



What Do Housing Choice Voucher Holders Want?

Understanding Residential Preferences



April 2026 | Zhu Gong and Matt Schroeder

The need for a "people-centered" view of opportunity

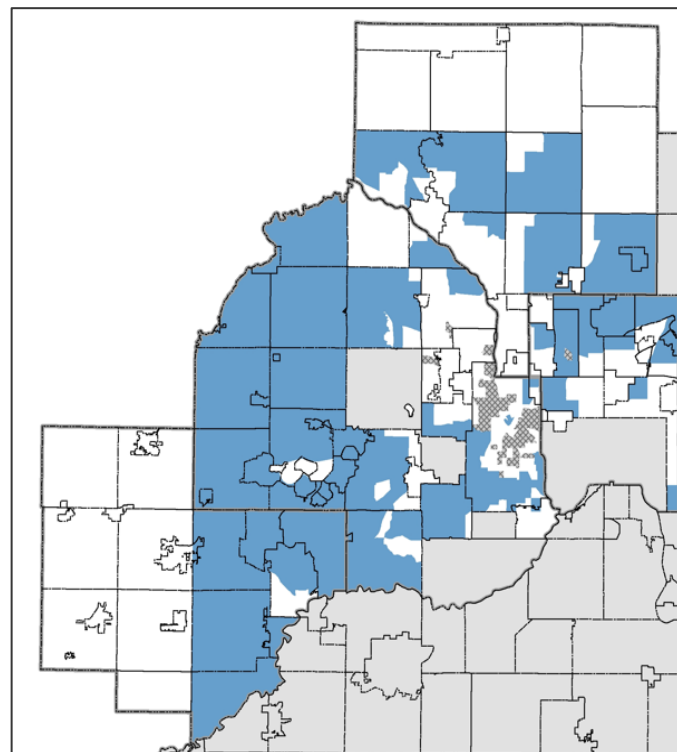
Place-centered view

What places offer opportunity to voucher holders?

Places are higher or lower in opportunity

Distills "opportunity" to a single, one-size-fits-all number

Conflates opportunity with neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics



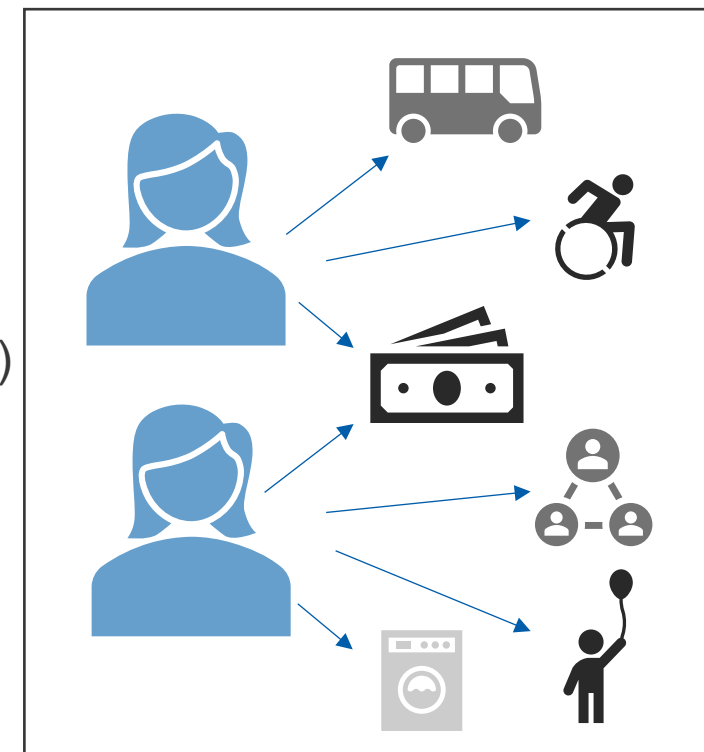
People-centered view

What kinds of opportunities do voucher holders value?

Places have different kinds of opportunity

Considers diversity in voucher holders' preferences and needs (including housing units)

Values things found in many places, including social connection and belonging

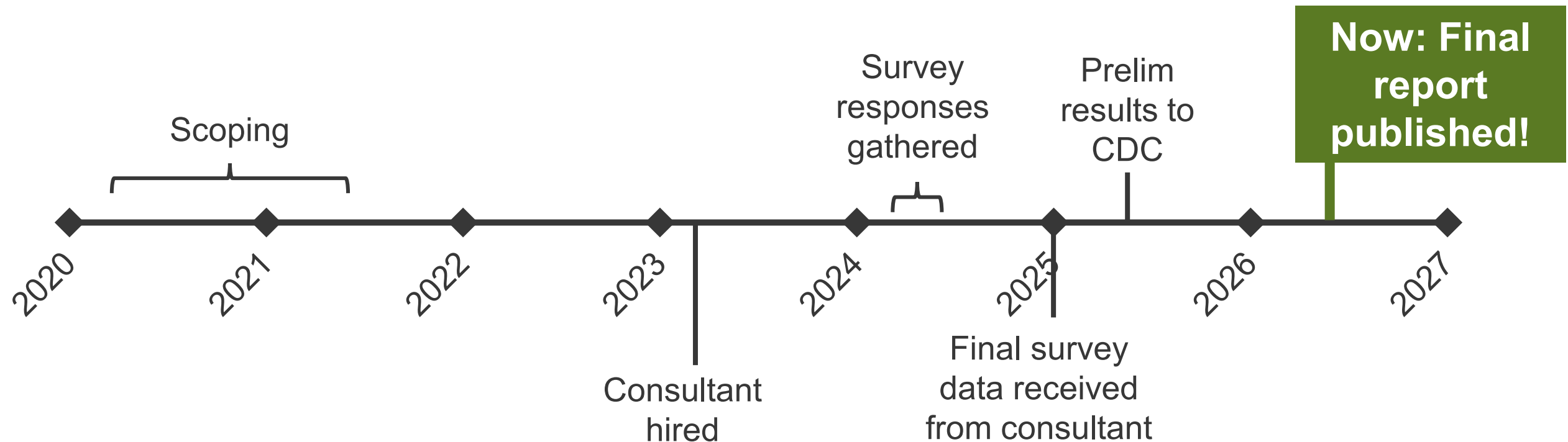


About the study

Goals of the study

- Understand what voucher holders want, what they have, and what they experience in housing searches
- Identify ways to help voucher holders get what they want

