First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Stockton Date(s) Visited: June 17 & 27, 2015

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

*They have an informative website for anyone trying to gather more information on the community. All businesses are listed, as well as city and county personnel information and several things for visitor information. As a first timer to the town of Stockton, I was able to gather plenty of information on the website. One thing I was hoping to see was community events and clubs/organizations throughout town, but no information was provided on those tabs. I especially wanted to see if there were any large events as we planned our visitation dates.*

*The Facebook page had not been updated in a long time. A post said if more likes were not received it would be taken down. It probably needs to be deleted if it’s not going to be regularly updated.*

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

*Stockton is a clean, well-kept community. My first impression of their downtown district was that it is a very neat area with historic buildings and brick streets.*

*It was early June so everything was still pretty green. I found coming from both the north and south side to be scenic. I felt that the Solomon River Valley was very pretty and comforting to drive into.*

*Overall the community was clean and you can tell that the citizens want to take care of the fronts of the buildings.*

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

*There is a welcome sign at each of the 4 entrances into town. Each sign represents something different (school on the west entrance, fair grounds on the south entrance, etc.) or has a different saying which we thought was original and neat. There were 2 areas that we found not* *attractive as you enter into town. From the south there is what appears to be a junk yard on the west side of the road with the white building with 4 garage doors. There was also a similar area when entering from the east side of town with clutter by a concrete building. I know many communities do not have much control over this, if privately owned. A row of trees in front to cover this up would be a thought.*

*The group felt the welcome sign on the north side had the best placement and the one on the south side was hard to see due to a tree in front of it.*

*As far as other sign there were not many. Usually you’ll see signs indicating churches and civic organizations such as Rotary or Lions Clubs.*

2. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

*The downtown buildings were historic and the business area was interesting because driving through it looks like a thriving place. When you actually get out and walk around you find that many of the businesses are closed and what is open is not really of a retail nature but more of a service nature like lawyers, accountants and medical. It was a bit deceiving because driving through you couldn’t tell whether the businesses were open or closed. Signs directing you toward the school, downtown business district, parks, churches, etc. were not observed.*

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

*Grocery store, pharmacy, gift shop, 2 lawyers, physical therapy, rec center, deli, accountants, chiropractor, newspaper, bakery.*

*Webster’s Supermarket – It was clean, organized and well stocked but the lighting was poor and needs to be worked on. They were in the store over the noon hour and only observed 2 other shoppers.*

*Carousel Bakery & Sand Creek Mercantile – looked like a neat store, however it was closed. Hours said they should be open but the doors were locked with no sign saying when they would return.*

*Pharmacy – The pharmacy had been remodeled within the last ten years. The pharmacist was not available during the lunch hour when members of the community could pick up prescriptions during their lunch break. It was also closed on Saturday. Hours were not posted. It was recommended hours by posted on the door or by the door.*

*End of the Line Hobbies – very original store, with friendly service. Sadly, they are going out of business. We got some great insight from the owner. She made it very clear that she is going out of business because the local residents do not support local businesses. She guessed that about 60% of Stockton residents have not been in her store and she has been open for 8-10 years. Her insurance rep who works down the street had just previously asked her if she sold anything in the store. This was a huge take-away from our visit – supporting local business is very crucial for the survival of a small town and it’s showing in Stockton that they are not supporting local businesses.*

*Main Street Trading Post – the owner of End of the Line Hobbies called Kelly Post to come down and unlock his store. We were interested in looking at something in his store and he was right down within 5 minutes. Great small town service! Very friendly!*

*The deli was suggested to us to get lunch. The lunch was fine but I wondered where visitors would go to sit in the winter time. Our group would have chosen the Asian Thai restaurant had it been open. There just didn’t seem to be anywhere for the community to get together for lunch and just be together as a community.*

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

*The people we did meet were friendly. The pharmacy technician and the city office were kind enough to answer most of our questions.*

*We were not asked for assistance at the grocery store – we had to approach a clerk to ask about places to eat in town on a Saturday. Her response was, “It sucks here on Saturday, there is just nowhere to eat really.” We received friendly service at End of the Line Hobbies and The Trading Post. It was very difficult to find anything else open.*

What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.)

