



## First Impressions Revisited\*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

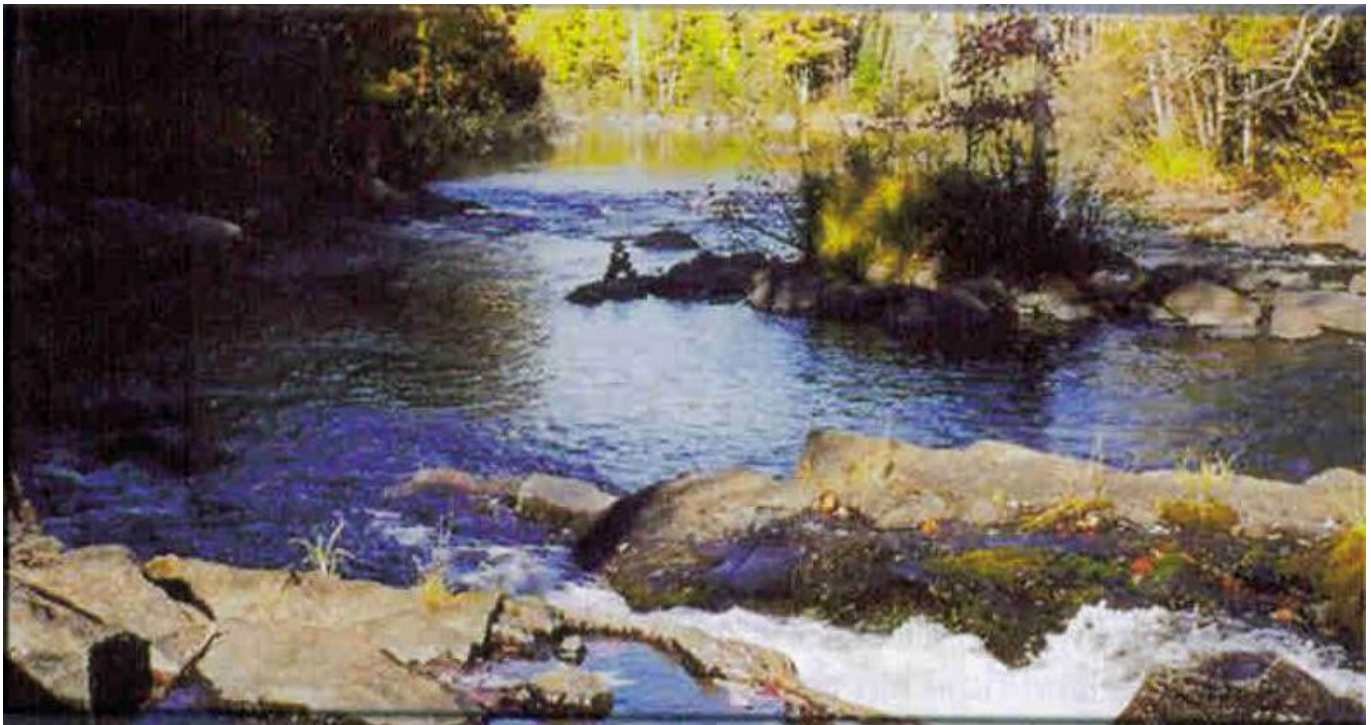
The Center For Community Economic Development

Community Visited: *Florence, Wisconsin*

Date of Visit: *October 21, 2005*

Visit Conducted by: *Citizens of Phillips, WI*

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**FIRST IMPRESSIONS REVISITED:  
A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement  
FINAL REPORT**

**Community Visited: *Florence, Wisconsin***

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**Date of visit and time spent:** October 21, 2005 – 9 AM to 2:30 PM.

**Weather on date of visit:** It was a clear and sunny fall day. The morning temperature started at a crisp 33 degrees, reaching the mid-50s by the afternoon.

## **Introduction**

The Florence County Economic Development Director, the Economic Development Commission, the Economic Development Committee and the Business League were working toward involving citizens in developing a community vision that includes downtown revitalization. It was felt that the First Impression Program would be a doable first step toward raising community awareness in advance of a strategic planning process.

The Town of Florence, the largest of the county's eight towns and also the county seat, was chosen to be the initial community to participate in the First Impressions Program. The Program would provide a unique opportunity to obtain impartial insight into the community's strengths and opportunities for improvement. It would also prompt immediate steps that could be implemented based on lessons learned from the exchange community.

Because of the small population of Florence County, and consequently the towns, it was a challenge to find an exchange community that would be comparable. The City of Phillips came to mind as a community similar to Florence in make up and facing some of the same challenges. The Florence Community contacted the Phillips Area Chamber of Commerce to see if they might be interested in a First Impressions Program exchange.

Phillips, a city of 1,500 people, faces many of the same challenges as Florence. Like Florence, it serves as the county seat and thus acts as a hub for activity. Declining population, caps on spending and a failing referendum are forcing the school district to consider closing a school. Phillips has a long history of entrepreneurialism which has spawned many industrial companies over the years. Many of Price County's residents travel up and down the Highway 13 corridor for employment and to conduct personal business.