Timeline



The survey design included key groups for accurate results

Sample

- 1,500 voucher holders in Metro HRA and Minneapolis
- Designed for representative results by agency, household size, race

Survey

- Online and paper options
- Responses gathered March - May 2024
- 454 responses (30.3% response rate)

Data

- De-identified to preserve respondents' privacy
- Data include closed-ended and open-ended questions

What we asked; what we found

What do voucher holders want?

Voucher holders care about many characteristics of neighborhoods and (especially) homes; a "one-size-fits-all" approach will not serve them adequately.

What are voucher holders finding?

Voucher holders manage to find some of what they're looking for, but it's hard.

How satisfied are voucher holders?

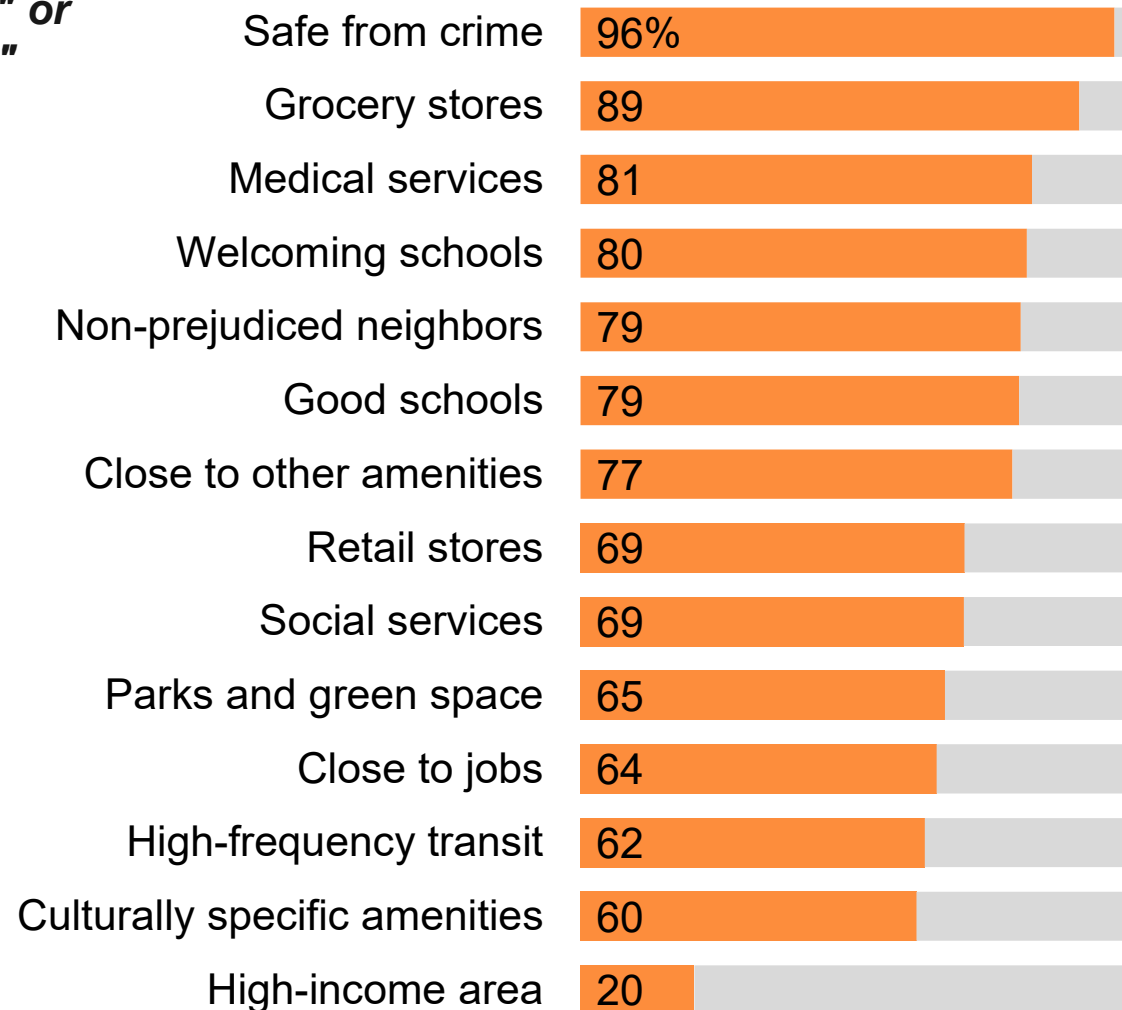
On the whole, voucher holders are pretty happy with their homes and neighborhoods.

What do voucher holders want?

