

September 2020

# City of Salem

## Community Satisfaction Survey



Prepared by **DHM Research**

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# Introduction & Methodology

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From September 1 to 19, 2020 DHM Research conducted a survey of Salem residents. Fielding was paused from September 10 to 15 as a result of wildfires in the Salem area. The purpose of the survey was to assess residents' satisfaction with City services and communications; to gauge emergency preparedness; and to weigh opinions related to fairness in the City of Salem. To track changes in opinion, the survey benchmarked several questions from previous surveys.

**Research Methodology:** The survey consisted of 400 Salem residents and took approximately 18 minutes to complete. This is a sufficient sample size to assess resident opinions generally and to review findings by multiple subgroups, including age, gender, area of the city, education, homeownership status, and party affiliation.

Survey respondents were contacted from a voter list and the survey was administered in both English and Spanish. A hybrid approach was used, in which respondents had opportunities to complete the survey by phone and online. Landline respondents were contacted by a live interviewer. Cellphone respondents, who are typically harder to reach, were contacted either by a live interviewer or via text with a link to complete the survey online. In gathering responses, a variety of quality control measures were employed, including questionnaire pre-testing and validation. Quotas were set by age, gender, area of the city, education, homeownership status, and party affiliation to ensure a representative sample.

**Statement of Limitations:** Any sampling of opinions or attitudes is subject to a margin of error. The margin of error is a standard statistical calculation that represents differences between the sample and total population at a confidence interval, or probability, calculated to be 95%. This means that there is a 95% probability that the sample taken for this study would fall within the stated margin of error if compared with the results achieved from surveying the entire population. The margin of error for this survey is +/-4.9%.

**DHM Research:** DHM Research has been providing opinion research and consultation throughout the Pacific Northwest and other regions of the United States for over three decades. The firm is nonpartisan and independent and specializes in research projects to support public policy making.

# Summary & Observations

# 2

**Optimism about the direction of the City remains low. But this is consistent with how Oregonians are feeling broadly during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

There has been a steady decline in optimism in the City, from a high of 66% who said Salem was headed in the right direction in 2016 to a low of 37% in 2019. The decline appears to have levelled off in 2020, with 38% saying Salem is headed in the right direction, but optimism is still low.

Residents are essentially split when it comes to the direction of the City: 38% say it is headed in the right direction and 41% say it is on the wrong track. At least two-thirds say the current state of affairs can be attributed to a combination of both City actions and circumstances beyond the City's control.

In DHM Research surveys since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, the percentage of Oregonians who said the state is headed in the right direction has fallen from 51% in March to 31% in September. This survey was conducted at a time when Oregonians have sustained six months of health restrictions, slowing economic activity and job losses. The opinions of Salem residents should be viewed within that broader context, and that relative to the state as a whole, Salem residents feel somewhat better about the direction of the city.

**Salem residents remain very satisfied with many of the services they receive from the City.**

Opinion of City services in general remains overwhelmingly positive, with nine in ten residents saying they are satisfied. Many specific services also continue to receive high ratings—especially the basic services with which residents are personally familiar, such as fire and emergency services, parks, street lighting, water and wastewater, and police. This year marked the first year that the survey distinguished between fire, ambulance, and 911 services and police services. While the former ranks higher (87% satisfaction) than the latter (72%), a strong majority is still satisfied with police.

Since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and the protests in response across the country, Americans have reported declining confidence in the police. Gallup regularly surveys Americans about their confidence in the police. In August 2020, confidence ratings were at a record low, with fewer than half of Americans (48%) saying that they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the police. The question about police services in this survey is different, but compared to the national numbers from Gallup, it is notable how high of a percentage of Salem residents say that they value police services.

Between 2019 and 2020, maintenance of city streets, sidewalks, and bridges enjoyed a big boost in satisfaction (from 54% to 68%), while satisfaction with library services dropped (from 74% to 69%).

**Homelessness and housing affordability remain the top concerns.**

Concern about homelessness has increased steadily, from 7% saying it was their top concern in 2016 to 49% today. It remains the top concern for all demographic groups, especially low-income residents. Among those who think Salem is on the wrong track, concerns about homelessness are even higher.

Although satisfaction with the City's approach to the homelessness crisis has improved slightly in the past year (from 20% to 25%), overall satisfaction with the City's approach to the crisis remains low. Similarly,

while satisfaction with how well the City has provided access to affordable housing has improved in the past year (from 27% to 34%), most residents remain dissatisfied.

DHM Research has found homelessness to be a top concern in local and state surveys for several years, even through the COVID-19 outbreak. Concerns about homelessness remain high in the urban areas of Portland, suburban communities in metro region, through the I-5 corridor to Eugene, and along the coast. Salem is not alone with these challenges.

**Residents have an easy time performing many everyday activities, but operating a business and rush-hour traffic remain difficult.**

Strong majorities of residents continue to say they have an easy time completing many basic tasks in the city, such as walking and biking, obtaining a permit or paying a bill, finding information to resolve a City issue, or even finding space for community events.

In the past year, however, those who say it is difficult to operate a business increased from 48% to 54%, perhaps an indication of the challenges faced by most businesses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of those who say it is difficult drive from one side of the City to the other during peak traffic hours decreased from 82% to 74%, but the challenges of navigating through the City remain high.

**A majority remains satisfied with the value received for taxes and fees paid.**

Nearly six in ten residents (58%) are satisfied with the value they receive for the taxes and fees they pay, with most saying they are “somewhat” satisfied (44%). In 2018 resident satisfaction with the value of services they received dropped significantly—from 69% to 56%. Results from 2020 suggest that levels of satisfaction may be stabilizing. Nevertheless, given higher satisfaction levels from previous years, there is certainly room for improvement.

In contrast to previous years, there are no significant partisan differences when it comes to satisfaction with value received for taxes and fees paid.

**Geographic inequities appear to be diminishing, but only a slim majority believe residents of all identities and backgrounds are being treated fairly and with respect. This view is less common among residents of color in Salem.**

While perceptions of fairness about how resources are distributed across the City as a whole and across particular areas have generally decreased since 2016, the trend shows signs of leveling and modest reversal in 2020. As in past years, people in West Salem are more skeptical of the equitable distribution of services across the City as a whole, but they appear significantly more satisfied with the distribution of services in their part of the City.

Only a slim majority (55%) believes Salem residents of all identities and backgrounds are treated fairly and with respect. Among residents of color, less than one in four (38%) believe everyone is treated fairly and respectfully. Nearly all residents (90%) believe it is the responsibility of all residents to ensure that the community is welcoming to everyone.

### **Residents are more prepared for natural disaster.**

Although only one in three residents believe City government is prepared for a natural disaster, two in three say they are personally prepared. This level of personal preparedness represents a 10% increase since 2019 and may in part be due to personal measures taken as a result of COVID-19 Stay at Home orders or in response to a particularly active and disruptive wildfire season.

A majority (54%) now say they have prepared an emergency kit—an increase of 13% since 2019. Even more notable is the reported increase in emergency kit preparedness among more vulnerable residents: women, young people, people of color, low-income residents, and renters.

### **Residents continue to see room for improvement in how the City communicates with them.**

Only one in four (27%) residents feel the information they get from the City is easy to understand and relevant. While this represents an increase from last year, when only one in five (22%) residents expressed satisfaction with the clarity and relevance of City communications, there continues to be considerable room for improvement.

One area has improved significantly: one in six (62%) now say it is “easy” to find the information they need to resolve a city issue, compared to one in five (53%) last year. But residents continued to appear disconnected from their City government, with six in ten (59%) saying it is difficult to have their concerns heard by City leaders.

# Key Findings

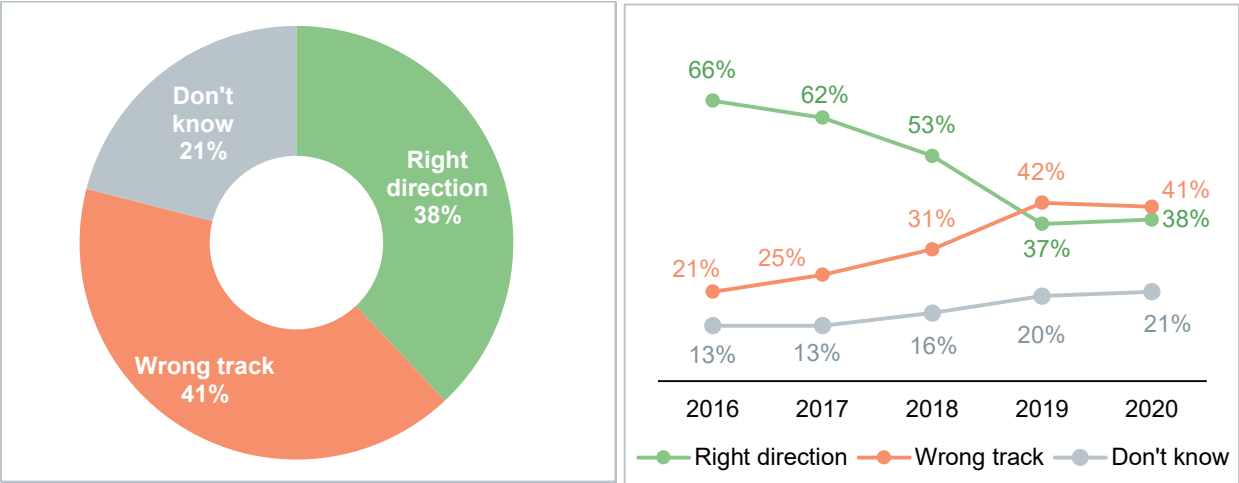
The following report describes the results of a survey of Salem residents conducted in September 2020. Residents were asked about their general mood, satisfaction with City services, equity issues, emergency preparedness, and communications. Where possible, results are benchmarked to prior surveys of Salem residents conducted by DHM Research. Full question wording can be found in the Appendix.

