

Project Description

During the late fall of 2004 the Social & Behavioral Research Laboratory at Winthrop University fielded a survey in Rock Hill, SC pertaining primarily to issues of livability and citizen attitudes toward life in Rock Hill. The Social & Behavioral Research Laboratory (SBRL) is a research arm of the Department of Political Science at Winthrop University under the direction of Dr. Scott Huffmon. The survey was fielded during the end of November / beginning of December 2004 and includes usable information from 461 respondents from Rock Hill giving the survey a +/-4.55% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. The sample was generated using standard Random Digit Dialing (RDD) methodology.

Data were collected under the direction of Dr. Scott Huffmon, Lab Supervisor Adam Smith, and Project Managers Jeremy Winkler and Crystal Welton. The SBRL also owes a debt of gratitude to the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. Karen Kedrowski and the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, Dr. Debra Boyd. Adam Smith compiled the graphs for this report.

Introduction

The purpose of this survey was to gauge the opinions of the citizens of Rock Hill regarding their attitudes toward their home city. Of particular interest were perceptions of the “livability” of the city. With guidance from Mayor Doug Echols, the SBRL developed questions relating to seven areas that directly impact livability and quality of life in Rock Hill. These areas are: 1) Arts, Culture, and History; 2) Beauty and the Environment; 3) Children, Youth, and Families; 4) Health and Fitness; 5) Human Relations; 6) Learning and Character Building; 7) Volunteering and Service. Information is also provided in two additional areas: Appendix A) City Services and Appendix B) General Quality of Life Issues.

As these pages are explored, the reader should keep several things in mind. First, a word about the metrics used. For most of the questions of interest, respondents were asked to “grade” Rock Hill on the familiar “A” to “F” (4.0) educational grading scale. There were several reasons for using this metric. Understanding of the common “letter grade scale” is near universal. This means that not only do respondents instantly understand the way in which they are being asked to judge these issues, but that the answers of one respondent are naturally comparable to those of any other respondent. This is not always the case when respondents are asked to make judgments using unfamiliar measures.

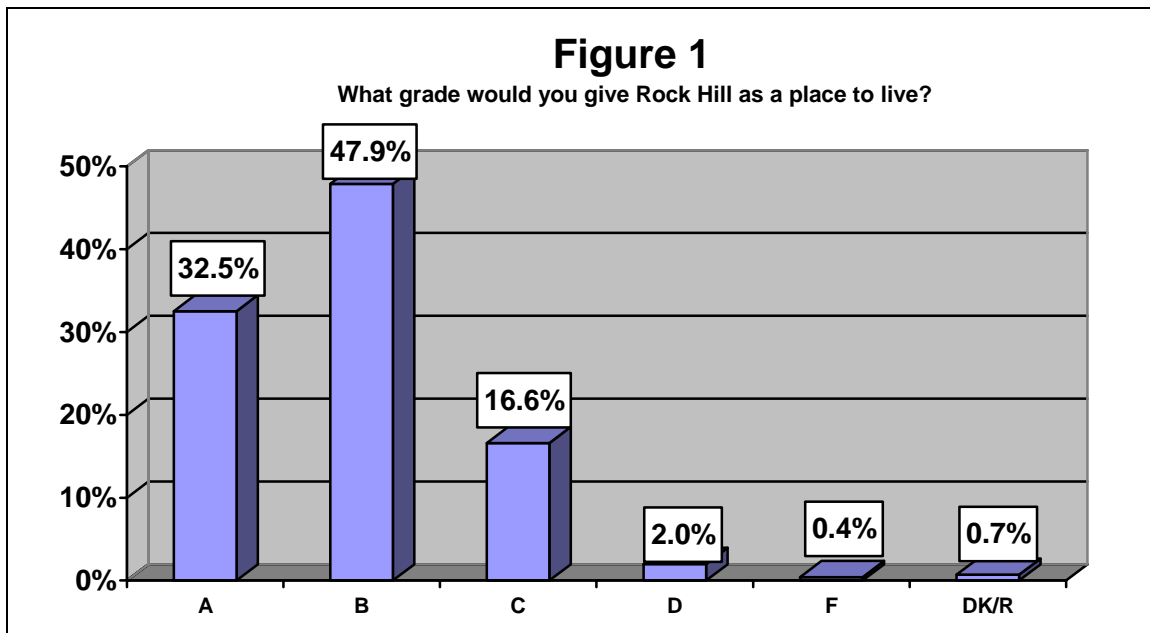
Second, using this scale makes achieving “perfection” all but impossible. Is this a good thing? I would argue that it is. On the 4.0 grade scale an “A” means near perfection (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0). The only way for a city to achieve a perfect 4.0 is for virtually every respondent to give the city an “A” for that issue. Obviously this is unrealistic. No matter how wonderful the city, there is always room for improvement. For most issues, I

will report the overall grade, modal category (the category that garnered the most responses), and describe the general tendency of the data for that question.

Respondents were introduced to the series of questions on Rock Hill's livability with the following statement:

We're interested in finding out what residents think about the quality of life in Rock Hill. I'm going to ask you about some areas or aspects of life and I would like for you to grade life in **Rock Hill** on that issue. We're going to use a grade scale of "A" to "F" where a Grade of "A" means Rock Hill is **excellent** with respect to that issue, "B" means **good**, "C" means **fair**, "D" means **poor**, and a grade of "F" means Rock Hill gets a **failing** mark with respect to that issue.

Perhaps the best place to begin this report is with respondents' overall impression of life in Rock Hill. Following the above introduction, respondents were asked, "Overall, what grade would you give Rock Hill as a place to live?" Answers appear in Figure 1 below.

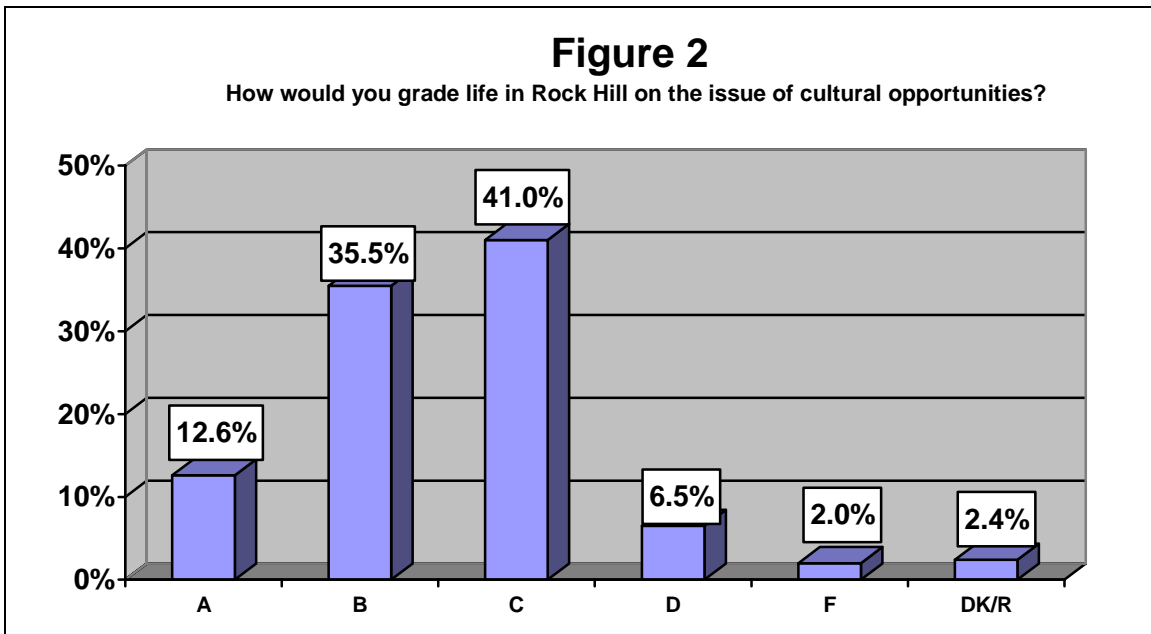


Clearly, the general opinion is that Rock Hill is a good place to live. The average grade for this item was a "B" and over 80% of respondents, or more than 4 out of 5 people, gave Rock Hill better than average marks as a place to live. The obvious tendency of the

responses for this item show favorable attitudes toward life in Rock Hill. However, as the saying goes, “the devil is in the details.” While general feelings toward life in Rock Hill are favorable, how do her citizens rate the city in specific areas? The following sections show citizen responses across our seven general areas of livability and paint a picture of a city that appears to be on the right track, or at least making progress, toward creating a vibrant and livable city for her inhabitants. Specific items in each section will allow us to see Rock Hill’s successes as well as highlight areas where further work can be done.

Arts, Culture, and History

Great cities are equated with a vibrant cultural life. However, a clear definition of what constitutes a “cultural life” is elusive. Certainly, any definition would include the arts, music, theater, and intellectual pursuits. Culture, like beauty, often resides in the eye of the beholder. How, for example, would one tap into and measure the “intellectual life” of a city. Perhaps a starting point is ask what each respondent thinks of “cultural opportunities” in the city of Rock Hill, whatever that term may mean to him or her. Citizen’s grades for Rock Hill with respect to cultural opportunities may be found in Figure 2.



