

Kitchener Community Engagement Research

Prepared for the City of Kitchener – January 2014



ENVIRONICS
R E S E A R C H G R O U P

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Background

The City of Kitchener is in the process of reviewing its strategic plan and, as part of that effort, wanted to better understand residents' views on City priorities for the years to come.

At the same time, the City decided to use this research opportunity to ask residents about their views on taxation, quality of life in Kitchener and the biggest issues facing the community, as well as to identify those things residents find most appealing about the City.

In the course of a 15-minute telephone survey, residents were also asked to provide insights on those characteristics that contribute most to the vitality of a neighbourhood, their support for corporate sponsorship of facilities and programs, value for taxes and the perceived strength of the City's economy.

Taken together, the results of the survey provide Kitchener with both a current pulse on the community, and insights for designing a strategic plan that will align with the views, opinions and wants of its residents.

Summary

- Greater accountability, economic development and the environment lead the way for strategic plan priorities.
- While accountability is ranked as the top priority for the City of Kitchener, a lack of accountability or distrust of the local government does not appear elsewhere in the survey. Accountability is less an issue unto itself, but rather an overarching ideal that should be taken into consideration when reaching other goals: is the process open and transparent? Are there opportunities for residents to provide input?
 - It is also important to note that recent, high-profile issues and events at all levels of government, particularly large GTA municipalities, have likely contributed to making accountability a more salient issue with Kitchener residents.
- What residents view as the top priorities for the City include maintenance and improved safety of roads, preserving green spaces, building infrastructure to support population growth, making downtown safer and providing adequate parking, supporting arts and cultural events, and providing recreation programs for children.

Summary

- When residents are asked, unaided, to name the most important issues facing their City, the most common response is transportation issues – but unemployment, development, congestion, and taxes are also important.
- Residents are satisfied with the City's efforts to ensure residents are engaged and active in decision-making, but they expect the City to come up with new ways of doing this, primarily online.
- Kitchener residents feel they enjoy a good quality of life in the City. Green space, friendly neighbours and access to amenities are the most appealing aspects of living in the City and the key determinants of a vital neighbourhood.
- Satisfaction with the City government is high, but the data indicate it has declined since 2009 and 2005.
 - The City government is generally seen as being on the right track, but related tracking data indicate that this has also declined since 2009.

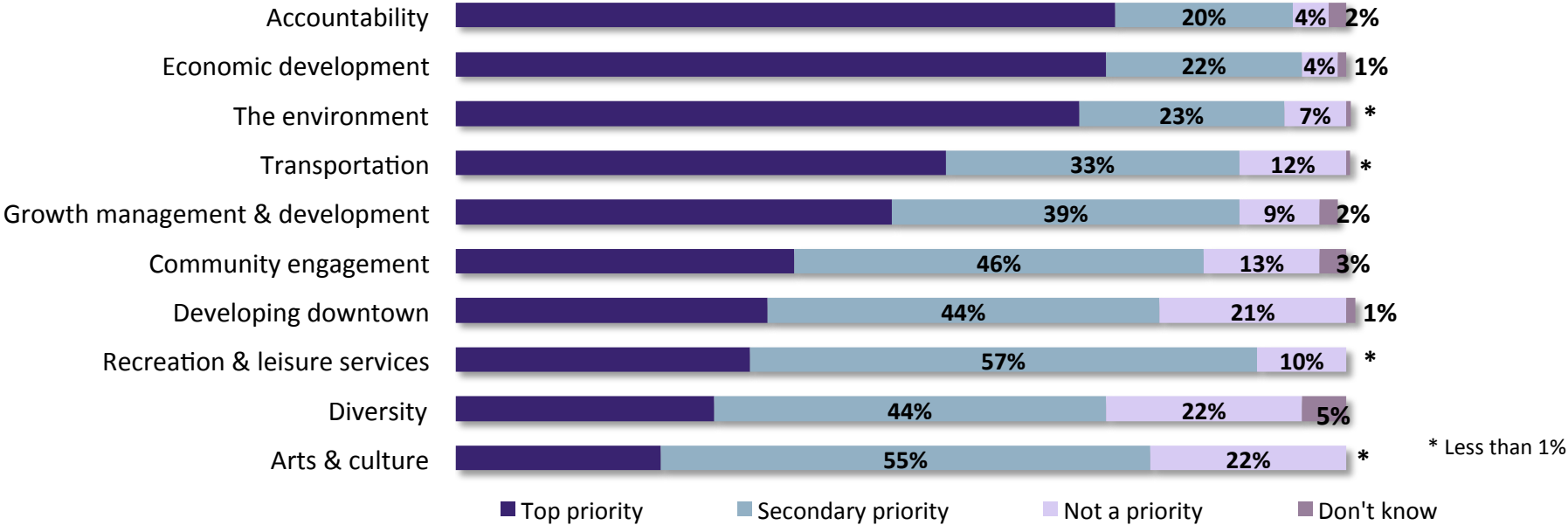
Summary

- Most residents agree that they get good value for their tax dollar. A majority believe that service levels should be maintained by keeping tax increases in line with inflation.
- A slight plurality believe that the money for services and programs should come out of general tax revenues rather than user fees, but opinion is somewhat divided on the issue.
- Allowing corporate sponsorship of programs and events to raise revenue for the City is widely encouraged by residents, as more than eight in ten support the idea.
- For the most part, the local economy is seen as holding its own, but a significant minority express concern that it is weakening.

Priorities

Accountability, economic development and the environment are the top priorities

Priorities for City of Kitchener



Respondents were asked to prioritize 10 areas of potential focus for the City; all based on the six strategic priorities of the 2011-2014 strategic plan. Three-quarters of residents, each, say accountability, (esp. higher income residents, but less for those aged 18-29), economic development (esp. for those aged 30-59) and the environment (esp. for women) should be top priorities for the City.

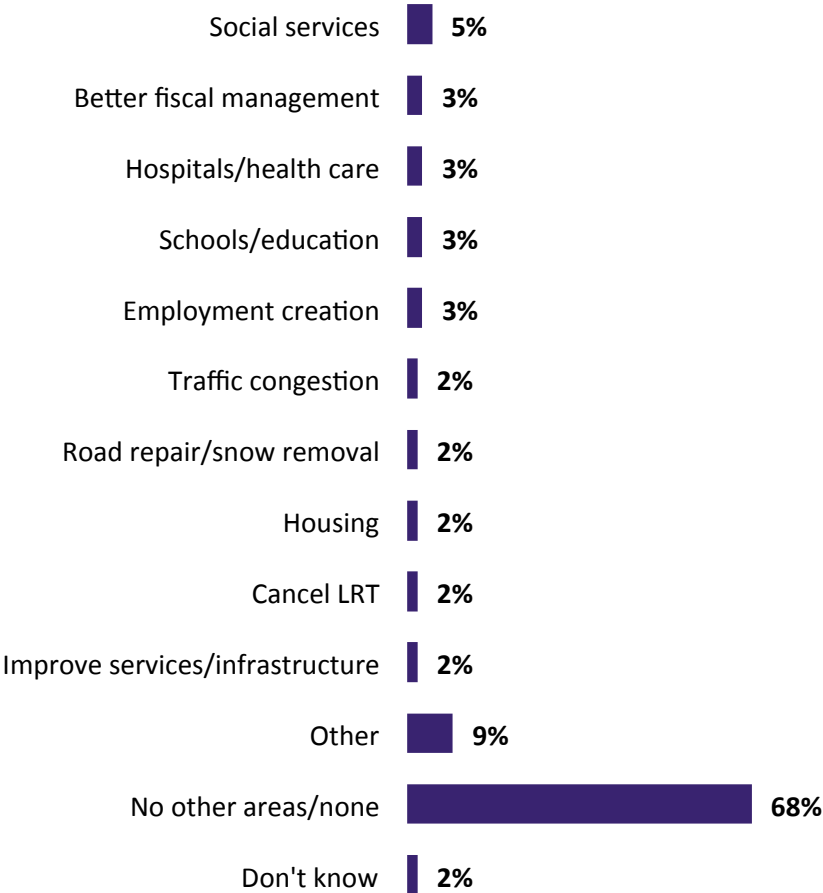
Half of residents would assign top priority to transportation (higher priority among those with a post-graduate degree) and growth management.

One-third of residents would assign top priority to community engagement, developing downtown (esp. those in top income group), recreation activities and diversity (esp. women).

Q13. The City of Kitchener is currently developing a strategic plan to help guide Kitchener's service plans and budgeting priorities for the next four years. There are several key areas of focus for the plan. For each of the following areas, please tell me if you think it should be a top priority for the City, a secondary priority or not a priority.

Most residents are unable to name other priority areas for the local government

Other priority areas?



When asked if other areas should be considered a priority, outside of those given in Q13, seven in ten residents (68%) say there are none.

Social services (5%) and better fiscal management (3%) are said to be a priority to a small proportion of residents.

