First Impressions 

**Team Report Form**

Community Visited: Downs Date Visited: 6/10/16

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?

* Downs has a lot of good webs results. They have two really good websites and also a good Facebook page. The websites are easy to use. Great web presence for such as small town.
* The Downs webpage was a beneficial site. There were many things listed on the website that would help a potential visitor coming to the community. While on the search, we found out about the following amenities/events/businesses, etc.
  + Downs Annual Celebration
  + Downs Pool including hours and prices
  + Federal Summer Meal Program
  + Downs Medical Clinic
  + Schools
  + Places of Worship
  + Places to stay
  + Events
  + Things to see and do
  + Businesses

1. The “Five-Minute” Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted.

* Downs is simple, small, and quiet, but the community appears to be keeping busy, full of friendly people
* Downs is a cute town with a lot of well- maintained homes. There were a few vacant stores on Main Street, yet very viable stores as well. The roads were well maintained with nice curb and guttering. There were places with lovely landscaping that caught your eye, including the town center gazebo area, stage coach, yard art, and the darling cabins on the outskirt of town.

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

* Entrances are good and have welcome signs except the one south of town where the welcome sign is several miles away from the community
* Downtown is extremely easy to find since all the entrances to town lead directly there
* Downtown is simple and is busy with people shopping or running errands
* Coming into town from the west, we noticed the big industrial park, Griffith Field with the unique palm trees, the City of Downs sign, and the sign recognizing the wheelchair athlete, Kevin Saunders. Coming in from the south, the city starts after the Solomon River, and the city of Downs sign is visible. Coming in from the east, you see the agricultural part with the elevators in the distance.

2. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

* Buildings have an old style look to them and seem to be well maintained
* Landscaping is good, especially in some areas, but could always use more
* Lots of flyers posted in the window letting know the events going on
* The main street had many nice looking buildings, and you could see the hometown pride in their businesses. The streets were marked with nice banners on the poles to give it that welcoming feel. There were benches placed throughout the main street and places with flower pots, etc. Some of the buildings were in disrepair and vacant.

Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.

* Variety of businesses such as a grocery store, library, town hall, hardware store, a bank, and several different merchandise stores
* Lots of merchandise on display
* Hardware store
* Grocery store
* Insurance
* Clothing
* Furniture
* Nextech
* Medical Clinic

Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

* Customer service is friendly
* The customer service at both locations was great. We were welcomed/greeted in both businesses. We found the quality of merchandise to be outstanding. What neat places. We had a very informative conversation with the man at Domoney’s regarding the community, its events and community pride.

What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.)

* There were several benches and a good amount of shade
* Benches were available throughout the downtown area. No public restrooms were observed. Places of nice flowers, landscaping. Etc.

Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

* No difficulty finding parking
* All services were in a very close distance so that wasn’t a problem
* The parking was convenient and ample. You could access several businesses from one parking area. You could also walk around the corner and down to City Hall and the Depot.

1. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

* The general store seemed to be the main attraction downtown
* Along highway 24 were two convenient stores. They were easy to access, but they had an industrial look to them.

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

* There is plenty of room along the main entrance on the highway which would get lots of attention and draw people in.
* Nice industrial part on the west end of town. There’s definitely room for growth. Looks like new industry for the town.

5. Health Care Services

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

* There was a clinic
* There were two medical clinics very close to one another. One has doctors that serve the Osborne hospital, and the other has doctors that serve the Beloit hospital. Nice looking clinics.

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

* Decent availability, but nothing like an actual hospital
* In addition to having the two clinics, there is also a dentist in town and an assisted care living facility.

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.)

* There were houses ranging from a few thousand dollars to a few hundred thousand dollars, so there are houses that would please all income levels. However, there was no availability of houses to rent, and only a few to buy. There was a very nice HUD complex, with several units, a nice community center in the middle, and a playground. There is a waiting list for HUD housing.

