

First Impressions

Team Report Form



Community Visited: Great Bend

Dates Visited: 9/21/23 (2)
10/12/23 (2)

1. 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?

- Information was very easy to find online relating to Great Bend and it was useful in terms of telling us about things we wanted to see.
- The Convention and Visitors Bureau site has listings for shopping and eating and links to articles by travel writers.
- Plenty of information online about activities for residents and visitors on the city's website.
- Easy to navigate on computer or mobile.

2. The "Five-Minute" Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted.

- One visitor described their first impression as exactly what they expected. A mix of modern and neat old buildings and everything in between. Clean with good streets and a lot to look at.
- Well maintained, inviting.
- Directional signs for drivers were not immediately obvious, but passengers were able to focus on looking for them more.

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

- Coming in from the east then driving through the city you could tell that the community was very involved with their schools. A large sign noted the sports and awards received.
- A very industrial feeling community coming in from all entrances which didn't seem very welcoming.

- The visitors also felt there was an agricultural feel along with the industrial, which wasn't unexpected.
- They would've liked to have seen signage directing people to the downtown shopping district.
- The Santa Fe Trail park looked nice during the drive through. Could not see the metal artwork coming from the east, but did see it from the west. Seemed like a large park to only have one picnic area.
- The west end of 10th has a lot of fast food options and hotels.
- Didn't see a large Great Bend sign coming from the east, did see large Great Bend lettering (which was cool) coming from the south.
- The city limits sign was observed when entering from the west.
- Visitors really liked the Great Bend sign when coming from the north. They also liked the big Great Bend letters in front of the Mexican restaurant. They were bright, fun and inviting.
- The marquee sign at the water park was noticed, but it was not turned on at the time of visits.

3. Downtown Business Area Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

- Some visitors struggled to find the downtown business area and had to stop and ask. Signage wasn't apparent immediately but did see it was high up on the stop light poles.
- Once in downtown, visitors thought it was great. The buildings were in really nice shape with a couple getting facelifts.
- Beautiful murals were seen on many of the older buildings. The Amelia Earhart mural was a noted favorite of some.
- The life-sized sculptures were popular with visitors.
- The courthouse was closed for construction, but visitors were still able to enjoy the statue of Jack Kilby, inventor of the microchip. They mentioned seeing the bandshell and a water park area where water shoots up for the kids in warmer months and it's used for ice skating in colder months.
- At some point businesses downtown were provided with bird houses to decorate. Some were keeping these fresh and maintained while others were not.
- It was a comfortable, easy walk through downtown with mostly good sidewalks.
- The crosswalks were fast so people didn't have to wait long.
- Quite a bit of shade from awnings and business signs were easy to read.
- Maps at the businesses that indicate other businesses, the courthouse plaza, and other things to see might be nice here, or a QR code people could scan to bring up such a map themselves.
- Downtown offered a lot of unique architecture that was older. The old and restored buildings were enjoyable to see while walking through the area.

Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.

- Multiple visitors mentioned the large mix of businesses – something for everyone. A lot of different types of businesses were observed: gifts, restaurants, second hand, clothes, a Family Crisis Center, and beauty shop. Visitors heard about the Family Crisis Center's "Break the Silence" fall festival while visiting another business.
- The old Crest Cinema appeared to be original and had been re-purposed for events with a new Cinema 6 across the street from it.
- Creator's Beauty was a cute corner yard art area.
- The displays in vacant storefronts were appreciated. It made it feel like the buildings were full.

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

- Visitors felt like they were greeted by friendly people at most of the shops they went to. Everyone was very helpful and answered questions about the city.
- The Bargain Barn was noted to be very nice. Staff explained the business model and their variety of merchandise and they recommended visitors go to the Rosewood Wine Cellar.
- Forest Avenue Antiques also had great customer service. They recommended visitors eat at Great Bend Coffee and even shared a menu. Upon going to Great Bend Coffee, visitors asked a patron who was waiting for her food how to order – she was friendly and explained the process. Great Bend Coffee appeared popular with groups having lunch and playing games.
- Other people encountered by visitors also recommended going to Great Bend Coffee (several recommendations).
- One person encountered on the sidewalk even asked visitors if they needed help finding anything. People were very enthusiastic about suggesting other stores and restaurants to visit.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available?

- Benches and trash receptacles were noted. One of the benches identified was outside of Forest Avenue Antiques.
- There were some flower pots seen, most were nice but some were sorely in need of water and looked raggedy.
- No public restrooms were noted downtown.

- Public wi-fi was not found downtown, but visitors noted they did see access at the water park.
- A lot of seating and picnic tables at the band shell on the courthouse lawn – this was beautiful.

Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- The parking downtown was adequate and easy to find. There was a mix of angle and parallel parking.
- Sidewalk brick inlays were nice in most parts but were a little uneven in areas. Visitors felt the west side of the street, but didn't remember if it was the block with The Buckle or The Beauty Bar. One of those two areas.
- Parking made visiting stores easy as it was within walking distance. Some visitors indicated it was easy to walk around until their arms were full of things they bought, but it was easy to get back to their car to unload and venture out again.
- The courthouse lawn was well manicured and the pumpkins decorating the downtown area for the fall season were nice to see.
- Lots of flowers downtown even though they weren't expected due to it being hot and dry.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- There is a large mall-type shopping area on the west side of town and on the busy east/west street, Hwy 56, many big box or chain stores.
- Everything was in close proximity to other stores with easy access. All appeared to be well maintained.
- Easy to access other retail areas in town. Standard shopping center options.
- There was surprise to see two Dillon's grocery stores.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- There were industrial/commercial areas at all 4 entrances to the city. It looks like more could probably locate or expand in those areas. It didn't give a "warm fuzzy feeling" encountering those first when coming into town, but there appear to be a lot of businesses in those spaces.

- Others felt that there was more concentration of industrial businesses on the west end of town and at the airport and indicated there was room for expansion there.

6. Health Care Services

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

- An Urgent Care Xpress Wellness facility was noticed. Also the University of Kansas Health Systems-Great Bend Campus was found. It was away from the main part of the city but had good signage to get people there.
- Clara Barton Clinic and other urgent care facilities were on the main road with easy access. They looked new and in good condition.
- The Chamber provided visitors with information about health care services in town.

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

- Visitors noted that there was a comprehensive list of such facilities listed on the Chamber's website.

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

- Visitors were pleased to hear that those supporting the Bargain Barn were allowing that business to support those with special needs in the community.
- Visitors did not notice long-term care or assisted living facilities while driving through town.

7. 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.)

- Many neighborhoods were observed in town. Driving through some of the residential areas, it appears that there was mainly middle-income level housing. All looked to be maintained very well.
- Not a lot of houses for sale.
- There is an area of newer homes near the golf course.
- The Chamber noted that housing options are limited at the present time but that they assist people considering making Great Bend home by setting them up with meeting realtors.

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

- There was a large apartment building run by the Great Bend Housing Authority observed. This was identified as income-based housing.
- No “for rent” signs were observed during visits, but the Chamber was able to provide a list of landlords.

8. Schools

What schools are present? (Head Start, Preschool, K-8, High School, Post-Secondary, etc.) Do the schools appear to be adequate in size? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

- When coming into town from the north there was a sign about the Central Kansas Christian Academy, but the school was not seen by visitors.
- The Park Elementary School was small but had a nice playground. The self portraits on the fence were nice.
- The high school was located in a neighborhood and appeared to have full, but adequate parking. The Panthers Sports Complex was located across the street. All appeared to be well maintained.
- The sports accomplishments signs were mentioned again as a positive observation.
- Three elementary schools were seen, one middle school, and then the high school. Schools were older buildings but looked well maintained. Online indicated a total of 5 elementary schools, so some were not seen in person.
- Barton County Community College has an outreach center downtown.
- The amount of schools seems adequate for a community of this size.

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

- Information was available on the school district website and nces.ed.gov.
- There was also information about a state assessment on the school district website.

9. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

- There were a few daycare facilities seen but no information about cost was readily available.
- Some didn't see any indication of childcare facilities in person.
- An online search pulled up about a dozen childcare facilities for some. Visitors think they remember the Chamber saying that space was limited.

10. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the places of worship represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of faith-based community services?

- There were many churches observed in town with a variety of denominations. People would likely find a church they were affiliated with here in town.
- Most were not located on main roads and you had to look for them.
- All churches encountered had a nice appearance and inviting.
- No evidence of faith-based community services was seen, but those aren't often known to those not seeking out the services.

11. Civic

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

- There were some service clubs listed on the signs as you come into town. Not easy to identify what was represented while driving through.
- Kiwanis and Lions stood out the most.
- The Bargain Barn told visitors about Rosewood Services.
- There was an American Legion seen on the west end of town.

Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- Some visitors did not see where the clubs met or evidence of any activities or projects they were involved with in town.
- Others noted placards on a couple murals that explained civic involvement. The Chamber explained how the alley was painted by community members.
- Some didn't notice any signs indicating "this project by" for any civic groups other than the work done by the mural committee.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- The streets all appeared to be in good shape and well maintained. The directional signage was difficult to locate as some was up high on stop light poles.
- The parallel parking was sometimes overwhelming for some visitors as they weren't used to it on such busy streets.
- The sidewalks, parks, and lighting all seemed to be in nice shape.
- The oval neighborhood on McBride and Russell Parkways was really neat!
- Highways themselves were well maintained and residential streets were ok and easy to drive on.
- Visitors liked the trees and landscaping down the middle of the street in residential areas.

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

- Visitors went to the Chamber of Commerce and City Hall and were very well received at both locations.
- Helpful staff who offered a lot of information on murals, the Main Street program, and recommendations of places to visit. Maps were also given out which made visitors feel welcomed. Places to visit on the route home were also suggested, which was great!
- Some visitors noticed City Hall but didn't go inside, but indicated they saw it was near the Chamber, downtown, and the fire and police departments.
- Some visitors received a new resident's packet from the Chamber which they felt was very useful.

