

First Impressions: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

Community visited: Keokuk, Iowa

Date of Visit: October 23, 2007

Visit completed by: Centerville, Iowa

Program developed by: Professor Andrew B. Lewis
Community Development Specialist
Center for Community Economic Development
University of Wisconsin Extension

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

Community visited: Keokuk, Iowa

Visitation Team Profile

Lyn Corkery

Age: 50 Gender: Female Occupation: Economic Development Director

Rick Kauzlazicit

Age: 39 Gender: Male Occupation: Management

Bill McAfee

Age: 68 Gender: Male Occupation: Retired

Pat McAfee

Age: 61 Gender: Female Occupation: Retired. Former Healthcare Administrator.

Marsha Mitchell

Age: 58 Gender: Female Occupation: Retired from Alliant.

Janice Weber

Age: 63 Gender: Female Occupation: Real Estate

Wayne Weber

Age: 64 Gender: Male Occupation: Insurance & Real Estate; 20+ years on Econ.
Dev. Board

Date of visit: October 17 & 23, 2007 and November 1, 2007

Time spent: 7 hours

Weather on date of visit: Bright, sunny, fall day. Highest temp in 60° range. Sunny both days.
Partly cloudy.

Past Perceptions

What is your impression of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see? Please comment on your knowledge of the community.

- Small rural town.
- First impression was an old river town. Expected to be similar to Ottumwa, Iowa. Only been to Keokuk for high school football games coaching. Not really familiar with the community.
- River town with lots of hills and homes with fantastic views of the river. Older Victorian homes – large homes. Old buildings used as retail businesses. Quaint!
- I had no idea. I didn't know the community size and a vague idea of the location.
- Have never been to Keokuk but have felt it was a dirty river town. Expect it to be an "old" community.
- No prior impressions or expectations.
- Old, somewhat dirty river town.

Prior to your visit

How easy was it to get information by mail and telephone about the community? Are you satisfied with the quality of the information received? Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

- Nice Web site.

Please rate and comment on the community's online Web materials and information. Could you find information on state and regional tourism Web sites about the community?

Range of scores: **9**

- Google search = "Economic Development Keokuk Iowa". Search rank #1 = Lee County (www.lcedg.com). Search rank #2 = Keokuk specific (www.lcedg.com/keo_index.htm).
 - Great ranking (chose #2 for Keokuk specific). I viewed each of the 8 categories and several of the detailed links under each category. Overall, I found the graphic display, ease of use and detail of material presented to be excellent. There was a wealth of info in good depth available.
 - Minor details:
 - When you go to "View current sites" under real estate it does not work on Keokuk tab unless you first go to the Lee County tab and open "View current sites". Then it will work when you go back to Keokuk tab.

- When clicking on News (upper right on KEDC tab) some of the dates on the articles are old. There are no dates on the FMEDC news so you think all are current. I'm probably the only person that has ever read that "prison crew are responsible for mowing" (what? is there a prison in this town – don't go here) in the "City looks seriously at City Administrator" article so who cares!
- I thought their Web site was easy to navigate and very informational.

Five Minute Impression

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

- Had a different opinion. Much more to the community. Has a lot of potential and seems to be utilizing or in the process of working toward their potential. Outstanding history and tradition. How many communities have two rivers meeting and one being the Mississippi River?
- Lots of empty buildings on Main Street – they need attention. Some of the occupied needed some TLC and new, better signage. Nice, new pavement on Main Street and some newer chain-type restaurants and retail spots like Wal-Mart, etc. Looks like lots of renovation going on. Lots of very old buildings – some were well-kept, some not so much.
- I was struck by the number of vacant buildings on the main street. It gave me a sinking feeling.
- As we came into the community I was surprised to see the new development. It was a larger community than I had thought it to be. As we arrived at the downtown area things quickly changed and everything was old and a large number of vacant buildings.
- Good buildings and houses on Main Street until you reach downtown.
- When entering from the north on 218 I got a whole different impression than my old impression. Modern town: 4-lane street, newer look, big city type business such as Sonic, Hy Vee, Hampton Inn, etc. until the downtown business district – old, some empty business buildings with a hodge-podge of business types. I drove total of 47 miles in and around the town during seven-hour visit.
- Entering on 218, neat, clean, well-kept. Newer businesses, good road, sidewalks. Could easily tell that the community had a strong manufacturing past but has suffered loss of jobs. Several run-down housing. Lots of renovating of older homes in efforts to preserve historic area. Nice parks. River road exit was typical of river manufacturing industrial area. No signage though. Hard to find specific site due to lack of signage. Residents encouraged to clean up and maintain yards and homes by pride awards. Can be a beautiful quaint historic town with continued push for preservation and revitalization. Downtown very depressed with most store fronts empty. Signs of influx of minority workers – can add culture diversity.

Community Entrances

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

Hwy. 218 North

- First impression as I came into community was good. There were numerous newer buildings and businesses. There was a nice entrance sign. It seemed like a clean community.
- Newer big city look until older downtown.
- Not outstanding but pleasant – until you saw downtown buildings.
- New developments – business upon entering.

Downtown retail really suffering – needs façade improvements and attractive signage.



136 from Illinois (East)

- As you come to bridge from Illinois side, entrance was lined with trees which were very pretty this time of year. After crossing bridge, houses were older but seemed to be well-kept. There was also a nice sign.



- Illinois side was somewhat junky before bridge and first appearance of Keokuk with name sign was good. Some older homes on right but all looked neatly kept and in average repair.
- The sign was located well with the park-like setting. Could be integrated more with the riverwalk.

- The river is a “pull” and it’s nice to have that right as you cross into Iowa and Keokuk.

61 from South then 61 Bypass N

- There was a junkyard just past bridge on right and a large number of rail cars parked on siding. 61 bypass was largely industrial but didn’t look bad as it appeared there was a lot of industry.
- Junkyard and rail cars at right just past bridge was slightly then on 61 bypass mainly heavy industry but not bad opinion as appeared town had lots of industry with jobs.