The Phillips Community, like many small northern communities, is challenged to find its downtown niche. In the mid to late 1990s the community had a Main Street Program which was dissolved in 1999 due to lack of funds and community support. The Main Street Program had participated in the First Impressions Program in 1996. Neither, the Phillips Area Chamber of Commerce or the local UW-Extension staff were aware of past participation. The Phillips group saw this as an opportunity to locate the past report and see if progress had been seen on the suggestions made. The downtown community has experienced many changes over recent years, but is always striving to build a stronger tourism base. It is the hope that the First Impressions Program will give the business community a glimpse of their city from the eye of a visitor.

On October 21 a delegation of seven made their way from Phillips to the Town of Florence for our First Impression. The group's overall response to Florence was positive. The natural surroundings of the town were a welcome site for the outdoor enthusiast. The proximity to skiing, lakes and trails, with the one stop Interpretive Center, say tourists stop here. The restoration of historic buildings gives quaint charm to

the community, demonstrating the community's determination for new life. The industrial park exceeded our expectations. The good signage and infrastructure said we're open for business and ready to grow.

The Phillips delegation had a few suggestions for areas needing improvement. Although downtown Florence had many of the amenities one would require it could use a little sprucing up to make it more appealing. Simple things like fresh paint, signage, sidewalk repair and landscaping would make it more inviting. Additional signage at the entrance to the town would help to pull visitors in to experience all the town has to offer. The County has made excellent strides to market the areas' outdoor beauty and amenities; the town needs to capitalize on that and bring the outdoor enthusiast in.

This report follows the First Impressions template provided by the UW-Extension Center for Community Economic Development. The report includes a summary of major themes coming from the visit, followed by verbatim comments from each of the selected visitors.

## **Prior to Your Visit**

### ***How easy was it to get information on the community that you are visiting?***

The Phillips Area Chamber of Commerce President took responsibility for gathering pre-visit information. A web search did reveal accurate information on the Community of Florence. Through the Wild Rivers site the group was able to glean information on general attractions of the area -- all geared to the outdoor enthusiast. The group was able to locate the restaurants, pubs and food vendors through the website. Information overall was very general with name, location and phone number. The listing appeared accurate as the delegation was able to locate the businesses when they arrived in Florence.

Other state websites provided general information on the Florence area that was easy to access and appeared to be accurate. Travel directions provided weren't necessarily the shortest or most direct route. Through some of the search engines you were given a negative feeling about the town because so much centered on the potential school closing; i.e., [politicalgraveyard.com](http://politicalgraveyard.com).

The Interpretive Center provided a wide array of maps, guides and newspapers to aid in trip planning. The recreation guide was nicely done and would be very helpful to visitors. Accommodations were listed as seasonal and year round which would be helpful. The area calendar of events listed things in general with no specific dates for events. We weren't able to locate a listing of current activities.

## **Past Perceptions**

### ***What was your perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see?***

No one from the Phillips delegation had ever been to Florence before, thus there weren't any real expectations. Our perceptions were based mainly from the things we had read or heard about from recreational brochures or the news.

"I really didn't have any..."

"I wasn't sure what to expect. I was thinking it was going to be small and secluded."

“From the area marketing materials I had seen in the past I thought the area would cater more to the outdoor enthusiast, i.e. skiing, hiking, and hunting.”

“Since the area was described to be similar to our city I was expecting there to be more in the way of a business community.”

“I had heard a lot about the probability of the school closing. I never expected to see such modern and extensive school facilities.”

“Had none...”

“I thought we were going to see more as far as lakes and rivers near the town.”

### **The “Five Minute” Impression:**

The Phillips visitors’ overall first impression was that Florence was an older, quaint community that had numerous downtown establishments to purchase both goods and services. The town exhibited a sense of pride in their community. It appeared that several historic buildings had recently been remodeled with other remodeling projects in progress.



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

“When we approached the town from Highway 70, I wasn’t sure which way to go to find the downtown. Appeared to be a small old community with quaint old store fronts; not too much activity but alive.”

“The town looks attractive and welcoming. Signs were nice once you found them.”

“The intersection of Highway 70 looks welcoming, although a bit confusing. Which way is downtown?”

“Looks like a cute small town. The bed and breakfast and the antique store caught my eye as places to visit.”

“We weren’t sure which way to turn to head into Florence.”

“The Interpretive Center really heightened my interest. The far ends of the town seem to be the liveliest and most recently renovated; i.e., antique shop, bed and breakfast, offices, gift shop, grocery, interpretive center.”

## **Community Entrances**

*The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances:*

### **Highway 70 entrance:**

“The Wild Rivers Interpretive Center as you enter gives a very pleasant feeling. However, I was slightly confused about which way was downtown.”

“We weren’t sure which way to turn to get into Florence. No sign welcoming you to Florence.”

“Not sure which way to turn.”

“From this end it looks like a nice little town. The Interpretive Center was very inviting, looks like a nice size grocery store. There appeared to be a lack of signage for downtown area. It could be I missed it while gazing at the signage for Interpretive Center.”

“Very quaint, little town... looks old but not forgotten. There appears to be activity to revive the community.”

### **Highway 2 approach:**

“This approach gives you the feeling of an old quaint town. I really liked this approach from Hwy. 2 heading west; it seemed to have more character with the old preserved buildings. It makes the community look more vibrant.”

“The sign had a Bobcat on it. Signage was difficult to read from the backseat.”

“Home of the Bobcats.”

“Town shows pride in their school with signage, Home of the Bobcats.”

**Highway N:**

“We drove by the county fairgrounds and then turned around and took a drive into the grounds. Nice little area. It looks like they host horse events.”

“This area appears to be mostly residential. I noted several homes that need some repair.”

