

# First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



**Community Visited:** Melvern

**Date(s) Visited:** a.) Fri 10/19/18

b.) Fri 10/19/18 c.) Fri 10/19/18 d.) Fri 10/19/18

**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 information on the website was very good. I thought their website did a great job of presenting information to new members of the community or those visiting. It does need updated periodically.
- b. Website was okay. I don't remember any information about your nature trails. If it's on the website, it doesn't make a strong enough first impression.
- c. The web page was easy to navigate through but it was missing valid information like the City Hall business hours. Yes the website did accurately reflect the Melvern businesses, churches, and parks. The website was second on the list when searching yahoo for Melvern, KS. No difficulties finding info on the web for Melvern.
- d. I did do some online research before we went and the website was easy to use and stated everything accurately.

**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. My first impression wasn't a very positive one, I just didn't feel like it was a place I would want to raise a family. I don't know if it was because it was a rainy day but nothing on our initial drive through the town caught my eye and excited me. There wasn't much signage coming into the town, few signs but nothing to really welcome you to Melvern. Homes looked run-down and weren't well maintained. Downtown looked like it needed some revitalization and something to spruce it up. New City Hall building! Looked good and will be a nice addition to the community. Need to move some signs as the new building blocked the sign point to the lake.

- b. First impression of the town was run down and tired. It appeared that many homes had suffered storm damage as many windows were boarded up and shingles missing. When asked at City Hall if a storm had recently come through, we were told not recently. Our GPS brought us in from the north. There was one small sign stating the school's sports achievements. The larger welcome sign we saw as we left town headed west towards the lake.
- c. Several old abandoned buildings/businesses. A large number of trailer houses. The majority of the housing properties did not have well-kept lawns/landscaping. The curb appeal could use some up keep. There was a cute old gas station with a few old antique cars parked in/around that might make a neat car museum or other attraction if it was restored. A few dead end streets not marked. We came into town from the north end and there was very little signage to direct us to Melvern or welcome visitors into town. First few businesses were no longer in operation.
- d. Going through town, it looked as though a storm had gone through. Boarded up windows, shingles removed everywhere. Seemed to be a lot of trailer homes in town and not a lot of new construction. We entered town from the north which is the way GPS took us. Not much signage coming from the north.

## **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 when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)**

- a. The buildings were older and seemed like they need some up-keep. The bar was closed and for sale. The community building looked nice but didn't have much on the outside (flowers, signs, etc.). New City Hall building (what are they going to do with the old?) We ate at Kathy's Café, service was very friendly. We stopped at City Hall and the secretary was very helpful and explained a lot of things about the town. The bank tellers were very friendly and gave us additional information. The bank is a unique building, like how they have kept the building looking original. I think this can be a point of interest in their community.
- b. The town has a few neat old buildings. The old car shop/filling station on the north end would be neat fixed up. Maybe a town history museum. The old two story grocery store is also a neat building. I understand it's privately owned. It would be nice to open the lower level for events. The bank is also a nice historic building. I would assume it might be able to be recognized as a national historic building? If so, you should display that for all to see as they come through town. Very few businesses still open. Bank, restaurant, photo studio, gas station on south end and headed west toward lake, library, and City Hall. School district office needs to have a large sign outside with school mascot/colors. You should be proud you still have a district office in town! Everyone was friendly. The lady at City Hall was very nice. She took the time to answer all of our questions.

- c. Most of the buildings were old structures but had character to them. The businesses that were in operation all had signs with the business name that were very visible. Bank, City Hall, Kathy's Kitchen, and Kramer Photography. Good hometown cooking and pies at Kathy's Kitchen. Kramer Photography has some excellent photos on display. Neat photo of the gas station as you enter town. City Hall- the clerk was very friendly and welcomed us. She answered all of our questions and provided great information about Melvern. Bank- the teller was welcoming and friendly.
- d. Your town seems to have a lot of history. The older buildings are awesome to see. It would be awesome to see some of those buildings restored and used for miscellaneous business. I know the new city hall is covering the lake sign but more signage for the lake would be useful. Went to City Hall, City Clerk was very helpful in answering our questions. Also visited the bank. Loved the bank. Again, lots of history. We had lunch at Kathy's Kitchen. Very friendly service. Love the atmosphere of the café.

