

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Columbus **Date(s) Visited:** March 1 (Friday) all 4

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 not think their web-site was representative of their community. I did have some difficulties. I would change the home page to something much more WOW to entice visitors and possible new residents to Columbus.
- b. Your web search seems to showcase the "theme" and what everyone in your community was most proud of the Columbus Day Balloons. For a small town your community offers several things that I would suggest you showcase on your webpage such as: Clock Tower, Veteran's Memorial, Columbus Museum, Big Brutus, Columbus City Park, Schools, Accommodations, Local Businesses, and Dining.
- c. The website had limited information. It didn't really give any ideas as to what to see or where to visit.
- d. The City Hall website is informative, but it is at the top of the search engine and so it could use some eye-catching pictures to give a feel of the "Columbus experience." It is "wordy." Noticed the Bill Pay option talks about online bill paying but there is no option to click on a button and pay. The "Site Tools" links do not work. The Chamber's website is nice and would suggest getting it optimized so that it appears immediately at the top of the search engine when someone searches ("Googles") Columbus, KS. It would be great if the City Hall website had a link on its homepage to the Chamber's website too. Also, on the "Events" page on the City's website, it only speaks about meetings of the city council. If this is just for meetings, you might change "Events" to "Meetings." If your city has advisory boards or committee meetings, election information, you might add those to that calendar. There is an empty space on the right hand side of the "Events" page that you might put a button or link to the Chamber of Commerce's events calendar page. Where is your recreation information? Public works just has a map. Assume the City Hall website is maybe a work in progress and a good start.

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. A “clean entrance” with nice entrance signs. I would recommend planting some landscaping around the entrance sign. The 5-minute impression I felt was somewhat cluttered. I would recommend banners on the cobra light poles to market the upcoming events or banners to welcome the public. Crossland Construction has a very nice presence as you enter the community. It really helps to have a major industry like theirs in the entrance to a small community. There are some building in disrepair but what community doesn’t have those. Overall I found Columbus to be a nice community with several positive amenities.
- b. Great Streets. Beautiful Columbus sign. Several low-income housing. Crossland – “BIG” economy for the town. Columbus Day Mural. Public Library. Park / Swimming Pool. Schools. 4 – H / Girl Scout Buildings. USDA Service Center. Budget Inn. Health Department. K-State Extension Office. Furniture Store. McDonalds. Sonic. Initials on Water tower. Apple Market. Blessing Boxes. Apple Glen Apartments. Autumn Place Health Department. Chamber Office. Car Wash. Items needing attention: downtown planter boxes, parking in the middle of the street (not really safe and people aren’t able to see the stores), Silver’s Bonding (tires, etc.), and old signs at sports complex.
- c. Small town feel, similar to other communities I have visited. Hard to find City sign to determine we had arrived in city limits. City sign is large enough, but poor location. Street and business signs visible.
- d. Columbus signs let you know you have arrived. The North (I think it's north!) sign is large and in a strange place. The smaller one on the south needs some attention. Crossland Construction definitely has a huge presence and almost makes you miss the small entrance sign. Observations: No wayfinding signs that I saw to give directions. The flower bed planters are unique but could use some sort of sprucing up or decoration during the winter. Your courthouse square with Veterans Memorial and bell tower is very cool!

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. What really helps a downtown is a significant detail that lets you know you have arrived into downtown. Columbus needs either banners or historic light poles to create the entrance to their downtown to help make it a destination. I really liked the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria on the light poles that is amazing. That theme would be excellent to carry through as their branding for the community. The planters seem dated to me and should either be refurbished or removed. Some of their building are in great shape other are in desperate need of repair but again this is so common in many of our downtowns. The mural is very nice as well as the Veterans Memorial. The Bell Tower is another very nice feature to downtown.

We visited The Furniture Store, Team Treads and Pharmacy/Gift Shop. Team Treads was very friendly and answered all my questions about places to eat, public restrooms and other points of interest. We did not have an opportunity to talk to the staff at the pharmacy they were all very busy (which is a very good thing). The staff at the furniture store were friendly and helpful.

