



MUSKOGEE THRIVING PROJECT MUSKOGEE, OKLAHOMA

THRIVING CITIES LAB
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN CULTURE



THRIVING CITIES LAB

1050
Forward



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MUSKOGEE THRIVING PROJECT

MUSKOGEE, OKLAHOMA

THRIVING CITIES LAB
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN CULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

1050 FORWARD

Phase One Report
03.2026



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1 • MUSKOGEE THRIVING PROJECT PHASE ONE

1.1: Executive Summary

The Muskogee Thriving Project (MTP) is an initiative of the Thriving Cities Lab at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia in collaboration with 1050 Forward. The Thriving Cities Lab works from the Civic Endowment Framework and its six classical and contemporary “civic endowments,” an interpretive and analytical approach to well-being and contemporary community life developed through fifteen years of research and study in partnership with pilot cities and research sites across the country.

PROCESS

We chose Muskogee as a national pilot city because of its work with the 1050 Forward project, working through a leadership structure already in place. We introduced the Civic Endowment Framework at convenings in Muskogee on November 9, 2025, with more than 45 Muskogee leaders in attendance representing all six of the endowment areas. At these initial meetings, we asked participants to evaluate their city and their role in helping it thrive. This effort was organized by Muskogee’s 1050 Forward Fellows, Eric Wells (project liaison), Earnie Gilder, Keith Harlin, and Kimberly Williams. We administered a civic capacity survey at our initial convenings and followed up with our “stakeholder survey,” which received 29 responses. After the November convening, the Thriving Cities Lab undertook project research on Muskogee and its institutions and, when the survey was completed on December 31, analyzed the survey data with key findings included below. The data team during this period reviewed and compiled publicly accessible data and reports comparing Muskogee to similarly-sized small communities in Oklahoma and across the U.S.

The purpose of Phase One is to introduce the leaders of a community to the Civic Endowment framework and to establish a baseline for its thriving, to capture a sense of how the community sees and values its own categories of The True, The Good, The Beautiful, The Just & Well-ordered, The Prosperous, and The Sustainable. Because the framework provides new language and new ways of bringing together the city’s institutions and leaders, it enables unlikely connections and new opportunities for collaboration and the identification of overlapping interests. This Phase One Report focuses on the endowment of The True, with particular emphasis on questions related to the well-being of youth including educational opportunities, transportation, and mental health, before presenting limited information on the other five endowments.

A key feature of our reporting model is the reliance on the voices of leaders in Muskogee so each endowment summary features quotations from selected open-ended survey responses, lightly edited for clarity and without attribution.

THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM OUR RESEARCH INCLUDE:

Economic development—keeping the momentum going (The Prosperous): Muskogee’s economic development trend has been overwhelmingly positive. In 2022, it ranked in the top five in the state of Oklahoma for capital investment. By 2024, it reached number one, with nearly \$4.1 billion in investments announced. According to some respondents, Muskogee’s continued success will depend on the ability of three key entities—the City of Muskogee, the County of Muskogee and the Muskogee City-County Port Authority—to level-up their intergovernmental communication and strategic coordination.

Public health—a mixed assessment (The Sustainable): There is a tension between the perceived quality of health care services available in Muskogee and the poor quality, overall, of public health. This disconnect between health care and health outcomes is not unique to Muskogee; it is a phenomenon experienced by many communities in the U.S. Without reducing the health care community’s ability to address acute and chronic illness, the community needs a decisive shift toward prevention. This, in turn, requires access to healthy food and to recreational opportunities. Relevant to this issue, the survey results highlighted the lack of walking and biking infrastructure and the need for more parks and recreational facilities and more strategic use and activation of facilities that exist.

Need to reclaim the community’s trust (The Just & Well-Ordered): There were several comments about a persistent lack of trust in community leaders. Community trust deficits do not emerge overnight; rather, they accrue over a significant amount of time. For community leaders trying hard to improve trust, addressing the legacy of distrust can feel like swimming upstream. Nevertheless, a serious commitment to improving communication and transparency can, over time, move the needle. Focusing on trust-building is critical for Muskogee, because ability to tackle challenges requires maximum community support, which depends on increased public confidence.

Significant aesthetic improvements on an otherwise uneven landscape (The Beautiful): It is not the case that Muskogee lacks noteworthy landmarks or beautiful public spaces; indeed, Honor Heights Park is a civic gem, and additions to the downtown such as Depot Green have significantly enhanced the city’s aesthetic appeal. Nonetheless, many respondents expressed concern that vast swaths of aging and deteriorating housing stock overshadow these positive assets.

Strive to ensure shared prosperity (The Prosperous): Many respondents acknowledged the city’s success in the area of economic development; however, the perception among a sizeable portion of the community is that these new enterprises have failed to benefit enough people. Stubborn inequality—a perceived lack of shared prosperity—has somewhat muted the positive impact of new development.

1.2: Overview of Project and Conceptual Framework

The Thriving Cities Lab is an extension of the thought and work of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, founded by cultural sociologist James Davison Hunter. The Muskogee Thriving Project builds upon the ambitious, interdisciplinary, multi-million-dollar research infrastructure of the Thriving Cities Lab, and benefits from its deep bank of research assets.

The basis of the Thriving Cities approach is a broadly humanistic and dynamic approach to civic life. We start from the premise that each city can be described in terms of an array of different but fundamental endowments—in this case, they are moral, intellectual, aesthetic, economic, political, and natural. These endowments include the three classical ideals—The Good, The True, and The Beautiful—to which we join three additional categories—The Prosperous, The Just & Well-Ordered, and The Sustainable. We call these civic “endowments” because, like financial endowments, they can grow over long periods of time and may be depleted by mismanagement or neglect.

To effect movement toward cultural change requires a small group of leaders from each of these endowments, working with a common vocabulary and shared goals. The groups most successful in effecting such changes are characterized by deep, cross-endowment collaboration, frequent discussion, and early-stage agreement on benchmarks and long-term goals. Leaders engaged in such collaborative initiatives reinforce complementary missions and benefit from overlapping concerns, solving mutually agreed upon civic problems together.

The Thriving Cities Lab brings together external data and historical sources, draws upon the wisdom of community stakeholders, and then advises lead partners to evaluate the strengths and challenges, consider how the endowments interact, identify new solutions to commonly understood problems, and build new coalitions for human flourishing in the community.

Using this conceptual framework, this study engaged community leaders from all spheres of civic life to reflect on Muskogee’s progress in each of these endowments and to contribute to a collective and holistic definition of community success. In so doing, these leaders could see their work and their city through a new lens, the first step in moving beyond the limitations of the status quo and creating together the conditions for their city to thrive in the future.

1.3: Muskogee Thriving Project Team

Dr. Scott Roulier (project lead) is Co-Director of the Thriving Cities Lab and a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. He is author of *Shaping American Democracy: Landscapes and Urban Design* and *Kantian Virtue at the Intersection of Politics and Nature: The Vale of Soul-Making*. Roulier received his PhD in Politics from the University of Virginia.

Dr. Ty Buckman (project organizer) serves as Co-Director of the Thriving Cities Lab and Director and Senior Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. A former provost and professor of English, Buckman has served as a strategic planning consultant and accreditation peer reviewer at more than thirty colleges and universities across the U.S. He holds a PhD in English Renaissance Literature from the University of Virginia.

Sherese Chee Mook (project consultant) is Assistant Director of the Thriving Cities Lab. A multidisciplinary professional with a strong academic foundation and a track record of impact at the intersection of civic innovation, human development, and strategic leadership, With deep experience as a business consultant, corporate trainer and advisor to C-suite executives across multinational companies and financial institutions, Sherese brings a globally informed, systems-thinking approach to building thriving institutions and communities. She is a MEXT and DFID scholar with multiple degrees, including a BA, MA, LLM and MBA.

Dr. Ed Hasecke (data team lead) is a political scientist in Washington, DC and the Dean and Executive Director of the Lutheran College Washington Consortium. He previously served as Professor of Political Science and Director of the Hagen Center for Civic and Urban Engagement at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, where he led the development of a community data repository and dashboard as a campus-city joint venture. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Ohio State University.

Dr. Brendan Connell (survey design) is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Lyon College. He is an expert on comparative political economy, and his research on migration and public opinion has appeared in multiple academic journals. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Colorado at Boulder and an MA from American University in D.C.

Caroline Daniel (project manager) has had leadership roles in several social service agencies and non-profits in greater Atlanta, where she is also active on the boards of school, community, and church groups. She received her BA in Social Rehabilitation Services and Psychology from Assumption University.

Kristen Evangelista (project researcher) is a freelance writer and researcher based in New Jersey. She has a background in curation, arts administration, and grant writing, and received an MA in Curatorial Studies from Bard College.

Branner Graphic Design (production design) is a Charlottesville-based graphic design firm responsible for all Thriving Cities Lab branding and design, as well as the editing and production of all city-specific reports. Owner, Beth Branner Gore, holds a bachelor of fine arts degree with a concentration in graphic design from James Madison University.

Dr. Taylor Hafley (demographer) is the Applied Demographer at the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Taylor's demographic research and data analysis supports state agencies and local governments as a part of the Workforce and Economic Development division. Among his projects, Taylor partners with the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget to produce county-state population projections. Hafley holds his PhD in Geography from the University of Georgia.

