First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

**Community Visited**: **Clay Center Date(s) Visited:** a) June 1 (Thursday)

 b) June 13 (Tuesday)

 c) June 13 (Tuesday)

c) June 17 (Saturday)

**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?**

1. Easy to find. Very professional city site. Everything you need to know with eye-catching pics. Found claycenter.info and it was outdated and looked unprofessional. Might be worth deleting that.
2. I liked the City’s website, it was organized well and easy to navigate.
3. I found the City’s website very “user” friendly and really liked the information available for new residents. However, some information was outdated, so having someone monitor it and updated it regularly would make it even better.
4. Found city website and Facebook page within a few seconds of trying.  Very well laid out website, easy to use and informative.  The website portrays an overly positive picture of the community that in my opinion does not accurately reflect the reality of the community.
5. **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.)**
	1. Clean, well-kept, mowed, inviting, good signage. Lots of limbs down so maybe had a recent storm?
	**From West**-Green, clean, trimmed

**From 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.

**From South-**Junky businesses on west side, nice “welcome” sign, faded zoo sign; Fairground South Entrance-bad houses, Midwest business is nice!, bad-looking “cooperation” sign, didn’t know if National Guard was open or abandoned-all overgrown and doesn’t look nice. Dead-end to fairgrounds could look a lot better. **From North**-Nice sign! Nice cemetery, 2 businesses look really bad-McGreer Roofing and Clay Center Motors.

* 1. Nice clean town. The water fall on the corner across from Wendy’s was a nice feature. Along the main streets, houses and yards are kept up nice. There are a few vacant store fronts down town. Nice, clean parks.
	2. Found it really odd the “nicest,” most beautiful “Welcome to Clay Center” sign was at the north entrance. In researching traffic numbers, over 1,000 more vehicles enter from the west then from the north, so it doesn’t make sense why it is like that.
	3. Some signs of needed road and sidewalk repair throughout the community.  Hospital was easy to find. Mix of newer and older properties (residential).  Thought I would have seen more traffic/people out and about on a mid-Saturday morning.  What I would consider standard to slightly below standard amount of signage directing people to locations in town.  Some signs in need of rehab.  Noticed faded paint on fire hydrants around town, minor thing but shows a bit of lack of care of how things look.  Felt like different community north of Court St. vs south of Court St. Well-manicured welcome to Clay Center signage when entering from North side.  Majority of properties seemed to be well maintained.  Plenty of downtown parking.  Some signs for businesses along main roads.  Industrial / Commercial areas on south side of city along 15 and south of western section of 24 seemed a bit run down, or less cared for.

2. **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?)**

1. Lots of cars at 9:30 am. Saw a sign for Veterans Memorial 3 blocks ahead and had a hard time finding it. Buildings look really nice and well-kept. Some vintage and some new signs. Clothes, décor, insurance, cell, jewelry, drug store-all good quality. All stores greeted us and were very friendly.
2. The courthouse and yard are beautiful. I liked that the library and museum are right there. The downtown area was larger than I expected. We did notice a few vacant buildings downtown. There was a wide variety in the buildings downtown, some were kept up, and some were not. There wasn’t a lot of consistency in the maintenance of the buildings. Some decorated the windows and tops of the buildings, but some were let go. We did try to go in the museum, but said it wasn’t open yet, would be nice to have a sign saying when it plans to open. Several different businesses, clothing, coffee shop, wardcraft home, hardware, lumberyard, etc. 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, the staff would check on us and happily talked to us about their community and all it had to offer and all they were doing to make it better. Ginger and her staff were amazing. When we went to the City office, they had great service as well. There was also a Twin Valley employee in the City office while we were there and she helped answer several of our questions. She didn’t have to, but was happy to help. Other places, we had to ask for assistance, or they asked once and then went back to reading a magazine.
3. NA
4. Mix of older buildings with some newer renovations/construction work.  Mix of well-maintained and barely maintained storefronts (a number of closed businesses).  Museum, bank, coffee shop, restaurants, cell phones, retail, pharmacy.  Mix of quality from lower end to mid end merchandise. Greeted in two of the four businesses entered.  In two where we were greeted, also asked if they could help right away.  Coffee shop owner was very friendly and inviting, and spoke positively about the community and shared some of her business and personal stories.

