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December 9, 1994

Greg Wise, CNRED
515 Oak, Courthouse
P.O. Box 49
Baraboo, WI 53913-0049

Dear Greg:

Thank you for your assistance helping link the communities of Baraboo and Monroe in a "First Impressions" partnership. All of our team enjoyed Baraboo very much. Our constructive critique is meant only to make an already wonderful community even better.

Four Monroe team members visited on October 17. It was a beautiful fall day. A husband-wife team visited on November 2, another clear fall day. A follow-up visit -- one "new" person, one "old" team member -- took place on Saturday, October 17. There were two husband-wife teams and (perhaps unfortunately) their reports are "merged." Again, everyone was quite impressed with Baraboo and felt the community would be a great place to live and work.

We had written for information prior to coming. I'm pleased to report the Chamber of Commerce had a one day in-same day out policy in place and our information was received promptly.

Overall, we felt the strengths of the community were:

- The wealth of architecture/potential for historic preservation.
- Circus World and Ringling Theater.
- Courthouse Square and off-square retail.
- Your friendly people.
- Your setting among the Baraboo hills.
- The tourism-retail nature of the community.
- The river.
- Your tremendous potential.

Some things to possibly work towards would include:

- Historic preservation.
- Proliferation of billboards diminishes your image.
- Some signage issues.
- Zoning (mixed)
- Possibly a lot of groups involved but is a specific person or group "in charge" of downtown?
- Why no banner downtown?
- Perhaps a Chamber-sponsored customer service program would be helpful.
- Your unrealized potential (Do you realize how truly great Baraboo could be?)

Again, thank you. We hope our comments are helpful. Good luck with your community development activities. We're looking forward to returning to Baraboo.

Sincerely,

Michael Jones
Community Resource Development Agent
UWEX-Green County

MJ:wk

Baraboo

As you approach the community.....

I. What was my perception before visiting? What did I expect?

- I knew that Baraboo had many tourist type attractions as well as the natural beauty of the state park and surrounding countryside. However, the community was in many ways similar to Monroe. I was eager to review this community.
- Baraboo was noted for Ringling Theatre and Circus World Museum, was near the Dells tourist area..
- I was familiar with Baraboo of the 70's -- remembered it as a nice town -- attractive and had no bad memories.
- Circus World. A tourist community plus retail. Also, the Al Ringling Theatre and Courthouse square.

II. The "five minute" impression:

Take one drive through the community without stopping. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence, don't talk with the others in your group for this part.

- As in many new towns, I felt somewhat disoriented to the features of the community. The attractions were strongly identified. But Baraboo should also be just as clear as to the highlights that make them a hometown. Difficult to locate downtown. Felt some confusion regarding Baraboo and West Baraboo. Where does one start and the other end?
- Many old buildings, mixture of zoning, old houses converted to business, mobile homes in many areas, zoning nightmare. Entrance population sign indicates 9,202 and also that was 54th best town of small town rated..didn't like that item mentioned.
- Baraboo has well kept homes -- almost all streets had curb and gutter -- very few potholes and some positive street construction. But with many entrances, a bit confusing to find my way. The numbered avenues, and named streets a different combination. Impressed by the industries' day care, parks and the downtown square.
- A bit "confusing" as far as signing. The traffic signal "coversup" the sign for downtown so I missed the downtown turn the first go around. Lots of trees lining the main route which was an unexpected pleasure.

III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.

Go about 1/2 - 1 mile out each road and return. List each road (61 North, etc.) and list positive and negatives for each.

- My "First Impression" was tuning into the Circus World radio report and hearing nothing but static. Arriving on Highway 12 south, I was not sure at what point I should turn right to go downtown. No apparent gateway leading me into the heart of the community. I didn't find any signage celebrating Baraboo at any of the entry points. Highway 136 was a picture postcard way into town with the river curving up to greet the roadway. Highway 33 with new divided roadway helps to provide easy entry to hotels and restaurants for travelers from Wisconsin Dells. Highway 33 east was torn up due to construction. Felt view of Historic Fairgrounds a plus.
- Noted downtown parking was 2 hours with no meters, very few people downtown and some parking was available, suspect merchants using stalls in front of stores. Went Highway 12 -- many fine homes, generally there was need for painting and repair.
- I went farther than that. From 33 -- all along the main visitor/transportation corridor from the Interstate -- an unsightly proliferation of billboards. Gives you the image of a tourist trap instead of the quality tourist attraction that you are. I'd suggest working with your county and town to improve this problem. I would let the lovely Baraboo Hills and farmsteads be peoples' introduction to Baraboo, not the tacky Dells-like billboards. Many are poorly done, too.

The drive-in should be a part of the tourists' travel experience. In approximately 13 miles, I counted maybe 40 billboards. (Someone should count them). Definite overkill.

