

First Impressions

Clay Center, KS

K-State Research and Extension
in Partnership with
The Dane G. Hansen Foundation



- 2010 Census Population 4,334
(-5% since 2000*) **KS= +6.1%**
- 2015 Estimate is 4,240 (-7.1% since 2000 **KS +8.1%**)
- 25.5% college educated, 95.9% high school or GED
 - **KS 31% college education, 90% HS or equivalency**
- 67.2% family households, 32.8% non-family
- Poverty rate is 15.4% (**KS=13.6%**)
- Median Age 41.9 years (**36**)
- Median household income is \$42,500 (**\$52,205**)

- **Web Presence:**
 - <http://www.cityofclaycenter.com/>

CITY OF
CLAY CENTER
KANSAS

[Home](#) [Government](#) [Community](#) [New Resident](#) [The City Beautiful](#)



Welcome to Clay Center, Kansas - *The City Beautiful* - where strong traditional values and pleasant, safe surroundings make this

Web Presence:

- Easy to find. Very professional city site. Everything you need to know with eye-catching pics.
- Claycenter.info “Outdated” and “Unprofessional”
 - *I saw it as one citizen’s accumulation of interesting Clay Center information.*
- Other expected entries:
 - Wikipedia
 - Mapquest
 - City-data, etc.

Web Presence:

- **FaceBook (Found in Google Search)**

- <https://www.facebook.com/ksre-clay-center/>

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Imagine what you could do
together
if you co-marketed.

Animal Rescue and Education Center

- *I counted 30 pages with Clay Center locations*

The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Clean, well-kept, mowed, inviting, good signage.
- A few vacant stores.
- Some sidewalks and streets need repair.
- Some signage needed and some needs repair.
- Nice waterfall.



Google Earth, 2014, retrieved 7-17



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Entrances
 - **West:** Green, clean, trimmed.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Entrances

- **East:** Nice houses, apartments that didn’t look great, bad trailer houses, nice church signs, trees and water tower coming into town looks pretty! Clay Center welcome sign is hidden.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Entrances

- **South:** Junky businesses on west side, nice “welcome” sign, faded zoo sign; Fairground South entrance- bad houses, Midwest business nice! Bad-looking cooperation sign, didn’t know if National Guard was open or abandoned– overgrown. Dead-end to fairgrounds could look a lot better.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Entrances

- **North:** Nice sign! Nice cemetery, 2 businesses look bad.



Downtown Business Area

- Lots of cars at 9:30 am. (Thursday)
 - Thought I would see more traffic/people out and about mid-Saturday morning.
- Courthouse and yard are beautiful.
- Downtown was larger than expected.



Downtown Business Area

- Mix of older buildings with some newer renovations/construction work. Mix of well-maintained and barely-maintained storefronts with some vacant.



Downtown Business Area



Downtown Business Area



Downtown Business Area



Downtown Business Area



Downtown Business Area



Downtown Business Area

- There was a variety of customer service in the businesses, even different experiences in the same business based on the time of day.
- Ginger's had the BEST Customer service.
- City Office had great service as well. Even other customers were friendly and helpful.



Downtown Business Area

Amenities

- Benches, flower pots, but nothing planted.
- No drinking fountains or public restrooms.



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Strip Mall/ grocery store- needs updating. Signs were faded. Curb appeal diminished at grocery store by shelves in front of windows.
- Grocery store, Shopko and Gibson's. The areas looked nice and clean.



Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

- GT looks really nice. Expansion availability wasn't visible.
- Visitors speculated about available space on west and south and noted the advantage the city has with access to highways 15 & 24.

If space is available, it is not visible on City website either.

Health Care Services

- Well-marked ER, nice wellness center, hospital looks old.
- Clay County Medical Center and surrounding buildings look in good shape with good parking. Major construction currently taking place south of hospital. Easy to find signage.



Health Care Services

- Chiro, pharmacy, hospice, family dentistry, eye care.



Health Care Services

- Saw the Health Department by the high school, but no signage to show us how to get there.
 - *I missed it, or didn't recognize it, in my photos.*
- One visitor admired that the old depot was now a dentist office; another visitor couldn't figure out what it was.



Long-Term Care

- Saw 3 different facilities, two close to hospital.
- Country Place Senior Living, hospice and rehab all near each other and by the hospital. All looked nice.



Housing data

KANSAS

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------|
| • Total Housing Units | 2,246 | |
| • Total Occupied Houses | 1,744 (77.6%) | (89.5%) |
| • Vacant Houses | 502(22.4%) | (10.5%) |
| • Owner Occupied | 1,393 (80%) | (66.7%) |
| • Renter Occupied | 351 (20%) | (33.3%) |

Housing

- Market seemed appealing to all wages.
 - Smaller houses in the center of town, big old houses on brick streets, newer nice houses on outskirts of town and new apartments being built.





Housing

- Saw a few “for sale” and very few “for rent” signs.



