First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Norton Date Visited: July 9, 2015

**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?**

The web search proved easy. There was a lot of useful information such as events, weather, city map, etc. on the website. Also included were phone numbers, schools, social services, clubs & organizations, calendar . . . it was really quite robust!

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.)**

Norton looked welcoming – had nice signs at all 4 entrances. The town seemed clean and well-kept for the most part – houses looked nice, the only eyesore quickly evident was the vacant church. Flowers on corners downtown look very nice. Blue Jay park very nice complex. Wide variety of events/local recreation can occur – race track, ball fields, dis golf, etc. It all looked well-kept. Hwy 36 was very rough and in need of maintenance. I believe it was along 36 that we saw the continuous sidewalk – great for foot transportation. There was no signage for directions to city hall, police or fire. Discover Norton sign on Hwy 36 looks faded and doesn’t communicate much. Could use some directional signage to downtown from Hwy 36. Only saw one small sign and I’ve missed it many times or am already past it before I realize what it says.

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?)**

Flowers nice/colorful touch. Buildings in downtown area mostly in good condition or currently under construction. I was impressed with the construction occurring. It looks like those buildings will be amazing and there will be good utilization of the upstairs area also – offices and/or shops too. I LOVE your brick streets! There was the one building on the corner that definitely needs some “love.” Also walking back from the Mexican restaurant, there was a business building (large picture windows) that was just being used for junk storage – not appealing. Some of the sidewalks were great, others were in need of replacement – having pieces that jutted up and could be a hazard. The vacant lot between buildings was a very nice flower garden – excellent use of this area and very appealing. The current businesses are very nice and good quality for a small town. I especially enjoyed the kitchen shop, drug store and the one “new” clothing store. There are plenty of “vintage” clothing shops. They were nice and had nice items displayed. All shops were very friendly – greeting us, asking what they could help us with and even chatting.

Many businesses in town, some empty sights. New economic center encouraging growth and new spirit of growth. We found restaurants, fast food, 2 pharmacies, vehicle repair, hardware, computer-internet companies, boutiques, clothing stores, car wash, floral, telephone, antiques, etc. Many businesses had nice displays. Some downtown stores had activity but no signs or indication of their business/purpose. We were greeted, asked if we could be helped. Friendly conversation ensued.

Walking in the downtown area was quite nice. It was nice to see construction taking place to repurpose buildings. Some of the sidewalks were needing repair as the concrete is protruding and could potentially be a hazard. The areas appeared to be clean and the area downtown with a mural was a nice conversation piece and was inviting. There was a building downtown which looked as though it was being used for storage (glass store front) which was not very attractive. The variety of businesses was nice for a smaller community to suite many tastes and desires. The kitchen store was a treat as I had heard many good things about it before our visit. The Mexican restaurant was fun as that was where we ate lunch. The consignment shops were kind of fun to peruse through as was the drug store. Folks in the stores and shops were friendly and some even took time to actually converse with us.

**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?**

Very nice park area where a building had been torn down. Landscaping was very pleasing and provided benches – shaded and unshaded. We used the public restrooms at Loves and found them to be nice and clean. I don’t remember seeing a water fountain anywhere. The landscaping and streetscaping was excellent!! As mentioned earlier – love the brick streets, large pots of flowers, flower garden in vacant lot and very nice park where building was torn down. There is an area just south of the downtown with the center island in the street that looks worn and “tired”. Many of the houses in this area needed a coat of paint. There was no difficulty parking and easy access to all services.

Benches and picnic tables were available at the park in the business area and at the Norton County Courthouse grounds. No drinking fountains were available. No public restrooms available except in businesses. Loved the downtown part converted from a fire. Loved the plants in large pots filled with flowers. Streets were clean. ADA side walk repair needed at some of the sidewalks and curbs. Plenty of parking with access to numerous businesses and services.

As stated above, the area downtown with the mural was nice which did provide seating. I didn’t notice any drinking fountains downtown. We didn’t use restrooms downtown as we stopped at Loves when we arrived into town. There restrooms were nice and clean!! It was nice to have a couple of options where we could have eaten downtown. This is great also for folks who work in the area. We took special notice of the flower pots downtown. These were lovely! We have some brick streets in Colby so it was nice to see them in Norton too; it’s such a terrific touch in a downtown area of a community. There were no issues with parking.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

Highway 36: appearance – OK and easy access.

