

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Iola

Date(s) Visited: A- 10/7/17 (Saturday)

B- 9/27/17 (Wednesday)

C- 9/25/17 (Monday)

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. I was impressed with their online presence. It was more informative than some city sites I have visited. It was easy to navigate and was a positive introduction to Iola.
- b. N/A
- c. When I Googled "Iola, KS" on my desktop PC, the official city site was the first listing. An impressive webpage which offers lots of information in a logical, concise way. Using Safari on my iPhone, the city page came up after the Wikipedia entries for Iola. The site works well on a cell phone as well. The photos are beautiful. If I were researching a town to live in, I'd like to see pictures included of people having fun together— "small town living" at its best.

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. Nice downtown square area. Lots of parking and clean. Entering from South has no city sign. The only welcome sign was from the North.
- b. Small town charm with many amenities—including a local paper (!). While population of Iola (n=5700) is not that much larger than Baldwin City (n=4500), our impression was that the town had A LOT more diverse resources comparing better to Ottawa as both are County seats. Wonderful and impressive biking and walking trails. Overall, signage was prominent and informative. However, Signage from 59 Hwy was not very clear. We entered from the northeast by the hospital and golf course. We saw the big sign saying something regarding the Downtown Square but nothing regarding where to turn.
- c. Good welcome signs on 54 east and west of town. New apt on 54, no sign. Farm city days banner for a festival. Well-kept streets. Several directional signs on 54, but too detailed and too small to read while driving. Noted they have a fine arts and cultural center, nice public works facilities (water plant etc.)

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. Signs could be better. Buildings were freshly painted. Curb looked good, parking lines were visible. Plenty of businesses, old movie theatre, there was a variety. B&B Café was great with friendly service and the food was good.
- b. Town Square with lots of businesses, diversity and unique shops. Antiques, Boutiques, Art, Culture and Historical. Customer Service - Chamber Director was fabulous, with lots of information pertaining to the community. Around the Corner coffee shop was a lovely, inviting space and very friendly and informative; great coffee and muffins too! Likewise, Audacious Boutique was friendly, informative and a delight to shop. Thrive had poor customer service. Treasure Chest did not even acknowledge or welcome us into the store.
- c. Preserved old architecture, apartments on 2nd story being remodeled. Central park is great feature. RV park west of town, properly located. Planter boxes, benches. Buildings on the square well-maintained. Well-marked and resurfaced pavement. Large clock in park is good. Clothing stores, Financial services, Personal services (nails, tanning), Farmers' market. Nice car wash with drive through, automatic bays. Courthouse. Customer service in shops was very good. Mentioned upcoming Corn Days and Buster Keaton Days.

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. Wi-Fi was good. Very good, you can park once and visit multiple shops. There was a lot of parking space.
- b. Lots of FREE parking; we noted accessible benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles. Cox Wi-Fi available.
- c. Public amenities were good on the square, lacking elsewhere. Plenty of parking on the square, easy to walk to shop.

3. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. Access was great for size of town.
- b. Variety of shops and stores including many national chains—Dollar General, Walmart—for example. Impressive for the size of community.
- c. Walmart was easy to find. Ford, John Deere, Kubota, Used cars and Case IH dealerships. Hibbett Sports, Dollar General signify good retail for small town

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. Spread out.
- b. Yes, we entered through the N. Industrial Park and found that very clear.
- c. We had trouble finding it, northern one not well marked. Had empty buildings, couple of buildable green sites

5. Health Care Services

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

- a. New hospital with easy access of highway. Need a sign.
- b. Adequate availability: Hospital—with emergency medical center.
- c. Saw an urgent care type facility but purpose was unclear from signage, may have been ambulance oriented. The hospital signage is weak. New regional hospital and doctors' building on 54 looked nice.

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

- a. Very good. All of the above.
- b. Physician's Offices and Pregnancy Resource Center and a couple of pharmacies.
- c. N/A

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

- a. Not sure. Hard to find.
- b. N/A
- c. Graystone Residential Care, Heartland Meadows for long-term care. Senior housing, much of rent controlled in ample supply, much of it was one-level living.

