

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Community Assessment
and
Improvement

Presented To:

PLOVER, WI

Conducted By:
Onalaska, WI
August 21, 2002

Plover First Impressions Report

Introduction

Our group scheduled and conducted this visit on Wednesday, August 21, 2002. The following pages are comments made by the seven members of our team. Our team consisted of:

3 Males, 4 Females
1 in education
1 retired city employee
1 business owner
1 lodging manager
3 in government related positions
All between 40 & 65 years old

Our team arrived around 10:30 a.m. and stayed until about 2:30 p.m. The weather was cloudy most of the day and started raining as we were getting ready to leave.

The northern woods atmosphere impressed us but we were concerned by the responses we received when asking about the community itself. When team members asked questions regarding things to see, do, gathering places, education, libraries, river access, etc. we were directed to Stevens Point. We left with the impression that Plover seemed to think of themselves as a true bedroom community to Stevens Point.

Plover has a fantastic opportunity to increase its economic vitality based on the proximity to major transportation corridors and the larger community to the north.

Based on the responses we received from residents in the community, the challenge will be to increase awareness of the community and make it enticing for businesses to build or relocate to their community without raising taxes.

The residents were very friendly, helpful, and enjoyed living in Plover.

We enjoyed our visit, the people, and the chance to participate in this program with Plover. We hope this report will be beneficial to your residents and city leaders.

First Impressions Report of Plover

I. Prior to Visit

1. How easy was it to get information?

Somewhat difficult if you are unsure which larger community they are located next to, But received good information from the community itself after the e-mail address was found.

2. Did the info you receive accurately reflect the community?

Yes. Received a Stevens Point visitor magazine with several communities included. A suggestion would be to do a co-op page for Plover in the magazine to bring more recognition and build an identity for the community. Also received info on the water park, the Korean War Memorial, Yellowstone Trail and a map.

3. Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

Some did & some didn't. E-mailed and asked for info before our trip and received it within 3-4 days. Still have not received info requested in another e-mail for 3 other family members.

4. Did you have difficulties obtaining info through a web search?

Search came up empty. Found Stevens Point and clicked on utilities, found a connection to Plover. The website for Plover is listed as eplover.com. Information on the community was difficult to find as a web search.

5. Quantity of info from State agencies?

Again, not much info out there about Plover. Was asked if it was located by a larger community. We failed to check with the Dept. of Commerce.

II. Past Perceptions

1. What was your past perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see?

- I have never had the opportunity to visit Plover; Didn't know what to expect.
- Had very limited information; Had no preconceived ideas.
- Been to Community before to visit relatives.
- Been to community previously to shop at outlet stores which are no longer there.
- Expected a quaint community with a couple of **frills**. Outlet Mall & nice water Park is what was expected for entertainment.

III. Five Minute Impression.

- Found myself hoping we would arrive at a "destination" that didn't seem to exist. Something like a town center or downtown. Initial impression was that there was many highway oriented uses and no clear sense of arrival.
- First drive through was not impressive.
- The community seemed to be one long "strip mall" with many small retail/service establishments lined along the main street. The water park at the entrance way was very unattractive.
- Quiet community with little activity.

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- ❑ No welcome signs; Nice country residential areas; Business area unsightly
- ❑ Left one feeling somewhat confused in that there was not a lot of signage that gave you an indication of where the community resources were located; variety of shopping and retail stores available.

IV. Community entrances

1. Approach #1 I-39/B

- ❑ Noticed the Del-Monte Factory and Water Park first. Water Park seemed somewhat unsightly from the approach. Was somewhat impressed with the retailers in the area. Rural housing seemed attractive; hoping there could be more connection to the water (river) in this area.
- ❑ Didn't see signs promoting the community; Water Park needs to be repainted a more vibrant and inviting color.
- ❑ The only entrance signs were the average green & white signs – almost missed it.
- ❑ Lack of welcome signs; no directional signs; water park uninviting.
- ❑ Lack of signage; unpleasing water park; abandoned mall.

2. Approach #2 Hwy 54

- ❑ Unimpressed with this entryway mainly due to the extensive outdoor storage and junk. The natural areas and farm fields were nice.
- ❑ The mix of services and highway oriented uses seemed disorganized. Noticed a large vacant retail building. Village Hall and area parks and schools seemed nice and relatively well kept.
- ❑ Went out past village limits to Whiting; some parts in the business district needs cleaning up, junk removed. Lacked directional signage.
- ❑ If I hadn't seen the "Plover" green sign I would have thought we were still in Whiting. Traffic signals and street signs adequate.
- ❑ Lack of directional and welcome signs.
- ❑ A lot of outside storage; no welcome signs; Not sure if this was the beginning of the downtown or not. No distinction between the communities, they blended together.
- ❑ Awning of a gas station sitting on a truck bed that looked like it had been abandoned for some time, took away from the appealing aesthetics at that entrance.