From 33 - Baraboo Welcome sign is faded and hard to see.

Highway 12 N - a "clean" entrance to town. For a strip (W. Baraboo), it seemed surprisingly clean. Directional signage was good.

From 136, a beautiful entrance, but no community entrance sign.

The scar on the hillside (Baraboo Hills) (leaving town toward the Interstate). HOW COULD THAT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN? That's your problem, too; not the township's alone. It reflects on you.

IV. (a) Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:

(signs, appearance, size, etc.)

- I certainly enjoyed the old town square type of marketplace. The side street businesses impressed me the most. They contained variety and seemed vibrant. A bit disappointed with some of the store fronts. Did not seem united...cluttered. Great potential. Definitely need guide signs to help draw visitors downtown.
- Not good, we drove in on Business Route but no mention of Business District, no directional signs for courthouse or downtown. Industrial park was visible and Sysco and Farm & Fleet was evident.
- The square is an ideal business configuration. Few vacancies -- parking tight (spaces narrow). I did not note downtown parking lots, one for county employees would be helpful.
- Beautiful second stories. A wonderful wealth of old buildings. Need to work (as we do) on the 1st floors, historic preservation, signing ordinance, National Register designation. False fronts (ugh!). (We have 'em, too.) A signing ordinance would really help you: colors, size, shape, type, recessed, etc. Was really impressed with the apparent vibrancy of your off-square retail area. That's unusual. The mix around the square is "different" -- is it working? Are you recruiting for mix or is it just happening? Banners good!

IV. (b) Driving...evaluate other business area.

- Enjoyed the Baraboo banners...should carry them all the way to the downtown. Lining the streets with them gives the red carpet feeling. Zoning in areas away from downtown seemed overly mixed. The pride in the businesses' external appearance went from one end of the scale to the other.
- On Highway 12 there was a nice mall with Maurices, Penneys, Wal Mart and others along with the fast food franchises. Understand that highway bypass's being considered. What will this do to the west side Highway 12 businesses?
- Other business areas vary. The K-Mart Plaza looked very good. The Highway 12 businesses are deteriorating along with strip, St. Vincent de Paul evacuated.

V. Driving...comments on residential:

- Some beautiful older homes as well as new home start-ups. Many residents taking an interest in revitalizing their homes. Still some areas which need to embrace this feeling of pride.
- We saw no run down neighborhood -- most yards well kept.
- Many old houses converted to business, mobile homes in many areas, as stated previously, zoning nightmare. Although nice older homes, many in need of repair.
- Beautiful mansions (off Oak). Nice place to live and raise a family.

VI. Driving...comments on:

a. street signs

- City signs were good. An unusual mix of numbers and names on street posts. For a visitor or new resident -- numbers are always easier to navigate by. Hoped for guide signs to draw out principle features.
- Needed help finding downtown -- no signs directing to hospital, schools, clinics, etc., that I noticed.
- Very difficult town to find your way around. Some directional signs other than city would be great. We are still looking for the high school.
- Didn't seem to be any missing or defaced. Good.

b. traffic patterns/street conditions

- Discovered many "potholes" on the side streets. Sidewalks in various stages of repair.
- Good
- Much traffic congestion, mixed uses in areas.
- Some need some work -- rough and potholes.

c. welcome signs (at entrances)

- Only encountered the population sign with "best community" plaque attached to a few but not all.
- Failed to see larger entry sign -- banners leading into city obvious.
- Didn't notice welcome sign, liked the banner early but then discontinued downtown.
- Not all entrances are signed. Faded sign at one entrance. Billboards overwhelming.

d. direction signs to parks, schools, hospitals/clinics, attractions, services (i.e. police), etc.

- Signs to Zoo and Chamber were the only visible effort on behalf of the city. Private and state attractions used signage to a strong advantage.
- See # VI.
- Good sign for Park and Zoo, tell people about it, hard to find way around. Better use and identification of Historic homes.
- Mixed bag. Some very good. Some I seemed to suddenly "come upon."

VII. Driving...comments on industrial park/area:

Sign well defined.. .busy.. .growing...new...etc.

- More than one park. Impressed with park near Highway 12. Good mix, good location. Thought placement of Huber Law Facility was a great way to integrate. Signage on this park was informative; however, would suggest placement visible directly from highway. Second park was experiencing new growth both by city, with placement of new roads, but also new business.
- Excellent sign - one on Highway 12 would get excellent exposure to drive thru traffic.
- Industrial park well identified was neat and inviting.
- Found a couple. Seemed to be very good. Location and mix good.

