



2022 CITY OF SACO COMMUNITY SATISFACTION SURVEY

AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2022

Prepared for:

The City of Saco, Maine

Prepared by:

The Center for Research & Public Policy, Inc.



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Moreover, no information regarding these findings will be released without the written consent of an authorized representative of the City of Saco, Maine.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Saco, Maine, together with The Center for Research and Public Policy, Inc. (CRPP), conducted an independent Community Satisfaction Survey among adult residents and business owners/managers in the City of Saco. This important survey included questions on quality of life in Saco, reasons for residing or working in Saco, community perceptions, awareness and satisfaction with city and services, opinions on community development and communication preferences.

The research study included 931 completed survey responses from City of Saco residents and business owners/managers.

The survey was conducted August 29th – September 19th, 2022.

The survey included the following areas for investigation:

- Quality of life in Saco;
- Experiences in Saco;
- Community perceptions of Saco;
- Awareness and satisfaction of city government services;
- Opinions on community development;
- Communication preferences; and,
- Demographics.

Section 2 of this report discusses the Methodology used in the study, while Section 3 includes Highlights derived from an analysis of the quantitative research. Section 4 is a Summary of Findings from the survey.

Section 5 is an Appendix to the report containing the composite aggregate data, cross tabulations, verbatim open-ended responses and the survey instrument employed.

METHODOLOGY

Using a quantitative research design, CRPP received 914 online and 17 hardcopy surveys among City of Saco residents and/or business owners / managers for a total combined 931 responses.

Survey input was provided by the City of Saco.

Survey design is a careful, deliberative process to ensure fair, objective and balanced surveys. Staff members, with years of survey design experience, edit out any bias. Further, all scales used by CRPP (either numeric, such as one through ten, or wording such as strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree) are balanced evenly. Additionally, placement of questions is carefully accomplished so that order has minimal impact.

CRPP programmed and managed the online survey instrument.

An Every Door Direct Mailing (EDDM) containing the online survey link was distributed along postal routes to 10,315 residences, P.O. boxes and businesses of Saco through the United States Post Office. City of Saco residents and business owners/managers were encouraged to visit the online link and complete the survey. The survey link was also posted on various Saco websites and social media pages. Paper versions were also available at four locations within the community (Saco City Hall, Age Friendly Saco, Saco Scoop, and Dyer Library).

All surveys were completed between August 29th – September 19th, 2022.

Statistically, a sample of 931 completed surveys has an associated margin for error of +/- 3.12% at a 95% confidence level.

Cross tabulations of data were developed and are included with this report. These compare core survey questions by demographic subgroups such as: gender identity, age, employment status, income, number of years lived in Saco, number of months residing in Saco in an average year, residents with /without children and rent / own residences.

Readers of this report should note that any survey is analogous to a snapshot in time and results are only reflective of the time in which the survey was undertaken. Should concerted public relations or information campaigns be undertaken during or shortly after the fielding of the survey, the results contained herein may be expected to change and should be, therefore, carefully interpreted and extrapolated.

Each qualified resident who lives in Saco had an equal chance for participating in the study. Statistical random error, however, can never be eliminated but may be significantly reduced by increasing sample size.

3 HIGHLIGHTS

ON QUALITY OF LIFE

Impressively, 97.0% of resident respondents indicated their quality of life in Saco was very good or good, while 95.1% of business owners or managers reported the same.

A strong majority of residents and business owners / managers both felt Saco was very good or good as a 'place to live' and a 'place to raise children'.

ON HISTORY

The leading reason residents chose to move to, or continue to live in, Saco included, in declining order, location, neighborhood, city appearance and ocean-side living.

Similarly, the leading reasons business owners / managers in Saco choose to operate there were, in declining order, location, birthplace or family nearby, neighborhood and city appearance,

ON EXPERIENCES IN SACO

In an open-end response question, top reasons respondents enjoyed Saco as a resident or business owner / manager were:

- Coastal living – 14.7%
- Sense of community / friendly character – 14.3%
- General location / convenience – 9.6%
- Proximity to other towns / cities – 9.1%
- Neighbors / neighborhood – 8.6%

Alternatively, top issues or problems respondents were most concerned about as a resident or business owner / manager were:

- Taxes / taxes for fixed income – 29.0%
- Traffic / congestion / speeding – 23.1%
- School concerns – 20.4%
- Pace of development / growth – 11.2%
- Home affordability / cost of home / rent – 9.7%

ON COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Residents agreed (strongly or somewhat agreed) most with the following statements:

- I feel safe within the Saco community – 92.0%
- Members of the Saco community care about each other – 86.2%
- I expect to be a member of the Saco community for a long time – 86.2%

Alternatively, residents agreed (strongly or somewhat agreed) least with the following statements:

- The City of Saco tax dollars are spent wisely – 46.4%
- I have personal influence over what the Saco community is like – 42.5%
- The City of Saco is affordable to live in – 41.4%

Business owners and managers felt similar to residents about these statements comparatively.

