

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Bern, KS **Date(s) Visited:** a) 2-7-2022 (Monday)
b) 2-4-2022 (Friday)
c) 2-6-2022 (Sunday)

1. Pre-visit web search:

How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

- a. It is very easy to get information from Wikipedia; named after Bern, Switzerland by early settlers.
- b. There was some online information that I found by using Google – both the community information and some businesses. My impressions from the online information made me think of a small quiet town, but instead saw a town with several businesses and industry with diverse of employment opportunities. No, I didn't really find an official city of Bern website to learn about the town.
- c. I was able to find some basic info from a Google search, population, area, etc. When I searched on Facebook, they do have a pretty active community page, that has events and information.

2. The “Five-Minute” Impression:

After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted. The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

- a. Nice and clean, quiet except around the industrial park west end of town. Welcome signs, streets and buildings kept up well, signage good, street signs up.
- b. This town has a lot going on. It is very diverse with houses, businesses, industrial plant that was noisy, and recreational areas. There are several entrances into town – 2 from the south, 2 from the north, and 1 from the east. The main entrance (southwest) has a nice Bern entrance sign near the ballpark area. It would be nice to have additional signage along the main east-west paved road (highway) with arrowed Bern signs. The water tower also is noticeable.
- c. My husband and I were pretty impressed on our initial drive through town. There is a lot more going on in Bern than we were expecting. Quite a few businesses, large and small, cute park, nice ballfield. More housing than expected.

The sign for the old high school in the town square was a nice touch. I'm sure Bern misses having their school, so the fact that they utilize the old sign for community info was a nice touch. There is nice signage coming in from the south, but did not see any other signage from other entrances.

3. Downtown Business Area

Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.

Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

- a. Bank, Locker, Polaris dealers, Helena ag, AHRS Contractor, Alphaia, and Werzel Repair. Bern Oil, friendly and helpful to find where Community Building was. Very nice Community Building and open for public restrooms. Locker, Polaris, AHRS Construction and Veterinary clinic were courteous and friendly. Good customer service, busy but still ask if they could help in any way.
- b. Mostly historic brick building “feel” with some modern metal business buildings. The city park had a prominent “Bern High School” upcoming event/activity sign that was a great idea and eye catching. Most of the buildings had identifiable signage, and the streets appeared to be maintained. Bank – foundational family business; Bern Oil Co. – on-site fuel & delivery; Animal Pet Food Plant – very visible presence by building size, exhaust noise, signage & employee parked vehicles; Bern Meat Plant – custom cuts or retail purchase products; Polaris Dealer – ATVs on display for purchase &/or service; Helena Ag Co.- ag. products & services; Auto Body Shop; Car Wash; City Hall – closed, but saw through the window- Bern H.S. banner & jerseys hanging on the wall (nice theme to remember the past); Library – closed, but had posted hours on digital sign; Vet Clinic on the east end of town – accessible service; AHRS – noticeable presence with several buildings and construction equipment. Bern Oil Co.- greeted, friendly & helpful; Helena Ag. Co.- greeted, friendly & helpful.
- c. We went on a Sunday due to my work schedule, so no businesses in downtown were open. However, we were very impressed with what businesses they did have in downtown and how nice the area looked and was maintained. Having the park just across the street made it nice as well. While we didn’t get to talk to anyone due to it being Sunday, anyone we met in town waved. For the time of year, the restrooms at the park were not open (as we expected) so we asked to use the restroom at Lani main office, as they had a lot of activity going on that day with trucks and people in and out. Very nice facility and the gentleman inside allowed us to use the restroom and was very friendly.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available? Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- a. Nice park and ball field. No problems with parking, the landscaping in the park looked good.
- b. City Park on the west end of the business district has two restrooms, drinking fountain, trash cans, and a fabulous shelter house with lots of seating. Parking was plentiful, and you could walk to every business from the parked location. The overall views were clean and open appearing.
- c. We were very impressed with the park! It was very cute, very clean, lots of nice areas to sit and watch kids. In the spring and summer the mature trees would provide lots of shade. The restrooms were locked but they looked like a nice building with a drinking fountain on the outside. There was also a nice fenced in basketball court about a block northeast of the park, behind the bank. Nice goals and concrete. The ball diamond at the south edge of town looked to be well maintained. Since it was February, it was hard to see any landscaping, although I think there were some bushes around the park that I'm sure are nice in spring and summer.

The streets are in town are wonderful. I would say most all the streets are concrete and in great shape. Very few streets are gravel. We were surprised and impressed with that.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

Describe other retail shopping areas. Were the areas attractive and easy to access?

