

First Impressions

of

Bloomington, Wisconsin

Plain Visit 9/14/92

A program for community improvement

Conducted by:

*Sauk County Development Corporation
&
Plain village Trustees*

Developed by:

*Grant County Economic Development Corporation
&
Grant County UW-Extension Resource Agent*

Project Summary

Our group from Plain traveled to Bloomington on Monday, September 14. If you remember, that is when the flooding was going on. Needless to say, the weather probably tainted our view of the community. It rained constantly, we were wet throughout the day, and the streets of Bloomington were for the most part deserted.

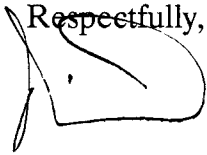
Having said that, we still liked the community. Our most favorable impressions were of the variety in the downtown, and the schools (both public and private). Our negative impressions centered around what we felt was a lack of proper zoning with regards to housing. The other complaint was that the village hall was open only one day a week.

Our group consisted of five people between the ages of 30 and 60. There were four men and one woman. Occupations included dentist, retired construction foreman, homemaker, student, developer, and public works employee.

We arrived in Bloomington around 10:00 and left at approximately 2:00. Since there was so much rain, we toured the community first in the van. Later we split up into small groups downtown. We met for lunch before making one final tour of the community.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (608) 356-3133.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David J. Piggott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "D".

David J. Piggott
Executive Director

1. What was my perception before visiting the community: What did I expect, etc.

I really didn't know anything about the community before my visit, other than their excellent basketball teams.

I figured it would be a small farming town.

A small farm serving community.

I had never visited this community and was anxious to visit it. I did expect it to be a farm community. There was a down pour of rain, which adds gloom.

Pleasant farming community. Improved main street and sidewalks from last visit.

2. Approaching the community, what do you notice first? (Evaluate EACH entrance)

Holstein cattle and also Black Angus grazing contentedly on the rolling green pastures - north entrance.

Positive:

Rural setting, nice main drag, many trees, sign greeting visitors/from all directions.

North - farm machinery lined up neatly.

East - nice park on left.

South - Nice park on right with welcome sign.

Welcome sign for village. Sign advertising Holy Name Seminary very impressive.

Clean streets - beds of flowers attractive.

Implement dealers.

North - The Holy Name Seminary Sign

South - The park in the valley

North - Nice farm land

South - Great park.

Negatives:

On one entrance there was an abandoned house with overgrown lawn.

North - old building on left is eyesore.

East - Abandoned house on left.

Since we came during a torrential rain storm, it stands to reason that the area seemed depressing.

Trailer court run down is in need of repair and grooming.

No phone booth downtown.

Homes in need of paint & repair.

More curb and gutter needed.

North - A junky County Building with another junky building just to the north
South - The non completed structure along the highway and unfinished parking areas

3. As you drive around town your comments on:

Appearance

A mostly well structured, neat appearance with several junky old dilapidated buildings.

1. Downtown

Most businesses attractive.

Mobil Station - poor housekeeping.

Grass Auto Body - poor repair in building. Inside is a mess.

I was very impressed by the diversity of the downtown. You have very many businesses for a town of this size. Some of the store fronts could use some renovation. In addition, there was one huge building in the middle of town that was unoccupied.

Overall a nice appearance. Some clutter & a mess behind Mobil station (Congress St.) Back of buildings in good shape Many different businesses for this size of town.

2. Residential

A mixed bag. There were some run down trailers, solid middle class homes, and a few very nice homes. I really did not see any "gold coast" part of town.

A lack of zoning with beautiful homes next to junky, poorly cared for homes. The worst was the trailer park in the southwest corner.

Some homes well kept. A number of homes need paint & repairs badly.

I felt at times that I was in two different villages. Zoning needs to be updated. Rundown trailer court and the next block nice homes. Some homes appearance looked rundown while only a block or two away there was pristine homes & lawns.

3. Industrial park

Nonexistent?

Does not apply.

None

None

There isn't one.

4. Parks

The park in the valley was quite pretty. The one on the top of the hill was quite functional, but the outdoor toilets were a real eyesore.

