First Impressions 

**Team Report Form**

Community Visited: Mankato Dates Visited: June 9 & 13, 2018

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?

*There are several excellent websites for Mankato and generally represented what we saw. They need to transfer some of the online advertising to local advertising and signage.*

*Basic Google search of Mankato, KS pulled up* ***Mankato Chamber of Commerce*** *website. Website was very attractive. Listed about 5 churches. Mankato schools (with a quick link – Nice!) Events – information was outdated. Mammoth Festival a week away and no information or supporting effort. Fire Department – very nice recognition but outdated. Cemetery – great idea for travelers looking for sites of relatives. Numerous businesses – some listed were not in Mankato. Dining & Entertainment – many listed. Real Estate – Listed Gerald Zimmer-his website seemed dated-ample number of photos-yards appear big-however no prices to get a feel. Contact for rentals available. Chamber Tab – love the community project list. City government & utilities – very nice relocating aid however no city office website for basic community info.*

*Other searches: House for sale –warnerealestate.com-landandfarm.com – Pricing seemed very reasonable – many houses listed needing work\*\*****I was a bit concerned on the number of houses and properties for sale for such a small community, 11+ houses plus two businesses\*\**** *Jobs – were not easy to find to help relocate.*

[*https://datausa.io/profile/geo/mankato-ks/*](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/mankato-ks/) *- decline in populations and income.*

*Trip advisor – Lodging 1 bad review. Restaurants, 32 reviews-all good/excellent. Stats: Income $40,000; Homes - $50,000; Owned – 25.2%; Rent – 75%*

[*www.kansasmammothfest.com*](http://www.kansasmammothfest.com) *– was not found easily, checked many google pages, had to specifically google mammoth fest Mankato, KS.*

*Facebook pages: Chamber of Commerce, Mankato Swimming Pool, Mankato City Library, buy sell trade, schools, Jewell County Community Development (posted job openings, community events, Tire Clean-up Day June 8-9th, love the little monthly newsletter)*

*\*\*Lots of information but scattered through many sites and pages.\*\**

1. 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.)

*My first impression was somewhat favorable. Many of the areas has small houses that were very close together. Some areas were in need of clean-up, but many small towns are that way. Schools, hospital, community center and library were all impressive. A “Welcome to Mankato” sign was noted at each side of town on Hwy 36. There was a small sign designating the business district, but easily missed. Very nice park along highway but limited access. Turning onto Main Street from Hwy 36, the first sight are abandoned buildings in need of repair. Not very inviting.*

*Entered Mankato from the East on Hwy 36. This highway was a smooth ride, looked new along with the curbing. The speed limit (40 mph) through town (with hills) was of immediate concern for me as a paranoid mother as well as a business owner. Quick glimpse through on Hwy 36, great entrance sign, adequate in size. No signs really “promoting” the community. Presence of sidewalks varied from block to block. Few commercial as well as residential properties needing attention to improve appearance however overall great impression. Mankato looked cute, quiet and promising.*

*Recommendations: It’s a US highway so it may be difficult but slowing the speed limit for local businesses. As a traveler, I would have passed through and Mankato would have been gone in the blink of an eye. Hwy 36 is Mankato’s main and only outlet to the outside world, the speed limit of 40 mph does not encourage tourism or business.*

*Landscaping/Tidy Up – Transportation office, churches, bank have set the example.*

*More and better signage – sell your community – promote the community.*

*City park – did not see any signage until it was right there (at 40 mph).*

*Pool – pre-visit, seen a page on Facebook but honestly forgot about it until later, nobody mentioned it, no signage.*

*Hospital – Husband said there was a small “H” sign with an arrow along the highway coming but no eye catcher sign on the corner by the steak house or Dollar General promoting or advertising it.*

*Community Center/Library – only sign is in front of the building.*

*Community Garden*

*The local government, organizations, and the commercial base has so much to offer. However, on the flip side, there seemed to be a small sense of community pride from the community. To us, every other property was riddled with yard and/or porch clutter and debris, tires and barrels, over growth, numerous untagged & unusable vehicles and equipment scattered throughout town. Dangerous/hazardous buildings, garages and sheds. Please don’t get me wrong, there were many clean and appealing properties, however it was easily offset by the equal or greater number of the properties needing attention or a helping hand. As a visitor the appearance came off as sort of income mixed neighborhoods.*

*Residential area is also in need of “Dead End” or “No Outlet” signs.*

2. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed. Describe the customer service received.

