

First Impressions

A Program for Community Assessment and Improvement

City of Horicon Visit to the City of Seymour



**Date of Visit: Friday,
September 19, 2008**

Visitors:

- Judy Billington
- Gina Crossley
- Jennee Harmuth
- Jeff Hoffman
- David Magnussen
- Robin Zarling

Prepared By:
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Program President,
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Introduction

The City of Seymour, Outagamie County, and the City of Horicon, Dodge County, conducted a First Impressions exchange in the fall of 2008.

The First Impressions Program was developed by UW-Extension to help a community learn about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor. The program also provides an opportunity to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of other similar communities. The results from the First Impressions visit can serve as the basis for community action. The final report and photos can also be used as a means of documenting change within a community over time.

Representatives from the City of Horicon visited Seymour on Friday, September 19, 2008. It was a beautiful autumn day, with sunny skies and temperatures in the low-70s.

Six people were part of the Horicon group visiting Seymour: Judy Billington, Gina Crossley, Jennee Harmuth, Jeff Hoffman, David Magnussen, and Robin Zarling.

The Horicon group arrived at approximately 8:30 a.m. and spent nearly five hours in the community before departing.

What follows is a summary of the comments collected during the visit related to a broad range of community characteristics. Overall, the visitors enjoyed their stay in this well kept, friendly community and hope their comments are useful to city residents.

First Impression Summary Report

Collection of Community Information

Prior to our visit, we were able to collect some information about Seymour on the internet, namely the Seymour Chamber of Commerce website. One of the visitors was able to find the city's tax rate through a municipal publication.

During our visit, we were able to collect more information about the community from businesses in the city as well as through local publications picked up at the Seymour Chamber of Commerce office.

Past Perceptions



Of the six team members, only one had previously visited Seymour during the annual "Burger Fest" celebration. She remembered the city as being a "charming small town" with a beautiful balloon rally and great hamburgers being served.

Those of us who had never visited the city sensed it would have a tourist industry based around Seymour

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being the birthplace of the hamburger. We also sensed it would be a well kept bedroom community based on its proximity to Green Bay and Appleton.

The “Five-Minute” Impression

We took an initial drive through the community to get a first impression. We noted a charming downtown area and very well kept parks. We also noticed the retail businesses and schools needed to sustain a community of Seymour’s size.

We also took note of the Seymour’s well maintained streets and the availability of parking throughout the city. One of the things that especially impressed us was the city’s state-of-the-art aquatic center.

The city seemed full of nice, clean neighborhoods and no depressed areas were noted. It seemed to us that Seymour’s economy was largely based in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors.

Community Entrances

Upon our arrival in Seymour, the first thing we noted was the entrance sign on CTH C North was in need of paint and was surrounded by brush. Additionally, no signs pertaining to the city’s civic organizations were visible.



The same held true for the entrance on HWY 55 North. With both of these

entrances, we didn’t feel very welcomed as we came into town.

To make these entrances more welcoming, we thought new paint jobs and having the brush removed around the signs would be an easy fix.

In contrast, the sign on Hwy 54/55 West was great! It was very visible, featuring an image of a hamburger, Seymour’s claim to fame. We assumed this sign marked the entrance most people would take into the city.



Downtown Business Area

One of the things we thought was especially appealing about Seymour was the way the main street/downtown is nestled within the city yet is very easy to find. On the day of our visit, traffic was light and we were able to cross Main Street with ease. However, the one thing lacking in the downtown area was marked crosswalks.

Our first impression of downtown was that it was quaint due to the number of historic buildings that call the area home. The Hardware Hank, laundry mat, and hotel buildings especially added to this feel.

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As we walked downtown, one of the things that struck us was the number of businesses closed during the hours of operation they were supposed to be opened as well as a number of empty storefronts. For the most part, the ones that did feature merchandise featured items that looked dated.



Another thing noted by a couple of the visitors was the fact that one downtown business featured local political newspaper clippings in its window. This left these visitors with an uneasy feeling.

Although the area is home to a large number of historic buildings, many were in disrepair and lacked a cohesive feel. It was also noted that many of the buildings did not appear to be handicap accessible.

One of the features we thought was especially charming was the city's use of banners throughout the area. Because of these banners, we definitely knew Seymour was the birthplace of the hamburger. Of course, Nagel Park capitalized on this theme to the greatest extent and came as a welcome surprise just off of Main Street.



Most everyone we spoke to in the downtown area was welcoming and friendly. The proprietor of the Crabby Reader and those working in the city clerk's office and police station were especially nice.

As for some easy changes that could be made in the downtown area, the weeds along the sidewalk could be sprayed, a prominent sign could be placed noting that the Seymour Chamber of Commerce is located inside the city's municipal building, and garbage placed in public view could be hidden (see photo above).



