First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

**Community Visited: Waterville Date(s) Visited:** A- 10/29/17 (Sunday)

B- 10/29/17 (Sunday)

C- 10/24/17 (Tuesday)

D- 10/24/17 (Tuesday)

**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. A google search brings you to the chamber web site. I liked the pictures (scenes of the community) rotating. Nice feature. Color combination to me is dated and somewhat hard to read. List of Chamber members was last updated in 2013.Business spotlight not up to date. Last one in 2015.Events appeared up to date. “Our history” was interesting! Links worked. There was a redirect to the city’s web site which although simple, was clean, easy to navigate, and the links worked.
2. I easily found information on the web before visiting and that helped me determine what to be on the lookout for, however, I did note some outdated information. For example, Jock’s Restaurant is noted multiple places, but I don’t believe it is currently operating. <http://www.watervillekansas.com/Your%20Move!/index.html> seemed to have a LARGE overview of what is available in Waterville and surrounding areas.
3. City website came right up when I searched it. They have their rates and budget on there, which we do not, I like that. There was nothing about the School/USD on the city website.
4. Very easy to find information. They put “now happening” on front page of the city site and they have a link to chamber website. They list activities on the page as well. Links from city for library, community center and golf course.
5. **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. At first glance, the community certainly appears larger than its stated population of 700(?). It appears to have a good manufacturing presence and most of the storefronts in the downtown appeared occupied. The neighborhoods were well maintained with better housing than you see in some small towns (although the usual mix of well-maintained and “less than desirable” existed). Sidewalks present in most, if not all neighborhoods. Coming in on 77 from the south there is nice big sign welcoming travelers to the community along with a sign talking about an information center (which was hard to find). There was a large manufacturing plant to the East. Coming in on 9 from the west is a nice drive. There is a smaller sign announcing Waterville. One of the first things you see is an abandoned facility to the south with a bulging door which an eyesore. Also seems to be favorite location of the police to sit. I did enjoy the sign “Waterville, next 5 exits”.
   2. For the most part a common rural farming town in Kansas with pride and people who have a desire to maintain and love their area. Most people take care of their property, which is a huge plus. Industrial looking coming in from the south and east. The south edge of town has some eye-catching homes that have had a lot of TLC done on them. Poor signage entering from all sides of town. They are there, which is a plus but look inexpensive, temporary and are far away from the road. I would describe the ambience coming into town as industrial and then you get into more residential as you get further into town. As I got into town, I noted practical signage that got me where I needed to go but there is not a consistency or eye appeal to most it. The sign across from the gas station is extremely busy and not exactly easy to read but does have a considerable amount of information of it.
   3. Definitely a farming community, co-op/grain bins everywhere. There is a “nice” side of town. Small business district. Quite a few remodeling and fixing up going on. Entering town from the East does not give a great impression. Could have a nicer sign when entering from the East. There is a typical blue highway sign, run- down junky house, grain bins, and stock trailers on East. South Entrance: nice sign, big stock trailer company (huge plus). West Entrance: no sign.
   4. Very similar to Onaga’s main street. There was no streetscape. Building similar in size and structure, roads need work and new signage needed. There were some very nice Victorian homes. Several homes being worked on. A lot of sand on roads. Several homes for sale. I came from the east. Industrial building not good and trailer with a lot of junk in yard. Need a better Waterville sign coming into town. Buildings need some work to frontage, no signage from west. Good signage from the south.

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. Good variety of businesses. I saw a hairdresser, fitness center, education building, thrift store; a new, very nice bank, and library. I believe the Waterville City offices are where the information center is located. The sign in the window said closed, however there were several cars and people in front of the building. There was an odd building with iron bars on the front. Looked really out of place. I wondered what the crime rate was! Again, it looked nice and the buildings had signage however no uniformity or planned design. There was also a law office when you turned the corner to the south, next to an abandoned building. The law office could use an upgrade. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to stop in any businesses, was also a Sunday. Some businesses indicated that they were open.
2. A mix of vibrant, active well identified businesses alongside vacant, worn-down buildings. My Sister’s Closet: well organized clothing, accessories, décor store and economically priced, only place open on a Sunday. Auntie M’s Attic: antique place but I did not see hours posted on either the internet or the door. Whitney’s Salon: locked. Restaurant that appears to be closed. Solid Bar Fitness: manufacturing of weightlifting bars (something unique you don’t find just anywhere) – didn’t have curb appeal or a welcoming entrance. My guess is most of this business is done by internet. Citizen’s State Bank: attractive, newer building that looks inviting. Community Center: there was a railroad meeting happening while I was there. Versatile building that I assume is used often for many types of occasions. Post Office, Accounting and Law Offices were noted. Average customer service. Briefly greeted when I first entered. Had to ask for assistance but when I checked out had a nice conversation. Found out a little history of the business and asked for some details about Waterville.
3. Sidewalks & lighting are old. No streetscape. Looked to me like most of the buildings needed some updating. Bank-nice, community center/city hall-very nice, eye doctor-dated not good store frontage, attorney-dated, accountant-nice, post office-good, 3 thrift/second hand stores-My Sisters Closet store front was nice good quality of merchandise, Warehouse Thrift store-thought I was going to fall through the floor-storefront needs updated-merchandise was well used, Bar and Auntie M’s Attic were closed, Library and Parents as Teachers buildings looked nice, USD building looked nice. I went into 2 places on the business district. First, one was My Sister’s Closet. I was greeted and asked if I needed any help. She visited while we checked out and was very friendly. The second place I went was the Wearhouse Thrift Store. I thought I was going to fall through the floor when we walked in; there was a stench.
4. Similar to Onaga’s buildings, need to work on frontage. Signs need updated, old historic buildings. Roads need work, not a lot of businesses. I saw clothing stores, attorney, library, bank, antique shop, bar, community center, post office, fitness center, barbershop, tanning salon, gas station and co-op. Gas station bathrooms were dirty and there was decent customer service. Floors were dirty, good service. Did not want to eat there.