VIII. Driving...comments on schools:

- Enjoyed seeing the wise placement of High School and Junior High facilities near each other. Elementary schools were not as easy to find but often they are nestled into neighborhoods.
- Schools looked impressive.
- Where are they, we never did find the high school, found St. Josephs Catholic School after much driving around. Need signage.
- High school/middle school easy to find. Looked to be in good shape, well kept up, etc.

IX. Driving...comments on Parks, play grounds, athletic facilities, etc.:

- Strong emphasis on their parks. Enjoyed the variety. Many small **parks**. Felt the ice arena with its potential for mixed uses was a good community solution and was a monument to volunteer enthusiasm.
- Many parks. Athletic facilities very impressive, especially the skating building and zoo.
- On entering town came onto nice park with no identification - appeared to have swimming pool and tennis courts - churches appear to be in good repair.
- Parks seem to be a community priority. Mix of large and small "neighborhood-type." Keep it up.

X. Driving...comments on other:

a. hospitals/clinics

- St. Clare has provided many years of service to Baraboo area.
- Coming west on Ringling Street no sign for hospital, we had to go back and forth several times -- between the various nursing homes and hospital some signage, should be better for visitors.
- Lots of car traffic/parking. Looked to be very busy.

b. billboards/advertising

- Strong "Dells" influence in the approaches to the community and in West Baraboo. Can be distracting to what the city of Baraboo has to offer.

- Like the banners when entering town, but not carried thru in downtown. No signs for business district or court house.
- Terrible. A major area for you to work on. It distracts/defeats your image as a quality attraction. Very "Dells-ish"/tacky. Didn't say "Baraboo" (mental image) to me. (Yes, you can do something about this).

XI. Walking around...comments on businesses (physical part):

Appearance, displays, signs, etc.

- Pleased to see empty store fronts being worked on -- not sure how Virtual Reality Golf will blend with historical business district. Sort of "Back to Future" approach.
- Seemed acceptable.
- Chamber office was very accommodating with very good brochure, office well identified. Civic building very large and was good use of old school .
- Beautiful second stories. Some historic preservation/renovation going on. I'd encourage that any way you could because Baraboo could be a crown jewel architecturally.

XII.

Walking Around...comments on people

- Helpful, friendly..all I could hope for in many of the shops. However, I felt I needed to initiate the interaction.
- Yes. All questions received with patience and courtesy.
- We walked around the entire downtown concerned about the number of vacancies. Many stores did not have hour signs and too many stickers in windows to confuse rather than inform.
- Yes. Very helpful and friendly. A few needed to make eye contact and "greet," but once I said something, then very nice and informative.

XIII Community information: comments on....

a. community brochure (tourist type)

- Colorful cover, good impression of area. Would like to see dates listed on an insert of upcoming events instead of reference to "second weekend" etc. More specific and projects a more current feel for the information.
- Very good.
- Chamber brochure was maybe too all inclusive but well done.
- A multi-use publication. I'd consider a "pure" marketing/tourism piece (1) and a second "on-site" piece (2).

b. businesses/attractions brochures or directory

- (see a) Brochure used in both categories.
- Did not cover much thoroughly.

- Many businesses listed with attractions.
 - (see a) Multi-use.
- c. community profile (demographic, industrial type information for prospective business people, etc.)
- Felt the Business Development Office was well placed next to chamber office. The BDO had a simple matrix layout of groups and what services they provide and available business listings.
 - Did not see any - we asked.
 - Development office was very helpful. (Matrix-format).
- d. map
- Tear off pad of maps a great idea. Very usable size, very clear.
 - Helpful.
 - Good map and we needed to find way around.
 - Tear-off pad was clever. I've seen these before, of course, but not for maps (calendar of events).
- e. other (ie. bulletin/notice, kiosks, etc.)
- Most information stands were owned by companies outside Baraboo and invited me to go elsewhere.
 - Noted information in one store. We covered only 11 stores.
 - Since area has many attractions we were able to find much literature.

XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:

a. appearance of facility, including signing.

- Did not visit...sorry.
- City Hall was nice building, too bad the Ameritech building across street is vacant or for sale.
- Missed it.
- OK.

b. helpfulness of staff

- Accommodating.

c. other

XV. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit

a. did people know where it was (or who to refer you to?)

- Yes they did and signage in this case was good

- o We were referred to the Chamber by Clark Gas Station, then found sign so were able to find easily.
 - o Yes.
 - o Yes. I **asked** five people. All knew.
- b. comment on information available
- o An administrative type of an office. It did not lend itself to a long stay. Information was self serve in hallway. I enjoy asking questions and having the appropriate info referred to me.
 - o Good brochure.
 - o Wide variety.
 - o Kind of "cold" and "officious"-feeling. Information was OK, but could use some creativity and work.
- c. comment on staff
- o I know we were visiting in the "off season." However when I said I had a 3 and 6 year old along, I was referred to spend my day in the Dells. I had to suggest the parks and local zoo.
 - o Interesting conversation with good information.
 - o Office person friendly. Spent only moments there.
 - o Could benefit from some customer service training.
- d. other (hours, appearance, locations, etc.)
- o Very satisfied with chamber, wondered if in season they didn't have some type of information booth.
 - o Excellent location. The building (Civic Center) a neat asset.
 - o What about weekends -- when most visitors come? Not a criticism. We're wrestling with this, too.

