



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

FIRST IMPRESSIONS REPORT

For

City of Oshkosh

Dates visited: October 26-27, 2007

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Edited: 11-27-07

***A revised and updated version of the *First Impressions* program developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider, 1991**



Purpose

The purpose of the First Impressions Program is to help a community learn about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor.

Limitations

The two primary limitations to this exchange were the distance and the size of the city. To offset the distance (approximately 4 hours drive one way) the team worked with the Oshkosh Visitors Bureau to find hotel rooms at government rate. This enabled team members to stay overnight. To accommodate the size of the city and the limited hours available to each team member, we divided the main categories up among the team, assigning categories to members that reflected their strengths and interest. By staying overnight and focusing our visit, we believe we were able to satisfactorily cover Oshkosh.

Conditions of Visit

Weather conditions on the first day of our visit were a bit bleak, with gray, cloudy skies dominating until mid-morning the second day. This seemed to reduce the potential of speaking with local residents; however the attempt was made and conditions were average for visiting the city.

First Impressions Team

- David Clements, La Crosse Visitors & Convention Bureau
- Tim Kabat, Senior Planner, City of La Crosse Planning Department
- Karl Green, UW-Extension Community Development Educator for La Crosse County
- Catherine Kolkmier, La Crosse Health Science Consortium
- Audrey Kader, City Council , City of La Crosse
- Jacie Gamroth, UW-L Political Science Major, La Crosse City Council, La Crosse County Board
- Samantha Marcus, Reporter, La Crosse Tribune
- James Ehle, Retired Marketing Consultant

Process

Our team had two groups, traveling on the same day in two separate cars. The Team met in advance to review the First Impressions Guide and clarify the sections they would focus on, as well as logistics for travel and overnight. The La Crosse CNRED Agent also followed the Winnebago CNRED decision to provide individualized comments, rather than boil them down too much. Most of these comments were recorded during the drive back while issues were fresh in our heads.

THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS RESULTS

PRIOR TO YOUR VISIT

Ease and quality of information about Oshkosh

- One study participant called for the Oshkosh Convention & Visitor's Bureau to request an info packet (1 week in advance); no packet was received.
- Pre-visit online searches of economic development websites & ED programs, as well as visitor's information, was helpful and informative.
 - The Downtown Oshkosh website in particular was helpful in determining areas to visit downtown, as well as restaurants to choose.
 - This website was particularly easy to negotiate.
 - The City of Oshkosh website had a few dead links.

Rating & comments on community's online web materials and information. Could you find information on this community on state and regional tourism web sites?

Ratings: 8, 8 = 8

- City website is decent; however some participants noticed dead links prior to the Oshkosh First Impressions visit. Recent visits to the City of Oshkosh website indicate this problem has been corrected.

PAST PERCEPTIONS

What was your impression of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see?

Please comment on your knowledge of this community:

- Similar in size and characteristics to La Crosse (University town, traditionally blue collar, etc.) However, Oshkosh has with Air Show/Museum
- Oshkosh B'Gosh apparel
- University & College housing – similar to La Crosse
- University & Stadium
- Bigger than La Crosse – more upscale than La Crosse
- University – Oshkosh Truck
- Lake Winnebago
- Good micro brewery

THE “FIVE MINUTE” IMPRESSION

After taking a five-minute drive through the community, without stopping, the following reactions were noted:

Most of the City’s entrances along Hwy 45, Hwy 41 & Hwy 21 appear to be newer with big box style development. It seems like your main shopping areas were along the highway corridors in the form of big box retail. These newer style development areas really lack the character of some of the older areas in the more typical downtown areas. The entrance areas seem very auto-dependent and not very pedestrian friendly.

Some of the other comments recorded by our visiting team were:

- Entrances to City seem like any other suburb – lacks personality
- Oshkosh seems spread out - shopping far from downtown
- We couldn’t find downtown area very easily
- Oshkosh seemed to have pockets of growth, but little connectivity between these areas.
- Oshkosh’s Downtown area seems to lack a center.
- Difficult to navigate downtown streets (cross streets)
- Highway 41 area – not a warm, welcoming entrance.
- Dirty Book Store along Hwy 21 entrance - negative
- Lack of way finding initially off Hwy. 21
- Older homes in historic district appear very nice
- Oshkosh’s newer areas contain many “big box” stores
- Lack of early way finding to direct visitors downtown

COMMUNITY ENTRANCES – OBSERVATIONS OF EACH ENTRANCE

HWY 21

Ratings: 3, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5 = **4.5**

- The Highway 21 entrance with Festival & Menards is clean with relatively recent construction (20 yrs or so?). This community entrance lacked sufficient way finding signage leading to downtown. In addition, as we traveled east on this entrance, we noticed a dirty book store (north side of street). La Crosse has a dirty book store too (and unfortunately billboards advertising it). These are unfortunate facets of free enterprise.

