



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Report from Firth, NE Visitation Team

A program sponsored by:
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension
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**First Impressions:
A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement
Final Report**

Community Visited (City and State): Deshler, NE

Visitation Team Profile:

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Date of visit and time spent: October 20, 2006

Weather on date of visit: Partly Cloudy, breezy & cool

Prior to Your Visit

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

- I did not access any information prior to the visit.
- N/A
- I knew there was tornado damage...thought it would be similar to firth with similar housing stock
-

Did it accurately reflect what you saw?

Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

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

- No. They don't have a "custom" web page of their own, but I did access <http://www.gpcom.net/deshler/> and it had a basic summation of the town & events, along with pictures from the 2003 tornado.
- I noted there are no autumn events, and I found that part of the state quite beautiful on the drive down. It might be possible to capitalize on that and their proximity to the Little Blue valley with its trees.

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

- N/A

2. Past Perceptions

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

- A very rural, somewhat insular community.
- Only heard of it because of Thayer County Fair. Huge asset – try and capitalize on that as much as possible..

Please comment on your knowledge of this community:

- My actual knowledge of Deshler was little or nothing before the visit.
- Not a lot.
- I knew about the meat locker and that was about it

3. The "Five Minute" Impression

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

- Hmm. This is a nice clean little town. Looks like they've had some rough times as many rural Nebraska farming communities but they really seem to be hanging on.



Wonder what's keeping them going? It's very tidy, not a lot of junk on people's lots and most of the houses are in good repair. Some really neat old historical buildings, many amenities - grocery, locker, restaurant, bank, bar & grill, medical clinic, library. The parts where the tornado went through: I couldn't tell at the park because I hadn't seen the "before" pictures. But the bare lots with the exposed concrete and metal and machinery all over were evidence.

- It was a clean town, with similar housing stock as Firth. Nice school and real nice parkand really cool Flag in the center of the street.

4. Community Entrances

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

Approached from east:



- Local pride extends to the highways east of the town, with a large sign that looked to be in pretty good repair at a major highway to the east. Good to note their existence so you look for the town that put up that large sign to see what they have to offer.
- Noticed at least 2 Adopt a Highway signs which indicate a desire to keep the approaches to the town tidy.
- Historical marker to draw interest and slow people down as they go through.
- Sign boards listing amenities offered in town, including camping.
- Saw many ads for Lutheran churches which seemed to indicate a large Lutheran population - confirmed when we entered the town to see school and multiple churches all in good repair and even thriving (renovation underway).
- An exceptionally tidy cemetery with extremely well-pruned cedars
- The water tower catches attention with its patriotic paint job.
- The approach to the town all around from the east is very pastoral and is not marred by the presence of things like huge stockyards or industrial complexes.
- Broom reference sign made me ask questions - generated interest.
- Lots of signage indicating that Yes, you are in Deshler and Welcome!
- The arboretum at the base of the water tower was lovely even though we got there after a frost.
- Heading into town from the water tower noted many small older houses that showed some wear.
- Most yards were tidy, absence of car parts or junk on lawns and lots.
- 1st cemetery very nice -- Cemetery on the corner needs a nice fence. The "Thayer country weed control" sign seemed to be a bad play on words given the cemetery right there. Perhaps that sign would be better mounted directly onto the building. The arboretum was very tasteful and appealing – good addition.
- The two cemeteries on the side that were very well kept. The water town with the arboretum very nicely kept and the Deshler sign for the slogan of "Our kind of town"



Approached from west:

- Not a lot of acreages but the ones I saw looked pretty well-kept.
- This doesn't seem to be a main entrance to the town - not sure...
- "Superior Dresher" kind of jumbled & junky looking between the equipment and the tanks, building looked like it could use a little maintenance. It almost looks like a continuation of the farm to the west. Once I got past it and realized what it was, like a farmers' co-op, I wasn't as disturbed by the "working" appearance.
- C-Mart looks clean and easy to get to, looks like a place I'd be comfortable stopping if I were traveling alone.
- Many beautiful older brick bungalows on the west side of town - can tell the proximity in this part of the state to Endicott Clay. Made me think a Christmas bungalow tour of homes might be enjoyable.
- Many nice newer larger brick homes on the west side as well with some very pretty landscaping and lots.
- Noticed about a half dozen lots were available on the west side of town - water, power, and paved up to lots already. They seem pretty desirable - did not check prices. Nice to have room ready for people to expand and build.
- Nice – Isaac Walton roadside area a nice addition.
- Convenience store nice and new.
- The blue signs listing town services coming in from east and west is a great thing. Might be good to update or modernize the signs. Seem sort of old. Perhaps repaint and make sure they are mounted straight.
- The Isaac Walton park is very nicely kept. Big convenience store on the side of the road. Neatly mowed before you got to town. I don't remember seeing any population sign on either east or west.



