

First Impressions

Team Report Form



Community Visited: Sterling, KS

Date Visited: 09/20/2019 (2)

09/23/2019

10/01/2019

10/19/2019

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?

Website easily accessed. Very informative and information met expectations.

Very informative website. Pretty thorough information provided.

www.sterling-kansas.com – boiler plate website. Didn't really reflect what was going on in town, just had "info". City of Sterling, KS Facebook Page. Main Street Sterling Facebook Page had shares from other businesses. Sterling-KS Community Bulletin Board: Couldn't ready without "Joining Group".

Very easy to access and it did accurately reflect what we saw.

Sterling's website looks professional, however it does not provide any information on things to do, businesses, or restaurants. It only has a link to the golf course, swimming pool, and lodging.

2. The "Five-Minute" Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted.

For a small Kansas community, it showed they are proud of their community. Well maintained. They have a lot of pluses

Individual residences are well maintained – old and new. Downtown is very impressive with signage and curbside seating options.

Great wayfinder signage to direct me off the main road to places people are probably looking for. Beautiful Broadway Street. Storefronts are full, great streetscape. New streets on east side

of town, but still a lot of roads that aren't paved. Also noticed very nice homes with dirt roads (problems later on).

Very impressed with the main street (Broadway). We liked the street lights and street signs. Very clean looking. There are immaculate homes on K14.

Community has clean streets, generally well-maintained buildings and infrastructure, trees along the main street, nice signage and lighting. Most homes and properties seem to be well-kept.

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

Great streetscape, well maintained properties along the main street. Like all small town business districts there were some empty store fronts. They did have a variety of businesses.

Street signs with fall décor pointing the path to notable venues. Large signs with directions to landmarks. South entrance was attractive with trees on the east side.

Entered from south and a nice brick sign was observed with "Sterling" on it. Wayfinding signs pointing me in direction of lake. New Sonic and Casey's were attractive from the north. When entering from the South, could see water tower (from a mile south) – needs a better paint job.

Loved the signage. Loved the brick down the middle of the sidewalks.

The black streetlamps give the main streets an old-time historical feel, which we loved. The one item that seems sorely out of place is the water tower. Approaching from the south we thought it was rusted, but when we got closer we found that it was painted brown with cream-colored lettering... definitely an ugly combination!

3. Downtown Business Area Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

Most structures well maintained. A good feeling of great care and concern for their businesses.

Very well kept. Most businesses occupied. Buildings well kept, even vacant buildings were not eyesores.

Buildings were well kept. Even noticed business owner out sweeping and cleaning front of their building. However when walking down street it was hard to see the names of businesses. Recommend business putting their names and business hours on front doors/windows.

Some older buildings that have been remodeled. Very few empty buildings.

Historic district looked well-maintained, and most of the old buildings are occupied by businesses. Sidewalks have a brick inlay and looked nice. Streets were in good condition.

Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.

Grocery – well done. Restaurants: A variety, from hometown to franchise.

Café, pastry shop next door had clothing items for purchase. Wellness center. Dillons with a good selection.

Variety of everything a small town might need. Tried to go to boutique but the doors were locked even though their Facebook page said it was open. Impressed with Dillons and lumber yard. Drug store was very small – could have some more retail here.

A few restaurants (3), a bowling alley, lumber yard, grocery store, clothing store, motel, funeral home, several churches and storage buildings.

Along Main Street we noticed the bank, pharmacy, flower shop, mail service company, post office, Jacam Chemical offices, and insurance company. There was also a gas station as well as a boutique and pizza place.

Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

In all instances I received a welcome. Good customer care.

Very kind and welcoming at the café. Talked with 2 ladies walking around the lake who were very helpful and proud of the community.

Flower shop was friendly – greeted and invited to look at other things in the back. TNT – very friendly boy at the window took our order. He was inviting and helpful. Peace Creek Boutique was closed during their normal business hours – no sign stating when they'd be back.

Nothing spectacular at the restaurant. Food was good and service was ok.

Customer service was average. We were helped, but found generally a lack of enthusiasm. People were polite, but not chatty.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available?