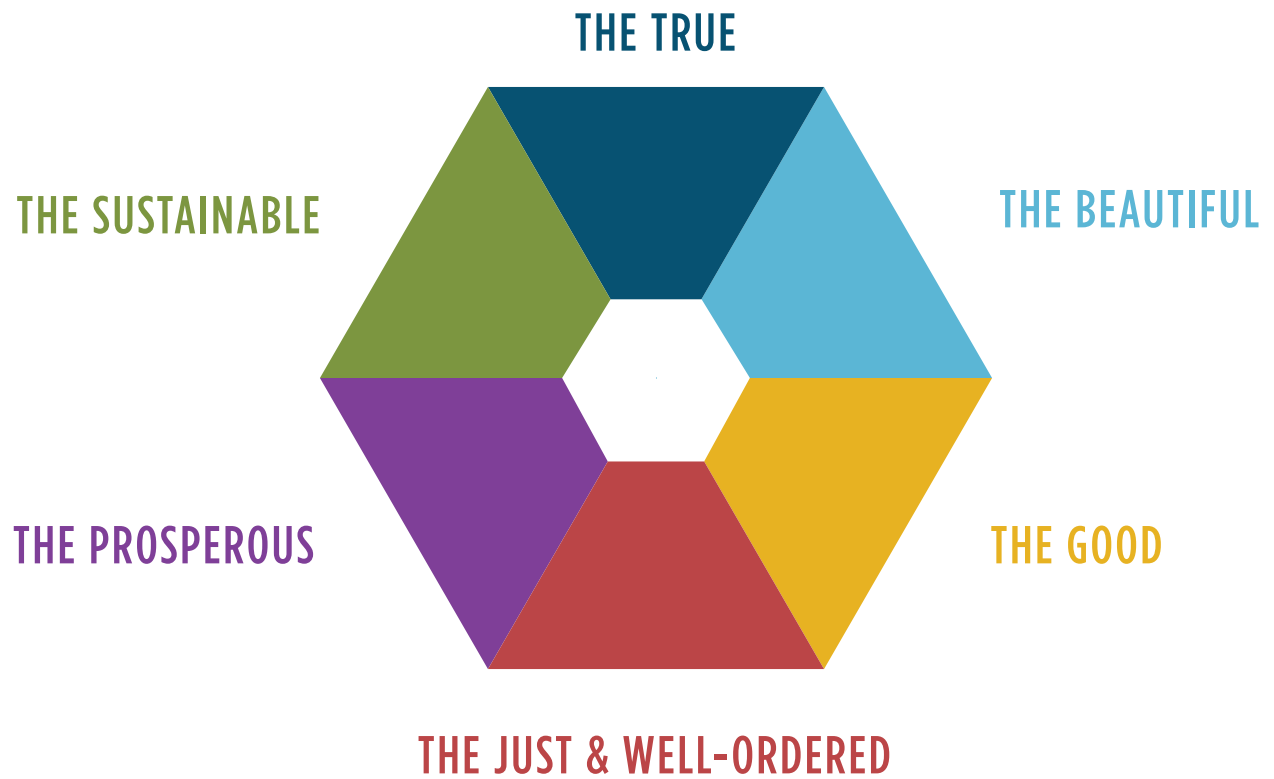
1.4: Acknowledgments

The Thriving Cities Lab would like to thank Oklahoma-based non-profit 1050 Forward, under the leadership of Consulting Director Joy Hofmeister and Assistant Director Brigitte Zorn, as well as Daniel Stid for convening the event at which we met Joy and Brigitte. The project could not have been undertaken without generous financial support from the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the contributions of fellows and staff of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, under the leadership of Executive Director James Davison Hunter.

Our work in Muskogee was facilitated by 1050 Forward Fellows Eric Wells (project liaison), Earnie Gilder, Keith Harlin, and Kimberly Williams. We are also grateful for the many Muskogee community members who joined endowment group discussions and completed surveys.

We also would like to thank the dozens of partners who worked closely with us in our two previous pilot cities, in Gainesville, Florida and Cave City, Arkansas. The research that led to the founding of the Thriving Cities Lab was conducted by sociologists James Davison Hunter and Joshua J. Yates at the University of Virginia. (See their co-edited volume, *Thrift and Thriving in America: Capitalism and Moral Order from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford UP, 2011).

1.5: Thriving Cities Civic Endowment Framework



1.6: Muskogee Thriving Survey Word Cloud

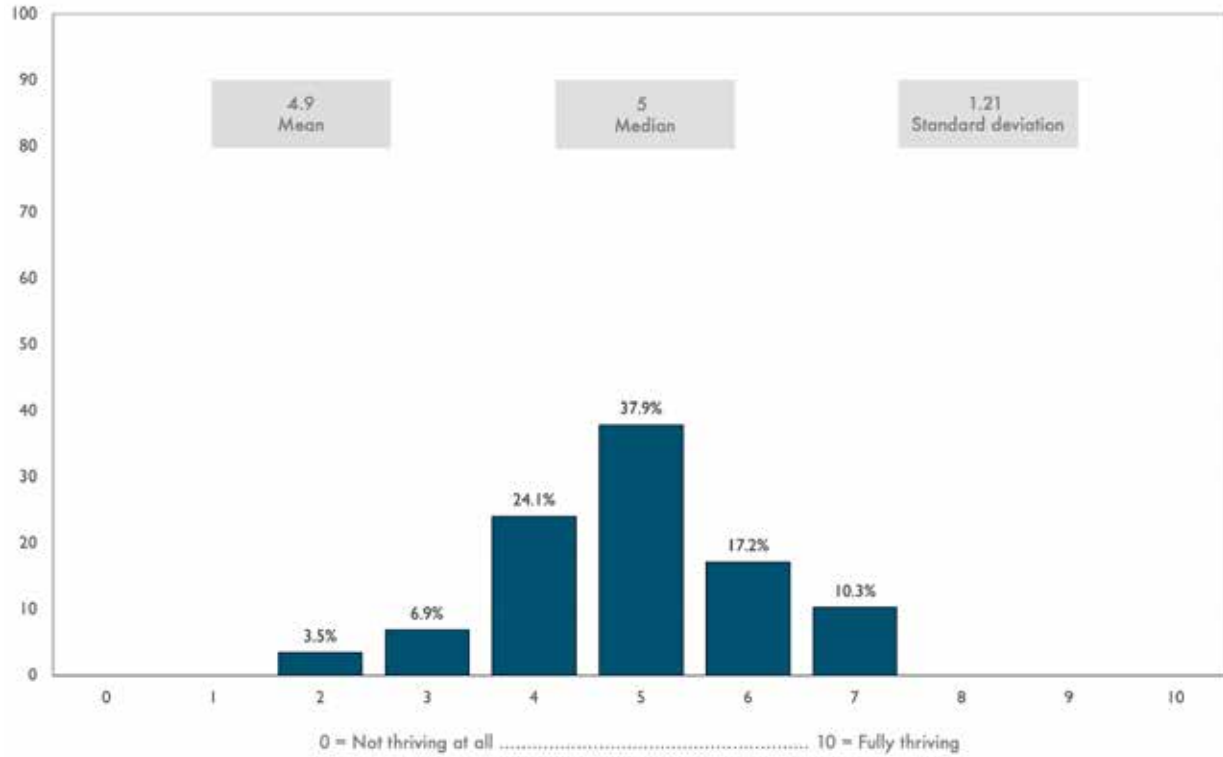
According to community leaders, what would thriving look like in Muskogee?



1.7: Muskogee Overall Thriving Score

With the characteristics of thriving in mind, how would you evaluate Muskogee at present?

4.9 on a ten-point scale



2 • FINDINGS BY ENDOWMENT



THE TRUE

2.1: The True—The realm of human knowledge and learning (e.g., schools, media, libraries)

1050 FORWARD CIVIC CHALLENGE FOCUS AREA: YOUTH

The Thriving Cities Lab (TCL) Muskogee Report seeks to complement and expand upon the research conducted by the 2025-2026 cohort of 1050 Forward Fellows. In March 2025, the Fellows administered a survey to students at the Muskogee Alternative Academy to help identify youth concerns. One set of concerns revolved around mobility and security, with students advocating for a sidewalk, a safe pathway, for students to access the school from the adjoining neighborhood. Using the Fellows project as a springboard—and anticipating a possible Muskogee Youth Summit in the spring of 2026—this report focuses on youth.

For TCL, drafting this youth-themed report presented a classic “category” problem. Arguably, all six civic endowments impact youth in some way. Nevertheless, one endowment is the most closely associated with youth, namely, the civic endowment of The True, the arena of learning and knowledge production. For the sake of clarity and coherence, then, The True, in the broadest sense, will be the lens through which we investigate the status of Muskogee youth. In the realm of public health, scholars often refer to the “social determinants” of health, acknowledging that there are a multitude of factors, beyond direct treatments of patients, that influence the health of a community. We will take a similar approach to The True, not merely asking about educational outcomes but exploring youth development more holistically, highlighting the “social determinants” of education and youth development.

Survey questions related to the Muskogee 1050 Fellows’ Civic Challenge and a summary of the responses:

Assuming that some youth do not have access to a car, do you believe Muskogee provides adequate public transport options and/or adequate biking/walking infrastructure that would enable youth to get to work, extra-curricular events and shopping?		
Choices	Responses	Percentages
Yes - Muskogee has adequate options of public transportation or infrastructure of biking/walking for youth to get to work, extra-curricular events and shopping.	4	13.8%
No - Muskogee does not have adequate options of public transportation or infrastructure of biking/walking for youth to get to work, extra-curricular events and shopping.	25	86.2%

Can you think of any cost-effective ways to improve youth mobility in Muskogee?

Some respondents noted the absence of ride-share services in Muskogee (leaving aside the question whether the city possesses sufficient density and demand for services). The two main solutions proffered involved expanding access to the existing Muskogee Transit System and building out walking and biking infrastructure. In regard to bus transportation, many people advocated for designated “youth passes” that would be highly discounted or even free. There were also suggestions that the community should develop a supplemental transportation system, for example, “micro-shuttles”—perhaps operated by some faith-based groups or other non-profits—that could run during high demand times (after school). Once better biking infrastructure is established, one respondent said, a bike-share program might be feasible. Some acknowledged that increasing walking and biking in the city would not only require material changes to the built environment but also require a cultural change to remove any class stigma associated with those activities.

Is Muskogee providing enough hands-on educational opportunities—internships and apprenticeships—for students?		
Choices	Responses	Percentages
Yes - Muskogee is providing enough hands-on educational opportunities for students.	11	37.9%
No - Muskogee is not providing enough hands-on educational opportunities for students.	18	62.1%

What new training experiences should be developed for youth, and how might students be incentivized to take advantage of existing or new programs?