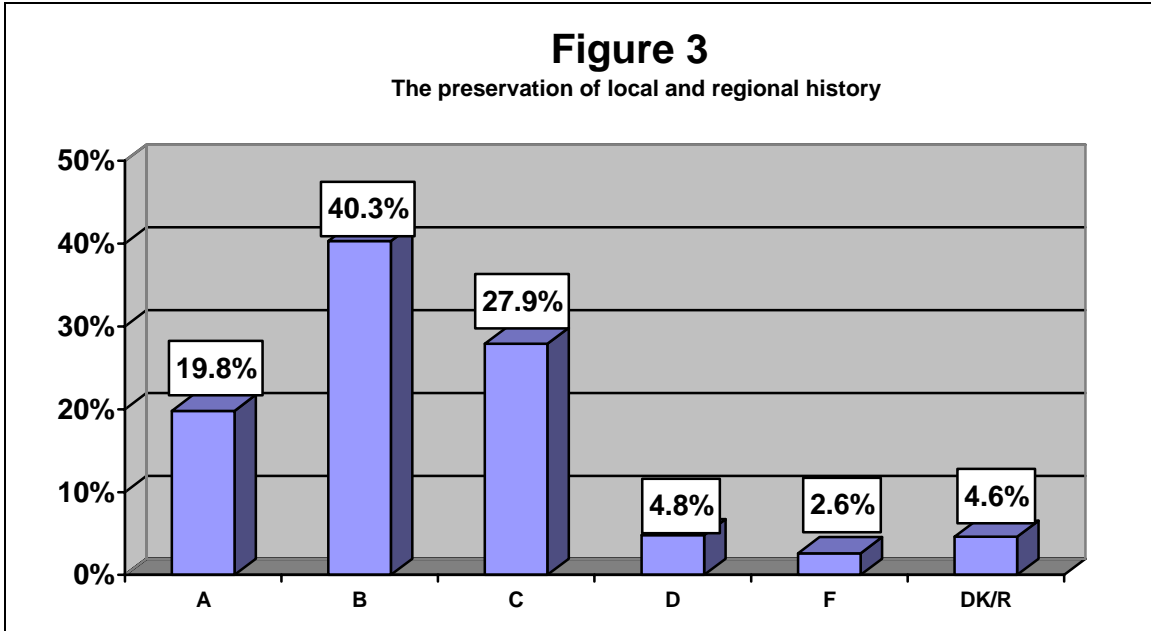
Rock Hill’s grade for cultural opportunities is a solid “C.” The bright side is that fewer than 9% of respondents gave the city “poor” or “failing” marks while nearly half (48.1%) gave the city “good” or “excellent” grades with respect to cultural opportunities. However, a modal grade of “C” demonstrates that the city as room for improvement.

Where might the city look to focus its efforts to move from good to great in the area of cultural opportunities? As is true with most difficult questions, there is no single easy

answer. As the city continues to focus on downtown redevelopment, and pursue aspects of its Old Town Master Plan, one might expect cultural opportunities to increase. For example, as the city continues to beautify downtown and attract new businesses, one might expect increased foot traffic and a vibrant nightlife. This, in turn, could increase attention to existing cultural opportunities such as the Center for the Arts, on Main Street. The planned expansion of the Museum of York County should bring added attention to regional cultural opportunities, as well

Turning to the “College Town” aspect of the Old Town Master Plan, a greater effort might be made by both the City of Rock Hill and Winthrop University to publicize the many opportunities to view art, hear music, and see plays on Winthrop’s campus that are open to the public. Further, local arts groups could be encouraged and their activities further publicized.

Rock Hill fared better on the preservation of local and regional history. Figure 3 displays respondents’ grades of the city on this issue. A substantial majority, 60.1%, gave the city a grade of “A” or “B.” This likely reflects not only the city’s more recent commitment to preserving history, but the long-time efforts of the city and county as well.

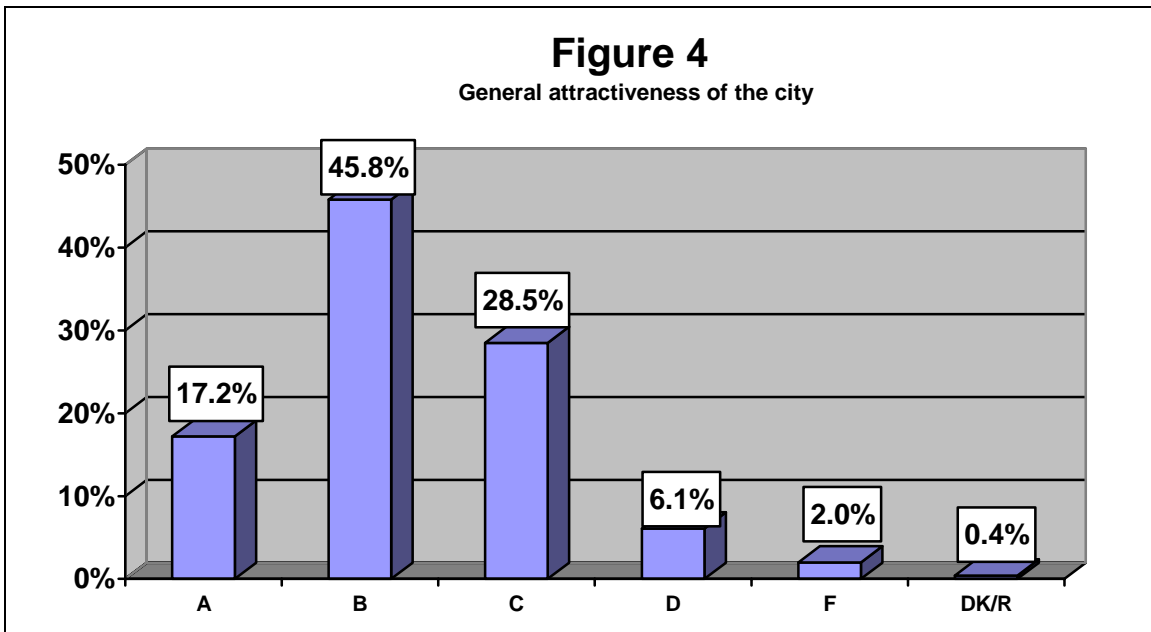


In addition to the Museum of York County, Historic Brattonsville, and a vibrant and active historical preservation society (Historic Rock Hill), development in Rock Hill, from the plans of the Economic Development Corporation in the early 1980s to the current Old Town Master Plan, has *always* made the preservation of local history a lynchpin of planning. One need look no further than current attempts to integrate history and economic growth in the development being planned in the textile corridor for an example. It seems clear from Figure 3 that Rock Hill residents are aware of these efforts and appreciate them.

Beauty and the Environment

Achieving aesthetic quality is a difficult task for a city. Often, beautification efforts have the forces of history, the economy, and personal choice working against them. History often dictates growth haphazardly with the fortunes of one area rising and falling out of sync with other areas of the city. The combination of economy and history in Rock Hill have contributed to some areas falling into disrepair. Examples of empty or burned out mills and deteriorating former mill villages may be found all over Rock Hill.

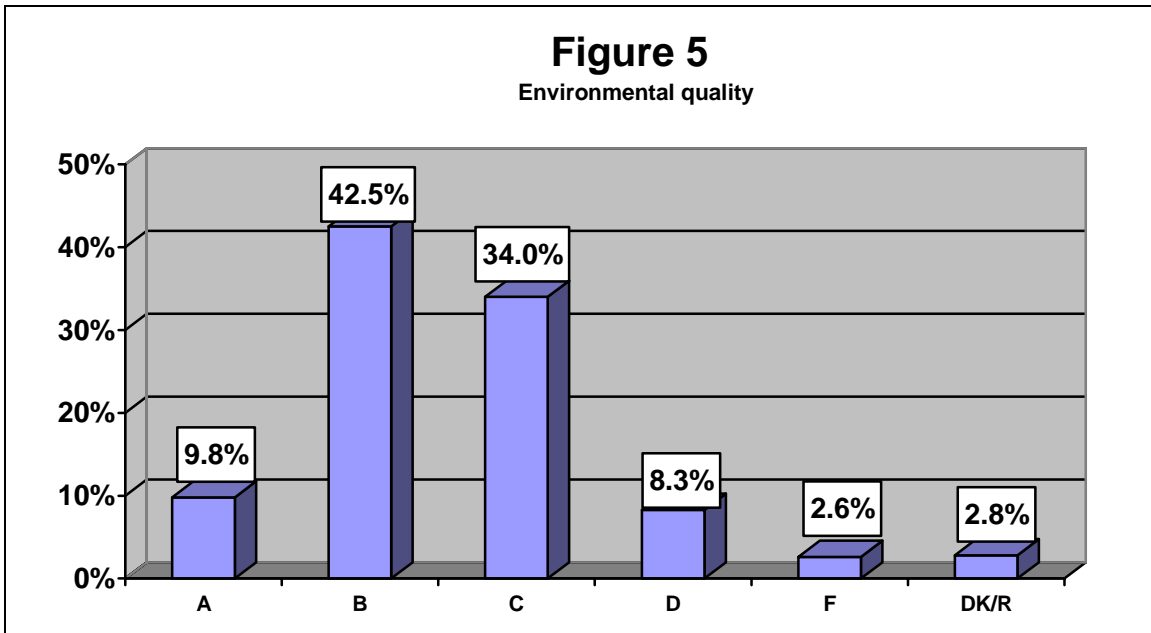
With this being the case, the grades for the “general attractiveness of the city” given to Rock Hill are a testament to the hard work of the city in this area. Figure 4 displays the responses when individuals were asked to grade the “general attractiveness of the city.”