“Better signage to courthouse etc. would be nice.”



“Noted numerous public buildings, i.e. VFW, churches, day care, senior housing, apartment building; most were in good or fair repair a few could use some sprucing up.”

**US 2/141 South:**

“Great industrial park sign, makes Florence look booming.”

“Nice signage to industrial park. It was easy to find industrial area.”

**US 2/141 North:**

“Nice, we found Wild River Interpretive Center easy to find from this direction.”

“We found the Interpretive Center when we came in. Nice clinic and grocery store.”



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## **Downtown Business Area**

### ***Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area including buildings, displays and signage:***

“The buildings overall look very nice. Most of the buildings had signs advertising the stores.”

“People on the streets and in the stores were very nice. The stores downtown had a funny (musty) smell. Many could use a good cleaning. There was a lot of dust on the shelves.”

“General appearance was good.”

“I thought overall the appearance was good. It was nice to see improvements being made. The corner of historic buildings; antique shop, B & B, etc. really stood out as excellent!”

“Appearance old-neat-clean; there wasn’t a lot of clutter or vacancies. Nice variety of businesses; not a lot of traffic, shoppers. The highway did have traffic passing through town.”

“Good appearance. Many old buildings, some old were restored others were not. There were some new buildings mixed in; nothing exciting.”

“Some of the buildings were attractively kept up and or restored. Some were run down.”

“It was obvious that there was a serious effort afoot to update and restore the town. The historic area was nicely done. Signage on most buildings was adequate. Numerous stores were closed at least for periods over the lunch hour. Some had nice signs saying when they would return; others had written and thumb-tacked to the building. Not sure if they were really ever open.”

“Bathroom fixtures on the front lawn for sale detracted from the remodeling being done.”

### ***The variety of shopping and quality of merchandise:***

“Lots of places were closed during the day or over the noon hour. I would’ve liked to see the town in the evening.”

“Not many people or much in the way of traffic.”

“Stores didn’t have much in the way of inventory.”

“Good mix; considering a lot of people drive to big cities for the bulk of their shopping. No apparel or furniture stores, very limited amount of specialty stores.”

“The primary focus was bars, restaurants, banks or service type businesses.”

“Not much variety -- quality average.”



“There appears to be a good variety for a town of its size: grocery, two banks, hardware, several specialty stores, lawyers, antiques.”

“The variety is what I expected for a town its size. There were some surprises: the art classes in the Sub Shop and the Ballroom Dancing place -- WOW!”

“The variety and quality was average for a town that size.”

“I was able to find a grocery, lawyers, medical services and banking.”

“There was a good mix of different stores and businesses.”

“There were a lot of empty shelves in some of the stores. Not a very good sign.”

“Stores often had a unique combination of items. Many stores offered deer food in front; a true sign of the northwoods.”

“Not much variety; lots of food and antique places.”

“Flower shop closed for delivery.”

“Some are updated, many are not.”

“Craft store giving art lessons: painting, stained glass, jewelry, antiques.”

“Nice gift shop in a house.”

“NO apparel stores.”

“Sub Shop-Art place confused me.”

“Multiple old buildings kept up, not much for displays, most buildings were like this.”

“No clothing, no furniture except antiques. There was a lack of specialty stores and eye appeal. If I had a full tank of gas, a full tummy and cash in my pocket the only 3 places I would consider stopping at are the Ice Cream Store, Antique Store and the Acorn Store; otherwise, I would just drive thru.”

“Selection was fair considering it was the end of the tourist season.”

***What kind of customer service did you receive when you entered the retail businesses?***

“Very approachable, most said ‘Hi.’ Other than that we asked questions and they pretty much answered them.”

“At a store the lady didn’t even say ‘hi’ when we came in. After we made a purchase she became more talkative.”

“For the most part customer service was good. There was one gift shop that I walked into that nobody greeted me.”

“The guy in the jewelry, gold mining, leather shop was a hoot! He provided some good information.”

“Customer service was mixed; some people were very friendly on their own -- others we needed to break the ice. Everyone greeted or acknowledged us -- not everyone asked if they could help us.”

“A particular store was exceptionally friendly -- the antique store and craft type store where they held painting classes.”

“Nobody was overly friendly at first.”

“Not all stores were open -- many were closed. One said, ‘Open by chance or by appointment.’ By the same token if there’s not much traffic during the day I can see why they wouldn’t be open.”

“At one store we walked around the entire store and didn’t see anyone.”

“Some stores we visited more than once before we found them open.”

***Were there any governmental or nonprofit organizational activities that might serve as a magnet for the shopping district?***

“Post Office seemed to bring people to town.”

“The County Fairgrounds could potentially bring business into town.”

“Post Office, Town Hall (or Community Center) and VFW were all visible.”

“We saw the post office and the town hall. The town hall could be used for community events. You probably already do this, but we couldn’t tell.”

“The community center, safety building and courthouse are very nice. Cute jail.”

“The highway shop and large salt shed indicated the town was dedicated to good roads.”

“Historic 1889 Courthouse.”

“Safety Building, Jail.”

***Were there the following public amenities?***

***Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!)***

All visitors were able to locate a phone with a book.

***Cell Phones***

All visitors reported good or adequate reception.

“Very good reception; 5 bars.”

***Mailbox***

Four people noted finding a mailbox.

“Only by the post office.”

Two people never found a mailbox.