There was consensus that many internships and hands-on learning opportunities exist in Muskogee, especially through vocational tech programs; however, there was also agreement that more effective advertising and closer coordination with schools is needed. Beyond the current offerings, many people said that more businesses across a greater variety of fields needed to consider creating internships. Shadowing tradespeople, launching summer camps with a technical/vocational focus, and promoting career days (such as a City Career Day to introduce students to job opportunities about which they are likely unaware) are examples of activities mentioned in the survey responses that could both raise awareness about and spark interest in non-college oriented career paths. Finally, it was suggested that converting some internships into certificate programs and providing more financial support to students who participate in them would make these programs more appealing and accessible to a broader array of youth.

Is youth leadership development a priority for the community?		
Choices	Responses	Percentages
Yes - youth leadership development is a priority for the community.	18	62.1%
No - youth leadership development is not a priority for the community.	11	37.9%

How might Muskogee integrate youth more effectively into existing institutions and organizations?

Give youth a “real,” not merely symbolic, seat at the table was a refrain found throughout the responses. That Muskogee has already made progress on this front is evidenced by the relatively strong score awarded in this section. 62 percent of respondents said that youth leadership development is a priority for the community. Several successful initiatives were mentioned, including public school-based leadership teams, the Youth Volunteer Corp (associated with the Teen Center), and the Chamber’s Teen Advisory Board. Nevertheless, despite the existence of some strong programs, most respondents indicated more should be done. Specifically, many who took the survey expressed hope that youth would be able to hold Junior Board Member positions in many more organizations, that more volunteer and service opportunities would be generated and that youth could function as ambassadors—in their school settings—for various institutions and civic actors, such as the city’s Police Department. Finally, some respondents urged more public recognition for youth leaders. This could be done, for example, by resurrecting the Mr. and Miss Teenager competition.

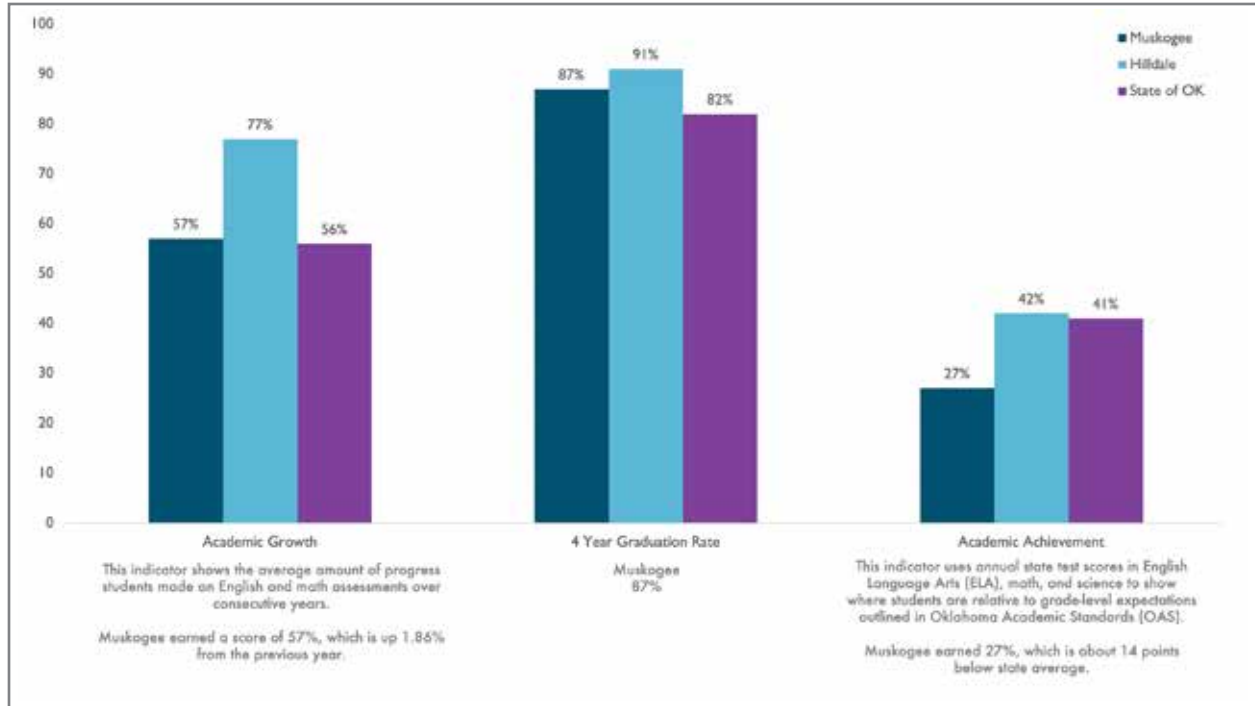
Is youth mental health a concern for the community?		
Choices	Responses	Percentages
Yes - youth mental health is a concern.	23	79.3%
No - youth mental health is not a concern.	6	20.7%

What mental health service gaps exist, and what might be some ways to improve the mental health of Muskogee youth?

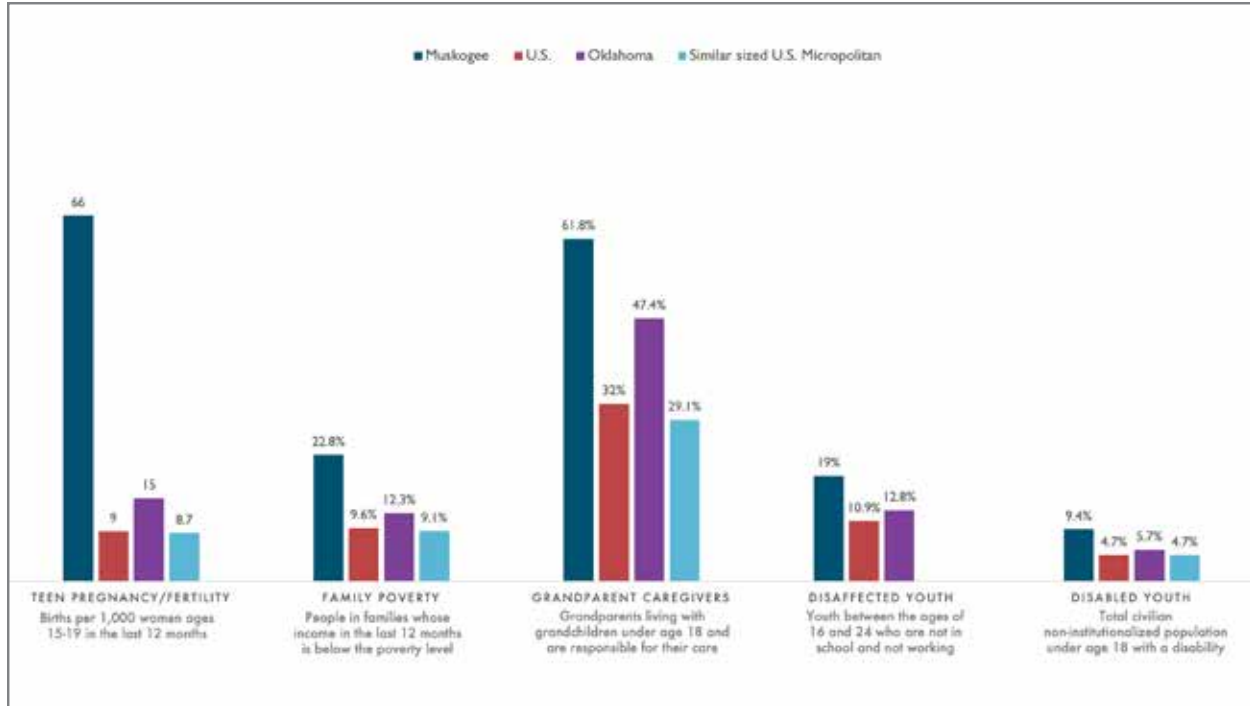
At least one person mentioned the outstanding care given by GCBHS (Green County Behavioral Health Services), noting only that too many in the community are not aware of its services. While respondents approved of the quality of care provided by the city's mental health professionals, the consensus was that the services in the community are inadequate to meet high demand. According to several people, schools, the institutional frontline actors when it comes to mental health, need more social workers and behavioral health professionals. The shortage of inpatient beds for youth was also discussed. Several commented on the lack of state funding for mental health—a shortfall difficult for local communities to make up. One of the main themes in this section was a perceived reactionary posture; that is, while the community does its best to respond to youth mental health crises, it does not give adequate attention to prevention.

Finally, because social media and other digital technologies play such a large role in the life of young people, one suggestion was to lean into that interest and to offer more gaming events and competitions, to help youth create more personal connections and overcome isolation. Parents, according to some respondents, also need more education in order to better support the youth in their families.

Public Schools: Muskogee and Hildale



Youth Relevant Statistics





THE BEAUTIFUL

2.2: The Beautiful—The realm of creativity, aesthetics, and design (e.g., art, architecture and urban design)

The Beautiful: Voices from Muskogee

“Muskogee is working toward improving the aesthetics of our community...”

•

“I see lots of effort to revitalize downtown.”

•

“Muskogee has some beautiful historic architecture, but it is overshadowed by abandoned buildings that are falling down.”

•

“We have too many dilapidated properties.”

•

“Effective code enforcement is needed.”

•

“Main thoroughfare is Highway 69. It [presents] a bad image for the city from Broadway South and from Shawnee Bypass North.”

•

“The beauty in Muskogee is spread out and clumped.”

•

“We struggle with preserving the old while removing the unsightly.”

