

# First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



**Community Visited: Valley Falls**

**Date(s) Visited: 4-27-18 (All)**

**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) We were able to obtain information from the Valley Falls website, and also through Facebook. What we saw online was accurate with what we saw. Some information may have been out of date. It is hard to keep online information current.
- b) I found that they had a web page as well as a Facebook page. Some of the information was not current but most was.
- c) It was very easy to find the Valley Falls city website and Facebook page. They were both very informative.

**1. 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) West entrance of Highway 16 needs a welcome sign of some kind. There is a Greenhouse that we weren't sure if it was outdated or out of business. There is no curb and gutter in the residential. Most residential yards were kept up, no trash or junk in yards. We noticed a Day Care sign on a home. We loved the sign on the Methodist Church that read, "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it!" No welcome sign.... That we could see. There is a small sign coming in from the west entrance by the Midwest Fertilizer that read "Got weed? Smoke 'em!" Funny!!! This is a pretty area.
- b) It needed a sign on the west side welcoming you to town. There seemed to be only one sign on the east side as you came into town. It seemed like a very sports-oriented town with the two ball diamonds and the new pool going in was very nice as well. Could use some improvements on the west side entrance.
- c) The 5 minute impression was very positive. We noticed lots of exciting areas of Valley Falls. The ball fields and pool are very impressive. Also the downtown and new housing development were extremely attractive. *We came in from the East.* There was no welcome sign from this direction. We knew it was Valley Falls because of the mini storage sign though. The greenhouse there seemed in need of a bit of upkeep. Coming in from the West on Hwy 16 the welcome sign there was very visible and inviting. The church signs on the highway were helpful. We also noticed a sign on a home daycare.

## **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?)**

- a) The light poles downtown are painted!!! They look so well kept!...Love it! The empty buildings or businesses downtown seemed to have window decorations or art work in them....great idea! The downtown area is clean. We visited a flower/gift shop - they had various gifts. We also visited a T-shirt screen printing shop – they had great shirts and other gifts as well. We visited the local Do It Best hardware store – fun items along with hardware. We ate at the Pizza café by the Do It Best store. All the businesses that we visited were very kind. We were greeted at each business asking if we needed assistance with anything.
- b) There were a lot of historic building, some of them were empty, but was still a very attractive downtown with at least some window coverings in the empty buildings. There was a flower shop, a restaurant, town hall, auto parts store, hardware store, everything seemed to be well kept and of good quality from what I observed. Everyone was very friendly and greeted us. Don't recall having to ask for assistance anywhere.
- c) The buildings downtown seemed to be very well kept. Like every small town, there were a few empty buildings. The fact that the empty buildings had paper covering the windows with a spring painting on them made it a more inviting atmosphere. We saw a Hardware store, lumberyard, antique stores, florist, screen printing, auto parts store, Dollar General, feed supply, gas station, restaurant, & pharmacy. All of these businesses were clean and inviting. All of the businesses were very welcoming and attentive to our questions. Customer service was very personalized.

**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?**

- a) We stopped at the City Building and were treated very nice there. We had a nice visit and they were able to answer any question that we had. We were able to use the restroom there. Much information at the city building! We don't remember seeing any trash receptacles through town.  
We were able to park downtown and walk to any destination. We stopped at the library... What a wonderful library. It is very deceiving from the outside. Not very appealing as a metal building, but perfect on the inside! Could use some streetscaping for the library. Maybe some pretty landscaping to make it more appealing outside.
- b) There were public restrooms in the city hall, drinking fountain at the library. Didn't see much in the way for waste cans available or benches. Forgot to check Wi-Fi. Parking was not difficult at all. You could access multiple services within walking distance of each other.

- c) I did not notice many trashcans available downtown. The library offered Wi-Fi, and the city hall allowed us to use their restrooms. Parking was very convenient downtown and readily available. We could have easily parked and walked to all of the businesses and amenities in this area. The parks were beautifully landscaped. We did not notice any streetscaping.

### **3. Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

- a) Retail shopping was very nice for a town this size.
- b) Everything was easy to access and very clean.
- c) The West entrance where Dollar General and the gas station were located, we did not find as appealing, but it was easy to locate.

### **4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

- a) We could not find an area that was designated as an industrial park or commercial area, except where the fertilizer plant was.
- b) Didn't see much in the way of expansion unless you bought more than one building downtown. Out on the east side of town looked more conducive for expansion of existing businesses.
- c) This was questionable. We did not notice a defined area, but assumed it was along the West entrance (hwy 16) where Midwest Fertilizer seed and feed was located.

