

First Impressions



Hays, KS

K-State Research and Extension

- Hays asked for First Impressions. Kearney, Nebraska agreed to be its partner; Distance is just at 2.5 hours. This is our first multi-state assessment.
- Volunteer visitors in both communities were trained and photos were taken of Hays at the end September.
- Four visitors (some with family members) visited Hays from April 28th through June 2nd.
- Results presented this evening, February 13, 2024.
- Hays uses the results for further discussion and action plans.

- **Feedback:**

How does a first-time visitor view my town?

- Evaluate successes.
- Set goals and priorities for next steps.

- **If you don't agree with the observation:**

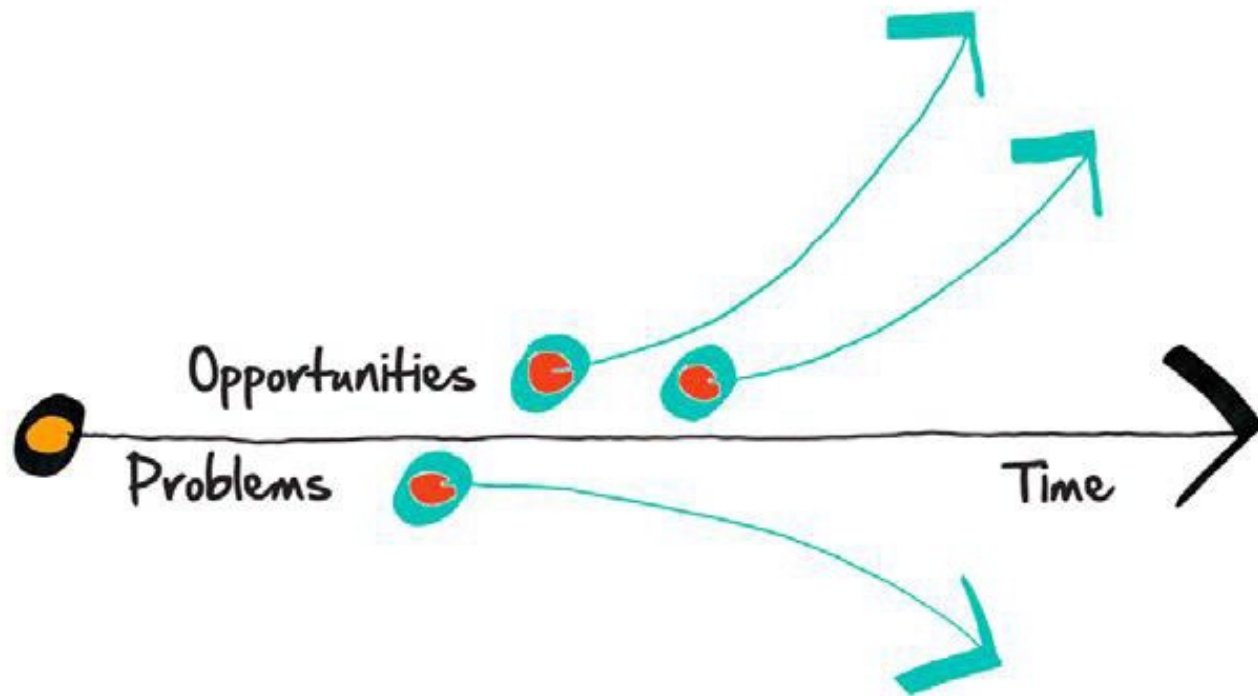
- ***Be curious:*** Why does the visitor see it this way?
- Is the observation worth considering?
- What can we do to change it– or the perception?

Curiosity: A strong desire to know or learn something.

-Oxford Living Dictionary

Asset Based Community Development

People move in the direction of their conversations



Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

- In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons people move to a rural community are:
 - Simpler pace of life,
 - Safety and security,
 - Affordable housing,
 - Outdoor recreation,
 - Quality schools
 - ***“A job” isn’t in the top 10 reasons.***
- Communities can work together to attract newcomers and create quality of life for everyone.

- “In small towns everyone knows each other.” **False!**
- *Get to know each other*, invite them to a newcomers’ meal.
- If you bring 7 people to a 700-citizen town every year in 10 years, you’ll have a 10% increase. It matters! It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
- We are our own worst enemies. We must monitor our customer service and what we say. It matters.
- Don’t say, “You have to live here twenty years to be an insider.” And don’t act like it either.

- Housing will be freed up as the Baby Boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
- Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.- *Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, University of Minnesota*



*Ben Winchester was our guest on the
First Friday Call.*

See the recording at:

<https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/>

- 2022 KS Certified Population: 21,136 ↑ 3.05% since 2010
(~2.95% if using just 2020 data)
- 2020 U.S. Census: 21,116
- 2010 U.S. Census: 20,510
- Median household income: \$55,349 **\$69,747**
- High school or GED 95.8% **91.8%**
- At least a B.S. Degree 43.0% **34.7%**
- Median Age: 30.6 years **37.3 years**
- Persons 65 and Over 15.2% **17.2%**

Blue: Kansas Comparison Data

- Moved since previous year (2021/22 data):

+/- 10% margin of error

- Poverty rate

(% of people below poverty line)

22.9%

13.4% - within Ellis Co; 6.4% from other county in KS;
2.9% from another state; 0.1% from abroad