ON AWARENESS OF CITY GOVERNMENT

Business owners or managers had a stronger familiarity with the City of Saco government (77.8% indicated they are very or somewhat familiar) than residents (66.4% indicated they were very or somewhat familiar).

Residents indicated a higher satisfaction with the City of Saco government with 77.3% reporting to be very or somewhat satisfied. Less than three-quarters of business owners or managers, 70.4%, indicated they were very or somewhat satisfied.

ON SATISFACTION OF CITY SERVICES

When provided a list of city departments and services, residents were most satisfied (very or somewhat satisfied) with the following:

- Fire / Ambulance Services – 98.5%
- City Clerk – 92.9%
- Wastewater Treatment Services – 89.2%
- Finance Department – 87.4%
- Parks & Recreation Department – 86.8%

Business owners / managers were most satisfied (very or somewhat satisfied) with the following:

- Fire / Ambulance Services – 95.5%
- City Clerk – 92.6%
- Parks & Recreation – 89.6%
- Finance Department – 86.1%
- Wastewater Treatment Services – 85.0%

ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Residents expressed the most need for, in declining order, restaurants, arts and culture venues, employment opportunities, housing, general retail and shopping areas, and accessible/passive open space. Business owners / managers reported similarly.

Both residents and business owners / managers reported a low need for grocery stores and banking.

ON COMMUNICATION

Two-thirds of residents, 66.7%, suggested they were very or somewhat satisfied with the level of communication from the City of Saco government. Fewer business owners / managers, 56.8%, were very or somewhat satisfied.

Preferred sources for communication on City ‘happenings’ for both residents and business owners / managers were monthly e-newsletter, the official City Website, and Facebook.

4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

GENERAL INFORMATION	PERCENT	N
Yes, resident and 18 years of age or older living in Saco	91.3	850
Yes, own or manage a business located within Saco, but live in different town	1.2	11
Yes, <u>both</u> a resident and business owner/manager in Saco	7.5	70

‘Resident’ results throughout this report (**N=920**) are composed of respondents that indicated they were a “resident and 18 years of age or older living in Saco (**n=850**)” or are “both a resident and business owner/manager in Saco (**n=70**)” in the above screening question.

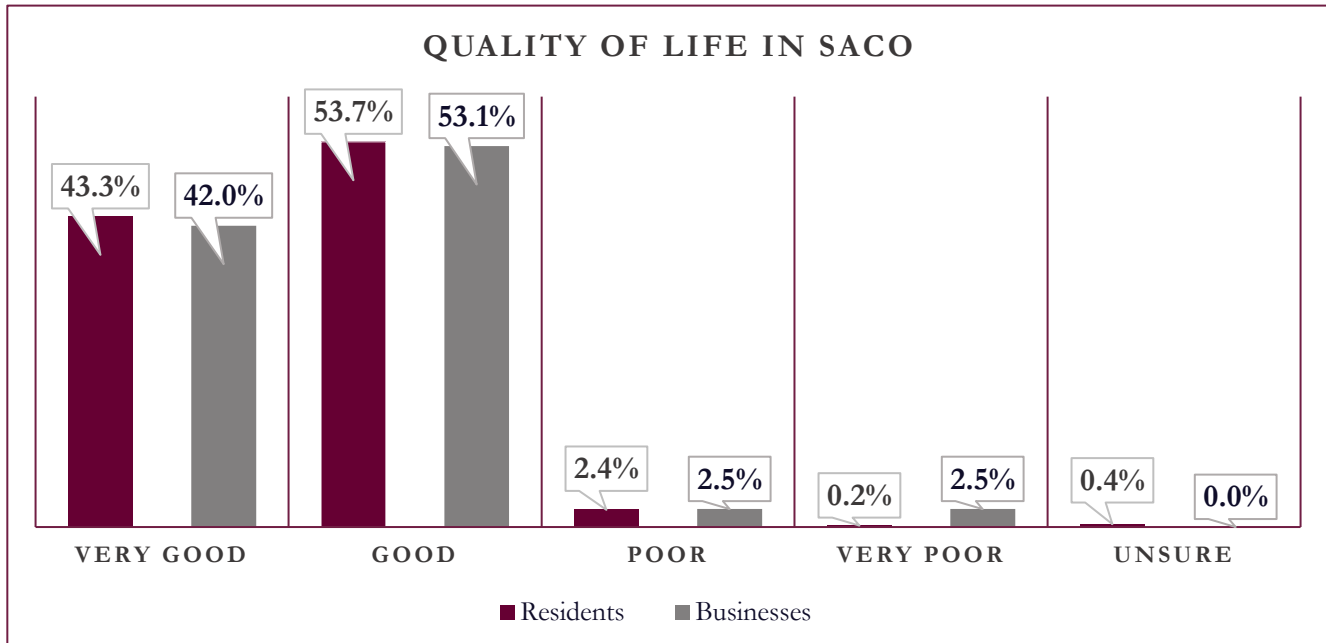
‘Business’ results throughout this report (**N=81**) are composed of respondents that indicated they “own or manage a business located within Saco, but live in a different town (**n=11**)” or are “both a resident and business owner/manager in Saco (**n=70**)” in the above screening question.