**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?**

1. Benches, flower pots but nothing planted, no restrooms but stores were open to public, no drinking fountains, and some trash cans but not enough. Lots of parking on both sides of street, very accessible courthouse and nice landscaping, if flowers were planted in the pots that would spruce up downtown buildings
2. We didn’t notice any drinking fountains or public restrooms in the downtown area. We saw several benches with planters in the downtown, but there were only in front of certain businesses and the only one we saw with flowers in the planters were at the City office. Some were close to buildings while others were out closer to the street.
3. NA
4. Did not see public drinking fountains or restrooms.  Liked the wood crafted benches along streets. Plenty of parking.  Most landscaping maintained effectively, but some curbs, street sections in need of repair.  Was able to easily walk around downtown from parking spot.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

1. Strip mall/grocery store-Needs updating. Signs were faded. Front windows of grocery store were half blocked with back of shelves which lead to bad curb appeal. Nice café in grocery store. Easily accessible but doesn’t look great. Dollar General looked REALLY BAD!!!!
2. There was a retail area on the West side of town, with the grocery store, Shopko and Gibson’s. There were right along the highway, so easy to access. The areas looked nice and clean.
3. NA
4. West entrance of town had other major retail area.  Ray’s Apple Market Plaza seemed quite dated, but overall maintained.  Easy to access off of 24.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

1. GT looks really nice. Expansion availability wasn’t visible to us.
2. I don’t know if I saw an area for expansion, other than along the City limits.
3. NA
4. Western area of city and some areas south of city could be expanded into.  Both would offer access from major roads (15 or 24).

5. **Health Care Services**

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

1. Well-marked ER, nice wellness center-looks new, hospital looks old and some windows were discolored and looked bad, but new construction was happening
2. The hospital looked nice, and is currently undergoing a major renovation. There were multiple dentists and optometrists and a chiropractor, so several different options. We did notice that the health department was out by the high school. We didn’t see any signage, so that would be hard to find if we needed it. It was neat that a dentist made the train depot into an office.
3. NA
4. Clay County Medical Center and surrounding buildings look in good shape with good parking.  Major construction project currently taking place south of hospital.  Easy to find with signage.  Pharmacy across the street along with other retirement and care facilities.

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

1. Chiro, pharmacy, hospice, family dentistry were all located near hospital. Eye care and pharmacy were downtown.
2. There were multiple dentists and optometrists and a chiropractor, so several different options. We did notice that the health department was out by the high school. We didn’t see any signage, so that would be hard to find if we needed it. It was neat that a dentist made the train depot into an office.
3. NA
4. Dental right next to hospital.  Eye care downtown.  Looked to be in good condition.

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

1. Country Place Senior Living, hospice and rehab all near each other and by hospital. All looked nice.
2. There was assisted living by the hospital and another nursing facility more in the mid-part of town. I would assume they are adequate for the town.
3. NA
4. Noted three different facilities, two close by hospital.

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.)**

1. 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. Seemed like a lot of for sale and for rent signs around town.
2. There was a wide variety of housing in Clay Center. There were definitely some that needed to be rehabbed or torn down and some newer construction. We saw a few for sale signs but not a lot. It did seem that entire neighborhoods were run down or kept up. We especially noted the intersection at Sherman and 8th needed cleaned up. The housing by the high school looked very nice.
3. There was a mix of housing – nice mixed in with not so nice, typical of most towns in the area. Didn’t seem to be much “code enforcement” with regard to junk, appliances, burnt structures, untagged vehicles, etc. When people are looking for housing, the neighborhood has a huge influence on their choice. Based on what we saw there is probably something for most everyone. There are several low income housing units and apartments, along with single family housing. We didn’t look into the real estate market to know what houses are listed for.
4. Saw mix of housing from smaller to multi-room to higher end.  Saw a few for sale signs, but few for rent signs.  Encouraged by growth of newer communities on eastern border edge of city.   Decent price ranges found online.  Mid 5 digit to 6 digit priced homes.

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

1. Big McKinley Apartments, nice but old. Rentals may be limited. Didn’t see a ton?
2. We asked about rentals and were told there aren’t very many, but there was a lot of income based housing. We did notice a couple of townhomes that were for sale, looked like investment properties.
3. NA
4. Only saw a few for rent signs.  Online price listings seemed high for rentals ranging from $650 to $875 per month for 2 & 3 bedroom homes.