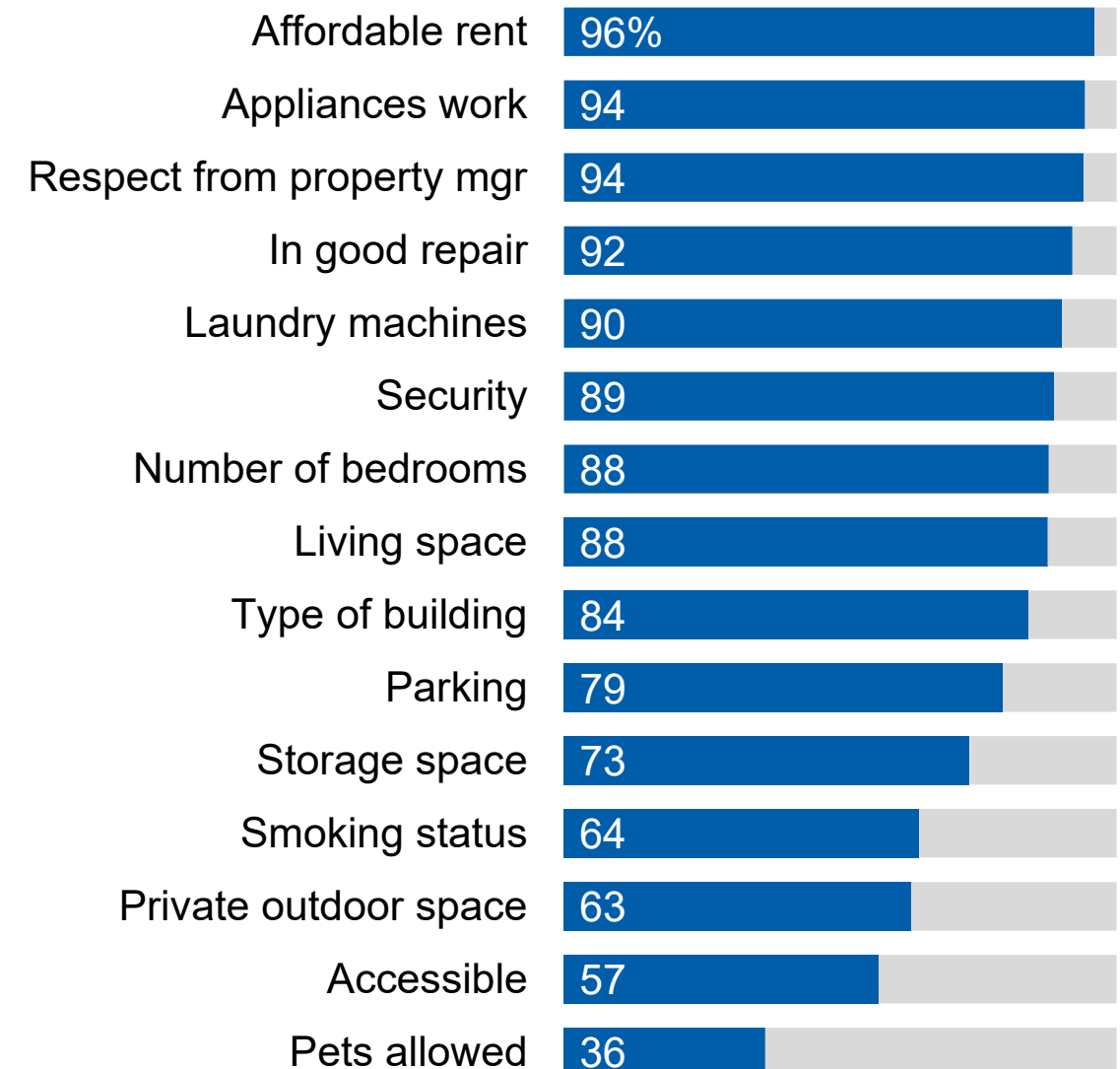
Voucher holders value neighborhood *and* home characteristics

Share of voucher holders who said that these items were "very important" or "extremely important"

