

# First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



**Community Visited:** Lyons

**Date(s) Visited:** 11/4/2019

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. The City of Lyons website is the only one that showed up at the top of a Google search.
  - b. Lyons has a good community web site that gives lots of information about the community on it. The web site was probably a little more updated than the community, but things are in good progress. No difficulties on obtaining information for the community online.
  - c. It was very easy to find information about the community online. Not only does the City of Lyons host a website, so does the Lyons Chamber of Commerce. I found both of these sites to be extremely well done. Lots of information, easy to maneuver, and the information was engaging. I learned quite a bit online! The Lyons Recreation Commission offers a great amount of info also on community events.
  
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. On a drive-through, Lyons looks like an average central Kansas town. Items of note included the salt mine and the Celebration Center and hotel. From the North – Lots of abandoned houses and junk. From the South – Salt mine, golf course, and nice homes. From the West – Lots of retail and restaurants. From the East – Older area, but neat and tidy, Mahindra plant, Celebration Center.
  - b. It is easy to drive through both directions with highways leading you through. This ease makes it easy to just drive through without stopping as well as allowing you to stop at places for specific travel needs. Better signage from those highways would probably be helpful to businesses not on those streets. Also the welcome signs which have been there a long time probably could use some updating. Signage could be improved everywhere. Streetscape is great around the courthouse, but the commercial area could use some attention. That is also true for the buildings and housing coming into town. Several homes that need attention as well as several large commercial buildings that need attention.

- c. Thoughts following the “5 minute” tour: Very clean and neat community. I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of commerce in the area- franchised and privately owned. Courthouse square is absolutely beautiful. Vacant, abandoned, and/or blighted housing/bldgs along the entrances of town are noticeable- but I happen to be EXTRA aware of that issue because my community has the same problem. It is a difficult and cumbersome issue to address. Shopping, eating, services are spread out all along entrances (mainly 56 highway) so there is not a sense of “arriving (we are here!)” until you see the courthouse square and realize you are “in town”. The main roads coming into town are highways, making “streetscapes” difficult. There is some signage welcoming you to town- “Land of Quivira”. I got the impression the signs had been there for quite some time. Signage seems a bit dated and lacks luster- I would consider updating. It is difficult to make a statement at “Arrival” when your traffic streams in from each direction mainly as highway traffic rather than purposefully taking an exit to get there. I think a bolder “statement” needs to be considered for the downtown area.

### **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. Very nice downtown square. Most buildings in good condition. However, when you get one block off the square in any direction, there appear to be a lot of empty buildings. Women’s boutique (although not open on Mondays), gift shops, coffee shop, bar & grill, banks, insurance, financial services, title company, hardware, furniture, photography, salons, phone company, laundromat, thrift store. Very good variety of businesses. Coffee shop was great. Floral and gift shop had nice variety of merchandise. Bar & grill has great food and nice interior, but needs an exterior facelift. Great customer services at every business we entered. We were welcomed with a friendly greeting everywhere we went.
- b. From a curb appeal perspective, the downtown area needs attention. I felt that out of about 20 storefronts only 2 or 3 have really paid attention to the outside of the building. Inside of the buildings was a totally different story. Great work had been given to renovate the inside of the buildings and make them inviting and welcoming to customers. We were there on a Monday and unfortunately some of the retail businesses were closed, but the 5 we were able to go in have created an inviting space that causes customers to linger. Signage on downtown buildings was good and it was easy to find the downtown district around the courthouse square. I did feel that the buildings could really be enhanced with some outside attention. Went in and shopped in retail gift/flower shop, hardware store, and ate lunch in a great downtown restaurant. Great merchandise and well displayed. Stores were clean and staff was very friendly. Food was awesome. Customer service was very good. Gave great assistance and answered all my questions.