HIGHWAY 45 FROM SOUTH

Ratings: 2, 2, 2, 3, 7, 7 = **3.8**

- The area near the Country Club rated a seven, however as we got closer to the downtown things seemed more dilapidated. In particular, one area near a marina (name?) appeared extremely dilapidated. We have a picture of this area. In addition, there was a population sign indicating Oshkosh's population, but not any form of welcoming sign or other indicator that you were crossing a municipal boundary. One positive we noticed along this entrance was the low amount of billboards.
- The area near the country club rated a 7
- Closer to downtown rated a 2
- Attractive at South end by lake
- Population sign – no welcome. Few billboards.
- Closer to river very run down – lots of opportunity (see photo)



20TH STREET HEADING EAST

Ratings: 7

- Wide, accessible, lack of landscaping/trees. In general, this area seemed prosperous.

HWY 41

Ratings: 5

- Typical 'big box' development
- Couldn't find Visitor's Bureau

OTHER AREAS:

AIRPORT & INDUSTRIAL AREA

Ratings: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 = **3.6**

- The industrial parks in general appeared clean and well maintained. However, as typical with industrial parks, most buildings were built with non-attractive facades and building materials that seemed to provide a certain level of blandness.
- Industrial Area rated a **7**
- Airport rated 1 or 2, nothing there
- Info about community
- Industrial area lacks landscaping
- Airport area lacks directional sign
- Industrial area clean but bland

TRANSIT CENTER

Ratings: 8, 8, 8, 8, 8 = **8**

- Very efficient, well located and heavily used, priced right
- Clean



OTHER ENTRANCES

- Bike store keeper said plenty of bike trails available; however we didn't notice any signage indicating the locations of bike trails.

HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS

QUALITY

- Overall Ratings: 6, 6, 7, 7, 7, 7 = **6.7**
- Existing/Older Homes: 8, 8, 9, 8, 6, 8 = **7.8**
- Housing for Seniors: 9, 9, 6, 8, 8 = 8
- New Homes: 6, 7, 8, 6, 6, 7 = **6.7**
- Apartments/Rental Housing: 9, 6, 4, 6, 6, 5 = **6**
- Vacant lots for new homes: 6,**

As part of our First Impression Team exercise, several team members were dropped off in various neighborhoods. In particular, the neighborhood around West High School & Titan stadium, the neighborhood between East Hall Park and St. Frances Cabrini, the Algoma Historic District, and the neighborhood around 20th Avenue and Ohio Street.

West High School/Titan Stadium Neighborhood:

Nice established neighborhoods around this part of town. There seems to be a decent density of homes, as well as a nice supply of neighborhood parks for residents.

East Hall/St. Frances Cabrini Neighborhood:

The housing in this area of Oshkosh seemed like it was older (1930's – 1960's), but relatively well maintained. Rentals in this area seem to favor the duplex style renovation, and appear to be tastefully converted. In La Crosse, some University neighborhoods are peppered with the high density student housing boxes of 8-16 apartments. Also surprising was the relatively low taxes compared to La Crosse. It appears the mil rate is 3-4 mills lower than La Crosse. There also appears to be some large, mature trees that have not been cut by the street department. Some streets were in better quality than others – for example McKinnley Street was in pretty rough shape. Condos located one block west of Main Street (Division St.?) were nicely placed and looked very nice.

-Condos rated **7.5**



AFFORDABILITY

East Hall/St. Frances Cabrini Neighborhood: I am pleasantly surprised at the low prices in this neighborhood. It seems \$90,000 - \$115,000 can still buy you a quaint home in a clean, safe neighborhood. I spoke to a mailman carrying this route – he said the neighborhood is safe, and the schools are considered good. Again, property taxes seemed to be very reasonable on the homes in this area and it appears this is a very livable neighborhood for young families in particular.

We also noticed a sufficient number of homes for sale:

- We observed a lot of variety in price of homes for sale.
- Homes appear available, as there were lots of 'for sale' signs across the housing spectrum
- Property taxes appeared to be a good 3-4 mils lower than the City of La Crosse.
- Homes in the Titan Stadium neighborhood seemed affordable, and well kept. This was a very attractive part of Oshkosh.

AVAILABILITY

- Existing/Older Homes 8, 8, 8, 9, 9, 9 = **8.5**
- Housing for Seniors 8, 8, 8, 8, 8 = **8**
- New Homes 6, 6, 7, 6, 5, 5 = **7.2**
- Apartments/Rental Housing 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7 = **7**
- Vacant lots for new homes 5
- (see quality comments)

APPEAL

Most Appeal

- Good signage in the residential Historic District



- Conversions to duplexes were done well (although there were many duplexes, they seemed well converted, with no noticeable multi-family boxes squeezed onto City lots.