61 from South then 136 to Main Street.

- This entrance was a mix of industrial & residential. Houses were all older and in need of repair. Junkyard and rail cars were at this entrance. There was a mix of businesses and older housing.
- Junkyard, rail cars, industrial mix with bad residential area houses in bad repair and burned out.
- Junkyard visible.



- Large junkyard at entrance to Keokuk.

218 to Airport Rd to Middle Rd and Concert St

- Road to airport was paved but then turned to gravel. Was hard surface again on Middle Road. There were several nice acreages with newer homes and a golf course. Everything was well taken care of.
- Good paved road to modern-looking airport (jet parked on tarmac) then road change to gravel but hard surface again on Middle Road past nice acreages and then nice homes and golf course.

Grand Road into River Road

- No sign noting city limits seen. From country to beautiful housing.
- Great drive along river and past Keokuk Yacht Club.
- Rand Park – beautiful. Big historic home. Tree-lined.

Other entrances (airports, bike trails, boat landings, train stations, snowmobile trails, etc.)

- Nice park area with trails on 61 N West neighborhood area. Would benefit from Riverfront Development project to make most of river view and attract tourists.
- Somewhat disappointed in the use of the Des Moines River. This river is easier to access than the Mississippi and probably has more potential for trains/bike paths.
- Everything along the river was enchanting and drew me in!

Housing & Residential Areas

How would you rate the overall quality, affordability and availability of housing?

Average score: **7.2**

Range of scores: **6 to 8**

Quality

Average ratings for:

7.8 - Existing/Older Homes

7.2 - Housing for seniors

6.6 - Apartments/rental housing

6.4 - New homes

6.2 - Vacant lots for new homes



- Didn't see senior or assisted living housing. Beautiful older homes being renovated.
- Saw few vacant lots for sale within city limits.
- The majority of homes appeared to be of good quality and well-kept.
- Some beautiful well-maintained old homes – all sizes. Didn't see new homes.
- Some of the existing/older homes are absolutely amazing; some just the opposite – very run-down.

Affordability

Is there an adequate mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels?

- Yes.
- Wide range of housing values.
- There appeared to be a good mix of homes. There were homes available in all price ranges but \$40,000 and below had the most houses on market. Seems to be a shortage of better homes.
- No visible – newer homes.
- Yes. We saw both very high-end homes, very low-end and everything in between.

Availability

Average ratings for:

8.0 - Existing/Older Homes

6.7 - Apartments/rental housing

6.3 - Housing for seniors

4.3 - Vacant lots for new homes

3.3 - New homes

- There seemed to be adequate housing for elderly and several nice lots for sale. Large number of lower-priced older homes. Was not able to determine apartments and rentals



available. Very few newer upper-end homes. Seems to be a housing shortage.

- Didn't see new housing developments. Lots of middle income in need of repair. Good number of large, older homes.

What are the most and least appealing features of the housing in this community?

- Most appealing – historic, older homes either already renovated or with great potential. Those along the river especially. Least appealing – those that are unkept with lots of trash, junk in yards. Wouldn't want to live there or next to them.
- Large, older homes along the river. Most neighborhoods tidy.
- Appealing feature is that all same type homes in one area. Not a mixture of old houses next to newer homes. Least appealing – southwest are of town had older homes mixed with businesses. Homes were in need of maintenance.
- The most appealing houses were along Grand Avenue because of their architecture and how well they have been maintained. Some houses, scattered throughout the community, need to be cleaned up or torn down.
- Very unique and interesting architecture designs. Very attractive historic home area. Should really promote an annual or bi-annual tour.

Comment on the quality and availability of residential infrastructure (i.e. roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation, bike trails/lanes, green space, trees, yards):

- Loved your downtown/Main Street lights – they fit the historic nature of your city. All other things listed above would average out to “average” – saw mostly good though.
- Roads good, noted public transport signs, very nice park, a lot of nice street trees, most yards tidy.
- Streets, sidewalks and lighting seemed adequate. Most yards well-kept. Did not see any bike trails in driving through residential areas.
- On the whole I would rate this category as good. Some road repair was in progress during this visit.
- Roads & sidewalks in good condition. Lighting? Beautiful trees.

Appeal

Average ratings for:

7.6 – Middle income

6.8 – Upscale/professional

6.6 – Senior citizen

6.4 – Young families

6.0 – Single young adults

- Professionals may prefer more modern housing. No noted residential area of blight. Poorly maintained homes (in every community) are scattered.



- Housing observed seemed adequate but seemed to be a real shortage in upper-scale homes for sale. In visiting with real estate office and looking at homes available, there were not many available. There was a larger supply in homes \$40,000 and below. Several nice lots were available in newer section of town.
- Lacking in new house developments but anyone loving old, ornate homes, one of the nicest selections. Middle income – needs work, in ill-repair.

Education, Health, Social & Emergency Services

Education

Comment on the availability and appearance of schools.

Pre-school/Kindergarten/Head Start:

- Variety very good with parochial and public.
- Available. Looked good.
- All schools were well-maintained and landscaped – clean-looking. Shows your community places great pride and importance on education.
- Appearance was clean and well-maintained. Elementary schools were hard to locate but that is typical since they are usually in residential areas.

Primary/Elementary/Middle School:

- Variety very good with parochial and public.
- Number of schools noted. Looked good.
- Middle and high school together disappointed in the signage for the high school.



High School:

- School good repair. Staff very helpful and promoting schools in very positive light.
- Looked very modern.
- Looked good – well-kept. Lots of parking – nice campus.
- Traffic around school was hard to navigate.

College/University:

- Post-secondary – lots of choices within relatively short distance.
- Noted sign – did not see.
- Could use better signage on Main Street but was easier to find than high school.

What do residents think about the quality and availability of their local schools?

- Overall - good.
- No problems!
- A lot of pride – with the football team doing so well that boosts community morale. Spoke supportive of their schools.

Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of schools for a community of this size?

Average score: **8**

Range of scores: **8 to 8**

- The schools are attractive and appear to be well-maintained. The school grounds are clean.