Neighborhood characteristics



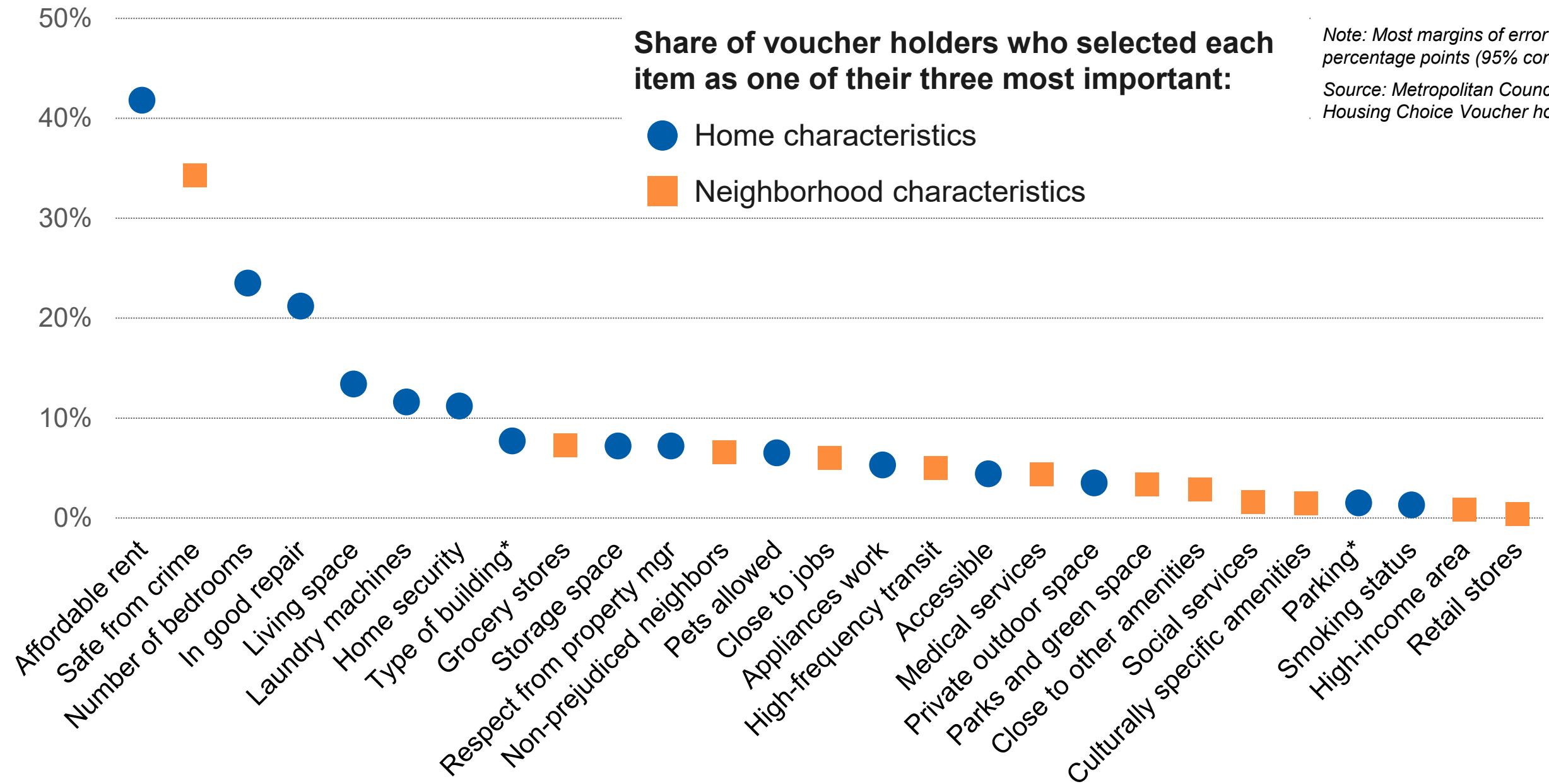
Home characteristics



Note: Most margins of error are 2-5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

When asked to choose, voucher holders tend to prioritize homes over neighborhoods



Note: Most margins of error are 1-4 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

But voucher holders' needs are diverse

50%

Share of voucher holders who selected each item as one of their three most important:

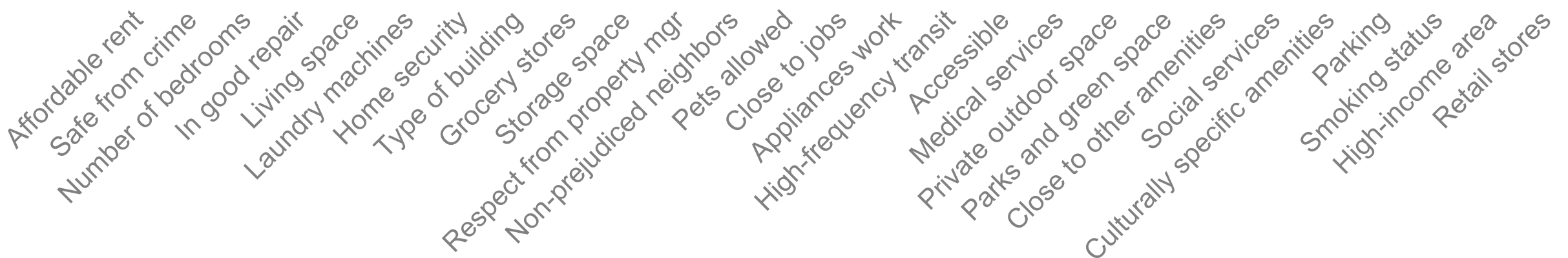
- Home characteristics
- Neighborhood characteristics

Note: Most margins of error are 1-4 percentage points (95% confidence level).
 Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

A few items are really important to lots of voucher holders...

... but each item is really important to *some* voucher holders.

0%



What do voucher holders find?

Most were able to find something they're looking for, but it wasn't easy

80% said they were able to find at least some of what they wanted in a neighborhood...

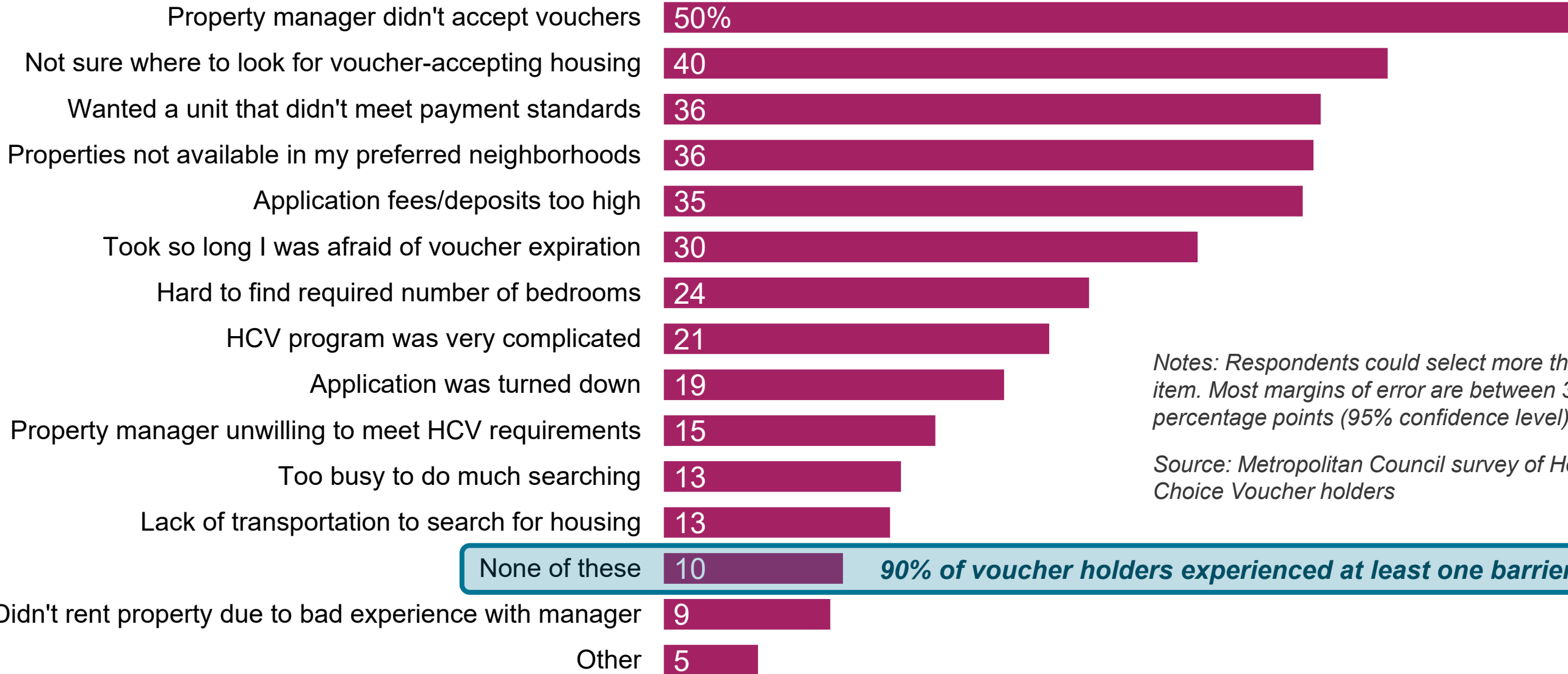
... but **78%** of them reported some difficulty

