

# First Impressions



## Harper, KS

K-State Research and Extension in  
Partnership with  
The Dane G. Hansen Foundation



- Harper asked for First Impressions, obtained Inman as its partner; 75 miles or about 1 hour and 20 minutes away.
- Volunteers were trained in both communities. Multiple visitors from Inman came to Harper on August 8, August 14, and August 25.
- Reports were compiled, pictures were taken of Harper observations in late September, presentation was designed in October.
- Results are presented tonight, November 18.
- Harper uses the results for further discussion and action plans.

# Why: First Impressions?

- **Feedback:**

How does a first-time visitor view my town?

- Evaluate successes.
- Set goals and priorities for next steps.

- **If you don't agree with the observation:**

- ***Be curious,*** Why does the visitor see it this way?
- Is the observation worth considering?
- What can we do to change it– or the perception?

**Curiosity: A strong desire to know or learn something.**

*-Oxford Living Dictionary*

**Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN**

***We need to change the narrative about rural.***

- Rural is *changing*, not dying.
- Brain Gain (30-49 year olds moving to rural) is a “new trend” that has been happening since the 70’s and no one is noticing or talking about it.
- Only 36% lived there previously.
- People research a number of places before they move to a rural town.
- Rural is in the middle of ***everywhere***. You live one place, work another and play another. With transportation and internet, it’s all accessible to you.



## Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

- In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons they come are:
  - Simpler pace of life
  - Safety and security
  - Low housing cost
  - *“A job,” isn’t in the top 10 reasons.*
- “In small towns everyone knows each other.” *false*
- *Get to know each other*, invite them to a newcomers’ meal.

- If you bring 7 people to a 700 citizen town every year in 10 years you'll have a 10% increase. It matters! It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
- We are our own worst enemies. We have to monitor our customer service and what we say. It matters.
- Don't say, "You have to live here twenty years to be an insider." And don't act like it either.

- 75% of rural homeowners are Baby Boomers and older. 30% are over 75.
- Housing will be freed up as the baby boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
- Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.- *Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, University of Minnesota*



*Ben Winchester was our guest on the  
**March 1, 2019 First Friday Call.***

*See the recording at:*

<https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/>

- 2010 Census Population 1,473  
(down 5.99% since 2000\*) (KS= +6.1%)
- 2018 Estimate is 1,287 ( $\pm 142$ )  
(down 17.86% since 2000) (KS= +8.0%)
- 85.4% high school or GED, 11.5% college educated,  
– 91.8% HS or equivalency, 34.0% college education (KS)
- Poverty rate 12.5% (KS=11.4%)
- Median Age 43.1 years (KS=37.2)
- Median household income is \$44,659 (KS=\$62,087)

\* 2000 Census was 1,567

- **Website**

- [www.cityofharper.com](http://www.cityofharper.com)
- Website easy to find with Google.
- Easy to use. Up to date. Well organized and flows nicely.
- Enough info to get what was needed.
- No broken links for the most part.
- Accurate representation of city.
- Liked the logo.



- **FaceBook**
- City of Harper, Kansas (@cityofharper)
- Mentioned later in the report that it helped visitors find Harper Rec. info.





# “Five-Minute” Impression

- Modern highway, well kept and helped give the community a thriving look.
- Once in town – quite a few run-down houses and businesses, some empty lots.





- Main and Central looked like an abandoned town, which gave a sad feeling since that’s where the fountain/lamp post logo comes from. The fountain is cool!



# “Five-Minute” Impression

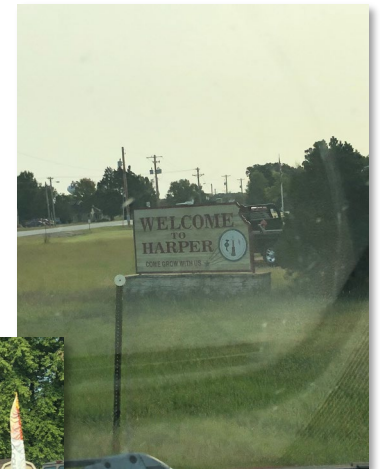
- In other parts of town were well kept houses and lawns, a really nice park, and several other businesses.