## 3.1 General mood

### Salem residents are equally split between those who are optimistic and pessimistic about the City.

Between 2016 and 2019 there was a steady downward trend in general mood among Salem residents. 2019 represented the first time since 2016 when “wrong track” responses (42%) outnumbered “right direction” (37%) responses. The downward trend appears to have stabilized, with residents split between saying Salem is headed in the right direction (38%) or that things are off on the wrong track (41%).

Chart 1  
City of Salem Direction



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

Views about the direction of the city are primarily partisan. Those who do not identify with a major party (44%) and Democrats (42%) are most likely to say the City is headed in the right direction, while Republicans are least likely (21%).

### Two in three residents point to a combination of City actions and outside circumstances as responsible for the direction of the City, with a lean among others toward placing responsibility on the City.

Among those who say the City is on the right track, two thirds (69%) say this is both on account of actions that the City has taken as well as circumstances outside the City’s control. Among the remainder, more credit actions that the City has taken (23%) than outside circumstances (3%).

Among those who say Salem is headed in the wrong direction, two thirds (68%) say this is also due to both City actions and outside circumstances. Among the remainder, more blame City actions (21%) than external circumstances (10%).

**Homelessness remains at the top of residents’ minds and its importance as an issue continues to grow.**

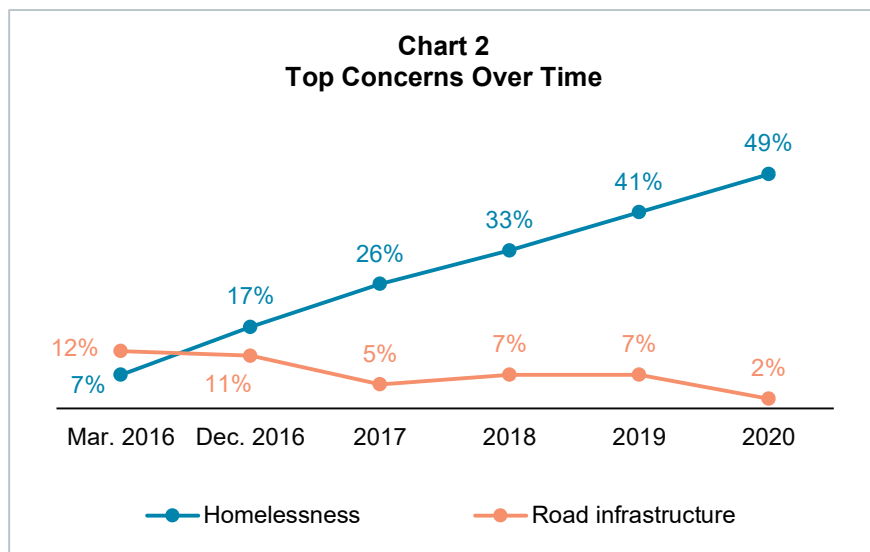
Asked in an open-ended question what issue they would like City officials to do something about, half of Salem’s residents mentioned homelessness. For perspective, the second most common concern—crime and drugs—makes up 6% of mentions. COVID ranks slightly lower at 4%, suggesting residents do not believe the City is primarily responsible for managing the pandemic.

**Table 1  
Most Important Issue in Salem**



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

Concern about homelessness has grown steadily year by year. Some 7% of residents mentioned it as a major concern in 2016, similar to the proportion who were worried about transportation infrastructure and education funding at the time, but since 2017 homelessness has overshadowed any other concern.



Source: DHM Research, September 2020



Homelessness remains the top concern for every demographic group. The groups most concerned about homelessness include residents in households earning less than \$50,000 (57% named as top issue) and voters who do not affiliate with any major party (56%).

Homelessness also appears to be a reason that residents feel the City is on the wrong track. Among those who feel negative about the City, some 58% cite homelessness as the top issue, while 41% who feel positive cite homelessness.

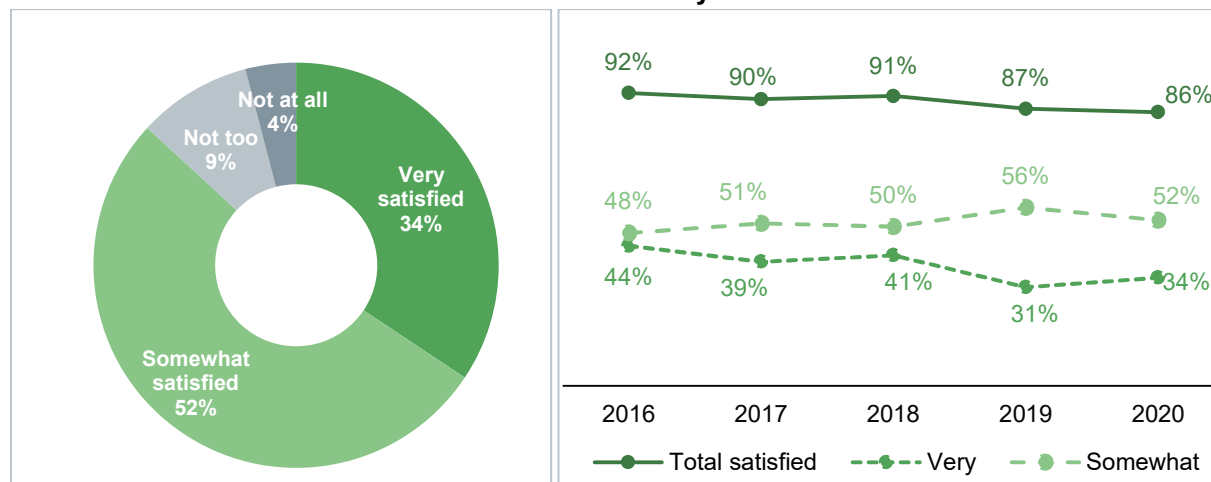
The issues of crime and drugs (6% named as top issue) and promoting businesses and downtown development (5%) have supplanted roads and infrastructure (2%) as secondary issues. In 2019, crime and business development were cited as top issues by 4% and 2% respectively, while 7% cited roads.

**Overall satisfaction with City services remains high.**

Nearly nine in ten Salem residents (86%) are satisfied with services provided by the City. About a third (34%) are “very” satisfied.

There are no significant demographic differences in overall satisfaction, with one exception: residents of South Salem (92%) are more satisfied than residents of West Salem (86%) and North/Northeast Salem (79%).

**Chart 3**  
**Satisfaction with City Services**



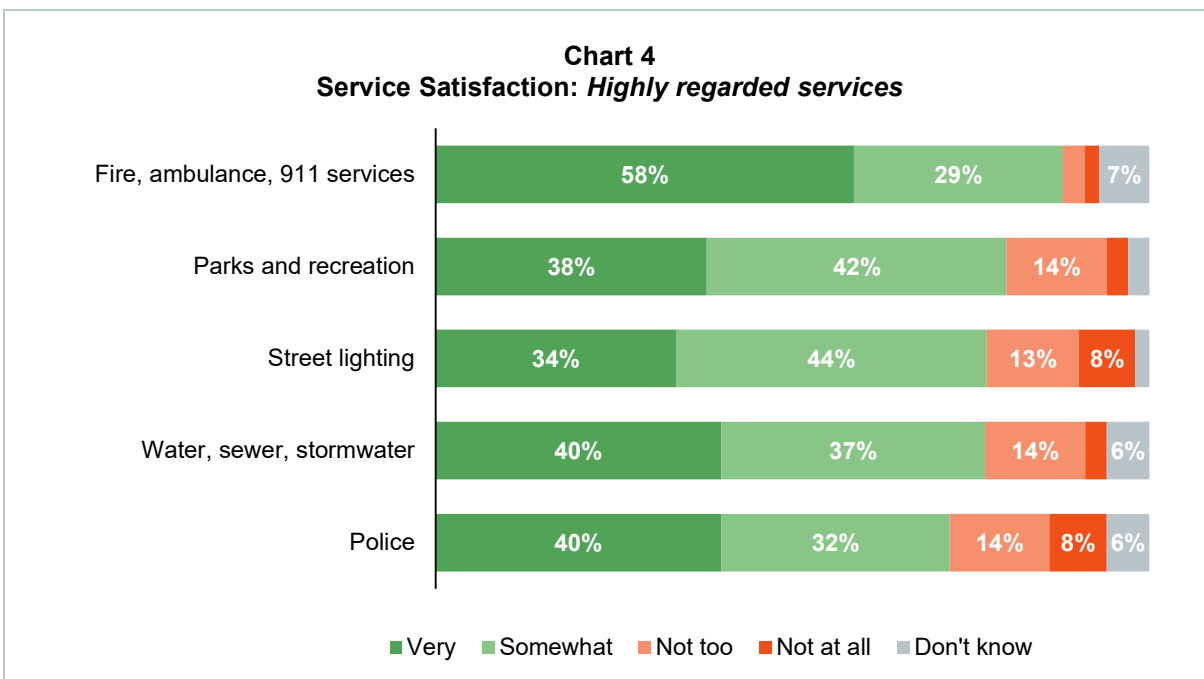
Source: DHM Research, September 2020

City services in the abstract have remained highly regarded over the years, despite the decline in general mood. In 2019 fewer residents were “very” satisfied, while more were “somewhat” satisfied, representing a slight softening in satisfaction compared to previous years. In 2020, however, there has been a slight increase of 3% in those who say they are “very” satisfied, possibly indicating a more favorable trend.

