

# First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



**Community Visited:** Burlington    **Date(s) Visited:** Nov 19, 2020 Thursday (a,b,c)

## 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 did a FB search first and it came up information on town. It seemed up to date and current. I then did a web search and found a city page with lots of helpful information and accruement to what we encountered. Lots of information with tabs and pull downs for different areas of information.
- b. A website shows the best parts of what a city would like you to see. It reflected the best scenes which was what I expected.
- c. Accessing the City of Burlington website was easy and provided a lot of useful information. I saw that all the city departments had a link. My one criticism is with "Goals" section. To me, they did not offer a way to measure their success at attaining them. Most goals started with "continue". "Continue to serve the residents...." Etc. Under accomplishments for 2019 were items like "continued to serve the residents" ....etc. I would like to have seen specific, measurable goals like lowering operating expenses by 3% or sending two people for special police training or adding body cameras for all police officers, for example. Our visit with the City Clerk was very beneficial. Mrs. Brown and one of her clerks, Laura, I believe was her name, answered all of our questions or directed us to the others to get them answered. They were very helpful and courteous.

## 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. It seemed very clean and had metal welcome signs as we entered on two highways. Main street was in decent shape with lights, sidewalks. The eye catcher was the light poles with the veterans' pictures on them! A few older buildings could use some cosmetic repairs. There are a lot of murals in the town on buildings. We toured the town/residential area and were on gravel streets. South end 75 hwy. had metal welcome signs that are very artistic but not colorful enough to grab your eyes. East end entrance had school sign showing their winning sports events. Burlington has many

buildings with various paintings depicting history of the town. Love the caboose on the corner. Nice street lights, sidewalks. West end wasn't as nice with single-wide trailers.

- b. There are a lot of empty shops downtown, like most other small towns. The murals and signs brighten up the town. There seem to be many types of businesses for the size of town. The metal signs at the entrances of town were a great touch! They are unique. The small brown signs on the east side at the town line could use replacing. They are difficult to see.
- c. My first impression of Burlington after driving around was very positive. I liked the veteran banners on light standards along the highways and also thought the city limit welcome signs looked great. There seemed to be a lack of sidewalks in residential areas especially leading toward the elementary school.

### **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. We stopped at the Chamber office downtown and talked to her. We then walked around downtown-most buildings occupied. Some could use cosmetic appearance repair. Everyone told us to visit Vintage Sisters downtown. The sign for it wasn't very appealing-to tell you what they had or that they had food. We were there during lunch so ate; they were busy dealing with people ordering food. So this made for not much interaction with them. Very nice store; good food. I think it needs better signage. I loved the store there, flea market with a variety of merchandise. I would suggest a different cashier for the other items to purchase since there was only 1 for everything. When we talked to everyone this was the only place mentioned to visit. It was too busy to greet us or interact with them. They assumed that we knew where menus/tables where to eat. The town has quite a variety of retail stores- pharmacies, liquor stores, phone stores etc.
- b. The downtown could be fixed up. There are many empty buildings and some that look unoccupied. Car dealerships, apartment complexes, Historical museum, aquatic center, electrical plant, Water dept., newspaper, assisted living facilities, eye doctor, dentist, chiropractor, golf course, Dairy Queen, Subway, pharmacy, Vintage Sisters, library and city offices. I noticed all essential businesses are covered for medical, dental and optometry. We were greeted at city hall and the ladies were very informative. They answered all the questions we had and even showed us the council room. The rec center did not have anyone up front for quite a while. We toured ourselves while waiting for someone to be at the front desk. Turns out, she was running a class upstairs. Once she came down, she was incredible. Exciting, bubbly and energetic.

- c. The downtown area is suffering from some of the ills that are facing other small towns but overall, I thought the downtown looked occupied and not empty shells of old businesses. I'm sure there were empty buildings but that didn't jump out at me as an eyesore. There were lots of vehicles parked throughout the downtown area. We didn't visit many downtown retail locations but one that was recommended to us. Three different people suggested the Vintage Sisters where we lunched. Other lunch possibilities were also mentioned but this one seemed special. I felt that if it hadn't been mentioned to us that we would not have found it or known about it. I'm sure locals know it and frequent it but an out-of-towner might not have found it. As we drove through Burlington, we saw optometrists, chiropractors, liquor stores, the grocery store, various fast food companies, the library, museum and schools. There seemed to be a good variety of businesses in town.