- c. As mentioned- the courthouse square is truly the visual anchor of the community. Its very presence draws you in and creates the desire to park and walk around. It is unfortunate there are not more retail businesses located directly surrounding it. As with many small communities, service and professional offices have taken over prime retail spaces. However, there is a decent “mix” of businesses on each block- making it worth the walk around! Several businesses are closed on Monday so we were disappointed we did not research that a bit more thoroughly. We visited a coffee shop that had a very comfortable and inviting atmosphere. The staff was incredibly friendly and informative. We were SO impressed with the multi-purpose approach this business has adopted- unique specialty pastries, breakfast beverages, specialty pizza, beer/wine, community activities. They serve a diverse customer base and many needs seamlessly from one location. A flower/gift shop captured a lot of our attention and \$. Very unique product lines, artfully displayed so they all seemed “one of a kind”. Every item purchased seemed very “special”. The owner was very friendly and knowledgeable and provided some delicious options for lunch. The restaurant we had lunch at was another pleasant surprise, and the wait staff was very helpful with our lunch decisions. She knew the menu and what the local “favorites” were. If this had not been recommended to us – we would not have gone there as we thought from the outside it was just a “beer joint”. Better signage? We were greeted at every establishment we entered, except for the grocery store which is understandable. I did not experience any poor customer service or unfriendly people.

**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. No public amenities were noted on the business side of the street. The landscaping on the court house square was nice. Didn't appear to be much else in the way of streetscaping. There was plenty of parking, but the spaces were way too narrow. The retail businesses and restaurants were fairly spread out with a lot of service businesses in between. From a visitor's/shopper's standpoint, it would have been nice to have them closer together.
- b. Didn't look for drinking fountains, had benches around the courthouse, did not see a public restroom, or trash receptacles. Wi-Fi was available in the businesses. Probably could have accessed it in the library as well. Landscaping and streetscaping were great around the courthouse. The business district could use some landscaping and/or attention to the outside of the buildings. Parking was accessible.

- c. The coffee shop restroom was available for public use, as well as complimentary ice water and cups for those of us not purchasing a beverage. You feel welcome- even if everyone in your group does not make a purchase. The owner (?) made a point of telling us we could help ourselves- very thoughtful. The Wi-Fi password was clearly posted in the coffee shop, but I did not find that in any other establishment we visited. The restaurant we had lunch in offered a restroom as well, and the wait staff was very helpful with our lunch decisions. She knew the menu and what the local “favorites” were. The grocery store had a seating area- but I do not recall any clearly marked restrooms. We could access several businesses by parking around the courthouse, and had no trouble finding parking. I did find it incredibly odd that there was no “assistance” provided to pedestrians trying to cross the street or highway at the corners. It was an “at your own risk” crosswalk which I found really interesting, and a bit disturbing based on the traffic. I’m not sure if KDOT does not allow that? Or why that has not been addressed? It would create a much more safe and “walkable” environment if pedestrians knew they truly had the right of way. Not all drivers voluntarily follow that rule.

#### **4. Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

- a. West Highway 56 has a number of retail businesses. They were average from the standpoint of attractiveness and ease of access. The ACE Hardware store was very nice and had a huge selection.
- b. Went out to the west of town and went into two other retail businesses. They were well stocked, staff was good, and outside was in better condition.
- c. The ACE Hardware store is AMAZING. The inventory was SO much more than I anticipated – all neatly arranged and organized. We were immediately greeted by employees and offered assistance. They allowed us to wander around, but also directed us to particular items of interest (seasonal items, etc.) I’m not gonna lie – we left our cards in the hopes of sparking some interest in opening a store in our community. SO impressed. We did not encounter any shopping areas that were difficult to access – you just have to drive some distance to patronize several of them. Not sure why the grocery store moved from downtown to the highway? Seems a bit out of the way for residents.

## **5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

- a. There is an industrial park in the Northeast area of town, but industry still seems to be fairly spread out (Mahindra on the east end of town, salt mine on the south end of town). It does appear that the industrial park could accommodate a couple additional small companies.
- b. There is an industrial park on the north edge of town. It is easy to locate and has a little bit of expansion area. There is also a business area to the south of town.
- c. Yes- we saw the signage as we were leaving town and visited the industrial area. I will admit – that was by accident (seeing the sign). I’m not sure if we had come to town “looking” for the industrial park we would have found it without asking. We honestly thought the area south/southeast of town was the manufacturing area. Although there is some vacant land around the industrial park – I can’t say if it would be “available” for expansion or if that is privately owned. However, at this time each of the entities located there seemed to have plenty of room. Also – the emergency services complex is very nice and makes such great sense to have it all in one place! It looks like there is definitely room to expand some there if needed.