- Rental Properties



Housing

- There were entire neighborhoods that were run down or kept up.



Housing

- Some need for code enforcement with regard to junk, appliances, burnt structures, untagged vehicles, etc.



Housing

- Encouraged by growth of newer communities on eastern edge.



Schools

- Head Start, 2 Grade Schools, Middle and High School. All seemed well-maintained.
- Located reviews on USNews.com Clay Center Community High School “Nationally Recognized.”



Childcare

- There is childcare, but sometimes hard to find openings.
- Project Lead is a very interesting program, but available mainly during the school year, with some special summer outings.

Faith/Religion

- Wide range of denominations! All looked nice.



Faith/Religion



Faith/Religion

Activities:

- Saw a sign for VBS and Lutheran preschool.
- One church had a community garden.
- Downtown meals and summer children's programming.



Civic

- Signs at entrances showed club logos.
- Activities were not visible.



Public Infrastructure

- Nice new bridge area with lights and sidewalks.
- Public restrooms were available in some of the parks but by appearance weren't ones that I would stop and use.



Public Infrastructure

- Hit and miss sidewalks.
- Some of the streets were nice and wide, which would be great with bikes and pedestrians, but some were pretty narrow.



City Hall

- Very friendly– talked to deputy clerk who was most helpful.
- Brochures available there.



Fire, EMS and Police Services

- Visited with a firefighter at City Hall who was helpful.
- Saw police three times driving on my visit.



Library

- Outside nice, inside needs updating. Staff was lukewarm. Small and only a few computers. Nice children's area. Not incredibly inviting.



City Parks

- Nice city park band shelter at Dexter Park- great equipment, very lucky to have.
- Tiger Terrace Park- Older, not well-kept, mainly just green space.



City Parks

- Confused about where to park during softball/baseball/football games. New Sports complex has no signage. We actually didn't see it but found out about it later.



City Parks

- A few of the shelter houses and public restrooms looked like they could use some maintenance.
- Did not expect to find a zoo, and it was not very well sign posted, but Utility Park is a nice hidden gem.



Recreation/Tourism

- Fair. Pioneer Antique Festival in September. (“Pi-Tiq”)
- Zoo, Aquatic Park



Other?

- At Ginger's they told us about their 3rd Thursday events, with the upcoming one being a BBQ by the Public Works employees to benefit the zoo.
- We didn't see any posters about the event.
- Zoo park is beautiful, but exhibits seem sad.



What is this?



Visitors Center?

- Downtown eco devo office/chamber office was friendly and lots of info.
- Saturday visitor stopped at the Museum downtown.



What would bring you back?

- Gingers, Java Junkie, Tasty Pastry, Dexter Park, water park, sports complex.
- Impressed to find a wellness center and a CrossFit gym.
- We also went south of Clay Center to see the meeting space with cabins, which was very nice, but again, the south entrance to Clay Center was the one that looked roughest.

Most Positive Observations

- Very positive feeling driving through. Downtown is vibrant with a good variety of things.
- Dexter Park.
- Everyone was friendly and inviting.
- Clean, people keep their properties up.
- Beautiful churches, church outreach downtown.



Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- Zoo! Not a lot of restaurants, trailer park areas were not nice and on a main road.
- Signage to know where things are located.



What will you remember the most in six months from now?

- Tasty Pastry! Overall positive.
- Beautiful churches, well-maintained parks, Project Lead, CCBA & great customer service at Gingers.
- Positive: Java Junkies, Utility Park/Zoo. Negative: Closed Rex Theater and closed storefronts downtown.

Next Steps:

Thank our leadership team:

- *Lori Huber*
- *John Forshee*
- *Jeremy & Nicole Glavan*
- *George Murchison*
- *Michelle Tessaro*
- *Jana Cott*

Next Steps:

- **Discussion**
- **Set next steps!**
 - Which group will lead the discussion?
- **Contact me if you need resources or help:**
 - Nancy Daniels
 - Community Vitality Specialist, K-State Research and Extension
 - 785.410.6352
 - nkdaniels@ksu.edu

Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOIMRJ-jc14>

- Brain Gain (30-49 year olds moving to rural) is a “new trend” that has been happening since the 70’s and no one is noticing or talking about it.
- Rural is in the middle of everywhere. You live one place, work another and play another. With transportation and internet, it’s all accessible to you.
- People research a number of places before they move to a rural town.
- Only 1/3 of the people who move rural have a previous connection with that area.

- 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 have to monitor our customer service! It matters!
- The number of people who live in rural areas is increasing—from 54M to 60M from 1970-2010. The relative % of people who live rural is smaller (19% instead of 26%) but the real number has increased.
- Don't buy in to someone else's narrative.
- We lose our hardware store, our school, consolidate our churches, etc... but we are still here! In MN, they have only lost 3 towns in 50 years.

- 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.
- 1/5 of dollars come from transfer payments—not employers.

*- Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow,
University of Minnesota*