 *In general the building could stand some TLC. Could easily make the downtown area more inviting. Signage, though available, could be improved. No marquee type sign designating local events, information, etc. other than the movie theater.*

 *Gift store, appliance store, gallery. The gallery was closed. The gift store had a very limited inventory. No Chamber of Commerce office. I had lunch at Bob’s Inn. Initially we were ignored for a while, but eventually had good service. The manager of Possibilities was very friendly and shared good information about the store and the town.*

 *Few abandoned buildings. Very nice church however upon turning “BOOM” garage caving in, building with broken windows and plastic.*

 *Furniture store, appliance shop, VFW (loved the flag drop off), law offices, pharmacy, dentist office church, thrift store, Possibilities, health services, auto body, storage. It took a few circles around the area to realize the grocery store.*

*Places visited: Mankato Express – We were not greeted upon entering but was thanked upon purchase and exiting. Very nice, clean store however pumps were dated, and shelf items were not priced. Had a small tourism information area. (Property was listed for sale online.)*

*Thrift Store – Wonderful thing to have within the community. It’s huge and very well organized. Ladies were very nice and kid friendly to our son (3). Mankato is very fortunate to have this.*

*Possibilities – Neat place, with a little bit of everything. Very friendly lady, she made and encouraged small talk. Recommended Sweden Crème as a place to eat while exploring the area. She was super nice to our son. Lady seems to care a lot and have new/fresh ideas. The business side of me believes an in town attraction or more tourism would really benefit this store.*

*Mac Kwik Shop – Purchased fuel, the pay at the pumps worked!! Which we find exciting, our station lacks it due to the expense of upgrading/updating. Asked a gentleman working where the park was or if there was anything for kids to do. He recommended the Mankato City Park and gave us directions.*

*Pharmacy – Sign said open until noon on Saturday however they must have jumped the gun.*

*Sweden Crème – One of those ‘Never judge a book by its cover’ type places! Not that the outside was horrible looking, but the outside plain blandness does not do the place justice. It could certainly use some flowers or landscaping. Maybe move the signage east, to in front of the building. Maybe a privacy fence blocking the house behind it. Outside music. Just something to draw your attention. The inside was awesome, the food was amazing! We would totally stop here again when in the area. The Philly Cheese Steak Melt was to die for.*

*Dollar General – great location, excellent parking.*

What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.)

 *There were numerous benches along Main Street. Public restrooms were in some businesses! Did not find wifi, fountains or trash receptacles.*

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

 *Parking was not an issue. At least some of the businesses were not handicap accessible. Most streets and sidewalks appeared to be in good shape.*

 *Very nice court house and police station for the size of town. Great variety of shops all within walking distance. Parking was easy. There were adequate trash cans on Main Street. Noticed a lot of even posters and flyers lining windows. We didn’t see much beautification, such as plants, flowers, community pride signage/banners. The age of the downtown showed a little and there was some cleanup/beautification needed but overall it was a nice downtown business area with many options.*

1. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

 *The grocery store was difficult to find. Several businesses were along HWY 36. The Sweden Crème parking was limited and lot could be improved.*

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

*They have an area where Debuque Packing was previously located that is available for both business and housing expansion.*

5. Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services. Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers.

 *Twelve bed hospital and clinic. Seemed to have very good medical services for a small community. Did not appear to be any local public transportation means.*

*Mankato is very lucky regarding the number of services available in a small community. Even a pharmacy, which help prevent travel. All together a huge asset as well as huge convenience.*

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

*There is a nursing home associated with the hospital. They also have limited HUD housing.*

*Didn’t see long-term health care facilities.*

6. Housing

Give a brief description of the existing mix of housing stock. Does the local market have housing that would appeal to all income wages? What challenges do you see in regards to finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)

 *Didn’t see many houses that appeared to be for sale. Several people told us houses sold for $30K to $150K. Newer housing was found in limited areas. Many of the middle income type houses seemed to be in need of repair.*