### **5. Health Care Services**

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

- a) Very pleased to find that Valley Falls has a medical clinic, chiropractor, dentist, and a pharmacy. There is a hospital in Topeka, which is not far away.
- b) I saw a medical clinic, a chiropractic office as well, not sure of quality of services there.
- c) Valley Falls had an array of medical services available. There was a Dentist, Medical Clinic, Pharmacy, and Chiropractor. We also noticed a helicopter pad.

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

- a) The buildings seem to be fine for the town.
- b) Chiropractic care, medical clinic and mental health facility.
- c) There was no optometrist or veterinary clinic.

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

- a) This was amazing to find! Valley Falls has a low income, equal opportunity housing facility. There is also assisted living available. A new housing development is being built for Senior Living. There are 7 duplexes with 14 apartments available. All of this available housing is in an area of town together. There is also a Valley Healthcare Mental Health housing in another part of town. There is no nursing home currently.
- b) Several assisted living facilities, but failed to see any nursing home.
- c) There were several excellent choices offered to residents of all ages. We were very impressed with the Delaware Place Duplex and the assisted living facility; however there was no nursing home.

**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.)**

- a) See above. I feel that Valley Falls is right on with their available housing.
- b) This was the thing that impressed me the most, the range in size and variety of housing available. Everything from new construction to trailer courts, low-income housing, and the housing opportunities are awesome for such a small town.
- c) The housing availability was very impressive to us. This is something our town struggles with excessively! It was very eye opening to see all of the different options you supply your residents with; The Delaware Place, Sunset Haven, Trailer Parks, and also homes for sale.

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

- a) We didn't see any signs of rental property. We asked at the city office and we were told that 100 out of 500 properties were rentals. WOW
- b) Several low-income housing developments, not sure about the rental opportunities.
- c) At the City Hall building we were informed that there are a large number of rental properties readily available. The City Administrator and City Clerk were extremely helpful with this information.

## 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?**

- a) Valley Falls has Pre-School to grade 12 classes. They also have an after school program. The one thing we did find interesting is that the school just dropped from 2A to 1A.
- b) Pre-12 buildings looked very well-maintained and adequate size.
- c) We were told that Valley Falls has recently implemented a pre-school program. We observed a large well maintained school facility for grades K-12.

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

- a) We couldn't find much about the school system.
- b) No.
- c) We did not find much information that allowed us to assess the quality of the educational system in Valley Falls. In talking with some of the residents we heard that the school was very focused on athletics. We also found that there was an after school program.

## 8. Childcare

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

- a) We didn't find any specifics about childcare, except for a sign on a house. However we asked at the city office, and they said they would be able to look up lists if we needed them.
- b) There is at least one daycare in town that was clearly labeled as such, and I really appreciated the signage that she had. Not sure of affordability.
- c) We did see one sign on a home daycare. The City Clerk informed us that they would offer assistance in finding answers for daycare availability.

## 9. 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?**

- a) We saw a Catholic Church and Methodist Church in town. The Methodist Church has a Mission Ministry shop.
- b) We saw a Methodist, a Catholic, and I think I remember a Presbyterian church?
- c) The Methodist and Catholic Church were most memorable. The Clothes Closet-Mission Ministry was very appealing to us.

## **10. Civic**

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

- a) There is a Rotary Club, Lions Club, and the VFW.
- b) Didn't see any signage for nonprofit opportunities within the community, but did find out that there were some at city hall.
- c) We observed evidence of the VFW, Lions Club, and Rotary Club. We were told that the Rotary Club helps clean highways, takes money at ballgames, and reads to classrooms at the local school. We were very impressed with the Lions participation in setting up the town Christmas lights.

## **11. Public Infrastructure**

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

- a) Street signs were hard to read. The library needs landscaping/streetscaping. The houses seem to set back farther from the streets with larger front yards. There is no sign of sidewalks or curbs. There is a pond in the park.
- b) Streets weren't the best, but not bad either. Didn't notice the lighting but, did see some lack of sidewalks in certain areas of town.
- c) The street signs were hard to read, but we also have this problem in our town. One building that stuck out in our minds was the town library. There was no landscaping or streetscaping which made the building a bit unattractive, but the inside was beautiful. We did not notice many sidewalks around town, other than the parks, ball field, and pool area.

