

# **FIRST IMPRESSIONS REPORT TO THE CITY OF FORT ATKINSON**

**REPORTED BY  
STOUGHTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**JULY 2000**

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**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**  
FT. ATKINSON, WISCONSIN  
July 18, 2000

**1. Before visit perception.**

- \* My only acquaintance with Fort Atkinson was the Fireside Theatre. Didn't know anything else about the city. I expected a small city with not much more than an industrial base
- \* Believed Fort to be about the size of Stoughton
- \* I thought Fort would be a close community
- \* I thought of Fort Atkinson as a more agricultural directed community because of its history

**2. The "Five Minute Impression"**

- \* Intrigued with the first entrance along HWY 106, realizing that the city be bigger than I had realized since the park facilities, especially the water park was quite large and very well laid out
- \* Strong presence of organizations represented in the City and shown on the entrance signs to the city. Examples include Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis.
- \* Fort entrance signs are at each entrance to the City
- \* Historic lighting looks nice
- \* Decorative brick pavers looks nice have withstood the weathering elements fairly well over the last few years
- \* Wonderful park system
- \* Well maintained lawns
- \* Historical relevance
- \* Comfortable traffic flow
- \* Large industrial city
- \* Much larger total area than expected
- \* Lions Quick Mart mini strip could use some "sprucing up."
- \* Beautiful planters with flowers (7) by new bridge on north side
- \* Impressed with City, showed good growth and what appeared above average income

**DRIVING**

**A. Evaluate each entrance**

- \* 106 entrance Fort Atkinson sign too many ads
- \* Neat Fort, well maintained tennis and aquatic center
- \* Route 106 along Rock River-Riverside Drive-very inviting entrance
  - ~ Homes along 106-very well kept-many flags had flags up, nice patriotic sense
  - ~ Glacier River Trail-very well marked bike trail
  - ~ Car lots, bank, credit union, Laundromat. Big facility with SpaceSaver Storage Systems, Shop-Ko, J-Star
  - ~ Entrance to City neat
  - ~ Rock River provides an appealing entrance
- \* Janesville Drive

- \* Wisconsin Conservation Club
- \* Fort Plaza
  - ~ awnings need to be replaced
- \* The river could be used better with improvements and park area development
  - ~ tennis court-eyesore(needs work) took picture
  - ~ pretty boulevards between school and residential areas, but could use landscaping to accent areas
- \* Route 89 to Whitewater
  - ~ nice homes at first-then run down area
  - ~ good signage into town
  - ~ driver's license facility-convenient for residents
  - ~ good to see continued street improvements
  - ~ mixed business and residential
  - ~ Memorial Park
    - well maintained, well fenced
    - 2 softball diamonds and lighted
  - ~ Bank River Nature Park-also very good park
  - ~ grass cut in ALL parks
  - ~ Water tower on south side needs paint
  - ~ not an organized entrance- many warehouses. Couple of billboards on this entrance, some of these items may not be in the City
  - ~ Welcome sign looks nice
- \* East Milwaukee entrance-Rock River
  - ~ nice buildings in area
  - ~- interesting to see police office on bike - would like to see that in our town
  - ~ Ralph Park-big soccer field and volley ball court
  - ~ E. Milwaukee provides long stretch of frontage along the river

## **B. Evaluate the downtown business area**

- \* Baker Road Kitchen Store
  - ~ first clerk of the day
  - ~ very friendly
  - ~ told us about Funky's and other parts of downtown
- \* The Antiques Exchange
  - ~ going out of business
  - ~ three stores bought by Mr. Erdmann who owns Funky's
  - ~ owners upset about losing business to Erdmann but excited that he is buying up land intends to build Ft. Atkinson into a thriving river city with a riverwalk and also buying Water Tower
- \* The Gallery On the Main
  - ~ helpful and friendly
- \* Jonas Office Products Ltd
  - ~ very helpful
  - ~ young clerk but could tell us where the Chamber of Commerce was located
- \* Humphrey Floral and Gift
  - ~ pleasant staff very helpful