*The downtown itself had blue wooden benches for folks to sit on and trash cans available. We found adequate bathrooms at the big park. We did not find a water fountain but some boys did use the hand pump at the park.*

Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping.

*The flagpoles and potted plants along Main Street gave a nice appeal to the downtown area. However not all the pots were planted giving it an inconsistent look. The trees added shade.*

Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

*Parking was not a problem. There were hardly any vehicles downtown the several hours we were there. Vehicles drove through on the 2 main highways, but there were not many that stopped. The few stores that were open didn’t have anyone in them. Since all the stores and the business district is small (only a couple of blocks) we were able to park and walk to all of them. (Saturday visit)*

*What concerned me the most was how much parking was available downtown especially at lunch time. (week day)*

1. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

*There were a couple of convenience stores (along HWY 183). We went into 1st Stop and received friendly service. The clerk was able to provide us precise directions to the park/pool. They had a bulletin board by their bathroom that provided information on a number of different things throughout Stockton. There was another convenience store across the street, a Napa and Dollar General along HWY 183.*

*Both groups missed seeing Heartland Building further south on HWY 183.*

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

*From a manufacturing standpoint most that activity appears to be on the south and east side of town. Wilkens seems to be the primary manufacturer in town. This company employs around 75 people of which 20 are from the correctional facility. Other than Wilkens and the correctional facility the schools were the next biggest employers in Stockton. There may be more but it was not evident from our drive around town or what I saw in the local paper.*

*Stockton’s Industrial Park is located along HWY 183 and there is approximately 35 acres of land that is available for development. For qualified businesses, land could be available at no cost.*

5. Health Care Services

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

*There is no hospital in Stockton, the one they would use is in Plainville which seems to be a great facility that is not too far away.*

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

*Stockton is blessed with what looks like great health care facilities that are easy to access and available to citizen’s county wide. During our visit and online research, we saw they have 5 physicians, a Dental Clinic, Vision Clinic, Physical Therapy facility, Chiropractic Office and a Rec Fitness Center. All of the facilities were recognizable by the signs at the front of the buildings. For a smaller community, Stockton is very lucky to have such wonderful healthcare facilities. What concerned me was that on a Wednesday late morning and during lunch time that no one seemed to be using any of these services. Parking was available everywhere.*

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

*Stockton has a 32 bed nursing home but does not have an assisted living facility.*

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.)

*We saw a wide range of housing, from lower income to higher income throughout the community. We discussed housing with a resident and she said there isn’t a lot out there for lower to middle income families. They have built a couple newer homes towards the southeast side of town. One of these homes appears to still be on the market. We didn’t see many other properties that are for sale or rent. This leads me to believe the housing issue is actually preventing some families from moving into the community.*

*Housing is limited. There are not many homes available on the market. The community has looked at some grant structures to build 3 to 4 new homes. It seems to be the same struggle that most rural communities have with valuations and what people can afford with what they can get paid with their jobs. Stockton does have incentives to build and 15 year tax abatement on revitalization of a property.*

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

*We did locate low income housing but duplexes and small home rentals appear to be hard to find.*

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?

*We noticed that the Kindergarten through High School were all on the same block. With it being summer, we couldn’t find much information on the school system. The grounds seemed to be well-maintained and the school buildings had a clean and well-kept appearance. It also appears that the community supports the school sports and extra-curricular activities by the blue benches all over downtown and extra signage in residents’ yards. It looked like there was a newer facility not far from the school to be for “Stockton Wrestling.” With a nice building of this size, it appears they value their schools and sports. There was the Wiggles and Giggles Daycare and Preschool downtown.*

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

*Stockton schools has an informative website that goes into great detail about each course offered. It provides the course outline of each class which I found as very useful information if I was looking into the school system as a potential place for my children.*

