

First Impressions

Compiled Report Form



Community Visited: Russell **Date(s) Visited:** a.) Wed 9/25
b.) Sun 9/22 c.) Wed 8/28 d.) Wed 8/28

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. Online, we found Russell has a population of 4,463 (2017). The City website looks new and impressive. We were also impressed with the new comprehensive, transportation and streetscape plans- wow! We're assuming this is a public/private collaboration and shows a desire to survive and thrive! We also like the welcome to Russell information on the city site. The resource links to the County, Chamber, schools, recreation, Economic Development were helpful links to learn more about the town. We also learned the town has a German heritage and is the home of Bob Dole. On the Main Street site, the Business Investment Guide is very impressive and informative. We also found a bit of information on the Deines Cultural Center and the restored Dream Theatre. The City Facebook page is not used often and mainly includes updates about the swimming pool, outages, mosquito control, etc.
- b. Google first brought up the City's website. Great that there were addresses for the City park locations. Good resource for new residents. No references to Chamber or Main Street for events or websites. Lodgeatrussell.com was the next website that came up on google. A motel, but it had a great overview of area attractions with links to their web pages. As well as the only listing of restaurants that I found. City of Russell Facebook page seemed to be more of a communication source to residents. There were no events listed. Russell Chamber of Commerce Facebook Page - Last post was August 27th, it seemed to have listed a lot of events that were showing in past events. Their website listed annual events and a community calendar, which did not appear to be up to date and utilized. It had good listing of area attractions. Main Street Russell Facebook Page- Current posts and a lot of events showing. Both hosted by Main Street and others. Main Street Russell Website had a lot of event links, but looked to be primarily their own events. Russellcountyks.org website with the ECODEVO and CVB. Nicely listed the attractions, but did not have an extensive listing of events.
- c. The website was helpful and the City Clerk validated information.
- d. I found the Web was a good tool to see what Russell has to offer. It even has a spot to apply for jobs and to see what is happening in town. I felt this site may need to be advertised more since there were only a few comments on there.

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. The limestone buildings and homes and the brick streets are charming. Entering from I-70 West First Exit. As we entered there were a few abandoned buildings. We came upon a nicely kept cemetery and golf course with veteran memorial. There were nice, well-kept neighborhoods. The historical marker of the railroad was nice. Eat Shop Stay Billboard with website on I-70 going west has stock photo rather than community specific photo. The Kitchen Vault & Espresso Billboard was noticeable. The first exit (business exit) did not have good signage. We noticed an airport but there was no signage indicating the airport was there or coming up. The signs for the Industrial Park (on the business exit entrance) were not leading to the industrial park. They indicated to turn too early leading to a field. Entering from North 281: Good wayfinding signs for the industrial part and downtown. The main street shopping signs were very nice. We did notice two Dollar Generals which seemed like a lot. Entering from South 281: The major highway exit was well maintained. When you pass the initial commercial area of the interstate, businesses had mixed care.
- b. The town is very disconnected from the interstate exit accommodations to the Main Street area. Might actually think the area from the Sale barn south IS Russell and not go any further into town. I’m sure this is a constant struggle for their community. I loved the main street area with the brick roads and limestone buildings. Seemed clean and welcoming. We came in from the South on Hwy 281. There were no signs indicating we were entering Russell. Same from the North on 281 Highway. From the South you first see the motels, truck stops and restaurants which garners most of the interstate business. Signs for RV parks. Didn’t really see anything indicating there was much more as you went further into town other than the one wayfinding sign.
- c. I was surprised how many businesses we located in Russell for the population. The West side was not as nice because of it being more industrial. Coming from the south it was very impressive probably due to the interstate, the other entrances were not as nice. It was very noticeable the city did the mowing along the highway entrances and where the county did not mow.
- d. I felt that Russell is an old town that has people that care. The limestone buildings and homes were well cared for and stood out above the others. Could also tell that there seems to be many old businesses and buildings that could use some sprucing up. There are signs that are all similar in every direction and the street ditches were kept up except for the road from the west. The park on the east side is fantastic. I felt it was not advertised enough since it is not near the main street or downtown areas.

