First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Oberlin        Date(s) Visited: 8/27/16 & 8/31/16

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? Nice looking website – very little content. Oberlin/Decatur County/COC site better. Easy to print map. No links to school site, etc.

The Pearl of the Prairie – website video; Found the map on different website

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.)

Entering business district from the North on Penn – very welcoming; brick streets – Pioneer statue sets a sense of place; Red brick streets invite exploration of neighborhoods to east and west of business center. Some very nice older homes. Old style street lights on Oak and Ash nice. Neat, clean downtown business district, nice park adjacent to the school.

South entrance – Idyllic rural vista of town; West and North entrance typical of well-kept rural town; East entrance more shabby, weedy lots.

Two large signs at north and south entrances a little dated. No signage to indicate important landmarks. Neat downtown with brick streets. Nice statue on north entrance. Very few signs on entering the community. Nice streetscape on north entrance.

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?)

Buildings in good shape for most part. Most store fronts filled. Nice wide open streets. Antique stores – typical wares. Saturday – few stores open. Typical grocery store. All customer service interactions were very pleasant; greeted; shop keeper waved from the street as I drove by.

Nice downtown; most buildings were occupied. The awning & lights was a good idea but needed some cleanup. Didn’t fit style of buildings. Buildings in good condition mostly.
We went into old bank turned tea room (B&B) with shop and convenience store. Ate lunch at the tea room. Drove up and down main????? Both the convenience store and restaurant were friendly. Greeted by all.

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?

Very few public amenities observed; 1 public restroom at high school stadium/swimming pool. Multiple services available from central downtown parking – library, dining, grocery store, city park, school and museum all in easy walking distance. Many streets overlaid to the point where intersections are very uneven. Neighborhood east of downtown prone to street flooding.

There were benches at the park by the high school and at the ball diamonds. Enjoyed the green spaces in street on north end of city; nice brick streets. No trouble parking. Nice gazebo park downtown.

3. Other Retail Shopping Areas
   Describe other retail shopping areas. Were the areas attractive and easy to access?
   Mostly downtown – reasonably attractive and accessible.

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas
   Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand? If so, describe.
   A few lots available on North side of town along Hwy 36. Local conversations indicate more might be possible.

   Saw several ag service areas. Didn’t observe manufacturing.

5. Health Care Services
   Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services.
   Hospital is older. One staff member on duty near nurses’ station. No one at admissions. Very poor signage. Hospital and ER signs on highway directed to one street which was blocked off for construction. No detour or alternate route signs.

   Had difficulty finding and identifying the hospital. Road construction made access difficult.

   Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers.
   Was not impressed with any observable health care entity. Older worn buildings. The emergency helicopter landing sign would be laughable if not so concerning.

   Didn’t observe many medical facilities away from the hospital area.
What long-term care services, assisted living or nursing facilities exist in the community?
Senior center in modern building near downtown and near nursing home.

Nursing home facility near downtown.

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.)
Mostly single family units observed. Little rental. A lot of nice older homes, some not ideal conditions. Some fixer uppers.

Identified around a dozen homes for sale. Variety of places all over town. Older well-kept homes around downtown area. Not much new construction.

What kind of rental properties did you observe for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?
Little residential rentals available. One apartment complex observed. Income based housing — some units available. Local conversation suggested more were planned subject to federal funding/planning.

Saw housing (income controlled) and some apartments. Didn’t see any building lots.

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?
Nice high school structure and grounds. Could not find elementary school.

Saw an elementary and high school. Window air conditioners. Grounds well maintained. Old buildings. Nice park with high school.

Were you able to find print information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?
Didn’t see anything at chamber about schools.

8. Childcare
Were you able to determine if childcare was affordable and available?
Did not observe.

Didn’t find city office to ask about childcare.

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?
United Methodist, Tri-denominational/United Church. Did not see evidence of sponsored community services.

Most churches were well cared for. Saw what appeared to be a youth center.

10. Civic
Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.
Not a lot of visible organizations.

Unknown, nice movie theater/bowling alley – new construction. Civic activity observed at chamber office. Great civic center.

11. Public Infrastructure
Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas other than downtown. Did you observe land-use planning?
Some neighborhoods east of Penn subject to street flooding. Did not observe land use planning.

Signage not evident. Streets were ok. Some not paved. Dips. Did not observe land use planning. Something new being built by fair grounds.

Comment on city/town hall (How were you received? Was there information about the town available?)
Closed on Saturday. No signage to indicate Gateway houses city offices (according to local info). If Gateway does house city hall it is inconvenient as opposed to being located near downtown.

Only found chamber office. Great reception.

Police/fire protection:
Did not observe police patrol activity.

Saw fire station.

Library:
Fairly modern, exterior well maintained. Closed for renovations during visit.

Yes, didn’t visit.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sportsplex)
City Park near high school well maintained. Small park on north end of Penn. Baseball fields run down. High school football field and track very good. Small skateboard spot near Gateway in disrepair.
Nice downtown park and park at school.

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?
Historical museum. No slogan that captures town’s quality.

Fair grounds – own carnival. Sappa Festival. Slogan – Pearl of the Prairie (on website)

Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?
Sappa Fest; Barn quilt project.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community.
Sappa park, museum, bandshell all have lots of potential but seem under utilized.

Statue; Sappa Creek Park could be nice; fair grounds

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.
Gateway – no signs to indicate hours, purpose, events, etc. Closed. Very visible. It’s hurt by the fact there’s no indication what it’s for.

Chamber of Commerce – discussed the quilt project.

Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?
Landmark Inn – nice comfortable feel with a touch of “old time” ambience. Funky antique store on HWY 36. Museum – interesting for a small community with potential to do more.

Landmark Inn was nice. New motel out by the civic center.

13. Wrap-up

What are the most positive things you observed about the community?
Friendly citizens, easy access to most town amenities (eating, museum, library, park, etc.) as well as necessities (senior center, county seat, etc.)

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?
Lack of apparent energy to capitalize on assets. Underutilized assets (Gateway), etc.

Hospital
Signage
Older school buildings needed updated.

What will you remember most about this community six month from now (positive or negative)?
Inviting appearance. A town with a lot of potential to expand/elaborate/market existing assets.

Nice downtown. Landmark Inn.

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