

**FINAL REPORT**

**FIRST  
IMPRESSIONS**

**of**

**BARRON, WI**

**By Shell Lake, WI  
Visit conducted 10/26/94**

*A program for community improvement*

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**  
**A TOOL FOR COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT & IMPROVEMENT**

**Visiting Team Profile:**

The diversity represented by the team from Shell Lake visiting Barron included:

Females  
Males  
Adult educator  
Homemaker  
Retired downtown business owners  
Current Downtown Business Owner

Age range: **40-72**

**Date and Weather:**

Weather during the visit October 26, 1994 was sunny and warm. The group left Shell Lake at 9:30 a.m. and returned at approximately 3:00 p.m.

**Contact Person For Shell Lake was:**

Beverly Stencil  
UW-Extension, CNRED Agent  
342 Walnut Street  
Spooner, WI 54801

**(715) 635-3192**

The visit was coordinated with Jack Sroka, University of Wisconsin-Extension-Barron County Community, Natural Resources & Economic Development Agent.

Many THANKS!!

The group from Shell Lake wishes to express their thanks to Jack and those citizens from Barron who participated in this fun and informative exchange of ideas and impressions.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS REPORT

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

-Turkeys - "highway" community (long, stretched out) several times larger than Shell Lake

-A farming community dependent on the city. Jerome's Turkey.

-I have been there 2-3 times previous for an event. I expected a typical small town, to see Jerome Foods.

-Small farming town, retired farmers, small locally owned businesses, much like it was 20-30 years ago, neat but old in appearance.

### II. The "five minute" impression:

-25 South, quite, clean at first, then seemed like a backdoor approach. Good variety of businesses. Mixture of old and new. 8 East older homes. Very few people on the streets.

-Good information signs coming into town. Streets were clean, easy drive through town. Spread out in several directions.

-It impressed me as a typical, smaller, midwestern town. A combination of older buildings and newer buildings and businesses along the highway (Hertz, Quik Trip, etc.) The Yellow River is prominent and pretty as we drove in (from the North).

-More businesses than I originally thought, spread out alot, some nice store fronts, some show signs of aging, need of repairs, signage (business) is a mess.

As you "drive" around town:

- Residential areas well kept. Streets are basically good and wide.
- Home & lawns are neat, clean generally well kept.
- Obvious ties to agriculture. Streets are in good condition with some construction going on.

**III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.**

- Hwy 25 - information signs very attractive, eye catching. Hwy 8 - two lanes through town.
- Hwy 8 east - (driving west into town) This was very pleasant. The buildings that are out far are pleasing, the log-style realty office, the yellow farmstead east of the livestock barn. The cemetery is pretty and well kept. The salvage yard well "hidden". The welcome to Barron sign very appealing.
- We had a Barron map and were trying to locate the industrial park. We did eventually but 16th St. & 18th St. are apparently the same now. We were looking for 18th St. to be east of 17th.
- We never found the airport mentioned in the Barron brochure. We did find a landing strip across from the beverage distributor.
- The highway itself looks and feels recently paved. The banners are a nice touch. The library sign was noticeable.
- Hwy 8 from the west. Several billboards prior to the Barron welcome signs. There are 2 welcome signs now. Will the lime green one come down eventually? I noticed several older homes that had been refurbished, colorful, eye catching.
- Hwy 25 from south - not considered a main entrance. The Barron sign is there but that is all. Didn't notice if there was even that when approaching from the north.
- Entrance "Hwy 8" from west and east both attractive, great welcome sign on east entrance. Welcome sign on west entrance "Hwy 8" seems amateur-like. Hwy 25 entrance from north is least desirable.

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

- Many nice store fronts, fairly clean and decorated. Didn't notice many shops closed down or for sale.
- Kinda spread out although every business was easily seen, appearance good, nice street lights.
- Good size, ie. several blocks which included courthouse, city hall looked "typical", no concerted effort apparent for revamping store fronts, though there are some nice individual efforts.
- Pennants on light posts nice touch. Signage is messy, could use a universal theme. Bank building near **IGA** store looks great, attempt to cover the old brick building is serious mistake.

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

- Where is airport? not even on map, no signs, only small grass strip at Industrial Park.
- We asked directions to golf course and airport. We didn't find the airport.
- Did not notice any mall development or any discount such as Walmart, Pamida, Shopko, etc. I was surprised considering the population of the area.
- Industrial park "lost", needs clean up, screen fences, etc. What are the two dams for (sign)? Is there some historical importance to the old dam on the east side of town?

