

# **2016 Town Government Survey Report**

January 5, 2017

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978-318-3039

# Table of Contents

## Sections

Methodology .....	2
Town Services .....	4
Household Finances .....	5
Communication .....	6
Priority Issues .....	8
Comprehensive Long Range Plan .....	9
Finance Department .....	17
Department of Planning and Land Management .....	19
Department of Public Works .....	20
Water Division .....	22
Sewer Divison .....	23
Solid Waste Division .....	24
Police Department .....	25
Fire Department .....	25
Library .....,.,,.....	26
Senior Services (Council on Aging) .....	28
Beede Center .....	29
Recreation Department .....	30
Energy Efficiency .... ..	30

# 2016 Town Government Survey

## Report

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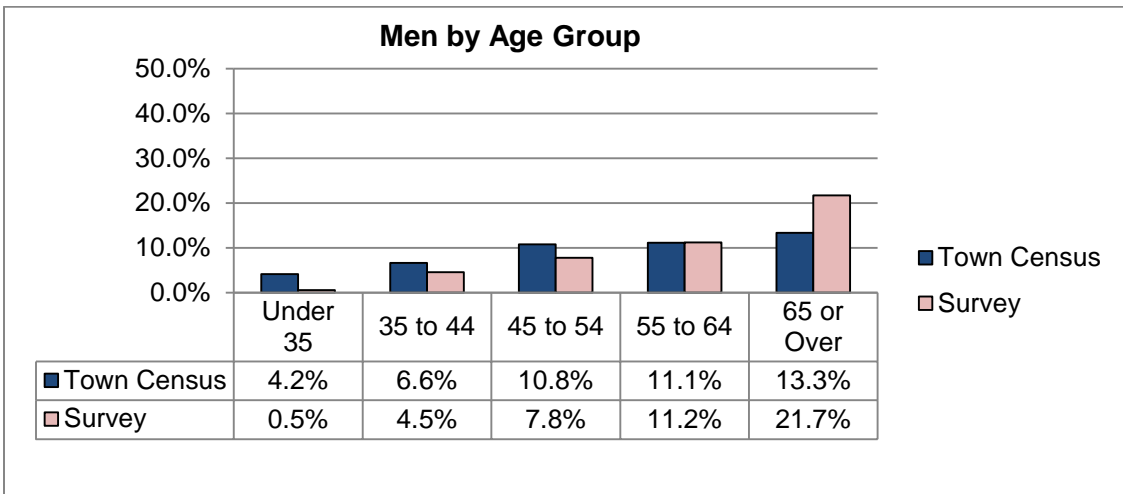
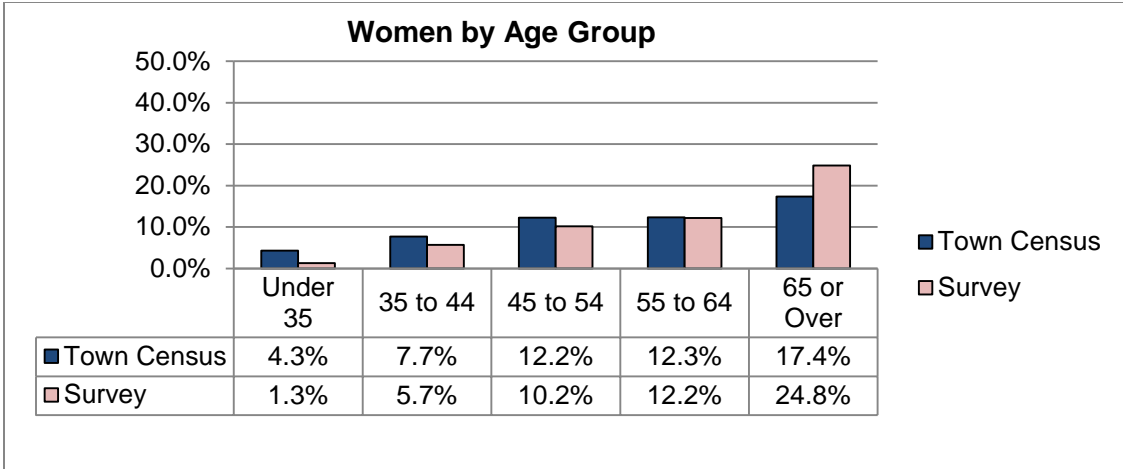
During the period from November 14, 2016 to December 2, 2016, the Town with the assistance from Pacific Market Research conducted a survey of Concord residents. For the surveys in years 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012, the method used for sampling residents' opinions was a telephone poll: randomly selected Concord residents were called on their land-line telephones and were guided through the process over the phone. Depending on the year, the total sample size was between 300 and 375 residents. Since residents were selected randomly, this sample could be generalized to the population as a whole within a certain margin of error. However, with the rapid increase of the use of cellular phones as the main household phone, this method would no longer accurately capture the opinions of all Concord residents in a statistically meaningful way.

Accordingly, as was done in 2014, the Town has changed its method of sampling residents' opinions. With the new methodology, the Town mailed out a paper questionnaire to all 7,047 residences in Concord and requested that one respondent per residence complete the survey in one of three ways:

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

From the 7,047 mailed out, a total of 1,022 completed surveys were received. That is, just about 15% households took the time to answer the 41-question survey. The majority of residents, 74.1% (757 responses), used the online method of response. Other residents, 24.4% (249 responses), filled out the paper questionnaire and delivered it to the Town House. A smaller group, 1.5% (16 responses), phoned the call center.

The demographic distribution of the survey sample differs slightly from that of the true Concord population. On the graphs on the next page are the percentages of cohorts grouped by gender and age as measured by the 2016 Town Census and as self-identified in this survey. As a note, in the Town Census, the cohort identified as Under 35 represents the number of residents between the ages of 27 and 34, in order to exclude dependents from this category.



There may be several reasons for the differences in percentages of the true population and the survey sample. Younger residents with families may not have the discretionary time to take a 41-question survey. In a household, older family members may be more inclined to take the survey than the younger ones. In addition, older residents may have lived in Concord for a longer time, may be more invested in how the Town government functions, and may be more willing to take the time to complete the survey.

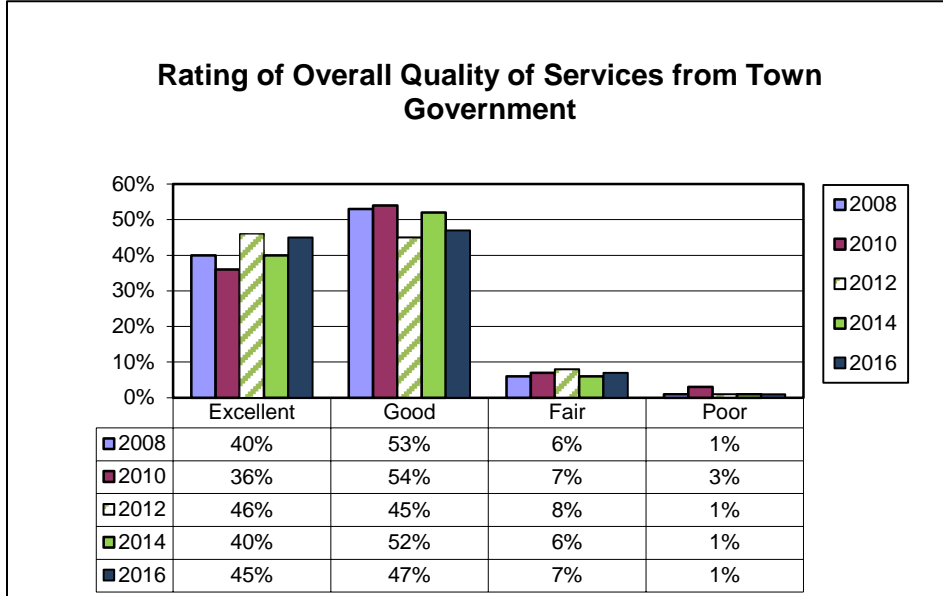
The method used to equalize these demographic groups is to weight the responses of each cohort by a specific factor. For example, the cohort of women between the ages of 45 and 54 represents 12.2% of the population but is 10.2% in the survey sample. Accordingly, a response from a woman between ages 45 and 54 would be increased by a factor of 1.19. The analysis below represents the weighted results.

With this methodology, the overall 2016 survey results of a sample of 1,022 completed questionnaires are accurate 95% of the time within a confidence interval of +/- 2.85%. The margin of error is larger for sub-groups within the sample.

**Town Services**

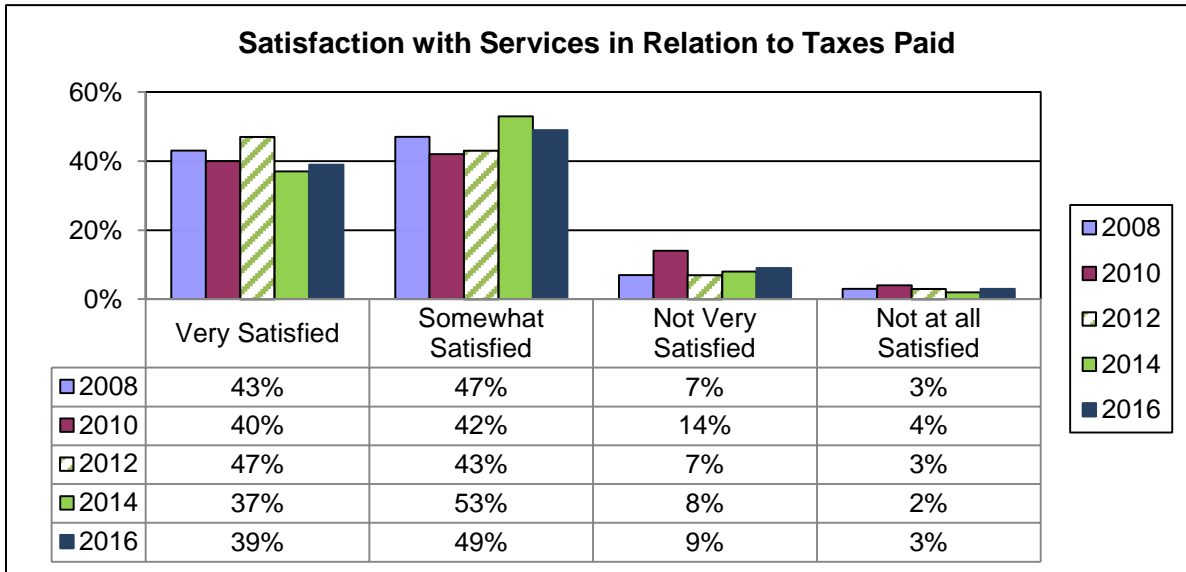
The baseline question that was asked in the 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 surveys is: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Concord Town Government?”

There is a slight trend in responses from those residents who feel that Town services are “excellent” as opposed to “good”, while the “fair” and “poor” response has remained constant. With the 2016 survey, 92% of respondents think that Town

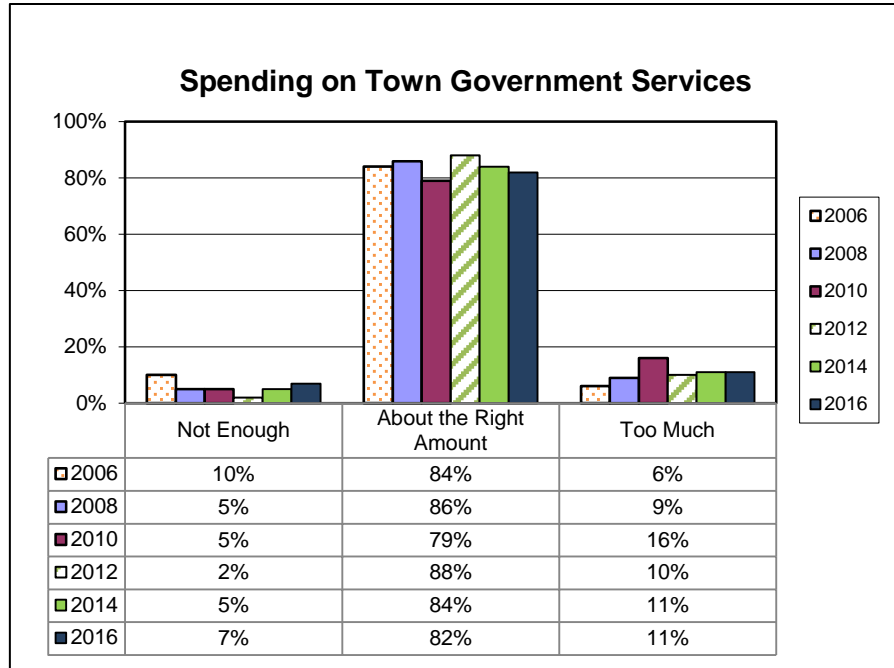


services are “excellent” or “good”. This is the same percentage as 2014.

When asked: “In relation to the property taxes you pay, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of Town Services?”, 88% of respondents feel the “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied”.



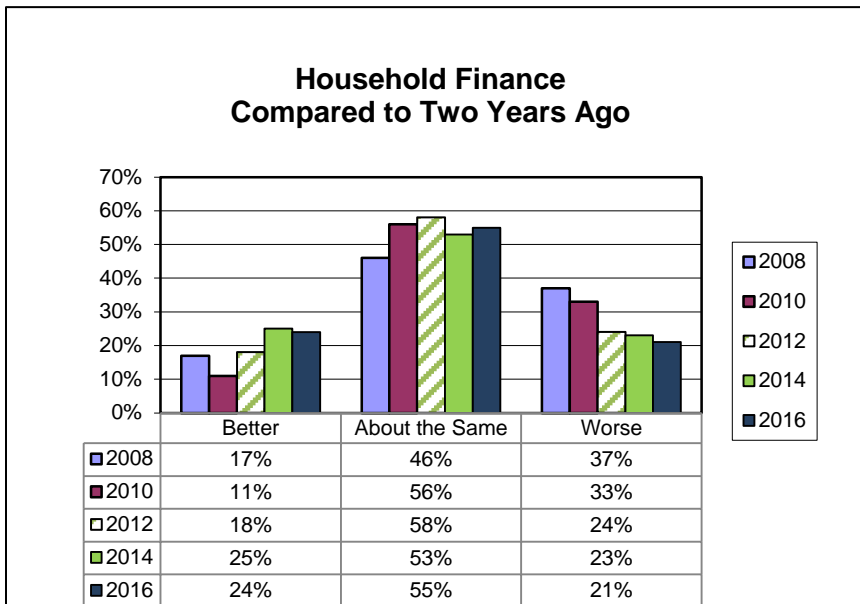
There continues to be a general consensus that the Town spends about the right amount of money on Town government services. For the last six surveys, the “about the right amount” response has tracked between 79% and 88%. The low point was in 2010 as the effects of the recession were being felt by Concord residents. In 2016, 82% of respondents feel that the Town spends about the right amount on Town governmental services.



**Household Finances**

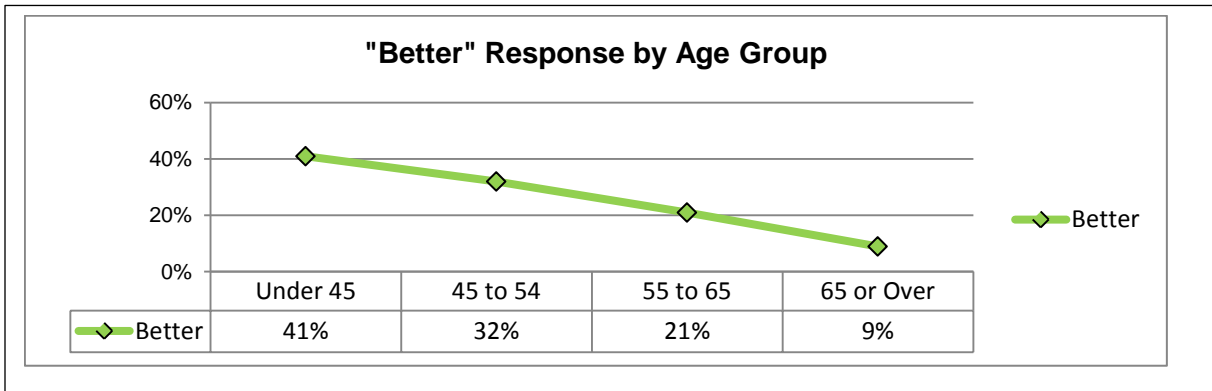
It is useful for the Town to have a fuller understanding of how Concord residents are faring economically, so as to better know how to provide Town services.