**Essential City services are highly regarded by Salem residents.**

Strong majorities have positive perceptions of many of the essential services with which they are familiar. Nearly nine in ten residents are “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with Salem’s *fire, ambulance, and 911*

services (87%). Residents also have positive impressions of *parks and recreation* (81%); *street lighting* (78%); *water, sewer, and stormwater services* (77%); and *police* (72%).



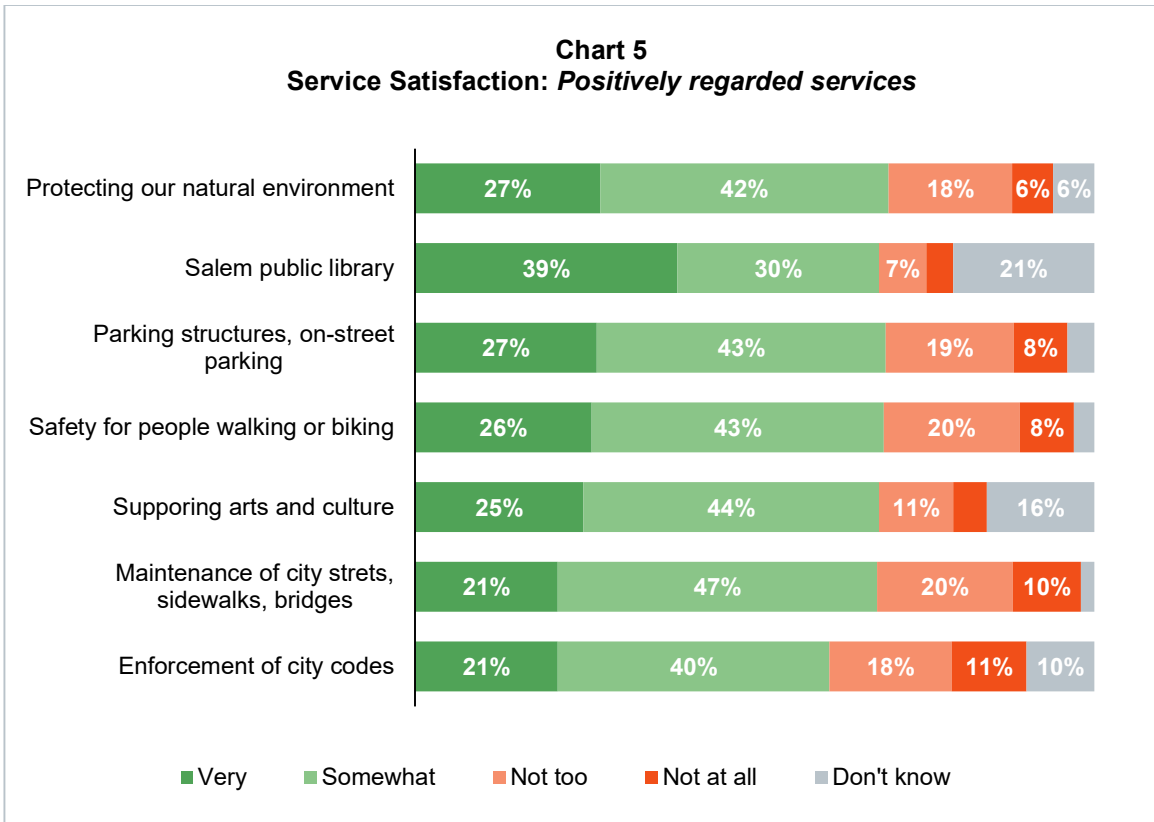
Source: DHM Research, September 2020

In prior versions of DHM Research surveys dating back to 2016, no distinctions were made between public safety services, but in 2020 Salem residents were asked about their perception of *fire, ambulance, and 911 services* as distinct from *police*. Results show that satisfaction with police services is slightly lower, though a strong majority remain satisfied.

While a majority of all demographic and area groups are satisfied with police services, there are significant differences in levels of satisfaction among such groups. White residents (77%) are more satisfied than people of color (54%). Residents ages 55+ (83%) are more satisfied than residents ages 35–54 (76%) and ages 18–34 (55%). Those who have resided in Salem 11+ years (77%) are more satisfied than those who have lived in the City for 0–5 years (57%) or 6–10 years (51%). Republicans (82%) are more satisfied than non-affiliated voters (71%) and Democrats (66%).

**While still positively regarded, resident satisfaction is softer for a suite of other core City services.**

Strong majorities are also satisfied with the following: *protecting the natural environment* (70%); *Salem public library* (69%); *parking structures and on-street parking near local businesses* (69%); *safety for people walking and biking* (68%); *supporting arts and culture* (68%); *maintenance of city streets, sidewalks, and bridges* (67%); and *enforcement of city codes for issues such as noise, yard upkeep, and other nuisances* (61%).



Between 2019 and 2020 satisfaction with the Salem public library declined from 74% to 69%, a drop possibly attributed to reduced library services stemming from COVID-19 restrictions. The decline is most evident upon closer examination of residents who say they are “very” satisfied (from 52% to 39%). While still positively regarded, the public library was more highly regarded in 2019.

Between 2019 and 2020 satisfaction with maintenance of city streets, sidewalks, and bridges rose from 54% to 68%. Street and sidewalk maintenance has been a long-standing issue for some Salem residents, and it typically has among the highest negative ratings compared to other services. Viewed as needing improvement in 2019, the City’s performance on maintenance of roads, sidewalks, and bridges is now more positively regarded.

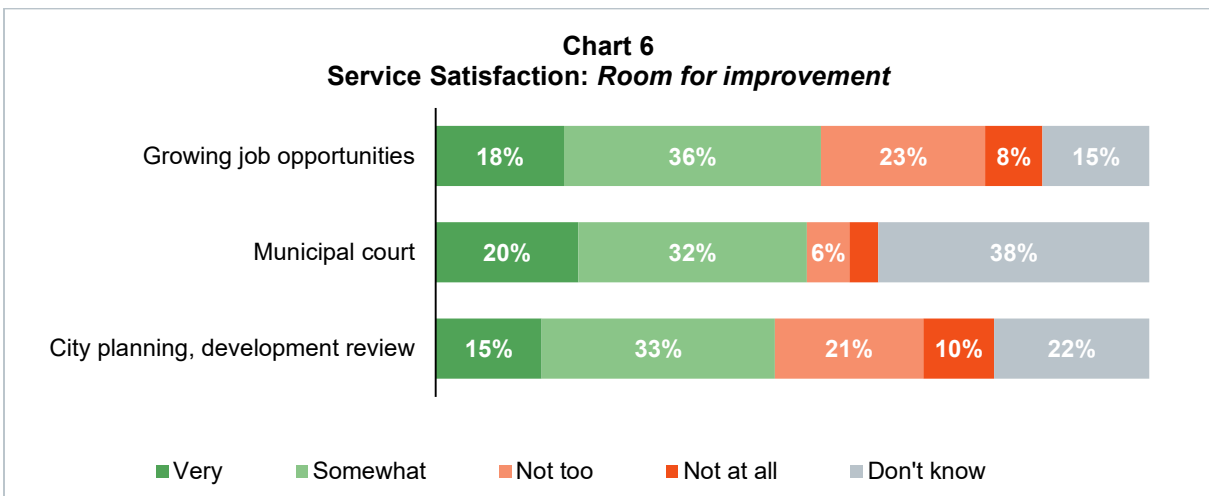
Between 2019 and 2020 satisfaction with parking structures and on-street parking near local businesses also rose from 65% to 69%. More notably, residents who say they are “very satisfied” rose from 18% to 27%.

**About half of Salem residents are satisfied when it comes to job creation, municipal court, and city planning.**

Just over half of residents approve of Salem’s job performance in the area of *growing job opportunities in the local economy* (54%) and its *Municipal court* (52%). Just under half are satisfied with *city planning and development review* (48%).

Satisfaction with job creation was high in 2017 (62%) and spiked in 2018 (73%) but fell in 2019 (55%) and remained consistent in 2020 (54%). News in 2019 about the possibility of an economic downturn, combined with the severe economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may help explain lower satisfaction in this area. Satisfaction with job creation is lower among women (46% satisfied) and residents ages 55+ (42%).

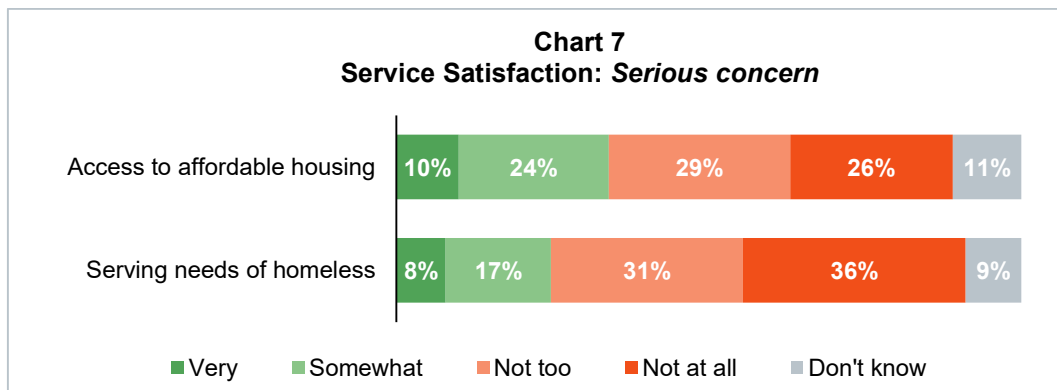
Satisfaction with the municipal court is impacted by over a third (38%) of residents saying they don't know how to rate the City when it comes to this service.



