First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: FLORENCE Date(s) Visited: a) 2-16-17 (Thurs)

 b) 3-2-17 (Thurs)

 c) 3-2-17 (Thurs)

 d) 2-16-17 (Thurs)

**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. Easy to find online. Official city website was the first result on Google, Yahoo, Bing and AOL. City map and business directory were very useful in planning the trip…. However once we got to Florence, we found that the website was outdated. Several of the highlighted businesses were closed (Auntie Em’s, Mercantile, Antique Store), and the Flint Hills Bakery and Market was not on the website’s list.
2. I printed all the information off I could find about the City of Florence, Kansas before our visit. Information was easy to find, eatery page needs to be updated. The economic Development page lists the board members who advise the Director of Economic Development, but does not give this person’s name nor how to contact local board members.
3. No Answer (NA)
4. There was a website for the town, and it was pretty easy to find and use. The list of businesses was not updated, so we had trouble finding places that were listed, or they were no longer open. The map was a useful tool, but once again was not updated.
5. **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.)**
6. Wide Main Street, some brick streets. Town has a couple of levels with some streets and a park on a hill closer to Hwy 77. Multiple churches, a tree farm near the river – appears to be walnut, and some nice looking stone houses in and near town. A very pretty 2 ½ - 3 story house on Doyle & 5th Streets caught our eye. From the west coming into town on Hwy 50, signs welcoming us to Florence, with a stone marker near the round-about. There was one sign on Hwy 50 that had a lot of information on it, but it was not able to be read at the posted speed limit. It might be beneficial to move that sign closer to town where people are driving slower coming to the round-about? We didn’t see Florence signs coming from the east on Hwy 50 into town, other than the sign for the cemetery. We first entered town from the west on Hwy 50 and ended up on a windy road on a hill which was near a park, then went down through neighborhoods, ultimately ending up at a tree farm near a damaged bridge over the Cottonwood River. This is when we went over the bridge, looped around back onto 50 and looked at the entrance to town from that direction.
7. Granted if this had been later in the spring when everything was green and the sun was shining I might have had a better first impression. Driving in from the second entrance into town I just got a sense of a town that needed some help. There were some really nice places and then some not so nice. Saw lots of abandoned businesses on Main Street, a nursing home in the south part of town and the old school that detracted from this town and its rich history. Saw homes where there porches were overflowing with “stuff.”
First entrance- Turned onto it and took a photo of the sign. Both signs were well-kept. I probably wouldn’t have read the signs if that had not been one of my questions. Later found out that the Mercantile closed.
The 2nd entrance into Florence was not very appealing as we drove by the closed run-down motel. We also drove by the restaurant and filling station where there were empty buildings also. That would be the view from the highway and not entice someone to stop.
The 3rd entrance was by Robinson’s Trucks, one of the major employers in the town. My husband would have been enticed to check this business out.
Traffic zipped along this highway continuously. There was a sign advertising the Harvey House along this stretch, but weather had done a number on it making it hard to read.
8. We noticed many homes were in disrepair. It would seem that community pride could be difficult to maintain. Was not sure which road to take to get to downtown when we arrived. Noticed the signage only when leaving the city. Did not notice any of the downtown buildings from the highway, so were a bit unsure where to go.
9. We noticed a very large welcome sign coming into town on the highway. It was hard to read everything on the sign, even for the passenger. We were not sure about a sign coming from the south of town, but did finally see one. We thought that most people will assume that the town may be smaller than it is, simply by the layout along the highway. We noticed the unique older buildings right away. There seem to be quite a few limestone buildings all built around the same time frame. The town appears larger (once you are going down the hill) than the population count suggests. After driving around to try to go all the way through town, we found the Florence Tree Farm. This was very interesting to us. We were intrigued and wanted to know more about the project. We also found the cemetery, and it was neat! Historical, well-maintained, and informative. I appreciated the gazebo with the documented “residents.” This could be advertised more.