**V. Driving...comments on residential:**

- Most are well taken care of -older homes on SW end of town need more trees. newer homes near community center. Some homes and yards need cleaning, trees
- Houses & lawns basically in nice shape. We noticed very few, if any "for sale" signs on the streets, lawns, etc.
- Pleasant neighborhoods, trees, well kept houses. Didn't notice a lot for sale.
- Modest homes, but well kept, neat lawns. Could not find many new homes.

VI. Driving ...comments on:

a. street signs

-Hwy 8 well marked - various municipal signs difficult to see.

-Average - could use **signs** other than "state" signs to designate schools, hospital, etc.

-Fine

-Generally good

b. traffic patterns/street conditions

-Moves easily, no problems.

-Traffic pattern good.

-Fine

-Generally good repair

c. welcome signs (at entrances)

-Good signs on Hwy 8, west & east

-Good signs on all entrances. **An** informational sign in a conspicuous place listing the major businesses would be nice.

-(see hwy comments)

-Great signs on east side Hwy 8, not much for signs on Hwy 25.

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

-Good signs for hospital/clinics, others poor. Many too obscure.

-Fairly good, could use better signs to Hospitals, Schools, etc.

-Did not notice directional to police. Why doesn't BACC have their own signs for out-of-town concert goers?

-Could use larger signs on Hwy 8 for hospital, schools.

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

-Didn't even notice sign the first **two** times we looked for it, even with the help of the map. Some good development with mostly new businesses.

-The steel fab. company rather messy. The rest okay. The only identification for Industrial Park was an arrow pointing on top of entrance, welcome sign.

-Sign ok, (see hwy section for comments).

-Sign for industrial park is adequate, however, looks like it was an after thought, needs clean up - mow grass.

## **VIII. Driving...comments on schools:**

-Advantage for high school to be connected to community center.

-Schools looked very good. Lawns well kept. Several buildings housing several grades.

-Nice schools, nice layout, still close to residential community.

-Good.

**IX. Driving...comments on parks, playgrounds, athletic facilities, etc.:**

-Nice parks, spread out into all parts of the city.

-Better directions at getting to them. That little park looked inviting. Are there restrooms available there?

-We drove through the park on 3rd St. Very "homey". Lots of function areas in one locale here - swimming, playground, tennis, ball, picnic, just sitting. I liked it.

-Several parks seem adequate. Might want to design a common symbol and color for all the parks. Great community center.

**X. Driving...comments on other:**

a. hospitals/clinics

-Excellent facility

-We found these places fairly well, better sign directions.

-I drove around twice looking for the hospital entrance. It is the same as the clinic entrance, but the clinic sign is very prominent whereas the "Hospital" is under the overhang.

-Generic signs are easily seen.

b. billboards/advertising

-Adequate.

-Billboards at all entrances into town. We ate at Roses, but found it by chance.

-No comment.

-Need large sign on Hwy 8. Is there only one motel? Could not find the airport.

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

-Mixture of businesses, Hwy 8 businesses are geared to transient traffic; LaSalle to local business, retail and services. Very trashy on 6th St. between LaSalle and Hwy 8. "Welcome" banners on Hwy 8 and LaSalle.

-Town rather spread out, a lot of walking to get to every business place. I like the street lights.

-Many of the sidewalks were in tough shape and weeds apparent in many cracks, particularly on side streets between Hwy 8 and downtown. But no weeds at the Senior Center! I took two pictures down "main street". It looked very similar to the shot hanging in City Hall which must be at least 40 years old. There is a preponderance of light poles and wires.

-Some individual buildings looked very nice and appealing. I especially liked the flowers at Dr. Caple's.

-I noticed two "kaffee klatsche's" at Hardee's - a group of middle-aged women and a group of older men (Norwegian bachelor farmers?). It is interesting that this type of assemblage occurs at a place like Hardee's. It seems to be associated with a place like Rose's.

-Many buildings are in excellent condition; bank next to IGA, Johnson accountant and many others. However, some are rather rough, i.e. **IGA** store.

XII. Walking around...comments on people:

-Most were helpful, knowledgeable - enjoyed talking with barber (McDonalds). Usually, if people didn't know information, they would find out for me.

-People were friendly - I ate at Rose's. A waitress didn't know where the Chamber of Commerce was but got the information for us.

-Clerks were friendly and helpful. I asked about clothes shopping and learned there really is no clothing store in the town now that Eason's has closed.

-Clerks in stores were helpful and friendly, people on street appeared friendly. However, no one said good morning, good afternoon.

