

First Impressions

Team Report Form



Community Visited: **Larned**

Date(s) Visited: 7/19/23
7/20/23
7/21/23 (2)
7/26/23 (2)
7/27/23

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?

- Visitors felt that information about the city, including the city website and social media, was easy to find in web searches.
- The city website was easy to navigate on phone and desktop computers.
- Chamber of Commerce and City websites were very impressive with coordinating designs.
- While most felt there was a lot of useful information, one user felt there could be more on the city website. Of note, the calendar on the city website had no apparent entries while the calendar on the Chamber site was full of entries.
- Positive comments about the community tab and links to things to do, though could be an extra click someone might not take.
- Other related sites found in searches included housing information from a real estate site, the county fair with dates but no location listed for those not familiar with the community, the library website, long term care facilities, and the health department, which one visitor felt took several steps to locate.

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

- Visitors did not see any welcome signs as they entered the city but did see signs pointing to areas when they got into town.
- Positive comments on hills, well-mowed yards, and how impressed they were with the cleanliness of the community, very few houses in need of repair with only one house with a pile of things in the yard.
- One comment was made about a lot of dead ends as they were trying to navigate around town while others indicated it was easy to get around.

- Looking at downtown while driving through, it appeared to be bustling with a lot of people and busy shops with cars parked outside. Planter boxes looked nice.
- Entering from the south, some commercial areas were noted, the road was rough after the bridge, some areas with weeds. Appeared to be a building that was torn down or needed to be torn down with parts of it on the east side of Broadway.
- Also observed were some industrial/commercial areas coming in from the northeast.
- One visitor noted they saw banners in the business district while driving through, but they didn't seem like they added anything to the area.

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

- The first structures you see coming from the south are grain elevators and some miscellaneous buildings. The elevators are in need of a fresh coat of paint to make the area look a little nicer.
- There were a lot of signs about attractions, but they were hard to follow because they were small. Passengers noticed them, but the drivers did not.
- Transition from industrial to residential and retail with some vacant buildings observed. There were a lot of beautiful buildings on Broadway, but many were empty, and one visitor wondered if there was a way to attract more businesses in that area or somehow fill the empty buildings by encouraging current businesses to move closer together.
- The train depot was noted.
- The Fort Larned sign was also noted, and it was recommended that it be painted.

3. Downtown Business Area Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

- Brick streets, roads were good and parking spots clearly marked, though one visitor noted that some parts of the streets and sidewalks in this area had some grass and weeds growing likely due to the street work that was observed.
- Street crews were working on what appeared to be accessible curbing, but the visitor later found out from business owners that it had to do with the fire department and that the city recently received a streetscaping grant, but one business owner didn't know a lot about what that entailed.
- Some cracked sidewalks, some missing pieces of concrete. Some weedy areas at corners.
- A lot of store fronts, not all had businesses in them. It was difficult to tell what buildings were open or had businesses in them while walking downtown because several signs were above the awnings so would have had to stand in the street to tell what was there.
- Flowers were again noted as a nice addition to the area, and it was observed that the Larned Garden Club was responsible for their upkeep.

- One wall appeared to be about to fall when entering the downtown area.
- There was a faded mural observed on one building.
- Many historical buildings and they looked to be in good repair.
- Some surprise at how many businesses were closed on a Friday.
- Some visitors observed and appreciated the music playing downtown.
- Some buildings like Senior Center, United Way, Wolff Construction could really look nice with some paint.

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

- Offices and a funeral home were observed.
- Insurance company, a thrift store, Subway, taco shop, Sonic, police department and gas station.
- A gift shop, agriculture related business, furniture store, Ace Hardware, scrapbook store, a clothing store.
- Edward Jones, a beauty salon, Chamber (nice handouts and bathroom), city offices (city gave out a welcome bag), and library.
- A lot of variety, though even with businesses present there were plenty of empty buildings that looked like a business might be there but wasn't.
- Antique store, flower shop, some flea market type businesses, and some healthcare related services.
- A store called "The Bin".
- Theater.
- The merchandise at the retail locations visited was described by multiple visitors as being excellent quality.

