



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Community Visited: Baraboo, Wisconsin

Visit Completed by: Merrill, Wisconsin

Date of visit and time spent: July 25, 2008 from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Weather on date of visit: 82 degrees and partly sunny



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Table of Contents:

The Merrill First Impressions Team	3
Summary of Conclusions	3
General Observations	9
Prior to the Visit	12
Five Minute Impression	12
Community Entrances	14
Housing and Residential Areas	18
Education	23
Health Care Services	25
Local Economy	27
<i>Downtown</i>	27
<i>Local Industries</i>	35
<i>Tourism</i>	37
<i>Restaurants</i>	40
<i>Recreation</i>	40
Conclusion	41

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Summary of Conclusions

Toward the end of their visit to Baraboo, Wisconsin, Merrill First Impressions team members summarized primary conclusions about the city using the questions and the space provided in their program manuals.

Part of their overall evaluation included analyzing a series of ratings they made related to several community aspects. Ratings were made on a scale of 1 to 10, with one being the lowest. In some cases, there was a high degree of consensus about whether a particular community aspect was strong or weak. In other cases, consensus did not exist. Ratings are shown beginning on page 14 and thereafter in some of the more detailed sections of this report.

What follows directly below (pages 4 through 11) is a summary of team members' overall city assessment including their general impressions about the community, their surprises and disappointments, and the most important positive and negative aspects of the city according to them.

Was your perception prior to the visit accurate? In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

- It was what I expected. Baraboo was quaint, friendly, [had a] great downtown and nice neighborhoods.
- The community seemed larger than I expected.



What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

- "Welcome Home" feeling – meaning that it appears safe, caring, clean and maintained.
- Housing everywhere.
- The apparent commercial activity and options.
- The theatre, circus museum, and café. (Old glass in building and sign).
- Only thing I know about Baraboo is that it was home of the circus. No other perceptions or impressions.

- Seemed a little “rougher on the edges” than I expected.

List the five most positive things you observed about this community.

(Responses are listed in rank order in the table below. One member chose not to respond).

The lack of uniformity of responses indicates that the group as a whole seemed to recognize that Baraboo has so many positive aspects that it was difficult for them to come to a consensus on what are the best.

Four direct references were made relating to the city’s housing stock. One other indirect reference (“diverse neighborhoods”) was based at least in part on that person’s evaluation of housing in the city’s various residential neighborhoods. Other community aspects referred to more than once were “parks/recreation” (3 references), “signage” (2 references), and “downtown/center city” (2 references).

1. Great downtown	1. Housing	1. Circus museum	1. Signage (would have used circus theme versus rocks)	1. “Center city” retail area
2. Beautiful trees throughout town	2. Schools	2. Theatre	2. Mostly good roads, trees	2. Diverse neighborhoods
3. Variety of nice parks	3. Well maintained [town]	3. Zoo/park	3. There seemed to be specific places for industry, medical, schools, residential, etc.	3. Very pleasant high school setting
4. Friendly folks	4. Diverse	4. Water/recreational city facility		4. Generally well kept housing stock
5. Historic preservation	5. Good directional and historical signage	5. Historic homes		5. Newer, plentiful apartment complexes

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

(Responses are listed in order for each team member in the table at the top of the next page. One member chose not to respond).

Responses to this particular question were even more diverse than responses to the previous question. There was little sense amongst team members that

Baraboo was not taking advantage of most of its opportunities. However, there are a couple responses which suggest specific actions that could improve some aspect of the city.

1. Market the historical aspects as a place to visit	1. Continued industrial development along Route 12	1. Finding an identity	1. More advertising of circus museum and update outside buildings	1. Improvement in street curb conditions and upgrades
2. Market as – enjoy the amenities of Madison and Wisconsin Dells while realizing economical housing, good schools, and a safe and quiet Baraboo life style	2. Housing development along County A	2. Harness more of the Dells traffic	2. Promote theatre in guide statewide?	2. More focus on center city upgrades to buildings – maybe specialty shops
	3. Downtown ambiance	3. Continued economic development	3. St. Mary's Ringling Convent/complex is for sale; looks to be in good condition. Could be used for assisted living. Merrill's Holy Cross Sisters converted their convent into assisted living and experienced great success.	

What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

(Responses are listed in order for each team member in the table at the top of page 7. One member chose not to respond).

Again, there was little uniformity of responses to this particular question. Two people thought that Baraboo's tourist industry would have a hard time developing considering the competition from nearby Wisconsin Dells and Madison. Another team member was concerned that Madison's growth is somehow making Baraboo a less viable city from an economic development standpoint.

1. Price of gas (for travelers)	1. Pedestrian usage of the town	1. Traffic control	1. Growing out of city limits	1. Proximity to other major tourist destinations
2. Attracting tourism		2. Decaying infrastructure	2. Things moving toward Madison	2. Main east-west highway goes north of downtown
3. Brain drain to near by bigger cities		3. Housing maintenance	3. Filling housing	3. Main north-south highway goes west of downtown
4. Aging population		4. Infrastructure maintenance	4. Attracting new companies to fill the housing	
5. Jobs		5. Economy	5. [Maintaining high level of occupied storefronts]	

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

- Its welcoming atmosphere.
- The hamburger I had at the Little Village Cafe. Best of my life.
- Circus Museum and [lunch] burrito.
- The damage done from floods.
- The sense of "center city" created by the government building surrounded on all four sides by retail [was the most outstanding feature of Baraboo].

What have you learned here that has changed your impression of your own community?

- Actually, I think that Merrill is similar in many ways.
- We could project our strengths better.
- Very laid back and slower paced.

Has this experience given you any new ideas about what is needed in your own community?

- More downtown shopping choices are needed in Merrill.
- To take more commercial advantage of our highway (51).
- We could tell our story better and develop a theme or brand.
- Try to do something with the Wisconsin River and City Water Park?
- Yes. Better signage.



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

- Outdoor area/seating at some cafes – will talk with mayor. The very friendly woman at the Cornerstone Gallery mentioned that Baraboo is the “sister city” to Merrill. It should be pursued as she liked exchanging ideas and mentioned that her visit in March to Merrill was very nice. (This was not a First Impressions visit).

- Design of theme signage. (Theme signage with pines/trees, deer and sun with directional arrows pointing to points of community interest).
- Need to think about this.
- Got a good look at signage and saw how Merrill's might be improved.

General Observations

The comments below reflect how appealing Baraboo was to team members. Not all team members chose to answer all of the questions.