 *Many houses online for sale. Upon visiting, there were a few houses with “for sale” signs that I didn’t recall seeing online. There did seem to be a bit of a gap – from fixer uppers, ranging in size ($15,000 - $78,000) straight to ($430,00) perfect, move in ready country dream home but nothing in-between. Mankato has potential to have a good variety for all income levels on the market, just not currently.*

 *Challenges – There seemed to be a good mix of houses to suit any income level, but it seemed as if the neighborhoods are somewhat income mixed, which could be frustrating. For example: supper nice house, owners take pride in the upkeep of both the house and property however right next door the house and property need attention. I think it would be challenging and frustrating for both a buyer and seller.*

 *Other challenges – Driveways, maybe some homeowners just have too many vehicles but there was one area of town where there were a ton of vehicles parked along the street, making it unattractive and very narrow for any traffic. Yards in another area seemed a bit cramped, houses were close together supported by small yards. Distance – the distance from Mankato to a city for bigger shopping trips.*

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

 *Rental property for businesses seemed limited. We were told that rental houses and apartments were in the $200 - $300/month range which seems very low for this community.*

 *Pine Haven- appeared to be in excellent condition. We did not view any apartments, but they look as if they would be very nice. We heard rent is super reasonable and half what they charge in our town.*

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

 *K thru 12 with pre-school. Buildings appear to be in good shape. The middle school and high school were very impressive. My understanding is that all county students come to Mankato. There was excellent information about Rock Hills 107 schools online. An abundance of information is provided, indicating strong community support.*

 *The website didn’t have a whole lot to offer in a sense of relocating or numbers. Googling didn’t off much information either. We drove by the elementary school as well as Jr/Sr High School. Elementary school looked older in comparison to the Jr/Sr high school, but both were big and adequate in size. Building and grounds appeared well maintained. High school was bland. It could use some flowers or landscaping. Mankato is blessed to have K-12 schools and even a track in such good condition. Is the community able to utilize the track for strength and conditioning as well?*

1. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

 *Did not observe any services and no one we talked to said anything about childcare services.*

 *There were a few properties littered with toys, one could possibly assume the property could be a home daycare. However, we didn’t see any signage or flyers for daycare.*

1. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the churches represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of church-sponsored community services?

 *We saw 5 different churches and all of them appeared to be well-maintained. The city administrator indicated that the church communities are very involved in Mankato and provide many volunteer services.*

 *All church properties looked wonderful, well maintained and kept up. Great landscaping. Other than possibly the thrift store, we did not see or observe any church sponsored community*

 *services.*

1. Civic

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

*The movie theater is a volunteer, non-profit organization. It seemed odd they closed for the summer due to lack of help. The Chamber appears to be very active. Farmers Market is hosted by the Historical Society. A concert series is sponsored by the library.*

*With the heavy advertising of Mammoth Fest, I’d assume there is some sort of planning committee. VFW appeared to be active as well as fair grounds for 4-H/FFA. Thrift stores are generally operated by local churches or group volunteers.*

1. Public Infrastructure

Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas **other than downtown**. Did you observe land-use planning?

 *Did not notice evidence of streetscaping or landscaping other than the city park which was very nice. Some areas needed cleanup and indicate a lack of pride, but not unusual for small towns.*

 *Highway US-36 was amazing.*

 *Streets throughout the community weren’t horrible (we have horrible dips), the brick roads seemed to be holding up rather well. There were some non-brick streets that could use some attention. There was a pothole along Spencer Street after turning from the City of Mankato building. Grass/weeds growing up through some cracks in the streets near the curbs. Curbing appeared to be in excellent condition throughout most of the community – some unattractive due to overgrowth. Few areas had no curbing.*

 *Sidewalks were hit and miss throughout the town. Some were cared for, some were covered in dirt or overgrowth and some were non-existent. I’m a huge fan of sidewalks. I believe they create great curb appeal, add value, promote wellness and safety. However, I also know they are expensive to fix and install. Also, some argue who is responsible (homeowner vs local gov.). Signage and landscaping was lacking. Signage was noted above. Clean up and landscaping throughout residential and commercial area is desperately needed.*

