

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Independence **Date(s) Visited:** a, b) Monday, March 4
c) Thurs, March 28
d) Wed, March 27

1. **Pre-visit web search:** How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

- a) When googling Independence, Kansas, the city's website is one of the top hits. The website contains good information but is very generic looking. Photos of the town itself would be nice to see. The city website provides information for people living in Independence but doesn't give much needed information for someone wanting to visit the city. The Chamber website had a better feel as it has more pictures and information, but was 9th in the search list when googling, so was almost missed as it was at the bottom of the page.
- b) The website is professional. Difficult to find jobs, shopping, or if daycare is available in the area.
- c) The website for the city was good, I found a lot of good info, and the city newsletter, but I found out even MORE when visiting the Chamber website. The Chamber's video is excellent, and I learned even more about Independence from that website – in fact, found things on the Chamber website I couldn't find when driving around. Maybe more signage for those cool things shown on the Chamber website?
- d) Their city website is the first thing to pop up.

2. The “Five-Minute” Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted. The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

- a) We visited on a very cold, gray, Monday so everything seemed more dormant and less vibrant. We realize if we visited again in May or June things would appear much brighter. The community has more of a spread-out feel rather than compact. The entrance signs from each direction are consistent which we feel is a positive, but it appeared they could use a fresh coat of paint and some solar or led lighting would enhance them at night. The four lanes/wide roadways coming in to town are nice.
- b) Indy has a lot going on! Easy to navigate through town. Town is clearly labeled, although some signs need a little attention.
- c) Nice large downtown, most buildings had a business inside. Noticed the empty buildings but more filled than empty! Beautiful statues and welcoming benches downtown. Drive in from the east is a little rough until I got closer to the downtown. Most homes seemed well kept (yards and exterior) more are nice than eyesores. School buildings and campuses well kept. My first impression would be a community with pride. Good signage welcoming folks to Independence at entrances. Farther east and farther west leading out of town a little sketchy looking, but downtown streetscapes are nice. I liked seeing sidewalks and the availability of being able to walk without having to walk in the street.
- d) There are several pockets of business. e.g. Walmart & Orscheln’s, downtown and by the zoo. The town is kind of broken up; no real flow through town. Several areas of no businesses or empty buildings.

3. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed. Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

- a) Mural is nice. We were impressed with the variety of downtown shopping; several nice boutiques, Libby’s Boutique, Apricot Lane, floral shop, furniture store. Libby’s Boutique was very welcoming, had coffee & toffee out complimentary for shoppers. We popped in Casey’s (café) – girl in there was very friendly and made suggestions of places for coffee, etc. Boutiques featured jewelry pieces handcrafted by local artists. The floral shop employee greeted us right when we came in and then we never saw her again, may have been in back working on a project. The coffee shop may have been getting ready to close, close to 2pm, but there was no coffee made so we purchased hot chocolate out of the machine – the cup was white Styrofoam with no sleeve or logo for

marketing. The lady in the candy store featured chocolates made in Emporia, Kansas-made, and a beautiful art display of her son's work and a baby grand piano. The restroom was immaculate. Some of the Downtown businesses/restaurants were closed which was to be expected on a Monday.

- b) Just like every rural Kansas community, Independence has buildings that need to be occupied. It would appear the buildings need a little work, but the buildings that are in operation look very nice! There was a nice, but small selection of downtown stores.
- c) Beautiful downtown for the most part. Some of the old structures could use some work, but there are more eye-appealing store fronts and buildings downtown than eyesores. LOVED the statues and benches. Looks like a welcoming friendly downtown! A lot of mom and pop restaurants most communities this size don't have! Clothing, gifts, flowers, antiques – good variety of stores downtown! Received good customer service for the most part. When asked directions, they were kindly given.
- d) Not all on one street more of a several block radius. There were a wide variety of businesses downtown. Large furniture store, movie theater, several eating places, financial institutions, and several small business stores. Felt very local. Like the people in the stores have been there and have roots there and care about the community. Very friendly and wanted to help you out.