**XIII. Community information: comments on...**

a. community brochure (tourist type)

-Good brochure at city hall. Lady working there gave good information.

-Yes! nice!

-Good

b. business/attractions brochures or directory

-Business listing did not contain addresses so I had to ask directions. - Church directory sign on Hwy 8 is difficult to read because of the **flow** of traffic.

-Yes

-Good

c. community profile (demographic, industrial type information for prospective business people, etc.)

-Not **very** much community profile.

-I didn't ask for this, some information is included in the general information brochure.

-Don't **know**.

d. map

-The Chamber of Commerce offered one. It helped a lot.

-You don't have a city map, neither do we.

-Yes!! (see highway comments).

-Good map.

e. other (ie. bulletin/notice tourism, **kiosks**, etc.)

-Turkey feathers everywhere.

-The county booklet is nice too. But I like the pieces specific to Barron better.

-Like Shell Lake, booklet seems to be under someone's counter, or at City Hall.

#### **XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:**

a. appearance of facility, including signing

-Clean, comfortable

-Nice old building--well preserved. Good sign identifying it.

-Easy to miss. Small lettering on side, missing some letters. No sign on door.

-If I recall, the building is old; a lot of the old has been covered up. Cannot recall what **the** sign looked like.

-Hard to find. Walked right by it. Poor signing.

b. helpfulness of staff

-O.K.

-Courteous

-Very friendly, helpful, answered all questions we had.

-They were very accommodating.

**XV. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit:**

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

-I asked 20 merchants if they had a chamber: **5** knew where it was; **2** were unsure; 10 didn't know; and **2** said "I don't think we have one."

-The waitress at Rose's instructed us as to where it was.

-Waitress at lunch time didn't know where or if there was a chamber, but she did ask someone, and told us the place was city hall.

b. comment on information available

-Map was good -- bus, church, etc. directory.

-We found all the information we asked about.

-Great brochures, one especially -- the one for the school district.

-Good.

c. comment on staff

-Helpful and friendly.

-I didn't speak to her, as my questions were answered by city hall person.

-Curiously, no one asked who we were, where we were from, or if we had some specific interest.

d. other (hours, appearance, locations, etc.)

-Same as city hall.

-I did notice community fund signs in many shop windows,

**XVI. Other stuff...**

a. public restrooms (available, condition, etc.)

-We didn't see one except in courthouse.

-? I used--Hardee's!

-Restaurant, city, courthouse. Did not see any other public stand along restroom.

b. payphones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)

-One on Main Street for sure.

-At Hardee's.

-Sure there were some, but didn't notice any.

c. Parking

-Municipal lot signs hard to see.

-A parking shortage around public buildings. Didn't notice a municipal parking area.

-Seemed adequate.

-Downtown seems adequate. Courthouse parking is confusing.

d. water fountains, benches, etc.

-Saw one on Main Street.

-Benches were nice! I only noticed them on the block across from the courthouse.

-Few benches. Didn't notice any water fountains (or bubblers, **as** folks from Milwaukee say.)

e. -Perhaps the old railroad depot could be converted into a museum, restaurant, etc. Good variety of outdoor programs.

-No movie theater?

-**The** community clothes closet looked typical--overstuffed! But it's a good-hearted effort. Sign doesn't tell you who runs it or why. Toot your horn!

## WRAP UP

### A. Using your “senses”...

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

-Fair selection of food--sub sandwiches, small town cafes, fast food--didn't notice any fancier restaurants. Good bakery.

-Good food at Rose's. Bakery was well-filled with lots of goodies.

-Food at Rose's was **EXCELLENT**, but my waitress didn't smile.

-Had lunch at Rose's. Food was good, modestly priced, fast. Waitress was nice, but not outgoing.

2. What does the community **SMELL** like:

-In October, clean and fresh, except near the welding shops.

-No comment. Nothing special drew my attention.

-Neither positive or negative comment here.

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

-Hwy. 8 traffic. Some construction sounds.

-No sound outstanding. It was rather quiet while we were down there.

-Downtown Main Street was fine. Highway 8 was noisy, but to be expected on major road.

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.)

-It seemed quieter than I expected. I liked the Halloween decorations in the shop windows.

-A nice quiet typical N. western town with all the necessities of a farming area. A warm feeling.

-Not many people on street or in stores.