A mere 8.1% of respondents gave the city poor or failing grades in this issue. The modal grade is a “B” and a powerful 63% of respondents gave the city a “good” or “excellent” grade.

I believe this represents an appreciation of the attention to aesthetics by the city as Rock Hill grows and changes. The Hagins-Fewell neighborhood is in line for beautification and redevelopment, including the razing of the long since burned Arcade Mill. The Highland Park Mill is being converted to low cost senior citizen housing. New “streetscape” is being put up in downtown. Cherry Road is undergoing an incredible transformation. Citizens seem to have clearly taken a long-view of beautification and greatly appreciate the work and planning of the city in this area.

Respondent attitudes toward “environmental quality,” however, are more mixed. Figure 5 displays respondents’ grades for Rock Hill on the issue of environmental quality. While the modal grade is still a “B,” there are fewer grades of “A” and a noticeable increase in the number of respondents who give Rock Hill a “fair” grade on environmental quality.



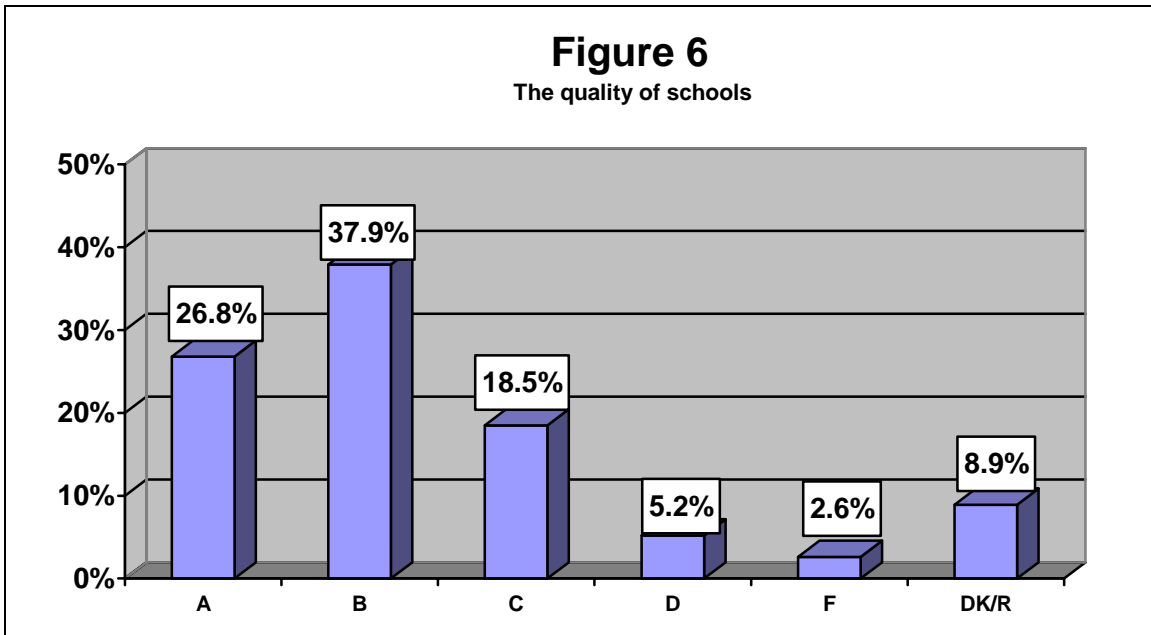
Environmental quality is an issue that our city and region have struggled with mightily. York County has been declared by the Environmental Protection Agency to be in “non-attainment” for air quality. Although the specific York County numbers were in

attainment, the county was lumped into the Charlotte metropolitan regional figures thus linking us to a “non-attainment” region. Perception of environmental quality in Rock Hill seems to be inexorably linked to pollution that remains beyond its control; namely, pollution produced by the Charlotte urban area.

Major sources of air and water pollution (and environmental degradation in general) include vehicle emissions and non-point source pollution (often in the form of run-off from paved or other impervious surfaces). According to the *2004 State of the Region Report: Central Carolinas Region* compiled by Voices & Choices of the Central Carolinas, Mecklenburg County, NC (Charlotte’s home county) has more maintained paved roads, more licensed drivers, greater population density, a larger percentage of impervious surfaces, and a greater number of identified ground water contamination sites than any other county in the region. It does not seem a stretch to argue that our proximity to this major urban center, while having many economic and cultural benefits, carries some environmental costs.

Children, Youth, and Families

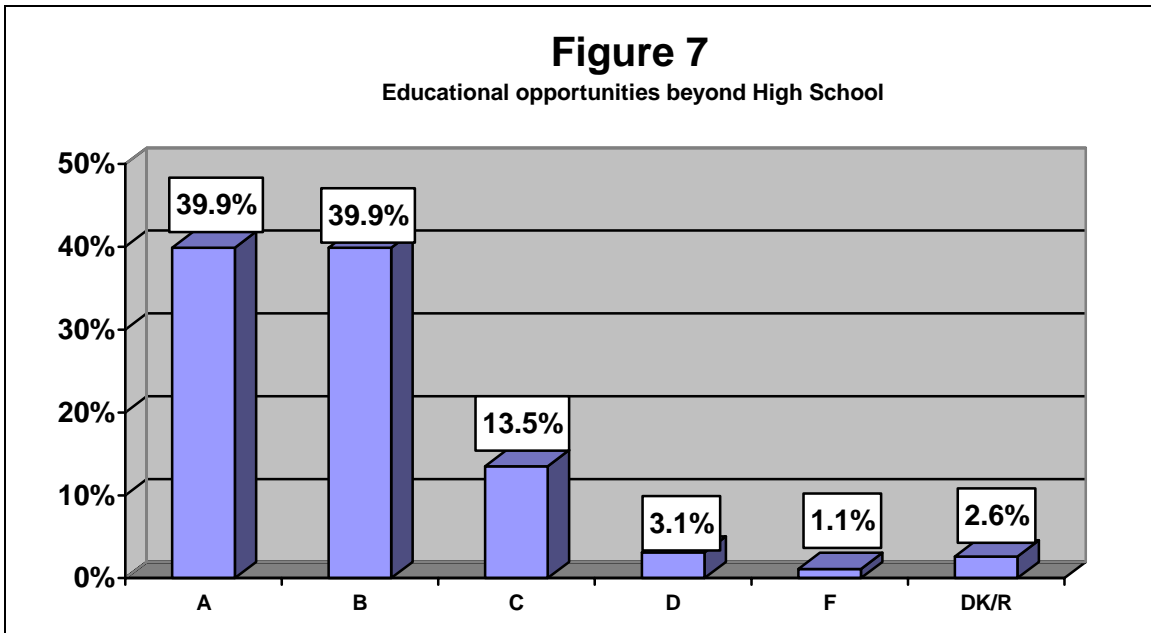
No city is livable that fails to create a safe, welcoming, and enjoyable environment for children youth and families. Children need opportunities to grow and learn and the city of Rock Hill shows a commitment to this mission through the Commission on Children and Youth. Further, educational opportunities and the quality of schools play a major part of this process. Figure 6 reports respondents’ grades of Rock Hill on the quality of schools.



Nearly two thirds of respondents gave Rock Hill a “good” or “excellent” grade on the quality of schools. A scant 7.8% negatively evaluated Rock Hill schools. One need only read the “report card” put out by the SC Department of Education to know that our schools offer an excellent learning environment. Much of the credit for this goes to Rock Hill School District Three for demanding excellence and trying innovative approaches.