XVI. Other stuff...

- a. public restrooms (available, condition, etc.)
- o OK.
 - o Very clean Civic Center.
 - o Good/clean.
- b. pay phones (working, phone book intact, etc)
- o OK.
 - o Found several pay phones.
 - o Yes
 - o I checked two - OK.

c. parking

- o Very tight in the downtown area. The county courthouse has a large appetite for parking, but it also draws those employees into the downtown district.
- o Was available with 2 hour limits which are OK. No ramps or lots located other than one by civic center. Curious to know if owners park in front of stores and how monitored.
- o Spaces narrow
- o I had no problem, but we were there mid-week. I assume weekends and summers it's tight?

d. water fountains, benches, etc.

- o Many benches available on the courthouse plaza.
- o Basically no benches or water fountains, didn't see many trash containers either. Courthouse did have benches.
- o Adequate.

e. Other

- o We ate at Christina's per recommendation of Clarks, was OK cafe. Visited store called Fashion Showplace, they were very unfriendly, not interested in selling.

WRAP UP

A. Using your "senses"....

1. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/restaurant, etc.)

- Restaurant was clean. Others appeared to be also.
- Teri's restaurant clean, food very good, waitress excellent.
- Good food.

2. What does the community SMELL like?

- Hometown.
- No unpleasant industrial or grain or manure odor.

3. What SOUNDS did you hear?

- Could hear the train as it was moving through town. Made me think of the Circus Train and its annual parade.
- We did arrive at the testing of the sirens. Thought the noon whistle was late but knew was Civil Defense testing.
- Noted cross-country train - an asset.
- Lot of truck traffic. Otherwise, small-town noises. River.

4. What did the community feel like (emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc., or physical response, i.e. rough streets, etc.)
- I generally had a warm impression which came directly from the people I encountered. Some of the physical cues described earlier did not build on this feeling.
 - Were patching streets as we arrived, downtown basically cold and uninviting, mixed signage was terrible, only several store fronts looked like thought given them. Ringling Theatre needs some paint and care, should be a great attraction.
 - Baraboo is inviting -- my type of town. Lots of industry, tourism a great factor and advantage of the UW campus in town.
 - Overall, warm. I liked (like) Baraboo. Felt it was its own "worst enemy" in some ways, e.g. seemed to be over-organized, billboards bad, not "pulled together".

B. List the 5 most positive things you observed about the community:

- Circus World Museum (3)
- Parks
- Conversion of school to civic building
- Hockey Pavilion and effort behind it
- Connection to the Dells and Devil's Lake (2)
- Eighteen hole public golf course
- New Freedom train
- Dells area
- Square
- Industry - Circus World Museum - Theatre
- Tourism
- Major Highway 12 plus RR - other highways
- Attractive Baraboo River
- Historic buildings/courthouse square and "off-square" retail (2)
- Baraboo Hills - community combination
- Water tower painting
- People

C. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours:

- The summary matrix of services available from various organizations.
- Thought the chamber brochure was good, multi color, maybe could be cut down, but good.
- None
- Development Corporation "matrix" idea.

D. What will you remember most about the community six months from now?

- Its variety, a strong tourism arena, ability to attract industry, and focus on community life.
- Tremendous potential with many tourist attractions, many historic homes, however, community in need of sprucing up and painting, could be described as sleepy with much potential.
- The downtown.
- **A** tourism/retail town. Nice place to visit (went back the following weekend and spent some disposable income). The river and its potential.

E. Other comments (that just didn't seem to fit anywhere else!)

- Lots of business opportunities, community rich in tradition, no evidence of pride in property. Mixed zoning businesses everywhere.
- Thought the awnings company had attractive store, would suggest he give other stores in town quotes on awnings in front of their stores.
- Understand downtown is looking at new (old) lightposts. They need banners, planters and benches, they have good square and could support some specialty stores..maybe they should visit Galena, new bypass won't hurt downtown but they have to make it possible for people to find them.
- We tuned into the "510" frequency on radio entering from south - heard only static. Should be used to publicize the Circus Museum - or the signs covered.
- You might want to "look inward" and see if you're over-organized with no one really "in-charge" of the heart of your community -- the downtown e.g. a "manager" like a "mall manager"). That was my perception - could be wrong. **A** very nice community. Thank you.