

# *First impressions*

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## *Columbus, WI*

*by Mauston, WI*

*Visit conducted 06/19/92*

*A program for community improvement*

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1. What was **my perception** before visiting the **community**: What did I expect, etc.  
None. I didn't have any preconceived ideas.

None. I had never really heard anything about Columbus (except for athletics). A "clean slate."

Perceived the community to be much smaller.

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

Positive: Sign for July 4th at both ends of town.

Community entrance sign.

Actually entering, the large, wonderful houses!

Liked the banners. Good idea.

Good signage and visibility good.

Negative: A little weedy/not much of an impression.

I came in from the "construction" side so an observation would be unfair. (One thought: I'd assumed there was no "Columbus" sign on the Interstate because of the construction. If that's not the case, you should lobby for a sign, i.e. other communities were mentioned at the exit, but not Columbus).

Didn't seem to be aware of/capitalizing on its obvious tourism potential!!

3. **As you drive around town your** comments on:

**A Appearance**

1. Downtown

Like it. Great historic preservation potential; Great tourism potential. Look up! The second stories are tremendous architecturally. Farmers and Merchants Bank's facade, City Hall, etc., etc. are wonderful. You might want to consider a downtown historic district; stripping off the false **fronts**, plastic and fiberglass; and long-range -- creating a more restrictive historic sign ordinance (shapes, colors, sizes, etc.).

The downtown looked neat, buildings kept up, except for 'lower town' area/plywood in the windows. Saw 7 empty store fronts.

Have you thought about the Chamber or Downtown Association getting permission to decorate the empty storefronts and **turn** a negative into a positive?

Inviting.

Very clean.

#### 4. Storefront **signs**

Seem **O.K.** Some pretty nondescript. (\*There was a lot of local support for student athletes). **Banks**, stores.

I **think** the hodge-podge of signs – some plastic, some wood, some **lit**, some unlit -- many in poor condition – are antithetical to the great historic architecture and (potential) **unity** of architecture downtown. The excess of "rugged individualism" reflected in the signs really **hurts** the overall picture of downtown Columbus. **A** sign ordinance (shapes, sizes, historic colors) would **immensely** improve downtown. ("The whole is greater than the sum of its parts").

#### 5. **Industrial park**

Saw signs.

Good signage.

#### 6. **City Hall**, police, etc.

Easy to find, old building, great stuff inside.

One of your downtown "anchors" architecturally. What a jewel!

#### 7. **Billboards/advertising**, etc.

Not many.

Congratulations on not having a proliferation of billboards -- which would be a negative mixed message in terms of your overall image of history, historic preservation.

#### 4. Visitor/community information

##### A. City/Village Hall

##### 1. Is there a street map?

Yes, there's a street map; it's hard to read, though.

##### 2. Community brochure/directory

The chamber has a business directory.

##### 3. **Community** profile (including business **and** industrial opportunities)

Industrial park was spread out. Looked like there was plenty of room for development.

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

Got good recommendations from "men/women on the street".

**A** few people mentioned the need for an "upscale" restaurant.

##### 5. **Contact** people **and** addresses listed if I want more info.

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

Chamber office had quite a few postcards.

The drug store I stopped in to (looking specifically for Columbus postcards) had only "generic ones" (i.e. same picture in all different towns; inscription only changes). Then, another member of our party did, in fact, find one of the Farmers and Merchant Bank facade, etc., at the Chamber that I'd been looking for. Strange(?)

**B. Chamber office/visitor info center**

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

Couldn't find it. Asked woman at City Hall, got bad directions. Asked two other people who didn't know where it was.

I didn't see a sign and the people I asked on the street didn't know. Seemed to me to be symptomatic of a community that doesn't think it has anything to offer to visitors (which is definitely not true).

Chamber was not visible. No chamber sign. Had to **ask** for Chamber Office. No regular hours.

**2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)**  
She had lots of info on history of area.

Chamber secretary was very informative. Very knowledgeable. Very positive, upbeat re community. Enjoyed visiting with her.

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

Places to visit were historical. No "modern" parks or events mentioned.

**4. How prepared/helpful were they.**

She knew what she was talking about (Chamber lady).

Very knowledgeable and helpful.

**5. Convenient hours?**

Opened at 9:30 **am.**

Need for more convenient hours.

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

**1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?**

Two people didn't know where Chamber office was.

Stopped in several shops, clerks very continuous and helpful. Everyone we spoke with was knowledgeable of the communities. We ate at the Country Kitchen. The hostess could have been more receptive and warm.

Chamber representative knew her stuff.

