

First Impressions Evaluation of Berlin, WI by Waupaca, WI June, 2003

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*A revised and updated version of the *First Impressions* program developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider, 1991

First Impressions Revisited: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement Final Report

Community You Visited (City and State): Berlin, WI

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Date of visit and time spent: 6/6/03; 3 hours

Weather on date of visit: cloudy, rainy

1. Prior to Your Visit

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

- Easy, mailed packet received in one week.
- Phone call
- Just fine.

Did it accurately reflect what you saw?

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

- Yes, 1 week
- Yes

Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

- No, but would have liked an “800” number for industrial development contact.
- Did not look.

What was the quality of information obtained from regional/state agencies and organizations?

- Good.

2. Past Perceptions

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

Please comment on your knowledge of this community:

- Driven through and attended high school football games there.
- A city similar in size to ours, size, age, industries, schools and location.
- I’d never heard anything about this.
- I have no prior knowledge of the community. However, I have driven through Berlin before.
- A community very similar to Waupaca. The size is about the same. I expected to see a downtown very similar to Waupaca. I also expected to see a good school system and also a nice park system.

3. The “Five Minute” Impression

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

- A lot of traffic through downtown; retail district only one block wide; several empty stores; obvious attention to signage.
- So much traffic!
- Very busy, little city, lots of traffic and noise.
- Very noisy community (truck traffic). Not as clean as I expected. Nothing on their main street that seemed to stick out in my mind.

4. Community Entrances

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

Approached from Hwy. 49 from south.,

- Highway sign showing directions to neighboring cities hidden in trees. Lot of heavy highway traffic goes directly through city center and backs up at lights.
- Traffic patterns through town takes you across the upper Fox River on W. Huron St. Good signage for hospital and schools.
- Welcome to Berlin very nice. Probably the neatest entrance. You come off the hill into some new construction of businesses. A sign welcoming us to Berlin as well as service organizations that are in the community.

Approached from County F from west, just very rusty sign at city limits here, though this is where Wal-Mart and strip mall are located.

- Easy to find and leave from.

Approached from Hwy. 91 east, here is large welcoming sign announcing area is known for its leather industries.

- Nice welcome sign, “Fur & Leather.” 92 or W. Huron very busy, lots of traffic through business areas, street decorations very attractive.

Approached from 49 North: Easy to find and leave from.

- Business entrance older looking, residential at top of hill. Looks nice.

Highway East from west.

- Newer area for residents and businesses. Wal-Mart located at this entrance.

5. Downtown Business Area

Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:

- Signage is very good; driving team found everything easy to locate.
- A lot are vacant, run-down.

General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage:

- Fair, older city, displays pretty good, signage good.
- Buildings are old. Need to be kept up. A lot of store fronts are vacant or have something in them I would not expect to see in a downtown.

The variety of shopping:

- Good mix.
- Good mix, but some empty buildings.
- I couldn't tell what was in business or out of business.
- There were a good mix of different businesses in the city. There were no surprises.
- Variety stores are in downtown area, as well as professional business like attorneys, accountants, bars and restaurants.

How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?

- Good.
- Good.
- The merchandise from the local businesses were good there were a variety of different items to buy for all ages and sexes.
- Quality is good, variety is slim.

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

- Driving only visited one store and one restaurant – all were very helpful and friendly.
- Mainly friendly.
- They were open during normal business hours. The people in the shops were very helpful and knowledgeable about their products.

- Retail stores were friendly. I felt as if they were waiting for me to initiate discussion.

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

- Chamber.
- Boys & Girls club, city hall, library
- Red Cross, Post Office
- Not to my knowledge, nothing popped out at me.
- City Hall is downtown off a side street.

Were there the following public amenities?

Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!):

- Yes.
- Yes.
- A couple of pay phones – 1 with a phone book.

Drinking fountains:

- It was fake!
- Not working.
- Drinking fountain at Firemen's Park, but it didn't work.

Benches:

- In parks.
- Yes
- Lots in parks.
- Just benches in park.

Public restrooms:

- Yes.
- Did not see any.
- I don't remember seeing public restrooms on main street. There was one down by the river in the park.

Appealing landscaping:

- Yes, very pretty.
- Nice groomed parks.