7. **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?**

1. Observed Lutheran Preschool-out of house maybe? The playground is nice. High School-older but looks well-kept. Nice tennis courts and green space. Nice new grade school and nice landscaping. Headstart-not a great looking building; playground looked sad. Early Head Start on highway.
2. There was a Head Start, two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. The middle school and high school looked very nice! The others looked like they were well maintained, just older buildings. The schools seemed to be adequate for the town’s size. We also saw a sign for a private Christian elementary school in a nearby town.
3. NA
4. Noted Head Start, Grade, Middle and High Schools in Clay Center.  All seemed well maintained.  Appeared to be newer builds for Community Middle and High School.

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

1. Web site was very nice, professional, easy to use.
2. We asked about the schools and it sounds like they have a great system there. We were very impressed with the Project Lead program.
3. NA
4. Located reviews on USNews.com high school rankings, with Clay Center Community High School “Nationally Recognized”.  BestPlaces.net was another source as was SchoolDigger.com which as of 2016 ranked Clay Center’s schools 164th out of 255 in Kansas.
5. **Childcare**

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

1. Went to health clinic to find childcare services and they gave us a state number to contact. They were helpful and friendly.
2. There is childcare, but sometimes hard to find openings. It sounds reasonable, especially the Project Lead after school program through the school district.
3. Project Lead is a very interesting program but available mainly during the school year, with some special summer outing days offered.
4. Clay Center Child Care, Learning Academy, some private.  Do not know $’s.
5. **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?**

1. Wide range of denominations! We counted at least 8 different ones. All looked really nice. Saw different signs around the community for the churches so well marked. Saw a sign for a VBS signs and the Lutheran preschool. Only community events we saw.
2. Wow, there are a lot of large, beautiful churches in Clay Center. We were amazed at how many different churches there were, their size and how well maintained they were. This was very impressive. We noticed one church had a “community garden.” Downtown also had a church sponsored center.
3. NA
4. 9 different churches counted.  Noted Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Jehovah’s Witness, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Episcopal and Non-Denominational.  Most seemed well maintained and cared for, with some more modern construction.  12 noted on city’s website.  Liked downtown meals and summer child care provided by churches.
5. **Civic**

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

1. Catholic Parish Hall, whole building downtown for health campaign, Elks and Lions. Entrance signs had a lot of club logos. We did not see evidence of civic organization activity.
2. We were very impressed with the CCBA. It sounds like several of the business owners really pour themselves into the community to make it better.
3. By several of the Welcome signs, there was a sign listing the community clubs. Other than that, there was no evidence of them.
4. Noted youth baseball and softball.  As well as girl scouts and church groups. None noted outside of church groups.
5. **Public Infrastructure**

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

1. Nice park, hit and miss sidewalks, wide streets-decent to nice, highways maintained, nice new bridge area with lights and sidewalks
2. We were there during the day, so lighting is hard to tell, but I think lighting at all of the entry signs would be a great addition. Most of the streets were in good shape, but some need repairs. Some of the streets were nice and wide, which would be great with bikes and pedestrians, but some were pretty narrow. Most areas had sidewalks, not all were kept up though.
3. Public restrooms were available in some of the parks but by appearance weren’t ones that I would stop and use. We didn’t actually go in them, but they weren’t inviting to use. Also, there were several Wi-Fi signs downtown noting it was available by the merchants but in trying to access it, there was no Wi-Fi available to connect to.
4. Some crumbling curbs, potholes and needed street repair.  Some worn out / faded signage.  Landscaping generally well maintained.

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

1. Very friendly-talked to deputy clerk who offered addresses to gyms. Firefighter was in office and he was helpful and told us where the fire station was. Brochures were available.
2. We were very well received at the city hall. They were more than happy to answer any questions we had.
3. NA
4. City hall was closed on Saturday. Not much information accessible in outer lobby.

**Police/fire protection:**

1. Nice law enforcement building. Very visible. Fire station was close to downtown. Average looking.
2. We noticed the fire station and police stations.
3. NA
4. Saw police three times driving around during visit, and noted location of fire department and police department.

**Library:**

1. Outside nice, inside needs updating. Staff was lukewarm. Small and only a few computers. Nice children’s area. Not incredibly inviting.
2. We noticed the library, close to downtown. We did notice it had stairs for the entry, but looked like there was a handicap entrance on the side. Nice, beautiful building.
3. NA
4. Noted Clay Center Carnegie Library a few blocks from downtown on south side of town.