15.7%

17.1%

12.0%

Race/Ethnicity

White: 90.9%

Black: 0.6%

Asian: 2.0%

Other: 1.7%

Not Hispanic or Latino:
93.8%

American Indian: 0.1%

Native Hawaiian/Other

Pacific Islander: 0.1%

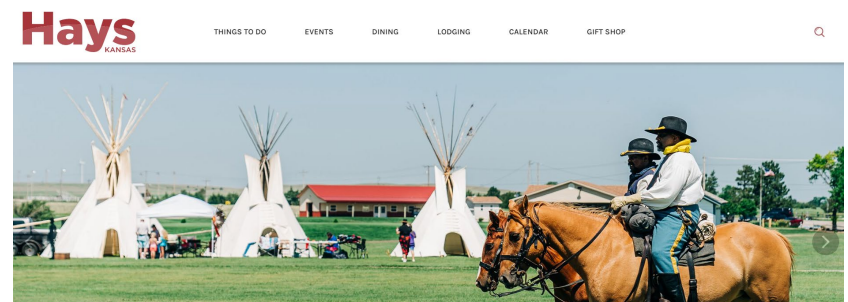
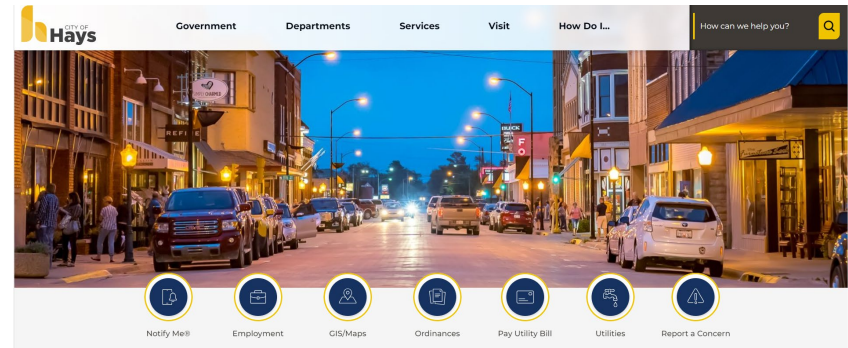
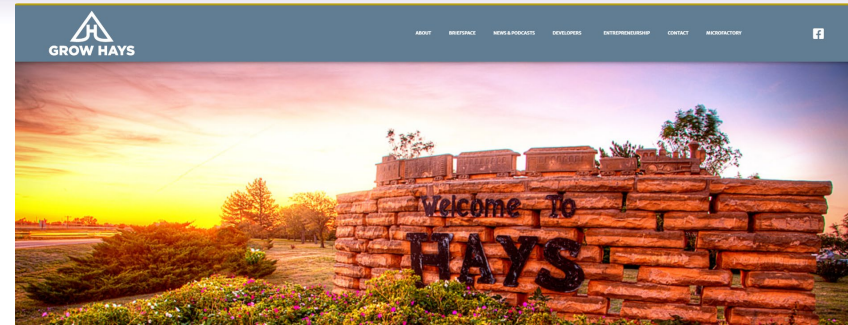
Two or more races: 4.6%

Hispanic or Latino:
6.2%

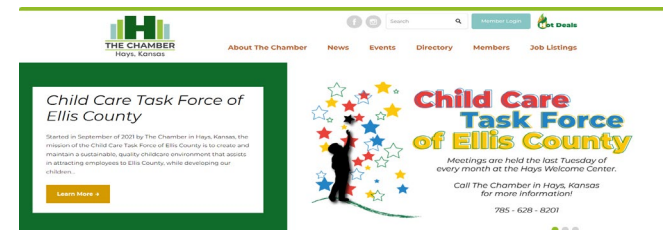
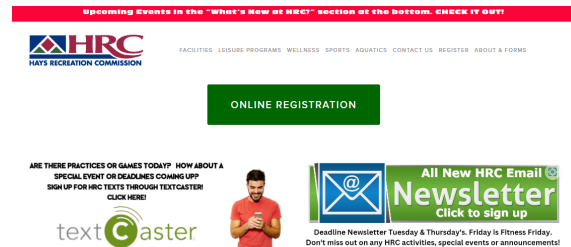
Website

- Most of the city-related websites were easy to navigate and find information about housing, shopping, restaurants, churches and businesses.
- Some felt the Grow Hays site was difficult to navigate and that the contact form didn't work for some and there was limited contact information observed by others.

Web Presence



- The Visitor's Bureau site had a lot of good information.
- Hays Rec website was also observed and was easy to navigate.
- Fast food options were not complete in a preliminary web search but visitors noticed the standard options appropriate for the city's size once they arrived.
- Web searches represented the city accurately for the most part.
- Other details found online were historical accounts of the 1860s-1880s, that crime rates were currently low, and additional details about the Sternberg Museum.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Downtown and the main streets and neighborhoods to and from the FHSU campus were clean. The more you head south, the more industrial the community looks.
- Typical main drag with a lot of eating options.
- Fort Hays State’s campus appeared to be very well maintained and clean while driving by. One visitor was impressed that the Wal-Mart had the FHSU logo above the doors.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- East side of town housed a lot of medical facilities with some residential.
- West side of town was very residential with a good mix of single-family homes and rentals.
- While visitors understood the roundabouts were likely constructed as improvements to traffic flow issues, reports were given of them being “crazy” to navigate and there was a lack of enthusiasm about having to drive through 4 of them, back-to-back.
- Because of the high amount of traffic in the roundabouts and having to stay focused on other drivers entering and exiting, visitors felt it was difficult to see what dining and retail options were in the area.