*A concern noticed on the webpage is that the school is asking patrons to buy from Amazon. As a small business owner myself I wondered how Stockton’s small business owners felt about their school asking the community to buy outside of the community.*

1. Childcare

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

*We saw one daycare downtown – Wiggles & Giggles Daycare with preschool. While discussing childcare with a resident while we were shopping in a store, they did not make it sound like there was a daycare shortage around town. The individual told us there were 3 to 4 daycares in the community. I was unable to see any rates on any of the daycares in town.*

*Other sources have indicated there is a shortage of daycare in the community.*

1. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the churches represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of church-sponsored community services?

*Both groups found 5 churches. They were not really well marked and it took them a little bit to figure out where they were at and the denominations. They loved the stained glass in the 1st Christian Church. Signs outside of town would let you know what is available from a faith perspective. Both groups noticed the youth center and thought it was a great thing!*

Are there any facilities or statements that some would view as intrusive or that would make someone feel uncomfortable if they were not of a particular faith? *None noted.*

1. Civic

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

*We saw signs of Rotary and Lions Clubs. There was a plaque on one of the shelter houses by the Lions. It was not clear if the Lions were still active. We noticed the Rotary club sponsored the swimming pool sign. From the paper the Chamber of Commerce looks to be doing some things. We noticed there was not a central place for chamber or any kind of visitor information except at the park and the info in the shadow box looked dated. We also noted the VFW which from the outside might be more active. They were not able to find any information on the “Clubs and Organizations” tab on the website.*

1. Public Infrastructure

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

*Public infrastructure throughout Stockton outside of the downtown area looked to be in good condition and well taken care of. Just like any community, you have a few areas of sidewalks which could use improvements, or unmarked intersections, however none of this really stuck out too much.*

*One thing noted when visiting the swimming pool was the signs on the door. Looking at the pool hours and fees, it appears there is no charge for daily swimming. If that is the case, that is wonderful. However, if there is an admission it should be noted on the signs.*

Did you observe land-use planning?

*According to the Stockton community website, there are 35 acres of land along U.S. HWY 183 available for development, known as Stockton’s Industrial Park. It also appears that the City of Stockton received a grant award from Kansas Housing Resources Corporation in the amount of $71,000 to build 4 single family housing units in the SE area of town.*

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

*The clerk was friendly and answered the questions asked of her.*

Police/fire protection:

*There was a police officer patrolling the community throughout the duration of our visit on a Saturday. To me, I would feel safe in the community of Stockton with their police and fire protection. Their facilities look good and it’s nice to have them the city serves so close to each other.*

Library:

*I think Stockton is very lucky to have the large, nice facility for a public library. Even from the outside, it looks like a fantastic facility that you could not and would not want to pass without stopping in for a visit. We had to do a double take at the sign because I would not think a town the size of Stockton would have such a large library. They are lucky to have this.*

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

*One great asset that Stockton has going for them is the park area on the west side of town. What a great, wide open space for a small community. It seemed that everything was in the same general area, as far as swimming, ball fields, playgrounds, tennis courts, public restrooms, fit trail and the designated camping area. I am not sure where there main community events are held, but this would be a great venue for some weekend or evening entertainment for families, alumni, visitors or community gatherings.*

*A concern with the Fit Trail is the condition of the grass along the trail. As I started to walk the trail I noticed a lot of stickers. This deterred me from continuing along the trail.*

*A couple of other small parks were also seen around town. One looked pretty run down, the other was in good shape.*

*The park at the correctional facility was confusing. Visiting teams thought it was a park they could visit but were quickly asked to leave the premises.*

1. Recreation/Tourism

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

*The city of Stockton is known for being halfway between Kansas City and Denver. Due to the great park facilities, I think this could draw more people to stop along the way, especially anyone traveling with a 5th wheeler with the camping hook-ups available at the park.*

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

*The Rooks County Free Fair and the Swing Into Summer Festival & Car Show seem to be the main events for Stockton. It looks like the Swing Into Summer Festival & Car Show is a fairly new event as the community just celebrated the 5th annual event this summer.*

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

*The Rooks County Museum has potential to draw people and the tourist information sign directs you to the museum. However the museum did not appear to be open and with the weeds growing in the parking lot it pretty much said please don’t stop here.*

*Webster State Park and Lake could be a tremendous attraction for Stockton if it was promoted. We didn’t find promotional pieces around town.*

*Also saw a sign for the Rooks Wildlife Park and Fishing Area but again no information was found about it.*

Is there an obvious visitor’s center, chamber of commerce office, main street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.