The customer service at each store we visited was great. We ate at Norma's restaurant on the square and the staff was very friendly, and the food was good. The restaurant was clean, the restrooms were also very clean and nice. It was a welcoming atmosphere, a place I would definitely go back and visit.

- b. **Team Threads:** I would give this business a 5* rating! The store front and the display of merchandise inside was amazing. This store would be a hit in other cities! We were greeted the minute we stepped into the store and the sales clerk was very helpful! The store did not have a public restroom but our group was able to park right in front of store (easy parking). **Norma's:** I would give this business a 5* rating! Our group was given a warm welcome the minute we stepped in the door. The food and service was amazing. It was especially fun to observe what appeared to be locals visiting with each other.
- c. Some nice established businesses were easy to identify. No street signs on the square, and a few businesses had great window displays but nothing (sign) to identify business. Furniture, wireless, restaurants, insurance, sports apparel. All had friendly service and a variety to choose from just not much retail. Everyone greeted us and volunteered to assist. Very pleasant experience. Furniture store was definitely a place I would revisit.
- d. Street signs were hard to find and see at first. I like the Columbus boats on the light poles. You are very proud of that symbol and carry it well throughout your city. Signage on some buildings is hard to read and some buildings have no signage, or it was hard to determine what was in them. One building had hearts in the windows and appeared to be an office but the awning nor the windows said what it was. The lady inside did wave and seemed friendly though! On another block on the town square there was an awning that was rather low for most people to walk under. Might address as a safety issue. The downtown seems to be more service oriented business and less retail.
- Types of businesses observed - Westco - nice store. Appreciated that the salesperson

suggested we visit a new boutique that just opened. Their selection of furniture and the way it was displayed was very nice. I would go back! Lunch at Norma's was nice and the hospitality there was very good. We felt very welcomed and they went above and beyond to make sure we were good with everything. The decor was nice and the plug in on the wall to hook charge phones or laptops is a thoughtful touch. There was a business building that was intriguing to us. It has murals painted on it where there would have been windows. It has Liberty Gun Sales on the front. That building has character and would make a great brewery/restaurant location. Its location makes a first impression as you head towards downtown. The people in the community overall are very nice and welcoming. Your greatest asset is indeed your people and their hospitality.

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. I did not see a drinking fountain downtown, one of team members commented on the public restrooms in the courthouse were poor. The benches were good, and I did not see any trash receptacles. There was plenty of parking in downtown around the courthouse. I would recommend taking the parking out of the middle of the streets. The angled parking is adequate on both sides of the street, so you don't need it in the middle of the street. Opening the streets will let people see the businesses so much better and enjoy a downtown with wide streets.
- b. No Answer.
- c. No difficulty finding parking. Several flower boxes, though some in need of repair. Amazing Veteran's Memorial but it made the courthouse look shabby.
- d. We used the restrooms at the courthouse. Did not see wifi capability if it is offered, but Norma's had electric plug-ins on the wall for charging, which caught my eye as a great idea. I didn't really see benches but saw the planters. They seem outdated and some are not in real good shape, but they are individually unique. Parking downtown was ok. Didn't have an issue trying to park. There is one street where parking in the center made it look kind of hazardous and narrow, but we had no problems. The concrete on the sidewalks closest to the street was a rough texture and assume when it was new was trendy but kind of looks like it is deteriorating now. I did notice the decorative brick in front of City Hall that has Columbus written on them. Very neat idea.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. There was easy access to other retail shopping areas, however they were not very attractive.
- b. No Answer (NA)
- c. Didn't really see a lot of retail areas.
- d. The grocery stores and convenience stores located on the main highway were nice and did not appear hard to access.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. It seems to me that there would be plenty of room for expansion and locating new industry in Columbus. What industry they have is very impressive both in size and appearance.
- b. NA
- c. Could locate.
- d. Couldn't find anything that defined an "area" for industry, but did see industrial and commercial businesses, including Tamko outside of town. So it appears you have property for industrial use just outside of Columbus that you can expand to. Your Chamber said you have a number of printing companies based in Columbus.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. The hospital's exterior was somewhat dated. There appeared to be an ambulance service. The hospital appeared to be very busy so it looked as though the community was utilizing it.
- b. NA
- c. Small hospital and several geriatric areas.
- d. Looks like adequate hospital facilities for assessment and emergency evaluation. If a quality hospital was a factor in moving to the community the current facility could be an issue. However, the long-term care facility on the highway looks very nice from the outside and gave a good impression. Knowing that services cannot always be judged by the buildings they are in, it is important to tout what you have if it is exceptional despite the structures they are housed in.

