

First Impressions:

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

Visit to Belleville, Wisconsin

June 3, 2009

Visiting Team from Dodgeville, Wisconsin



A Park in Belleville

First Impressions: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

Visitating Team Profile:

Florence Crubaugh	Occupation: Retail Store Owner
Ed Weaver	Occupation: Local Business Owner
Lori Lease	Occupation: Director
Jim Blabaum	Occupation: Realtor
Bob Berglin	Occupation: Chamber of Commerce Director
Paul Ohlogge	Occupation: UW-Extension Community Resource Agent



Date of visit and time spent: June 3, 2009; 4 hours

Weather on date of visit: Nice, sunny day

What is your impression of the community before your upcoming visit?

What are you expecting to see? Please comment on what you know about this community.

Expected to see more of a variety of little shops and perhaps a gallery?

Basically a small bedroom community of Madison. I expect to see a nice quiet Wisconsin small town. Small little main street, business district, little parks, etc... I know nothing about Belleville

How easy was it to get information by mail and telephone about the community you are visiting?

Easy

Called the Chamber office. Friendly staff. Requested a visitor's guide and they don't have one. Printing first ever one this year and will be available later this month.

Quality of online materials:

Website was pretty clean, basic – had some good community information and a small calendar of events. I like the info about UFO days and the other websites. Info about Belleville was found on Wisconsin Dept. of Tourism website. The home page seemed text heavy. Would like to see more pictures of the area.

After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, what was your first impression?

It looked nice and clean – lots of schools – condo's and apartments – nice parks – and a swimming pool – nice town for a family.

Quiet, small, typical Wisconsin Community. I like how easy it was to find the schools, the Hillcrest Estates and housing development on 92 was nice, but it was a big contrast to the homes and roads as you came into town. I like the feeling of town as I can in from 151. The lake, etc... Easy to find police/fire. Downtown seems to be lacking. Lots of repair shops and bars.

Needs signage for Municipal Services, Public Parks, Chamber office, & Business District. Stopped at the gas station to get information. Very friendly but got wrong directions/info.

Belleville appears to be a quiet community with a small amount of historic value. It seemed to be lacking the modern stores that allow its residents to be self sufficient without driving to larger communities to do business. Although there is an industrial park, it appeared that there were not enough jobs in the area so most people would need to travel for work. There seems to be much value put on the school system and for the size of the community it may appear that the tax base for those schools may scare off potential home owners.

Approach the community from the major entrances. Rate and comment on each entrance. While there may be an obvious main entrance to the community there are typically multiple ways to enter the community. In some communities there are entrances for other modes of transportation. Comment on other community entry points like airports, bike trails, water access (boat landings), and train stations (page 11).



ENTRANCE #1

Could use better signage to downtown area.



ENTRANCE #2 Hwy CC

Average Team Score: 3

Observations: Sure it is a minor entrance. Cool Catholic Church. No signage but had a “Welcome to Belleville” blue sign.

ENTRANCE #3 Hwy 92

Average Team Score: 6

Observations: Sign was very easy to see there on the corner w/ park as a background. No flowers, dry, brown weeds/grass.

ENTRANCE #4 Hwy 92/69

Average Team Score: 6

Observations: Cool to see the schools as you came into town. Sign was hard to see with big bush behind it. Kind of run down.

Other entrances: Hwy 69

Average Team Score: 7, 7

Observations: Good visibility, very nice presentation. Sign itself seems worn out, blah City has expanded beyond signage. Existing signs need to be repainted & maintained.

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

Average Team Score: 5,

Rate using a 1-10 scale (10 is best/highest) Quality

Average ratings for each:

7,6	Existing/Older Homes	8,8	New Homes
	Housing for Seniors	9	Apartments/Rental Housing
7,4	Vacant lots for new homes		



Residential Housing

Observations: Some very nice developments around town, like Hillcrest and Sugar river estates. Downtown housing in some areas seemed a little run down.

Depending on the neighborhood, some of the older homes need to be spruced up. The newer neighborhoods looked good.

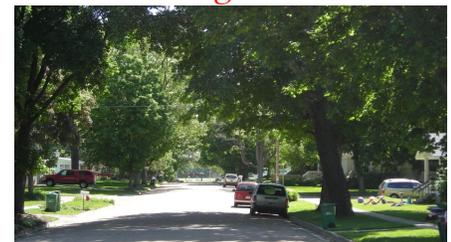
Is there an adequate mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels?

Yes.

Rate using a 1-10 scale (10 is best/highest) Availability

Average ratings for each:

4	Existing/Older Homes	7	New Homes
3	Housing for Seniors	8	Apartments/Rental Housing
4	Vacant lots for new homes		



Residential Housing

Observations: Good mix of old/new & apartments.



A new church building



St Mary's Church

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

Roads need repair. Lighting ok, No public transportation, nice parks/green space, street trees looked nice, but blocked signage.