Text, tables and graphs throughout this report present these composite results.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Respondents were asked about their overall quality of life living in Saco. A large majority of residents, 97.0%, suggested their quality of life was very good (43.3%) or good (53.7%). Similarly, 95.1% of business owners / managers reported their quality of life was very good (42.0%) or good (53.1%).

Results are displayed in the following graph.



Respondents were asked to rate several aspects of life in Saco as very good, good, poor or very poor. Majority of both residents and business owners / managers both felt Saco as a place ‘to live’ or ‘raise children’ were very good or good.

Results are displayed in the following table. Unsure / not applicable responses have been removed from the data.

LIFE IN SACO STATEMENTS	PERCENT VERY GOOD OR GOOD	PERCENT VERY GOOD OR GOOD
	‘RESIDENTS’	‘BUSINESSES’
Saco as a place to live	97.3	96.2
Saco as a place to raise children	95.6	98.6
Saco as a place to work	78.9	83.6
Saco as a place to own a business	74.8	83.3
Saco as a place to retire	75.7	76.2

HISTORY

Survey respondents were asked to report the reasons they chose to move to or continue to live (or own/manage a business) in Saco. The leading reasons for residents included location (58.7%), neighborhood (54.7%), and city appearance (42.3%). Business owners / managers reported similarly with the addition of Saco being their birthplace or having family nearby (54.3%).

Multiple responses were accepted. Results are displayed in the table below in declining order by residents.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING SACO	PERCENT OF CASES	PERCENT OF CASES
	'RESIDENTS'	'BUSINESSES'
Location (close to work/close to highways)	58.7	59.3
Neighborhood (nice neighborhood)	54.7	44.4
City appearance (city character/community feeling)	42.3	38.3
Ocean-side living	41.3	35.8
Birthplace or family nearby	40.5	54.3
School systems	32.3	37.0
City amenities (recreational opportunities, city services)	27.2	21.0
Housing (nice house/affordable)	27.0	17.3
City reputation	21.4	14.8
Great place to retire	18.9	11.1
Affordability	14.5	7.4
Work opportunities	8.7	16.0
Other: _____	6.6	8.6
City property tax rates	3.9	6.2
Unsure	0.7	2.5

Other responses included: Inherited house/ property, only place found during Covid, spent summers in Camp Ellis at family cottage before moving, can't afford to move, central to everything in southern Maine, active art community, population size, proximity to retirement activities, attracted to rural North Saco area, close to transportation, followed spouse, safe community, and familiarity.

EXPERIENCES IN SACO

In two open-end formatted questions, respondents were given an opportunity to provide feedback pertaining to life in the City of Saco. Verbatim responses to both questions are provided in the appendix of this report.

The first open-ended question asked all respondents to explain what they liked most about being a resident or business owner / manager in the City of Saco. The most frequently named responses are presented in the following table in declining order.