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



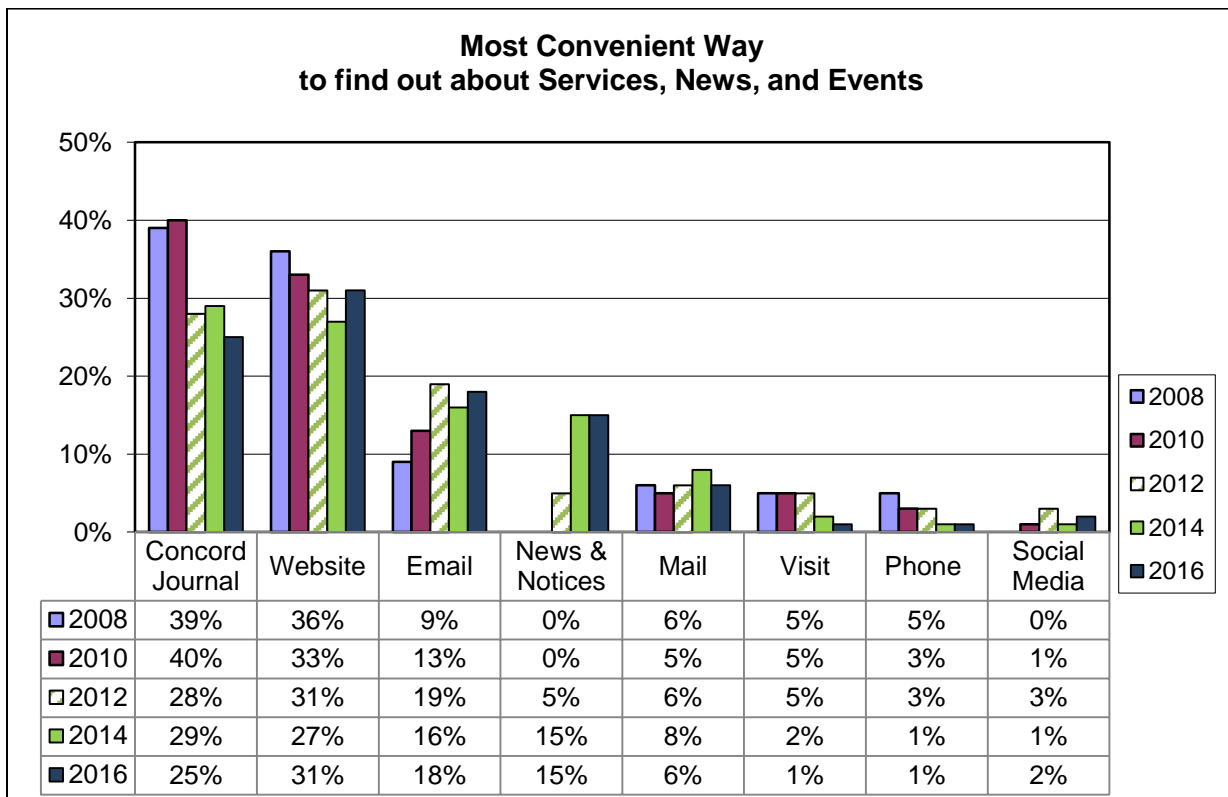
years ago, worse, or about the same.” In 2016, approximately a quarter of the respondents feel that they are doing “better” financially.

The 2016 survey results also show that there is a trend in terms of age group as to whether respondents feel like they are doing “better” than they were two years ago. Younger respondents are more likely to feel “better” about how they are doing.

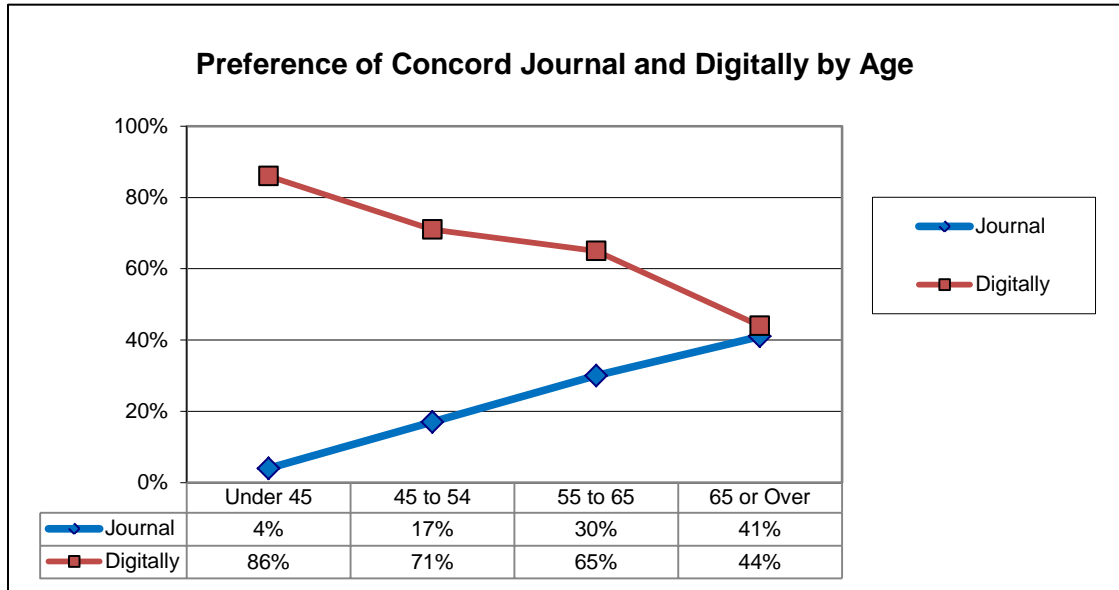


**Communication**

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

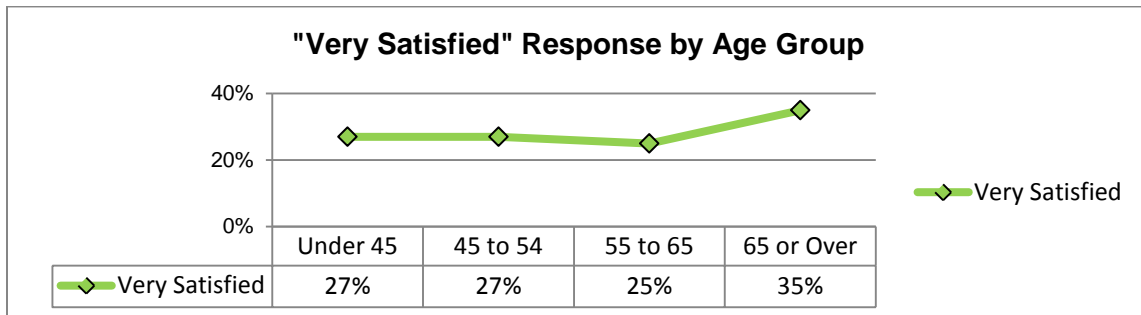


As could be expected, there is movement toward purely digital media as a means of receiving information from and about the Town, although it should be noted that the Concord Journal does have an online presence. In 2016, if the categories of Town website, email, and emailed News & Notices are combined, a total of 64% of respondents prefer to receive their information through the use of a computer, tablet or smart phone directly from the Town.



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

In terms of satisfaction with the way residents receive information from the Town, respondents are generally satisfied: 29% are "very satisfied", 56% "somewhat satisfied", 12% "not very satisfied", and 3% "not at all satisfied". When broken down by age, respondents in the category age 65 or over are more satisfied with the way they receive information from the Town as those in the younger age categories.

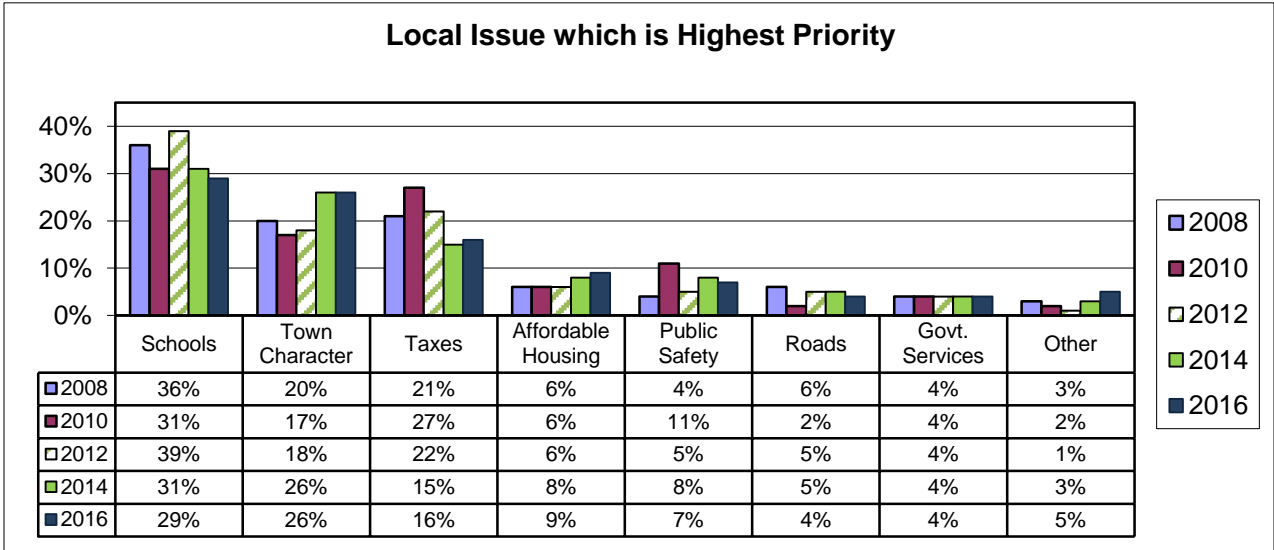


These results combined with the low level of respondents receiving information from social media may point toward the need for the Town to better provide information to residents through contemporary digital media, such as Twitter and Facebook.

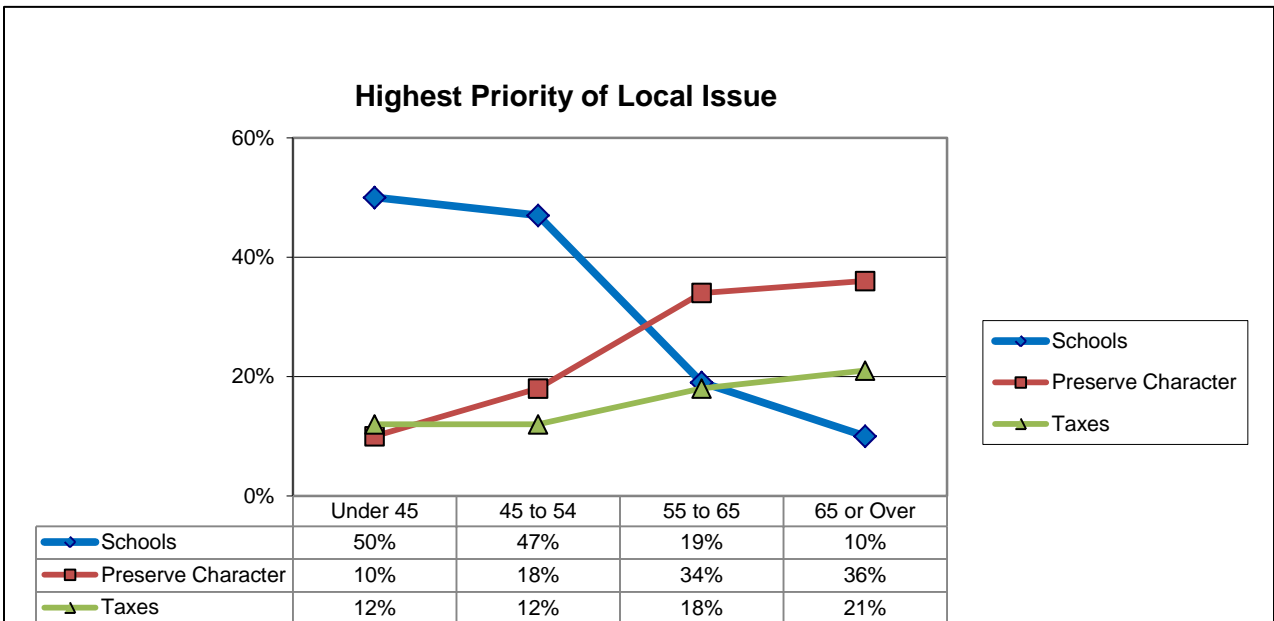


**Priority Issues**

Concord residents continue to place the schools as their highest priority local issue. When asked “What local issue would you say is the highest priority for you?”, 29% of residents said “schools”, 26% “town character”, and 16% “taxes”. Since the 2010 survey, there has been an uptick by respondents identifying “town character” as their highest priority.



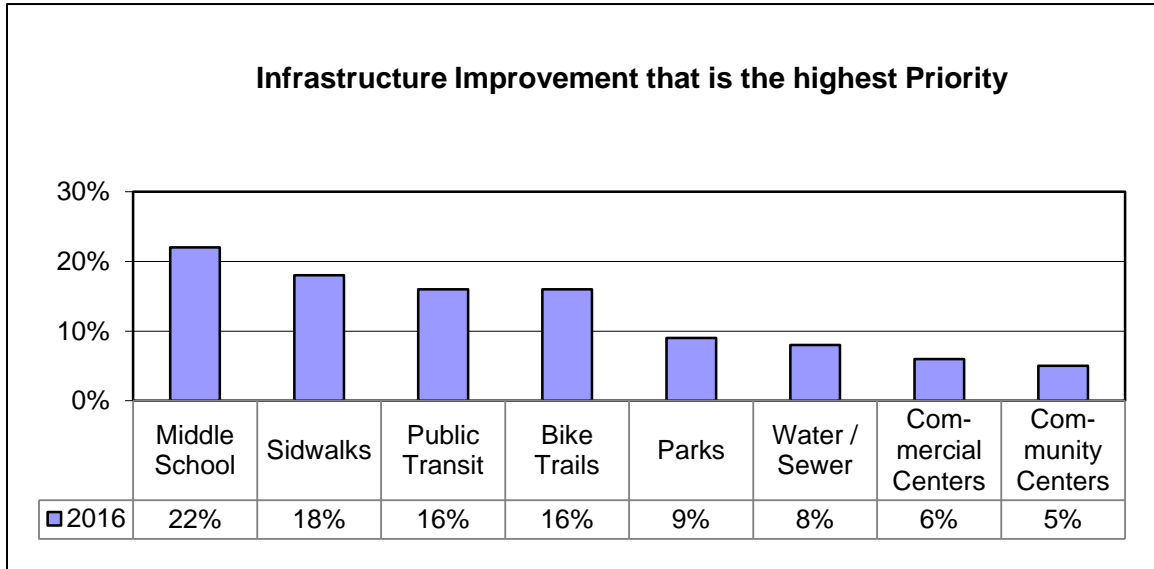
As could be expected, younger respondents place “schools” as a priority. With older respondents, “preservation of Town’s character” and “taxes” are more important.



