

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Fort Scott

Date(s) Visited: a, b, c) 2/22/2019

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. A wealth of information is available online. Both the Fort Scott Chamber of Commerce and the City of Fort Scott have very well-designed, easy-to-navigate websites with an abundance of community information and links to additional resources. Note: the City of Fort Scott's social media pages seem to be far out of date (no recent posting), but the Chamber's social was engaging and updated.
- b. Information is pretty easy to find on the website. The website is easy to navigate and locate certain information. The chamber website was a little bit clunkier. The biggest issue was on the city website, there is a link to available housing properties that doesn't go anywhere.
- c. City web site easy to navigate and visually appealing.

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. Traveling straight through on the main highway, it would be easy to miss a lot of (and the best parts of) the community. It's necessary to veer off onto side streets to reach important community locations, such as the downtown, community college, parks, etc. However, signage was very thorough and readily available throughout town. The town definitely has an older/historic feel. Seems business district is very concentrated on the south end of town. Many vacant commercial buildings throughout the community. The billboard addressing abortion at the city's south entrance is somewhat startling and could be a turnoff for visitors. Welcome sign at the south entrance is professional but not colorful; nearly blends into landscape. Vacant convenience store/gas station at the south entrance is not appealing. Industrial park, Quinlan Eye Center, brand new baseball complex, etc. at south entrance are all attractive. Entrance from the city's northeast side (coming from Nevada, Mo.) is not terribly welcoming or attractive.

- b. Driving through town the biggest thing that stood out is the signage. They have great signage to help you get yourself to key points in the area. Having said that, the sign at the Rec Center is hard to see because of the bushes blocking part of the sign. The industrial park looks like a booming area as you enter town and the baseball field adds a nice feature as well. The abortion sign just before both of those is a bit of turn off. The welcome sign as you enter town could use some paint as well.
- c. Historical pride in its history, quaint downtown. Rough roads, dilapidated housing. Great signage, good way finding signs.

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. MANY vacant business buildings in the downtown and vacant lots between buildings. Several buildings have “front porches” (awnings over sidewalks and painted pillars) reminiscent of an “old west” town. This is quaint and cute! Memorial Hall, county courthouse, large banks and churches all were very attractive and impressive buildings. Fort adjacent to downtown is very beneficial. Fort grounds appear very well kept. All brick streets – interesting from a historical perspective, but obviously difficult to maintain. It’s not a smooth drive in downtown! Downtown banners were due for a change-out – banners promoting the holidays were still up. Variety of shopping options very, very limited. Several flea market/antique businesses of varying quality. Scarce or no options for clothing, furniture, jewelry, household items, appliances, etc. A few different options for dining in the downtown and a nice variety. The first flea market store (Main Street Gallery & Gifts) space housed a variety of different shops, but most were not staffed and lighting was very dim. The home brew supply store was an interesting concept and appeared to have a lot of merchandise, but it was dark and no one was working there. Quality of flea market goods seemed very poor. No or very limited greeting in the flea market stores we visited. Did have a very good customer service experience at The Iron Star Antiques & Such store, and displays and products were high quality.
- b. Some of the downtown buildings have a great look to them (Memorial Hall, Methodist Church). But there seemed to be a lot of empty stores. The banners on the light posts are a nice touch, but some of them still talk about the holidays, which at this point seem dated. There was not a wide variety of shopping in town. It was mostly big chains (Hibbett's, Goodies) along with a lot of flea markets and antique stores. A lot of residents said there isn't much shopping in town. A few of the places we went into we had to go and try to engage with them. They mainly focused on security monitors. The last store we went into the woman at the register was nice and helpful.

- c. Quaint historical downtown- I want to go back during summer as I am sure it is very showy with the flower baskets and planters. Mainly eateries and antique shops. Lack of clothing/boutiques. Nice home décor store. Customer service was about 50/50. Home décor store- personable- other shops failed to get off phone or come from behind counter to engage.