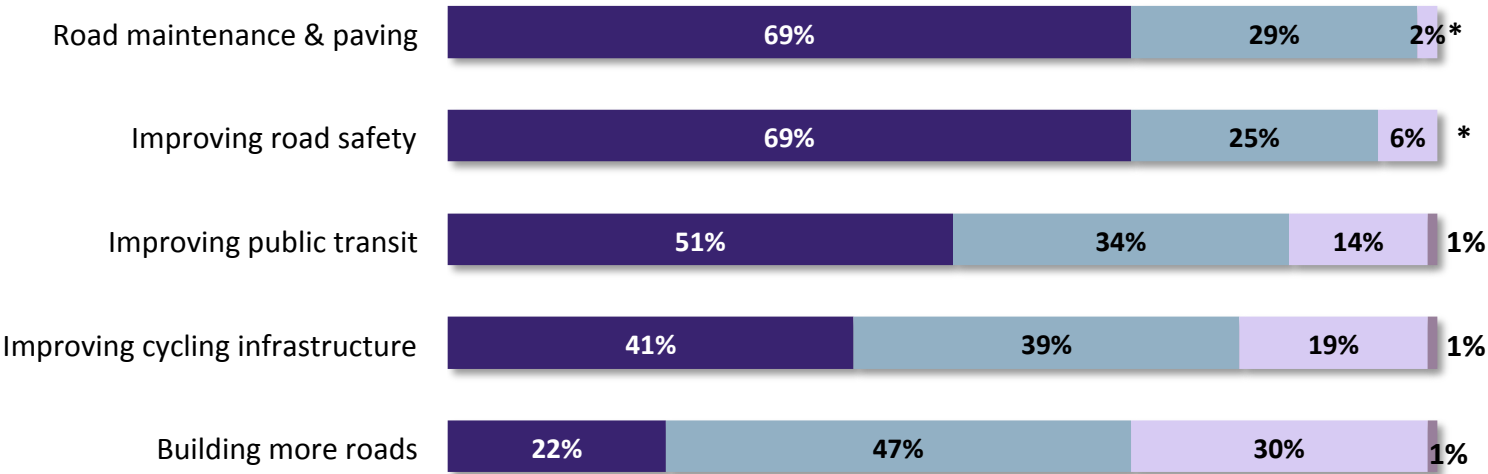
Several of the issues mentioned either fall outside of the jurisdiction of the local government (health care, education) or can be included under the umbrella of larger priority areas listed in Q13 (transportation, growth management and development).

Kitchener residents seem to have a better than average understanding of the services delivered at the municipal rather than provincial or federal levels of government.

Q14. Are there any issues or areas of focus you feel are important to the City of Kitchener, but are not covered under the priority areas?

Road maintenance and improving road safety are named as the top transportation priorities, ahead of public transit and cycling infrastructure

Transportation initiatives



■ Top priority ■ Secondary priority ■ Not a priority ■ Don't know * Less than 1%

Seven in ten residents, each, assign top priority to road maintenance (esp. those aged 60+) and improving road safety (esp. those aged 60+, women and those with least education). Improving road safety is not typically seen as a high priority in similar research.

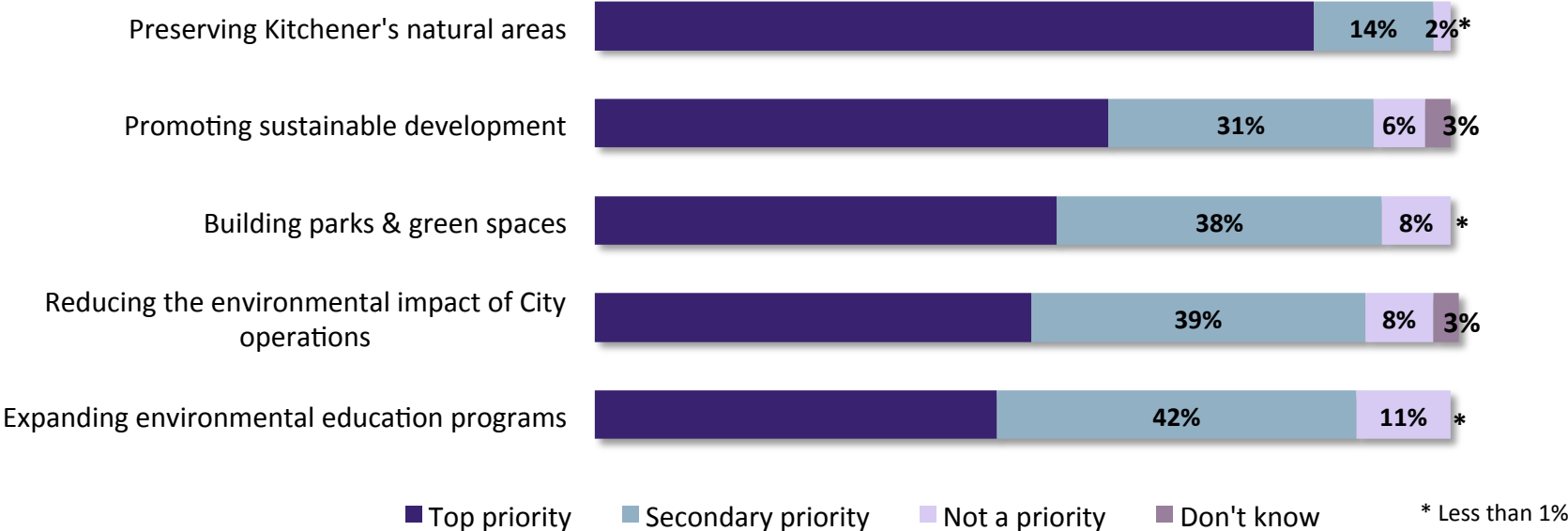
Half of residents assign top priority to improving public transit (esp. younger residents) and 4 in 10 do so for cycling infrastructure (esp. women).

Residents place the lowest priority on building new roads and 3 in 10 say it should not be a priority. This is typically a reflection of resident understanding that building more roads is not an option in more urban and suburban environments.

Q15. Looking ahead, do you think the following transportation initiatives should be a top priority, a secondary priority or not a priority for the City of Kitchener ...?

Preserving Kitchener's natural areas is the top environmental priority

Environmental initiatives



More than 8 in 10 residents say that preserving the City's natural areas should be a top priority. A smaller majority of 6 in 10 would assign top priority to promoting sustainable development. These findings are similar across all demographic groups.

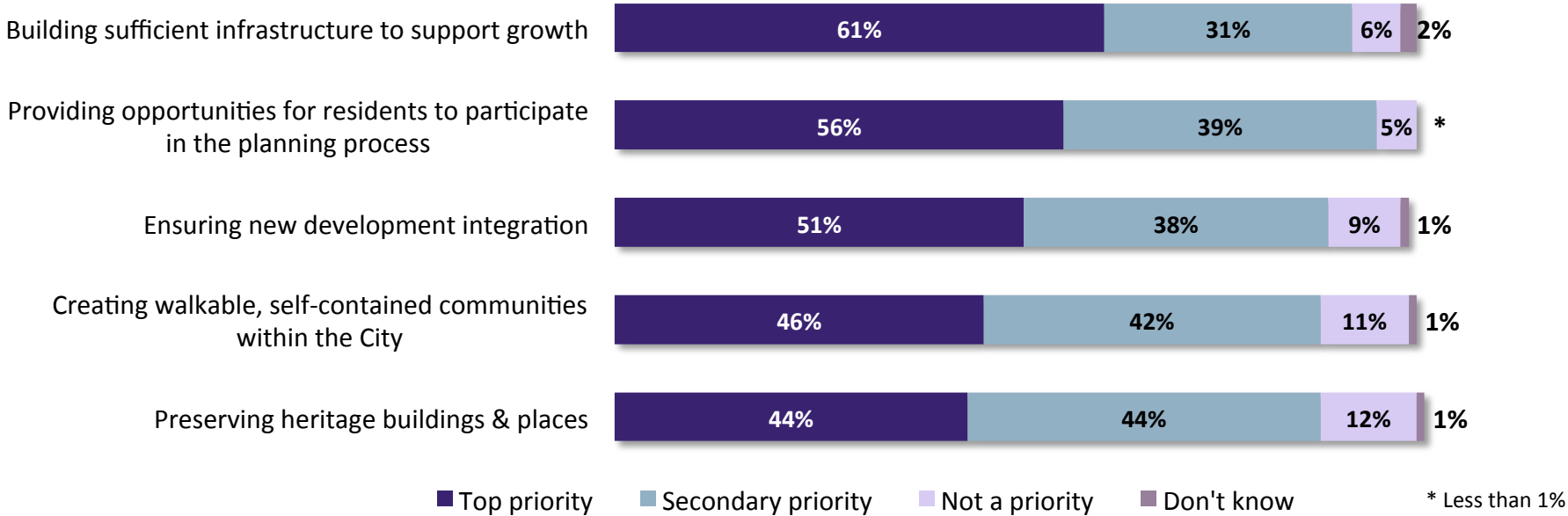
Half of residents, each, would put a top priority on building parks and green spaces, reducing the environmental impact of City operations (esp. for women) and on expanding environmental education programs (esp. for women and less affluent residents, but less so for those aged 45-59).

