

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Elkhart

Date(s) Visited: 8/5/19 (Monday)

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. Great Information. Saw all the businesses posted. Easy access to the chamber website and also the school website
- b. I visited the city website, Chamber of Commerce website, and the school website. They are all very thorough and informative. I felt they accurately reflected what I saw while visiting. I was impressed with both the city and Chamber sites.
- c. Had two very user-friendly websites. The city and the chamber. Good info, formatted well. Chamber had good testimonials that made you anticipate what was available. Good hook: Stop, Stretch, Stay. Businesses and activities seemed well represented.

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. Three different entrances welcoming to Elkhart. Only one area was nice with landscaping. Other sign was covered with overgrown trees. The third sign needed updating possibly from sun fading or old. The downtown was great to see all the buildings having a business. The churches were recognized. The digital screen with the information with the community events was really nice!

- b. I was really impressed with the walking path and the number of benches. The main street was well maintained. The buildings appeared to be in good condition and full. Most homes seemed to be well taken care of and occupied. There were a handful that needed some TLC, mowing, clean-up, etc., but not an unreasonable amount. Because the streets were not on a square grid, some of the intersections were confusing. Elkhart seemed to be a quiet community as there wasn't a lot of traffic or people going from place to place. I loved the painted windows. The community seems to take a lot of pride in their students. The east and west entrances were more welcoming and defined than the north one. I guess the south one starts where the highway turns onto Morton Street. If not, I did not recognize a south entrance. Several signs needed to be touched up, removed, or replaced. The west entrance was by far the "prettiest." The convenience store at the beginning of town could maybe spruce up their lot. It did not look as well maintained or welcoming as the rest of main street.

- c. Several very nice features jumped out immediately. Whistle Stop Park had a nice walking path with improvements being made as we were driving through. The city lamp posts were extremely nice. Museum, Civic Center, fairgrounds and golf course looked very inviting. Some of the initial positives were offset by the weeds growing along the railroad right of way and the general clutter of the Coop elevator. In general things were kept up and attractive. Sign from the east entrance was partially obscured and did not seem to have the same amount of landscaping as the west and north entrances. Original city sign could use a touch up. Some vacant signs could be taken down or utilized by new business. Several new buildings mixed in with older established business.

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. Great buildings. Every business was well put together. Store fronts were very appealing. Every business I visited was very welcoming, friendly and helpful. Blossom Boutique, Courthouse, Theatre, Higher Grounds, Epic Touch, The salon downtown, School District Office, City Office, Community Civic Center. Every business was very welcoming and very friendly with a smile on their face.

- b. The buildings seem to be well taken care of and in good shape. Main Street was inviting as well as quiet. There were a few places I was unsure about their business as I couldn't/didn't see a sign. Elkhart has a main street and buildings that are used for businesses. I loved the streetlamps. I think the welcome flags must be down for now as I saw the bars that hold them were empty. Business owners appear to take pride in their property and community. City Hall—We were treated to a quick tour and shown the adobe wall. There was a community bulletin board with a variety of community events and information available. Epic Touch—we visited the Chamber booth and found it to be informative about the city and state. A hair salon-I don't know the name, but it is new to Main Street. The stylist was so friendly, inviting us to look around. She offered salon services including tanning, manicures, and pedicures. Blossom Boutique—gifts, flowers, food items, and an adorable puppy to love on. It was a nice gift shop. Mitchell Theater—was closed, but the cleaning lady kindly let us in. This was a highlight for me. I was so impressed by the whole thing—movies, live theater, bar, dressing rooms, etc. It was great. The housekeeping lady needs a raise. She was a gem. Higher Grounds—café and coffee shop. It had a small variety of food options, but it was really delicious. Morton County Courthouse— a traditional courthouse. We enjoyed looking at the maps and phone booth. City pool—it was a nice pool and appeared to be suitable for all ages. We like the canopies on the west side. District Office—It was very nice and full of great amenities. They displayed uniforms for all the sports. I didn't notice academic or other extracurricular such as FFA, Scholar's Bowl, or Forensics, but maybe I missed those items. TBK Bank—it was nice and open. The people were friendly. There was a community bulletin board that offered information about events and other small business ventures. City Hall—The ladies were very kind and seemed happy to visit with us. Tim spent time visiting with our driver, sharing information with him. Epic Touch—we didn't really go here to look at the business, but the man was friendly and pointed us to the Chamber booth and was available to assist us. Another lady came out to talk to us. She was very friendly. A hair salon—the owner was very friendly and shared about her new location. Blossom Boutique—the furry owner came right over to greet me, so I was happiest about that. His human was inviting and friendly. She welcomed us to look around. I bought coffee. I appreciate her using fair trade products. Mitchell Theater—the housekeeping lady was a gem! Seriously, she needs a bonus or a raise. She was so welcoming and friendly. She invited us to look around and answered questions even though we were interrupting her work. The door was actually locked, but she saw us and opened it, inviting us in once we told her about our mission and we weren't there for a movie. District Office—the clerk took time to welcome us and give us a tour. She was very friendly and welcomed questions. Courthouse—we wandered around the courthouse for at least 15 minutes, maybe longer and were not greeted one time. I know people saw us, but they didn't ask if we needed assistance.
- c. Nice entrance to the downtown area. Laid out in a user-friendly manner with several upgrades in infrastructure easily identified e.g. sidewalks and current building remodeling underway. Two very nice banks. Had the feel of an old western town street front. Variety of businesses from eating places, salons, flower and gift shop, movie theatre, and more. Each business I walked into I was greeted in a friendly manner.