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. We love the limestone/historic buildings but did notice quite a few empty buildings—especially around the Cultural Center. One building in that block is under construction though. We explored several retail businesses including gift stores, antique shop, clothing stores and furniture stores downtown. It was a good variety of options. The downtown did not seem busy over the lunch hour as we might have expected. Everyone we encountered in town was very nice and friendly.
- b. A couple signs that the Main Street was off of the Highway (Fossil St). Ie: Business district and Main Street. There were wayfinding signs that helped a lot throughout town. Beautiful limestone buildings still being used, brick streets, murals, pocket park. Seemed to be several empty buildings, but noted one had construction workers (on Sunday) for the upstairs. Antique Stores, Theatre, Cultural Center, Furniture Store, Museum and Sports Bar & Grill. Obviously on a Sunday, I did not expect downtown businesses to be open. As I was walking Main Street one of the Antique stores had their lights on and did not have a closed sign. The door was unlocked. The gentleman at the counter said he wasn't open, just waiting on someone to drop something off. He said I was welcome to look and asked where I was from. I inquired about other stores on Main Street and he said most closed Saturday afternoons and Sundays. I stopped at Casey's on Wichita St. and inquired about the location of the Fair Grounds and while the clerk was not from Russell, she did ask someone in the back kitchen for accurate directions. Very pleasant. I also asked at the larger Cenex store located at the South entrance to town and was also pleasantly given accurate directions.
- c. Very nice and there is work in progress and more projects in the future based on what the City Clerk mentioned. We noticed the specialty shops, antique shops, different places to eat that weren't chain restaurants and the special park downtown. Very friendly at each location we visited.
- d. The buildings are old, limestone and large windows. The little park along main is attractive. You can tell there is growth in the downtown area and pride within the community. There were several small shops, a pharmacy, several banks, bars and gift shops as well as a theater and cultural center. It was all very inviting and surprising for a rural area. We were greeted in the shops we went in to downtown. The people were very friendly and helpful with any of our questions. They liked being where they are and invited us to return.

**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. There were several benches available within the downtown area, although they were old and not in constant places. The trash receptacles were plentiful. We noticed the availability of Wi-Fi in a few of the businesses. Parking was easy to find and navigate. The cultural center located downtown was very nice. The inside featured art and had been updated in an impressive way. The name "cultural center" didn't tell us what to expect as we entered. The art gallery we found was amazing. We would not have guessed that is what was located inside.
- b. Benches were available in front of some of the stores on Main Street. The Pocket park had benches, shelter and picnic tables. Seemed to be adequate trash cans. No public restroom was seen in the Main Street Area. There was a public restroom at the very nice park on the East Side of town. On a Sunday, there were no issues with parking. I was able to park and walk 3 or 4 blocks on each side of Main Street. There were planters with beautiful flowers and benches. Also the limestone posts that were represented all along Main. Most of the businesses had their windows painted by the High School announcing their Homecoming game. I felt that this showed the local support to the schools by allowing them to do this.
- c. The downtown park was very nice and could be used for guests to the community or for employees working in the area. No problems, parking easy to find and you could walk easily to many businesses from the downtown area.
- d. We did not try the WIFI. There are benches and small parks in different areas of town including the downtown area. I do not recall there being any public restrooms but there were trash receptacles available. There is plenty of parking wherever we went. The city office did inform us they are planning a street revitalization for the downtown area with new sidewalks, plantings and parking. They have applied for grants to help fund the project.

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

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

- a. The fast food/convenience shopping located off the interstate was easy to navigate. The grocery store was very large. We were impressed with the large produce section for a community of this size. The prices seemed reasonable.
- b. I found 2 Dollar General Stores and 1 Grocery Store. I noticed that they had lost their Shopko also. I did see a lumber store and auto parts stores. Most of the restaurants were located at the Interstate Exit at the South of Town as well as the Convenience Stores. The Casey's on Wichita Street was the only convenience store in proximity of the large park, recreation areas and Main Street. The large antique store on 281 on the South side of town was open with several customers. I shopped there and was greeted when I entered. They did have a rack with brochures for different attractions within the county, as well as a map of the City.
- c. Very quaint and nice, a place you would drive back to visit.
- d. The down town area was very nice. The road from the interstate to the downtown area could use some "upkeep" and signs. There seems to be many old buildings and some sit back off the road far enough you would not know they are there.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

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

- a. Finding the industrial area from 281 was easy. It looks like there is plenty of room to expand. It is encouraging to see industry so close to town. The signs coming in on the business entrance of I-70 were misleading.
- b. Signage led me to the industrial park. Access to the Interstate without going to town for the trucks and I think there was Rail access also. I found the Ethanol Plant, Purina and Wheat processing. There would be plenty of room for additional industry here or at other locations in the city.
- c. Yes, but some of the lots could have been more attractive while driving out to the airport.
- d. There is manufacturing to the east, west and north. They have an industrial area north of town that includes the ethanol plant and the local elevator with plenty of room for expansion and the roads are already paved and well-marked. The area east of town includes the airport about 2 miles outside the main shopping area. The state road works is there as well. The area west is older oil industry but room for growth there too.