How would you rate the overall appeal of housing to the following populations (1=Not Appealing, 10 =Very Appealing):

Average ratings for each:

4	Single young adults	6	Senior citizen
7	Young families	2	Upscale/professional
7	Middle income		

Please comment on your observations: Belleville appears to lack the amenities that the typical young adult or upscale professionals would be looking for.

Notes: The 1 year housing trends for Belleville appear to be steady to slightly increasing at this time. That is a positive.

Schools

Comment on the availability and appearance of schools.

Pre-school/Kindergarten/Head Start

Good (2)

Primary/Elementary/Middle School

Good (2)

Nice little elementary school.

High School

Good (2)

Wow. Impressive for a small town.



What do residents (young and old) think about the quality and availability of their local schools?

Those I talked to seemed to be happy with local schools.

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

Observations:

High School again was impressive.

Healthcare Facilities

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of healthcare facilities

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

Adequate offices, small Dean clinic

Other health services (e.g., Chiropractor, psychotherapy, naturopath, massage, etc)

Saw a few Chiro downtown and on north end.

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

Average Team Score: 7



Social Services

What social services (e.g., day care, senior center, counseling, etc.) are available in the community?

Didn't visit but saw office attached to library.



Economy

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

The downtown area was limited but the industrial parks made it seem like it was good.

Same as most of America, struggling.

Average – Good

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

Better signage needed

Easy to find, not a lot of signage

Easy to find, hard to miss

Needs signage



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

Average Team Score: 5 (3), 6,

Lots of empty store fronts & dirty windows. Liked the benches outside some establishments, lamp posts are beautiful, wonderful park in the middle of downtown.

Seemed run down, lack of signage.

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

Average Team Score: 3,

Not enough shops, Restaurants good

Only 2 businesses to shop in



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

Average Team Score: 7, 9, 7

English Rose – very friendly owner, came to the front of the store to help us & chat.

Bell Blue Restaurant – very friendly person, invited us in when it was not open, great advocate for the community. Patches – friendly staff, chatted, told us about upcoming quilting events/classes.

Rate and comment on the signage in the downtown.

Average Team Score: 1, 3 (3)

Limited signage, the building in the park was not marked in any way, still wonder what that was.

Beautiful building.

None



Renovated Building in Downtown Area



Historic Home in downtown park

Rate and comment on the window displays in the downtown.

Average Team Score: 2, 2, 6

The 2 stores did have nice displays.

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

Average Team Score: 1, 3

Only 2 shops

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

Good mix

Lawyer, library, village hall, bars, The bell blue restaurant. Looked like a great place to go. I am planning a trip around a visit of that establishment.

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

Average Team Score: 7, 8, 7

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

Average Team Score: 7, 7

Liked the old fashioned street lights

Lamp posts are beautiful

Does the downtown play a role in tourism?

There is potential – saving the old depot and making shops there.

Great building in the park along the bike trail.

Nothing on the trail to point people to eat/drink downtown.

Railroad building would be great to restore.

No



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

A lot

Would you find the downtown to be a desirable place to live? Please comment.

No (2)

Unfortunately I would not. Just not enough going on there. Not enough shops.



Old Railroad Depot

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

Yes

Post office/Library 1 block off downtown street. Fitness center downtown which is a good thing.

City Hall & post office

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

Not enough retail

Small strip mall on the north end of town.

Good mix of strip malls.



Park Hotel

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

Clothing, gifts, furniture

Clothing/shoes, cellphone/electronics, Jewelry

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

Quilting & Fabric Store

None

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

None

Bell Blue restaurant.

Rate and comment on the overall condition of the retail sector

Average Team Score: 6, 2

Needs more shops and brightening up with flowers, etc.

Limited

Retail area #1

Average Team Score: 8

Small mall with Dollar store, grocery store, bank, & hardware



A unique downtown business

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping

Average Team Score: 5

If applicable, explore other retail shopping areas outside of the downtown business district and visit as many businesses as possible.

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

Average Team Score: 8

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

Average Team Score: 6

Consider industries only within or adjacent to the community.

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

All businesses in the Industrial Parks

What are the major types of manufacturing in the community?

There seems to be a lot of building of condos



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

Yes, very good

Are the industrial facilities well maintained?

Yes

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

Yes, they are very close to the Madison area. Large schools, good shipping lanes out of town.

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

1 print shop

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

Several banks, none really in the downtown area.

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

Average Team Score: 9

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

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

Did not appear to have this.

From what I saw, no.

Does the community have a slogan/brand?

None

Don't think so

Is the community well known for an attraction or event?

Bike trail, Sugar Creek River

UFO Days. Found that on the website.

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

Railroad dept, building in the middle of the park. Hotel – stone in downtown area.

Train depot, building in the middle of town square. The Island park.

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

Comments: Beautiful parks around the river.

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

1 B & B, no other accommodations

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

No

Possibly the High School

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

Did not see a center nor was there any signage

No, I was bounced to a few different places 😊

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

Comments: It's hard to comment when there doesn't seem to be one.