***ATM Machine***

Everyone found the ATM machine

“Two found.”

***Newspaper***

All but one person was able to locate a newspaper

***Drinking Fountains***

“No.”

“None found downtown.”

“There was one at the Interpretive Center.”

### ***Tourist Maps***

“Found at the Interpretive Center.”

“Available at Service Station.”

### ***Benches***

“Just by the post office.”

All reported finding benches.

### ***Public Restrooms***

Four reported finding public restrooms.

“At the Interpretive Center and service station.”

“Restaurant facilities adequate.”

“Very nice restroom at the craft store.”

### ***Trash/Recycling Receptacles***

“Not where I needed one.”

“The only place I found recycling was at the Interpretive Center.”

“Could use more.”

“Not recycling.”

“I carried trash for a long time before I found a trash can in a store.”

### ***Appealing Landscaping***

One visitor reported notable landscaping but didn't identify it.

“Yes, around the courthouse. Downtown area could have flowers, trees or something.”

“Life So Good' sign.”



### ***Did you have any difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?***

“We parked in the middle of downtown -- could reach everything by foot.”

“No difficulty parking.”

“Easy to access services.”

“We parked right downtown, so we were pretty much everywhere we needed to go.”

“Didn't note any parking lots, not really sure they are necessary.”

“Crosswalks not really marked; need painting.”

## Other Retail Shopping Areas (Big Box retailers Shopping malls)

*What types of businesses did you notice that would fit the general category of “Big Box Retailer”:*

Big Box stores weren't an issue for the community. We were informed by the residents that most people do that type of shopping out of town in Iron Mountain, Michigan. This didn't appear to be a problem for the residents as many traveled to work in the city. Daily living supplies could be purchased locally. The group did not go in the grocery store, but it appeared to be of good size for the community.

Three reported “None.”

“No Big Box -- Just Grocery Store type strip mall.”

“Grocery Store.”

“None of the above.”

## Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

*Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand?*



“There were 7 companies located in the park.”

“Lots of room to expand.”

“I was surprised to find such a large area designated as an industrial park. The area was designated with a sign although it was a little difficult to read from a car.”

“Yes, lots of extra space for expanding. Cannot really read sign saying where everything is.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, sites available.”

“Yes -- there is a defined area for expansion, looks like extra land or vacancies off gravel road.”

“No railroad facility or access.”



“Although the area was designated an industrial park it wasn’t really a big manufacturing area. Some businesses were commercial but not really industrial; i.e., the Brew Pub.”

***What did you find attractive about the potential locations for manufacturing/commercial businesses?***

“Plenty of Space.”

“Map was great. It looked like the park had room to expand. There were several businesses there.”

“Some look pretty new with lots of space to grow. It was easy to find because of sign on the highway.”

“The park was easily accessible. It was one of the first things we were able to find thanks to the great signage from the highway.”

“No railroad access.”

“The industrial area was in a separate designated area with blacktopped roads and easy access off of Highway 2.”

***How would you evaluate the general health of manufacturing businesses that are currently located in the community?***

“Not a lot of employees at most of the businesses.”

“There weren’t many cars in most of the parking lots.”

“Some of the buildings looked very kept; others could use some landscaping and sprucing up.”

“For a small community I was surprised at the number of businesses in the park.”

“A nice loop drive; looks well planned out.”

“Not so good, doesn’t look very big and some look a little run down.”

“Seven businesses, none are very large. Didn’t look like many people working at businesses.”

“Several businesses, not many cars parked there. It could be better.”

“We saw seven businesses in the Industrial Park. None seemed very large/not many cars parked outside. Pride Manufacturing appears to have scaled back (lettering was painted over).”

“Functioning -- It was Friday and some places appeared to have work and some didn’t- May not work on Fridays. Most buildings looked well maintained, some no.”

***Could you find print information and informed persons that could provide you with data that would help you make an informed business location decision?***

“No information on industrial park sign. However, there was one which was well marked with businesses and locations.”

“Phone number was available on the sign.”

“Yes, was able to identify the Economic Development Coordinator.”

“Newspapers listed several commercial properties.”

“Easy to find park; I think the Economic Development person was located at the Interpretive Center.”

## **Health Care Services**

### ***Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services:***

“ER is located 15 miles away.”

“The hospital is located 15 miles (Michigan) away according to the visitor map.”

“Looked like it was about 15-17 miles to the nearest hospital.”

“Nearest Hospital 15 miles in Iron Mountain.”

“Hospital was 15 miles away same with emergency services.”

### ***Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physician, dental, optometrist, and other medical care:***

“The clinic was very visual when coming into town; looks new.”

“Clinic services were available locally, very nice looking.”

“Very apparent right when you come into Florence.”

“Florence Medical Center upon entering town.”

“Local clinic appears well kept; not sure what was all there.”

“Didn’t see any dental or eye care.”

“Looks very nice and welcoming.”

“No chiropractor, dentists, optometrist found.”

### ***What long-term care, assisted living, or nursing home facilities exist in the community?***

“Assisted living available.”

“Senior Living.”

“One apartment building looked like it might fit this category.”

“Florence Villa.”

“I understand there is a nursing home.”

## Housing

***How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock? Did it provide an adequate mix of existing older homes, new construction, available vacant lots for new development, assisted living, and rental units?***

“Good mix, not many for sale signs.”

“I didn’t see any new homes, maybe a couple of vacant lots. They all seemed to be in the same income bracket.”