All retail shopping has easy access.

Along Hwy 36, businesses seemed to have easy access.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

Area was in good location right off 36 and on edge of town so trucks don’t bog traffic. Buildings and area around looked nice, well-kept – not junky. Only possible downfall – signage did not indicate what they made/did – had company name and that was it. One did say something about aluminum but not what was made.

Industrial areas are readily located. There is plenty of land to expand.

The industrial area on the east end of town seemed to be located properly but we really couldn’t tell what was being manufactured there. It looked as though it was nicely kept and could possibly expand if necessary.

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

The hospital was easily located which was nice. We did see the Valley Hope facility on Hwy 36 and the additional facility (administration?) off the downtown area. I didn’t see an area for public health but did locate the veterinarian facility which looked quite large. I can’t truly speak to the apparent quality of these facilities however.

Hospital, emergency services, elderly housing, etc. Offices of health care professionals – some were found – optometrist, veterinary. Did not locate dentist or physicians. Nursing facilities found, looked presentable.

Visual – seemed adequate. We saw the hospital and long-term care and assisted living units. Valley Hope is very evident and an asset to the community. (I don’t remember what other services we saw – dentist, optometrist, county health, etc.)

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

It appeared there was a mix of available housing for sale (not an over-abundance) and there were marked areas of socioeconomic status. There were areas of residences that needed plenty of TLC from needing painted and repaired to just needing the collection of “stuff” cleaned away, but other residential areas were quite nicely kept up. It was fun to see the quilt blocks that some homes had displayed. It was great to observe several rental properties/areas. The Housing Authority looked quite nice! The Timber Creek duplexes were inviting but Prairie Hill needs some TLC.

Numerous houses for sale. All levels of housing except for very high end were seen. Mixed neighborhoods. Really nice homes and yards with dilapidated ones. Found low cost housing that was rentable. Did not see housing with rental signs.

There was a mix of housing; old, new, small and large. Man of the old houses needed to be painted. We jokingly said that Norton needs to have an exterior paint party! The internet didn’t indicate many homes for sale. We did see some as we drove around, but assume there may be somewhat of a housing shortage. There was evidence of new housing being built that should help. That area was a bit junky, but hopefully as the construction is completed it will all be cleaned up. As with all communities, there were a few homes that had “eclectic” owners – (nice way of saying the property was junky). The one housing area that we guess at one time may have been an area of pride (has center island in the street) now looks “tired” and needs some love and renovation. There seemed to be plenty of rental property. Some seemed nice, including the housing authority but the Prairie Hill Apartments looked like they were in desperate need of attention.

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?**

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

We were able to locate the schools easily which appeared to be well-maintained. I don’t remember seeing any temporary classrooms and didn’t locate any printed materials speaking to the quality of the educational system.

Appear to be adequate in size and well-maintained. 2 Preschools were found. No print materials in the community.

The public school buildings and grounds were well-maintained. We did see the Head Start facility that looked OK too. (I don’t remember if we saw a learning center???) There was school pride with large Blue Jay signs.

1. **Childcare**

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

We did observe a daycare but didn’t check into availability.

No information is kept at Child Care Aware, not locally in the community (like other Kansas communities).

We did see one daycare. We did not check into affordability or availability. I would guess it is like most other western Kansas towns and is lacking in daycare providers.

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?**

There are many options for practicing one’s faith and I don’t feel like anyone would be uncomfortable if they weren’t a certain faith. There weren’t any signs present regarding church sponsored community services but it was great to see such a large bus for the church in the downtown area.

Numerous churches in the area. The Rock for youth was evident as an ongoing service. No signs describing services or special events. One church – Chapel of Hill was blighted and needs help and not to be boarded up. All other churches seem to be in good repair. No signs or messages that would cause visitors or residents to feel uncomfortable.