OPEN END: SACO POSITIVES	PERCENT OF CASES
Coastal living / near beach	14.7
Sense of community / friendly character	14.3
General location / general convenience	9.6
Proximity to other cities / towns	9.1
Neighbors / neighborhood	8.6
Small-town feel	8.2
Proximity to downtown / restaurants / retail	7.1
Walkable / sidewalks	7.0
Safe city / general safety	6.8
School system	6.1
Near friends / family	5.9
Proximity to highways	5.0
General recreation / outdoor opportunities	4.2
City services / amenities	4.0
Quiet	3.8
Hometown / home	3.4
Clean	3.4
Senior support / programs	3.4
Recreation department / facilities	3.1
Community events / family programs	2.8
Proximity to transportation / airport	2.6
Rural location / feeling	2.0
Natural beauty	2.0
Public safety / emergency department	1.9
Proximity to work	1.8
Proximity to medical facilities / healthcare	1.5
Retired / place to retire	1.3
Place to raise family	1.2
Nice library	1.2
Affordable	1.1
Historic background of city / buildings	0.6
Public works department	0.6

Other mentions with less frequency included: dog friendly, diversity, job opportunities, hope for City future, familiar / comfortable, life doubles as vacation, ease of parking, size of town, not overcrowded in summer, progressive, and no winter tourists.

The second open-ended question asked all respondents to explain issues or problems they were most concerned about as a resident or business owner / manager in the City of Saco. The most frequently named responses are presented in the following table in declining order.

OPEN END: ISSUES OR PROBLEMS SACO FACES	PERCENT OF CASES
Taxes / taxes for fixed income	29.0
Traffic / congestion / speeding	23.1
School concerns	20.4
Pace of development / growth	11.2
Home affordability / cost of home / rent	9.7
Local retail and restaurant need	5.7
Parking	3.5
Need for vibrant / revitalized Downtown / nightlife	3.4
Access to, and quality of, alternative transportation / bike lanes / sidewalks	3.2
Environmental concerns / erosion / loss of habitat	2.9
Drugs / crime / safety	2.9
Look to other communities for direction (ex. Biddeford)	2.4
Cleaner neighborhoods / beach	2.4
Utilities (including water issues, recycling, large trash item pick up)	2.3
Police / Emergency service issues	1.8
Code / zoning / planning concerns	1.7
General overcrowding	1.7
More business-friendly spaces / support	1.6
City council / civic engagement	1.6
Community Center / community recreation opportunities	1.5
Noise of development / traffic	1.4
Asylum seeker / refugee plan concerns	1.2
Homelessness	1.1
Be open to change / more inviting of new residents	0.9
Lack of long-term planning / direction	0.9
Losing small-town character	0.9
Local politic concerns	0.6
Library update	0.5
Communication	0.5
Too many banks	0.5
ADA / Accessibility concerns	0.3

Other mentions with less frequency included: Need hardware store, need diversity, need new types of businesses, inequality, poor healthcare, Covid-19 response, restrictions on land owners, should be no dogs on beach, need to care for current residents, lack of traffic signals / signage, city maintenance, address seasonal rentals, and issues with neighbors / neighborhoods.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with several statements about life in Saco today.

Statements with the most agreement (strongly or somewhat agree) from both residents and business owners / managers include ‘I feel safe within the Saco community’, ‘Members of the Saco community care about each other’, and ‘I expect to be a part of the Saco community for a long time’.

A statement both residents and business owners / managers agreed the least with was ‘The City of Saco is affordable to live in’.

