First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: **WaKeeney**

**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?**

The city of WaKeeney has a very nice website. It’s very informative and has a lot of information on it. The big background picture on the main page can cause confusion at times, but other than that it is user friendly. It’s easy to see you are known at the Christmas City of the High Plains.

It’s pleasing to see that a variety of information on WaKeeney came up with a simple search. Schools, health care, real estate, maps, lodging, city data and speedway information were all readily available. The TCLMH website was very nice. It was very user friendly and well organized. It was also good to see a young physician on staff. The only recommendation would be to have a professional picture taken of the facility for the site. The school website however looks outdated. It provided good information but needs to be updated to become more user friendly.

The city website somewhat accurately reflected what we saw on our visit. The city itself wasn’t quite as nice as depicted on the site. They definitely show their best on-line but that’s what you want to do. It helps entice people to visit your community and the web presence definitely did that.

There was a good amount of information on WaKeeney and surrounding area, such as Cedar Point and the Trego County Fair. It was pleasing to not only see current information, but history of the area as well. One thing we noticed during our visit was there wasn’t any information *in* WaKeeney about Cedar Point but it was highly publicized on-line. That would be an area for improvement if it truly is a highlight of the area.

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.)**

Entry points are attractive however the welcome sign on the north side is extremely weedy. Great signage towards downtown. Main Street has nice landscaping and new pocket park plantings and lighting at the Railroad tracks are great. Downtown has a lot of businesses. Nice brick streets, good sidewalks with trees. Courthouse on a square gives a very nice center of town. The economic development office attached to the courthouse will be nice once upgrades are completed and it has the limestone to match. We liked the wide streets with ample parking. Downtown neighbors have well-kept residences. There are a lot of options to stop on the I-70 exits. The new gas station on the southwest side of town is a good addition. The old Hwy 40 corridor has some run down and vacant commercial properties which need to be addressed.

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.**

The downtown area is mostly attractive and well-kept. There are nice brick buildings but some metal facades which deter from the old downtown look. Overall buildings and sidewalks are clean and neat. Established trees are attractive. Nice signs and flags. It was nice to see a store front salvaged where there is no building behind in order to maintain a nicer curb appeal. There were no directional signs to the library, post office, city office, etc. They loved the idea of the information center in the main intersection but it could be improved.

WaKeeney has a good mix of independent retail & services for a city of its size. Depth of selection and breadth of quality are lacking due to lack of volume. Very nice pharmacy downtown with a variety of items in the store – plus a soda fountain area – really nice.

**Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)**

Everyone was very nice downtown at the businesses we stopped at. People were very friendly at the pharmacy, gift shop, the second-hand store and city hall. We were not greeted at the grocery store. The cashier was indifferent. The main concern was at the daycare center. Two of us stopped in there and three different people saw us and went about their work before someone greeted us. The children were napping at the time and it could have been a safety concern if we were people with ulterior motives. The art store is also a very nice addition to downtown and nice helpful staff.

**What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.)**

One team member said there were no drinking fountains nor public restrooms downtown. We had to go into a business to use a restroom. Another team member commented it was good to see a couple of drinking fountains, nice new trash cans and some benches available downtown.

**Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping.**

The established trees throughout downtown are a nice feature as well as the fun new Christmas tree idea to strengthen the community’s tourism attraction of “The Christmas City of the High Plains.” The “North Pole” pocket park is great as well but could use some refreshing. The other pocket park however has potential but needs to be developed. In addition, the sidewalks throughout the downtown are very well maintained and the area appeared as though it would be well lit at night.

**Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?**

The parking throughout WaKeeney’s downtown was more than adequate and it was easy to access multiple stores and services.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

The I-70 convenience stores were very attractive and easy to access. The shopping along the west entrance into town from I-70 was easy to access as well, but the appearance of some buildings were dated. Some simple updating and cleanup would improve the feeling as you drive into town as well as attract new interest to their businesses. The pharmacy along old Hwy 40 is nice.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

Commercial/Industrial areas are well defined and maintained. It seems like a fairly large area with room for growth. Easy access to the interstate from the east side of town. The industrial area along old Hwy 40 however is an area of town that needs to be addressed for weed control and overall clean-up in appearance. Residential areas go to the city limits with rural business clutter as the edges.

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?**

All health care facilities were attractive and updated with nicely maintained landscaping. The hospital is easily accessible from east entrances of town.

It was nice to see the medical clinic at the hospital. The Health Department was conveniently located downtown. An optometrist office was not located (I did find it just north of the Sheriff’s Office). A well-known chiropractor is located downtown.

Long term care facilities (24 bed) were easy to find and had a nice appearance. The assisted living is conveniently located adjacent to the hospital. The nursing home (47 bed) was a good size for the community. Having transportation available is an excellent feature.

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?**

WaKeeney has a good mix of ages and sizes of homes. It is a little heavy on small, old homes, but this is very common in small towns. Most of the residential areas throughout town were well-kept, but the northwest corner of town could use some code enforcement. There are very few rundown houses in town.

