



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

KNOX COUNTY

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE OF KENTUCKY

UK University of
Kentucky
*College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment*



2018

Introduction

Purpose

The First Impressions Program is a service offered through the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK). First Impressions was developed by Andy Lewis, University of Wisconsin Extension Associate Professor, and James Schneider, Grant County (WI) Economic Development Director, and conducted in over 1,000 communities across the US and Canada. Dr. Dan Kahl with CEDIK has adapted the First Impressions Program to meet the need of Kentucky communities. The program coordinates anonymous visits to your community by professionals in community and economic development, small business owners, community leaders and more, depending upon your specific community assessment needs. Visitors document their experience and interactions with community members. Their responses are then compiled and presented back to the community by a CEDIK representative. In addition, the program will offer suggestions and resources to address the areas identified for potential improvement.

For further information about this report or additional questions, please contact:

Melissa Bond, Extension Specialist

Community Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky

melissa.bond@uky.edu

Conditions of Visit

Visits to Knox County were conducted by 20 team members throughout the months of May to October. One team reported sunny and clear weather conditions, and another experienced warm and mid-70s temperatures. Visits were conducted on both weekdays and weekends to capture a variety of activity within the community. Overall, conditions were favorable for visiting and exploring the roads, small communities, parks, and businesses within Knox County.

Team Members

Adult ages ranged from 20 to 60 years, with students, small business owners, travel enthusiasts, tourism officials, and community development professionals. Assessors are from both rural and urban areas.

Assessments were completed at an individual pace, allowing personal life experiences to shape participants' impressions. While quotations in this report should not be considered true for all individuals of these demographics, they do provide a valuable snapshot of visitors from a variety of ages, life experiences, and interests.

Background

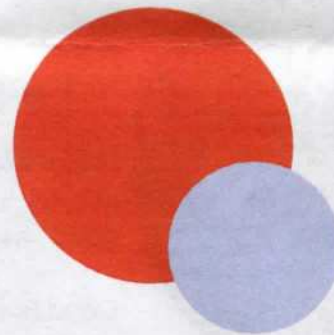
Process

Team members began by reviewing the Assessors' Guide with the coordinator and clarifying the purpose of their visit and geographic location from which they would enter Knox County, in order to ensure that major entrances were explored. Assessors also identified past perceptions of Knox County to establish a baseline of familiarity to ensure they had only a general knowledge of the community prior to visiting.

Then, assessors researched the community on the internet: visited official and non-official sites from search engines, restaurant and hotel reviews, and even school and newspaper outlets. After completing this "Pre-Visit" phase, your team began their time in Knox County by doing a Quick Pass Impression: driving through the community quickly without stopping to create an instinctual impression without focusing too much on detail.

After completing the Quick Pass, Assessors returned to locations that caught their attention and began detailed exploration and documentation of the following:

Educational
Residential
Healthcare
Arts and Culture
Civic Engagement
Downtown
Public Infrastructure
Recreation & Tourism
Small Businesses
Restaurants & Lodging



After several hours exploring Knox County, assessors document their Lasting Impressions on assets, challenges and opportunities they envision for the community, and make recommendations for further appeal to visitors that travel to the area.



Quick-Pass Impression

Highway 25 has good highway signs pointing to Barbourville.

Downtown is cute, lots of little shops.

The very first thing I noticed was the houses. I thought they were so pretty, whether they were Victorian style or modern. It seemed that so many of the houses were in good shape with pretty, well-kept yards.

The city, built to human scale now seems very narrow and tight to drive. However, a very walkable place.

The square in Barbourville was fun, but felt really cramped. The buildings look a little old, but in a good way—giving a rustic feel.

Leaving the downtown area, I still liked the feel of the town with chains mixed in with locally owned stores.

First thing we saw when exiting the main road was a waterpark and sign for Union College.

Pretty roundabout around courthouse.



Community Entrances

A nice, quaint town. Very hospitable sort of folks. Seems like a very "full" place, built very well in its day.

I came from Williamsburg KY, so I came in on HWY 11. My overall impression of the town on the first drive through was that it looked in good shape.

