

First Impressions

Team Report Form



Community Visited: Kearney, NE

Date Visited: 7/13/23
7/19/23 (4)

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?

- City of Kearney and Visit Kearney official websites were both full of useful information and easy to find. Really helped prepare for visit. Showed information about attractions people might not know of otherwise.
- The city website had a form for reporting concerns and an app. The app wasn't explained very clearly.
- The event calendar did not load very well on a mobile device.
- VisitKearney.com was the second link on Google's results page for one visitor. They felt the site was dynamic with use of pictures and very user friendly. The calendar was utilized to see what activities would be available during the visit. No difficulty finding information online and the shops and sculpture seen online matched the experience in town.
- One of the initial search results was Trip Advisor.
- Accurate information – what was seen online matched what was experienced during the visits.
- Also found downtownkearney.com

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

- Streets were congested with a lot of traffic, but otherwise everything flowed together nicely.
- Streets were clean, as was the city as a whole.
- The city has a very large footprint. Spread out, so if you don't have a mode of transportation it could be hard to get to the north shopping end, the library to the south, and everything in between.

- It was busy in a good way with a lot of activity. The downtown looked to have a lot of retail, restaurants, and service businesses, with only a few buildings looking to be for sale or lease which gave a good first impression of downtown on the drive through.
- A lot of flowers noted while driving through downtown, though the roads were really bumpy.
- Noted quite a few bicyclists using the bike trails.
- The large power substation isn't great to look at when coming into town, but it can't really be hidden, though some wondered if there was a way to put a large "welcome" billboard up to cover at least part of it from view. It's just unfortunate.
- Taking the first exit it was easy to see where the visitor's bureau was, as well as the Chamber and Economic Development Center.
- Multiple visitors noted that coming in from the south on 44, the Viaero Center was one of the first things seen and was impressive, but visitors wondered what it was used for. Later in the visit, CVB staff explained what the Viaero Center was used for, including ice hockey and other events.
- Driving through the business corridor downtown, visitors gave a positive reaction to the brightly colored metal banners and imagined they lasted longer than the fabric ones.

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

- Good directional signage observed which really helped with navigation. Most felt the signs were large and easy to read (street signs and attraction signs). Some visitors did, however, miss the welcome signs.
- Lines and arrows on roads need to be repainted in higher traffic areas, especially in the north part of town.
- Most buildings appeared to be in good repair.

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

- Nice, clean downtown. Signs on streetlights advertising upcoming events were observed. Traffic lights were clean and easy to see.
- The colorful planter boxes on the street corners were impressive and impactful – good job on beautification.
- The streets and sidewalks were nice and wide, but some felt the roads were very bumpy. Others felt the bumpiness comes with the territory of having brick streets and gives the area personality.

- Some empty storefronts, and while the tops of most buildings were nice, they were noted to be very well maintained if occupied. If a storefront was empty, it was easy to tell it had been empty for a while and neglected.
- Noted were some boarded up windows, and an awning with weeds growing out of it.
- Some noted that they appreciated the historical charm of the downtown area.
- Many of the first floors of buildings were occupied, but it didn't look like the upper floors were being utilized. It would be great to see the second floors leased out so everything was being used.
- Great to see so much space being used, especially the large furniture stores and the dentist office in the movie theater.
- Things seemed to get nicer as visitors crossed the railroad tracks heading north. The buildings downtown had a lot of personality and beautiful architectural details.

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

- One visitor went to Redman's Shoes and Ranchwear and felt they had a nice selection of boots. They also visited K-Town Cakery to look at their custom cakes and kitchen utensils, ABC Drug and noted they were a gift store as well as a pharmacy, The Rustic Patch had handmade items, Home Within and their home décor selection, and The Alley Rose Restaurant.
- Other visitors mentioned that K-Town Cakery was awesome and should be advertised way more than it was, and that they were really good at convincing people to buy their products. Visitors bought treats and extra to take home.
- The co-working space was noted to be a great asset and should look into utilizing more co-working space apps to get travelers in the doors. (Proximity app).
- A tour of Nest Space and Central Mercantile resulted in visitors declaring those locations very impressive and making a great use of their space, with mention of the Nest manager giving a tour and answering plenty of questions.
- There was surprise to see three theaters and the one housing the dentist office was really well done.
- Other businesses noted by visitors in the downtown area: clothing, specialty services, tattoo parlors, beauty salons, music stores, and furniture. Robust shopping and useful services – a good mix, though there didn't appear to be many dining options downtown.

