First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Paola Date(s) Visited: A- 9/7/16 (Wed)

B- 8/30/16 (Tues)

C- 9/12/16 (Mon)

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?

1. My initial search “Paola, KS” didn’t list the city’s official page, Wiki came up with information and a map; from there I refined my search and was able to find the official website. I love that it is phone friendly! Yay for Paola, I rarely pull out my laptop these days. I also searched “family friendly restaurants in Paola KS” Commercial chains showed up, but no mom and pop shops.
2. Typing Paola, Kansas into Google brought a variety of links to several aspects pertaining to the City of Paola
3. It was incredibly easy to gather information about Paola that was very accurate in its reflection. I didn’t have any trouble and thought the website was thorough aesthetically pleasing and easy to navigate.
4. **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.)
5. Very clean and well kept! BEAUTIFUL town square! Type 1 EMS, firehouse with on-site training facility, strong police presence. Easy to find City Hall, adorable shops, couldn’t find a family friendly non-fast food restaurant (I had a 2year old with me). A lot of fast food, newer Walmart (I liked the lower signage in the Commercial district).The city sign was pleasant, well maintained, noticed a tree city USA 10 years. Great signage on the highway; making the town easily located once you are in the general vicinity.
6. Overall, Paola is just a nice and appealing city. Entering from 169 highway onto Baptiste Drive showed fast food places, modern buildings for businesses, clean streets, and appealing views. Visible street signs indicated where you were. The older parts of town were farther west. The Baptiste Drive corridor is the newer business district in Paola.
7. We love the historic downtown district and the overall charm of this little town. We entered from the highway first and noticed a nice sign east of Paola as well as some other signage on highway 169. (There wasn’t any signage off of I-35.) Normally we would have entered from the roundabout north of town but it was under construction. The area near the highway was very commercial and had lots of variety. There was also a nice sign right off of the highway exit. There were some ditches that needed mowed or edged but it was a good impression overall. Nothing outstanding, just a typical area a traveler might expect near a highway. The signage to downtown was a bit confusing (we turned left on Hospital Dr. and didn’t see any other signage directing us west). The buildings were well maintained with a few exceptions. We loved the drive on Old Kansas City Road. The farms, and homes, and signs, and golf course were all very lovely.

**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?)

1. All buildings appeared to be well kept and maintained whether occupied or not. Toy store was a nice addition, but was closed when we came down. Signage was cohesive, which was nice, it brought the whole downtown together and gave a very unified comfortable feeling to the area. Gun shops, toy shop, salon and boutique, steak house, law offices, insurance agent, Title Company, dentist, museum. Great customer service! Went to city hall to ask to use the restroom, nice building, nice restrooms, was able to get a pamphlet. Had to ask where a family friendly restaurant might be as well as a park for the toddler to play. The ladies were great in giving directions to both. Did not see any parks on the way in or in driving around for 5 min., and only 1 on the pamphlet.
2. The downtown square is, of course, the oldest core of the city. The old buildings were, for the most part, in good repair. Renovations appeared to be going on in the old courthouse building and another large building was being renovated. A rather new county administration building had been built close by to the courthouse. Sidewalks for the most part were smooth and colored a reddish tint. Rubbish and trash was not present. Some of the curbing along West Peoria St. was in bad shape. New curbing and sidewalks would be a big visual enhancement. The alley by the sheriff’s offices was filled by many tall weeds and a hodge-podge looking array of electrical wires. The Historic Park Square had the beautiful fountain and a Victorian gazebo. Both have been updated and are a focal point of activities in the park. Several benches under the large shade trees give a person places to sit and enjoy the park. 16 electric replicas of the old gas lights that once illuminated the area now serve that purpose and add the looks of a bygone era. Streets were in good repair. There were about six antique stores in the downtown area. Being a county seat, there were also attorney offices and title companies. A sports store, eating places, floral and gifts, county historical museum, hotel, office supplies, and a gun shop were some of the other stores in the downtown area. Due to time restraints, we were not able to enter any stores and it appeared that many of the stores bordering the square were closed on Tuesday. We did go into the visitor center/Chamber of Commerce office and were treated very nicely and had our questions answered about the city and county. We ate lunch in a Mexican restaurant downtown and were also treated very nicely.
3. We love the Park Square! The historic buildings are well maintained and quaint and have an individual character while at the same time blending well together to create an overall appeal. The streetlights are beautiful (although the flowerpots needed attention or removed), the signage wasn’t uniform which added a bit of charm and made it look authentic. It did make it a bit difficult to know where to look for signage in some cases. Antique shops, boutiques, quilt shop, hotel, restaurants, banks, chamber/tourist office, dance studios, toy/game shop, and law offices. There was an eclectic mix of merchandise that was appropriate for the individual shops that would appeal to a variety of shoppers. Every shop we entered was staffed by friendly helpful people who were happy to provide us with all kinds of assistance. Very friendly community.