**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 needed to find a restroom and we found one at the park on the north side of town, and it was open! Didn’t see a whole lot else. Parking was easily accessible and appeared to be centralized.
2. Chairs, trashcans (in abundance), benches, a gazebo. Found public restrooms at City Park. I could see the effort put forth at landscaping/streetscaping with a consistent view, however, I would say the downtown looks unkempt (some businesses keep up with grooming the flowers) but a lot of overgrown flowers and outdated bench/chairs. The quantity of trash cans and decorative planters make the sidewalks look crowded and are overwhelming (in a negative way) to the eye. Parking was easy, and we went to multiple places in walking distance.
3. I did not notice any public amenities- drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles, flower pots, Wi-Fi. Plenty of parking spots as there is not a lot of services. Need to update their streetscape.
4. No fountains or benches. Restroom at gas station. Restroom at park. Lots of parking. Main street is one block so easy access.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

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

1. No other retail areas that I saw.
2. Noted Gas Station and 2 Trailers Sales Businesses
3. There were no other retail shopping areas that I noticed.
4. Thrifts shops, clothing store. Yes, easy access. Customer service in thrift shop was poor. Areas were not attractive; need work on frontage and building structure.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

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

1. The biggest opportunity appeared to be on the east of town near an existing plant, “Blue Valley Trailers.” Looks like there is land to expand with great visibility off a main road. At the south near Titan Trailer Mfg., I did not see much opportunity for expansion. Land is very hilly here. Also looks like there is plenty of land off to the west on 9 which could be developed and again, good road access.
2. Seems to be on the outskirts of town but not sure how easily other industries could locate based on farm ground, river, etc. Titan Trailer Manufacturing appears to be a large employer in the area.
3. There is a manufacturing industry on the south edge of town, which is easy to locate and could easily be expanded. The coop/grain bins look like they are spread right through the middle of the town. It would be nice if they were just in one area.
4. Big trailer warehouse, not much room for expansion. Big co-op. Not sure where everyone goes to eat lunch.

5. **Health Care Services**

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

1. I honestly did not see any medical offices of any kind, including physicians or dentists. I did find the EMS building, which appeared to be new.
2. Available in neighboring towns but none noted right there in Waterville
3. Could not find any sign of any healthcare or pharmacy.
4. No healthcare facility.

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

1. none
2. N/A – believe they are in Blue Rapids
3. I saw a little sign on the window for an eye doctor in the business district. If I wouldn’t have parked right in front of it, I probably wouldn’t have noticed it.
4. Eye doctor, no dentist or healthcare available.

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

1. none
2. N/A – believe they are in Blue Rapids
3. None that I saw
4. Independent living facility was all we saw.

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 regarding finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)**

1. For the most part appeared to have a nice amount of market rate housing, mixed in with some newer homes, and then the typical eyesore homes. The neighborhoods were nicely maintained. I didn’t see many junk cars or other debris. The sidewalks appeared to be in good shape. The neighborhoods to the south and north of the downtown were equally well maintained. I did discover the 3 (?) stately homes to the far south of the community. Very nice! Would love to know the story behind them! Saw several homes for sale and a couple that were sold. Generally, a good mix of housing!
2. Limited but not surprising for a small area…it seems like the market either has huge 3-story money pits or small homes available, however, home prices are very reasonable.
3. The housing quality looked very nice! Several houses were getting update. I did not notice any rental signs. Several homes for sale but they looked like a good quality home. A couple run down/dilapidated homes, but every town has those. I was impressed by the housing.
4. Several houses for sale. Wide range of houses available. A lot of low to medium houses. Beautiful Victorian houses near the school. Beautiful bed and breakfast.