- Good mix & variety
- Nice restored homes



- Appears to be good availability of older homes near lake
- Town areas – types of locations next to a lake, river, downtown, etc.
- West end/side housing near Titan Stadium was excellent!
- Older housing stock (brick/stone) very attractive and generally well maintained

LEAST APPEAL

- Downtown housing – lack of & quality i.e. converted motel near chamber
- Too many bars, homes converted to bars
- Lack of street trees sidewalks
- Infrastructure quality



- Homes too far from shopping, health care
- Some unkempt properties, with trash in yard
- Some frame construction in need of maintenance
- Some student housing seemed somewhat run down, for instance around McKinney Street.



QUALITY & AVAILABILITY OF RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Lacking sidewalks, street trees
- McKinley street was bad, poor quality
- Curbs & gutter, no bike trails/lanes
- Lack of focus on boulevards, trees, seemed pedestrian unfriendly
- Paved boulevards lacked lighting
- Downtown needs, general lack of maintenance
- The low cost fixes on Main Street appear to be a very distracting from the historic pavers used along the side walks. This was also noted by other Team members in other areas of town.

QUALITY & AVAILABILITY OF RESIDENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE (CONT)



APPEAL RATING CATEGORY

- Single young adults 3, 4, 7, 6, 6, 8 = **5.7**
 - Young families 6, 6, 6, 9, 8, 9 = **7.3**
 - Middle income 8, 8, 8, 9, 8, 9 = **8.3**
 - Senior citizen 8, 8, 8, 7, 8 = **7.8**
 - Upscale/professional 7, 7, 6, 8, 5, 9 = **7**
-
- There does not appear to be a lot of options for people that wish to reside in the downtown area, unless you live in the neighborhoods directly adjacent to downtown. It doesn't appear that many apartments exist above the downtown storefronts.
 - Oshkosh appears similar to La Crosse in that their appears to have limited racial diversity

EDUCATION, HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

EDUCATION

Each team member was asked to look at the schools in the neighborhoods they were visiting. These visits to the campuses were brief, and mainly looked at noticeable issues the facilities may have had.

Preschool/Kindergarten/Head Start

- The schools I observed looked good. The Arts for Kids Center was nice
- Head Start nice, lots of playgrounds at Trinity Lutheran School.
- Few daycares
- We only saw one
- Very nice
- Well decorated

Primary/Elementary/Middle School

There seems to be a fair number of neighborhood elementary schools. All of these schools looked older, but very well maintained. They appeared clean, and well kept. In addition, there were several private schools. Some of these were very impressive and seemed to be very nice assets to the neighborhoods. Neighbors living in the East Hall/St. Frances Cabrini Neighborhood indicated that schools in the neighborhood were very good. A mailman in this neighborhood also indicated the school system was very good locally.

- The middle school with access to river (St. Johns-?) was very nice.
 - Older stock, well maintained

High School

- West High School, as well as Lourdes High School looked like nice complexes, and were well maintained.

College/University

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh campus has nice, older buildings dating the landscape. It had a bit of a dated look, simply because of some of the more recent buildings (cafeteria). The new parking ramp was awesome. I spoke with several students who loved the campus, as well as the available campus housing opportunities. A few of these students said there is plenty of on and off-campus housing.

The Fox Valley Tech College appeared to offer good programs for business people. In addition, its location near the airport probably offers good programming for airplane mechanic type programs. The campus seemed dated.

What do residents (young & old) think about the quality and availability of their local schools?

- Only the university – people loved it

Rate the Adequacy of schools for a community of this size:

Ratings: 8, 8, 9, 9, 9, 7 = **8.3**

HEALTH CARE

A member of the visiting team works in the healthcare field in La Crosse. She made visits to both hospitals, as well as several professional offices to see what type of facilities Oshkosh has to offer.

The following comments illustrate her findings:

Hospitals

- 2 hospitals on far west side, on bus route, good
- Both hospitals' quality looked good. Aurora is a very nice, new facility. Aurora seems to have a strong presence
- Strong presence of Aurora, apparently prosperous

Physician, dentist, optometrist, and other medical offices and clinics:

- Several clinics, dentist – generally good
- One dentist office was not nice looking
- Some independent doctors
- One was for profit
- Many optometrists downtown

Long-term care, assisted living, and nursing home facilities:

- The assisted living we observed looked very nice, new, scattered around the community and near neighborhoods.
- Didn't notice any

Other health services (e.g., Chiropractor, psychotherapy, naturopath, massage, etc.):

