First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Sylvan Grove Date(s) Visited: 11/6/2017

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?

*In doing the web search information on other businesses with the name Sylvan Grove popped up first. We had to scroll down a little to find the Sylvan Grove, Kansas official website. The website is very basic but has good information. There is a nice list of businesses. The school tab takes you directly to the school website. In checking Facebook, we found the Sylvan Grove Library page.*

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.)

*Sylvan Grove is a quiet small rural community. It has a wide main street with many limestone buildings. The park looks to have been recently updated and is inviting. Wondered if a wind storm had recently went through as a big tree had been uprooted. The “Welcome to Sylvan Grove” sign at the park was difficult to read from the road. The sign on the south side of town was much easier to read. There was a group of signs at the intersection of K-18 & HWY 181. The State Champ and the “Live Lincoln County” signs both caught our eye. Right as you enter town, there is a run down farmstead to the north of town that doesn’t give the nice impression that the rest of town does. Yards looked fairly well maintained but there are a lot of older houses and many that are vacant or need to be demolished. There was no directional signage for the school but did note signs to find the churches. We thought that the “commercial” ag businesses on the outskirts of town were unique (Ag Supply and Sale Barn).*

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?) 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?

*There are lots of limestone buildings and some of the stone buildings have been covered with tin. It would be nice if those could be restored to the original stone to unify the downtown. The bank had been added onto and had a nice sign and landscaping on the north side. Fly Boys Brewery looked interesting. It would have been nice to have gone in. The Hometown Convenience Store had a nice variety of merchandise for a small town. It was good to have the restaurant connected to it. Staff was nice and friendly.*

 *Saw the sign on the window for Labertew Apiaries but it wasn’t open. Other businesses noted were the Hair Shop, Country Soul, LLC and M&G Signs. There were a couple of buildings that looked nice but we couldn’t tell what they were used for. Also wondered about a couple of places that appeared to be café/bars. One you could see had napkins holders and such on the tables but no hours were listed. The other looked like a bar but again no hours listed. The work that has been done on the Depot building is nice and it would be neat if this could be utilized even more. We also liked the limestone markers on some of the downtown corners.*

*Fire/EMS, the library and city office were all close together and buildings looked good.*

*We saw flower pots on the streets. Since it has frozen, they weren’t very* *attractive and need to be put away for the winter. The main street could use more benches, since there were just a sparse few in some of the landscaped parks. That along with art installations might give people more reason to come and linger longer in downtown.*

1. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

*Didn’t see any other retail areas, even though it’s neat to have a clothing store in downtown.*

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

*Commercial/industrial type businesses seem to be scattered around town. We saw the service station, World Pest Control and 181 Ag Supply. 181 Ag had a directional sign which was helpful. The elevator is on the south side of town. Wondered if the facilities on the west side of HWY 181 are operational. Also on the south side we found Sylvan Sales Commission and Frederking Seed. It would be nice to have a directional sign to the sale barn from main street. It’s a unique thing to have a Livestock Commission in town any more, since many from the “old days” have closed.*

5. Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services. Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers. What long-term care services, assisted living or nursing facilities exist in the community?

*Nice to see a medical clinic. The sign said closed and we didn’t get out to see what the hours were. Also saw the Senior Center downtown. Did not find any other type of health care facilities in town.*

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

*It appeared there could be housing for all income levels. It didn’t appear there were many houses for sale or rental places. Did see one set of apartments. Lots of older homes and many houses which needed to be torn down.*

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

*It is a unified school district with junior high and high school located in Sylvan Grove. For a visitor it’s hard to find and there is no directional signage. Leaving the school on the north side and heading east we past 181 Ag and then saw some livestock pens and a really run down house. It didn’t leave a very good impression.*

*The school facilities look nice and well cared for. The website is good and has lots of information.*

*We also saw the old grade school and wondered what it is used for. Are the tennis courts kept usable? That and the former Lutheran School might offer a huge opportunity to bring something in to utilize those buildings if they are useable and available. Could it be a place to start local entrepreneurs out in?*

1. Childcare

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

*Didn’t find any out about childcare.*

1. 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?

*There are two churches in town – the Bethlehem Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church. There is an old school building next to the Lutheran Church which looks to be maintained. Also a basketball court and playground across the street. We found the website for the Lutheran Church.*

1. Civic

Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.

*We saw the Legion Building and signs for 4-H and the Lions Club. Also saw the fairgrounds. It might be nice to have a sign telling people that the Lincoln County Fair is held in Sylvan Grove, since we would doubt that many outsiders would know that.*

1. Public Infrastructure

Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas other than downtown. Did you observe land-use planning?

*The side streets were either paved or sand and gravel. Streets kind of seemed to be an after-thought to get to the grain storage facilities. We didn’t find any open public restrooms. The ones at the park were closed for the winter.*

*It really didn’t appear there was any land use planning. The consistent downtown sidewalks and wide streets throughout town were nice. Decorative light poles and street signs could really add to the beauty of town.*

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

*City Hall was a nice looking building. We didn’t go inside though.*

Police/fire protection:

*Saw the Fire/EMS Building south of city hall. It looked very nice. We didn’t see a police station but noticed a county Sheriff’s vehicle at a residence.*

Library:

*The library looked nice from the outside. Since we were there on Monday it wasn’t open. It was nice that they had posted hours on the building and on-line.*

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

*Very nice city park with updated play equipment and what appears to be a nice bathroom. Some of the older facilities are still there. A nice sidewalk/walking trail. The old bridge on the west side is quaint but the creek needed to be maintained a little better.*

*The ball fields are out by the fairgrounds. They looked good.*

1. Recreation/Tourism

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

*The slogan on the website is “Gateway to Wilson Lake”. We didn’t really see it being used in the community. On K-18 we did see directional signs for the lake and the double stone arched bridge. Fly Boys, the County Fair, and Wilson Lake are all attractions that outsiders could come and return for. Make sure outsiders know about those. When is the Museum open? What kind of items are showcased in there?*

*Also saw signs promoting the upcoming Pheasants Forever Banquet.*

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

*Pheasants Forever Banquet in Vesper. We liked the digital events sign..*

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

 *Wilson Lake, Double Stone Arched Bridge, and hunting*

 *Also all the limestone buildings and the museum.*

 *On the south side of town is an old railroad depot.*

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.

*No*

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

*We would like to try Fly Boys Brewery. Labertew Apiary is also unusual. Country Soul is also unique.*

1. Wrap-up

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

 *Small quiet community. Friendly people.*

 *Nice park.*

 *Proximity to Wilson Lake. Fly Boys.*

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

 *A number of run down building.*

 *The number of older and dilapidated houses.*

 *It’s off the beaten path. How do you draw people to the community?*

*Uses for the empty school buildings and getting even more supporting businesses in to support those great businesses that you already have going. Could all of the businesses ban together to pay for ads in the shopper or on-line to encourage people to get off of the beaten path and visit you?*

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

*It’s off the beaten path.*

*Fly Boys looks like it could be an attraction.*

*The number of old and dilapidated houses.*

*The wide streets and the limestone features.*

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