86% said they were able to find at least some of what they wanted in a home...

... but **84%** of them reported some difficulty

Barriers to housing searches are quite common.

Share of voucher holders who reported experiencing each of the following barriers:



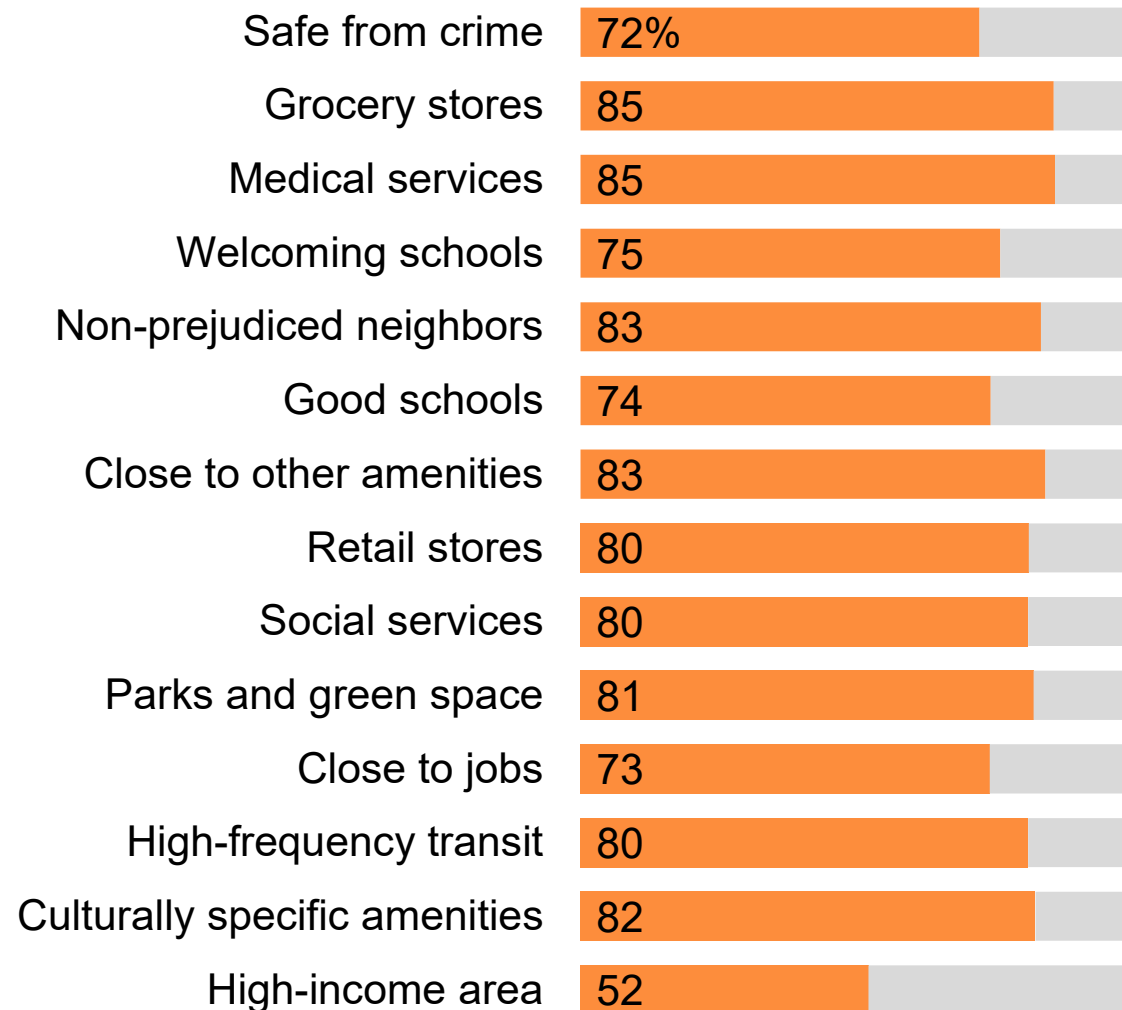
Notes: Respondents could select more than one item. Most margins of error are between 3 and 6 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