**Comprehensive Long Range Plan**

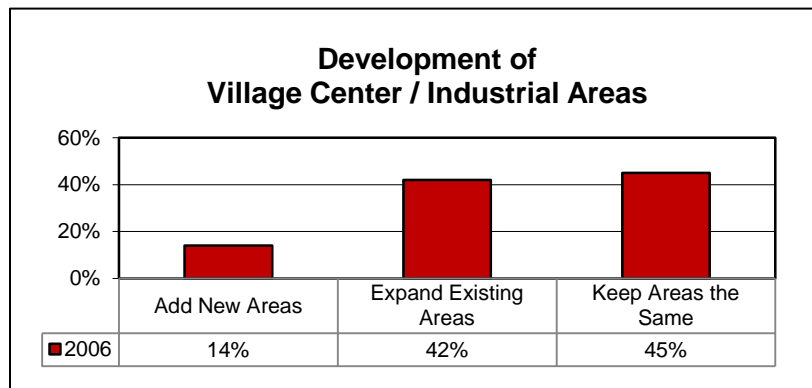
The Town is currently undertaking an open, public process to define Concord’s vision for the next 20 years. Accordingly, several questions were asked to better understand residents’ feelings about several potential areas that this Comprehensive Long Rang Plan should focus on and emphasize.

As an inquiry about residents’ opinion on possible areas for capital investment, the 2016 survey contained the question, “Which type of infrastructure improvement is your highest priority?”



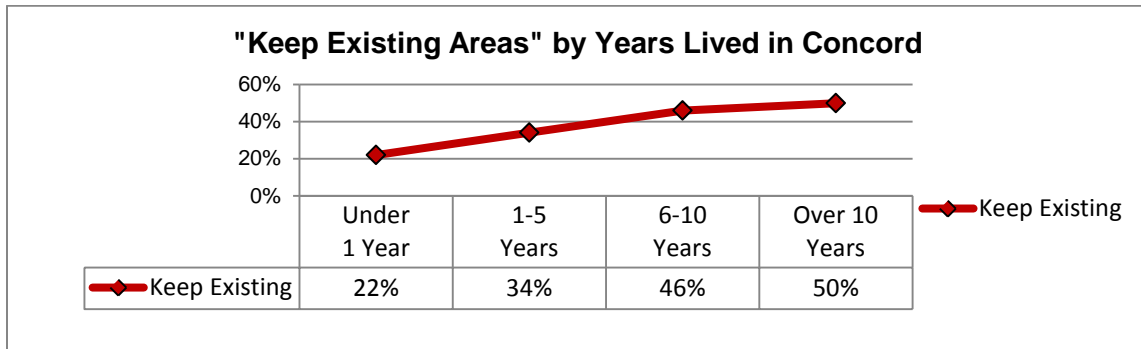
As could be expected, 41% of respondents in households with children selected “Middle School”, as compared to 9% of respondents without children. “Sidwalks” as the highest priorities were chosen by 21% of women and 13% of men. More seniors (24%) feel that “Public Transportation” is the highest priority than those under age 45 (14%) and between ages 45 and 55 (10%). “Bike Trails and Bike Lanes” have largest support in the cohorts from ages 45 to 54 (21%) and ages 55 to 64 (19%).

The question was asked, “The Town can use zoning regulations to guide the development of the three village centers and three industrial parks. New / expanded business areas could create jobs and provide for a more diversified economy. How should the Town approach the development of these areas?” The respondent could choose from the following responses: “Add new / additional areas”, “Expand existing areas”, or “Keep existing areas the same”.

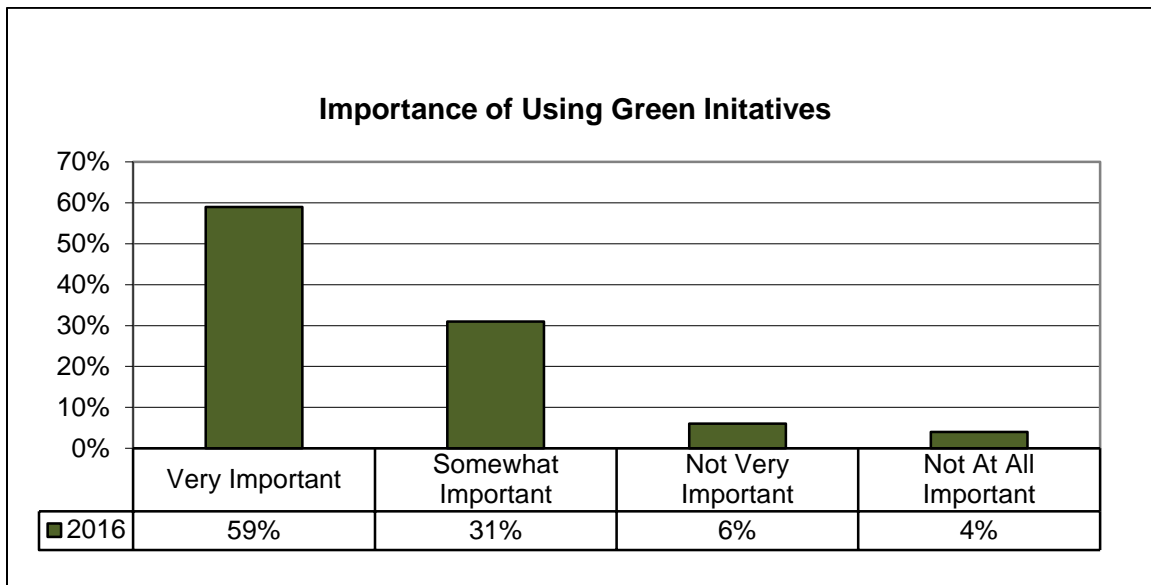


A respondent's general neighborhood can be approximated by where that person votes, a question that was asked in the survey. With the use of this locator, those respondents who would like the commercial areas to be kept the same are as follows: 55% of those who voted at 141 Keyes Road, 44% who voted at Harvey Wheeler Community Center, 43% who voted at Hunt Gym, and 35% who voted at Ripley Gym.

There is a trend that relates to the number of years that a respondent has lived in Concord with the feeling that the three village centers and three industrial park areas should be kept the same. However, it should also be noted that a majority (52%) of respondents age 45 to 54 felt that the existing commercial areas should be expanded.



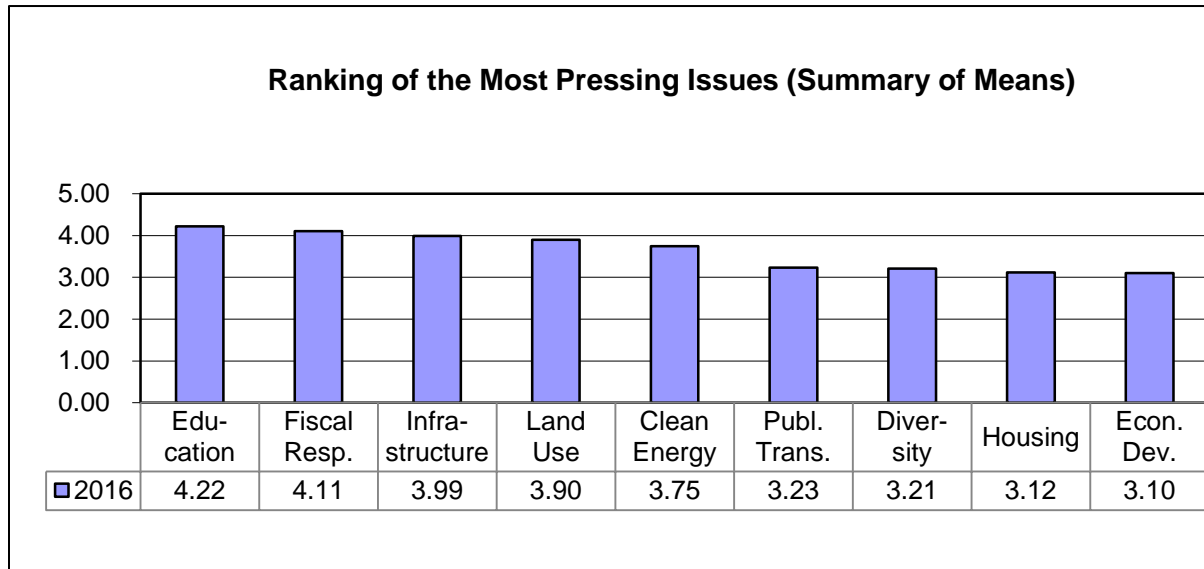
An effort was made to ascertain the importance of environmental initiatives in the Comprehensive Long Rang Plan process. The question was asked, "How important is using "green initiatives", which focus on maintaining a sustainable, natural environment, in the long-term planning process?"



For the "very important" response, more women (66%) than men (50%) and more households with children (63%) than households without children (53%) feel that green initiatives are "very important".

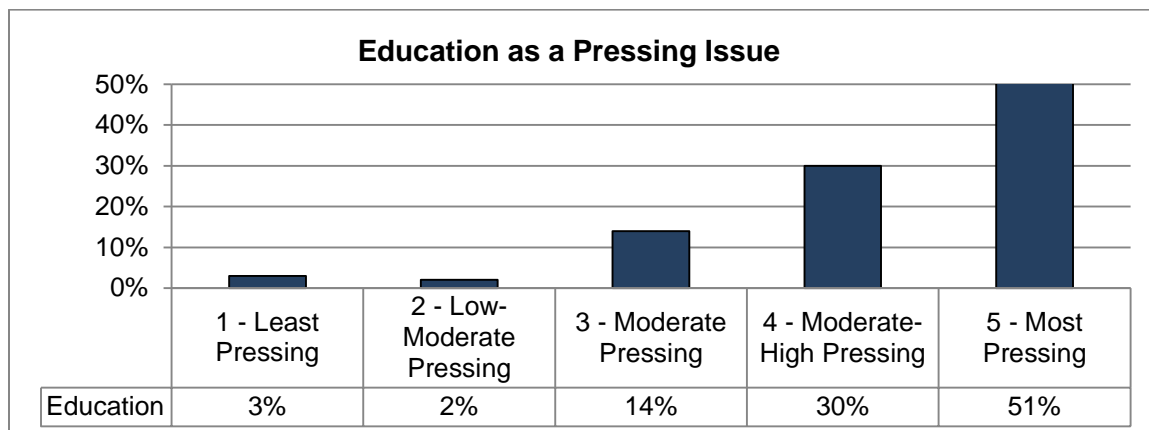
Several questions were asked about which issues will need to be addressed in this planning process. The question was “On a scale from ‘1’ to ‘5’ with ‘1’ being the least pressing and ‘5’ being the most pressing, what do you think are the most pressing issues that the Comprehensive Long Range Plan will need to address?”

The chart below shows a ranking of the nine identified issues with the number being calculated as the mean of all the responses for that question. For example, for the “education” question, there were 501 “5” responses, 292 “4” responses, 141 “3” responses, 23 “2” responses, 31 “1” responses and the mean value of all of these responses is 4.22.



The next series of charts represents the distribution of the responses for each of the nine identified pressing issues. For example, when asked about “education” as a pressing issue, 51% of respondents feel that education was a “5”, a most pressing issue.

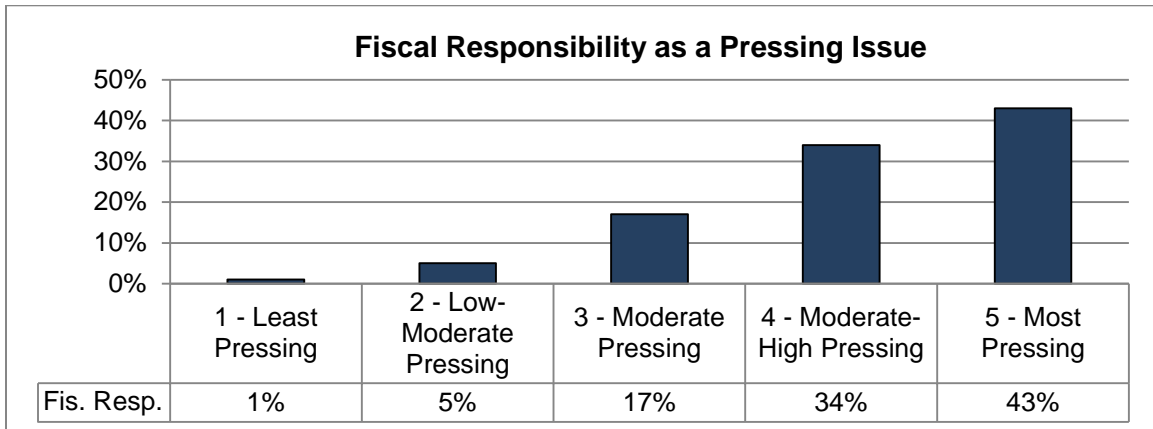
Education



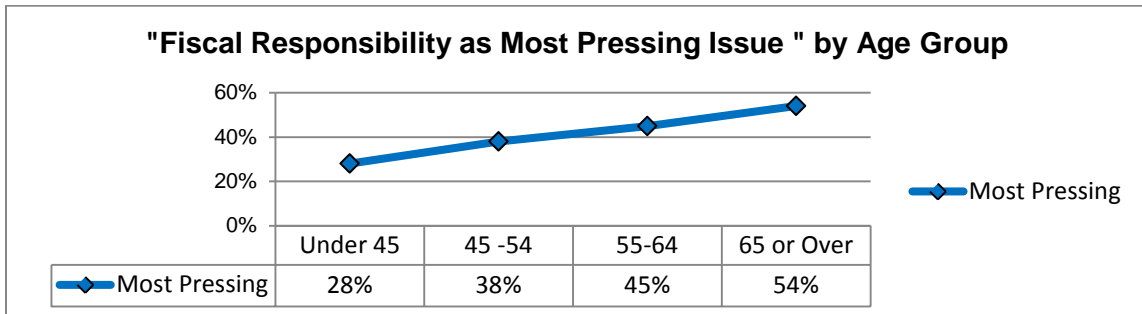
For this question, 65% of respondents with children in the household feel that education is a most pressing issue, whereas 40% of respondents without children feel that way.

Fiscal Responsibility

Respondents also think that fiscal responsibility will need to be addressed in the Comprehensive Long Range Plan.

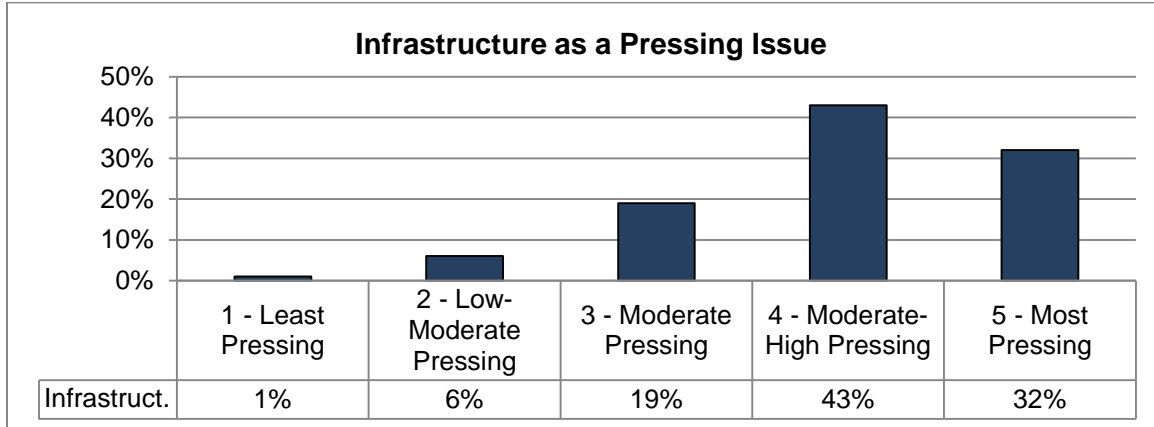


It should be noted that as older respondents are more likely to feel that fiscal responsibility will need to be addressed as a most pressing issue in the Comprehensive Long Range Plan.