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

- a. There were several well-maintained facilities for healthcare. The public health Department has a very nice facility.
- b. NA
- c. Did not see eye doctor, but large dental facility was modern, well-kept and easy to see, as well as the physicians' annex.
- d. We saw the hospital and what appears to be the physician's offices, a dentist office. We saw the Kansas Department for Children and Families located in Columbus. Appearance of most services was adequate.

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

- a. The Autumn Place Memory Care facility looked like a nice facility.
- b. NA
- c. The home (skilled?) was beautiful from the outside.
- d. 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. Yes, I found that there was a very nice mix of all income housing. There was a very nice housing sub-division that was well maintained and attractive.
- b. There appeared to be a variety of housing in Columbus. I noted at least three low-income housing areas, a trailer park, middle income housing and a high end area of housing, Riverside Drive. Honestly I did not notice many for sale signs. Like the small town I live in I did notice you have several dilapidated houses that could use some TLC. I did not inquire about renting so I am not able to give any clear feedback on that question.
- c. Seemed to be a large amount of low-income housing. A couple of "Country Club" areas, and several dilapidated homes. I think finding something within a reasonable price range and in good condition would be a challenge.
- d. Columbus has some very nice housing and neighborhoods. Did not see a lot of for-sale signs in those areas. We see some blighted areas, homes that have overgrown brush against the structures and items in the yards. There are several low income housing apartments. One of them is adjacent the baseball complex. Would suggest creating a landscaping barrier between the ball field and the backyards of the apartments. It could be of nice, decorative bushes or trees, but close off the view and help keep the tenant's privacy.

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

- a. There was a mix of housing and it appeared that there would be some rental units.
- b. NA
- c. Did not observe any rental signs.
- d. We did not see nice houses with rental signs. We did not pursue looking at the local newspaper or contact a real estate agent for this information. We saw available property adjacent to nice housing division on Riverside Drive to build.

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. The schools we all very nice. Parkview Elementary, the high school as well as the middle school. The playground, track and soccer fields were all adequate and well maintained.
- b. While driving through town I noted four schools an elementary school, middle school, high school and Coffeyville Community College extension. From the outside all facilities seemed well taken care of and had an overall appearance of “things” were clean and tidy. The track for middle and high school looked amazing. However, I only noticed swings and some basketball goals at the elementary. As an elementary principal myself, I would probably look for some ways to purchase some needed outdoor equipment for the elementary children.
- c. High school, middle school, elementary. Well-maintained though signs directing to them were misleading.
- d. We saw Park School (my first thought was that the sign meant there is a park and a school, LOL), Central School and the high school. All were well maintained. Utilizing metal buildings for additional classrooms was not appealing, but understandably necessary. Online the website for the school district is good. I would like to see some "Wow." I'm sure you have some wow factors to tout. The online newsletters are nice. The websites for the schools are more than for just the people who already live there. The school's website can determine whether a family moves to a community because the vibrancy of the school is represented by its website and social media presence.

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

- a. Yes, the school’s website is excellent. I could find information on most everything.
- b. I did not find any information about your schools at the Chamber office.
- c. No.
- d. The online report card link was available. Not a real online sense of what the experience is like for students to attend.

9. Childcare

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

- a. Childcare services were available, I saw only one that looked nice. I did not find out the cost.
- b. Again on the drive through town I noted one day care facility but I did not find any information about day care facilities at the Chamber office.
- c. Noticed a couple of daycare centers- no idea of price.
- d. We saw a childcare facility across from Park School. We didn't go in as the time of day we were there the buses and parents were waiting and there was no room to get around in that area at the time.