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

* Saw a few houses for rent

7. Schools

What schools are present? (Head Start, Preschool, K-8, High School, Post-Secondary, etc.) Do the schools appear to be adequate in size? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

* The schools looked nice, but needs greenery
* The school we observed was the junior and Senior High School. This is a consolidated school serving Downs, Cawker City, Glen Elder, and Tipton. The school seemed adequate in size, but the grounds could be better maintained.

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

* Good website that provided a lot of information
* The school has a nice website where information can be found. There is also a very neat alumni building on Main Street, displaying memorabilia, old uniforms, trophies, etc. We thought that was a very clever idea.

1. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

* We saw one childcare facility, Little Blessings. The building was very well maintained and had awesome metal art. However, we were unsure if the facility was open; it looked vacant. Hope that is not the case.

1. 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?

* Saw several churches of many denominations. Well maintained
* Downs has a variety of churches and denominations available to the public. Of the churches we observed, the churches were very nice and well maintained.

1. Civic

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

* It wasn’t really apparent, but it is known that they have a Chamber of Commerce and possibly a Lion’s Club. We didn’t observe evidence of activity.

1. Public Infrastructure

Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas **other than downtown**. Did you observe land-use planning?

* There were sidewalks in the core of the community but a big chunk of the community didn’t seem to have any.
* Most streets appeared to be in good condition. The street signs were dark and not easy to read. Updated, reflective street signs would be beneficial. It would also be helpful to have a sign showing the direction to City Hall. We had to ask for directions getting there.
* Did not really see land use planning, seemed pretty typical for a small town

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

* Seemed friendly – no complaints
* While at City Hall, we were warmly welcomed and given a lot of information. We also received welcome sacks that had community and county brochures inside.

Police/fire protection:

* Fire protection and EMT services are evident in the community.

Library:

* Saw the library seemed maintained and welcoming
* The historic Carnegie Library is a marvel. The librarian was very passionate about her job. She regaled us with the history of the building and took us on a tour, explaining different tid-bits as we went. We were impressed with the many things offered by the library: summer reading programs, storytelling events, book clubs, tea parties, movie nights, etc.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sports complex)

* The park was good and could also be used as a rest stop since it is located along the highway
* The city park was very nice and located along the highway to attract visitors and people coming through town. The landscaping was very beautiful, flowers and all. There was access to the ball fields, tennis courts, public restrooms, picnic areas, benches and grills. The historical marker itself attracts visitors. We did not go to the Sod and Stubble Country due to the rain and muddy country roads, but will definitely be a place we visit next time.

1. Recreation/Tourism

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

* Downs is a center for many attractions. It is one hour from 5 different lakes, so they have fishing, hunting, boating, and camping. It would be a good central point to do other sight-seeing opportunities, such as the Ball of Twine in Cawker City and the Sod and Stubble self-guided tour.

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

* Downs also holds an annual celebration in June and a Storytelling Festival in April. There is an all class reunion in July and the Annual Tree Fest in November.

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

* They have the Richardson Pipe Organ, the 111 year old Carnegie Library, and the Missouri Pacific Depot.

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.

* Did not see any visitor center, but main street was easy to find

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

* If you are traveling to north-central Kansas, Downs has a number of attractions that would occupy your time. Unfortunately, there is not a nice restaurant available if you are spending the day or traveling through and want to stop.

1. Wrap-up

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

* Seems small, peaceful, and safe to raise a family
* Downs seems to have a very strong sense of pride in their community. The celebrations are many and brings the entire community together. The Carnegie library stood out in our minds, and we would love to come back and spend more time in the library, see the pipe organ factory, and take the Sod and Stubble tour.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

* Signage and a nice eating place
* It would be very beneficial for this community to have a nice restaurant. One other challenge is the availability of rental property.

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

* We will remember the friendly atmosphere surrounding this community. We will also remember the library and the gracious librarian. We had a very fun, marvelous day. Thank you for the opportunity.



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