I didn't observe any drinking fountains. Public restrooms were available elsewhere in the park.

Benches. 2 small parks on Main. Parking options at the back of several city blocks.

Did not notice any trash cans along Main street. There was a drinking fountain at the lake park – very nice. Lots of benches at the park, some tables in front of businesses, but could use more benches in front of businesses.

Did not see any public amenities downtown.

We found public benches and trash receptacles, but did not observe public restrooms, or water fountains. We did not attempt to locate or connect to wi-fi.

Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

Main street parking allowed good access, and parking was available. Great street lighting and signage to guide you.

Convenient parking!

Easily walked down business district – enjoyed small statues, banners on light posts, landscaping. Liked the fall décor wrapped around lamp posts on corners.

No trouble to park and streets were clean.

We noted the trees along Main Street as well as the light poles. Banners were affixed to the light poles as well. Parking was ample and well-marked along Main Street.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

Noted shopping and fast foods were available around the college at the north end of town. Relatively new and well kept.

Not many, but ones available were well kept.

Only found a few blocks on Broadway with retail shopping. Easy for pedestrians to get around with pedestrian crossings mid-intersections and crosswalk signs. Very attractive street and buildings!

Did not see any other retail shopping areas.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

Areas were located west of the main street as well as one large area right on the main street. Looks like it could easily expand. A very good number of larger industries for a small community.

Yes, east near Hyatt Life Sciences Building”, United Industries just down the road to the west.

Only saw United Industries, but didn’t see any room for expansion for new industrial businesses to build.

Not much of a manufacturing area.

We did not notice any specifically designed areas for industrial businesses.

6. Health Care Services

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

Medical center is available. Staffed by 3 physicians and one nurse practitioner (stated on website). Hospitals located nearby in Hutchinson or Lyons.

Small medical center is very valuable the community.

Nice medical complex with dental office, but didn't see ambulance or hospital. Rice County medical building on west side when entering town looks run down and doesn't fit the rest of Broadway St.

Did not see any hospitals or emergency medical services.

Availability of health services was good. We saw a pharmacy, doctor's office/clinic, dentist, and veterinarian.

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

I saw a pharmacy and medical center, but didn't see a dentist or optometrist.

Looked like all medical options were in the same building/location with new signs.

Did not notice these facilities.

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

Nice area north with assisted living.

There appear to be nursing facilities. Some duplexes and triplexes suited for the elderly. Presbyterian Manor.

Did not see any of these services when driving around town.

We did see a long-term care facility (senior housing).

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.)

It looked like a good mix of housing was available. Homes were for sale in a variety of price ranges. Student housing was also available and some nice apartments.

Wide variety of housing options. In talking with a resident, potential growth areas are in a flood plain.

Good variety of housing – most homes on east side were well landscaped. Smaller type houses on west side were/could be used for rentals. Only saw 3 houses for sale in town – very limited selection. There were signs showing available lots for sale to build on (great job on this!).

Saw only one home being built. Several were being remodeled or renovated. No housing developments. Only saw a few “for sale” signs. A few trailers, but in good shape.

There is a good mix of housing that is easily available for middle-class families. Many older style homes (pre-1940), most of which are well-kept. There did not appear to be much new home construction, nor many elegant/expensive homes.

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

I really didn't see any great availability in building lots. They are working on some housing grants (noted on website).

Did not see many rentals. Several homes for sale and seemed to be by the same realtor.

Did not see any signs for rental housing available, but website had a landlord list. Wondered if apartment building (multi-level) would be utilized by college students?

Only saw 1 “for rent” sign. Yards were very nice looking with no tall grass. There were several dirt streets. Did not see any animals on the loose.

We did not notice any rental opportunities except one commercial/business space.

8. Schools

What schools are present? (Head Start, Preschool, K-8, High School, Post-Secondary, etc.)
Do the schools appear to be adequate in size? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

Grade school and high school (550 students according to website), college (750 students from the website). All were well maintained and seemed adequate for their enrollment.

Elementary school with an excellent playground surrounded by a wrought iron fence. Middle school and high school, all well maintained. Attached fitness center is a plus.