Good Barbourville signs along the highway, waterpark very prominent.

Getting off highway 25, I saw the waterpark and ball fields. Medium condition. New construction as we turn onto Knox St. Town is clean. Bigger than online presence let on.

Quiet. Murals are beautiful. Courthouse beautiful.

Many signs for the city and the stores. The downtown square looked very vintage and cute!

I saw good signs indicating hiking trails. Parking was limited at 9:40 AM on a Monday. Buildings either in beautiful shape or totally run down.

The signs were plentiful. Town looks like a cute/walkable downtown with sufficient parking.

We saw many businesses including restaurants, shops, banks, and churches; and a lot of advertisements for the moon-bow.

"Union College was gorgeous, looked well maintained."

Educational

We observed Union College, which was well-maintained and beautiful. I liked the brick and aesthetics of it. In the town square there was a distinguished school district sign.

Union College campus very nice. Also came across an elementary school that looked pretty good.

Saw 1 elementary school sign that said it had "proficient education." Union College was gorgeous, looked well maintained.

Saw an elementary school; it looked pretty nice. Union College was very pretty.

Aside from the sign in town square, there wasn't visible print information that talked about the quality of the system.

Elementary school had a banner saying that they were proficient.

Residential

Barbourville has a significant variety of housing available. Options vary from quaint, Victorian homes, luxury new homes, apartments, duplexes, trailer parks, and country living. There are 11 apartment complexes in Barbourville, most of which are low income or income based rent housing.

We saw a lot of high end homes near the college, with more low end homes near the highway. Unclear if there was any middle ground.

Lots of nice houses near Union College that seemed promising, but we didn't observe many houses away from the college.

Housing seemed to pretty much be all the same- small houses. Not much variability.

There were nice houses on big properties near Union College which looked appealing- but that was the only location I saw nice houses in.

Rental properties appeared too permanent and not for starter families seeking to move up in the community to residential property owners.



Healthcare

The healthcare options could be marked more clearly. Once you saw the hospital, you could tell it was a hospital---but signage was lacking and it is hard to know what is available because signs aren't easy to see.

Barbourville has several options for Family Practice Doctors and dentist. The town has about 5 choices for eye doctors and about the same for OB/GYN.

Nice hospital on road leading to town.

The local hospital is Barbourville AHR Hospital. Google reviews are 3 stars. Their ratings and reviews on healthgrades.com have high death rates. Death within 30 days was much higher than expected.

Saw a dentist and doctors office, but limited healthcare signage overall.

I found two places of long-term care services, Barbourville Health and Rehabilitation Center and Friends and Companions (Adult daycare). Nursinghomeating.org gives BHRC 4 stars with survey rating getting a 4, Staffing and RN ratings getting a 3 and Quality rating a 2.

There was a large hospital we saw that was pretty obvious to the public.

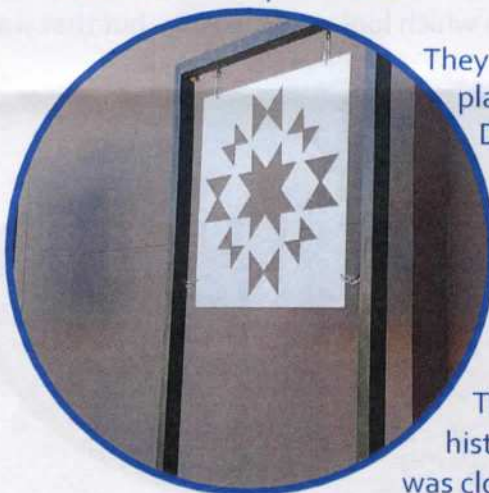
It seems that outside of the hospital, the nearest Urgent Treatment Center is Corbin. It seems this would clog the ER with non-emergency illness.

Friends and Companions is open only during the day, there did not seem to be many overnight facility options for those who need care.

Saw hospital and internal medicine office, but did not see signs on how to get there.

Arts & Culture

There were many attractive murals that reflected the history of the community—it showed a definite commitment to public art.



They seem very proud of their history and the Civil War battle that took place there. There was also a war memorial and they really celebrate Daniel Boone.