**Affordable housing and homelessness remain urgent concerns.**

Only one in three residents are satisfied with how well the City has ensured that *all residents have access to affordable housing* (34%), and only one in four are satisfied with how it has *coordinated social services to serve the needs of homeless in our community* (24%).

It should be noted that while satisfaction is low in both of these areas, there have been slight increases in satisfaction since 2019. While only 27% of residents in 2019 were satisfied with the provision of affordable housing, 34% of residents in 2020 are now satisfied. While only 20% of residents in 2019 were satisfied with coordination of services for the homeless, 25% of residents in 2020 are now satisfied.



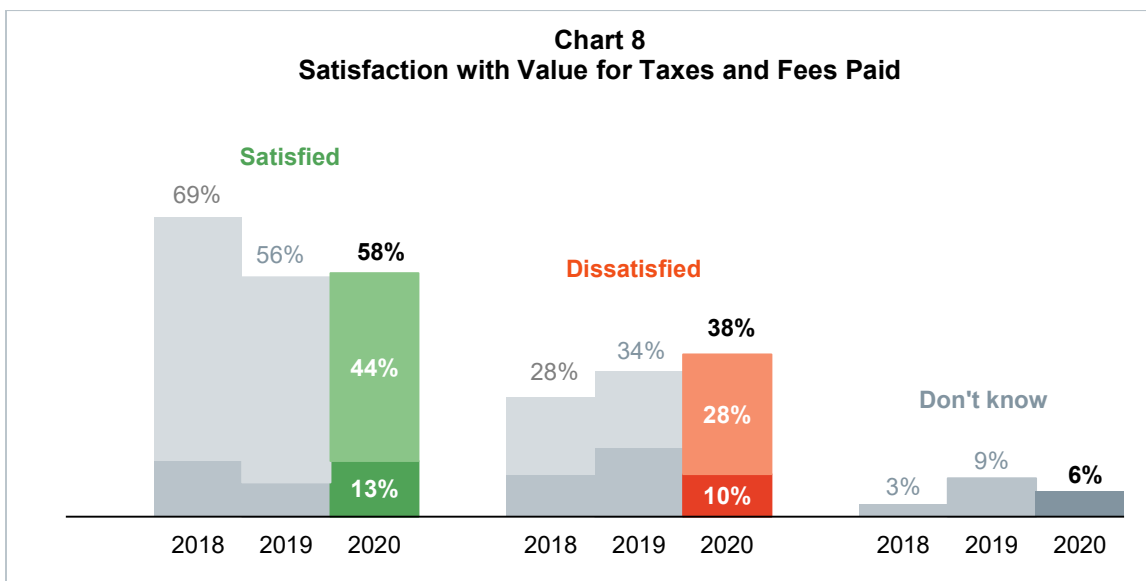
Views of the City’s response to the housing crisis are similar across demographic groups, with some key differences. Women (24%) and residents in households with incomes less than \$50,000 (24%) are especially unlikely to be satisfied with how the City is providing affordable housing.

### 3.2 Resources for City services

**Residents report being less satisfied with the value they receive for the taxes they pay compared to past years, though a majority continue to be satisfied.**

Nearly six in ten residents (58%) are satisfied with the value they receive for the taxes and fees they pay, with most of those saying they are “somewhat” satisfied (44%).

There has been a decline in satisfaction since 2018, when nearly seven in ten residents were satisfied with the value they receive. Over the last two years, dissatisfaction increased eight points.



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

In contrast to 2019, there are no significant partisan differences when it comes to satisfaction with the value residents believe they receive for taxes and fees paid. Republicans (61%), Democrats (59%) and NAV/other residents (51%) are all satisfied at roughly equal levels.

South Salem residents (63%) are more satisfied than people in other areas of the city.

Those least satisfied with the value they receive for taxes and fees paid are younger residents ages 18–34 (44%).

### 3.3 Living in Salem<sup>1</sup>

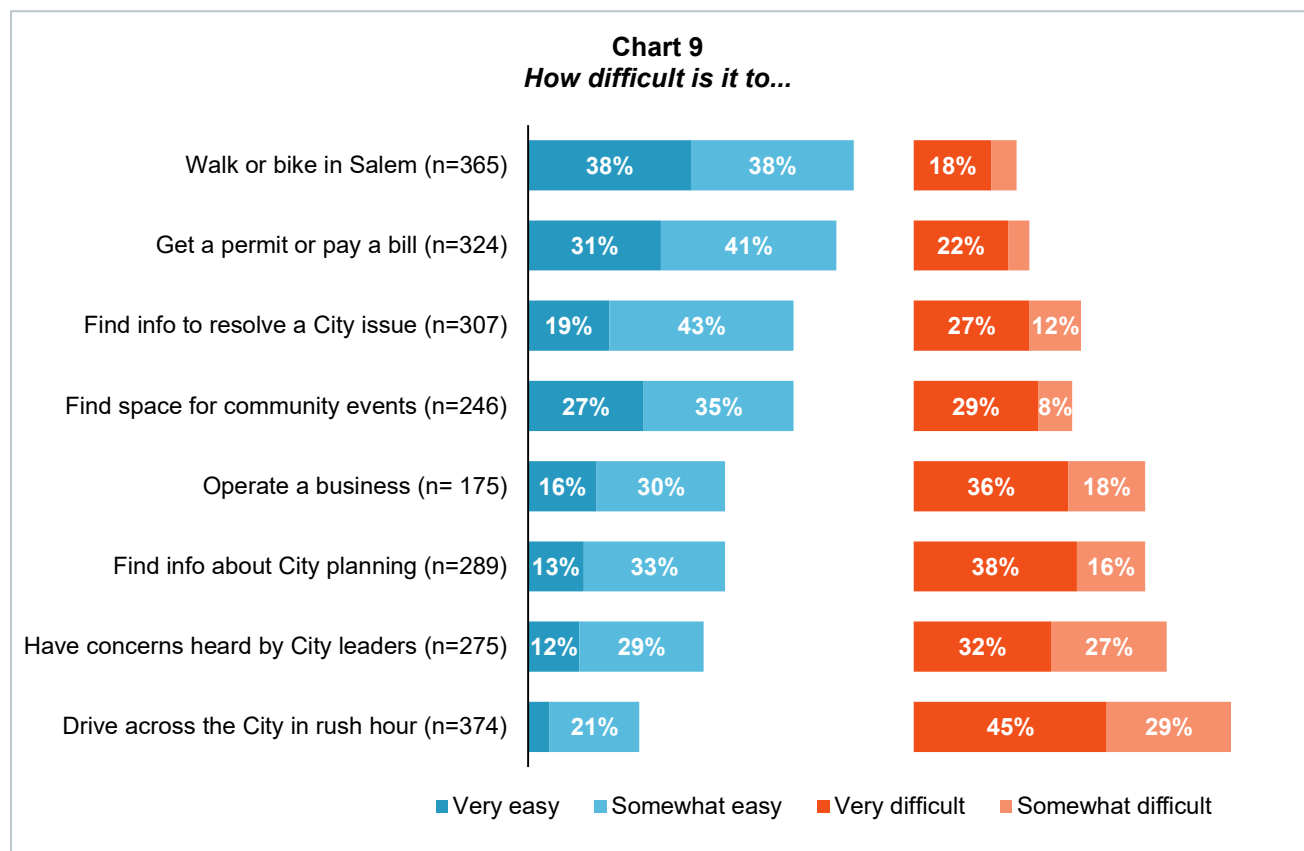
#### Salem residents have an easy time performing many everyday activities.

Strong majorities of residents say they have an easy time completing many basic tasks in the city, including *walking or biking* (76% of residents who provided a response), *getting a permit or paying a bill* (73%), *finding space for community events* (63%), and *finding information to resolve a City issue* (61%).

Younger residents ages 18–34 (83%) and older residents ages 55+ (83%) both find it easier to walk and bike than residents ages 35–54 (63%). Residents in households with incomes between \$50k-\$100k (84%) and \$100k+ (84%) find it easier than lower-income residents earning less than \$50k (63%).

Democrats (78%) and NAV/other (76%) say they find it easier to get a permit or pay a bill than Republicans (60%).

Residents in households with incomes above \$100k (81%) say it is easier to find space for community events than residents in households earning less than \$50k (57%) or between \$50k-\$100k (62%).



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this section, the reported numbers exclude the “don’t know” and “not applicable” responses so that results are more directly comparable across questions.

## **Residents identify difficulties with operating a business, obtaining information about City planning, and making their voice heard.**

*Operating a business* (54% difficult), *finding information about city planning and how decisions are made* (54%), and *having one's concerns heard by City leaders* (59%) are seen as difficult by a majority of residents.

Operating a business in 2020 appears to be more difficult than in 2019, when fewer (48%) found it difficult to operate a business. This growing sense of difficulty may be an expression of the challenges faced by businesses as they struggle with the economic impact of COVID-19.

Finding information about city planning and how decisions are made in 2020 appears equally difficult as in 2019.

Although a majority of residents continue to find it difficult to have their voices heard by City leaders, there appears to be some improvement compared to 2019, when nearly two thirds of residents (64%) found it difficult. Younger residents ages 18–34 (65%) and ages 35–54 (68%) are more likely to find it difficult than older residents ages 55+ (42%) to have their voices heard by government. In contrast to 2019, the partisan gap has narrowed in this area. While the difficulty among Democrats in making their voices heard has remained stable at (54%), the view among Republicans has dropped from 74% to 64%, and among NAV/other from 78% to 60%.

