

First Impressions

Basic Version - Revised 2017

*A program for
community improvement*

Originally Developed by:

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&

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Introduction:

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of the First Impressions community exchange program. Along with other visiting team members, you will make a short, incognito visit to an exchange community you are not familiar with and record your first impressions. You are not expected to offer expert advice—you are simply asked to give an outsider's candid viewpoint on various aspects of the community you visit.

We ask you to think in terms of three perspectives:

- 1) as a tourist visiting the area,*
- 2) as someone considering moving to the community,*
- 3) as someone looking to start a business in the community.*

Purpose:

To help a community learn more about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of a first time visitor.

Your Group:

Ideally 3-6 people. Try for a mix of M/F and from different age groups. Great to have young people involved. Best if you can car pool and make the visit as a team if you can. It makes for a more enjoyable experience.

In Advance:

Please review the manual in advance so you are familiar with the type of questions you will be asked to respond to.

Feel free to check out the community online. One person should contact the chamber or government office to request a 'packet of community information' to see how they respond.

The Visit:

Plan to arrive in the target community by 10:00am. You will want to spend two - four hours touring the community. You will do the initial drive through and 'Five Minute Impression' as a group. Once this is completed you should split into teams and decide which

team will drive first and which team will start with walking the downtown to visit stores, city hall, chamber, etc.

Try to have lunch in different establishments if possible. After lunch the teams should switch driving/walking.

Your Story:

Develop a story to explain your reason for visiting the community. You don't want the word to get out that the visit is happening. You get to be an actor for the day. ("I'm looking for property in the area", "I'm interviewing for a job in a neighboring community", "Just traveling through and looking for a place to vacation next year", etc.)

Photos:

Feel free to take photos of buildings, signs, etc that will help you better make your point about comments or suggestions you are making about the community. Please be discreet as you don't want to tip local residents off about the visit.

Tips:

- 1) Consider having a small notepad for notes as writing in this manual is rather conspicuous.*
- 2) Take notes, notes and more notes. If you don't this will all turn to mush before you can do your report. When driving stop frequently to do so.*
- 3) EXPLAIN why you feel certain ways about things...the detail is helpful. Here's one case when more words will be better than fewer.*
- 4) Look for positives as well as problems. Every community needs to know what it is doing well so they can build on those strengths.*
- 5) There is no wrong way to do this. Remember, two people may see or experience the same thing and react differently. That's OK.*
- 6) Have Fun!!!*

Thank you!!

1) What was my perception before visiting the community? What did I expect?

2) Did you check out the community in advance via website or social media? If you did, what did you learn about the community and what was your impression of their online presence? What impressed you? What might they improve?

3) The 'five minute' impression - take one drive through the community without stopping and without talking to others in your car. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence so you don't influence each other.

4) Community entrances - Check out EACH community entrance and as you approach the community, what do you notice first?

5) Driving - Downtown Business Area - evaluate the downtown for appearance, signs, quality of buildings, variety of businesses, etc.

6) Driving - Additional Business areas - are there additional clusters of businesses? If so, evaluate them for appearance, signs, quality of buildings, variety of businesses, etc).

7) Driving - Overall comments on residential. Are there differences between neighborhoods.

8) Driving...Business/Commercial/Industrial Park - Overall impression?

9) Driving - Parks, playgrounds, athletic facilities.

10) Driving - Hospitals/clinics/other health services.

11) Driving - Signs/Billboards - were directions to parks/schools/etc. clearly marked and easily understood?

12) Driving...Schools & Churches...what is your impression based on their appearance?

13) Driving - Lodging/Camping - what is the availability?

14) Walking - comments on appearance of businesses, displays, signs, etc.

15) Walking around - comments on business staff - did they greet you, were they able to answer questions about the community, were they helpful, would you hire them for your business?

16) Walking around - (Ask questions, directions, start conversations) - comments on people in general - were they friendly, did they know answers to questions, could they give clear directions? What was their attitude toward their community?