I saw several murals and a quilting garden that allows for an area of rest in the downtown area. There were many quilt squares around town with different patterns and designs that gave a coordinated look.

There was limited signage for the arts opportunities—such as the historical museum. We only found it after we went to the town hall, but it was closed at the time. It seems they have few available open hours.

Big emphasis on the Boone festival, with good Instagram presence and lots of advertisement--but didn't see much evidence of other artistic/cultural events that are ongoing or occurring outside of festival season.

There are so many neat nooks and crannies off the square---a lot of potential here for interesting pocket spaces!

I didn't notice a community art space that teaches classes---this would be a nice resource for the local residents.

The museum was wonderful! Very nice exhibit but limited open hours.

Several alleys or side streets connecting to secondary businesses provide wall opportunities for artistic expression. Local artists, high school students, and college artists should be encouraged to provide community art to fill these alleys.

They have made great effort on an artistic presence, keep it up! There is opportunity to continue to expand even more.

Civic Engagement

The local restaurants had "local" awards hanging up---they seemed well supported.

The museum volunteers are well informed, eager to share local history, knowledgeable and welcoming.

The area was busy with both pedestrian and vehicle traffic. One thing I noticed during my entire visit there was that the town is a busy place. People are obviously giving their business, as much as they can, to this city.

I did not notice much presence of local citizens engaged in the community (i.e. civic clubs, volunteer opportunities, etc.)

The Ugly Mug had a "local" Kentucky sticker on the cash register. It seemed well supported by the local community. Other than that, I didn't see a community "shop local" campaign throughout town or in the businesses.

Did not noticeably engage civic leaders as much as I would have liked. The Aquatic Center appears to have been a driven public/private partnership with much success. College youth influence is evident in the amount of pedestrian traffic during dusk hours. The local population could be more involved---I sensed a gap between leadership and average residents.

Partnership with tourism/main street and college is evident throughout the community. They seem to work well together and complement each other.

Public Infrastructure

Lots of city buildings (for education/town) and a library! Loved to see it!

I did not see a Farmers Market but everything else had many, clear signs and was of walking distance.

The visitors center was very friendly, and the public library seemed nice.

All of the old fashioned lamp posts gave it a nice "back in time" feel. Could use more lighting in the alleyways, though.

Police/fire dept found in city hall, not very well marked. Found city hall, it was accessible. Found library, also accessible.

We saw a police presence, library, jail, city hall, courthouse. All well labeled, but minimal signage.

Went inside City Hall and visitors center. Saw courthouse, library, and board of education. Very well signed. You knew where to go. Very accessible, you could walk right in.

Building directly across from court house, to the right of the corner, is very unattractive, and needs painted badly. Could also consider an awning cleaning program or committee to clean up faded awnings.

City hall was nice, but weren't very welcoming. Seems to just have resources for locals. Museum was closed, which was a bummer.

The bump outs are attractive and well-maintained, but could use some more landscaping/streetscaping for roads as you approach the downtown square.

Maintenance of structures and facilities needs care and attention. It looks like there was momentum and several were updated, but that momentum has slowed down.

Pool recreation facility was fantastic! And the shuttle was a nice amenity.

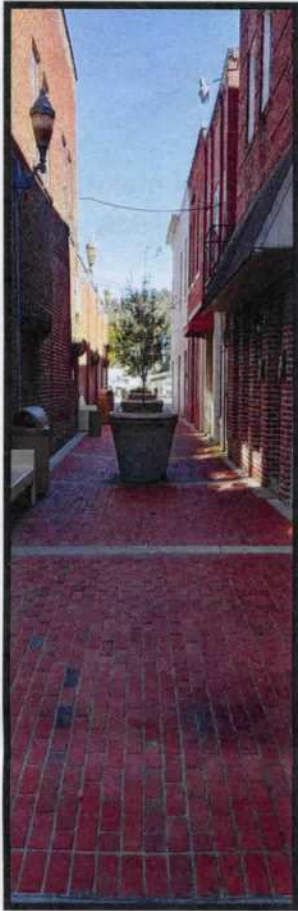
Town hall was a little bit of a walk so had to ask how to get there. Combined with a museum but it was closed. Not many pamphlets or information out in city hall.

