First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

**Community Visited: Council Grove Date(s) Visited: a- Sept. 13 (Wed)**

 **b- Sept. 19 (Tues)**

 **c- Sept. 20 (Wed)**

**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. Very impressed with web search and web designs of both city and chamber! Both websites were easy to use and impressed with “relocate” tab options and links for tourism and business, especially lodging and recreation. I do not have any constructive criticism in these areas. Very impressed with lakes nearby, I was not aware of those and I have been to Council Grove in the past.
2. Very nice website. The chamber and the city website are very easy to use and have links connecting the two. There were a few formatting issues, text wasn’t always aligned correctly.
3. N/A
4. **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. I entered from Hillsboro (west) through Herington. Well maintained and historic cemeteries were visible as well as older homes. Several of the older homes were maintained very well while a few were not maintained well that were scattered throughout. I like that the main entrance from that end has a natural and direct path to the downtown district and the river walk. Very picturesque… I thought signage was well done mainly. It is confusing that the hospital and nursing homes do not seem to be on a main route into town.
	2. The town has lots of historical character. There are parts of town that are a little untidy but overall the community is very nice. The river walk is very nice! Signage was very well done when entering town.
	3. The entry from the north that goes along the lake is very inviting and a nice welcome to town. The other entrances started with housing or retail before there was really a sign notifying you that you were in or near Council Grove. Street signs were visible but a bit small and varying sizes and styles. There are not many lights in the residential part of town which probably makes for a nice, quiet neighborhood, but a bit difficult to navigate after dark. Big beautiful trees lined the streets and were present in all parts of town.

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. Hays House is a known destination and it has been beautifully remodeled inside and out. Historic architecture including limestone and masonry work is very impressive from the bank buildings to several others. I did notice about a half dozen vacant (or what appeared to be vacant) businesses on first drive through, which were quite noticeable. I walked in several businesses on the main street as well as the quick shop on opposing side of river walk. The quick shop appeared to be older on the outside but was impressed with the cleanliness of the restroom and the modernness of the interior and available products. I purchased a couple items and was treated with friendliness. I enjoyed seeing local artisans displayed in the pharmacy, as well as several handmade items, antiques, and interior decorative items. I was surprised that two of the businesses on main did not know I was present when browsing their merchandise (floral store and custom metal signs). I did not call out or search for assistance, but it could be losing sales for those businesses.
2. Historical, well-kept for the most part. Some buildings downtown could use a good paint job. I ate lunch at the Hayes House Restaurant. The food and customer service was great. I went to the quick shop and was impressed with how clean and nice it was. There were quite a few retail stores in downtown.
3. Main Street is inviting and quaint in the way many rural Kansas towns are. There are several retail businesses and city services along Main Street which is nice for visitors to see as they drive through downtown. The buildings nicely represent original architecture. It’s nice to see that the businesses have taken pride in this and now gone with cheaper construction over style. Restaurants, retail shops (furniture, second-hand, gardening/nursery), services. The only business I visited was a restaurant because I arrived in town around 6 p.m. The Hays House was very friendly and their staff was great!

**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. I did not notice drinking fountains or public restrooms directly, but those were likely available at the sports complex that I drove through. I was impressed with the seating available downtown, the Riverwalk, and at the monuments. It would be nice to see or have more noticeable drinking fountains/public restrooms. I did not have trouble finding parking, and enjoyed being able to walk and use multiple businesses from one parking area. It is nice having the Chamber office centralized on your main street.
2. There is available seating downtown which is great. I did not notice any drinking fountains or public restrooms. Parking was easy to find. You could access almost everything in downtown Council Grove from Main Street. Council Grove is a very walkable town.
3. I saw several benches and some businesses had very appealing landscaping or flowers. Parking was easy to find after 6 p.m. Sidewalks were nice and wide as well as well-maintained along downtown. I would be able to park once and visit several businesses or services without moving my vehicle. As I drove around I didn’t find any place where parking might be challenging.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

1. I was impressed with the size of a locally owned grocery store, and Dollar Store available and both were easy to find.
2. Very nice local grocery store (jealous), and Dollar General. Both were easy to find.
3. Several franchise food stores, convenience stores, home/lumber and farm stores.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

1. It appears there could be room to expand if necessary in industrial area. Very impressed with Neosho Gardens and its expansion. I was surprised I did not see more Ag-related businesses. I did speak with a farmer in the convenience store I was in and said he had to drive 60-90 minutes to dealers or for parts at times for his equipment. There is definitely room on Main Street for more commercial areas.
2. Neosho Gardens is well known thoughout Kansas. There were several businesses located at what I assume is the industrial park. Looks like there is room for new businesses or for those currently there to expand.
3. There was an obvious section of town where industry was centrally located. John Deere, a few manufacturing or packaging companies, a commercial nursery were together in one section of town. Additionally I stumbled on a manufacturing company that was in the middle of a residential area.