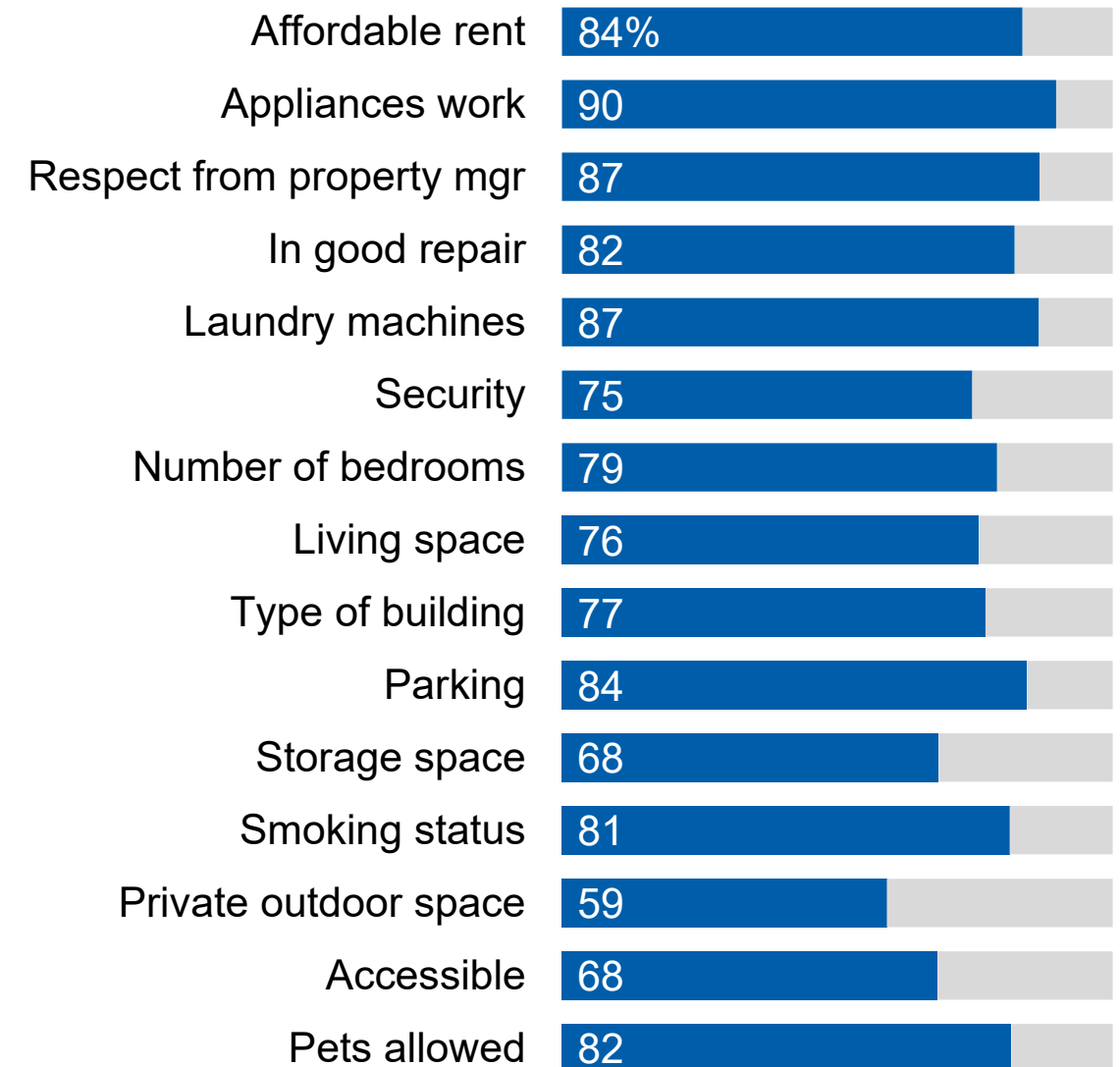
Most voucher holders say they have each characteristic we asked about

Share of voucher holders who reported having each of these

Neighborhood characteristics



Home characteristics



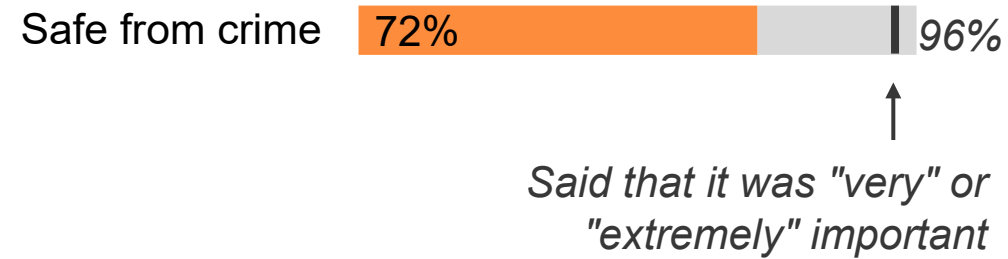
Notes: For each item, this question was asked only of respondents who said that characteristic was “moderately,” “very,” or “extremely” important to them. For easier comparison to other results, items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was “very important” or “extremely important” (Figure 3). Most margins of error are between 2-5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

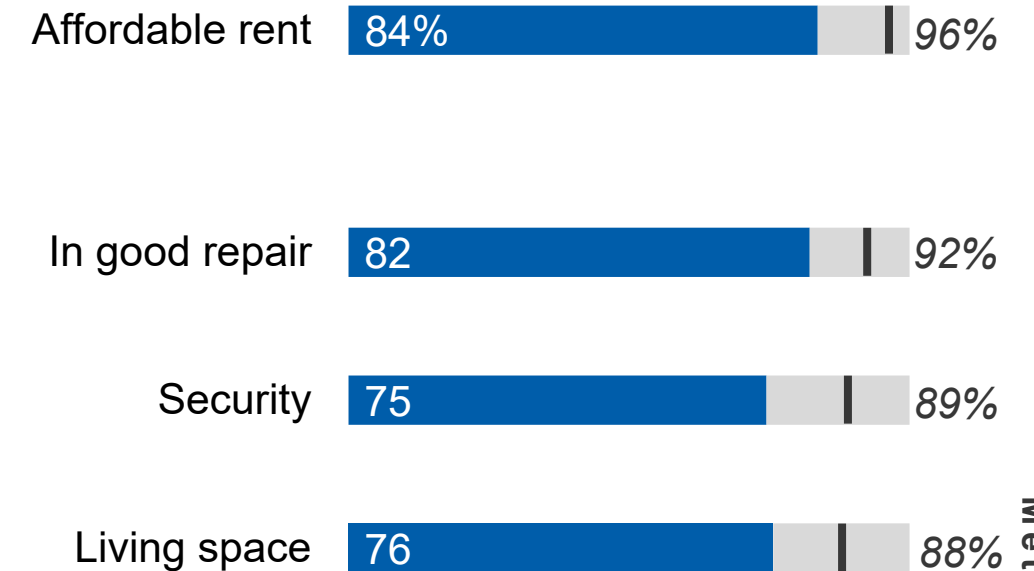
But gaps exist in safety, affordability, good repair, and space.