The city hall staff were nice, but the hours of the museum are very limited.

Signage was okay, helped in terms of finding the visitor's center. Town hall looks a little beat down (windows in front). I didn't notice or hear anything about a Farmers Market in the area.

Downtowns

I found the area very appealing with lots of character. They had nice street lamps, parking was easy, landscaping was very pretty and the streetscapes were the best I have seen.



I never noticed drinking fountains, but I saw several benches and picnic tables. One thing I LOVED to see were several trashcans and cigarette disposal containers. Kudos to the city for this!

Street parking was very full, but we found a parking lot using well-marked signs. From there we could access most of downtown with a very short walk.

In between the buildings, there are small pedestrian alleyways. They are paved in brick and have benches and landscaping.

Nice murals around city near the visitors' center, very good decorations (fall themed) placed around town.

Town square was cute but could look more put together to be more appealing. There was sparse grass that didn't seem healthy, but the fountain outside visitor center was pretty.

"Bones" of downtown are very good; a little landscaping could go a long way.

The fall decorations and landscaping everywhere made the community seem very appealing. Maybe add more lighting and flowers, and places to sit.

Barbourville has a lot of brick paved area, which I find very visually appealing. They also had nice landscape. I think extending this concentrated effort to other areas of the town would be very nice.

Parking in Barbourville was free and easy. They had signs directing parking if street parking was unavailable. In addition, the other places of business that I noticed that were not within easy walking distance of downtown, also had plenty of parking.

Streets are well kept, walked down Knox St. and then down side streets. Best part were the murals in alleyways and side streets.

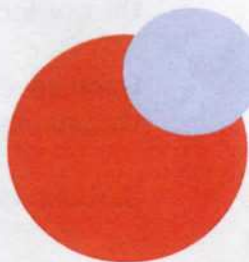
Sidewalks could be more level. Landscape at visitors center was nice but didn't notice much anywhere else.

Seating and trashcans appeared to be located along entire main street area and well maintained. The landscape/streetscapes were pleasing and the street names were visible.

The whole downtown area was pretty nicely developed and maintained.

I liked the set up of the town square, but a little farther from there things started to look a little run down.

There were plenty of sidewalks and parking spots. The town was very nicely decorated for fall.



Downtowns continued...

"The whole downtown area was pretty nicely developed and maintained."

I liked the gazebos and corn stalk wrapped light posts.

Very well signed, sidewalks are good, design of town is nice, cute and restive. Not that much lighting, but good streetscapes.

Signs for downtown and the visitor center were good, but too many cigarette butts on the street.

Lots of gazebos around which are cute but lots of cigarettes, didn't see drinking fountains. Couple of close parks (recommended by the visitor center staff) and there were benches, gazebos, and fountains that were well maintained.

Not many pedestrians or cars going around.

Buildings either in good condition or very run down. Lots of vacant lots. Lots of brick so looks nice that they're all similar.

Some/most buildings are in decent shape, have character, and signage is very good, infrastructure is generally good.

Buildings looked a little old, some not in use anymore, but overall had an attractive vibe. Signage was helpful.

I did not see many people other than employees in the entire restaurants/town hall /visitors center.

Recreation & Tourism

This town has the Cumberland River going right around their town, but I saw nothing to indicate any public usage of the River. Hiking trails, canoe rides, inner tubing...all of these things seem like possibilities for getting people to the town.

I didn't notice many signs depicting well-known events, slogans, opportunities for recreation, etc.

Didn't notice a slogan or certain event, but lots of focus on Daniel Boone, statues, quotes, festivals.

There was supposed to be an outdoors center, but it was difficult to find.

Daniel Boone festival, info in visitor center, Daniel Boone statue outside courthouse

We saw a nice community waterpark area, signs for the Daniel Boone festival, and rodeo. Looked for the outdoor center we had read about but couldn't find it.

Good advertising of upcoming events and festivals at the visitors' center, but not a very strong community presence while walking around.

Barbourville has a very nice aquatic exercise center and a water park, as well as an RV park for camping.