5. **Health Care Services**

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

1. Impressed with exteriors of hospital and two elderly care facilities, one being quite new. The location of the hospital seems out of place/hard to find.
2. The hospital was pretty hard to find. I ended up having to google where it was located. The facility seemed to be in good condition. I would highly recommend some better signage. I did after I found the hospital notice a few of the blue H signs.
3. I didn’t see any hospital or emergency medical services. I did see the fire department and assume there might be EMS in the same facility.

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

1. I liked that several of these businesses are on your “main” route and easily visible. I like to see historic buildings being used on main street to create and enjoy a sense of community and small town living.
2. I noticed that there was a good variety of services available for a community this size. Physicians, Dentist, Optometrist, Chiropractors etc.
3. I found a dentist and optometrist.

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

1. I noticed two assisted living facilities on my driving through town and was impressed with the structures and views that are likely enjoyed by the residents.
2. LTC Center was a little hard to find. The facility looked pretty nice. I did not see any assisted living facilities but I did not really look for them.
3. I saw at least one facility that was assisted living. I found a couple of apartment buildings, but it wasn’t clear if those were for assisted living or general housing.

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. I did see mix of housing, and several for sale that would appeal to a variety of economic statuses. I also like that there are lake front options available nearby, and those properties also appeared very diverse but overall well maintained. Sidewalks are always a plus for young families with children and elderly and I noticed several neighborhoods that did not have sidewalks installed. I did not see many extremely large/new houses like some larger towns or cities have.
2. There was a good mix of housing available. There were not very many newer homes. I also drove out to the two local lakes and there was lake front property available. I did not notice any new housing developments being labeled any particular name. For instance we have Carriage Hills, Glen Willow, Orchard Haven, Prairie Pointe etc.
3. There were a lot of options in sizes of housing all the way from apartments to big homes. It was also easy to find older, well cared for homes as well as newer construction. There wasn’t a neighborhood that was significantly “better” or “nicer” than others. Most types of homes could be found throughout the community.

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

1. There was a good sized apartment complex directly by downtown district that looked like it would have rentals available. I saw several for sale signs but did not notice any significant amount of rentals available.
2. I noticed a few apartment complexes in town. I saw that there were quite a few homes for sale but was not aware of any rentals aside from the apartment complexes.
3. There were a couple apartment complexes and at least one hotel that could provide temporary housing.

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. I was impressed with the elementary, middle and high school buildings and maintenance. I did notice a preschool/daycare near the sports complex area. I did not find online information about head start or preschool programs available.
2. K-12 school buildings look very well maintained. Very nice sports field. Did not see any information relating to Head start or preschool.
3. The middle school and high school are together on one campus. They have nice facilities and looks like the building has been expanded as newer or more facilities were needed. The athletic complex provides a lot of opportunity for community members to be part of the school. Lots of seating, parking and space for community use outside of school hours. Similarly the elementary school was well maintained and appeared easily accessible for parents waiting to pick up kids or visit the building.

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

1. I was impressed with the school district website and the Connect with Kids link that makes help available 24/7.
2. Yes, very nice website. One of the nicer school district websites that I have seen.
3. N/A
4. **Childcare**

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

1. I could not find online information about the Building Blocks childcare or other available businesses.
2. I did not see any childcare services.
3. I saw at least one daycare/preschool facility. There were also some kid and family friendly gyms that were unique options for the community.
4. **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. Several well maintained churches were visible as well as diverse denominations from non-denominational, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, and Lutheran. I did not notice any church sponsored activities during the time I was there which was Wednesday, September 13th during the day.
2. Wide variety of Christian Churches (Protestant through Catholic). I did not observe any evidence of church sponsored events in town.
3. I saw at least 7 churches, but there may have been more. It became difficult to count them all. They were mostly nestled into neighborhoods.
4. **Civic**

**Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.**

1. Community members have several national/common community organizations available and several I noticed that are not as common but diverse such as CASA, PRIDE, to youth rodeo. The abundant historical monuments and park and recreation areas make it evident that they are developed, protected and maintained by various organizations.
2. Great variety of civic organizations, Rotary Club, PRIDE, CASA etc.
3. I saw signage for Rotary, a tree city sign and the CASA organization had an office on Main Street. Most of the signage about events or activities was related to opening the nature trail. It will be a great addition to the community, but it wasn’t clear from the signage that any of the civic groups had a part in completing the project.
4. **Public Infrastructure**

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

1. Sidewalks and bike paths are always a plus and could be utilized more throughout the town other than River walk/ Main Street. There was good and informative signage by historical markers.
2. The streets throughout town are very narrow but it does add to the charm of the town. Parts of town do not have good sidewalk access. Overall the town is nice but I think there are some ways to improve it by adding in more sidewalks and maybe a biking/walking trail. Some streets especially on the northeast side of town (trailer homes) are in bad shape and need replaced.
3. There were virtually no sidewalks in the neighborhoods. Lighting was limited and became noticeable after dark. Parking was easy to find along most streets and neighborhoods were easy to access. The streets in some parts of town have a lot of dead ends and I got a little turned around trying to get out of the neighborhood.