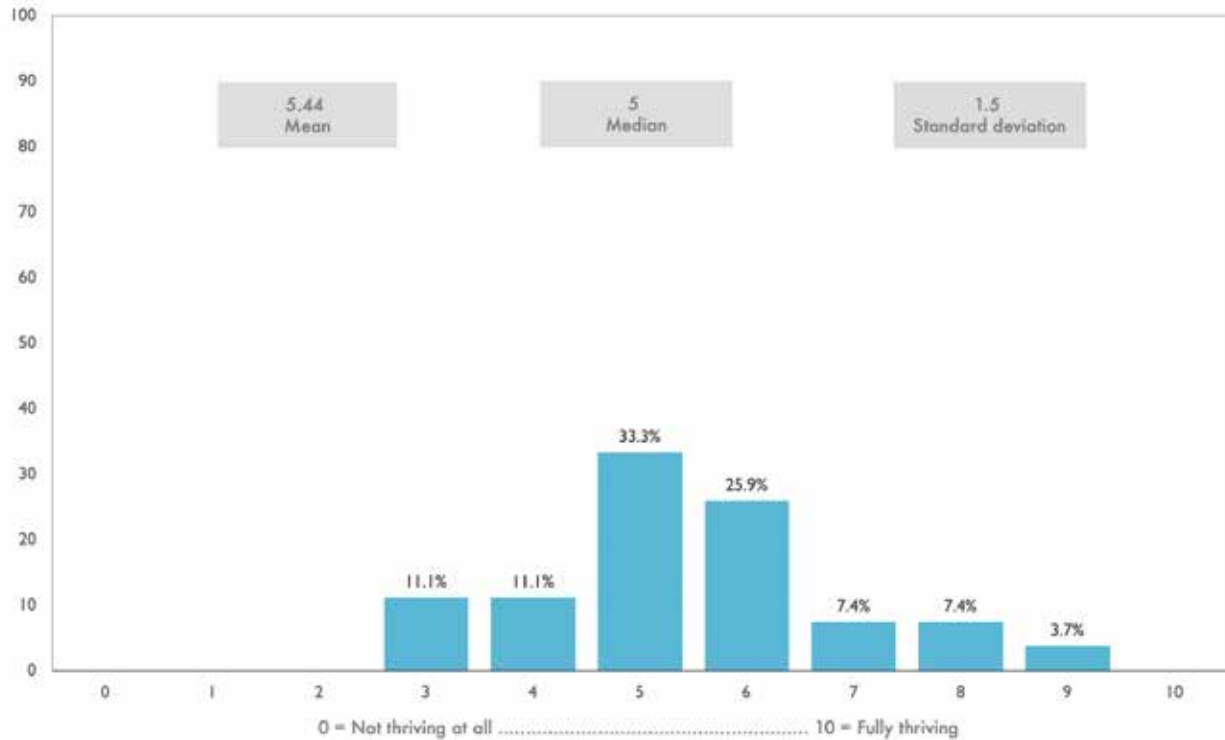
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“Focus on neighborhoods [by creating] infill homes that match the period of the neighborhood would help.”

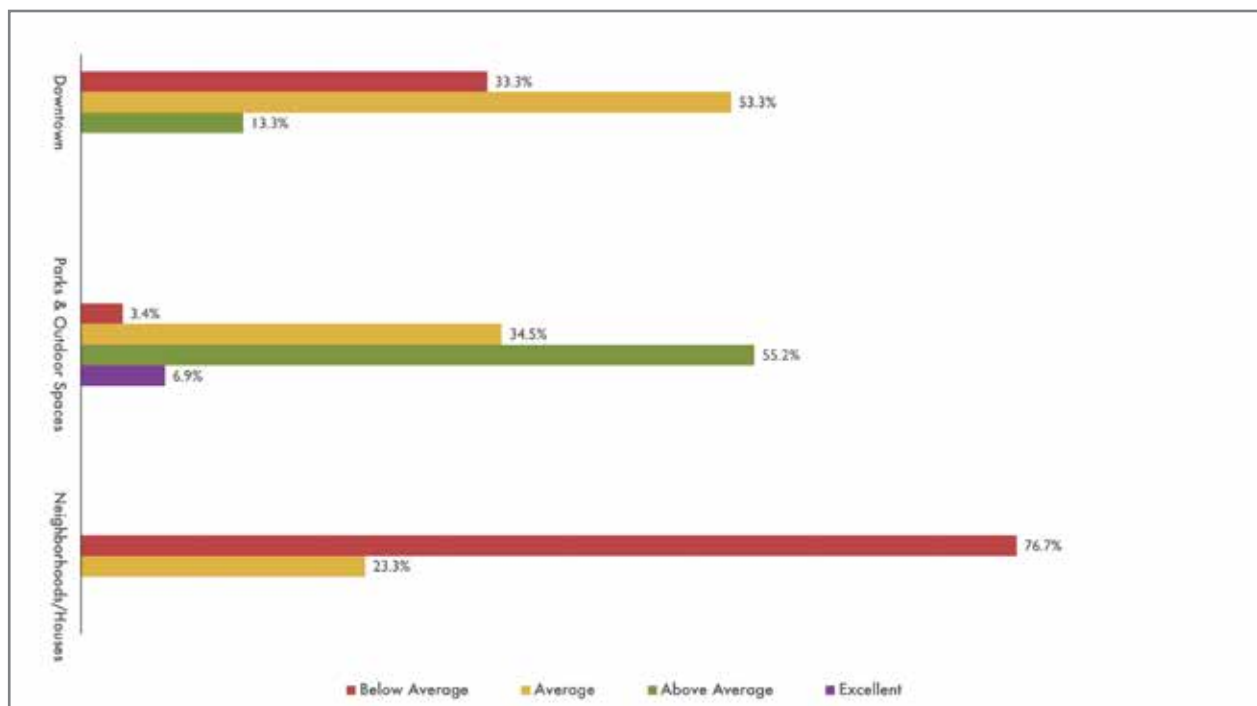
Community Survey Results

Thinking only about *The Beautiful*, how would you evaluate Muskogee's level of thriving?

5.4 on a ten-point scale



Thinking only about *The Beautiful*, how would you rate the following aspects of Muskogee?





2.3: The Good—The realm of social mores and ethics (e.g., service and religious organizations)

The Good: Voices from Muskogee

“Muskogee has many non-profits and religious organizations that are doing good for the community.”

•

“There is a major gap in parents knowing how to parent effectively. [More] resources [are needed] to support parents in difficult situations.”

•

“People in the non-profit sector are working overtime here.”

•

“Muskogee is a welcoming place with adults who care about the health, safety and happiness of our youth...but there is no centralized place to catalog and advertise youth activities.”

•

“I believe we are on the right track. When we as a community get together with outcomes in mind—and not who gets credit—we do much better.”

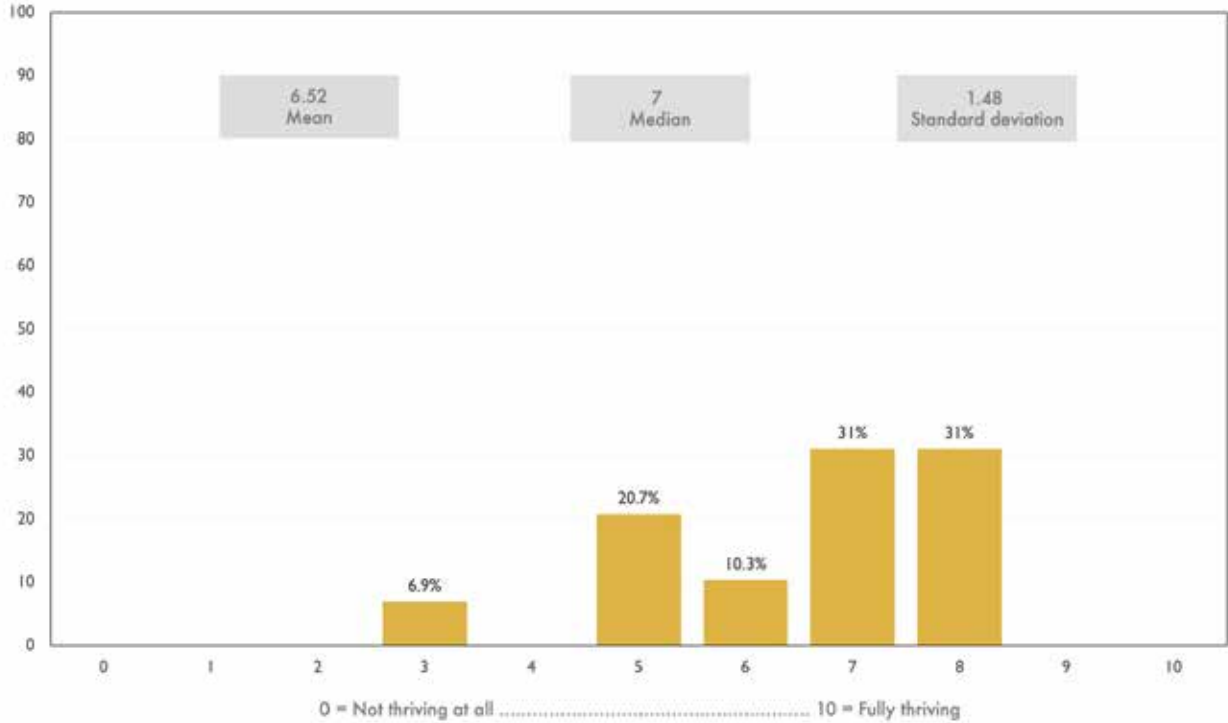
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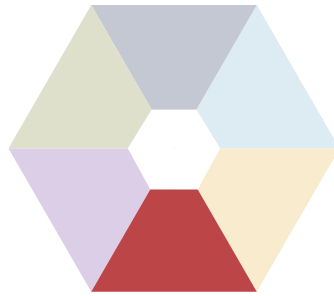
“We have a lot of churches in Muskogee and lots of activities [for youth], but we also have a high poverty rate that contributes to youth problems.”

Community Survey Results

Thinking only about *The Good*, how would you evaluate Muskogee's level of thriving?

6.5 on a ten-point scale





THE JUST & WELL-ORDERED

2.4: The Just & Well-Ordered—The realm of political and civic life (e.g., city planning, local government, law enforcement)

The Just & Well-Ordered: Voices from Muskogee

“Continued transparency, community engagement and alignment with local needs will be key to ensuring [that The Just & Well-Ordered] endowment’s impact is both lasting and broadly beneficial.”