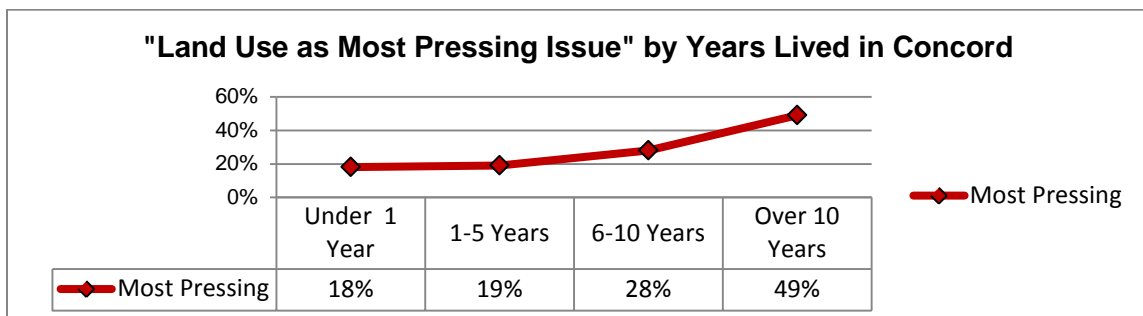
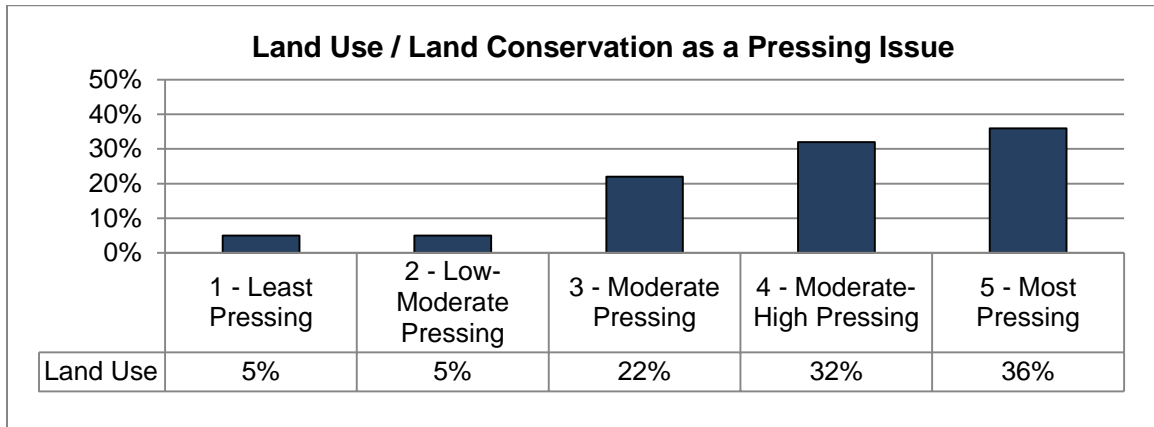
Infrastructure (Streets, Utilities, etc.)

A plurality of respondents feels that infrastructure is a “4”, a moderate – high pressing issue. Still, infrastructure ranks as the third most pressing issue as determined by the mean of all respondents to this question.



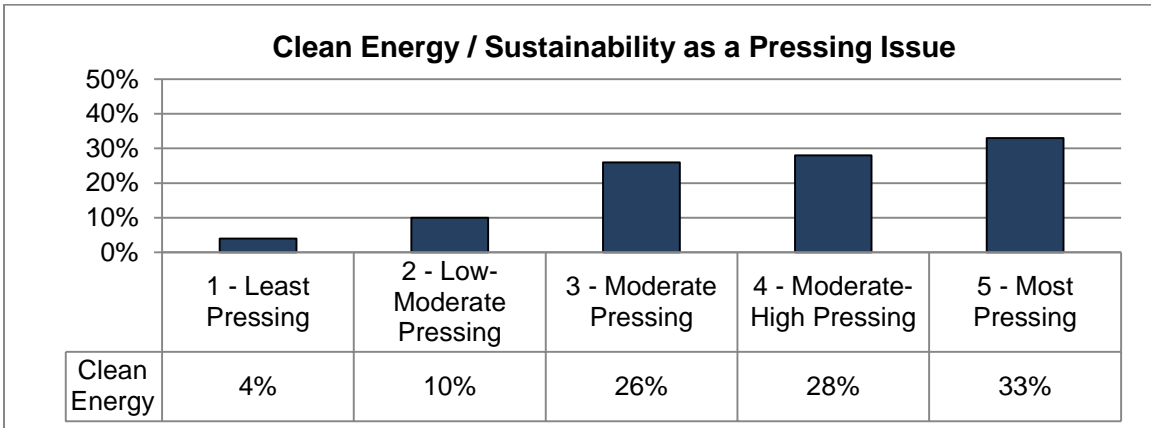
Land Use / Land Conservation

Land use / land conservation is a more pressing issue for those who have lived in Concord for a longer period of time.



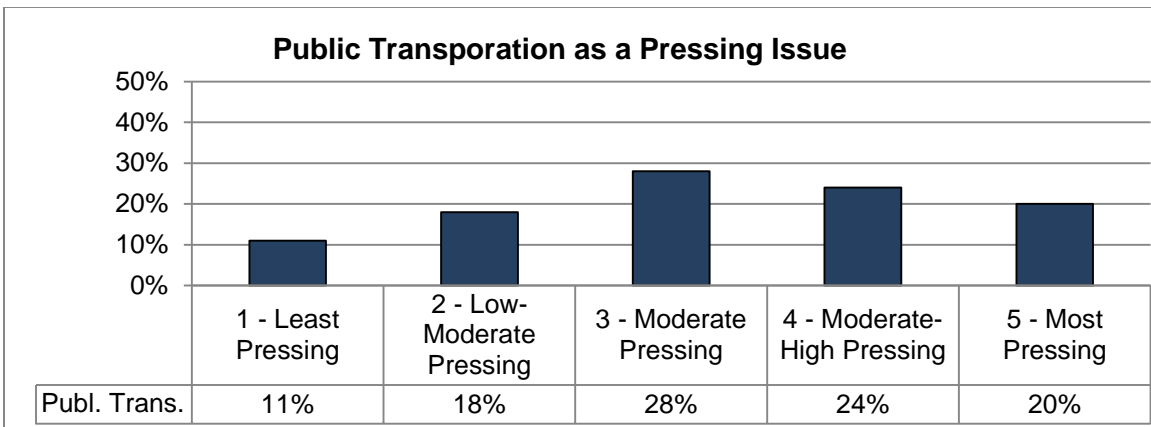
Clean Energy / Sustainability

Clean Energy / Sustainability is selected as a most pressing issue by 38% of female respondents and 26% of male respondents.



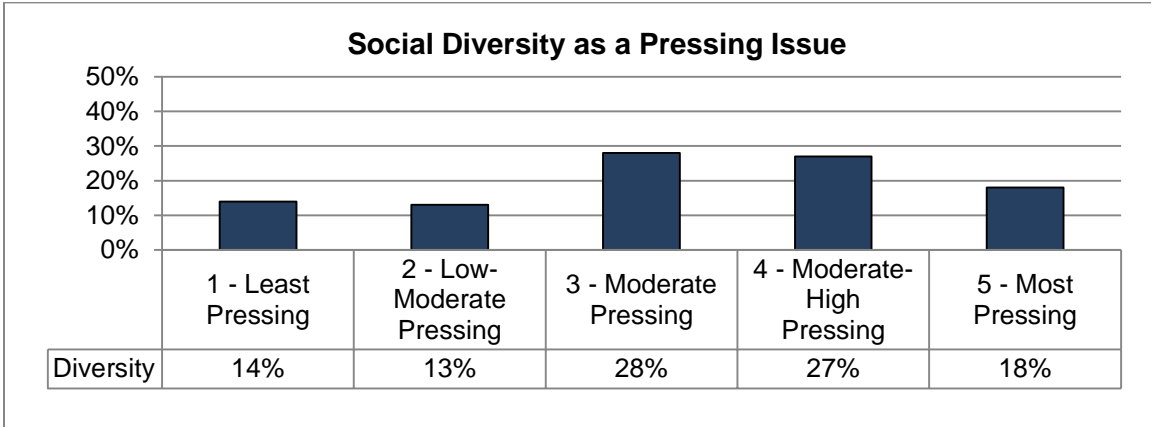
Public Transportation

Interestingly, if the two categories “4 – Moderate-High Pressing” and “5 – Most Pressing” categories are combined, 51% of respondents in households without children feel that public transportation should be address in the Comprehensive Long Range Plan, whereas only 32% of those with children feel this way.

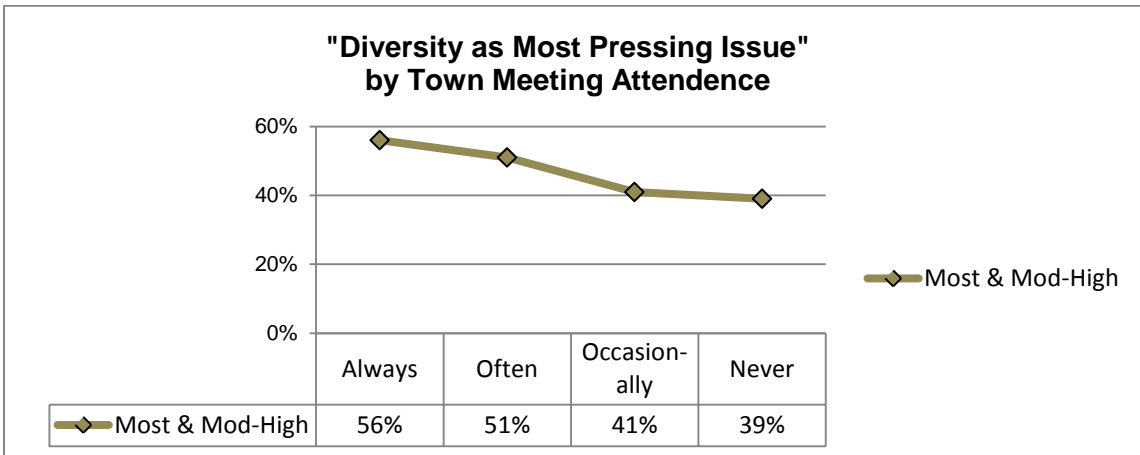


Social Diversity

In terms of social diversity, 54% of women feel that it is a most pressing or moderate-high pressing issues, as compared to 34% of men.



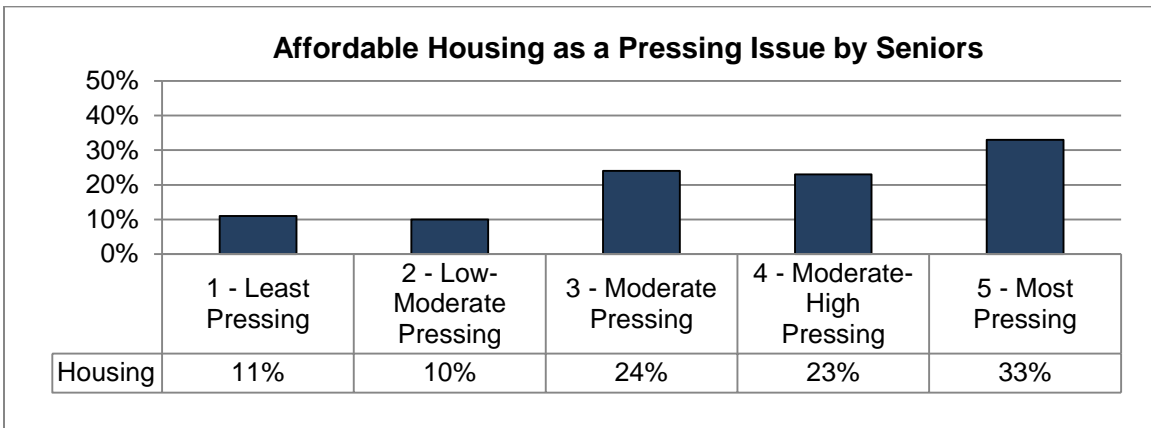
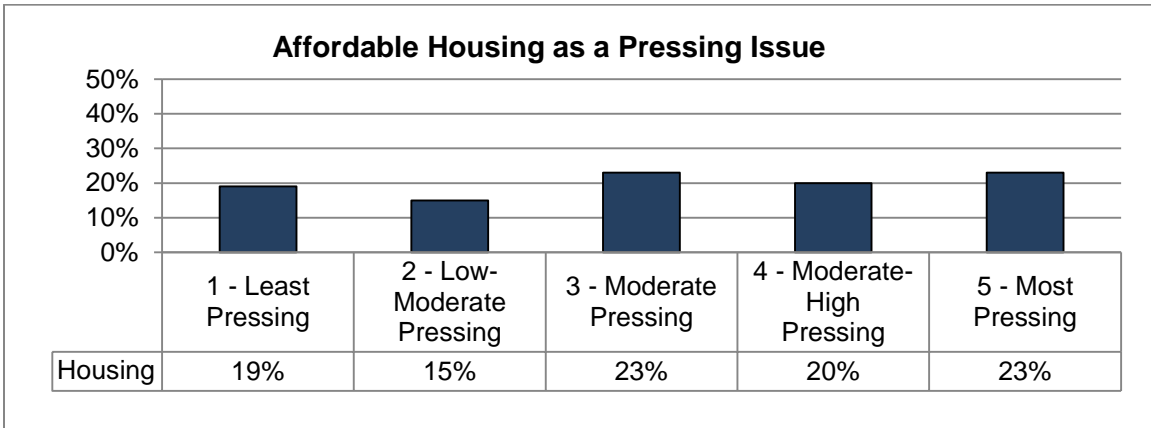
For those residents who say that attend Town Meeting more regularly, there is more of a feeling that the issue of diversity is a most pressing or moderate-high pressing issue.





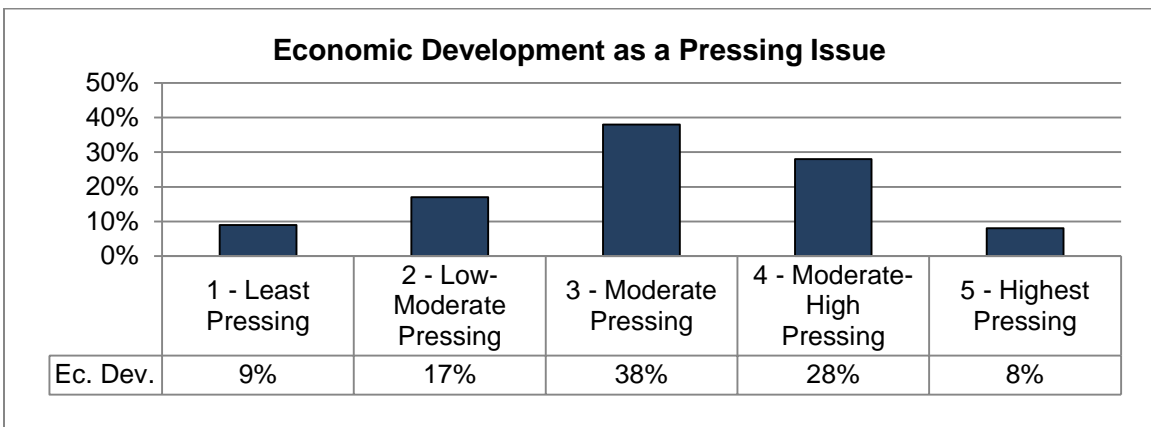
Affordable Housing

One-third of seniors feel that affordable housing is a most pressing issue, whereas a quarter of the other age cohorts feel that way.



