

# First Impressions of Fennimore, Wisconsin

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By the Neillsville Improvement Corporation

July 2017

***First Impressions of Fennimore, WI by Neillsville, WI***

Dear Fennimore:

We have been eagerly awaiting a First Impressions exchange with the community of Fennimore for several years and are grateful we finally had the opportunity to participate in the program with you.

We visited your community on a Monday late in July 2017. Despite the date we selected being in July, it was a cool, overcast day. Our group included:

- A Neillsville City Council member and local business owner
- A Neillsville School Board Member, and local business owner
- A member of the local media and member of the Clark County Economic Development and Tourism Board
- I am the Community Resources Development Educator with University of Wisconsin-Extension in Clark County.

We arrived mid-morning and our visit included:

- Several drives around Fennimore to check out the entrances, neighborhoods, schools and parks
- We parked downtown and walked main street
- A visit to the Train Museum and Veterans Memorial
- A stop at City Hall
- A visit to the Industrial park
- A visit to Carr's Cheese
- Lunch at Frederick's Family Restaurant

The following report includes our notes on the First Impressions curriculum developed by Andy Lewis and James Schneider at University of Wisconsin-Extension. We are very honored to have the opportunity to participate in this program with you. If you have any questions or if I am able to provide additional feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me at 715-743-5121 or via email at [melissa.kono@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:melissa.kono@ces.uwex.edu).

Sincerely,

Melissa Kono  
Community Resources Development Educator  
University of Wisconsin-Extension Clark County, Wisconsin

## ***First Impressions of Fennimore, WI by Neillsville, WI***

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

- I expected a similar sized town like Neillsville. Very similar in terms of layout.
- I thought it would be more run down.
- Had no expectations.
- Knowing Fennimore's population going in, I expected a handful of shops and a quiet, laid back feel.

***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?***

- Website was basic, but well laid out. Links to most important areas easily accessible.
- N/A
- Did not check anything out beforehand.
- I didn't conduct any online research in advance.

***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.***

- I liked how the downtown was filled out. Not many empty spaces. Not a lot for signage. Houses are really nice. Town seems clean and well kept.
- The downtown is very long and interesting mix. New residential housing, nicer than I expected. Tourist info well marked. Interesting place I want to check out, especially downtown.
- Long downtown. New neighborhood. Not much way finding signage. Few old buildings - mostly newer in last 40-50 years. Nice sidewalks.
- Hometown feel; buildings seem to be well-kept; a lot to offer as far as businesses and services; visitors would find it easy to locate basic things (e.g. travel info, food, fuel, etc.)

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

- Nice welcome signs.
- Easily recognizable, a little dated. Really odd that there's a religious sign - from a non-religious group.
- Nice entry sign, all the same
- The "Welcome to Fennimore" signs at every entrance.

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

- The buildings, although older, seemed well maintained. A good variety of businesses even with a long downtown. Downtown was clean and well kept. Wasn't a lot for signs pointing to different areas like the schools, hospitals and industrial park.
- Downtown looks well-kept, on first drive through not evident that there are vacancies. I liked downtown, lots of varieties of businesses.
- Nicely kept up. No central focus. Several buildings for sale. Very spread out, not conducive to walking, seemed auto-oriented.
- Large business district; buildings in good condition; downtown is clean and well-kept; don't notice much blue way signage pointing out post office, technical college, 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).*

- See #5
- Industrial park - well outlined. Neighborhoods established. Downtown area on its own.
- Very spread out, there was no cluster. Not good signage to lead you from one to another.
- Industrial park with technical college - newer, modern, attractive buildings, many businesses/offices listed on signage (difficult to read quickly when driving by).

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

- Neighborhoods were consistent. Most lots well-kept with nice houses.
- Yes. Really nice new neighborhood.
- One nice new neighborhood - bigger houses. Mostly older neighborhoods - smaller houses.
- Older/historic neighborhood - seem typical for a small community; newer residential neighborhood - indicates a community that is growing.

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

- I liked the industrial park. It's full, but there's room to grow!
- Well organized and laid out.
- Should have better signage from downtown to industrial park and college.
- After viewing the historic downtown district, surprised to see the expansive industrial park and educational facilities (technical college, CESA); these newer, modern facilities also give the impression of a growing, thriving community.

