

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Burden

Date(s) Visited: a.) Fri Feb 7th, 2020

b, c.) Fri Dec 27th, 2019

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?
 - a. I first found the Cowley County web page for Burden. Some of the businesses had links, so I found some community information. I had a framework of things to look for on the visit. Unfortunately, I overlooked the site for LoveSmallTownAmerica.com, which the City Clerk indicated was the town website they used. On returning home, I checked that. It looks nice, but the list of businesses only has phone and address pop-up boxes, no links to business websites.
 - *On the Cowley County site, I was very impressed to see links to a Barn Quilt tour map, and Stone Bridge tour map. Good opportunities to draw in visitors.
 - *Link to Turner's Facebook page took you right to the menu.
 - *Link to City Facebook page a little out of date. Visit Feb. 7; page still has Santa.
 - b. There wasn't an official website, but they do have a Facebook page. Hard to access since I don't use Facebook. It was a little difficult to get anything that didn't come through a secondary source like Wikipedia. The business list online was more extensive than the impression I got driving into town.
 - c. Web search gave current information which matched my observation. The Jr/Sr High is shown twice which gives the impression that there are three schools. The monthly calendar at a glance was a nice feature.

2. **The “Five-Minute” Impression:** After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted. The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

- a. The first thing noticed about the town was 5 miles south on highway 160/K-15, a nice, big, well-done sign directing travelers to turn north to Burden. *Coming into the town, the town is right on State Highway 160.
*Feeling of a solid, substantial town.
*Newer apartments at 4th and Main.
*First thing you notice is a nice park, brand-new modern playground.
*Town sign is adequate. Signs for other clubs give a general sense that a lot is going on, but too small letters to read from the highway.
*Noted signs for HS Athletic fields.
- b. It seems like the community ought to have a bigger population than 535. There is curb and gutter and a grid layout pattern you’d expect from a community of that age. The down town is more extensive than you’d expect in a smaller town. There were a lot of potential business locations, but most were closed or empty. The park as you drive-in gives an excellent impression. There seemed to be a lot of homes in disrepair or in various stages of reconstruction. Noticed a building down town had a collapsed roof, but the façade was still fine. The signage was appropriate. It would be hard to argue that there was any formal streetscape. The buildings coming into town were in decent condition. The old café building on the outskirts was a little disappointing; I thought we were going to be in for a treat.
- c. Nice welcoming sign stating town’s name (at both ends of town). The first impression driving into town is that it’s clean and well kept. The park welcomed us and is a nice feature. Had it been summer it would have been a nice place to stop. Since it was a cold day in winter, there weren’t people outside. I only saw a few kids outside. Everyone else was either at work or indoors keeping warm. The kids waved at us as we drove by. Houses had mailboxes so there must be mail delivery.

3. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed. Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

- a. *Evident that this is an older town with historic, charming stone buildings. *A well-established Main Street area, but some business buildings empty. *Creative variety of business signs. *1-Stop convenience store, gas station with nice, modern tiled public restroom *Clear to see where the City Hall and Bank are. Restaurant, Retail. *Turner's bar and grill absolutely "oozes" character. Antique building, pressed tin ceiling, wood floor, stone walls, but with modern artwork on walls and two big flat-screen TVs. Not to mention the great food. *Another town treasure is Joseph's Storehouse, named after Joseph in the Bible. Quite a large thrift shop to serve senior citizens and others in need and anyone in the community. Started 20 years ago; built this new building. Has a Board, 4 paid staff plus volunteers. It also funds a Food Pantry in the back. *Bank is a valuable asset. *Farmer's COOP is essential to the Ag community *An auto mechanic on the west side of town is critical for a town like this. In Turner's, the fellow had great service, and answered any questions I had. When asked "what's the best thing about Burden?" He said "the people are so nice. Small town friendliness." Same at Joseph's Storehouse. It's the people.
- b. It was a mix of decently maintained property (like the bank, city building, restaurant, thrift store), empty store fronts and store fronts that look abandoned. The former gas station on the corner of main and the highway had a nice Christmas light display with a snow man. Overall the sidewalks seem to be in OK condition, with a few spots that need attention. Turners needs a slightly more visible sign; I drove right by it. The thrift store was closed for the holiday at the time we visited, but it looked well maintained and clean. It had a Christmas display that was nice. Turners was awesome inside. I was surprised at how cool and contemporary it was inside. The art on the walls was great. Cool use of the old gym scoreboard and floor. The gentlemen at Turners was super nice, welcoming and helpful. He took time to talk with us about the menu and the décor. They had pamphlets about other towns in Cowley County and he was very helpful. He seemed very knowledgeable and gave us some tips on going to the candy store in Dexter. I was very impressed with the hospitality. Even another patron sitting at the table opposite us was helpful in answering questions.
- c. Turner's was the only business open on Main St. I had lunch there. Clean, nice décor, greeted when we entered the restaurant. Friendly service and good food. The two buildings at the north end of this block appeared to have collapsed leaving only the front of the former business intact.