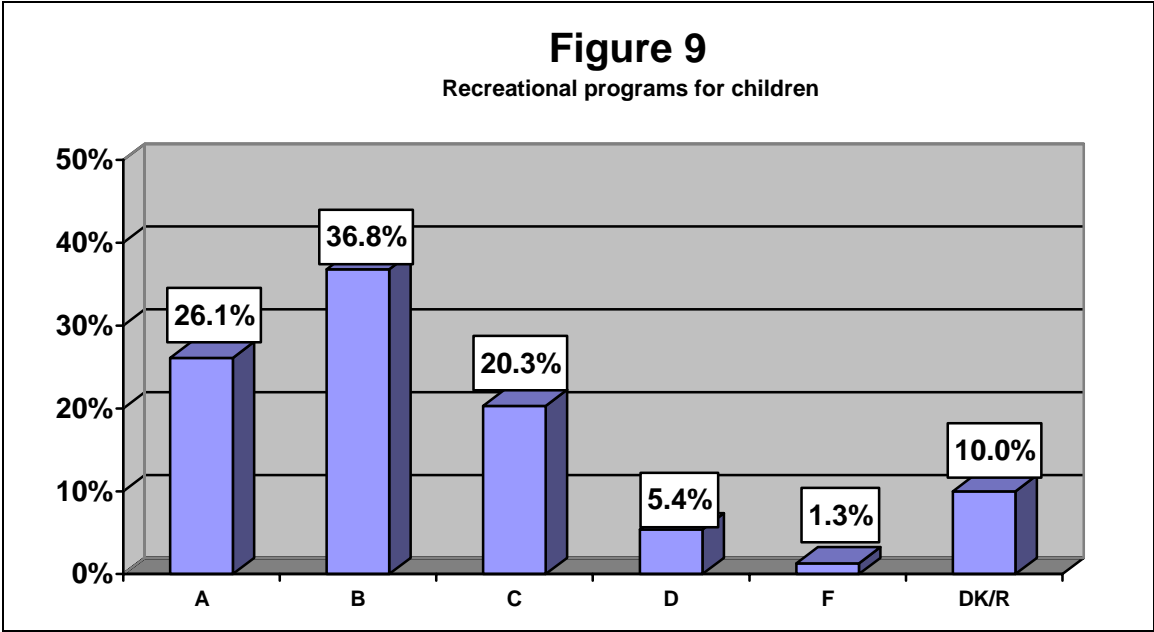
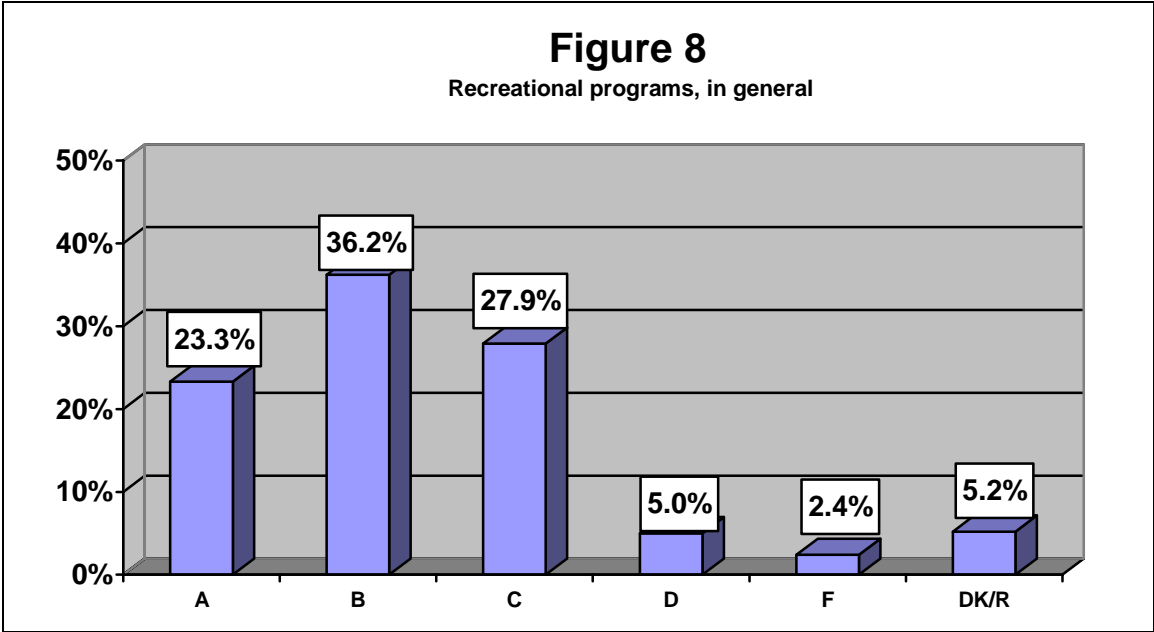
Educational opportunities do not end with high school, however. It is important to the educational health of a community, as well as its economic health, to offer educational

opportunities beyond high school. Figure 7 displays citizens' grades for the city on this issue.



The response is unequivocal. Nearly 80% of respondents give Rock Hill a “good” or “excellent” grade in this area. The reasons for this seem obvious: York Tech and Winthrop. Rock Hill is extremely fortunate to be the home to two outstanding learning institutions. York Tech is an institution on the cutting edge of technology and truly lives up to its motto, “You can go anywhere from here,” by preparing students to enter the workforce or other institutions of higher learning. I would also argue that York Tech is a major contributor to the economic health of Rock Hill. Although this report is being generated by a research arm of Winthrop University, I do not think it overtly displays bias to state that Rock Hill benefits from being the home to an institution that regularly receives national recognition for its commitment to excellence.

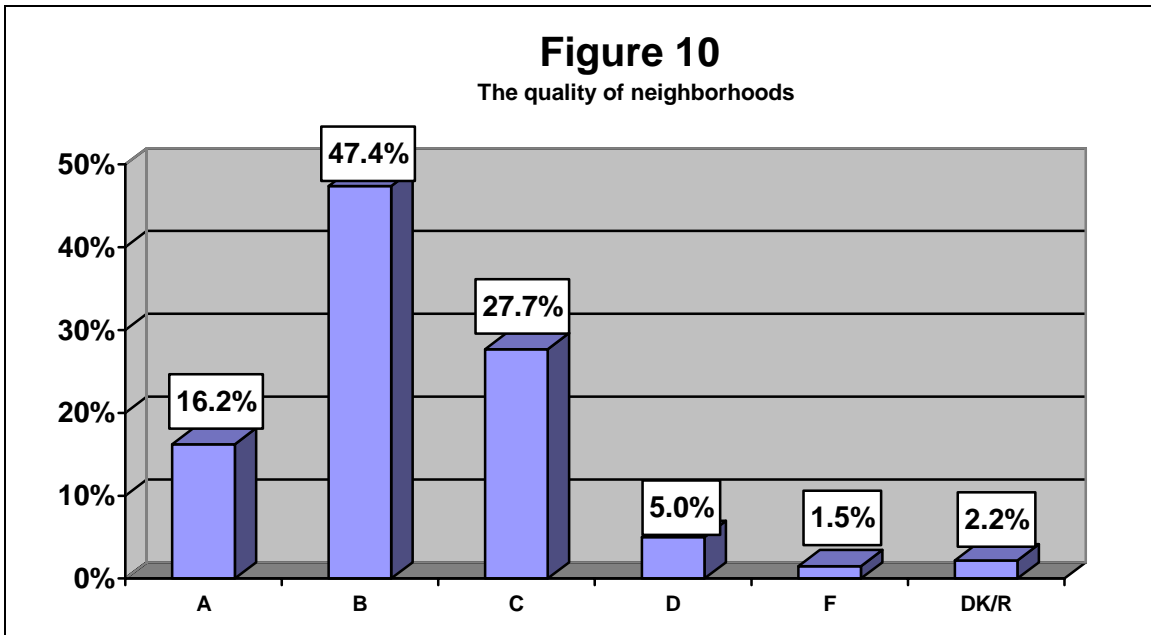
Another key aspect for livability for children, youth, and families is recreational opportunities. Figures 8 and 9 display respondents' grades of Rock Hill for recreational programs, in general, and recreational programs for children.



The modal grade for Rock Hill in both of these areas is “B.” Both areas receive “good” or “excellent” grades from roughly 60% of the population. I believe this is due to a

combination of efforts from public entities and private businesses in both Rock Hill and York County. In addition to many private companies offering recreational options, our area has an impressive collection of public areas, parks, and programs administered by local government entities.

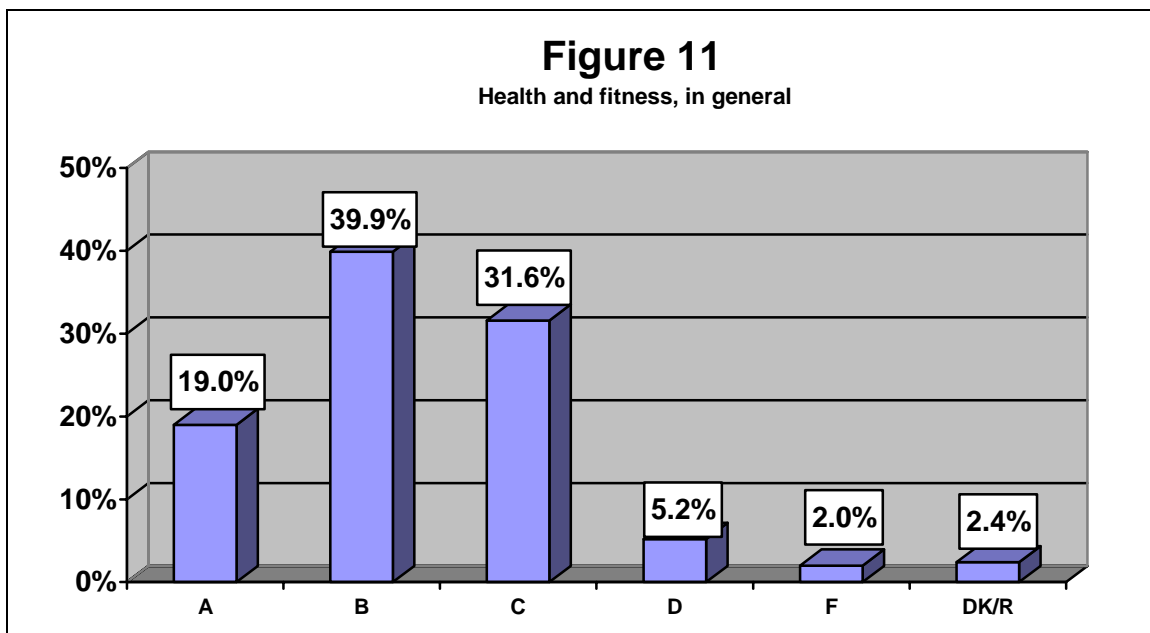
Finally, healthy families need healthy neighborhoods. Figure 10 reports citizens' grades for Rock Hill with respect to the quality of neighborhoods.