17) Community information - what information did you find on businesses, attractions, events, things to do, etc. Brochures, signs, message boards, kiosks? Did you find a community map?

18) Walking around - Chamber or City/Village Hall - were they open, did they have information readily available, were staff friendly and helpful? Were the facilities well signed and appealing?

19) General items -

- Parking***
- Public Restrooms***
- Wi-Fi & Phone signals***
- Water fountains/benches***

20) Using your senses -

- What did the community TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/restaurants)

- What did the community SMELL like?

- What SOUNDS did you hear?

- What did the community FEEL like? (Emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc. or physical response, i.e. rough streets, etc)

21) List the 5 most positive things you observed about the community.

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**
- 5.**

22) Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours.

23) If someone asks you about this community six months from now what do you think you will say...in one sentence.

Your final thoughts...If you were...

<p><i>...traveling as a tourist, would you have stopped here? Why? Why not?</i></p>	<p><i>...looking for a business location would you consider this community? Why? Why not?</i></p>	<p><i>...looking for a place to live would you consider this community? Why? Why not?</i></p>
<p><i>Would you come back? Why or why not?</i></p>	<p><i>What could make this community more appealing to business?</i></p>	<p><i>What could make this community more appealing to families?</i></p>



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Report Prepared by Todd Johnson: University of Wisconsin-Extension Grant County

Baraboo, Wisconsin



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*A revised and updated version of the *First Impressions* program developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider, 1991.

First Impressions: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement Final Report

Community You Visited: Baraboo, WI; Sauk County

Visitation Team Profile:

Tim Boldt, owner, Pioneer Ford Sales
Barb Stockhausen, Platteville City Council and owner of H&R Block
Kathy Kopp, Executive Director, Platteville Regional Chamber
Todd Johnson, Community Resource Development
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P.O. Box 31, 916 E. Elm Street
Lancaster, WI 53813

Date of visit and time spent: September 20, 2013

Weather on date of visit: Sunny and warm.

Prior to Your Visit

What is your impression of the community before your upcoming visit? What are you expecting to see?

Our impression of Baraboo before arriving was that it had a historical connection to the circus. Most of us traveled through Baraboo on our way to the Dells or Wisconsin Rapids.

Information on Baraboo via the phone:

We contacted the Baraboo Visitor Center and learned about places of interest. The staff was very courteous. We requested a visitor packet from the Baraboo Chamber and never received it.

Information about Baraboo was easy to find on the internet:

We browsed the internet and found several sites useful:

- <http://www.cityofbaraboo.com/>: Colorful and well organized. It would be nice to have a contact phone number available on the front page or by clicking “Contact Us”.
- <http://baraboo.com/>: Very attractive website that is easy to use and has the content that visitors need. Perhaps too many things on the front page that forces you to scroll down.
- <http://www.downtownbaraboo.com/>: Very attractive website that was easy to use and full of great information. Again, a lot of content on the front page which forces the user to scroll to make sure they aren't missing something critical at the bottom of the page.

The Five-Minute Impression

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

- Older community with a mix of well-maintained properties and run-down properties.
- A lot of greenery.
- Nice historic downtown.
- Creative landscaping in areas.
- Entry into city was well marked but landscaping was not good.
- Housing on Main Street through town was rundown, yards not well kept in many cases.
- Roads were very rough.
- School, hospital, downtown, church were excellent
- Town seemed very busy, good traffic.
- South to north Hwy 12, signage great listing population (12048), shopping options normal, trees/diversity, bridges with green space, common visitor center, shoe box store 2 of 2, need to mark the college entrance better, home of cow pie chocolate candy bars, home of animal crackers, food stands, center square very well in appearance.
- Didn't realize it was so big.
- Beautiful healthy downtown.
- Good signage.
- Healthy businesses

Community Entrances

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances:

Approached from Highway 12 Heading North

- Entrance is well marked.
- Medians have a lot of vegetation growing.
- Businesses on the right side are rough looking. The left side is very nice (Anytime Fitness area and Garden Artwork)
- Appearance is good
- Empty lot on corner.
- Weedy road condition.
- Very good
- Very nice "Welcome to Baraboo Area" sign. It feels like it is placed a little far from town. The city feels like it begins much closer to the location of the "population" sign.