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

- Excellent customer service at all shops and restaurant visited.
- Customer service was great, as expected it would be. Experienced Midwest hospitality and people genuinely happy to see and talk to new customers.

- The Nest Space and Central Mercantile had very friendly people working there who did not mind answering a ton of questions. They were very gracious with their time and had positive attitudes.
- The Nest was locked due to being members only, but the manager noticed the group, opened the door, and offered a tour.
- One group felt that the Central Mercantile and K-Town Cakery were both understaffed so they were not initially greeted. The person working at the Cakery was friendly when ordering, and the place smelled great making for a good first stop.
- Greeted in most stores visited.
- The receptionist at the dentist office in the theater was friendly and allowed visitors to look around. Great use of space!

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

- Trash receptacles and bicycle racks were observed in the downtown area. Only one recycling bin was observed.
- A lot of benches were also found downtown. Visitors appreciated how they were angled instead of straight on, giving those using them a better view of the street instead of just the buildings alone.
- Some noted that the city office wi-fi showed up temporarily but faded out – it would've been nice to see more free wi-fi access downtown for visitors who may not have good cell coverage or be over their data limits for the month. Others did not see any wi-fi access downtown.
- No public restrooms observed.

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

- Parking was easy – adequate number of spaces, not difficult to walk to different locations from one spot.
- Planters were mentioned again and noted to be an awesome addition to the downtown with plenty of fresh flowers. The trees were also described as lovely.
- Quite a few murals were seen and they were fun to look at.
- Additional notes about the main road being very bumpy and in need of repair.
- Some trash and cigarette butts on the sidewalks which was disappointing since there were so many readily available trash bins. It's too bad people couldn't be bothered to dispose of things properly.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- Multiple strip malls seen with a wide variety of shops.
- The shopping area on the north end of town is what you would expect for an outdoor mall.
- The Wednesday farmer's market had some fun people, tasty produce and treats. Visitors were disappointed that it was set up in the mall parking lot, figuring if it has been around for 40 years it should have a home in one of the beautiful parks in town. It was a small farmers market and not marked well, but the vendors were friendly and it made for a nice time visiting.
- The Hill Top Mall looked a bit dated.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- There appeared to be multiple commercial/industrial-type buildings for sale at the time of the visits, though no signs indicating any land for sale or lease for expansion or building new facilities.
- Visitors drove past the industrial park at the east exit. There seems to be a lot of room to expand if the agriculture land was available for purchase.
- Multiple visitors noticed the solar farm, indicated it was interesting and visitors wondered how it was going.
- One of the industrial areas mentioned was observed on the way to Cabela's (at the exit). It was neat and clean and appeared to have room for expansion.

6. Health Care Services

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

- The CHI Health Good Samaritan is a very nice, newer looking facility!
- Also observed Kearney Regional Medical Center south of town.
- Availability of hospital and emergency services seemed adequate for the community's size.

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

- There appeared to be a good variety of medical facilities and those observed had nice facilities. Some visitors lost count of how many clinics they encountered. There really seemed to be an abundance of specialty clinics in a good way.
- A mix of services were noted both in person and identified during online searches prior to visiting.
- The feeling was healthcare services were well spread out with options all over depending on where you were located.
- Lots of pharmacies and medical supply stores were observed.
- The dentist in the old movie theater was an awesome facility!

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

- There were some long-term care facilities observed, but some visitors forgot to write down the names. One of the facilities was indicated to be downtown.
- Very happy to see the veterans home.
- When searching online, multiple options for assisted living and similar facilities came up, and some of those were noticed in person, tucked into neighborhoods.

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.)

- While some felt there were a substantial number of houses listed for sale in the city, others indicated the housing supply seems short which limits variety.
- Housing was observed at multiple price ranges – trailer homes, college housing, upscale duplexes, single-family starter homes and very large homes on the lake.
- The housing closer to the university campus seemed more run down.
- House costs observed online started at about \$200k and increased as the properties were closer to the water. At the time of the search, Zillow indicated 93 properties on the market.

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

- Found useful information provided by the Kearney Housing Agency on what properties are available for rent.
- There were a few rental signs, but maybe not as many as would be in April or May since it's a college town.

- One of the apartment complexes looked very new and would be an excellent option for families starting out in the community.
- There were some trailer houses available, but they were not appealing as housing options.
- One visiting group was told about a new facility (University Village?) that was being built to alleviate housing strain and connect the community to the campus a bit more. Viewing the site, it appeared to be more like on-campus housing for students, so the benefit to the community as a whole wasn't clear.
- Not much in the way of rental properties listed for Kearney on apartments.com.