- Appears to be pride in the local school.
- Teacher/student ratio under 20 pupils per teacher and clean facilities.

Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of healthcare facilities.

Hospitals:

- As a former hospital administrator, I was very impressed. Friendly volunteers & shuttle service equal to finest U.S. hospitals. Suggest getting cancer doctor to set up a clinic.
- Great – parking was tight though!

Physician, dentist, optometrist and other medical offices and clinics:

- Convenient, professional looking, great variety of qualified MD services.
- All very impressive and professional looking. Noticed lots of specialties, etc.

Long-term care, assisted living and nursing home facilities:

- Available – appear good.
- You offer adequate services for this segment of your population.

Other health services (i.e. Chiropractic, psychotherapy, naturopath, massage, etc.):

- Available – quality unknown.
- No cancer unit – but seems like you had everything else – including massage!

Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of health care services for a community of this size?

Average score: **8.5**

Range of scores: **8 to 9**

- Appears to have outstanding quality and a broad range of services, well-suited for this size of community.
- Good for this size of community!

Social Services

What social services (i.e. day care, senior center, counseling, etc.) are available?

- YMCA.

Overall, how would you rate the level of social services for a community of this size?

Range of scores: **7**

Civic

Are there a variety of not-for-profit organizations and clubs within the community?

- Seemed to be adequate – had all the normal – Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.
- Yes – normal mix of expected organizations & clubs exist in this town.

Overall, how would you rate the level of nonprofit/civic services for a community of this size?

Average score: **7.7**

Range of scores: **7 to 8**

Emergency Services

Overall, how would you rate the police, fire, ambulance and emergency medical service facilities?

Average score: **7.3**

Range of scores: **7 to 8**

How do local residents feel about these services?

- Citizens I spoke with thought police & fire was satisfactory & felt emergency services including available helicopter air-lift was very good.
- People I talked to seemed satisfied with what is offered. I heard no complaints. Except police building which looked cluttered and unattractive with junk cars, etc.
- Community-rated emergency medical services – as very good. Fire truck looked new. Police were visible – in newer cars.

Local Economy

What is your impression of the health of the local economy?

- Poor.
- Obvious loss of manufacturing. Empty storefronts & depressed middle income housing are tell-tale signs.
- All of the citizens I spoke with indicated some decline on “hard times” had occurred in local economy in period 5 to 10 years ago but some improvement had occurred and many expressed hope that new wind turbine company with hiring 400 would really boost economy.
- My impression of the health of the economy is good. Most of the storefronts/buildings are being utilized.
- Looks like you might be having some difficulties – some retailers appeared to be struggling.
- Local economy in downtown area did not seem very good. Everyone talked to seemed to agree that business was not very good.
- Not good.

Downtown

Could you locate the downtown easily? If not, why did you have difficulty finding it?

- Businesses were very easy to find
- Yes (3 team members said this).
- Downtown was easy to find and access. Industrial area – not marked – hard to find.
- Yes. Parking will always be a problem but had public parking areas.
- Yes – right on Hwy. 61 – main drag of town – couldn’t miss it.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance of the downtown (buildings, displays, signage, streetscape).

Average score: **4.7**

Range of scores: **2 to 7**

- Good and bad. Lots of empty stores/buildings and many unkept – even ones occupied sometimes.
- Could upgrade. The lighting to make it more of a district somewhat like a Court Avenue in Des Moines on a smaller scale. Thought the signage could be more visual.
- All buildings have old appearance with many vacant and others with dirty windows on junky appearance. Some were in satisfactory condition and booked as successful businesses. However my overall impression was that some major decline had occurred in the past and total recovery did not happen.
- Signage definitely gives low quality impressions. Storefronts need facelift to promote wonderful historic building architecture. Storefront displays.
- Many vacant buildings, clean streets.

- About all buildings in downtown area were old. There were many vacant buildings. Windows were very dirty and no nice window displays. It appeared that the downtown area did not have much business.

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping in the downtown.

Average score: **4**

Range of scores: **2 to 7**

- Lots of bars in one block or two – otherwise there was a variety of business – professional services – not so much actual shopping. Gaps between “open” stores (gas were empty stores); long walks between retailers in some areas.
- Businesses on Main Street were not visually appealing. The mall was nice, but appeared vacant.
- Had a good mix of shopping and professional business. Had a nice mix of old buildings and new building went well together.
- Very little retail shopping was available in downtown or outlying strip mall area. Almost all local citizens said you had to go to Quincy to find good shopping.
- Very limited.
- Few stores.
- Shopping in downtown area was poor. Many stores were closed. There were not any ladies clothing or children’s clothing in downtown area except used clothes. There were a lot of service-type stores.

Rate and comment on the customer service you received in the downtown.

Average score: **6.4**

Range of scores: **6 to 10**

- The first shop I visited was an antique shop. I walked the entire store without a “hello” even when I walked past clerk. I spoke but either she didn’t hear me or just didn’t want to speak. It was a very “cold” feeling. Consignment store clerk was somewhat friendly but it was a customer that actually answered most of my questions. She was very helpful. Furniture store clerks were very helpful. Had lunch at the “cellar”. Owner was very friendly and helpful. Lady in convenience store was very helpful and gave much information.
- Friendly. Great service.
- Good customer service throughout. Would not pick up negative thinking from most. Overall positive and cheerful. Very important to maintain.
- Very limited exposure but clerk in Quickshop gas station was friendly and helpful. We had lunch at the “cellar” downtown and the owner/waiter was outstanding in food suggestions and information. He had a very positive attitude but said business had been up and down causing hard work for little profit at times. He was hoping new wind turbine company would be an upshot for general attitude and business. He said he really hated to see local dollars go out of town but the type of shopping most ladies wanted wasn’t available in town.
- Very good customer service and polite. I was impressed with the downtown businesses I visited.

- Everyone was friendly and wanted to help.

Rate and comment on the signage in the downtown.