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

1. At the north end of town is a large single-story apartment complex, Sunny side homes (?). Looked to be well maintained although a little non-descript. I did not see any other apartment complexes or duplexes in town.
2. N/A
3. I did not see any rental houses, so they are either not advertised or there is none.
4. Did not see any. Most of the houses were for sale, not for rent.

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. I don’t recall seeing any school signage in the community! Then I stumbled upon the elementary school at the south end of town. It looked like a nice facility, in a nice neighborhood, with a good-sized playground. Again, I would never have known there was one in the community. I also found the pre-school (by accident) near the school. Good for a community of this size to have a structured pre-school. Did not see any organized day care centers.
2. We got out at the Elementary and played on their playground. Right across the street is their Preschool. Was a comfortable area. Their High School is between Waterville & Blue Rapids.
3. Elementary only. Small but well maintained. USD office located in business district, nice building.
4. Elementary schools. Yes, grounds and building look good. High School is out of town. District office is on Main Street.

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

1. N/A
2. N/A
3. There was no link for the school on the city’s website. Might be good to add that on the website. People might not know what school District you are in.
4. They had a link on the city website to the school.
5. **Childcare**

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

1. Did not see any.
2. N/A
3. There was no sign of any childcare facilities or in-home childcare
4. Not sure, didn’t see any centers.
5. **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. Saw two churches, one Lutheran and one Methodist. Both looked like nice facilities in nice neighborhoods.
2. Took note of the Lutheran and United Methodist Churches. They both looked well maintained from the outside.
3. I was really surprised that there was only two Churches. Our town has 5 and our 3 little towns close to us each have one. Churches looked well maintained. Did observe one old church that looks to have someone living in it. Did not observe any church sponsored events.
4. Couple of churches look good. One church looks to be dived in. Didn’t see a Catholic church.
5. **Civic**

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

1. I do remember seeing a service organization listed at one of the community entrances…but can’t remember which one!
2. Lion’s Club was noted on a sign
3. The only think I witnessed was a building that had “Sutton 85” on it. I’m not sure what that is.
4. Not sure
5. **Public Infrastructure**

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

1. General lack of signage although there was a lot of signage around the campground, which was hard to follow. No signage for school or park that I saw.
2. Average review…nothing that jumped out to me that was notable as over-the-top OR horrible. Like any town there were some areas of town that seemed more updated than others but didn’t note anything extreme on either side.
3. Streets were covered in sand, not sure why. Street signage was typical, nothing extravagant. Lot of places didn’t seem to even have sidewalks. Most parking seems to be off street. No landscaping, streetscape. Lighting was old.
4. Restrooms at park, no good sidewalks, no good lighting, roads need work, a lot of dead ends.

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

1. Did not go in. Sign said closed. Signage was not ideal.
2. N/A
3. Did not have a chance to go in but the building was extremely nice and in the business district.
4. Community center/ city hall look nice and fairly new.

**Police/fire protection:**

1. Did not see any…other than officer sitting off 9.
2. Saw the police truck patrolling through the town. I noted seeing the truck 4 times during our stay. Saw the fire station that is supported by volunteers. There was a legible sign in front of the building. Also took note of the EMS building.
3. Very nice fire station. Witness one County officer while I was in town.
4. Good size and condition of the fire satiation.

**Library:**

1. Saw from the outside. Looked nice
2. Looks like an active library in the downtown area…want to go back during open hours and especially try out their children’s section.
3. Library was in the business District and the building looked like it might be a little out dated.
4. On main street

**City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sports plex)**

1. Nice park area to the north with playground, swimming pool. Nobody was there at the time of visit. The restrooms were open! Saw picnic areas and a gazebo which needs repair. Do not remember seeing any signage for the pool or park. There is also the railroad area with small train on tracks. As a history buff I found this very interesting with lots of potential…however it seemed out of place and again not well marked if at all. It is in the same location as the historic hotel and “soon to be renovated” opera house. There is lots of signage for the hotel but no indication whether one can tour the hotel or what its purpose is. I saw the big fundraising sign for the opera house, but I would have liked to have seen a history of the building and what its significance is. This area, with the hotel, opera house, and train would appear to be a huge opportunity for the community, yet at present it looks ill-defined and again, I’m not sure why the emphasis on the hotel when it doesn’t look like you can tour it, rent it out, or anything. And I almost forgot about the “settlement house”! What’s the story there? That could have signage like the railroad area.
2. Spent a lot of time here having a picnic and running around their city park. The tractor in the playground area was a highlight…something unique to Waterville’s park and my 5-year-old gravitated to it. Mostly a welcoming environment…the pool building (where you enter) feels outdated and there is some equipment in need of revitalizing but overall a very positive area to spend time. Noted plenty of picnic tables and shelters and a stage area for events to take place. Also took note of the Waterville Campground on the East side of town. There is a sign there to inform visitors of major attractions of the town and provide a phone # to get more tourist information.
3. Ball diamonds were on the outskirts of town, they look ok. No walking trails. Nice playground. Out of date tennis/basketball court.
4. Ballfields, parks, basketball and tennis, decent condition – needs some minor work. Some upgrades needed to courts and seating at the ball fields. Playground looks okay.
5. **Recreation/Tourism**