There wasn’t much for sale and we were told that houses turn quickly. No building sites were located, and the city has no plans for new development. Perhaps a city-county cooperative is needed?

It was indicated rentals are hard to get. Others are in need of rehab or demo. The low-income housing facilities were good size and in fair condition.

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?**

The schools appeared to be a good size for the community and there was no evidence of temporary classrooms. All of the schools and grounds were well-maintained and had nice landscaping. Schools are easy to access from the East exit of interstate.

Our team did not locate a pre-school or Head Start facility but with our visit being during the summer when schools are closed it presented a hurdle that might not have been there otherwise.

We did not find print information in the community about the education system. The school does have a website but it needs updating.

1. **Childcare**

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

We found one large downtown daycare center, but only by exploring. There is no signage on the building to indicate a daycare center inside, only a baby blanket in the window. There is obviously a need they are filling in the community because a lady there said they just keep growing. With quick growth can come growing pains, and they need to get some systems in place. As mentioned earlier in the report, it was alarming to be able to enter the facility and be seen by three people before anyone greeted us or questioned our being there.

There are three other daycares in town but still a need for more.

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? Are there any facilities or statements that some would view as intrusive or that would make someone feel uncomfortable if they were not of a particular faith?**

Very diverse group of churches and many churches – nicely listed on the website. On the visit we noticed eight different denominations. All had a nice appearance outside and were well maintained. We were not able to see evidence of church-sponsored community service, but that would be more easily attainable if living there as events come up.

1. **Civic**

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

We easily found the VFW and American Legion buildings. Scout Hall was an older Lions Club project. The downtown Christmas decorations were made by volunteers. There are 4-H clubs in the county.

1. **Public Infrastructure**

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

WaKeeney has nice wide brick streets with new street signage that is bold and easy to read. There are plenty of street lamps and very nice vintage lights at the RR Park. It would be nice to see the lighting used on the south side of town continue throughout downtown. There are nicely landscaped welcome signs at the city limits. Sidewalks downtown are good but there are not sidewalks in all areas of town.

**Did you observe land-use planning?**

There were well defined residential, commercial and industrial areas. There was no indication of future residential areas or new housing. Also, we were not sure if there is an “industrial park” or if all the industrial type businesses are just located together along old Hwy 40.

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

City hall is beautiful. However we didn’t know it was city hall as the sign is small. It is very accessible. We were well received by the new receptionist as well as the city administrator. Upon inquiring we were given great information about a variety of things.

**Police/fire protection:**

Police station was located on the square by the jail. Fire station is located on 1st Street but we did not find it.

**Library:**

The library is a nice newer building, but tucked between other buildings, therefore hard to identify.

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

Many parks in town. They are nice and well-maintained. Legion Ball Park is easy to find but other ball parks were not. They need some signage. The sports plex, tennis courts, and high school track were located. All facilities looked nice and parking improvements were being made during out visit.

(I found the rec commission building and a nice large building named in honor of several donors. This looks to be a fantastic addition to the community. It was not mentioned by the team.)

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?**

It was easily identified that WaKeeney is “The Christmas City of the High Plains.” It was nice to see the city is trying to continue the theme throughout the year by putting up Christmas trees. Doing a nice job of branding to promote the town.

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

The Trego County Fair was well publicized.

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

A feature that was publicized on-line is Cedar Bluff Reservoir. There was no signage or information that we found in WaKeeney to promote this.

(I did find it on the information board in the downtown park).

**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.**

We did not find a facility to serve visitors. There is no chamber office – only economic development office – much more visible than ours.

(There are brochures available at one of the truck stops on the south side of interstate but nothing on Cedar Bluff Reservoir or WaKeeney attractions).

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

There were many eating places/restaurants in town but not one that would bring us back. It would be interesting to return during the Christmas season.

1. **Wrap-up**

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

The most positive things about the city of WaKeeney were the wide streets, friendly well-dressed people, good beautification efforts, community pride, that most residential areas are nicely landscaped, well-kept, and painted. The streets are clean with gutters.

Nice Frisbee Park and the park by the pool is very nice. Fire hydrants being painted for their water flow colors were nice. Large fairground was nice. Great tennis courts. Rec Center very involved with community – nice to have tennis courts inside. Rec Commission sponsors Halloween and Easter activities for kids, also sand volley ball courts are new.

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

The biggest obstacle may be location. This area may not appeal to enough people who can create jobs, grow businesses, and have money to invest.

The water tower need painted. Signage is needed so you can find areas in town. We did not find fire station/EMS.

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

The addition of the gas station on the south side of interstate. Will also remember the art store and how they are incorporated into the community.

What we will mostly remember about our visit is the presence of community pride that results in a nice looking town.

Wide streets, beautiful park and pool area and vehicles parked on the grass.

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