First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Belleville Date(s) Visited: July 15 & 31, 2015

**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?**

Very pleasing website with a wealth of information on their city. However, there are quite a few typos throughout the website, also some links that do not work. It was fairly easy to navigate.

It was a little confusing to have two sites, one for the city and the other for Chamber and Main Street. Is there a way to combine the two?

Nice Facebook page which is regularly updated.

1. **The “Five-Minute” Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted.**

Belleville is a nice community to drive into. Several historic homes, nice lawns, special attention to the town square.

Difficult to know where “downtown” is located. Lots of construction that didn’t help – but will be very nice when finished. Nice and not so nice homes throughout town and side by side. Larger downtown but upon looking closer realized some buildings that are struggling. Schools spread out.

Overall a nice looking community. Lots of banks and churches. One grocery store that looks nice. All basic services – hospital, eye doctor, dentists, schools, library, gas stations, motel.

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

Road construction on 36, but still able to visit businesses along highway. 81 very pleasing – several businesses easily accessed. Along 36 some buildings in disrepair/vacant.

Some signs but I felt difficult to know where to go. Interstate frontage is sparse and that appears it would be a good development site. Maybe 3 different retail areas? Interstate, Hwy 36 and downtown.

Signs to downtown are lacking. A banner across the road to get to downtown off of Hwy 81. Nothing noted off of Hwy 36, however there is road construction on Hwy 36 right now.

2. **Downtown Business Area**

**Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.**

Nice downtown area, some vacant buildings causing some blight.

Older buildings, garages, metal buildings. Appears either buildings in good shape or very bad shape.

Downtown is a square with the Courthouse in the center. Older buildings, some businesses, lots of empty storefronts, many in disrepair. Some of the empty buildings could at least have something nice looking in the windows.

**Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and**

**quality of merchandise displayed.**

Good variety. Health insurance to dining. Feathered Nest is a huge plus to downtown.

Antiques, flower, clothing, furniture, flooring, home décor, coffee shop.

Downtown businesses – CPA, Investment Company, appliance store, hair saloon, drugstore, theater, bowling alley, attorney, restaurant, quilt and gift store. The restaurant was old but clean with good food. The quilt shop was really nice with lots of fabric, sewing supplies and nice gifts.

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

Good customer service

I visited one business on 2 different days. First time I did not get a hello or anything. 2nd time I was greeted and helped. Another business – had a nice discussion regarding her retail area and the challenges they face.

Greeted well, people friendly, service good.

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

Courthouse has a great set-up. Park also.

I didn’t see any drinking fountains – don’t remember any benches or public restrooms.

Restrooms in Courthouse and bank building where chamber is.

**Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping.**

Streetscaping beautiful downtown.

Courthouse yard – grass mowed, but no landscaping. Feel that could help. Courthouse large unique style with white façade. Probably needs “softened” by plants, trees, shrubs.

There wasn’t really anything to draw your attention, but it was decent.

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

Lots of parking, all in walking distance.

No trouble parking. Quite plentiful. I could access downtown area well – good sidewalks. The 2 stoplights appear a little much. I would get stopped about every time and honesty just wanted to get away because they appeared more of a nuisance to shopping and taking care of business.

No difficulty parking, plenty around businesses and courthouse. Can go to several businesses from parking.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

Hwy 36 – not super attractive, some shopping, road construction. Hwy 81 & North main area both good.

Two other areas – Hwy 36 with either a good looking building/structure or the complete opposite. Interstate – felt like lots of “holes” that could be filled to attract the north/south travelers.

Dollar General on Hwy 36, Mr. Goodscents-a sub shop on Hwy 81, Lumber Yard and car dealership on Hwy 81. All easy to access. There is a Pizza Hut, a Dairy Queen, Mexican Restaurant (Los Primos), a restaurant at a motel and a restaurant downtown (The Dinner Bell).

4**. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

There are a couple of areas – looks like some places available for new businesses.

I would say either Hwy 36 east or North/South of the Interstate.

Renke, Lambert Vet Supply, Haarslov Industries, Mid-America Truck Equipment and Livestock Auction on highways. Saw at least 3 signs for industrial properties for sale on Hwy 81.

5. **Health Care Services**

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

A bit “hidden” – good area – decently maintained.

Small town hospital. Appears to have nice size clinic with dental office included. It’s a little difficult to find the hospital – not very visible.

Hospital and long term care appear to be built in the “50’s but look like they are kept up well. EMS building across the street from the hospital. No way to assess the quality.