Approached from Highway 12 Heading South

- New Hwy entrance sign hidden in trees are over grown, but clean.
- Vacant Wal-Mart/cheese factory
- Just like everyone (small town)
- Log home business- beautiful roundabout-busy!
- Weeds in median.

- Lots of activity.
- Pizza Ranch is the first building you notice.
- A lot of commercial signage, somewhat overwhelming and indistinguishable. Consider consolidating signs.
- Need something “big” at the 136 intersection to let you know where you are.

Approached from Highway 136 Heading East

- Once again, well-marked.
- Empty Wal-Mart Building
- Tow shop, but clean
- Vacant building- large
- Ochsner Park- beautiful
- Good school signage
- Older, run-down homes
- New Hwy entrance sign hidden in trees are over grown, but clean.
- Very scenic except for big white building across the road from welcome sign. A mural or larger sign saying, “Downtown Straight Ahead” would be nice.
- Ochsner Park & Zoo is gorgeous!

Approached from Highway 136 Heading West

- Fairgrounds look nice.
- Very nice, well groomed.
- Sign next to cornfield but well landscaped, I liked it the best
- Beautifully kept farmland & buildings

Housing and Residential Areas

Quality

In general, the group felt as though the quality of housing varied quite a bit. We found some very nice older and newer homes, but an equal number of homes in need of repair/maintenance. We were impressed with the assisted-living facility near the hospital, but found several apartment buildings in rough shape.

Affordability

It was difficult to tell how affordable the housing was without more information from local sources. There did seem to be a variety of housing choices that might meet the needs of variety of people. We were not certain how many of the apartment buildings are filled by students.

Availability

- Not a lot of “For Rent” or “For Sale” signs.
- Very nice newer multi-family unit.

Residential Infrastructure

- Roads tough shape
- Good greenspace/trees
- Very nice lighting in the square
- Need more marked crossroads

Appeal

- Most appealing: old stone homes
- Very nice housing in a few neighborhoods
- Homes on 136 most bad shape not appealing at all
- Downtown housing is attractive
- Homes close together
- Historic homes are very nice
- Creamery Apartments-attractive
- Blackhawk Manor trailer court – attractive
- School building in town brand new UW campus is new and beautiful
- Beautiful senior center and housing - new units
- Most areas were very well-kept & neat.
- Lots of curb & gutter (good!)

Education, Health, Social and Emergency Services

Education

- We saw all phases of schools. They seemed well kept/clean and the town was very proud of the "Thunderbirds".
- Well located, easy to drive to.
- Well marked with signage.
- Nice 2 year college.
- High school-nice, looks new college
- 2 year college UW-system very nice campus
- Head Start-signage was good
- First Student buses
- Well-kept and good playground space
- We found the Sylvan Learning Center
- UW-Baraboo- compact. Not easy to find. Nice looking campus from parking lot.
- Talked about Business owner downtown, very positive about school. Thought I should sit in on class if I was moving here with kids
- Appears to be a lot of pride for the schools.
- Good comments from the public
- Easy to get to the schools

Health Care Services

- Good location
- Town seems to have a reasonable number of clinics and other medical services.
- Very nice hospital campus.
- Brand new by hospital very nice and clean
- Hospice, Assisted Living, and Memory Care are all available
- Everything was convenient.
- The serve the greater Dells area, nice

Social Services

- Found a number of daycare facilities that varied greatly in street appeal.
- Had difficulty locating social services.