Dr. Thomas Walker State Historic Site has a copy of the first home in Kentucky. It has a very large park area with multiple and varied picnic spots available. It is a very nice park.

There were signs/flyers about events happening around town and the visitors center, like the Daniel Boone festival, outdoor center, and Halloween Hustle 5k.

The manmade murals are beautiful and could draw locals and visitors to the community. Nice nature areas surrounding the outskirts of Barbourville (trees/mountains). The hills are beautiful.

The visitors' center is very attractive, but doesn't quite fit with the feel of the town. The fountain is nice, and local artwork inside. The trolley ride seems like a great idea for the town.

There was a visitors' center with helpful staff. Signs for it everywhere and lots of maps/brochures.

The visitors' center was obvious; lots of signs. The staff was nice and they made us a map to find city hall. There were many brochures available.

There's a visitors' center, had a lot of brochures and maps and flyers for their community events and sites. Recommended going to the park and the historical museum.

Small Business

There are several open places for businesses downtown, including many that appear to have been recently renovated.

Over 60% of the buildings downtown are occupied and doing well. Two were in obvious renovations, and 8 were empty. I noticed several thriving businesses in the square.

I did not see any industrial areas. I did notice on my way out, Jackson C. Valley Electric. This is Cumberland Electric. They had a building on the outskirts of Barbourville and appear to have many employees. Walmart and the hospital are also big employers.

There are a bunch of empty, rentable spaces. Economic drivers seem to be legal assistance. Lots of drug courts, marriage lawyers, etc.

it seemed like the only driver was the government. Didn't see much prosperity in anyone area.

The businesses there seem to be doing okay. Some businesses that were smaller and looked a lot older didn't seem open anymore.

There was a florist shop with event room space that was attractive with a nice display. This is a good example of renovating a space for the community.

Good amount of cars driving around, but didn't seem to be many "booming" businesses, although there were many cute little shops. We were the only pedestrians.

Not too busy, some cars and pedestrians downtown, some businesses looked almost abandoned.

Area isn't particularly busy, some storefronts seem to be empty/closed.

It appeared that the number of storefronts vacant or struggling is proportional to main streets across the Commonwealth.

Minimal pedestrians/cars. A lot of for rent signs. Looked barren.

Not really busy, we were the only ones walking. A good amount of cars, not too many.

Businesses seem to be doing well.

No other pedestrians. Lots of cars driving and parked. Lots of closed storefronts but some seem to be doing well.

Restaurants & Lodging

Few restaurants in town. But, we visited a coffee shop and a café which were perfect for breakfast.

Didn't seem to be many local joints- would be nice to have more variety. Many available and easy to find, were not very full. Was not a huge variety, at least near town square.

The Ugly Mug Café had great coffee, excellent service, and even gave hiking recommendations. It was a nice atmosphere with strong selection of drinks. Definitely a trendy/millennial vibe. I would recommend to others.

There are several good quality local owned restaurants. I felt there were choices and variety, from cafes to Mexican. They all need help with online presence, though.

Scot's food truck was a great idea! I only noticed one hotel, but there was a nice area for RV camping. This could appeal to outdoors adventurers.

Love the pizza restaurant off Main St. and the Oven Mitt. I'd return there.

Barbourville itself only has one hotel, Best Western Wilderness Trail Inn. It is a 3 star hotel with 4.2 star rating. Corbin, the town right off of 75 and in Knox county has several chain choices.

Went to a few nice restaurants/cafes near the town square with great customer service. Everyone was friendly.

A lot of food places, cute coffee place, quality was good, good prices, service a little slow but people very friendly and nice.

The Oldway Café was well decorated, had good service, was affordable and enjoyable for breakfast. They also sold vintage items. I'd stop again if I came back through!

Lasting Impressions

Assets



The community has a strong artistic identity, and the employees I met were helpful and suggestive.

Downtown is attractive, walkable, and I felt comfortable exploring the community. Everyone was so willing and eager to help us. They really made us feel like we were wanted in the community.

The most positive thing about Barbourville is the homes, the consistent quality of homes downtown. I will also remember how alive the town seemed.