What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.) Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- a) We felt there could be more trash cans in the downtown area.
- b) Limited trash receptacles around downtown. Benches were nice. Maybe more landscaping around downtown.
- c) The benches are welcoming and nice. Trash cans were available, and I was able to find a place to go to the restroom inside one of the sandwich shops. No problems parking and nice sidewalks to be able to visit many stores. The street scaping is just lovely!
- d) Benches and trash. Some Wi-Fi. Bathrooms available at most businesses. Well-kept landscaping, parking might not be right in front of the building you wanted but never very far to walk.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a) Woods Lumber looks very nice. Nice car dealership. Several nice funeral homes. Number of hotels is impressive. Nice variety of shopping/retail. We visited Hugo's Industrial Supply and the exterior of the building has a very nice appearance as well as the inside retail area. We also took a short tour of the business with Andy.
- b) The retail shopping areas are on the outskirts of town. They are easy to access, and there is a good variety of stores.
- c) Outside of the downtown area (esp. farther to the east and west) the retail seems to drop off and is not as attractive as downtown. Easy enough to access, if one would wish to.
- d) Walmart, show store, Dollar Tree, Catos, Orscheln, Ace Hardware. All within visual range of each other but not close enough to walk. Lots of options. Good customer service.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a) No Industrial Park sign on the main road, we just kind of happened across the Ind. Park – there was a sign once you got into the park that could use updating. Water tower looks nice. Independence Enterprise & Training Center sign could be replaced or taken down. Could use signage showing what plots/options are available for development. Recommend more signage on the businesses telling what they do such as VT Hackney; they have a sign they are hiring but one doesn't know what they do. We commented several times that we were curious what the vacated tall, high-rise building is close to Downtown – wondered what business was there or had maybe left town. If the building is available, we might suggest signage showing it is available or for lease.
- b) Industrial area was easy to find, but I couldn't determine what businesses were there, or what their focus is. If there was better signage, people could potentially stop in to apply for jobs.
- c) Good industrial park and noticed many industries with room to expand, it seems.
- d) Several different areas with lots of room for other industries.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a) Labette Health/Independence Health Care Center building is very nice, Emergency care with ambulance service is available. Fort Scott is in similar boat to Independence with our hospital closing as well, and we applaud your community and the related entities for quickly establishing a new form of care.
- b) Labette Health is widely used and respected in the Southeast Kansas area. It is an impressive facility with an excellent reputation.
- c) I knew the hospital had closed and worried I would feel a big lack of services offered but found the opposite and I noticed many medical clinics and healthcare centers. Mental health location and a nice amount of elderly care homes. All looked very clean, tidy yards and inviting.
- d) New hospital/doctor offices that have been recently built.

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

- a) CHC/SEK and St. John Health Clinic are present making up several forms of healthcare provided to the community.
- b) It appears that Labette Health has a tremendous network of physicians. Facilities are top-notch and appear to offer services for all ages. It is beautifully landscaped and well maintained.
- c) It looked like there are plenty of options for healthcare needs even without the hospital. Saw locations for physicians, dentists, eye doctors, etc. It seems as if the community is covered well with health care opportunities.
- d) Tried to use the city website to review these things and the resource directory doesn't work.

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

- a) Long-term care and assisted living facilities include Medicalodges and Country Place Living among other options.
- b) I did not see the long-term facilities during the visit, but a web search shows that Eagle Estates is a beautiful facility. Medicalodges offers a full range of services from long term care to rehabilitation.
- c) I noticed many but didn't write down the names. Looked like a good amount for a community this size. All very inviting and welcoming. Clean and tidy looking from the outside.
- d) Eagle Estates, Medicalodges, County Place, Gran Villas.

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) Penn Terrace Apartments/public housing is nice, nice pavilion across the street. Nice new housing area on the north side of the schools. Quite a few trailers in town and sporadically placed. there are homes that would appeal to different income wages as well as for those interested in historic homes or more modern homes. There are some homes on the market, some appear they could be purchased, given some TLC and turned into very nice rentals or starter homes for people looking to come into the community.
- b) Just like our own community, Independence has a mixed bag of housing.
- c) I found clean, tidy, appealing homes more than eyesores, but there definitely are both. Some rough looking homes with messy yards, but, the big historic beautiful homes made me forget the other. So many nice homes for sale, so many homes (in general) looked so neat and tidy. Well-kept homes and yards continue with the feeling of Independence pride.
- d) There are several apartment buildings throughout town. Also, lots of options for purchase as far as size and price are concerned.

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

- a) Chamber had a rental/realtor listing.
- b) It was not easy to find rental properties in Independence, especially if I was new to town. I would probably start with a realtor, but a web-based search would be beneficial. I noticed Penn Square Apartments because they look nice, but that is only for residents 62 and older.
- c) I didn't see many "for rent" signs in front of homes but was amazed at how many nice apartments were in town! Washington Historical Residences looking like a new one, too! It is great to see nice clean apartment spaces available for folks.
- d) Apartments but no houses or list of renters readily available.

