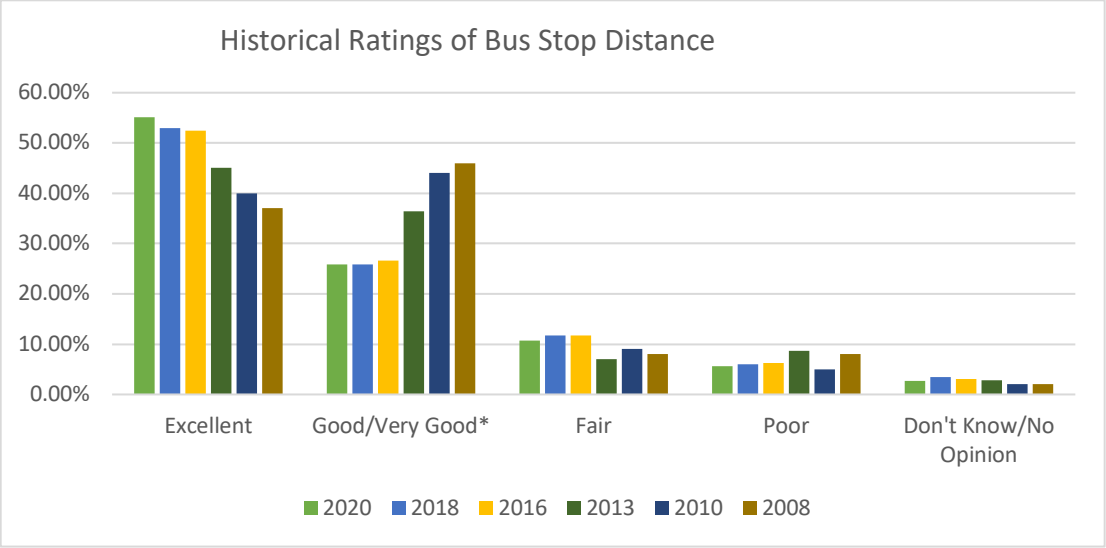
Bus Stop Distance

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Walking distance to a bus stop…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	55.11%	766
Good	25.90%	360
Fair	10.65%	148
Poor	5.61%	78
Don't Know/No Opinion	2.73%	38
Total	100%	1390

Most respondents (81 percent) rate the walking distance to a bus stop in their neighborhood positively – 55 percent rate bus stop distance as *Excellent*, and 26 percent rate *Good*. 16 percent of respondents rated their neighborhood's walking distance to a bus stop negatively (*Fair* or *Poor*).

From 2016 to 2020, total positive responses (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**) and negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*) considering bus stop distance have been relatively stable.



Regional Influence

Responses concerning walking distance to a bus stop vary significantly by neighborhood. Census Tracts whose responses are more positive than the city average include: 4, 5.01, 5.02, 6, 8.05, 10, 12.01, and 12.02. Census Tracts whose responses are more negative than the city average include: 1, 3, 8.03, 8.04, 9.02, and 11.