6. Health Care Services

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

- a. The emergency entrance of the hospital looked new and very nice. We loved the walking trail near the hospital with the exercise equipment. This could be an opportunity to show off.
- b. Signs easily led me to find the hospital and looked to be a nice updated hospital.
- c. Very impressive facilities and there was a neat exercise area next to the hospital.
- d. There is a nice hospital in Russell. They provide housing for the staff that come for rotating shifts. There are several chiropractors and dental offices in town as well as eye care facilities. There are two pharmacies too. The EMT has a full-time staff along with the fire department that is not just volunteer.

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

- a. We noticed several facilities and offices located in all parts of town including a medical clinic near downtown.
- b. I did see a pharmacy and also noticed a dental office. The hospital also has a physician's office at that location. All looked to be in good condition.
- c. It seemed there might have been an abundance of health care facilities spread out throughout the community.
- d. See above comments

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

- a. We spotted Homestead of Russell as we drove around town. The facility looked well-kept from the outside. From our research, there is one other senior care option providing in home services and rehabilitation services.
- b. I did see an assisted living complex on the East side of town. Looked like a very nice facility.
- c. There was a nursing facility but I don't know if it included long-care or assisted living.
- d. There is a long-term care facility that is near the hospital and assisted living attached to that facility as well.

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. We noticed several houses for sale in all types of neighborhoods. The neighborhoods were not consistent in types of properties. There were updated/kept houses and struggling houses in the same neighborhood. A search on Zillow indicated there are houses on the market with varying price ranges.
- b. I did see houses for sale in all neighborhoods. Zillow indicated that there is a lot of availability in a wide range of prices. Any of the lesser homes were few and far between. I never did see an entire neighborhood that I would consider less than desirable.
- c. There were no for sale signs or for rent signs in the community, so it would appear there could be a housing shortage and it may be difficult to find a place to live if you wanted to relocate.
- d. There is not very much housing in Russell right now. We only saw about 3 houses for sale and nothing really to rent. The city is in the process of finding a contractor for building new apartments and maybe housing. There are plans to open a large manufacturing company there so they will need more housing for the estimated 200 employees.

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

- a. We didn't notice any rental signs and a Zillow search came up with options in Hays. We're guessing rental properties may be difficult to find.
- b. I did not see any homes for rent. But the CVB website did have a download with contacts for rental properties.
- c. There appeared to be places where someone could build or construct some new housing opportunities if the City wanted to get some grants for housing.
- d. Did not see any rentals available with the exception of a couple low income units on the SW side of town.

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. The elementary school, middle school and high school appear to be large. The old school buildings looked like they had been re-done to be up to date. We noticed the schools did not have central air. We love that the middle school limestone building has newer windows and appears to be well-maintained. It was easy to notice the homecoming pride/support throughout the town with the windows decorated.
- b. I did locate two elementary schools, the middle school and high school. All appeared to be well taken care of. Love that the middle school was in a large limestone building. High school has a very nice football stadium right there on campus. I did notice on the USD website that they are working on Bonds to make facility improvements or potential new school buildings.
- c. Everything looked great at all the different locations and it was the first day of school when we visited, the stadium at the high school was very nice and we didn't get any information on Head Start or Preschool like signs you may see in other communities.
- d. Not sure if there is a head start program available. There are two grade schools that are close to the downtown area. The Jr high building is directly behind the courthouse. It is an older limestone building but appears to be in great shape. The high school is located on the NE side of town near the park and industrial area. There is room for growth. It could use more signage and upkeep since the first appearances seem low.

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

- a. Our pre-visit search found basic information about the schools, but we didn't note anything that indicated the quality of the system as far as awards, assessments, etc.
- b. Through google I was able to find that Russell Schools were ranked #989 out of 1,268 schools in Kansas. I did not find any community resources that indicated school quality.
- c. No, didn't attempt
- d. The Russell web page said nothing about their school system. The school has a nice web page with numerous pictures of the Ruppenthal Jr High Building.

