First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

**Community Visited: Seneca Date(s) Visited: A- 11/2/2017**

 **B- 11/2/2017**

 **C- 11/2/2017**

 **(Thursday)**

**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. The web site for Seneca was easy to get to and even easier to use. This is in my opinion a well thought-out and organized array of information made available.
2. Information was easy to locate on what appeared to be a joint City/Chamber website.
3. Googled and found Seneca-kansas.com right away on first page. Website seems pretty complete and up to date. Like that, you have access to restaurant menus directly from page.
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.)**
	1. We entered Seneca first from US-36 going west; then K-63 coming south and finally from US-36 headed east. All avenues of entry to the city seemed well kept and the businesses looked like they were “of going concern.” There were not many preliminary signs telling you to look for what business at the next stop, however a smaller community really does not require signs that a larger city would want/require.
	2. A very clean, caring community. Even after spending the entire day, we were hard pressed to find much to improve. We had heard of the SKF closing and were saddened of how this might impact the community. That said, we saw an opportunity for other businesses to absorb a much needed labor force and a resiliency in the community that was a real strength. On entering from the south on highway 63, while there was a sign some distance before the intersection, a sign located once one arrives at the intersection itself could be most helpful. We expect signage regulations may have precluded this consideration or one would already be there. That said, we would encourage exploring a creative solution, whether on private property or otherwise.
	3. Typical small Kansas town, clean, more variety of stores than originally thought. Signage and signs for historic downtown – Great but don’t really draw enough attention for the casual drive through. Streets- well marked, well maintained except a rare few streets. Buildings- Most are well kept and give a pleasant street view/curb appeal, quaint and inviting downtown buildings. Also, very deceiving from the highway that there is much to do “downtown.” I think it would help immensely to have signs/billboards on 36 & 63.

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. Downtown is dubbed as “historic downtown” and even though the majority of the buildings were older, they were well kept and attractive. With downtown several blocks south of US-36 it could be beneficial to advertise “historic downtown” prior to the sign that tells you where to turn. There were lots of retail shops with a good variety of merchandise - really impressive for a town this size. The stores were clean and pleasant to enter and look around. The Community National Bank provides many jobs for the area not only in their bank but also in the Retirement Plans Division. The service personnel were friendly and for the most part attentive to someone coming in their store. Generally the comment was - “may I help you?”
2. Very much appreciated and hope to emulate the walking tour historical markers. Seneca boasts a nice variety of businesses, even several new car dealers and at least two hotels. This was the universal constant – great hometown service. Sweet Pea’s Bakery was a delight. The only thing warmer than the tea and cinnamon rolls was the friendly small town customer service.
3. Wide sidewalks, easy for handicapped, etc. to shop. Nice banners and flags. Hard to find any negatives – beautiful downtown! Small negative was welcome flags looking a bit old. This historic downtown needs to be the focus from highway 36 with billboards or signage, brown signs aren’t sufficient. Great parking and lines for bigger vehicles/trucks. Shoes/Clothing – Personable, well stocked and lots of choices. Bakery- Wonderful, pleasant and clean. Variety of stores- they have it all! Great window displays in retails service business. People were friendly – somewhat expected in Kansas/Midwest. Very welcoming.

**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. We did see a drinking fountain and restroom downtown which is pretty much unique. The area to the west by the school looked like they could get dual usage from the schools and then from the public when school was/is not in session. Parking was more than adequate as there is a fairly long main business district.
2. Did not observe any of the above, though restrooms were accessible in various establishments. The Seneca Downtown boasted wide, easily accessible streets and parking, even for long bed twin cab trucks, so common to rural Kansas.
3. Plenty of benches downtown. Public restroom sign at city hall. Drinking fountain, maybe at the parks. Storm shelter. Plenty of parking downtown and on side streets. Easy to park and walk to just about any shop/service within 2 blocks from our parking spot.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