- a. No Answer
- b. Not applicable (NA)
- c. No Answer

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand? If so, describe.

- a. Industrial parks were at the lower west and north end of town with room for expansion.
- b. Yes, the manufacturing industry was along the west edge of town next to farmland. It would be easy to expand as long as the land could be purchased.
- c. The industrial areas were on the edges of town, so expanding would not be a problem, for the right price to the farmers who own the land around of course. ☺

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. They have first responders for medical emergencies.
- b. N/A
- c. No Answer

Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers.

- a. None
- b. No Answer
- c. No Answer

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

- a. No Answer
- b. N/A
- c. No Answer

7. Housing

Give a brief description of the existing mix of housing stock. Does the local market have housing that would appeal to all income wages? What challenges do you see in regards to finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)

- a. Only saw 1 house for sale, and it had a pending contract.
- b. The housing ranged from affordable (manufactured homes & RV/Camper lot), remodeled well-built older homes, and high end custom newer built. The only "For Sale" sign had a Sale Pending insert, so availability would be the main issue for home buyers.
- c. There were homes of all shapes, sizes, age and price ranges (I think). There was also a small apartment complex (Lik Home Apartments) that we did not expect. It was small but I'm sure a nice option to have in town.

We did not notice any homes for sale, no signs that we saw. On the edges of town, there were what looked to be new homes with large lots. Could possibly have room for more homes in those areas, provided the lots were for sale.

What kind of rental properties did you observe for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?

- a. Wilson Rentals and RV Park.
- b. One apartment complex (5 units?) located on the east end of the downtown business district.
- c. Only saw the Lik Home Apartments, but we assumed there were houses in the town that are rentals. Most small towns have at least a few places like that.

8. Schools

What schools are present? Do the schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of temporary classrooms? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

- a. None
- b. None, but it appears that the former Bern High School building is being used by Lortscher Ag Service (semi-trailers parked in the school lot) or the pet food plant. There was no signage to distinguish who owned/used it.
- c. The old Rural School building is still there. Looks to have a business in it now, but there was no signage that led us to find what it was. The old school sign is still up.

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

- a. None
- b. N/A
- c. No answer

9. Childcare

What childcare services are available? Is it affordable?

- a. I don't know of any.
- b. Didn't notice any, but it would be a nice service with all the employment in town.
- c. We didn't notice any, no signage to elude to that. If it doesn't exist, I'm sure it would be a welcome addition to the community.

10. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearance of the faith communities represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of faith-based community services?

- a. First Methodist Church was the only church noted in town.
- b. One church, United Methodist Church. Very nice appearing church building with a front circle drive with lots of parking. I didn't notice any faith-based community services.
- c. There was a Methodist Church in town. It was fairly good sized, good parking, nice looking building.

11. Civic

Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community. Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- a. American Legion and Auxiliary, Bern Caring Group, and Bern Community Support Group. Did not observe civic activity.
- b. I didn't notice any organizational signs. I noticed an activity flyer for either a Superbowl watch party or a Valentines party in a downtown building window.
- c. We did not find any civic organizations nor activity.

12. Public Infrastructure

Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas other than downtown.

- a. Good streets and upkeep of city buildings; most of this town is kept up very well.
- b. The streets seemed sufficient, noticeable signs, sufficient street lights, ample parking, and public restrooms in the city park & ballpark area.
- c. Again, we were very impressed with the streets in town. Most all were concrete and in great shape. Very few were even gravel.
I don't recall there being many sidewalks around town, other than in downtown.
Not sure on lighting, as we went during the day and failed to take note.
There were restrooms in the city park, but they were not open due to time of year.

Comment on city/town hall (How were you received? Was there information about the town available?)

- a. Library closed on Monday afternoon.
- b. Not open when I toured town on a Friday morning.
- c. There is a city hall building. I don't recall seeing any hours that it was open, and since it was Sunday no one was there. I would say the old high school sign by the city park is the main way that upcoming events and info is communicated to the community.

Police/fire protection:

- a. Bern Fire Department
- b. No police presence, but there is a newer firehouse for the fire trucks on the west end of downtown.
- c. The fire station north of the city park looked to be relatively new and was a very nice building. There wasn't signage for it, although we did see an old one leaning against the building to the west. We thought maybe it was blown down during the wind storm from a few months prior. Would be nice to see something go back up or something be put on the building.