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

- a. With it being 2020-we observed drinking fountains and public restrooms by train but closed at the time. Benches were available in the many parks in town. Trash receptacles in park and on main street. Not sure about Wi-Fi. Plenty of parking on store fronts along main street. From there you could access several businesses by walking.
- b. I only saw one set of benches, drinking fountains and public restrooms by the caboose. I believe there might be a couple by the grade school as well. The parking was sufficient for the retail businesses. I would like to see better parking for the hospital. It is a long walk for those heading to clinic also. I understand, there is not much in the way of parking up front so better lighting or a canopy over the walkway might be a good option.
- c. I liked the main intersection with the park on one corner and the caboose across from it. The public restrooms were also a positive at that corner. I imagine there may have been trash bins around but I personally didn't notice them.

#### **4. Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

- a. The outlying retail shopping was attractive with plenty of parking, new buildings, new businesses. I only observed 2 empty buildings for future growth which was a grocery store and restaurant. They had another local grocery store along with a Dollar general. Not many places to eat, very few chain restaurants. Had several liquor stores, pharmacies, phone stores, car washes, banks. I didn't notice any bars except for the American Legion downtown. Also didn't see any type of farm store. I was thrilled to know it still had a working/printing local newspaper.

- b. I would like to see more shopping possibilities. There are empty buildings that have great potential. It is not attractive to see so many empty buildings on the downtown or the newer buildings empty.
- c. Due to time constraints, we didn't get to visit other retail businesses.

## **5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

- a. There are two industrial park areas with plenty of space for growth. It seemed the signage on the businesses may have not been correct for what was being manufactured there. Example said bowling alley but wasn't a bowling alley. Had a lot of storage units there which I don't believe belong in an industrial area.
- b. Yes, the industrial park is very well defined. The buildings could be better marked. We went looking for the bowling alley from the sign that did not exist.
- c. We drove through both Industrial Parks. It looked like there was plenty of room to expand or for new businesses to locate. The entrances were well marked and, I believe, business names were posted at the entrances.

## **6. Health Care Services**

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

- a. I observed a nice but seemed small town hospital. Which they are lucky to have. Also had some other medical building or offices-not great signage to tell me that. Has several eye doctors, pharmacies, chiropractors. Nice nursing homes and an assisted living care. Good quality for the seniors.
- b. The hospital was easy to find, looked clean and accessible, except for parking.
- c. Saw the local hospital from the outside along with a couple of other medical services surrounding it. Any time a city the size of Burlington has a hospital that is certainly a positive.

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

- a. No Answer
- b. I did not see any clinics or physician facilities. We had to ask where they were. Dentists and optometrists were located.
- c. No Answer

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

- a. Yes, good quality homes with some apartments for seniors.
- b. We located a nursing home and an assisted living.
- c. We saw at least one long term care facility that appeared to have an assisted living part to it.

## **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. Like any town it has its area of mixed housing. Some areas had single-wide homes while others were brand new homes and still others where well-kept older homes. I didn't see very many homes for sale. A lot of older homes with some not kept up. I observed nice/well kept low income housing area also.
- b. I noticed nice housing around the high school but not much throughout town. There were several apartment complexes that looked like a variety of income wages. There were a few homes for sale also. Not much variety.
- c. We saw a variety of housing in town. Some newer residential areas and some older homes. Also, saw several apartment complexes. Also saw a number of "For Sale" signs so there appears to be some turnover of housing as people come and go. I would think that upper managers and business owners should be able to locate here along with a variety of employees.