Share of voucher holders who reported having each of these

Neighborhood characteristics



Home characteristics



Notes: For each item, this question was asked only of respondents who said that characteristic was "moderately," "very," or "extremely" important to them. For easier comparison to other results, items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was "very important" or "extremely important" (Figure 3). Most margins of error are between 2-5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

**How satisfied
are voucher
holders?**

Satisfaction with neighborhoods and homes is widespread, with some differences

64% overall were happy with their neighborhood

- **Race difference:** Somali voucher holders more satisfied than other groups (90% vs 55%-63%)
- **Agency difference:** Metro HRA residents more satisfied than Minneapolis residents (71% vs 57%)
- **Vehicle access difference:** Voucher holders with a vehicle more satisfied than those without (71% vs 54%)

65% overall were happy with their home

- **Race difference:** Somali voucher holders more satisfied than other groups (89% vs 56%-67%)

Notes: Overall margins of error are 5 percentage points (95% confidence level); group-specific margins of error are 5-9 percentage points (90% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Respondents describe varying criteria for satisfaction

Happy

- “I live next to a park with a wonderful trail system. I can cover a lot of ground on the trails in my power wheelchair. Being in nature is important to me (it eased my anxiety last summer, which I have not had in months). I enjoy seeing & petting dogs on walks in the park with their humans. I also live next to a library, which I frequent during warm weather (and read the books outside). Cub Foods and CVS are close, as well as other stores, my credit union, and restaurants.”

Unsure

- “My current neighborhood it’s OK, but it’s still not accessible for people with handicaps especially getting to public transportation and so forth like the neighborhood stores. It’s not convenient not handicap accessible place.”

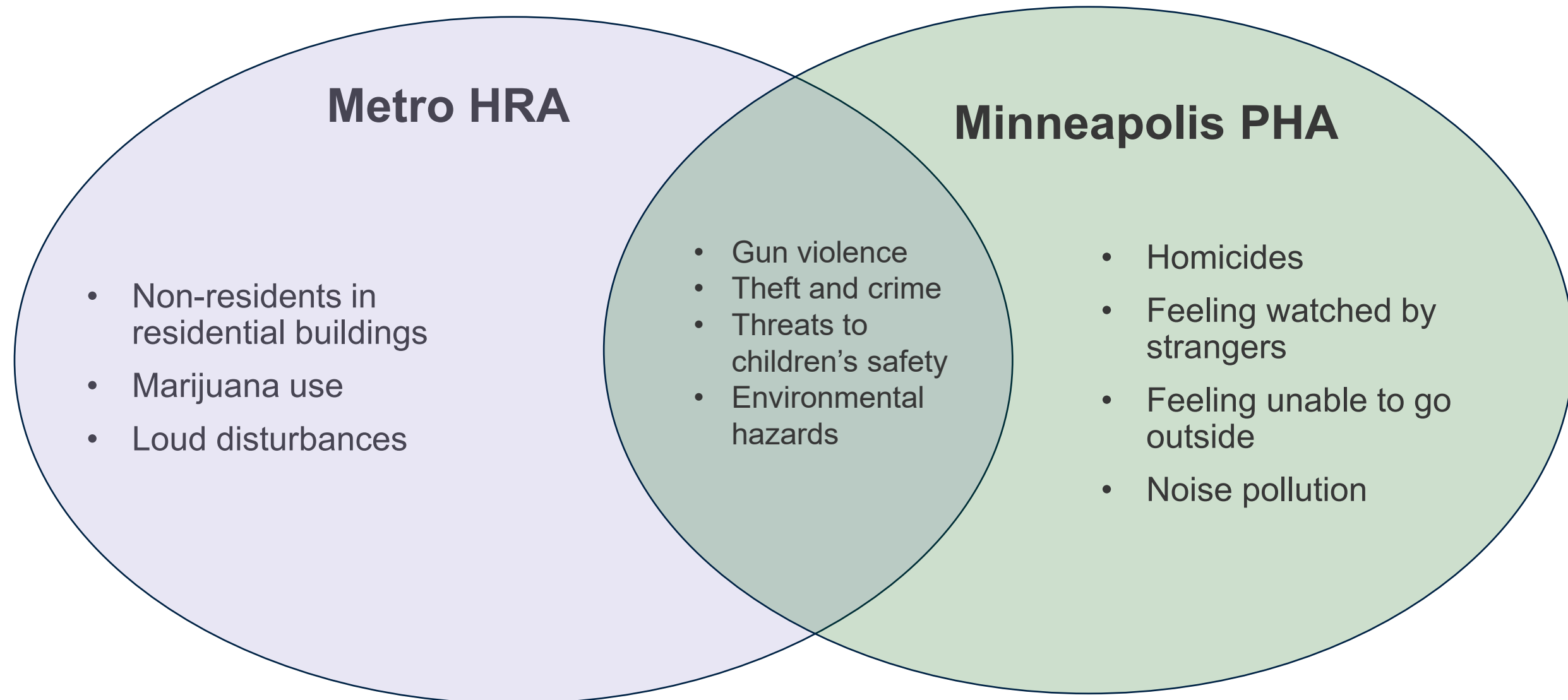
Unhappy

- “My home is very small. My home is not handicap accessible. I need a walk-in shower, which I don’t have. I need other accessible handicap equipment that I don’t have.”

