El Cerrito, CA
Community Livability Report
2019
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The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of El Cerrito. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 383 residents of the City of El Cerrito. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the Technical Appendices provided under separate cover.
Quality of Life in El Cerrito

About 4 in 5 residents rated the quality of life in El Cerrito as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark (see Appendix B of the Technical Appendices provided under separate cover).

Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Economy, Natural Environment and Built Environment as priorities for the El Cerrito community in the coming two years. Ratings within the facets of Economy and Education and Enrichment tended to be lower than the national averages, while evaluations for the remaining facets were on par with national comparison communities. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for El Cerrito’s unique questions.
Community Characteristics

What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of El Cerrito, 87% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents’ ratings of El Cerrito as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the city as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality. About 8 in 10 residents were pleased with their neighborhood as a place to live and El Cerrito as a place to raise children, while about 6 in 10 residents gave high marks to the overall image or reputation of El Cerrito and the city as a place to retire. Fewer respondents felt positively about the overall appearance of El Cerrito, which lagged behind comparison communities. Ratings for the overall appearance of the city and El Cerrito as a place to retire decreased from 2016 to 2019 (see the Trends over Time report under separate cover for additional details).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. All measures for Safety and Natural Environment were on par with national comparison communities. Areas where El Cerrito had stronger comparisons to the national averages included ease of travel by bicycle, ease of travel by public transportation and public parking. Assessments of openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds were also strong and increased from 2016 to 2019, with about 8 in 10 residents awarding high marks. Other improvements were observed in evaluations of residents feeling safe in their neighborhood and opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events and activities.

Residents’ ratings for aspects of Economy (including cost of living and El Cerrito as a place to visit and work), health care-related aspects of Recreation and Wellness, and aspects of Education and Enrichment (including K-12 education and opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities) were lower than those observed in other communities. Compared to 2016, survey participants’ marks for ease of travel (via bicycle, walking and public transportation), cleanliness, overall built environment and cost of living declined in 2019.
Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)

Comparison to national benchmark
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

SAFETY
- Overall feeling of safety: 74%
- Safe in neighborhood: 82%
- Safe in commercial area: 93%

MOBILITY
- Overall ease of travel: 78%
- Paths and walking trails: 72%
- Ease of walking: 71%
- Travel by bicycle: 68%
- Travel by public transportation: 61%
- Travel by car: 76%
- Public parking: 73%

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
- Overall natural environment: 79%
- Cleanliness: 59%
- Air quality: 78%

BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- Overall built environment: 48%
- New development in El Cerrito: 41%
- Affordable quality housing: 23%
- Housing options: 41%
- Public places: 46%

ECONOMY
- Overall economic health: 49%
- Vibrant downtown/commercial area: 23%
- Business and services: 46%
- Cost of living: 25%
- Shopping opportunities: 46%
- Employment opportunities: 15%
- Place to visit: 36%
- Place to work: 45%

RECREATION AND WELLNESS
- Health and wellness: 60%
- Mental health care: 26%
- Preventive health services: 35%
- Health care: 39%
- Food: 63%
- Recreational opportunities: 65%
- Fitness opportunities: 71%

EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT
- Education and enrichment opportunities: 51%
- Religious or spiritual events and activities: 60%
- Cultural/arts/music activities: 37%
- Adult education: 48%
- K-12 education: 49%
- Child care/preschool: 52%

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- Social events and activities: 42%
- Neighborliness: 73%
- Openness and acceptance: 79%

Opportunities to volunteer: 62%
Opportunities to participate in community matters: 61%
Governance

How well does the government of El Cerrito meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by El Cerrito as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 7 in 10 residents gave favorable evaluations to the overall quality of services provided by the City, while 3 in 10 were pleased with the services provided by the Federal Government. Ratings for the services provided by the Federal Government decreased from 2016 to 2019.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of El Cerrito’s leadership and governance. About half of residents gave positive reviews to all aspects of government performance and all of these ratings were similar to those given in other communities. Respondents gave lower marks to confidence in City government and the City acting in the best interest of El Cerrito in 2019 compared to 2016.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in El Cerrito. Most City services were rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to the national benchmarks. Assessments of drinking water stood out with above-average scores, with about 8 in 10 residents giving favorable ratings. Evaluations of economic development, health services, public library services and public information services were lower than observed in comparison communities.