Image obtained from Google Maps

“Five-Minute” Impression

- Some of the buildings and other structures in town felt a bit dated, like they were built during a boom in the 1960s or 1970s and haven’t been updated since.
- Many positive historic references were noted while visitors drove through the city.
- Vine Street from north to south has a lack of beautification – not much landscaping, some run down businesses and properties, though despite that there is a lively feeling in that area.



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Some felt signage and streetscapes were good to and from downtown and the campus.
- Others felt signage wasn't clear enough on where downtown or the campus was. It just didn't stick out for some.
- There could be better signage to find the in-town ball fields as Google maps didn't direct well to them either.



“Five-Minute” Impression



- The wind farm, hotels, restaurants, and businesses by the interstate looked to be in good condition.
- Quite a few one-way streets that required some getting used to.
- There were many wayfinding signs directing traffic to the hospital, high school, airport, and some other locations. Most was modern and aesthetically pleasing.

Downtown Business Area

- The downtown was perceived to be very clean and didn't have many vacant properties.
- The buildings were beautiful and well maintained and cared for.
- Good infrastructure and sidewalks – there were some sidewalks with chipped concrete, near the county administration building as an example, but overall great!



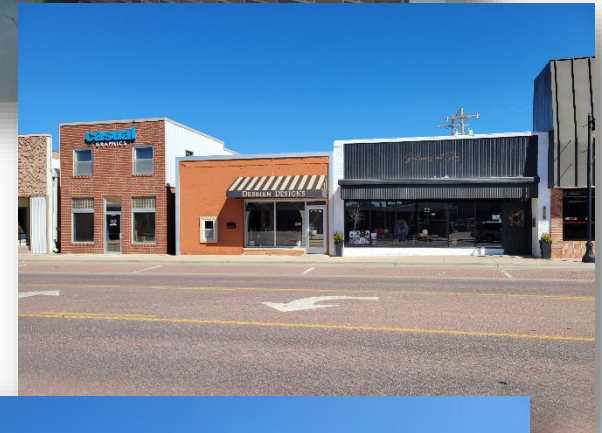


- The brick roads were smooth! Kearney needs your secret!
- The two murals on buildings downtown were a positive highlight for visitors, as were the sculptures.
- There's a historic feel and modern energy.
- Architecture was really interesting: The Glassman, Bird, and Powell building, along with the Frontier Apartments and St. Joseph Church looked very historic and intriguing. Great to see preservation instead of tearing down!

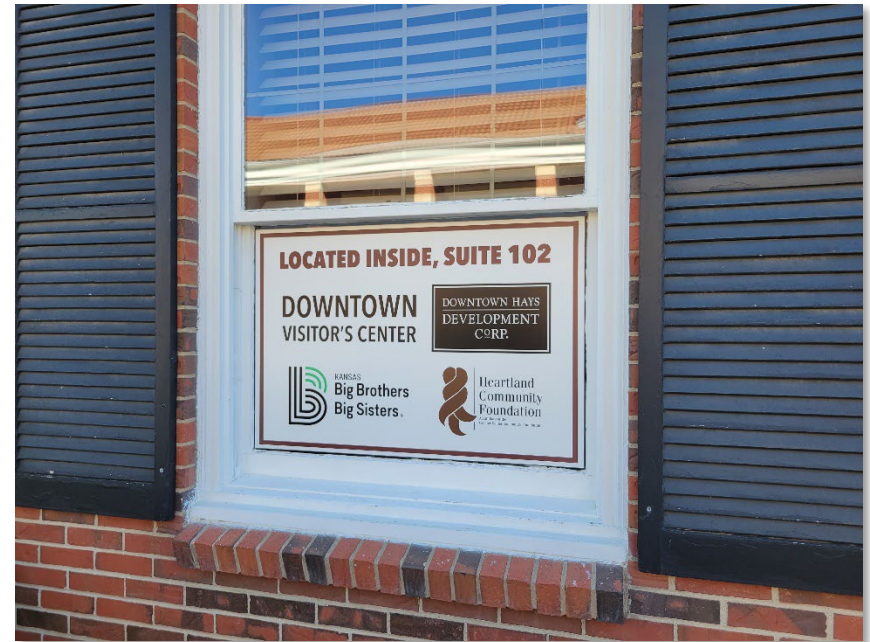
Downtown Business Area

Some businesses and other things observed:

- Micro-brewery
- Park and venue for shows
- Lomato's Pizza – lots of praises about how good this was.
- Some antique stores
- Hair salons
- Hallmark store
- Good mix of retail, services, and restaurants.
- All restaurants looked very clean.
- Public library building looked nice.
- Toby Jugs felt tacky. Initial thoughts were it was an adult establishment with dancers, but later found it was a regular pub/bar.



- The Downtown Hays EcoDevo director and CVB ladies were very friendly and made referrals.
- All downtown businesses visited were friendly and visitors were greeted right away.
- Breathe Coffee House had a classic downtown vibe to it. Nice atmosphere, fast service and free Wi-Fi access. A great spot to stop.