Would you consider this community a suitable location for a young family?

- Yes. Good schools and housing. Good medical facilities.
- Yes. Nice schools, two year college, many parks.
- Yes. Has beautiful river and lots of places to work. Very nice schools.
- Yes. Adequate housing. School location in relation to population a bit inadequate. Would feel uncomfortable letting my children walk or ride a bike.

Would you consider locating your retail or service business here? Why or why not?

- Yes. Seems to be adequate foot traffic and visibility downtown.
- No. They have good furniture stores and enough [selection] to choose from. Lots of housing for sale.
- Need major shopping outside of town.

Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here? Why or why not?

- Town seems to attract large industry despite its size.
- Perhaps a product that could or would be consumed at the Dells or Madison.

- Yes. Big area for employment and would have major highways for distribution.
- It's easy to see why industry, etc. has located here. Major routes/thoroughfares in-between large cities make getting supplies for production relatively efficient and allows for easy transport of finished goods. Larger population centers are relatively close, creating markets for finished products. The community also seems to encourage business diversity. This could be a plus, especially in hard economic times, but may also be a detriment. Baraboo seems to lack a niche, especially when it comes to promoting one type of cluster industry and suppliers. It is caught between the touristy Dells and Madison, the center of state government and higher education. Defining more succinctly what Baraboo is would be the start to making a very good city even better. (Merrill definitely has the same difficulty but in a more pronounced way).

Would you consider this a suitable location for a retired person? Why or why not?

- Personally, I like the forested areas compared to southern Wisconsin.
- Questionable. Did not notice extensive senior facilities or transport.
- Appears to be adequate, affordable housing opportunities. Also the medical campus would be an attraction.
- Depends on what you want. Golf, yes. Busy area traffic wise.

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young adult?

- Yes. Plenty to do – close proximity to WI Dells and to Madison. Two – year college opportunities. Not sure if jobs are available.
- Yes. Housing and proximity to the Dells and to Madison.
- Looks as though there would be employment opportunities.
- Yes. Close to Madison for employment. Lots of housing available and looks like good school system.

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist? Why or why not?

- Yes I would. To see the Circus Museum.
- Yes. A fun visit. Fun shopping.
- Yes. I liked the downtown and the restaurant. I also would enjoy seeing the theatre (Ringling) renovations after they are completed. The Circus Museum looks as though it too would have been enjoyable to visit.
- Yes. Would be neat to see the circus and play center/theatre.



Memorabilia from the Ringling Brothers Circus can be found throughout the city. Baraboo was the circus' home base from 1884 through 1917.

Prior to the Visit

When answering the *questions* “*What is your impression of the community before your upcoming visit?*” and “*What are you expecting to see?*” First Impressions team members mostly stated that they had not visited Baraboo in the past. Their comments were:

- Similar size community as compared to Merrill. Probably more tourism related. Will have a good business mix. Variety of nice parks, mix of manufacturing.
- I've never been to Baraboo so I really don't have an initial impression. All I know is that they have the Circus Museum.
- Nothing. No prior visits.
- Never been here.
- Don't have one. Never been here before.

Five Minute Impression

Team members began taking notes on their initial impressions of Baraboo as they entered the city from the east on Highway 33. The team van stayed on Highway 33 until entering the town of West Baraboo. Many team members' comments below reflect that they were impressed by the Ochsner Park and Zoo, the housing stock along the thoroughfare (although several members quickly noticed that many homes were for sale), and the number and variety of businesses apart from what was later observed in the downtown area.

Most team members thought that the park/zoo combination was a unique feature for a city of this size. Several were also immediately impressed by the number and quality of Baraboo's recreational opportunities. A couple team members had trouble discerning where Baraboo ended and West Baraboo began. Similar comments were made by a few of the members when they evaluated the 33 West entryway into the city (see page 15).

- Great [community points of interest] signage. Businesses and agriculture are evident. There is a variety of churches and schools. High school is conveniently located off of 33 East entrance. Route 33 is tree lined and pretty. Some older housing. Ochsner Park looks very inviting and beautiful. Like Merrill there is a mix of nicely kept homes and buildings and houses. [Some are in] need of repair. Some mix of business with

residential. Seems to be plenty of housing opportunities. Similar to Merrill in that entryway to downtown is a few miles away. Baraboo must be "spread out" like Merrill and long.

- My first impression is that Baraboo is a nice, neat community. Seems to have a large agriculture economy judging from farms just outside of town. Interesting to see a park and zoo combined. Impression that it was a safe community with a good police presence. Nice community that has a lot to offer. Nice public swimming pool, recreational facilities, and civic center with Boys and Girls clubs. Seems to have diverse businesses/restaurants. Nice signage throughout the community.
- Fair grounds could use some paint! Nice sidewalks and rock along Highway 33 entrance. Ochsner Park and zoo is well groomed. Nice [scenery] around high school. Lots of businesses along Highway 33. [City] pool in good location and looks well used. The historic circus park is nice along the river. Water from recent flood may have caused some of the road damage? On Highway 123 south there is a large apartment building complex. Tax service. Skate park [looks well] used.



- Looks like a clean community. Several homes for sale. Good to see school from road. Park and zoo, lots of trees, and nice yards. Couldn't tell where Baraboo ended. Lots of clean commercial businesses.

- Signs for Circus World Museum. Mixture of residential and small businesses of all types. Ochsner Park is very nice! Shopping mall has good parking and is placed in West Baraboo. Don't really know where Baraboo starts. Clean lawns and housing well maintained and lots of good growth trees.

- Good sized information signs to specific locations such as the hospital, museum; with street sign identification. Several more modern, newer looking commercial office space (might be West Baraboo). Rolling hills makes for very attractive setting – as would be expected. Residential neighborhoods on the main street (33 East and West) are adequate. Well enough kept and modest. Most commercial/retail businesses on main thoroughfare appear pretty well kept and modest to nicer. I sense street and curb infrastructure could use more regular replacement program. Streets also show age and wear.

Community Entrances

The team began its assessment of community entrances by critiquing the *Highway 33 entryway into the city from the east*. They each evaluated the overall appearance of the entryway by using a rating scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being “poor” and “10” being “excellent.” Ratings for team members are included in parentheses after each one’s comments. One member chose not to provide a rating. An average team rating is also included below.

One general comment about Baraboo’s entryways made by several team members is that there are many, which they thought was for the most part an advantage to those looking to attract people into the city.

