

# First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



**Community Visited:** Blue Rapids

**Date(s) Visited:** 5/10/2018 (a,b,c,d)  
5-17-2018 (e,f)

**Pre-visit web search: How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?**

- a. There was limited information on the web. The city website should be reconfigured to promote and market the city better.
  - b. FANTASTIC city website.
  - c. I visited the city website. It didn't have much information that someone moving there might want to know, schools and housing.
  - d. Several websites. Couldn't find info on school rankings- outcomes.
  - e. I found it very easy to find information about Blue Rapids online. I viewed their official website, [www.bluerapids.org](http://www.bluerapids.org). Could use more photos on that site. For Blue Rapids attractions, I went to the Marshall County site.
  - f. Easy to get, no difficulties.
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1. **The "Five-Minute" Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted. The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)**
    - a. This is a tale of two cities—one with beautiful housing, the other with substandard and dilapidated housing. The eastern entrance to the city was incredible. It left a very good impression with me.
    - b. Beautiful setting, interesting circular main "street," quite a few dumpy houses (sorry!)
    - c. I thought it was a nice small town and liked the ballfields, pool, fairgrounds all in the same area. The senior housing was nice. The fire department was very nice for a small town.
    - a. Small town in central Kansas trying to survive. Love the limestone buildings. Nice small town. New fire/police department building, but rest of area on highway could use some tidying up.
    - d. I found it to be a very neat and clean community. It looks like a good place to live. Good signage, well-maintained streets and building. I would love to see the little diner on the east side of town restored.
    - e. Pleasant appearance, Welcome sign, houses, some businesses.

## **2. Downtown Business Area**

**Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.**

**Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses.**

**(Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)**

- a. The downtown business area is in dire need of investment. The circle drive is nice, the new library addition is first rate, but the city needs to bring in new investment to revive a potentially great asset. We saw a library, bank, bar & grill and a number of vacant buildings.
- b. The bank and library were beautiful. It appeared that buildings were missing. Others were run down. We stopped at the Blue Rapids flower shop. It was great, but off the beaten path. We were not greeted; she was ringing another lady up. No assistance was given, but it was a small shop so none was really needed.
- c. I thought the buildings were well-kept, streets clean. I liked the circle main street with the park in the middle. We saw historical society, pharmacy, library, bank, diner, and city office, which the people were very friendly and helpful. We were greeted and they were very nice and helpful.
- d. Business area built around a circle. Limestone buildings. Oldest public Library west of the Mississippi. Glacier display. Bank, Library, Community Center/City office, trailer manufacturer, greenhouses. Friendly and helpful customer service.
- e. The downtown area is beautiful and the buildings well-maintained! Signage and infrastructure great! Flower and gift shop; plants, gifts, food. Bought a delicious jelly there and tomato plants. Antique shop—collectibles, food, housewares. Grocery – nice selection. We were greeted, did not have to ask for assistance.
- f. Mostly older buildings but well maintained. Gas Station, grocery store, Dollar General. Grocery store had a large variety, deli and Subway Sandwich Shop. Displayed well. Was greeted and offered assistance.

**What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.) Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?**

- a. NA
- b. Honestly, I was driving so paid more attention to the streets and signs. With so many greenhouses, I really would have thought the downtown could be landscaped better. Just a thought.
- c. There were benches in the park. Not sure about Wi-Fi. No trouble parking and good sidewalks to walk around downtown. One of the churches had awesome landscaping.
- d. Benches in City Park and in the downtown circle. No parking issues. Landscaping around Presbyterian Church was beautiful.
- e. Found all of these (Didn't search out Wi-Fi)
- f. Neatly kept park in the middle of older businesses. City Hall and Community Center across the street with amenities and police department.

