First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Ellis Date(s) Visited: February 10, 2016

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?

*There was some info that was helpful, but we felt that it lacked some helpful resources (any healthcare services/list of businesses, amenities). There were some Facebook pages with helpful info and good content, however, non-Facebook users cannot view much. The main website had backgrounds on the specific pages that made reading info difficult.*

1. 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.)

*We felt like people were friendly (smile/waving) and welcoming. Liked the welcome signs by the interstate, but we felt like signs with directions/attractions were small or nonexistent (ex. Never saw any sign for pool). We liked the brick main street charm, and really liked the memorial park downtown. We felt the orange street signs were very difficult to read. We wondered if the signs were reflective at night.*

*There was a standard point of interest sign for the museums on I-70. As we exited the interstate, there was a nice welcome sign, and an informational sign (included some event dates & office location) sponsored by the Alliance (included Chamber, Economic Development, and Tourism). We could see traces of the sunflowers that were painted on the main street intersections downtown.*

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?)

*Some of the downtown buildings were well maintained and attractive, others needed some love and a coat of paint. About 50/50. There were sturdy benches and trash cans. Parking was street parking. Sidewalks seemed well maintained. There seemed to be some street signs missing, but there were directional signs for museum, post office, etc.*

*Hardware/paint, auto parts, thrift store, dress shop, salon, flower shop, clinic, phone company, nurse staffing, banks, grocery store, legal services, furniture/antique shop, school district office. We felt like there was a good variety of businesses with good quality merchandise.*

*We were greeted at the flower shop but felt like we were inconveniencing the clerk. She welcomed a local lady very warmly while we were there. Other businesses greeted and asked if we needed help.*

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?

 *Benches, trash cans, no obvious restrooms or drinking fountains.*

 *Parking was no problem and was convenient for multiple businesses.*

 *There was a memorial and park downtown which was nice.*

1. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

*There is a Love’s Store and gas station by I-70 which is clean and well-maintained. The staff was friendly.*

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

*There is a small industrial area by the interstate, but no officially labeled area. Seemed like there was room to expand, but no obvious place.*

5. Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals, emergency medical services, and facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other health care providers.

*We felt there was a huge lack of information on healthcare on the website. We did find after driving around town that there is a dentist office and a healthcare clinic which is about one year old and staffed by the WaKeeney doctor. There is an EMS station. Everything else is located in Hays.*

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

*There is a nursing home/assisted living facility. It appears to be good quality and well-maintained.*

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.)

*We felt there was a nice mix of housing: low income (housing authority), moderate, and new homes. We didn’t see much in the way of for sale or rental signs.*

*The community has very obvious sections of older un-kept homes which need attention.*

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

*Not much in the way of rentals, that was obvious. We also didn’t find any list of rental owners on the website.*

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?

 *St. Mary’s Catholic Grade School*

 *Public School – all levels (Pre K – HS)*

*They seem to be adequate size and well-kept. We did not find any Head Start type facility.*

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

*We did not stop at the District Office and did not see much about the schools at the city office. The school’s website is nice and includes good info.*

1. Childcare

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

*We did not find any info on childcare.*

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?

*We noted at least 4 churches: Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran and Catholic. The churches seemed in good condition and were good sized. There were posters for church sponsored youth events around town and visited with community members who were organizing a fundraiser for another church and school.*

1. Civic

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

*We noted Knights of Columbus, VFW, Bukovina Society and rotary. Their Alliance included Tourism, Economic Development and the Chamber which we assumed were all non-profit. Ellis Rec Commission was also easily recognizable. We saw a sign for Rotary/AARP Nutrition Center and wondered if it was a food bank type thing? The rec commission was also sponsoring events.*

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?

*Especially in the residential areas, sidewalks were lacking and inconsistent. The streets were well maintained and the street crews were out working too. Lighting was adequate, and many areas had well maintained landscapes/yards. The orange street signs were very difficult to read. The few signs, not street signs, were small and not obvious. Did not observe land use planning.*

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

*The staff was friendly and helpful; it took a few moments for them to find the information we were looking for, but they were great. We got lots of info and felt welcome.*

Police/fire protection:

*The police station is located with the city offices. We saw at least two officers on patrol. The fire station was also with the city office, and is volunteer based. It appeared that they have 3 – 5 vehicles.*

Library:

*The library is downtown and appears to be well maintained. There were posters for events being held at the library around town.*

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

*There were several nice parks, ball diamonds, a pool, walking trails, playgrounds, disc golf course, golf course/country club. There were public restrooms at the parks and the parks were equipped with nice picnic tables. Volleyball pit also at one of the parks. The signage for the parks was poor.*

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?

*Ellis is home to the Railroad Museum and it is a theme throughout town. No slogan was obvious. The museum of course, but several displays throughout town also had a railroad theme. There was a mini train near one of the parks.*

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

*There were two events on the “Welcome” sign: garage sales & River Fest. The River Fest sounded like an interesting event, but there wasn’t any other info. Unfortunately due to a family emergency, the Chamber/Alliance Office was closed. We feel like we could have gathered more info there.*

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

 *The Walter Chrysler Boyhood Home/Museum, Railway Museum, Cemetery Bell Tower.*

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.

*Yes, the office is downtown and had a substantial sign. As stated, due to a family emergency the office was closed.*

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

*There are three restaurants, but probably not that would bring us back. There is a shop called “Paint the Canvas” which fascinated us and could be a reason to return. The Railway Museum was closed and would have been of interest.*

1. Wrap-up

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

*Friendly, small town feel; good mix of business/service offerings; family friendly (parks, school options, sports facilities, etc.); recycling facilities; housing mix*

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

 *Lack of visible/easily noticeable signage for amenities/navigation of town.*

*Some unkempt/rundown properties – particularly one on Main Street, high traffic streets (both businesses and residential).*

*Location: Certainly not a fault, but a difficulty as far as securing businesses & amenities when so close to a larger town. We felt that Hays being so near, keeping current businesses and attracting new businesses would be extremely difficult. It makes the small number of restaurants, specific retail businesses very understandable.*

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

*Unfortunately, the orange street signs are going to stick with me. However, the nice people and friendly, small town feel, along with the museums and attractions will bring me back to Ellis again in the future.*

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