

## First Impressions Report

Community Visited: **City of Middleton**  
Date of Visit: 4/1/05  
Weather: Partly Cloudy  
Mild Spring Weather



Assessment Team: **City of Sun Prairie**

*Dave Hanneman, Mayor*  
*Pat Cannon, City Administrator*  
*Bill Burns, Finance Director*  
*Shirley Fulton, Communications Coordinator*

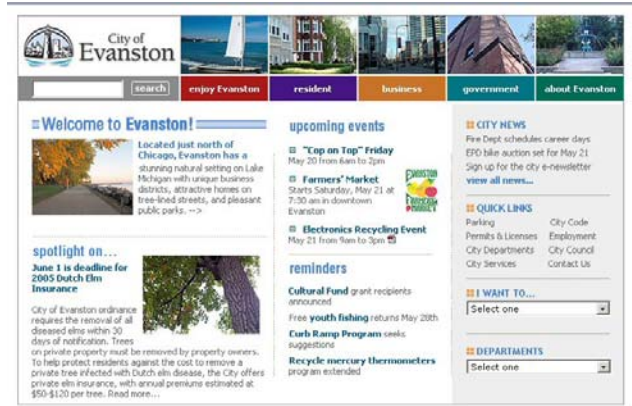




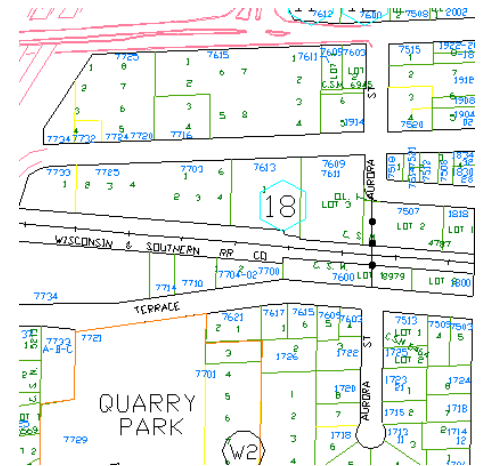
throughout the site. Some departments have all their information on one page (cumbersome), while some have links.

## Recommendations

- ✓ Structure information from the perspective of a resident seeking information. Focus on services rather than taking up valuable major space with welcoming messages and mission statements that convey no real meaning or measurement of a city's effectiveness, like online services do.
- ✓ Adding prominent "How Do I", "Report a Problem" and "Online Services" sections would make it much more geared to the end-user.
- ✓ Consider using private companies to handle online services as many communities have done (such as officialpayments.com), particularly for and park programs and citations.
- ✓ News features on homepage would be much more visually appealing and inviting if photos were included.
- ✓ Search function needs improvement. Simple search terms (like "contest my assessment") produced no results, or non-relevant ones.
- ✓ No calendar of events or meetings.
- ✓ External sites (Library & Tourism) should link *back* to city homepage (back button didn't work for library – kept you on their site).
- ✓ Ordinances need a search feature.
- ✓ General information about the city (population, demographics) should be located on the city site, rather than just the chamber, which didn't have an obvious link back to the city site.
- ✓ Information should be organized into bite-sized chunks (since people tend not to read information on the web, but rather scan it) instead of having to scroll down all information on a single page (see Public Works)
- ✓ PDF files should pop-up in a *new* window so you don't accidentally exit from the site by clicking out of the document, as many people tend to do.
- ✓ Community profile information has not been updated since 2000.



- A downloadable city map was difficult to locate and make use of (We were unable to download and print a *readable* city street map).
- Interactive map was confusing to use.
- Should be a link from maps back to the homepage.



## 2. Past Perceptions

- Saw Middleton as an extension of Madison
- This is a prosperous community with upscale residential, commercial and office development.
- Many good restaurants & shopping opportunities.
- It is difficult to tell when you are in Madison versus Middleton and what's the difference?
- There is unfettered development – the City is continually looking for additional development sites, including environmentally sensitive areas.

## 3. Five Minute Impressions

- The city appears vital and active
- There appear to be a lot of apartments along main thoroughfares.
- Concern that the considerable growth may be at expense of valuable resources.
- Several of the newer residential developments have a cookie-cutter feel.





- Middleton Hills is one exception with its distinctive, traditional architecture and character.
- Houses are close together but there is an emphasis on people and community.

- From Century/Beltline – see considerable new growth and development.
- Traffic is a concern, particularly along Century Avenue. Considerable congestion during the morning rush hour and many drivers traveling at excessive speeds. Appears to need a by-pass or alternate route.

#### 4. Community Entrances

- Approaching the city from several main entrances, there were only 2 stand-out signs, one up on a hillside off the beltline, and the other on University Avenue with a questionable value. It's confusing as to where Middleton begins and ends.



- Directional signage is difficult to locate. We only noticed signage in proximity to the downtown. There didn't appear to be a signage system directing people to the downtown or other city areas from the periphery of the city.
- Recommend different color street signs to distinguish between neighborhoods.



- While there were some welcome banners on the Westside of the City, we did not notice welcome signs or banners at other community entrances.

- Traffic on major thoroughfares and at community entrances gives a negative first impression – particularly at peak times (University Avenue, Beltline, Century Avenue/County M).



- Apartments and multifamily residential are predominant at community entrances.
- Some of the more positive aspects of the community (downtown, parks, high-end retail) are not at the entrances and could be somewhat hard to find if you don't know where to look for them.
- Other transportation: The airport looked as if it is not very active. There is an older run-down terminal, which is the first building we saw at this site.



- Approaching the Greenway Station area from the north, we saw what appeared to be an old grain elevator, which did not fit with the character of the new development.