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. The downtown buildings have some great architecture, it looked like many were unused. There was a nice park with a covered area and a mural of an eagle and flag. Walking around town, there were some sidewalks that were in bad shape. Coming into town as an outsider, it wasn’t initially known if businesses were in these areas, though someone from town might know that there wouldn’t have been a reason to walk where we were. The customer service was helpful and friendly and we learned a bit more about the town after visiting the Flint Hills Bakery and Market. We were greeted once we made our way to the back of the store.
2. Looking south the town seemed deserted, sparse traffic or cars parked on Main Street. Did like the brick Main Street, gave the town a sense of history. Florence Farmer’s Market: Absolutely loved this market with library shelves stocked with canned goods, homemade gifts to buy as well as homemade bakery items to take home. I bought some of the homemade kolaches to take home. Yummy! I would stop here again. We ate lunch here and I was very pleased with the selection offered. Service was outstanding and it was evident that the two women who worked behind the counter loved their job. We encountered two acts of honesty involving our purses in this store. We originally sat at a big table close to the counter waiting on our order. I had visited with this gentleman about the town. He told me he lived at the Lake but liked to come eat here. When I told him where I was from he told me his great uncle had lived in Arlington and he visited him growing up. He said the great flood had a big impact on this town and that it just never fully recovered. Lots of cheap buildings to buy he told me. When our food came we moved around the corner so we could sit across from the opera staircase and admire this piece of history. Before long, here he came with my friend’s purse that she had left at the table. Then here came the server with my purse. Small town acts of kindness.
The Market was the only business we visited on our trip. However we would of visited the greenhouse, but it had not opened for business yet. I don’t know if this counts as a business, but we did tour the city Water Plant and they do sell water to the city. Tyler, the city’s water man, originally lived in Arlington. As we are driving down Main Street I see this pick-up with a familiar face in the driver’s seat. I wave! As we are eating lunch, I get a phone call from Tyler asking if we would like a tour of the water plant. Of course we said yes. He started from the very beginning, as we followed him south of town to view the spring. A beautiful secluded spot that we never would have seen had it not been for Tyler’s phone call. We did see the water town in town with the saying “Our City Water is 99.6% Pure Spring Water.” From the spring we traveled into town to see the water house where the spring water is piped to. Tyler shows us one of the filters used here.
3. The downtown business area did not appear to be very busy. It was easy to find City Hall. We were greeted warmly at City Hall and the clerk was so willing to help us. The buildings downtown seemed to be in ill repair. The business called The Bakery was such an attractive building and clearly the highlight of Main Street. It served as restaurant, grocery store and gift store.
4. The main street is very wide, and seems pretty long as well. There is a lot of room to expand and grow here. There were quite a few empty or closed buildings, making it seems a little forgotten. The buildings are beautiful and unique, and the businesses that are open are well-kept. We visited everything that seemed open on Main Street. The Flint Hills Market and Bakery certainly stands out. The quality of the merchandise is incredibly high, and very well displayed. We had concern about enough community support for the types of goods there. I enjoyed all of my purchases there, if I were to live nearby, I would love to frequent that store, but would be somewhat limited financially. The City Office looked like it had recently moved and was still getting settled into a new location. There was a lack of Florence-specific information or events there- mostly nearby communities. Once someone came back to the City Office (no one was there when we first arrived) they were VERY helpful. The Bakery also had really great service, and answered questions we had about the town. No one greeted us when we first arrived at either place.

**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. There were some benches along Main Street in front of some buildings. There was water and electricity at the veteran’s park. We noticed some large cement cowboy boots, indoors, and outside in front of buildings. The buildings that were vacant, or at least not used for business, had some items on display in the windows as a sort of decoration, so it was nice to see that while we walked along. Parking was not a problem. Other than some areas of the sidewalk being broken, we found it very easy to walk all over downtown from where we parked at the post office and library. The veteran’s park was especially well landscaped and has a great area for events or just walking. There were also some wooden flower boxes placed in different areas of downtown along the sidewalks.
2. I only viewed these at the city building where we stopped first. Benches would have been available in the four city parks. Not sure about the rest rooms at the parks as we did not get out and walk around.
3. There were several nice gazebos in town, but did not know if there were any public restrooms that were open other than at City Hall. We had no problem parking anywhere. There was no traffic on Main Street. Did not notice any landscaping efforts.
4. There were nice benches available at park on Main, no bathrooms. There were water pumps in various places around town that advertised the spring water- could have signs updated. The bathroom I checked at a park on the north side of town did not have open bathrooms, so I’m not sure there were any public restrooms.

1. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

1. The Town and Country Restaurant and the convenience store were the other areas we accessed. They were easy to access, and close to the highway which is good for drawing in travelers. We also found a small, attractive home being used as a hair dresser’s salon.
2. The Mercantile—knocked on the door and the owner let us look around. She showed us the eating area in the back of the building. Not sure why these businesses closed. Must have community support to survive in our small communities. When I was in the Market and Bakery did not see any buying except in the deli. People have to support their local businesses if they want to see them succeed.
3. Did not notice any other retail areas other than the very few on main street.
4. There were not many “other” retail spaces that we found other than on Main. There was the restaurant and the gas station on the north end of town. They were very easy to access and as attractive as a normal highway stop. Clean and well-maintained.

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

1. There were two areas we saw that might be good for manufacturers to locate. One was near Hwy 50 and the International truck dealer/mechanic. The other was near the railroad tracks in the area of the old train station and grain elevator.
2. Did not see a designated area.
3. Florence has good highway exposure to help attract any type of manufacturing.
4. There seemed to be an area on the west (I think I remember correctly) side of town that had some industrial businesses, and there seemed to be space to expand to the south, depending on owners’ wiliness to sell. There seems to be a great potential for trucking industry expansion.

5. Health Care Services

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

1. The only healthcare related service we found was the EMS garage downtown.
2. Florence does have a volunteer ambulance service. Hospitals are located 30 minutes away in Newton, El Dorado, or 50 minutes away from Emporia and Wichita. Did not talk to anyone other than the city clerk on this.
3. Am not aware of health care services within the city limits of Florence.
4. There was clearly an EMS station with an ambulance. I’m not sure where the nearest hospital is. If I were injured there, I would need to ask someone where to go.

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

1. None available that we saw.
2. No Answer
3. NA
4. There was not any immediate care, health departments, or small practices in town. I did not see any sign of optometrists, dentists, or other health professionals.

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

1. None currently. There was one 10-15 years ago that the city issued bonds to build, but it closed and was not re-opened. It sounds like it was full at the time and a much needed service, as well as a large employer for the community
2. The only one we saw was empty and in disrepair. City clerk said had one but it closed.
3. There was an abandoned care facility that was surrounded by growing weed trees.
4. No mental healthcare or care for aging populations, except the apartments near the ball fields, these seem to help serve a need left by the sunshine meadows home when it closed. We talked to residents about the facility, and it seems like a sad thing to lose, as well as a potential asset if used soon.

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. There is a mix of really nice houses – many older stone, 2+ story, and some more modern – and some houses that appear to be abandoned, or just in need of repair or landscaping. I couldn’t say there was one specific area of town that could be designated a good or bad area for housing stock – because it did seem mixed throughout. I think if some of these houses were for sale, it would be a wide range of appeal to different income levels. Some cleanup, paint days, even exploration of claiming and bulldozing abandoned properties would be a challenge, but something to possibly be considered. In discussions with residents, we were asked if we were planning on moving to Florence, and that those we spoke to hoped so, which is very nice. A friendly, welcoming group of citizens. We were told there were a lot of houses for sale, but not many for rent. We did find 2 houses for sale with signs in town, and looking online at Zillow, we found one more. Is it possible that some houses are for sale but not officially on the market? Maybe if you wanted to live there, more options would be made available once interest was shown?
2. Did not see any new houses being built in the town. Saw some brick homes, but mostly wood structures. Lots of older homes in the town. Did not find out what the average rent paid was. Saw one 4-Sale home sign and one rent sign as I drove around. The homes along the brick wall on south-east side of town were where I would want to live. Challenges would be getting home owners to either improve their properties or tear them down.
3. NA
4. While driving around town, we only saw two homes for sale advertised, and one for rent. We found a few more listed online. When we asked about availability at City Office, we were told there were “lots” of options. We did notice many houses that appeared empty. Perhaps better clarification and advertising as to which ones are available for sale or rent. There were lower class options, some lower middle class, and not any upper-class choices that we saw. There were not easily identifiable neighborhoods, and there were not any that seemed particularly higher class than others. There were not any large houses available that we could see.