*A sign said tourist information at the museum but it wasn’t open.*

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

*The Asian Restaurant could be an attraction depending on the hours it is open.*

1. Wrap-up

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

*Stockton is very scenic, well-kept and clean. The historic features of the downtown district gives the town a unique feel and character – something to remember and sticks out from other towns. The city park is an incredible asset especially having all of their recreational facilities all together. The people we met were nice and when asked what they liked about Stockton everyone liked the people who lived there.*

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

*The biggest thing I will take away from this visit was the lack of support towards local businesses. It was completely shocking to hear from a small business owner that her guess was over half of the town had not stepped into her store and she had been open for 8 years. I understand Stockton is only 30 minutes from Hays and retail is better there, so it is easier to make that trip to Hays and knock it all out at once, however Stockton is going to suffer if they do not support their local businesses. Sometimes, we as human beings take things for granted – such as being able to run down the street to our local supermarket for a carton of eggs or a gallon of milk at the last minute while cooking dinner, however if that is not available all will suffer and certainly see how lucky they were to have these options available. I think that is another reason that the town appeared to be a “ghost town” on the Saturday that we visited – because people travel out of town for the day to go shopping, etc. Stockton has all the necessary shopping, so I would strongly encourage local shopping in their community they lose it.*

*Stockton is a gem that needs some polishing. The downtown is quaint but not active. On the week-ends that park should be full of campers who want to enjoy Webster Lake as well as whatever Stockton might have to offer. A couple of good restaurants, a few week-end cabins to rent, and some live events along with the movie house and the bowling alley Stockton could be an awesome week-end destination town especially with Hays and Phillipsburg nearby. Stockton could be the place that folks would drive to for the evening just for a nice drive, a dinner and a movie or a round of golf. It appears that the citizens of Stockton don’t seem to care if the downtown survives or not, nor do they seem interested in using what they have available to them.*

*After reading the visiting teams comments, I really struggled with including all of them and I had to ask myself why. One of the items from the city demographics that really struck me has the high poverty rate – it more than 1 out of 5 people living in poverty. From the appearance of Stockton you would never know that. It really says something about the pride we folks in Western Kansas have. It says that we have learned to live without much but our communities are suffering. One of the reasons for the lack of support to the businesses on Main Street is because the residents don’t have the dollars to spend. To correct this it really going to take a major effort to increase wages. Stockton’s unemployment rate is comparable to the state rate. For Western Kansas their unemployment is higher than the rest of Western Kansas and part of this is due to the drop in oil production. It’s going to take some creative minds and people working together to change the trend.*

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

*How wonderful the big city park is and if given the opportunity will come back for the Asian Thai restaurant.*

*I will certainly remember the character that the downtown district has, the cleanliness of the entire town and all the large recreational park on the west side of town has to offer. I will also be curious to see the town of Stockton in a couple years from now. I will be interested to follow up and see how the businesses are doing. I also heard from some residents that they are expecting a couple new restaurants in town in the near future. I will look forward to seeing how those turn out and would even come back for a visit to try these new restaurants. The new one going in just east of the supermarket looks like it will be a great asset to the downtown area and like it could even attract people from out of town. I was pleased with the friendliness that we received from the few people that we saw throughout town.*

*Downtown buildings appear to be full but after walking up and down the streets a lot were empty. Not much downtown activity while we were there.*

*I will remember the park but I’m not sure it would bring me back to visit Stockton.*

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