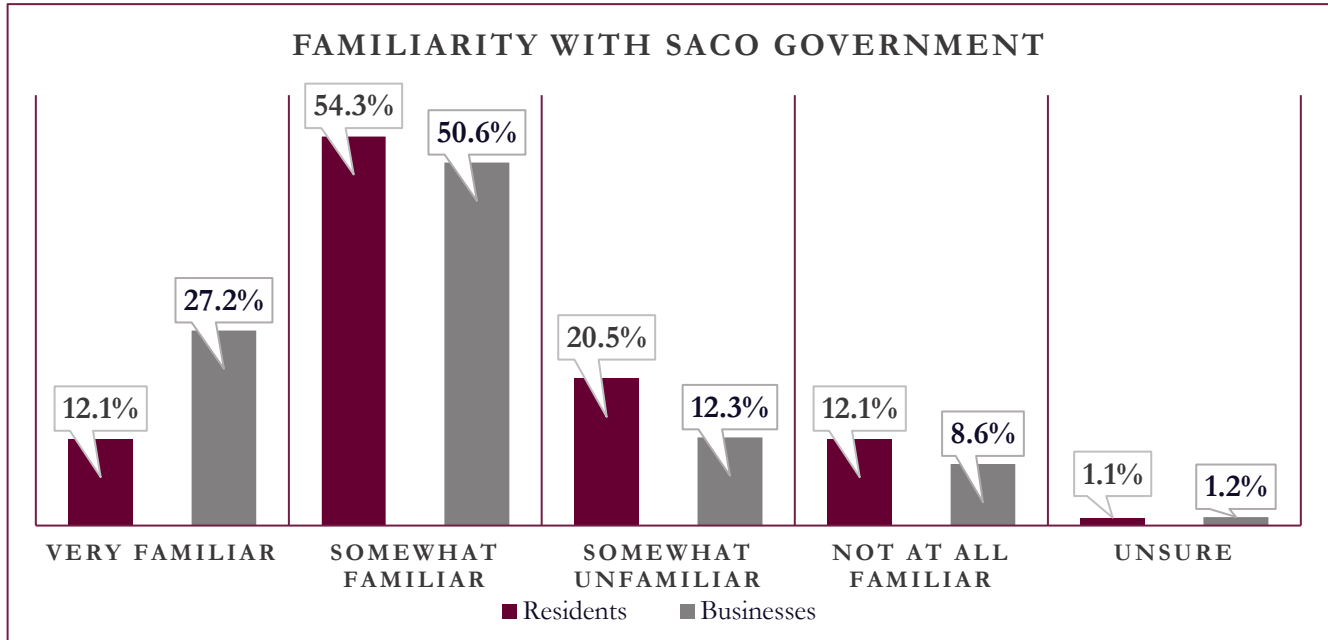
Results are displayed in the following table in declining order by residents indicating strongly or somewhat agree. Unsure / not applicable responses have been removed from the data.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION STATEMENTS	PERCENT STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT AGREE	PERCENT STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT AGREE
	‘RESIDENTS’	‘BUSINESSES’
I feel safe within the Saco community	92.0	92.5
Members of the Saco community care about each other	86.2	85.5
I expect to be a part of the Saco community for a long time	86.2	86.8
I am hopeful about the future of the Saco community	81.7	74.0
Being a member of the Saco community feels good and is part of my identity	79.4	75.0
The City of Saco is successful in meeting the needs of its members	73.4	69.6
The City of Saco is transparent about policies and budgets	58.2	57.6
The City of Saco tax dollars are spent wisely	46.4	39.7
I have personal influence over what the Saco community is like	42.5	47.9
The City of Saco is affordable to live in	41.4	35.0

AWARENESS OF CITY GOVERNMENT

Survey respondents were asked how familiar they were with the City of Saco government. About two-thirds of residents, 66.4%, indicated they were very (12.1%) or somewhat familiar (54.3%) with the City of Saco government, while over three-quarters of business owners / managers, 77.8%, indicated they were very (27.2%) or somewhat familiar (50.6%).

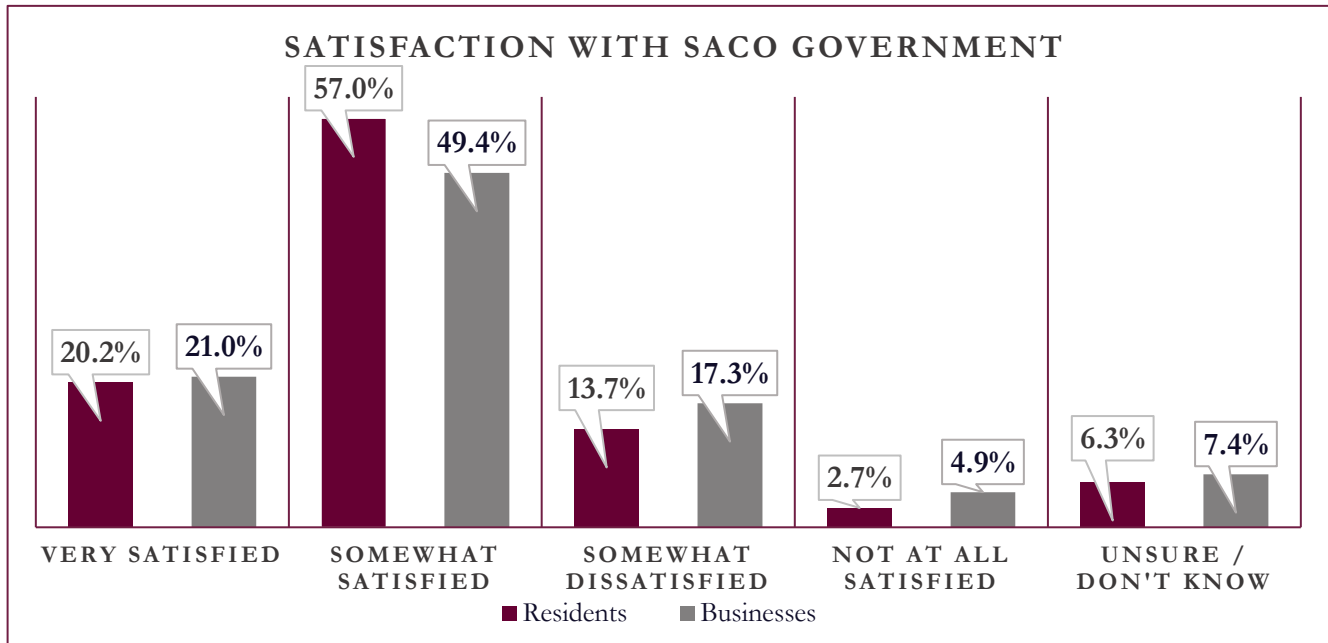
Results are displayed in the following graph.