**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. I didn't notice any of these downtown but they had public restrooms and trash receptacles out on the walking trails as well as a place for recycling. There was free Wi-Fi available at the library. We had no difficulty parking. Street and landscaping wasn't that great, it wasn't bad, but nothing that caught my eye to make me think "that looks good."
- b. 2 parks, 1 memorial park, restrooms at parks and hiking trails. I liked the recycle bins located throughout town and free Wi-Fi at the library. Street and sidewalks seem bare. Maybe add planters along main street and at memorial park. Clean up downtown sidewalk. Saw mouse traps along sidewalk.
- c. Recycling bins throughout town and trash cans. Did see public restrooms near the trail and at the railroad park. Do not recall seeing many benches throughout town. Free Wi-Fi at the library next to Kathy's Kitchen. Landscaping and streetscaping is in need of up keep. Plenty of parking available. There were multiple businesses close together so it was easy to park and walk.
- d. Noticed the recycling bins around town; that was very nice to see. Wi-Fi availability is great. One of the services available is an ATM. We do not have that in Axtell and wish we did. Residential landscaping could really use some work. Landscaping around the park is great and welcoming.

### **3. Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

- a. A convenience store on the way to the lake (still in town) didn't have any signage explain what it as. Just looked like a rundown old gas station.
- b. Gas station on highway going to lake needs a sign and window pictures/wording advertising what's available to purchase..... bread, milk, bait, fishing permits, etc. Especially since there's no grocery store in town.
- c. Other than the convenience store there really wasn't any retail shopping available. Kramer photography was downtown and easy to access.
- d. Signage for some of the businesses around town could be updated or added.

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

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

- a. Didn't really notice any industrial parks besides the CO-OP.
- b. Not really that I saw. There were some storage units and an empty storage lot.
- c. No defined area that we could tell but possibly could expand by the co-op.
- d. I did not notice any area where this is possible but I'm not sure how far out the city limits go.

### **5. Health Care Services**

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

- a. Patrons and visitors would have to travel for health care. Had a volunteer Fire and EMS department.
- b. None present.
- c. Volunteer EMS that are actively engaged with training high school students and getting them interested in EMS. Hospitals are all located in neighboring communities.
- d. None located in town but a close distance away. Same as Axtell.

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

- a. N/A
- b. There are empty buildings downtown that might be available but would also take an investment to repair/meet code.
- c. These services are not available in Melvern. Residents have to travel for all healthcare needs other than EMS.
- d. N/A

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

- a. Didn't notice any long-term care facilities in the community.
- b. Did not see any. Only apartment complex (8 units) that appeared to be lower income units.
- c. None
- d. None that I am aware of.

**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.)**

- a. There were a couple of houses for sale and the city clerk told us some of the rental properties available as well as landlords.
- b. So many homes seemed uncared for. Boarded up windows, missing shingles, missing paint/poor siding. There is also a large number of trailer homes in similar conditions. Yards are not taken care of throughout town. I saw very few homes in good shape that would appeal to middle to upper income families. Perhaps look into available grants that would provide assistance to replace bad siding. A neighboring city did this, and the grant covered half the cost of new siding. A city wide clean up would do the town good.
- c. Housing consisted of about ½ trailer homes and ½ traditional homes. Some 2 story, and some ranch style homes. Most of the housing is older homes. There were only a few homes for sale. A couple of the homes would need significant renovations. There was a 2 story limestone home for sale on the edge of town that was beautiful and had a nice red barn/shed on the property. Yes, there are homes that would appeal to all incomes if they weren't afraid of renovations.
- d. Saw lots of trailer houses with a mix of older homes. Not much for new construction on homes.

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

- a. Saw several lots that would potentially be building properties. City Hall secretary did mention a couple lots available.
- b. No rentals were advertised publically that we could see. We did ask at City Hall and were told there were privately owned rental houses and trailer homes.
- c. There was an apartment complex with 6-8 units that could be rented and we were told there were also a few trailers that were rentals.
- d. City Clerk talked about some rental houses around.

## **7. 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. The school has grades 7-12. Adequate size and looked maintained. They had a home football game that night but school was not in session that day.
- b. Jr high- high school building looked nice and well kept. Very little landscape. Might look into a beautification project the students could do to help. (They could design and provide the labor for the project.) See if K-State or Washburn or Emporia State has any assistance at helping the students learn about different plants and landscape design.
- c. Junior high/high school (6-12) in Melvern. Building and grounds were well kept. Older school building with what appeared to be a detached gymnasium addition. There was a new baseball field near the school that looked very nice.
- d. Very nice looking school that houses JH-HS. Looks like a lot of school spirit in the community which is always nice to see. LOVE the painted parking stalls for the students. That is something that we need to do in Axtell.