## **Driving across the City in rush hour remains the hardest thing to do.**

A strong majority of residents say it is difficult to *drive across the City in rush hour* (75% difficult). This represents an improvement compared to 2019, when 82% considered the activity difficult. Nevertheless, driving across the City in rush hour remains the most challenging activity for Salem residents.

## **After a steep decline in 2019, many aspects of living in Salem seem to have improved slightly in the last year.**

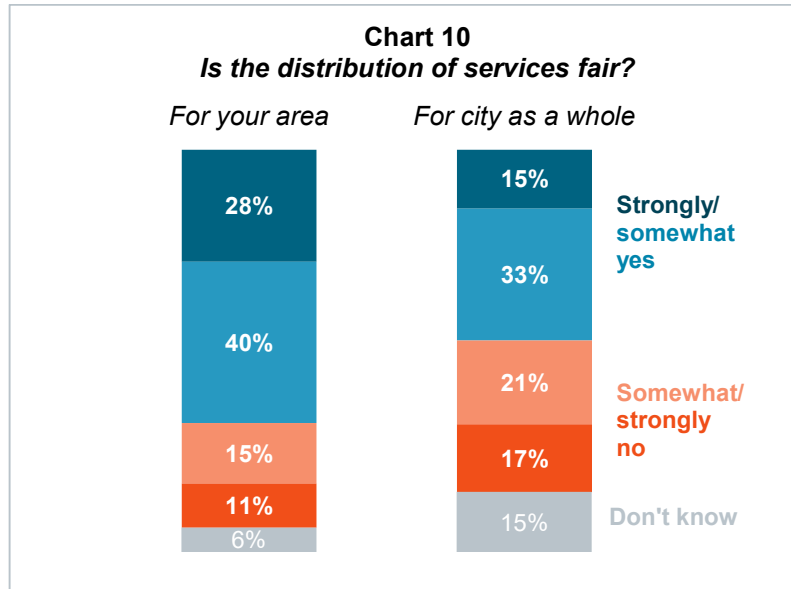
Positivity in each of the activities from previous sections fell significantly between 2018 and 2019. Between those years “easy” ratings decreased an average of 15 percentage points, with the largest changes in how easy it was to *have one's concerns heard* (21-point decrease), *finding information about city planning* (18-point decrease), and *finding space for community events* (17-point decrease).

However, positivity ratings improved slightly in 2020. Excluding walking and biking, which were asked as separate questions in 2019, positivity ratings are on average 2 percentage points higher in 2020. The biggest decrease is in how easy it is to operate a business (6-point decrease). The biggest increases are *finding information to resolve a city issue* (9-point increase) and *driving across the City in rush hour* (7-point increase).

### 3.4 Equity

**Most Salem residents believe their neighborhood gets its fair share of City resources, but there is more uncertainty about the system as a whole.**

A majority of residents (68%) believe their area receives its fair share of City services. Fewer (48%) believe City services are distributed fairly throughout the city as a whole. The gap between these two competing perceptions narrowed from 25% in 2019 to 20% in 2020.



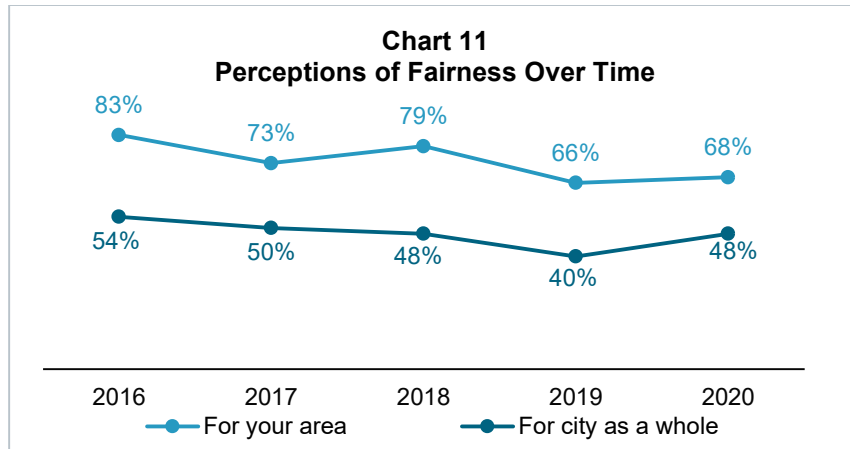
Source: DHM Research, September 2020

There are significant differences in perception according to where residents live in the city, but the differences appear to be narrowing. As in 2019, people in South Salem are most confident that their neighborhood receives its fair share of services (78%). In contrast to 2019, when only 49% of those in West Salem believed they received their fair share, by 2020 some 65% of West Salem residents now believe they receive their fair share. In North/Northeast Salem 57% now say they receive their fair share, a decline of 3% from 2019.

South Salem residents remain most confident in the distribution of services throughout the city, with 52% believing distribution is fair overall. Less than four in ten residents in West Salem (38%) agree the distribution of services is fair overall.

After a general decline in perceptions of fairness since 2016, findings from 2020 may represent a shift toward a more positive direction (see Chart 11 on next page). The proportion of residents who feel that their neighborhood receives its fair share has increased 8 percentage points.





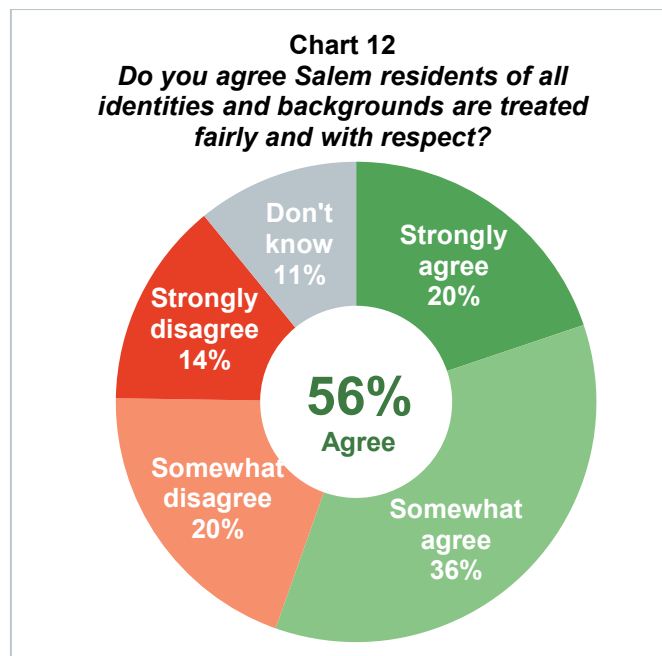
Source: DHM Research, September 2020

**Only a slim majority believe residents of all backgrounds and identities are treated fairly and with respect.**

This year’s survey marks the first time that residents were asked their perceptions of equity and inclusion for Salem residents of all backgrounds and identities. While a majority (56%) of residents agree Salem residents of all backgrounds and identities are treated fairly and with respect, fully a third (34%) disagree.

Groups most likely to agree that all are treated fairly include Republicans (68%), men (63%), and white residents (61%). By contrast, those least likely to agree include Democrats (45%), women (50%), residents of West Salem (46%), and residents of color (38%).

Residents of color clearly feel differently than their White counterparts. Put another way, fully half of Salem’s residents of color (50%) do not feel residents of all backgrounds and identities are treated fairly, with 12% saying they don’t know.



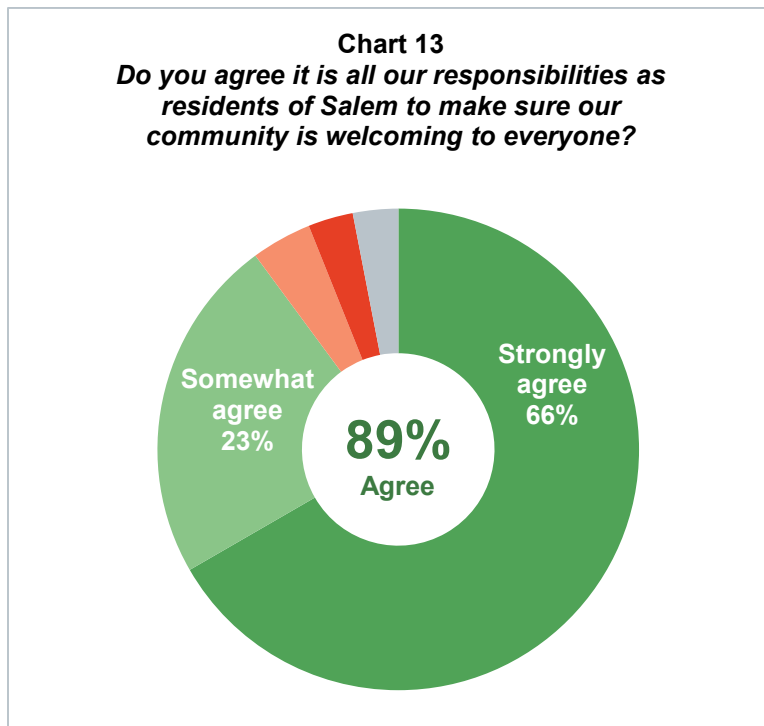
Source: DHM Research, September 2020

**Most residents believe it is everyone’s responsibility to make sure Salem is welcoming to everyone.**

While a third of Salem residents—and half of Salem’s residents of color—say all groups are not treated equally and with respect, nearly all residents (90%) believe it is the responsibility of all residents to ensure that the community is welcoming to everyone. This latter belief, if acted upon, may serve to increase the sense of fairness and equal treatment among all residents.