“Great law enforcement and citizen communication but we are on a major north-south highway which makes us susceptible to attracting the wrong people sometimes.”



“Utilize public-facing civic dashboards to inform citizens of project timelines, budget status, election info etc.”



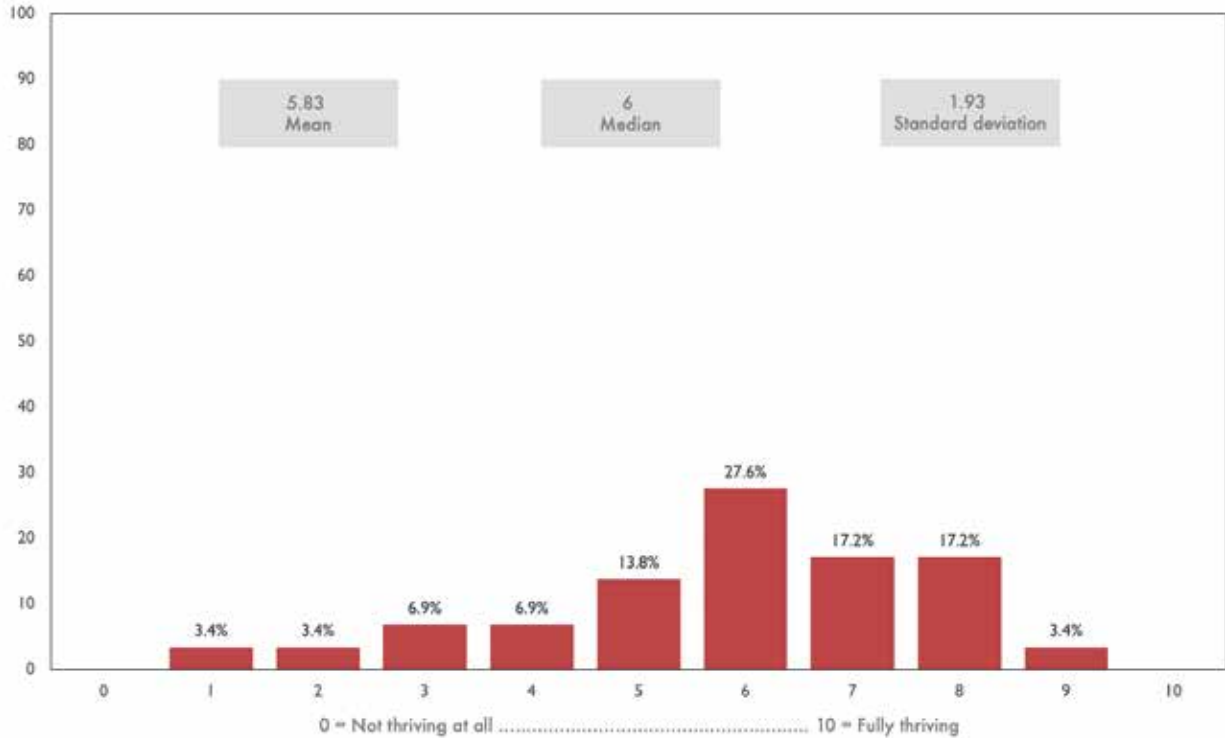
“There is a lack of trust that has been earned over decades.
Restoring trust must be a priority and considered in every decision made.
City leadership and staff need to go way beyond what is required in every engagement with the public.”



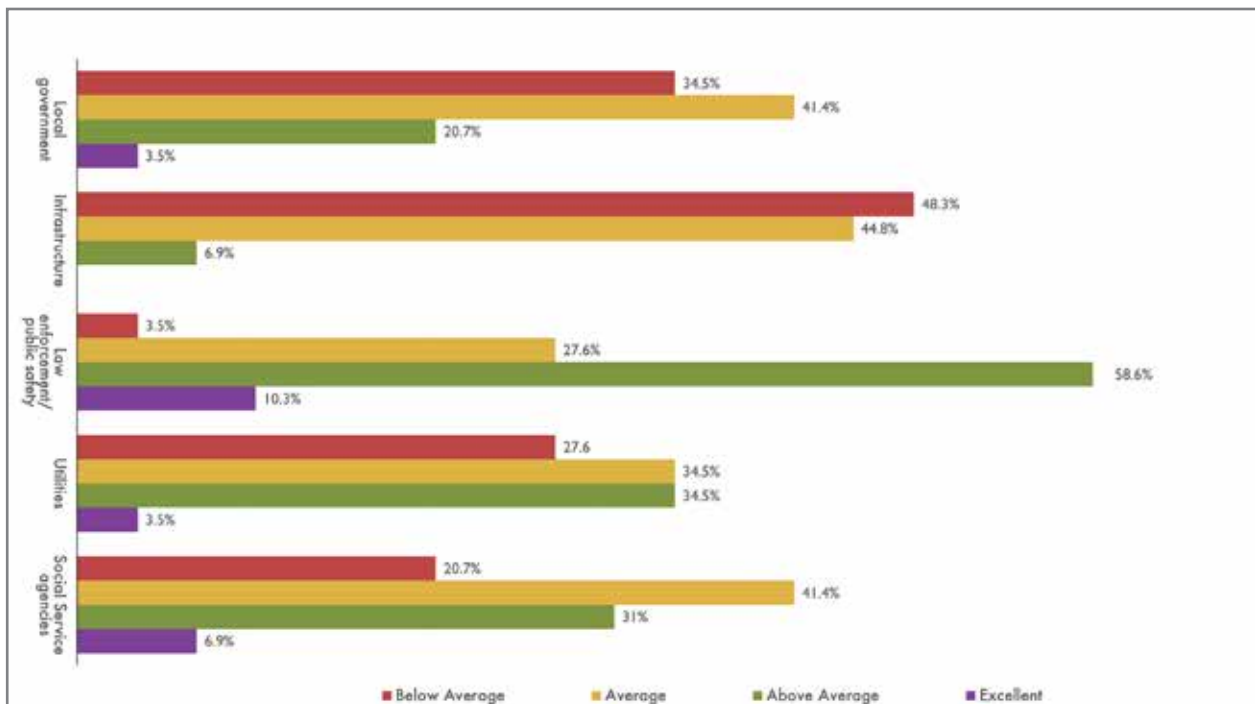
“Muskogee has had a history of deferred repairs due to funding.
The city has not consistently issued bonds to fund general maintenance.”

Community Survey Results

Thinking only about *The Just & Well-Ordered*, how would you evaluate Muskogee's level of thriving?
5.8 on a ten-point scale



Thinking only about *The Just & Well-Ordered*, how would you rate the following?





THE PROSPEROUS

2.5: The Prosperous—The realm of economic life (e.g., business development and meaningful work)

The Prosperous: Voices from Muskogee

“Muskogee has more manufacturing than many people realize. The Port, OG&E, St. Francis, the City of Muskogee Foundation, and other businesses are valuable assets.”

Data centers:

“Google coming to the area will provide even more value, hopefully attracting others.”



“[Data centers] will be a tax base win, but how many sustainable jobs will it really create, and will the strain on power infrastructure be worth it?”

Areas for development:

“...the West side of town, now that the hospital has been completed.”



“The turnpike area could be bustling with restaurants and retail.”



“Activate the Arkansas riverfront and make it usable, not just visible (fishing access points, pop-up events at the harbor, expanded trail system).”

Messaging:

“Outsiders and businesses do not want to come to a community that talks negatively about the town, the leaders of growth and development, and the individuals living there.

We have opportunity but tend to get in our own way.”

Housing:

“We have jobs coming to town and nowhere for these people to stay.”

•

“Focus needs to be on affordable housing—apartments, duplexes and small homes.”

•

“[Need for] housing in the \$250k-400k range.”

Need for coordination and collaboration:

“City and industry...need to be partners, not adversaries.”

•

“The city, county and port need to work together to change the public view of Muskogee. As long as our three entities compete against each other, our community will continue to struggle.”

•

“We have money in Muskogee but it is siloed. We have a large population of poor [people].”

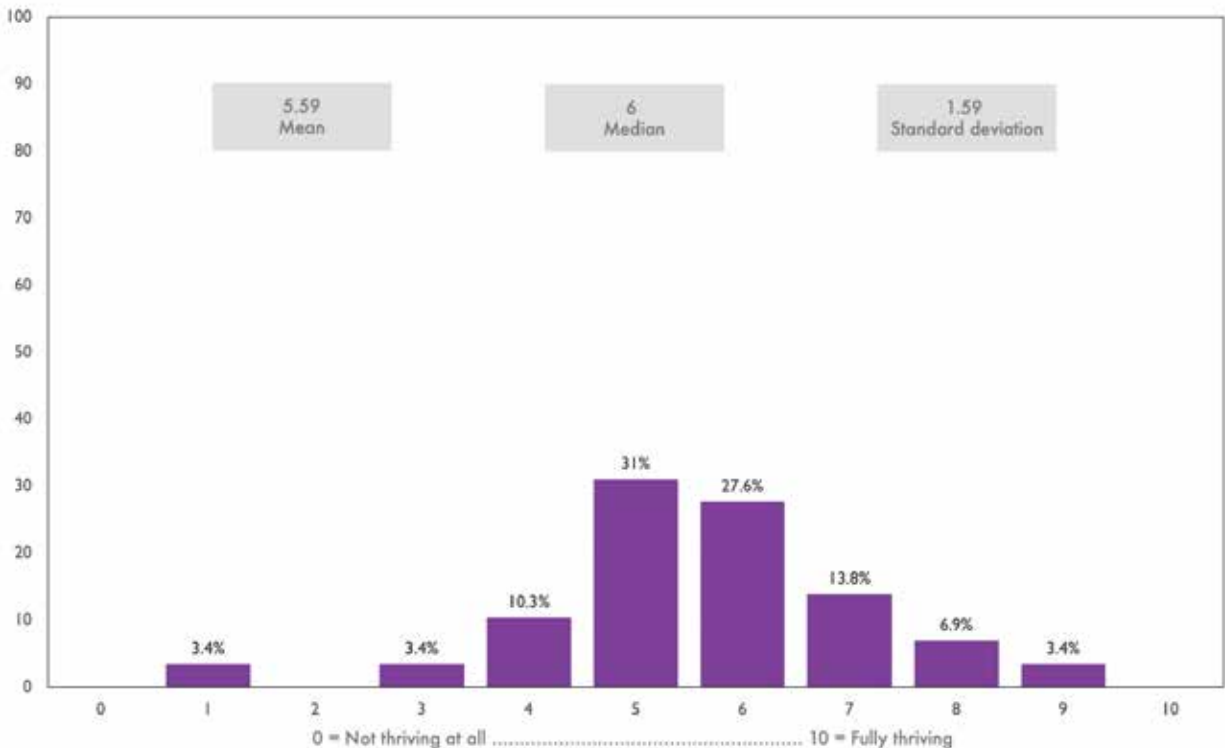
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“Muskogee needs more industry jobs that provide sustainable income—
not more minimum wage jobs.”

