



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Community Visited: Monticello

Date of Visit: June 3, 2006

Visit Completed by: Shullsburg



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

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Date of visit and time spent: Saturday, June 3, 2006, 4 ½ hours
Weather on date of visit: Beautiful weather – sunny, high 70s

1. Prior to Your Visit

How easy was it to get information on the community that you are visiting?

It was very easy to find information about Monticello online. The www.monticello-wi.com site is nicely done. You may want to check the Mapquest map. It shows Mineral Point to the east of Monticello and other towns we'd never heard of, such as Schultz and Sterns. We were unable to print the list of businesses. Luckily we found that list of businesses in a brochure. The website www.monticellowi.com has a somewhat confusing home page. Once we got into the site, however, we really liked the list of businesses, calendar of events, and list of clubs and organizations. Each website has its strong points, but combining them into one website (or at least linking back and forth) would provide more complete information and send a consistent message to visitors to the site. We were happy to be able to look at the detour route online.

We looked at a copy of Hidden Valleys and found a full page of advertisements and a couple of descriptive paragraphs. Monticello is also featured in the Driving Tour.

Did it accurately reflect what you saw?

The websites both accurately reflected what we saw. They included many color photographs. The writing in the Monticello Business and Professional Association webpage is very descriptive.

Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

Immediate.

Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

No

What was the quality of information obtained from regional/state agencies and organizations?

Not applicable

2. Past Perceptions

What was your perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see?

Please comment on your knowledge of this community:

One person from our group did the First Impressions tour in 1992 for Monticello. She expected more improvements. Another person from the group occasionally had stopped at A&W as they traveled by on the highway. This person was drawn in by the beautiful lake. A couple of us had never really been in Monticello, but had driven by on the highway many times. Each of these people had often thought it would be a nice idea to stop in Monticello "some day." We felt the lake is a very attractive entrance to the city. Being that Monticello has nearly the same population as Shullsburg, we really anticipated more retail shops and dining. One person commented that they thought of it as a small town with nothing much unique to offer.

3. The “Five Minute” Impression

After taking a five-minute drive through the community, without stopping, the following reactions were noted:

From Highway 69 it appeared to be an inviting community with much to offer. However, once we got downtown, it appeared to be a sleepy community that hasn't set itself apart as unique or vibrant. We visited on a Saturday, and maybe because of that there was not a lot of life other than quiet wheels of bicycles. Some of us felt like the community “had given up, or quit trying.” However, we did notice some remodeling and renovation on private homes as we drove through town.



4. Community Entrances

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

There was major road construction on the highway, but access to the City was well marked. We appreciated the catchy signs for road construction. We were envious of your highway curb appeal. When we approached from Hwy 69, east on C, it seemed there was no clear entrance to Business Park. Comments included: Signage very nice, nice houses, inviting from the highway.

5. Downtown Business Area

Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:

The group really liked the garbage cans and the signage. However, some felt the need for more flowers. We also found no common theme. One comment was: “It was nice until you look closer.” There were quite a few empty storefronts. Some of the buildings have not been kept up very well. The house on Main Street with the hot pink roof needs some TLC and maybe a different use to fit in better with businesses.



General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage:

The Monticello House is a beautiful building on Main Street. Empty storefronts, like “_indley’s on Main” need to remove their signs completely. City Hall is a very nice, newer building with an inviting open entrance area for tourist information. We liked the idea of putting up kids’ artwork in the Post Office. (They had the theme of “Your Favorite Place in Monticello” or something like that.) However, when we initially drove into town, it looked like the Post Office had paper over the windows because it was vacant. The buildings on Main Street have a lot of charm. The museum could use a bigger sign. It is a wonderful asset! Some of the buildings need some TLC. The business signs were generally very good.



The variety of shopping:

There is very little variety. Everyone in the group thought there would be more.

How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?

“Awesome” grocery store (Gempeler’s Supermarket).

What kind of customer service did you receive when you entered the retail businesses?

We experienced terrific customer service at Gempeler’s Supermarket, Swiss Heritage Cheese, M&M Diner, and the Museum. The owner of Ott to Recover was full of ideas and good information. We were invited in to look at fiber displays at The Dining Room by the mother of the owner (even though the restaurant was closed). She bid us to “Enjoy your day,” and commented, “We’re having fun.” Too bad they are not open for lunch. We had wonderful help at the Museum. The M&M Café had excellent service and food. When we inquired about good places to shop or things to do in town, every single person we talked to suggested going to another town for shopping or something to do. Most suggested Monroe or New Glarus.

Were there any governmental or nonprofit organizational activities that might serve as a magnet for the shopping district?

The Museum, Post Office, and City Hall. The group thought it was a great idea to have the entry way of City Hall open so we had access to tourist information.

Were there the following public amenities?

Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!):

None

Drinking fountains:

Must be by park

Benches:

None

Public restrooms:

The restrooms in the park were not very appealing.

Appealing landscaping:

Lake Montesian and the Gardens are beautiful!

It felt inviting and restful as you enter the town.



Did you have any difficulty finding parking?

No

Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

Yes

6. Other Retail Shopping Areas (Big Box Retailers/Shopping Malls)

What types of businesses did you notice that would fit the general category of "Big Box Retailer":

None.

7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand?

Industrial Park

What did you find attractive about the potential locations for manufacturing/commercial businesses?

The business park is in a good location with easy access to the highway and near Monroe and Madison.

How would you evaluate the general health of manufacturing businesses that are currently located in the community?