1. Downtown was really nice. The new sidewalk initiative was extremely nice – both in beauty and also in functionality.
2. Yes, clean, attractive, easy to access. We eventually found our way to a wonderful golf course, however, would recommend relocating the sign to the main road or highway. It took us several trips to find the entrance to a gem of a golf course we could see, however, “couldn’t get there from here.”
3. Most other retail was on Highway 36. Easy to get to but spread out across town.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

1. Historic downtown has the majority of the retail, albeit the US-36 corridor also has lots of retail – just not in the same form as downtown. Both areas have easy access.
2. Appeared to be industrial clusters, Nemaha County Coop offered a very orderly presence. The Retirement Plans Division of the Community National Bank appears to be a community strength.
3. Seems like most of the industrial park is occupied.

5. **Health Care Services**

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

1. The hospital and clinic complex appears to be more than adequate – making Seneca a destination for local care. The ingress, parking and egress all look more than sufficient.
2. We visited Nemaha Valley Community Hospital and Seneca Family Practice. A newly expanded clinic with caring staff which rivals what we would expect to see in suburban Kansas City.
3. New addition to hospital/clinic

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

1. The hospital and medical clinic look like a good source to recruit physicians and related medical personnel.
2. Driving through Seneca we observed a full complement of healthcare providers, including, but not limited to Nemaha Valley Community Hospital, Seneca Family Practice, Country Place / Assisted Living, Crestview Manor and Life Care Center Nursing Homes, two Chiropractors and two Pharmacies.
3. Definitely adequate for small town

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

1. Long term care facilities were located by the hospital medical complex. We did not go inside to observe any of these facilities citing privacy issues.
2. Country Place / Assisted Living, Crestview Manor and Life Care Center Nursing Homes.
3. N/A

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. Housing looks like it is limited. We only observed two “for sale” signs and one of them had the “sold” addition to it. The vast majority of the houses looked well kept albeit like many small towns much of the housing has been there quite some time.
2. We estimated Seneca to be a pretty popular place to live, as we only observed a few for sale signs in the residential communities.
3. Good assortment of single-family homes, but only one house for sale. Main challenge would be for families moving that need immediate occupancy. Biggest Problem: Lack of Housing

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

1. Rental property availability appears to be quite limited. We did not see a single “For Rent” sign.
2. Did not observe rental properties.
3. Most available rentals appear to be section 8 housing. Could not find home rentals for a family. Problem: Lack of Rentals

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. Seneca has the majority of the schools in USD 115 – an elementary school, a 6-8 junior high and the 9-12 high school. The schools appear to be in excellent condition although we did not tour inside of any of the buildings.
2. We visited Nemaha Central High School, Elementary and Middle School, as well as St. Peter and Paul Grade School. We were very impressed with the apparent planning and economy of scale of sharing school recreation areas and parking. The schools were well-maintained.
3. We did not have much time to look at schools, but the size of buildings looked as expected for a town the size of Seneca. According to a website called <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com>, Seneca is one of the top 10 schools in the state of Kansas.

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

1. The USD # 115 web site was extremely helpful. It is clear and concise and provides more than adequate information about the schools.
2. Yes
3. A few websites I found concerning the city and schools all gave Seneca very good marks for school.
4. **Childcare**

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

1. I did not find out anything about child care.
2. We did note childcare as available. We did not explore affordability vs. market.
3. Drove by one daycare center. Price?
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. We observed the Catholic Church which is the predominant church in Seneca. The entire church complex, with the school included, are in excellent condition. We did not go in any of the other churches.
2. We noticed Catholic, Baptist and Methodist churches present in the community.
3. Catholic, Baptist & Methodist churches. Appears to be predominantly Catholic with two large churches.
4. **Civic**

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

1. The only nonprofit organization I observed was the Knights of Columbus Council. I know they are a strong organization and operate one of the restaurants in town. Obviously someone was responsible for the flag display in the downtown area. Commendable!
2. American Legion.
3. American Legion and Branches
4. **Public Infrastructure**

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

1. Public infrastructure appears to be more than adequate. City services look like they are well maintained.
2. Like many other rural communities, businesses develop where they can, without much consideration to zoning or planning for the collective benefit.
3. Seemed typical for Kansas small town.