Average score: **3.8**

Range of scores: **3 to 5**

- Either no signage or very old – sometimes unreadable signage. Not well-maintained.
- Poor. No appeal.
- Thought signage could have been a little more visible and after dark because harder to see and read. Someone driving through at night may not realize all quality businesses available.
- Signage was not uniform and was sometimes hard to read on stores while driving. However, some signs did stand out and were easy to recognize.
- Very low quality. Gives appearance of barely surviving and low quality goods and services.
- Very limited, useful signage.
- Many of the signs were small and hard to read. There was no standard signage.

Rate and comment on the window displays in the downtown.

Average score: **3.7**

Range of scores: **2 to 7**

- Most windows appeared to be very dirty. It was hard to tell if some businesses were open or closed from looking on outside.
- Not appealing. Vacant store windows need to be cleaned up.
- Almost none. Really need to work on keeping them attractive since it is on main drag.
- Overall I felt window display was junky, unorganized and some were dirty – appearing to not have been cleaned. However, again this was not true of all as some were attractive appearing with good displays.
- The businesses that could use window displays did a very good job.
- Not attractive.
- Pretty average. Nothing really caught my eye.

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise in the downtown.

Average score: **5.2**

Range of scores: **3 to 7**

- From jewelry to odds and ends.
- I did little or no shopping so not rated but didn't appear to have much variety available from driving down Main Street several times.
- Limited. Large number of bars. Little retail. Lots of professional services spread throughout.
- Good quality but little variety. One patron stated you need to go to Burlington or Quincy for shopping.
- I felt there was very little variety of shopping in downtown. There were more service-related businesses than shopping. There were no good retail clothing stores.

Comment on the mix of facilities and services in the downtown (housing, professional services, retail, recreation, accommodation and food, industry, parks, etc.).

- There were several service-type buildings such as tax, law, beauty shops, music shop, banks, fitness center, camera shop and insurance. City hall, post office and county offices were easily accessible.
- Very scattered.
- Professional services ample throughout. Retail very limited. Accommodations satisfactory with new hotels. Recreation needs updating. Food: fast food and grocery okay. Parks few, but nice.
- City hall, county building, post office were all easy to access. Several types of professional services (law, tax, CPA, real estate, investment) were downtown.
- I think there was a good mix. With Super Wal-Mart keeping the downtown vital will always be difficult.
- Professional services available and display quality. Sparse food service range of fair to excellent. Could not find tourist info until we asked. Later we found it in the mall.
- The mix was good. You can provide many different types of professional services.

Rate and comment on the quality and availability of parking in the downtown.

Average score: **7.3**

Range of scores: **3 to 9**

- Experienced, so no problem with parking! Had plenty.
- Good. However, then didn't appear to be much shopping or business activity so might be more difficult to park on street. Signs for public parking off the Main Street were marked.
- Ample parking for available shopping.
- Lots of availability due to few businesses being located there.
- There appeared to be plenty of downtown parking with on-street parking readily available as there was very little activity in downtown area. There were also city parking lots well-marked.

Rate and comment on the quality (appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting in the downtown.

Average score: **6.8**

Range of scores: 3 to 10

- Was not there during evening hours to observe lighting.
- Very nice street lights in the downtown area on Main Street.
- Lighting was attractive. Would fit beautifully with storefront renovation.
- No opinion – only there in daytime.
- Evening hour became difficult to see the businesses.
- Loved your street lights!

Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for the downtown to play a greater role?

- Yes!
- Downtown should play a bigger role – a visible information center.
- I didn't feel the downtown played as well as it could.
- Not apparent.
- It does not, but definitely could with beautiful architecture enhanced through façade uplift.
- Downtown should have a role in tourism but does not. There is a lot of potential.
- None apparent that I could see.

Describe the residential housing mix in the downtown (apartment, single detached).

- There was a senior citizen apartment building. Possibly some apartments over businesses but was not able to determine this from my observation. Very little single-family detached housing.
- None.
- Good mix, just not in great condition or appearance.
- Only type I observed was senior housing apartment building.
- I don't feel that residential is important to the downtown mix because of its location on the highway.
- Not seen.
- Didn't see a lot – mostly apartments above retailers.

Would you find the downtown a desirable place to live?

- No – just didn't feel comfortable as a residential area.
- No.
- N/A
- No – most services not available in immediate downtown area – grocery, gas, garage, large eating selection, etc. No housing except senior observed.
- Not sought after – but sufficient.
- No housing available in downtown.
- No. There did not appear to be any residential houses in downtown area. There were no grocery stores or many eating places.

Were there any government or nonprofit organization activities that are serving as traffic generators for the downtown (city hall, post office, YMCA)?

- Yes. Post office, city hall and county offices.
- Yes.
- City hall was not helpful. Chamber of Commerce was hard to find. No signage – helpful though.
- Yes – city hall, county, post office, YWCA.
- Had trouble finding the tourism and convention bureau.
- No.
- Chamber at Holiday Inn. Post office and city hall just off Main Street. Visitors' Bureau also at Holiday Inn.

General Information about Overall Retail

Describe the mix of retail shopping available (malls, specialty shops, strip malls, big box stores).

- A Wal-Mart Super Center. Mall was half empty (River City).
- Mall – good. Few independent businesses. Box store – good.
- Wal-Mart Supercenter. Downtown specialty shops.
- Very little.
- Very limited shops – mall. Wal-Mart has probably hurt – but is there to stay.
- Very limited.
- There was a super Wal-Mart and small shopping mall but many stores were closed there.

What retail goods do local residents appear to need to travel to surrounding communities for?

- There were no new car dealers or large department stores, Best Buy or Home Depot, etc. Most people talked to said they had to travel to Quincy for these things.
- Apparently most needs as stated before (need to go to Burlington or Quincy).
- Clothing, books, furniture, building materials, night life entertainment.
- New cars, clothing (Dillards, Younkers, mall-type department, etc.), big box (Best Buy, Home Depot, etc.)
- Better women's wear.
- A choice of clothing!

What stores or services were missing that you would expect to find?