- ~ wonderful proprietor
- ~ extremely excited about being a shop owner in F. A.
- ~ very proud of F.A.
- ~ doubling size of business (purchased property next door)
- \* Thrift Shop
  - ~ in business 30 years
  - ~ all volunteers
  - ~ all money goes to charities that the volunteers select
  - ~ all clothing donated
  - ~ wonderful service being done for the community
- \* Funky's
  - ~ incredibly expensive store
  - ~ unique and well designed
  - ~ should be real draw for city
  - ~ very unusual and fun to see different items
  - ~ stone patio with chairs and tables very inviting and wonderful view
- \* Black Hawk Bar & Grill -
  - ~ A pleasant waitress, relaxing environment, good service, excellent food and coffee
- \* Daily Jefferson County Union
  - ~ greeted by Diane Niemeyer-very courteous and helpful. Directed me to Chamber for additional help
- \* Marlene Wallace Real Estate
  - ~ Very positive person. Offered to help me find a house in my price range. Spoke well of the forthcoming improvements on the river

### **C. Evaluate other business areas**

- \* Simple but effective street banners
- \* Lots of small stores
- \* Nice waterway
- \* Open feeling, not bordered by any close large cities
- \* Clean, flower boxes are taken care of
- \* Store signs visible
- \* Very impressed with the size of the new stores, number of grocery stores, restaurants
- \* Post Office pretty nice looking in the downtown district - back side of Main St.
- \* New construction of Police Department
- \* Large library

### **D. Comments on residential**

- \* Well kept lawns
- \* Older housing well maintained. Riverside Drive very nice older homes
- \* Residential areas incorporated parks nicely
- \* Newer housing development mixed in comfortably
- \* Many different styles and designs. Good use of landscaping
- \* Nice attention to apartment dwellers

- \* Home owners have great pride in their property, lawn mowed, many flowers, well maintained
- \* A day care in a residential area was very nice to see, and very accessible to working neighborhood residents
- \* New apartment complexes look very inviting. Beautiful buildings

#### **E. Comments on street signs**

- \* Well maintained
- \* Tough to view the Fort on the sign
- \* Easy to read street signs, difficult to depict logo
- \* Touring the city used we used maps more than signs
- \* Was there a sign on Main St. for the library or Police Station?
- \* Driver license sign was very visible and with schedule
- \* Small logos on street signs

#### **F. comments on traffic patterns/ street conditions**

- \* Street is kind of rough until you get to Bark River Drive - then it is newer
- \* Main Street - no sidewalks, Hilltop-major, east & west - no sidewalks New sidewalk replacement project - 89 South to Whitewater
- \* Totally new street reconstruction behind the Middle School
- \* Business 26 from the North or South rough, older section of street
- \* Parking stalls on Main St. are narrow and marked with a full rectangular box. Getting out of a vehicle on the driver's side requires caution
- \* Some one-way streets downtown, which may add to a slight bit of confusion for non-local people
- \* Many different points of entry/exit to downtown makes for unique view of city. Well maintained, easy flowing
- \* Clean streets

#### **G. Comments on welcome signs**

- \* Every entrance had some type of Fort idea, made you feel you have arrived
- \* Hwy. 106 sign needs bushes trimmed to read
- \* Hwy. 26 entrance sign, part of the words missing

#### **H. comments on direction signs to various**

- \* Good placement of signage for hospital
- \* Good signage for parks. Some noted what was available at park

#### **I. Comments on industrial park/area sign**

- \* Lacked directional signs from edge to town
- \* Industrial area-no sign available to identify as Industrial Park. Lack of signage regarding industrial parks
- \* Gordon F. Day Industrial Park-next to Ralph Park-not very big, looks like older part of industrial area
- \* Lacking directional signs to Industrial Parks
- \* Industrial parks have room to expand

- \* Wrecking yard off Hwy. 26 well screened

#### **J. Comments on schools**

- \* Very neat and clean
- \* Impressive new high school
- \* Good use of old grade school as administrative building
- \* Good play and sports areas
- \* Beautiful high school building. School district administrative offices/youth center building and Purdy Elementary. Buildings and grounds well cared for
- \* Purdy Elementary neat, well maintained
- \* High School in excellent location away from traffic at edge of City

