

# *First Impressions*

*of*

*Abbotsford, WI*

*by New Lisbon, WI  
Visited on 11-11-93*

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*A program for community improvement*

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I. What Was My Perception...?

A "typical" small Wisconsin town, probably a little "seedy" in the downtown and around the outskirts of town.

I thought it was going to be a very small town, like New Lisbon, that wouldn't take long to go through.

A small community near a large medical center (Marshfield).

Small Wisconsin community

11. The "Five Minute" Impression...

Many varied businesses

Well-kept homes (some areas could be better kept, i.e., old tires, rusted cars in driveways)

Attractive Christmas decorations

Wreath sale was eye-catching

Road led directly with good intersection

Well-built elementary school (interest in education)

Church signs north and west and south

Flower shop well decorated

Some older homes in poor condition

Excellent welcome signs at all four main entrances to the community. **A** little paint, a little fix-up in the residential areas would go a long way.

It looks like the city is doing its part to revitalize downtown (new pavement), but the merchants themselves need to work on building facades, fix-up, signs, window displays, etc. I think this community is selling itself short.

Very surprised at the amount of traffic, fast food chains, etc., with only a few hundred more people than New Lisbon -- and **us** on an Interstate.

No sign that I could find directing **us** downtown(?)

Streets were clean and new looking. Buildings were clean. I could see some unfinished work on sidewalks out of town. That isn't all bad because it makes the town look like it's doing something. Shows progress.

Construction

Big bank

Good, big welcome signs

Houses unkept, need painting

**Looks** somewhat dirty in the center of town

Big enough for traffic lights

Lots of traffic

Most small businesses  
Small houses, not many big yards  
Yards unkept  
Didn't see many bars or eating places.  
Doesn't look like many teenage places  
Few sidewalks, only by stores  
Grass in sidewalk cracks  
Lots of insurance agencies  
Nice motel  
Fastfood toward edge of town

North strip very neat. Obviously upgrading. Inviting.  
Town center, less neat or inviting.  
More neglected.  
Multiple welcome signs excellent!  
West side very nice!  
South side pretty good, especially coming in  
Growth seems well-planned  
Town well-kept & maintained houses.  
Eastside; service station -- scruff -- detraction! Zoning must be reasonably exercised.

### III. Driving -- Evaluation Each Entrance

Needs renewal.  
East side very haphazard, etc., for first half, yet the outside ½ very nice near mall, hotel, etc.  
Center not downtown -- definitely not pleasing to the eye.

Roads have deep ditches. Off-road situations in the winter?  
No potholes, well-kept, good lines & signs

Nice big signs. Easy to read. I don't like the big, black message letters. They are sort of drab. I do, though, like the idea of a greeting as such. But some color would be nice and less "cold."

You are to be commended on the obvious expenditure of money and energy on large community welcome signs, particularly covering all entrances and with message boards attached.

The welcome signs are great and help show where the community begins and ends; however, you have a creeping progression of billboards and businesses along some of your entrances which make it unclear where you start and stop. Generally, this is not too pleasing because the appearance is spread-out sprawl.

On the positive side, I think you **could** turn it into an opportunity, for example, by working jointly with Colby on cooperative marketing, promotion and planning. Your communities are no longer clearly defined anyway (at least visually to a visitor). You

could get more "bang for the buck" by working together.

I found the old farm complex north of town to be intriguing. I wanted to learn more about it, but no one could seem to tell me...

#### Driving -- Downtown business area

Downtown not impressive. Drab. Commerce center promising

Signs weren't very good. Most businesses were small, but kept up nice.

No signs directing people to downtown. The street itself was impressive (new construction) but now the merchants themselves need to clean-up, fix-up, market, promote & "smart-up." The contrast was amazing: I saw lots of cars & foot traffic everywhere except downtown. I had the feeling; downtown was for the locals and the strips were for locals and visitors (my impression).

A lot of false fronts on buildings downtown.

#### Driving -- other business area

East Town Mall, large industrial park, liquidators (needs repair)

Gets "scattered" out toward the outskirts

Very impressive, I thought, for this size community away from the interstate.

#### Driving -- residential

I thought the yards were pretty nicely kept **up**, but there were an inordinate number of houses needing painting. Have you ever considered having the city and/or chamber purchase paint (or get a corporate-donation) and have a giant "Let's Paint the Town" weekend?

New development attractive neighborhood N.W., open and inviting, large lots.

**S.W.** - Presbyterian Church new.

Lots listed and priced. New houses have character. Elderly housing sign neat.

#### IV. Street Signs

Signs were placed good. There wasn't any graffiti on the signs.

Readable.

I didn't notice any missing or defaced signs.

### Traffic patterns

Industrial streets bumpy, others O.K.  
Some sidewalks need repair (replace).