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. Benches on the walking trail. Very accommodating with parking and the lights downtown are very nice! I would like to see the flags put up on the light poles but very nice downtown.
- b. There were benches all along the walking path, which seemed nice. I didn't notice a drinking fountain or bathroom anywhere. I didn't notice trash cans along main street, but I saw them at the parks.
- c. Lots of benches along the walking path. No difficulty parking and most things were in an easy walking distance.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. Very easy and quiet. Almost every business was open and most of the buildings were occupied with a business.
- b. We didn't even realize there were other areas with businesses. Once we found them, they were easy to access, but we only knew to look because the lady at the salon told us where other businesses were located.
- c. Aside from downtown the Dollar Store seemed to be about the only other retail easily identifiable.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. Not really. Kind of scattered on the outer edges of town just not one area.
- b. I think the east, west, and south sides of town looked industrial and commercial. It looked like they can expand any of those directions.
- c. There was evidence of an industrial area but of an older nature and not laid out for new growth.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. The nursing home was very well updated from the outer appearance. The clinic and hospital need some updating.
- b. All the health care services appeared to be in one area. We saw the hospital, medical clinic, and three senior living facilities. We did not enter any of the facilities. The senior care centers and medical clinic looked newer. It appeared to offer a wide variety of services.
- c. Large health complex for a city this size with alternative medicine as an option.

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

- a. Only the medical office
- b. I did not see a dentist, chiropractor, or eye doctor. I didn't notice the Morton County Health Department in that area. There was also an Angela's Clinic (?) near the clinic
- c. Seemed very adequate.

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

- a. Assisted Living and Nursing Home
- b. I saw a long term and rehab center, a memory center, and an independent and assisted living center.
- c. Several levels of senior care were visible. Nursing home, assisted living and rehab.

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. The housing was great variety. The homes for sale were all very nice.
- b. I noticed several homes for sale. It appeared to be mostly in the upper- or lower-income range, but I didn't check prices. The homes for sale appeared to be scattered throughout the community. I think it would be more challenging to sell a nicer home when it has some of the lesser maintained houses nearby.
- c. Wide variety available. Initial drive thru showed above average housing for this type of community. Later we found the lower-income side of town. Several very nice neighborhoods

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

- a. Did not find any rental property, just homes for sale.
- b. I didn't notice rental properties while driving around, but we did get a list of renters from the Chamber booth. That would certainly be helpful for people wanting to relocate to Elkhart.
- c. Several vacant lots had for sale signs and the chamber had a list of contacts for rental properties on their counter.

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. Grade school, middle school and high school. Great sizing and lots of shade and grass at the grade school was great along with the playground for the kids play.
- b. We were told about a possible new preschool option from the Chamber lady. That will be helpful. The elementary building was removed from the middle and high school area. Everything seemed to be well maintained. The trees at the elementary school were lovely! The middle school and high school campus appeared to be combined, but separate. I think the gym area is their common ground.
- c. Elementary school was on the rougher side of town; however, it was well maintained with lots of trees and a chain link fence around the play area. Middle school and High School were in a nicer neighborhood with lots of campus buildings and ball fields.

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

- a. The downtown school district office was very amazing. If you were out of town moving to town it would be a great way to learn about the schools. The clerk of the school office was super nice and helpful with information. I am very impressed!
- b. Yes. Their website was very informative.
- c. Info was available. The district office is right downtown and is an impressive lead into the school.

9. Childcare

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

- a. We only knew of two childcares and heard of the need for childcare in Elkhart.
- b. We didn't find out much about childcare services except there is a need for it. I think that is common everywhere.
- c. Seemed to be a challenge from the people we talked with.

10. Faith/Religion

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

- a. 2 Baptist, Nazarene, Catholic, Lutheran, Church of God, Church of Christ.
- b. We saw approximately 9 places of worship. They all looked smaller in size. They were not all well-marked or easy to find. We happened upon them.
- c. Counted 8 places of worship with a variety of denominations. Hands of Hope had a building on main street and provides assistance with various things.