Adequate for a town that size. A paved road to the park is almost a necessity.

Unpaved parking - equipment exposed.

Two parks. The one in the valley was very nice. Pavilions, hoops, volleyball, baseball etc.. It was underwater when we were there. It might help to pave the parking lot. The fairground/park at the top was nice too. Looks like a great place for a party!

Plenty of space, equipment, and fields. Pretty with stately trees & nice pavilions. They need to blacktop driveways & parking lots.

5. Schools

The schools seemed in good repair and one could tell that the community revered education.

Beautiful High School with well kept athletic field. *Also* a paved track (**surprised**). Elementary school - red brick also Catholic Grade School (1-8).

I was surprised that you had your own high school (although we heard that consolidation with the neighboring school was inevitable). Nice elementary school and catholic school.

Nice - great sports area at high school.
Nice Catholic school and church
Nice public grade school.

6. Infrastructure (Sidewalks, streets, lighting, etc.)

The streets had poor and positive places. There was no sidewalk to the north side businesses.

Proper sidewalks. Effective lighting.

Seemed good enough. You have to do one of two things though. Either the village has to have someone get rid of brush, tree limbs, etc... or, you have to make the property owners do it. Roads and sidewalks were fine.

Nice streets and sidewalks downtown.
Great improvement over last visit.

Lack of curb & gutter throughout town. Streets in good shape.
Water tower - nice paint job & safety fence - good idea.

7. Other

There seemed to be extensive junk in many of the yards and what seemed to be businesses.

Congress Street has junk sites. Fairground is it functional?

Trailer park on east side poor upkeep. Public phone - poor location. Nice fire department.

Zoning seems to be a problem. I noticed some new homes going up near the pond. They were right next to a trailer park. For that matter, a village of this size should not have two trailer parks.

B. Signing

1. Community entrance/exit signs

Bright welcome signs. The FFA signs were too small to be legible.

Nice welcome signs - south side.

Adequate - as they are on each entrance. Very visible.

They were noticeable.

Personally I like signs that list the churches, parks, etc. They would be a definite improvement.

Bright - friendly.

2. Streets

Adequate.

The street signs were covered with foliage making them hard to read. The streets were functional but needed work.

Street signs in excellent condition.

Some stop signs faded. Need to be replaced.

Street signs were fine.

3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.

No hospital. Part-time Clinic Doctor's office.
No dentist.

No directional signs.

Adequate for the park.

There were none???

None

4. Storefront signs

Needs to be improved for travelers. Had to enter stores to discover what was inside.

Could use some work. But then again, that could be said about every village in America.

Some could be more attractive.

In walking main street I didn't know one business from the next.

They were not too congested, but ample enough to communicate.

5. Industrial Park

None.

Does not apply.

There was no park, hence, no sign.

Nonexistent???

None.

6. City Hall, police, etc.

Closed. No clerk available for information.
Clerk's hours were not posted.

The building and its location were fine. The problem was that it is only open one day a week.

Could be improved

While the rest rooms were open, there was no one to contact.
They were closed???
Closed.

7. Billboards/advertising, etc.

Not noticeable.

For Holy Name Seminary - Excellent.
For Farm Implement - good.

There seemed to be none. Personally I like small notifications of what is present in the community.

Not too many. That is good, because I hate billboards.

4. Visitor/community information

A. City/Village Hall

It was closed.

Closed.

It was closed every day of the week but Wednesday. Since we came on Monday, we were up a creek without a paddle (and with all that rain, we needed all the help we could get).

1. Is there a street map?

None that were to be found anywhere.

I could not find an open hall!

Didn't find any.

2. Community brochure/directory

None were found in the restaurant or taverns.

Found in cafe.

Nothing.

Didn't find any.

None.

3. Community profile (including business and industrial opportunities)

People we talked to said that Bloomington would resist new development. They seemed very surprised that I would want to build a home.

?

No.

None.

Nothing in print form.

4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit...etc.

The restaurant in the middle of town seemed to be the place to eat. The meal was excellent.

?