- One chiropractor – nice
- Very few others
- Many located in downtown area

Rate the Adequacy of health care services for a community of this size:

Ratings: 5, 5, 6, 7, 7 = **6**

- Locations seems spread out and far from neighborhoods

SOCIAL SERVICES

- Social Security office – poor signage, markings, and landscaping
- Name of very small, good location
- Domestic violence center- very nice looking

Rate the level of social services for a community of this size:

Ratings: 2, 3, 3, 5, 5, 7 = **4.2**

CIVIC

- Kiwanis – yes, rotary sun dial, amphitheatre strong presence
- Maybe Lions
- Community Center
- Others – no
- Apparently adequate

Overall, rate the level of nonprofit/civic services for a community of this size:

Ratings: 4, 5, 5, 6, 7, 7 = **5.7**

- Not visible
- Rotary and Kiwanis – have raised a lot of \$\$\$
- More marketing
- Apparently adequate

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Rate the level of police, fire, ambulance and emergency medical service facilities. How do local residents feel about these services?

- Seemed to have good ambulance
- Small, dark police stations
- Only saw one police officer driving around
- Nice fire stations
- Didn't talk to locals about this

Ratings: 5, 5, 5, 6, 6 = **5.4**

- Good student – police relationship (Univ.)

LOCAL ECONOMY

What was the impression of the health of the local economy?

- A lot of houses for sale/rent
- Didn't get a feel for major industries
- Seemed kind of dreary
- Downtown seemed empty
- Fringe stores – good
- Kind of stagnant
- Fairly decent
- Oshkosh truck – good
- Loss of Oshkosh B'Gosh
- River development
- Stagnant

DOWNTOWN

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

- Yes, for the most part
- Yes
- Downtown was not well defined
- Library was beautiful
- City Hall/Safety Building nice

Overall appearance of the downtown:

Ratings 2, 3, 4, 4, 5, 3 = **3.5**

- Seemed abandoned and drab
- Weeds, streetscaping was tired
- Few fronts
- Riverfront – decay, lack of appeal
- Park was drab, bathrooms in need of repair
- Convention center landscaping was hideous
- Back of buildings were trashy
- Better signage on stores re: hours stores open.
- Unoccupied need to be tidier/cleaner

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

Ratings: 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 3, 3, 4, 5 = **3.4**

- Limited variety
- No storefront appeal
- Good: 2 pharmacies (Morton, Loyal customers)
- 3 bookstores
- 2 coffee shops
- Hardware store
- Not a variety of restaurants
- Needs more diverse retail

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

Ratings: 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 9 = **9.8**

- Park Plaza hotel – not good (rated 2 or 3)
- High level of customer loyalty
- Everybody except Chamber of Commerce very good.
- Impressed by youth in hardware store

Rate and comment on the signage in the downtown.

Ratings: 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 3 = **3.2**

- So easy to get lost downtown
- If it wouldn't have been for the river you wouldn't know where you were
- Cross streets signs – good
- Generally poor except for 1 block (200?) on Main

Rate and comment on the window displays in the downtown.

Ratings: 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 4 = **2.7**

- Skimpy
- Lack of attractive displays
- No eye appeal
- Spotty, in general
- Poor on vacant properties

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

Ratings: 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4 = **3.7**

- Homemade/cottage industries – good
- A couple of really unique stores
- No florist or bridal shop
- Shoes, hats and True Value – good, otherwise poor

Comment on the mix of facilities and services in the downtown.

- No grocery store downtown
- Historic housing – good
- Lodging – lacking
- Printers, salons, art stores
- Lack of food – restaurants or grocers
- Bathroom facilities awful (i.e. Peabody's & Family Rest.)
- Handicap accessibility poor.
 - Old, narrow ramps.

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

Ratings: 8, 8, 9, 9, 9, 8, 9 = **8.6**

- Tons of parking, plenty
- Striping – good
- Get rid of the meters
- Ramp on rivers – poor locations, waste
- Very well done with streets marked
- Assessed snow removal from lot is good

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

Ratings: 6

- Great lighting around the amphitheatre
- Downtown lights needed paint
- Lack of a theme, some banners
- Didn't notice historic lighting, was not there after dark

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

- Huge potential
- Yes
- Waterfest is good
- Gallery walks good
- Amphitheatre awesome
- Yes. Needs to be more inviting especially in area of hotel and convention center

Describe the residential mix in the downtown.

- Very high priced or very low
- Not much of a mix
- Condos, apartments, duplexes generally adequate

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

- No, you would have to leave downtown to do your grocery shopping
- Not enough essentials shopping
- Not in current condition but has major potential

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

- Symphony, library
- City Hall was off the beaten path
- Amphitheatre in the summer
- Oshkosh Center
- Opera house
- Post Office – no
- Didn't see YMCA
- United Way Center questionable
- Many City Hall/gov't agencies

OVERALL RETAIL

Describe the mix of retail shopping available (malls, specialty shops, strip malls, big box stores).