Streets need to be redone on the sides where you pull off to park

Your traffic patterns, and lack of directional signs, steer people away from downtown. So, it's a "Catch-22." Right now, there doesn't seem to be a lot of vision on the part of merchants to get people back to the heart and soul of your community. But, once they get their act together, then you need to think about steering people to parking, shopping and spending downtown.

Once again, think about traffic patterns creating a "new, merged" community -- ~~from the~~ point of view of the visitor -- which is Abbotsford/Colby. This is a golden opportunity to make good things happen in a cost-effective way.

### Welcome signs

Nice big welcome signs. Decorations on them are nice. "Happy Thanksgiving."

Large, easy to read. Big school welcome sign.

Great! How about fun messages once in a while? How about having different messages -- once in a while -- at the same time, so the signs are for local enjoyment, too?

### Direction signs

Lack of signs to City Hall  
Rest bench in shopping area  
Sign for St. Bernards needed on Hemlock Street

Very good; however, there should be more put up to show where City Hall is.

O.K., but some obvious ones are overlooked.

## V. Industrial Park

Looks like it's growing

Large, some in-town, space for growth.

Signed, easy to find. **A** central, contained industrial park will help stop the

sprawl on your outskirts.

VI. Schools

Well built. New addition being built.  
Good sign and activities listed.  
"Park-like"  
Green house -- athletic field joins property  
Positive signs of good support

The one-way street by the school should be made so no one parks on it (dangerous).

From the outside, schools appear to be well-maintained and a priority.

VII. Parks, Playgrounds. Etc.

Central  
The school layout was very impressive with athletic facilities joining the school.  
Large area for any future expansion.

Nice playgrounds. Had a lot of equipment and room for the children to play.

Seemed adequate. (You can never have too many parks).

VIII. A. Driving - Hospitals/Clinic

Dental clinic, physical therapy. Maybe Marshfield Clinic takes care of other needs, but **21** miles is a long way for some (?)

Didn't see any.

Surprisingly, no clinic.

A. Billboards/Advertising

Conservative and O.K.

Good billboards at the school telling of current events.

Neat, attractive.

Right now, not a proliferation of billboards. Good for you! Keep up the good work.

Downtown, your merchants and city should consider implementing a tough sign ordinance (size, shape, material, placement, colors, etc.) It's a visual riot right

now -- not helpful collectively at all and, individually, barebones help.

#### IX. Walking -- Businesses

Hardware -- Thank you sign high above door.

Clothing -- Helpful clerks. Store well stocked.

Bookstore -- Friendly

Antiques -- Recommended other places, friendly.

The signs were O.K. The businesses were a little dirty looking on the outside. Small, but nice on the inside. The bank in the center of town was very nice looking. A lot of insurance buildings around town. No chamber of commerce office.

Every business had a good appearance. You could tell right away what kind of business it was. There are lots of stores with big windows with displays in them that make walking the streets nice.

Neat, but should have signs directing to city hall, chamber, etc!

Not particularly out of the ordinary.

7 insurance places!

There's no unified vision for downtown. It looks like it's "every one for oneself": no fixed-up storefronts (authentic), no uniform signs, etc. Suggestions:

- Have your chamber bring in a program on window display, (your merchants need basic layout and design ideas)
- Have a series on "customer service." (People don't acknowledge you orally or by eye contact when you come in).
- Think about community marketing and promotion (as a whole).

#### X. Walking... Comments On People

Very friendly with exception of one dejected shopkeeper.

Antique shop owner recommended 3 other places! Great!

The people were real friendly. Although none of them knew anything about the Chamber, they all did their best to help.

Friendly. No one seemed to know how the town got its name. City clerk didn't know anyone who did.

Very friendly people who tried to answer our questions. Some didn't know where the chamber of commerce was located. Very talkative people.

The woman who waited on me at Pizza Hut needs to be commended: immediate greeting, smile, repeat visits to my table, good directions, excellent customer service!

XI. A. Community Information

Plain, but gets you where you want to go.

Did find one at city hall

Very well put together

B. Business/attractions brochure

None available at City Hall -- a real drawback

Manufacture -- direct to customers so they did not have any brochures/handouts

None

C. Community profile

Looks like it would be growing but not really for industrial people at this time

Library closed

None

Very little, but they were quite friendly and knowledgeable

You seem to have attracted a lot of business without one (?)

D. Map

None visible except at one bank

Needs some work. Got one from the State Bank

One on the wall at City Hall

*Also* City Bank handout

Drawn in the City Hall. Not very much information on the map -- very plain.

Map "facilities" & publication don't seem (strangely enough!) geared to visitors. Symbols, directions, user-friendly, etc. Make it easy for people!

E. Other

Bulletin boards didn't have that much information on them. Not very full.

Only at school listing athletic activities

The bank had a bulletin board. Didn't see anything about the Chamber on it.