8. Schools

Do the following schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of temporary classrooms? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

- a) Independence Community College: Modest, but effective signage. Independence West Campus building is nice. Looks like new student housing. College buildings/grounds overall are not impressive, outdated looking. Middle School: Nice digital sign. Early Learning Center, High School. Ash Youth Center: the south side of the Ash Youth Center sign is deteriorated. Jefferson Elementary looks new and very nice. Our overall impression of every school was that they are very well maintained, and they do an impressive job of grounds keeping.
- b) The High School utilizes the rec building, which makes it nice for out of town teams to get all their games completed in a timely fashion. The high school appears up-to-date and large.
- c) The schools looked very nice, very clean and well kept. I saw a "Riley Early Learning" all the way up to high school. It took some driving to find the college, but, that campus looked nice, too.
- d) Public school includes a 3- and 4-year-old program.

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

- a) No answer
- b) The District website is helpful, but I didn't find anything in the community about the quality of the educational system. The schools are modern, and appearance tells me the district cares about their schools.
- c) Yes.
- d) Yes.

9. Childcare

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

- a) We did not observe any childcare locations. Also, could not locate a list on the city or chamber website. There was a Montgomery County licensed facility list hit on google, but the link did not work.
- b) No Answer
- c) Not sure
- d) Not sure

10. Faith/Religion

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

- a) There are a variety of well maintained, historic churches. Catholic Andrew's Catholic Church as well as the Methodist Church are beautiful buildings. The chamber website lists a few of the churches in its directory. Couldn't find any on the city website. Many of the churches have signs posted with the hours of their services which is beneficial.
- b) No Answer
- c) I didn't notice any faith-based services, BUT I did notice all the churches and how lovely and well-kept they all seemed to be. Again – a show of pride.
- d) Several churches in the area.

11. Civic

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

- a) We were unable to find much information about civic clubs. Meetings were not noted on event calendars for the city or chamber that we could find. VFW has a nice building and appears to have a strong presence in the community.
- b) No answer
- c) I saw signage for a Lions Club, Kiwanis and VFW, I didn't see activity, just the signage.
- d) There is a theater group that does children's and adult productions, zoo and park have a local group. Lions club sign, 4-H signs, etc.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a) When driving around town, there was a very blighted area at 2nd & Cherry, seems like it was near a business called A&J Storage. We also drove through a huge pothole in this vicinity. We didn't notice any public restrooms. Our group made a point to drive in to the community from each entrance to gather our first impression: From the East we didn't necessarily note anything positive or negative, we believe there was an entrance sign consistent with others into the community. From the West, we noted the Welcome to Independence sign could use some work and the 4 lanes coming into town are nice. From the South, the Emerson Field ball field sign could use some rehab or cleaning (from the north). From the North, we noted that this entrance is very nice minus the old motel and adjacent office building. The Welcome sign is nice and in good condition, there is nice housing in this area. The cemetery is impressive and well maintained, WPA era rock walls are attractive. In summary, the entrances are all large 4-lane entrances which is very nice. We saw a sign for the airport, so we thought we would keep going to find it and see what it was like. We drove out a distance on the highway towards Caney and gave up, there wasn't any further signage directing us to the airport that we could see. On our driving tour, we took note of the availability of public services that many communities do not have such as the Social Security office and Kansasworks.
- b) Restrooms at the park were closed because it is winter. This makes sense.
- c) Nice streets and sidewalks for the most part. As one leaves the downtown all seems to go downhill a bit, but maybe that is normal.
- d) Streets are well labeled, quick drive through town and it looks nice.

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

- a) No answer
- b) We did not stop at city hall.
- c) I was a little confused as to where the city hall was located. Temporarily located in a different place than the cool big brick building that said "City Hall" on it.
- d) No Answer

Police/fire protection:

- a) No Answer
- b) The police station is nice.
- c) Seemed like adequate police / fire protection
- d) No Answer

Library:

- a) No Answer
- b) Although the library is an older building, it has been remarkable preserved. Staff have done a good job of maintaining the original building and the addition tells me they care about institutional services. I would like to live in a community who cares about their library because it is a direct reflection on their educational values.
- c) nice library!
- d) Their web site isn't loading everything correctly. Good signage to find library

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

- a) VERY NICE Riverside Park & Aquatic Center. Fountain looks like it would be neat when in season. Nice tennis courts. Yellow/rusty trash dumpster needs to go or be rehabbed. We assume there is not a recreation lake for fishing & boating that we could see, if there is one then it should be promoted with signage. Independence Country Club: Tennis court and pool need care or taken out. The golf course itself has a reputation of being one of the nicest if not THE nicest in SE Kansas.
- b) Truly impressive Riverside Park.
- c) Beautiful Riverside Park and Ralph Mitchell Zoo! What a wonderful destination location for folks from out of town to come and enjoy! Wonderful little park and zoo!
- d) Very nice park on the North side of town. Several ball fields around town.