- Can't think of anything right now, other than more clothing stores.
- Shoe store, better clothing for women.
- Lumber yard (found on the Main Street) – had Farm/Home Supply.
- New car dealer (at least one), outlying mall in residential/commercial area even if small. Downtown mall was in poor location and many vacant stores.
- Dining, winery.
- Computer.
- There were no new car dealers. I would have expected to find stores such as JCPenney's, Younkers or Dillards. Very little shopping for size of town.

What retail stores or services did you find that were unusual or unexpected for a town of this size?

- Did not find any.
- None (2 team members said this).
- Hotel and convenience stores.
- Beautiful kitchenware store in the mall. Great looking pharmacy.
- The number of professionals (i.e. CPA's, attorneys, tax preparers, Lasik eye surgery and more) was excellent!

What store(s) in this community would you travel a distance of more than 30 miles to patronize?

- Antique stores (2 team members said this).
- None (2 team members said this).
- Lumber yard, TV appliance stores – although Wal-Mart has TVs
- Maybe Wal-Mart if no other one closer.
- Wal-Mart.

Rate and comment on the overall condition of the retail sector.

Average score: **4.3**

Range of scores: **2 to 7**

- I thought the overall condition was good. Just like every small town operator we always need more customers & disposable income.
- Was very disappointed in retail business.
- Poor.

Other Retail Shopping Areas

Type: Small shopping mall.

Location: Downtown.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance.

Average score: **4.6**

Range of scores: **3 to 6**



- From exterior, mall had little appeal. It did appear better inside but many businesses had closed. Exterior appearance was not good.
- Exterior appearance was bad. Interior was much better but drive-by windows would keep you out.

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping.

Average score: **4.0**

Range of scores: **3 to 5**

- There was one larger department store there but not much other retail shopping. Many businesses closed.
- Many empty. One business that was there was closed. Sign said “was trying to improve store but she was only one who worked there and had to look up when needed to leave. Note said leave message on recorder if needed something.”

Rate and comment on the customer service of businesses you visited.

Average score: **8.3**

Range of scores: **8 to 9**

- Great customer service everywhere we went!
- Visited 3 stores in the mall.
- Clerk in department store was very helpful and friendly. Thanked me for my business!

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

Average score: **5.8**

Range of scores: **3 to 8**

- Nothing unusual, but what was expected.
- Limited and in general lesser quality. Suggest putting mini-booth businesses in the center of mall to increase activity and perception of viability.
- Department stores had a large variety of products and quality seemed good.

Local Industries

Consider industries only within or adjacent to the community. What are the major industrial sectors in the community (i.e. manufacturing, construction, transportation)?

- Industrial park – manufacturing.
- Manufacturing – energy – wind and fuels.
- Manufacturing, transportation related to river port access and rail and highways.

Who do you think are the major employers in the community?

- Roquette, hospital, schools, Griffin Wheel.
- Metzeler – auto wiring, school, hospital, Keokuk Steel Casting – metal castings, Wal-Mart, Griffin Wheel – train wheels, Roquette – grain milling.

What are the major types of manufacturing in the community?

- Roquette, corn products.
- Auto wiring, metal castings, steel train wheels, grain milling.
- Biofuels, auto parts, C&C parts, wind energy.

What are the major types of primary industry in the community (i.e. agriculture, mining, forestry or fishing)?

- Agriculture?!
- Manufacturing, agriculture, fishing.
- Manufacturing.

Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry?

- No (2 team members said this).
- Seemed to me Keokuk is like Centerville – depended too heavily on manufacturing.

- Seemed to be a variety of industry.

Is there a well-defined industrial park or improved land where industries could locate or expand?

- Not well defined, but fairly large and occupied.
- Yes, nice area.
- The defined industrial park does not appear to have a lot of additional room and economic development group does not own adjacent land but it appears industry is being successfully located in other industrial-type areas outside the park.

Are the industrial facilities well-maintained?

- Yes (2 team members said this).
- Most. Some appeared cluttered (river milling area) and some are vacant or abandon looking (Carbide).

Would this community be an attractive location for industrial development? Why or why not?

- Yes, available work force, space and facilities available.
- Yes, infrastructure available (rail, waterway, highway, multi-state access, airport, fiber optics).
- Main attraction over some other Iowa locations would be river port and rail.

Commercial Services

What types of commercial businesses serve the local community (high-speed Internet provider, print shops, etc.)?

- Print shop.
- All the above and more – good!

What commercial services appear to be missing in the community?

- Didn't notice anything missing. You've been able to cover this area very well!

Professional Services

Are banks and ATMs conveniently located? Do the banks have convenient hours of service?

- Yes.

How would you rate the adequacy of financial services for a community of this size?

Range of scores: 9

- Lots of options.

What other professional services are available (accounting, insurance, legal, etc.)? Are there any apparent gaps?

- CPA's, tax preparation, legal, insurance.

Tourism

Does the community have a strong tourism sector? Please comment.

- No. Chamber of Commerce office difficult to locate.
- No. No signs or directions to RV parks or B&B. No signs to direct tourist to information center. Great visitors guide.
- Due to the river and associated businesses and events – yes.

Does the community have a slogan/brand?

- Unknown.
- River City?

Is the community well-known for an attraction or event?

- Civil War re-enactment.

What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction (natural or man-made)?

- I would have liked to have seen more on the National Cemetery – couldn't find Civil War section – should be better, clearer signage.
- River Front.

Rate and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

Average score: **7.5**

Range of scores: **7 to 8**

- Need more and better signage to show locations.

Do you consider any of the attractions underdeveloped?

- Not really, but there's always room for improvement.
- Yes. Drive through "Statley homes". Visit National Cemetery – advertise in military magazines. Expand on honoring military service.
- No.

Are there any community events that could be expanded/developed to be a tourist attraction?

- Art Over the Mississippi – never heard of it. The locks and dam.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations in the community (hotels, motels, campgrounds, B&B's).