**9) Driving - Parks, playgrounds, athletic facilities.**

- Nice parks and playgrounds. Athletic facility looks nice. Just need more signage so they're easier to find.
- Hard to find at first (but maybe not a bad thing?). Seems like there were neighborhood-centric parks.
- Didn't see any downtown parks. Great train museum. One green space park next to newer housing development.
- Impressive, striking veterans memorial park. What a wonderful place for visitors to pause and reflect! Newer, modern, well-kept athletic facilities at the school district. The Dinky Bike Trail sounds like fun and a great way to attract visitors.

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

- Only saw one clinic. Didn't see hospital. Again, more signage would be great!
- Very hard to find hospital--is it located in another town?!
- Just saw one clinic, seemed to be easy to access.
- Noted sign for hospital on Hwy. 61.

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

- As I mentioned in previous questions, more signage would be good. Some things were hard to find and we wouldn't have without the map we picked up.
- Yes, when available. More would help.
- Needed better signage for strangers.
- Could use additional blue way signage to direct visitors to essential services and public institutions.

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

- Churches and schools looked nice.
- Well . . . there's a religious sign at each entrance to town . . . Schools look nice--I want to raise my children there. My perception looking at the schools, it looks like the community cares about its children.
- Nice from what I saw.
- Schools were modern and impressive; noted a couple of places of worship that seemed to be older buildings, but were well-kept and inviting.

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

- Didn't see much for either, but saw some on the map.
- Unsure, it was hard to find.
- Saw one hotel, didn't see any signs for camping.
- Lodging was lacking - had to pull out the community brochure to find something. This appears to be an "opportunity for improvement."

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

- For the businesses I went into, yes, they were very friendly and helpful.
- Small areas of improvement but otherwise it was nicely done.
- I liked that signs on buildings were perpendicular to the street. The fronts of buildings were in good shape.
- Extremely surprised when walking by all of the empty buildings. When driving, the signage leads one to believe that the buildings are filled with commercial businesses. Not sure if this is a plus or a minus. Also surprised that some of the buildings are in disrepair, when they don't appear to be so bad while driving through.

**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?**

- Didn't see many people while we were walking, but seemed friendly and polite.

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- Didn't encounter a lot of people, which is another factor. When we went into businesses, people were friendly.
- Seemed friendly. Nice thrift store/not junky, well run.
- Nice friendly people who were very knowledgeable and willing to share information regarding the community! Several that specifically stood out were: the woman at the Railroad Museum, the staff at Carr Valley Cheese, and our waitress at Friederick's Family Restaurant. Loved the practice of the waitresses at Friederick's placing a card on the table with their name on it.

*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?*

- Didn't see many people while we were walking, but seemed friendly and polite.
- We didn't see a lot of people (for a Monday in the summer).
- Didn't have many conversations. The two people I talked to seemed friendly.
- The far end of downtown was quite busy at the intersections of Hwy 18 & 61; very noisy and lots of traffic. Wondering if a stop light would slow the fast pace rush of traffic or just impede it. Because we visited on a week day, surprised some of the businesses were closed.

*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?*

- We found a lot of information in the museum. There was more than enough, including a map and it was all very helpful. Loved the museum!
- There were a few places with info--a little cluttered at City Hall.
- Good brochures in train museum and City Hall/Chamber of Commerce. Event flyers in many store windows. Large banner for farmers market. Did not find map.
- LOVED the marketing pieces for the community! Kudos on the community brochure with the fold out map, as well as the Dinky Trail promo pieces. Brochure racks were well-stocked in many community locations. A bit confused on the 1/3 page chamber list of businesses, which contained a section on the back of "non-Chamber businesses."

*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?*

- City Hall was open. Chamber was not. Person in Clerk's office wasn't very helpful when a group member asked questions. Facilities were a little cluttered.