- Fringe area-- new Lowes
- Festival, Menards – good, some on bus route
- Good locations around town
- No regional mall?
- Very limited small retail, otherwise typical midwest

What retail goods do local residents appear to need to travel to surrounding communities for?

- Movie theatres
- Old Navy, Bed Bath & Beyond
- No major department stores
- Bridal Store
- Outfitters?
- Off-sales liquor/wine shops

What stores or services were missing that you would expect to find?

- Pier One, Costco, World Market
- No Toys R Us
- Sporting Goods, Cabela's
- Clothing, hardware
- No Caribou Coffee
- Bakery, candy store, deli, gourmet/specialty food
- Ice cream parlor
- Dress shop, florist, jewelry

What retail stores or services did you find that were unusual or unexpected for a town of this size?

- Pretty typical
- Hat shop
- Restoration store/ Salvage Store
- True Value store

What store(s) in this community would you travel a distance of more than 30 miles to patronize?

- Antique shops
- Columbia Outlet
- Prime Outlets
- Salvage Store

OTHER RETAIL SHOPPING AREAS (MALLS, BIG BOX STORES, ETC.)

Retail Area #1 Outlet Mall

Location: Hwy 41/45

Rating: 5

- Parking lot clean

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping:

Ratings:

- Good but not exceptional

Rate and comment on the customer service of businesses you visited:

Ratings: 8

- Personnel very helpful
- Benefits important to attitude of employees!

Rate and comment on the variety of quality merchandise:

Ratings: 7

LOCAL INDUSTRIES

Consider industries only within or adjacent to the community. What are the major industrial sectors in the community (manufacturing, construction, transportation)?

- Oshkosh Truck
- Aviation-tourism
- Boat dealers & storage – recreation
- Miles Kimball
- Rail/Air/Trucking

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

- Miles Kimball
- University
- Hospitals
- Public Schools
- Local Government
- Retail
- Walmart?
- Education
- Gov't services
- Banks
-

What are the major types of manufacturing in the community?

- Oshkosh Truck

What are major types of primary industry in the community (agriculture, mining, forestry, or fishing)?

- Health care
- Education

Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry? Please comment.

- No, not really
- No

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

- Yes, several of them
- Yes

Are the industrial facilities well maintained?

- Yes
- In some cases

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

- Yes, there are lots of opportunities
- Plenty of housing
- Good transportation
- Growing labor force
- Good transportation – rail, air, roads
- Plenty of industrial land
- Affordable housing
- Education opportunities

COMMERCIAL SERVICES

What types of commercial businesses serve the local community (high-speed internet provider, print shops, etc)?

- Several print shops, we saw wireless internet, banks, credit unions, insurance, realtors – huge showcase information packet
- Downtown office supply store

What commercial services appear to be missing in the community?

- Graphic artists
- Marketing, advertising
- Copy shops
- Fed Ex, Shipping
- Video store

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Are banks and ATMs conveniently located? Do the banks have convenient hours of service?

- Yes (2)
- I guess so, they were open when we visited

Ratings: 7, 7, 7, 8, 8, 7 = **7.3**

- Thank God no check cashing places!

What other professional services are available (accounting, insurance, legal, etc)? Are there any apparent gaps?

- Accounting – Clifton Gund.
- Good
- No noticeable gaps

TOURISM

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

- Yes
 - Not clustered very well
 - Menominee Park is awesome
 - Museums - good
 - Amphitheatre – good
 - Waterfest – good
 - Symphony
 - Opera House
- No
 - Downtown- places for live entertainment, lacks lodging and restaurants
 - No
 - No, where is Convention/Visitor's Bureau

Does the community have a slogan/brand?

- Oshkosh on the Water
- City on the water???

Is the community well known for an attraction or event?

- Yes, the EAA Fest and Museum
- University Baseball team
- Housing Miss Wisconsin Pageant
- Yes, EAA

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

- River
- Lake
- Opera House – more developed
- Downtown entertainment
- Waterfront

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

Ratings: 4, 5, 6, 6, 7, 6 = **5.7**

- Some poor condition – Oshkosh Center
- Riverfront
- Amphitheatre was beautiful

Do you consider any of the attractions to be underdeveloped? Please comment.

- Oshkosh Center & Riverfront
- Opera House
- Menominee Park
- Main Street
- Do more with the sun dial
- River/lakefront to include trails/paths

Are there any community events that could be expanded/developed to be a tourist attraction?