Reviews for recycling, storm drainage and health services decreased from 2016 to 2019; however, scores for crime prevention, fire prevention, street lighting, recreation centers or facilities and public library services improved since the last survey administration.

Overall Quality of City Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good) Comparison to national benchmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Lower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of services for taxes paid</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall direction</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming resident involvement</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in City government</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in the best interest of El Cerrito</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating all residents fairly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services provided by the Federal Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

The National Community Survey™

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

SAFETY
- Police: 86%
- Fire: 96%

MOBILITY
- Traffic enforcement: 59%
- Street repair: 52%
- Street cleaning: 64%
- Street lighting: 57%
- Sidewalk maintenance: 42%
- Traffic signal timing: 46%
- Bus or transit services: 66%

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
- Garbage collection: 87%
- Recycling: 86%
- Yard waste pick-up: 82%
- Drinking water: 85%
- Natural areas preservation: 67%
- Open space: 67%

BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- Storm drainage: 66%
- Sewer services: 83%
- Power utility: 72%
- Utility billing: 69%
- Land use, planning and zoning: 44%
- Code enforcement: 38%
- Cable television: 45%

ECONOMY
- Economic development: 33%

RECREATION AND WELLNESS
- City parks: 80%
- Recreation programs: 73%
- Recreation centers: 75%
- Health services: 36%

EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT
- Public libraries: 69%
- Special events: 65%

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- Public information: 51%
Participation

Are the residents of El Cerrito connected to the community and each other?

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Similar to other communities in the U.S., about half of respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in El Cerrito.

About 4 in 5 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in El Cerrito to someone who asked and planned to remain in the community for the next five years. About 4 in 10 residents reported they had contacted El Cerrito employees. These ratings were similar to those reported across the nation.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of Participation varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparisons, as well as comparisons to El Cerrito over time, useful for interpreting the results.

El Cerrito residents exhibited higher than average participation rates in the area of Natural Environment. About 9 in 10 residents reported conserving water and recycling at home. Additionally, residents reported higher levels of using public transportation, walking or biking instead of driving and stocking supplies in preparation for an emergency.

Compared to municipalities across the country, fewer El Cerrito residents reported working in El Cerrito, participating in a club, or watching a local public meeting. About 2 in 10 community members believed the economy would have a positive impact on their income. Levels of residents’ participation in Education and Enrichment activities were also lower than average.

Most rates of Participation remained stable over time. In 2019, fewer residents had stocked supplies in preparation for an emergency, made efforts to make their home more energy efficient, believed the economy would have a positive impact on their income, or read or watched local news.
Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

- **Percent rating positively** (e.g., yes, more than once a month, always/sometimes)
- **Comparison to national benchmark**
  - Higher
  - Similar
  - Lower

**SAFETY**
- Stocked supplies for an emergency: 52%
- Did NOT report a crime: 77%
- Was NOT the victim of a crime: 86%

**MOBILITY**
- Used public transportation instead of driving: 90%
- Carpoled instead of driving alone: 47%
- Walked or biked instead of driving: 79%

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**
- Conserved water: 93%
- Made home more energy efficient: 70%
- Recycled at home: 99%

**ECONOMY**
- Purchased goods or services in El Cerrito: 99%
- Economy will have positive impact on income: 19%
- Work in El Cerrito: 23%

**RECREATION AND WELLNESS**
- Used El Cerrito recreation centers: 56%
- Visited a City park: 84%
- Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables: 91%
- Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity: 67%
- In very good to excellent health: 89%

**EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT**
- Used El Cerrito public library: 49%
- Participated in religious or spiritual activities: 15%
- Attended a City-sponsored event: 41%