None noticed

Negligible, but these are over-rated anyway

## XII. City Hall

### A. Appearance:

Minimally kept - running down...

Was hard to find. No signs on the main street to point the way.

Quiet streets. Main approach not marked until you get to the building itself.

We couldn't find it until we were told.

Again, it appears only locals use the City Hall because of lack of directional signage. What about prospective new businesses? People needing the police? People wanting information? Newcomers needing a drivers' license? First rule of customer service: Make it easy for people (easy to correct!).

### B. Helpfulness of staff

Very helpful. Answered our questions

The one woman was real friendly and helped **us** with all our questions without hesitation.

Pretty uninformed and not at all professional. Police officer looked and acted sharp.

## XIII. Chamber of Commerce

### A. Did people know

No. For a community of your size and wealth, we can't believe there isn't a prominent, visible chamber office and presence.

Didn't know where it was or who to talk to since there was no office.

City Clerk did -

Didn't know where it was because there wasn't an office. So we had to ask the City Clerk.

Apparently, you have an all-volunteer Chamber that gets together 12 times a year. Is that correct? How do prospective businesses get information? Where does structured growth and planning come from? Who organizes community-wide events? If we would have been Sony, wanting to locate in your town, you would have lost **us**. Have you considered a kiosk or a volunteer staffer or a part-time staff person?

B. Comment on information available

"They meet here for dinner once a month."

Not much information available except for what you thought to ask and were told.

They had no information about the industry here or employment opportunities.

None offered and none visible.

I had the feeling there was some somewhere **if** we could just find the right person who knew where. This "**system**" might merit some rethinking.

C. Staff

Very helpful -- gave **us** answers to our questions

Quote: "The Chamber? They get together once a month to eat dinner."

I don't think there is any staff, correct? Does the City Clerk and his/her secretary serve that function?

Could be more professional

XIV. Other Staff

A. Public restrooms

City Hall -- sufficient

What does a tourist/visitor do after hours or on a weekend when City Hall's closed?

Didn't see any

Didn't see any

Clean -- sufficient at restaurant

B. Payphone

One

One by Snowmobile Shop

Dirty -- only one seen, don't know if it works or not

I believe I only saw one

Only one outside. Public phone signs absent

C. Parking

**Very** available

Rutty parking lots -- very small

Adequate

Convenient and plentiful

D. Water fountains

The sidewalks need lots of work. In some cases they were more dangerous than walking on the highway.

City Hall -- yes

Benches are nice. Very welcome, messages on them

No. Few benches

Sidewalks need a lot of work. Some trees need some trimming.

XV. Wrap-Up

Taste

Very good **food** and quick service

Good food

Enjoyed my meal

Smell

No unpleasant industrial pollution odors. Good for you!

Car exhaust

Sounds

Quiet streets. Some large truck traffic on highway **29**

Highway, animals

Wind. Bustling main thoroughfares; quiet side streets and downtown.

Truck convoys, but otherwise very peaceful.

Feel like

Open, park-like, inviting

Feels like a deserted town if it weren't for the cars passing. However, the people were real nice. Rough streets when you're pulling off to the side.

Residential very spacious. Not crowded.

**An** interesting mixture. The entrances seem bustling; the town seems open. Downtown seems hidden and deserted, though. Merchants need work on greeting and eye contact; however, once they acknowledged you, there were very friendly, and helpful. You seem to have accomplished **a** lot, but I think you need a strong Chamber or similar organization.

B. 5 most positive things

1. Appears to serve large area
2. Businesses friendly
3. Many small manufacturers that sell nationwide
4. People seemed pleased with school system

1. Friendly people
2. Well-done roads
3. Community welcome signs
4. Banners

5. Potential

1. Friendly people
2. Nice welcome sign
3. Variety of stores
4. Some nice homes -- cute
5. Nice bank

1. City signs
2. Very clean
3. Wonderful new home developments
4. Schools
5. Nationally connected & well-diversified light manufacturing

C. One idea..

A current events billboard

School marquee/community marquee

More city maps available

Information Kiosk

Community bulletin board

Map of city for visitors

Directional signage to Chamber, City Hall, etc.

D. Remember most?

The residential area (well planned)

Mushrooms -- People had charred wooden mushrooms **as** a lawn ornament

Spaciousness

What great potential you have

E. Other comments

Schools seemed to be the only cultural center. Are there more?

Cultural events? The new housing here indicates big investments. What about library hours, etc.? *Also* medical clinic?

You seem to have achieved a lot of growth with primarily city vision and money (e.g., streets, etc.). Congratulations! To get to the next level, you need a Chamber-like organization to represent industrial-retail-and tourism interests. *Also*, you might want to consider area planning, marketing and promoting. Good luck and thanks for inviting **us**!