V. Downtown Business Area

1. General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage, commercial mix

- ❑ There was a good mix of commercial but lack of organization. Due to the highway type development, it was difficult to stop ~~at~~ many establishments and you are inclined to keep moving. The mix did not attract me to **stop** for shopping.
- ❑ No real "downtown"; service and retail was car oriented.
- ❑ **Too** much mix of business and residential; didn't feel like we were entering a downtown area. **Was** expecting more retail services and restaurants.
- ❑ Seemed to be a rather long stretch of business district. No noticeable downtown. Good mix of stores for the community. **After** traveling through the residential areas, I would think the stores are not a good match for the residents. Upscale stores could be incorporated in the retail mix.

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2. Customer service

- ❑ The bakery we stopped at was clean and we were helped right away. I sensed some reluctance to stop since it was attached to a gas station but the products were good.
- ❑ Staff at the bakery and dining establishment very friendly and helpful.
- ❑ Reluctant to stop at bakery, was on outskirts of town attached to a gas station. Nice friendly staff, wasn't sure of directions to library or downtown area, newcomer. Nice lunch stop at local eatery, very friendly staff, obtained a lot of information about the community during our stop.
- ❑ Expecting more retail services and restaurants; businesses we entered had quality service and friendly environment.

3. Government; non-profit activities

- ❑ The large parks and Village Hall seemed like activity nodes and may be beneficial for central development,
- ❑ Visited the Village hall; very helpful but continued to direct us to Stevens Point for activities, things to do, etc.
- ❑ Village Hall/Fire/Police etc. is well located; Need directional signage; We searched for sometime to find the library.
- ❑ Water Park could be beneficial to the community if it were updated and refurbished. The Korean War Memorial could be a major attraction, but there is lack of signage and promotion.
- ❑ The Korean War Memorial is highly under rated. This could be a great marketing tool for the community.
- ❑ School was very attractive, very friendly/helpful staff; residents were especially proud that the recreational facilities and programs were run through parent volunteers.

4. Pay phones, Drinking Fountains, Benches, Public restrooms

- ❑ didn't notice; not clearly marked or visible

Landscaping

- ❑ The parks and natural settings off the highway were nice; library landscaping at the library was nice
- ❑ WI County landscaping very colorful and well maintained but tucked away
- ❑ Need more flowers/landscaping to welcome visitors
- ❑ Park system seems to be the pride of Plover; the volunteers and residents seem to work very hard to privately support it's growth.

Parking

- ❑ Parking seemed easy at most destinations
- ❑ Adequate
- ❑ parking adequate, sidewalks limited

VI. Other Retail Shopping Areas

1. Big Box retailers

- ❑ Shopko/Menards

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2. General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage

- ❑ Status quo-like others I've seen; Parking areas could use better landscaping.
- ❑ Appeared very typical to big box retailers
- ❑ Larger retailers presented their material & signage well; Smaller retailers could use upgrading of facility and signage

3. Retail **Mix** commercial/retail

- ❑ Expected more retail to be located near major corridors.
- ❑ Seemed to be a good mix of services.
- ❑ Suggest approaching upscale stores or specialty stores to locate within the community.
- ❑ Seemed to be a variety of services offered. However, there was not a lot of competition within services.

4. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand

- ❑ The areas appear to be scattered from the roadway; there does not appear to be uniformity in industry types. (more mixed uses) Good highway and service access,
- ❑ Unsure of zoned areas; had to ask about industries and jobs in the community.
- ❑ Residents seem to refer to Stevens Point for job opportunities.
- ❑ Major corridors seemed to be under developed.

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

- ❑ City Planner out that day; Asked for a commercial property map; given copies of property available and was shown the zoning code and map. The service was personal and prompt.

VII. Health Care Services

1. Availability and quality of hospitals & emergency medical care services

- ❑ Directed to Stevens Point for hospitals & emergency care.
- ❑ Medical clinic branch which has walk-in facilities; looked relatively new.
- ❑ Didn't notice directional signage to medical facilities.
- ❑ Dentists, Chiropractic, physicians available within the community.