### **3. Other Retail Shopping Areas**

**Describe other retail shopping areas. Were the areas attractive and easy to access?**

- a. NA
- b. NA
- c. The grocery, Casey's and car lot were easily accessed and looked well-kept. The antique store looked pretty full though.
- d. Most retail located on the highway. Grocery store has a pleasing appearance. Well-kept. Casey's store looked fine, but an antique/mercantile store could be cleaned up some. The trailer manufacturing plant downtown detracts from a neat appearance in a residential area.
- e. The antique shop was attractive, needs better parking area. Flower shop was attractive and easy to access. Grocery store easy to access, could use some updating. (ie water-stained ceiling tiles.)
- f. Green house with retail sales, large variety of plants.

### **4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

**Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand? If so, describe.**

- a. NA
- b. I found it somewhat odd that the "industrial" area wasn't limited to the outskirts of town.
- c. There is an area outside the main downtown that looks like it has plenty of room for expansion.
- d. New industrial park. Sharp Trailer Manufacturing has built a new plant in the park. Plenty of room for expansion.
- e. Yes, we drove by trailer manufacturing plant, appears to be room to expand. Green houses seem to be spread all over the place.
- f. There is an industrial area, don't know about accessibility or expansion.

### **5. Health Care Services**

**Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services.**

- a. NA
- b. I remember there being a medical clinic.
- c. We located the medical and dental clinics but there wasn't any signage on Main Street or the highway.
- d. Hospital is 12 miles away in Marysville.
- e. I saw the medical clinic. Not sure about emergency medical although I read in the Blue Rapids Brochure that hospital is 13 miles north.
- f. Medical Clinic good appearance. Fire Department is located on Hwy 16.

**Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers.**

- a. Have a clinic and GP in town.
- b. NA
- c. We saw a physician's office and dentist.
- d. A medical clinic and a dentist office is located in town. Do not know the hours, etc.
- e. All looked good and were easy to access, although I didn't locate Mesa View Housing (May I have missed the sign?)
- f. Don't know.

**What long-term care services, assisted living or nursing facilities exist in the community?**

- a. The city has the Blue Valley nursing home. The setting was beautiful at the edge of town.
- b. NA
- c. We found a nursing facility in a sort of rural area which is probably nice and quiet for the elderly.
- d. Senior living/nursing home??
- e. Nursing home. Mesa View Housing.
- f. Assisted living, nursing facilities, and income-based housing.

**6. Housing**

**Give a brief description of the existing mix of housing stock. Does the local market have housing that would appeal to all income wages? What challenges do you see in regards to finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)**

- a. Blue Rapids is in dire need of quality housing. There are a good number of nice homes, but a bigger number of substandard homes that need to be demolished. Most good quality homes are sold without going on the market. In fact, we did not see any "for sale" signs in town.
- b. Such a mix. Some *very* dilapidated, some *really* nice.
- c. We found some nice housing and some not so appealing housing. No for sale or rent signs in sight.
- d. A mixed bag of housing and neighborhoods. Did not see any "for sale or For Rent" signs. Housing could be a problem.
- e. It looks like there are homes for all price ranges. The majority of the homes are in good repair. I went online to view houses for sale and the price range was \$52,000 to \$579,000.
- f. Wide variety of homes, most well-kept but some in need of repair.

**What kind of rental properties did you observe for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?**

- a. There appeared to be very little quality housing for rent. We did not observe any for rent signs.
- b. Didn't notice any houses for sale or rent.
- c. Did not see any.
- d. Small apartment building (maybe former motel?) not too pleasing appearance. No rental signs.
- e. I didn't notice any rental properties but I'm sure they are there.
- f. Don't know. Fair housing discrimination information available.

**7. Schools**

**Do the following schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of temporary classrooms? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?**

- a. The city has a K-3 grade school. Building appeared to be adequate. Grounds were immaculate.
- b. Yes, kids were outside playing. It looked like a nice facility and playground.
- c. There is a 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade school. Buildings and grounds were very nice.
- d. Grades 3-6 are in Blue Rapids. Nice, well-maintained buildings and grounds. K-2 in Waterville, 7-12 building is located between the two towns.
- e. Preschool, elementary and high school. All appear to be adequate and well maintained.
- f. Valley Heights School, Preschool, K-6. Well maintained.