Nearly half of the respondents gave Rock Hill a “good” grade on the quality of neighborhoods and over 60% gave Rock Hill an excellent or good, collectively. That a mere 6.5% gave a grade of “poor” or “failing” is a testament not only to government institutions such as Neighborhood Empowerment, but to the city’s general efforts and future plans to strengthen and revitalize the neighborhoods of Rock Hill.

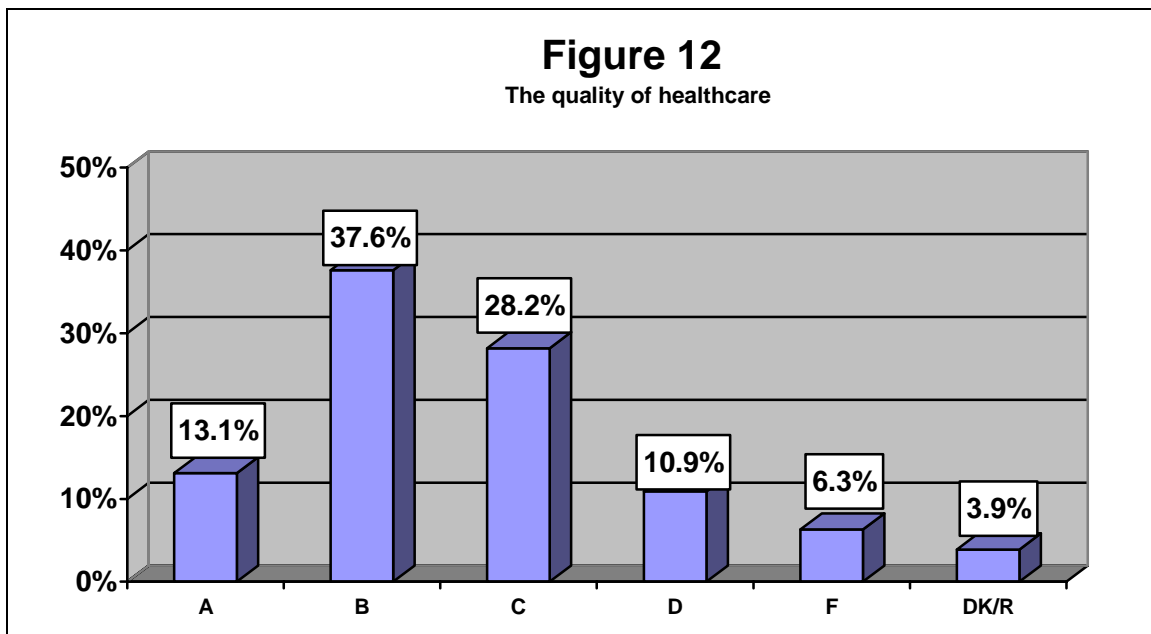
Health and Fitness

Is Rock Hill a healthy city? This is a tough question to answer because it is extremely subjective in nature. What makes a city “healthy?” Objective measures are hard to come by and detailed lifestyle questions would have been beyond the scope of this study. However, we can get a subjective snapshot by asking residents to grade Rock Hill on “health and fitness, in general,” as they interpret those concepts. Figure 11 shows respondents grades of Rock Hill with respect to health and fitness, in general.



The modal grade on this issue is “B,” and nearly 60% gave Rock Hill a “good” or “excellent” grade on health and fitness, in general. It should be noted, however, that the proportion giving Rock Hill a grade of merely “fair” is approaching one-third. Whether this truly reflects perceptions of the health and fitness of the people of Rock Hill, or is simply a reflection of the growing waistline of the country, cannot be determined here. Perhaps it is noteworthy that in this era of expanding waistbands, Rock Hill scored so well with roughly three-fifths of the respondents giving Rock Hill an “A” or a “B.”

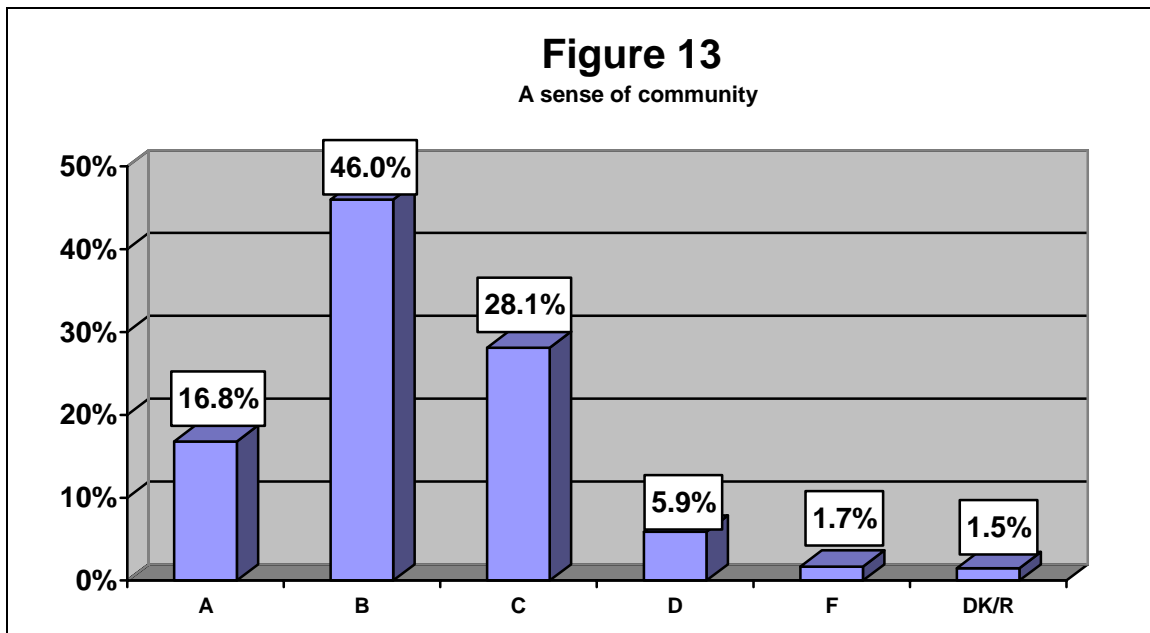
The next obvious issue relating to the general health of a city is the quality of healthcare available in that city. Rock Hill has no shortage of physicians from a myriad of specialties, a 288 bed hospital (Piedmont Medical Center), a 40 bed rehabilitation hospital (HealthSouth Rehab Hospital), and close proximity to the plethora of world-class facilities in Charlotte. Even so, respondents’ grades for the quality of healthcare in Rock Hill, while generally positive, were slightly more mixed than some of the other indicators we have reported upon thus far. Figure 12 displays respondents’ grades for Rock Hill with regard to the quality of healthcare.



Just over 50% gave Rock Hill a “good” or “excellent” grade for the quality of healthcare. That half the populations believes healthcare is good or excellent is certainly something to be pleased with, as is a modal grade of “B;” however, we must note that over 45% gave healthcare in Rock Hill a “fair,” “poor,” or “failing” grade. We can take some comfort in the fact the fewer than 1 in 5 respondents gave healthcare in Rock Hill a “D” or “F.”