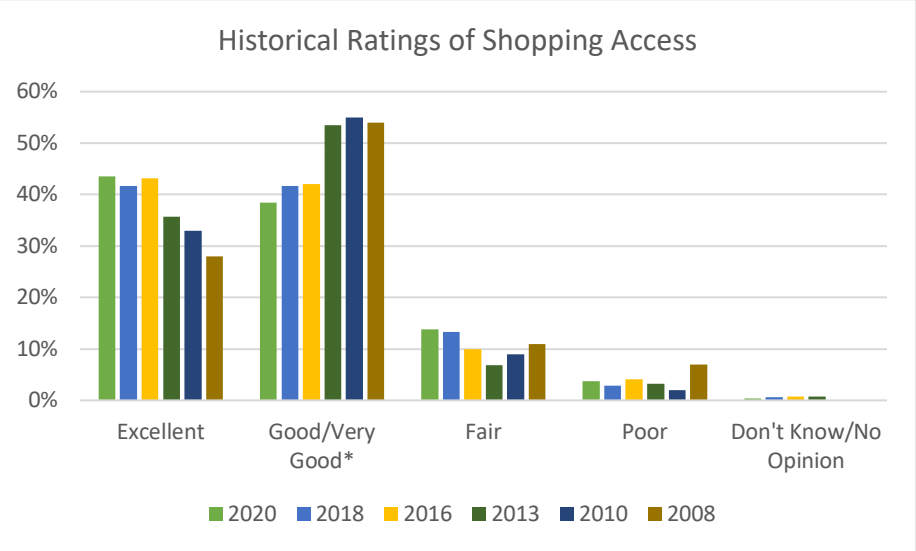
Shopping Access

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Access to shopping, or other services

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	43.52%	604
Good	38.47%	534
Fair	13.83%	192
Poor	3.75%	52
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.43%	6
Total	100%	1388

Most respondents (82 percent) rate access to shopping or other services in their neighborhood positively – 44 percent rate shopping access as *Excellent*, and 38 percent rate *Good*. 13 percent of respondents rated their shopping access as *Fair* and 4 percent gave a *Poor* rating.

Historically, positive responses are trending more toward *Excellent* and negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*) about shopping access have been relatively stable since 2008.



Regional Influence

Respondents from Census Tracts 4, 5.02, 10, and 12.02 report access to shopping or other services as more positive than the city average. On the other hand, respondents from Census Tracts 3, 7, 8.04, 8.05, and 12.01 report access to shopping or other services as more negative than the city average.

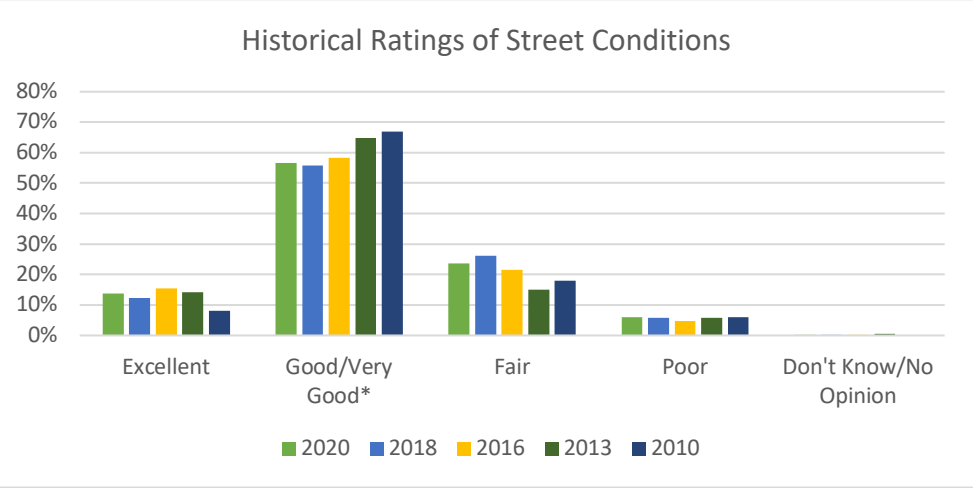
Street Conditions

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Physical condition of streets…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	13.77%	190
Good	56.59%	781
Fair	23.55%	325
Poor	5.94%	82
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.14%	2
Total	100%	1380

Only 14 percent of respondents think the physical condition of the streets in their neighborhood is *Excellent.* Most respondents (57 percent) rate street conditions as *Good*, and 24 percent rate street conditions as only *Fair*. Just under 6 percent of respondents rate their neighborhood street conditions as *Poor.*

Historically, 2020 results are fairly similar to 2018 and slightly less positive than 2016.



Regional Influence

Respondents from Census Tracts 2, 4, 8.03, 8.03, 8.05, 9.01, 11, and 12.02 rate street conditions as slightly more positive than the city average. Respondents from Census Tracts 1, 3, 7, 9.02, 10, and 12.01 rate street conditions as slightly more negative than the city average.