Before respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with individual City of Saco government services, they were asked how satisfied they were with the services provided by the city government overall.

Over three-quarters of residents, 77.3%, indicated they were very (20.2%) or somewhat satisfied (57.0%) with the City of Saco government, while fewer business owners / managers, 70.4%, indicated they were very (21.0%) or somewhat satisfied (49.4%).

Results are displayed in the following graph.



SATISFACTION OF CITY SERVICES

Respondents were presented with several departments and services provided by the City of Saco government. They were asked, based on all they know or have heard, to indicate how satisfied they were with each.

Results are displayed in the following table in declining order by residents that were very or somewhat satisfied. No opinion / have not used responses were removed from the data.

CITY DEPARTMENTS AND SERVICES	PERCENT VERY OR SOMEWHAT SATISFIED 'RESIDENTS'	PERCENT VERY OR SOMEWHAT SATISFIED 'BUSINESSES'
Fire / Ambulance Services	98.5	95.5
City Clerk (care of municipal documents, supervision of elections within the town, and the recording of various documents and vital statistics)	92.9	92.6
Wastewater Treatment Services (Water Resource Recovery Department)	89.2	85.0
Finance (Vehicle registration and tax payments)	87.4	86.1
Parks & Recreation (outdoor and indoor sports opportunities, childcare [after school and summer camp] and Community Center facilities)	86.8	89.6
Public Safety (victim services, dispatch, police records, patrol, and dog and animal control)	85.6	83.3
Public Works (roadway maintenance, snow and ice removal, drainage infrastructure, trash and trash services)	84.4	82.3
Social Services (including General Assistance program, Senior Tax assistance)	79.6	75.8
Assessor's Office (property assessment, on-line property record searches and inquiries)	77.5	76.5
Administration (daily operations, the appointment of all department heads, and proposing the City's annual budget)	75.7	76.1
Code Enforcement (inspections and investigates complaints for compliance with City codes and ordinances)	72.9	69.8
Traffic Enforcement / Management	55.1	49.3
Economic Development (ensures business access to the resources and infrastructure to successfully operate, attracting new businesses to the area)	53.0	43.9
Planning (reviews of development proposals for conformance with the City's regulations, including site plan, conditional use and subdivision review)	50.1	39.1

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Respondents were asked to indicate if the City of Saco has too few, enough or too many of several facilities, services or programs. “Community need” is viewed as those reporting “too few”.