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
- Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate: 27%
- Contacted El Cerrito elected officials: 19%
- Volunteered: 30%
- Participated in a club: 14%
- Talked to or visited with neighbors: 96%
- Done a favor for a neighbor: 82%
- Attended a local public meeting: 19%
- Watched a local public meeting: 11%
- Read or watched local news: 76%
- Voted in local elections: 86%

Higher

Similar

Lower
The City of El Cerrito included four questions of special interest on The NCS, with topics related to the City of El Cerrito Police Department, earthquake safety in City buildings, the importance of ADA compliance in City buildings and residents’ language preference for receiving communications.

Respondents were asked to rate the work of the El Cerrito Police Department. At least three-quarters of residents gave excellent or good ratings to the El Cerrito Police Department enforcing the law, using appropriate force on suspects, treating all residents fairly and protecting residents from violent crime.

Figure 4: Quality of City of El Cerrito Police Department

*Please rate the job the City of El Cerrito Police Department does at each of the following:*

- **Enforcing the law**
  - Excellent: 25%
  - Good: 58%
  - Fair: 14%
  - Poor: 2%

- **Using appropriate (not excessive) force on suspects**
  - Excellent: 34%
  - Good: 47%
  - Fair: 16%
  - Poor: 3%

- **Treating all residents fairly**
  - Excellent: 25%
  - Good: 54%
  - Fair: 14%
  - Poor: 7%

- **Protecting residents from violent crime**
  - Excellent: 24%
  - Good: 52%
  - Fair: 19%
  - Poor: 5%
When asked how safe they would feel in City buildings during an earthquake, residents reported they would feel the safest in City Hall, with 91% feeling very safe or somewhat safe. At least two-thirds of respondents indicated they would feel safe in the Public Safety Building, the Recycling & Environmental Resource Center and the Community Center, while over half of respondents would feel safe in the Midtown Activity Center, Public Works Maintenance Offices and the Contra Cost Civic Theatre. Less than half of residents reported they would feel safe in the Library during an earthquake. While the figure below shows the percentage of those who had an opinion, it’s worth noting that a majority of respondents selected the “don’t know” option when assessing their level of safety in most of the City buildings listed.

Figure 5: Safety in City Buildings during Earthquakes

Considering the condition of each of the following City buildings, how safe or unsafe would you feel in each building during an earthquake?

- **City Hall**: 57% Very safe, 34% Neither safe nor unsafe, 7% Somewhat unsafe, 2% Very unsafe
- **Public Safety Building (Fire & Police)**: 42% Very safe, 38% Neither safe nor unsafe, 12% Somewhat unsafe, 4% Very unsafe, 3% Don’t know
- **Recycling & Environmental Resource Center**: 31% Very safe, 41% Neither safe nor unsafe, 18% Somewhat unsafe, 8% Very unsafe, 2% Don’t know
- **Community Center**: 22% Very safe, 45% Neither safe nor unsafe, 23% Somewhat unsafe, 8% Very unsafe, 1% Don’t know
- **Midtown Activity Center**: 27% Very safe, 37% Neither safe nor unsafe, 23% Somewhat unsafe, 9% Very unsafe, 4% Don’t know
- **Public Works Maintenance Offices**: 22% Very safe, 41% Neither safe nor unsafe, 31% Somewhat unsafe, 3% Very unsafe, 3% Don’t know
- **Contra Costa Civic Theatre**: 18% Very safe, 41% Neither safe nor unsafe, 24% Somewhat unsafe, 12% Very unsafe, 4% Don’t know
- **Library**: 10% Very safe, 34% Neither safe nor unsafe, 24% Somewhat unsafe, 22% Very unsafe, 10% Don’t know
Community members rated the importance of updating several City Buildings in order to be more compliant with ADA guidelines. At least 6 in 10 respondents reported it was essential or very important for each of the buildings to be more ADA compliant. The buildings that were given the highest importance were the Library, Community Center and Public Safety Building, while the Public Works Maintenance Offices and Recycling & Environmental Resource Center were lower on the list.