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

- a. Yes, through KSDE I found their building report card and through several other online sources found the information on the quality of the education system.
- b. Online showed it was a consolidated school district. City Hall informed us that the high school has a lot of home schoolers in the area that end up coming to high school in the public school.
- c. Yes there is a link to the schools on the Melvern website. The district seems to be setting some good guidelines for the path they want the students and educators to be on.
- d. Yes.

## **8. Childcare**

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

- a. The City Hall secretary told us of two daycares located outside of the city limits. Prices seemed reasonable.
- b. City Hall informed us that there are a few daycare providers outside of town.
- c. No daycare located within city limits. All daycares were outside of town. We did not ask about the price of daycare but were told that the daycares stay full and busy.
- d. Child care services are located just out of town, but seems like in town service is not necessary since a lot of the residents work out of town.

## **9. 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?**

- a. There were 3 churches listed on their website. I only saw one during our drive through the community. City Hall secretary mentioned all three though.
- b. We saw two churches. Did not see any adopt a highway or other services in/around town.
- c. 3 churches- Methodist and not sure of the other 2 denominations. Physical appearance of churches- clean, well-maintained, adequate parking. No church sponsored services for the community were observed.
- d. Didn't see a lot of churches but maybe 2-3. For the small community it is probably enough with several churches being located in nearby towns.

## **10. Civic**

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

- a. When talking to the secretary it sounded like their PRIDE organization was very active. I saw a sign for a Legion meeting. We didn't hear about any others but several are listed on their website.
- b. Did see notice on PRIDE meetings, Legion meeting, and Ladies Aux. meetings.
- c. PRIDE, Legion, and Auxiliary, 4H, Friends of the Trail, booster club. PRIDE runs the community building and rents it out for events, weddings, funerals, etc. The PRIDE group seems to be very active- were told they helped with the RR parking. Saw posters for a Fall Festival. The Melvern PRIDE group had their next meeting date and time posted on the electronic sign. There was a sign posted that said Legion meetings 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month and Ladies Aux meetings 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday.
- d. Phenomenal job. I think it is great to have a PRIDE organization that cares so much for their community. The community center looks amazing right in the heart of the town with the automated sign.

## **11. Public Infrastructure**

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

- a. I thought the street signage was adequate but feel like it could be better. More stop and yield signs on the streets. We visited during the day so I can't comment on the lighting but it did seem like there wasn't enough street lights. Yards weren't really maintained and there was limited curb appeal on most houses. Several had boarded up windows and roofs that needed replaced. Sidewalks need updated and added.
- b. There are a lot of dead end streets. Label those with street signs. Sidewalks need cleared in many residential areas. Towns seems old and tired.
- c. There were a couple unmarked dead end streets. Not much for sidewalks other than downtown. Public restrooms were available at park and near the trails. Parks and ball fields landscaping and up keep were good.
- d. Like I said above, landscaping throughout the residential areas throughout town could use some work. Maybe if the town held a "Clean-Up weekend" with free haul off or something would help. There are several old buildings downtown that would really add a lot of character to the town if fixed up a bit. We toured the bank and were in awe of the history there. Ladies there were very welcoming as well.

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

- a. City Hall was nice as it is a new building. The secretary was very polite and informational. They had several brochures available at the City Hall about the resources in Melvern.
- b. Brand new building. Very friendly staff with a wealth of information. The brochures at the entrance are nice.
- c. We were welcomed and greeted politely by the clerk. There were town and area brochures located just inside the door to City Hall. Fall Festival posters were visible.
- d. The day we toured the town, they were just moving into the new City Hall. The location of the building is great because it is easy to find and access. City Clerk was very helpful in answering our questions and very welcoming.

### **Police/fire protection:**

- a. Half time police protection. Volunteer fire department.
- b. One part time police officer and volunteer fire.
- c. Volunteer fire department that is active with the youth of the community.
- d. Nearby towns



**Library:**

- a. Privately owned library.
- b. Privately owned library. It was closed when we visited.
- c. Private library ran by an older couple- they were out of town so the library was closed. Free Wi-Fi at the library. Conveniently located/connected to Kathy's Kitchen.
- d. Privately owned

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

- a. Two city parks and a skate park. New ball complex (needs signage to say where it is located) Trails (need signage to advertise and to guide visitors)
- b. Nice walking trails north side of town. 2 city parks. Skate Park was a nice surprise. Maybe add some color to the skate park? Nice baseball diamonds west of school. Add some landscaping and benches/shaded seating around the memorial park.
- c. For a small town there are multiple parks, 2 baseball fields and a football field. There are also walking trails- might be nice to have a sign downtown directing traffic to the trails- did not see one.
- d. The parks in town are great. We did not go through any of them, but they seem to be a popular area.