# “Five-Minute” Impression

- The signage was ok, but didn’t notice any “Welcome to Harper” signs.
- Ditches well mowed.
- Lots of businesses coming in from the east.
- Very pretty houses at the major corners, especially those around the school.
- Not much in the way of streetscapes.



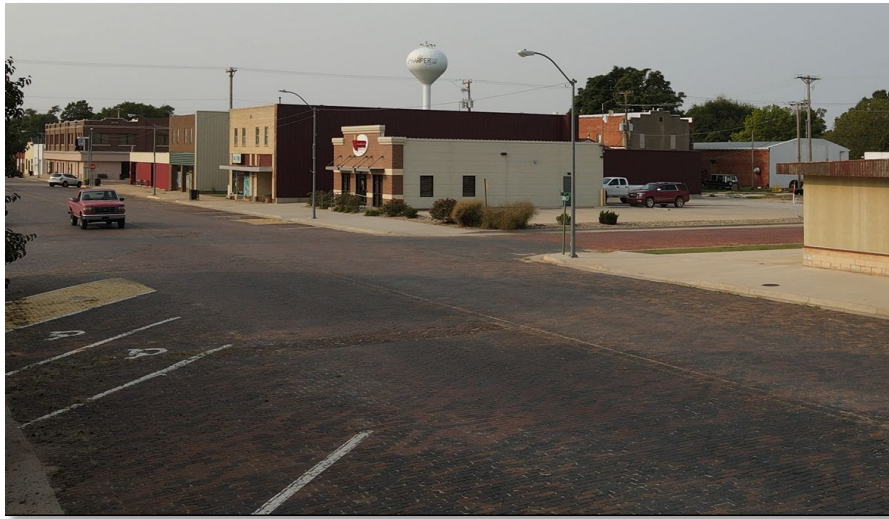
# Downtown Business Area

- Downtown seemed a little run down.
- Some of the buildings on the north side of the street looked historic and might be attractive if fixed up.
- Quite a few closed businesses. Probably was beautiful 50 years ago.



# Downtown Business Area

- Many brick streets.
- Restaurant only building that was welcoming.
- Hope this area can get a facelift!





# Downtown Business Area

- Nice pocket parks, nice fountain.
- Bank of Commerce looked daunting and uninviting.



# Downtown Business Area

- Some restaurants
- Banks
- Insurance agency
- Secondhand store
- Antique Store
- Friendly customer service at restaurant.
- Gentleman at antique store was super chatty and very informative about businesses and happenings in town.



- Didn't notice any public amenities downtown.
- There was a park in another part of town with restrooms and trash bins.
- Casey's would've been an option for a restroom if needed.
- There was a nice gazebo downtown.
- Good parking even during the county fair, though not much to park for downtown.
- Very little streetscaping/landscaping.



# Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Noticed most of the new businesses were moving to the south/southwest side of town.
- Main stores were grocery store, Dollar General, and True Value.
- Also observed Red Rooster Café, Beal's Orchard. On the way to downtown saw insurance and eye doctor. Red Rooster was noted to be worth the 1+ hour drive.
- Are there gift stores or a clothing store in town? Did not see any in person or listed on the website.



# Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Casey's General Store was also noticed.
- Was the only place visitors weren't greeted when they came in, but they employees were observed to be fairly busy.
- Thought the ice cream place was closed, but after seeing a recent Yelp review, visitors realized it was still open and went back.



- *A drive-by is not how industry will find you, check with your local Eco Devo director to make sure your site is listed on LocationOne @ Kansas Department of Commerce.*

## ***Observation:***

- “Entrepreneurs who choose to start their small businesses are responsible for 63 percent of net new jobs created in the United States every year.”
- *Global marketing makes your town accessible to purchases all over the world.*



# Industrial Parks/Commercial

- There is an airport.
- Appears to be room in the industrial area and other commercial areas on the west side for expansion.
- Driving in from the north, the industrial area is what is noticed first.
- Industrial businesses in town appeared to be clean and not causing air pollution. Well kept and respectable looking.