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

*We stopped at the city building and found very limited brochure type information. The city administrator was very helpful and provided a lot of information on a variety of topics. Appeared to be very passionate about improving Mankato.*

*City/Town Hall was of course closed on a Saturday. The corner of the court house, I would think would be a perfect location for a triple sided kiosk or bulletin board/information center type thing and even in the city park for another.*

Police/fire protection:

*Volunteer fire department. Heard good comments about personnel and equipment.*

Library:

*Very nice library that was connected to the community building.*

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

 *The city park was very impressive and is used as a focal point for many events.*

1. Recreation/Tourism

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

 *Did not note a slogan or specific event, but they do have many events throughout the year.*

 *NA*

What significant events take place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?

 *The Kansas mammoth Festival was being advertised locally. They also sponsor concerts, 5k runs, car shows, farmer’s market. Not sure is these are promoted area or state wide.*

 *There were a lot of flyers for Mammoth Festival throughout the community which should capture the interest of the community as well as those from neighboring communities. Living over an hour away, I personally have never seen advertising or heard anything about their festival.*

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

 *There are 2 lakes, Waconda and Lovewell. We were told they do not benefit Mankato commercially very much. Maybe this is an opportunity that needs explored.*

 *Lovewell Lake which is 26 miles away is a huge attraction. Mankato is good location to fuel up and dine. Word of mouth says Mankato has some of the best places to eat. Such as the Steak House, Bob’s Inn and Sweden Crème.*

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.

 *There was no visitor center, chamber office or other facility that seemed to focus on or welcome visitors. The city offices were also somewhat remote from downtown.*

 *Mankato Express had a small tourism brochure area right as you walked in the door. We didn’t think much about it since we just arrived into town and hadn’t been downtown yet. We discovered later there wasn’t much downtown or businesses opened to assist on Saturday.*

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

 *Did not really see anything that would bring me back other than some of the planned events.*

 *I can’t stop thinking about those Philly Cheese Steak Melts!!! I say “those” because I snarfed one down dining in, it was soooo good I ordered one to go. I want a reason to go back just so I can stop there for a Philly Cheese Steak Melt.*

1. Wrap-up

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

 *The medical services provided, school system, city park, several businesses providing services not always found in a small town. Indication of growth – sale barn, new liquor store, numerous people talked about avid community support.*

 *The items we viewed as most positive were: the swimming pool, the Mankato City Park, the K-12 schools, community center/library, the grocery store, the gas station(s), health services (all without commute). Great food choices for nights one wouldn’t feel like cooking. Proximity to the lake. As a family, we viewed this very appealing.*

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

*Like many small towns, financing community projects, re-vitalization and growth is always an issue Maintaining an inviting downtown area, including repairing buildings and storefronts. Finding ways to keep young people or providing opportunities for them to return.*

*If we were to consider relocating to Mankato, a couple of the biggest challenges/obstacles we discussed were jobs and housing. Mankato has so many things to offer without travel, but would we be able to find decent paying jobs with benefits without travel? Housing, though there were many on the market – we prefer to steer clear of major fixer uppers. So finding a small/medium house, already renovated or needing minimal work or updating, with big yard and within our budget could be a challenge.*

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

*Overall I was impressed with the many services provided, both businesses and activities, i.e. events, swimming pool, park, etc. I do think they are missing out by not doing a better job locally of capturing the hundreds of thousands of people that pass through Mankato each day on HWY 36. Their online sites are excellent, but very little local signage to get people to stop. Seems like and it was expressed that Mankato wants to be the best kept secret in Jewell County.*

*On the negative side, we will remember the number of rundown buildings as well as the number of older and dilapidated houses. The sense of pride or effort that needs to come more from the residents (and a few business properties). The cleanup or “tidying up” that needs to happen or needs to be enforced. Or maybe help or assistance in these efforts if a lower income community. (We are unsure of any ordinances for overgrowth vegetation, vacant/dangerous buildings and untagged/uninsured/inoperable vehicles and/or equipment).*

*On the positive side, all the great things Mankato has to offer as a convenience for easy small town living. Proximity to the lake. The friendliness of those we encountered. The amazing food at Sweden Crème as well as others we heard about (Bob’s Inn and Steak House).*



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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension Service

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