- Through the city two lanes on each side. No separate left hand lanes. (6)
- Need welcome to Baraboo sign. Fairgrounds need paint. Housing looks clean and well maintained. Building for sale on left side of road has junk outside which needs to be removed. Looks like a busy entryway. (7)
- Very beautiful hilly terrain. Agriculture. Nice looking fairgrounds. (7)
- Aging streets in need of repair (has narrow lanes). Bikes need to use sidewalks. Nice pedestrian right of way signs on road which are helpful. (6)
- New smooth entrance. 11,505 population. Clean streets and good sidewalks. Clean yards and homes. Busy streets (with vehicles). Two or three may need repairs. (8)
- Baraboo “Welcome You” sign is present. West end should be better kept with stone base or something similar. Decent look. Fairgrounds fence could use a little upgrade as entrance feature.

Average Rating = **6.8**

Highway 33 West:

Two people did not provide ratings.

- Country road that quickly develops into West Baraboo over a hill. Takes a while to enter Baraboo. (6)
- See creek and zoo/park coming in by population sign. (7)
- Entrance is through West Baraboo. Hard to differentiate between West Baraboo and Baraboo. (7)
- West Baraboo – rural. Farming thrives. A strip mall near the Baraboo boarder was not busy at approximately 10:00 am. Baraboo Chamber located on Highway 12. Nice huge chamber office. Limited parking and walking on highway side of office sign. (6)
- More homes past zoo on south side; could use some repairs. Saw Baraboo city sign dividing it from West Baraboo.
- Just runs together with West Baraboo. Nothing distinguishing [to indicate you've left or entered Baraboo].

Average Rating = **6.5**

Highway 123 South:

Most team members took note of what they thought to be a very nice newer mixture of housing stock in the area. Several members were impressed by what looked like a nice and challenging golf course surrounded by housing. Overall, team members rated this entrance high based on the mean rating. One member did not provide a rating. Judging from his comment, he did not seem as impressed with this entrance as most of the other team members. But, he went on to contradict the first part of his comments by stating that this was the best entrance of all those evaluated.

- Two great parks. Housing subdivision and apartments mixed with distribution and businesses. Baraboo Country Club. Minimal signage but well maintained. (6)

- Good signage. Campbell Park has pretty scenery. Location of distribution center. Newer apartments and homes/subdivision. Nice Park with pool and skate board [facility]. Fountains to play/run through. (8)
- Gave impression that Baraboo has plenty of nice apartments. [Entryway] located near nice recreation facilities area. Beautiful homes. Country club also very appealing. Nice swimming pool and skate park in same area. (9)
- Driving range could use new building. Very nice Baraboo Country Club sign. Apartment buildings look well kept. Golf course looks good. Motel needs some upkeep. (8)
- Golf course surrounded by nice housing. Pierce Park is nice. Road in good repair. Newer housing developments include individual and family units. Sign for housing lots indicates financing assistance is good. (8)
- Unremarkable – looks like a side door to the community. Should locate another “Baraboo Area Welcome Sign [here]”. Should be one at every entrance. Best, most welcoming of all entrances.

Average Rating = **7.8**

Highway 113 Southeast:

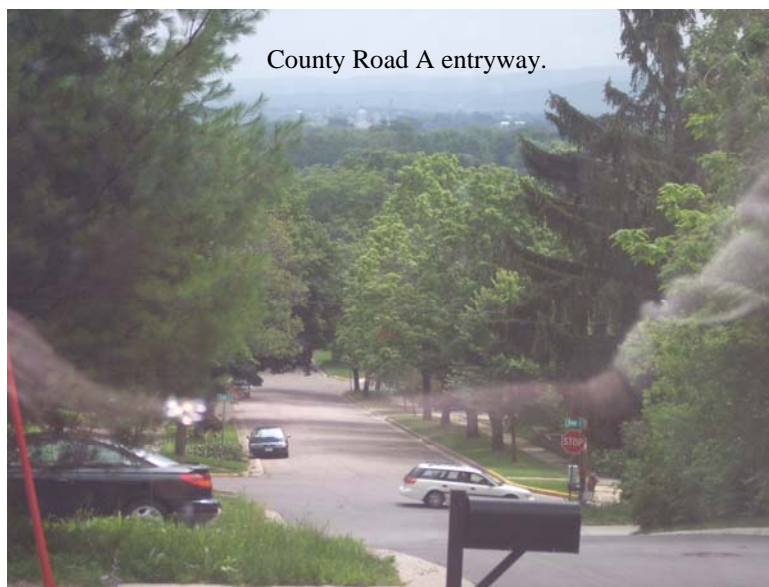
Most team members thought that this entryway was fairly weak primarily because of what they deemed a poor roadway. Based on the comments, the primary strengths of the entryway were the Circus Museum and nice country scenery as one drives into town. One member chose not to provide a rating.

- Circus Museum. Only a couple of buildings need work. Rough road. Again, minimal signage. Great trees that are well maintained. (5)
- Hilly and pretty. Good signage. Some junkie areas. Some older homes need repair. Some very interesting architecture. Circus Museum is cool! Older huge trees and dense foliage is very pretty! (8)
- The Circus Museum appears well kept and inviting. (6)
- Nice museum sign/entrance. Road needs work (very rough). Nice signs for courthouse and sheriff. (6)

- Scenic drive in. Poor road. Circus Museum and attraction (20-30 vehicles). Older section of town. Nice bridge prior to post office. (3)
- Unremarkable. Just one of the back door entrances to town. Maybe tie this entrance into the Circus World Museum. [The museum is here, so exploit that].

Average Rating = **5.6**

County Highway A North:



Despite some fairly negative comments about this entrance, the three who chose to provide ratings liked it quite a lot. Three team members did not offer ratings.

- Baraboo sign blocked by business. Seems like odd zoning as there is such a mixture of businesses and housing. Easy to get to places (needs to be like this). Water tower looks like hot air balloon. (9)
- Red and white water tower and cemetery. Well maintained. Like the view on the hill coming into town. Houses are very nice and well maintained. (8)
- Cool water tower looks like a hot air balloon. Very residential with nice homes.

- Plenty of residential. Nice church, cemetery, and lush greenery.
- Baraboo taxi service. Good road. Nice residential area. Beautiful green tree line. (8)
- Welcome sign partially hidden. Another “quiet” side entrance. Pleasant.