- The hospital in town was closed, but visitors noticed that there is a new one between Harper and Anthony and it is state-of-the-art.
- Hospital is 4 miles south and has EMT services between the two towns.



*Image source: Patterson Health Center*

- Visitors found the following during their trips:
  - Pharmacy
  - Eye Doctor – appeared busy and building in good condition
  - Wellness Center
  - Chiropractor
  - There were health and mental health flyers available in the city building.
  - Some noticed Heritage Estates (assisted living/apartments), others did not notice in person or on the web. Did not find any long-term care nursing homes.





- Many houses had wonderful landscaping which made for a nice drive around town.
- Multiple housing options seemed to cover a wide price range, though most of the lower priced houses were in poor shape and had been on the market for a long time. Might make other housing unappealing due to the amount of properties needing repair.
- There appeared to be a shortage of homes for sale in the mid-price range. Several 'for sale' signs, but not an abundance.



- Neighborhoods did not seem to have clearly defined borders. One block was super nice, the next was run-down. The closer to the highway, the nicer the houses, though there were several gems deeper into town.
- Not much in the way of available rental property found. Some was in poor condition.
- There was a flyer in the city building for a newer apartment complex.



## HARPER

## KANSAS

• Total Housing Units	784	
• Total Occupied Houses	543 (69.3%)	(88.4%)
• Vacant Houses	241 (30.7%)	(11.6%)
• Owner Occupied	363 (66.9%)	(66.5%)
• Renter Occupied	180 (33.1%)	(33.5%)
• Family Households	305 (56.2%)	(64.4%)
• Non-family Households	238 (43.8%)	(35.6%)



- **Need for clean-up/demolition of older properties**





- The elementary school was well maintained.
- The Jr./Sr. high school was 4 miles south of town between Harper and Anthony. Condition of secondary school – it looks new and nice.



- School website was hard to navigate. “Poor quality” and aesthetic was off-putting. Not much engaging or eye catching.
- School district website is linked to on city website, but at the time of visititing, one person noticed the link didn’t work. Appears to be working correctly now.



## Comments:

- Some visitors found no information or evidence of childcare in town.
- Others saw there were two local childcare options in town listed on website and another while driving around.
- No details seen on pricing/affordability.

## Harper County Data (2019):

- Number of Children Under Age 6 Potentially Needing Care: 266
- Number of Licensed Family and Group Day Care Homes: 10
- Number of Childcare Centers: 1
- Desired Capacity of Childcare Centers: 167
- Extent that desired capacity meets potential need: 63%
- Creating a Childcare Action Plan

<https://www.ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/Child-Care-Supply-Demand-Action-Plan.pdf>

*Contact [ks.childcareaware.org](https://www.ks.childcareaware.org) to get access to local childcare specialists.*

**785-823-3343**

- There were multiple denominations (between 3 and 6 noted) found: Catholic, Methodist, Mennonite, etc.
- All church grounds and buildings were well taken care of, though appearances varied by age.
- No evidence of faith-based community services observed.