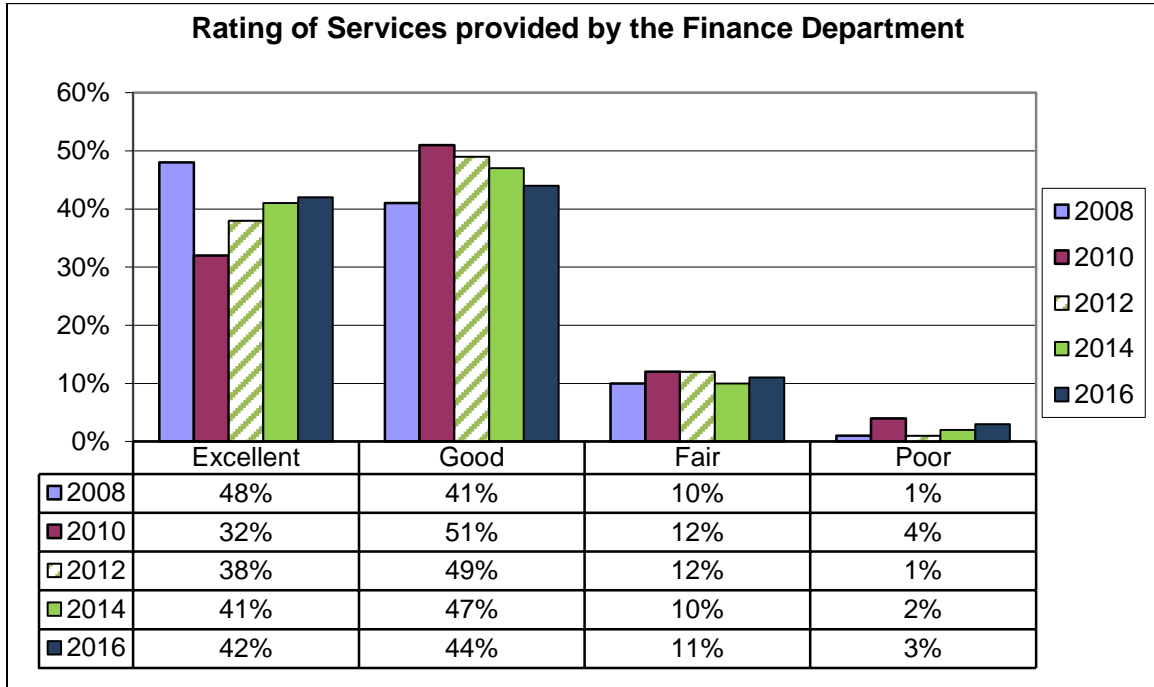
Economic Development

There is general uniformity among gender and age groups in the opinion of economic development as a pressing issue.

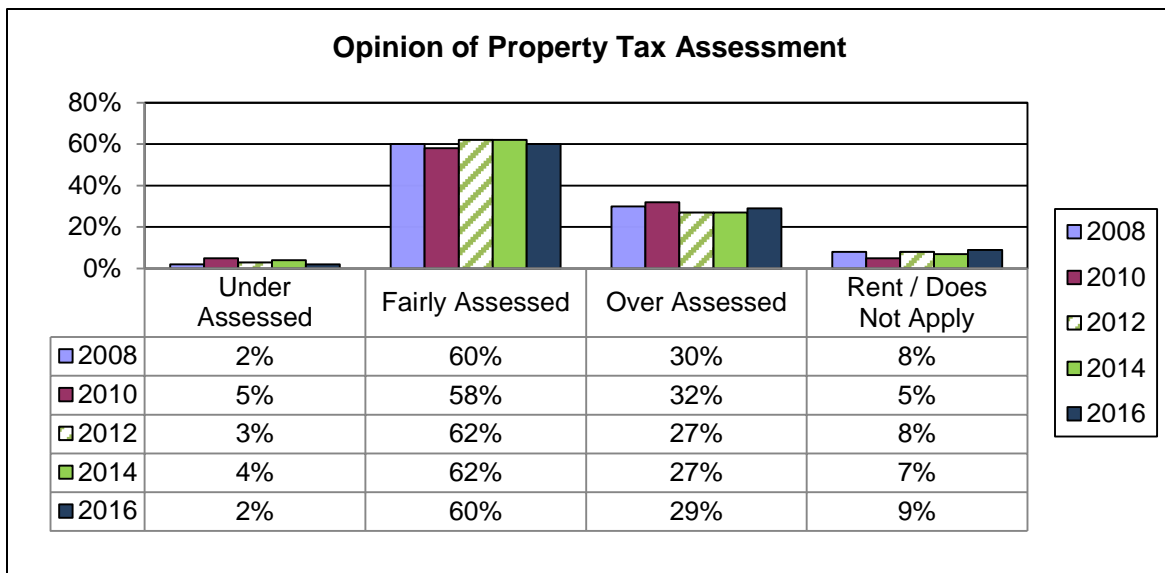


**Finance Department**

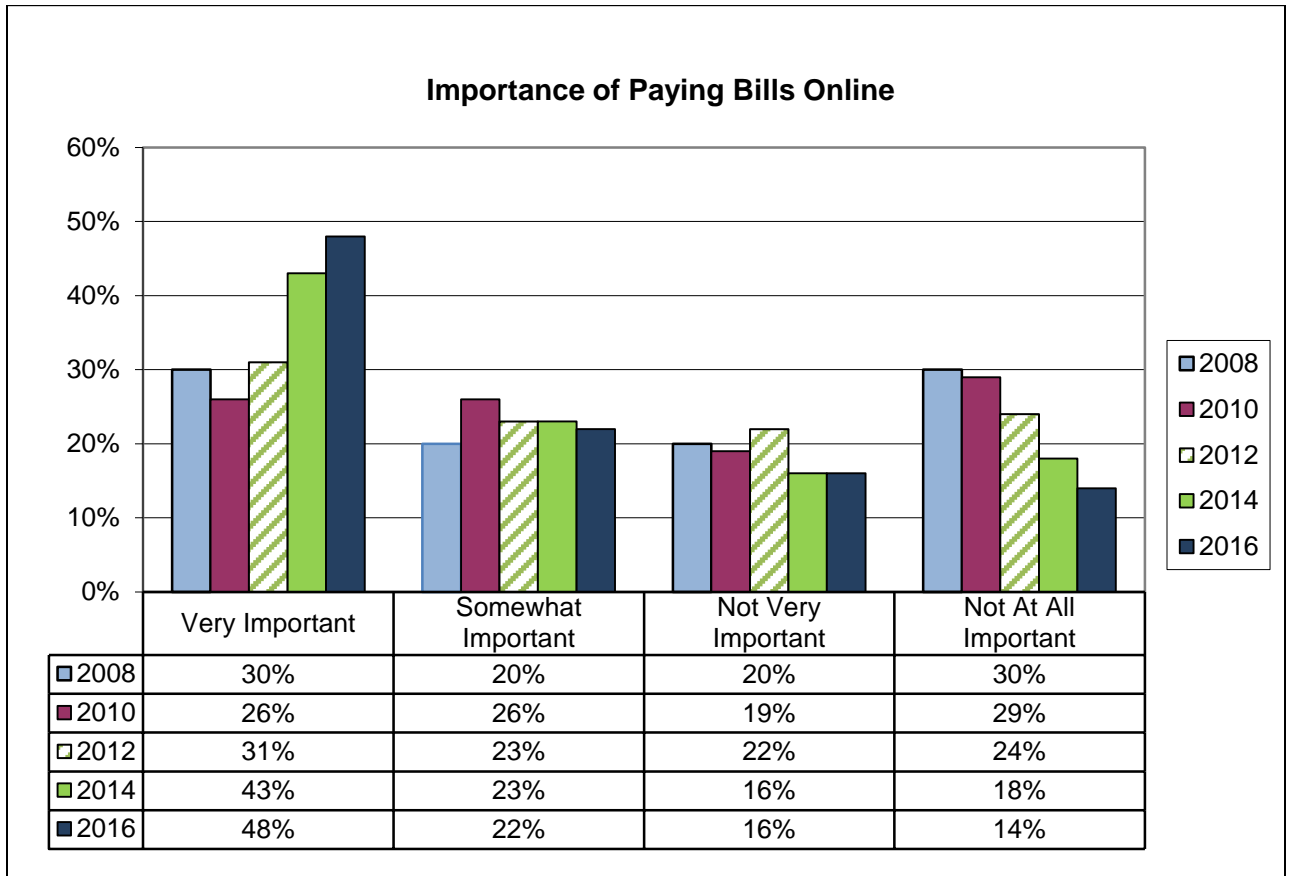
Three specific questions were asked about issues related to the Finance Department. For the last five polls, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Finance Department, which includes services of the Town Clerk, Town Collector, and Town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



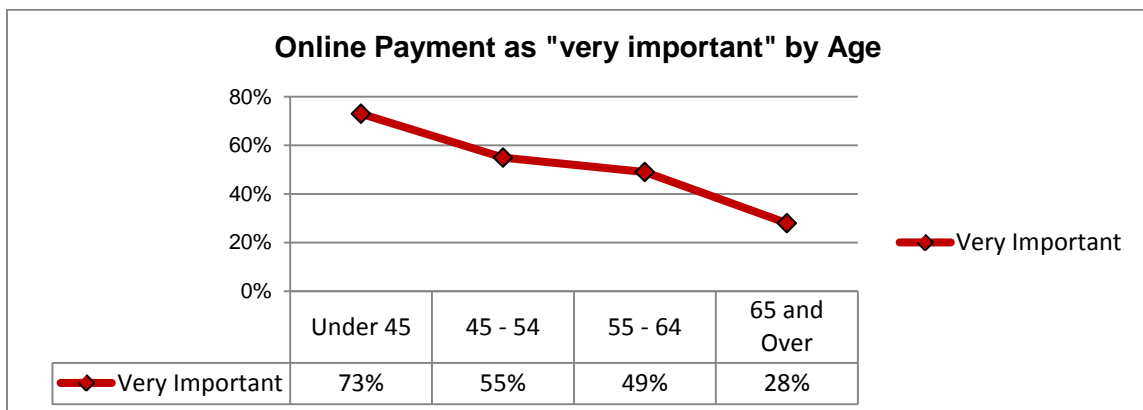
In addition, the following tax assessment question was asked: “In terms of the assessment of your property, do you believe that your property is over-assessed, under-assessed, or fairly assessed relative to others in Town?”



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

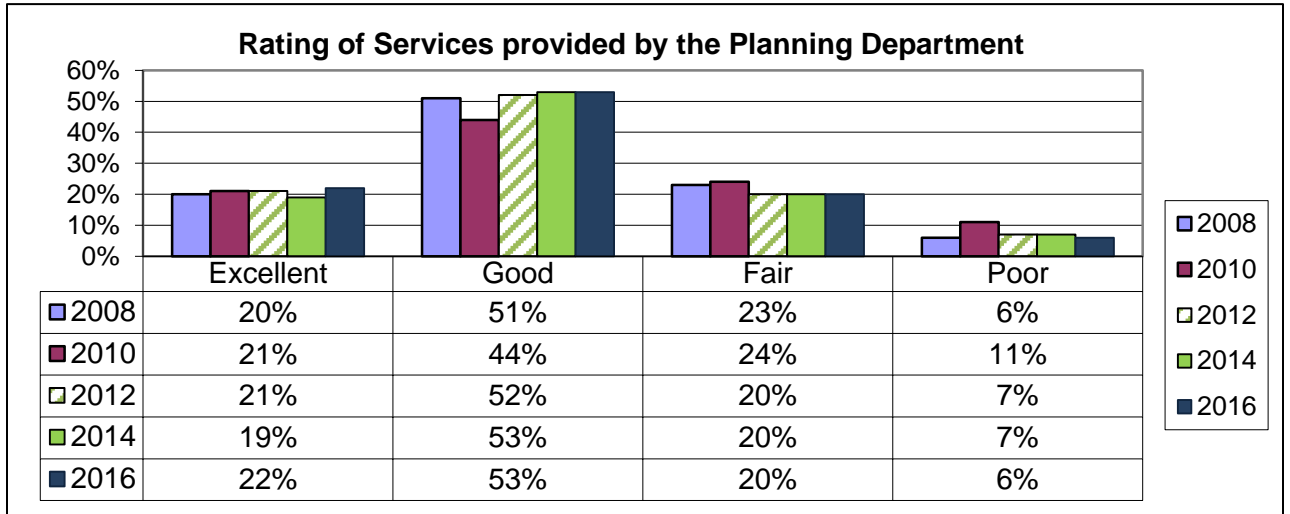


As could be expected, there is a generational preference in the 2016 survey in which the younger residents place a greater importance on paying bills online than older residents. The remaining municipal invoices, fees, and/or violations that cannot be paid online are water and sewer bills, and building permits and other permits that can require approval from the appropriate department.

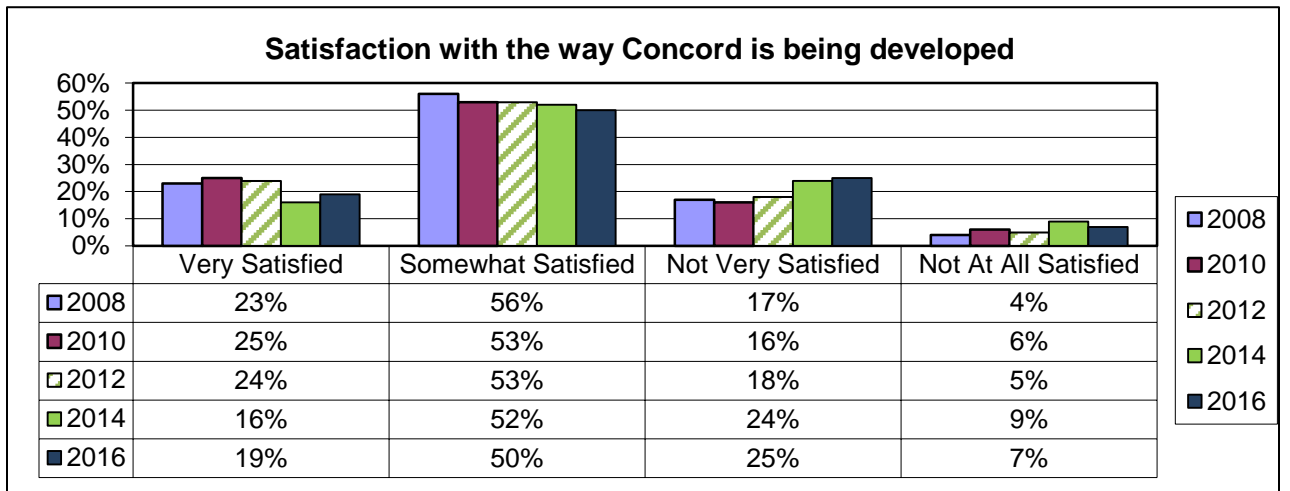


**Department of Planning and Land Management**

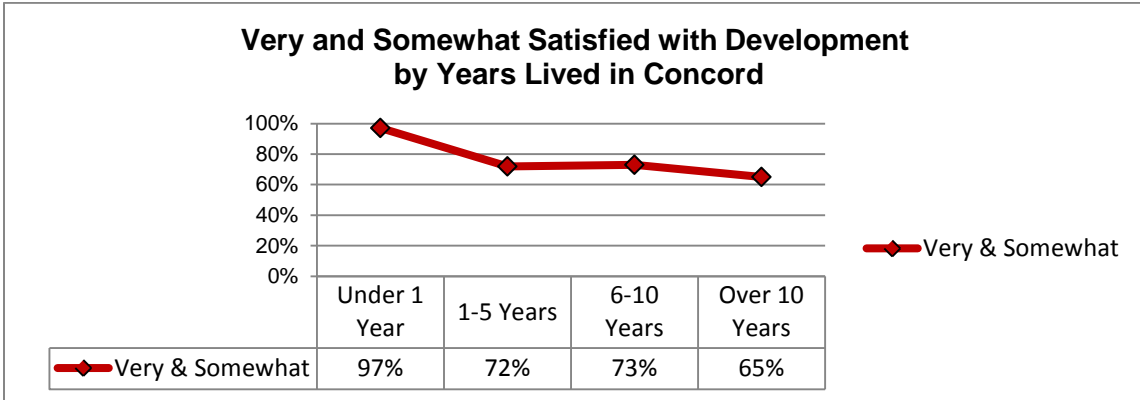
In the 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 surveys, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services that you receive from the Planning Department, which regulates matters related to buildings, zoning, health, and environmental protection.”