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

- a. Plenty of trash receptacles and benches. Did not locate any public Wi-Fi downtown. Located public restrooms downtown but they were “closed for winter”. Most stores had “No Public Restrooms” prominently posted. Parking was plentiful. Accessing multiple services was only limited by the limited number of services/options actually available.
- b. We saw a lot of downtown benches and trash cans. They all blended well with the sidewalk and didn’t look to be in the way. We didn’t find any Wi-Fi downtown. We saw something that looked like public bathrooms but they had a sign on them that said closed for the winter. Parking wasn’t an issue but the brick roads were a problem after a few minutes. The more we drove on them the less comfortable they were.
- c. Noticed public restrooms but they were closed. Nice benches and trash receptacles. Could not obtain info in the downtown area. Wrong time of year to see street/landscaping. We knew it would shine as the planters and baskets were visible. No problem parking-nice walk through the downtown area.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. The primary other retail area seemed to be on the city’s south side, and again, there were vacant stores. Walmart appeared to be one of the only available options.
- b. Outside of downtown the only other place to shop was on the highway out by Walmart. Typical chain stores that you see in a lot of towns.
- c. Noticed a few other locations for retail. Access off of highway and main roads. Some areas clean and attractive, others faced challenges. When asked where to buy clothes, we were told Goodies or Walmart. No boutiques.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. Industrial park appeared to be well developed with a number of companies but adequate space for expansion. Location right of the main highway and close to the city's main entrance should be appealing for prospective companies.
- b. The industrial park was easy to find and looked like it had room to grow if it needed to. It already seemed like a busy place with a lot going on.
- c. Yes, visible as one enters town. Nicely marked- good open space-signage demonstrating room for new growth and expansion.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. Though the hospital recently closed, emergency services have been retained by a new provider and signage was prominent at the south/main entrance.
- b. You can easily spot the emergency room as you enter town. We didn't see much as far as a hospital or health clinic, but we are also aware they just had a hospital close.
- c. Just lost hospital. Retained emergency room. Big concern- not sure of the future was the impression.

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

- a. All facilities we located seemed to be modern and well-kept.
- b. I didn't readily see a lot of available healthcare providers during the trip.
- c. This is an unknown.

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

- a. Seems to be several large long-term care and nursing facilities available, and the facilities seem updated and well-kept.
- b. We did see some good places for assisted living. Country place looked well-kept as did Presbyterian Manor.
- c. Noticed several facilities. Outward appearance they were well kept and inviting.

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. Appeared to be a lack of middle-income housing. Several rather run-down neighborhoods in proximity to the downtown. High-end housing was found on the outskirts. Also neighborhoods with large/older/Victorian homes. Did not locate many neighborhoods with newer, moderate housing.
- b. I did not see many places to rent online or during the drive. A few apartment complexes located right next to the college. The issue I saw with housing was the availability. While affordability may not be an issue, the condition of the houses is. We saw many that were falling apart and didn't look suitable to live in. The website lists a lot of places to buy but we didn't see many of them driving around town
- c. Housing around downtown area is challenged. Nice housing area around golf course.

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

- a. Did not observe obvious rental properties.
- b. Rentals were scarce and not easy to locate online or in person.
- c. Noticed a few apartment complexes, but looked old. When asked about moderate income rental property available, said Fort Scott really didn't have any. Only got one recommendation.

8. Schools

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

- a. Don't think we ever located an elementary school, but the high school, middle school and Fort Scott Community College all appeared to be well-maintained and recently updated. College campus was very attractive with cohesive building design and good signage.
- b. We did see schools for all ages, including a day care. They all seem to be in good shape and have some recent work done to them.
- c. Nice new middle school. High school and elementary schools looked nice. Was told that all schools had recently been remodeled.

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

- a. Surprisingly, not really. The USD 234 website is very basic with information on policies, etc., but has few photos and no stories about activities or programs in the schools. (I don't know that this is uncommon among K-12 districts. Just something I noticed.) Chamber website seems to only make a brief reference to education in its online quality of life video. USD 234 Facebook page is also out of date. Fort Scott Community College does have an updated, comprehensive website and up-to-date FB page.
- b. The school districts website was easy to find and navigate which gives some insight into the schools.
- c. No Answer

9. Childcare

Were you able to determine if childcare was affordable and available?

- a. Did not see any daycares during our visit, but was able to find a few centers online, including a couple of Head Start programs. Did not locate any websites for these.
- b. We saw what looked like a good sized day care facility. I could not find out where it stood as far as cost though.
- c. Per information provided at City Hall, it appears that they do have several child care providers.

10. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the churches represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of church-sponsored community services?

- a. Seems there are multiple churches and faiths represented throughout the community. Did not observe church-sponsored community services.
- b. I didn't see much as far as community events but there was a plethora of churches, many of which looked appealing and were in well-kept buildings. There was also a vast number of different denominations represented among the different churches
- c. Noticed numerous churches and denominations.

11. Civic

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

- a. Unsure. Chamber did not seem to have a list of these organizations readily available. There was prominent signage for an upcoming Kiwanis pancake breakfast. Chamber also listed civic organization events on its website calendar of events.
- b. We saw a banner for the Kiwanis club as we entered town. Outside of that I wasn't able to get much information about nonprofits in town. I didn't see much for activity as we drove around.
- c. Did not see anything upon our day visit.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a. Beyond downtown, there are LOTS of brick streets throughout the neighborhoods! While the historical significance is understood, the streets are very uneven and uncomfortable for driving. Good signage nearly everywhere. Didn't visit at night, so unable to comment on lighting.
No evidence of a particular streetscape plan in areas beyond downtown.
Landscaping tough to comment on during the winter.
- b. The brick roads stretched away from downtown creating even more of an issue. The signage was great throughout town and is the biggest plus for the community. There seemed to be a nice lighted walking path out by the college that looked appealing.
- c. Though brick roads are historic, they are rough to travel. Other main traveled roads were in good condition. Sidewalks were 50/50 as far as condition. Signage was excellent.

