

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Carbondale **Date(s) Visited:** a, b) 10-28-20 (Wed.)
c) 11-06-20 (Friday)

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. The website was pretty decent. They included history of the town and notable historical figures. They had different links to community events, meetings, the school district, etc.
- b. The website was informative and helpful, which included links to community events, meetings, the school district, background history of the town and notable historical figures, etc.
- c. We did a pretty thorough internet search on the way up there, the pages we found seemed to be useful for someone that lived there but not necessarily someone looking to visit or looking for attractions. They had things like court dates, etc. It was difficult to find much of anything online.

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. There is not much there at all. Everything to see is on one of two main roads through town or easily accessed from the main roads. For a small town, it has two liquor stores and no entertainment options whatsoever. But it was good to see updates happening at the library. New gas station right on the entrance to town. Childcare option was easy to see. Nothing else of note.
- b. I covered a lot of ground during the first 5 minutes I drove through town. Drove through a couple “subdivisions” and was sure to drive around the school. There is not much to look at. The whole town needs a facelift. I did see they were putting in a new library, but to get something to eat I had to drive 5 miles south. When exiting the highway, I noticed a child care to the east. Once across the bridge into town I noticed a new gas station.

- c. It was pretty dead, not much life. Although it was a Friday afternoon. I kept looking for something to draw my attention, and we finally found the pool. The main strip through town didn't seem to offer much. One thing that stood out to me is that they had really well maintained streets. We came in from 75 South and the only real sign that pointed us there was the state sign on the highway. There was one sign on the exit for a child development center, but nothing real welcoming or pointing you downtown. I'm not even sure that there was a sign for the extremely nice Casey's General Store. We searched for a more welcoming entrance from the Topeka direction but never found anything. The main strip buildings were old, but we did notice there was some new construction going on across from the City Hall, which was promising.

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. The new library is impressive! Otherwise, the buildings are old, in disrepair and mostly empty. But it was easy to see what businesses were there to access. The amount of buildings in the business area is not many. Historic buildings are not in use. I didn't see any retail stores except for the grocery store and 2 liquor stores. I did not stop to visit any of these.
- b. The construction on the new library looked like it was progressing! It will be a nice asset to the community once it opens. Other than that, not much of real note. The town looked like a town lost in time; old buildings mostly empty and in disrepair. The few businesses there were easily accessible from the main road. I didn't see any retail shops. There were a couple liquor stores, but I didn't stop in there. Went into the gas station, but didn't buy anything. I noticed a barber shop on the other main drag.
- c. The signage was somewhat weak, we had to really look for the city hall, which was closed when we were there. We observed the grocery store and Casey's upon entrance into town. After that there was a little store next to city hall. The only store we went into was Casey's and it was really nice. I was not greeted when I entered the Casey's but the restrooms were very clean. I asked if there was anywhere else to eat in town but they were not much help.

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. I saw benches available on main street, but not much else. Public restrooms were at the gas station. I saw no drinking fountains, but it's not the season for them to be out. There was one in City Hall, though. Parking was very easy and you could access just

about anything since the main street was so small. Other retail businesses on the old highway had their own parking lots.

- b. The only thing I saw were some benches on the main street through town. Parking on the main drag was easy, but with no retail shops or food there was really not much to do.
- c. There was a really nice public restroom near the park, and not sure we searched for Wi-Fi anywhere as there wasn't really any place to go into and sit down.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. I didn't find the too much attraction to the liquor stores, but they weren't awful. Their parking lots were sufficient.
- b. They had adequate parking and were easily accessible.
- c. No Answer (NA)

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. There was a lot of wide open space around town, but this town is not far from the Topeka Warehouse District.
- b. I didn't see this as an area that would make for manufacturing unless they were to build a whole new factory.
- c. If I were to pick a location to expand there is a nice chunk of land near the ball fields and the pool, but really seemed like they could grow in any direction. The obvious hot spot would be closer to 75, especially for a business wanting to draw in some of the major traffic that travels that highway. A nice walking trail could be added near the ball fields as well that tied into the park somehow.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. They have a medical clinic and pharmacy in their business district run by the hospital out of Topeka nearby. I didn't see an EMS office, but I imagine they have one through the fire department.
- b. I noticed a pharmacy available on the main drag.
- c. We never came across a hospital and emergency medical is questionable. We only saw what appeared to be a clinic next to the pharmacy.

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

- a. The Clinic looked in good condition, but I saw no other medical services offered in this town.
- b. I didn't see any other services available than the pharmacy.
- c. There was a chiropractor, pharmacy, and medical clinic.

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

- a. I saw the retirement home off the highway and thought it looked in decent condition from the outside.
- b. There's a retirement home near the highway that looked okay.
- c. No Answer (NA)

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. There are very few new builds in the city limits. There are a few decent looking, move-in ready houses, but most houses looked like they could use a lot of love, even just for curb appeal. It looks like the current housing is available for low-income families and individuals who would like a house. You don't need a higher income to be able to afford what is available. There were a few signs of houses for sale, but they all looked like they could use some work.
- b. Not much of anything looked attractive to me. Many of the properties needed a lot of attention. I did notice some nicer properties on the outskirts of town, especially heading south out of town on the other main drag.
- c. The housing was better than expected given the availability of businesses. Seemed like a nice place to raise a family, if you were willing to accept having to drive somewhere to eat. The city appeared to be kept fairly clean on majority of the properties which is appealing to people that are looking to buy a home.