**12. 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. Have a community event coming up (Fall Days???) I don't remember what it was called) Melvern Lake.
- b. I would say the lake is the biggest draw to town. Be sure to move the "TO THE LAKE" sign to corner. New city hall building blocks view from the street.
- c. Melvern Lake. No slogan that was visible on the website or posted in town. Slogan on the website "Building Bridges Together" represent the A.T. and S.F. Pratt Truss Bridge?
- d. When I hear of Melvern, KS, I think of Melvern Lake.

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

- a. Did not see any advertising for it or anything around town. Was not located on their website.
- b. Fall festival coming soon.
- c. Fall Festival- the craft show, haunted hayrack rides, soup supper, costume parade, live music, and silent auction.
- d. The Fall Festival

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

- a. The big bridge that is shut down to vehicle traffic. I feel like this is a piece of history. (It is on their website but not much mentioned in the community.) The bank and its antique design- I would think this is a piece of history and probably one of the few left.
- b. Historic bank, trails, and old bridge.
- c. Melvern lake- camping, fishing, and watersports. Riverfront Park and trails- there is a really nice and informative map with brochures and rules about the park and trails located at the entrance. Downtown there are several older buildings that have historical relevance that could be restored as museums or bed and breakfast, restaurant, etc.
- d. N/A

**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. I did not see any available.
- b. City Hall. Make sure you have signage up advertising the brochures available.
- c. City Hall. Brand new building, they were just moving in. Friendly and informative staff. Clearly visible signs.
- d. I did not notice any. The City Hall clerk's office seems to be the center of town and the best place for information.

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

- a. The walking trail would be something that could potentially bring me back. Also the lake.
- b. Restaurant was good and the staff was friendly. Might think about staying open one night a week or for Sunday lunch once a month for a special meal... fish fry, fried chicken, etc.
- c. Possibly the lake for camping.
- d. Loved the atmosphere at Kathy's Kitchen. The staff was very welcoming and friendly even though we were "out of towners." The Photography shop was not open at the time we were in town, but looks like a thriving business.

### **13. Wrap-up**

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

- a. Friendly. Seemed like a community that cared and looking to do more.
- b. The nature trails would be a good draw for visitors. Maybe do seasonal special activities... story book forest or haunted trails for example.
- c. Very friendly people and the bank. IT is fantastic that the bank has been maintained all these years to look much like what it did back in the “old days.” Visiting the inside of the bank was a highlight of the trip.
- d. Very welcoming people. Everyone we met was friendly. Be proud of your parks and trails. They sure add a lot to your community. The Community Center seems like the heart of the town that holds a lot of events.

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

- a. I feel like the biggest obstacle in place for the community would be revitalization of the downtown and clean-up of the community. I think the curb appeal of many of the houses brings down the climate of the community. It looks like a community that doesn't care, however when you speak with them it sounds completely different. I think getting the whole community to understand the importance of curb appeal is going to be a challenge for them. I see a challenge of utilizing the lake as a resource for them. Being that it is outside of town and so many other larger communities are within driving distance. I can see visitors not utilizing Melvern and its resources. I would like to see a Lake Day or event that ties the community with the lake.
- b. The town seems like a bedroom community with a majority of its population driving out of town for work and shopping. A lot of clean up needs to happen. There is very little appeal for anyone new to move in. Perhaps implement a tear down/build up incentive where the city helps cover the cost of the tear down of old, run down homes so new homes could be built. Or look into a neighborhood revitalization benefit for new construction (homeowners would get a break in county taxes over so many years if new home is constructed)
- c. Housing properties that are deteriorating. There were several homes with boarded up windows. Many properties need to have the excess clutter or old unused items removed from the property to make it look cleaner and more appealing.
- d. Clean up. I believe that if the town was cleaned up a bit it would be very beneficial to people looking to move to the area.

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

- a. I will remember the condition of the houses. I know that it sounds bad but it stuck out to me.
- b. The high number of run down homes and lack of new construction.
- c. Negative due to the housing and up keep of properties.
- d. The old buildings downtown. I would have loved to go through them to see all the history. Sounds like the one building downtown has been renovated. You have a GREAT town and GREAT residents. We never felt unsafe or not welcome so thank you. Be proud of your town and always strive to be better.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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