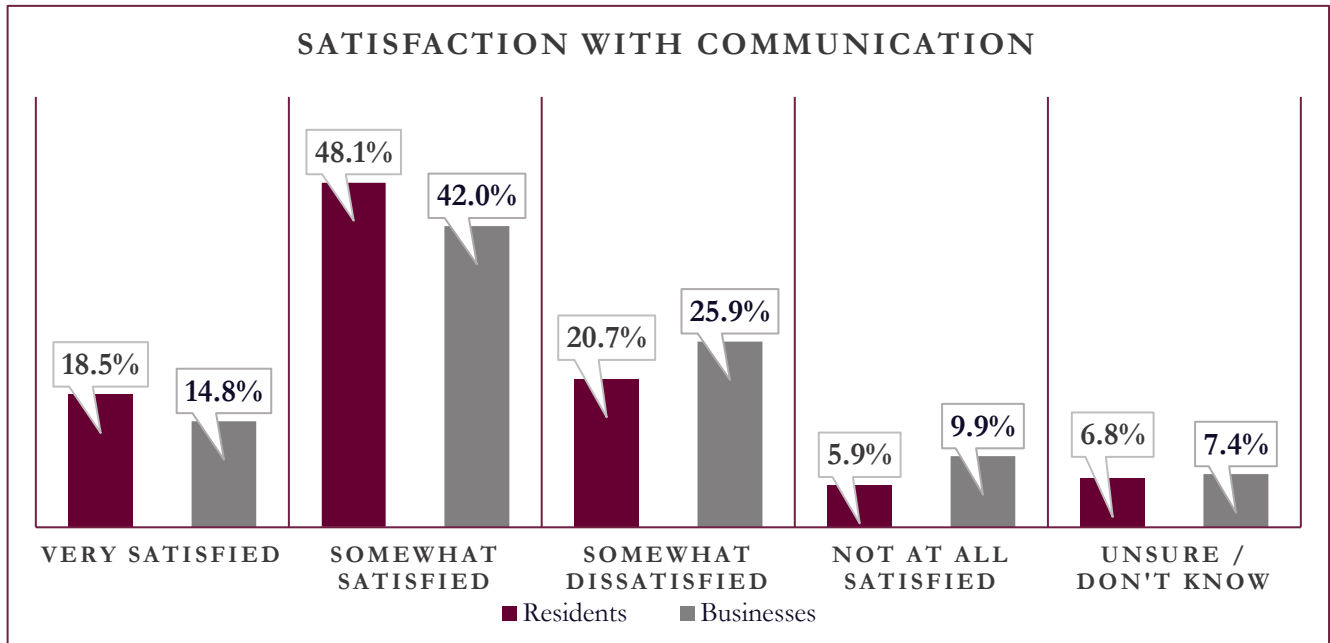
The following table holds the percentage of respondents indicating “too few” in declining order by residents. Unsure responses were removed from the data.

COMMUNITY NEED / DEVELOPMENT	PERCENT TOO FEW	PERCENT TOO FEW
	‘RESIDENTS’	‘BUSINESSES’
Restaurants	64.8	78.5
Arts and culture venues	62.8	64.6
Employment opportunities	55.7	53.4
Housing	49.5	50.0
General retail and shopping areas	43.9	43.6
Accessible, passive open space that is preserved with minimal activities such as birdwatching	39.5	35.5
Civic and community events	39.2	43.1
Available downtown parking spaces	35.7	31.6
Senior services	35.3	33.3
Accessible, active city-owned and operated open space for recreation, sports, and biking/hiking trails	35.1	28.2
Youth programs/services	31.3	31.0
Community Center programs	28.8	27.6
Home businesses	28.4	28.2
Libraries or library branches	12.0	13.0
Grocery stores	11.5	10.4
Vacation rentals (VRBO or AirBnB)	11.5	19.6
Banking	1.8	1.3

COMMUNICATION

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the overall level of communication from the City of Saco. About two-thirds of residents, 66.7%, indicated they were very (18.5%) or somewhat satisfied (48.1%) with communication levels, while over one-half of business owners / managers, 56.8%, were very (14.8%) or somewhat satisfied (42.0%).

Results are displayed in the following graph.



The survey included a list of 15 different ways residents may receive information about ‘happenings’ in and with the City of Saco government. Each was asked, regardless of where they *currently* received city information, to indicate where they preferred to receive city information. Multiple responses were accepted, and the list is presented in declining order by residents.

PREFERRED SOURCES OF INFORMATION	PERCENT OF CASES	PERCENT OF CASES
	‘RESIDENTS’	‘BUSINESSES’
Monthly e-mail newsletter	63.3	65.4
Official City Website	57.6	60.5
Facebook	56.0	58.0
Newspaper coverage	37.5	25.9
Friends/neighbors/co-workers	25.3	30.9
City-sponsored events	22.5	28.4
Print advertisements	20.3	21.0
Digital signboards	20.0	18.5
SacoTV, Channel 3, Government Access Channel	16.5	19.8
City offices	14.3	19.8
Instagram	12.8	18.5
City employees I see in the community	7.4	13.6
Other social media platforms	6.2	7.4
YouTube	5.4	3.7
Twitter	5.3	8.6
Other	2.2	0.0
None of these	0.9	1.2

Others mentioned included: E-mail as soon as information available, mail, letters to community, Channel 6 News, mailed newsletter, community bulletin boards, free newspaper, Biddeford/Saco/OOB Courier, text message, paper calendar mailing, and posters.