People were friendly and helpful, but they didn't seem to know a lot about the history of their community (e.g. "How/why all the wonderful homes?; Where/when did all the money come into the **community** historically?" etc.

I got the distinct impression people didn't realize what a potential jewel they have: architecture, history, festivals, antique mall, etc. In that sense they weren't "knowledgeable."

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

Yes, I was referred to City Hall.

Yes.

Everyone was very helpful with directions and referring us.

**3. Attitude, appearance, etc.**

Attitude was kind of "chill" at two stores; the others were O.K.

People on the street were friendly and nice; however, at two stores I was the only customer in the store, and I was never acknowledged by the managers/clerks. I think a series of hospitality training/customer service programs would be in order.

Appearance was very good -- everyone dressed well, and professional.

**4. Other comments**

At drug store it took **5** minutes for anyone to say "hi".

**5. General**

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

I couldn't find anyone who did (in stores, on street, etc.).

Residents are very proud of the history of the community. Very informative. Seem to project much pride in their community.

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

Not many clothing stores -- two. Couldn't find a hotel. One bed and breakfast -- no signs!

I was surprised there weren't a lot of bed and breakfasts. (Where **do** people stay?) I was also surprised there weren't businesses catering to tourists.

Need lodging facilities.

**C. Are there public restrooms?**

I couldn't find them.

No visible restrooms.

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

Found two pay phones, both had books. Used a pay phone. It was in good shape. Saw another -- both conveniently located.

Yes, three pay phones, all working and books.

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

Looked fine.

Appears to be expanding and active.

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

They had "mom and pop" places; didn't see a bakery.

I found the bakery, but I'd never go back. Rude and inhospitable staff. I couldn't believe it!

No convenient restaurant down town. Had to travel to outskirts of town to eat.

**G. What does community SMELL like?**

No smell...no farm, factory or restaurant smell at all. Only diesel fumes (trucks); no negative industrial odors.

**H. What SOUNDS did you hear?**

A lot of heavy truck traffic..inordinate noise levels, really. (There seemed to be a high volume of vehicular traffic, but not a lot of pedestrian traffic. You might want to consider strategies to generate more pedestrian traffic downtown).

No trains, a few trucks, some construction on the corner building.

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

It was quiet (people)-friendly when spoken to first. A really nice community in which to live. You could tell that the focus is on "home"... and in terms of business, you could tell the focus is on Madison. I wondered why you didn't "flip that on its ear" and market to Madison; draw those tourists in to your buildings and homes (tours, festivals, b & b's, etc.), and use what you have to economic advantage. You are a potential jewel! -- but I think there's a bit of community blindness in terms of what you have and what you could be.

Community projected a warm environment. Not crowded, but active.

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

The woman outside the Courthouse was very nice. The woman inside smiled but **was** formal. The woman at the drugstore was nice, but the girl who worked there, and the pharmacist really didn't say too much.

The woman who ran the craft store was friendly.

The people "on the street" were very nice, helpful, and friendly when you asked for directions or information. Some of the merchants need to learn to "acknowledge" people when they walk in and some hospitality training would be very helpful.

All very friendly and helpful.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:**

It seems to me that the people who founded this town were very wealthy. I've never seen so many big homes, old homes, for personal use. Everything was basically built in the 1890's. Looks like they spread the wealth around.

There were only two "For Sale" signs anywhere but no home construction (we saw only 1 house).

A lot of unrealized potential: downtown storefronts, tourism, house tours, festivals, the "boulevard," history, historic preservation, bed and breakfasts, marketing to Madison and Milwaukee -- right in your backyard.

**WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW?**

The Farmer's Bank front, City Hall, lots of history in the town. Seems closed off somehow....

"Drooling" over the potential tourism infrastructure and excitement and potential.

A nice place to live -- which tourism would only enhance (more vitality, more verve, an "economic engine" which would help with storefront renovation).

How pleasantly surprised I was. The Antique Mall.

Historical marking.

Neat appearance.

A community I would like to reside in.

**6. Doing it Right!**

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

Very few (2) "For Sale" signs (people staying).

The businesses were taking the initiative (some) to fix up their stores, regardless of who helps them.

The history of the city **was** interesting.

Overall, it was a very nice place.

The "boulevard."

City **HALL**.

Farmers & Merchants Bank facade (and others).

**THE HOUSES!**

The banners.

Entrance to community very neat and clean **as** through entire community, residential and downtown.

Store frontages well maintained.

Vacant buildings appearance neat and historical markings displayed in several.

Very few homes for sale.

Community cooperation was obvious, This community works together in a positive mode.

**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!**

We saw a festival sign out on a business lawn -- we liked it so much, we want to do the same thing.

City hall's historical marking.