Civic

- Optimists
- ELKs
- Noticed a number of plaques at entry signs
- Hard to tell

Emergency Services

- Did not see these facilities, checked out on the website, the facilities are great and good info on
- Beautiful hospital/EMT
- Sauk City Law Enforcement- very nice

Local Economy

- By the looks of some of the housing, I would say a tough economy
- Beautiful!
- Business seems to be very strong. Some "hiring" signs.
- Businesses look like they are doing well, but there are some homes that tell a different story.

Downtown and Business Areas

Could you locate the downtown easily?

- Easy to find.
- Downtown around square beautiful little shops and cafes
- Seemed many people enjoyed walking down streets
- Easy to find. A lot of activity.

Overall appearance:

- Great signage, old buildings
- Very similar to Platteville as per buildings
- Nice green space around square
- LOVE the downtown!
- Wonderful buildings, signage, and activity.

Variety of shopping:

- Many choices: Antiques, toys, furniture, bakery, surplus, cooks, theater...
- Many different retail stores
- Great variety!
- Lots of pride.
- Flowers/trees/greenery is very appealing
- I'll be back to explore more!



Customer service:

- Went to bakery, coffee shop, Ploetc Furniture store was excellent
- Went into the surplus store and no one talked to me at all
- Stopped in several small shops. "Amber Moon" had a very sweet employee. Corner drug store was clean with nice displays but no one said hello (was there about 10 minutes).
- Hallmark store closing after 34 years. The owner loves the town.
- Kids store was fun look & lights on but closed.
- Becka & Kate's- cooking lessons!
- Great conversations with staff at the toy store and gallery.

Signage:

- Good signage downtown.
- Fairly easy to get around.
- Attractive.

Window displays:

- Very few open storefronts
- All open businesses had displays in window
- Very nice & appealing

Mix of facilities:

- Such a great variety of businesses!
- A bit of trash on the sidewalks here and there.
- A lot of different shops and stores. A fun place to explore.

Parking:

- Great on-square parking.
- Enough side lots for parking.
- Seems adequate.



Lighting:

- Looked adequate, but we were there in the daytime.
- Hard to tell.
- Visited in the daytime, so we couldn't tell.

Downtown's role in tourism:

- Yes, not sure it is a historic downtown
- Yes! Great restaurants and lots of retail = success!
- Interesting mix and lots of opportunity to window shop.

Residential in the downtown:

- Good mix of housing in the downtown.
- Seems to meet the needs of the downtown.

Would you find the downtown a desirable place to live?

- Yes, close to shopping and food.
- Yes, everything is convenient.
- Yes, a lot of activity.

Government and/or nonprofit organizations to generate traffic:

- City Hall is at the center of downtown.
- Elk's Lodge



Other Retail Shopping Areas

Mix or retail:

- A good mix (Wal-Mart, Menards, Gander Mtn, small strip malls, furniture, auto dealers)
- Amazing variety! (Farm & Fleet, Radio Shack, convenience stores, Walmart, Gander Mountain, thrift store)
- Ample supply of chain stores.

What's missing?

- I did not notice anything.
- If they can't find it in Baraboo, they are probably travelling out of town "just to shop", not necessarily because they have to.

What's unexpected?

- Gander Mountain

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

- Gander Mountain
- Farm & Fleet

Overall appearance, variety, customer service, and merchandise:

- Very clean area
- Flowers and clean streets
- Good mix (antiques, bakery, restaurants, furniture store, sporting goods, hardware, etc.)

Local Industries

Major industry sectors:

- TEEL Plastics - manufacturing
- SYSCO Foods

Major employers:

- I think the major employers are the big box stores overall
- MSA Sysco!
- Teel Plastics
- Sauk County Law Enforcement
- St. Claire

Major manufacturing:

- Unsure
- TEEL Plastics - manufacturing
- SYSCO Foods

Major types of primary industry:

- Recreation
- Forestry
- Agriculture
- Tourism

Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry?

- No
- I don't think so.
- Seems to be quite varied.
- Amount of rail infrastructure suggests freight traffic (manufacturing and/or logistics/storage).

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

- Yes, it appears as though there are (4) distinct areas.

Are the industrial facilities well maintained?