#### **K. Comments on parks, playgrounds, etc.**

- \* Ft. Atkinson River Park and Family Aquatic Center
  - ~ Old Fort-historic appreciation clear
  - ~ very nice facility(great shelter) for a city of this size not very well used on the day we were there-surprising for a warm summer day not to see more children in the pool or playing basketball. Many playing tennis
  - ~ Kiwanis Athletic field-pretty grounds
  - ~ Eagle Trail-well marked walking trail
- \* A very nice new park shelter in the park by the Aquatic Center. The community is going the extra mile by watering grass around the new shelter to get it established. The trap range is a unique feature within the city. The Aquatic Center appears to be well-kept and utilized
- \* Aquatic center superb, and all that surrounds it. Sign at entrance very good
- \* Zida St. Park ice rink? Could probable use some maintenance
- \* There seems to be a nice series of bike trails, i.e., the lake route and Glacial River bike trail
- \* It appears a hockey rink is flooded that does not have boards but does have a fence enclosure and lighting . Did not see a sign for this park
- \* Designated bike route, however no bike lanes in a residential area. Bike lanes have been a point of discussion in our community and it is interesting to see how Fort handles this issue.
- \* Ralph Park well maintained
- \* Loermans Bicentennial Park not as well kept as the others but in pretty good shape, nice location, one block off of Main St. to the west. Convenient for downtown picnics or lunch time rest areas
- \* Nice band shelter park in center of town
- \* Wide variety of possible activities
- \* Jones Park, tennis courts need some attention
- \* Good fencing around parks
- \* The river front is quite an asset in this community and is utilized well, as there is a significant amount of access for the public to get near the river

#### **L. Comments on hospitals/clinics**

- \* Entire health care section to city

- ~ So convenient to have all medical facilities in one general area, well thought out
- ~ Modern buildings, landscaping, neatness projects excellent care
- ~ excellent use of space to have all medical facilities located in one area and near the Ft. Atkinson Memorial Hospital where there was lots of parking
- \* Nice locations for several health care providers; dentists, UW-Physicians Plus ear, nose, throat, dermatology, urologist, orthopedics
  - ~ Health center area about 2 blocks behind hospital
  - ~ Driveways near hospital are painted yellow about 4 or 5 ft. out from the driveway apron
- \* excellent planning and very impressive
- \* Very good signage to and around the hospital
- \* Hospital neat & clean. Appears to have adequate on site parking. Residential Neighborhood not impacted by hospital parking.
- \* Appears to have adequate parking for all facilities
- \* Home health center was clean and inviting looking building
- \* Convenient to have Day care in the same area

#### **M. Comments on billboards/advertising**

- \* Didn't appear to have a proliferation of billboards

#### **N. Comments on other**

- \* One of the neatest compost areas I have seen within a City limits
- \* Compost & brush drop site-compost drop site hour 3:00 p.m. to dusk on wed. and 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Sat
- \* Police firing range. A unique feature within the City
- \* Compost site - well organized, and locked, using during specific hours
- \* Area set aside for logs to be used by residents
- \* Hockey rink near riverneat area, not signed.
- \* Municipal airport neat and well maintained

### **WALKING AROUND**

#### **A. Comments on businesses(physical part): Appearance, Displays, Signs, etc.**

- \* Industrial scrap metal and iron appears to be in the city. Seems to be fairly well screened to the city
- \* Stores were very neat and clean. Aisles were clear
- \* Well Maintained. Variety of business from food to antiques
- \* Hartel Building - windows out
  
- \* Lions, and Rotary Clubs are to be recognized for their labors to provide funds for shelter, the Kiwanis Club for the Athletic Field, the Women's Club or their avenue of trees
- \* Good mix of restaurants, from bar & grills to nice dining - Fireside
- \* Nicely situated public works building, basketball court inside
- \* Gordon F. Day Industrial Park, the grounds were not maintained, rather a messy area, as were the buildings

- \* Library is large, in center of town, with parking
- \* Library was busy on week day and offers a large section of books, periodicals, videos, etc.

**B. Comments on people, Friendly? Have answers to questions?**

- \* Police Officer presence on bicycle. It shows good police presence in a friendly manner
- \* People at the recreation office were very helpful
- \* People at the First Federal Building extremely helpful
- \* Warm greeting from all downtown businesses
- \* The enthusiasm of the people for their city
- \* The city was very comfortable
- \* I missed a women's dress shop, shoe store, children's clothing store which seems to be gone from all small communities
- \* Location of Professional offices?
- \* Is there a Senior Center?
- \* Mall?