In 2003, one-quarter considered environmental preservation to be the most important factor contributing to the quality of life in Kitchener. In the 2005 and 2009, residents expressed high familiarity and satisfaction with the City's parks, playgrounds and natural areas – with nearly 4 in 10 wanting to see more spending in this area – and majorities placed a high priority on protecting the environment (2005 – 78%, 2009 – 71%).*

Q16. Turning now to the environment, do you think each of the following should be a top priority, a secondary priority or not a priority ...?
 *Note: 2003 survey was conducted by phone; 2005 and 2009 surveys used a combined mail/online methodology.

Building sufficient infrastructure is the top growth management priority, but facilitating resident participation in planning process is also important

Growth management initiatives



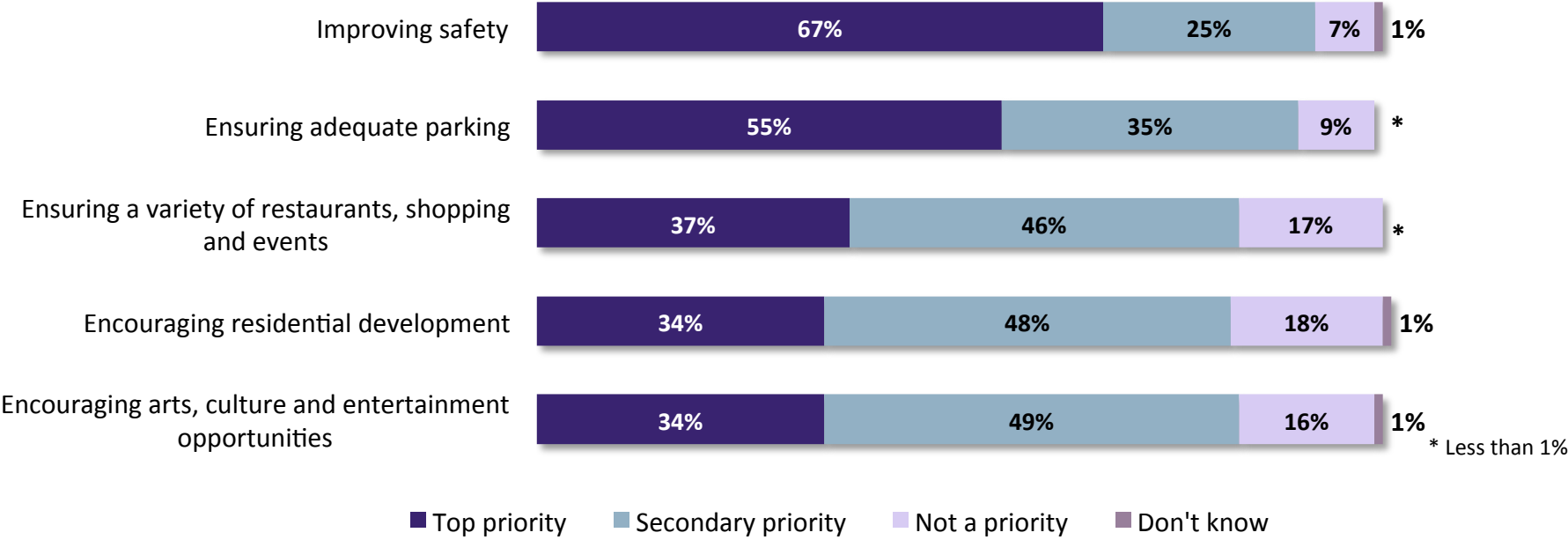
Approximately 6 in 10 residents, each, assign top priority on building sufficient infrastructure to support growth (consistent across all groups) and providing opportunities for residents to participate in the planning process (less so for the least affluent). Providing opportunities to participate in the process is not typically seen as such a high priority for residents of a community.

Between 4 and 5 in 10, each, assign top priority on ensuring new developments are integrated with existing neighbourhoods (consistent across all groups); creating walkable, self-contained communities within the City (esp. among women); and preserving heritage buildings and places (esp. among women and those aged 30-44). That creating walkable, self-contained communities appears lower on the priority list is, in part, likely a reflection that such communities are not a traditional feature of cities like Kitchener.

Q17. To build a better City of Kitchener and manage its growth, do you think each of the following should be a top priority, a secondary priority or not a priority ...?

Improving safety and ensuring adequate parking are the top priorities for downtown Kitchener

Initiatives for downtown Kitchener



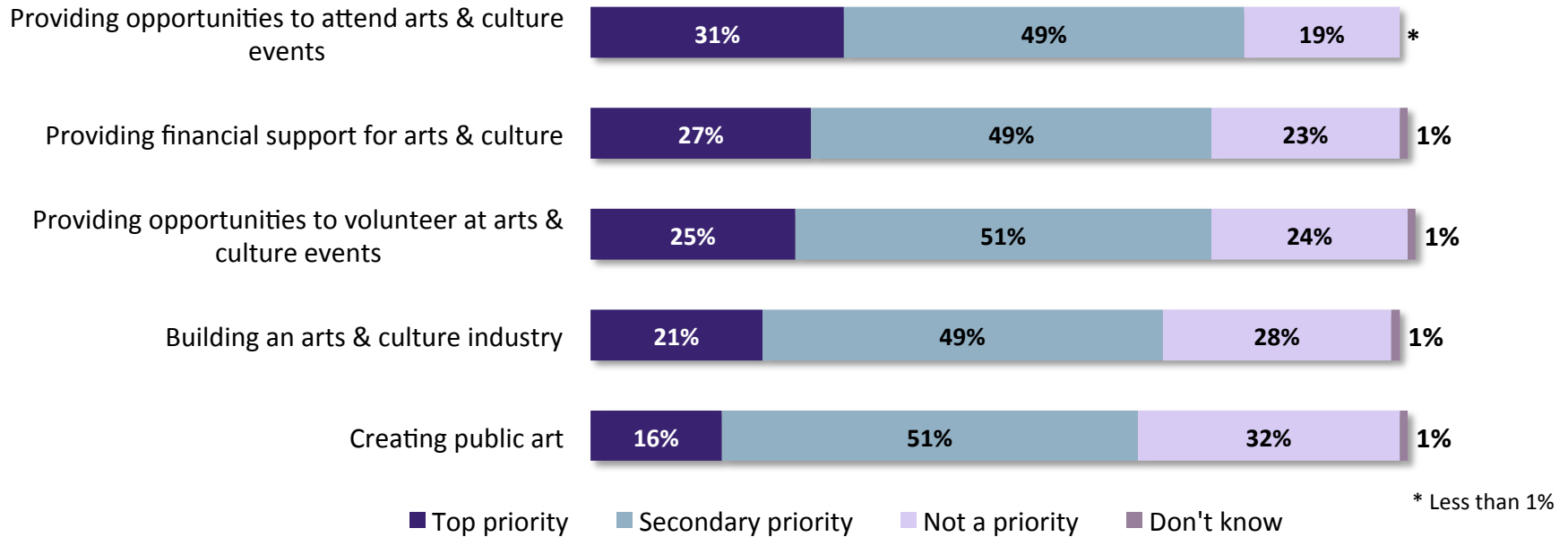
Two-thirds of residents assign top priority on improving safety (esp. women and the least educated and least affluent) and over half say the same about ensuring adequate parking (esp. women, the least educated and the less affluent).

One-third, each, put a top priority on ensuring a variety of restaurants (esp. those in the top education group), shopping districts, social spaces and events; encouraging arts, culture and entertainment opportunities; and encouraging residential development.

Q18. Turning to downtown Kitchener specifically, do you think each of the following should be a top priority, a secondary priority or not a priority ...?

The top priorities are providing opportunities to attend and/or volunteer at arts and culture events, and providing financial support for arts and culture

Arts & culture initiatives



Approximately 3 in 10, each, say providing opportunities to attend arts and culture events (esp. among younger residents and women, but less among those in the lowest income group), providing financial support for arts and culture, and/or providing opportunities to volunteer at arts and culture events should be top priorities.