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

1. We found one rental property by noticing the sign. There were no other rentals we could find online. We noticed some brick homes close together in the north part of town, and after stopping by the library, found out those were rentals for seniors and income-based residents. We were told they were fairly popular and always seemed to be full. It sounds like a nice place to live.
2. One of the people I talked to said they had considered living in the rentals on the east side of town before deciding to rent in the town of Marion. Thought they were nice and well kept. City clerk said there was a waiting list for low income housing.
3. There was an active apartment complex in town. If an active new home development exists, we did not see it.
4. We only saw one place advertised for rent.

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. Florence once had active schools, but now students go to Marion. The former gymnasium for the high school is used by the community for different functions. The old high school is fenced off with a caved in roof. It doesn’t seem repairable. If cleared, it might make a nice lot for a business or some homes.
2. No schools in Florence for many years. Kids are bused to Marion, which is 9 miles away. Brochure listed an after-school youth activity sponsored by the Methodist and Christian churches. I commend the churches for initiating this program. Just hope that it is still happening.
3. There are no schools in Florence.
4. No school in town, students are bussed to Marion. There may be an after school program available, and that would be helpful. We didn’t see any evidence of Headstart, preschool programs, or other early education centers. I would assume those are all in Marion or other neighboring towns. This would make early education challenging.

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

1. Nothing we saw.
2. Prior to our visit I was not aware of where students attended and did not look on the internet for neighboring schools.
3. NA
4. No, but we did see one athletic calendar in the restaurant on the north end of town.
5. Childcare

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

1. None we could see
2. No licensed childcare services provided. However the City Clerk stated there are baby sitters in the area but aren’t licensed.
3. I do not know if there is childcare in Florence. I do not think so.
4. There did not seem to be any available, so I would assume the inconvenience of location would make it more costly.
5. 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. There were 3 churches in town: Methodist, Christian, and Catholic. The church buildings and grounds were very well maintained. We did not notice any association between the churches and any community projects, services, or events, though there was a Lenten Study listed in the Crossroads newsletter by the Methodist church.
2. Saw all 3 churches- Methodist, Christian and Catholic Church. Nothing going on during the day we visited. The only evidence of a church sponsored community service was in a brochure where it stated there was an after school program sponsored by two of the churches.
3. There are three churches in the community. They were attractive facilities.
4. I think I remember three churches. We did not walk up to them, but also did not see any flyers or ads around town showing community involvement. After talking to the librarian, we learned about many programs that the churches are doing for the community. Word of mouth seems to be the primary way to advertise local events, programs, and services.
5. Civic

Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community and any evidence of civic activities.

1. We saw that there is a Masonic Lodge in town. There were some Lions Club pamphlets in the city building, but we couldn’t tell if there was a club in town. PRIDE is mentioned in a community newsletter, but we didn’t see any Kansas PRIDE community signs in town – at the entrances or otherwise. The Masonic Lodge seemed to have some activity as we drove through town. We saw a community bulletin board that had commodities delivery scheduled at the Masonic building. There were also some benches donated by Florence Pride, and PRIDE is listed in the community newsletter as having fertilizer available for people buying plants.
2. Brochure listed all the organizations available—an alumni association, American Legion, 4-H Club, Boys Scouts, Girl Scouts, Chamber of Commerce, Advance Lodge 114, Florence Labor Day Committee, Kids Club, PRIDE organizations. This is a lot of organizations for a town of only 500. One of the citizens of Florence we talked to said organizations and clubs were the core of their community, but it was hard to get people to work together. It was the same people serving on every committee.
PRIDE committee and Historical Society Committee keep the Harvey House going. The City Clerk made a phone call and we were able to tour the historical Harvey House. Would like to comment how accommodating the people in Florence were. Noted that on their brochure there was “for dinner reservations call & For Museum tour call,” but there isn’t a number. Nor did we see a number on their sign out front. If we had visited on the weekend the city office wouldn’t have been open and we wouldn’t have gotten to tour the famous Harvey House.
Saw that they have a Labor Day celebration every year. Saw brochure posted in window of downtown building but it was for 2016. City Clerk said the 2017 hadn’t come out yet. Sounded like a fun event to attend. Wondered how many are on this committee and is it hard to get people to commit every year.
3. There appear to be several different civic organizations working within the city. They do not all seem to work together. IN a community this size, it seems to defeat their purpose to have so many. Perhaps one civic group working for a common cause would be a lot more beneficial. Do any of the community activities combine to benefit the downtown? Does the City of Florence/Civic organizations make every effort to hold any and all events in the downtown area, so the merchants could benefit from the extra business that might happen if all events were held downtown?
4. There was a Masonic Temple and Lions Club (I think) and a Historical Society and Labor Day Committee. I think there were one or two more. There seemed to be quite a few different civic engagement choices. I don’t know what involvement numbers are like, but am impressed with the number of options.
5. **Public Infrastructure**