Please specify:

- Annual multicultural event
- Didn't see any community lure book available at very many locations
- Marinas
- Band shell

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

- Not enough hotels downtown
- Saw only one B&B
- No campgrounds
- Hilton Garden staff did not explain breakfast coupons
- Hilton Garden excellent
- Park Plaza uninviting – need more waterfront (Convention Center)

Are there facilities to accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors?

- Yes, Oshkosh Center, EAA Facilities
- Sort of – too spread out

Is there a Visitor's Center, Chamber of Commerce office, or other facility serving the needs of tourists? Please comment on staff, facilities, signage, marketing material, maps, etc.

- Never found Visitors Center
- Chamber of Commerce
 - 30-something male, noon hour Friday, rude, bad attitude.
 - Joan & Melissa were fantastic.
- Where is the Visitor's Bureau? 2 different addresses – not found in either
- Chamber of Commerce – male very unfriendly
- Male at Chamber seem unengaged, disinterested
- Maps poor except for one

Ratings:

- Male 0, 0, 0, 0, 0 = **0**
- Joan & Melissa 8, 8, 9, 9, 9 = **8.6**

RESTAURANTS

Comment and rate the quality of restaurants:

Ratings:

- Fratello's 3, 5, 6, 6, 8, 5 = **5**
- Kodiak Jacks 8, 9, 9, 10, 11, 6, 7 = **8.6**
- Hilton Garden 9
- Fratello's – too much food
- Unaware of difference between sugar pop and diet
- Hostess did not seat us by the window
- Terry messed up diet drink for diabetic person
- Kodiak Jacks – Molly was awesome
- Halloween costumes were great

Variety/Mix of restaurants:

Ratings: 3, 4, 4, 6, 7 = **4.8**

- No ethnic restaurants
- Not enough downtown

What do local residents recommend on where to stay, eat and visit?

- Recommended Brooklyn
- Planet Perk
- Water City Grill
- Oblios
- Roxy Supper Club

What local restaurant, specialty shop or attraction would bring you back to this community in the near future?

- None (2)
- Kodiak Jacks
- Fratello's
- New Moon
- Dainty Daisy
- Antique Shop/ Crescent Moon is a true asset

GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Are municipal offices conveniently located? Please comment.

- Yes, poorly oriented
- No – off the beaten path
- Near each other, well clustered
- Somewhat

How would you rate the availability and quality of the following information provided by the municipal government?

Community brochure/guide: 7, 7, 8, 3 = **6.3**

Business Directory: 8, 8, 4 = **6.7**

- Chamber building
- Only on web

Community Profile: **7**

If applicable, were you able to find adequate information to make informed retail, commercial and/or industrial business investment decisions?

- Yes, info from credit union
- Poor info from Chamber
- Fair feedback from retailers
- Retailers offered good info and encouragement
- City – limited info
- Library – good info

How would you rate the helpfulness of government employees?

Ratings: 5, 7, 9, 7, 8 = **7.2**

- HR referred me to website for job openings
- City staff- good
- Town board - good

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Comment on and rate each of the following for quality accessibility, or availability where relevant.

Public Transportation:

Ratings: **9**

- Available, accessible but limited hours of operation
- Airport not well signed
- Didn't see any cabs
- Saw 1 cab

Sidewalks:

Ratings: 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 2 = **3**

- Lacking, many cracked
- Missing, weeds
- Curb cuts hard to see
- Too much pavement downtown
- Very poor downtown

Streets:

Ratings: 3, 3, 5, 6, 5 = **4.4**

- Asphalt patching looked bad
- McKinley Street – very bad

Landscaping, Street Trees:

Ratings: 3, 4, 4, 4, 6, 3 = **4**

- Not enough
- Sawyer was nice
- Sundial nice, otherwise nothing
- A lot of overhead wires



Public Restrooms:

Ratings: 3, 4, 5, 5, 6, 1 = 4

- Restroom in park by Oshkosh Center was locked
- Library was nice
- No restrooms by transit center
- Couldn't find

Street signage:

Ratings: 5, 5, 6, 6, 6 = 5.6

- Cross street signs – good
- Directions signs – good to get you to downtown but once you were there, you're on your own
- Blue signs excellent, clear to read
- Having upcoming street on them-- good

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, public Internet access points, other misc.

Ratings: 4, 6, 6, 6, 7 = 5.8

- Not enough benches
- Drinking fountains missing
- Payphones had been removed
- Plenty of wireless internet

PLANNING

Do you see conflicting land uses in the community (e.g., a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill)? Please comment.