13. Recreation/Tourism

Is the community well-known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?

- a) We didn't take note of any community slogan but recognize that Neewollah is one of the well-known annual events. The event also has a nice website online.
- b) No answer
- c) A great place for a day or weekend trip! I hope this is marketed well! The zoo, the park, the downtown with its statues as well as a Braums ice cream store AND not far outside of town is "Little House on the Prairie." Market this well – it is a great destination opportunity!
- d) Neewollah is huge. They have info about it available all year long.

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

- a) No Answer
- b) I want to come back on a warm and sunny day where we can take advantage of the awesome water park and walk through the zoo! Indy really has a wonderful park. They have a good reputation for Neewollah! There was signage for Walk Kansas, and as a person from another community it is good to see a community who cares about health/wellness.
- c) I saw on the Chamber video a clip regarding Neewollah – very popular and great event for Independence!
- d) Downtown offers regular events that locals are aware of.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community. (Public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds, regional heritage locations).

- a) NO ANSWER
- b) Little House on the Prairie is a neat feature of this community!
- c) Again, the Chamber video online talked of the lakes, Little House on the Prairie and zoo. I noticed the museum looked very inviting. I would like to have seen more signage or information for campgrounds and lakes.
- d) Elk City Lake has nice facilities. Ralph Mitchell Zoo.

Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, main street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.

- a) Chamber of Commerce: Very nice digital sign. Staff was pleasant, good amount of info.
- b) We visited the Chamber office. Their staff was very friendly!! It seemed like maybe they were moving things around for an event, but the office was a bit of a mess, but in a good way!
- c) Nice chamber. I was well received and given information.
- d) Located in Downtown provides info about events and attractions.

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

- a) In the area of dining, we are impressed with the Brew Pub coming as they are great assets in other SEK communities! Our group had lunch at Vintage Steakhouse upon recommendation, there was Christian music playing which was nice, but we felt it was too loud. The restaurant has real potential and is probably very good, but the greeter that met us at the door was not overly friendly, it took a while for anyone to come to our table for service, and we felt the food was average. It is a beautiful Downtown building. The Braums restaurant is newer and looks nice, there was a sign broken out at the McDonald's. Recreational assets we took note of were the Cinema, a Disc Golf course, and the Ralph Mitchell Zoo which should be a draw.
- b) The boutique was a stand-out shop. Restaurants were just okay, but I do like Braums! If my family were driving through, I would remember to stop at Braums because I love their cherry-limeades 😊
- c) A great little shop called Apricot Lane ... I apologize I didn't get the name of the store, but, also all the mom and pop eateries left me in a quandary as I would have liked to eat at them all! I ate at Ane Mae's and will go back again! Found an old-time soda fountain, too!
- d) Good Mexican food and love the pool.

14. Wrap-up

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

- a) The most positive thing we observed about the community was the appearance and condition of the schools. There is great potential in the Downtown area, the micro-brewery should be a great asset. It is impressive how a new model of healthcare was implemented to serve the community after losing the hospital. We would love to make a follow-up visit when the weather is nice, and the landscape is green and in bloom!
- b) My most positive impression was the park/zoo/aquatic center which was awesome!
- c) A community with pride. Nice and clean for the most part.
- d) Quaint, lots of options

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a) No Answer.
- b) Just like our own community, there is a need to keep the downtown businesses full. That is so hard to do with aging buildings and limited parking. A fresh coat of paint and updated signage for the many features would be helpful. I didn't want to eat fast-food, and it was a little difficult to find a sit-down restaurant. I made my decision upon a recommendation, but it just wasn't great.
- c) So much to offer. Probably a challenge marketing it but need to invite folks in as a destination community with so much unique and quaint things to see and do!
- d) No Answer.

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

- a) The beautiful park, cemetery and that great boutique shops Downtown!
- b) It is a nice sized rural Kansas community, with many amenities. I will go back on a sunny day and enjoy that park and zoo!! It is so nice, you should really be proud! I will also remember how friendly the boutique staff were. It was nice to see that they utilize local artisans, and I loved the dog that roamed the store. Out of curiosity, we stopped into Hugo's and were amazed by what they accomplish! Not only were they friendly and professional, but they have an awesome story to tell. We are looking to Hugo's to help Fort Scott with a similar effort. This is quite the entrepreneurial gem to have in Independence, KS.
- c) I will remember the zoo, the cute downtown, the large number of good places to eat, and the overall community pride I felt.
- d) No Answer

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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