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

- No problem parking.
- Yes and no.
- Didn't see public parking, we parked at a restaurant.
- The parking was very scarce, very limited. For walking it wasn't bad at all, clear and somewhat clean.
- Parking on the main street was difficult mainly because of the traffic. They did have some public parking lots by the river and the chamber office.

6. 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”?:

- Wal-Mart in strip mall on west side of town.
- Greentree Mall – good variety of stores plus Wal-Mart and Greenings foods; lots of parking.
- Wal-Mart, etc.
- They had a Wal-Mart, that’s the only “big box retailer” in town.
- There is a Wal-Mart in town and there is also a strip mall at the same location.

General Appearance of buildings, displays signage:

- Building in good shape. Mall a bit run down, especially parking lot pavement.
- Fair, strip mall.
- Signs were nicely put, visible and clear.
- The town buildings were kept up to a certain point. As for display, there were none.
- Building appearance of the Wal-Mart and the strip mall was nice. Looked fairly new.

The variety of shopping:

- Good variety, no surprises.
- Pretty good mix no surprises.
- I couldn’t tell if they were out of business.
- There seemed to be a well rounded variety of shops for the amount of people in the city. Not too big.
- For a community of Berlin’s size, I would say they do have a good mix of stores.

How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?

- Nice women’s dress shop with upscale merchandise on a par with any large city.
- Good, locally made “crafts” and other items in some places.
- Variety is good. Quality is also good.

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

- Good service, people willing to chat.
- Pleasant, good hours.
- Overall friendly.
- Yes, they seemed to know what they were talking about. The majority of the stores were open.
- I was greeted when I went into stores. They were helpful if I had questions. They were open during typical hours.

Did you have any difficulty finding parking?.

- Yes.
- No and yes.
- We parked in a food parking lot.
- Parking not very good. Walking is good to shops and other businesses were in walking distances.
- Downtown was difficult to find parking in front of the stores.

Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- Yes.

7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- Yes
- No.
- Yes, at both sites out of the city north and south 2 industrial parks.
- They do have an industrial park.

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

- Spots were available in the park.
- A small park with a few empty lots.
- That it was located out of the city but off the main highways so it made it easy to get to.
- The location was good. They kept it up well. Easy access.

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

- Good.
- Poor.
- Good for the most part.
- Manufacturing businesses seem to be down.

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

- Chamber was helpful.

8. Health Care Services

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

- Hospital, clinic, dental and associated services were clustered on side of city and looked new and attractive.
- Very nice, Berlin Memorial Hospital and Medical Arts Building.
- Good, a nice size for the community.
- They have a nice small town hospital.

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

- All were visible on driving around the city.
- Noticed several facilities for other medical care.
- Good, there were an abundance of these businesses for people to choose from.

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

- Noticed Wilcox Retirement Home and Juliette Nursing Home.
- There were a few retirement homes and nursing home for the community.

9. Housing

How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock?

- All were visible on city tour.
- Seemed to be good mix of housing, come nice Victorian older homes and new home areas. Some “for sale” signs.
- It was okay, I didn’t see much space for new houses.
- There was a good mix of old and new houses and there was room for development within the community “vacant lots.”
- Older homes in the inner city area. Newer homes on the outskirts. Very similar to most communities.

Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed?

- No obvious signs of a depressed housing market.
- No
- A lot of “for sale” signs for apartments, houses and stores.
- No, not so much for houses, however for businesses in the city (downtown) there were places for rent and it looked as if they were vacant for a while.
- I did not see a lot of growth in Berlin. Very little new construction of homes.

Were there any signs that it would be difficult to find acceptable housing?

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?

- Appeals to all, but did not see realtors.
- I did not see too many houses for sale and I don’t know the cost of them. However, there were places to rent, it seemed that it was affordable for the most part.
- Realtor offices were not as plentiful as in Green Lake. They did have pictures and booklets of available real estate available.

10. Schools

Do the schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of “temporary class rooms”? Are they well maintained? Please comment on the following:

- There seems to be space. All seemed to be well maintained. Old high school (present day middle school) looks quite charming with stonewall around athletic field.
- The Berlin school district is very nice. They have newer buildings and athletic facilities. For a small community they seem to have big city school system. I would feel very comfortable sending my children to the Berlin schools.

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

Elementary School:

- Public and parochial
- Drove by Clay Lamberton, well kept up
- I saw no pre-schools.