10. Faith/Religion

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

- a) The churches were well represented in the community. We saw a few sponsored services, one of our other team members addressed the churches in more detail.
- b) During the drive through town I noted several beautiful churches and the Visitor's Guide at the Chamber office noted a few church-sponsored activities in the community for example the Easter Egg Hunt, Easter Sunrise Service and Pancake breakfast.
- c) Several denominations. Faith was represented throughout the community.
- d) The Methodist Church was very nice and ornate. Jehovah's Witness Church looks very new and nice. While we did not see evidence of church-sponsored community services, we did notice the Blessing Boxes. Kelley Wells at the City Hall said that the community is very active in helping each other; fundraisers are held to help those in need all the time.

11. Civic

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

- a. Several prominent civic organization such as VFW, Lions Club and American Legion were all visible in the community. The Veterans Memorial downtown was very prominent.
- b. I wrote down several civic groups with signs to promote their organization: American Legion, Lions, 4-H Clubs, Girl Scouts, VFW and Rotary.
- c. Prominent nonprofits—VFW, American Legion, Lions. I saw several civic-sponsored events: memorials posted and easily identified.
- d. Civic investment is shown in the buildings they sponsor at the fairgrounds. A Lion's Club Bean Feed poster was on display on the bulletin board at City Hall.

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, signage, sidewalks were all adequate. Parking outside the downtown was good as well as landscaping and streetscapes. The cobra lights were evident throughout the community which are very adequate for lighting. Public restrooms at the park were visible.
- b. NA
- c. It was a combination. Some signage, lighting, etc. good; others in need of repair. Restrooms dirty. A couple of well-maintained parks. Streets suffered a bit due to weather.
- d. See that some street asphalt overlaying is visible in residential areas.

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

- a. We were received very well at city hall. The person was very helpful and friendly. She took ample time with us answering our questions even though she was working by herself.
- b. NA
- c. City hall was hospitable. People pleasant and helpful with all questions. Brochures and maps about the town are available.
- d. City Hall building is very nice. Both City Hall and Chamber Office had staff that were very welcoming and knowledgeable. They present a great personality to first-timers to Columbus! They had brochures and answers readily available to answer all our questions. Very impressive! They were great.

Police/fire protection:

- a. I did not see fire or police but am sure they were there.
- b. NA
- c. Excellent
- d. Look to be within the City Hall facilities. We saw marked patrol car while driving around.

Library:

- a. The Carnegie Library was a great building and in a good location for walking. Parking was available as well.
- b. NA
- c. Beautiful
- d. I missed seeing the library.

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

- a. The city parks were very nice as well as the ballparks, playgrounds and sports complex. Columbus has done a very good job of providing these amenities and maintaining them.
- b. I was impressed with the overall appearance of the sports complex. For the most part the complex was well kept and had several electronic score boards. I am curious how you accommodate parking with several ball fields. I only noted one sign that probably needed to be taken down (Jay Hatfield?). I liked your fairground area especially the fact that it was on a grass area instead of located on gravel.
- c. Track at school was beautiful, as well as the small parks.
- d. The pool was interesting and looked nice. I question where everyone parks during ball games, especially if it has rained. Looks like you are making some positive upgrades to your ball park facilities.

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. The Hot Air Balloon Festival. Columbus has branded themselves as the town of Christopher Columbus, again I was impressed with the ships on the light poles downtown. They are very unique and interesting.
- b. NA
- c. Hot air balloons. Columbus Day ships.
- d. Your anchor attraction/special event is the balloon regatta.

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

- e. The Hot Air Balloon Festival is significant, and it would be an event I would like to go back to visit.
- f. NA
- g. Only in brochures.
- h. Columbus uses the Christopher Columbus logo. The website gave an indirect connection to Columbus, Kansas to Christopher Columbus via its namesake of Columbus, Ohio. There is no tag line or branding further than that found on the City's website or that I see during this visit. I would suggest something that entices people to explore Columbus. The Chamber's website says "Help America Discover." I would suggest figuring out what you want people to discover in Columbus when they get here and market that niche with pride. Your anchor attraction/special event is the balloon regatta.