Elementary school looked great! Black wrought iron fence made the school look new. High school looked dated, but well kept. College had nice curb-appeal when traveling through town. Cute daycare on Broadway. Never saw a sign for the middle school.

Was very impressed with the grade school. Large playground with a nice fence. Liked the small turf soccer field. Great entrance on the west, but didn't know if you could enter from other sides.

The buildings and grounds at Sterling College seem very nice. The high school is dated, and the architecture of the building seems out of place in the town. The elementary was nice and obviously the newest building project. It included the best playground we have ever seen for a public school.

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

Yes, online sources gave information leading one to believe schools were very good.

A brief paragraph mentions the educational system, but does not provide any specific results indicating the quality.

Link to Wellness Center didn't work on Main Street website.

Schools website was good.

I found the college website but didn't really see a high school or grade school website.

Several sites rated the school system highly – in the top 20 districts in Kansas (out of 280) for safety, quality of teachers, and academic performance.

9. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

Did not see any information on this in town.

Did not see much.

Saw a childcare center on Broadway. It would be nice if this information was on the website because I didn't see any other options.

Noticed that one of the churches had a daycare sign.

We did not observe any childcare.

10. Faith/Religion

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

A Presbyterian connection with the college and assisted living center. Several churches seen, all well maintained.

6+ churches of various denominations.

Saw 2 of the 10 churches listed on the website. Saw a sign on Broadway with community items on the side of a building for a Presbyterian church.

Counted at least 6 churches.

There are several churches along the main street, including the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Each was well kept. Also, the Church of Christ was at the south end of Main Street.

11. Civic

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

Did not see any evidence of civic groups in town.

Wellness center might be a nonprofit?

Saw the Legion.

There was an American Legion building.

We noticed that the Masonic Lodge has an old, stately-looking building on the south end of Main Street. Also, there was an American Legion building.

Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

Did not see any evidence of civic group activity in town.

There are several boards listed on the website – housing authority, library board, planning commission, park advisory board.

Did not see any signs from organizations welcoming or thanking people for visiting/advertising.

Did not see any civic group activities.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

Good roads and signage throughout. Not all areas had sidewalks. Many streets were paved, but some lacked curbing.

Signage visible throughout the town. School landscaping is very attractive.

Looked like there were a lot of sidewalks and new sidewalks being installed. Great amenities at the lake, but would be nice to have sidewalk from splash pad to island in the lake (had to walk int street to get to the lake docks from splash pad). Liked the plaque on Jacam building with history.

Older looking city but overall impression was that residents took care of their homes/landscaping. Need ADA ramps on sidewalks.

The old-looking streetlamps extended much further outside of downtown. Most other streets did not have lighting or parking, although many had sidewalks. The sidewalks outside of downtown were definitely not maintained at the same level as those on Main Street.

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

Well received, friendly with general information.

It was closed when we stopped by.

Stopped by city hall with a general question. Very clean, but didn't see any fliers or info available to grab about town. Liked the community profiled on the website.

We did not visit City Hall.

Police/fire protection:

5 full-time police and a volunteer fire department.

Police and fire on opposite sides of the street (volunteer fire).

Liked how fire and police stations are across the street from each other. Never did see a police vehicle patrolling in town while I was driving around.

We did not observe a police or fire presence.

Library:

Noticed the library, but did not go in to check it out.

Old, but nice building by downtown park.

Did not stop, but Facebook page looks like they have a lot of events to offer.

Noticed the library but did not go inside.

The public library was in a small, historic brick building and had a clear, electronic open sign in the front window.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sports complex)

A great park with lake and RV parking.

Adequate recreation areas.

A great lake with a walking path.

Only saw parks at lake and schools. Did not see any other parks on the west side. Playground on the east side of lake needs updated. Splash pad was nice – maybe add some benches at the splash pad. Trash cans were overflowing on island area at lake. Liked the water fountain at the playground, new basketball courts, bike station, covered pavilions.

Very impressed with the city lake area (playground equipment). Neat bridge. The homes around the lake need to be cleaned up.