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

1. I did not see any evidence of an event or attraction. No community slogan
2. Takes pride in the Weaver Motel. A few museums are in Waterville and tours are available.
3. I did not find anything about a well-known event or attraction.
4. Golf course, not well kept. No community slogan.

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

1. none
2. Nickel Days
3. None that were noticed
4. On the website the events were listed but all were outdated. Nothing in town.

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

1. Coming in from the south is pretty as you go into the valley. Again, the area of the hotel/opera house has a ton of potential! I could see the hotel being a draw from other communities for meetings or events. Something different and historic.
2. Little Blue River and Idle Wild Lake are a few miles outside of town. We drove out the Idlewild Lake and it is a picturesque setting, however, the couches under the shelter were disgusting and creepy to me.
3. I saw a railroad park.
4. Nothing

**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. N/A
2. There is a sign directing people to call a number for tourist information as you come in from the south of town & at the campground.
3. I would day City Hall would serve this purpose
4. Nothing present. Didn’t go into the city office. I believe it was inside the community center building.

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

1. Did I see any restaurants? Once again, the railroad/ hotel/ opera house would have the potential to bring me back.
2. My Sister’s Closet impressed me with their wide selection and organization of their store. Their hours were broad as well which really helped me since I went on a Sunday.
3. The only plus I feel that this community has is a nice new/used clothing store (My sisters closet). It was well maintained, and they were friendly.
4. No restaurants, the clothing store is nice.
5. **Wrap-up**

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

1. I thought the neighborhoods were well maintained with good market rate housing. Again, looked bigger than stated population. Significant potential for the railroad/hotel/opera house area, although the location is a little odd. Throw in the settlement house for good measure! Location is tremendous given proximity to Marysville and Manhattan. Plenty of other recreation available with Tuttle Creek so close.
2. The renovations at the Waterville Opera House are exciting! I also saw a number of homeowners doing some major projects on their personal homes. Always a good feeling to see TLC projects happening! Surprised to see the clothing stores in town but not restaurants/groceries stores. I enjoyed going into My Sister’s Closet.
3. Housing looks nice
4. The clothing store was nice, and park was also nice. They are close enough to Blue Rapids for all other amenities. Town has very little necessities that are needed.

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

1. Like most small communities, what to do with the “undesirable” housing. Although not an obstacle per se, the downtown could use some uniformity/theme. Get rid of the iron bars on the one building! I’d also repair the gazebo in the park. Signage needs to be significantly improved. Is there any promotion of the railroad line? And what’s with the odd little campground to the west of the apartments? I can’t imagine what that looks like with campers in it. It doesn’t need to be there and detracts from the rest of the community. I can see no purpose for it.
2. It could be looked at as a challenge or as a benefit, but I believe the closeness of Blue Rapids greatly impacts Waterville. A lot of what I expected to find in Waterville isn’t there (a grocery store, a couple restaurants, medical industry, etc.) and I am assuming that is because Blue Rapids has it. Only being 4 miles apart makes me think you must look at the two towns instead of separately to determine what brings people there to live.
3. I was very disappointed that there was nowhere to sit and eat and that there wasn’t a grocery store. They advertise a golf course (I missed it coming in to town) but when I asked around about it, no one knew much about it. When I left town, I stopped by it and it looks very run down.
4. They need a restaurant. Their main street is small and needs some work. Needs lighting, new sidewalks and better signage. Need to advertise more about bed and breakfast.

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

1. Much nicer than what I expected. Nice neighborhoods. Good manufacturing base. No visible healthcare services. Unbelievable potential with Opera house/hotel/railroad area.
2. All positive…spending time with my sons enjoying an October fall day and experiencing someplace none of us had seen before.
3. A lot of dead ends!! In addition, no signs to tell you. Never to go into the quick shop again. It was filthy, and they were listening to music that was talking about getting high. Nowhere to eat or purchase groceries. Weird sign that had lots of little signs on it. I am nick naming it the Trailer Town (lots of stock trailers).
4. Negative – Nowhere to sit and eat. Positive- Clothing store that brings people in. Negative- Streets need work. A lot of dead ends. Positive- Beautiful Victorian home and a bed and breakfast.

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