Average Rating = **8.3**

Housing and Residential Areas

How would you rate the overall quality, affordability and availability of housing in the community?

One person chose not to provide a rating.

Raw Ratings = 7, 7.5, 7, 9, 7

Average Rating = **7.5**

Quality:

Team members used the same rating scale (1 to 10) to evaluate the overall quality of various housing types. The results are in the table below. The symbol “N/R” means no rating was given in a particular category. One person chose not to provide any ratings.

As can be discerned from the ratings below, most team members thought that the number of apartments was quite high for a city the size of Baraboo. Also, the fact that these complexes were usually very nice helped to persuade many of the team members that the quality of “Apartments/Rental” properties should be rated high.

Category	Existing Older Homes	New Homes	Housing for Seniors	Apartments/Rental	Vacant lots for New Homes
Raw Ratings	9, 8, 8, 7, 8	9, 8, 7, 7, 4	9, 7, N/R, 7, N/R	9, 9, 8, 7, 7	N/R, N/R, 5, 7, N/R
Average Rating	8	7	7.7	8	6

Observations –

Team members were very impressed by the older, large homes off of Highway 33 coming in from the east. Several of these homes were mansion – like and in some cases quite ornate. One team member observed that many new trees had been planted in this neighborhood to replace larger trees that had recently died or were lost for some other reason. He surmised that the city has a very aggressive and effective tree re-planting program. Many homes were for sale in the older section of town.

- New subdivision on Highway 123 South entrance and apartment complex or condos going up.
- Did not see a lot of vacant lots. Some gorgeous old Victorian style homes in many parts of the city.
- Several for sale signs. Much available.
- There does appear to be ample housing on the market. Ashland 10th [street] intersection has five homes for sale. Street soon in need of repair.
- Significant stock of older homes (50+ years). Good quantity of 20-30 year homes. Didn't observe any new construction.

Affordability:

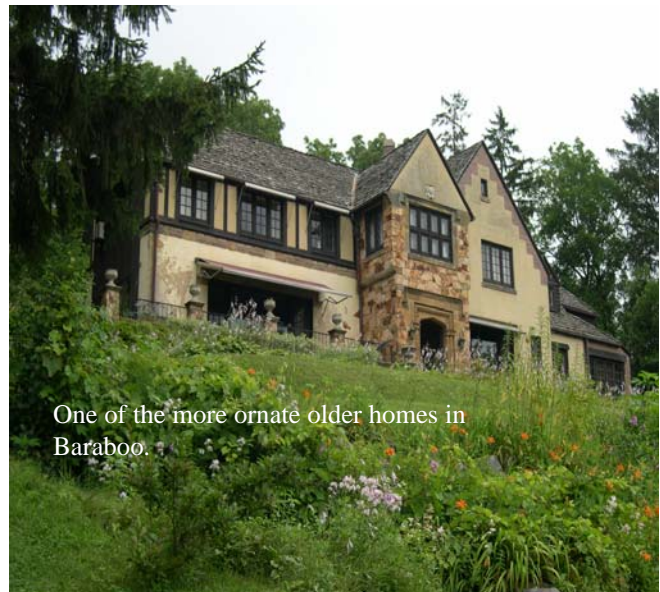
(No ratings were asked for or provided).

Is there an adequate mix of housing to suit a variety of home levels?

- Yes.
- Yes.
- Seems to be.

Observations –

- Lots of old and newer homes for sale.



One of the more ornate older homes in Baraboo.

- Not sure of housing prices but there appears to be good variety for all income levels.
- New and old quality homes. Lots of apartments and/or condos.
- Many apartments and duplexes and moderate to expensive housing.
- Seems like a fair mix – local real estate data shows more high – end homes available than was generally observed.

Availability:

Two team members did not provide ratings.

Team members instantly noticed and commented on the number of homes for sale especially in the older part of town. They speculated about the causes, including the national housing slump, but were at a loss to explain the seemingly disproportional amount of homes for sale as compared to what is up for sale in Merrill. Although there is no empirical evidence available to answer why, the seemingly high number of homes for sale could at least in part be a function of rising fuel costs, meaning that those living in Baraboo and working in Madison might be seeking homes closer to their jobs.

Category	Existing Older Homes	New Homes	Housing for Seniors	Apartments/Rental	Vacant lots for New Homes
Raw Ratings	9, 8, 7, 9	8, N/A, 7, 2	8, N/A, 7, N/R	10, N/R, 7, 7	N/R, 3, 7, N/R
Average Rating	8.2	5.7	7.5	8	5

Observations –

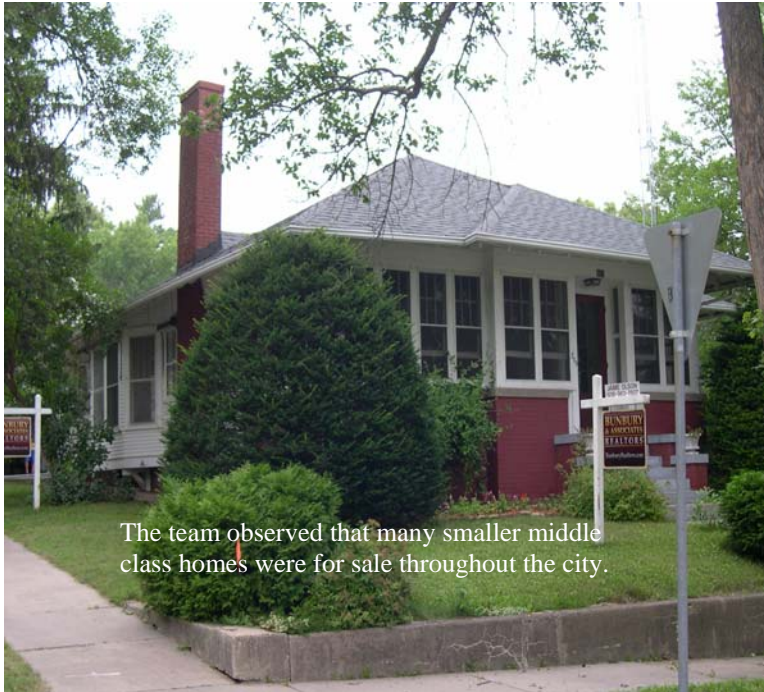
- Homes on Ash very clean and neat. Saw for sale signs on some businesses and homes.
- Seems to be a high percentage of homes for sale.
- Saw many for rent and for sale signs.
- Adequate rental and good mix of apartment/building complexes, duplex and town homes.

