

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Perry

Date(s) Visited: a,b) 7-20-20 (Monday)

1. Pre-visit web search:

How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

- a. From the City's website, the Perry PRIDE website and "googling" Perry, KS, I learned:
 - The pop of Perry is 929. I thought it would be a bigger community. It may be geographically spread out more than St. George.
 - Perry has a library!
 - I like the stone welcome sign on its webpage and looked for it when I entered Perry.
 - I found City Hall and planned to go in. I know what our City offices looked like (not so great) and wanted to check theirs out.
 - I noted besides a City Hall, Perry had a Community Building/Fire Station and a City Shop. I wanted to check them out.
 - A Zillow and realtor.com search noted there were three houses for sale and one was under contract. It looked new so I planned to go and find it. Is there a new development in Perry?
 - I read through the City Council meeting minutes for six months. It appears Council meets once a month for about 30 minutes. In January, it was mentioned the City was holding a special meeting on January 23rd at 6 p.m. for a visioning project. Nothing more was in the Council meeting minutes. Did anything come of this? I also noted the Council was having discussions about annexing across Hwy 24. These were the only two items I noted of city long-range items happening. Are there any long-term plans for Perry being worked on?
 - Noted Perry Pride had some activities in town: 6/5 - City Cleanup; 9/12 - Festival (which was cancelled due to COVID); 12/5 - soup with Santa; 12/12 - Christmas Lights Appreciation. There may have been an Easter Egg Hunt and pancake feed in April. I did read and liked the reason Perry Pride was started was because the community members felt the community was segmented. This was a way to bring all demographics together.
 - There is a mobile home park. St. George's is not well maintained so I wanted to make certain to go look at this.
 - There are trails. Note to go look at them.
 - There is a Farmer's Market and it appears to be robust.
 - Perry has a High School, Middle School and Elementary School. Plan to go look at them.
- b. Getting information was pretty simple. The web page has changed (looks like they are updating and improving it). Looking on the web site and googling you can get a lot of information for the town of Perry.

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. What a CLEAN community! Either residents take a lot of pride in their homes and yards or the City has some super-duper code enforcement officers. We were there on a Monday so maybe everyone mowed over the weekend? I think there were only a handful of places that looked less than stellar. If we compare Perry to St. George, it looks so much better overall than our town does. Kudos to your residents. Entrances: Lack of junk upon entering the community from any direction. I loved the "Welcome to Perry" rock/concrete sign. I saw it on the web and then saw it in "real life." I specifically looked for the sign for the trails coming into town but I missed it and had to Google to find it. And then the train was in the way so we couldn't get there. There seems to be a lot of trains going through Perry in the hours we were there. Very interesting looking downtown buildings. I was sorry so many were empty and didn't house small businesses.
- b. I was very impressed with how clean the town looked. You can tell residents care about their community.

3. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed. Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

- a. I was impressed with the number of businesses in Perry. I also wondered why there were so many neat old buildings empty in the downtown area. Some of them didn't seem to be as well maintained as the homes and yards were. There was a lot of potential for those buildings, I thought, although I know you have to find the right people willing to invest in them. Also, the downtown business area didn't seem to be in one area but rather scattered in different locations. I also learned in talking to community people that some of the downtown buildings were actually homes and not businesses which I thought was unique. Was sorry to see the grocery store had closed. I specifically visited a couple of business to talk to the individuals there. One I walked into looked incredibly professional on the inside and this was the carpet and flooring business. The two people I spoke with really knew their business. I wanted to lay basement carpet in the next year and I think I'm going to come back and talk to these store owners. Just wow.

Diamond Everley Roofing has a nice building. Looks like they are very busy. At least there were a lot of vehicles parked outside of the building which defined to me there was activity happening there.

We saw a large number of Hamm, Inc. pickup trucks and had to Google to learn what this business was. We noted MCM's location outside of Perry. MCM has a home in our area as well.

I liked seeing the Paw-liday Inn Pet Resort. As someone who needs pet care when I leave town, I look for things like this. Yay!

We ate lunch at the Bar and Grill and hoped to talk to area people but we didn't get the opportunity. We were pretty much left to ourselves which doesn't happen in St. George's Bar and Grill. And I like it like that. If one wants to know what is happening in St. George, one goes to Willie's.

Customer service in most of the businesses we visited was okay. Nothing spectacular (except for what I experienced in the carpet store). People simply worked at those locations. No one seemed too excited to be at work. I will say that the customer service people in Casey's were having difficulty with their masks. I was told they had to wear them but one particular woman had hers covering her mouth but not her nose. I think she was struggling with it as I know many people do. I am betting she didn't want to wear one.