Residents who have lived in Salem for less than six years (97%) are most likely to agree it is everyone’s responsibility to make sure the community is welcoming, with 83% of such residents strongly agreeing.

Residents who believe that Salem is off on the wrong track are less likely to share this belief. Only 83% of such residents believe it is everyone’s responsibility to make sure the community is welcoming, as compared to 96% of residents who believe Salem is moving in the right direction.

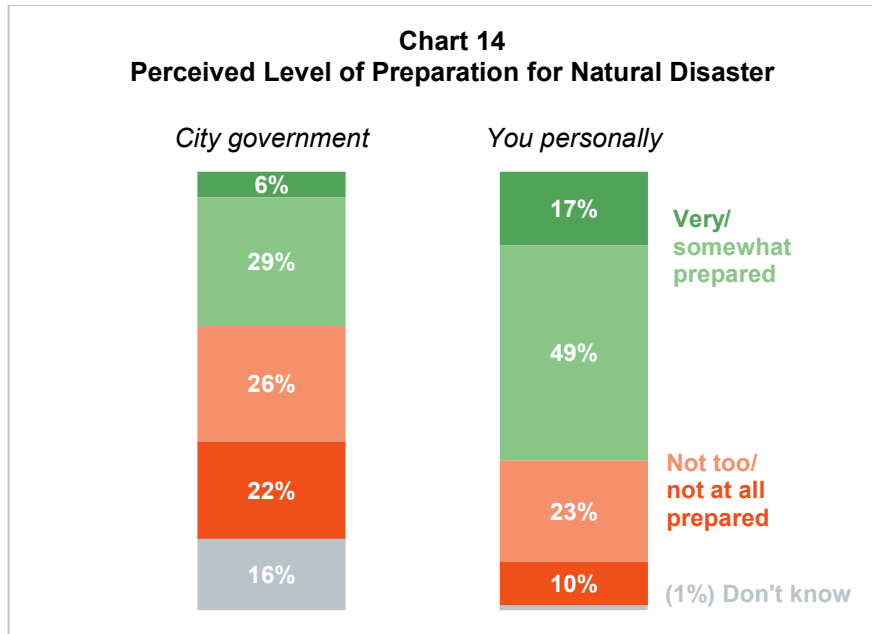


Source: DHM Research, September 2020

### 3.5 Emergency preparedness

**Approximately two-thirds of Salem residents consider themselves prepared for a natural disaster, an increase from 2019, but many remain less sure of the City’s level of preparation.**

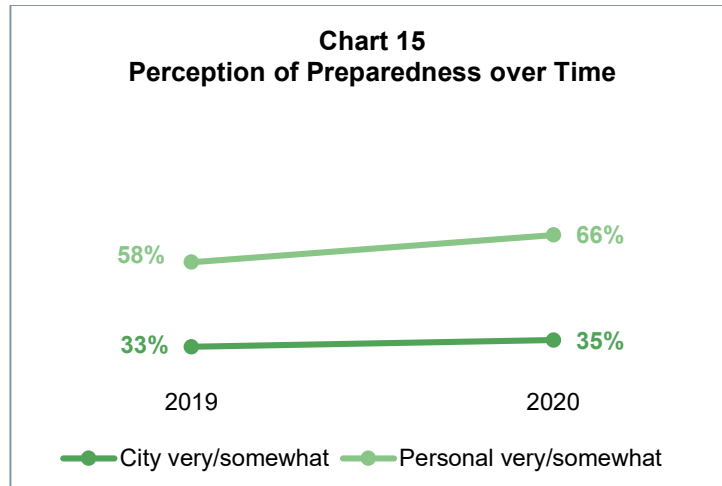
About a third (35%) of Salem residents believe City government is prepared for a natural disaster, while half (48%) believe it is not prepared and about one in five (16%) are unsure. These perceptions have remained stable since 2019, when residents were first asked the question. By contrast, two-thirds of residents (66%) say they are personally prepared, an increase of 10% since 2019.<sup>2</sup>



Women, residents younger than 35, lower-income residents, and renters say they are less likely to consider themselves prepared. Past DHM research on resilience suggests that preparedness is more difficult for people with fewer economic resources and less stable housing.

<sup>2</sup> For comparison, in 2015 DHM Research asked Oregon residents if their community was prepared or not for a major earthquake. At the time, 43% said their community was very (5%) or somewhat (38%) prepared. The same survey asked if they were personally prepared for a major earthquake. 63% said that they were very (12%) or somewhat prepared (51%).

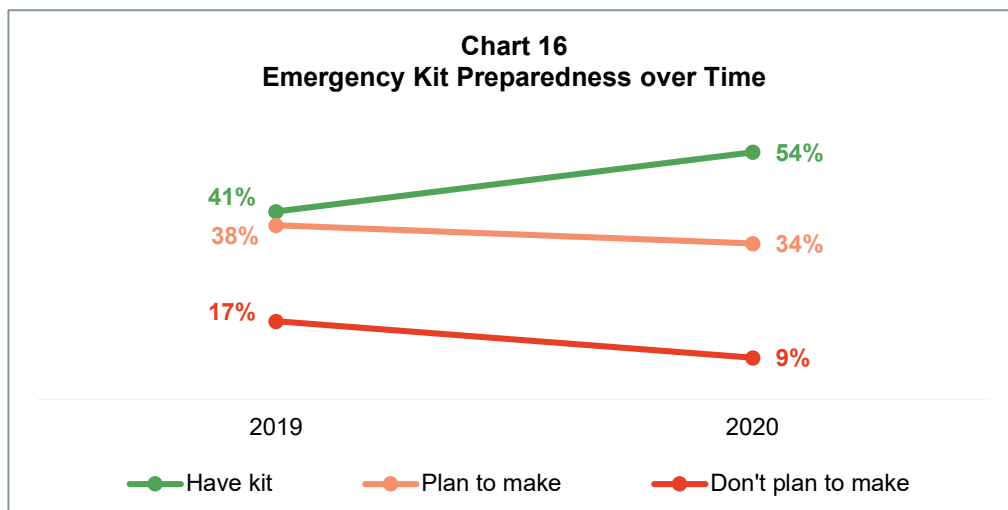
In a 2017 survey of Portland residents, 52% said that they were very (14%) or somewhat (38%) prepared for natural disaster or emergency that left their household without electricity for two weeks.



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

**In contrast to 2019, a majority of Salem residents now say they have prepared an emergency kit.**

Just over half of Salem residents (54%) have already made an emergency kit with basic items like food, water, and first aid supplies. This represents a significant increase compared to 2019, when only 41% said they possessed such a kit. Another one in three (34%) say they plan to make a kit but haven't done so yet.



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

Behind this general increase in preparedness among Salem residents, results indicate a growing level of preparedness among traditionally more vulnerable populations. Between 2019 and 2020 there have been significant increases in reported levels of emergency kit preparedness among the following groups: women (from 32% to 44%), young people (from 25% to 61%), people of color (from 26% to 64%), people with incomes under \$50k (from 32% to 47%), and renters (from 25% to 47%).

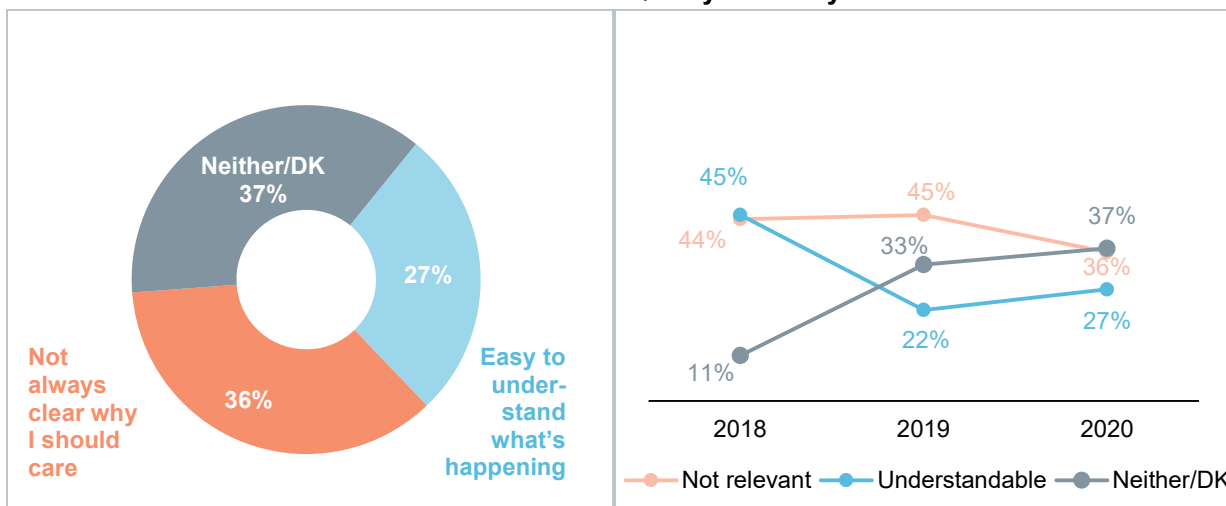
While it is difficult to identify the reasons behind this positive trend, one significant reason may stem from a likely increase in emergency preparedness resulting from various Stay at Home orders due to COVID-19, or in response to a particularly active and disruptive wildfire season.