What are the most appealing and least appealing features of the housing in this community? Why?

- There was a good mix of old and new homes. Weeds on sidewalks and street edges. Lots of homes for sale on the corner of Ash and 10th. [I] like all the trees along roads in [residential areas] in town. Lots of homes for sale overall (being sold by many realtors). Liked the elephant in sidewalk concrete/Oak and 9th.
- The maintained older housing is great. Live - in motel on 33 was trash.
- Appealing older homes and very nice new homes. Paved alleys. Wild flowers in yards. Boulevards had many trees. Trees were of different varieties and age. Really nice! Some areas had "garbage" items in yards.
- Seems to be a fair amount of homes on the market. Also see a lot of home repair construction being done.
- Most: properties generally well kept. Least: Properties between Highway 33 and downtown not that well maintained.

Please comment on the quality and availability of residential infrastructure (e.g. roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation, bike trails/lanes, green space, street trees, and yards).

- Corner of Ash and 10th sidewalks could use repair. Neat housing in this area.
- Loved the trees! Did not see any bike paths. Some roads need repair. Several yards had beautiful wild flowers planted instead of grass.
- Streets and sidewalks appeared to be in good repair. Lots of big beautiful trees in residential areas.
- Appears to be ongoing tree planting initiative in some residential areas.



The team observed that many smaller middle class homes were for sale throughout the city.

- Roads, sidewalks, curbs seem a little more worn. Behind [more] in routine replacement/maintenance than I would have expected. They are adequate, but don't enhance appearance as newer ones might.

Appeal:

Overall, members felt that the variety of housing would appeal to several different segments of the population based on age and income. One person chose not to provide ratings.

Category	Single/Young Adults	Senior Citizen	Young Families	Upscale/ Professional	Middle Income
Raw Ratings	8, 8, 7, 7, 5	9, N/R, 7, 6, N/R	7, 7, 7, 10, 8	10, 7, 7, 6, 4	8, 7, 7, N/R, 8
Average Rating	7	7.3	7.8	6.8	7.5

Observations –

- Ringling Manor for sale. Big building needs some upkeep to look [good].

- Northeast side. Beautiful older homes, hilly streets. Many homes for sale. Area of historical significance? Shows past wealth. Great trees; variety of trees (age). Many homes on Sixth Street need repair. Many older, nice looking homes are up for sale. Needed road repair is in progress. Many nice paved alleys. Seventh Street is nice (St. Johns Lutheran Elementary School). Seems like a good location. Nice summer program for kids. Third Street has smaller homes. Some are well kept others are not. Second Street St. Joes Catholic Parish School. Neighborhood schools and churches accessible to residents' new homes and some construction. Plenty of apartments and duplexes. Throughout many are for sale. A variety of prices based on home signs and home conditions.
- Nice alley areas in some older residential areas which appeared well kept.

Education

Pre – school/Kindergarten/Head Start

- Pre across from middle. Nice day care on Madison. Also have Lutheran and Catholic pre-schools.
- Private pre-schools and private day cares.
- Saw lots of pre – schools and parochial schools with neighborhood locations.

Primary/Elementary/Middle:

- Jack Young Middle School is next to the high school.
- Nice large middle school.
- Nice athletic fields between middle and high school.
- Middle school is a natural fit by the high school. Well thought out planning. Built into landscape/hills around football field and tennis courts. Pre – school across the street from middle and high schools is convenient.
- Nice looking facilities. Impressive athletic fields and tracks. Nice that they are located closely. (Comments also apply to pre – schools).

High School:

- Entrance to the high school and middle school seem limited.
- Seemed hard to get to. Found Business Park nearby with plenty of recruiting offices.
- Can see it from highway 33. Only one entrance. Had trouble finding entry to school from highway. Has a distance learning center, auto shop, and greenhouse. It is a large school.
- No direct access off of Highway 33. Ball fields look good. Well maintained building.
- Hard to get to the high school. One entrance and exit. Great sports facilities.



College/University:

- UW Baraboo. Clean. Beautiful small campus. Nice view.
- Nice campus. What a view of the Baraboo area!

- UW Baraboo. Two year campus off of main drag. Nice looking view. Only one entrance. Excellent opportunities for local youth.
- UW Baraboo is a very nice two year campus near high school. One entrance and one exit.

Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of schools for a community of this size?

Each team member evaluated the overall adequacy of schools by using 1 to 10 scale. Ratings for team members are included in parentheses after each one's comments. The average team rating is also included below. Three team members did not provide ratings or make comments.

- Looks like plenty of public and parochial school choices and after high school UW Baraboo. (9)
- The community has invested in their school system. (7)
- Looked like good mix of public and parochial schools. (8)

Average Rating = **8**

Additional Note on Education:

- When downtown, I noticed the School Administration Building which was located in the old Post Office (2nd Avenue). I stopped in to find out about Primary/Elementary schools. Very nice woman tried to help me. She said that there were five primary/elementary schools in the area. That was all the information she would give, referring me to the school's website. No physical information on Baraboo's school system was found even when she looked. I found this a bit disappointing.

Health Care Services

One team member along with the Lincoln County UW – Extension Community Resource Development Educator visited health care facilities while five other team members evaluated the downtown area.

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of healthcare facilities.

- St. Claire Hospital and Health Services Complex. Well marked. Offers a wide array of services. Seemed to have lots of visitors. 100 beds. (9.5)
- Overall, I was impressed with the number and variety of medical services offered in one convenient location. All around the hospital and inside the complex were various health care related agencies all within easy walking distance. Those facilities included a nursing home, assisted living complex, memory care center (all indicating an emphasis on elder care treatment), psychiatric center, physical therapy building, and dental care units. The hospital also seemed to emphasize oncology and geriatric care. For a city this size, the health care complex seemed impressive. The complex clearly serves a regional population. Considering Wisconsin's aging population, there should be even more opportunity for these health care facilities to expand services. Even though the signage made it easy to find this complex, facilities seemed tucked away a bit in what is predominantly a residential area. I'm not sure this is an advantage especially to those living in the immediate area who probably constantly hear loud sirens. Is there a way to expand into less residential, more isolated areas while maintaining convenient access? (8.5)

Average = 9



Local Economy

Five team members focused on evaluating Baraboo's downtown. Their general impressions of the local economy's health based on their downtown evaluation are listed directly below.