- Yes

Would this community be an attractive location for industrial development?

- Yes – strategic location
- Yes – great community infrastructure (schools, housing, and shopping)
- Yes – rail service

Commercial Services

What types of commercial businesses serve the local community?

- RR Donnelly
- A major printer
- Lumber yards
- Plumbing and heating stores
- Well covered in all areas
- Flambeau Tech Center

What commercial services appear to be missing in the community?

- None that I noticed.

Professional Services

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

- Biggest bank I noticed was Baraboo Nat. Bank taking up one city corner downtown with smaller branches located around town.

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

- Many insurance agencies, financial planners, and legal services (as per chamber site)
- Insurance and attorneys
- Does not appear to be missing any professional services.

Tourism

Does the community have a strong tourism sector?

- Yes, Devil's Lake State Park and Circus Museum
- Yes, Crane Foundation, Circus Museum, close to Wisconsin Dells
- Visitor Center is great! Friendly & helpful staff. It was a bit confusing to get to the building in spite of good signage.

Does the community have a slogan/brand?

- Indian Reservations
- Cow Pie candy factory
- Shoe Box Store
- Home of animal crackers
- Nothing that jumps out
- The Chamber uses imagery of Devil's Lake in their logo, but I always think of the history surrounding the circus as the community's unique identity.

Is the community well known for an attraction or event?

- Circus World Museum
- Parades
- Crane Foundation Mid Cont. Race Way (North Freedom)

What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction?

- Did not see anything
- Downtown- retail center

Do you consider any of the attractions to be underdeveloped?

- No, they have been around for many years. They continue to up-grade. Especially the Circus World Museum

Are there any community events that could be expanded/developed to be a tourist attraction?

- Not that I know of.
- Nope, just continue what you have been doing in regards to the programs for the downtown.

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

- Only noticed 2 hotels (Clarian Hotel and Best Western)
- Wisconsin Dells close by = hundreds of rooms available

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

- Clarian Hotel has small convention center attached

Is there a Visitor's Center, Chamber of Commerce Office, or other facility serving the needs of tourists?

- Yes, Visitor Center/Chamber very nice and accommodating, nice job done
- Beautiful, new Visitors Center and Chamber
- Our first stop was at the Visitor Center where we were warmly welcomed and received a great deal of information useful to our visit. All of us were very impressed with the facility, staff, and information available.
- Chamber service: very clean, thought kinds of tough to get info restaurants: we went to Broadway Diner for lunch- excellent!

What do local residents recommend on where to stay, eat and visit?

- Visiting the Circus Museum.
- The stores and shops downtown.
- The Little Village Café, the Log Cabin, and The Barn

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

- Broadway Diner was nostalgic
- Broadway Diner! Great experience! We had lunch & were treated very well by Lauren!
- The Barn
- Just Imagine Toy Store
- The theatre

Government/Public Services

Local Government Information

Are municipal offices conveniently located?

- Yes, middle of downtown, fourth street
- Yes, downtown on square
- Yes, central and contribute to the energy of the downtown.

If applicable, were you able to find adequate information to make informed retail, commercial and/or industrial business investment decisions?

- Community guide: picked up a community guide at chamber (well done).
- Chamber website has very nice and easy directory

Public Infrastructure

Please comment on public transportation, sidewalks and streets:

- I did not notice or see any public transportation
- Downtown sidewalks were up to date, not broke, or cracked or heaving up
- Streets were rough in downtown area
- Some streets could stand resurfacing
- More attention needs to be taken on sidewalk upkeep.

Please comment on landscaping, street trees, public restrooms and street signage:

- Landscaping around municipal buildings downtown was very nice.
- Landscape coming into town was very shaggy, needed work
- I thought street signage was great, especially in downtown district
- Attractions, hospital, library, looked great

Planning

Land uses:

Our group did not notice any conflicting land uses or inappropriate land uses. We could see challenges in the amount of rail traffic coming into town.

Traffic congestion?