No bed & breakfasts, motels or place to stay overnight.

Gold Rush Cafe - dining

People directed use to the Gold Rush. There is no motel.

No room for rent. Restaurants were not advertised and difficult to locate. Gold Dust Cafe - Good food, reasonably priced.

5. Contact people & address listed if I want more info.

No.

We obtained addresses and phone numbers of the mayor and real estate broker with interrogation.

?

Did not apply.

None posted.

6. Complimentary Items (Postcards, bookmarkers, coupons, etc.)

I found none of these items.

?

None that I saw.

None.

Nothing.

B. Chamber office/visitor info center

1. Easy to locate (and did people refer you to it?)

None

On Main Street, but no one was in the building to assist us.

None

I could find none.

There is no chamber of commerce, and village hall/library was closed.

2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)

None

None

NA

None

I could find none.

3. Recommendations on places to stay/eat/visit etc.

None.

None

People were friendly and recommended the Gold Rush Cafe for food.

No rooms.

There was one restaurant, that had an excellent meal. We were definitely outsiders; there were many questioning stares.

4. How prepared/helpful were they.

None

People were friendly and eager to answer questions.

None.

None

The store keepers were very polite and enjoyable and enjoyed conversation but were quite questioning.

5. Convenient hours?

None

None

None

???

None

**C. Info from general community (service station/motel/bars/restaurants/
shop employees, etc.)**

1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?

They seemed well informed about the happenings of daily life and the structure of the way of life.

Very knowledgeable

If they didn't know the answer to my questions, they knew who did and pointed that person out to me

Pretty good. Talked to a farmer in the supper club/cafe/bar at the edge of town. The guy at the meat counter was nice too. I bought some salami and bologna. Both were great.

Their attitude toward governmental decisions seemed passive.

Friendly

Proud of their schools

Answered all questions intelligently

2. Did they refer you to someone else who could help?

They were very helpful in providing addresses and phone numbers.

No

Always

No

Directed me to the Ace.

3. Attitude, appearance, etc.

Their appearance was clean and casual.

Neat & pleasant

Very nice people

Their attitude was questioning and somewhat mellow.

Positive - liked living there

Upbeat

Well informed about their community.

They went out of their way to be helpful

Typical small town farm folk. Friendly enough, but not too friendly. Helpful enough, but not too helpful.

4. Other comments

The people seemed to have a grasp of life "as is" in Bloomington.

Grocery store on main street has lots of needs to attract.

Everyone I talked to seemed very friendly

No problem with the locals.

They seemed content or resigned to accept it "as it is."

Hardware store very good

Flower shop is wonderful

5. General

A. Do residents know their community history/events/directions/etc.

The residents seemed content with their life in Bloomington but seemed frustrated and somewhat depressed.

Yes

Yes, all were informed. I think the rain was bringing everyone down though.

Yes

Yes - all residents that we questioned

B. Services...variety of retail..lodging facilities...

Services were very minimal

2 Grocery stores

1 Hardware store - nice

Locker plant

Feed store

No lodgings

Retail mix was excellent for a town of this size. Service needs (lawyers, dentists) seemed to be lacking. Farm service needs seemed to be met.

Many different retail outlets for this size town.

—
Lots of feed stores, hardware store, implement dealers. 2 grocery stores
No clothing store

Overall, I was suitably impressed by the variety.

C. Are there public restrooms.

Yes - in the Village Hall

Yes

I didn't see any. As to the restroom that I used in a bar, does it meet state standards? How do they get by?

Saw some at the fair/park. Used the ones at village hall.

D. Pay phones...are they working, phone books intact.

The book was quite wet and phone was open (no booth); the one that we could find.

Poor location. Exposed to weather. No signs.

It was my job to get out of the van in the pouring rain to check the phone book. It was there, and was soaked. You need one downtown. And you need a booth so poor saps like me do not have to get drenched in order to make a call.

The only pay phone I noticed was at least 1 block off main drag.

No pay phones on the main street. Pay phone on a street with phone book intact.

E. Industrial park...does it look active & attractive.

Nonexistent???