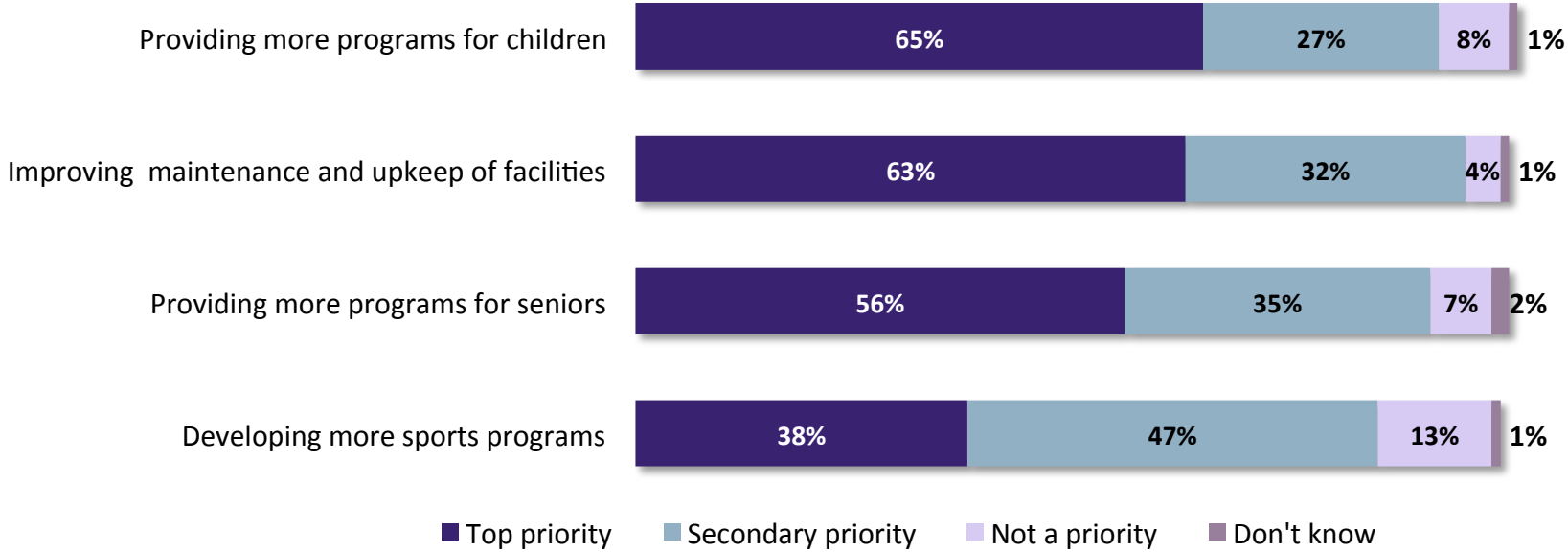
About 2 in 10, each, would assign a top priority to building an arts and culture industry, and/or creating public art (more so among those in the lowest income group).

Between 2 and 3 in 10 say none of these initiatives should be a priority for the City. This feeling is more pronounced among older residents and those who think they get poor value for their tax dollar.

Q22. Thinking about the arts and culture opportunities in Kitchener, do you think each of the following should be a top priority, a secondary priority or not a priority ...?

More programs for children and improving facilities are the top recreation & leisure priorities

Recreation & leisure activities



Two-thirds of residents assign top priority to providing more programs for children (esp. among those aged 30-44) and/or improving the maintenance and upkeep of recreation facilities (less so among the youngest age group).

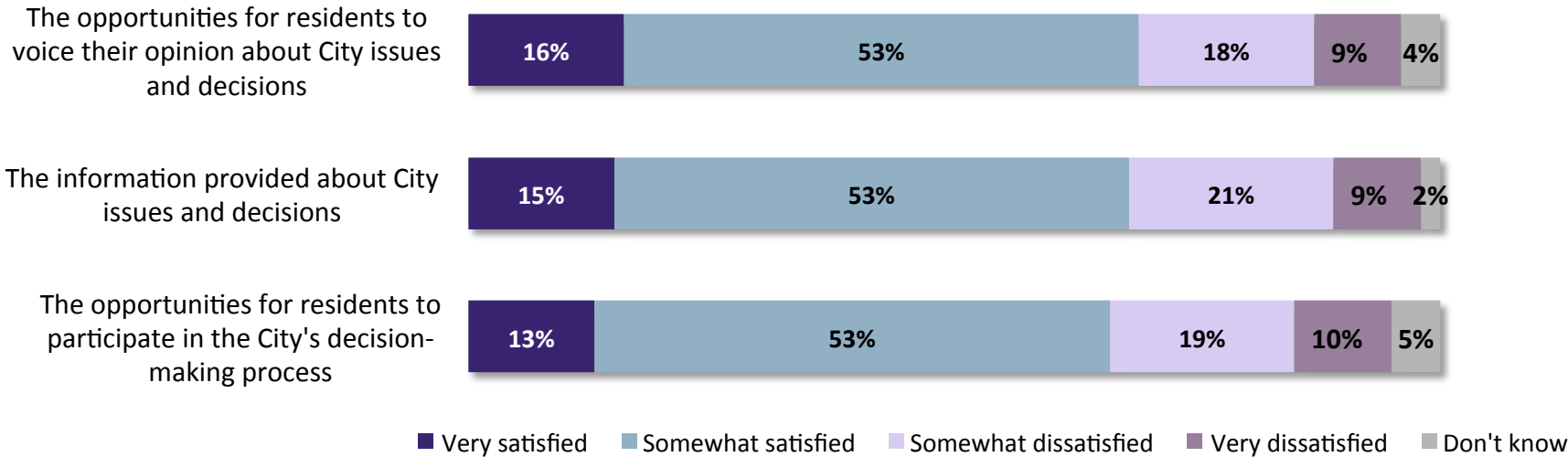
Just over half say the same about providing more programs for seniors (esp. among less affluent residents) and one-third say developing more sports programs should be a top priority (esp. among younger residents, those in the lowest education group and lower income residents).

Q23. To improve the recreation and leisure activities in Kitchener, do you think each of the following should be a top priority, a secondary priority or not a priority ...?

Community Engagement

Residents are generally satisfied with the City's efforts to ensure residents are engaged in decision-making

Decision and initiative engagement



A majority of 69% are satisfied with opportunities for residents to voice their opinion about important City issues and decisions. Satisfaction is greater among those aged 30-44, but less so among those in the lowest education group.

Similar proportions are satisfied with the information provided to residents about important City issues and decisions (68%), and with opportunities for residents to participate in the City's decision-making process (66%).

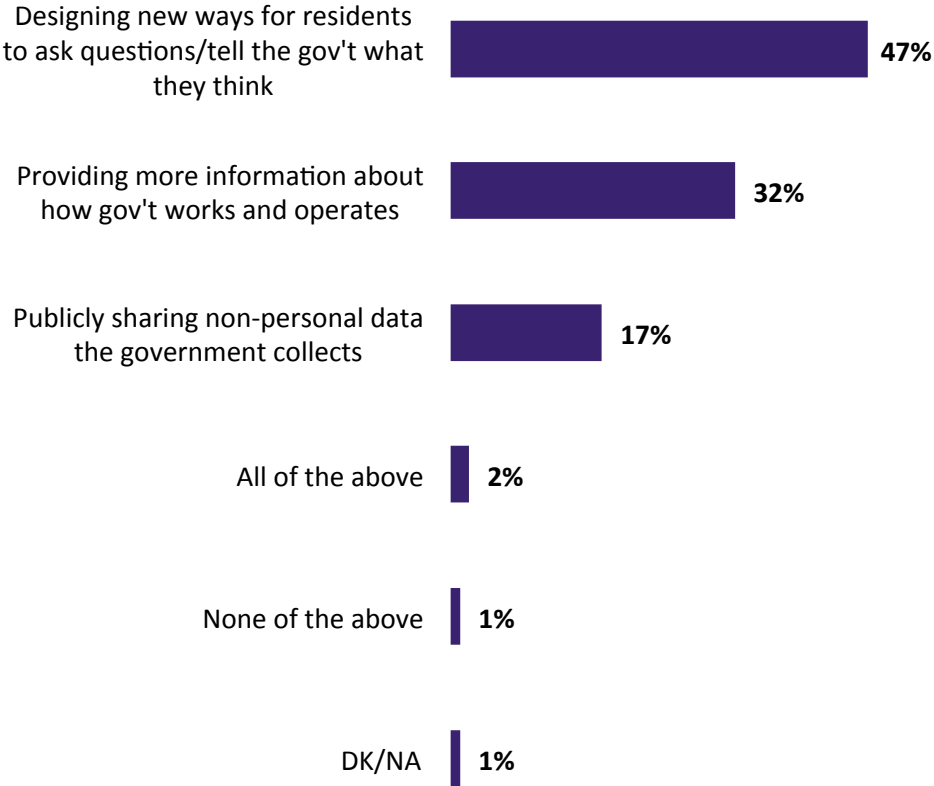
Satisfaction levels regarding all 3 aspects of the City's efforts are higher among those who feel the City provides them with a good/an excellent quality of life and good value for their tax dollar.

These are positive results, given it is a subject residents rarely have occasion to contemplate. Of greater concern for the City would be high dissatisfaction scores.

Q19. Thinking about the City's efforts to ensure residents are engaged and active in decision-making, are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with each of the following?

Designing new ways for residents to ask questions and give input should be the top priority if the City wants to prove its commitment to transparency

Top priority for transparency



When residents are asked to name the best way for the City to show its commitment to being open and transparent, 47% say that designing new ways for residents to ask questions and tell the government what they think should be the top priority for the City of Kitchener (greater among those who think they get poor value for their tax dollar).