- Seemed to have plenty – B&Bs were very quaint.
- Hotels adequate. B&Bs – at least one well-known.
- A good variety of hotels/motels on Main Street and they are easy to see driving through town but campgrounds and B&Bs are not easy to locate with little or not signage.

Are there facilities to accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors?

- Yes.

Is there a Visitor's Center, Chamber of Commerce office, or other facility serving the needs of tourists? Comment on staff, facilities, signage, marketing material, maps, etc.

- Need better signage.
- Not visible.
- No signage – difficult to find without asking for assistance.
- Staff was great. Facility under remodeling, signage was not effective. Materials were good.

Rate and comment on the customer service of Chamber/Visitor staff:

Average score: **8.5**

Range of scores: **8 to 9**

Rate and comment on the quality of restaurants:

Average score: **7.5**

Range of scores: **5 to 10**

- We ate at Hawkeye and River City Restaurant – both good.
- Enjoyed two different restaurants on this trip. Good food. Excellent service.
- Breakfast in older facility – okay.
- Hawkeye was great. Diner on 218 was okay.

Variety/Mix of restaurants:

Average score: **7.7**

Range of scores: **7 to 8**

- Good variety.
- Saw Mexican (lots), Chinese, pizza, American, high-end and fast food. Very good.
- There are several different eating places for a small town!

What do local residents recommend on where to stay, eat and visit?

- New hotel was recommended. Hawkeye Restaurant was recommended. Cemetery, lock and dams, park.
- We were told the Holiday Inn Express or new Fairfield Inn. Told Hawkeye was best in town. Miller Museum and Riverboat.
- Residents recommended places to eat.

What local restaurant, specialty shop or attraction would bring you back to this community in the near future?

- Antique shop, tour of homes.
- Tour of homes along river.

Local Government Information

Are municipal offices conveniently located?

- Had to ask twice for the location of city hall. Wrong information the first time.
- Yes – once we found them – need more signage to avoid the “search”.
- No, they were hard to find.

How would you rate the availability and quality of the following information provided by the municipal government?

Community brochure/guide:

Average score: **6**

Range of scores: **3 to 9**

Business directory:

Average score: **8.5**

Range of scores: **8 to 9**

Community profile (includes business and industrial sites):

Range of scores: **9**

How would you rate the helpfulness of government employees?

Average score: **6**

Range of scores: **3 to 9**

- Went to city hall to speak to the public works director but he had recently retired and no replacement had been made.
- Overall – great! Admin at city hall not very helpful!

Public Infrastructure

Comment on and rate each of the following for quality, accessibility or availability.

Public transportation:

Range of scores: **8**

Sidewalks:

Average score: **6.8**

Range of scores: **3 to 9**

- Most in good repair.

- I was wondering where people walk in their neighborhoods.
- Overall they were in a good condition.
- Good.

Streets:

Average score: **7**

Range of scores: **5 to 8**

- Good.
- General good condition with some being replaced.
- Street conditions are fair. Every community has this problem.
- Most in good repair and it was obvious work continues!

Landscaping, street trees:

Average score: **7**

Range of scores: **4 to 9**

- Thought the downtown area could have more landscaping/signage.
- Landscaping in the city parks that I saw was very good.

Public restrooms:

Average score: **4**

Range of scores: **3 to 5**

- Hard to find.
- Didn't see any.

Street signage:

Average score: **6**

Range of scores: **3 to 9**

- Signage for the streets was very good.
- Poor.
- So-so.

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, public Internet access points, other misc.:

Average score: **4**

Range of scores: **2 to 7**

- Same. Didn't see any.
- Not noticed.
- Pretty good – I saw no problems.

Planning

Do you see conflicting land uses in the community (i.e. a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill)?

- Did not observe any instances of this.
- No (2 team members said this).
- Some conflicting but this community is limited with two rivers surrounding it.
- Older residential area near river industry on Hwy. 136 has bad appearance. Also, manufacturing plants on south side of 218 near commercial area (Hy Vee, etc.) is conflicting but this area appearance is neat in comparison to other manufacturing areas.

Are all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space, etc.)?

- Appears to be.
- Yes.
- Okay in general.

Did you experience traffic congestion anywhere?

- Highway 61 Bypass-218 intersection. Possible light or all-way stop as somewhat dangerous to make left turn from stop on N 61 Bypass onto 61-218 north if high speed oncoming southbound traffic heavy going to 218.
- Downtown – but isn't that what you want. Street lights close together give the businesses a chance to encourage that traveler to stop in.
- Good traffic patterns.
- No.
- Only where road work was taking place and that is to be expected.

Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities?

- Yes.
- Yes from what I noticed.
- The newer locations are handicap accessible, but some of the older buildings create problems.

Does the community appear to be pedestrian/bike friendly?

- No. Sidewalks?
- Yes.
- Good.
- Yes.

Recreation, Faith, Culture and Heritage

Recreation

Rate and comment on the availability and appearance of each of the following types of recreational facilities.

Parks:

Average score: **8**

Range of scores: **5 to 9**

- Beautiful park.
- Rand Park is beautiful!
- Few, but very nice.
- Very nice, clean facilities.
- Had a direction sign but no other signs leading to the park.



Public recreation facilities:

Average score: **6**

Range of scores: **4 to 9**

- Some were well-located and others hard to find.
- Very good.
- Need work. Pool, courts, rinks.
- Pool area looked a little run-down.
- Need modernization.

Private recreation facilities:

Range of scores: **7**

- None seen. Has YMCA.
- Gold courses are all private.

Based on your impression, what do people appear to do for recreation/fun?

- Baseball, bowling. Golfing – private in Keokuk and public in Hamilton and Nauvoo. I'm sure there is water recreation just not this time of year.
- Fishing, school sports.
- Theater – lots of physical activities and sports.
- Movies, community plays, golf, bowling.



What recreational facility (private or public) in this community surprised you?

- The ice-skating rink and half-pipe.

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

- Are biking trails available?
- Did I see soccer fields?