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

1. Community center; welcome signs attractive; a few of the older brick buildings look great.
2. Parks, lamp posts(street lights) nice, good assortment of businesses.
3. Street banners, welcome pennants on every other post--Neat! In addition to Jerome's, have good "industrial" base.
4. Variety of businesses; not much sign clutter on Main Street; entrances into town are generally great.
5. New construction, good streets--I don't think I saw a pot hole.

**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:**

-Maybe better "Welcome to ---" signs.

-Work on maps of city and listing business places.

-Yellow brochure that Mary picked up from school would make an excellent format for our Industrial Development Corporation.

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

-Should be able to find most goods and services in Barron but could use a theater.

-Jerome's turkey plant is well-kept and stands out as you come and leave town.

-Old historical buildings that have been preserved; several are excellent.

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

-Library was cramped, not enough open space, old building.

-No specialty shops for tourist attractions that I could see. Ben Franklin - a complete store but hard to find what you wanted. A lot of merchandise in boxes on floor. Not enough help.

-Need to make a special effort to continue restoration of some old buildings.

When taking pictures keep this in mind as to why you have the camera.

TO document what features add to or detract from the downtown area?

**LIST ON THIS PAPER THE PICTURE NUMBER, SUBJECT AND WHY YOU TOOK THE PICTURE.**

**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

TURKEYS SITTING IN CAGES IN THE HEAT FOR HOURS, MIGHT BE CONSIDERED INHUMANE BY MANY PEOPLE; MAYBE A SCREEN OR FENCE COULD BE ERECTED TO SCREEN THIS FROM THE PUBLIC.



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**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

THIS BUILDING LOOKS A LOT BETTER IN THIS PICTURE, HOWEVER VISUALLY, IT LOOKS LIKE AN OLD WAREHOUSE, IT IS NOT VERY ATTRACTIVE, NEEDS A LOT OF HELP.



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

THIS BUILDING IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PRESERVE A HISTORIC BUILDING, EVEN THE "DRIVE-IN" NOT SHOWN IN PICTURE WAS DONE ARCHITECTURALLY CORRECT. GREAT JOB!



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

DAMS OF THIS SIZE ARE RARE IN NORTH WISCONSIN, A SIGN SHOULD BE ERECTED TO TELL US WHAT ITS ABOUT, HISTORY, ETC.

ALSO, YOU HAVE A SECOND OLD DAM, DOES IT HAVE ANY HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE.



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PICTURE #

THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:

THIS IS YOUR BEST ENTRANCE. EVERYTHING IS CORRECT, LOOKS GREAT, GOOD SIGNAGE.  
YOU NEED SOME SIGNS AT YOUR NORTH & SOUTH ENTRANCES ON HIGHWAY 29.



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

GREAT SIGN, WISH IT WAS IN FRONT OF THE ELECTRIC POLE, IT IS A BIT OBSTRUCTED.



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

GREAT SIGN!!



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**LIST ON THIS PAPER THE PICTURE NUMBER, SUBJECT AND WHY YOU TOOK THE PICTURE.**

**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

WONDERFUL COMMUNITY CENTER, A BIT HARD TO FIND. TELL THE REST OF THE WORLD ABOUT IT, DIRECTION SIGNS, BROCHURES, ETC.



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**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

PICTURE DOESN'T DO THIS JUSTICE. DRIVE BY AND I'M SURE YOU WILL AGREE IT'S VERY BAD.



10  
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**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

WONDERFUL BUILDING, ARE THERE TOURS?



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**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

THIS OLD DEPOT IS SITTING ABANDONED AND DETERIORATING & YET IS NEAR THE PARK AND JUST OFF THE HIGHWAY. HAS ANYONE CONSIDERED RENOVATING AND USING, EITHER A PRIVATE CONCERN SUCH AS A RESTAURANT OR A PUBLIC CONCERN SUCH AS THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY?



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**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE PARK, A LOVELY SETTING. ANY SAFETY CONCERNS WITH KIDS AND A LOWHEAD DAM?



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**PICTURE #**

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

WELL, THE PHOTO DOESN'T DO JUSTICE TO THIS BEAUTIFUL SCENE, THE CRABTREE LADEN WITH APPLES, REFLECTED IN THE WATER.



When taking pictures keep this in mind as to why you have the camera.