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

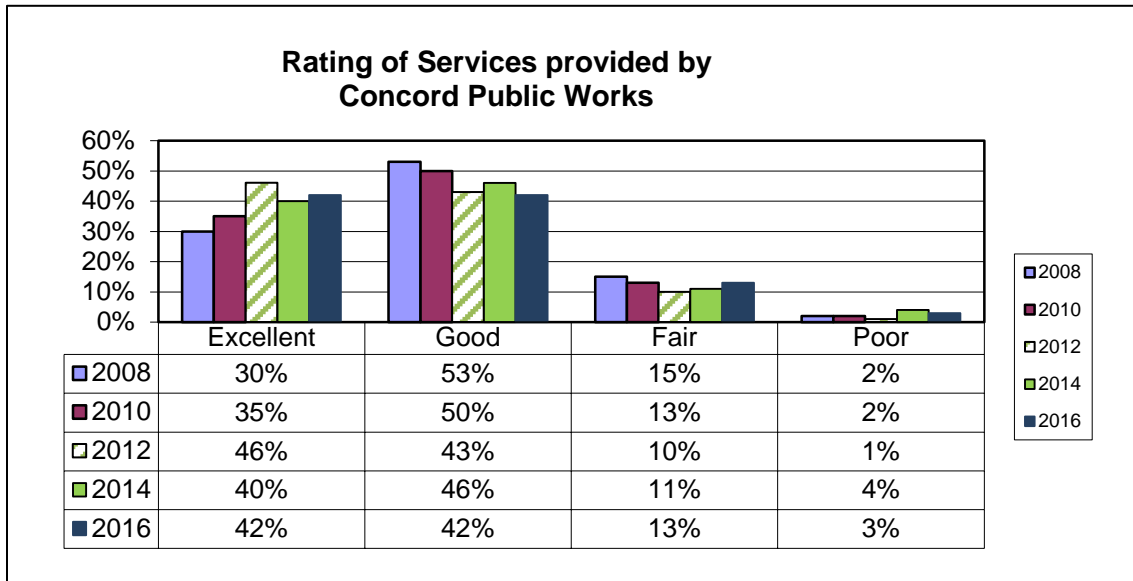


There are some differences in satisfaction level from respondents who live in general neighborhoods as determined by polling place. The percentage of respondents who are “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied by location are as follows: Ripley Gym (74%), Harvey Wheeler Community Center (67%), Hunt Gym (66%), and 141 Keyes Road (63%). In addition, residents who have lived in Concord longer seem to be slightly less satisfied.

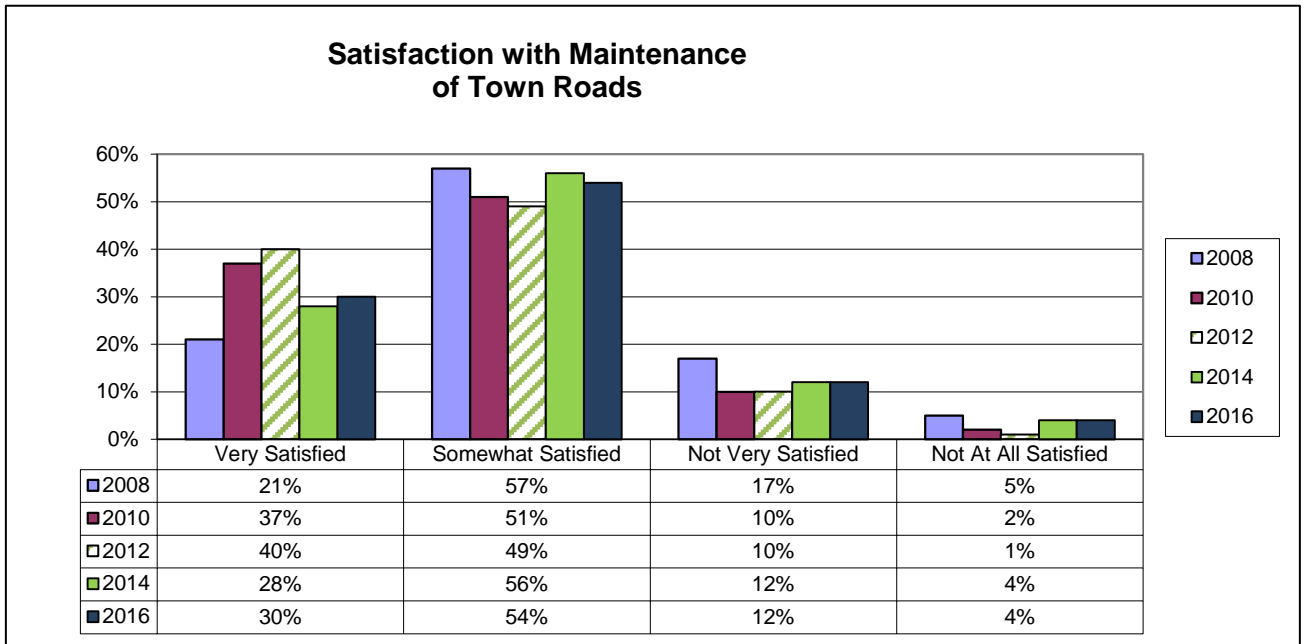


**Public Works**

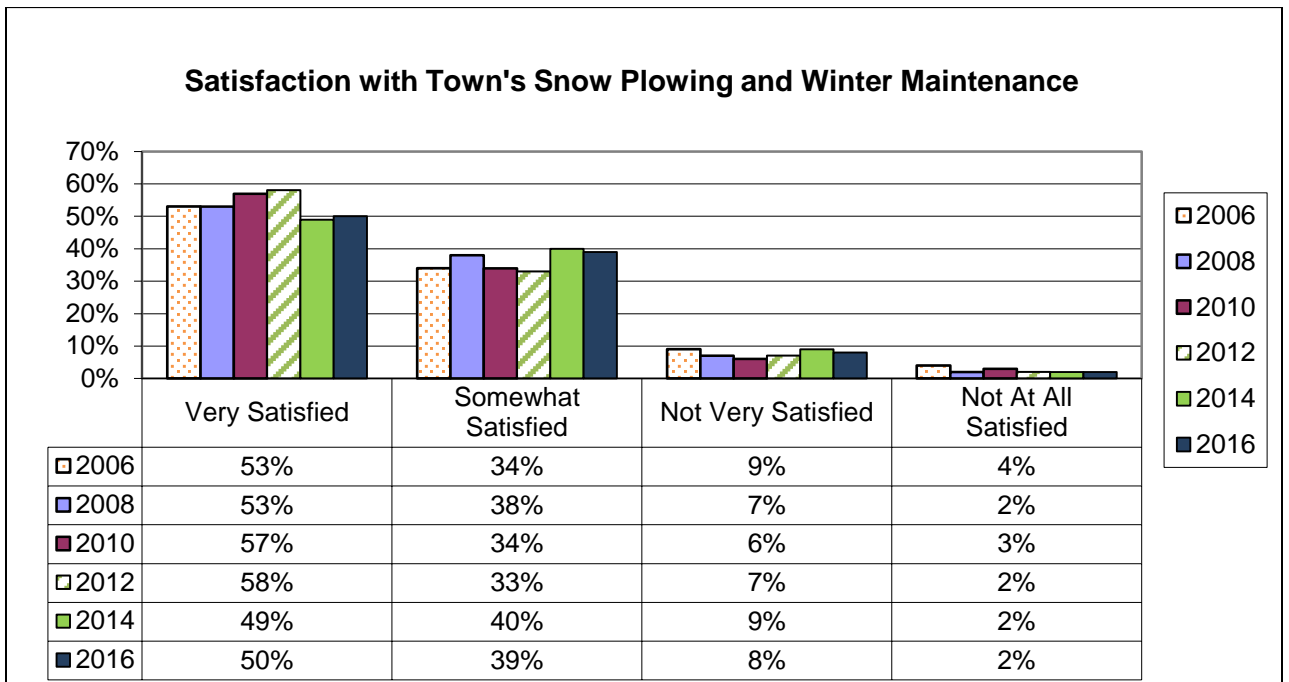
With the surveys conducted in the last decade, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by Concord Public Works?”



Approximately 4% of respondents stated that “roads” are their highest priority. In 2016, the percentage of residents who feel “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the maintenance of Town roads is at 84%, the same level as in 2014.

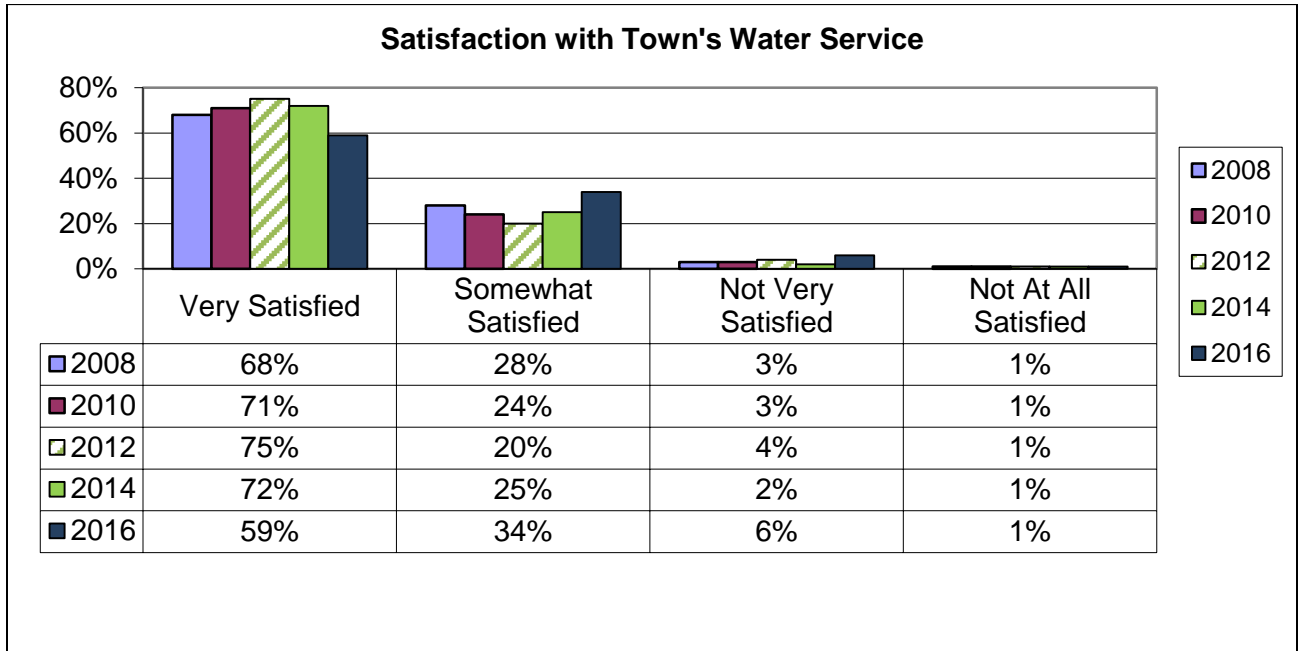


For the last six surveys, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate your satisfaction with the Town’s snow plowing and winter maintenance?”

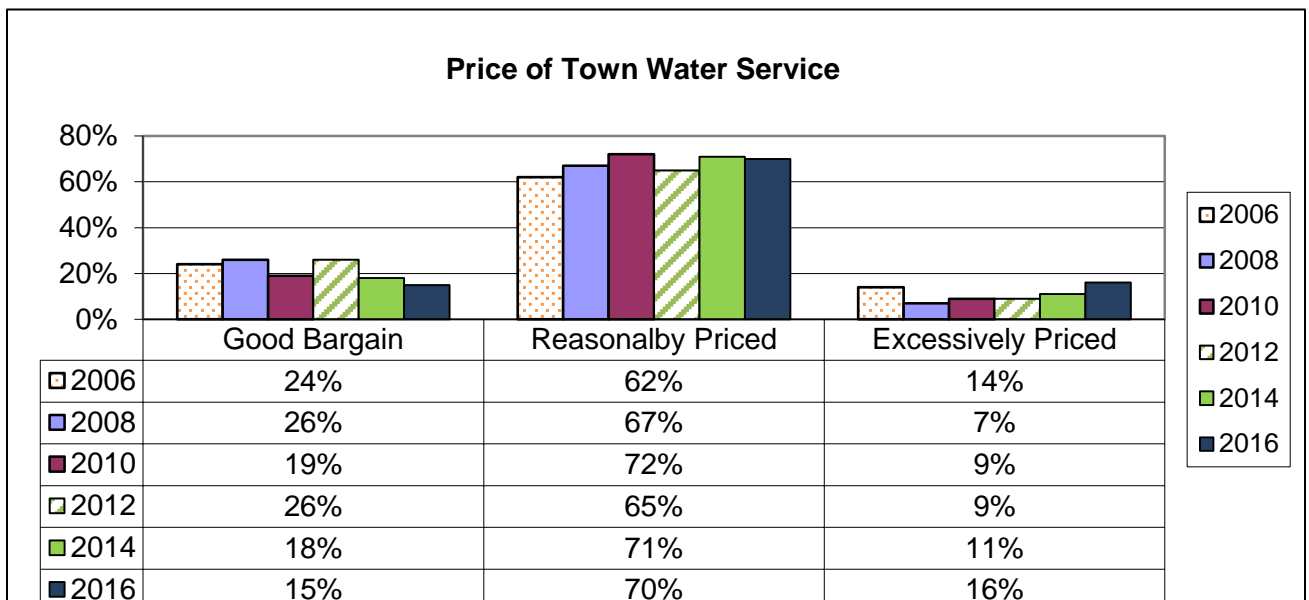


**Water Division**

When the question, “How would you rate your satisfaction with the Town’s water service?”, was asked, satisfaction with the Town’s water service is shown to be slightly less favorable in 2016 than in previous years. The “very satisfied” response dipped to 59% from an average of 71.5% in the previous surveys.

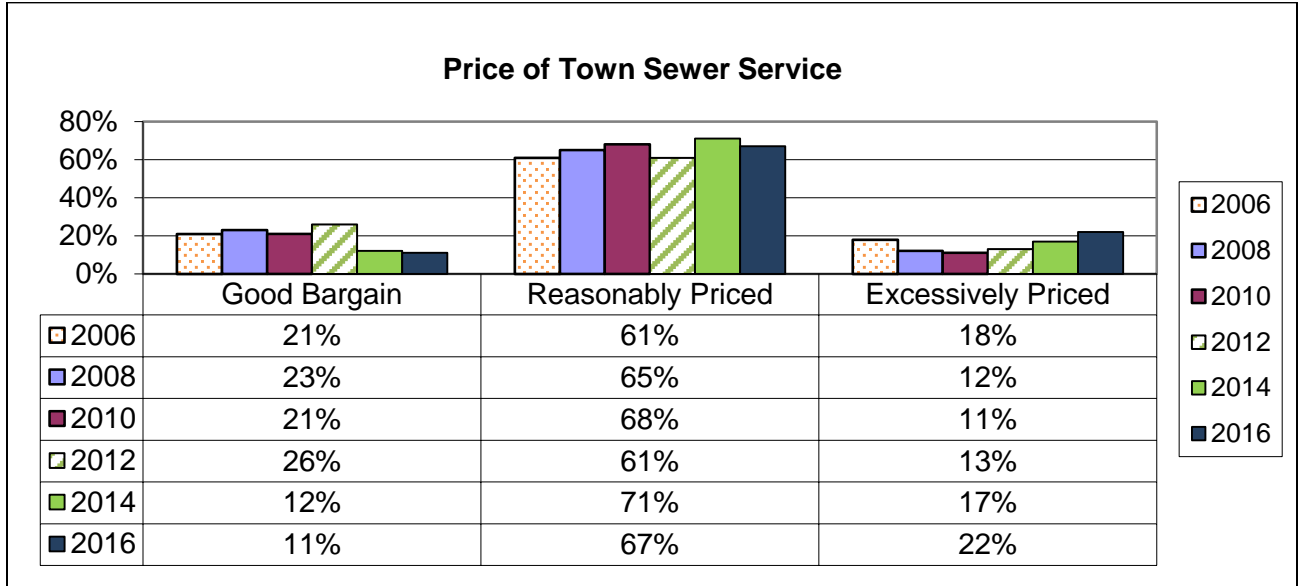


In addition, the six surveys included the question “With Town water service, please tell me whether you consider the price to be a Good Bargain, Reasonably Priced, or Excessively Priced?”