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

- Most businesses greeted visitors upon entry or very shortly after.
- Majority of the visitors felt everyone they encountered in the stores seemed very polite.
- Furniture store was very welcoming. The flea market store ladies were very welcoming.
- The Country Seasons Flower Shop was very hospitable and attentive and also provided some thoughtful insights into the community.
- The Chamber of Commerce was very excited to have visitors, discuss the community, and provide literature.
- Impressed with the woman running The Bin store for her uncle, very engaging.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available?

- Benches and trash cans were mentioned by most and the benches were affixed to the flower planters mentioned earlier in the report.
- A bike rack near some of the flowers/benches.
- Some noted no public restrooms downtown, others found restrooms at the Chamber office and a park.
- No drinking fountains.

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

- Sidewalks are throughout the downtown area and extend beyond, clean, but beyond the scrapbook store there were some areas of weeds in spots.
- There seemed to be plenty of parking spaces and it was easy to walk to several places from one parking spot. Due to some storefronts being vacant, another visitor noted the businesses are spread out so having to move to another parking spot might be in order.
- One visitor wondered if the brick streets would be difficult to travel in the winter due to it being hilly.
- Streets were clean.
- The light pole banners with Larned branding were noted.
- Appreciation of the flowers and the music were noted again in this section by visitors.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- Retail options were observed from all entrances to town and seemed easy to access, though some felt those retail areas were not well defined (scattered businesses coming into town – restaurants, car dealers, health care along 156/Edwards).
- A Casey's was visited by some and it was noted that the ladies there were very helpful and also gave one visitor some notepaper because there was a need and none for sale. The restrooms were said to be clean.
- The Dollar General was easy to locate, but some felt the Dillons was hard to find.
- Edwards Street Café had excellent service and the best baked potato one visitor has ever had.
- Some of the east-west highway near the retail areas were not maintained as far as weeds were concerned, but it had rained recently so it may be due to that. It was also noted that near the Pizza Hut was some private property with some tall weeds.
- Some older motels and one newer motel were noted.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- There appeared to be enough area near the edges of town to locate or expand, such as the areas near the feed lot by the elevators. 14th street and Hwy 19.
- No manufacturing facilities were observed and no designated industrial park found.
- A new building appears to be going up on W. Edwards with plenty of room for other businesses to build.
- An airport was observed and there may be land in that area.

6. Health Care Services

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

- The Pawnee Valley Community Hospital was conveniently located and looked to be a new facility.
- Emergency room was identified.
- State mental hospital was also noted by visitors.

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

- Did see a dentist office on 156.
- Eye doctors, a chiropractor, doctors' offices, and a clinic downtown.
- From the outside these facilities looked to be in good shape and well cared for.
- These medical options were scattered and not found in a more grouped location so one would have to travel around if they had multiple appointments.
- Health Department was located but kind of crammed in the corner of the courthouse basement.
- One visitor noted multiple county license plates at many of these locations indicating people either travel to Larned for medical service or travel to work in the medical field there.
- Pawnee Valley Sport and Health looks like a place for people to come and exercise.

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

- Some saw 3 long-term care facilities: Country Living of Larned, Four Seasons Village, and Diversicare, others saw only Country Living and Four Seasons.
- There was assisted living with dementia care identified.

- Visitors felt the number and quality of facilities was just right for the community, and one visitor even noted that there appeared to be another senior care/assisted living facility being built.