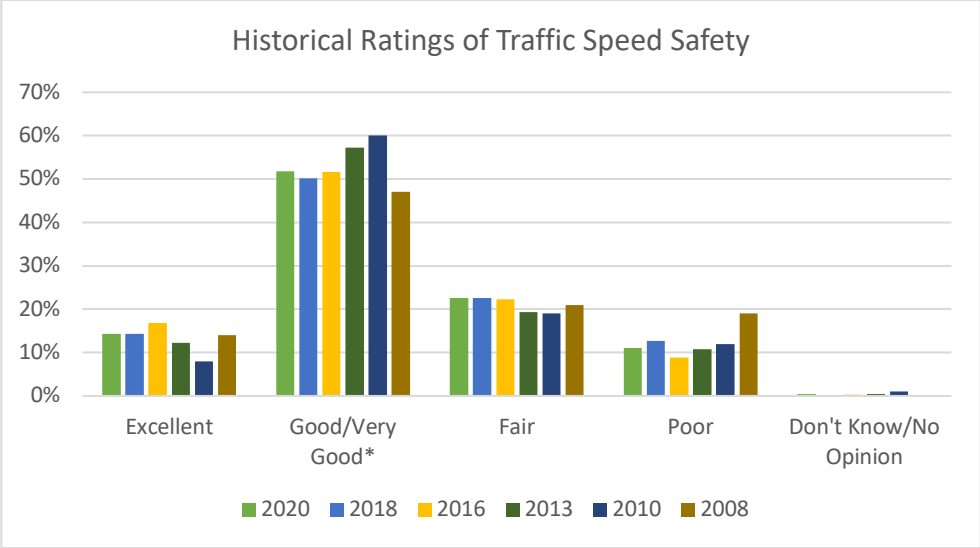
Traffic Speed Safety

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Safety of traffic speed…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	14.33%	198
Good	51.74%	715
Fair	22.50%	311
Poor	11.00%	152
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.43%	6
Total	100%	1382

Only 14 percent of respondents rate the safety of traffic speed in their neighborhood as *Excellent.* Most respondents (52 percent) rate traffic speed as *Good*, and 23 percent rate traffic speed as only *Fair*. 11 percent of respondents rate the safety of traffic speed in their neighborhood as *Poor.*

While the 2018 study showed a departure from the trend that positive ratings (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**) of traffic speed safety have been steadily increasing and negative ratings (*Fair* or *Poor*) have decreased since 2008, the 2020 study shows a return to approximately 2016 levels – however *Excellent* ratings remain at lower 2018 levels and *Poor* ratings are slightly elevated compared to 2016.



Regional Influence

Respondents from Census Tracts 5.01, 5.02, 6, 8.03, 9.01, 10, and 11 report that the safety of traffic speed in their neighborhood as more positive than the city average, while respondents from Census Tracts 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8.05, and 12.02 report that the safety of traffic speed in their neighborhood is more negative than the city average.