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

1. There were several brick streets, which gives the town some character. There were some restrooms at Grandview Park, but they were locked, obviously for the winter and preventing pipe freezing. There is a nice community garden near the Harvey House Museum which had some activity as we were there. No specific theme to street signs, lighting, or landscaping in other areas of town that we noticed.
2. Okay—parks nicely landscaped, sidewalks could be better.
3. Observation of the downtown appears at face value to be not an area of pride for the Florence community. The historic buildings are so unique. Any efforts to restore them and maintain them would seem to be good for the community. What a wonderful resource have in your buildings. It appears that restoration of these community buildings would go a long way in promoting your town. What an excellent resource you have if exploited. These buildings were simply fascinating—what we saw.
4. I cannot comment on lighting, as we were there in the morning and afternoon. The sidewalks near open businesses seemed to be in good shape, but once you walked very far they were rough. The street signs were fine. We found ourselves driving into dead ends and residential drives several times thinking we were on a street. Since the streets are all wide, it was harder to see street signs all the way over on the side. Landscaping looked good in areas where it was done. There was a lack of consistent sidewalks in residential areas.

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

1. Town hall was a nice building – easy to access on Main Street. Plenty of information about regional attractions, some local newspapers available to read, a large map of the city, more cement boots inside. The clerk was very friendly and was able to answer all of our questions about the town. There was a newsletter called “Crossroads” available in the library and town hall. The newsletter spoke about chamber news, an annual pancake feed, commodities delivery, church activities, and Labor Day planning.
2. Warmly and Enthusiastically. I had met the city clerk, Janet Robinson, when she visited Arlington. She answered all our questions about her town that we could think of at the time. As I worked on this report there are several questions that I wished I would have asked. She was very accommodating, arranging a visit to the Harvey House for us and to the Mercantile.
We picked up the Welcome to Florence, KS Brochure which is very nicely done and illustrated. Very nice city hall building, very inviting. Liked looking at the displayed photos.
3. Our reception at City Hall was excellent. We were greeted with open information to our questions and noticed the many professional brochures about the city.
4. We were received very well once the people returned. While waiting, we looked around at signs, ads and brochures. There was mostly information about what is happening in nearby towns, and ads for businesses outside town as well. The most information about the town was available through the people at City Office.

**Police/fire protection:**

1. There is a police station and it is located in the same complex as the town hall. There was a fire department near the library and veteran’s park.
2. Police and fire station were housed on Main Street. Did not visit either.
3. We did notice a police station.
4. They have some. It is hard to tell much more beyond that.

**Library:**

1. The library is at the opposite end of Main Street from the town hall. It is a very nice facility with computers, internet access, a good selection of books and has a rotating collection from the North Central Kansas Libraries book truck. The library has an active book club, will be installing a kitchen soon, and a store to sell items to fund the library. There is also a very tiny museum room in the library and some history of the building when it was a bank.
2. This was our last stop- I think she was expecting us and gave us a guided tour of the library. Nice library but was disappointed no one was using it. Librarian showed us the kitchen they are adding, the old bank vault and the reading area. She said they have a book club for adults that meets once a month, why not meet once a week to get more people in. Offer programs on researching genealogy since the library pamphlet emphasis is preserving the past to enjoy the future. I also saw the word “safe” used several times in this pamphlet and wondered if this was a big concern for families in the area. I just wanted to see a busy library.
3. We were in town long enough to visit the library. We were impressed with the building that is being done in the library. A nice kitchen and meeting room. Observed a children’s area, but do not know how many children attend the library.
4. The library turned out to be worth the wait for it to open. We were surprised about the short number of hours. It was neat to see the progress that has been made in that historic building. I liked the reading room and the old bank vault with the historic artifacts. The layout is unique for a library, and while it could be hard for a librarian to feel available and connected to patrons, it is interesting and provides a unique experience. The librarian also provided great information about the town and was pleasant to talk to.