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 mix of single-family homes, apartments, duplexes, and townhouses were noticed in town.
- Housing ranged from low-income to higher end homes with something for everyone. West side seemed to be the newer part of town for housing.
- There were very few for sale signs, some sold signs.
- The majority of homes were well taken care of, nice yards, flowers, good décor. The older homes still showed love and attention.
- Maybe 15% of the properties were run down, overgrown, and needed paint.
- Online search indicated average price was in the \$87,000 range.
- One visitor liked the “Housing Opportunity” sign at the new duplexes on the north side of town.
- Mobile home park was in a nice area. It needed a little attention, but would look good with a little effort.

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

- There were several apartment type houses with “for rent” signs, one single level apartment complex that had rentals but appeared to be in poor condition.
- The spacing on some of the rental properties seemed really tight.
- The Santa Fe Trail apartment complex could use a new sign to make the area look a bit nicer.
- Visitors indicated that some units were built to house staff at the State hospital.

8. 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?

- Preschool, grade school, middle school, and high school were observed.

- During visit, groundskeeping and building maintenance had been underway at some of the buildings.
- The high school looked older, and the elementary and middle school were new and unfinished. Visitors said it took a while to find the new elementary building.
- Didn't appear to be sidewalks at the elementary school on the north side of town.
- The high school football stadium was getting new artificial turf.
- A wellness center on the north side of the high school was observed.
- Some saw the presence of Head Start, others did not.
- Grounds and buildings were well maintained.
- All schools look to be large for the size of community.

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

- Information was found online on the school website with details about their Pre-K program. School system is in the top 50% in Kansas, 12:1 ratio with 855 students.
- Other details were found from greatschools.org and publicschoolreview.com.
- Some details found online were out of date.

9. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

- Some found no indication of childcare in the community, either in person or online.
- Others noted there were 7 organizations providing childcare: Little Learners, Morning Out, Golden Rule, Steppingstones Pre-School, Brown's Day Care, Best Day Care, and Caring Hands. There was no indication on affordability.
- Appears some of the childcare is for workers at the state mental hospital and prison area.

10. Faith/Religion

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

- Over a dozen churches observed, including Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, and Episcopal.
- No other religions represented outside of Christianity.
- One new Assembly of God church was being built.
- All churches appeared to be well maintained and welcoming.
- Some visitors noted no faith-based services that they could identify, and no staff in the churches during the visits to ask. Others noted that the thrift store is run by the Christian Church volunteers and that from brochures, some local activities in the community are sponsored by a community church.

11. Civic

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

- Some visitors saw evidence of one or two civic groups, like Lions or Kiwanis.
- Others noted quite a few more – a combination of 21 civic organizations and non-profits, including Larned Civic Pride, Music Club, Hospital Auxiliary, Hospital Foundation, United Way, American Legion, Rotary, Saddle Club, Community Health organization, Family Crisis Center, Golden Belt Community Foundation, and the Garden Club.
- The Larned Senior Center was identified in a Southwestern-style building.
- The United Way building is home to some food services and other community needs organizations.

Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- Larned Civic PRIDE is involved in the parks, including the Veteran's Park – this was considered to be an "awesome" place.
- Garden club small garden and flower boxes in town.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- City and utility crews were observed to be working on projects during visits.
- Street signs are present and readable.
- Some streets are rough, most in good condition.
- Sidewalks and streets were good, landscaping was green and lush.
- The stop sign/light at Broadway and the highway intersection was a little confusing, but a good way to get people into the downtown area. People might drive right through town otherwise and not know what they're missing.

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

- Some noted the gift bags and being welcomed, another mentioned they weren't welcomed but could hear people talking in the back.
- City hall itself was easily accessible.
- Not a lot of information present.

- One visitor was not able to get to city hall when it was open but called later for more information. They asked about how residential areas were kept looking so nice and how the city dealt with dilapidated buildings since not much of that was observed. The person in charge of those areas gave the visitor a call back to answer questions.

Police/fire protection:

- Some had trouble finding the police department, others found it on Main Street easily.
- Fire presence was noted and also a training field to the south of town.