### 3.6 Communication

**Only one in four residents feel the information they get from the City is easy to understand and relevant.**

Asked about their opinion of the information they get from the City, a little over one in three (36%) say it is “not always clear why I should care about the topic,” a little under one in three (27%) say it is “easy to understand what’s happening and what I can do about it,” and bit more than one in three (37%) say neither or they don’t know. In short, most residents question the clarity and relevance of City communications.

**Chart 17**  
**Communication Quality from City**



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

On the positive side, compared to 2019, fewer residents (36%) view communications as not relevant and more residents (27%) view such communications as understandable.

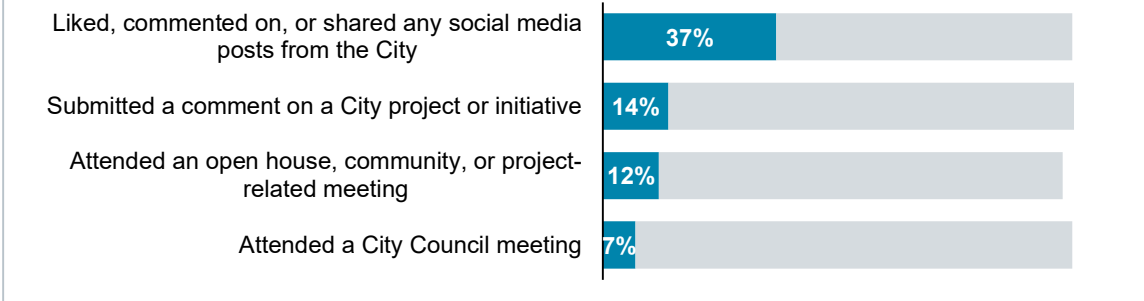
There are no significant demographic or area differences when it comes to the quality of communications from the City.

**Few residents are engaged with the City, with social media engagement most common.**

About one in four Salem residents report having interacted with *social media posts from the City* (37%) in the last six months. Residents younger than 54 are most likely to have done so (45%) than residents 55+ (24%).

About one in ten residents report having *submitted a comment on a City project or initiative* (14%), having *attended an open house, community, or project-related meeting* (12%), or having *attended a City Council meeting* (7%). College graduates are more likely to submit comments.

**Chart 18**  
**City Engagement Over Past Six Months**



Source: DHM Research, September 2020

The overall level of engagement with these activities has not changed significantly since 2018.

In contrast to previous years, when Democrats were most engaged with City government, in 2020 there appears to be no partisan difference when it comes to levels of engagement.

**City of Salem 2020 Community Satisfaction Survey**  
**Salem Residents**  
**N=400; margin of error +/-4.9**  
**September 1–19, 2020**  
**20 minutes**  
**DHM Research**  
**Project #00977**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from [name of fielding house]. I have some questions about your community (specify if possible).

As needed:

- We are not trying to sell you anything.
- The survey should only take a few minutes and I think you will find the questions interesting.
- Your answers are strictly confidential.

## WARM UP & GENERAL MOOD

1. All in all, would you say things in Salem are headed in the right direction, or are things off on the wrong track?

Response category	2020 n=400	2019 n=459	2018 n=450	2017 n=457	2016 n=450
Right direction	38%	37%	53%	62%	66%
Wrong track	41%	42%	31%	25%	21%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	21%	20%	16%	13%	13%

2. Would you say that Salem is **[restore response: headed in the right direction, off on the wrong track]** because of actions the City has taken, circumstances outside of the City's control, or some combination of both?

### **Right Direction/Wrong Track combined**

Response category	2020 n=316
Mainly because of actions the City has taken	22%
Mainly because of circumstances outside the City's control	7%
Some combination of both	68%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	3%

3. What is the most important issue that you would like the City of Salem to do something about?

[Open]

Response category	2020	2019	2018	2017	Dec. 2016	Mar. 2016
Homelessness, poverty	49%	41%	33%	26%	17%	7%
Crime, drugs	6%	4%	4%	1%	5%	5%
Promote businesses, downtown development	5%	2%	<1%	1%	3%	3%
Additional bridge	4%	5%	4%	5%	3%	3%
COVID	4%	--	--	--	--	--
Education, funding, class sizes	4%	3%	4%	5%	10%	5%
Police reform	3%	--	--	--	--	--
Affordable housing	3%	3%	2%	7%	4%	1%
Politics	3%	--	--	--	--	--
Roads, potholes, infrastructure	2%	7%	7%	5%	11%	12%
Traffic, congestion	2%	6%	3%	8%	4%	7%
Environment	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
High taxes, property taxes	1%	2%	2%	5%	1%	4%
Budget, spending	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%
Police enforcement, traffic violations	n=1	2%	1%	2%	3%	5%
Immigration, refugees	--	3%	2%	--	1%	1%
None, nothing	2%	2%	6%	4%	7%	9%
All other responses	3%	1% or less	2% or less	4% or less	5% or less	7% or less
[Don't read] Don't know	4%	4%	6%	5%	6%	1%

**SATISFACTION WITH EXISTING SERVICES**

4. The City of Salem provides many services and facilities: police and fire protection, ambulance services, street maintenance, parks and recreation, water and sewer and more. In general, how satisfied are you with the services provided by the City of Salem: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

Response category	n=400	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Very satisfied		34%	31%	41%	39%	44%
Somewhat satisfied		52%	56%	50%	51%	48%
Not too satisfied		9%	8%	4%	9%	5%
Not at all satisfied		4%	6%	4%	1%	3%
[Don't read] Don't know		1%	<1%	1%	0%	1%



Now, I will read to you a list of community services in Salem. For each, please tell me if you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied, or not at all satisfied. **[Rotate Q5–Q21]**

Response category	n=400	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Not too satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know
<b>5. Police (benchmark results for "Police, fire, ambulance, and 911 service")</b>						
	2020	40%	32%	14%	8%	6%
	2019	51%	33%	5%	6%	4%
	2018	65%	26%	3%	1%	5%
	2017	49%	39%	7%	1%	3%
	2016	58%	30%	4%	4%	5%
<b>6. Fire, ambulance, and 911 service (benchmark results for "Police, fire, ambulance, and 911 service")</b>						
	2020	58%	29%	3%	2%	7%
	2019	51%	33%	5%	6%	4%
	2018	65%	26%	3%	1%	5%
	2017	49%	39%	7%	1%	3%
	2016	58%	30%	4%	4%	5%
<b>7. Maintenance of city streets, sidewalks and bridges</b>						
	2020	21%	47%	20%	10%	2%
	2019	12%	42%	24%	17%	5%
	2018	21%	46%	18%	14%	1%
	2017	16%	45%	29%	9%	1%
	2016	23%	47%	18%	11%	1%
<b>8. Salem public library</b>						
	2020	39%	30%	7%	4%	21%
	2019	52%	22%	5%	2%	19%
	2018	55%	23%	3%	1%	16%
	2017	40%	36%	3%	2%	18%
	2016	54%	31%	4%	2%	9%
<b>9. Parks and recreation</b>						
	2020	38%	42%	14%	3%	3%
	2019	41%	38%	10%	3%	9%
	2018	49%	37%	7%	3%	4%
	2017	38%	43%	7%	5%	7%
	2016	48%	37%	8%	4%	3%
<b>10. Water, sewer and stormwater services</b>						
	2020	40%	37%	14%	3%	6%
	2019	38%	37%	11%	8%	6%
	2018	32%	45%	13%	7%	3%
	2017	39%	40%	13%	5%	3%
	2016	38%	41%	10%	7%	4%
<b>11. Ensuring that residents of all income levels have access to affordable housing</b>						
	2020	10%	24%	29%	26%	11%
	2019	7%	20%	32%	30%	11%
	2018	14%	34%	25%	15%	12%
	2017	6%	23%	36%	18%	16%
	2016	14%	27%	24%	16%	18%

Response category	n=400	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Not too satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know
<b>12. Municipal court</b>						
	2020	20%	32%	6%	4%	38%
	2019	14%	31%	12%	2%	41%
	2018	26%	31%	4%	4%	36%
	2017	15%	38%	6%	3%	38%
	2016	24%	30%	5%	3%	37%
<b>13. City planning and development review</b>						
	2020	15%	33%	21%	10%	22%
	2019	10%	33%	16%	10%	31%
	2018	21%	32%	18%	6%	23%
	2017	11%	37%	18%	8%	25%
	2016	14%	35%	16%	9%	26%
<b>14. Parking structures and on-street parking near local business</b>						
	2020	27%	43%	19%	8%	4%
	2019	18%	47%	20%	9%	6%
	2018	25%	39%	23%	8%	5%
	2017	20%	47%	17%	9%	7%
	2016	24%	48%	17%	8%	2%
<b>15. Enforcement of city codes for issues such as noise, yard upkeep, and other nuisances</b>						
	2020	21%	40%	18%	11%	10%
	2019	20%	40%	19%	10%	10%
	2018	30%	40%	15%	9%	6%
	2017	23%	44%	17%	6%	9%
	2016	32%	38%	11%	8%	11%
<b>16. Street lighting</b>						
	2020	34%	44%	13%	8%	2%
	2019	30%	45%	13%	7%	5%
	2018	41%	44%	9%	4%	3%
	2017	35%	43%	15%	4%	2%
	2016	36%	41%	12%	8%	2%
<b>17. Growing job opportunities in the local economy</b>						
	2020	18%	36%	23%	8%	15%
	2019	14%	41%	20%	12%	13%
	2018	28%	45%	10%	3%	14%
	2017	14%	48%	16%	9%	13%
	2016	16%	41%	20%	8%	14%
<b>18. Protecting our natural environment</b>						
	2020	27%	42%	18%	6%	6%
	2019	23%	47%	14%	9%	6%
	2018	26%	51%	9%	5%	10%
	2017	28%	52%	7%	3%	10%
	2016	35%	42%	13%	4%	7%
<b>19. Supporting arts and culture</b>						
	2020	25%	44%	11%	5%	16%
	2019	32%	36%	10%	3%	18%