## 5. Downtown Business Area

- Downtown seems more focused on community uses – bank, senior center, library, city hall.
- Not much variety – mostly specialty stores.
- Doesn't seem to be much of a draw to shop – people primarily come to eat or go to library.
- Very open, lots of parking, focused primarily on civic, city, tavern uses.
- Vacancies – Cayuga Court: not much foot traffic.
- Antique business – positive, good draw, large number of people shopping there.
- Customer Service mixed – at one store we never saw an employee – others were very helpful.
- Landscaping okay, benches – some, but not a community gathering spot.
- Senior center very nice, lots of people. Had a working pay phone.
- Hubbard Avenue Diner – attractive, good food, lots of people, good diversity of people (glad we are getting one!).



## 6. Other Retail/Shopping Areas



- Greenway Station: very aesthetically pleasing, distinguished and upscale.
- Seemed very active on several visits.
- Large sporting goods store vacancy may be a concern.
- Designed to be pedestrian friendly – encourages shoppers to walk store to store.
- Very well maintained – parking lots, garbage cans, sidewalks and landscaping.
- Liked music playing.

- Several restaurants are a good draw.
- Impressed by murals, not just blank facades.
- Restrooms were clean, well marked, and the information kiosk was helpful.
- Impressive integration with hotels and office buildings and the pedestrian walkway.
- Ample parking.



- Other retail areas: Several more traditional strip malls, and a few newer developments (such as the one across from Culvers) with curb appeal, though not much foot traffic noticed at Cayuga court.

## 7. Industrial Park/Commercial Areas

- Industrial park – hard to locate for first time visitor.
- Signage not as noticeable/distinctive at University Avenue entrance as from Airport Road entrances.
- Mix of businesses and appearances.
- Lack of signage to identify newer businesses.
- Older part – lots of outdoor parking, trucks outside not great visual appeal.
- Lots of vacant land, quiet, w/older buildings – gives impression that it's not doing that well – didn't see a lot of new construction.
- Doesn't have much visual appeal – landscaping w/walk ways, fountains, trees.
- Appears there is reason to go there unless you are going to work.



## 8. Health Care

- Large clinic nearby – not clear if in Madison or Middleton
- Close easy access to Madison Healthcare
- Hospital signage lacking
- Didn't notice major professionals – dentists; eye care, etc., except for large new center for Cosmetic Dentistry at University exit.



## 9. Housing

- Maple & Cooper neon blue house a real standout!
- Lot of apartments visible.
- Older SF homes – not much variety, but then again, difficult to tell whether some neighborhoods were in Madison or Middleton.

- Upper end homes outside of Middleton – Town of Westport.
- Middleton Hills is a distinctive area – very attractive.
- Didn't see a lot of sale signs or vacancies.

## 10. Schools

- Elementary school on Branch Street was quite attractive – backs up to conservancy. Appears to be well maintained.
- High School, nice – not great directions to it – lights for fields most distinctive.
- Not much character – big institution – lots of parking – well maintained.
- Pool and tennis courts are very nice.
- Kromery – Institutional look.

## 11. Faith/Religion

- Noticed some large churches along main thoroughfares in downtown.
- Somewhat dated architecture.
- Mid week – not much activity.

## 12. Civic

- Senior center is attractive and seemed to have a lot of activities. Several people there; very helpful staff.
- Library – good customer service – very helpful – low late fees a real plus.
- Chamber was very impressive. Staff was friendly and very knowledgeable with a good selection of brochures available.
- A "New Resident" kit would have been helpful to hand out at City Hall and the Chamber, rather than just brochures stuffed in folders.



- City staff was also very welcoming and helpful, though there was little in the way of brochures and community events information on view.
- Very attractive interior.

### 13. Residents

- People were friendly and helpful, particularly at the Senior Center, Library, Chamber and Diner

### 14. Infrastructure

- Roads – main thoroughfares in good shape – residential roads – many in need of maintenance.
- Didn't see many sidewalks in residential neighborhoods.
- Land use planning – boxed in – few main streets – traffic difficult.
- Library – very attractive.
- City Hall – not a major feature – nothing distinctive.
- EMS – doesn't look like a government building.
- Fire Department appears older.
- Public parking – downtown – was sufficient – well used.
- Lots of trees in the community – attractive



### 15. Recreation/Tourism

- Does good convention business – clean, accessible, lots of restaurants and hotels at all levels
- Difficult to locate parks, particularly Lakeview which seems "hidden."
- Conservancy – nothing to tell you its there and parking is across busy street at a bar.

- Downtown antique mart seems to be a major draw.
- Lake = major feature. Boating access is available at several places.
- Hard to find dog park – lack of signage except for the soccer field. Tough entrance to find on such a high speed road.

## 16. Wrap-up

- Taste = Enjoyed the Diner (Didn't notice anything especially distinctive or local).
- Smell = nothing offensive, downtown good near diner.
- Sounds = liked music at Greenway Station. Heard beltline/traffic noise in downtown and noise from Century Avenue in the nearby neighborhoods – not bad.
- Feels = felt welcome talking to residents.

## 17. Five Positive Things

- Lake Mendota & Parks
- Clean/well maintained
- Upscale
- Lots of restaurants – good mix
- Greenway Station



## 18. Five Negative Things

- Poor signage welcoming you to the community or directing you to City Hall, library, parks, conservancies, airport, etc.
- Lack of distinction, of a unique sense of place.
- Traffic, particularly on Century Avenue and traveling at excessive speeds.
- Difficulty determining where Middleton begins and ends.

- Concern that there is unfettered growth.

## **19. What we would apply from Middleton**

- Courage to do downtown project – Cayuga Court.
- Strive for high quality retail – Greenway Station – not just same old thing.