

# ***First Impressions***

*of*

**ATCHISON**

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*A program for community improvement*

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K.S.U. Community Development in Nov. 1992.*

The "**First Impressions**" instrument may be used by any community free-of-charge. However, we request that the author receive credit on the front cover. We would also appreciate copies of any final reports, media releases, or comments you might have about the process.

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## **FOREWARD**

All too often community leaders say--and may honestly believe--that they want to improve their community. However they may go about it the wrong way. Too much self-evaluation and too little outside evaluation may continue to mask real problems and opportunities.

The First Impression program is designed to bring outside community leaders, leaders very much like yourself, to a community they are not familiar with to express their First Impression of that community. The team members will pose as visitors, vacationers, shoppers, prospective business owners, and they will look at your community from that point of view.

The team arrives unannounced in your community. The basis for the team's First Impression of your community will be through the auto windshield; visiting with people on the street; and visiting with business owners. The observations are jotted down and then compiled into a community report. No individual business or comment will be considered as a First Impression of the total community, it will be the composite of all.

These impressions, true or false, are the result of the team members' honest and straightforward feelings about your community. We feel that if a team of visitors feels this way, then others coming into your community may also have the same First Impressions.

1. *What was my perception before visiting the community: What did I expect, etc.*

People would be discouraged because of the flooding, loss revenues to merchants and recent word of lay off.

Old town along MO River, knew it had Benedictine College. Always felt it was a "**dirty**" town - all industry, smoke stacks, etc. and fast food restaurants. Knew it had a college and many bars.

River, industrial, blue-collar, grain-processing community.

2. *Approaching the community, what do you notice first? (Evaluate EACH entrance)*

**Positive:** Signs at each entrance are attractive and well-kept.

East (59 Hwy) - pretty view on north, directions to business district, visitors center; (Hwy. 73 South entrance) - neat appearance, roadsides well maintained; (Hwy. 59 West entrance) - Highway & roadside maintained; (Hwy. 73 North entrance) - nice trees & roadsides; (Hwy. 7 North entrance) - very pretty, well maintained.

North & South 7 Hwy. attractive.

Hwy. 73 - narrow, but still attractive.

**Negatives:** Existing businesses that have deteriorated and/or are no longer in use.

East (59 Hwy.) - Welcome to Atchison sign is hard to read and placed too far into town; Hwy. 73 (South entrance) - welcome sign is too far in town; Hwy. 59 (West entrance) - Businesses needs to clean up; many closed businesses that look shabby: businesses and homes have a lot of junk in yards: can't read welcome sign (Hwy. 73 north entrance) needs signs! Needs to indicate where business district is; Hwy. 7 north entrance needs to indicate where business district is.

59 Hwy. - abandoned elevators, overgrown weeds/shrubs, cluttered, abandoned building - gives impression of not caring about the community.

3. *As you drive around town your comments on:*

**A. Appearance** Mix of well-kept homes (both old and new) alongside of deteriorating residential areas.

**1. Downtown**

Empty, large elevator structures are an eyesore and electric station could be disguised or screened.

The mall area is nice and has pretty landscaping. It does seem a little deserted. West of the mall on Commercial St., there are empty buildings and the buildings need painting and sprucing up. The sidewalks and tree bases have weeds growing all over them.

Landscaping of mall good but windows in occupied & non-occupied buildings dirty & cluttered, stores signs missing & need paint. Need to get stores filled and more people shopping there.

Transition from old to the new was not smooth - from old business district to new.

**2. Residential**

Strange mixture, housing. We questioned how strict is the zoning; perhaps these are not within city limits (mobile homes and commercial in residential area). Would neighborhood districts or historical districts designations help upgrade some areas of housing. Heritage Trust Fund sign to restore old home is a good example (8th & Atchison) of utilization of available funds for preservation projects.

Beautiful, old historic homes. Yards are kept up. No junk is out in yards. No dead trees. Overall, very nice.

Abandoned, cluttered housing, broken windows in the downtown area.

**3. Industrial park**

Signs to underground defense facility easy to miss if not familiar with area.

Too bad industry is right in town. The industrial park NW of town is nicely kept. Not unattractive. If you are just driving through town, it looks like all there is is industry; workers sit on street curbs.

Unit Rail has numerous rusting gates, could be screened; coop waste could be screened from view.

- 4. Parks** Need to remove dead trees in Jackson Park. Playground Equipment in good shape and nice shelter house. Is there a city recreation program? Not many parks in town north of 73 & 59.

10th & Kearney - nice park, but needs to be kept up. Picnic table benches were broken. More could be done to improve it since it is close to downtown.