- Yes, parking ramp next to river
- Downtown lacks a plan, not conducive to small retail
- Used car lot on Main Street
- Subdivisions across street from industrial
- Junkyard across from park/amphitheatre

Are all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space, etc.)? Specify where land uses are not appropriate:

- Parking ramp
- Junkyard
- Under utilized spaces near river
- Redeveloping Housing – good
- Hotel on river – good
- Amphitheatre – good
- Wetlands in neighborhoods – good

Did you experience traffic congestions anywhere? If yes, location.

- Yes, a lot on Hwy 41, trying to get on 41.
- No, not even on Friday PM

**Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities?
Please comment.**

- Seemed to be
- Riverfront was bad
- Handicap ramps – good
- Sidewalks no.

Does the community appear to be pedestrian/bike friendly?

- Not bike friendly – no trails/lanes
- Not pedestrian – maybe downtown
- Good walkability to schools
- No

RECREATION, FAITH, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

RECREATION

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

Parks:

Ratings: 8, 9, 9, 9, 10, 6 = **8.5**

- Very nice, spacious
- Good variety, visibility, subtle – not obnoxious
- Appeal to all ages
- Skate park was lacking

Public recreation facilities:

Ratings: 7, 7, 8, 8, 8 = **7.6**

- YMCA was nice
- Sports complex nice, not enough parking

Private recreation facilities:

Ratings: 6, 7, 7 = **6.7**

- Country Club, course looked nice
- Club house not that impressive

Based on your impression, what do people in this community appear to do for recreation/fun?

- Take kids to the park, zoo
- Boating
- University sports games
- Amphitheatre, symphony
- Grand Opera House

What recreational facility (private or public) in this community surprised you?

- Public water park
- Amphitheatre

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

- Bike trails
- Indoor concert facility
- Fitness clubs
- Public tennis courts
- Volleyball courts

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

- Senior Citizens: 5, 7, 6, 6, 5 = **5.8**
- Families: 8, 8, 7, 7, 7 = **7.4**
- Singles, young adults: 5, 6, 6, 4, 4 = **5**
- Teens: 4, 2, 4, 3, 3 = **3.2**
- Children (12 and under): 7, 7, 7, 6, 5 = **6.4**

ENTERTAINMENT

What does the community do for entertainment?

- Hunting
- Neighborhood pubs
- No ice cream place downtown
- Symphony, movies, shopping
- Eat, boating, fishing, golfing

What entertainment opportunities do residents feel they lack?

- Trails, biking
- Camping
- Banquet, dancing

Does the community have a vibrant nightlife? Please comment.

- Didn't see much on Friday night before 7 PM.
- Downtown shop owners comment that during the summer the city is good at attracting nightlife to the amphitheatre for concerts.

FAITH/RELIGION

Comment on the number, appearance, and selection of denominations in the community.

Overall, the team experienced a relatively diversified mix of faith/religious institutions. Many of these churches were catholic or protestant denominations. The following comments illustrate the team's remarks:

- Lots of churches, well kept
- No First Adventist
- No Mosque
- Hmong services, didn't see any sort of Hmong services offered?

Are there any outstanding architectural or design features found on the religious buildings you visited?

- Many were very nice, well maintained
- Historic

Please rate the religious buildings and denominations represented in this community.

Ratings: 7, 7, 8, 8, 9 = **7.8**

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Does the community hold any events (festivals)? Which events are held annually?

- Multicultural
- Air fest
- Waterfest

What events are popular with residents?

- Waterfest
- Gallery walk

Do the residents feel there is a lack of community events?

- Forgot to ask

Does the community have historical buildings or places? Are they well maintained?

- Museums
- Commercial facades downtown
- Firehouse
- First National Bank

Oshkosh does have several historic structures. One thing noticed by a team member, was the proficient amount of power lines in the downtown area (see photo below.) Overhead power lines create a messy look, and tend to distract away from historic areas



GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ROLE PLAYING

Would you consider this community as a suitable location for a young family? Why or why not?

- Yes, everyone we talked to had positive comments and represented the community very nicely.
- Oshkosh would make a suitable location for a young family because of the number of neighborhood schools (from preschool to University). There also seems to be significant variety of religious congregations.

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

- Maybe, nothing specific for women
- Some support – BID grants

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

- Sure, seemed safe, lots of assisted living type facilities
 - “I am not sure if Oshkosh would be the best place for a retired person. I personally didn’t see many places for the elderly to live (Senior Housing opportunities).

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young adult? Why or why not?

- Yes, schools seemed very good.
- A young adult would enjoy the nightlife events, and the university. Some more diversity in downtown shops would help provide more of a backdrop that attracts young adults to a downtown area.

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

- Possibly, didn’t seem like there was a lot to do

INFORMATION FROM RESIDENTS

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

- Yes, wine store owners were great

Did they refer you to someone else who would help?