11. Civic

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

- a. Hands for Hope and no.
- b. We window peeked into Hands for Hope. That looked to be the food bank and free/reduced clothing store. The 4-H kids decorated the store fronts with fair information. That was super fun to read and very informative. We stopped by the fairgrounds where the finishing touches were being added to the new bathrooms. What a great addition! Vince was super friendly. We also visited the Civic Center where we met some friendly people. That is a wonderful facility to have. It is well-maintained and has plenty of room for hosting events.
- c. Very nice Civic Center, currently being used in conjunction with the fair. Seemed like a lot of weekends were booked with weddings and events. A seniors' dance was on the calendar. Did not specifically see civic activity.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a. Most landscaping on the homes very well kept. Very few streets needed upkeep. Street signage may be a little better as pointing to downtown or school or hospital.
- b. The streets seemed to be well maintained. Some sidewalks look old and in need of repair, but some were fine. The streets were clean. The street signs were visible for the most part.
- c. Several city parks in good condition. Some curbs were breaking down. Overall seemed to be plenty of parking.

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

- a. Very well greeted and all personnel were friendly and happy.
- b. The ladies and gentleman at City Hall were very welcoming. They shared a great deal of information about the city with us. They are very proud of their community.
- c. City Hall was very welcoming with lots of info available. Very nice building with neat features.

Police/fire protection:

- a. Did not find and no signage. No police were sighted during the six hours we were in town.
- b. We didn't see a single police car or law enforcement officer. I didn't even see the police department or fire department buildings.
- c. Not readily visible.

Library:

- a. Great impression from the outside. A few small parks and the walking trail will be nice when they are finished. Maybe maintain mowing around walking trail but maybe that's because they are working on the walking trail.
- b. This was off the main street area. It looked inviting and of adequate size. Sadly, we did not have time to go inside. I don't remember seeing a sign for it, again we happened upon it while looking for other businesses.
- c. Older building with outdoor seating available for reading and relaxing.

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

- a. Noticed a few parks, walking trail will be nice when they are finished.
- b. There were several small parks that had a variety of equipment. We noticed the school sports complex as well as what we thought must be the rec ball fields. They all looked well cared for. The walking path is being cemented and looks great.
- c. Several ball fields apart from the school. City pool with playground adjacent. Playground area was well mowed but did not seem to have been trimmed with a weed-eater in a while. Walking path was long and appeared well lighted.

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. NA
- b. I didn't see anything that made me think they are famous for an attraction, event, or person.
- c. Doric Theatre: WOW any town would consider this an asset. Cimarron Grasslands with a headquarters building on the main highway

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

- a. The fair was great advertisement downtown.
- b. The fair was well advertised on the uptown windows. That was great!
- c. The fair was on that week and they had handwritten items in the store windows advertising meals, activities and events of the week.

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. The museum was closed while we were in town.
- b. I did see the historical society museum and grasslands center on our second drive on the highway south of town. Unfortunately, the museum was closed. I hoped to visit. Both have the potential to attract visitors. They weren't as well marked as maybe they could be, but I knew to look for them because of the websites. Elkhart also hosts a nice golf course and RV park.
- c. Cimarron National Grassland

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 was a nice place to visit to know of info in town.
- b. I didn't notice that the Chamber booth was in the Epic Touch building; the ladies at the city office told us. Otherwise I did not notice a visitors' center. City Hall was very noticeable due to its unique structure. City Hall and the bank we visited both had community events posted.
- c. Chamber was a bit hidden inside the Epic Touch business. Did not realize it was there until I was inside.

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

- a. The Higher Grounds was an exceptional place to eat. The movie theatre was closed but the cleaning lady welcomed us inside and showed us around. Every business recommended to come back and enjoy the movie theatre!
- b. I would love to attend the theatre! I would also visit the county museum.
- c. Doric Theatre.

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. 70/30 housing was well kept. Every single person we ran into or went into any business literally opened doors with smiles and asked what we needed help with.
- b. Elkhart seemed to take a lot of pride in their community and schools. The main street was clean and there were a variety of stores open for business. They have a nice civic center to host events.
- c. Very friendly people. Several cornerstone pieces, Theatre, Grasslands, Museum, Civic Center and golf course. I had been to Elkhart on numerous school activities and can say I was very impressed upon a closer look.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. The landscaping/mowing coming into town and along the railroad tracks had lots of weeds. The entrance sign on the east side was overgrown with weeds and trees.
- b. For me, the biggest obstacle is location. It seems to be quite a distance from any larger cities. I think with all small communities, retail businesses struggle to provide their customers with all the necessities at a competitive cost.
- c. With the long highway frontage there is a lot to keep looking nice. The primary gas station that is visible to the public needs a serious facelift. It takes away significantly from the other nice features that surround it.

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

- a. The downtown was so quiet and almost all the buildings downtown were kept up. The Higher Grounds had amazing food! Every single person greeted us with a smile and made me feel very welcomed as I was a part of their community. The secretary at the downtown school office was so kind. So many great things within this community that I wish I could bring back to my hometown!!!
- b. I will for sure remember the friendly people and warm welcomes. I will also remember the theater, thanks to the cleaning lady. I will probably remember all the benches along the walking path as well. Mostly, I will remember the friendly people.
- c. That there was visible evidence of improvements throughout town including new bathrooms at the fairgrounds, new sidewalks in the park. A community striving to improve.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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, Gregg Hadley, Director.