“Yes, very good mix, assisted living and lots of rental homes.”

“Not much for sale.”

“Senior Housing is available.”

“Not many new homes.”

***Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed; i.e., was there an abundance of “For Sale” signs and a lack of upkeep and maintenance? Were there any signs that it would be difficult to find acceptable housing (i.e., no real estate signs, and no visible place for new construction)?***

“There was some remodeling taking place; other homes could use a little care.”

“Not many for sale-maybe counted three.”



“Not many houses for sale. Repairs were taking place on many properties.”

“Not many homes for sale, about three.”

“Not many for sale signs, but some houses need some tender loving care.”

***If you can get easy access to some housing information from a local realtor or from publications in the community or from listings in the paper, please comment on the range of housing costs. Does the local housing market have housing that would appeal to all income ranges? Are there sufficient rental properties for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?***

“I didn’t notice housing information, but there was a local realtor.”

“I didn’t notice many fancy houses; I imagine these upper income homes would be on the lakes.”

“I saw a few apartment type homes.”

“The price range didn’t seem very large. Most homes in the same price range.”

“One local realtor, not very well advertised. There were more realtors available in Iron Mountain.”

“Wild Rivers Associates listed only four houses for sale in the newspaper all in the \$110,000-\$140,000 range.”

## **Schools**

The School facilities overall were very impressive. The group was very surprised at the newness and extensiveness of the facilities. Since much of the publicity around the Florence School District has been negative in the media, the group had no idea they would see such wonderful facilities. There was a definite pride in the school from the overall maintenance and care. It was nice to see the school trying to get the community involved by opening up the facilities in the evenings for the public.

“Mostly new buildings, one was refinished, all were in good shape.”

“No sign of temporary classrooms.”

“Very well maintained, sad to think it might be closing.”

“The school buildings all looked new.”

“Great schools - Grade School constructed in 1999 new - High School kept up - Great athletic facilities - plenty of busses – well maintained grounds.”

“Very impressive, not at all what I expected with all the talk of closure.”

“The School District will possibly be dissolving. One store owner reported 100 kids have already left the district.”

***Pre-School/Kindergarten/Head Start/Day Care facilities:***

“Noticed some type of preschool; it seemed well kept.”

“The school looked so NEW.”

“Early Child facility very nice looking.”

“Daycare.”



***Elementary School:***

“Built in 1999.”

“Great, new in 1999.”

“Very nice looking, open library and computer lab on Tuesday.”

“Such a new building; we did comment on what seemed to be extensive Phy. Ed. equipment between elementary and high school.”

“A very impressive facility! Great sign very inviting; Open Library and Computer Lab on Tuesday evenings. This shows the community that the school belongs to everyone. Nice landscaping!”



***Middle School/Junior High:***

“Good sports facility.”

“Very new and looks great.”

“Older with high school; well kept with great grounds.”

***High School:***

“Old, but with a new addition...Nice that the library is shared.”

“A climbing wall and new bleachers, very nice facilities.”

“Amazing athletic facilities; climbing wall and new bleachers. It makes one wonder if elected officials making expenditures were out of touch with the public in light of the potential school closing.”

“It was obvious that students travel a distance to attend school in Florence. We counted 15 buses in the parking area. They all looked well taken care of.”

“Looked nice.”



***Higher Education (Community College, Technical College, University)***

“Noticed a Community Learning Center connected to the School Administration Building.”

“WI Technical College presence.”

“Noticed some Extension, (CRD) and Community Tech.”

“None found.”

“Branch.”

“N.E. WI Tech Community Learning Center.”

“It was nice to see Community Learning Center Connected to the rest of the Education facilities. I’m not really sure what they offer. There didn’t appear to be anyone around.”

“We found UWEX on the outside sign at the Interpretive Center. We didn’t find signage inside the building however. When we asked the person at the front desk she directed us to the offices but no one was available. We questioned why the Extension Educators are not located together.”

***Were you able to find print information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?***

“There was lots of information on the internet and news due to recent vote to close the school system.”

“Yes, having problems funding the school.”

“County 0.5% Sales tax to be used to off set tax levy.”

“There was information everywhere due to the schools funding problems.”

“We saw posters, t-shirts and buttons all geared towards the funding referendum. The letters to the editor in the newspaper definitely show the rift between the residents over funding education.”

“The political graveyard did not paint a very positive picture of the school district.”

“Residents commented they didn’t know what would be left of their town if the up-coming referendum didn’t pass. It was reported that they already lost 100 students because people were moving away.”

“All the negative press would tell me not to move to Florence.”

## **Faith/Religion**

### ***Overall Impression:***

“Noticed Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches.”

“There were about 4 denominations.”

“Noticed 2 Lutheran and 1 Presbyterian, No Catholic?”

“We found most of the major denominations, Catholic, Lutheran and Presbyterian.”

“Saw 3 denominations.”

### ***Please provide some commentary on the physical appearance of the churches in the community:***

“Well kept.”

“They all looked ‘kept up’.”

“Old-well kept.”

“Churches all looked in good shape.”

“Looked good.”

***Are there any signs of church-sponsored community services (i.e. educational facilities, meeting facilities, food pantries, day-care, and recreational facilities)?***

“Didn’t see any.”

“?”

“No.”

“No.”

“None that I saw.”

“The newspaper listed service times and that was it.”