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

1. I was not immediately greeted and there was a slightly awkward introduction when explaining I was participating in the First Impressions study/partnership with Hillsboro by clerk. I was not greeted by any other staff or police officers present. There was a city and lake map available.
2. City Hall is a very nice building. Information about town was available at City Hall.
3. N/A

**Police/fire protection:**

1. Extremely impressed with fire station facility.
2. Very nice Fire Station. Police station located at City Hall.
3. The fire station was a really attractive building and well light after dark.

**Library:**

1. Observed historic Carnegie structure and “new” library in what looked like an older repurposed building.
2. The old Carnegie building is really cool. The new library is pretty good sized and nice.
3. N/A

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

1. Elementary school had updated and nice amount of play equipment. Sports complex was well laid out with center facility. Noticed more dilapidated building on edge of complex and I cannot remember purpose of that building. Noticed a fenced in soccer field on edge of complex. Very nice walking trail on river walk.
2. N/A
3. There were several parks with varying level of amenities. I didn’t have time to walk around any of them, but was pleased to see that many ages and abilities would be accommodated. I loved seeing the nature trail that will open soon and it seemed several people in the community used it as a place to walk leisurely and take dogs for exercise.
4. **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. First of mind is always Hays House, and second are the historical markers. I did not realize just how MANY historical markers there were, it would take more than a day to enjoy and learn more about each.
2. There are a ton of historical markers and historical buildings in Council Grove. I am a history buff and I was not aware of all the things that are located in Council Grove.
3. I saw the slogan “The Flint Hills Life” on banners along the street, marketing and informational material. Very noticeable!

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

1. I did notice a flyer on Main Street that showed a recent circus that came to town. I was impressed that a town the size of Council Grove would have an event like that.
2. I did not notice any evidence of a significant community event.
3. The opening of the Flint Hills Nature Trail was the most noticeable upcoming event.

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

1. The Flint Hills is known to be beautiful and the setting for Council Grove is perfect to enjoy the Flint Hills. With my marketing background I also appreciate the consistent use of the city logo between the city and chamber websites that share “The Flint Hills Life.”
2. The Flint Hills is a very beautiful place to be and both lakes are very nice and should be capitalized on. It’s one of the nicest places in Kansas.
3. I didn’t get to see it before dark, but the lake north of town is likely a big draw.

**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. The location of the chamber of commerce is very optimal, while the signage could be improved upon; as I did not at first notice, it was there. The staff was extremely attentive and polite and did a great job of promoting the city and area.
2. The Chamber of Commerce is in a nice location but it was hard to find at first.
3. This was located on Main Street and easy to locate for anyone coming downtown.

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

1. I would definitely return with my family or friends for a day trip to enjoy what the town has to offer. There are several things that I would like to see more in person than just a drive by such as the historical sites, shops and restaurants. The lodging accommodations make it ideal to enjoy a weekend or a few day trip to the town as a getaway. I also noticed handicapped accessibility at the Hays House, which impressed me including exterior ramp and chair lift on interior staircase.
2. I definitely want to return in the near future to better check out some of the historical sites in and around Council Grove.
3. Several locally owned restaurants, a soda fountain, the gardening center/nursery, the nature trail.
4. **Wrap-up**

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

1. 25 Historic sites/monuments (and consistently messaged throughout retail/apparel/signage/online)

River Walk connected to downtown

Specialty restaurants and stores

Unique and well-kept lodging

Lakes/Recreation, rentals available

Nationally known food service establishments

1. The historical character of the community and all the historic sites with signage.
2. There is an obvious pride in Main Street and the historical aspects of the community. The proximity to the lake and the addition of the nature trail were also nice features.

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

1. Empty storefronts on Main and maintaining historic infrastructure

Noticed upon walking on Main one business that still had items inside but cobwebs covering doorway

Entertainment for locals/young adults (aside from lakes that may include a sports bar, movie theatre, etc.)

Jobs for middle and upper middle class families (I feel this is a struggle for many small towns)

Foot traffic downtown (was surprised there were not more visitors and noticed not many tables filled at Hays House)

Maintaining neighborhoods/first impressions (paint, landscaping, etc.)

1. Declining population is the biggest challenge I see facing Council Grove. Promoting yourself as a safe family friendly bedroom community to Topeka or Junction City/Manhattan is what I would suggest.
2. Navigation of the neighborhoods was the biggest drawback. Because street signs are small and have several styles, neighborhood streets are narrow and don’t have sidewalks, lighting is limited, I found it more difficult to explore the parts of town not on a main thoroughfare.

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

1. The members of the Council Grove community are extremely friendly people who are obviously proud of the town’s heritage. I learned a great deal researching the town and during my visit. I am passionate about small towns and visiting and living in other areas of the United States feel like the Flint Hills is one of the most beautiful places there is. While I look forward to visiting the Hays House again (pie was amazing), I also now know there are a variety of places to eat in town and will try others as well. The lake areas are beautiful and well-kept and would provide great camping and boating experiences. I plan on making more visits with friends and family in the future.
2. How beautiful the surrounding areas are and the amount of historical structures there are.
3. The variety of shopping and unique downtown stores. I really enjoyed the Hays House and would come back for the delicious food.

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension Service

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