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

1. There is a disc golf course at the old football field, a city pool, baseball diamonds, veteran’s park, Moses Shane Park, Grandview Park, and Unity Park. City crews were clearing away some branches and also painting playground equipment at Grandview Park when we were there. The old school gymnasium is also available for use.
2. Because it was a school day when we visited and it was a little cool, did not see anyone utilizing the well-maintained city parks. According to the pamphlet the city owns four. Loved the mural on the building downtown and the park facility nearby.
3. NA
4. While we were visiting, a park was getting a fresh coat of paint and brush was being cleared. There seems to be some pride in the local parks. I was impressed with how many different playground equipment installations there were throughout the town. I would bring my children to play at the playgrounds we visited. We noticed a small ballfield, and even a disc golf course. I think it was a creative way to use the old football field. It could be developed further.
5. 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. The community is known for the Harvey House Museum.
2. Definitely the Historic Harvey House, their Labor Day Celebration and now the Market. Slogan would be Crossroads of the Nation and on the web page it was “Nestled in a Valley of Opportunity.”
3. We noticed the signage and apparent signature “fame” advertised for the Harvey House. We found the House, but it was closed. There was not a sign posted for hours it was open or a phone number to call. The City Clerk did call and we had an EXCELLENT tour of the Harvey House.
4. There were several things that the town seems to take pride in and promote. One is the water source, another is the Harvey House. The slogan said something about the Flint Hills I believe. The event of the year seems to be the Labor Day weekend festivities. All of these things are very interesting and worth investing in and advertising year-round.

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

1. The Harvey House Museum has events from time to time, and can be booked for events by groups of 12-24. There is an annual pancake feed to benefit the fire department, and a Labor Day celebration. We were told of market days, and the farmer’s market, and that sometimes the Moses Shane Park area between the highways is used for such things.
2. The only one I could think of would be the Labor Day celebration.
3. We saw a lot of advertising for the Labor Day event. Hopefully that event is held downtown and the whole community gathers with the merchants. Because of a local Arlington connection, we had an excellent tour of your well-advertised natural springs. We were even treated to seeing a section of the graveyard where victims of cholera were buried.
4. The Labor Day festival looked fun for anyone, I want to go!

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

1. The Cottonwood River goes through here, and at the edge of town is a bridge and a tree farm at the river. With a little planning and dirt moving, access to the Cottonwood River could be made at this bridge/tree farm area, giving people a chance to fish, canoe, or picnic in the area. No one we spoke with seemed to know the story about the tree farm, but that might be an interesting attraction. There are many signs for it, so it’s a curiosity at least. The bridge over the Cottonwood River at the tree farm could use some repair, but would be a great walking area since it’s not a high traffic spot. With the Harvey House Museum, the town has a major railroad history it could build upon, especially if the train station could be renovated and opened for events or as a museum.

This wouldn’t necessarily be a “draw” to the community, but a way the community could use its resources to gain funding, or even create some jobs – the city is promoting 99.96% pure water on signs throughout town. Bottled water is a major market. Has there been any interest in seeking out a company to bottle the water? Conway Springs, KS years ago had pure spring water, bottled, and sold it nationwide until nitrates affected the source.

1. The spring—however I could see why you wouldn’t want a lot of people in this area polluting the water source.
2. NA
3. The water tower and spring-fed water source is interesting. The Florence Tree Farm seemed interesting as well, and left me wondering.

**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. Other than the town hall, not really.
2. Did not observe any evidence of this.
3. NA
4. I think the City Office serves that purpose. A community center and event rental in the old train station would be awesome! There was not signage that seemed directed at visitors, except along the highway and at the water pumps. We did notice the neat painted boots around town- fun idea that could be encouraged some more.