**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?**

1. Drinking Fountain, Pavilion/gazebo, decorative water fountain with benches, ball diamonds, cool pool, sports complex, Wallace Park. Easy access to ample parking, lots of businesses accessible. Walked to Paradise Cove to eat, was a great place to take a toddler we had a lot of fun and great food and service!
2. In the downtown square, there were several benches but unless we missed them, we did not see any drinking fountains or public restrooms. We had no trouble finding a place to park downtown on a weekday. The park in the square was very nicely landscaped with grass, some flowers and plenty of shade trees. As mentioned before, the fountain and gazebo were highlights. Also mentioned before, the curbing and sidewalks in the area were somewhat subpar in condition. All the businesses in the downtown area were within walking distance of parking.
3. We didn’t notice any drinking fountains or public restrooms, although I image we could’ve used the restroom in the visitors’ center or the museum. There are lots of beautiful benches in the park in the center. The landscaping in the park was beautiful. The streets were clean and well maintained or being improved at the time of our visit. We had no difficulty finding parking and could walk to a number of businesses or community buildings.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

1. Commercial area when we first came into town was definitely a concrete palace, the landscaping helped it was clean and well maintained. Everything looked fairly new. Again I appreciated the look of the low commercial signage.
2. The other main business area of town with a variety of businesses represented was along Baptiste Drive, the main street through town. For the most part, it was an attractive part of town.
3. The other retail areas were incredibly easy to find and were attractive but were did not look historic. They had a much more modern feel that was commercial and very typical of an area close to a highway. They had a very large variety of shops considering the population of the community.

**4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

1. No information
2. Yes, in the northern part of the city was an industrial area that contained some businesses and it looked like there was space for expanding.
3. I didn’t notice an industrial park nor any manufacturing facilities.

**5. Health Care Services**

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

1. Saw ample and obvious hospital signage; led us right to it and a VA as well as a primary care office.
2. There is the modern Miami County Medical Center that is a hospital and health care center. There are several doctors and specialties represented there and in the town.
3. Wow. What a large hospital/medical center. It looked modern and more than adequate. Very impressive for this small town.

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

1. LOTS
2. We observed several physicians’’ offices, dentists, two pharmacies, and other healthcare offices in the city. Paola appears to have adequate services available.
3. The dentists & optometrists’ offices looked suitable.

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

1. Saw what appeared to be a lovely senior living center!
2. There are nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and rehabilitation services in Paola.
3. We loved your senior housing on Hospital Drive, very quaint, welcoming, and well maintained.

**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.)

1. All kinds; gorgeous architecture to new build. Seemed to be many price ranges of housing; didn’t see any for sale signs.
2. There are many older homes in different states of upkeep and size as well as many newer homes. There appears to be a good mix of size and prices for homes in town. Newer housing was in the northern part of town.
3. There were a number of existing houses for sale and for rent that would appeal to all income wages. The neighborhoods were well maintained for the most part. There were a few homes that needed to have the grass mowed or couches on porches as well as other furniture in the yards but overall, the homes were clean and well cared for. I didn’t see any new developments but saw a few opportunities to purchase lots in existing neighborhoods so that someone might be able to build a home in town.