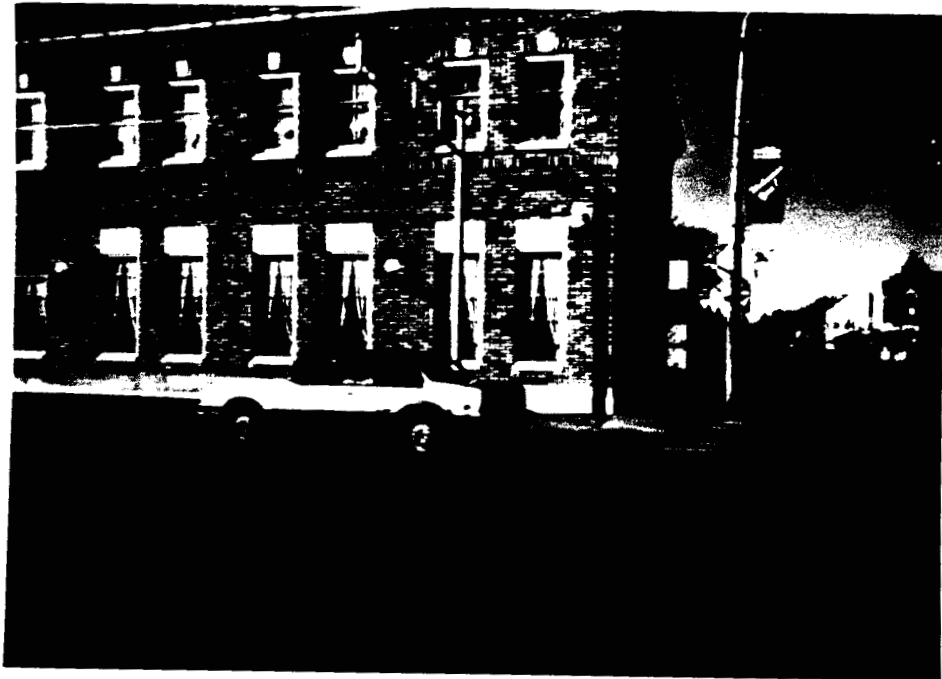
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PICTURE #

THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:

THE BANK BUILDING WAS VERY APPEALING, CLEAN AND IN GOOD REPAIR. INTERIOR WINDOW TREATMENTS ADD TO THE POSITIVE EXTERIOR EFFECT.



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PICTURE #

THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:

ANOTHER VERY ATTRACTIVE BUILDING. THE ADDITION OF AWNING HERE AND THE FLOWERS AT THE DENTIST OFFICE REALLY ADD CHARM TO THIS CORNER.



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

I WAS TRYING TO RECREATE A SIMILAR PICTURE THAT HANGS ON THE CITY HALL WALL.

THINGS LOOK QUITE SIMILAR DESPITE A 40 OR 50 YEAR SPAN OF TIME.

THE POWER LINES ARE NOT AS VISIBLE IN THE PHOTO, AS THEY ARE IN REALITY.



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

THE CONOCO SIGN OVERPOWERS THE SIGN DIRECTING FOLKS TO THE BUSINESS CENTER.  
ADDITIONALLY, THE BUSINESS CENTER SIGN, EVEN IF IT STOOD ALONE, DOES NOT  
INVITE PEOPLE TO DOWNTOWN. WHY SHOULD FOLKS GO DOWNTOWN?



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

WE LIKED THE ENTRY SIGNS! BRIGHT, VERY VISIBLE, WITH A SIMPLE, CLEAR MESSAGE -  
WELCOME !



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

THE MUNICIPAL PARKING IS GREAT TO HAVE AND THE SIGN IS LARGE, BUT OBSCURED BY THE CEDARS, A LITTLE TRIMMING IS IN ORDER.



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THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:

SIGN IS SMALLISH AND NOT VERY INVITING. SEE ALSO COMMENTS FOR #7.



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THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:

HALF A BLOCK OFF "MAIN STREET" THE WELDING WORKS & BODY SHOP SPILL ALL OVER THE SIDEWALK. UNAPPEALING AND A LIABILITY.



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**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:**

THE BACC IS A REAL ASSET TO YOUR COMMUNITY & IT IS EASY TO FIND ONCE YOU GET NEAR IT. HOWEVER, I HOPE BACC FOLKS ARE CONSIDERING PUTTING SIGNS ON THE HIGHWAY. YOUR ARTS PROGRAM NOW BRINGS IN PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE (I'VE BEEN THERE 3 TIMES FOR CONCERTS), A SIGN WOULD BE HELPFUL.



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THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BECAUSE:

NICE TO SEE GREEN SPACES CLOSE TO DOWNTOWN AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS. EVEN SMALL COMMUNITIES NEED PARKS AND OPEN SPACES WITHIN THE DEVELOPED AREAS.