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

- a. I didn't observe any for rent signs in town. I didn't think to ask city hall for a list of people who rent houses. There is an older hotel that I did observe advertise by the week.
- b. I did not observe any rental properties, only apartment complex.
- c. No Answer

## 8. Schools

**What schools are present? 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?**

- a. Burlington has excellent schools; I've been told since there is a power plant nearby for funding. The High/Middle School are fairly new and in good condition. The grade school seemed older but very well maintained in a residential area. The school has excellent sports fields but football field wasn't turf. The sports area was very well maintained.
- b. I saw one daycare, grade school, middle and high school. The middle and high school were well maintained. The grade school could be better fenced and better maintained.
- c. I've attended several football games at the high school in the past and one of our other participants has been at events inside the high school. Both were very positive. The athletic facilities are very good. Also, the Rec Center was particularly impressive. I think all the schools look very good. I was especially surprised at the physical size of the elementary school.

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

- a. Yes, I did. When talking to people I was a little confused about the Rec Center. I first thought it was through the school, maybe funded. The Rec Center is outstanding which is located by the High School. It has so much to offer the community. Indoor pool, walking area, gym workout, basketball court, exercise classes, game area, etc. It's like a YMCA for the town with reasonable membership prices.
- b. The school quality looked sufficient from online views.
- c. No Answer

## 9. Childcare

**What childcare services are available? Is it affordable?**

- a. I was told by city hall that there are several in-home child care/daycares. None with signs. Also was told a church had a daycare. The one daycare I did see was in a bad area & not very appealing.
- b. We were told there were 3 facilities available but only noticed one. It was not somewhere I would take my children based upon looks alone.
- c. We were told there were several childcare places in town and we saw one in particular. I have no idea if there is an adequate number and have no idea about costs.

## **10. Faith/Religion**

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

- a. I observed an abundance of Faith/Religion establishments in town. All seemed very well kept. Some very large and elegant. It seemed all denominations were evident. I didn't observe any faith based community service.
- b. So many churches!!!! It seemed to have many denominations that all looked nice. As far as services for the community, it is unknown.
- c. There seems to be all the major religious denominations represented in town and all appeared to be well kept even the smaller churches.

## **11. Civic**

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

- a. It was hard to find any Civic -nonprofit organizations in town. When I asked at City hall- they too had to think hard on what was in town. Finally said Lions Club. They said a Rotary Club but was for the entire county. Was told the Rotary Club does a big fundraiser for the entire county residents to help with bills incurred with health problems. I did not observe evidence of civic organization activity.
- b. We noticed a sign for Rotary, Holts Foundation, Lions Club and Coffey County Support Group. I did not notice any evidence of civic organization activity.
- c. We learned from the City Clerk that there is a Lions Club, Rotary and the Floyd Lewis Foundation which I believe is part of the Cancer Support Center. I'm sure all are beneficial to Burlington. The Cancer Support Center drew praise from several people we talked with because they are very active and the money they raise stays in the area.

## **12. Public Infrastructure**

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

- a. Streets- I believe we here still in city limits-possibly new housing area. but the streets were gravel. Had signs for parks, street names. The parks had nice landscaping for the time frame. I loved the veterans' flags on the light poles in several areas of the town. Some were large and some were smaller.
- b. Loved the soldier banners on the street signs. There could be better signage on the outside edges of town.
- c. Public streets seemed okay. The main highway through town was very good. I was surprised to see several gravel streets in town.

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

- a. City hall we talked to City Clerk. She was very nice and informative about the town. City hall was open and newer renovated facilities. Showed us the conference room. There was information about the county at the chamber office since it is a county chamber. The water dept. building looked too elegant for what it is used for. No drive up available for city hall to pay bills but enough parking for it.
- b. City hall was welcoming. I would have liked to see a map or other information about the city on flyers to pick up.
- c. No answer.

**Police/fire protection:**

- a. The city police station was off the beaten path and looked like an ordinary house. Not impressed and not much parking.
- b. We had difficulty finding the fire department.
- c. Drove by the police department. A little surprised to see it was a house. After seeing several other city departments, Water Department, for example, I thought the police would have had a larger facility. The County Fire Department was a little hard to find. As a visitor I don't think I would have found it without GPS or someone telling me where it was. Signage was almost non-existent due to vehicles parked in front of the building.

**Library:**

- a. Excellent library- has two. One for a useful patron library and the other a Carnegie Library as a museum/ Arts building. Didn't have time to visit unfortunately.
- b. The library was very nice.
- c. I liked the old Carnegie Library even though we were unable to visit...again due to time restraints. The new library looked great.