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?

- Really is the whole range represented, preschool through university (UNK) for those in need.
- Many schools observed and all look to be maintained well. Elementary, middle, and high schools observed as well as a Christian school system.
- The UNK campus looked nice, and in addition to the university, visitors learned of a community college and a cosmetology school.
- The schools looked newer and appear to have room to grow if needed.

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

- The Kearney Public Schools website had this information available and the information was current.
- Top 30% test scores in the state, 8/10 - seemed pretty good!
- The site was easy to find as one of the first results in a search, and easy to navigate.
- It seems the district is moving in the right direction.
- The university didn't show up readily in searches that were for schools in Kearney.

9. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

- Other than the preschool options noticed while in town, did not see other childcare offerings during the visit.
- An online search showed nearly 20 options, but not really any details on pricing.

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?

- One visitor noted encountering approximately twenty different churches.
- At first glance visitors thought the First Baptist Church was the gymnasium for the elementary school – very impressive building. Others thought it was the city's sports complex, complete with summer outdoor ninja obstacle course which looked like a fun time, as did the other outdoor spaces there.
- St. James Church looked modern and inviting.
- Other churches observed showed signs of growth and that the facilities were well taken care of.
- There is a Christian school system in town, but not sure what affiliation it has with churches in town, if any.
- There was a Catholic hospital.

11. Civic

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

- One visitor noted that they didn't see any obvious civic organization activity or signs during their visit.
- Others noted that some of the murals were sponsored by local civic organizations.
- Some visitors did see a road sign that listed quite a few civic organizations such as Kiwanis and Rotary.
- The Chamber features 16 organizations in the civic category, the country club listed as one of them, which didn't seem to be a good fit.

Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- The Downtown Kearney website did list a calendar of upcoming civic events.
- It was felt at some point the Masons were very involved in downtown Kearney as it was observed they were referenced on several buildings.
- Visitors liked the stars on the sidewalk.
- While downtown it was noted that a sign mentioned an Optimist Club project.
- There were some indications of sponsorships by civic groups at the fairgrounds.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- Some construction was apparent around the interstate, all seemed to be in an effort to help with traffic flow.
- The streets were rough all over, especially Lakeview, Main. Second Street was very nice.
- Street signs were consistent and readable making it easy to get around.
- No issues parking in other parts of town outside of downtown.

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

- Received very well at city hall. Very pleasant experience.
- Mary at city hall was given high praises. She was very kind and helpful. It was expressed that every city should have someone like her, and that the visitors would like to thank her for making their visit great.
- After a friendly reception, materials about parks, trails, the library, restaurants, and public art were presented to visitors. Did not have any housing referrals to offer.

Police/fire protection:

- There was some surprise that there were volunteer firefighters.
- The fire station was very well taken care of.
- No notice of a law enforcement force – either a building or cars on patrol.

Library:

- The library seemed to be a bit of a distance from the general public, but looking at a map, it's right in the middle of town. Encountering the railroad track and going over the bridge may make it seem farther away. It was an awesome looking facility.
- Visitors liked the book-themed exterior and there was plenty of parking available.

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

- Impressed with the quality of the parks in the city. Very nice! Some were surprised with how great the parks were.
- The bike trails and water trails were a positive note by visitors, with the bike repair station at the entrance to the water trail receiving praise. The trails are visible as soon as you arrive in town.

- Harmon Park was super impressive – one of the city pools was there. The golf course was in good condition.
- Yanney Park was also really cool with visitors spending a considerable amount of time there. The final scope of the park project looks like it will be a treasure for the city.
- Visitors received a tour of the senior center at Yanney Park and were impressed with that facility.
- Parks were very inviting and it looked like the work happening during the visits will continue to grow these areas.

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?

- This is the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World, though it didn't seem like everyone embraced that. There were references around town in the senior center, the welcome center, a sculpture in Yanney Park, and a mural downtown. Based on the pre-visit web search, visitors felt they would have encountered more signage related to this on their visit.
- Also notice a slogan "The Heart of Nebraska".
- The new sports complex looks like it will be exciting and a great draw to the city. Multiple mentions of this.
- The Big Apple Fun Center.
- Visitors asked around about the ice rink and everyone acted like it was old news and not very exciting.
- The Peterson Activity Center was a nice facility for those 50 and older. Visitors were able to get a tour of the site. It had some great trails through beautiful floral areas and was in a nice location.
- The Archway Museum was unique

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

- Cityofkearney.org site was full of events for those taking the time to look before arriving.
- The highway patrol was having a meeting at one of the convention centers and it was reported that hundreds (or more) of troopers would be in attendance.
- Art in the Park was listed on the calendar, but was outside of the visitors' time frame.
- Posters and flyers for community shows were seen in town, as well as a concert series, and the Senior Games.
- Kearney is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year and there was a series of events dedicated to this.
- Movies in the theater downtown.