Public Amenities Downtown



- Restrooms were available at the library for anyone in need while downtown.
- A lot of benches and planter/flower pots were noticed. The pots were empty at the time of some visits, but looked to be in the process of transitioning to summer plants.
- No public drinking fountains.
- Plenty of trash bins available throughout the area.
- Wi-Fi was available just about everywhere.
- Awnings provided nice cover during a rain storm.

- While some visitors felt parking was plentiful when they arrived, others encountered difficulties finding spots and had to park blocks away from where they wanted to be.
- The parking areas were well marked with signage.
- Public parking near the railroad tracks was weedy
- Minimal landscaping, but the buildings were well maintained and beautiful which adds a positive look.



- One visitor's 17-year-old daughter gave the mall a "mid" rating.
- Another visitor came with their child's baseball team for a game. They were pleased with Thirsty's ability to serve the 20 people in the group so well.
- Good experiences at IHOP and Arby's.
- Big Creek Crossing was observed to have the same stores as Kearney. Part of the mall had a construction project underway. The outside looked run down – the inside was nice, however.
- Tebo Village appears to be a newer facility with specialty services like insurance and nail salons.
- Other areas seemed to be mostly strip mall style facilities.



- Other retail areas – a lot of them felt dated or old.
- Walmart was observed.
- Dillons was particularly busy.
- Overall the shopping areas felt active but congested.
- Everything on Vine Street felt crammed together.



- *A drive-by is not how industry will find you, check with your local Eco Devo director to make sure your site is listed on LocationOne @ Kansas Department of Commerce.*

Observation:

- There didn't appear to be an officially defined industrial area, though the south and southeast parts of town seemed to be the most industrial looking. Pepsi and Budweiser bottling plants were observed and were right next to each other.
- The northeast part of town also looks to have an industrial area, according to visitors.

- The hospital had good signage which made it easy to get to and identify once there.
- HaysMed has an emergency services department and the facility itself was very nice. Expansive, modern and inviting campus. Landscaping was great.
- Some smaller clinics, surgery center, and a daycare in the area of HaysMed.
- During the web search, visitors noted a children's hospital but didn't see it in person.



- Visitors found physical therapy, speech pathology, and a number of other services in person, most conveniently located near HaysMed. Easy access in one location was great!
- During the web search, visitors noted dentist offices, optometrists, physical therapy, chiropractors, and dermatologists.
- For the size of the city, it's well served by these entities.



- There were a handful of assisted living/nursing home facilities observed.
- Good Sam Society, Brooksdale, Homestead, Acension Living Via Christi, St. John's.



		Kansas
• Occupied Housing Units:	8,613	1.15m
• Owner Occupied:	58.1%	65.3%
• Renter Occupied:	41.9%	34.7%
• Vacant Housing Units	1,026	124k
- For rent:	267	
- For sale:	159	
- Sold, not occupied:	125	
- Seasonal/recreational:	85	
- All other vacants:	390	
• Average Household Size:	2.30	2.48

Blue = Kansas Comparison Data

Data Source: Census.gov 2020 Census
& ACS 5-year Narrative Profile (Household Size) - Retrieved on or
before 11/1/23

Kansas

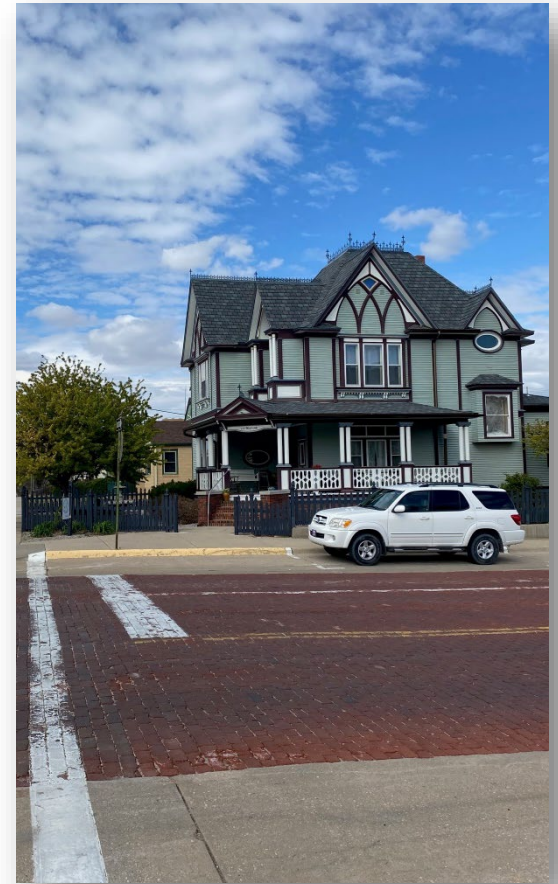
- Mean Travel Time to Work: 11.4 mins 19.6 mins
- Households without a computer*: 374 (4.3%) 45k (3.8%)
- Households without an internet subscription: 782 (9.07%) 108k (9.2%)

* Includes smartphones, tablets, other wireless devices

Blue = Kansas Comparison Data

Data Source: Census.gov 2022 ACS 1-Year Estimates
- Retrieved on or before 11/1/23

- Nice housing for the most part. Smaller homes near the older town center, increasing in size going out.
- Impressive quality and variety for a town this size.
- Not many for sale signs observed in person. Are there incentives for developers to add housing?
- In May, Realtor.com showed 39 homes not pending and 46 homes available in Ellis County with a good mix of price points and sizes. Another search later showed 61 properties for sale.