## **6. Health Care Services**

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

- a. There appears to be an adequate supply of health care services. However, I did not observe a behavioral health care provider.
- b. The hospital and emergency medical emergency facilities were easy to find and look very functional.
- c. Although we did not enter the hospital, the overall impression was that it was of good quality. The facility looked very nice and well maintained. There seemed to be an abundance of ancillary services available surrounding it such as long term care, senior housing, assisted living, etc. Seems very well planned rather than being spread all over town.

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

- a. The hospital and clinic appear to be fairly new. EMS is located with the county health department in a new facility.
- b. All services were available in the community, great signage on them and look to be accessible and updated.
- c. 2 dentists. Geriatric specialist, Physician’s assistant, family medicine doctor, 3-4 chiropractic, 2 eye doctors

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

- a. Lyons appears to have all of the above.
- b. Located close to the hospital and were easy to access. Seemed like there were several options for these services.
- c. Waldron Place Senior Living, Country Living of Lyons, Good Samaritan Society. These all looked to be VERY nice facilities and are located close to the hospital.

**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. There is a nice selection of mid- to high- end housing with many nice brick homes. Some of the lower end housing north of the railroad tracks is in very bad shape. There are a lot of great older homes in the mid-town area that need a little TLC for those willing to take on a fixer-upper. Did not see a lot of homes for sale.
- b. Found several neighborhoods in the south and central part of the community that were in great condition and appeal to middle /upper income. Properties were for sale in different price points.
- c. I was very impressed with the housing inventory, and was surprised by the number of all the brick homes in the community. The SE and SW quadrant of town seem to have the higher end values and newer construction or custom homes. The area north of Highway 56 seems to be the original part of town and has some blighted properties, smaller and older housing units. Great potential in this are for rehab and potential rental inventory. I was VERY impressed by the fact I only saw 4 Morton Building/oversized sheds out of approx. 150 homes in various neighborhoods. Obviously the planning and zoning boards are doing a great job of keeping residential neighborhoods protected from this type of building.

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

- a. Observed duplexes and the Smart Suite apartments
- b. Did see a few signs in front of homes sharing a landlord's phone number. Also saw a new structure in the south edge of town advertising for rentals.
- c. It's hard to know what single family homes might be rentals, so that is difficult to assess. The Smart Suites facility is a wonderful benefit to the community and looks to be of good quality and affordable in the sense that utilities, etc. are included. That would make for easy budgeting on a fixed income. Regarding the first part of this question on housing – a nice selection of inventory on the market currently with prices ranging from \$25,000 to \$155,000. This should provide plenty of budget options for families interested in purchasing a home.

## **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. There appears to be more than one preschool, two elementary, and junior/senior high schools. All appear to be well maintained.
- b. Found all schools including what appeared to be a preschool in an older school building. Signage on the schools were very hard to read, except the new middle high school. Schools looked in good condition and well maintained.
- c. 2 elementary schools, a middle school/high school facility. The Frisbie Education Center is home to the district office, and may house other services? This was obviously an elementary school at one point (pre middle school addition?). It is WONDERFUL to see the building repurposed into District headquarters. There is a Head Start program as well as a Cornerstone Pre-school facility. All of the facilities look to be in very good condition and well maintained. The Middle School/High School facility is especially impressive.

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

- a. Not found
- b. NA
- c. Yes, there are several online sources that provide this type of information.

## **9. Childcare**

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

- a. Unknown
- b. N/A didn't find information on this.
- c. Online information reflects there are approximately 3 in home licensed daycare providers. There is also a preschool, and a head start program. I do not know the capacity or if these centers are full. I would assume for a community of this size, additional day care could be beneficial.