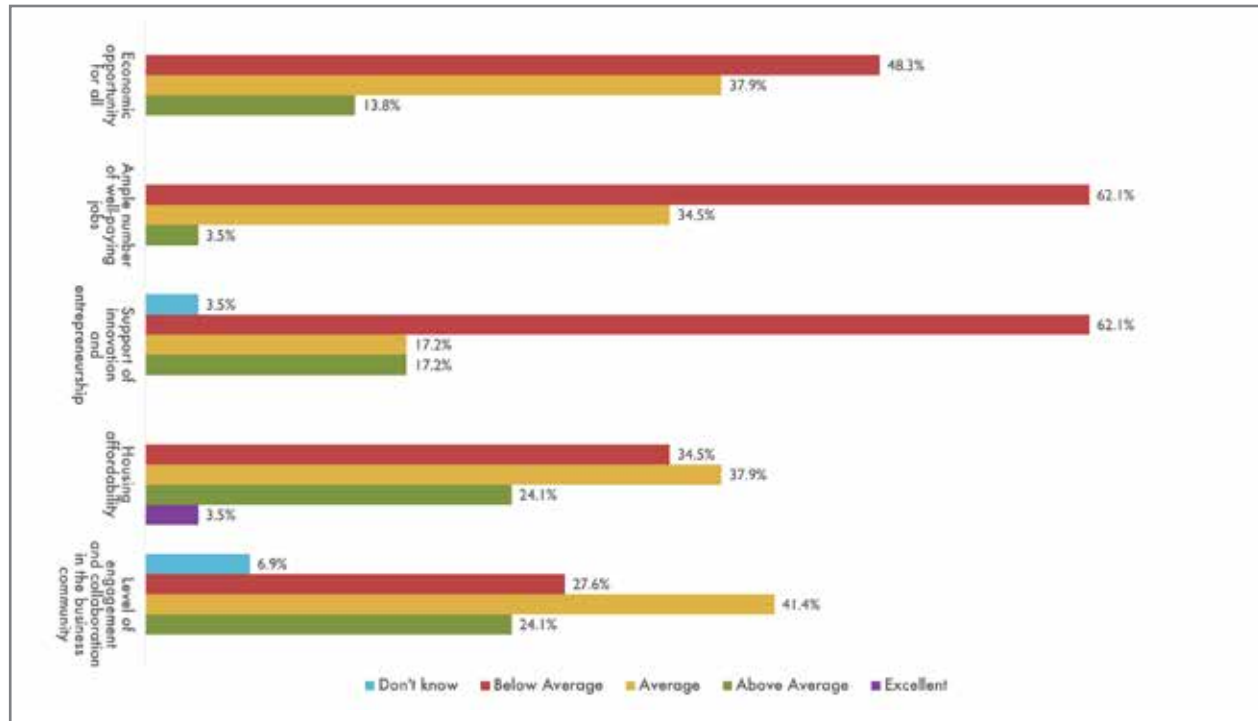
Community Survey Results

Thinking only about *The Prosperous*, how would you evaluate Muskogee’s level of thriving?

5.6 on a ten-point scale



**Thinking only about *The Prosperous*,
how would you rate the following aspects of Muskogee's economic life?**





THE SUSTAINABLE

2.6: The Sustainable—The realm of natural and physical health (e.g. health and wellness organizations, parks and the environment)

The Sustainable: Voices from Muskogee

“We have great parks and resources, [but] we need to get creative on how we utilize these for health, fun and engagement...”

•

“Healthcare is a bright spot.”

•

“We have many miles of bike trails that are not maintained and not safe.”

•

“We, along with Oklahoma in general, are first in too many bad areas, i.e. hypertension, diabetes, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, etc.”

•

“Muskogee is lucky to have waterways that connect it to ports and lakes for recreation. Naturally, it is a good location.”

•

“Our parks are wonderful in Muskogee. The only area of improvement would be to promote and advertise the more “wild” nature that the public could visit (trails, river, etc.).”

•

“Activate the Arkansas riverfront and make it usable, not just visible (fishing access points, pop-up events at the harbor, expand the trail system).”

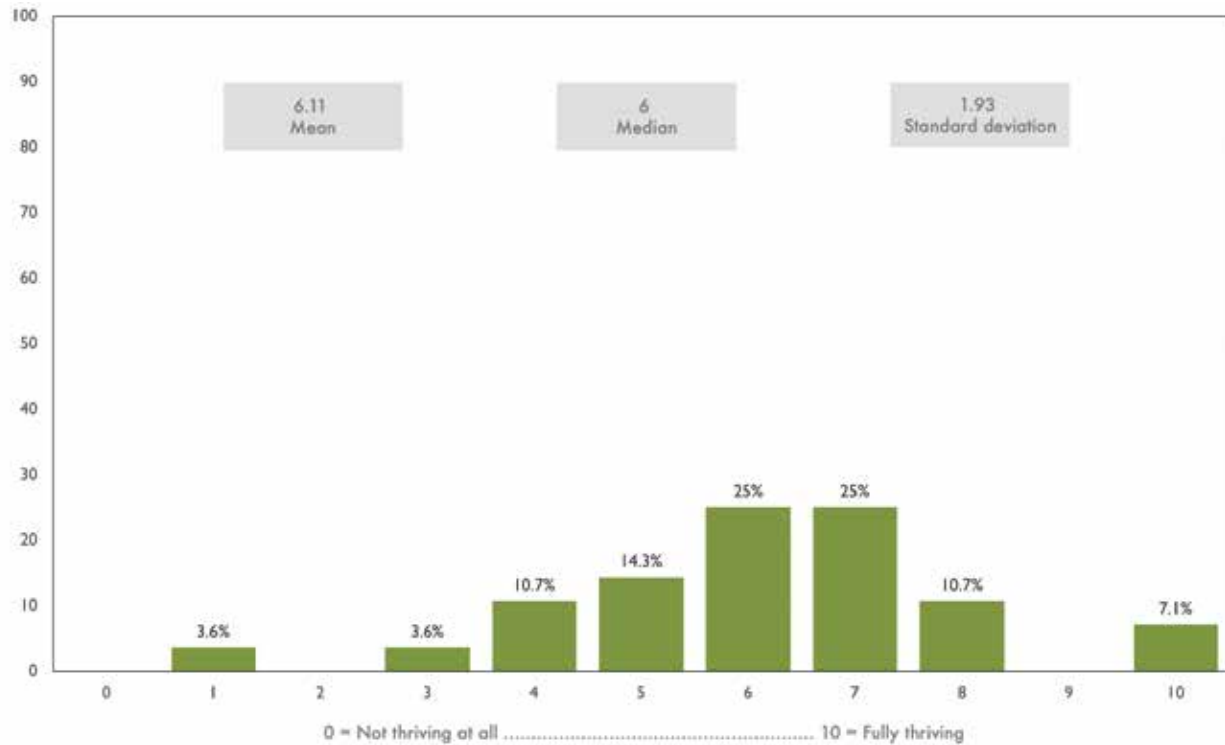
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“There are a lot of good things in Muskogee in this area. Thanks for making these possible. The new wing of St. Francis Hospital should really be a blessing.”

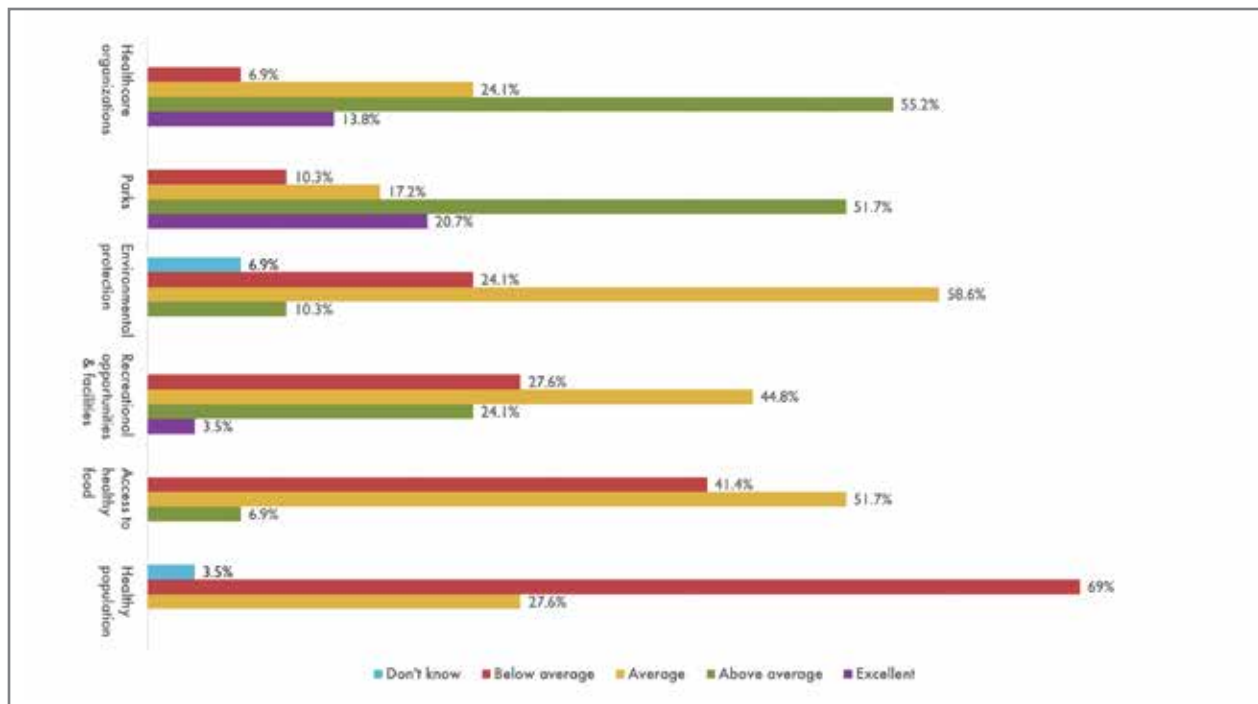
Community Survey Results

Thinking only about *The Sustainable*, how would you evaluate Muskogee's level of thriving?