9. Childcare

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

- a. After searching online, one day-care was contacted about care for an infant. This daycare was full until May-June. The Facebook page looks great for this business, very interactive with kids. A second pre-school was contacted although a call-back was not received. The website notes being closed on Friday which may be difficult for parents. There are several in-home daycares listed after a more extensive google search. This information was more difficult to find, and all seem to be very small (only a few children). These comments are consistent with findings in similar rural communities. Daycares are hard to find and fill quickly. It would be hard for someone relocating to the community to find a spot. Prices were not confirmed.
- b. I did not notice any childcare facilities or mention of such on any of the websites.
- c. Did not get any information
- d. Not sure about this as we did not look into this area while there.

10. Faith/Religion

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

- a. Several Churches were noticeable with signage. We noticed the church sponsored Thrift Shop.
- b. There were many churches found in the community. Both very large buildings as well as many smaller locations.
- c. Can't describe how impressive the new Catholic church and grounds were, and there were many other places to worship that were very nice, the Catholic Church was massive and the stone was beautiful.
- d. There are several churches in town. The Catholic Church is huge and new with a fabulous building added for gatherings. There is a Lutheran and Methodist and Baptist church there as well. All nice buildings and well-advertised.

11. Civic

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

- a. Many of these organizations had noticeable signage or promotional materials around town with upcoming events. The Hospital Auxiliary is holding a fundraiser activity.
- b. I did see indications of Rotary, Kiwanis, Historical Society, Hospital Auxiliary. Yes, I did see advertisements for events being sponsored by different groups in the community. There was a sign for Rotary by the Horse Shoe pits location.
- c. The Historical Society appeared to be very active. There are four different museums.
- d. The nonprofit and downtown associations are working with the city on the revitalization project. There is Lions and American Legion in town as well as 4-H clubs. There were signs for all the clubs along the roadways.

12. Public Infrastructure

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

- a. The side streets seem narrow and had weeds growing in the cracks. Parking was accessible and easy to find. Public restrooms were only spotted near the sports complex. All the parks were mowed but featured aging equipment except for the playground at the sports complex
- b. Russell has wayfinding signage on the main roads about town. The parks and public areas were nicely landscaped and in good repair. There were public restrooms at the largest park on the East side of town, but I did not see any at the others.
- c. The only problem I saw was not having ADA accessible sidewalks throughout the City
- d. The area just off the interstate is well lit and kept. Once past that area there could be more lighting and better facilities for the public. Little to no landscaping in that area as well.

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

- a. We passed city hall several times while walking, driving and shopping downtown and somehow missed noticing it. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to visit the office.
- b. City Offices were not open while I was visiting.
- c. We got so much information at City Hall, very informative.
- d. We were greeted with a bit of skepticism at first but we visited with the city clerk for a little over an hour. She offered great information and was very pleasant to speak to. She offered for us to return any time or to call back if needed.

Police/fire protection:

- a. Stations appear to be well-maintained.
- b. I did not see the Fire Department. There were several City and County Police vehicles parked at their homes. I did see one City LEO patrolling.
- c. It looked adequate for the size of community.
- d. There is a fire department that is not just volunteer. The police station was a bit harder to find and not well marked.

Library:

- a. Well kept, good parking. There was a sign for the library on 281.
- b. Wayfinding signs directing to the Library. I did not go inside.
- c. Very nice
- d. Do not recall where the library was located

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

- a. The sports complex was very nice and well-kept. It was great to have a walking path outlining the facility with a variety of activity courts and other "field" games available. The pool looked to be a nice size for the community. The area was labeled as Memorial Park. Because of that, we almost missed it in looking for a "sports complex". The walking trail with activity stations by the hospital is great! We didn't recall seeing these assets on the website.
- b. Wayfinding signs directing Sports areas, Recreational Centers and Parks. All seemed in good repair and well maintained. The huge park with Golf Course, Play Ground, Disc Golf and Walking trails on the East side of town was amazing.
- c. This was amazing for the size of the community, horseshoes, golf, skateboard park, pool, tennis courts.
- d. There is a large city park with golf, swimming, tennis and ball fields. They also have horse shoe pits and a large play area for children. It is close to the fair grounds. It is a very impressive park. Felt it could have been advertised more or better signs to know where it is.