Downtown seemed to place an emphasis on local/small businesses, and everything was easily walkable. Town square looks like Back to the Future!

I really liked this town. I felt it had a lot of character, beauty, and nature. It has a thriving community. I loved the different neighborhoods and the surrounding hills.

The murals made the community interesting, and the gazebos and decorations gave a great environment, making it inviting for visitors.

People were very friendly, the signs were clear, and the visitors center was beautiful and welcoming.

Some good businesses near town square, beautiful buildings, and Union College. There is plenty of potential in this town.

Cute local family-run businesses, shops, and restaurants such as the Ugly Mug gave it a true 'small town' feel.

I will remember the beautiful houses and the activity and liveliness of the town. Barbourville seems like a great place to live, with a beautiful and thriving downtown and surrounding by beautiful hills.

Lasting Impressions: Challenges

The lack of local businesses in the town. Lack of quality retail, heavy on services making it difficult for the retail.

I didn't get a sense that people were proud to be from Barbourville. I was told there's "nothing to do here" and wonder what it would take for citizens to have a sense of pride in their town?

Businesses/restaurants seem a little slow. Make the turner outdoor center easier to find.

Need more ways to highlight scenic outdoors. Also, there should be more diverse options for food.

Didn't seem to be much community pride and not many pedestrians frequenting the town.

There's not a broad variety of businesses or noticeable lodging for visitors.

Replace upstairs windows, paint buildings, highlight features. The 'second level' of town seems in disrepair.

Doesn't seem to be unique opportunities in the community they can offer to visitors. It was a cute downtown, but not sure what one could do for more than an afternoon in the area. Could highlight things to keep someone busy.

Most of the people we met seemed to be employees of the local government or owners of shops. It didn't feel like the average citizen was involved or engaged that much.

Lasting Impressions: Opportunities

Possibly- fair where local artists could paint murals around town. Other could strip and repaint worn down buildings. After a barbeque! It would draw locals of all skill levels together and would be an attraction to draw visitors.

Make city hall more accessible, clean up cigarette butts, get water fountains for public. Overall I liked it, but it would be totally looked around in a short amount of time. Very nice employees.

I'd love to read more history about the area when downtown.

The Cumberland River, along with waterpark and campground, is such an asset that seems underutilized.

Try to bring the college crowd downtown-get retail shops that appeal to that age group. Add lighting to alleys.

Focus on the legacy of firsts as noted on the tourism website and exploit the vision of what was and can still be.

Make sure when you have visitors send them to your downtown retail shops. Encourage to buy local.

The courthouse square is very compact and would allow for low cost landscaping and minor improvements that would provide a warm and festive atmosphere for family engagements and visitors to enjoy.

Try to bring the community together more, maybe engage to attract younger people.

More directions to Outdoor Center, more prevalent looked for it 45 minutes, and could not find it.

It would be nice to add some green space downtown. The brick is very nice but could use a little green.

Diversify, be strong on social media. Online presence doesn't reflect the "feel" of downtown and its charm.

Several storefronts are fixed, but there are still more that need repair.

I think expanding the downtown area with more lights and diverse food selections would attract more people. Also, more obvious signs to the scenic and outdoor areas/attractions would be helpful.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback compiled from visits to Knox County, the following suggestions are recommended for future opportunities:

Identify Ways to Engage Local Citizens

Visitors experienced pleasant interactions with local government employees, but felt there were not many noticeable opportunities for civic engagement for residents or college students. Consider identifying ways to draw more local involvement into decision-making, or organizing campaigns to encourage more community and residential pride and local ownership in the county.

Develop Alleyways and Walkways Downtown

Several visitors noted the alleyways and walkways downtown as an asset, but felt they were underlit and could be a source of petty crime. Consider intentionally planning to develop these areas, activating them into safe, well-trafficked public spaces.

Celebrate the Cumberland

Visitors think the river can be further utilized as a local asset and tourism draw. Consider more ways to advertise activities on the Cumberland such as canoeing, picnicking nearby, or organized cleanups. Plan events that highlight and celebrate the history of the Cumberland while looking forward to capitalize on its potential.