***Are there any facilities or statements that some would view as intrusive or that would make someone feel uncomfortable if they were not of a particular faith?***

“None seen.”

“None.”

“No.”

## **Civic**

***Does it appear as though there are a variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community?***

“I found the Masons, VFW, American Legion and 4-H.”

“Noticed that VFW had a building I’m not sure it was active; it could use some sprucing up.”

“American Legion appeared on a sign at the community center.”

“Yes, VFW, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Daycare.”

“Great ballroom banquet facility, but not a nonprofit organization.”

“Didn’t see any except VFW and American Legion.”

“The newspaper was advertising ‘Bobcat Bonanza’ with proceeds going to academic and athletic groups and PTO. The community calendar in the newspaper lists activities by Community First Aid and Red Cross, Florence Lions, Athletic Booster Club, and St Vincent de Paul Society.” Without the newspaper I wouldn’t know what was going on.”

## **Residents**

### ***Please comment on the friendliness and hospitality of community residents.***

The residents of Florence overall were friendly. However, there was a certain tension in the town among the residents themselves over the school issue. Numerous people commented on how the issue had really divided the community. Being just a small, quiet community, visitors tend to stand out. One of Phillips groups was recognized as the First Impressions visitors by a resident. She was very friendly offering a tour of the ballroom, that we would have missed otherwise.

### ***In what ways did you find (or not find) people helpful (i.e. community information, suggestions for dining, directions)?***

“Many residents gave helpful dining suggestions and they all suggested different places.”

“So, so – had to ask.”

“They gave us suggestions where to eat. They were very helpful answering questions about the town.”

“The lady in the information center was very friendly and as helpful as she could be.”

“I overheard the lady at the information booth give incorrect information to visitor on hunting.”

“Not overly friendly, all would respond if you asked them a question but they didn’t go out of their way to greet us.”

### ***How did people talk about their community? What were their attitudes about their schools, public leaders, and community services?***

“School was a poor subject because it is going on its 4<sup>th</sup> referendum.”

“Public school was a big issue, if they don’t get funded the residents are in fear of the population dropping.”

“NO.”

“A student at the Interpretative Center wore a t-shirt that said, ‘From Florence and Proud of It’.”

“When asked what people do in Florence we got comments like, not much, they go to school activities, they go to the city.”

“People commented on how the school issue was dividing their community.”

“People seem to appreciate and take pride that a local women had invested in the community to restore some of the historic buildings.”

***Were they knowledgeable about their community or able to refer you to people who were?***

“We talked to a woman who provided a lot of information on issues within the school district and how it’s impacting the town.”

“Yes, we were told to go to ‘Rachel’.”

“Not sure.”

“They were all pretty knowledgeable.”

“The gentleman at the Ballroom was helpful in describing a little of the history. It was amazing what he knew considering he was so new to the area.”

***Did residents reflect the diversity that is represented in the rest of the country (age, income, ethnicity, political etc.)? Are there some segments of the population that would not feel comfortable in this community?***

“Not a very diverse culture.”

“I don’t believe it is very diversified unless there is a lot of tourism.”

“Gimme a break.”

“NO.”

## **Public Infrastructure**

“I didn’t see a downtown sign when we first pulled up-that would be nice.”

“Good.”

“Streets and sidewalks are not the best. Absolutely no crosswalks. The sidewalks were not always there; many were run down.”

“Street signs were good. Should paint the crosswalks.”

“Nothing stands out as outstanding, just kind of there.”

## **Land Use Planning:**

“Nice historic area, you should really capitalize on this. It is nice to see that the water will be used as an attraction for visitors.”

“Nice Fair Grounds area not far from town.”

“Nice Community Center.”

“Schools and education center seem well planned out.”

“Many open spaces downtown, land and buildings.”

***Sidewalks (In addition to the condition of the sidewalks, did the community appear to be “pedestrian friendly”?)***

“There were no crosswalks.”

“Yes.”

“There are a lot of cracked sidewalks on the main street especially in the residential area.”

“No, definitely not pedestrian friendly.”

“Many of the sidewalks were cracked or heaved.”

“Some sidewalks actually seemed dangerous because they were so broken.”

“Traffic did not stop for pedestrians; there weren’t any crosswalks.”

***Public Restrooms:***

“Found some in the Information Center and the Gas Station.”

“Yes, they had them at the gas stations.”

“Didn’t notice any.”

“I thought there might be some at the community center.”

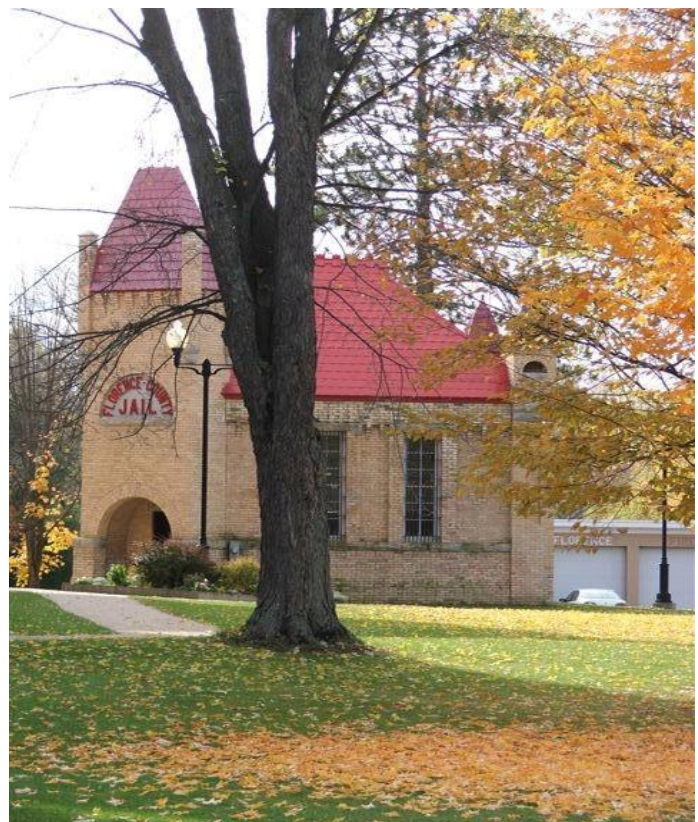
“I didn’t find one.”