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 found no signs for rental properties, but my contact at City Hall did provide me with a list of rental owners.
- b. I didn't see any signs for rentals in town, but some were made available through city hall.
- c. There was an apartment complex on the south end of town, not sure if they were low income housing or not.

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. The only school in town was the 4-8 Upper Elementary/Middle School. Two other schools are further out in the district, not in town. It was a large building and had 2 different sized playgrounds. However, parking and entrance were very closed in and hard to find.
- b. The only school I found was the secondary elementary/middle school. The school could use a good power wash. It just seemed dirty and run down. Old football field has potential. It has a pretty park-like setting dressed up by the trees.
- c. There was a child development center, and we were able to only find one school on the north end of town but not sure on the grade levels. The buildings looked like they were lacking attention but it could just be the time of year

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

- a. I found their website, but I wasn't able to find any great accomplishments of the district or accolades.
- b. I didn't find anything of note that would cause their education system to stand out.
- c. Yes, there were a few sites rating the school system.

9. Childcare

What childcare services are available? Is it affordable?

- a. There was a small house right off the highway that offered childcare, but I was unable to find contact information or price information.
- b. There was a childcare center just off the highway, but I didn't inquire into pricing and availability.
- c. The only thing we found that resembled child care was the child development center right off of 75.

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. There were 4-5 churches in town, but none looked very well maintained.
- b. I found a few churches spread throughout town, and they looked like they needed attention. I didn't see any other faith based programs.
- c. We found numerous churches, but not the typical churches you would see, the buildings were older but looked to be operating.

11. Civic

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

- a. I saw evidence of the Lions Club, but any others were simply listed on the town website. The Lions Club had provided benches at the Community Center in the Business District.
- b. There is a Lions Club. City benches were donated by the Lions Club.
- c. There was a community building, with things going on, but we didn't go in.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a. The streets weren't in terrible shape, but there weren't many sidewalks, even to the school. Since I was there during the day, I was unable to observe lighting. The gas station has most amenities.
- b. I didn't really notice many sidewalks, if any. The roads seemed in decent condition, even when driving on the side streets. Didn't notice many if any streetlights. If you stop for a restroom in this town, you most likely will have to use the gas station.
- c. See above, streets were in really good condition. Street signage was acceptable. Didn't seem to be much for sidewalks on side streets. Not any notable landscaping.

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

- a. I was very well received! I even figured out that she had been one of the ones from Carbondale to visit our town. She offered me a sheet of information I needed if I were to move to town.
- b. I didn't have time to stop in, sorry!
- c. City Hall was closed unfortunately.

Police/fire protection:

- a. They exist
- b. I notice a police vehicle when driving by the school.
- c. There was presence of police, there was a fire building and a police station. Both buildings seemed to be outdated.

Library:

- a. Brand new and beautiful!
- b. New one is going in!
- c. The library was in the same building as the city hall, but not sure if the new building is for the library or the city hall.

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

- a. They were nice, but near the active railroad track and outside of the main parts of town. Most of the town is walking quite a distance to access the park or pool.
- b. They were quaint, but could use some love. Not sure if they actually use the football field near the school.
- c. The park was nice, the pool and the ballpark was a nice area for kids to enjoy during the summer months.

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. I saw nothing anywhere.
- b. The only thing I remember seeing of note was Home of Barnum Brown?
- c. No known events or attractions.

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

- a. I saw nothing anywhere
- b. No
- c. No known events that would attract visitors.

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. There is a nearby reservoir, but it is not accessible. I saw nothing else.
- b. Nothing to note.
- c. We didn't notice any lakes or campgrounds. No museum either. In that area a lake or reservoir or even RV Park would potentially draw a lot of interest. Especially with the traffic on 75, and being that close to the city.

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. I only found City Hall with one staff member present, but it was easy to find in the business district.
- b. City Hall is easy to find.
- c. We didn't notice any chamber, but we did see city hall and a community building. Like I said, I am not sure what they had to offer.

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

- a. There is a steakhouse 2 miles south, otherwise, no, there is nothing that would inspire me to make a return visit.
- b. No, the closest restaurant I found was 5-7 miles south of town.
- c. We looked for a place to eat because we had not eaten yet, the only thing we could find was Casey's. So we went ahead and drove on into Topeka. This is a huge disadvantage for them. Some place to eat would certainly give people more reason to stop and see what else there is to offer there.

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. The park is nice, the retirement facility looks nice, I love that the gas station is updated and the library is going to be amazing! It is a decent bedroom community.
- b. Potential! Located close to Topeka.
- c. The thing that I noticed most was, the street maintenance was great. The city park was really nice with accessible public restrooms and trash receptacles. It was small, and quiet. There is a lot of opportunity for their main strip through town. Really reminded me of Martin City in Missouri. They have a street similar to that and they have a brewery, a pizza place, and a steakhouse all accessible from one parking spot.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. It is so close to the state capital, so there is no incentive to have more availability inside city limits. It's only 12 miles to anything you could possibly want: restaurant choices, entertainment, retail shops, specialty shops, etc. So honestly, access to a larger city is its biggest hindrance.
- b. Money! Needs major facelift having mainly to do with clean up. Just sprucing up the place would help; having houses and buildings cleaned or painted.

- c. The biggest obstacle I feel is being so close to Topeka. They need a restaurant or something to draw in visitors. There is nothing there to speak of that would make me want to stop there again.

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

- a. I probably won't remember much. There is just not much to it.
- b. Probably how tired the town looked.
- c. I will remember the streets, mainly because ours are so bad. I will remember the park. And of course I will constantly think about the potential that they have with that main street.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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