**Were you able to find online information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?**

- a. NO. The city website is very functional, but not usable to promote the town. Need marketing.
- b. NA
- c. I didn't look but on the city website and there wasn't a link to the school.
- d. Could not find any rankings or scores for the school district.
- e. Yes.
- f. Yes

**8. Childcare**

**Were you able to determine if childcare was affordable and available?**

- a. Based on a web search, found 4 daycare centers.
- b. NA
- c. Did not see any daycares and nothing on website.
- d. I'm sure there is child care available for did not notice any building/sign.
- e. I didn't find any information on child care services. I also looked online for this.
- f. Don't know.

## **9. Faith/Religion**

**Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the churches represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of church-sponsored community services?**

- a. Found 4-5 churches in town. The United Church is a jewel.
- b. A number of churches and a REALLY gorgeous one!
- c. There were 5 different denominations. Physical appearances were fine— Presbyterian was awesome! I did not see any church-sponsored community services.
- d. Five churches—Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian. The Presbyterian Church was absolutely beautiful (limestone building) with a neat, landscaped lawn.
- e. I saw five different churches/five different denominations. All churches looked to be in good repair.
- f. 5 churches, well maintained.

## **10. Civic**

**Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community and evidence of civic organization activity.**

- a. No impression of any clubs or such. Saw no activity.
- b. Unknown.
- c. I did not see any signs for any, such as Lions Club or Rotary. I saw where they were trying to raise money for the new pool.
- d. I'm sure there are some, but I did not notice any.
- e. A large variety of clubs exist for all ages. From 4-H and scouts to Rotary, Lions Club, etc. I read in the brochure about parade, Easter Egg Hunt, 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration.
- f. 10 Organizations + Marshall County Historical Railroad Society, Blue Rapids Historical Society and Habitat for Humanity. Youth organizations, 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts, Church Fellowships, Summer Ball. Saw the Fair Grounds, Ball Field, Party

## **11. Public Infrastructure**

**Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas other than downtown.**

- a. The city parks is a highlight in Blue Rapids. The setting is very nice and is unique due to its location.
- b. Streets were fine, signage was a bit difficult to see, but it was fine.
- c. Street signs were hard to see.
- d. Did not see any “city limit” signs. Some street signs (small limestone and posts with street name painted on them.) Black top streets—some curling.
- e. Overall I had a good impression of all infrastructure. Found that Blue Rapids T-Shirts are for sale and proceeds go to paint street signs. Great idea!
- f. On the average good.

**Comment on city/town hall (How were you received? Was there information about the town available?)**

- a. The city clerk was very inviting and a wealth of information. Did not see any information about the town at city hall. If I missed the obvious, that’s my fault.
- b. Very friendly and helpful. Wish we’d had more time to visit.
- c. We were very welcomed at City Hall. They were very knowledgeable about the area.
- d. Nice city hall. Clerk very friendly and knowledgeable. Not sure about info available except word of mouth. City council meets once a month- 2<sup>nd</sup> Wed at 7pm.
- e. City Hall is housed in a newer building downtown. Very nice! Office staff were friendly and helpful. There were lots of brochures and information available. A nice meeting room, restrooms, water fountains and kitchen.
- f. City/town hall- well received. Display of pamphlets with information about the area. Chief of police and one officer happened to be in the city office, had a nice visit with them.

**Police/fire protection:**

- a. The city has a nice facility for both.
- b. Sooooo many bays. Wow!
- c. We were told 2 full-time officers and a new office in the fire department building.
- d. Police: 2-full-time; 5 part-time. Huge new building on the highway that houses fire and police. Had/have issue with tax financing on the building between city and township.
- e. Yes!
- f. New Building- police chief and two full-time officers.

**Library:**

- a. Yes.
- b. Wish we'd gone in; it looked beautiful.
- c. Very pretty building!
- d. Library is located downtown in a nice limestone building.
- e. Beautiful downtown library! I love to see the historic buildings being put to good use.
- f. Public Library on National Register of Historical Places.