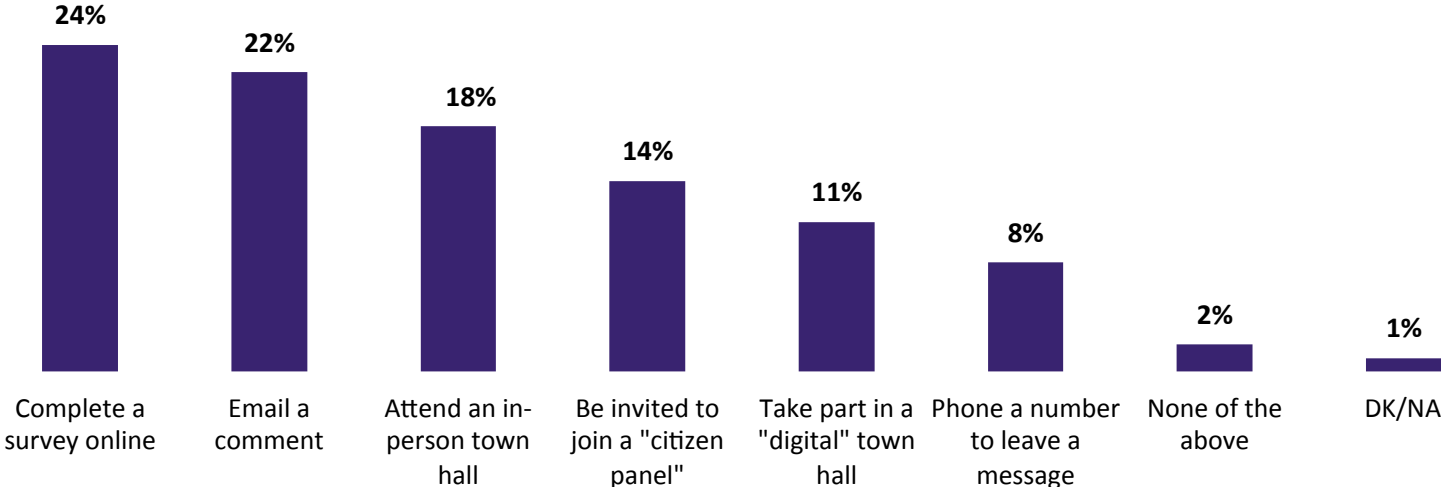
Smaller proportions say the top priorities should be providing more information about how government works and operates (32%), and publicly sharing non-personal data the government collects (17%, but less so in larger households).

One reason for the relative position of open data may be attributed to the fact the concept is generally not well understood with the general population.

Q20. As part of its commitment to being open and transparent, which of the following should be the top priority for the City of Kitchener ...?

Residents most want to give their input online

Getting in contact



When residents are asked how they would like to give the government their input on specific issues, the largest proportions say they would be interested in completing an online survey (24%) and/or emailing a comment (22%), and another 11% would like to take part in a digital town hall. Interest in online surveys is greater among those aged 30-59, and better educated and more affluent residents. Interest in email is greater among younger residents.

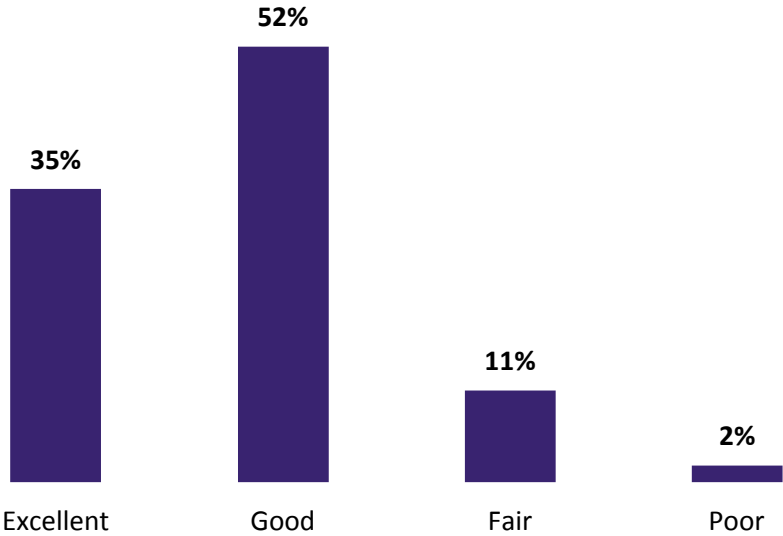
Between 1 and 2 in 10 would like to attend an in-person town hall (18%) and/or join a citizen panel (14%), but fewer would like to leave a voice mail message (8%). Interest in an in-person town hall is greater among those aged 45+. Interest in voice mail is greater among those aged 60+ and those in the lowest income group.

Q21. If you wanted to give the government your opinion on specific issues or policies, how would you prefer to do that ...?

Quality of Life and Economy

Residents believe the City offers them a good quality of life

Overall quality of life in Kitchener



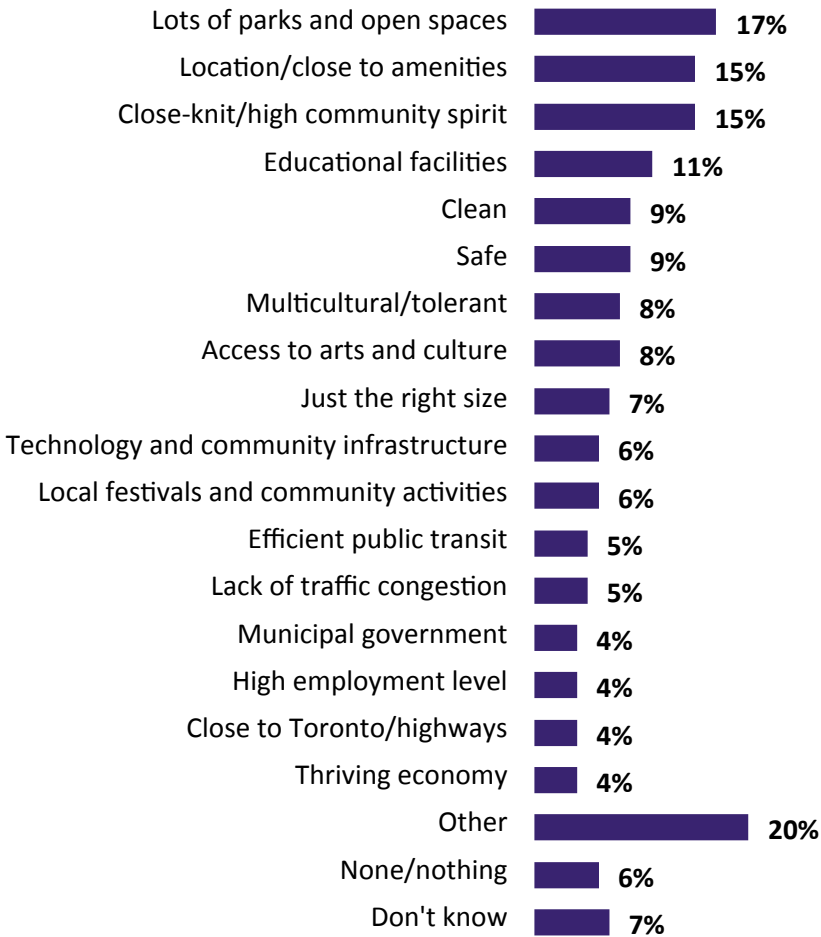
Just under nine in ten residents (87%) say the quality of life in Kitchener is excellent or good, while only a small proportion view the quality of life as poor.

Strongly positive reviews are found more often than average among those aged 60+ and those with incomes of \$100,000+.

Q3. Overall, how would you rate the quality of life in Kitchener?

Parks, community spirit and being close to amenities are the most appealing aspects of living in Kitchener

Most appealing things about Kitchener



When residents are asked to name, top-of-mind, the most appealing aspects of life in Kitchener, they are most likely to talk about there being lots of parks and open spaces, the close-knit community spirit and location close to amenities. Smaller proportions mention a variety of other appealing factors, including educational facilities, safety, cleanliness, access to the arts, diversity, size, local festivals, access to technology/infrastructure and being able to get around (lack of traffic congestion and good public transit). Six percent finding nothing appealing about living in Kitchener.

The City's newest residents are impressed with the City's thriving economy.