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

1. I did not go into city hall.
2. Well received, and easily accessible.
3. N/A

**Police/fire protection:**

1. Police and fire protection appear to be more than adequate. Did not ask for the current fire protection rating.
2. Observed, however, did not have any interaction.
3. Drove by but did not stop

**Library:**

1. The library was/is fairly new. I did not go inside.
2. Observed, however, did not have any interaction.
3. Drove by but did not stop. Several people in the community commented on what a great library it is.

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

1. Very impressive walking trail and park area – lots of space. Once again it looks like this can be used by the schools as well as for summer programs.
2. Very impressive, presented as if a community much larger in size.
3. Very spacious, variety of sports and playground equipment.
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. Not that I am aware of.
2. Cornerstone Coffee House could easily be listed under greetings with Sweet Pea’s Bakery. With exceptional customer service and fresh, made from scratch meals, it is listed here as a community asset, that, if packaged with other experiences, would entice us to visit Seneca.
3. The golf course seems to be the biggest draw for outsiders.

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

1. Fairly new 18-hole golf course that is “home” for many golf tournaments on an annual basis. It was difficult finding the signage that told you where to turn to the golf course. Then we went down a private lane thinking that house could be the clubhouse, which it was not, however we finally did get to the clubhouse.
2. There were some postings of upcoming events. Did not appear to be a draw for visitors.
3. N/A

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

1. Veteran’s Memorial on US-36 east side of town. This is very impressive.
2. For some strange reason, we found ourselves drawn to take a picture on the dinosaur!
3. Hometown of John Riggins, Super bowl XVII MVP

**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. Yes.
2. Not particularly. Did stop by Chamber and noted friendly sign, however, were closed at the time, as were a number of other businesses downtown.
3. Chamber office was closed, but sign with contact information.

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

1. Yes, golf course.
2. The Cornerstone Coffee House and Sweat Pea’s Bakery would get us off the highway on our next trip through Seneca.
3. Cornerstone – for sure. Several other in downtown that make Seneca a great stop for a day’s journey.
4. **Wrap-up**

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

1. Clean, caring and friendly. The excellent work force benefits from the Kansas culture of hard work and commitment. They have a very strong agriculture partner in Nemaha County Co-op.
2. It has been said that people make a place what it is. And no doubt, Seneca would be a great place to live! Perhaps the opposite of New York, in that New York is a great place to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there. In Seneca, there’s no single compelling attraction that would make it a great place to visit on its own, but it presents as a great place to live and raise a family!
3. Pleasant people, well-kept buildings, downtown has a lot to offer, need more homes, would greatly improve look of downtown buildings.

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

1. The loss of 170 jobs at SKF industries is a short term issue in my opinion. The lack of a plentiful and available labor force appears to be an on-going issue – so the community should be strong enough to overcome the loss of SKF.
2. We think Seneca has made it’s greatest challenge, distance from a larger town, into a strength. Because it is too far from a larger city, it has developed many services and amenities not found in similar small towns.
3. Housing; including rentals and lack of sufficient quantity. Signage; to get passers-by to come downtown. Having a destination significant enough to draw tourists to spend a day in Seneca.

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

1. Positive: Clean, friendly, golf course, veteran’s memorial. Negative- NONE
2. The sense of a settled, close-knit community, where neighbors care for and look after one another. A place where faith, integrity and hard work are important. A place where country traditions, a sense of patriotism and simple pleasures are enjoyed, even treasured. A great place to call home!
3. Downtown, brick streets, quaint shops, great food and fine people.

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension Service

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