- Regarding retail – good to slow for a Friday afternoon. I expected to see more tourists shopping.
- All things considered, the economy seems to be stable here. Nothing robust and nothing slow.
- Seems to be okay but could be better. Fuel and food have caused slowdown.
- Fairly good. Areas seemed busy. Most retail fronts were occupied. Good traffic on streets.

Downtown

Could you locate the downtown easily? If not, why did you have difficulty finding it?

Most team members emphasized the easy to read very descriptive signage available in the downtown area (and throughout the city). They also seemed to like the well preserved older downtown buildings.

- Yes, and directions are well marked.
- Yes, had very good signage.
- The downtown was easy to locate. Signage leading to downtown was easy to read and to follow.
- I saw "shopping areas" on way to downtown. A small bit of difficulty due to traffic flow and not enough stop lights to re-enter main roads.
- Yes.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance of the downtown (buildings, displays, signage, streetscape).

Team members evaluated the overall appearance of the downtown by using the 1 to 10 scale. Ratings for team members are included in parentheses after each one's comments. An average team rating is also included below.

For the most part, team members liked and enjoyed Baraboo's downtown. But, several of them took note that despite the well defined central downtown area Baraboo suffers from sprawl. This is largely due to being near several major state/interstate highways and routes.

- Very nice square and old buildings with sign saying what they were. Old furniture store had a very cool sign. The theatre is the major attraction. (9)
- I liked the old time street lights in the downtown. Many of the old time buildings and architecture was preserved. The Ringling Theatre was beautiful and impressive. I particularly enjoyed the small historical plates placed on the outside of the buildings explaining their history. I also found "the square" layout of the downtown helpful to keep it compact and quaint with the courthouse as the focal point of downtown. It gave a warm, small town feeling. (8)



- For the most part, well maintained older buildings. Great signage. Nice old fashioned lampposts [with] flowers and flags. Most [stores] had appealing displays. (7)
- City is working hard to maintain the theme of downtown. (7.5)
- The square around the downtown area creates a sense of "center city." Shops were well kept, but buildings generally aged with not major renovation or updating. (6)

Average Rating = **7.5**

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping in the downtown.

Team members evaluated the variety of shopping in the downtown using the 1 to 10 scale. Ratings for team members are included in parentheses after each one's comments. An average team rating is also included below.

- Lack of clothing, shoes and hardware. Oldsmobile dealer very friendly and helpful. (8)
- There was a good mix of retail, offices and government facilities. The retail end was lacking shoe and clothing stores. Nice to see a good bakery. (7)
- Wonderful mix of shopping choices. (9)
- Many different types of shops. Variety of goods and banking. Variety of eateries. (7)
- Seemed to be a good variety of professional services along with retail. One car dealer located near square give a sense of a time gone by. (7)

Average Rating = **7.6**

Rate and comment on the customer service you received in the downtown.

Team members evaluated the customer service they received in the downtown using the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. An average team rating is also included below.

Despite some negative experiences, team members were clearly impressed with the customer service they received. However, since only a few shops/places were visited, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about customer service.

- Three stores I went into did not ask if there was anything they could help me with. (7)
- Customer service at the Little Village Café was as excellent as the food! Not much proactive customer service at either of the furniture stores in downtown. Neither store asked if I needed help. Fred Kruse from the Kruse dealership was a delight to talk with. (9)
- All very friendly, helpful and liked to converse. [I] was offered tomorrow's street sale prices today. That was very nice! (10).
- When people were engaged, they were helpful most of the time. (7.5)
- Lunch restaurant was only retail visited, but very friendly. (8)

Average Rating = **8.3**

Rate and comment on the signage in the downtown.

Team members evaluated downtown signage using the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. An average team rating is also included below.

- Liked the signs. Easy to read and follow. Roads could use some stop lights at more intersections. (9)
- The signage was good. I particularly liked the old neon sign at the downtown furniture store. (8)
- Great signage! (9)
- Informative signs. Nice historical signs. (7.5)
- Adequate, but not very fresh. (5)

Average Rating = **7.7**

Rate and comment on the window displays in the downtown.

Team members evaluated window displays using the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. One member of the downtown evaluation team did not provide comments or a rating. An average team rating is also included below.

- Very nice. Some could use glass cleaning. (7)
- The antique shop displays were very well done. (7)
- Most were appealing. (7)
- Okay. Nothing spectacular. (6)

Average Rating = **6.75**

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise in the downtown.

Team members evaluated the variety and quality merchandise in the downtown by using the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. One person provided a rating but no comments. An average team rating is also included below.

- Little Village Café food was great and reasonable. Cool atmosphere. (9)
- Rather unique to see a car dealership in a downtown location. (7)
- I was pleased with the many shopping choices and quality of products. I saw few clothing stores and no shoe stores. (9)
- Good antiques. Could use a greater variety. (6)
- (7)

Average Rating = **7.6**

Comment on the mix of facilities and services in the downtown (housing, professional services, retail, recreation, accommodation, and food, industry, parks, etc.)

- Mixed with retail, the downtown included a copy place, police/municipal building, bakery, and taverns. Plenty of interesting eateries, coffee shops – candy and ice cream shops. Seemed to be tourism related. Retail businesses mixed with services the town's folks [probably] need.
- Near residential on all four sides. Quite a few attorneys, CPAs and title companies.
- Seemed a good mix. Saw ... restaurants, car dealership, building with combination of retail and service office space (printer), clothing store, theatre, and fine arts office.

Rate and comment on the quality and availability of parking in the downtown.

Team members evaluated the quality and availability of parking in the downtown using the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. An average team rating is also included below.

Those evaluating the downtown particularly liked the angled parking.

- Like the square and angled parking. (9)
- Plenty of downtown parking was available. I liked the angled parking. (9)
- Plenty of store front parking. Was told that there was at least one municipal parking lot. (7)
- Lots of angled parking. (7)
- The square provided double the parking for the number of retailers present. (8)

Average Rating = **8**

Rate and comment on the quality (appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting in the downtown.

Team members evaluated downtown lighting using a the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. One member evaluating the downtown did not provide a comment or rating. An average team rating is also included below.



One of several attractive downtown Baraboo streetscapes.

- Liked the lights and flowers on polls and pots. Old signs on buildings and store signs. (8)
- Lighting appeared adequate, although it was day light. Great old light posts on the corners for more light. I imagine the night time lighting of downtown is very quaint. (9)
- Nice lampposts! Liked flowers and flags. Was there during the day and don't know if night illumination of lampposts in bright enough. (8)
- Lights had just been painted. Daytime visit. (7)

Average Rating = **8**

Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for the downtown to play a greater role?