**City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sportsplex)**

- a. Yes to all. All appear to be well-taken care of.
- b. Really liked the town center; hope it's utilized.
- c. We saw the ballparks by the pool, they seemed well-kept.
- d. City Park has a playground, ballpark and pool.
- e. Yes—all beautiful!
- f. City Park, Ballparks, playgrounds, sportsplex

**12. Recreation/Tourism**

**Is the community well-known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?**

- a. City hosts the county fair. City needs to promote itself much better.
- b. NA (No Answer)
- c. The rock in the park.
- d. "NA" (*answer that was given.*)
- e. Yes, baseball game of 1913, Fountain Park Square (First Round About), Marshall County Fair.
- f. 1913 Baseball game with Chicago White Sox and New York Giants playing on Blue Rapids diamond.

**Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?**

- a. None.
- b. No
- c. No
- d. "NA" (*answer that was given.*)
- e. Read about lighted horse-drawn parade, Marshall County Fair & Parade, 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration.
- f. NA

**Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community.**

- a. The city park is a gem. I would like to see the city promote and use the river. This a great resource that should be developed for hiking, kayaking, etc.
- b. River/fishing.
- c. Didn't see any.
- d. Big Blue River—well-known for fishing.
- e. Alcove Springs, museum, and the park.
- f. Murals, museum, campgrounds, Oregon Trail Camp site.

**Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, main street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.**

- a. None that I could see.
- b. Was not well marked to find city hall.
- c. The city office.
- d. City Office.
- e. We stopped at the City Office. The people were very friendly and helpful! Need better signage. City Office sign in window is hard to see if vehicles are parked in front.
- f. City office has friendly staff and very nice facilities.

**Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?**

- a. The green house is an awesome business in town. This business could be a way to draw people to town to not only shop there but in other shops as well.
- b. NA
- c. The green house.
- d. Not specifically to go there, but if I was in the vicinity, I would probably stop at the greenhouse.
- e. Yes, Alcove Springs.
- f. Need a good café. Antiques and collectibles.

### **13. Wrap-up**

#### **What are the most positive things you observed about the community?**

- a. This is a lovely town. But has much work to do in housing. The town also needs to capitalize on the natural beauty of the flint hills and the river.
- b. Several active, successful businesses. Have a pool and nice ball fields. LOVE the city's website. VERY user friendly. Engaged city clerk.
- c. The clean downtown and limestone buildings. Great nursery. The job market in manufacturing is great.
- d. Strong manufacturing presence—not sure how many employees. Friendly people.
- e. Pretty, clean, and friendly.
- f. Friendly, Inviting, gives a good impression.

#### **What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?**

- a. Housing. Need a plan to market the town. Need branding at present. Blue Rapids is anonymous.
- b. Housing, so many businesses within city limits, like literally in the middle of residential houses. Distance from bigger city.
- c. More businesses. More land available for new housing as town seems to be surrounded by farm land.
- d. Not a heavily populated part of the state. Hwy 9 does run through the town, but feel most of the traffic is probably locals in the area. Don't believe they have many "new" visitors traveling that highway that might stop and check out the town. They need a reason for people to come.
- e. Bringing a few more businesses to the downtown area. Good, affordable daycare (may be there but I didn't see it). A good restaurant that people from out of town would drive to would be nice. Need good restaurant. Very few choices. We ate at Subway.
- f. NA

**What will you remember most about this community six month from now (positive or negative)?**

- a. The park, green house, eastern entrance to town, the limestone church (awesome!)
- b. The greenhouses, circular main “street,” dumpy houses, Sioux quartz rock in town center.
- c. Positive- the friendliness, the circle main street, and the nursery.
- d. The friendly people—limestone buildings. With several manufacturing facilities believe there might be good paying jobs locally. Housing problems. Areas of town need major clean-up. Main business area seems to be on the highway.
- e. The beauty and friendly people. I would come back. I would like to take grandkids to the park. A swimming pool would be a great addition. Overall positive, keep up the good work!
- f. Museum and Mercantile Store.

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