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

- a) Lots of information when asked! It was wonderful to see their pool blue prints.
- b) The town hall staff were amazing, they were very helpful and seemed to be full of knowledge.
- c) We received a very warm welcome. We were overwhelmed with the amount of information and time that the city employees gave to us. They were most helpful!! The fact that the city has refurbished and saved an original building to the town of Valley Falls was very exciting to us. It was very interesting to see how the city council and mayors of Valley Falls have implemented new ideas and committees into the workings of the community. Knowing the struggles our town has, having one city clerk, it was very attractive to see the idea of having a city administrator in addition to the clerk position. Seeing the progress that the city has in progress or accomplished was astounding. I loved the idea of having an economic development committee. This seemed to be vital in fostering the improvement of your city.

**Police/fire protection:**

- a) 3 full time police! 1, sometimes 2 part time
- b) The police officer was very nice and helpful as well.
- c) We noticed a new fire station. We were told there were 3 full-time police officers and 1-2 part-time officers.

**Library:**

- a) Needs landscaping. Librarian not friendly.
- b) It was nice. Thought it was amazing how many computers it had for such a small town.
- c) The inside of the library was beautiful. The set-up was great for all ages; we especially loved the children's area. However the outside of the building could use some curb appeal.

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

- a) Well kept. Nice batting cage. There is a new pool! Nice track field! But the RV Park seems to be placed right by the sewer pond?
- b) It had a lot of nice stuff for older kids but didn't see much for younger children.
- c) The parks were very clean and inviting. The ball park had many things that our town is in the process of funding. (i.e. batting cages, shelter with picnic tables, etc.). The new city pool looks like it will be a great addition to your town. It was nice that the RV Park was off the main highway, but thought maybe a bit odd to be located near the sewer ponds.

**12. 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) There seems to be a place called "The Barn," but we didn't see it.
- b) Didn't find any.
- c) The Barn: The website states "Historic Town with a vision for the Future"

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

- a) There are flyers and posters placed in the window of the city building showing upcoming events.
- b) No.
- c) The community building had several posters advertising events taking place in or around the community.

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

- a) Close to Perry Lake and the Barn. There is a neat rock by the water tower that says 1888. That should be added upon... history is great!
- b) Wasn't sure of the placement of the campgrounds so close to the sewer plant?
- c) The pond in town was very attractive to me. I loved the museum downtown. It is so important to keep the history alive in our little towns. I also believe it draws interest from outsiders. The campground with access to the river is also an attraction to people passing through.

**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) The city building. They were very helpful!
- b) The city hall staff was very helpful.
- c) The City Hall offered an abundance of information and pamphlets concerning many activities and topics helpful to visitors. The office was easy to find, but we were a bit confused with the old city hall building displaying the sign of "City Hall."

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

- a) I would like to go back to Valley Falls to spend more time in the shops. It is really hard to rate the town in the small time we had there, after the time traveling and then traveling back. I would love to be able to walk around town more and go to all the antique shops.
- b) Not for me.
- c) The Smokehouse BBQ restaurant seemed to be an attraction, but was not open while we were there. We also would like to see The Barn in full swing!

### **13. Wrap-up**

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

- a) The housing!
- b) The housing was amazing. The ball diamonds were very nice as well.
- c) In my opinion the many different housing options was the most appealing part of your community, with the vitality of the downtown a close second. Valley Falls appears to have a high success rate in the completion of large projects. This shows that the community is very supportive in the growth and stability of the town itself which is vital in keeping our small towns alive. Congratulations!!

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

- a) Midwest fertilizer/seed plant being right at the entrance of town. There is no sign of industry in Valley Falls. Is Valley Falls losing people? The sign to us was the school dropping to 1A.
- b) I think the school, and the city proximity to Topeka. Not sure why kids are attending school in Topeka when there is a school in town. If you don't support local, the town will continue to get smaller.
- c) Schools are such an important role in our small communities as well. One thing that may be a bit concerning, was the fact that enrollment dropped from 2A to 1A. This has also been a concern in our community.

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

- a) I think it is great to have both a city clerk and a city administrator. The housing is what will always stick in my mind! Lots of choices in housing!!
- b) The housing.
- c) The City Employees were extremely positive and helpful during our visit. The downtown would definitely be a place I would like to visit again. The new pool and ball fields were also appealing. Because our community is focused on developing housing at this moment, this would probably be the most memorable item.

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