- Yes. The history of the Ringling Brothers Circus plays a huge role.
- Yes. We were told that the Ringling Theatre is a very popular tourist destination and a very good draw for downtown.
- The downtown definitely attracts tourists. Today, a coach bus stopped and about 50 ladies were on a quilting tour and visited a quilt shop.

- Yes. Different colored lion statues or something like this to [emphasize] circus and theatre heritage.
- Didn't appear to.

The historic AL Ringling Theatre opened in 1915.



Describe the residential housing mix in the downtown.

There was a clear difference of opinion as to whether there was a mixed use atmosphere in downtown. Those who suspected that there were residential units above businesses were not sure they existed. Most team members observed that residential neighborhoods were in easy walking distance of downtown. Services were adequately mixed in with retail.

- Seemed that there would be apartments above some store fronts. Many nice neighborhoods close to downtown.
- Didn't appear to be any housing above the downtown stores, but plenty of housing around downtown.
- In downtown not much, but a lot of residential single and apartments around.
- Mix looked adequate.
- Appeared to be typical use of second floor of retail for apartments. Nothing unique or strictly residential.

Would you find the downtown to be a desirable place to live?

- Yes but not as fast moving as West Baraboo. Friendly people.
- Possibly. Depends upon the location and condition of living in downtown. Might have concerns about tourism in the summer.
- Yes. Seems like there is a lot to do. Had nice farmer's market type store and organic store downtown.
- Access to theatre and the arts.
- No.

Were there any government or nonprofit organization activities that are serving as traffic generators for the downtown (city hall, post office, YMCA)?

- The courthouse and municipal buildings.
- Yes. Noticed several including the Moose Lodge, churches, police department, school administration building, and post office.
- Yes. City Hall, county seat, courthouse, and Boys and Girls Club.
- The entire middle block of the downtown was either the city or county government. The other was across the street and adjacent to the square. Definitely as sense of "center city."

Local Industries

Most of the comments in this area come from one team member who accompanied the Extension educator on a drive through of Baraboo's primary industrial park off of Route 12. Other team members chose to make general comments about the local industry.

What are the major industrial sectors in the community (e.g. manufacturing, construction, transportation)?

- There is a large industrial area strategically located off of Route 12 near the 90/94 interchange. The area contained a good mix of mostly manufacturing and distributor operations. There did not appear to be

much room for expansion. Although we believe that there are other business/industrial parks within the Baraboo city limits, we are not sure how many. Web information about them does not seem readily available. Neither were signs on the ground leading us to those areas. We did not see signs promoting this area as a designated industrial/business park, although it clearly seemed to be. There were several entrances into the area, so it is possible that we missed the primary signs. It might be wise to include signs at each entrance. The primary employer represented in this park appears to be Sysco Food Systems (food distribution). There seemed to be a clustering of distributor businesses here. That makes sense because of the park's close proximity to the highway.

- No good signage to where the industrial/business parks are.
- Tourism, manufacturing and agriculture. Also local/county government.

Who do you think are the major employers in the community?

- County, UW – Baraboo, Sysco Foods, park and zoo.
- Food distribution.
- Sysco.

Is there a well defined industrial park or improved land where industries could locate or expand?

- No. We had to ask a realtor for directions after coming into town from the southwest along route 12.

Are the industrial facilities well maintained?

- Yes. Nice, clean facilities

Would this community be an attractive location for industrial development? Why or why not?

- Yes. Access to 90/94. Location in proximity to Madison. May be some activity as a result of the Dells being so close.

- Baraboo's primary advantage is that it is located just off of interstate 90/94. Being in the Madison area helps, but its proximity to this major thoroughfare that provides direct routes to Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis is most important. It is an attractive area to locate business/industry because of what I would presume is a relatively well educated labor pool. UW-Madison is close by. Baraboo is also a physically attractive area with numerous cultural and entertainment choices in the city or within easy driving distance. This helps to attract top notch labor talent. For a city this size, Baraboo's housing stock seems to be varied and affordable, another attractive element. My question would be how much is Baraboo doing with other cities/towns to develop a regional economic development identity? Is there a niche besides distribution and farming operations that Baraboo and surrounding communities can work together to exploit? Are bio-fuels an option? Considering that one of the nation's top research universities is only 40 miles away and that farm land is bountiful surrounding the community, Baraboo seems to be a strong candidate for bio fuels development. Baraboo is also a tourist town, but how much of its identity can be or is tied to Wisconsin Dells? (Does the city want to be more associated with the Dells?)

Tourism

Most team members who evaluated tourism took note of the Ringling Brothers circus history and the city's close proximity to Wisconsin Dells. Although the chamber website includes the slogan "Where memories of a lifetime are still being made everyday!" most team members did not feel that it was promoted well within town. For this reason, many team members thought that the city lacked an identity, something which seemed to be puzzling to them considering that Baraboo, they believe, has much to offer.