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).

- The arch over the interstate was very cool!
- Harmon Park was a hidden gem. It didn't come up anywhere during the pre-visit internet search.
- One group of visitors was blown away by Yanney Heritage Park with the water trail, paddle boats, splash pad, amphitheater, gardens, and senior center. A visitor from one group mentioned they would definitely come back to town for a concert on the water at the amphitheaters and to let their kids paddle the swan boats around (the kids would like the observation tower, too). The botanical garden has endless opportunities.
- The Crown Plaza and conference center was beyond impressive. After visitors walked in the staff was kind enough to show them around. They saw a dining room set up for 2,500 people attending a law enforcement event. The square footage available here is a real benefit to the city.
- There was some disappointment of missing MONA as it was closed for renovation, but once complete it will probably be a significant draw for tourism. Visitors from the art world will love it – that's exciting for Kearney!

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.

- Visitors did stop at the Chamber and Visitors Center. Some said if they weren't looking for it specifically, they would have missed it. They are excited to see they are moving to a new facility. The current facility seemed cramped.
- The Welcome Center for others was very easy to find as signs led visitors straight to it. The staff was friendly and dropped what they were doing to visit with them.
- People were very helpful in answering questions.
- CVB staff provided guides and promoted Yanney Park. The Chamber CEO spoke about the new sports complex. The Economic Development office was also visited.

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

- K-Town Cakery, the children's museum, the Big Apple, and the theater that is volunteer lead and plays old movies.
- A great family trip would include Yanney Park, lunch at the Mercantile, dessert at K-Town Cakery, and dinner at Joy's Table.

- Dinner for one group at Joy's Table was perfection, and they loved the live music on Wednesday night.
- Not many shopping options were noted to bring people back, but the parks would, definitely.
- Additional praise for the Mercantile, Cunningham's on the Lake and Joy's Table as being wonderful and worth a return trip for. Especially of note was Cunningham's vegetarian options.
- O'Malley's was unique and would be of interest when bringing people back to town.

14. Wrap-up

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

- Very clean city, clean neighborhoods.
- Cityofkearney.org is an amazing website full of information and does a great job of highlighting everything related to the city.
- Friendly service everywhere visitors went.
- City, as a whole, seems to have some great momentum.
- Desserts sampled downtown were fabulous.
- The museum bridge looked great.
- The new sports complex will be a huge win surrounded by convention centers and hotels. It will also make the key leaders (CVB, Chamber, Eco-Devo) more visible.
- Amazing parks. Yanney especially, along with the senior center.
- The new housing construction project on campus.
- Stellar hotels and convention centers.
- Private investment by community members to make things happen.
- City prioritizes beautification.
- Younes is clearly a major developer in town which is on display at the Crowne Plaza Hotel and Event Center. Having a key investor and a facility which allows the community to attract a variety of groups is a great asset.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- Right now, the construction near the interstate, but it will make things better.
- Public transportation.
- While some visitors noted that there was housing for all income ranges in town, it may not have been for sale or rent meaning there would be benefit in bringing in new, income-based/income-appropriate housing.
- City appears to be landlocked.
- Not every space is currently utilized downtown. There would be a more positive impact on tourism and community growth if that could happen.
- The mall needs to be updated.

- Strategic filling of downtown vacancies needed.
- The city is growing at a rigorous pace, but infrastructure needs to keep up with it.
- Childcare and housing – is there adequate availability in both areas?

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

- Friendly people.
- Clean community with a lot of potential.
- There are a few major donors that care a great deal about the city.
- The parks were amazing and one visitor noted they would come back just to explore them in more detail.
- The water and flowers everywhere.
- One visitor asked themselves 4 questions about Kearney: 1. Would they take their family for a weekend? Yes they would. 2. Would they go back multiple times per year? Probably not. They felt they could see and do everything they wanted in one weekend. If they needed to visit a larger city, Salina was closer and Wichita was about the same distance from Hays as Kearney. 3. Would they go once a year? Probably, yes. It would be a weekend trip with the family and especially if there was an event going on. 4. Would they move there? No, not because it's a bad place or something is wrong, they're just happy in Hays and have no reason to leave right now.
- Hands down: Yanney Park
- The Mercantile downtown.
- Cracked roads.



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