Police/fire protection:

- Fire trucks were observed to be well maintained and looked new.
- Two fire stations. In addition to the newer fire trucks, the police vehicles also seemed new.

Library:

- The library's Facebook page showed it had a lot of community programming being offered.
- Visitors indicated that they did not see the library while exploring the city.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sports complex)

- The free zoo was visited. It wasn't very big but had a lot of animals and food was offered so visitors could feed the animals. The facility was well maintained.
- The waterfall feature at Santa Fe Park was noted to be really pretty.
- The Rec Department's website was amazing! So much programming and easy to follow.
- A sign at the Zoo parking lot said "No Large Gatherings" – multiple visitor indicated they are sure there's a story there, but it seems contradictory and not very inviting. With the zoo and water park right there it seems like a logical place for family reunions, etc., but apparently that's not possible.
- A sign for a walking path out west was observed.
- Not a lot of playgrounds or neighborhood parks were seen.

13. 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 Convention and Visitor Bureau guide boasts "Proud Home of the Kansas Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway." It's a very nice visitor's guide.
- There's also a B-29 Memorial Plaza just outside of town.
- Cheyenne Bottoms and Fort Hays' Kansas Wetlands Education Center is located within minutes of town.
- The courthouse and plaza was beautiful as was the zoo and water park.
- Some didn't notice a community slogan other than the Convention Bureau guide's wording.
- Panther Pride was evident all over town.
- Great Bend and Panther wording on signs in town and on t-shirts at the shops visited.

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

- There was note of a lot of events on Facebook, mentioned that there was a GBKS or I Love GBKS group that listed those.
- Fridays on Forest looked like a lot of fun.
- The Chamber did provide a list of events of interest and visitors noticed on the Chamber calendar things like "shred days" for residents to know about, which they appreciated.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community. (Public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds, regional heritage locations).

- Other than the murals and previously mentioned recreation options, visitors didn't indicate any features that had the potential to draw people to town.

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.

- The staff at the Chamber was very kind, knew all about the area, and was very helpful.
- The Chamber of Commerce was very helpful with lunch and shopping recommendations, explained Fridays on Forest, and gave everyone visitor publications.
- The Chamber office people were great – met the volunteer at the front, the office manager and director. Visitors never felt rushed. They loved the atmosphere and felt like it would be a great place to work.
- A sign indicating that the Chamber also serves as a visitor's center would be helpful. Visitors had to look up the location of the Chamber on Google since they weren't familiar with the city.

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

- Many shops in the downtown area. Visitors would like to visit longer and spend more time there.
- Would like to have more time to visit Cheyenne Bottoms, the Wetlands and Wildlife Scenic Byway, and the B-29 Memorial Plaza.
- The Bargain Barn seems like it would have inventory turn over often enough to be a draw back to town.
- Visitors would love to attend an event on the courthouse lawn.
- Forest Avenue Antiques had cute, trendy collectibles and the owner was awesome to visit with – definitely a place to come back to!
- Some said there was so much to see that they didn't get to, they'd like to come back to explore more.
- They'd like to come back and visit the zoo and the antique and thrift stores downtown again.
- Great Bend Coffee is somewhere visitors would like to bring family and friends to see – it was delicious.
- The town square was so inviting – that would be a draw.

14. Wrap-up

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

- Most positive things were the merchants and people in town.
- The downtown area and the cooperation – it seems to keep that area welcoming and updated while preserving the old.
- There's a lot of industry in town.
- The kindness of the people in town. Some visitors were trying to remember where they parked along Main Street and a lady stopped to help.
- Everyone had an answer to any question visitors had and genuinely made them feel like they wanted them there.
- The art movement.
- School pride.
- Fridays on Forest.
- Strong family and community pride and spirit. Business owners and residents obviously care about the city.
- Seems like a great place to spend a day or weekend without having to travel too far.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- Being able to find where visitors were wanting to go. The signage was either not located well or not visible.
- The traffic, parking and finding where to go on the main drag through town, easy to west, seemed very clustered.
- Entrances to the city from all directions seemed more industrial than is appealing – not so welcoming.
- Getting people traveling through to stop – how to make them aware of what the city has to offer if they are driving through?
- Lack of signage highlighting attractions and businesses.

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

- Will remember the downtown area and how welcomed they felt just wandering around.
- How welcomed the Chamber and City offices made the visitors feel.
- How relaxing the zoo was.
- The courthouse!
- Great Bend Coffee and its great atmosphere. Cozy, family friendly place. Loved seeing people playing games there and enjoying their time with others. The food was great, too!

How much money did you spend while you were in the city you visited?

- \$150
- \$100
- \$43

(Please include total purchases: Gas, soft drinks, food, purchases. No detail necessary.)



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