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

- a. Had lots of parks-little nook areas in town to sit and observe the area. Excellent playgrounds/ballparks. Sports complex thru the school/Rec Center. I didn't observe any walking trails.
- b. Kelley and Katy Park were both nice. Loved the location of the Veterans Park.
- c. The Aquatic Center was very nice. Drove through Kelley Park. That appeared to be the location of the county fair. Liked the grandstand in particular. Heard about the walking track but didn't see it. Also, drove by the golf course. Seemed active with a number of golfers out when we drove through the parking lot. I've already mentioned the park/green space at the main intersection.



### **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. Web page says " No Place Like Home" slogan but didn't observe it carried thru the town. It says "Catfish Capital of the World" with no other mention of it in town. I was told they have a huge craft fair every year that brings thousands of people in but with the time it was cancelled this year. Has a public golf course. Again praise for the Rec Center for all the recreation items available there.
- b. Vintage Sisters is the one establishment everyone said to visit while we were in town.
- c. I've already mentioned the Rec Center. It certainly appears to be a community meeting place with lots of different activities. The entire facility was very impressive and the person who manages it was very helpful in answering our questions and showing us around. We also saw some of the events in town listed on signage at the caboose uptown and were told about several events that normally happen each year but were cancelled this year to the virus.

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

- a. Not available at this time again with Covid year.
- b. Yes, the sign by the caboose listed the yearly events.
- c. No answer

**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. The murals on several of the buildings in town and also in other surrounding towns. They have a caboose on a corner. Also a map of all the area murals in the towns with 100+ created by a Burlington native artist. They have several lakes close by.
- b. The rec center is amazing, and the museum looked like a great draw for the community.
- c. We also noticed all the murals in town. While visiting the County Chamber of Commerce I saw an article in the Summer 2020 issue of Southeast Kansas magazine regarding the local muralist who apparently has created most if not all of them. I think these are things that bring people to visit your community. While I didn't get to see John Redmond Reservoir or the lake on the east side of town, I'm sure these are areas that draw out of town visitors.

**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. No visitors center. Chamber Director was leaving position with no one hired to replace yet.
- b. We found the chamber of commerce. It had great information inside the door. We found the director was preparing to leave.
- c. The director of the Chamber was quite helpful and polite when we visited.

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

- a. I didn't observe very many restaurants. Not many chain names maybe 5 or 6. Was only told of one locally-owned restaurant to visit in town; which is also a specialty shop- flea market. The Rec Center would bring me to town to live. As a whole county- it offers many things, airport, lakes, boating, fishing.
- b. Vintage Sisters! It was a unique and delicious establishment.
- c. No answer

#### **14. Wrap-up**

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

- a. #1 The Rec Center  
#2 The school system.  
#3 The arts- murals, parks, museum,
- b. Comparing this community to my own, I noticed people did not wave, say hello or good afternoon. People were congenial but not until spoken to first.
- c. The most positive thing I saw in Burlington was the Rec Center. Sally, I believe that was her name, obviously was a key ingredient to its success. In addition to the facilities themselves, she mentioned the short trips she conducts to area places of interest for seniors.

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

- a. Not living in the community to know what it would be like living so close to a working power plant. It is good for the community to have the employees living and working there and supporting the school, and businesses but what are the health issues it brings?

- b. The empty buildings. This is not only an issue in Burlington, it is very common in small towns right now. An economic development committee might be able to bring in business ideas.
- c. I'm not sure what obstacles or challenges Burlington might face without more time spent in the community. I was surprised that several streets weren't paved. Probably the biggest challenge would be if Wolf Creek was to ever close and the tax base was seriously eroded. I also think it would be beneficial to have a separate Chamber of Commerce for the city. As many cities are encountering, keeping a vibrant downtown is becoming more and more difficult as businesses move.

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

- a. The Rec Center and all the Murals the town has to offer.
- b. I love the iron signs at the entrance of town. They are unique and will stand out in my mind. Also, the murals. They are a great touch.
- c. The one thing I'll probably remember about Burlington is the school facilities and the Rec Center.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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