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

1. Nice city park band shelter at Dexter Park-great equipment, very lucky to have. Tiger Terrace Park-older, not well-kept, mainly just for green space. Looks confusing on where to park during softball/baseball/football games. New sports complex no signage and difficult to sign. We actually didn’t see it, but found out about it later.
2. Clay Center has a lot of parks! There were several ballparks, playgrounds, the aquatic park and the zoo. They were kept up. A few of the shelter houses and public restrooms looked like they could use some maintenance. We were told the zoo is undergoing a renovation.
3. NA
4. Did not expect to find a zoo, and it was not very well sign posted, but Utility Park is a nice hidden gem.  Noted picnic areas and band shell along with baseball fields and pool area.
5. **Recreation/Tourism**

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

1. Fair. Pi-Tiq Festival, Pioneer-Antique Festival in September. Some people knew what this was and some couldn’t explain it to us. Didn’t notice a community slogan
2. They are very proud of their zoo, aquatic park and their hospitality. I didn’t notice a slogan.
3. NA
4. Zoo is the only one I noted.  Website advertises “The City Beautiful.”

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

1. No
2. None noted.
3. At Ginger’s they told us about their 3rd Thursday evening events, with the upcoming one having a BBQ by the Public Works employees to benefit the zoo and other activities on the Courthouse lawn. But we didn’t see any posters about the event.
4. No not on this visit.

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

1. Wondering what is in the nice train depot building. No signs but cars were there. Dexter Park would draw people. Waterpark. Zoo park was gorgeous! HOWEVER, the zoo was very sad! Especially wolves, foxes, bears and panther looked especially sad. They all looked unhappy and facility was worn-down and seemed like animal-cruelty. Cages too small, no grass, bear seemed insane and rocking back and forth!
2. The aquatic center, the zoo and all of the parks. A young family could enjoy a great day in Clay Center.
3. NA
4. Zoo if further developed and advertised.

**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.**

1. Downtown eco devo office/chamber office was downtown and we stopped-they were friendly and lots of info.
2. There is a chamber office and we talked to the County office. They were very friendly. The City Chamber office is currently being ran by a local business owner. We talked to her over lunch and she was nice and helpful.
3. NA
4. Museum downtown.

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

1. Gingers, Java Junkie, Tasty Pastry, Dexter Park, water park, sports complex.
2. We were impressed that they had both a wellness center and a crossfit gym. We noticed their theater closed several years ago. It didn’t look like there were very many activities for high school aged kids for the evenings, other than sports. A lot of the roads curve, so if you are trying to turn out on one of these roads, it was hard to see oncoming traffic. 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 the roughest. Something else that really stuck out to us was the directory at the cemetery. As family comes to town, that would be very helpful, I was really impressed with that.
3. In discussing what teens did for entertainment with the Economic Development Office, they felt they drove to Manhattan. The bowling alley is also closed, so very limited activities to keep their money in Clay Center.
4. Perhaps the Zoo, but will be stopping in the downtown coffee shop Java Junkies next time driving through.
5. **Wrap-up**

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

1. Driving through gives positive feeling. Downtown was easy to get around and full and vibrant. Good variety of things. Dexter Park. Everyone was friendly and inviting.
2. It was clean. A lot of beautiful churches. Nice, friendly people.
3. NA
4. People do seem to want to keep their properties kept up on the whole, civic minded church outreaches, downtown does seem to be making some effort to keep businesses.

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

1. Zoo! Not a lot of restaurants, trailer park areas were not nice and on a main road.
2. Signage to know where things are located. Also, it seems like there are a lot of initiatives happening, but not everyone is included or on board, so things look fragmented (the planter benches). They need to come up with a unified plan for their downtown.
3. NA
4. Staying relevant, providing people with a reason to come and stay for a while, or bringing people back.

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

1. Tasty Pastry! Sad zoo but a cool parakeet that talked to us, friendly people, parks, and schools seem nice. Overall positive!
2. The beautiful churches, the number of well-maintained parks, Project Lead, CCBA and the friendly, great customer service at Gingers.
3. NA
4. Positive - Java Junkies, Utility Park/Zoo. Negative - Sad looking closed Rex Theatre and closed storefronts downtown.



First Impressions was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and adapted for use by K-State Research and Extension. Restructuring made possible through a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Works, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and the United State Department of Agriculture Cooperating, John D. Floros, Director.