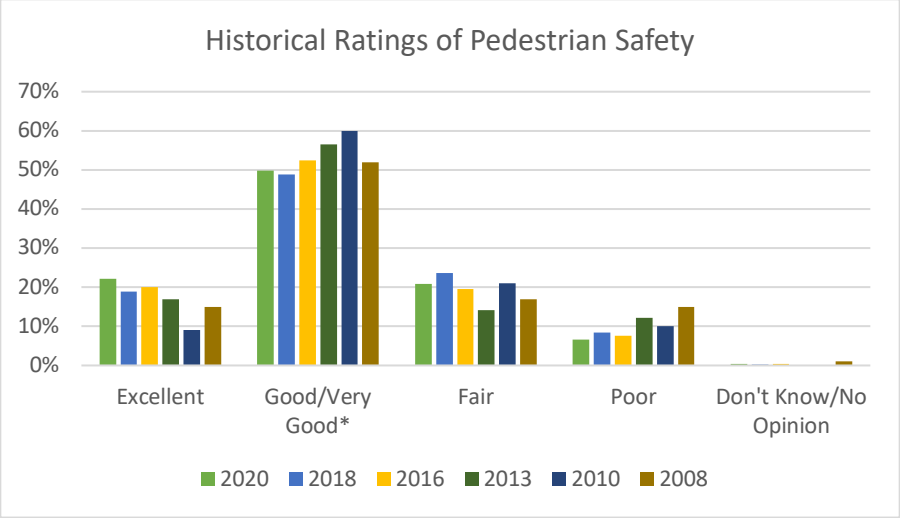
Pedestrian Safety

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Safety of pedestrians…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	22.23%	307
Good	49.82%	688
Fair	20.85%	288
Poor	6.66%	92
Don't Know/No Opinion	0.43%	6
Total	100%	1381

22 percent of respondents rate the safety of pedestrians in their neighborhood as *Excellent,* and 50 percent rate pedestrian safety as *Good*. 21 percent rate pedestrian safety as only *Fair*, and 7 percent give their neighborhood a rating of *Poor.*

Historically, positive ratings (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**) of pedestrian safety have been steady from around 70 percent. Negative ratings (*Fair* or *Poor*) have been steady around 30 percent.



Regional Influence

Respondents from Census Tracts 2, 4, 5.01, 5.02, 8.03, 9.01, and 10 report that pedestrian safety is more positive than the city average. Respondents from Census Tracts 1, 7, 8.05, 12.01, and 12.02 report that pedestrian safety is more negative than the city average.

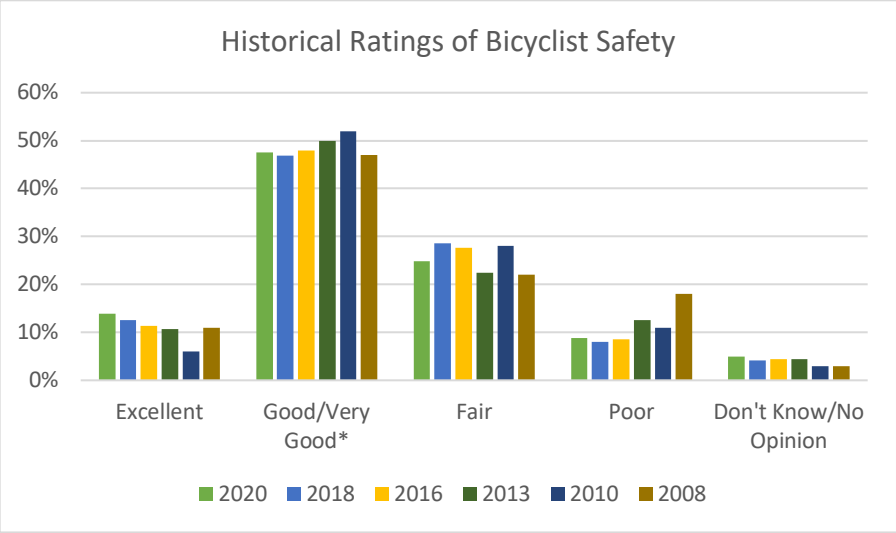
Bicyclist Safety

Q: Turning to the quality of life in your own neighborhood, please share your thoughts about how you think your neighborhood is doing in the following category: Safety of bicyclists…

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Excellent	13.92%	192
Good	47.50%	655
Fair	24.87%	343
Poor	8.77%	121
Don't Know/No Opinion	4.93%	68
Total	100%	1379

Just under 13 percent of respondents rate the safety of bicyclists in their neighborhood as *Excellent.* Many give a moderate rating for neighborhood bicyclist safety – 48 percent rate bike safety as *Good*, and 25 percent rate bike safety as only *Fair*. Almost 9 percent of respondents rate the safety of bicyclists in their neighborhood as *Poor.*

Historically, total positive responses (*Excellent, Good,* or *Very good**) and negative responses (*Fair* or *Poor*) about bicyclist safety have been relatively stable since 2008.