VIII. Housing

1. **Mix** of housing; old/new; available lots; assisted housing; rental units

- Didn't notice rental units; Neighborhoods seemed like a good mix with a **variety** of housing styles and sizes. Didn't notice any assisted housing units. Didn't notice a **glut** of vacant property. Seemed to be options for new home buyers.
- Good mix; nice, newer subdivisions; nicely landscaped.
- ❑ Homes were nicely kept; Newer, larger homes on the outskirts of town in newer subdivisions. Group of houses along the Wisconsin River West of town seems disconnected from Plover.

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- ❑ Housing sales looked average.

IX. Schools

Elementary

- ❑ Nice Facility; recreational complexes located nearby for activities.
- ❑ Received good information from the staff on relocating, activities, etc.
- a Provided with school handbook, but no performance report. Nice Facility, friendly staff
- ❑ Part of the Stevens Point School System.

Middle School/Junior High/High School/ Higher Education

- ❑ All located in Stevens Point.

X. Faith/Religion

- ❑ Noticed a Lutheran Church in the pines behind the Village Hall and a Catholic Church on the main highway.
- ❑ Seemed to be a variety of Denominations.
- ❑ Nice, welcoming buildings.
- ❑ Didn't notice any church sponsored community services, food pantries or day cares.

XI. Residents

Friendliness/hospitality/knowledgeable

- ❑ We received great service and courtesy at the "Cedar Post" restaurant. People there were very informative. Many references made to "Point" for services and activities.
- a Residents very helpful and friendly but referred us to Stevens Point for activities.
- a Consider themselves an off shoot of Stevens Point and seemed to be satisfied with it being that way. They go to "Point" for most of their services. Don't seem to have a true community identity, other than their sports programs.
- ❑ Staff at bakery unsure of a unique lunch place in town.
- ❑ Some residents stated taxes are too high for the area.
- ❑ Library expansion an issue.

Diversity

- a Didn't see much ethnic diversity.
- ❑ Residents were of middle-class income; middle aged.
- ❑ Some higher-income housing in the newer subdivisions.

XII. Public Infrastructure

Streets/Signing/Lighting

- ❑ Streets seemed less developed due to lack of curb and gutter; street signing was okay but directional signage would have been helpful.
- ❑ lighting - conducted our visit during daylight hours; unable to comment.

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Land use planning

- ❑ Village had a very nice zoning map. There seemed to be many unrelated and potentially conflicting land uses adjacent to one another such as heavy industry near retail. The open view of outdoor storage was not appealing.
- ❑ According to the village board minutes, it appears they have land use ordinances and are working with the plan commission on “Smart Growth”.
- ❑ Seemed haphazard; not a lot of continuity or central locations. Businesses seemed spread out.

Sidewalks

- ❑ Noticed limited number of sidewalks along major highways, which were not pedestrian friendly; lack of amenities and no sidewalk-oriented businesses.
- ❑ Not many sidewalks at all; residents must walk in the street in neighborhoods.
- ❑ Didn't notice many sidewalks or curb & gutter.

Public Restrooms

- ❑ Didn't notice

Village Hall

- ❑ Village Hall was nice and perhaps could be more pronounced as a village center and point of destination.
- ❑ Nice; literature available; staff friendly and knowledgeable but directed to Stevens Point for family reunion and things to do.
- ❑ Older; under construction.
- ❑ Reminded us of our old City Hall.

Public Parking

- ❑ Appeared to be adequate

Library

- ❑ Seems to be hidden; need directional signs.
- ❑ Small; crowded with material.
- Very friendly, knowledgeable staff; knew a lot about the community.

Landscaping/street trees

- Seemed to be an abundance of trees that add charm to the residential areas. The thoroughfares could use more street-scaping.
- ❑ Housing seems to be built into the existing natural trees.
- ❑ Didn't notice community garden beds.

Pay Phones/Drinking fountains/benches

- Didn't notice any pedestrian amenities except for adjacent park areas

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XIII. Recreation/Tourism

Popular attraction/Event/Community slogan

- ❑ Lack of local advertising for local events. It would seem that there could be more tourism and recreation with the great athletic complexes and adjacent river access.
- ❑ Water Park available but no signage to tell you that what it is.
- ❑ Korean War Memorial very attractive sight. In a secluded area. Need more publicity and signage to find it.
- ❑ Residents proud of recreational facilities. Did not notice events promoted or a community slogan.