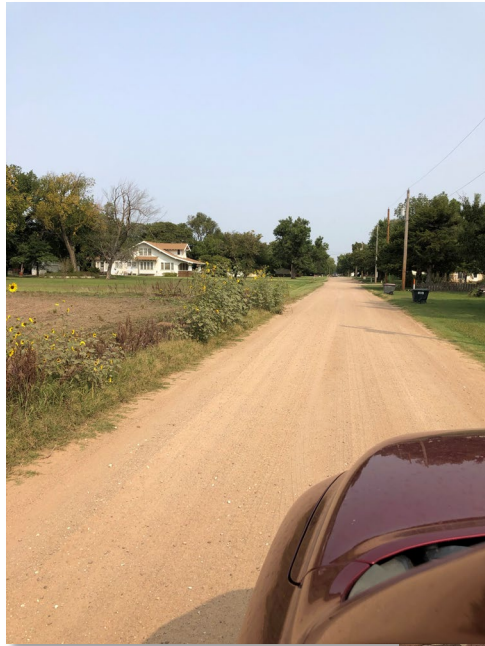




- Harper Rec. Commission found through city's Facebook page.
- VFW, American Legion, Chamber of Commerce, and evidence of some Lions Club activity.
- Some visitors didn't notice any.
- No current activities noted other than pocket park.



- Streets were good and well marked. Many brick streets and some construction due to improvement projects.
- Last several blocks at end of town were unpaved.
- Clean restrooms at the park!





- Hard to tell what the city lighting is like during the day.
- Some didn't notice sidewalks in areas that might benefit from having them.
- Others noticed some of the sidewalks were overgrown and buckled.

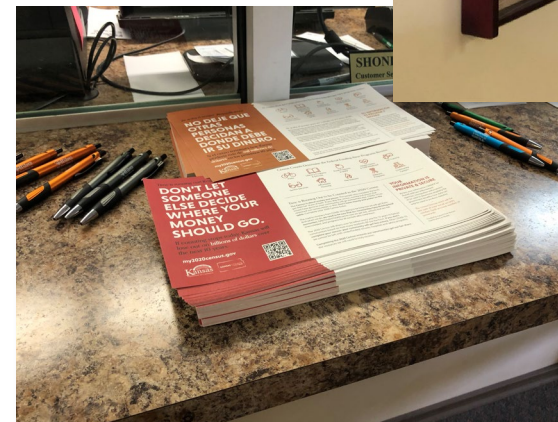
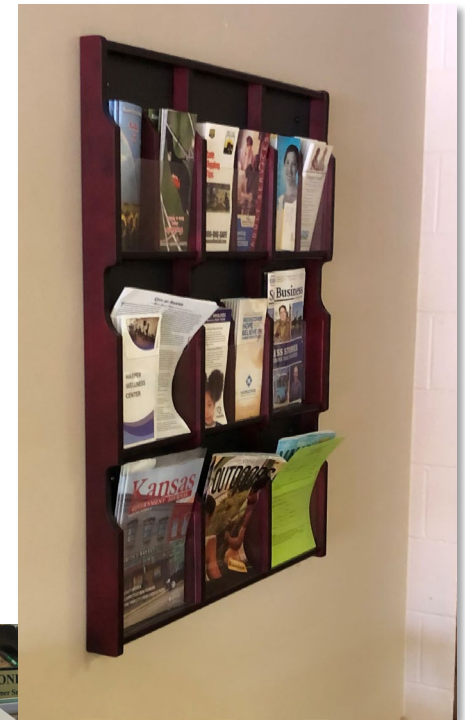


- City hall was nice and located downtown.
- Learned they received a grant to improve the basement and move the library to another facility.
- Staff very helpful and informative.
- Some visited on a Saturday when office wasn't open.
- Was greeted by front desk person, but no advice, history, or information offered when it was mentioned visitor was exploring town.





- Some general information flyers and brochures mentioned.
- Not many specific to Harper.



# Fire, EMS and Police Services


- One group did not notice police or fire protection.
- Others noticed the police cars and the police department in the city building, as well as the fire department behind.



Welcome to Kansas Insurance Department

Home Contact Us search GO

**Kansas Insurance Commissioner**  
**Vicki Schmidt**

**Kansas Insurance Department**  
420 SW 9th Street  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1678  
Consumer Hotline: 800-432-2484 (KS only)  
[Email Us](#) | Phone: 785-296-3071

**ISO Public Protection Classification**

Most U.S. insurers of home and business properties use Insurance Services Office's (ISO) Property Protection Classification (PPC) in calculating premiums. In general, the price of insurance in a community with a good PPC is lower than in a community with a poor PPC, assuming all other factors are equal.