Could not find any.

- 5. Schools** Grounds and buildings well-kept.

Yard & landscaping is beautiful at Atchison High School. Nice to see tennis courts next to them.

Good!

- 6. Infrastructure (Sidewalks, streets, lighting, etc.)**

Some nice sidewalks, trash along drains, main streets are good, some side streets (brick) deteriorated.

Lack of sidewalks or sidewalks are overgrown (corner of 5th & Division). Hard to get around in town, narrow streets, many one way streets, hills, etc. Many streets are not thru streets.

59 & 73 Hwys., narrow and no shoulder; sidewalks good.

- 7. Other** Difficult to recognize where city limits end in residential areas, although it is marked by signs. PRIDE Program?? Saw a sign on a lawn that said, "PRIDE in Atchison."

Recycling Center - positive; PRIDE could get involved in making improvements on main street through city.

**B. Signing**

- 1. Community entrance/exit signs** South Entrance (Positive) Maur Hill, well-kept grounds. Neighborhood watch signs are good. Tree in front of stop sign at 12th & Atchison Streets.

The community entrances - Hwy. 59 from west is the worst entrance and needs to be cleaned up.

Star-looking signs unattractive; replace with wood sign similar to one on Tenth Street near Chamber.

- 2. Streets** Riverview Road presents some opportunities for several overlook areas to river. Most main arteries are well-paved. Main streets downtown are nice and wide.

Old brick streets are charming and do not need much maintenance. There are weeds growing out of the bricks, though. Streets are well maintained - not too many pot holes.

Street signs, (posts in ground), are too low. You don't know what street you are on.

Unusual street identification signs.

- 3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.**

Directions to airport are not well-signed, making it difficult to find; never did find the airport.

The person we asked about parks couldn't really think of any except one south of town. No signs directing us to the parks or hospital.

"Get on 2nd street & go north," - one merchant gave us a city map; good, all should have some.

- 4. Storefront signs** No central theme.

Most stores did have signs, but could use some improvement. Some looked tacky along commercial street.

Some missing.

- 5. Industrial park** Was not easy to find; need signs.

Park entrance is marked. Businesses are marked.

- 6. City Hall, police, etc.** Fire and police stations are well-kept and easily identified.

Receptionist was helpful @ utility hookup information; bathroom ugly & not too clean.

- 7. Billboards/advertising, etc.**

Cluttered bill board on east entrance.

A few billboards on highways, but not in excess.

Star-looking signs with Rotary Lion Club organization signs not attractive. Other billboards not noticeable or eye-catching.

**4. Visitor/community information (Visited by one team only)**

**A. Convention & Visitors Center** Called Chamber; friendly, helpful. Jolene answered questions; basically come to the Chamber for all information.

**1. Is there a street map?** Yes (nice and also easy to read). Community profile on map is good idea. Might identify city hall and library. next printing; and post office.

**2. Community brochure/directory** Yes - Good

**3. Community profile (including business and industrial opportunities).**

Yes - On city map which was a good idea.

**4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit.....etc.**

Looks like eating establishments are adequate. No one recommended a place to visit.

Yes, very good at helping people.

Restaurant Guide

**5. Contact people & addresses listed if I want more info.**

City Receptionist; check with Realtor for rental properties.

**6. Complimentary Items (Postcards, bookmarks, coupons, etc.)**

Did not ask.

Phone books of another city are free. Don't know of any free items.

None!

**B. Chamber of Commerce**

**1. Easy to locate (and did people refer you to it?)**

Yes - people in restaurant weren't sure where it was until they discussed it a little.

Yes - easy to locate. Everyone we asked knew where it was located - even told us about the museum inside and how it was recently redone.

Most knew about it; one person said it was in the "depot thing."

**2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)**

Maps and brochures attractive and helpful.

All would be provided.

**3. Recommendations on places to stay/eat/visit etc.**

Paolucci's - good food and service; waitress friendly and helpful; restrooms were clean; good atmosphere.

All would be provided.

**4. How prepared/helpful were they.**

Well prepared.

Very prepared and helpful. It is nice to have other communities brochures, nice display!

Very helpful.

**5. Convenient hours?**

Look like most establishments closed at 5:30 p.m. and would not be able to catch the evening traffic.

Yes, open all day 8-5.

**C. Info from general community (service station/motel/bars/restaurants/shop employees/etc.)**

**1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?**

a. Gave airport directions but not complete.

Cook at restaurant/college student - very knowledgeable. She liked to talk about Atchison.

New employee at Conoco not helpful.

b. Chamber office was questionable but knew where tourist info center was.