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

Respondents were asked to take the opportunity to note anything not covered in this survey regarding their satisfaction with the community to the City of Saco. Verbatim responses are provided in the appendix to this report.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

GENDER IDENTITY	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Male	33.9	49.4
Female	60.3	43.2
Non-binary	0.4	2.5
Prefer to self-describe	--	--
Prefer not to answer	5.3	4.9

AGE	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
18 to 24	0.7	--
25 to 34	9.1	6.2
35 to 44	18.3	21.0
45 to 54	14.7	24.7
55 to 64	21.5	24.7
65 or older	32.2	21.0
Refused	3.6	2.5

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Working full-time (35 hours or more per week)	48.9	71.6
Working part-time (less than 35 hours per week)	10.0	13.6
Working multiple jobs	3.7	6.2
Student	1.3	--
Retired	35.8	12.3
Unemployed – looking for work	0.8	--
Unemployed – not looking for work	1.4	--
Unemployed – unable to work because of disability	2.1	--
Unsure / other	2.6	6.2

INCOME	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Under \$25,000	3.8	2.5
\$25,000 to less than \$50,000	11.5	6.2
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	15.4	6.2
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	16.4	13.6
\$100,000 to less than \$200,000	26.6	32.1
\$200,000 or more	9.7	16.0
Unsure	0.2	1.2
Prefer not to answer	16.3	22.2

NUMBER OF YEARS LIVED IN SACO	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Less than 5 years	16.7	7.4
5 to less than 10 years	18.2	16.0
10 to less than 20 years	18.0	8.6
20 years or more	46.5	53.1
I do not live in Saco	.1	13.6
Unsure	.4	1.2

WHERE LIVED PRIOR TO SACO	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Have always lived in Saco	14.6	24.3
Most recent location lived prior to Saco: _____	74.0	71.4
Unsure / prefer not to answer	11.4	4.3

****An alphabetical list of most recent locations has been included verbatim in the appendix of this report.**

NUMBER OF MONTHS RESIDING IN SACO IN AVERAGE YEAR	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
1	0.1	--
2	--	--
3	--	--
4	0.3	--
5	0.2	--
6	0.9	--
7	0.8	--
8	1.0	1.4
9	0.9	--
10	1.7	4.3
11	1.6	1.4
12	91.9	92.9
Unsure	0.5	--

CHILDREN UNDER 18 LIVING AT HOME?	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Yes	29.2	31.4
No	69.6	67.1
Unsure / prefer not to answer	1.2	1.4

RENT OR OWN RESIDENCE	PERCENT RESIDENT	PERCENT BUSINESS
Rent	10.1	1.4
Own	87.8	95.7
Prefer not to answer	2.1	2.9

INTERPRETATION OF AGGREGATE RESULTS

The computer processed data for this survey are presented in the following frequency distributions. It is important to note that the wordings of the variable labels and value labels in the computer-processed data are largely abbreviated descriptions of the Questionnaire items and available response categories.

The frequency distributions include the category or response for the question items. Responses deemed not appropriate for classification have been grouped together under the “Other” code.

Each frequency distribution includes the absolute observed occurrence of each response (i.e. the total number of cases in each category). Immediately adjacent to the right of the column of absolute frequencies is the column of relative frequencies. These are the percentages of cases falling in each category response, including those cases designated as missing data. To the right of the relative frequency column is the adjusted frequency distribution column that contains the relative frequencies based on the legitimate (i.e. non-missing) cases. That is, the total base for the adjusted frequency distribution excludes the missing data. For many Questionnaire items, the relative frequencies and the adjusted frequencies will be nearly the same. However, some items that elicit a sizable number of missing data will produce quite substantial percentage differences between the two columns of frequencies. The careful analyst will cautiously consider both distributions.

The last column of data within the frequency distribution is the cumulative frequency distribution (Cum Freq.). This column is simply an adjusted frequency distribution of the sum of all previous categories of response and the current category of response. Its primary usefulness is to gauge some ordered or ranked meaning.