Library:

- a. Closed Monday afternoons
- b. Hours were posted with a bright digital sign in the window.
- c. There was a Library in the downtown area, with hours posted. It looks to be open a lot, only closed Sunday and Tuesday, and there was 1 night that it was open late.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sportsplex)

- a. Ballparks, playgrounds and sport complex noted.
- b. City Park is centralized with modern a playground-restrooms-large shelter house picnic area. The ballpark has restrooms, covered seating, and a large rocked parking lot with what appeared to be a self-serve recycling trailer.
- c. The city park is nice, but only about a quarter to half a block big, so not really a walking track. But there were sidewalks in the area. The park is directly next to an industrial area, however, so it was pretty noisy with the constant buzz of industry.
The baseball field is on the south end of town. The bleachers and ball shack look to be older but I'm sure they do the job.

13. Recreation/Tourism

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

- a. Did not observe any, Bern School Auxiliary Complex, (old school auditorium)
- b. I have heard of the town's large fireworks show every July that attracts large crowds to celebrate Independence Day (4th of July). I am unsure if there is a community slogan.
- c. We have heard the fireworks at 4th of July are a big event, but there wasn't any information at the time about it.

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

- a. Big 4th of July Celebration, Fall Festival late October.
- b. Nothing more than the Fireworks show in July.
- c. The sign in the town square had a lot of things listed, but for the time we were there, it was just upcoming holidays. We assume that when events are upcoming in the community, they are posted there.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community. (Public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds, regional heritage locations).

- a. Swiss Summit in City Park
- b. My main thought is that the town has multiple businesses that grow/make/prepare food for all creatures. In other words, the ag related businesses supply farmers with seed-fertilizer-chemicals to grow crops, while the pet food plant manufactures a nutritional product for pets/animals, and the meat locker/plant cuts/provides a product for human consumption. Big or small, they feed them all!
- c. None that we saw.

Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, main street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.

- a. Community Building, not staffed. Library and City Hall buildings are easily accessed on Main Street.

- b. City Hall or Library would be a natural visitor center as long as someone can be available to greet people. Otherwise, the open businesses will become the city ambassadors (good or bad).
- c. Maybe the city hall and library would be places for that? On days when they are open.

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

- a. No.
- b. The meat company would bring me back since I like to grill. Maybe the Polaris shop.
- c. There is a restaurant space in the downtown area, but it is currently without an owner/operator. I'm sure the community would love to get it going again and we hope that works out soon.

There is also a small RV park, Wilson's RV Park. Maybe 3-4 spots. 2 were being used. We felt it was a nice addition to the community.

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. There seems to be a lot going on for a small town. Friendly, well-kept streets and buildings.
- b. There appears to be a strong, viable employment base to sustain or grow the city population. The overall condition of properties is well-kept. They have a beautiful city park & ballpark. I see the connection of the past with the present through the Bern High School (closed) community activities/events sign in the city park and the school banner/jerseys hanging in the City Hall.
- c. We were very impressed with what we found in Bern. It looks like a very nice little community with more going on than one would think. Lots of businesses, small and large, that could bring people to the community to live and work. The city park, basketball court and ball field are nice assets.

The concrete streets were a surprise. They were awesome!

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. Housing for Alpha Dog Food Plant, employees are bused in from Topeka morning and night.
- b. The 14-21-mile proximity to the area county seats (Seneca, Sabetha, Pawnee City NE) could be a positive or negative. With all the town employees for the businesses and manufacturing plant, I am wondering how a local café couldn't be supported/sustained. Cafes are great community hubs for information sharing and deepening fellowship.
- c. I think Bern faces the same challenges as any other small community. Having to drive 15-20 minutes to get groceries, go the school, restaurants, etc. can make it hard to draw in more community members.
Having the industries there in town brings in employment, but also a lot of noise. It was unfortunate that downtown area and super cute city park were right next to it all.

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

- a. Friendly people.
- b. The industry and businesses dominate the center of town, and the housing kind of circles around them. There could be more signage to help visitors, but the locals know where things are without additional signs.
- c. We were impressed by our tour of Bern. It had been 20+ years since we had been there when we came over for sports games so we were pleased with what we saw. More signage, especially in the downtown area, would be nice. I'm sure locals know what every building is, but coming from out of town, there were a handful of buildings that we were unclear what they were.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

<http://www.ksre.k-state.edu/community/civic-engagement/first-impressions/index.html>

First Impressions was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and adapted for use by K-State Research and Extension. Restructuring made possible through a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Works, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and the United State Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Gregg Hadley, Director.

Revised: 8/20/20