- Not a lot of apartment complexes observed by some.
- A lot of residential neighborhoods had smaller homes with a lot of low-to-middle income housing areas.
- Some of the homes listed online did look run down, but that was based on the photos available.
- Challenges – number of homes on the market, university town with university housing.



- Not many rental properties observed except a few east of campus that seemed to be in appropriate “college house” condition.
- Handful of rental units available in a quick search online, however some of the buildings looked rough – might not be good for someone wanting to feel safe.
- Many 1-2 bedroom units available, not much in the way of family-size offerings.
- A couple 55+ apartment complexes were observed.



- While some visitors noted there were multiple apartment complexes, they also noted Apartments.com only had 2 listed for rent. Realtor.com showed 18 rentals, but most were trailer homes.
- Is this a major opportunity for developers?
- Stonepost Apartments looks like a nice complex with a playground and is near the pool and a ball field.



- Kansas Housing Corporation is a resource to find out about housing grants and other tools for homeowners and renters.
- Also has some resources to address homelessness.

<https://kshousingcorp.org/>



- A full tour of FHSU was conducted by some visitors. Administrators and a science professor were honest, friendly, and nice people. The campus was noted to be good.
- Nice digital sign at FHSU welcoming people to campus.
- Light pole banners look updated and well kept.
- The alumni association building was one of the first noticed and it looks like a newer, modern facility.
- The student union/services center was really impressive. Students must really like this space.
- Friendly and helpful staff at the Student Engagement Office who referenced a number of student services available.



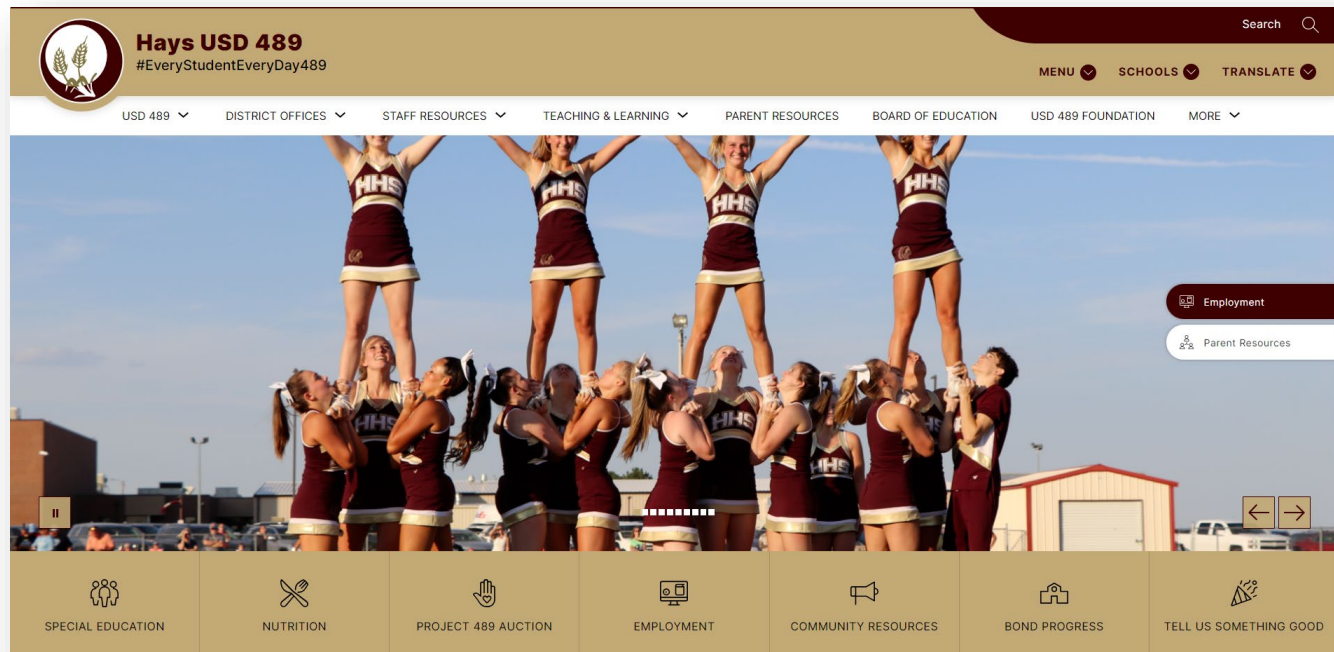
- Campus buildings had a very cohesive look with similar color schemes and types of stone used. A mix of historic feel and modern, some of the buildings looking like actual castles.
- Well manicured lawns on campus, flowers in full bloom.
- Very clean campus.
- FHSU branding was prominent and tasteful.
- Overall impression of campus – outstanding! – from a University of Nebraska Kearney employee.



- Other school observations include Early Childhood Connection, many preschool options, 4 elementary and 1 middle school – all elementary schools were well maintained and had large outdoor play areas for students.
- Hays Middle School seems to be an adequate size.
- Hays High School was observed and it was noted that a new bond was passed to build a new one. Great focus on education in the community!
- Also found was the North Central Kansas Technical College facility.
- Private schools: Holy Family Elementary, Hays Catholic School, Thomas Moore Prep-Marian.