There were two city parks we saw within walking distance of downtown – one was just a bench with some green space on a city corner; the other was an open grass area near the water tower. The baseball fields and tennis courts by the high school could use some maintenance. I would guess the football team shares the college stadium, which is nice.

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?

They have a community celebration in July.

Fine arts activities are prevalent. The high school and college promote this.

Did not see a slogan for the city. Known for Sterling College.

Known for the college. Had a very nice pool house and concession stand area.

The community slogan is “Where the quality of life shines,” which is ok, but it doesn’t say much about Sterling, and is easily forgettable. There were no community events listed on the website, nor advertised in town that we saw.

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

At the time I was there: college activities, as well as public school activities were taking place.

Warrior Fest

Old fashioned 4th of Julie on website, but didn’t see anything in town about it. Didn’t see anything advertising community events – need a digital sign!

There were events taking place at the college. Did not see the golf course.

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).

The city lake and RV park.

Golf course, but had difficulty finding it.

Sterling Lake with a small camping area. Drinking fountains at the lake park.

RV ground and lake. Liked how these were next to each other. Studio 96 on Broadway – I googled it later to see what it was and it looks very cool, however there were no signs on the outside indicating what it is. A lot of the windows on Main are tinted, so I couldn't see what was actually inside and no signage to indicate what the business was. There was a small "Sterling" mural on a gray building across from city hall – might be an opportunity to add to this.

City lake did have a campgrounds across from it and a home that said it was a "bed & breakfast".

There is a public swimming pool which is a nice amenity. This is next to Sterling Lake, a public park that includes a campground. Swimming pool still had water in it; wondered why.

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.

According to the website there is an active chamber of commerce.

City offices were all I visited.

Not obvious. City hall address did not match what was online.

No, but found the website for the Main Street Association, however not all of the links on the website worked.

We came in the evening so did not visit any buildings or stores.

We did not notice one when we drove through.

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

Not for myself. There were a variety, but nothing I would consider making a special trip for.

Sterling Lake, the college.

Would like to have checked out Boutique. TNT Ice Cream was very good – building looked old and wished there were outside umbrellas so it wasn't so hot waiting at the window.

We ate at the Mexican restaurant and it was very good.

We stopped at a quaint place that is prominent as soon as you hit the town from the south called TNT Dairyland. This looks like an old roadside attraction you would see on Route 66. They serve treats – the ice cream was very good.

14. Wrap-up

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

Nice community with a great number of businesses. 10 fairly large businesses and job opportunities. I would think with the businesses present that budgeting would be greatly enhanced.

Very attractive downtown. College town.

Broadway street was very clean and saw several projects going on around town showing community improvements. Sterling College – great opportunity for locals to take classes/employers to offer continuing education courses to employees and high school.

Very clean. Homes were well maintained.

It is obvious that the majority of residents and businesses take pride in their properties and the town is clean and well-maintained.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

Similar as all small Kansas communities. A need for growth and competition with close proximity of larger cities.

Apparently they are somewhat landlocked due to the flood plain limited potential development sites.

Appeared to be little growth area for additional businesses. Noticed some of the streets didn't have curbs/guttering. Also noticed very nice homes had been built on dirt roads. City may have maintenance nightmare for several years as homeowners complain about potholes (dirt roads were rough, not maintained very well when I drove on them). Sterling seems much nicer than Lyons, but city employee instructed me to go to Lyons to shop instead of promoting Sterling's local businesses.

No new housing or housing developments.

It is difficult to know/answer this question without knowing the dynamics involved. Location of the town I think is an obstacle for drawing new residents; it is a good drive from the nearest large city, and job opportunities outside of the school district an college I feel would be scarce.

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

I was impressed with how well things were taken care of in the city. Well maintained, nice yards, clean appearance.

Well kept downtown and school grounds.

Impressive website.

Splash pad and lake area was very nice. Street lights and streetscaping were great.

Very clean looking town with older homes. Has a stop light but don't know why.

Positive: The nice, hometown feel of the business district, including the lampposts. The TNT Dairyland ice cream shop. The amazing playground at the elementary school. The history and

stately buildings of the college. Negative: The ugly water tower. The outdated high school. The website that did not provide much information to draw people to the town.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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



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