When traveling, Casey's is a place I normally stop because I think they are nice and safe. I used the restroom and couldn't help but notice the sign on the door about how Casey's keeps their restrooms clean and this one wasn't so clean. Still I was happy to have the use of a bathroom. This Casey's looked old. I wondered if it hadn't been something before and then Casey's bought it. I don't know anything about the Casey's chain but I wondered if a City Official might call and ask them to consider building a new one. Offer some community statistics as to why it might be beneficial for them to do so. I have seen Casey's tear down and build new ones in other small towns. It might be worth a call. All someone can do it say "no."

Bernie's surprised me because it was actually a nicer stop than Casey's was. From the outside of the business, it didn't appear that to be the case. It was cleaner and larger than I expected when I walked in. I noted they did have fried food items that people stopped in and bought for lunch. Most of the menu items were the same thing that could be had at the Perry Bar and Grill.

- b. The buildings were older which shows to me there is a lot of history there. A lot of buildings looked vacant, after talking to some town residents we were told people actually reside in the vacant looking buildings. The business that were open you could clearly see that they were open, people were friendly and willing to answer questions.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available? Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- a. Parking was good with the exception of in front of Casey's. Maybe we just got there at a bad time. I had to park in a weird spot to get in because there was nowhere to park. I didn't experience this problem at Bernie's. Yes, I could access multiple services from where I parked. Parking at the District office and at the actual schools seemed in abundance. Of course no one was there when we were. I could see the place filling up for kids' ball games.
- b. No Answer

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. Yes, it was easy access. We parked and walked to a number of businesses. Many buildings were attractive. Some were empty or non-descript. As noted earlier, we were interested to learn that some of the large business looking building were residences.
Near the old grocery store, much of the signage for businesses in that area was damaged or not attractive looking. If the businesses were closed, perhaps this was why. The area didn't look as polished as the residential area did.
- b. We visited both convenience stores. People were friendly, bulletin boards had upcoming events posted with information for Perry and surrounding areas. The businesses seemed to be on the north or south side of town, most on the south side were walkable.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. It doesn't appear there is one. I read in the minutes posted on the website that the City would like to annex businesses on the other side of Hwy 24. We understood why when we arrived. It appears, and we were told, that Perry is landlocked and there isn't any room for the town to grow. If that is true, that is rather unfortunate because being so close to Topeka, Lawrence, and KC, I bet you have younger people who would drive back and forth to work. Second Hand Roe's was a bit of an eye sore. However, it WAS mowed, weeded, clean and fenced. I had to give the owner much credit for that. One man's junk is another man's treasure. Perhaps I was missing the treasure.
- b. No Answer

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. In talking with residents, the Lawrence Hospital was building a medical facility branch or annex which would be located 10 minutes away from Perry and people seemed happy with that. Driving around, we didn't see any medical providers, hospital clinics or emergency services - other than there was a police station.
- b. Didn't see any.

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

- a. When in town, I didn't see any health care providers. On the web it appears there is a chiropractor in town but I never noted his/her location as I drove around.
- b. Didn't see any.

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

- a. I specifically looked for this and if there were any, they were not easily identified. The only thing I spotted was USDA's housing authority apartments. When individuals were ready to move out of their homes, I wondered where they went? Did they stay in town or go to Lawrence, Topeka, KC to be nearer to their children? I couldn't tell.
- b. Didn't see any

7. Housing

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

- a. If I wanted to move to Perry, I had a choice of one home. One was almost \$700,000 which would have been out of my price range, one was under contract, and one was an older craftsman. I wondered if homes didn't sell by word of mouth rather than through a realtor. There were a number of very nice homes anyone would like to live in. The residential area, again, was so clean there wasn't a home I didn't think I wouldn't want to live in. I think the housing stock mix was good. There just wasn't any inventory and talking to people in town, I don't think there were plans for any new houses or developments going in. I wondered if the City was missing out on an opportunity?
- b. Appearance wise it looked like the housing would be in all income brackets. Not a lot of homes looked to be vacant or for sale. I saw two houses for sale driving through town. Challenges for growth with housing looked to be space. There didn't seem to be vacant lots or new housing developments.

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

- a. I couldn't tell what homes were available for rent and which ones were owner-occupied. We wondered if the City kept a list of open rentals in the event someone wanted to move into town or did rentals fill by word of mouth? Sometimes rentals are less well-maintained. I didn't see that in Perry. I'd like to specifically call out how nice the mobile home park is. It's mowed. It appears to always be mowed with a lack of junk around the mobile homes. Like the rest of the housing in Perry, it was clean. Perry, KS just demonstrated to me that a community can have a mobile home park which is nice and clean looking. Kudos!