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

1. Didn’t see any for rent signs
2. There were signs for rental apartments displayed in some areas.
3. There were a large number of apartments as well as homes for rent throughout areas in town.

**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?**

1. Yes, yes, and saw the community college… nice!
2. We saw 2 elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. All were modern and well maintained. There is also a branch of the Fort Scott Community College located in the SE section of town. USD #368 is completing a recent bond issue. The following is taken from the school district’s web site on the progress of the bond issue. The usual excitement of starting a new school year has increased especially with the “flurry” of building projects and improvements that are taking place around the 368 district campus. While students and most staff were out of school for summer vacation, the construction work was proceeding at full-tilt so that Phase II project goals could be reached on schedule. Noteworthy upgrades include a newly surfaced track and artificial turf football field; the impressively remodeled Paola Middle School auditorium and commons area restrooms; and the secured entries at each of the four campus buildings. The tornado shelters are scheduled to be completed mid-winter, thus they will be ready for the Spring tornado season. Progress continues on the baseball and softball fields.
3. We saw preschools, daycare, two elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, as well as a small college facility of some sort. They appear to be adequate in size and the grounds and buildings are very well maintained.

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

1. No
2. We did not see anything.
3. The Chamber of Commerce was very helpful in providing all kinds of information.
4. **Childcare**

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

1. N/A
2. No information
3. Yes. It is affordable.
4. **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?**

1. Methodist church was stunning! Didn’t see any other denominations.
2. When driving around, we saw probably 8 or 10 churches including an old, beautiful United Methodist Church just south of the County Courthouse. It was well maintained as were the other ones. We saw no evidence of church sponsored community services.
3. We saw Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Catholic churches. They were all very well maintained and sponsored community services. Very nice impressions.
4. **Civic**

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

1. American Legion and Masonic Lodge were nice to spot!
2. We drove by a Fraternal Order of Eagles, an American Legion Post, and the Paola Country Club.
3. We saw evidence of an Optimist Club, a Lion’s Club, etc. When I tried to get more information about nonprofit organizations on the Paola Chamber website it was very difficult. I had to try to guess what existed and type it in instead of just having them listed under the nonprofit organizations tab.
4. **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?

1. The tall stone signage for the streets were beautiful and easy to read at a distance! Absolutely! Areas were clearly defined and all areas seemed purposeful.
2. We thought everything look very good in town while driving around. There was a minimum of “junky” areas that we saw. The fairgrounds, baseball fields, pool, and a park were together in the south part of town. The schools were close together. Upscale housing and the industrial area were off by themselves and the main thoroughfare through town contained most of the businesses. City and county governments were concentrated in the old town square district.
3. We loved the quaint street signs in the residential historic part of town. The streets were all well maintained and if there weren’t sidewalks it looked as if they were getting ready to pour a few. The parking was easy to find and more than adequate. The landscaping and streetscapes were good. No.

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

1. It was an old fire house! So cool! Nice restroom, great space, conveniently located, great parking, nice people, map available.
2. We did not go to city hall but were received very warmly in the visitor center/Chamber of Commerce building which had a wealth of information about Paola and Miami County.
3. The employees in city hall were incredibly friendly and professional and provided us with maps and all the information we requested.

**Police/fire protection:**

1. Heavy police presence, very safe feeling. Type 1 ambulance service, ambulance looked fairly new. Fire Department was the pinochle, great firehouse with on-site training facilities, noticed custom made fire apparatus in the bays (wow, fancy) The town clearly cares about community safety and high quality services to their residents! If the buildings and equipment are an indication of the staff I’d say 100% top-notch services!
2. Both looked very good and modern. The county sheriff’s office is also in Paola.
3. Very nice vehicles for both fire and police and a large fire station with lots of equipment. Clearly the city or county has invested a great deal in the fire department. The police vehicles looked new and gave a very nice impression. This city invests in itself and cares about the image it projects.

**Library:**

1. Looked fairly new and definitely welcoming and well kept.
2. It is a pretty stone and brick structure located close to the downtown Park Square. According to their website, plans are in the works for a new library due to the expanding population and the need for more information.
3. We loved the architecture and details of this lovely building.