**C. Community Information**

- \* Community brochures (tourist type)
- \* Businesses/attractions brochures or directory
- \* Community profile (demographics, etc.)
- \* Map
- \* Other (bulletin, kiosks)

**D. City Hall**

- \* Appearance of facility
  - ~ A Few brick pavers have recessed in new area near City Hall
- \* Helpfulness of staff
- \* Other

**E. Chamber of Commerce**

- \* Did people know where it was
  - ~ Yes, several people interviewed directed me to the Chamber for additional information
- \* comments on information available
  - ~ People are very courteous at the Chamber office, more than helpful, I think they knew we were coming
- \* comment on staff
  - ~ Penny Wiesmann greeted me and went through a welcome folder, she was very nice and gave a good presentation of all material in the folder
- \* Very helpful with questions, nice chamber office, walked in and found a wealth of information
- \* Other
  - ~ Good location, nice building, very professional looking

## **F. Comments on other stuff**

- \* Public restroom
  - ~ Didn't see any or any signs posted
  
- \* Payphone
  - ~ Nice, small airport, paved with pay phone
  - ~ Only payphone I saw was at the airport
  
- \* Parking
  - ~ Available parking places available at the locations we traveled
- \* water fountains, benches
  - ~ I didn't see fountains or benches
  
- \* other

## **G. Comments on what you experiences USING YOUR "SENSES"**

- \* Community taste like
  - ~ Black Hawk Restaurant offered good food and nice atmosphere for casual lunch
- \* Community smell like
  - ~ There were no odors noticed, the City smelled clean
- \* Community sounds like
  - ~ Usual traffic sounds, busy community but Rock River provides a visual calmness
- \* Community feel like
  - ~ Friendly, also had a "big city" feel without the congestion
- \* List 5 positive things
  - ~ Excellent health care facilities
  - ~ Excellent park facilities
  - ~ Large industry
  - ~ Excellent compost sight
  - ~ Pleasant downtown
- \* Describe one idea that you will steal and use
  - ~ Development of our river and derelict Hotel
- \* What will you remember
  - ~ The parks
  - ~ Compost sight
  - ~ Pleasant feeling walking through the City
  - ~ Large industry
  
- \* Other comments-Over-all impression

Very much impressed with Fort Atkinson—while it is a smallish city in terms of its population, it has the feel of a much larger city (large medical complex, many city parks, numerous grocery stores, theater, etc.). It seems like a lovely place to live with the homes well kept up for the most part and pretty areas around the river. The downtown merchants I spoke with were all pleasant and very happy with their business AND with Fort Atkinson and all very excited about the new possibilities with Erdmann's opening of

Funky's which apparently has been drawing customers from afar. I could see why young couples would want to buy a home in Ft. Atkinson, especially with all the park facilities and pool area. I was pleasantly surprised with the city and have told many people about it since our visit. It is clear that the larger industrial base that the city has is responsible for its thriving. Very Impressive small city!!

Overall, I was very impressed with this community. I have driven through Fort Atkinson many times, but I was pleasantly surprised when I had the opportunity to really "check out" the city. To the visitor, you have a very neat and well maintained city. Keep it up.

I was impressed how Fort Atkinson is able to maintain large industry without an overflow or disturbance to the residential or downtown area. The city is much larger than I had thought and flows nicely with the river. The people of Fort Atkinson should pride themselves in their wonderful park system. Fort Atkinson impressed upon me that it is a city that knows where it has come from, where it is presently, and where it will be in the future.

Enjoyed my day in Fort , especially the park system. Having coached for 32 years I have been in Fort Atkinson may times, it has been a pleasure to visit our neighbors to the East, with the Fireside being a great attraction.

My view of Ft. Atkinson had completely changed from being that of a small city, which it really is, to one that operates like a much bigger city with great well-maintained parks and an excellent health care facility for its residents. What a bonus for families with small children and teen-agers and for senior citizens so all medical appointments can be scheduled together to save time.