Two women in clothing shop were very helpful with directions and other places to shop. Gave us an Atchison brochure.

Person in grocery store did not know where Chamber was.

c. Very positive.

d.

**2. Did they refer you to someone else who could help?**

a. Yes, called on another person.

Yes, referred us to the Chamber.

b. Yes, asked other employee.

**3. Attitude, appearance, etc.**

a. attitude was good, people were friendly and wanted to be helpful.

attitude was positive. People were helpful.

b. appearance retail - it doesn't look prosperous.

c. Stores downtown had a 70's look - need to update.

**4. Other comments**

a. Dumping station for campers is a good idea.

Saw many Atchison brochures in store windows and on counters. Store workers gave us one.

b.

c.

**5. General**

**A. Do residents know their community history/events/directions/etc.**

Yes.

Residents know community fairly well. People knew street names and addresses of places we asked about.

OK!

**B. Services...variety of retail...lodging facilities...**

Retail doesn't have a good mix and may need to look at what can compliment what.

There is a variety of retail. Only two decent motels. One employee of a restaurant discouraged us from staying at one of the motels.

Good - downtown. Only 2, need more businesses.

**C. Are there public restrooms?**

In parks, but not downtown except in Fast Food restaurants.

Never found any except at park.

Yes, in certain stores & govt. buildings.

**D. Payphones...are they working, phone books intact.**

Quite a few - books were missing.

Yes! Many!

No phone books - could find phones at various sites.

**E. Industrial park...does it look active & attractive.**

Yes, active - not too attractive, but not too bad or dirty.

Unit Rail has numerous rusting gates, could be screened; coop waste could be screened from view.

**F. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty restaurants/bakeries/etc.)**

Looks like a good mix, prices competitive.

Not very many specialty restaurants. A lot of fast food which is nice to see, makes Atchison look big. The three team members ate in three different restaurants and all had good food.

Fried food, (home cooking).

**G. What does community SMELL like?**

Alcohol - some days it is stronger than others. Since this is a large industry, the residents did not seem concerned.

Alcohol, grain - but not all the time.

Sewer, grain - downtown (mall area) shops.

**H. What SOUNDS did you hear?**

No loud industry noises and people were positive.

Minimal noise.

Industrial - emission of steam, noise.

I. **What did community FEEL like (Emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc.)**

Felt the community was more inviting to a visitor than a would be resident.

Downtown seemed deserted. People don't seem too friendly; not many said hi or waved.

Small town, somewhat friendly, home-grown, not too many people move in, mostly local people, concerned with flood.

**DESCRIBE THE PEOPLE YOU MET (Friendly, helpful, etc.)**

Seemed like they were all friendly and helpful.

Everybody was helpful. They weren't friendly until we asked questions or approached them.

Most were friendly.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:**

This report is a composite of 3 teams of visitors to your city. The team is familiar with the high rainfall that has stimulated vegetation and flooding problems. These conditions were considered in the review. The impressions, true or false are the result of the team members spending six hours visiting your community.

Some General Considerations...

Residential: Would neighborhood districts or historical designations help upgrade some of the housing? Heritage Trust Fund sign at 8th & Atchison is an excellent example of utilization of available resources for projects.

Mall: The change from old to new is very sudden. Need to be some type of transition. Mall - was and could be a very nice facility; the mix of businesses are not compatible (might consider a mall manager promoter and/or scheduled events to bring people to downtown).

Parks & Recreation: Some of the city had adequate and very nice parks while other areas were quite void of any type of park or recreation area. Many areas were available for linear parks but was left to be overgrown by brush. It appeared that the city did not have a recreation department. These are becoming more popular in most cities and provide leisure activity for all ages.

There were dead trees in the parks, along right-a-ways and in residential areas. The city could assist home owners by assisting with tree removal. Might consider Kansas Tree Program.

Too many run-down industrial, commercial bldgs. & homes vacant & unpainted.

**WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW**

Beautiful homes. Historic aspect of Atchison.

Grain Elevators, train tracks, landscape mall (downtown), hilly, college.

**6. *Doing it Right!***

**A. List the 5 MOST positive things you observed about the community.**

1. Nell Hills.  
Benedictine College.
2. Good streets - no potholes.  
River front view.
3. Historic homes & brick streets.  
Chamber of Commerce building.
4. Chamber & CVB & museum - good location.  
Pedestrian Mall.
5. Mall area.  
Drug Store - .25 coffee & sodas.  
Abundance of furniture stores.

**B. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe the steps you will take to implement it within the NEXT 72 HOURS!**

1. Brochures in all of the businesses on counters and in store windows.
2. The way there is a scenic tour and signs directing you to it.