We saw many options for practicing faith of choice. Not every religion was present but a very good number of churches for the size of the community. All seemed well-kept (except the abandoned church). There was nothing to make us feel uncomfortable. Saw no signs of VBS’s being held at the time of our visit.

1. **Civic**

**Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.**

During our visit I didn’t observe much evidence of civic organization activity but I do appreciate that information was on the website.

Numerous information on the website for nonprofit organizations. Found the Eagles, Valley of Hope, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Museum, Library, Northwest Kansas Library System, Kansas State Extension

We did not see a lot of evidence of civic group activity. The website did indicate that there are groups in existence.

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?**

I believe that the infrastructure is good. There were a couple of areas of landscaping down the center of a street which needed some attention.

The infrastructure seemed fine. No restrooms per say for the public other than in stores. Streetscape and parks were nicely done.

Overall I felt the public infrastructure was pretty good. There was a city crew working on a sidewalk putting in ADA crossings the day we were there. Sidewalks in general may be a concern. We observed problems with uneven sidewalks downtown and noticed there weren’t many in the newer areas of town. Seemed like there might be a few more in the older areas but they weren’t maintained well.

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

I’m not sure if everyone would have the trouble we did, but we had a hard time finding the City Hall. With our first glance we thought it was just the police and fire station. We google mapped to find it.

**Police/fire protection:**

Seemed adequate

**Library:**

The library is a GEM!! The staff was quite friendly and helpful. The facility is inviting and has materials for everyone!! The statues outside are lovely. Also has the NW Kansas Library. Very nice facility with lots of display and learning area.

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

The parks were nice and contained fun equipment for the kiddos.

Blue Jay Park is wonderful! Many facilities in one place. I don’t remember seeing many other parks, besides the little one downtown where the building was removed. (Was there one by the swimming pool?) Might be nice to have another park or two sprinkled around for children to play.

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

It was great to see set-up for the fair. There were some signs downtown telling of some events but nothing larger anywhere about town such as an LED sign or community sign. We did locate the 4-H Building. The city pool looked like a blast. There was a ball field and disc golf which would provide some fun and recreation. The building which houses the Rec. Department looked well-kept.

There were no community event signs downtown and we did not see hardly any posters etc. advertising upcoming events.

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

Prairie Dog State Lake is close by and a tourism attraction for Norton. I didn’t see anything promoting 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.**

The Chamber of Commerce building was easily located and attractive. We didn’t enter as not to be recognized. The chamber building is very visible and great use of an abandoned building.

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

I loved the kitchen store!! I would absolutely come back for this store and the Mexican restaurant! We drove out to the lake on the way back to Colby which was nice because I had never been around there. I can certainly see coming back to go fishing

The shop with all the cooking items. Loved their lunch menu.

Yes and No! If I happened to be going through or close by Norton, I would definitely stop by the kitchen store, new clothing store, drug store and Mexican restaurant – I wouldn’t drive the strong hour just to visit those places. The thing I would probably drive the hour for is the lake.

1. Wrap-up

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

Most notably, it was nice to see the repurposing of the buildings downtown. This is an amazing use of existing facility.

New construction in downtown location. Just seeing the construction for new offices held promise for us as we strolled downtown.

Community pride: people willing to donate buildings, the money to renovate, entrepreneur program, to build facilities at Blue Jay Park and keep them up, develop an extensive website, etc. This community seems to have a nice occupation mix: farming/ranching, Valley Hope, the two industries as well as the rest of the mix for a town. This type of mix helps to be more resilient when one faction experiences hardship.

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

It can be a challenge to recruit new businesses and industry to town and keep them. Our own community faces workforce issues as do most communities in NW Kansas.

Keeping businesses open downtown and inviting new businesses to invest.

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

I am really looking forward to seeing the completed buildings downtown!! I would also be interested if any of the residential areas can put some TLC into the structures.

Your downtown park and the new construction. May want to come and see how they turn out.

The kitchen shop and new clothing shop. Will wonder how the building remodeling is coming and what businesses have moved in. The need for a house paint party.

First Impressions was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and adapted for use by K-State Research and Extension. Funds for this program have been made possible by a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, Logan, KS.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Works, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and the United State Department of Agriculture Cooperating, John D. Floros, Director.