What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.) Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- a. No drinking fountains, benches were only at the high school, public restrooms at 1-Stop, Joseph's, no trash receptacles. City Hall says they have good high speed internet and Wi-Fi. No landscaping I noticed in February. No problem parking downtown. Could walk to everything downtown.
- b. There was Wi-Fi but I didn't connect with it. There weren't really any amenities downtown. Parking was not a problem. The sidewalks could use some work but there were kids and people walking on them. We could easily walk back and forth to different service if they were available.
- c. Wi-Fi

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. *Really only the 1-Stop convenience store on 160, mentioned earlier.
*A need felt for a grocery store in town.
- b. The only other shopping areas were the gas station and on the entry of town. They were easy to access. Not very attractive, but not bad for a gas station.
- c. Store was closed. It looked like it would be a fun place to shop.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. No, set-aside Industrial Park could be identified where industries could expand.
- b. Nothing that was easily located other than the grain elevator. Has rail access so there were people noticeable on the property.
- c. It seemed the presence of the railroad and grain silos that the commercial area was larger than most small towns.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. No medical clinic or hospital--closest in Winfield 16 miles west. Emergency medical--there are First Responders, with ambulance coming from Winfield.
- b. Did not see any
- c. None available

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

- a. No other physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers in town. Closest is Winfield.
- b. Did not see any
- c. Probably Winfield, about 15 miles away

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

- a. None
- b. Did not see any
- c. None available, closest nursing facility in Dexter, about 10 miles away, or Winfield about 15 miles away.

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.)

- a. Mentioned by more than one that housing is the town's biggest need and concern. Many older houses from the 1940s and before, few built since the 1960s. Locals said several places need repair and fixing up if you would buy them. Some houses have small piles of junk in the yards. Mentioned as a challenge for incoming employees, such as teachers to find suitable housing.
- b. The housing looked older with the newest home probably built in the early 1980s. Everything looked like typical single-family homes. There was a huge variance in conditions and likely price. I was suspect that there are very inexpensive properties available, probably one or two homes over \$150,000. There were several that looked abandoned mid build or renovation. One had been boarded up from fire damage that did not look very recent. There were mobile homes scattered throughout the town and one mobile home park. The big challenge would be finding anything that would livable at the lower end of the price spectrum.
- c. I only observed one house with a for sale sign. There appeared to be several houses in need of major repair and several in need of general maintenance. Variety of housing available for all income levels.

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

- a. Rentals were not mentioned. The houses that were built recently are on the far south end of town; there is space there.
- b. There wasn't any rental property that I could identify by signs.
- c. There were a few apartments, no indication that any of them were vacant. Did not observe any house for rent.