Industrial growth seems to be lagging. It must be difficult to attract businesses so close to Madison.

Could you find print information and information and informed persons that could provide you with data that would help you make an informed business location decision?

It was Saturday, so there was no one to ask.

8. Health Care Services

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

There were none available that we saw.

Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physician, dental, optometrist, and other medical care:

There was a dentist's office on Main Street.

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

We didn't find any evidence of services for seniors.

9. Housing

How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock?

We noticed a lot of remodeling on homes. There were nice older houses. People were working on them and clearly taking pride in the community. We could see a subdivision of new homes in the distance, but it was not clear if it was in the City of Monticello.

Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed?

No

Were there any signs that it would be difficult to find acceptable housing?

No

Does the local housing market have housing that would appeal to all income ranges? Are there sufficient rental properties for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?

Our group didn't notice any, but in hindsight, there may have been apartments above Main Street.

10. Schools

Do the schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of "temporary class rooms"? Are they well maintained? Please comment on the following:

The group thought the school building looked nice and appeared to be new or recently remodeled. All grades appeared to be housed in the same school. One guest visited the school on a previous occasion and reported that it was a very nice well-maintained facility with no apparent overcrowding issues. The building appears to house all grades.

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

Most of the information on the school's website was "Coming Soon" – probably because school is not in session.



11. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations represented in the community:

We located the Zwingli United Church of Christ on East Lake Avenue.

Comment on the physical appearance of the churches in the community:

Gorgeous. The old Church was beautiful, and taken well care of.

Are there any signs of church-sponsored community services?

Not that we saw.

Are there any facilities or statements that some would view as intrusive or that would make someone feel uncomfortable if they were not of a particular faith?

No



12. Civic

Does it appear as though there are a variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community?

We did find a list of Clubs and Organizations on the monticellowi.com website. We liked the fact that the website listed the focus of the organizations and when they meet.

13. Residents

In what ways did you find (or not find) people helpful?

We found people to be friendly, courteous and helpful. The people in the grocery store were very friendly. The mother of the owners of The Dining Room was very interesting and helpful. The ladies in the museum were great. David at Ott to Recover was extremely helpful. When asked about a good place to have lunch, most people suggested M&M Café for lunch, others suggested going to Monroe.

Were community members knowledgeable about their community or able to refer you to people who were?

People didn't have much to say about Monticello. One woman commented, "You need to have a 'name' to be Important in Monticello town politics."

Did residents reflect the diversity that is represented in the rest of the country? Are there some segments of the population that would not feel comfortable in this community?

There is little to no diversity in the county, and Monticello mirrors that.

14. Public Infrastructure

Streets, street signing and lighting:

We were pleased with all of the directional signs except one. We followed sign for Sugar River Trail and never found it.

Land Use Planning:

Pink-roofed residential house out of place on Main Street.

Sidewalks:

There was grass between cracks. Sidewalks were narrow and old.

Public Restrooms:

The restrooms in the park were not very clean or inviting.

City/Village/Town Hall:

City Hall was closed. However, the entrance was very nice, and had a good assortment of information available.

Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities:

Very nice, new Fire Department.

Public Parking:

Public lot is very accessible to downtown merchants.

Library:

The library was closed by the time we got there. The lawn was not mowed and some from the group felt it had little curb appeal. It was good to see the extended hours.

Landscaping/street trees:

We didn't note any trees on Main Street.

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, and other misc.:

We didn't find any pay phones or drinking fountains. We liked the bike racks, and thought benches would be nice for bike riders. We really liked your themed garbage cans.



15. Recreation/Tourism

Is the community well known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?

The annual Homecoming Celebration is publicized on the website and in publications.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations:

We didn't observe overnight accommodations and didn't see anything on the website. Someone picked up a flyer that mentioned reasonable rates at Monticello Extended Stay.

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

We really like the advertisements for Homecoming in the Green County Visitor's Guide. We found a nice community brochure in City Hall.

Are there any significant natural features that have the potential of drawing people to the community?

The Montesian Gardens obviously draw many people to Monticello.

Are there any significant man-made attractions?

Access to the Sugar River Recreational Trail is a wonderful attraction.

Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, Main Street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Please comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.

The Village Hall had information available in the entrance.



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

The Dining Room and Monticello House

16. Using your Senses

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

Sour Cream Blueberry Pie – at The M&M Café

What did the community smell like?

Fresh mowed grass

What sounds did you hear?

The quiet of bicycle tires on pavement.

Kids playing in the pool.



Did you have any experiences that impacted the way the community feels?

We met many helpful, friendly people on our visit such as the owner of “Ott to Recover,” the ladies in the Museum, and the young lady at Swiss Heritage Cheese.

17. Wrap-up

What are the 5 most positive things that you observed about the community?

1. *Bike Trail*
2. *Relaxed feel no need to rush*
3. *Lake area and park with pool*
4. *Excellent Signs*
5. *Great people in stores and restaurants*

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

The biggest obstacle we observed was the close proximity of Monticello to New Glarus, Monroe and Madison. We felt this may contribute to the lack of retail establishments.

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

M&M Café's Sour Cream Blueberry Pie; Ott to Recover; the beautiful Montesian Gardens and how the park attracts visitors from the highway.

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!

Shullsburg needs to work on our appearance from the highway. We need to order signs. We are also working to find a way to keep the City Hall entrance open for visitor information.



Questions or comments about this report can be addressed to:

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