Regional Influence

Respondents from Census Tracts 2, 3, 4, 5.01, 5.02, 8.03, 9.01, and 11 report that bicyclist safety is more positive than the city average. Respondents from Census Tracts 1, 6, 8.04, 8.05, 9.02, 12.01, and 12.02 report that bicyclist safety is more negative than the city average.

Equity

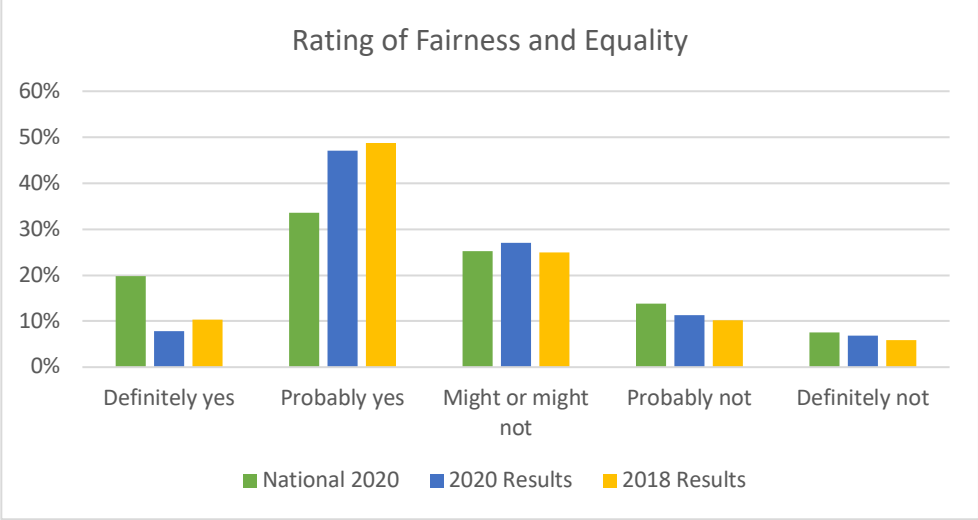
Fair and Equal Treatment of Residents and Visitors

Q: Do you feel that the City of Bellingham treats all residents and visitors equally and fairly?

Answer	National Results	Count	2020 Results	Count
Definitely yes	19.84%	223	7.85%	108
Probably yes	33.54%	377	47.02%	647
Might or might not	25.18%	283	27.03%	372
Probably not	13.88%	156	11.26%	155
Definitely not	7.56%	85	6.83%	94
Total	100%	1124	100%	1376

55 percent of Bellingham respondents rated the fairness and equality of their city's treatment of residents and visitors positively (*Definitely yes* and *Probably yes*), compared to 59 percent the year prior and 53 percent of the national respondents. 27 percent of respondents rated the City's treatment as neutral (*Might or might not*). 18 percent of respondents rated the City's treatment negatively (*Probably not* and *Definitely not*) – this is compared to 16 percent the year prior and 21 percent of national respondents.

Male respondents had a more positive impression of the City's treatment of residents and visitors, with 64 percent of males responding with *Definitely yes* or *Probably yes,* as opposed to only 51 percent of female respondents.



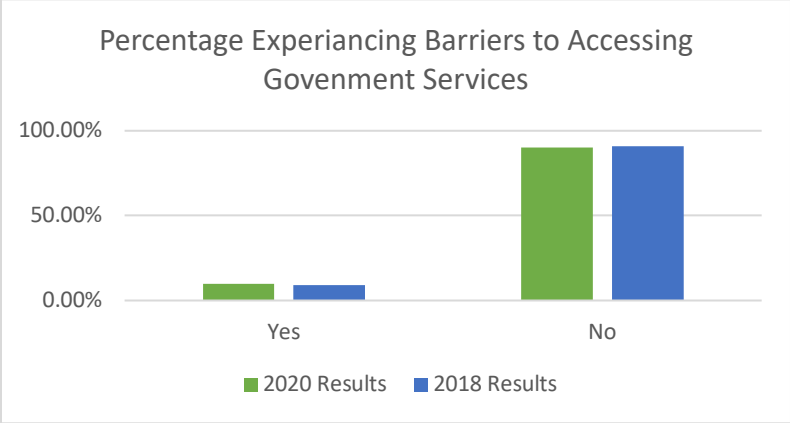
Barriers to Accessing City Government Services

Q: Have you experienced any barriers to you accessing City government services?