Middle School/Junior High:

- Old senior high – historic building just north and east of downtown.
- Drove by Berlin Middle school, buildings kept up nice.

High School:

- Fairly new looking facility and athletic areas.
- There is a newer high school. It looks good.

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

- Didn't see any.
- N/A

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

- Yes.
- The directory signs were helpful.
- No.

11. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations represented in the community:

- Many
- Catholic, Lutheran, Federated Baptist
- Well rounded for that size of town.
- Catholic, others, however I did not ask about them.
- Churches were plentiful in this community. There were even some storefronts on the main street that were being used. The architecture of some of the churches was nice. But none of them stood out.

Comment on the physical appearance of the churches in the community:

- Most were well kept up, a couple vacant churches.
- Older, in a good way.
- I saw one, it looked good. There are others, however I did not see them.

Are there any signs of church-sponsored community services?

- One church school.
- Downtown there were a few buildings that would house meeting places for the Lutheran Church for classes, but no church around 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?

- No
- No
- No
- I did not see religion was a big part of the community.

12. Civic

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

- VFW, Masonic Lodge
- I didn't see.
- A few, mainly through the school, FFA and others.
- There does seem to be quite a few nonprofit organizations and clubs in Berlin, judging by signs coming into town and by signs by the parks.

13. Residents

In what ways did you find (or not find) people helpful?

- Very helpful.
- They were willing to give advice/directions – friendly!
- The lady at the Chamber of Commerce was very helpful.
- I did not find the residents very helpful in giving suggestions about Berlin. They were very helpful in talking about the resort areas surrounding Berlin, for example, Green Lake. They seem to be proud of their schools and their hospital.

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

- Good, for the most part not so convincing to visit their community.

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

- Yes
- No.

Did residents reflect the diversity that is represented in the rest of the country? Are there some segments of the population that would not feel comfortable in this community?

- There is not much variation in ethnicity or skin color visible here.
- Didn't see many people.
- Yes, there is a lot of diversity within the community among race.

14. Public Infrastructure

Streets, street signing and lighting:

- Signs were very adequate. Lighting? Hard to say in daytime.
- Streets fairly good; signage good; lighting good.
- Very clear.
- Street signs were small and sometimes covered by branches.
- They have street signs on all streets. I do think they could be larger signs. Lighting is good. I think in older communities the Lane Use Planning takes care of itself. Wherever we walked there were sidewalks and they were well maintained.

Land Use Planning:

- Areas provided for industrial park and medical campus. Evidence of zoning ordinances in place for residential and commercial areas.
- Fairly good for older town.
- Yes.

Sidewalks:

- Yes, in the older section of town. Newer subdivisions don't have sidewalks. There is no evidence of "new urbanism."
- Fairly good.
- Smooth, few cracks.
- Sidewalks were easy to use. Somewhat clean. There weren't sidewalks to the river or of the main street. Traffic doesn't allow people to cross the busy downtown main street.

Public Restrooms:

- Park off Huron St.
- Clean and not awful odor.
- Did not see any.

City/Village/Town Hall:

- Good.
- There is one, but did not go there.

Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities:

- Good.
- Good, well taken care of facilities.

Public Parking:

- Not so good.
- Bad for the downtown, need more parking lots.

Library:

- Carnegie Library nice.
- Very good.

Landscaping/street trees:

- A couple of lovely city parks in downtown area. Area on river being utilized more fully downtown, i.e., old depot building, buildings capitalizing on river views.
- Nice
- Not very kept up. Some improvements would be good.

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, other misc.:

- Benches, bandstand in beautiful park.
- The drinking fountain did not have a way to turn on!
- Drinking fountains-but did not work. Benches in good locations. Some pay phones.

15. Recreation/Tourism

Is the community well known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?

- Known for fur and leather industry.
- Victorian Days and Walk.
- Not that I am aware of. If there is something they did not advertise it all that well.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations:

- There weren't hotels that I saw or told about. Not very well advertised in the city. Not sure of B&B's.

Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?

- No
- No, Chamber had info about other places, barely anything about them.
- No.

Are there any significant natural features that have the potential of drawing people to the community?