8. Schools

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

- a. Schools are a K-6 Elementary, and 7-12 Jr. Hi/ High School. The 7-12 building is 1972, K-6 1999, so they are fairly new and in excellent shape. *Footsteps painted on the street leading up to the 7-12 building. Fun idea! *Vast, asphalt-paved parking lot provides easy access. *Attractive brick front to school; benches outside. *Great "word mural" in the hallway, as well as glass case student artwork on display. *When I walked into the open building on Friday, there was nobody there. I heard voices in the gym. I met the lady Athletic Director who gladly answered any questions I had about the school. She said they have no school on Friday; they are a 4-day-a-week school to save money. However, some activities have Friday practices. *Asked what they are known for, she listed a great teaching staff, excellent facilities (gym, top-notch track, football, baseball fields) for hosting league and regional sports events; an In-school day care center for staff children (the only one in town) Art, Music, FACS, Vo-Ag, and business classes running a T-shirt printing business.
- b. Central Middle and High School was easy to find. They were well maintained and looked recently added/renovated. The district office was with the middle and high school. The school had done a public art project on the portion of main street leading up to the school. It was very attractive and inviting. Central grade school was difficult to find. I did not find it until I looked it up on Google.
- c. Elementary, Jr/Sr High School. Large building and well maintained. Appears to have own bus service to rural area students.

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

- a. Schools don't always list the academic achievements online. One program mentioned online is Zeros Aren't Permitted (ZAP), designed to increase expectations of students who habitually, or even occasionally, fail to complete and turn in homework assignments on time.
- b. The online information wasn't great. GreatSchools.org had ratings on both the elementary and high school. The elementary school had a 6/10 rating making it average. The Middle-High School has a 4/10 rating, making it below average.
- c. NA

9. Childcare

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

- a. Only in school for employees.
- b. Did not appear to have any available
- c. Next to one of the churches there appears to be a building that could provide childcare.

10. Faith/Religion

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

- a. *Methodist, Baptist churches in town; seven churches in a wider area are part of the community. The Baptist church is a slightly older brick building. The Methodist church is a newer attractive brick and stone front. *Joseph's Storehouse is a cooperative non-profit venture among area churches.
- b. The church on the way into town on 160 was a very nice brick building with an electronic sign. According to the waiter/host at the restaurant the thrift store is run by religious volunteers. I don't recall seeing any other churches.
- c. Two churches. One medium size and the other larger. The larger church a sign for kids centered believes club, K-8th grade.

11. Civic

Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community. Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- a. *Senior Citizens Center with an active coffee group. *Masonic Lodge, Eastern Star *4-H *Kansas Pride I would expect the park playground and park might be such evidence.
- b. There was a senior citizens club but nothing other than that. Nothing.
- c. 4-H had a welcoming sign. Senior Center housed in a small house.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a. *When driving all over town, noticing the streets are almost all paved; not all towns this size have paved streets. *Street signs are adequate. *Other public restrooms in the Park, if open (not when I visited in February)
- b. The streets outside of downtown needed work; potholes and asphalt heaving in places. Massive valley gutters at intersections make driving without bottoming out a problem. Lots of street signs missing and the existing ones did not have appropriate reflectivity. The park was really well maintained. Gravel roads appeared to be maintained appropriately.
- c. Streets were in good repair. Restrooms at the park. Parking seemed adequate in all areas.

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

- a. City Clerk was very helpful with verbal information. Hours 9-12, 1-3. Information was found on the town website.
- b. We went there but they were closed beyond the lunch hour. It was a little odd. I knocked at the police department door and no one came.
- c. City Hall was closed so I didn't have an opportunity to visit with anyone. The police department was next door and it was also closed.

Police/fire protection:

- a. Police department is staffed. Fire is a volunteer Fire Department.
- b. Had a police department, but no one was there. There was a volunteer fire station in a metal building.
- c. NA

Library:

- a. No public, City library. Citizens may use the High School library if needed. One "tiny library" by Joseph's was visible
- b. Did not observe a free standing library, but it did look like there were books in the city hall lobby area for checkout.
- c. NA

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

- a. Yes, walking track through the Park. Excellent playground. No public ballpark or sports complex, but a rodeo arena in the Park. ****POOL! YOU HAVE A POOL!** Not many towns this size do.
- b. City Park was excellent, fair exceeding what I would have expected. They have a swimming pool that is older but looks to be well maintained. The covered patio area at the park had a weird fencing around it. I'd guess that's to keep out animals or people after hours, but it was inhospitable looking.
- c. City Park included an outdoor pool and close to it is the site for its annual rodeo. Nice basketball court.