- Most couldn't find what they felt was accurate information about the schools online. Some sites had mixed reviews, others couldn't locate quality of education details.
- USD489.com was found easily. The "about us" section was appreciated and contained statistics related to the school system. The site gave the appearance of quality education.



Comments:

- A couple childcare services were seen by visitors as they drove through town.
- A web search indicated there were more childcare centers.
- Only one had pricing information on their website and that was \$229/week for an infant and \$213/week for children aged 1-4.
- Three websites were found relating to childcare services.
- Information obtained while visiting indicates there was a shortage of workers in the childcare sector which potentially results in a need for such services.

Ellis County Data:

- **Extent Desired Capacity meets Potential Childcare need: 69%**
- Contact ks.childcareaware.org to access local childcare specialists.
785-823-3343

Source <https://ks.childcareaware.org/data-research/> Retrieved from internet 11/1/23



- Several churches observed in or near town. They all looked to be nice and inviting with well maintained buildings and landscaping.
- 31 churches are in the city, according to a Google search.
- Of those churches, one faith-based community service was observed: St. Joseph's Food Pantry.
- A Christian school was also observed.
- Places of worship in town include: Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Muslim.

- The ballfields behind the Legion had no concessions being offered despite all fields being used for a large tournament. This seems like a missed opportunity for a civic organization to raise funds for their service projects.
- Observed the United Way of Ellis County, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Habitat for Humanity, Heartland Community Foundation, Masons, and VFW.
- The downtown concert center appears to be a non-profit. Community theaters are great and this one looks well taken care of!
- Some visitors didn't see any evidence of civic organization activities or projects, but wondered if it was because they visited during the week. Maybe there were some sponsored events on weekends?
- The senior center looks outdated, but found out during the visits that a new facility is scheduled to be built.





- Infrastructure throughout town seemed adequate. Visitors were impressed with the trashcans in the alleys instead of on the street.
- Not as impressed with so many power poles everywhere. Can a move be made to put lines underground?
- Sidewalks and curbs looked good in most parts other than some weedy spots in residential areas and places just off downtown, and some spots with dips and rises (probably because of roots).
- Plenty of parking in other areas of town.
- Not a lot of landscaping observed throughout town unless it was individual homes/yards.



- Some brick streets off downtown were a little weedy with some more run down, commercial-type properties in those areas.
- Most of the 4-way stops were confusing because they weren't marked as such.



- Some had a great visit at City Hall, meeting with the city manager, mayor, and commissioners. They also enjoyed the pictures on the walls.
- Others were there on a Friday afternoon and City Hall was closed so they didn't get to go inside but noted the facility looked nice.
- The county building was observed but visitors did not go in.





- A new fire station was under construction on the west side of town, close to the country club area. This shows a commitment to public safety.
- Visitors didn't notice any police cars around town during their visits.



Welcome to Kansas Insurance Department

Home Contact Us

Kansas Insurance Commissioner
Vicki Schmidt

Kansas Insurance Department
420 SW 9th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1678
Consumer Hotline: 800-432-2484 (KS only)
[Email Us](#) | Phone: 785-296-3071


ISO Public Protection Classification

Most U.S. insurers of home and business properties use Insurance Services Office's (ISO) Property Protection Classification (PPC) in calculating premiums. In general, the price of insurance in a community with a good PPC is lower than in a community with a poor PPC, assuming all other factors are equal.

PPC Program: <https://www.isomitigation.com/program-works/how-the-ppc-program-works.html>

A community's PPC depends on:

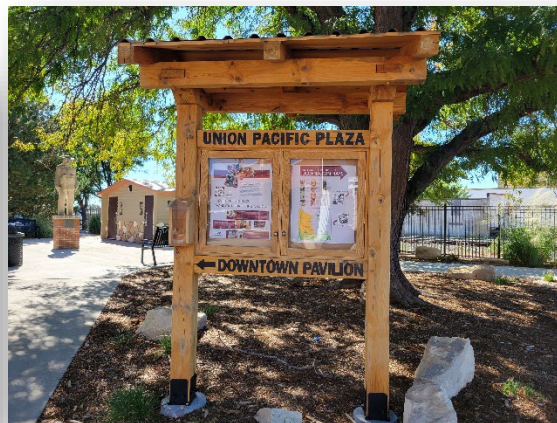
1. Emergency communications systems, including facilities for the public to report fires, staffing, training, certification of telecommunicators, and facilities for dispatching fire departments
2. The fire department, including equipment, staffing, training, and geographic deployment of fire companies
3. The water supply system, including the inspection and flow testing of hydrants and a careful evaluation of



- Very impressive facility.
- Clean and modern.
- Inviting – very great place!



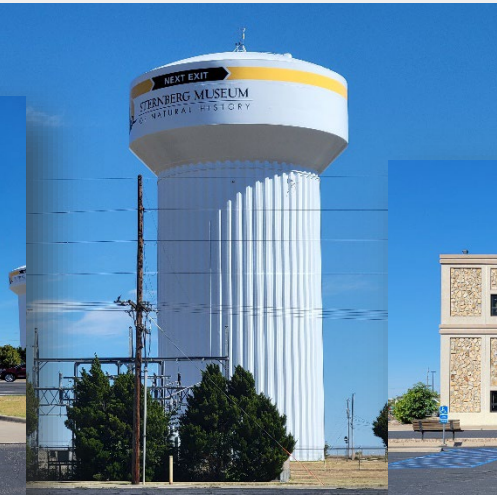
- The park along Rail was very nice. Visitors were impressed with the UP Plaza.
- The ball parks and sports complexes were well maintained and impressive.
- The walking trails were observed to be well used and popular.
- The water park is awesome!
- The FHSU athletic facilities were in good condition.
- A few different small parks and playground areas were seen. One on the east side had sand volleyball, a nice playground, and some small ball fields.