Rate the overall suitability of the recreational facilities for each of the following populations using a 1-10 scale (10 is best):

8.0 – Families

7.7 – Children (12 and under)

6.3 – Teens

5.7 – Senior citizens

5.7 – Singles, young adults

Entertainment

What does the community do for entertainment?

- Movies, bowling, have a tremendous park facility.
- Theater, golf.

What entertainment opportunities do residents feel they lack?

- No one mentioned lacking anything.

Does the community have a vibrant nightlife?

- Lots of bars on Main Street
- Seem to have a good mix of restaurants and bars.

Faith/Religion

Comment on the number, appearance and selection of denominations.

- Lots of churches – many denominations – 90% were beautiful!
- Wide variety. Most appear good. Some in the back of retail space or vacated commercial buildings?
- Large variety of church denominations.

Are there any outstanding architectural or design features found on the religious buildings you visited?

- Yes, First Methodist.
- Yes, historical features were retained – that's great!

Please rate the religious buildings and denominations represented in this community.

Average score: **8.3**

Range of scores: **6 to 10**

- Large and excellent variety.

Culture and Heritage

Does the community hold any events (festivals)? Which events are held annually?

- Civil War re-enactment, Geode Fest and Hunt.

What events are popular with residents?

- Anything providing musical entertainment.

Do the residents feel there is a lack of community events?

- One person (waitress at River City Restaurant) commented there was “nothing to do during the week”, only weekends. She also thought your population was around 30,000!

Does the community have historical buildings or places? Are they well-maintained?

- Absolutely!
- Observed several historical buildings and they appeared to be very well-maintained.
- Noted historical homes.

General Observations

Role Playing

Would you consider this community as a suitable location for a young family?

- Yes. Recreational availability, schools, housing appearance, parks, college, YMCA. Possible employment availability would be only question.
- Yes. Lots of amenities and activities for young, active families.

Would you consider locating your retail or service business here?

- Not right now – doesn't look like it would prosper – the retail part.
- I asked if a shop owner would consider the mall a good place to locate a skin care and lingerie shop – she said yes – I think it would go here.
- Service – maybe. Retail – no because there is little other retail-type businesses that would help attract customers to my business.

Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here?

- Yes. Amount of current industry indicates business-friendly environment. River and rail available is positive. Labor available from three-state area. Immediate decision might be negative based on possible labor shortage if new industry hiring 400 workers soon.
- Yes. Good workforce available and sites available as well.

Would you consider this a suitable location for a retired person?

- Yes. Good housing for seniors. Good health care facilities. Nice churches.
- No. I am a retired person and didn't see much that appealed to me for fun and activities.
- Yes. Quiet, nice community, affordable, great medical services, suitable entertainment.
- Yes. Availability of senior housing complexes, river, friendly small towns nearby, adequate medical.

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young adult?

- Not sure.
- No. Jobs and recreation and housing not suited for young adults.
- Kind of. Lots of professional opportunities, but didn't learn a lot about the night life.

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist?

- As a frequent tourist myself, I would probably not stop in Keokuk. Tourists do not stop at every Chamber of Commerce office to see what is available. If there is a lack of signage, most tourists will not stop.
- Yes – I love the river!
- No. Signage does not direct tourists to areas of interest. This community could be a great one-day stop for travelers.
- No. No obvious activities or attractions for desires of all age groups.

Information from Community Residents

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

- Yes. Every person I asked was able to provide adequate answers to the questions I asked (general public – directions and information in general; city employees – specific to their area and general; Chamber of Commerce – all).
- Yes. Number of residents noted how proud they were of mayor and community leaders and their plans and work to develop the community.
- Some were; some were not. About half and half.

Did they refer you to someone else who would help?

- No.
- Yes.
- Chamber suggested contact Lee County Economic Development for additional help if further interest.

In general, did residents you spoke with have a positive or negative attitude toward their community? Why? Did you sense community pride?

- Mixed. All expressed hope and positive attitude for new employer but about 1/3 said decline had occurred and resulting “hard times” had result of community not being like it was before. Three said live in Illinois because tax on housing cheaper. One because no tax on retirement pay. Didn’t find anyone who lived in Missouri.
- Positive attitude in community. Negative attitude in city hall.
- We experience both positive and negative. In some there was great community pride!
- Very positive – especially about the new business (turbine blade manufacturing) coming to town.

Did residents identify a particular issue to be of major concern?

- A couple of teenagers said they couldn’t wait to “get out of here”.
- No (2 team members said this).

Overall, how would you rate the quality of information from community residents and business employees?

Average score: **7.8**

Range of scores: **7 to 9**

- I was able to find or get information or answers for everything I wanted.
- City hall not helpful.
- For the most part it was very helpful.

Using Your Senses

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

- None.
- The Hawkeye was excellent!
- No.
- Not really.

What did the community smell like? Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors?

- No good or bad. I think it was a plus that I didn't detect bad odor from corn milling or river.
- Nothing unusual noted.
- Just fresh air. I noticed no particular smells at all.
- No odors.

What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community (traffic, industrial, birds, water falls, music on the street, trains, noon whistle, etc.).

- No abnormal sounds.
- Seemed quiet and peaceful overall.
- Quiet community.
- All normal – no unusual sounds.

How would you describe the overall environmental health of the community (air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

- Okay.
- Good.
- In general, about average. Those few places blight other areas by being close.
- Excellent.

Did you experience anything that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you (hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets, safety issues, smiling faces, etc.)?

- Friendly, courteous people - positive, empty buildings on Main Street were strong negatives.
- No.
- Empty building on Main Street.
- Everyone I talked to was friendly and volunteered to talk or help me.

Do you think your impression would be different if your visit occurred during evening hours?

- Unknown, but would assume not.
- Blank building will give a dark, unsafe feeling.
- No.
- Maybe.

Wrap-Up

Was your perception prior to the visit accurate? In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

- No prior perceptions.
- Yes, but more rundown and empty than I expected.
- No. Community was more updated and progressive than I expected. Had more industry and projected larger size than population except for available shopping.
- No. A community full of opportunity. Has a great history and tradition. Once again, the two rivers make this an outstanding community.
- No. Community was much larger than I expected and has much more industry. I was surprised there was so little shopping for a town this size.