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- They were not open. The office was a mess and visible even when closed. The person in the City Clerk's office did not have good info nor was helpful.
- City Hall open, Chamber not. Looking through chamber window office seemed very messy and disorganized, did not inspire confidence.
- Stopped by the Chamber Office to inquire about opening a business in town (glass allows view of Chamber Office from hallway - LOTS of papers!). Chamber door was locked with instructions to see City Clerk. City Clerk's office was confused when told that Chamber Office was closed and, after hearing our inquiry about opening a business, spent time searching for a business card for the Chamber director. I was a bit confused that the Chamber director's title is actually "Promotions Coordinator" and surprised that a person with that title would be responsible for fielding an economic development request.

**19) General items -**

**- Parking**

- Good!
- Eh, parked on the busy street.
- Fine
- We parked on the street; didn't see a municipal lot nearby.

**- Public Restrooms**

- Didn't see many.
- ?
- Didn't see any besides city hall and train museum.
- Looked for a public restroom; waited until we got to the restaurant.

**- Wi-Fi & Phone signals**

- Didn't see many.
- Better than I thought!
- N/A
- Reception was excellent.

**- Water fountains/benches**

- Didn't see many.
- Nice near the veteran area.
- In City Hall but not much else.
- Reiterating my love for the Veterans Memorial Park!!!

20) *Using your senses -*

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

- No specific taste. Food at the restaurant we had lunch was very good.
- (No answer)
- Nice cheese shop. Nice diner.
- No noticeable taste.

*- What did the community SMELL like?*

- Typical city smell.
- Summer
- Average
- No noticeable smell.

*- What SOUNDS did you hear?*

- Downtown was noisy.
- Traffic
- Nothing special
- Traffic! The intersection of two major highways has its advantages and disadvantages.

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

- I felt the community was warm and inviting.
- A little cold/but overcast/chilly day.
- Nicely kept up, but spread out, nothing special to me except for the train museum.

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- Quaint town that actually feels bigger once you view it in its totality. The museums, parks and small businesses give it the warm, hometown feel, while the industrial park and new residential district make you think it's a thriving community on a positive growth curve.

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

1. Clean
  2. Good information for travelers
  3. Friendly atmosphere
  4. Wide variety of businesses
  5. Room to grow
- 
1. Variety
  2. Large/long downtown
  3. Looks clean/organized
  4. Beautiful surroundings (the rolling hills in the rural area)
- 
1. Train museum
  2. Cheese shop where you can watch them make cheese
  3. Well kept up and clean.
  4. College
  5. Standard entry signs
- 
1. Information is readily available to visitors
  2. People are friendly and helpful
  3. Green spaces and opportunities for physical activity
  4. Interesting historic attractions.\
  5. A commitment to education (K-12, tech college, CESA)

*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.*

- (No answer)
- I liked the community, but not sure if there's something I can replicate here.
- Banner for farmers market and work through Extension, Chamber and NIC to procure, work with city to hang.
- Increase and stock more brochure racks through the community.

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

- It was nice, little community with a lot to offer and a lot of potential for future growth.
- I was pleasantly impressed, liked the downtown (and its potential).
- It has nice train museum.
- Small town feel that's clean and inviting with big town features.

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

*...traveling as a tourist, would you have stopped here? Why? Why not?*

- Yes, the museum and veterans park would have caught my eye and convinced me to stop.
- Because it looks interesting. Hard to see it all, especially main street.
- Maybe. I liked the cheese factory where you can watch it being made. I liked the train museum.
- Yes, because it looks clean and quaint. No, if I were looking for overnight accommodations.

*Would you come back? Why or why not?*

- Yes, I enjoyed my time there and would like to see more of the shops and other items.
- I would like to visit again on my own or with a friend.
- Probably not. Once I had seen those two sites I would not revisit except maybe train ride.
- Absolutely! I'd love to bike the Dinky Trail!

*...looking for a business location would you consider this community? Why? Why not?*

- Yes, seems like there's a lot of traffic going through.
- Yes. Although I would consider what type of business because I didn't see a lot of people.
- Depends on the business. If a shop downtown I would have to study traffic count. If manufacturing I would investigate taxes and supply of quality employees.
- Yes, because the intersection of two major highways should bring in lots of traffic. No, because the number of store fronts that are currently empty may provide a warning to future potential entrepreneurs.