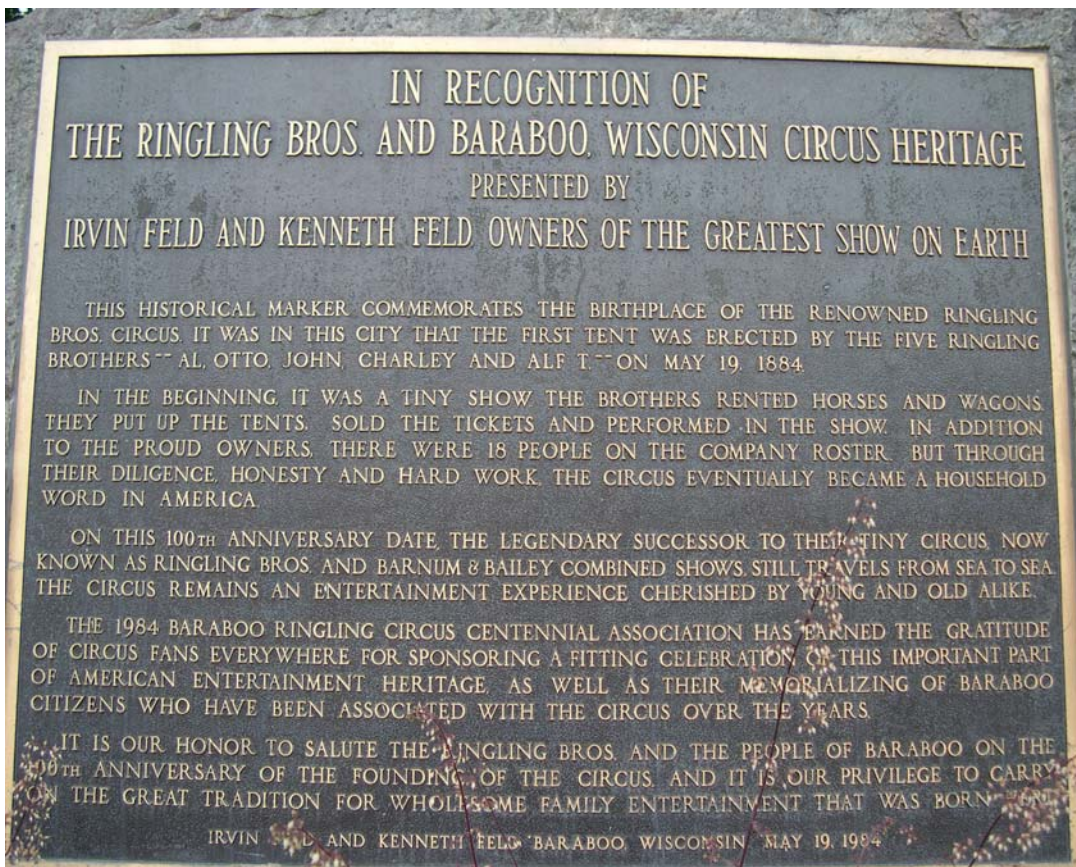
Does the community have a strong tourism sector? Please comment.

- Focus on circus heritage and very close to Wisconsin Dells.
- Yes. I also believe that the strong tourism of nearby Wisconsin Dells help to bring in business and tourism.
- Yes. Zoo/park, theatre, Circus Museum and golf courses.
- The circus attraction.

- It appears to be based on the Circus Museum proximity to Devil's Lake and the Dells

Does the community have a slogan/brand?

- Didn't notice any slogan. Some stores featured circus posters.
- Obviously there is a lot of history and connection with the Ringling Circus. But I did not see a strong attempt to promote this as a slogan or a brand.
- Not apparent.
- No. Nothing uniform.
- Not observable.



What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction (natural or man – made)?

- Riverfront. Looks like [development] is already in progress.
- Nothing extra.
- Tours of some of the several large historic homes.

Rate and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

Team members evaluated the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions using the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. Three team members chose not to provide ratings or comments. An average team rating is also included below.

- The Circus Museum looked empty with not a lot going on. (7)
- Circus Museum seemed interesting. (7)
- Could use some paint at the Circus Museum. (8)

Average Rating = **7.33**

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations in the community (hotels, motels, campgrounds and B&BS).

- Seemed to be plenty especially in nearby Wisconsin Dells.
- Some older hotels were present. Looked like the new hotels were in West Baraboo.
- Saw motels. So close to many Wisconsin Dells hotels. Campgrounds etc. Many visitors must stay overnight in Wisconsin Dells?

Rate and comment on the customer service of the Chamber/visitor staff.

No team member stopped at the visitors' center primarily because it was not convenient considering our circumstances to do so. However, because of the inability to walk to the center from the downtown area, one team member felt compelled to make the following comment.

- The chamber was not close to retail/downtown area.

No other visitors' center/chamber was observed besides the one near the West Baraboo border. That particular office was designed to attract tourists off of the various nearby major routes and highways. But, at least this team member felt that there should be a chamber branch office, etc. located in the downtown area. If there was one, no team member saw it.

Restaurants

Comment on and rate the quality of restaurants.

Team members evaluated the quality of restaurants using a scale the 1 to 10 scale. Team members' ratings are included in parentheses after each one's comments. Two team members chose not to provide ratings or comments. An average team rating is also included below.

- Ate at the Little Village Café. It was excellent. Downtown had many restaurant choices. (10)
- Little Village Café was accommodating and had great food. (7)
- Great food and service. Would love it in our town. (9)
- Excellent food and service at our lunch stop. (9)

Average Rating = **8.75**

Recreation

Two of six team members evaluated "recreation."

Comment on the availability and appearance of each of the following types of recreational facilities. Rate each type of facility.

Parks:

- Many inviting parks. (9)
- Lots of parks and a zoo. Water and skate parks. Disc golf. (8)

Average Rating = **8.5**

Rate the overall suitability of the recreational facilities for each of the following populations using a 1-10 scale (10 is best)

Category		Senior Citizens	Families	Singles and Young Adults	Teens	Children (12 and under)
Raw Ratings		7, N/A, 7	8, 7, 9	8, 7, 8	7, 8, 8	8, 8, 8
Average Rating		7	8	7.67	7.67	8

Conclusion

Merrill First Impressions team members felt that Baraboo, although seemingly bigger than its 11,500 population, was quite similar to the smaller Merrill (population 10,150). Perhaps the most important similarity that team members observed was how Baraboo like Merrill is a “long town” meaning that sprawl situations are evident in both places. This is true in Merrill’s case even though there is only one major highway (51/39) leading into the city. Baraboo has 90/94 at its doorstep and other major state highways.

It also seemed that team members felt that the two cities’ housing stocks were quite similar. Like Baraboo, Merrill has several older large homes, although not as many or as concentrated in one or two neighborhoods as is the case in Baraboo. Also like Baraboo, Merrill has a wide range of lower middle class to upper middle class housing. That said, team members are still wondering why it appears that Baraboo has many more homes for sale on a percentage basis than does Merrill.

It was obvious that the team liked Baraboo’s downtown a bit more than they like Merrill’s. Because of this, team members could readily imagine how some positive downtown features found in Baraboo could be effectively applied in Merrill.

During the completion of this report, several discussions were held by members of the Merrill Area Marketing Committee, UW-Extension’s local Community Resource Development Educator, and the city about creating and installing attractive signage directing people to points of interest within the city. There seemed to be consensus that this would be a relatively easy, inexpensive way to help people take advantage of all the interesting things Merrill has to offer. Such a measure could also help pave the way, many of those who attended the meetings agreed, to more ambitious improvements to the downtown and perhaps even areas along the Wisconsin River flowing through the city. Only

time will tell how many ideas are generated and acted upon as a result of Merrill completing the Baraboo and Ashland First Impressions studies.