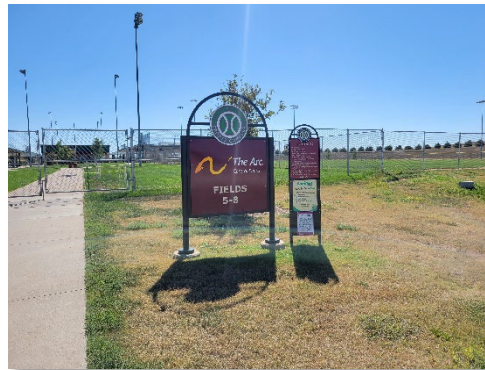
- Frontier Historical Park next to FHSU was serene. A good place to relax and enjoy nature. The proximity to campus likely makes it popular with students looking for a place to go to study.
- Most impressive was the Bickle-Schmidt sports complex – a mix of FHSU and city facilities. Tons of space for soccer fields and many baseball/softball fields. One of the nicest facilities for youth sports.



- The turf ball fields are definitely an attraction/destination when coaches decide where to go early in the season. Keep adding shade areas.
- Oktoberfest.
- The bike lanes and the brick streets downtown.
- The Sternberg Museum appears to be the primary tourist attraction with the large water tower on I-70 promoting it – this is prime exposure.

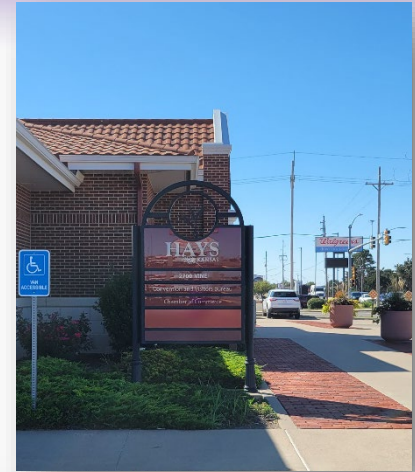


- For significant natural or manmade features that have a potential of drawing people to town, some felt there wasn't a lot that stood out.
- Others felt the ball fields would be a draw for people.
- FHSU was a big regional draw.
- The murals downtown might bring people to town, as would the buffalo pens south of town, the Sternberg Museum, and Historical Fort Hays.
- The water park was also very nice.
- For significant events, visitors felt the downtown concert/show venue was used and they found a list of upcoming shows. Not much else of note other than that.



Visitor's Center or Chamber

- The Downtown EcoDevo office was friendly and was able to refer visitors to potential properties available.
- When asked, there didn't appear to be any business incentives to improve downtown properties such as a façade rebate program.
- Visitors indicated there was no obvious signage for the Visitor's Center or Chamber office. They had to use Google to find them. They did see a Welcome Center sign in proximity to the Visitor's Center and Chamber office, but it wasn't automatic to put the sign together with the offices. More direct signage with the names was expected. Basically just hard to find because of signage issues.
- Visitor's Center staff was very well informed about the city and very friendly.



What would bring you back?

- The Avid Hotel was worth staying at. Clean, good service, easy to get around town from there. The lobby staff was friendly.
- The shops were really good downtown with different types of stores and products than are available in Kearney.
- University activities.
- The neat art gallery.
- Lomato's
- A lot of chain restaurants you'd see in other communities – those wouldn't bring people back. There was a lack of local establishments that stood out.

- Community was clean and easy to navigate.
- Friendly business staff.
- Appropriate mix of housing types, restaurants, and shops for a city this size.
- Hospital is a great facility with clinics and nearby supporting businesses.
- The downtown!
- The Health Complex and Cancer Center.
- Wide variety of things to do in town.
- The airport was great with flights to Denver and Chicago daily.
- FHSU and the campus, impressive union, nice signage, architecture and branding.

- The rundown feel of the main commercial stretch (Vine Street). It's such a visible space and a high-traffic area doesn't match with other areas of town like HaysMed, FHSU campus, Smoky Hill area.
- Maybe cleaning up Vine Street by asking the business community to improve signage, storefronts, and general upkeep. Then adding landscaping, trees, light pole banners and other signage that welcomes people. Visitors don't remember seeing anything about "Welcome to Historic Hays" when entering town.
- Lack of housing or built commercial properties for sale at any level.
- Lack of destination businesses other than the ball fields or campus events.
- While most of town was clean, there were some parts that could use some help.
- Lack of rental properties is a concern.

What will you remember?

- Nice FHSU campus.
- Nice turf ball fields. The Bickle-Schmidt Complex was awesome!
- Great downtown – a lot of diversity there. Visitors spent a lot of time there.
- How run down the Big Creek Mall looks from the outside.
- Development of the other bypass by the interstate.
- Hays seems like a mirror image of Kearney. One visitor mentioned they could see themselves living here and their visit was a positive experience.
- The congested, rundown feel from Vine Street.