- 5 nice parks, upper Fox River
- A river, garbage.
- Yes, very nice public parks and a river runs through the city. There was a lot of trash along the river.
- Berlin has some nice parks by the river and also by the schools. They do have a nice park on the main street. I could see myself relaxing in this park. I did not see any Bed & Breakfast facilities. From what the chamber told me they do have a campground. There are not a lot of hotels in this community. But, there is plenty in the surrounding area. They have a river that flows through the downtown area. They have a nice park on part of this. We ate a family restaurant that was on the river. I think the restaurant could take better advantage of being on the river.

Are there any significant man-made attractions?

- I think I saw a water feature for children just north of the downtown, drove past quickly, didn't see a sign.
- Ripon/Berlin trail, Webster St. pool
- Parks are beautiful!

- There is a nice water park with slides and a pool. Downtown there were two workout facilities on main street.

Is there an obvious visitor's 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.

- Chamber had fire and relocated. No obvious signage yet.
- Yes.
- Chamber was hard to find.
- Yes, it's cool because it's in the Old Depot downtown across the river.
- We found the chamber office. It is just off main street. I guess they just recently have moved because of a fire at their previous site. They could use more signage to the office. I don't think this is the type of community that you would just visit. You either live here or work here. I don't think I would vacation there.

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

- No
- Leather stores.
- No.
- The water park and ice cream diner.

16. Using your Senses

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

- Not really.
- The food at the local restaurant that went to was average.
- I cannot really say that the community has a taste. With all the truck traffic that flows through the downtown, this community smells like burning tires. If I lived in Berlin, I would try to work very hard to find a way to have the truck traffic bypass the downtown area. Again, because of the truck traffic, this community is very loud. I do like their train museum that is by the river. I would like to see Waupaca have an attraction that would bring people to the downtown area.

What did the community smell like?

- Downtown area smelled pretty industrial, but parks were well landscaped and lovely.
- Could smell the foundry.
- Car odor, very industrial.
- The smell was bad in the city because of the foundry by the river. "Burning rubber."

What sounds did you hear?

- Lots of trucks and traffic noises downtown.
- Traffic
- Too much traffic!
- Loud traffic noise through the city and the noise of the foundry.

Did you have any experiences that impacted the way the community feels?

- Some comments that the community was changing – downtown retail sector not as vibrant as in the past.
- I felt out of place, it seemed run down.
- No, it's a normal community – kind of boring.

16. Wrap-up

What are the 5 most positive things that you observed about the community?

- 1) Obviously a lot of effort put into beautifying and making downtown “user friendly.” 2) This community doesn't have any problem getting visitors into its downtown. 3) This community has some beautiful, older Victorian homes. 4) There are several areas in which new buildings can locate. 5) Useful information on community contacts is available on-line.
- 1) The attractive clock tower on Huron St., 2) Good stores for shopping.
- 1) Parks, 2) Friendly
- 1) Nice people. 2) Well groomed parks. 3) Memorials that they have. 4) The ice cream shop. 5) The water park.

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

- 1) One must be marketing itself-demise of fur industry has hurt downtown retail, as well as employment figures. 2) Need more outdoor café space and entrances off noisy main street to make downtown a more pleasant place to spend time. Bringing in more jobs, preferably cleaner offices and light industry. 4) Promoting more symbiotic relationship (business) with neighboring communities, i.e., play there, but do you business there.
- 1) Losing stores. 2) Traffic through town.
- 1) Traffic, 2) Smell, 3) Garbage, 4) No stores
- Build a bypass around the city. 2) Bad parking. 3) Not enough parking in the city. 4) Something big, a big attraction. 5) The noise (very, very loud).

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

- I'll remember its attractive downtown and scenic little parks.
- The horrible traffic.
- The busy traffic through the city (not to go through during rush hour).

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!

- I liked parts of its website – its simplicity and nice graphics.
- I enjoyed the fire fighters park, very good idea!
- Putting more water fountains around the city, better flower gardens.

You might want to consider tracking purchases (perhaps even finding a sponsor to provide \$50 to each participant). It would be useful to report where any money was spent within the community.

Insert pictures where appropriate in the sections above or paste your photos into the final report at the end using the following format:

Picture # _____

This Picture was taken because:

*Please don't forget to send a copy of your final report to:
ablewis@facstaff.wisc.edu (an electronic version would be appreciated!)*

Andy Lewis

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