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

Seem to have a good variety of services for size. Not an overabundance of docs. Would like to see more (medical field).

The medical clinic, a dentist, an optometrist and a chiropractor are across the street from the hospital. The clinic not being attached to the hospital is a down side. There is a Mental Health Clinic, Home Health Agency, and Health Department. The buildings look nice.

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.)**

Good number of housing open ranging from $15,000 to $130,000. Great new apartment building. Neighborhoods like most – good & bad.

Did not see many for sale signs of homes vs the “bill boards” by local realtors. Lots of building of new townhomes/apts. & remodeled school. The new units appear to be very plentiful and gave me question of a new industry coming to town??

There didn’t appear to be a lot of properties for sale. Many older, small homes. Looked like quite a few properties needed to be torn down.

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

A+ apartment availability. Some areas vacant, not sure if open for building.

As mentioned before, appears that they will have adequate numbers, not sure about rent price.

Looked like quite a few apartments and they are building more apartments in the old high school with duplexes behind it.

7**. Schools**

**Do the schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of temporary classrooms? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?**

Located 1 preschool/daycare. K-12 buildings looked good.

I saw one downtown (Head Start) but could not tell if it was open. Saw a temporary classroom with the elementary school and it was located away from the high school. District office is away from both schools.

Saw a building labeled Head Start, don’t know if it is functioning. There appeared to be a preschool in a small old house, clean appearing – called Doodle Bug Academy. There is a small modular building behind the elementary school. High school looked nice, air conditioning had been added to classrooms individually.

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

No or not much. School does have a nice website.

1. **Childcare**

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

Maybe a bit of a lack – or not easily found/located by newcomer.

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?**

Great churches available.

We saw 3 or 4 churches and they were very well maintained.

There were quite a few churches and all of them looked well cared for and nicely landscaped.

1. **Civic**

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

Only did web search on this – seems to be several organizations.

One of the churches was having a fund raiser with quilt displayed.

The fairgrounds had people working here and there.

1. **Public Infrastructure**

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

Streets like most towns – some good, some in dire need of repair. Good parking, lighting, etc.

Side streets small – some minimal to not paved. Felt a little crowded on some side streets.

Street signs ok, landscaping ok, sidewalks on some blocks and not others, didn’t see any public restrooms.

**Did you observe land-use planning?** None noted

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

Good service at the Courthouse and there was information available. Did not enter the city office.

City Office – nice clean front. Again on back side of downtown and not very visible.

Didn’t see a city/town hall. Had difficulty locating the Chamber of Commerce. When we found it, there was no one there, but there was a table out front with pamphlets available.

**Police/fire protection:**

Adequate

On Main Street, very visible, well maintained façade.

Saw the police department and the fire department

**Library:**

Did not see.

It looked in nice condition and some work was being done to the roof.

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

Pool – fairgrounds – but parking appears to be difficult. I drove around during a “fair day.”

Nice parks – well set up with stage area.

The city pool, a play area, ball park and fairgrounds were all close together. They are located close to the Midget Auto Race Track. There is a small amphitheater.

1. **Recreation/Tourism**

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

The community is known for the races. They are a great asset to the community.

Midget Auto Racing

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

Fair during the first day I was visiting, but no signs – etc. on HWY to advertise (that I saw).

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

Rocky Pond

Not applicable

**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.**

Yes, (Chamber Office) several pamphlets were available.

The chamber was difficult to locate. No one was there. It was afternoon on a Wednesday. A table in front of the office had pamphlets.

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

I heard the “Feathered Nest” is the destination place that draws people to Belleville.

Feathered Nest is amazing.

The quilt shop would bring me back. The restaurant was pretty good

1. **Wrap-up**

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

Some nice shops, newer hotel, Casey’s, Dairy Queen.

Beauty, comfortable, welcoming, several activities.

The few people we encountered were very friendly. Things appeared pretty clean.

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

Loss of residents – empty buildings.

“Where to go” signage. Structures that are a deterrent in both downtown area and on Hwy 36. Businesses to fill up store fronts. Adequate cost efficient business buildings.

Getting the unoccupied downtown storefronts cleaned up and/or getting businesses in them.

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

The warm, welcoming downtown, Rock Pond and beautiful historic houses.

2 stop lights in downtown that were cumbersome. Unique Courthouse. Lots and lots of new housing with the Buffalo apts. And new townhouses/apts.

Impressed with the number of apartment complexes. The Quilt Shop/Gift Shop really great.

First Impressions was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and adapted for use by K-State Research and Extension. Funds for this program have been made possible by a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, Logan, KS.

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