The Bike Trail



The Bike Trail

Restaurants

Comment and rate the quality of restaurants:

Average Team Score: 6, 7

Comments: Friendly diner style right in the heart of downtown.

Bleinis? Good Food/Service.

Variety/Mix of Restaurants

Comments: Limited, your choices were bars, a diner, and Bell Blue

What do local residents recommend on where to stay, eat, and visit? One way to do this is to ask questions: "I have only one hour (half a day, etc.) in this community, what would you recommend?" or "where would you recommend we stay/eat?"

Bike Trail

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

Bakery, Ice cream shop along trail

Are municipal offices conveniently located? Yes

Please comment: Would be easier to locate if there was more signage.



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

Parks:

Average Team Score: 8

Comment: The river is a beautiful back drop for the Parks.

Public Transportation:

Average Team Score:

Comment: Unknown

Sidewalks:

Average Team Score: 9

Comment: appeared to be adequate

Streets: 7

Average Team Score:

Comment: some streets needed repair, but normal to above average for most communities.



City Park

Landscaping, Street Trees:

Average Team Score: 8

Comment: very clean town – could see much being spent to keep town in good condition.

Public Restrooms:

Average Team Score: 8

Comment: did not see any in downtown area, good at parks.



City Park

Street Signage:

Average Team Score: 7

Comment: adequate signage – hard to read from a distance

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

Average Team Score:

Comment: **unknown internet access.**
payphone unknown but not needed



Planning

Do you see conflicting land uses in the community (e.g., a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill)? Please comment: **Park next to sewage treatment plant – fortunately on the south side, so most often smell would not be a problem.**

Are all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space etc.)? Specify where land uses are not appropriate: **seemed reasonably good.**

Did you experience traffic congestion anywhere?

Comment: **None**

Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities? Please comment.
Yes

Does the community appear to be pedestrian/bike friendly? **Yes on pedestrian. No bike lanes but traffic is light enough not to be an issue.**

Recreation

Comment on the availability & appearance of each of the following types of recreational facilities. Rate each type of facility.

Parks:

Average Team Score: **7,**

Nice # of parks. Island park seems neglected (tennis courts, basketball).



Private recreation facilities:

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

Go to Madison, unless it is some outdoor activity

Entertainment

What does the community do for entertainment?

Go to Madison, unless it is some outdoor activity



Role Playing

Would you consider this community as a suitable location for a young family? Why or why not?

It is a nice bedroom community

Would you consider locating your retail or service business here? Why or why not?

Probably not. Not a tremendous location for a business, proximity to Madison.

Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here? Why or why not?

Probably not. Not a tremendous location for a business, proximity to Madison.

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist? Why or why not?

No, besides the bike trail, didn't seem like much to do.

Comment on the quality of information and assistance provided by residents and employees of local businesses.

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

Michelle Joseph at the Library was very helpful. Denny at the Village knew a lot too.

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

Michelle should be selling this community. Very helpful, great information. Really took the effort to greet me and help answer any questions I had.

Did residents identify a particular issue (e.g. safety) to be of major concern?

No

Using Your Senses

What did the community smell like? Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural, or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors (flowers, food, etc.)?

Nothing offensive

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

Quiet town

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

Good

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

No

Wrap-Up

The following questions are to be answered by all team members:

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

I thought the downtown would have more active shops, surprised by the big industrial park & daycare facilities.

Yes

No

I have been to the community before so my expectations were built prior and were no different.

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

Yes (2)

The website has a vast amount of info and seemed to be quite accurate

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

Lakes/parks

Parks & cleanliness

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

1 – downtown shops

Location

Educate businesses about the community/what's available

Available space for growth

2 – signage (2)

Lake/river – how are they using it now?

Be able to direct people to business district & municipal offices/chamber offices

Show people what a nice community it is.

List five positive things you observed about this community.

1 – friendly people,

Schools, especially high school building/land set up

Industrial park

Cleanliness

2 – Industrial park

Great parks (Island Park)

housing availability

Parks (excellent)

3 – Daycare facilities

Lake/river

Main street / trees/ sidewalks

Streets in good condition

4 – School facilities

Bike Trail

Parks

5 – Nice housing developments

Schools

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

1 - Seems like people just live there but don't thrive there. Little involvement with the community.

Downtown seems to be fading

Size

Lack of signage (directional)

2 – Old feel in a lot of community

Attract & retain young people

Lack of business in general

3 – Disconnect between “new” and “old” residents

Maintaining downtown business district

Lack of places to eat

4 – Attracting new businesses

5 – Taxes

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

Bell Blue – great guy, neat place I want to return

High School

The Lake & parks

This is a very beautiful, quiet town which seems like a great place to live. Maybe not a good place to work or pay taxes in.

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

We too need signage.

We also need signs to direct people to businesses/municipal offices.

I did not learn anything that changed my impression of my own community.

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

Oh yes, a lot of what was already on my list just confirmed.

Better signage for people to find places of interest.

Describe one idea that you will borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours!

Signs/information; Speak with Bob; speak with employees