***City/Village/Town Hall:***

“Town Hall.”

“Didn’t see.”

“Not notable.”



“Noted the Florence County Courthouse.”

“The 1889 Courthouse building was impressive.”

***Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities***

“Saw police and ambulance building.”

“I was able to find Fire Station, Rescue Squad, Jail and Public Safety building.”

“Looked awesome, no police only sheriff.”

“Noticed all except emergency services- guess they are 15 miles away.”

“The jail was a very cute historic building.”

***Public Parking:***

“Only noted a few designated parking areas.”

“Didn’t note any.”

“Other than highway, I didn’t note any parking areas.”

***Library:***



“Nice looking library.”

“Nice that it is connected to the high school.”

“Looked nice, didn’t go in though.”

“The library was connected to the school, looks like a nice building.”

“Elementary School also had a library that was open to the public on Tuesday according to the sign.”

“Library was nicely located by the school. Great to see the Elementary School Library is open to the public.”

### ***Landscaping/street trees:***

“Need more.”

“Not good.”

“Not many, mostly on houses which was beautiful.”

“Some.”

“The town could definitely use more landscaping.”

### ***Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, and other misc.:***

“I didn’t notice any drinking fountains, but I did see ATMs.”

“The pay phone was working.”

“I noticed two phone booths.”

“Small pavilion by the community center provided seating.”

“It would be nice to see a few benches downtown.”

### **Recreation/Tourism**

Florence County truly has a lot to offer the outdoor enthusiast. The natural beauty and extensive trail system have something for everyone, whether they enjoy the water or the forested trails. The Wild Rivers Interpretive Center does a fantastic job as a one stop visitor Center. The town of Florence would really benefit if they capitalized on their proximity to these outdoor activities. Additions to the downtown to attract the outdoor tourist could help Florence flourish.

“The Florence DNR Wild River Interpretive Center is a nice attractive Center. The 1 mile hiking trail was not very secluded but nicely maintained.”

“Not really sure what they are known for, didn’t see any slogans.”

“They seem to have lots of hiking trails, rivers, lakes, forests and hunting and fishing.”

“The area (not the town) has rivers, ATV trails, hunting, skiing and hiking.”

“The Interpretive Center is truly a gem. They promote the area’s many recreational opportunities. The maps and wildlife guide are great. They have some terrific displays. I don’t see the town capitalizing on its proximity to the trails, hills or streams. This could be a great tourist destination.”



***Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations (Hotels, Motels, Bed & Breakfast, Resorts and Campgrounds)***

“A few, 2 hotels.”

“One Bed and Breakfast.”

“I only saw 1 motel and a B&B.”

“I saw the Nicolet Lodge and B&B.”

“The recreation guide lists several, although I only noticed two. The B&B looks very welcoming to tourists, very upscale yet homey.”

***Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents, i.e. festivals, athletic events, tours, etc.***

“Go Bob Cats’, the sporting events seem to be at the heart of the town’s activities.”

“Florence County Fair Grounds.”

“No, we did have a tour of the Ballroom- What a great center. What a wonderful addition to your town. I hope it makes tons of \$ and the town prospers.”

“Volleyball.”

“Some school sports.”

“Not at this time of year (late fall). I suspect they are with the lakes north of town.”

***Are there any significant natural features that have the potential of drawing people to the community (i.e. Lakes, Rivers, Scenic views, public parks)***

“The Lake.”

“You need a public park!!!”

“The lake in town.”

“Yes, hiking trails, lakes and rivers.”

“Florence County is known for hiking and rivers.”

***Are there any significant man-made attractions....i.e. museums, athletic facilities, water parks, bike paths?***

“The Wild Rivers Center, it’s great!”

“The Wild Rivers Interpretive Center is awesome! What a fabulous place to have.”

“ATV trails.”

“Fitness Center and Ballroom.”

“Great DNR welcome Center, very informative. There is a lot to look...”

***Is there an obvious visitors’ center, Chamber of Commerce office, Main Street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Please comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.***

“Excellent Wild Rivers Interpretive Center. The staff was very informative and the facilities are excellent.”

“The Interpretive Center is a very nice place to visit. People there were very nice, very helpful and gave lots of good information.”

“Yes, it is very nice, nice trail.”

“DNR Interpretive Center is great!”

“The Wild River Center is a one stop place to get all the information you need!”

“The Wild Rivers Center is great! Very helpful staff, terrific displays, signage for individual offices was missing.”

***Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?***

“Yes, I would come back to the ballroom and the Acorn.”

“The Antique Store.”