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. No Answer (NA)
- b. NA
- c. Museum, Veteran's Memorial
- d. We did go by an RV Park near the river or body of water.

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. The Chamber of Commerce does a great job of promoting Columbus and the county. They promote all the events and mention the many other amenities that make this community great. The Chamber building was very nice and well kept. The team spoke of how friendly and knowledgeable the director was. The Chamber website is very well done and easily maneuvered to find information about the community.
- b. I visited the Chamber office. The lady there did a really nice job in sharing background information about Columbus. She noted some places she felt were important to your community such as: Hot Air Balloon Regatta, hunting/fishing, Claythorne Lodge, Rowdy's Rustic Moose Lodge, Pitcher Pump B&B, and Crossland Construction Company.
- c. Chamber office—slightly hard to find but the director was amazing and full of knowledge.
- d. The Chamber Office is very visible with the marquee sign. The inside with paneling could use updating. The Chamber Director is a delightful person.

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

- a. I would return to try other restaurants even though Norma's was great and it was fun to get the local vibe while there. The staff were so welcoming and friendly. I would like to visit other businesses in Columbus that we didn't have time for.
- b. Not really, unless it's for the hot air balloons.
- c. NA
- d. Recreation - The Claythorne Lodge has events that keep the town busy with visitors. The downtown lodging place with the art gallery was intriguing. We tried to visit it but it was locked at the time of our visit.

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. The friendly welcoming people in my opinion are the greatest asset of Columbus. I believe the community capitalizes on their many assets and seem to be striving to work on those things that need to be updated and refreshed.
- b. Columbus appears to be a very warm and welcoming community and I would say people are your biggest asset! Those working in stores or restaurants on the square were very friendly and welcoming. In fact, an elderly gentleman walking in front of the Court House on an extremely cold day took time to look up and say, "good morning" which is not what you might find in the city. That small town feel is alive in your community where everyone works together for the common wealth and providing quality of life. I would suspect having Crossland Construction located in your community is a huge help in supporting jobs for those who live in Columbus.
- c. Hospitality. Fire/Police department were impressive. Would definitely eat at Norma's again and visit the sports apparel shop.
- d. The City Hall and Department facilities nearby are very nice. The people are very nice and hospitable. The bell tower and Veterans Memorial are your town treasures and unique. You appear to have big commercial and industrial businesses. You have a camper sales business and both a Ford and a Chevrolet dealership, Subway, Sonic even a McDonalds in a town of your size. You are the county seat and strategically located close to Missouri and Oklahoma to draw visitors, businesses and potential new residents.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. They, like so many communities, have dilapidated homes and downtown buildings that need to be rehabilitated. Those are very big challenges that are hard to tackle and find solutions for.
- b. Like all communities, if we had plenty of time, money and resources we could accomplish many things. Overall, I believe the biggest challenges your community might face would be the expense of infrastructure, downtown revitalization, bringing new businesses to your square, housing (funds to refurbish dilapidated buildings and housing), working to clean up specific areas of town, updating your hospital (partnering with Saint Luke's), looking at what will bring your children back as young adults to their hometown, providing opportunities for quality of life, and your vision going forward.
- c. Road conditions, junk and dilapidated homes.
- d. I'm sure it's money, like all of our rural communities! Financing improvements, whether it is infrastructure (roads, curbs/gutters and sidewalks), housing, medical services, schools, business expansion- is difficult. I hope that our assessment isn't taken in a negative way, but that city leaders engage with the citizens to work on Columbus' future. Likewise, we hope the same for our community and feel privileged to participate in this program.

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

- a. The incredibly friendly people who were so warm and inviting to us. Whether it was a local business or City Hall everyone was kind and took time to talk to us. I will always remember the ships on the light poles. I have visited many downtowns and those ships are a feature that will stay with me, they are impressive and outstanding.
- b. What I will remember about Columbus and what I plan to tell others about your community is that you are people oriented, warm and welcoming, proud of your community, and you have a lot to offer for a small town.
- c. The food, the people and the Veteran's Memorial.
- d. NA

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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



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