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Yes	9.91%	137
No	90.09%	1246
Total	100%	1383

90 percent of respondents indicated that they had not experienced any barriers to accessing services provided by the City of Bellingham. Only 10 percent of respondents indicated that they had experienced barriers to accessing services.

Male respondents reported experiencing barriers to accessing City government services at a slightly higher rate than female respondents – 9 percent for male respondents vs. 8 percent for female respondents.



Barriers to Accessing City Government Services, Broken Down by Service

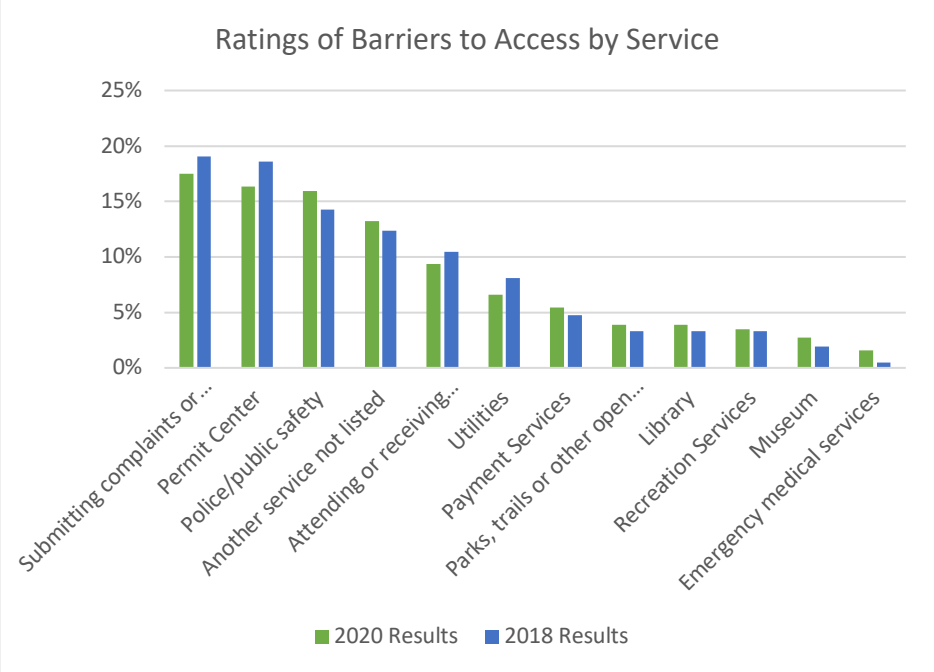
Those who responded *Yes* to the previous question, indicating they had experienced trouble accessing services provided by the City of Bellingham, were then asked to indicate which services they had experienced a barrier to accessing. Respondents were allowed to answer more than one service, so the total count is higher than the number of *Yes* responses. Respondents were then given the option of elaborating on the barrier they experienced in a short open text response.

Q: You indicated that you personally have experienced barriers in accessing City government services. We are interested in understanding your experience. As you review the following list please select the box for any service(s) where you experienced a barrier to access.

Answer	2020 Results	Count
Submitting complaints or feedback	17.51%	45
Permit Center	16.34%	42
Police/public safety	15.95%	41
Another service not listed	13.23%	34
Attending or receiving information from a public meeting	9.34%	24
Utilities	6.61%	17
Payment services	5.45%	14
Parks, trails or other open spaces	3.89%	10
Library	3.89%	10
Recreation services	3.50%	9
Museum	2.72%	7
Emergency medical services	1.56%	4
Total	100%	257

Respondents had the most barriers with *Submitting complaints or feedback* (18 percent), accessing the *Permit Center* (16 percent), and with *Police/public safety* (16 percent). Respondents had the least barriers to access for *Emergency medical services* (2 percent), and the *Museum* (3 percent).