*What could make this community more appealing to business?*

- Making sure Chamber director is available and staff in clerk's office is more informed.
- Visibility of people.
- Have a brochure outlining the items above.
- The volume of traffic needs to be managed so that people are stopping to patronize businesses rather than just passing through and, if a business no longer exists, the vacant building should be cleaned out and made to look inviting to potential buyers/tenants.

*...looking for a place to live would you consider this community? Why? Why not?*

- Yes, I like the small town atmosphere and the homes.
- Yes. Because of the neighborhoods/schools/parks.
- Maybe.
- Yes - the community is clean and friendly, plus the level of education and industry are impressive; along with the development of new modern housing. No - the pass through traffic from the intersection of two major highways is a chaotic distraction in an otherwise peaceful community.

*What could make this community more appealing to families?*

- Better information on schools, job opportunities, etc.
- Activities/businesses for children/families.
- Event calendar. More restaurant choices.
- Management of downtown traffic to make that area safer for pedestrians. More businesses catering to that demographic.

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

<p><b>...travelling as a tourist, would you have stopped here? Why? Why not?</b></p>	<p><b>...looking for a business location Would you consider this community? Why? Why not?</b></p>	<p><b>...looking for a place to live would you consider this community? Why? Why not?</b></p>
<p>-Because it looks interesting. Hard to see it all, especially main street. -Maybe. I liked the cheese factory where you can watch it being made. I liked the train museum. -Yes the museum and the Veteran’s park would have caught my eye and convinced me to stop. -Yes, because it looks clean and quaint. -No, if I were looking for overnight accommodations.</p>	<p>-Yes. Although I would consider what type of business because I didn’t see a lot of people. Depends on the business. If a shop downtown, I would have to study traffic count. If manufacturing, I would investigate taxes and supply of quality employees. -Yes, it seems like there’s a lot of traffic going through. -Yes, because the intersection of two major highways should bring in lots of traffic. -No, because the number of storefronts that are currently empty may provide a warning to future potential entrepreneurs.</p>	<p>-Yes. Because of the neighborhoods/schools/parks. Maybe. -Yes, I like the small town atmosphere and the homes. -Yes, the community is clean and friendly, plus the level of education and industry are impressive; along with the development of new modern housing. -No-the pass through traffic from the intersection of two major highways is a chaotic distraction in an otherwise peaceful community.</p>
<p><b>Would you come back? Why or why not?</b></p>	<p><b>What could make this community more appealing to business?</b></p>	<p><b>What could make this community more appealing to families?</b></p>
<p>-I would like to visit again on my own or with a friend. -Probably not once I had seen those two sites (Carr’s and Train Museum) I would not revisit except maybe for a train ride. -Yes, I enjoyed my time there and would like to see more of the shops and other items. -Absolutely! I’d love to bike the Dinky Trail!</p>	<p>Visibility of people. -Have a brochure outlining the items above. -Making sure Chamber Director is available and the Clerk is more informed. -The volume of traffic needs to be managed so that people are stopping to patronize businesses rather than just passing through and if a business no longer exists, the vacant building should be cleaned out and made to look inviting to potential buyers/tenants.</p>	<p>-Activities/businesses for children and families. -Event calendar -More restaurant choices. -Better information on schools, job opportunities, etc. -Management of downtown traffic to make that area safer for pedestrians. More businesses catering to that demographic.</p>

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We enjoyed our lunch at Frederick’s Family Restaurant, it looks like it might be a tourist trap but it was clearly a local favorite and the food was fantastic. The customer service was wonderful and we appreciated the touch of the card at each table with our server’s name on it.



The Fennimore Railroad Historical Society Museum was a group favorite. It also had ample literature on surrounding attractions and is really a tourism-promoting gem. The staff were friendly and helpful.



We also encountered friendly staff at Carr’s Cheese. We thought the gift shop was ideal. Here are some of our group members looking over literature that we got from Carr’s.

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We found the signage at each entrance to the city to be nice, although we were confused about the signs of a religious nature of a service club that is not religiously affiliated.



We liked the look, design, and planning of the Industrial Park. For an industrial park it was *nice* and the location of the technical college to the industrial park is ideal—great planning!