**Sewer Division**

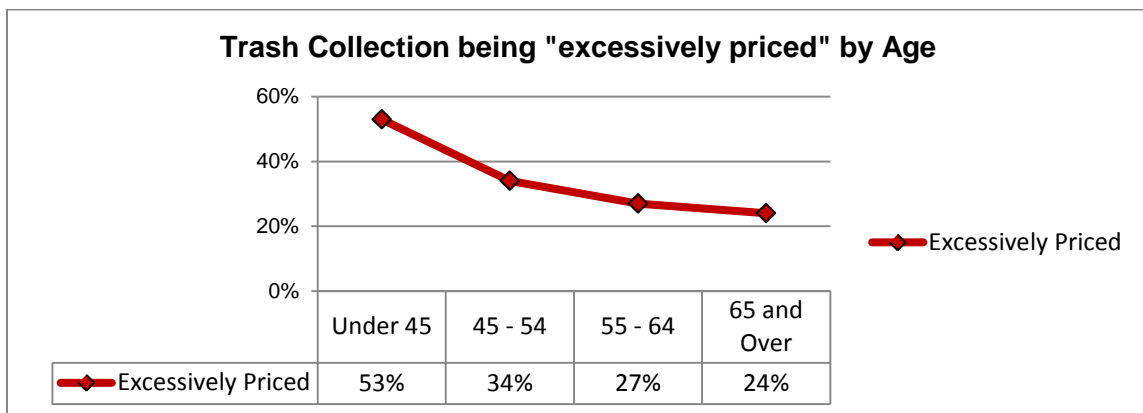
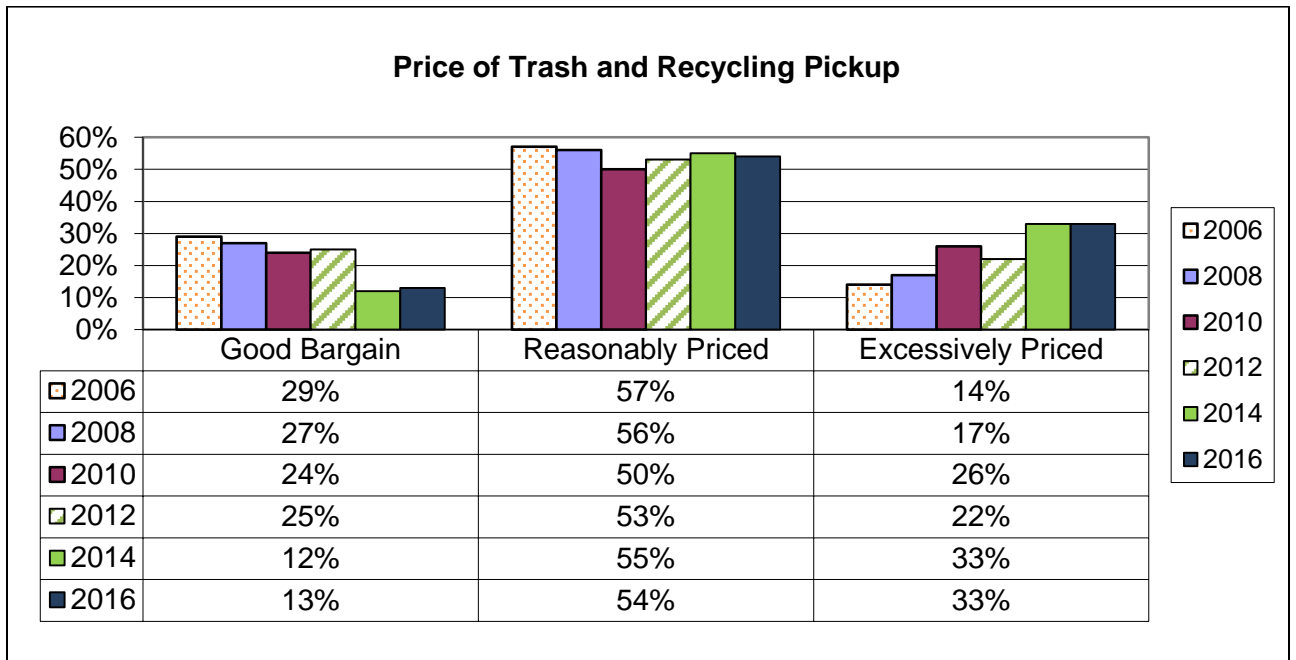
Of the 421 out of a total of 1,022 respondents who said they use the Town sewer service and expressed an opinion, seventy-eight percent think that the price was a “good bargain” or “reasonably priced”.





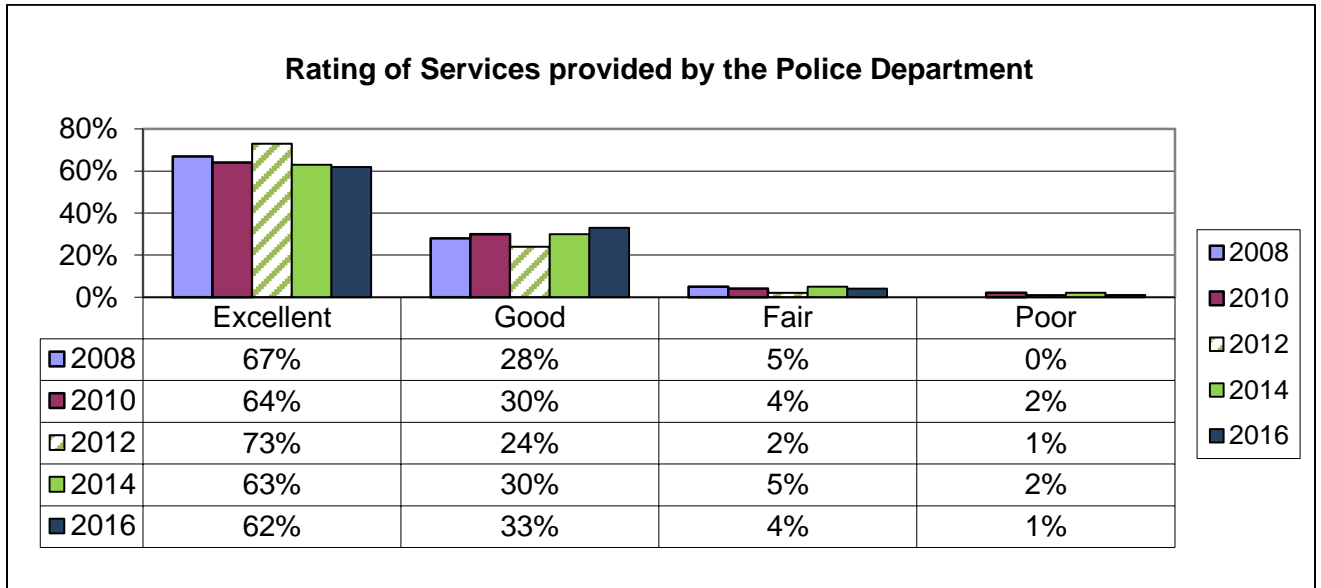
**Solid Waste Division**

Trends in the opinions about the price of trash and recycling collection show that respondents perceive the service has become more expensive. The percentage of those who respond “excessively priced” has increased from 14% in 2006 to 33% in 2016. However, compared to the other haulers that can be contracted by Concord residents, the cost of trash and recycling collection by the Town is very reasonable.



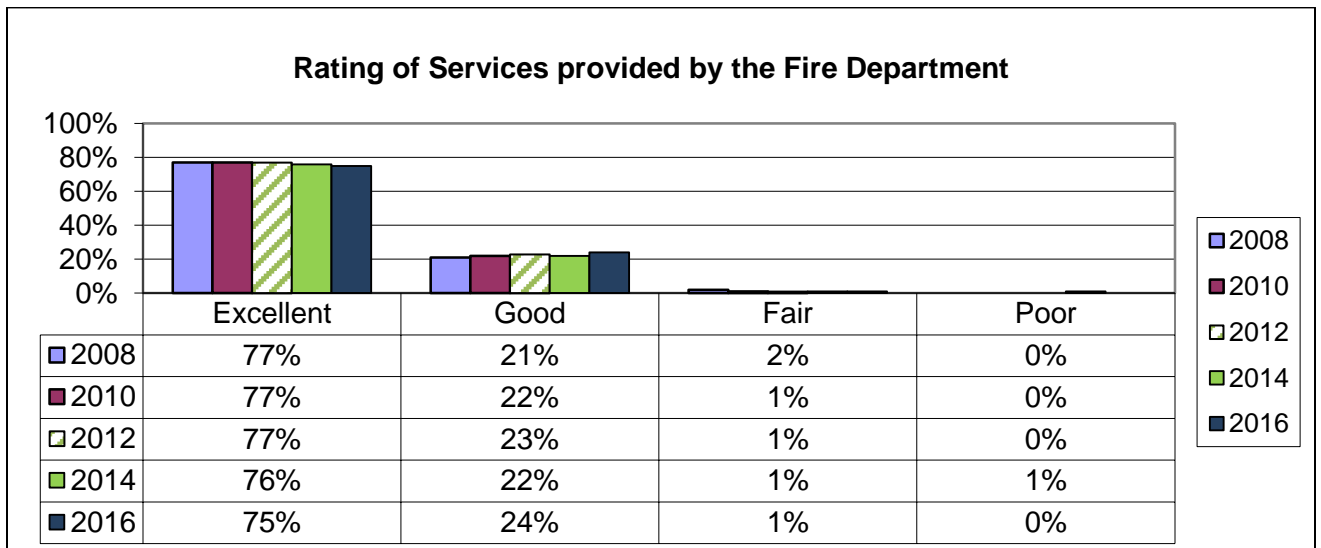
**Police Department**

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



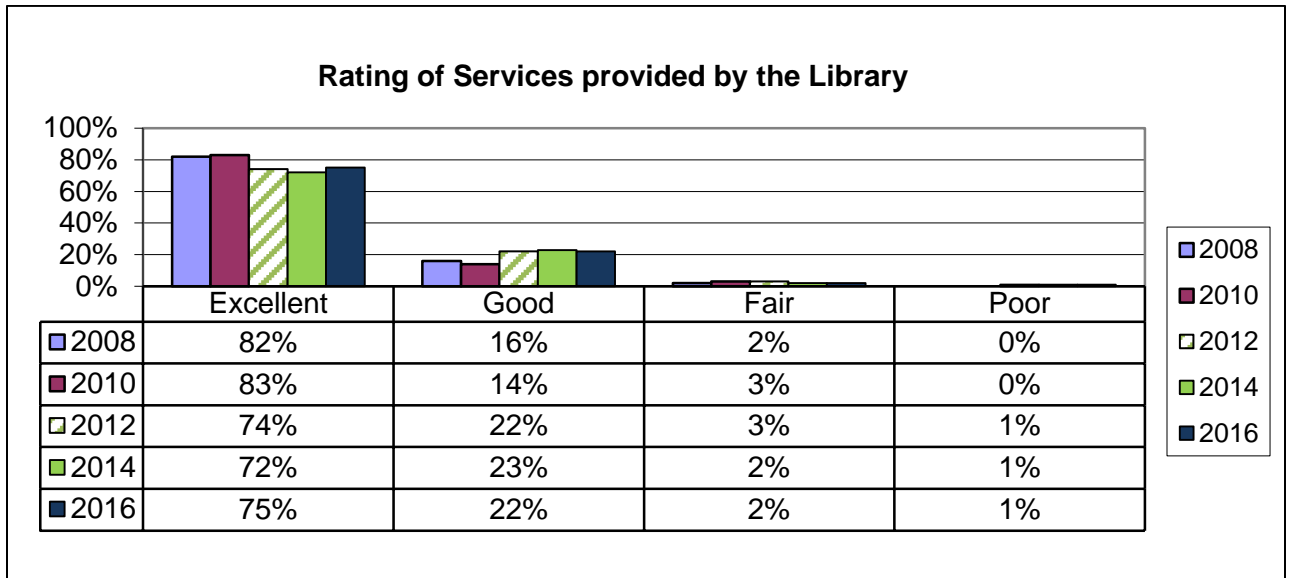
**Fire Department**

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

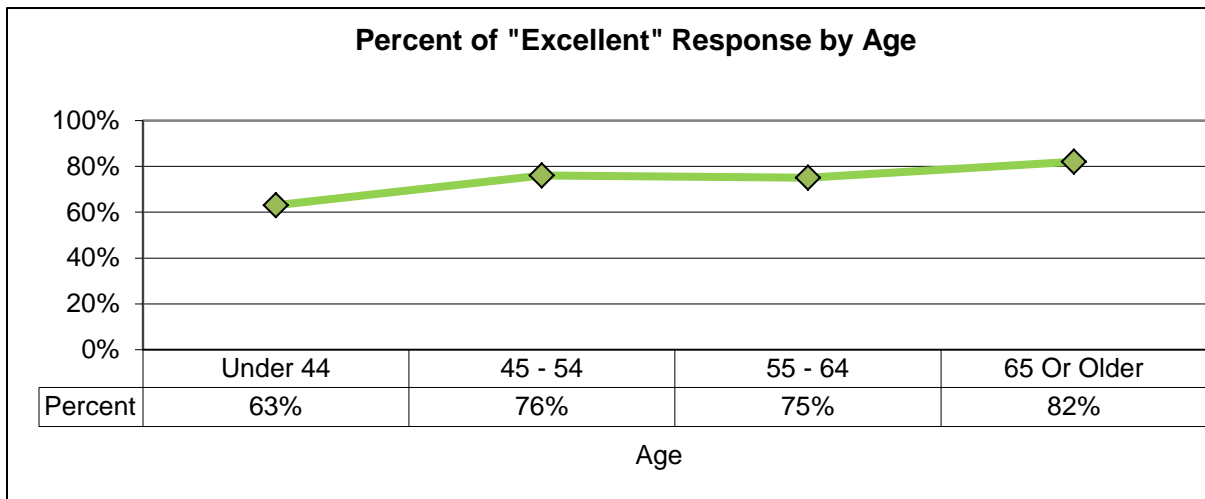


**Library**

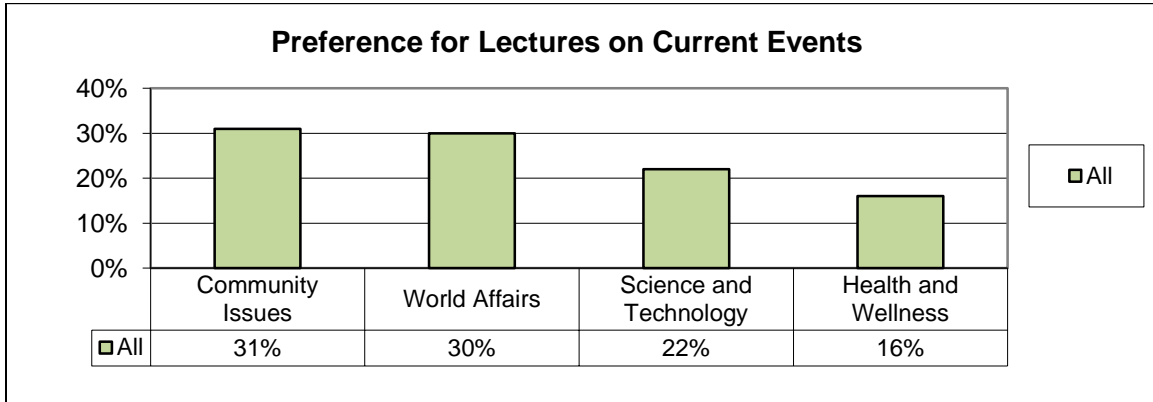
For the last five surveys, the following question has been asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by Concord Public Libraries?” In all surveys, there is a strong opinion that the quality is “excellent” or “good”.