None

NA

None

Does not apply

F. What does the community TASTE like? (specialty restaurants/bakeries/etc.)

The meal at the restaurant was excellent.
The 2 beers at the bars were warm and no glass was offered.

Bakery closed
Food at restaurant good

Food at the Gold Rush was good and reasonable priced. Diet Pepsi at the supperclub/bar was warm and nobody offered me a glass of ice. The salami and bologna that I bought are now only fond memories to my taste buds.

Excellent food at cafe down town

Bakery was closed.

Restaurant - "Gold Rush Care" - Excellent food & prices reasonable

G. What does the community SMELL like?

The community smells clean

WET!

None

Agriculture

Damp the day we were there

H. What SOUNDS do you hear?

None - A quite dead community

Rain.

None

People at work

Raindrops - very little traffic or business

I. What did community FEEL like? (Emotional response i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc.)

The people were quite structured but seemed to be depressed and very inward.

People reserved with strangers.

Warm - standing still - inviting

As it was a cold damp day.

There were few people around.

Beautiful flower shop for a town that size

Warm - standing still - inviting

Hard to tell. The weather was so miserable that there were not a lot of people milling about. Lousy weather brings out the worst in people anyway.

DESCRIBE THE PEOPLE YOU MET (Friendly, helpful, etc.)

Waitress pleasant

Secretary - very informative. Knew history of schools and churches

The people we met were all friendly, kind and neatly dressed and

informative

Yes, very friendly

I didn't feel any uneasiness speaking with them

The people were in awe that a stranger would be interested in the community.

No problems.

ADDITIONA

1

Quiet farming community

Most homes well maintained

Downtown not signed very well for visitors

Lots of places were closed on Monday

No dentist and only a doctor on certain days

None

It seems that the government with taxes and rules and regulations have drained the economic vitality of the people living in a community such as Bloomington. It seems that left alone they could prosper and be quite content.

You need an industrial park. One person claimed that "one will be built if you need one." In this day and age, that does not fly. Why would I wait for one to be built when I can have my pick of hundreds of improved industrial parks in Wisconsin alone? At the very least you have to get an option on some land so that at least you have something concrete to show a prospect.

One person commented that out-of-towners were not that welcome in town. He claimed that the mayor would give us lip service, but that nothing would be done for us.

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

Nothing great

Schools are neat

The welcome signs were inviting

A delicious chicken dinner with dressing, mashed potatoes, corn, etc. for only \$3.00

This is a farm community

The Catholic Faith is alive by the beautiful church, rectory, gym and school they maintain.

Nice schools

Cafe where we ate

Probably that Bloomington is a small depreciated farm community that will eventually be a ghost town

I really was impressed with the school system. I was also impressed with the parks and the retail *mix* downtown. You need to work on proper zoning though.

6. *Doing it Right!*

A. List the 5 MOST positive things you observed about the community.

- 1.) Schools both public and private are well kept
 - Solid religious structure
 - Schools
 - Recreation park nice
 - Schools

- 2.) Have a wonderful athletic field by the high school
 - Solid farm service businesses
 - Schools attractive
 - Friendliness
 - Parks.

- 3.) Their park is an attraction to all. Something for everyone.
 - A strong acceptance of people of all economic structures
 - Retail mix.
 - Low cost housing
 - Number of different retail businesses

- 4.) Streets are clean
 - Meat market
 - A sincere attempt to create a quality mainstreet business structure
 - Good streets and sidewalks
 - Condition of streets

5.) Implement dealers for the surrounding farmers.

The cooking pits, pavilions, beer coolers and such in the parks indicating a strong social spirit

Residential expandability

Park

Clinic.

B. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe the steps you will take to implement it within the NEXT 72 HOURS!

Have a welcome sign on each highway leading to the community.

The day made me more aware of the degradation of a community due to increased taxes, mandates and rules and regulations. It will further my resolve to attempt to lessen these problems.

None

I really can't come up with one, sorry

I would like to see Plain designate one business as a tourist info spot for when the village hall is closed. It doesn't need to be anything fancy, just a place for the community profiles etc...