Figure 6: Importance of Updating City Buildings for ADA Compliance

*Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the City to update each of the following buildings to be more compliant with ADA (American Disabilities Act) guidelines (appropriate entrance ramps, elevators or lifts, bathrooms, etc.):*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Essential (%)</th>
<th>Very important (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat important (%)</th>
<th>Not at all important (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Center</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Safety Building (Fire &amp; Police)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midtown Activity Center</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Hall</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa Civic Theatre</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works Maintenance Offices</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling &amp; Environmental Resource Center</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey was used to assess the languages that residents would prefer to receive communications in. Almost all residents said they preferred or somewhat preferred receiving communications in English; only about 1% would not prefer English. Less than 2 in 10 residents said they preferred receiving communications in Chinese Mandarin, Spanish, Cantonese and Tagalog.

**Figure 7: Preferred Languages**

*Thinking about the kinds of languages you might receive communications in at your home, please rate your preference for receiving communications in each of the following languages:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Primary/preferred language</th>
<th>Somewhat prefer</th>
<th>Would not prefer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Mandarin</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

**El Cerrito continues to be a desirable place to live.**

At least 8 in 10 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in El Cerrito, the city and their neighborhood as a place to live and El Cerrito as a place to raise children. About 6 in 10 residents positively rated the overall image or reputation of El Cerrito and the city as a place to retire. About 9 in 10 residents were likely to recommend living in El Cerrito to someone who asked and planned to remain in El Cerrito for the next five years. Over half of residents favorably evaluated the sense of community in the city. These strong ratings tended to remain stable over time.

**Residents value Safety and emphasize its importance.**

As in 2016, residents indicated that Safety was an important focus area for the City to address in the coming years. At least 8 in 10 respondents felt safe in their neighborhoods and in commercial areas. Police, fire and ambulance or emergency medical services were given the most positive reviews. Evaluations of crime prevention and fire prevention improved from 2016 to 2019. At least three-quarters of residents favorably rated the job the El Cerrito Police Department does at enforcing the law, using appropriate force on suspects, treating all residents fairly and protecting residents from violent crime.

The safety of City buildings was of special interest to the El Cerrito community. In the event of an earthquake, at least 6 in 10 residents indicated they would feel safe in the majority of City buildings. However, less than half of residents reported they would feel safe in the Library. Residents felt it was important for the City to update their buildings to be more ADA compliant, with at least 6 in 10 respondents reporting it was essential or very important for buildings such as the Library, Community Center and Public Safety Building.

**Economy is an area of opportunity for El Cerrito.**

Survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the City in the next two years. Similar to comparison communities, roughly 4 in 10 residents positively rated the overall economic health of El Cerrito and shopping opportunities. About 7 in 10 residents were not under housing cost stress. Other Economy-related characteristics tended to be less positive. About one-quarter of residents or less gave high marks to the cost of living, employment opportunities, vibrant downtown/commercial area and availability of affordable quality housing; these ratings were lower than the national benchmark. Marks for cost of living decreased between 2016 and 2019. Respondents reported lower than average rates of believing the economy would have a positive impact on their income and working in El Cerrito. Finally, about one-third of residents gave high marks to economic development in El Cerrito, which lagged behind comparison communities.

**The Natural Environment is a community asset.**

El Cerrito residents also selected the Natural Environment as a key focus area for the community. Overall, ratings for aspects related to Natural Environment tended to be on par with comparison communities. At least three-quarters of residents gave favorable scores to the overall quality of the natural environment and air quality. About 8 in 10 residents applauded the City for garbage collection, recycling services, yard waste pick-up and drinking water. Ratings for drinking water in El Cerrito were above average. Additionally, El Cerrito residents exhibited higher than average participation rates in the area of Natural Environment. About 9 in 10 residents reported that they recycled at home and made efforts to conserve water; levels that were higher than the national benchmarks. About 7 in 10 residents made efforts to make their home more energy efficient.