6.1 on a ten-point scale



Thinking only about *The Sustainable*, how would you rate the following:



3 • APPENDICES

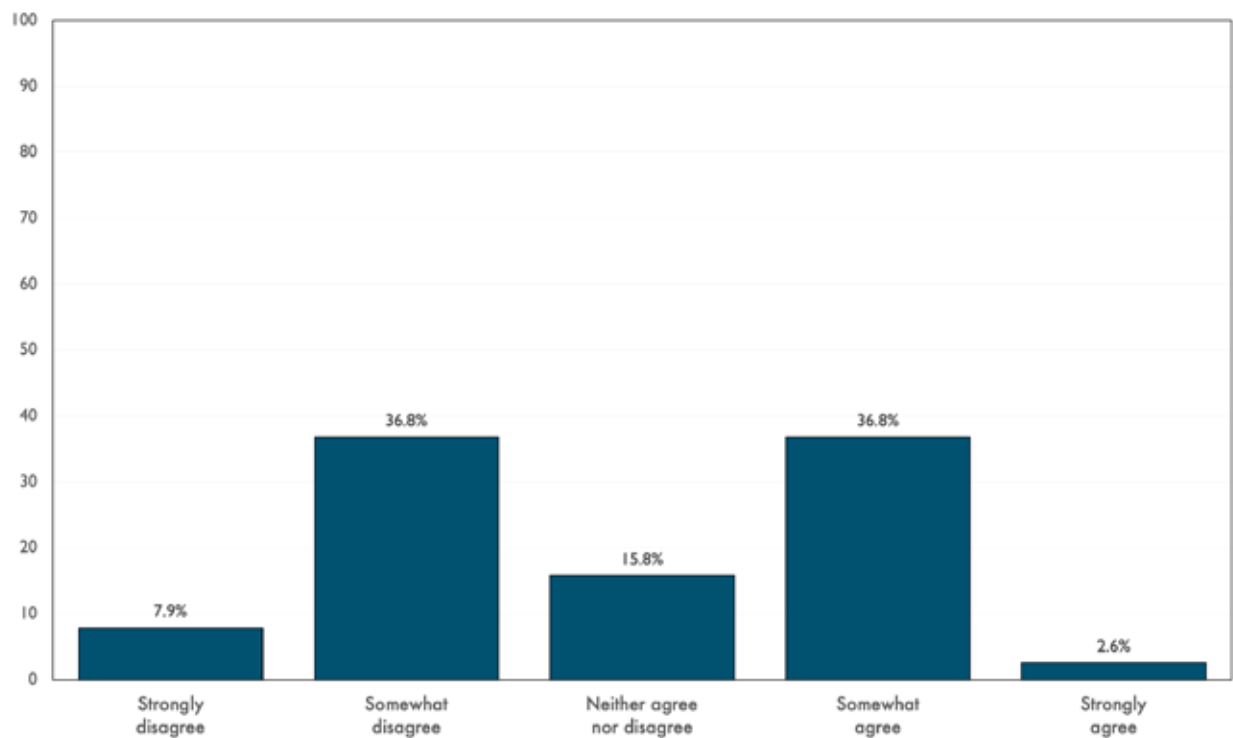
Appendix 1: Civic Capacity

Civic Capacity is a concept that describes a community's ability to identify problems and to rally its human and material resources to address them. Our short Civic Capacity Survey asks questions about key indicators of civic capacity. This survey was administered to individuals who participated in the Civic Endowment group convening in Muskogee in November. The answers to that instrument provide further context for understanding the community.

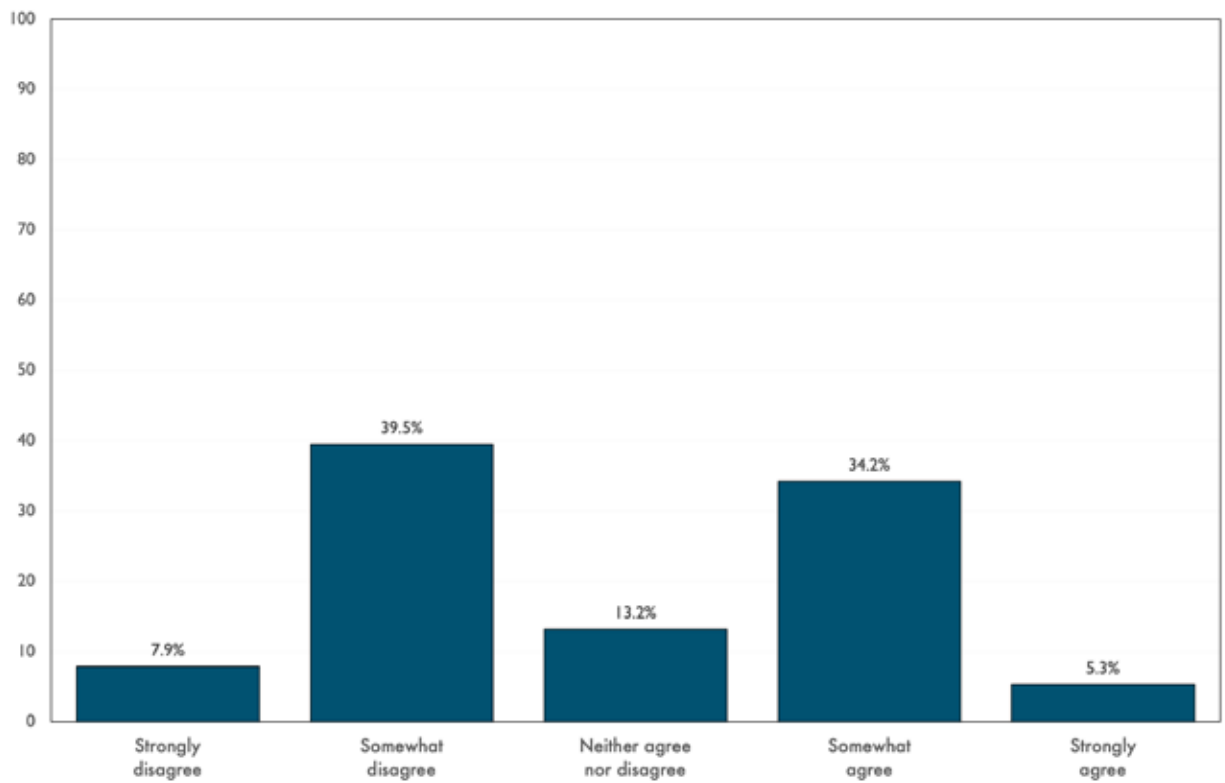
In response to two questions, whether leadership in Muskogee is broadly distributed and whether citizens are willing to compromise for the greater good, respondents were almost equally divided (see graphs below). Interpretations of these two key community ingredients—public-spiritedness/willingness to sacrifice and broad based leadership—vary considerably and seem to reflect different experiences of community life.

Civic Capacity Questions:

“Leadership is broadly distributed—not concentrated in the hands of just a few individuals.”

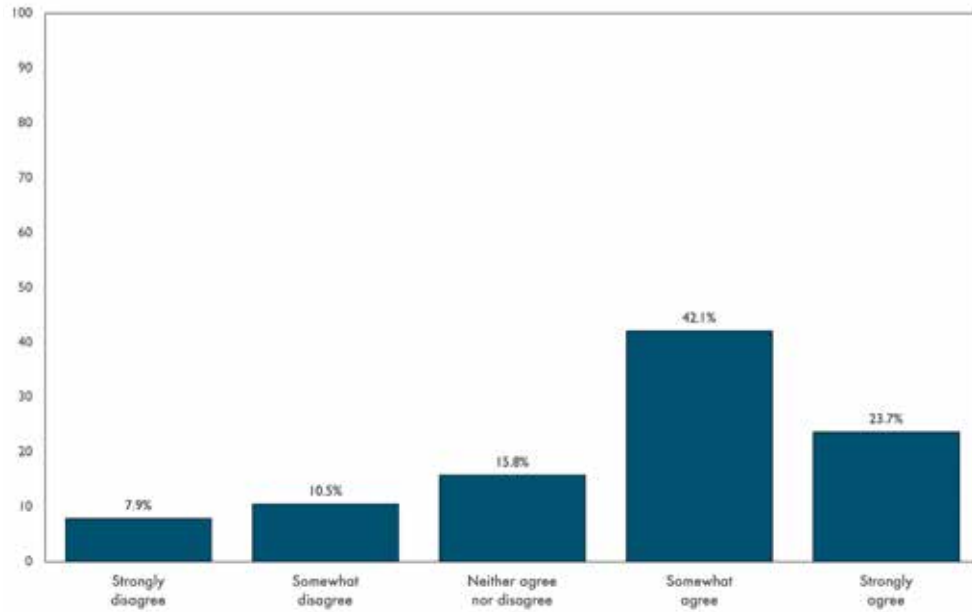


“Citizens are willing to compromise for the greater good.”