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

1. All we were able to find was Wallace Park and the town square; if those are your only parks they are spectacular areas. As a mom I would have liked to have seen some “neighborhood parks”.
2. We saw the county fairgrounds, baseball fields and Wallace Park in the southern part of town. There are walking tracks around the park, around Lake Myola and some residential areas in the northern part of town.
3. The walking tracks at the lake and by the riverside were wonderful. Wallace Park was very easy to find on the map and we were impressed with the pool and the ball fields, mature trees, and green space but overall we didn’t notice any other parks. We were impressed with your golf course & country club.
4. **Recreation/Tourism**

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

1. Fairgrounds
2. The Park Square is the main focus in downtown. Many activities are held there during the year including a car show, music programs, farmers market, a Halloween parade, the Mayor’s Christmas Tree Lighting, Roots Festival, and many weddings in the gazebo there giving rise to the title of Wedding Capital of Kansas.
3. I am not aware of any slogan or event that Paola uses to brand itself.

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

1. County fair
2. I think most of the above activities could be of interest to both residents and visitors.
3. There are many events taking place in Paola that would be of interest to both visitors and residents of all ages and backgrounds.

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

1. The area of the springs that started Payola, great history!
2. The above descriptions plus the lake to the north east of town, Lake Myola.
3. The lake and river are natural features that are potentially drawing people to the community.

**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.**

1. No Answer
2. Yes, there is a visitor center/Chamber of Commerce office just off the Park Square downtown. I have described it previously.
3. The visitor’s center was staffed with friendly helpful people who were happy to help us discover all the possibilities in Paola and the surrounding area. They were great ambassadors for the city. It took us a little while to locate the office. We didn’t see the signage on the window/door the first few times we passed directly in front of the building. It was a beautifully maintained office.

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

1. City hall and the Museum LOVED both! Intense passionate, sharing people at the museum. The town’s history is just astounding! Specifically, the beginnings of the “secret service” the first oil well west of the Mississippi, the Indian heritage/hunting grounds, the first colored troops, with the longest civil servants family still residing in the community. All rich and colorful, beautiful to imagine and easy to connect to. The history of the town square being donated to never be built on and that being honored to this day by the city/community… really great heritage and something you want to be a part of!
2. Beethoven’s #9 Restaurant was closed the day we were there and since it was listed as one of the 11 finest small town eating places in Kansas, we might want to come back for that. Twenty-six eating places are listed in a Paola brochure and 5 are near the Park Square. That’s a lot of places to eat in a town of about 5,600.
3. Yes. Although it is a long drive from our community I do believe I would go out of my way to stop here and have an opportunity to try other shops/restaurants in the historic district.
4. **Wrap-up**

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

1. Live music in town square sounds awesome! When leaving the community there was a flood of children all ages walking home, no traffic jams of parents clogging the roads… how did you accomplish that? Very self-sufficient yet comfortable positive small town.
2. It’s small, charming, and friendly, has most of everything you need but close enough to Kansas City for all of your “big town” needs.
3. The historic area surrounding the Park Square, the friendliness of every person we came in contact with (amazing, but not an exaggeration).

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

1. Construction off of I-35, and signage from the interstate
2. I would say probably competing with the Kansas City area for some necessities but I think the “smallness” of Paola will win out and it will remain a thriving city.
3. Getting visitors from the area near the highway to the historic downtown area with clear signage and easy access to information without leaving their vehicles – maybe a free Wi-Fi portal that leads people to your unique areas (unless you are satisfied with keeping your downtown area somewhat of a secret from the travelers on the highway). Making sure that residents and businesses keep their properties mowed and clean. (This was a very difficult question to answer because this community has so much to be proud of.)

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

1. Truly peaceful, beautiful town square, a very wholesome and traditional feeling.
2. Just driving through the town impressed me that the town has many things to offer and would be a great town to live in.
3. The nice people, the architecture and charm of the historic downtown.

First Impressions was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and adapted for use by K-State Research and Extension. Restructuring made possible through a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation.

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