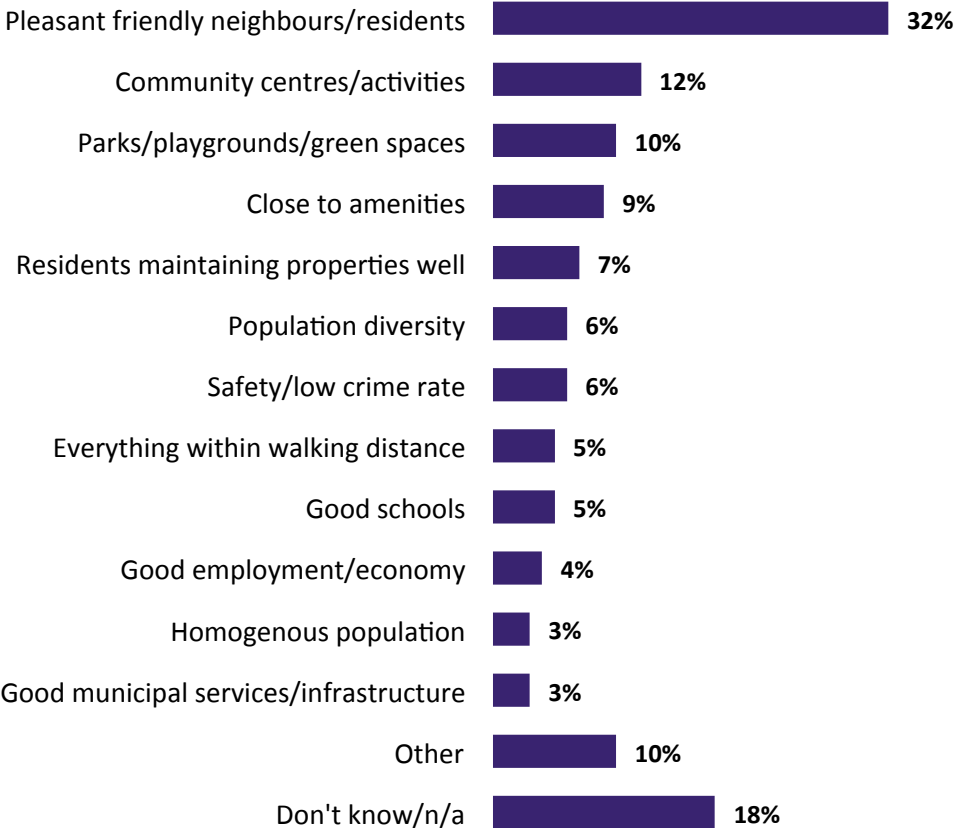
Q2. What would you say are the most appealing things about your city?

People make the neighbourhood but recreational facilities and amenities are also important

Contributes most to the vitality of a neighbourhood

When residents are asked, top-of-mind, what contributes most to the vitality of a neighbourhood, the largest proportion, by far, say friendly neighbours. One in ten, each, mention community centres, parks/green spaces and/or being close to amenities.

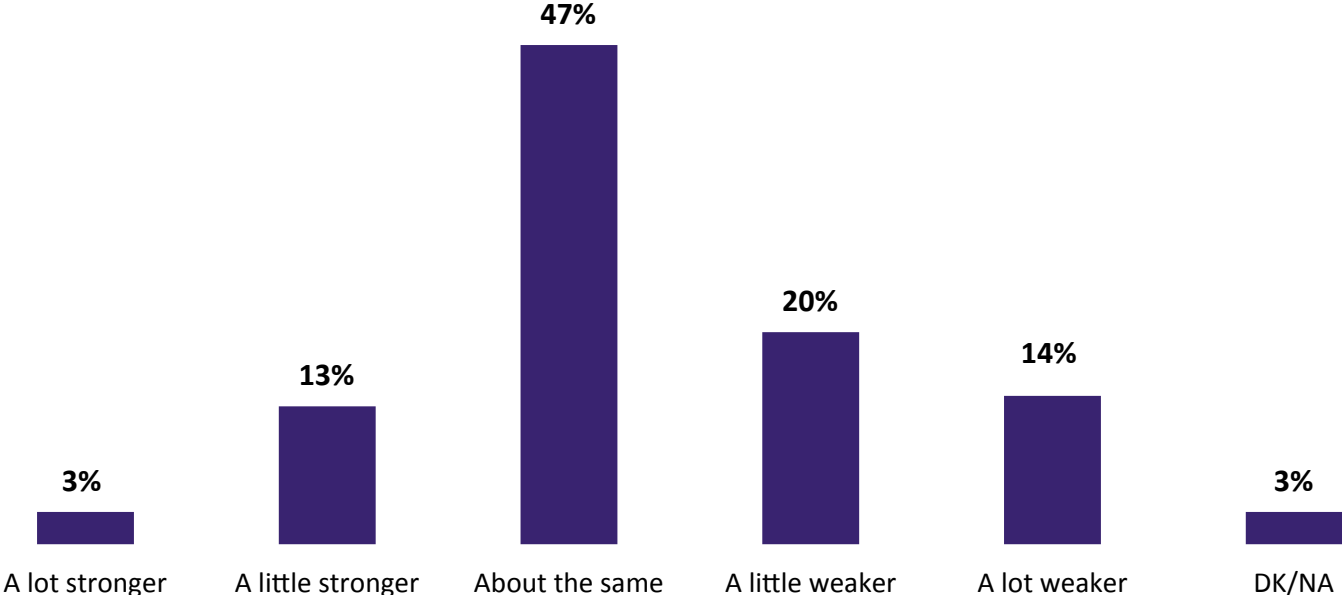
Neighbours are more important to those aged 60+.



Q4. What would you say contributes most to the vitality of a neighbourhood?

The economy is seen as mostly stable, but pessimistic assessments are twice as prevalent as optimistic views

Strength of the Kitchener economy



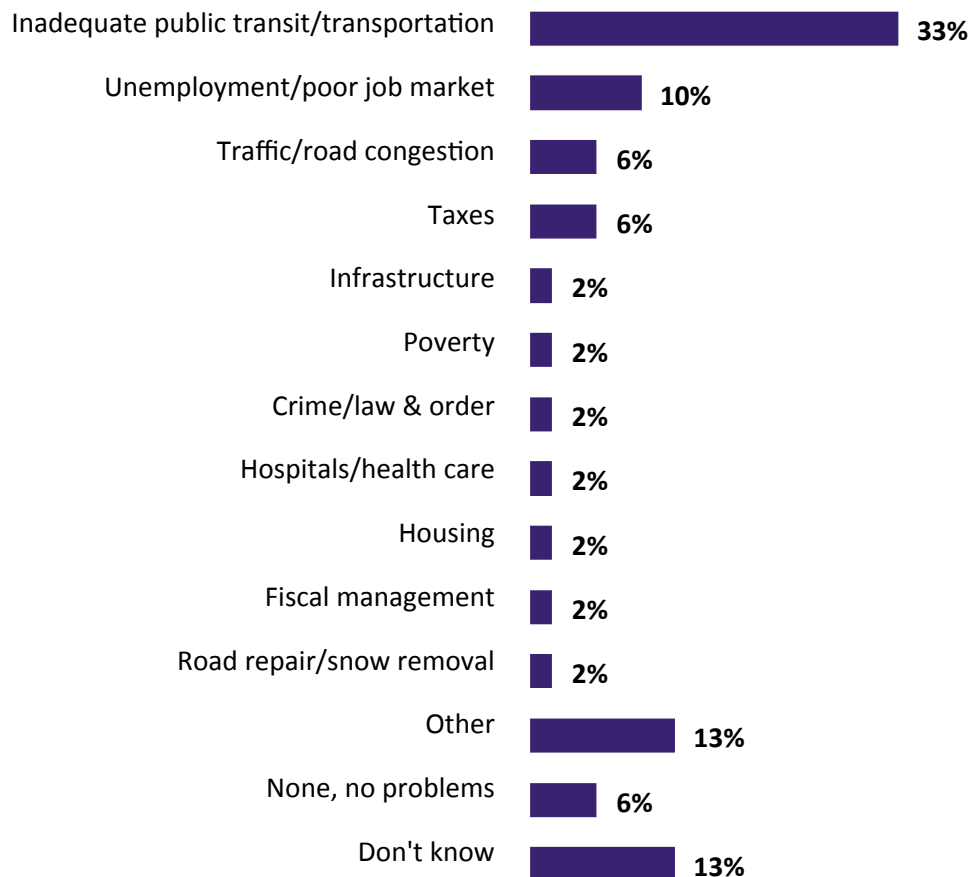
About half of residents say the City’s economy is staying the same. However, the remainder are twice as likely to say it is getting weaker (a total of 34%) as to say it is getting stronger (a total of 16%).

Older residents are more pessimistic. The perception that one gets poor value for one’s tax dollar is also reflected in a pessimistic assessment (56% say *a lot weaker*).

Q5. In your opinion, is the Kitchener economy getting stronger, weaker or is it staying about the same?

Transit issues dominate residents' local agenda

Most important local issue



When residents are asked to name, top-of-mind, the most important issue facing Kitchener today, the largest proportion, by far, mention transit issues. On the next tier of concerns are unemployment, traffic congestion and taxes.

Men and older residents are more likely than average to mention transit issues. Men are more likely than women to mention taxes. The City's newest residents are more likely than others to mention traffic congestion. Those who disapprove of the City government are more likely than average to mention unemployment (a finding that suggests job creation issues may be driving dissatisfaction with the City government).

Q1. What, in your opinion, is the single most important local issue facing the City of Kitchener today?
*Other contains a number of responses of less than 2% each.

The evolution of the most important issue over the past 10 years

Most important local issue: 2003 – 2013 (Top three)

2003	2013
Management of growth – 22%	Inadequate public transit/ transportation – 33%
Downtown – 15%	Unemployment/poor job market – 10%
Affordability – 9%	Taxes – 6%*
	Traffic/road congestion – 6%*

The top three issues that emerge in the current survey – transit/transportation, unemployment, taxes and traffic/road congestion – while different from those found in the 2003 survey, may nonetheless be related to the findings from 10 years ago.