“The Acorn Shop, it was very nice, clean and smelled good.”

“There’s a variety of interesting places... Acorn Shop, Ice Cream Shoppe, Ballroom. I’d be interested in recreational activities.”

“No.”

“Not as a destination. If I was in the area I would stop at the Acorn or Antique Shop.”

“If there was something special happening at the Ballroom I would consider making this a destination.”

## **Wrap-Up....Using your Senses**

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

“Some specialty food products were expensive, out of date and tasted old.”

“Good food... We ate at the Black Bear Inn.”

“The Ice Cream Shoppe was O.K.”

“Nothing stood out as memorable. Food was good but nothing unique or distinctive.”

“It tasted like Northern Wisconsin... Fresh.”

***What did the community SMELL like: Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural, or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors.... were there any smells from local restaurants or flower gardens that attracted your attention?***

“Nothing really.”

“A few of the shops smelled old, they could use a good cleaning.”

“Good smells, I did notice the smell of breakfast foods.”

“Smelled pretty much like a cool fall day.”

“No particular smell.”

“NO...NO.”

***What SOUNDS did you hear? Traffic, industrial, natural (birds singing, water fountains, winds gusting), train or boat whistles, noon whistle, music on the streets or in the mall....***

“Nice music outside the bank.”

“Traffic.”

“Not much traffic sound, town was pretty dead.”

“Traffic and people talking.”

“Traffic needs to be slowed down thru town; crosswalks would help. Maybe add some yield to pedestrians.”

***Did you have any experiences that impacted the way the community FEELS (Hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets, cold or warm weather, safety issues, etc.)?***

“I think the town feels lost. The town needs help, appeal, something to make you want to stop and take a walk downtown. You are half way there with the old town charm, but you need some specialty shops (something that deals with canoeing, hiking, Northwood’s stuff).”

“The streets were pretty quiet. Could be because it was October???”

“Cold weather and deserted streets not good. There really isn’t much for teens my age to do. No movie theater, nothing....”

“The town felt stressed over the uncertainty of the referendum that’s pending.”

“Felt safe.”

***There are likely a number of things that you will forget about this community amount of time. What are the 5 most positive things that you observed about the community?***

1. "Remodeled Buildings."  
 "Some Neat Restored Buildings."  
 "Friendly People."  
 "Wild River Interpretive Center."  
 "It has a highway going through town to draw potential customers."  
 "Remodeling of Historic Buildings."  
 "It is well equipped with the basic businesses."
  
2. "It is well equipped with the basic businesses."  
 "Ballroom/Fitness Center."  
 "Acorn Store is very nice."  
 "History."  
 "Judge's House."  
 "The Wild River Interpretive Center as a one stop visitor center."
  
3. "Interpretive Center."  
 "Town Pride in Schools -Go Bob Cats."  
 "Ice Cream Shoppe is nice."  
 "Place to take art classes."  
 "It doesn't have a totally vacant downtown or main street."  
 "Nice opening of school facilities to public, computer lab/library."
  
4. "It does have lakes and rivers to attract tourists."  
 "Corner of historic buildings."  
 "Ballroom is nice, best place in town."  
 "Good food."  
 "Access to trails, skiing, outdoor recreation."
  
5. "Nice variety of special interest shops i.e. antiques, etc)."  
 "Good burger at the tavern."  
 "Entrepreneurial Spirit."

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

Although asked for five obstacles or challenges the community is facing, no one in the group listed more than four. The list varies from individual to individual but the same general themes occur that face most small northern communities.

1. "The School problems with funding."  
 "Filling up the Ballroom/Fitness Center."  
 "Smelly stores and dusty shelves."  
 "Possible dissolving of the school district."  
 "Schools."  
 "Potential School Closure."

2. "Property Taxes."  
 "A larger nearby town offering shopping and jobs."  
 "Empty shelves."  
 "Finding and promoting natural resources for tourist use."  
 "Attracting new main street businesses, people willing to take risks."  
 "Lack of local employment."
3. "Attracting industry with fuel prices; at the present cost it would be difficult to ship cost effectively."  
 "Overcoming the reputation of not caring about education."  
 "Losing the school."  
 "Lack of things to do in town."  
 "People moving from the area."
4. "People moving out of the district."  
 "Horrible sidewalks."  
 "Competing with other areas for tourists."  
 "Branding the Community."

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

"The Interpretive Center."

"The problems within the School District."

"The cute little jail."

"The Wild River Interpretive Center as a one stop shop for information."

"It's a nice community that needs to overcome obstacles."

"The use of the Interpretive Center for visitor information and education center."

***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!***

"Make sure we promote the hobbies of local people to tourists."

"Use t-shirts as fund raiser to publicize the referendum (not in 72 hours)."

"Not really anything other than I think Phillips is a really neat little town that has a lot going for it compared to Florence."

"Inventory if there are other historical buildings we might encourage others to restore for business purposes."

"Share the forest products display ideas from the Interpretive Center with the School Forest Group."

## **Final Conclusions**

The Phillips' delegation very much enjoyed their visit to the Florence Community. Florence has many good things going for it. The industrial park is well planned out with room for expansion. It gives the impression of a town ready to grow. The quaint downtown area offers the basic amenities to residents with a few surprises. The recent remodeling of historic buildings, businesses and homes proves that there is a sense of pride in the community. There appears to be a strong core of individuals dedicated to building and strengthening the community; in time they will bring others along on their journey.