Open-ended analysis shows variety

Safety concerns vary and overlap across locations

Comparing safety perspectives between housing agencies



Voucher holder satisfaction was influenced by shared buildings

Shared building likes

- Social networks and connections with neighbors
- High quality property management practices
- Building maintenance and upkeep

“The apartment staff and neighbors are friendly! I like my apartment building!”

Shared building dislikes

- Unclean communal areas
- Poor quality property management practices
- Inadequate amenities in buildings
- Theft and lack of safety

“Trash is being left on the sidewalks and parking lots. Someone put nails in the parking area. The neighbors let their kids run in the hallways... People are yelling/arguing in their unit, and you can hear them from your own unit.”

Voucher holders with children prioritize kids' needs

Parents satisfied when:

- Children are housed
- Children have enough space
- Children are safe
- Children's schools are close and/or good quality

“For the first time in my entire life my house feels like a home. It is a clean environment and safe for my children.”

Parents dissatisfied when:

- Children do not have enough space
- Children are exposed to violence in area
- Children threatened by traffic in area
- Children's schools are poor quality

“...We need more space since my kids are getting older... The oldest is a teen boy, he especially needs his own room from his younger sister, a pre-teen, and little brother...”

Recap

What do voucher holders want?

Voucher holders care about many characteristics of neighborhoods and (especially) homes; a "one-size-fits-all" approach will not serve them adequately.

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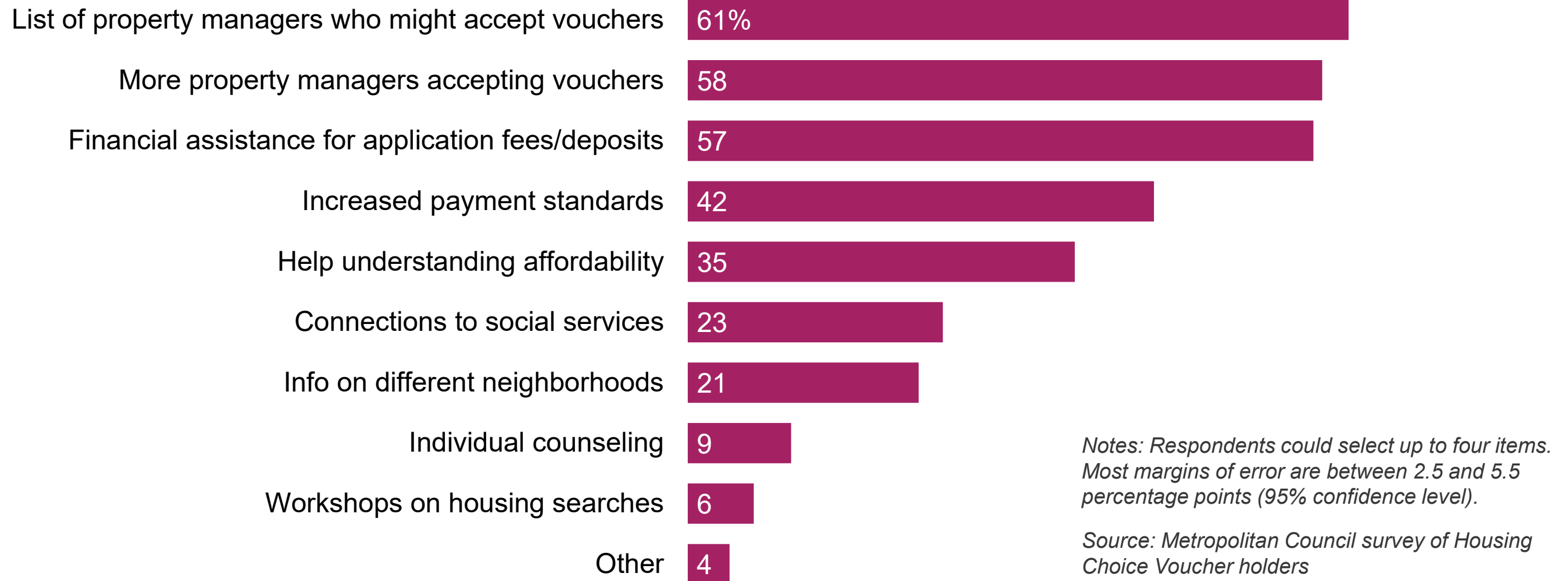
How satisfied are voucher holders?

On the whole, voucher holders are pretty happy with their homes and neighborhoods.

What would help?

Housing availability and financial assistance are key ways to help

Share of voucher holders who said that housing authorities could help them most by providing:



The results suggest lots of ways to help voucher holders

Assistance

- Ways to find properties that will accept vouchers
- Financial help with application fees and deposits

Information

- Neighborhood characteristics (not just "opportunity areas")
- Home characteristics, including physical condition
- Affordability of prospective homes

Programmatic/systemic change

- More homes accepting vouchers
- More funds to increase assistance and/or the number of vouchers
- Bans on voucher discrimination (with enforcement)

Next steps



- Report will be published on Community Development-Research team website through metro council.org
- Metro HRA will use these results to inform established, targeted processes
 - Resident Advisory Board
 - Programmatic outreach efforts



Thank you

Thanks to:

- Staff from Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA
- ACET (survey consultant)
- Feedback from Metropolitan Council members, Metro HRA leadership, and Twin Cities Research Group webinar participants.

Contacts:

- Matt Schroeder, Principal Researcher (Matt.Schroeder@metc.state.mn.us)
- Zhu Gong, Researcher (Zhu.Gong@metc.state.mn.us)

