

BUSINESS

Survey: Affordable housing, upward mobility big concerns for Capital Region

Siena College survey designed to take stock of quality-of-life issues that impact Capital Region residents

By **Larry Rulison**, Staff Writer
April 11, 2025



The City of Albany on Friday, April 11, 2025, from across the river in Rensselaer County. A new Siena Research Institute survey found that the most complaints are about the lack of affordable housing and a high cost of living. Although, in general, the Capital region got high marks for its cultural, medical and educational amenities.
Jim Franco/Times Union

COLONIE — A new Siena College Research Institute survey designed to take a critical look at a wide range of quality-of-life issues found deep concerns among Capital Region residents about the cost of living amid a shortage of affordable housing options.

The SCRI survey called the Capital Region Progress Report, is based on interviews with 1,096 residents of Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady and Saratoga counties in January, before President Donald Trump took office.

Overall, the survey found that people are generally happy living and working in the Capital Region, with 68% having a positive view of their overall quality of life.

There are some variances to that view depending on race. For instance, 72% of white respondents had a positive view of their quality of life here. Around half of Black respondents had a negative view.

But when it comes to the housing market in the Capital Region, there is universal disappointment across a wide swath of the population, with 75% of those surveyed having negative views about the availability of affordable housing in the Capital Region, where rents have increased nearly 50% in the past decade, [according to U.S. Census data](#).

“That just jumps off the page,” Don Levy, director of the institute, said in a phone interview. “It’s an enormous concern. We’re all working on it, but the general public is quite clear in saying we have an enormous problem.”

Pioneer, the Colonie-based bank, provided the funding for the unique study as the main sponsor. The Boys and Girls Club and the Jankow Companies, an Albany real estate firm, also partnered with Siena and Pioneer on the project.

“What intrigued Pioneer about it is it really fits perfectly within our charitable foundation because we are really focused on helping kids be kids in our community,” Tom Amell, Pioneer’s CEO, said in a phone interview. “What this survey does is shine a spotlight on areas in our community that need more attention.”

Amell said there are various reasons why there is an affordable housing shortage, and it’s not just an issue here but all across the country. In New York, the regulatory approval process for housing is long and expensive, which contributes to the shortfall, he said.

“There’s certain states like Florida that have an abundance of housing, but in our marketplace, there’s just a supply-and-demand imbalance,” Amell said.

Siena’s Levy said the survey looked at four main aspects of quality of life: affordability, livability, opportunity and cultural assets. The idea is to track local opinions on these issues over time to see if efforts to make change are working.

“I was really excited to do it. I’ve been wanting to do something like this for a while because I think it’s a really important project for the stakeholders across the region,” Levy said. “We came up with this sort of metaphor of a progress report, you know, similar to when you walk into school and meet with the teacher and the teacher would kind of go through a series of indicators as to how your child is doing across math, science, reading, etc.

“There is the hope that we could generate some participation, some partnerships, some attempts by the well-meaning stakeholders and citizens of the area to say we can do better, that we can enhance our progress in these areas,” Levy added.

There are many positive findings to come out of the survey, Levy says, especially when it comes to how people perceive the safety and security of their neighborhoods.

Eighty-nine percent of the respondents said that the typical person in their community feels “safe and secure” in their homes. The numbers remain high, between 80% and 90%, across different ages, races and political affiliations.

“That, again, to me is a dramatically high number. I think it’s something that we can pat ourselves on the back, and the police get a pretty good assessment as well,” Levy said.

The survey reveals that not all residents feel they have the same opportunities for advancement, something that concerns Levy. A majority of those surveyed, 56%, say minorities in the Capital Region face racial or ethnic discrimination. Nearly all Black respondents, 91%, agree.

“I think that collectively as a region, we need to see where can we generate more opportunity,” Levy said. “Obviously, the winds are blowing against discussions of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion policies). But I don’t think the winds are blowing against the discussions of discrimination. So this continues to be a belief, a sense that we have sort of a built-in sense of discrimination here in the Capital Region.”

Levy, Amell and others involved in the project were scheduled to hold a roundtable discussion about the results Friday afternoon at Siena College with stakeholders and others.

“I mean we do have some ingredients in place, some by virtue of our location, the proximity to recreation, the fact that we have big city amenities without big city crime or threats,” Levy said. “Hopefully this report points to the sense that we could parlay that into enhancing the perceived quality of life.”

April 11, 2025



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