The general mention of growth management in 2003 has perhaps evolved into more specific concerns about transit/transportation and traffic/congestion today, while issues of affordability have possibly become focused on concerns about unemployment/poor job market, and even taxes.

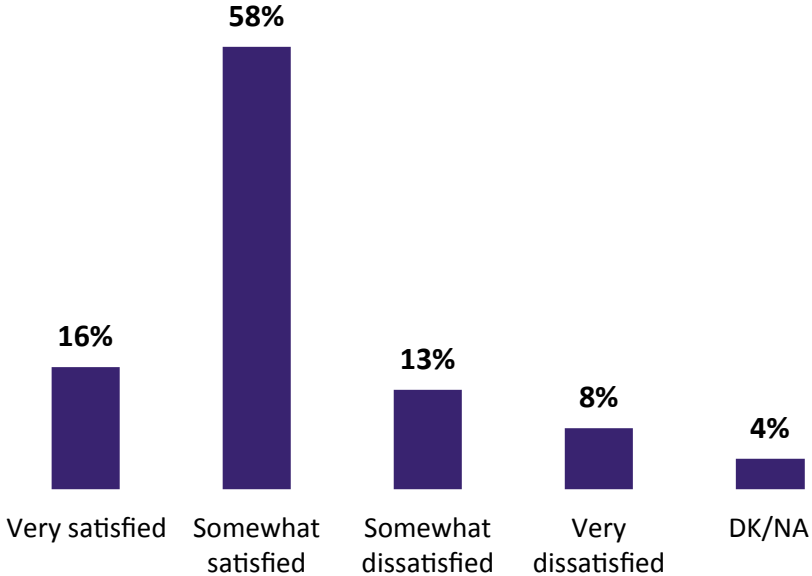
Q1. What, in your opinion, is the single most important local issue facing the City of Kitchener today?

* Tied for third place

Government, Taxation and Revenue Generation

Satisfaction with City government performance is high, but has declined from 2009 and is also lower than that found in 2005

Satisfaction with the City of Kitchener Government



A total of 74% of residents are satisfied with the City of Kitchener government, but just 16% say they are very satisfied. A total of 21% are dissatisfied.

Satisfaction is lower than that reported in 2009 (84%) and in 2005 (80%); however, this is still stronger than many other municipalities recently studied.

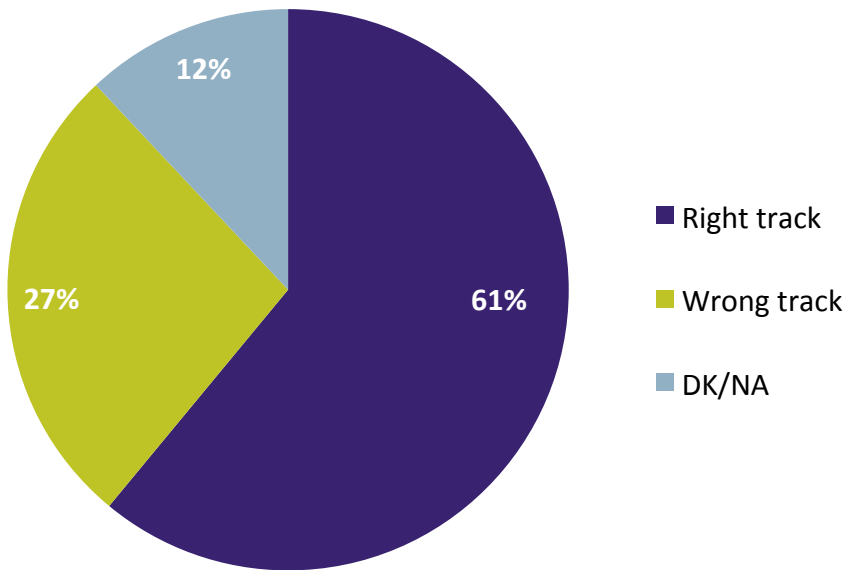
Strongly expressed dissatisfaction is more pronounced among older residents, those who feel the quality of life in the City is poor and those who have lived in the City for 16+ years.

Among those who believe they get good value for their tax dollar, 22% are very satisfied with the City government and 78% are somewhat satisfied. Conversely, among those who say the value for their tax dollar is poor, 39% are very dissatisfied and 61% are somewhat satisfied.

Q6. In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the City of Kitchener government?

The City government is generally seen as being on the right track in addressing local issues

Is the Kitchener government on the right track?



A majority of 61% of residents say their City government is on the right track, but related tracking data from 2009 (when 81% said that Kitchener as a whole was heading in the right direction) indicate this perception has declined over the past 4 years. Today, 27% say the government is on the wrong track and 12% offer no opinion.

Younger residents are more likely than older ones to say *right track*. Those who are satisfied with the City’s government and quality of life in the City, those who think they get good value for their tax dollar and those who have lived in the City for less than 16 years also tend to be more positive.

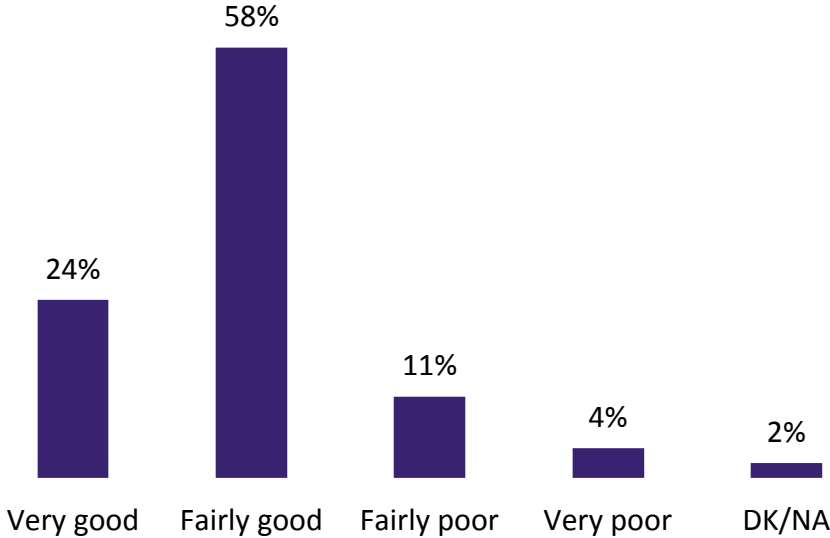
Conversely, the view that the City is on the *wrong track* is higher among those who are dissatisfied with the City government and quality of life in the City, those who believe they get poor value for their tax dollar and those who have lived in Kitchener for 16+ years. Those with lower levels of income and education also tend to be more negative.

Those who think Kitchener is on the right track are more likely to prioritize transportation, the environment, developing downtown, arts and culture, and diversity. Those who think Kitchener is on the wrong track are more likely to indicate that accountability is a top priority.

Q7. Looking forward, would you say that the Kitchener government is on the right track or the wrong track in addressing the issues facing your community?

City residents think they get good value for their tax dollar

Value for tax dollars



A total of 82% of residents say they get good value for their tax dollar, with one in four (24%) who say they receive *very good value*. Just 15% say that their value for tax dollars is poor.

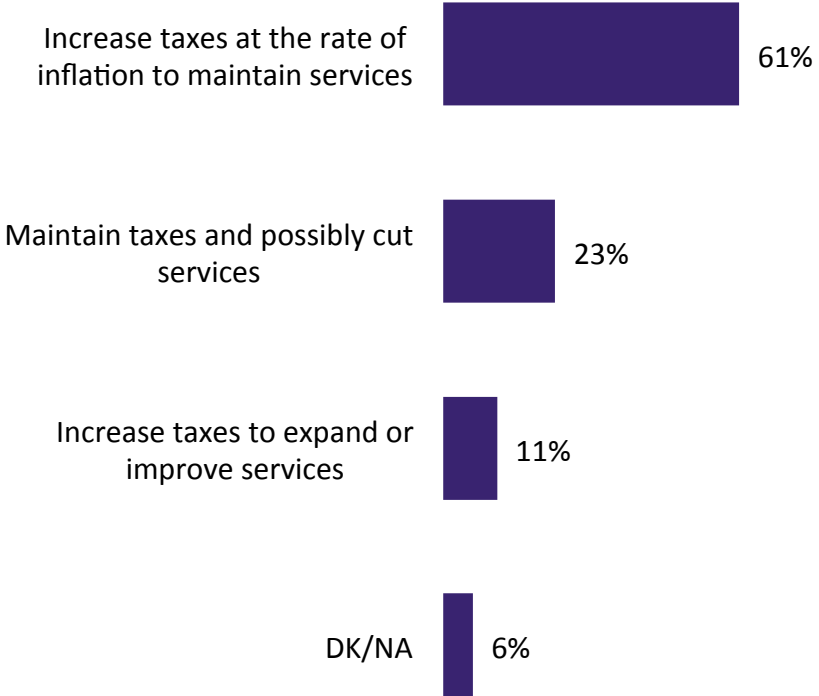
Generally, Kitchener residents are more likely to say they receive good value for their taxes than are residents of other municipalities recently studied. This is particularly true of those of those who say they receive very good value for taxes.