- Yes, insurance people tried to help direct me to a realtor

In general, did residents you spoke with have a positive or negative attitude toward their community? Why? Did you sense community pride?

- Positive, some community pride
- Community pride was present in some of the stories of people that moved away from Oshkosh, and came back to town because they liked it so well.

Did residents identify a particular issue (e.g. safety) to be of major concern?

A particular issue that residents mentioned to me was the roads and the infrastructure. I was especially surprised with McKinley Street. This road section was in dis-repair, and travels in front of poorly maintained student housing. Overall this gives a very distracting impression of one area around the campus.

Overall, how would you rate the quality of information from community residents and business employees?

Ratings: 7

USING YOUR SENSES

What did the community taste like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, or candy store that you will remember?

- Kodiak Jacks had a very friendly, enthusiastic staff that kept us well feed and in a lively mood.
- The community had a lot of coffee places that I liked, and tasted several coffees from different shops. However there was not much in the means of ethnic restaurants. Not a lot of variety, especially in the downtown area.

What did the community smell like? Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural, or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors (flowers, food, etc.)?

- N/A

What sounds did you hear? Please, comment on the level of noise in the community (traffic, industrial, birds singing, water falls, music on the streets, trains, noon whistle, etc.).

- Lots of traffic noise in the downtown

How would describe the overall environmental health of the community (air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

- Oshkosh has a typical feel for most communities this size. There was some examples of litter in the lesser traveled portions of downtown, and behind the Park Plaza Hotel & Convention Center. Air quality didn't appear to be any problem. Oshkosh's riverfront behind the Park Plaza Hotel and Convention Center looked like, with some sprucing up, it could be a real wonderful public place for downtown workers and hotel visitors to relax during summer weather.

Did you experience anything that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you (hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets, safety issues, smiling faces, etc.)?

- Desolate area across the river from downtown

Do you think your impression would be different if your visit occurred during evening hours?

- No

Notes:

- Due to the cool, overcast day with some periods of brief rain, it was not a good day to find people out in their yards.

WRAP –UP – LASTING IMPRESSIONS

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

- Yes/No, knew about commerce, growth by Hwy 41, didn't know much about downtown Oshkosh. Didn't know about the amphitheatre, or the attractions it brings. Our college student representative on the team discussed the nightlife with UW-Oshkosh students. Some indicated students commute to other communities for nightlife entertainment opportunities instead of staying in Oshkosh.
- I knew very little about the City of Oshkosh prior to our visit, except that it had the University of Oshkosh. I knew that the University had a reputation of having a lot of drinking. It was different in that the students seem to have a good relationship with the police, but they also don't have the ordinances that La Crosse does that deals with alcohol consumption. They also have been lucky in not having any drowning from alcohol intoxication.

Did the information you collected prior to the visit accurately reflect what you observed/experienced?

- For the most part it did. However, as noted earlier, an informational packet requested from the Chamber was not received.

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

- Menominee Park
- The area around UW-Oshkosh
- The most outstanding feature of this community is the park and the riverfront near the park (Riverside Park). It is an adequate use of greenery and there are a lot of events that take place there in the summer. It is great that Oshkosh found a way to keep the road near the river for those that drive along it.

List five positive things you observed about this community.

1. EAA
2. The K-12 schools
3. Menominee Park
4. The Wine Store
5. The population base of the entire Fox River Valley

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

1. River area / shoreline
2. Growth to the west of Hwy 41 – there is ‘room’ to grow
3. Small investments in downtown improvements (eg overhead lines, pavers, facades, back of buildings) would have large payoff on aesthetics and first impressions



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

1. The attitude of the guy at the Chamber
2. A parking garage on the riverfront
3. Some downtown streets in bad shape
4. Fragmentation of lodging facilities (i.e. scattered)
5. The Hwy 41/Hwy 21 interchange

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

- The difficulty of the streets downtown and the lack of riverfront development

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

- We have some of the same issues but I believe we have a nicer community.

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

- Absolutely – sidewalks, directional/street signage, stadium expansion, more waterfront improvements
- Outdoor amphitheatre
- More programming downtown such as gallery walks, Waterfest
- Small grants for small businesses administered by the chamber versus loans

Other comments:

- We need better directional signage in La Crosse

FINAL IMPRESSIONS

Oshkosh is similar to La Crosse in size, and historical characteristics (manufacturing jobs that have taken flight over past twenty years). Although Oshkosh has a Business Improvement District, they seem to have taken some quick fixes that seem to add to a tired feeling in the downtown area. However, housing costs seemed a bit more affordable than La Crosse. In addition, property taxes appeared lower than La Crosse. It seems like Oshkosh has been more successful than La Crosse in providing summer nightlife in the downtown/lake area, associated in particular with Menominee Park and the amphitheatre.