We did experience some traffic congestion coming into town on Highway 12 heading north.

Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities?

Yes, we entered City Hall and some other services and found it very accessible.

Does the community appear to be pedestrian/bike friendly?

- I did not see bike lanes as per say.
- Cross walks were marked
- Once off the main highways
- Did not notice and bicycle routes, lanes, or cyclists. So, I'm guessing "no".

Recreation & Entertainment

Please comment on the availability and appearance of parks, public recreation facilities and private recreation facilities:

- Ochsner Park and Zoo right downtown looked very nice
- Golf courses, many camp grounds in area
- Devil's Lake State Park
- Fairgrounds, parks, and zoo look fantastic!

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

- Camp
- Golf
- Water Sports
- Hike
- Outdoors
- Shopping

What recreational facility (private or public) in this community surprised you?

- Sauk County Fairgrounds
- The Zoo

What does the community do for entertainment?

- Shop
- The theatre is popular.
- Local sports.

Does the community have a vibrant nightlife?

- Depending on the locals you speak with, I would say "yes".
- Based on past visits, "Yes".

Faith, Culture and Heritage

Faith & Churches

Our group saw many different denominations of churches. Several had some very nice architectural details (i.e. Saint Joseph, First Presbyterian Church, Trinity Episcopal Church, and First United Methodist Church).

Culture & Heritage

Community events:

Our group was excited to hear about the regular events that occur in the downtown. This is a wonderful idea that many communities could learn from. Please keep up the great work!

Event that is popular among residents:

- Big Top Parade

Does the community have historical buildings or places? Are they well maintained?

- Elk's Lodge and Circus Museum are very well-maintained.
- Downtown is wonderful.
- Several pieces of historic architecture in and around the downtown that are very well maintained.



Would you consider this community as a suitable location for a young family?

- Yes, attractive schools and job availability.
- Yes, a lot of pride in the schools.

Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here?

- Yes, it is centrally located in the state with highway and rail access.
- Yes, it has access to an educated workforce.

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young adult?

- Yes, it has fun things to do, unique businesses and events, and a college.
- Yes, but they probably wouldn't think it was "exciting" enough.

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist?

- Absolutely! Things to see- very inviting- great downtown.

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

- I spoke with the owner of the furniture store downtown and she was well informed about the community
- Friendly.
- Very knowledgeable and willing to share their knowledge.

Did they refer you to someone else who would help?

- We spoke to someone about the quality of education in Baraboo she and she referred me to the principal at high school.

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

- They were positive but did mention going through some economic issues in the downtown area.
- Positive.
- You can see community pride.

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

- No

What did the community taste like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you will remember?

- I went to Bakery, on Ash St. and bought some items
- Coffee shop & Broadway Diner
- I bought some candy at the toy store.

What did the community smell like?

- No issues, many flowers downtown
- Love the greenery & flowers
- Fragrant

What sounds did you hear?

- I heard nothing offensive
- Peaceful

Describe the environmental health of the community:

- I think it is very positive
- Very good
- The residential areas seem very green and lush with vegetation (even in the downtown).

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

- I was very pleasantly surprised! Much more energetic than I thought.
- A lot more activity in the downtown and industrial park than I would have thought.

Wrap-Up

List five positive things you observed about this community.

1. Capitalizes off us its unique connection to circus history.
2. Maintains a vibrant downtown.
3. Has a variety of retail and service options.
4. Healthy manufacturing and industrial park.
5. Healthcare and educational facilities.

What are five potential opportunities available to the community?

1. Stronger connections to the college.
2. More attractive options for denser housing.
3. Consolidate signage on highway to make it more legible to travelers.
4. Play off the circus history more.
5. Better way-finding to the downtown and college.

What will you remember most about this community six months from now?

Conversations with community members revealed a strong sense of community pride.

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!

- Downtown Square - it is beautiful we desperately need to up-grade downtown tourist attractions, especially museum (walk downtown main) I believe our historical committee wrote a book about.