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Oddly enough, when it came time for us to find out who served a good hamburger in the downtown area, many residents stated they were looking forward to the Dairy Queen reopening. A couple of residents pointed us in the direction of a tavern where we enjoyed a very good, reasonable priced, hamburger.

Although we were left with a sense that the downtown area is depressed, we couldn't help but feel it was an area that has a lot of wonderful, undeveloped potential and is home to very friendly business owners.

Other Retail Shopping Areas

The more recent shopping area, located on HWY 54/55, was home to stores that would cater to locals. Although there were empty storefronts in this area, they were clean and the buildings seemed to be in good repair.

The lack of sidewalks leading from the downtown area, along with the state highway, made it difficult for a pedestrian to navigate through this section of the city.

Industrial Park/Commercial Areas

As we made our way through the community, it was hard to tell who the city's main employers would be. It seemed as if the most jobs in the city would be those relating to the school district, canning factory,

pallet company, or agriculture industry. It was our feeling that many residents may travel to Green Bay or Appleton for employment.

The city's industries were found throughout the city as well as in an industrial park. The park appeared to be well laid out and quite full.

One suggestion we would like to offer is to consider expanding the number of lots available for industrial uses as these seemed to be limited.

We did notice that downtown was home to a newspaper office which offered printing services for residents to utilize. No technology services, such as internet providers or cell phone stores, were noted.

Professional Services

For a city the size of Seymour, we were quite impressed with the number of professional services available. Banks, attorney offices, insurance companies, and accounting firms are all available for residents.



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Health Care

As with the number of professional services available, we were very impressed with the number of health care options available to residents. The Aurora Health Center, three dentists, chiropractic and massage services were all easy to find. We imagine this is a plus in a community that seems to have quite a number of elderly residents.

Housing

Seymour shined in this area. Every neighborhood we drove through featured well kept properties, no matter if they were single family or multi-family, new or old.

As in many small towns, Seymour features homes from many different periods. No matter if they were newer or older, there was a sense that residents care about their properties and take very good care of them.



When it comes to newer construction, we were impressed by the quality of the home stock and how these neighborhoods linked with green spaces. Although not many homes were on the market at the time of our

visit, the ones that were for sale seemed affordably priced.

We noted two senior living facilities and a limited number of lower-income properties. The fact that these types of residence seemed to be lacking was the only negative we noted in the area of housing.



Schools

The school facilities in Seymour were nothing short of amazing! It is very evident Seymour is a community that places a high value on education. All of the schools, including the Catholic parochial school, seemed to be within walking distance of all of Seymour's neighborhoods.

Members of the team were very impressed that the high school/ middle school were newer and had an aquatic center on campus. Equally impressive was the center is open to both students and community members.

All the members of the Horicon team agree the schools are something that residents Seymour can be proud of.

Faith/Religion

The city contains a number of churches, which appeared well kept and functional.

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One thing that we did notice is that St. John the Baptist Catholic Church seemed to be an anchor in the community, being located downtown and home to a parochial school.

Residents

We had the opportunity to talk with several city residents. All and all, our interactions with community members were pleasant as they were very welcoming and helpful.

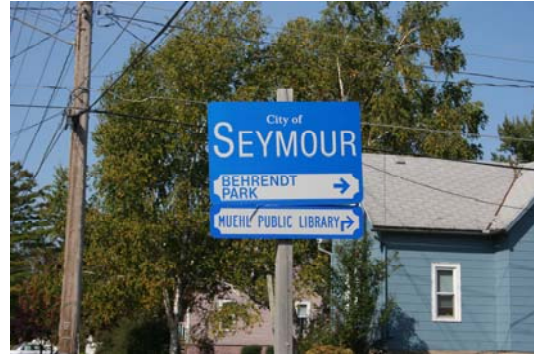
One thing we sensed is that residents are a little unsure about the city's identity. A couple of residents we spoke to didn't place credence in Seymour's claim that it is the birthplace of the hamburger. Others talked about how there "is nothing to do" in Seymour. One conversation featured a young person commenting living in Seymour "was boring."

The friendliness of those working in the public sector should be applauded as it is a real asset for the community.

Public Infrastructure

As with the schools, it is very evident community members place much value on the upkeep of the city's public areas.

All of the streets the Horicon team traveled were in good repair and clean. The same held true for the sidewalks. Making travel especially easy was the placement of very visible, blue directional signs throughout the city.



Additionally, the trees found in public spaces were nicely trimmed and the parks were litter free, well maintained, an easily accessible.

When it comes to the public restroom facilities available in the parks, they were very clean and modern.

As for the negatives, only a few and these were noted in the downtown area. The downtown sidewalks contained a fair amount of weeds. And although everyone loved the flowers planted in Nagel Park, we thought the planting containers, which appeared to be trash



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cans, could be upgraded in keeping with the otherwise beautiful park.