- b. We were unable to ask City Hall about rental housing as the office was dark and door was closed. There was no sign as to why they were closed, before, during and after the lunch hour that was posted.

8. Schools

What schools are present? Do the 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 schools look very nice and well-maintained. The outside facilities looked very nice. It took us a bit to figure out that the Middle School was connected to the High School but once we found it, we were excited to see pre-K through 12 in one town. I found it interesting to learn that the School District is spread between three counties (is it Douglas, Jefferson and Shawnee?) and when the district needed to determine what county's leadership they would follow for school closing and opening, Douglas was chosen. This information was provided through a community individual we spoke with. I also think there are Pre-K programs such as HeadStart, pre-school and daycare. I think these happen within the District. If so, kudos.

We found the Highland Community College Building. The building looked inviting but there was no activity. Maybe summer hours or COVID was impacting that. I was happy to see it there because any opportunity for higher education closer to home, I think, helps with keeping down student loan costs. It's great that opportunity is there.
- b. Community College, High School, Middle and Elementary Schools were located on our drive around town. The buildings and grounds looked to be well maintained as did most of the town. Schools looked to be of decent size. The web site has contact numbers and links to the schools that provided information about the district.

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

- a. On the School District's website, there is a lot of information. Some of it relates to the re-opening or not re-opening of schools in August. Other information is just a lot of information that parents need to know about getting their children back into school and into activities. If I were a parent, I would download the July 2020-2021 newsletter, sit down with my highlighter, read through it and try to figure out just what I was going to need to do. Wow. Lots of info.
The District appears to be going through a Re-design. I applaud school officials for taking this on as I'm sure it will be a lot of work.
<https://www.wibw.com/content/news/17-NE-Kansas-schools-shoot-for-the-moon-with-education-redesign-program-508660611.html>
I did not find information on any website that spoke to the quality of the education system. I know in St. George, our school district ranks very high and residents move into our area to get their children into our district. But I didn't see anything but the re-design information. Was the school selected for re-design because there are problems in the district? I don't know.
- b. No Answer

9. Childcare

What childcare services are available? Is it affordable?

- a. I saw a very large older house that looked like a daycare. If I Google, I think there are one or two preschools. I couldn't tell what the pricing structure was. I wondered if working parents driving to Lawrence, Topeka or KC took their children to those communities for day care. If parents weren't home by the time school was out, what did they do with their children? Were they home alone? Did a neighbor watch them? I couldn't tell what happened with childcare in Perry.
- b. Didn't see any facilities

10. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearance of the faith communities represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of faith-based community services?

- a. Yes, we saw churches which were also well-maintained. I didn't see any faith-based community services such as food pantries or other missions. I could have missed them.
- b. Observed churches, they seemed to be well maintained

11. Civic

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

- a. It appears there is a Farmer's Market. The website photos indicate it's well visited. There is an indication the PRIDE Committee is active. I couldn't tell if there was a Lion's Club or anything else like that. Except for the PRIDE Committee's info on the website, I didn't see evidence of civic organization activity.
- b. No Answer

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a. Residential streets were clean. Some of the business areas were a little less clean. Many of the homes displayed personal decorations that were very attractive. The 8th grader with us kept picking out houses she said she would like. I didn't see many businesses decorated up for anything special. Signage was easy to follow. Parking, except for Casey's, was good. No public restrooms noted once we left Casey's and Bernie's. The sidewalks looked well maintained. The streets could use a little work but what town's streets couldn't use some work these days?
- b. The streets seemed to be good, no major repairs visually that was noticed. Parking- a lot of side of the road parking on south end of town (by the bar), residents did say that parking is an issue in business district and that is why a lot of the businesses are used as homes rather than for small business.

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

- a. I attempted to visit City Hall multiple times. The hours posted were 8 to 12 and 1 to 5. We arrived about 10 a.m. and stayed until maybe 1:30 p.m. or 2 p.m. and there was never anyone at City Hall. I thought maybe people were working from home due to COVID but there wasn't a sign posted with any indication that was happening. In talking to community members, I was told there is seldom anyone at City Hall.
- b. City Hall was not open. we were in town from 10-2:30, City Hall was dark and the door was locked. No signage was used as to why they were closed.

Police/fire protection:

- a. From the website, I know the City has police protection but we never saw a City officer. Did see a Jefferson County Sheriff vehicle and was told by a community member he lived in town. I asked a community person how many officers there were, but the individual was not sure. I noted the Fire Station. The firefighters were sitting in the garage area enjoying the weather. Obviously there was no fire to go to - a good thing.
- b. The police station was located next to City Hall. Didn't see any local patrol active during the visit other than County and they were just passing through.