Availability of overnight accommodations

- ❑ One lodging facility within the city limits - AmericInn. View of Water Park across the street was not appealing.
- ❑ Nice lodging facility; knowledgeable staff; knew what was going on in the community; directed us to several venues within the community; tried to keep our interest within Plover Area.
- ❑ Facility had a variety of information in their racks for the community.

Significant Events/Festivals/Athletic Events/Tours

- ❑ Noticed the great baseball fields, which were exceptional.
- ❑ Brochures available for the Green Circle Trail and Yellowstone trail.
- ❑ Didn't notice signage for events, festivals or tours.

Natural features-Lakes, scenic views, public parks

- ❑ The river although close in proximity was difficult to access.
- ❑ Found a county park outside of town. Boat landings, access not marked or indicated. Park difficult to locate. We hoped we were making the correct turns.
- ❑ River has great potential; should be more easily accessed and utilized for either recreational or business opportunities.
- ❑ Nice wooded residential areas.

Man-made attractions – museums, athletic facilities, water parks, bike paths etc.

- ❑ Korean War Memorial was absolutely beautiful; It ~~was~~ worth the drive; It **is** a jewel hidden away; Very impressed with the wall tiles, setting, bridges, and layout.
- ❑ Bike Paths
- ❑ Green Circle Trail
- ❑ Athletic Fields and complex
- ❑ Water Park – Seemed mundane and uninviting; needs painting and updating.
- ❑ Need signage to direct people to these tremendous assets in the community.

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Restaurants, Specialty Shops, attractions that would bring you back

- a Cedar Post Restaurant had good food, hometown atmosphere, and friendly staff I would stop there again if I were in the area.
- a Rainbow Falls Water Park if it were refurbished and upgraded aesthetically.
- a Biking/Hiking trails. Need to be promoted more.

XIV. Wrap-up ... Using your senses

What did the community taste like? Specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, candy store

- Bakery near 1-39 had good bakery items but its association with the adjacent gas station was unappealing. Cedar Post restaurant had good food and inviting atmosphere.
- Bakery had good Kringles.
- The lunch at Cedar Post was good nothing else really stood out except the Korean War Memorial Park.

What did the Community smell like? offensive, good odors?

- Didn't notice any good or bad odors; may have been wrong time of year to visit.

What sounds did you hear? Traffic, industrial, birds singing, water, music, etc.

- Primarily heard traffic along the arteries.
- Typical "car oriented" area. The Korean War Memorial was peaceful, someplace I would go to have a picnic.

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.)

- a Generally our visit with area people and establishments was pleasant. I was negatively impacted by the unsightliness of scrap yards, industry and the aging water park. I was also negatively impacted by the lack of "sense of arrival" and no clear destination like a riverfront park, community center or downtown. It seemed like a pass through community.
- P Seemed like the residents like the less stressed relaxed way of life.
- Seemed to be a lack of community identity.

Five ~~most~~ positive things you observed about the community.

- Athletic fields
- Friendly/Person service at Village Hall
- Korean War Memorial
- P Wooded residential areas
- Friendliness of the people
- Potential for growth & development
- Biking/hiking trails
- Easy Highway access

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Five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- Directional Signage
- Land use confusion
- Community Identity and promotion
- Own school system seems to build community pride and recognition.
- Access and utilization of the river
- Updating existing businesses to make them more aesthetically appealing
- Clean-up of outdoor storage
- Attracting new businesses
- Becoming somewhat independent of Stevens Point

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

- There is a tremendous amount of potential with the Interstate/River/ Northwoods feel and services.
- Positive – The wonderful Korean War Memorial
- Positive – The athletic complex, fields & parks
- Positive – the friendliness of the people
- Lack of community "center" or Village "center"
- Lack of access to the river
- Lack of community identity. Seems to consider itself a part of Stevens Point
- Lack of organized land use
- Lack of curb & gutter
- The fact that taxes are close to the same **as** our community, yet Plover lacks many of the community services we expect in a community our size. (i.e. curb & gutter, tourism office, park & recreation run programs, own school district, **pool**, library system, community events, etc.)

Describe one idea that you would borrow for use in your own community

- Perhaps the private funding of exceptional recreational facilities by an organization
- Making sure the park system is maintained and updated.
- Making sure our community is aesthetically appealing

Photos

- Cedar **Post** Restaurant
- Sports Center
- Athletic Fields & shelters
- Ice **Rink**
- Flatbed trailer with Gas Station Canopy on it
- Medical Center
- Korean War memorial
- Vacant Strip Mall and parking lot
- Water **Park** from the parking lot away from the highway
- Water **Park** looking across the highway from the **AmericInn Parking** lot