Library:

- The library was found on Main and was an attractive building in a prominent area.
- Found information about their summer reading program in the newspaper.
- One visitor checked out the genealogy area.
- Lots of overstuffed chairs to read in.
- Some visitors noted people were playing a game of dominoes.

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

- Parks, playgrounds, and recreation areas were well maintained.
- Observed was a large park with sidewalks, restrooms, a memorial, tennis court, soccer fields.
- Wayfinder signage pointed the direction to parks and the swimming pool, though some thought the words were too small to see while driving.
- Seemed like there was a park in every part of town, so that people wouldn't have to walk more than 6 blocks to get to one.
- Community Center and display barns for rodeos and other ag events were nicely maintained.
- Football field, baseball field, and soccer field noted.
- One park had a splash pad that appeared to be popular.
- Larned is not lacking for public activity areas – some were surprised the city could support so much in the way of public facilities.
- The Veteran's Park was nice but some of the benches with engraving could use some maintenance.
- One person noticed the skate park, no one noticed if there were any walking trails.
- Park across from the extra-large swimming pool had a rose garden in the parking area, lots of swings and slides, and a duck pond.

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?

- Fort Larned. Very well maintained.
- Large rodeo grounds.
- Gun club was mentioned.
- Santa Fe Trail tourist site.
- State Mental Hospital.
- Slogan: Find Yourself in Native American Country
- Being the county seat.
- There was some surprise that the city doesn't capitalize more on the historic sites.

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

- The county fair, and even though it was happening during some of the visits, visitors did not see advertising locally.

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).

- Pawnee Rock.
- Horse Thief is not that far.
- Again, Fort Larned and the Santa Fe Trail Museum areas.
- Sibley's Camp.
- With the statewide emphasis on murals lately, one visitor was surprised to only see one faded one in town, also did not see any other types of public art – thinking there should be some relating to frontier history.

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.

- Chamber office was closed for the fair during one visit but had some flyers about area attractions in the lobby. The building's architecture was really nice!
- Some Chamber members were observed visiting businesses downtown.

- The Chamber also had several businesses engaged in a shopping promotion that involved a punch card/drawing.
- The Chamber was also promoting Midnight Madness.
- For those who were able to visit the Chamber office when open, they again felt welcomed and found a lot of useful information about the community.
- There were visitor centers at Fort Larned and the Santa Fe Trail Museum.

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

- Edwards Street Brew and Bites was a great experience – good food, atmosphere, and staff.
- Fort Larned for the living history and many restaurants make for a great day trip. Probably wouldn't stay longer.
- The furniture store was worth coming back to.
- The Edwards Street Café was a favorite that would bring people back to town.
- One visitor observed that none of the standard fast food places like Sonic or Subway or the Mexican restaurant were worth coming back for as they weren't unique. They were surprised a town this size didn't have a full-service down-home restaurant. Maybe there was one and they missed it?
- Would visit the businesses downtown again if in the area.

14. Wrap-up

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

- Old style homes and newer homes.
- Fort Larned.
- Santa Fe Trail Museum.
- Wildlife sites.
- Friendly people.
- Great looking community.
- Parks and pools.
- Busy retail activity.
- City and utility workers present and improving the community.
- Community vibe felt new.
- Most business people were welcoming.
- Community pride.
- Recent influx of grants is encouraging.
- Active Chamber director working with Economic Development director to bring business and visitors to town.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- Feed lots could be a drawback because of the smell.
- Being only 30 miles from a larger city – Great Bend. The draw of the bigger community to shop in, or even online shopping.
- Lack of businesses downtown/empty buildings.
- County Health Department needs larger facilities.
- When a visitor mentioned they were going on a trip to Larned the responses were “to the state hospital?”
- Lack of for rent/for sale housing opportunities.

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

- Fort Larned.
- Assortment of housing.
- Clean downtown.
- Good restaurants.
- Friendly people.
- Positive attitudes.
- Parks.
- Lack of response from the city office for some visitors.



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