Human Relations

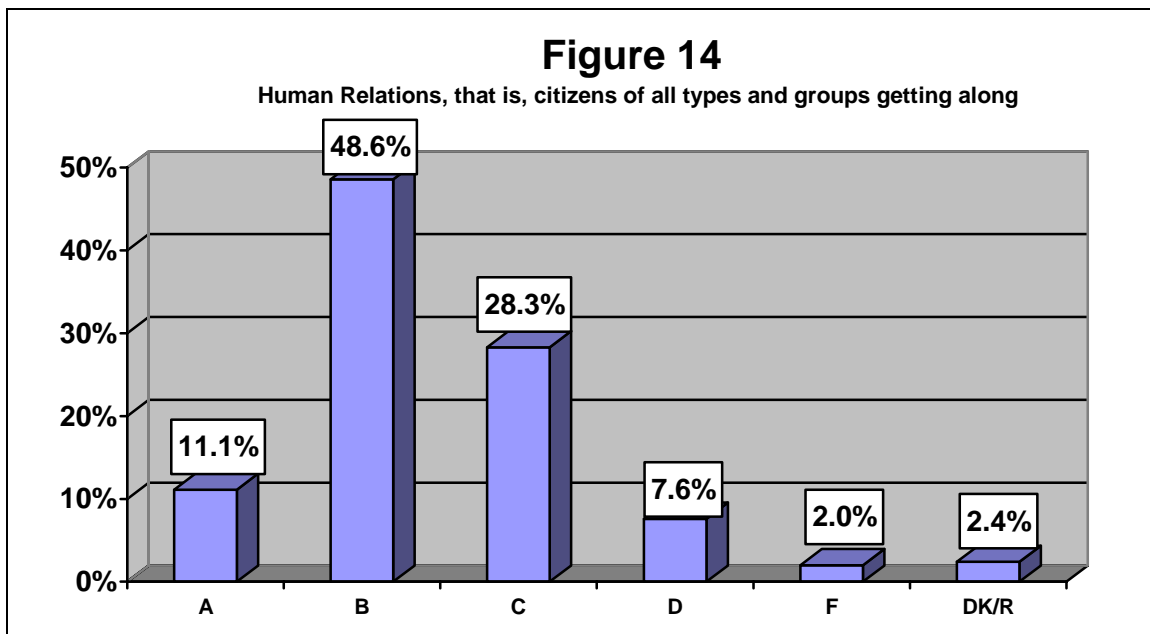
“And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). Likewise a community marked by deep divisions between its people will have a difficult time growing and prospering. Rock Hill has overcome many great divides among her citizens over her history from the rough and tumble frontier atmosphere of some of her streets early in her history to the struggling death throes of Jim Crow to the path toward development in the wake of a waning textile economy. Through all of this adversity, has Rock Hill been able to maintain a sense of community among her residents? The vast majority of those polled answer, “yes.” Figure 13 asked Rock Hill residents to grade the city on its sense of community. Over sixty percent of respondents graded Rock Hill as “good” or “excellent.” Fewer than eight percent gave the city “poor” or “failing” marks.



A “sense of community” is often a hallmark of small southern towns, but with a population estimated to be in excess of 56,000 by the U.S. Census Bureau as of July 2003, Rock Hill hardly qualifies as a “small town.” (Note: because of South Carolina’s unique

annexation laws, the legal boundaries of the city hardly match the “effective” limits of the city; therefore, the “effective” population of Rock Hill is even higher than the Census Bureau projections.) That so many citizens recognize a sense of community is a testament to the people and leaders of Rock Hill.

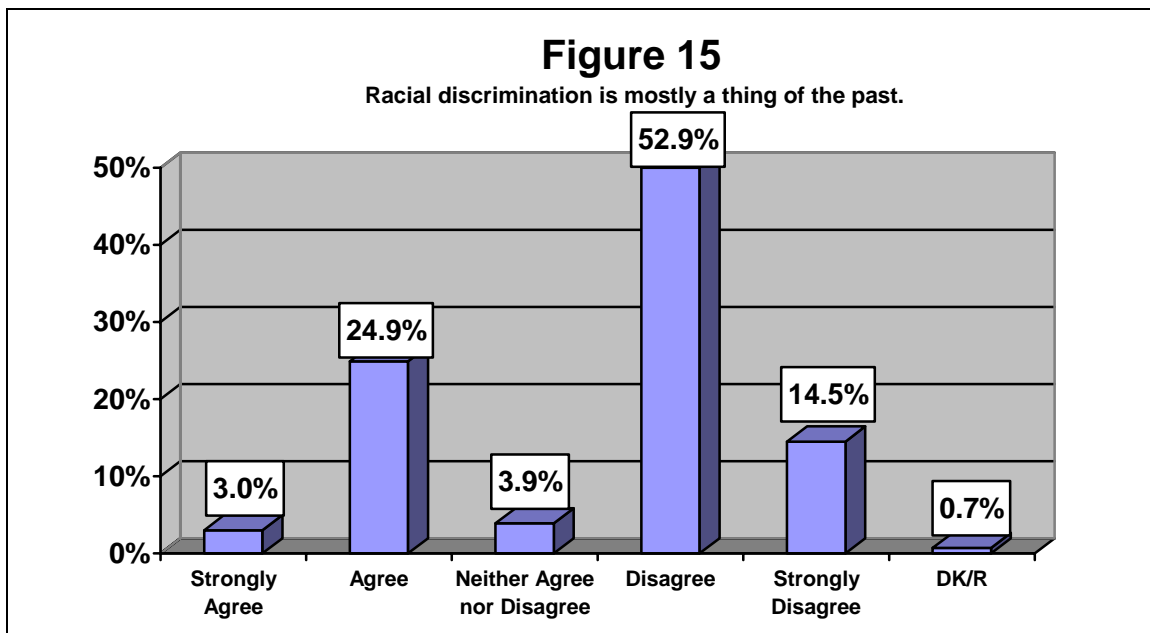
Is this sense of community matched by individual relationships among the citizens of Rock Hill? According to Figure 14, it is. Nearly 60% of respondents gave Rock Hill an “A” or a “B” on the issue of human relations. “Human relations” was defined for the respondents as “citizens of all types and groups getting along.”



This positive result is hardly unexpected. Rock Hill has worked very hard to foster positive relations among her citizens. This issue is of such great importance to the city that a Committee on Human Relations was created to “promote positive human relations and reduce discrimination.” Although the name and scope have evolved, this committee has been working on human relations in Rock Hill for nearly a quarter of a century.

Much of the focus of the Committee on Human Relations, as well as the No Room for Racism Committee is on racial harmony. Rock Hill has truly grown as a city from the dark days of Jim Crow and the struggles of desegregation to a city that currently bills itself as having “No Room for Racism.” Nowhere is this growth more evident than when we compare citizens’ grades of *Rock Hill* on issues of human relations to their view of racism in *American society as a whole*.

Figure 15 displays the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Racial discrimination is mostly a thing of the past.”

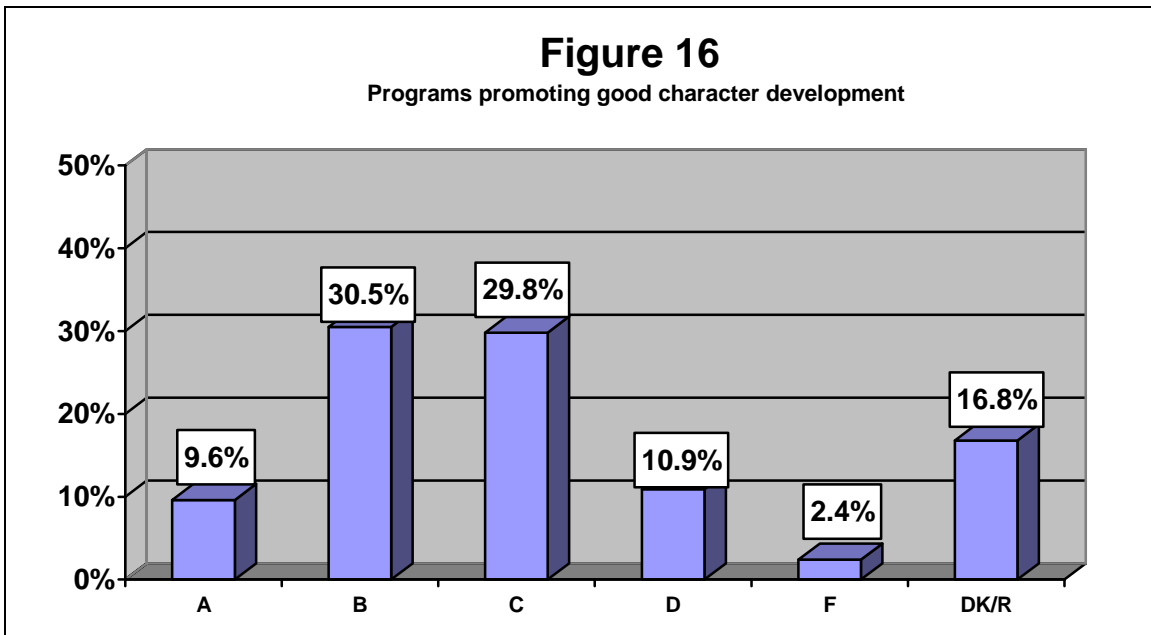


Over two-thirds of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that racial discrimination is a thing of the past for our country. Despite a general pessimistic look on race relations for our country, Rock Hill’s citizens had positive views of human relations for our city. Every city should make a continuing effort to improve the relationships between her citizens. Rock Hill appears to be on a successful path toward this goal.

Learning and Character Building

A dynamic city such as Rock Hill must never stop striving to improve the nature and character for both the city and her citizens. To that end, Rock Hill offers several programs that promote and encourage good character development. These include several programs through the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (Rock Hill Rocks, environmental programs, Climb the Rock, The Merry Pranksters, Trailblazers) as well as programs such as Rolling in Rock Hill and Trees for Rock Hill. Additionally the Commission on Children and Youth takes as its stated mission to “establish volunteer advisory committees to explore programs and services for children preschool through 12th grade.”

It is obvious that the city works diligently to create programs that promote good character development. However, it is less clear that the public understands, or is even aware of, these programs. Figure 16 presents respondents’ grades for Rock Hill regarding “programs promoting good character development.”