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. Very good mix. Not much on the market.
- b. Mixed diversity of housing; the new apartments on the east of downtown are inviting
- c. Older neighborhoods south of downtown lack sidewalks. Nice mix of new and older housing. Appears to be green space that could be developed.

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

- a. Could use a little up-keep. Did not see much for rent.
- b. N/A
- c. College duplexes, New apartments downtown, Senior housing 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?

- a. Hard to find.
- b. Quaint high school and middle schools located adjacent to the town square and residential areas. The grade school was not well marked—we didn't know what the building was. The grounds were all well maintained.
- c. Signage for grade schools was lacking. North of community college, need more signage. Street through high school campus did not seem safe for students walking. Noted junior high students walking mid-morning also Chamber director noted dual credit program, college credit reduces student loans-good quality feature.

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

- a. Yes.
- b. N/A
- c. N/A

8. Childcare

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

- a. Didn't see much.
- b. Did not see any.
- c. Chamber said childcare is adequate, but night shifts at plants have few options.

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. Good mix. Churches were in good shape. No, we didn't see church activities.
- b. Lots of diversity. We didn't notice much connection with community work and churches. We saw a sign associated with a soup supper.
- c. Several denominations visible on 54, at least one new church north of town. Did not seem like church was strong in community services.

10. Civic

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

- a. N/A
- b. Masonic Lodge, Library, Art Center. The community garden was especially nice in the core of downtown. The Chamber Director mentioned Thrive Allen County which seems like a great county health initiative. This is why we checked out the Thrive building to learn more but were disappointed.
- c. Lions, Masons, Humanity House and its community garden observable.

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 sign needs update, curb needs some up-keep, storm water looked ok. The sidewalk was fair. Landscape looked fair.
- b. Walkability great downtown square but around the edges poor.
- c. As noted, quality public works structure. Good parking and walkability downtown, poor other areas.

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

- a. N/A
- b. N/A
- c. Great reception in city hall. Very little information on lola in city hall, 1 phone book giveaway, Chamber was better.

Police/fire protection:

- a. N/A
- b. Police and Fire prominent.
- c. Saw downtown near County services on the square, but did not see local fire/police.

Library:

- a. N/A
- b. Library present—a little hidden.
- c. Library had poor signage.

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

- a. Well Maintained
- b. N/A
- c. Noted dog park, JuCo sports complex, central parks, National Guard Armory.

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. N/A
- b. Farm City Days—banner well promoted; learned about Christmas Trees/lighting around Town Square annual tradition—sounds like a lot of fun.
- c. Did not see the big event or slogan.

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

- a. Farmers City Days, but no other information.
- b. Farm City Days
- c. Rail Trails for biking/walking is a big promotion. Iola Industries has separate 3 mile trail connecting to rail trail; lake facility rented to Elks Club.

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

- a. N/A
- b. Awesome Riverside Park! Iola should be proud of their trails and lake.
- c. N/A

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. Visibility was good, facilities were good and signage was good.
- b. As noted, Chamber director very informative but what was interesting no local brochure was seen. It would have been great to see a brochure with town map, featured events throughout the year and history of Iola.
- c. Hard to find Chamber office. The office and the director, Carol Ann Sager should be more visible and promoted heavily—wealth of information.

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

- a. B&B Café
- b. LOTS of fast food! Local BBQ was great as previously mentioned. Around the Corner great local coffee shop. These two would bring us back.
- c. More fast food than many small towns.

13. Wrap-up

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

- a. Nice slow pace town, not much traffic business.
- b. Local charm around Town Square, schools were inviting and charming and Parks and Trails were amazing.
- c. Big positives were Chamber Director, Iola Industries, Thrive Allen County, and bringing high school graduates back to town to be dentists and do other key jobs.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. Needs better signage entering the town.
- b. Biggest obstacle—Your town is SO COOL but lacks “shout it out” to visitors in form of informational brochure and social media presence. A website would be great and Facebook could use improvement.
- c. Challenges were directional signage and Chamber office visibility.

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

- a. B&B Café
- b. N/A
- c. Will remember Iola Industries, Thrive Allen County and upbeat, active business community. Much more cohesive and unified than Baldwin. Entire community more comparable to Ottawa than Baldwin.

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