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?

- a. Burden Dayz, 2nd weekend in September, seems to be an attractive event, parade, rodeo, and all. May want to come back for this.
- b. From an internet search they have the Burden Dayz fall festival and an active PRCA rodeo. I don't remember seeing a slogan on the sign, but I might have missed that.
- c. Horse racing and annual rodeo

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

- a. Burden Dayz; High school games and events.
- b. The rodeo arena area would be a definite attraction that would bring people into town. It was large and if you didn't know what it was you'd definitely have questions
- c. NA

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).

- a. *Timber Creek Lake, 6 miles WNW. *Eastern Cowley County Historical Society (Museum by appointment only) *Barn Quilt map and tour. Barn quilts very visible around town. *Stone Arched Bridge map and tour.
- b. Nothing that I noted on that.
- c. There are a number of buildings made from natural stone including the original city hall. A beautiful building that appears to be well maintained.

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.

- a. City Hall is easy to find; clear sign. Serves the purpose of a visitor's center. No chamber of commerce group active at this time. City clerk was extremely helpful and friendly answering questions. Nice, well-lit meeting room for Council and the public, renovated recently.
- b. Did not observe a visitor's center, but the restaurant had a display of Cowley County attractions.
- c. NA

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

- a. Yes. Turner's bar and grill, and Joseph's Storehouse. Maybe come for Burden Dayz.
- b. Turner's at 421 was a real surprise. The food was excellent. Chili Verde in Burden KS? I would have never guessed. That's the type of place I could see making a trip back for. It was really a cool little restaurant that offered some unique things that you'd not be expecting.
- c. NA

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. *The school is the crown jewel of the community, with top notch staff, newer facilities and can host many league and regional competitions. *The friendly and loyal people of Burden were often mentioned as a reason to live here. *Although some Main St. buildings are empty, the great historical architecture of the buildings is a treasure and just waiting for someone to renovate them and bring them back to life.
- b. Since it was decent weather and Christmas break there were a lot of kids out walking around and playing in the yards. By and large they were all friendly and smiling. More than one waved at us. That's always a good thing to see. Again Turner's was really great and they were super friendly.
- c. The residents appeared friendly, waved at us as we drove by. The community, for the most part seemed clean and well maintained. It seemed like a quiet place to live and raise children.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. *Older housing makes it hard for new school staff or other employees who want to live here. The town might benefit from a "Habitat for Humanity" or "Mennonite Housing" type organization, maybe based with the churches, to renovate housing and bring pride to families and the community. *Employment opportunities are there, but few. Need new entrepreneurs to start businesses. *Every small town has youth who beg for "something to do." Aside from school activities, things for young people to do would be great.
- b. The housing and code enforcement were a little rough. It could definitely use some sprucing up. The housing is going to be a challenge for anyone looking to come in from the outside. They are also missing a grocery store which is critical to a small town.
- c. There isn't a grocery store which means a short trip when you realize the recipe calls for 2 eggs and you only have 1 in the refrigerator. The other challenge I see that Burden will have to deal with is the housing that needs major repair, or in one case, already being torn down.

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

- a. I would drive out of my way to eat at Turner's again. People seem to be positive and friendly in spite of some community drawbacks. They seem encouraged, and aren't going anywhere.
- b. Turner's at 421
- c. It was fun to see a town similar in size to the one I live in. I enjoyed comparing the differences, what was better, what seemed to be missing. This is probably what I'll remember most about my visit.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

<http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/civic-engagement/first-impressions/index.html>

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