- Remember that potential new residents are researching before they come. Use your City and School websites to highlight your many assets.
- What are you proud of? Show us online.
- Tell your positive stories. Make your residents want to contribute to a positive story.

N o o n e c a n d o e v e r y t h i n g ,
b u t e v e r y o n e c a n d o s o m e t h i n g .

Thank you to our volunteer visitors.

Set Next Steps:

- Start talking! Find ways to discuss what you heard in small groups of every kind.

Contact me if you need resources or have questions:

Jan Steen

Community Vitality Specialist

Kansas Community Empowerment Co-Coordinator, K-State Research and Extension

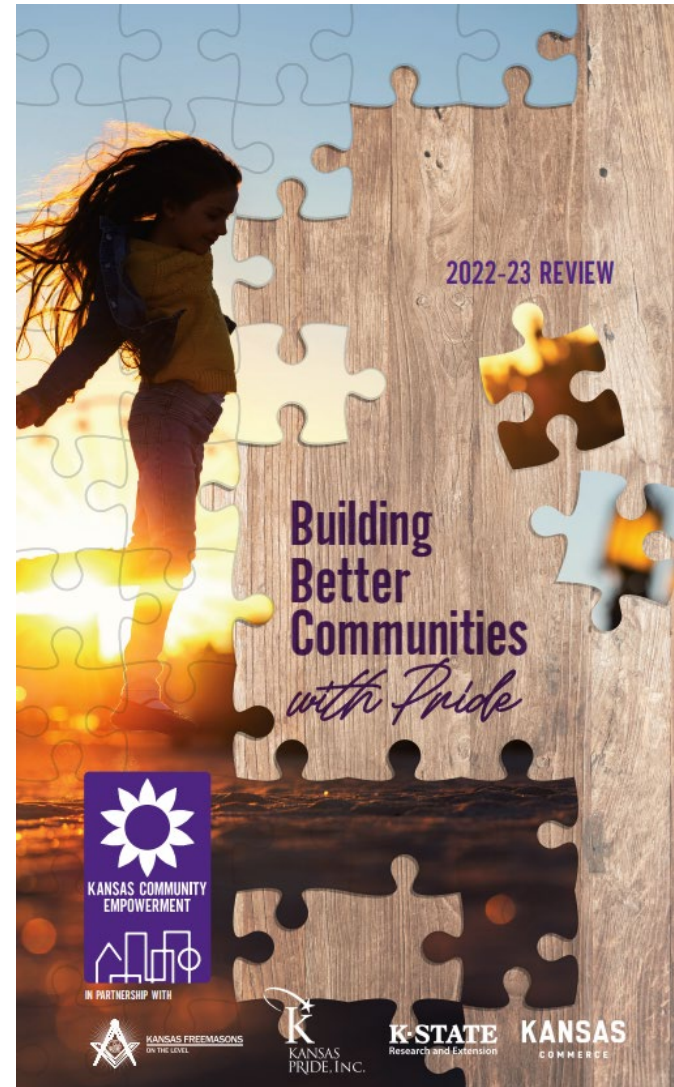
785.532.5840

jmsteen@ksu.edu

Kansas Community Empowerment

<http://kce.k-state.edu>

- Local communities identify what they would like to preserve, create, or improve for their future and volunteers pull together to create their ideal community future.



Youth Community Perceptions

- Youth-Based Community Assessment.
- Gives communities insights on how youth see their community.
- Creates opportunities for youth voices in the community.
- Allows youth to become involved in local government and community process



K-STATE
Research and Extension

Community
Vitality

K-STATE
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Grant Writing Classes and Support

Contact

KSRECV@ksu.edu

to participate.

Grant searches for
Kansas communities and
organizations also
offered at no cost!



K-STATE
Research and Extension

5 GRANT WRITING RESOURCES

K-State Research and Extension provides resources to help you write and submit successful grant proposals to improve lives, livelihoods and communities across Kansas.

- 1 ONLINE GRANT WRITING CLASSES**
Class alum reported receiving \$28 million in successful grants. 
- 2 A PROFESSIONAL LEVEL GRANT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT COURSE**
An 8-week course dedicated to helping you complete a fundable proposal. 
- 3 A LIST OF CONTRACT GRANT WRITERS**
Professionals willing and ready to write grants on a contract basis.
- 4 SUPPORT FOR KANSAS PRIDE COMMUNITIES**
Excellent resources for those wanting to bring more to their communities.
- 5 ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT BY K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS**
Our professionals are prepared to help you find grants and review your grant proposals.

Small Business and Community Development

- **First Friday e-Calls 9:30-10:30 am**

Connecting small businesses and communities with the resources to make them successful.

– [Register here](#)

– Previous calls are recorded at

<http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/>

- Now people have a choice, and millions of them are planning to move.
- **“The pivot to remote work is the biggest, fastest transformation of the labor market since the World War II mobilization.”**
- **Major cities will see the biggest out-migration:** 20.6% of those planning to move are currently based in a major city.
- **People are seeking less expensive housing:** Altogether, **more than half** (52.5%) are planning to move to a house that is significantly more affordable than their current home.
- **People are moving beyond regular commute distances:** 54.7% of people are moving over two hours away or more from their current location, which is beyond daily or even weekly commuting distances for most.

[UpWork October, 2020 <https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move>, retrieved from Internet 12-12-20, UpWork October, 2020](https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move)

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