Those who feel the City offers a good quality of life are more likely than average to say they get good value. Among those who disapprove of the City government’s performance, three in four still think they get good value for their tax dollar.

Q8. Thinking about all the programs and services you receive from the City of Kitchener, would you say that, overall, you receive very good, fairly good, fairly poor or very poor value for your tax dollars?

There is support for increasing taxes, but just at the rate of inflation to maintain current services

Balance delivering services with taxation



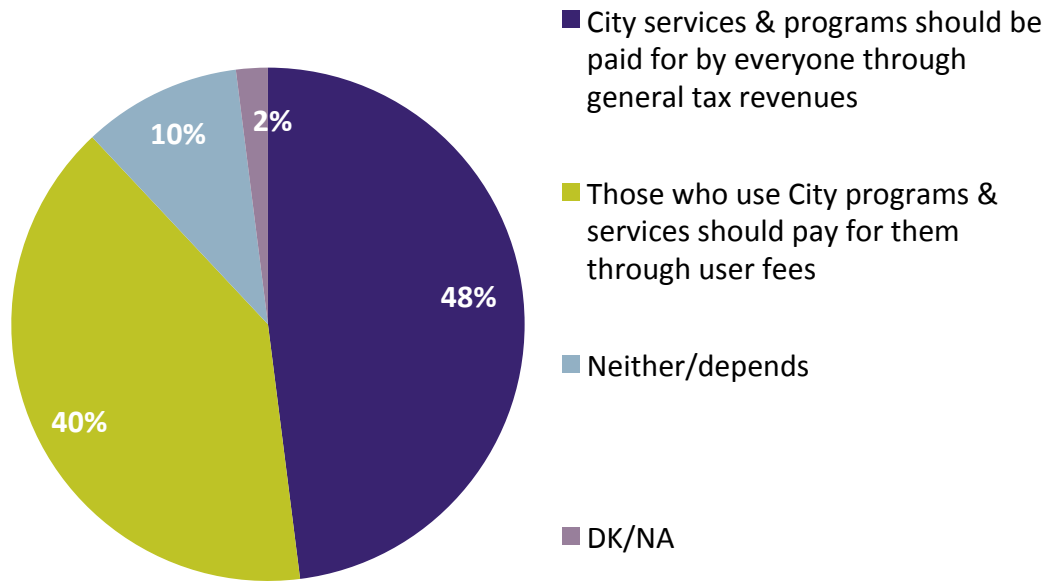
A majority of 61% would support a tax increase at the rate of inflation in order to maintain services, but just 11% would like to see tax increases in order to expand or improve services, and 23% are in favour of holding the line on taxes and possibly cutting services.

Support for increasing taxes to expand/improve services is slightly greater among those who already think they get value for their tax dollar and, conversely, those who feel the value is poor are more likely to favour maintaining current tax levels.

Q9. Local governments must balance the cost of delivering services with taxation. Which of the following options would you most prefer in your city?

A slight plurality say City services should be supported by tax revenues rather than user fees

Who should pay for services and programs?



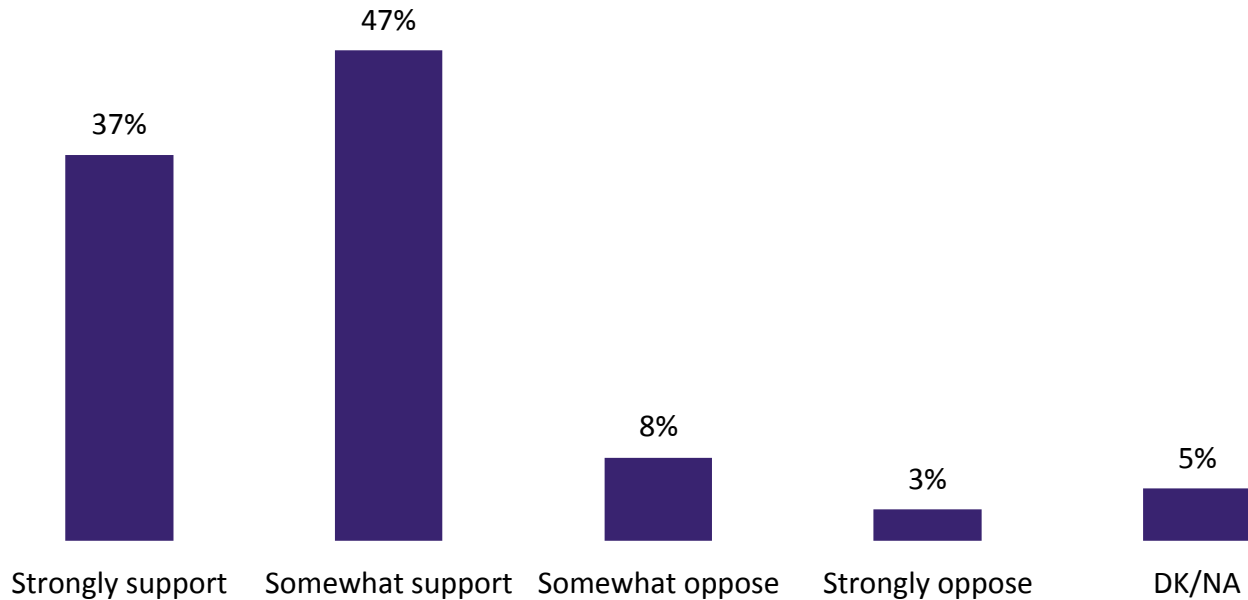
A plurality of 48% say City services and programs should be paid for by everyone through general tax revenues, but 40% say these should be paid for by user fees.

Support for user fees is greater among those who think they are getting poor value for their tax dollar: those who think the value per tax dollar is good are more in favour of paying with general tax revenues.

Q10. Which of the following statements is closer to your own opinion?

There is strong support for generating revenue for the City through corporate sponsorship of City facilities, programs and events

Revenue generation through Corporate Sponsorship



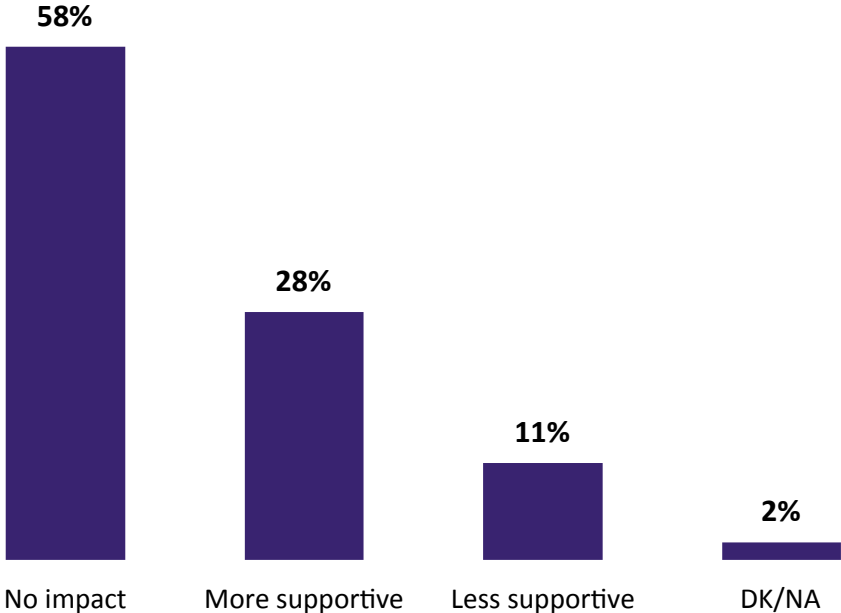
A total of 84% of residents support generating revenue for the City through corporate sponsorship of City facilities, programs and events, including 37% who strongly support the idea. Support is even greater among those who work in Kitchener.

Q11. Would you say that you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose generating revenue for the City of Kitchener through corporate sponsorship of City facilities, programs and events?

Impact of more promotional activities at City facilities, programs and events on support for corporate sponsorship

When residents are told that corporate sponsorship could mean more promotional activities at City facilities, programs and events, 58% say this does not impact their support for corporate sponsorship. The proportion who say they become more supportive (28%) is more than twice that who become less supportive (11%).

These reactions are generally consistent across regional and demographic groups.



Q12. Corporate sponsorship could mean more promotional activities – such as advertising, product placement and naming – at City facilities, programs and events. Would this make you more supportive, less supportive or have no impact on your support for corporate sponsorship?

Methodology

Methodology

- The survey was conducted by phone among 1,002 residents of the City of Kitchener between November 26 and December 10, 2013.
- Representation from each of Kitchener's 10 wards were included in the total sample, as was a cellphone sample of 100.
- The margin of error for a phone sample of this size is +3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.



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