Respondents had the option to elaborate on their experiences with an open text response. These responses are attached in the appendix.



Equitability of Bellingham

Q: For each of the following statements, please use the slider bar to indicate your perception of the statement with 1 representing the opinion that Bellingham is very equitable and 10 representing your opinion that Bellingham is very inequitable.

Field	2020 Mean	Count	**2018 Mean**	**Count**
Bellingham provides physical access to public facilities	3.87	1198	4.39	1040
Bellingham supports community celebrations and events	3.89	1203	4.32	1025
Bellingham provides adequate inclusive services for diverse sexual orientations	4.55	1136	4.54	939
Bellingham provides the opportunity to communicate directly with city staff or elected representatives	4.67	1046	4.54	839
Bellingham provides adequate inclusive services for diverse gender identifications	4.67	1092	4.57	890
Bellingham provides physical access to private facilities	4.79	969	4.64	774
Bellingham provides adequate inclusive services for diverse racial identities	5.36	1095	4.87	891
Bellingham supports income and employment opportunities	5.5	1111	4.94	911
Bellingham is a racially/culturally integrated community	6.31	1234	5.48	1054
Bellingham is a racially/culturally diverse community	6.47	1301	5.41	1106
Bellingham's housing options and affordability are equitable	7.09	1254	5.81	1081

Respondents felt that the City of Bellingham was least equitable with regard to:

- *Housing options and affordability* (mean response 7.09)
- *Racial/Cultural diversity* (mean response 6.47)
- *Racial/Cultural integration* (mean response 6.31).

Respondents felt that the City of Bellingham was most equitable with regard to:

- *Providing physical access to public facilities* (mean response 3.87)
- *Supporting community celebration and events* (mean response 3.89)
- *Providing adequate inclusive services for diverse sexual orientations* (mean response 4.55)

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

Q: In thinking about how you and your household has been impacted by COVID-19, which of the following have been true for you? (Select all that apply)

Among Bellingham respondents, the most common impacts of the pandemic were increasing use of outdoor spaces (36 percent), having reduced household income (22 percent), having someone in their household lose their job (11 percent), and having increased risk of financial and housing insecurity (10 percent). These were also the top four impacts for the national respondents. It is worth noting that the fifth most common impact in the national sample is increased use of food banks at 12 percent, while this was sixth in the Bellingham sample at 5 percent.

The structure of this question allows respondents to choose multiple answers, thus the total represents the total number of impacts experienced by the respective groups rather than the number of individuals who responded.

In terms of other city services, national respondents mostly used this area to indicate that they had done none of the above and some reported travelling to other cities more to use their services. Among the Bellingham respondents, individuals mentioned: increased use of online City resources (6), using public transportation more (3), decreasing their use of public space due to mask-less individuals (2), increased utility usage due to more time spent at home (2), and COVID-19 testing (2).

COVID-19 Impacts	National	Count	Bellingham	Count
I/we have increased our use of outdoor recreation spaces, such as parks and trails	16.17%	309	35.56%	698
I or someone in my household has had their income reduced	19.78%	378	22.41%	440
I or someone in my household has lost their employment	12.87%	246	11.36%	223
My housing arrangement is more at risk due to financial insecurity	12.93%	247	9.73%	191
I/we have increased our use of public library services	5.18%	99	8.91%	175
I/we have increased our use of assistance for food at food banks or other programs	12.45%	238	5.25%	103
I/we have relied on assistance for utility services (electricity, gas, water, etc.) through payment forbearance or other arrangements	8.01%	153	2.19%	43
I have had to move to a different housing arrangement	5.34%	102	2.04%	40
I/we have increased our use of another city service (please explain):	2.15%	41	1.53%	30
I or someone in my immediate household has tested positive for COVID-19	5.13%	98	1.02%	20
Total	100%	1911	100%	1963