Also noted were the unkempt commercial properties adjacent to the downtown area. These lent the area a depressed feel. We wondered if the city will be following a comprehensive plan to help clarify the issue of land use around the downtown area and in residential neighborhoods as it seemed that some of these businesses seemed out of place.

Although the chamber of commerce was difficult to locate as it is inside the clerk's office, once it was found the staff was very friendly and helpful and a fair amount of information was able to be gathered about Seymour. One suggestion we have is to place a visible sign outside the municipal building, letting visitors know the chamber is located inside.

There were two other things missing in the area of infrastructure in downtown Seymour. Crosswalks were lacking and most of the buildings did not appear to be handicap accessible.

However, the city's overall infrastructure was very impressive and the public buildings in the downtown area (the municipal building, police station, and library) were very well maintained.

Recreation/Tourism

Collectively, our favorite spot in Seymour was Nagel Park. It was clean, well maintained, had beautiful flowers planted, and did a terrific job capitalizing on the hamburger, the city's claim to fame. We could envision tourists having their photo taken in front of the "Hamburger Charlie" and giant hamburger statue.

The old depot at the park as well as the museum also offered tourism

opportunities, although they were not open on the day of our visit.

We also imagined the Outagamie County Fair Grounds offers much in the way of entertainment and recreation during the warmer months.

A number of events are held in Seymour each year, including "Burger Fest" and the Outagamie County Fair.

One of the things we found very exciting is what appeared to be an old railroad bed located off of French Road. We did not see any trail marker signs, but thought this old bed could easily be transformed into a snowmobile/ATV trail or perhaps a bike trail.



One of the things we thought was lacking in the area of tourism was the fact the hamburger theme, although evident, has not been capitalized on. None of the retail establishments we visited offered hamburger-related memorabilia and we had a difficult time finding a restaurant to enjoy a hamburger. These areas are something the city may want to consider looking it as it considers further developing a tourism industry.

Of course, we can not talk about the area of recreation without mentioning how impressed we were with Seymour's aquatic center. This state-of-the-art facility took our breath away! We

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imagine this facility is well used by community members year-round.



Using Your Senses

The most memorable “taste” of Seymour was the delicious hamburgers we enjoyed for lunch at a downtown tavern. This meal perfectly capped off our time spent in Seymour.

We were impressed by the lack of smell Seymour had. For being a rural community, there were no offensive smells in the air on the day of our visit. The air was fresh and clean.

As for noise, there really wasn’t much to speak of once inside the city. The noise we did hear came from the limited traffic traveling through the downtown area as well as the heavier traffic out on the state highway.

The community had a cozy “feel” to it. The downtown is quaint and the people we encountered were very friendly. Seymour is a place many of us would like to visit again, especially during “Burger Fest”.

Positive Observations

We have a number of positive observations about Seymour.

We really enjoyed the community’s parks, especially Nagel and Veteran’s Memorial. We think these parks are an asset in the community and especially the downtown area.

The grocery store is well stocked and seems to meet the needs of residents.

Overall, the city is very clean and well maintained. All of the neighborhoods and roadways are well kept.

New construction abounds and there are many nice homes in the newer sections of the city.

The schools are top-notch facilities that are the centerpiece of the community.

The downtown area is home to many historic buildings, many dating back to the founding of the city.

The economy seems to be a mix of agriculture and manufacturing; therefore it is diversified.

The newer retail area is easily accessible from the state highway and there is room for growth in this area of the city.

The friendliness of residents made us feel very welcome in the short time we spent in Seymour.

The blue directional signs placed around the city were very visible and helpful.

The city’s proximity to Green Bay and Appleton make the community an ideal bedroom community.

Challenges Facing the Community

We have identified a number of challenges facing the city as well.

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While the downtown is full of historic buildings, many of them are in need of rehabilitation and tenants.

Capitalizing on the hamburger theme is another challenge for the city. You've made a great start with Nagel Park and "Burger Fest", but this theme needs to be capitalized upon. A gift shop featuring hamburger related items as well as a Seymour "hamburger joint" would do a great job of making this theme more prominent.

The transition from a rural community, with a larger elderly population, into a bedroom community that appeals to families from Appleton and Green could be a challenge.

Drawing larger employers into the community, with the limited number of industrial lots the city has available, could also be a challenge. The availability of lower-income housing could be an obstacle in this area as well.

What We'll Remember Most About Seymour in Six Months

We'll remember Nagel Park and the stature of "Hamburger Charlie". Also, who could forget all the friendly people we met!

One Idea That We'll Borrow to Use in Horicon

We liked the directional signage used in Seymour and will be installing it when Highway 33 is reconstructed in 2009.