Response category	n=400	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Not too satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know
	2018	38%	43%	5%	4%	11%
	2017	30%	47%	6%	3%	14%
	2016	34%	39%	10%	2%	15%
<b>20. Coordinating social services to serve needs of homeless in our community</b>						
	2020	8%	17%	31%	36%	9%
	2019	5%	15%	30%	40%	11%
	2018	7%	24%	35%	25%	9%
	2017	4%	24%	31%	23%	17%
<b>21. Safety for people walking or biking in Salem (benchmark results for two separate questions in 2019)</b>						
	2020	26%	43%	20%	8%	3%
	2019 Walking	20%	38%	24%	14%	3%
	2019 Biking	24%	32%	17%	14%	13%

Thank you. Now, please tell me if doing the following activities in Salem is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult. If an activity doesn't apply to you, just let me know. **[Randomize Q22–Q29]**

Response category	n=400	Very easy	Somewhat easy	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	Doesn't apply
<b>22. Driving from one side of the city to the other during peak traffic hours</b>						
	2020	4%	20%	42%	27%	6%
	2019	3%	13%	28%	45%	11%
	2018	5%	21%	34%	36%	5%
	2017	3%	14%	45%	33%	5%
	2016	7%	16%	31%	40%	6%
<b>23. Walking or biking in Salem (benchmark results for two separate questions in 2019)</b>						
	2020	34%	35%	16%	6%	9%
	2019 Walking	30%	32%	19%	12%	8%
	2019 Biking	20%	23%	16%	11%	29%
	2018	48%	26%	12%	3%	11%
	2017	31%	40%	15%	5%	9%
	2016	40%	33%	13%	6%	9%
<b>24. Doing business with the City, such as getting a permit or paying a bill</b>						
	2020	25%	33%	18%	4%	19%
	2019	29%	26%	17%	8%	21%
	2018	40%	30%	9%	7%	14%
	2017	30%	36%	12%	3%	18%
	2016	31%	32%	12%	5%	19%
<b>25. Finding space for community events</b>						
	2020	17%	22%	18%	5%	38%
	2019	17%	26%	20%	3%	35%
	2018	20%	31%	10%	2%	38%
	2017	20%	30%	15%	1%	35%
	2016	24%	33%	9%	5%	30%

Response category	n=400	Very easy	Somewhat easy	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	Doesn't apply
<b>26. Finding information about city planning and how decisions are made</b>						
	2020	9%	24%	27%	12%	28%
	2019	7%	27%	25%	13%	27%
	2018	21%	28%	19%	7%	26%
	2017	14%	26%	21%	6%	33%
	2016	14%	25%	20%	8%	33%
<b>27. Having your concerns heard by city leaders</b>						
	2020	8%	20%	22%	19%	31%
	2019	8%	18%	28%	17%	29%
	2018	12%	23%	14%	11%	40%
	2017	14%	22%	24%	10%	29%
	2016	15%	25%	17%	10%	34%
<b>28. Finding the information you need to resolve a city issue</b>						
	2020	14%	33%	20%	9%	23%
	2019	13%	27%	25%	12%	24%
	2018	17%	33%	20%	7%	22%
	2017	14%	30%	26%	7%	24%
	2016	18%	31%	17%	9%	25%
<b>29. Operating a business</b>						
	2020	7%	13%	16%	8%	56%
	2019	8%	12%	14%	5%	60%
	2018	9%	21%	8%	7%	55%
	2017	6%	16%	14%	4%	61%
	2016	7%	16%	13%	5%	59%

## RESOURCES FOR CITY SERVICES

30. The City of Salem funds basic services with taxpayer dollars and fees for services. In general, how satisfied are you with the value received for your taxes and fees paid? Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

Response category	n=400	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Very satisfied		13%	8%	13%	12%	17%
Somewhat satisfied		44%	48%	57%	56%	54%
Not too satisfied		28%	18%	18%	22%	17%
Not at all satisfied		10%	16%	10%	8%	7%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know		6%	9%	3%	2%	5%

## EQUITY ISSUES

31. Thinking about the part of Salem where you live, do you feel your area receives its fair share of city services? **[Yes/No; wait, ask strongly/somewhat]**

Response category	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Yes, strongly	28%	23%	42%	30%	46%
Yes, somewhat	40%	42%	38%	43%	37%
No, somewhat	15%	13%	9%	15%	7%

No, strongly	11%	13%	10%	7%	8%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	6%	8%	2%	5%	2%

32. Thinking about the City of Salem as a whole, do you think city services are distributed fairly?  
**[Yes/No; wait, ask strongly/somewhat]**

Response category	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Yes, strongly	15%	14%	15%	14%	27%
Yes, somewhat	33%	26%	34%	36%	28%
No, somewhat	21%	23%	17%	22%	15%
No, strongly	17%	19%	20%	14%	17%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	15%	18%	15%	14%	14%

Please let me know if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. **[Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, DK]**

33. Salem residents of all identities and backgrounds are treated fairly and with respect.

Response category	n=400	2020
Strongly agree		20%
Somewhat agree		36%
Somewhat disagree		20%
Strongly disagree		14%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know		11%

34. It is all of our responsibilities as residents of Salem to make sure our community is welcoming to everyone.

Response category	n=400	2020
Strongly agree		66%
Somewhat agree		23%
Somewhat disagree		4%
Strongly disagree		3%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know		3%

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The next few questions are about preparing for a natural disaster.

35. If there were a major natural disaster in Salem today, would you say that the City government is very prepared, somewhat prepared, not too prepared, or not at all prepared?

Response category	2020	2019
Very prepared	6%	6%
Somewhat prepared	29%	27%
Not too prepared	26%	25%
Not at all prepared	22%	24%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	16%	17%

36. If there were a major natural disaster in the Salem area today, would you say that you personally are very prepared, somewhat prepared, not too prepared, not at all prepared?

Response category	n=400	2020	2019
Very prepared		17%	18%
Somewhat prepared		49%	40%
Not too prepared		23%	23%
Not at all prepared		10%	18%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know		2%	1%

37. Let me know whether you have already done, haven't done yet but have plans to do, or have not done and do not have plans to make an emergency kit for your household with basic items like food, water, a battery-powered radio, a flashlight and first-aid kit.

Response category	2020	2019
Have already done	54%	41%
Have not done yet but have plans to	34%	38%
Have not done and do not plan to	9%	17%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	3%	4%

## COMMUNICATIONS

These next questions are about how the City of Salem communicates with residents of the community.

In the past six months which of the following have you done? **[Randomize]**

Response category	Yes	No	Don't know
<b>38. Submitted a comment on a City project or initiative</b>			
2020	14%	80%	6%
2019	13%	82%	5%
2018	16%	84%	<1%
<b>39. Liked, commented on, or shared any social media posts from the City</b>			
2020	37%	59%	4%
2019	33%	60%	6%
2018	30%	69%	<1%
<b>40. Attended a City Council meeting</b>			
2020	7%	90%	4%
2019	9%	86%	5%
2018	9%	91%	--
<b>41. Attended an open house, community, or project-related meeting</b>			
2020	12%	85%	4%
2019	17%	80%	3%
2018	18%	81%	1%

42. Which of the following is closer to your opinion about the quality of information you receive from the City? **[Rotate statements]**

Response category	2020	2019	2018
A. It's easy to understand what's happening and what I can do about it.	27%	22%	45%
B. It's not always clear why I should care about the topic.	36%	45%	44%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Neither	17%	22%	7%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	20%	11%	4%

## DEMOGRAPHICS

43. Do you describe your gender as:

Response category	n=400
Male	50%
Female	49%
Non-binary or gender non-conforming	1%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Don't know	--
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused/Missing	--

44. What is your age?

Response category	n=400
18–24	14%
25–34	16%
35–54	32%
55–64	13%
65+	22%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	3%

45. Area of the city **[From sample]**

Response category	n=400
West	18%
North/Northeast	35%
South	47%

46. What is your political party? **[From sample]**

Response category	n=400
Democrat	35%
Republican	25%
Independent	26%
Other	1%
Non-affiliated	13%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	--

47. How many years have you lived in Salem?

Response category	n=400
0–5 years	15%
6–10 years	7%
More than 10 years	76%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	3%

48. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Response category	n=400
Less than high school	6%
High school diploma/GED	31%
Some college	36%
College degree	14%
Graduate/professional school	10%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	3%

49. Which category best describes your 2019 gross household income, before taxes? Remember to include everyone living in your household. Your best estimate will do.

Response category	n=400
Less than \$25,000	15%
\$25,000 to less than \$50,000	21%
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	20%
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	14%
\$100,000 to less than \$150,000	11%
\$150,000 or more	5%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	13%

50. Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity? **[Allow for multiple responses]**

Response category	n=400
African American/Black	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
Hispanic/Latino	13%
Native American/American Indian	3%
White/Caucasian	78%
Other	2%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	6%

51. Do you rent or own your home?

Response category	n=400
Rent	33%
Own	57%
Something else	5%
<b>[Don't read]</b> Refused	5%

52. Survey language

Response category	n=400
English	98%
Spanish	2%