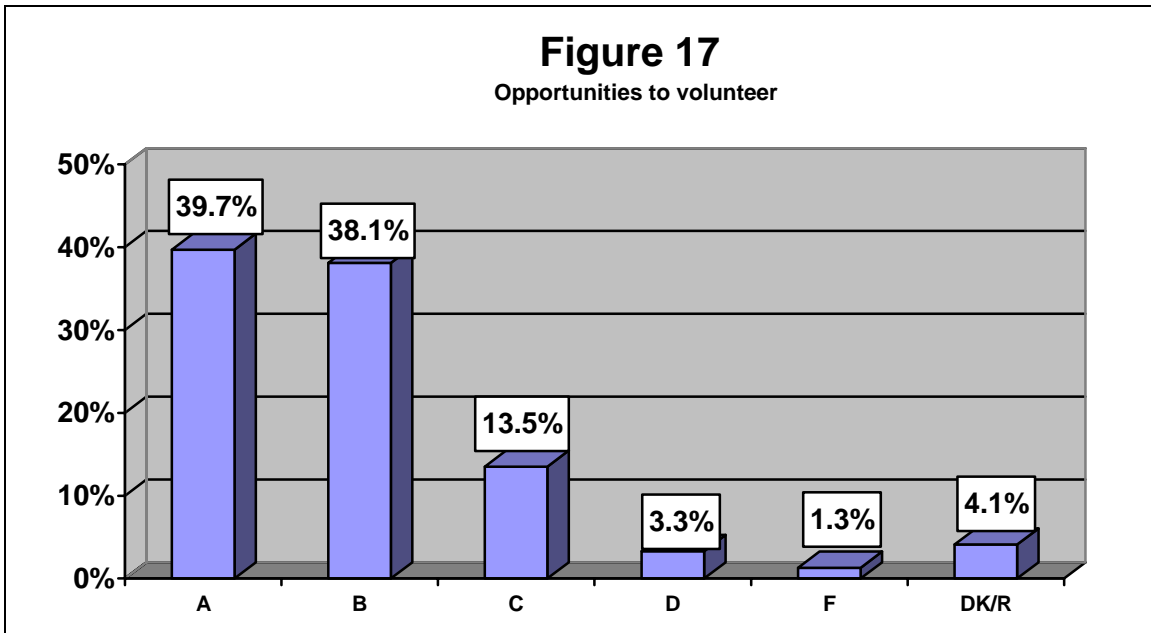


There is no clear modal category as the percentage of respondents giving Rock Hill a “B” is within the margin of error for those giving Rock Hill a grade of “C.” I believe this represents a lack of familiarity with the concept of programs that promote character development as well as a lack of awareness of specific character development programs offered by Rock Hill. In addition to the lack of a clear pattern, I believe evidence for this lack of awareness may be found by noting how many respondents chose to answer Don’t Know” or “Refused.” This question garnered the highest percentage of “don’t know” for any of the areas under examination. Despite the significant number of programs promoting good character development offered by the city of Rock Hill, the city clearly needs to raise the visibility of these programs to promote awareness of them among the public.

Volunteering and Service

After viewing respondent evaluations of community, human relations, and programs of character development, the next logical step might be an examination of “volunteerism” in Rock Hill. There are two sides of volunteering. First, there must be opportunities to volunteer. Second, there must be a willingness among citizens to volunteer. This being the case, the story regarding volunteering for Rock Hill is mixed.

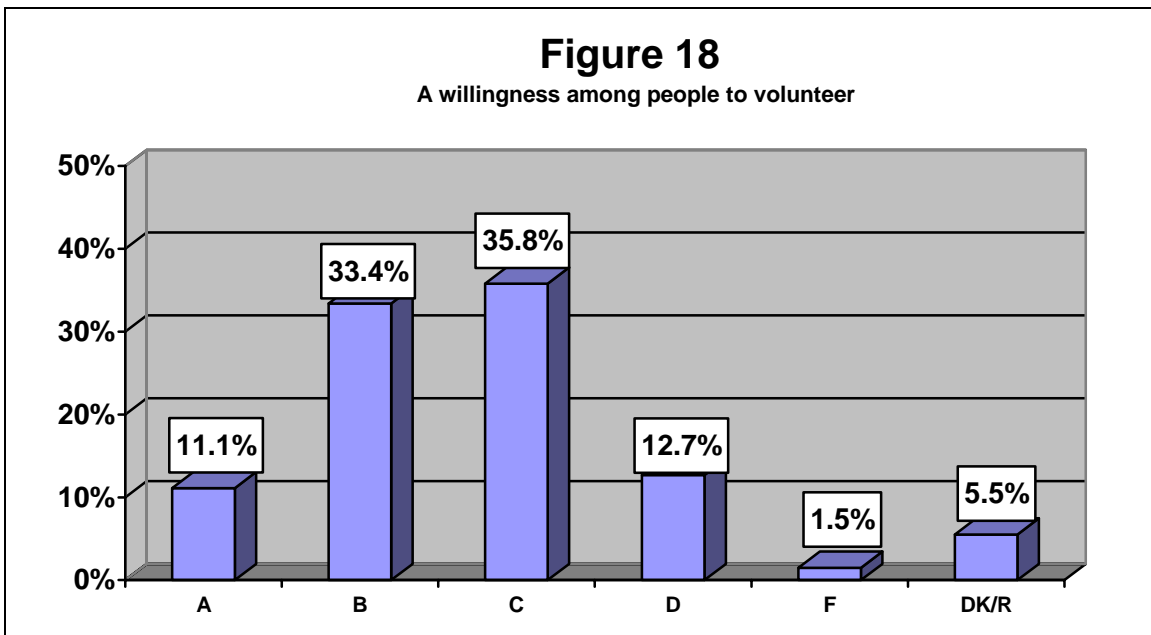
On the one hand, as Figure 17 demonstrates, respondents gave Rock Hill *extraordinary* marks for “opportunities to volunteer.” Although it is within the margin of error, the modal grade for the city on this issue is an “A.” This is the only issue, across all areas, for which this is the case. An astounding 77.8% of respondents gave Rock Hill a “good” or “excellent” grade regarding opportunities to volunteer.



Respondents may be unaware of Rock Hill’s many character development programs, but they are clearly aware of the many opportunities to volunteer (public, private, and non-

profit) available in Rock Hill. However, respondents do not seem to believe that their fellow citizens are taking full advantage of those opportunities.

Figure 18 presents respondents grades of Rock Hill with respect to “a willingness among people to volunteer.” Although bordering the margin of error, the modal grade on this issue is a “C,” or “fair.” Obviously, the fact that 69.2% gave Rock Hill a “Good” or “fair” grade demonstrates that Rock Hill is *not* judged as failing on this issue. However, there is clear room for improvement.



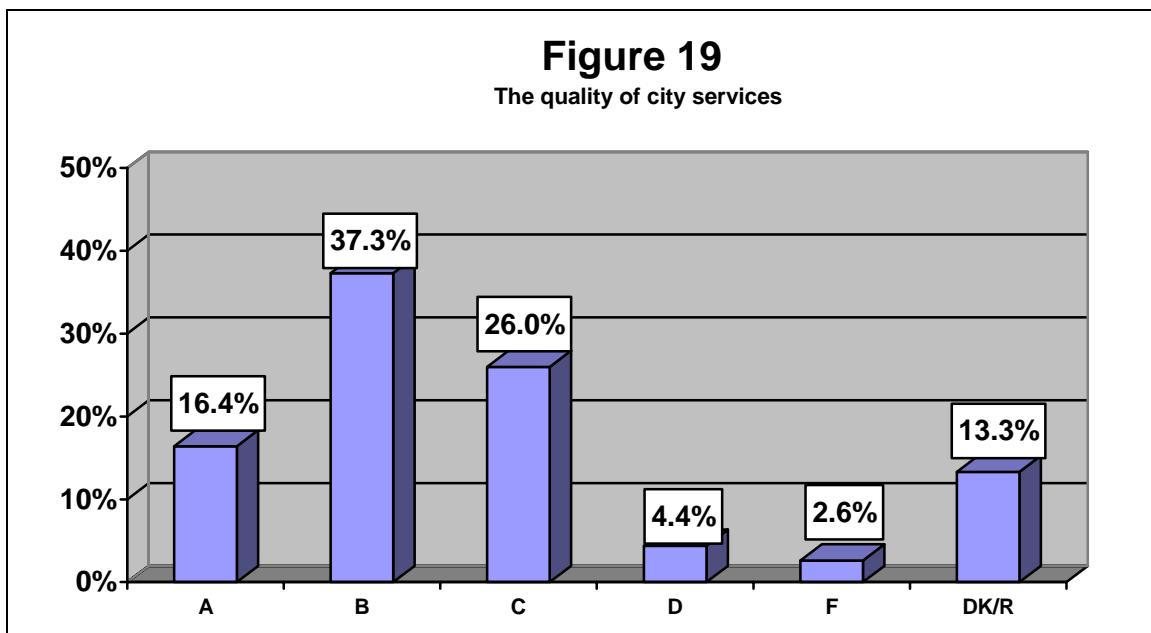
Although many of the city committees and commissions state the promotion of volunteering as part of their mission, it seems evident that these efforts are not sufficient to promote greater willingness to take advantage of Rock Hill’s numerous volunteering opportunities. All committees and commissions seeking to promote volunteerism should reevaluate their efforts. The city might consider some type of highly visible Volunteer Task Force to promote and increase a spirit of volunteerism among the citizens of Rock Hill.