## **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. Observed many denominations: Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, Baptist, Nazarene, Catholic, Community... maybe more. It looks like maybe the Baptist church has a preschool.
- b. There were several different denominations of churches throughout the community. The physical appearances of the church buildings were all in good condition.
- c. Methodist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Christian, Lutheran, Baptist, "Community Hispanic Praise Chapel" I was VERY surprised by the number of churches in Lyons. Most of them are denominational, but it looks as though there are a couple of options open to non-denominational attendees.

## **11. Civic**

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

- a. Rotary. Not aware of others. Rotary Community Service Building
- b. Saw several nonprofit organizations listed on buildings and it appears they are active and doing different projects in the community. Saw a Boy Scout building, but didn't see a lot of other community organization signage.
- c. We visited the Rice County Community Foundation office- actually to ask about the location of the Chamber of Commerce and Eco Devo offices. There is an active Rotary Club, and I saw something about a Lions Club but I do not know if that organization is still active. We did not – but we did notice the Rotary Community Service Center building.

## **12. Public Infrastructure**

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

- a. Typical public infrastructure, in good condition. However, there was no directional signage, which would have been nice for navigating around town.
- b. Overall the community has taken care of the streets, parking, and lighting. I did not see public restrooms, landscaping along with streetscapes could be developed, especially with two highways coming through town. Signage was very old and welcome signs had Quivira on them, but no tie in to what that is.
- c. I did find it interesting that even in some of the nicer neighborhoods, the street signage was VERY faded! Some of them had obviously been replaced, but it would be nice to see them all uniformly new. Once you being to travel a "block off" of the square, the appeal and charm of the buildings decreases rapidly. It would be nice to see the appeal of the "square" carry over into those areas. There is no cohesiveness to the west commercial district. No landscaping/hardscaping, etc. It is just a bunch of businesses along the highway. I think there might be opportunities for aesthetic improvement here. Coming into town from the south, visitors see the wonderful school facility, and the beautiful golf course so that's nice.

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

- a. Nice new City Hall/Library. Former City Hall/Library appears to be abandoned.
- b. Didn't go into City Hall, but found good information online about the town. City of Lyons web site had good information on it. The City Building was easy to find and looked very new.
- c. I did not go into the city building.

**Police/fire protection:**

- a. New fire station
- b. Good Fire Department, thought that the police station was located in an older building appeared to be a little outdated.
- c. The emergency services complex is very impressive! It really makes a statement that the community is committed to state of the art facilities for their law enforcement and emergency medical teams serving the community. The police station was interesting. Previously a service station? Sorry – I don't mean to giggle but it made me think of the Andy Griffith show = Barney. I was wondering if the police department might be moved to the former City building location that is now vacant?

**Library:**

- a. New. Located with City Hall
- b. Looked new and very inviting. Website has current information going on in the library on it and good information to get additional information about the library.
- c. City Hall and the library share a facility. I did not visit this building.

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

- a. Observed a large number of sports facilities, parks and green spaces. All appear to be well maintained. Drainage ditches are neat, clean, and attractive.
- b. Found the swimming park which looks very well maintained and probably gets lots of summer use. The ballparks looked well maintained and has nice area around it.
- c. Recreational facilities and parks seemed to be in good condition well maintained, and easily accessible within the community.

**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. Land of Quivira
- b. The Quivira image used on the entry signs ties to a Historic marker about 3 miles from town, but did not understand the tie in on the welcome signs with the historic marker. Did not see any community slogans.
- c. Not that I am aware. "Land of Quivira" doesn't say much to me – I'm not a history buff. They do have a wonderful municipal golf course!!! The Lyons Rec Commission seems very active in planning community events – really great website and promotion! This entity is a great partner to the Chamber of Commerce in regard to community info.

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

- a. None
- b. The brochure we received at the retail stores about the area Christmas activities was very well done and a great invitation to come back to the other communities around Lyons as well as Lyons.
- c. The recreation commission sponsors several great events. This particular event really caught my eye and touched my heart... GREAT opportunity to honor local service members AND build community pride. *The Lyons Chamber of Commerce along with the City of Lyons are proud to offer the opportunity to honor our hometown heroes (Veteran or currently active) with the purchase of a banner. These banners hang downtown in May for Memorial Day and fly again during the month of November in observance of Veterans Day.*

**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. None
- b. Did not see any public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds or regional heritage.
- c. Unaware of any. If there are some, they are not being promoted, and are a secret to outsiders! I saw something mentioned online about a hiking trail! But could not find any specific information about it.