PPC Program: <https://www.isomitigation.com/program-works/how-the-ppc-program-works.html>

A community's PPC depends on:

1. Emergency communications systems, including facilities for the public to report fires, staffing, training, certification of telecommunicators, and facilities for dispatching fire departments
2. The fire department, including equipment, staffing, training, and geographic deployment of fire companies
3. The water supply system, including the inspection and flow testing of hydrants and a careful evaluation of



- Library is nice and clean.
- It has moved to the business district.





- The parks and ball fields were nice and new. Various equipment for multiple ages. All kinds of fun!
- Swimming pool was a hit with visitor's children. Good price and had enough to keep them playing for several hours.
- Tennis courts and picnic areas.





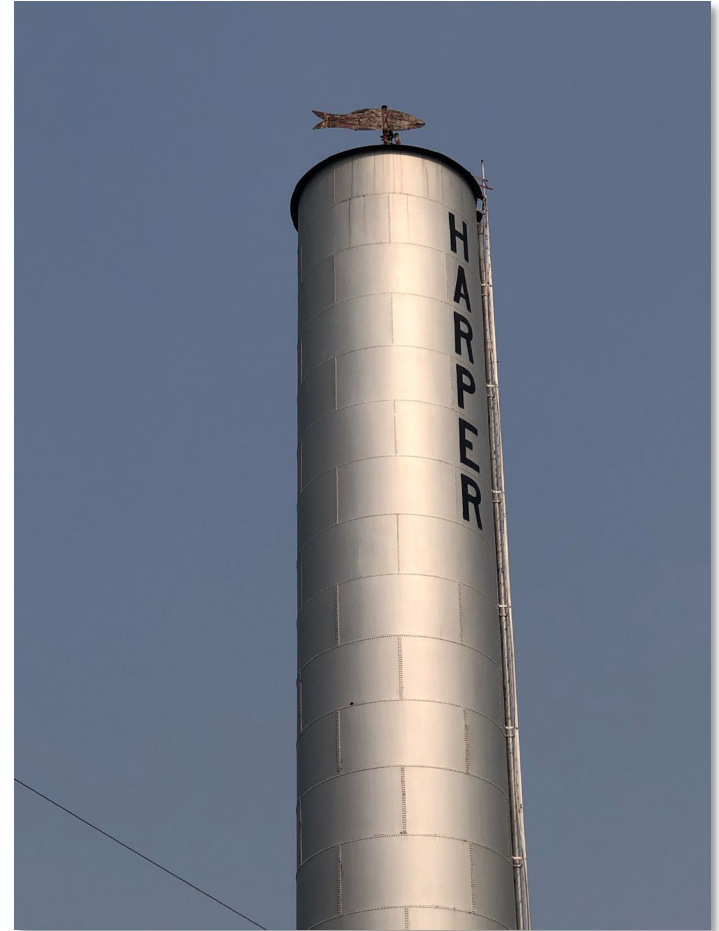
## Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- Knew of Harper from ‘Harper Camperland’ advertisements.
- Some didn’t notice any other slogans or attractions, others did find the “Come Grow with Us” slogan.
- There is a rodeo grounds and a county fairgrounds, so it is known for hosting those events.



## Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- The fish on top of the water tower.
- The museum and art depot are on the east edge of town and far from being noticed.
- The lake and golf course south of town.



## Natural or manmade features that can draw people?

- Neat mural on Central.
- The unique archways at the park.
- The church from a failed English settlement.
- Would not have known about most of these things if not for the Kansas Guidebook.





## Visitor's Center

- Did not see a visitor's center.
- Chamber of Commerce and city office are the closest entities.





## What would bring you back?

- The Red Rooster Café.
- The antique store.
- The walk-up ice cream place.
- Anthony Lake.

# Most Positive Observations

- Small town feel.
- Swimming pool and parks.
- Rec facilities were nice.
- A lot of businesses and industry.
- Shared hospital and secondary school appear nice.
- Highway is well kept and modern.
- People were quite friendly.
- Seems like a pretty decent town to live in.

# Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- A little too far from larger cities like Wichita.
- Though hospital and school both nice, is moving them outside of town a challenge?
- Housing was available, but neighboring houses had junk-filled porches.
- Many homes and businesses needing repairs.
- Town and its businesses are very spread out.
- Lack of signage.
- Disrepair in downtown.
- Town logo/fountain in area no one is drawn to.
- Nowhere really to find information in town about churches, the fish on the water tower, the fountain.



## What will you remember?

- The Red Rooster Café (SO GOOD) – made visitor wonder what their small café could become.
- The ice cream place.
- The amount of empty buildings on Main Street – not really the emptiness, but the disrepair. Was a sad feeling driving through downtown.
- Friendly city staff.
- Run down residential areas.
- Antique shop

***Thanks to the volunteer visitors from  
Harper and Inman!***

## **Set Next Steps:**

- Which group will lead the discussion?

## K-State Research and Extension

**PRIDE:** <http://kansasprideprogram.k-state.edu/>

- Local communities identify what they would like to preserve, create, or improve for their future and volunteers pull together to create their ideal community future.





## K-State Research and Extension

### Contact

**Nancy Daniels**

[nkdaniels@ksu.edu](mailto:nkdaniels@ksu.edu)

to participate.

### Grant Writing Workshops

**Grants are a vital piece in your community's funding puzzle...and *you* can do it.**

K-State Research and Extension's Community Vitality Team offers grant writing workshops for local communities.

#### Objectives

- Conquer your grant writing fears and start writing.
- Learn new sources of data to document community needs.
- Learn new sources of grant funding.
- Practice developing the Grant Elements: Problem, Outcomes, Activities, Evaluation, and Budget.

#### Short Term Outcomes

- 93% have increased confidence to write a successful grant.
- 94% learned new sources of data to document community needs.
- 80% learned new sources for finding grants.
- 91% have increased confidence to develop the elements of a successful grant.



## K-State Research and Extension

- **First Friday e-Calls 9:30-10:30 am (CT)**
  - Connecting small businesses and communities with the resources to make them successful.
  - Contact Nancy Daniels [nkdaniels@ksu.edu](mailto:nkdaniels@ksu.edu) to participate.
  - Previous calls are recorded at <http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/business/entrepreneurship/>
  - Community Vitality Calendar of events: <http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/>

Kansas Department of Agriculture in partnership with other state organizations, will work with your community to find the best opportunities for growth using the assets of your region.

A graphic for the 'GROW IN KANSAS' Strategic Growth Initiative. It features a collage of various agricultural and technological images, including a sheep, wheat, a cow, a pig, chickens, a drone, a green tractor, a circuit board, a person in a lab coat, and various fruits and vegetables. The text 'GROW IN KANSAS' is prominently displayed at the top in white on a blue background. Below the collage, the text 'STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE' is written in bold, followed by a description of the program as a pilot for recruiting food, agriculture, and UAS/small aircraft businesses to Kansas.

**GROW IN KANSAS**

**STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE**

A pilot program for the proactive recruitment of food, agriculture and UAS/small aircraft business to Kansas.

For more information on the Strategic Growth Initiative, please contact  
Russell Plaschka, Ag Business Development Program Manager  
785-564-7466 • [Russell.Plaschka@ks.gov](mailto:Russell.Plaschka@ks.gov)  
[agriculture.ks.gov/GrowAg](http://agriculture.ks.gov/GrowAg)





## Jenni Carr

Extension Agent, Agriculture, Natural Resources, 4-H  
jlcarr@ksu.edu

## Christy Reel

Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences, 4-H  
christyd@ksu.edu

K-State Research and Extension-Harper County  
620.842.5445

## Jan Steen

Community Vitality  
Specialist  
jmsteen@ksu.edu

K-State Research  
and Extension  
620.200.0665