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

1. The food was good at the Town and Country Restaurant. I would come back to visit the Flint Hills Bakery and Market to try out the deli for lunch, and see if there were any new items for the home or local food products. I would also come back to the Harvey House Museum, and have it down as an option for hosting maybe a future dinner with friends. I’d love to see the Harvey House Museum open on a regular basis, even if it’s just a couple days a week, instead of by appointment only.
2. Possibly the Harvey House with my daughter. I would like to eat at the Market again. Have driven that road many times to Emporia, but never once have I driven thru your town. Now I just might.
3. Would I go back to Florence? Because we had such an interesting and informative tour, I would certainly go back. I would like to bring people back for a meal at the Harvey House or at the Bakery. I would love to walk up those stairs at the old Opera House and peek in. I would hope there is a historian for the community. Those historic buildings deserve to have their story told.
4. The Flint Hills Market and Bakery was really neat, and I was interested in a meal at the Harvey House. I am more likely to shop at the Bakery and get gas at the convenience store than other places. It would be neat to come to the Labor Day celebration
5. Wrap-up

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

1. The Harvey House Museum, the community garden, the Flint Hills Bakery and Market, the parks, the cemetery had some great information about the town’s history – that was interesting to read. The veteran’s park was also a very nice addition to downtown. It’s nice to see a pool and baseball diamonds in a community this size. There were also some very beautiful homes in town, and you could tell that the owners care about the community. The Crossroads newsletter is a good resource for residents and visitors alike. Is it online somewhere?
2. Friendliness & Commitment of some of the citizens who want to make this a better place to live.
3. Our tour was excellent.
4. There are neat old buildings, dedicated people, and room to bring in new people and grow.

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

1. Housing and jobs. While there are some nice homes, there are quite a few that are in need of repair, or removal if abandoned, and there is a lack of housing on the market if people are looking to move to town. Main Street is mostly vacant. Being on 2 highways, more stores on Main might be a good pull for travelers passing through and tourists, and it would be a good source of jobs. I think since people travel to surrounding communities for work now, those looking to live in the area might be attracted to those communities first due to being closer to goods, services, job location, and available housing. The city website has a lot of information, but it’s not current. The Flint Hills Bakery and Market is a great attraction, but the community would really benefit from a grocery store that sold brand name and store brand foods and products or from the Market carrying more of this type of item.
2. **Getting younger people more involved** in their community because the older residents are tired and burned out.  **A City Wide Clean-Up Day.** City Council needs to get residents to clean up their property. Abandoned buildings and houses need to be cleaned up. This attributes to the bleakness of the town that I first observed when I did my 5-minute assessment. **Marketing your assets:** the Hillcrest Cemetery (we did get the tour of this on our way back from the spring), the Harvey House- we have a page on Facebook titled Arlington Community Center and we also created an events page for our Craft Fair. A great way to get the word out about what is happening in your area. Getting all those vehicles traveling highway 50 to want to stop at the market. Good luck!
3. You seem to have a lot of city employees. That has to be expensive for your city budget. We were surprised that you have your own trash service instead of contracting with an established trash service. Perhaps there is not another available service close by. Your community is like so many others, it would be nice to have a younger generation step up to take pride in their community, be active in the administration and participate in all aspects of building community pride. But how do you do that? Fortunate are the communities that have the younger generation involved.
4. A minor challenge may be a lack of community events and opportunities to connect. Also, the website and advertising being up to date. A major challenge I see is that there is not a “bad neighborhood” where all the junk is piled and empty houses are, they are spread evenly across the town, making it all appear less valuable than it is. There are some really neat places and buildings, but it can be hard to notice them when the place next door looks vacant. On the bright side, these places would really shine by removing the scattered sore spots.

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

1. I love history, so I’ll definitely remember the cemetery, the old storefronts on Main Street, and the Harvey House Museum. We were lucky to be in town the same day the museum was preparing a dinner for a group. Someone heard we were in town and encouraged us to come and visit at 3:30 PM, which we did, and we got a great tour and explanation of everything in the museum, and the town of Florence itself. Great, great asset to have. Our family usually takes a trip on Labor Day weekend, so I’m hoping to remember the Labor Day celebration in Florence when it comes time to plan our trip. It looks like a fun time!
2. The friendliness of the people I met. I felt like we had made a new friend as we visited with one of the residents. Would love to sit down with her over a cup of coffee in the future to see if any changes have been made.
3. NA
4. I will remember the neat buildings, the huge main street, the scattered junk (in a few places,) the Harvey House, Library, the falling-down school, and unique water tower. I will hopefully also remember the Labor Day celebration. 😊
Thanks for hosting me in your town- it was a really fun day for me- I hope this can be helpful and not discouraging. I enjoyed your town and want to see it doing its best. Good luck!

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