Did the information you collected prior to the visit accurately reflect what you observed/experienced?

- Yes (2 team members said this).
- Yes. I thought their Web site was tremendous and informational.
- Yes, based on what was found on Internet.

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

- Hospital, schools, Grand old homes.
- The people, health care, the great houses on Grand Avenue, schools, parks.
- The location near the river!
- Amount of industry – both large and small businesses.
- The rivers – potential.
- The community had a larger number of small and large industries which would provide jobs in the community so younger family members would not have to leave the area to find work.

List five positive things you observed about this community.

- Large amount of industry; Good impression as you come to town from north on 218, everything was well-kept; Location on river would provide recreation for community; Nice housing area in northeast area of town; YMCA and golf courses.
- Location; Highway system gives downtown and outside district equal exposure; Good mix of business and professional services; Industry seems strong – river unlimited potential; Educational system – rich heritage.
- Lot of industry – river and rail access; Good highway access; River scenery and recreation; Newer housing areas without old houses mixed into these areas; Schools, YMCA, college.
- Great, well-maintained schools; Rand Park; Variety of professional services available; Pride awards; Historical past/museums.
- How nice the citizens are (good attitudes); Health care facilities; Schools; New industry; Condition of old buildings (mansions, churches).

- Warm, friendly people; Positive attitude about the future; Great infrastructure; Great healthcare; Great schools.

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

- Displays and lighted windows in vacant downtown buildings; Flowers in front of vacant building to detract from storefront; Attractive signs to direct visitors to your assets – “Tour of Riverfront Homes”.
- Better signage for tourists so they do not have to hunt for campgrounds and attractions; Advertisement of local attractions in appropriate publications (National Cemetery and Re-enactments in military magazines – Bald Eagle Days in birding magazines); Dress up front of the mall at 300 Main Street – from the street it appears to be an empty building.
- New business coming in creating jobs; More tourism concentration and marketing.
- Job opportunities with new industry and river port expansion; Develop larger retail base; Attract more big city-type business (i.e. Big Box – Home Depot, Best Buy, Office Max, new car dealer, etc.).
- Kayak, canoe race event, outdoor water business – not just boating; Two water towers – marketing – let people know who you are – visitors (every person driving through is a potential visitor even when they don’t think they are); Do you have a branded car dealership (i.e. Chevrolet, Ford, Dodge).
- Need to provide better shopping in area so residents do not have to go elsewhere to shop; Availability of new jobs with new industry coming to town; Attract businesses such as Home Depot, Lowes, Best Buy, new car dealer.

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

- Lack of shopping and appearance of downtown area; Housing shortage with new industry coming to town; Additional land for industry expansion; Appearance of current mall and adding business of a variety there.
- The Wooden Wall – can we make use of it – is there advertising? Marketing ability if not. Plant trees, shrubs; Water towers – focal points driving in and out of town; Use Nauvoo, IL – potential as your own; Keeping downtown vital – parking, lighting, landscaping; Strong infrastructure – sidewalks, roads, street signs.
- Vacant industry and poor appearance of some industry areas (Carbide, Roquette areas); Downtown and mall appearance and retail availability; Possible desirable housing shortage; Additional land in industrial park for more small industries.
- Number of empty retail space; Number of empty and rundown homes; Lack of adequate signage; Trash and junk cars in residential areas; Need more jobs.
- Clean up inside empty building; Good businesses downtown; Retaining young people in the community; Entertainment for all ages of residents; Maintaining positive attitudes.
- Large number of vacant downtown buildings; Available new housing; Available quality retail; Entertainment for young couples during school year (outside school events).

What will you remember most about this community six months from now?

- Excellent lunch.
- Empty buildings on Main Street.
- The pull of the river.

- Good – newer, more updated city with lots of industry. Bad – lack of shopping and retail.
- It's rich and proud heritage. Street signs not upright. Sidewalks.
- Negative – lack of downtown shopping. Positive – large number of industrial businesses.

What have you learned here that has changed your impression of your own community?

- Need to clean up housing areas (remove junk cars, debris, etc.). Improve appearances of all entrances to city and improve signage coming into town.
- That the true purpose of each community is to become an asset to the people of the community and the people become an asset to the community.
- Internet Economic Development presentation. Housing areas appearance. City entrances appearance.
- We need more recreational amenities and things for our youth to do.

Has this experience given you any new ideas about what is needed in your own community?

- We need stated goals and plans that citizens can repeat to visitors.
- To look more closely at what is needed and establish a plan to achieve these goals.
- Yes! It has helped a lot.
- Better Internet presentation. Better written materials presentation.
- Yes, how important street signage is. Don't be a secret!
- Need to attract more industry even if it is smaller companies as they provide jobs for young people. Doesn't just have to be large companies.

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!

- Suggest that the city work harder with residents to clean up area and give better impression when driving through town.
- Look at our community from an outsiders view and write down 10 ideas/suggestions. Can we implement there and are they cost effective. Money is always an issue.
- Suggest to Centerville Chamber of Commerce and Appanoose Economic Development Corporation that they review the Keokuk and Lee County Economic Development Web sites plus the written material obtained from Keokuk to see if improvements are needed in current Centerville and Appanoose County presentation to industrial and business prospects.
- I want to increase the appeal of our park areas. Will visit with Parks and Rec department.
- Discuss with the appropriate personnel the need for some signage.
- Start talking to elected officials about community "plans" for improvement.

Other comments:

- Area had adequate newer type motels such as Hampton Inn, Fairfield Inn, Super 8, Holiday Inn Express. Also major fast food eating places such as McDonalds, Wendy's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, Sonic and KFC.

- Turned off Hwy. 61 bypass where sign indicated “Industrial Park”. Drove about two miles to end of the road looking for the park. Didn’t see the little street sign saying “Kindustry”. Needs much better sign just after turning off of Hwy. 61.