Conclusion

This report tells the story of a very livable city. Rock Hill has been judged by her residents across seven areas identified as key livability concerns: 1) Arts, Culture, and History; 2) Beauty and the Environment; 3) Children, Youth, and Families; 4) Health and Fitness; 5) Human Relations; 6) Learning and Character Building; 7) Volunteering and Service. Although some areas, noted in the analysis above, indicate that there is still room for growth and improvement. Rock Hill should be proud of the living environment offered to her citizens as judged by *their* grades of the city across these areas. As Rock Hill continues in the struggle for economic development and growth, the city should be aided in this quest by the findings that Rock Hill offers a livable city with community-focused priorities.

City Services

A true and fair evaluation of city services requires a detailed analysis of particular services that focuses on the evaluation of these services controlling for familiarity and frequency of use. Such an analysis was far beyond the scope of this study. However, it seemed logical to get a quick, if imprecise, snapshot of citizen evaluation of city services, in general. Figure 19 reports respondents' grades for "the quality of city services" for Rock Hill.



There appears to be general satisfaction with city services. More respondents gave the city a grade of "B," or "good," than any other. Additionally, a majority, 53.7%, gave the city a "good" or "excellent" grade for city services, in general. While no specific inferences about any city service in particular may be inferred from this, it appears that the city government is doing a more than adequate job of serving its constituents.

General Quality of Life Issues

The following table and graphs include information that may be relevant to livability issues, but the scope of which lies outside the parameters for the study suggested by the Mayor’s office. These are presented without interpretation since their analysis falls outside of the scope of this project. Nonetheless, the information presented in Table 1 and Figures 20-26 may offer valuable insight to city leaders and decision makers. Figures 20 and 21 asked respondents whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statements indicated. Figures 22-26 used the common “grading scales” above and asked respondents to grade Rock Hill on the issues indicated.

Response	%
Most of the time	29.5
Some of the time	34.7
Only now and then	19.3
Hardly at all	16.1
Don't know/Refused	0.4

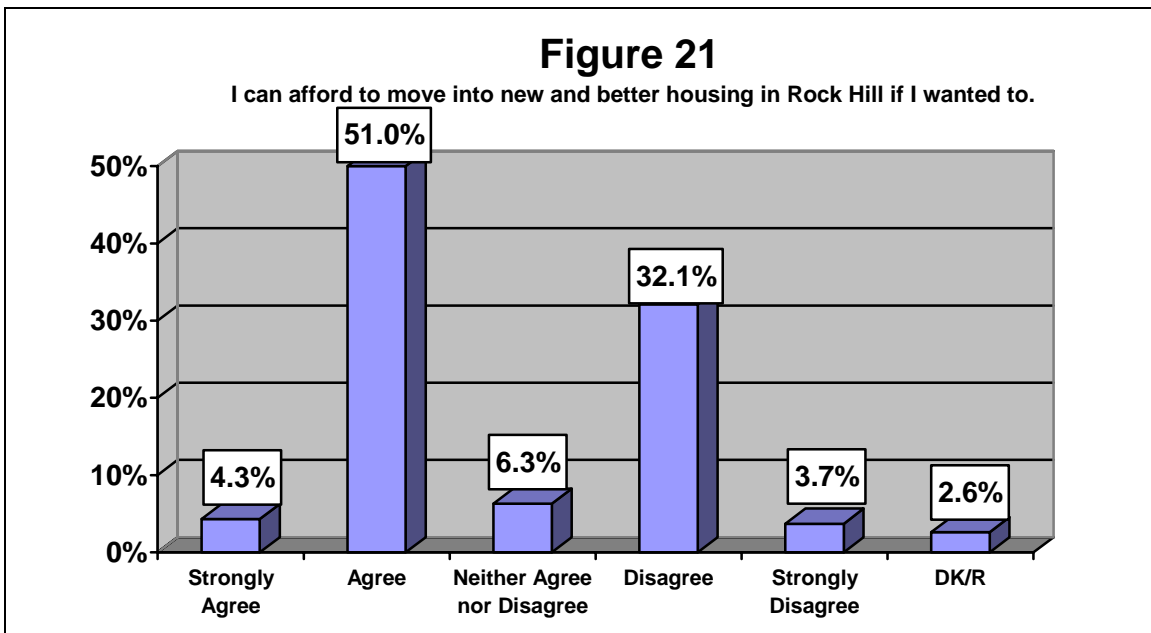
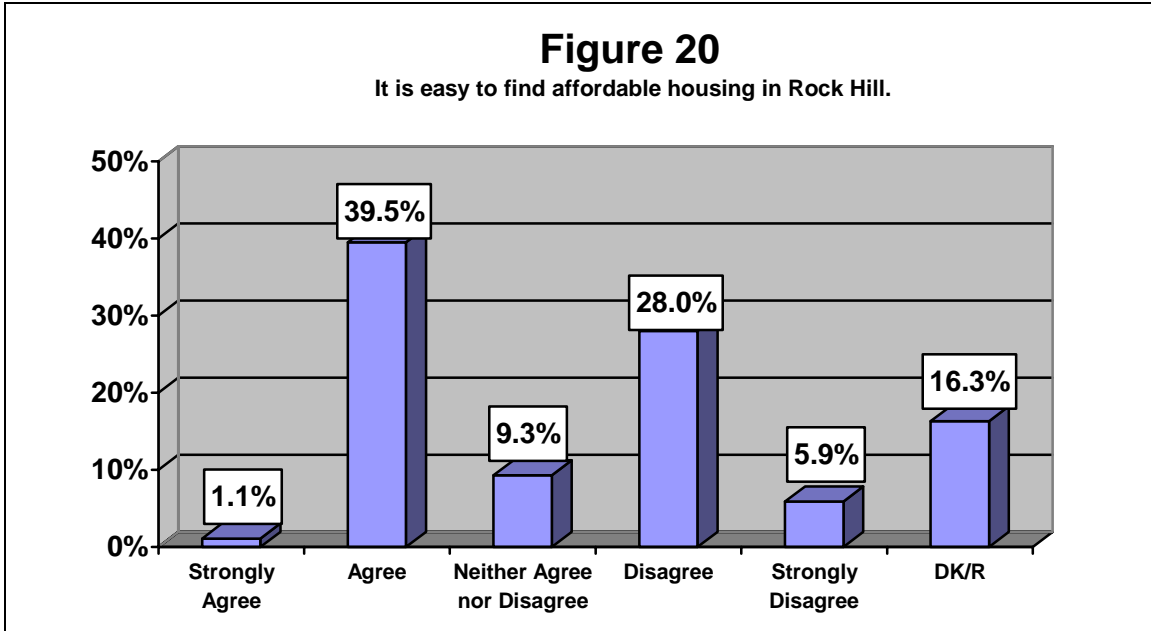


Figure 22

The cost of living

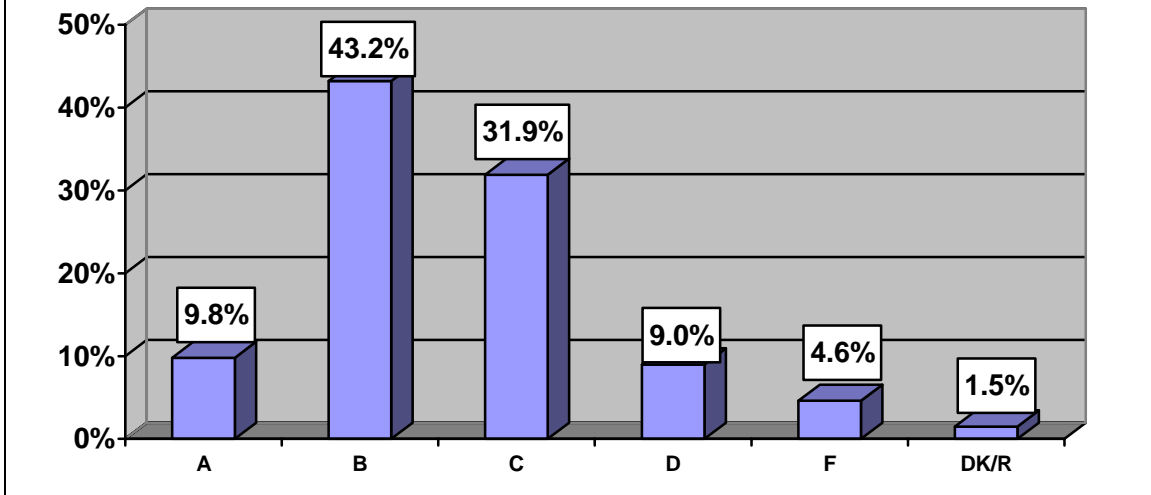


Figure 23

Employment opportunities