**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. No. However, we did note the Community Foundation office downtown
- b. Went into the community foundation office and was informed that the Chamber doesn't have a current office location, no main street program. The foundation person did say that Economic Development office was located in the courthouse.
- c. Not an OBVIOUS one. We had to stop in the Community Foundation office to find out where the Eco-Devo office was located. It is my understanding that there is no Chamber of Commerce bricks and mortar location.

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

- a. Yes. I would make a point of stopping at Brew 56, County Seat, and the Ace Hardware. I would like to stop at the Rustic Arrow on a day when they are open.
- b. YES, the restaurants and specialty shops has great food and merchandise. The employees were very friendly and helpful.
- c. Brew 56 for sure! Lovely atmosphere! I would love to come back and visit the clothing shop close to the coffee shop. It looks wonderful but was closed on Mondays. Yours Truly was a delightful place that I would visit again!

## **14. Wrap-up**

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

- a. Friendly people and a nice downtown area. You have a fabulous old train depot.... Do something with it!
- b. The food and retail stores are a great asset to draw people back into the community and the friendliness were spot on. Good selection of different types of goods and service for both community needs and people visiting. It appears that they have services for all types of community needs. The amount of quality housing and updated rental options was outstanding. The hospital and health care appears to be updated and meeting the needs of the community for all types of services. Liked the banners in the downtown district and the continuation of those that went down the highway.
- c. Everyone we visited with were very friendly and helpful. I felt it was a pretty “clean” community – not an overabundance of blight properties (although I know when you have even one that is extremely visible it is incredibly annoying). But overall – the neighborhoods were well kept without a lot of “couches on porches” and yards full of debris. You either police this very well by peer-pressure or ordinances, or there is a lot of pride in property ownership in the community. Again – the veterans banners were simply amazing and such a great tribute and touch to the downtown area.

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

- a. A dependence (both direct and indirect) on commodity markets. (ag, oil/gas, salt) Housing conditions in the north end of town.
- b. Signage and entrances into the community need to be looked at. The north end has the industrial park area, with housing that needs to be cleaned up. There are also large commercial buildings that appear to be vacant and used for storage that could have artwork or clean up done to make the town feel more attractive and welcoming. Spend some time looking at the 4 blocks surrounding the beautiful courthouse and statues to make the inside of those buildings be as welcoming as they are when you open the door.
- c. The downtown is somewhat detached from the major commercial districts on the highway, but I don’t know that I would consider that to be a huge obstacle. In many ways I suppose it is an advantage as you can set your own “tone” and create promotions/events that are more effective for smaller independent businesses. However, it does require additional marking and signage to drive visitors to downtown area. We have this same issue in our community. It can be difficult to manage the first impression of a community when you have separate business districts – many times with very different values and concerns. I would most certainly continue promotion and recruiting in the downtown square – it truly is a gem!

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

- a. I learned that Lyons has a wide variety of retail and service businesses, some very nice homes, and very nice people.
- b. Positive were the retail and food places I got to visit. When I return I have many places to revisit and some more that I would like to in on another day than Monday.
- c. The positive thing I will remember most is probably the housing inventory. The brick homes especially – so astounded by the number of them! And also the amount of senior housing and skilled care facilities. There seems to have been a good percentage of “senior” population, and it is nice if they can stay in their “hometown” as they age- even if they need additional care. The negative thing that sticks in my mind is actually a question. WHY IS NOTHING BEING DONE WITH THAT AMAZING TRAIN DEPOT?!?! It is very disappointing to see it sitting unused and not being repurposed. I see a GOLDMINE opportunity there for a civic center, a restaurant/bar, a brewery..... WOW. What a GREAT building!!!! Capitalize on this! The only other thing was the blasé entrances into the community. Update those community welcome signs!

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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