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

- a. Another member of my team visited here.
- b. City hall was kind of hidden in a smaller building but the big sign made it easier to find. They were receptive and eager to help. They had an abundance of information ready for someone looking to relocate.
- c. Engaged immediately, was friendly and helpful and provided great written information that I was able to walk away with.

Police/fire protection:

- a. N/A
- b. We saw police officers driving around town including at the high school but that was the extent of it.
- c. Noticed it present.

Library:

- a. N/A
- b. The library didn't stand out to me.
- c. Historical Carnegie Library- looks like active children's programming. Well kept.

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

- a. SEVERAL recreational facilities (ballparks, Buck Run Community Center, Gunn Park, community college walking path and fishing lake, disc golf) were observed. This community has a lot to offer in this regard!
- b. Gunn Park was nice and looked like it had a lot to offer. Plenty of walking space and a place to take your dog as well.
- c. Gunn Park- great open park, nice amenities.

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. Not finding a particular slogan, but the Chamber logo and other signage around town features a "bugle," indicating the community identity is built around its historic military fort, and I think the community also touts its "age" (founded in 1882) and being a "historic" community.
- b. I did not see a community slogan or any signage for 1 major event. They did have signage pointing you toward the Gordon Parks Museum shortly after you enter town.
- c. Historical Fort Scott and cemetery

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

- a. Did not see anything particularly significant at this time, but the Chamber produces a weekly events calendar/flyer, which we picked up at a local motel. This is a helpful publication to keep visitors informed.
- b. I saw 2 signs about the farmers market that happens during the summer and fall. This could be something that is appealing to travelers and residents.
- c. The Fort and cemetery are great visitor sites as well as Gunn Park. Twin Mansion is another interesting visitor site.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community.

- a. Historic military fort, Gunn Park recreational area (walking/jogging trails, river, disc golf course, campsites, dog park, shelter building facilities for gatherings). This is a fantastic area! Gordon Park's history/museum (famous photographer, author, screenwriter who is a native of Fort Scott). New baseball facilities built by former professional baseball player Adam LaRoche. Dolly the Trolley tours. Lyons Twin Mansions / Nate's Place restaurant
- b. The Fort is the biggest attraction in town. And downtown does a good job of growing off of it. Would be easy to draw people to the Fort and have them explore downtown as well.
- c. Gunn Park/Gordon Parks Museum

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. Yes. Located near the fort, so good spot to capture tourists. Trolley parked there, so that is eye catching. Staff was very friendly and had a lot of printed materials available.
- b. The Chamber office is easy to locate once you are downtown. Signage is bright and draws you in. Staff is friendly as well.
- c. Chamber of Commerce office was a nice building, good location by the Fort and downtown.

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

- a. I enjoyed the Iron Star Antiques & Such shop and although we did not visit the Lyons Twin Mansions / Nate's Place restaurant, it was suggested by several locals and after researching the website, I want to plan a visit here for dinner!
- b. I could see myself visiting the Fort in the summer when the weather is nicer.
- c. Gunn Park/The fort and cemetery/Gordon Parks Museum

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. Most people were very friendly and helpful. Residents and employees of convenience stores, restaurants, shops, etc., seem to be pretty well informed about the community and available amenities/activities and spoke positively about them. (Good cross-promotion.) Some great recreational facilities. Gunn Park is a huge asset. Though several properties are vacant, that means several properties are available!

- b. The people were really friendly almost everywhere we went. Ready to help us and point us in the direction we were looking. That along with great signage were the biggest positives.
- c. Excellent signage and good written information packets for new residents and visitors. Great opportunity for day trips. Nice golf course.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. Downtown seems to be struggling with many vacant properties and very limited shopping/services. Also seem to be large vacant commercial properties in the south side of the community. May be a need for more move-in ready, moderate-income housing. (Or maybe it is there and we just didn't find it.)
- b. The biggest issue I had was the brick roads. 1 or 2 might add a nostalgic feel downtown, but the number of them around town makes it uncomfortable. Plus the extra wear and tear it can take on a vehicle.
- c. Healthcare concerns with loss of hospital. Condition of roads, lack of retail shops.

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

- a. Friendly people. Good experience at the Iron Star shop. Intrigue with Nate's Place restaurant. Impressive Gunn Park. Impressed that successful former residents (i.e., LaRoche) are returning to the community to live and invest.
- b. The roads will be the biggest thing I remember. After a few minutes of driving around the bumpiness becomes noticeable and a bit of a headache.
- c. The opportunities for day trip- will come back to see the Fort/cemetery/Gordon Parks Museum.

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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