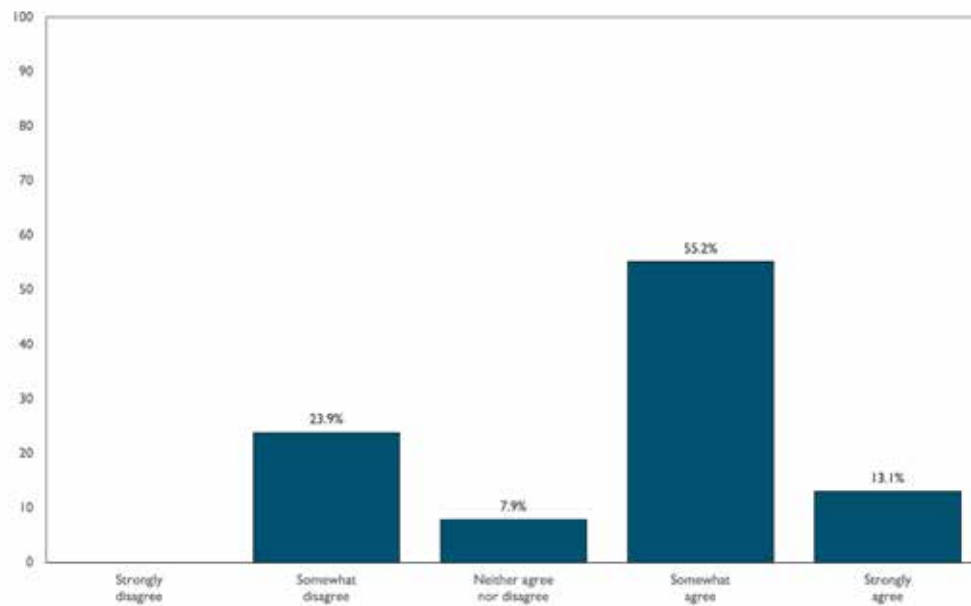


Answers to three other questions point in a more positive direction (see graphs below). 66 percent of respondents somewhat or strongly agree that Muskogee’s leaders do not ignore difficult problems but are willing to address them, while 68 percent of those surveyed somewhat or strongly agree that there is a lot of collaboration across all sectors of the city (government, businesses and non-profits)—a more favorable viewpoint than the tenor of the comments in the community-level survey. Finally, 61 percent somewhat or strongly agree that the community displays a hopeful attitude about the future. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of hope as an effective resource that can support community-driven change.

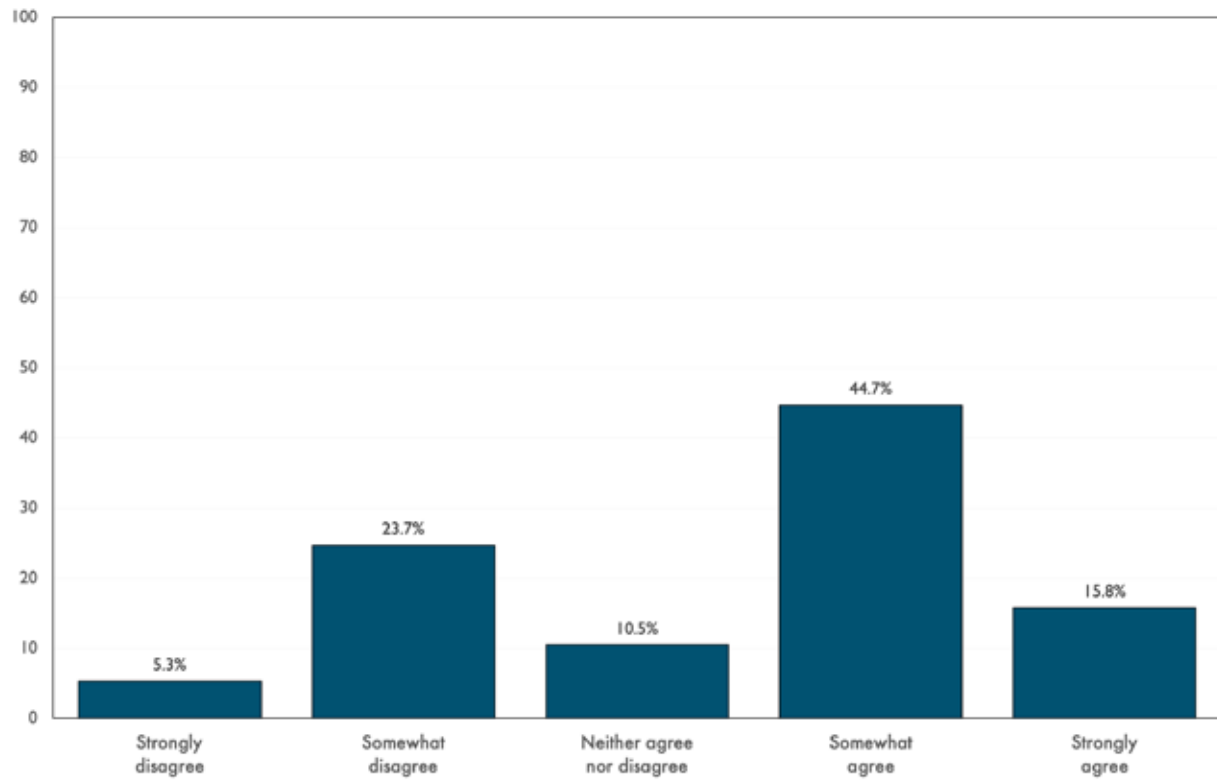
“Leaders do not ignore difficult problems but rather are willing to address them.”



“There is a lot of collaboration among community stakeholders—government, businesses, churches, schools and other non-profits.”



“This community displays a hopeful attitude about the future.”



Appendix 2: Priorities and Obstacles

Are there any obstacles to helping Muskogee thrive that you wish could be removed?

“I think we lack community pride and are taught to talk poorly of Muskogee. This needs to be addressed with school systems, current adults, etc. At the same time we need to add visual reminders of why Muskogee is a wonderful place. We are the biggest obstacle to Muskogee’s growth.”

•

“Money to build then invite people to live in the city. We need higher paying jobs.”

•

“Negative social posts from an extremely small group.”

•

“Seems to have many small cliques that need to be open to and engaged with others.”

•

“Individuals who are not open minded about new ideas and hope for the future of Muskogee.”

•

“The stigma that our city is not trying to grow and move forward.”

•

“Politics.”

•

“Streets repair and other infrastructure needs.”

•

“Lack of funding for projects.”

•

“Affordable/quality housing.”

•

“Siloing and not collaborating, failure to recognize the value of economic development outside of current economic development efforts, i.e. downtown, and the 69 hwy.”

If you could focus on one priority, initiative, or project to move Muskogee towards a fully thriving community, what would that be?

“There needs to be a partnership of all entities talking around the table to organize what is available and what is needed.”



“I don’t have a single initiative, but rather the need for laser-focused alignment across business, civic, religious and non-profit orgs when tackling complex community challenges. Pick just a few projects and focus all community resources toward a single desired outcome. Muskogee has the resources—they’re just disconnected.”



“Better housing, I work in the city, however, I can’t find housing that a single woman can move into without having to repair the home first. Apartments downtown would be ideal!”



“A more welcoming place for youth to go out and be social and have fun. I would like to see something like a community center similar to something like a YMCA.”



“Industrial development to include housing projects to encourage individuals to work and live in Muskogee. It would be beneficial to have apartment or condo housing, entertainment, restaurants and activities for all ages in consolidated areas. Main Street Broken Arrow, downtown Jenks, and Cherry Street in Tulsa are all great examples.”



“Expanding the utility infrastructure on the west side of town (48th/Okmulgee and West) to allow more opportunities for safe, nice homes that will draw more people to want to live here. Finding nice homes in safe neighborhoods is a challenge and that impacts people wanting to move here.”



“Revitalizing downtown”



“We are a diverse community with many moving parts. Are there efforts to develop a coordinated effort in these many moving parts—the beautiful, the good, the sustainable, the just, etc.? It seems to me that a lot of good is done by a lot of people and organizations, but that the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing, so we may be inefficient in how we approach many of these areas. I am certain that volunteerism has suffered in many ways since the pandemic, but I think people are ready to get involved, IF the cause is worthy and needed. If someone had a finger on the pulse and could be a conduit of communication to others, what a blessing that could and would be.”



“Housing. We have land and lots but don’t have the contractors coming in and building. The cost of materials have gone up since covid and kept the prices increased of the one new development we have. They have the land to building another 40ish houses and we need them.”

•
 “Localizing funding for community non profit mental health services to include jail services and homeless services.”

•
 “We need a destination recreational area.”

•
 “Razing the abandoned buildings and houses in the community.”

•
 “Inclusivity, highlight areas of cultural value.”

•
 “Downtown—recruitment of businesses.”

•
 “Downtown development, In-fill housing in the old town neighborhoods, home grants in the old town neighborhoods. 69 Highway development and promotion of the current development. If roads can’t be fixed then fixing curbs or sidewalks. Using community service to remove over grown grass and dirt off of sidewalks/curbs in the old town area (very easy). Adding character or community pride aspects around the whole town (wrapping service boxes with old photos of the area), banners, etc. (this is something we lack in Muskogee is visible community pride).”

•
 “Employment opportunities (with wage growth) for the average person. This in turn causes more spending, increases tax base for the roles of government in the areas this survey has covered.”

Appendix 3: Key Sources for this Report

American Community Survey
 Area Health Resource File/American Medical Association
 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
 Colorado State University Civic Capacity Index
 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data
 Easy Access to State and County Juvenile Court Case Counts
 Mapping Medicare Disparities Tool
 National Center for Health Statistics—Natality and Mortality Files
 National Civic League Civic Index
 Map the Meal Gap from Feeding America
 U.S. Census Data





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