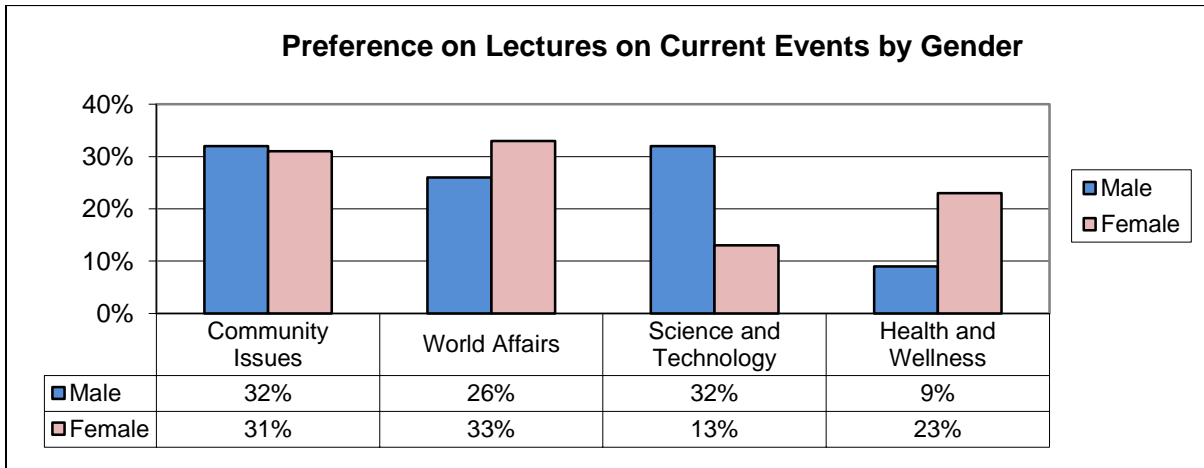
The graph below presents information on the percentage of each age group that responded “excellent” to the quality question in the 2016 survey. There is a slight trend which suggests that older residents perceive the Library services to be of better quality.



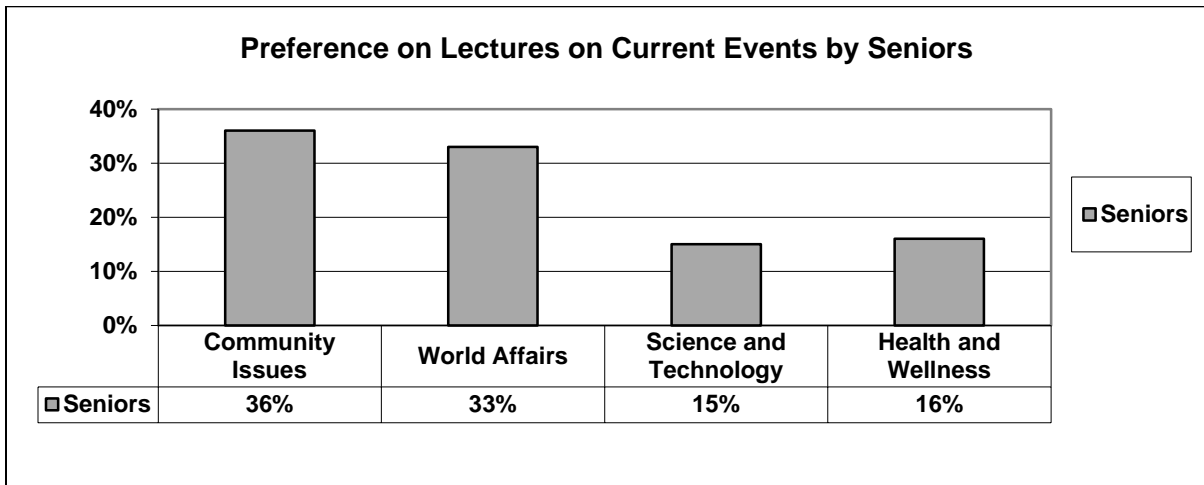
The question was asked: “What types of lectures on current events would you like to attend, if they were offered by the library?” Below is the results of 4 lecture types.



Men would like “community issues” and “Science and Technology” to be offered while women would like “community issues”, “world affairs” and “health and wellness”.

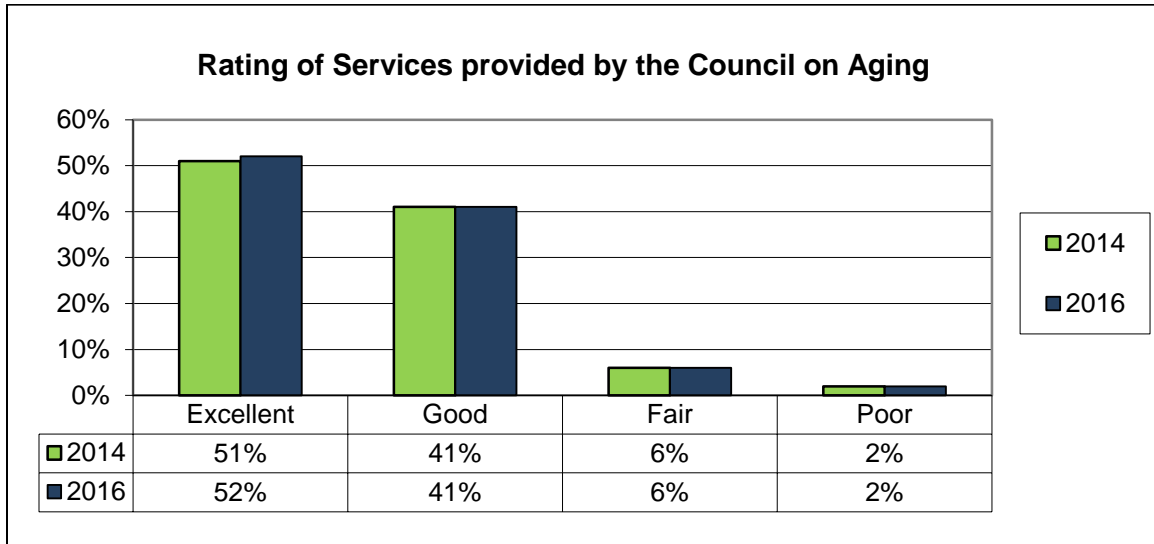


Seniors are interested in “community issues” and “world affairs”.

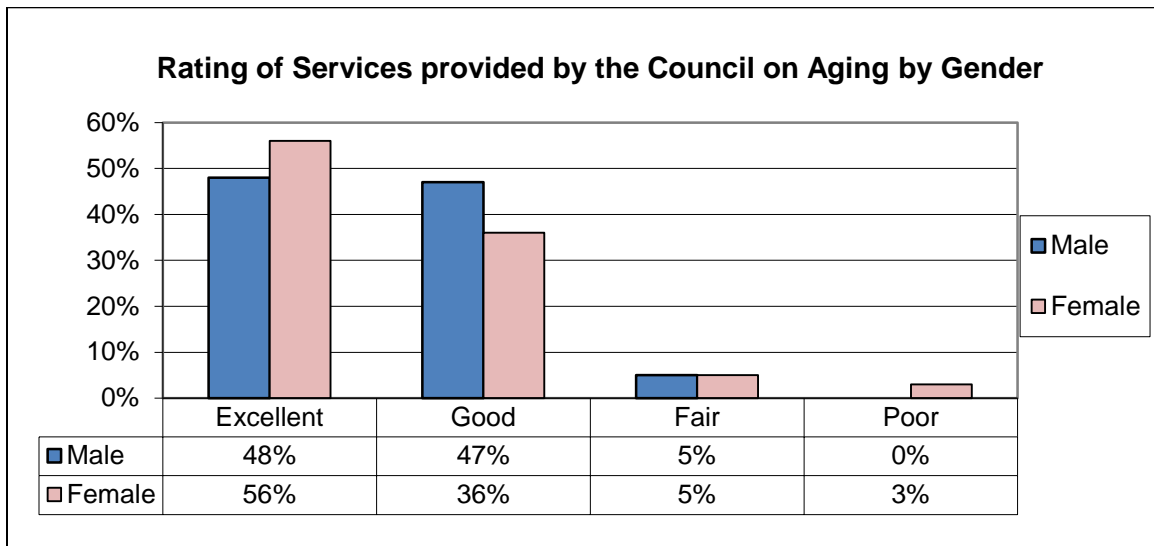


**Council on Aging (Senior Services)**

In the 2014 and 2016 survey, the question was asked: “How would you rate the overall quality of services provided by the Council on Aging?”



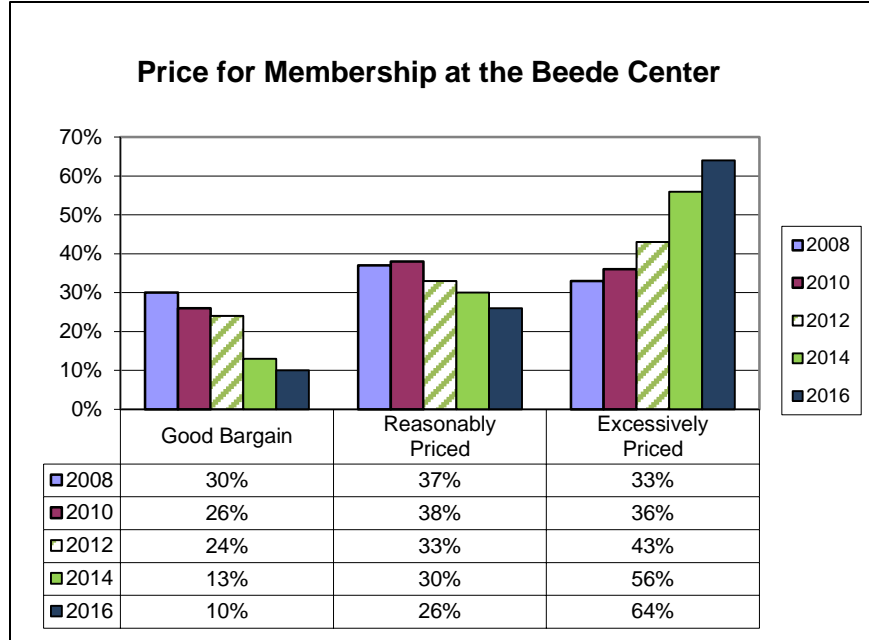
The results below are the satisfaction percentages in the 2016 survey shown by gender.



**Beede Center**

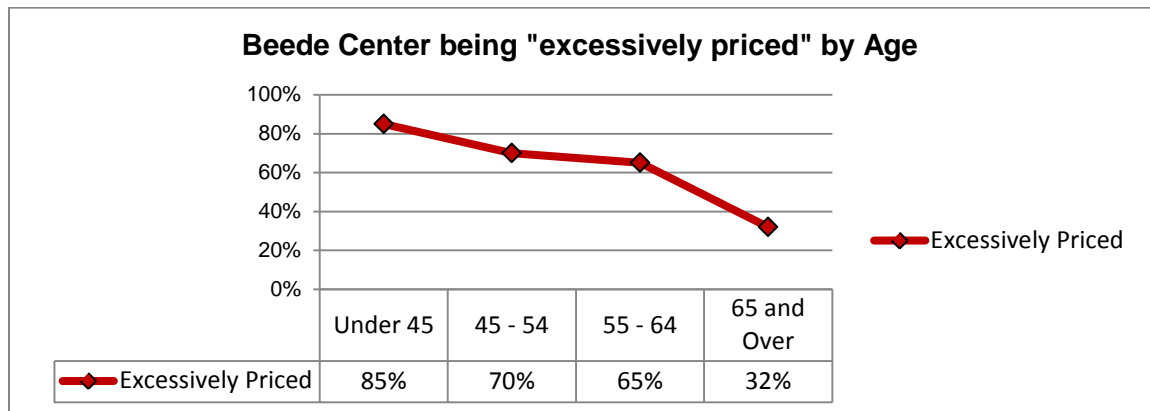
For the Beede Swim and Fitness Center, the following question was asked: "Please tell me whether you consider the price to be a Good Bargain, Reasonably Priced, or Excessively Priced?" There is a trend from 2008 to 2016 which shows that respondents feel that the Beede Center is becoming more expensive place to be a member.

Furthermore, when the question was asked to just families with children, 4% responded "good bargain", 24% "reasonably priced", and "72% "excessively priced". Alternatively,



residents with no children responded in the following way: 15% "good bargain", 29% "reasonably priced", and 55% "excessively priced".

In the 2016 survey, there are fewer older respondents who feel that the Beede Center is "excessively priced".

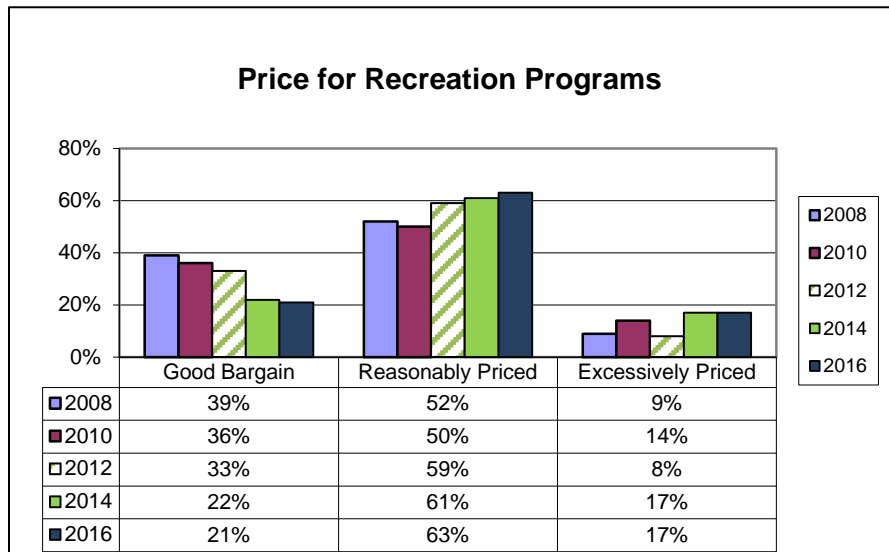


Out of 1,022 residents polled, 563 residents expressed an opinion about the pricing for membership at the Beede Center.

**Recreation Programs**

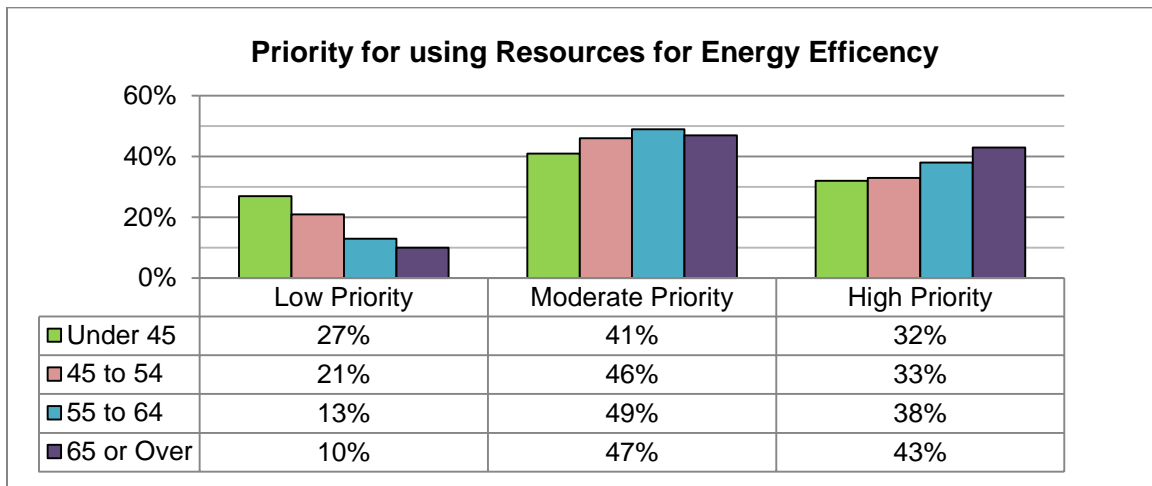
Of the 391 respondents (out of 1,022 surveyed) who expressed an opinion on the question regarding the price of Recreation Programs (such as after school programs and summer camp), 84% think these programs are a “good bargain” or “reasonably priced”.

If the results are limited to just those households with children, 22% think that these programs are “good bargain”, 60% that they are “reasonably priced”, and 19% that they are “excessively priced”.



**Energy Efficiency**

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



In aggregate, 37% of respondents feel that it is a high priority, 46% a moderate priority, and 17% a low priority.