Library:

- a. I specifically wanted to find the Library. Books were always important to me and the use of a library has always been a big part of who I am. That Perry had a Library was exciting to me. I was disappointed it wasn't open perhaps due to COVID or the lack of volunteers as there were flyers in Bernie's and Casey's asking for Library volunteers. I would have liked to see the inside.
- b. No Answer

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

- a. The school's sports complexes were very nice. Play grounds were available. We didn't see anyone using them and didn't know if they were closed due to COVID or if people were just not out and about yet. I liked where they were positioned. I could see kids playing on the playground equipment while their older siblings might be in the sports complex. Although it was empty at the time we saw it, I could see many families getting a lot of use out of this area.
- b. The walking trail was difficult to find. There are a lot of reviews online for this, with the parking on the street next to the tracks we passed the sign several times before we found it. (maybe on web page a map to show how to get there)

13. Recreation/Tourism

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

- a. I didn't see anything either in town or on a website.
- b. Digital signage was used as well as posters in local convenience store for upcoming events.

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

- a. It appeared a PRIDE Committee was active. Per their website, there was a city cleanup on June 5; a festival on September 12 which had to be cancelled; December 5 was Soup with Santa, and December 12 was Christmas Lights Appreciation. Somewhere I noted there was an Easter Egg hunt and Pancake Feed on April 11. I think I found this on their website: the reason the PRIDE Committee was started was because it was felt that their community was segmented. They wanted to do something to bring the community together. I had to applaud that. I hope this Committee is able to grow.
- b. I would say overall our visit to Perry was very positive. The town was very clean and people were friendly and willing to carry on conversation and talk about their town. Biggest obstacles that I see for this town is a lot like ours getting more business in town. I think Perry will have this problem due to people living in business areas i.e. buildings by city hall. There is also not a lot of room for growth i.e. Developments for new homes for the town to grow.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community. (Public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds, regional heritage locations).

- a. Nothing noted with the exception of the trail we tried to locate and get to.
- b. Mural was painted on the side of building by City Hall. Welcome to Perry sign was updated and a great look entering into town.

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. There was nothing available that served the needs of visitors. No chamber, no one in City Hall, and so I specifically sought out people to talk to who I could just catch who were willing to talk about their community.
- b. No Answer

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

- a. No. The Bar and Grill was a nice place for lunch but not something I would specifically drive back for. Their FB page says they often have bands, so maybe I would if they had a specific band I liked. There was a Gambino's, but there are Gambino's everywhere. Let me back up. Because I am looking for carpet in the next year, I may come back to the carpet store. Those people were extremely knowledgeable and knew their flooring. Plus, they had someone to lay the flooring. I really liked the idea of buying from someone who wasn't a chain.
- b. No Answer

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. I was struck with how clean and well-maintained homes and yards were. I went on a Monday so either everyone mowed that weekend or it just looks that nice all the time. We had an 8th grader with us. We asked her if she would want to move to Perry. She said, "no" because there didn't seem to be anything for her to do there. When we asked her if she would change her mind because she'd be so close to Topeka, Lawrence and KC, she still declined.
- b. I would say overall our visit to Perry was very positive. The town was very clean and people were friendly and willing to carry on conversation and talk about their town.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. In talking to business owners, they don't feel there is a good communication from the City to them. It is felt that Council keeps things very close to their vests. Many things are secret. When I asked specific questions about what I had found from the website, a common response was, "that's the first time I've heard about that." I was told there wasn't a Chamber of Commerce in town. The PRIDE Committee doesn't fit in with what their mission as businesses would be. Some of them belong to the Jefferson County Chamber and feel like they get benefit from that but I wondered if finding someone to start a Chamber might be beneficial. And perhaps having a Council person being a liaison to the Chamber might be helpful too as info could be passed back and forth. I was surprised at the lack of housing developments. Being so close to major cities in KS, I was sure I would see more building that I did. One community individual explained to me that the community was landlocked and there was only one direction it could expand due to a flood plain. If this is true, Perry may be about as large as it is going to get. I felt as if the leadership of the community may be people who have lived there for generations. Maybe the status quo was a good thing. I couldn't help but wonder if Perry's leadership could use some different thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Are new people moving to the area encouraged to participate in community activities, issues, planning?

- b. Biggest obstacles that I see for this town is a lot like ours- getting more business in town. I think Perry will have this problem due to people living in business areas e.g. buildings by city hall. There is also not a lot of room for growth, i.e. developments for new homes for the town to grow.

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

- a. Positive - how clean the residential area of this community is. The carpet store. Negative - nothing left me with a negative impression.
- b. Six months from now I will still remember how clean the town ways and how friendly store owners were. Overall I would say this was a positive trip to Perry.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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