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. We're not aware of a particular event.
- b. It was not apparent that the Community was promoting anything specific. The limestone posts on Main Street did support their recognition of all of the historic limestone buildings. But I did not see anything about the buildings besides viewing them while exploring. The websites that noted attractions: RussellChamber and RussellCountyks listed numerous attractions, including Wilson Lake, museums and many other attractions in the county of Russell. The mural on Main indicated some connection with the Wind Generators as well as stickers on some of the downtown stores. But no other mention was noticed on advertisements or web sites.
- c. There is an annual event which draws many to the community, I just can't remember what it was called. They have a huge 10 year celebration and a festival each December.
- d. The city clerk mentioned they have a festival every ten years and the next one is coming up soon so they want to have the revitalization finished by that time. Did not see any slogans.

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

- a. Yes. The event advertised for October 4th and 5th sounds great for both locals and visitors. The signs promoting the event were in several places around town and at local businesses. Since traveling, advertisements were heard on the radio as well.
- b. I found several posters and flyers of upcoming events in the community in the windows of downtown businesses. I did not see anything at the Cenex Store by the interstate advertising community events.
- c. There is a community theater.
- d. There is not a list of events or attractions that we saw and there is not anything listed on their web site either.

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. We loved the murals on the sides of buildings. They were done tastefully. The local heritage was not prevalent in the type of public art, signage etc.
- b. I feel like the limestone buildings are unique and interesting to most people. They were to me. Even the murals were impressive, but not mentioned anywhere that I found.
- c. I would think the parks would draw people to the community because everything is located in one area and the whole family could find something to do, swimming, golfing, tennis courts, skate boards etc.
- d. Russell is located just west of Lake Wilson, but the lake is not in the same county. It is the main drawing event for the area. There is a cultural center too they are proud of that would draw people as well.

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. The CVB/Economic Development office was visible and easy to find and event signs were hanging around the fence. We spent most of our time in Russell driving all around town and looking at downtown- we were unable to stop in at the CVB office.
- b. Yes, at the corner of Wichita and Fossil (281 Hwy) is the Economic Development Building. It has great signage. There is a fence out front where banners are hung about events in the community. There is also a box to pick up brochures and literature about the community.
- c. It was easy to spot as we came into town and we stopped in and got information which was greatly appreciated by a very friendly gentleman.
- d. There is a visitor center as you travel north into town. They were friendly and let us know they were changing a few things about the center and share an office with another business now.

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

- a. It would be fun to come back for the Bikes, BBQ event- it sounds fun!
- b. I like the antique stores and would return when they are open. Meridy's restaurant was a must for my husband while visiting Russell.
- c. All of the above
- d. There are a couple of fast food places near the interstate. We ate at a local restaurant that had a buffet. The meal was nothing special and the servers were not overly friendly there. I have heard the steak they offer in the evening are worth coming back for. There are a couple of shops downtown to eat. We should have tried them for lunch.

14. Wrap-up

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

- a. Everyone was friendly and the limestone buildings and historical murals are very appealing.
- b. I enjoyed the murals, brick streets and limestone buildings. Everyone I spoke with was very friendly and helpful. The parks and school areas were very well maintained.
- c. I like the vision different people in the community expressed when we visited, which came from the City Clerk and the Visitors Bureau.
- d. The downtown area is very friendly and inviting. The limestone buildings are a nice attraction in the community. It would be a nice small town to live in.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- a. As in many smaller, rural areas- renovation and occupancy in historic downtown buildings. Attracting the types of businesses that would “draw” people into town not just for a quick stop off 70, but to visit several downtown business and attractions.
The new plans finished this year will hopefully achieve some of the town’s goals.
- b. I would say their biggest challenge would be routing tourists to their Main Street area.
- c. They face a lower income level of individuals that don’t work like many other communities.
- d. I felt the southern side of town could use some cleaning up and more structure. I do feel there needs to be more housing options in town and find a way to bring business there and not go out of town for their shopping needs.

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

- a. The limestone buildings and houses.
- b. I enjoyed the Main Street area and would like to go back to shop the antique stores when they are open. Also noted the Disc Golf Course, which is also something my husband and I enjoyed playing.
- c. I would like to go back and be able to spend more time in the community and talk to some of the townspeople about the history of the area.
- d. The LIMESTONE BUILDINGS!!!

PowerPoint Presentation is posted at:

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

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