Approached from south:



- Dirt/gravel roads on southeast corner of town kind of rough. City maintenance sure has a variety of surfaces to deal with.
- There are some modestly nice ranch style houses on the south side of town on older lots that are attractive.
- Even the low income housing / apartments were pretty tidy.
- I remember a nice school and a Lutheran church that looked pretty new. Entrance from the south was on gravel road.

5. Downtown Business Area

Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:

- Looked a little deserted at first glance. Love the flagpole at the center of the main intersection. View down to the parkway/boulevard is nice.
- Small historical signs on buildings (looked a little faded) and also hung securely – one was upside down.





- Very clean with some business - I remember the flag pole was really cool. It is nice to see other towns to get ideas of what you can do in your community to improve it. Someone made mention that in Firth the flag And it was not flying I'm going to get a light on the pole so I can put the flag out in Firth and fly it like Deshler.

General appearance of buildings (clean, repaired, painted, windows clean etc.)

- Many '50's era buildings toward the north end - must have been the town's heyday
- Many of the older downtown buildings look like they could use some sprucing up, like cleaning the windows and giving some attention to window displays, and painting the front doors & trim (see hardware / auto parts store photo.)
- The downtown streets themselves looked to be in pretty good repair from what I could see.



- There seemed to be a lot of empty buildings until we got out and started walking around looking at things. Then we noticed the CPA, the trucking company, the model train "shop" and the medical clinic that showed signs of life, and that the restaurant included an additional building to the south.
- The little space where the landscaping company has its setup was appealing even though they were not open and selling plants at that time. It looked cared for and the fences and arbors were a nice touch.

- **General appearance of buildings (clean, repaired, painted, windows clean etc.) ---for the most part.**
- Clean, the one thing I noticed a little bit of the south of the downtown area, you can still see the tornado damage.....which can be still cleaned up.
- I like the brick streets – it gave a homey feeling to the town . Appearance of the buildings were pretty clean....some empty building and potential for businesses to come to town.
- I really liked the mural painted on the side of the grocery store.



Historic and Interesting buildings (architectural and design details preserved, enhanced, removed or covered up? ("Re-muddling" present in community?))

- There are some lovely, interesting old buildings downtown and there are historical markers, but the markers on the buildings could use a touch up and some re-attaching here & there. The town has a nice sense of history about it.



- Really enjoyed the mural on the grocery store of "Olde Deshler". That took a lot of work. It also offsets the metal siding on some of the adjoining walls & buildings.
- Enjoyed the fact that "Grampa's" restaurant is located in

an old bakery building with the original tile floors. Might be interesting to visitors to display old photos of the bakery in action if they exist, give a little synopsis of the history of the building. What was the baking specialty when it was thriving?

- I don't recall what the building on the Northeast corner of the main intersection was, but it had some historical character in its construction & detailing.
- The Presbyterian church is off the main intersection but still has a lot of charm, though it looks like something will have to be done with it soon as wear is starting to show.
- Farther on, the broom factory looks really intriguing from the north. As a person who is fascinated by old buildings, I would be drawn to this during my visit.
- I would also be drawn to Maschmann's mill. I saw the round tower a couple blocks away and requested we drive by it. That's a place with some character! Makes me wonder what you could do with that?
- **Yes – some great potential for further beautification and use of historic and interesting buildings.**
- **Old building on the northeast corner of the flag intersection looked historical.**

General appearance of displays, signage (professional, clear, fits with building or community and/or store type):



- Signage that was immediately clear: Grocery store, Bank, Locker, Newspaper, Bar & Grill, one side of the restaurant.
- Some of the other businesses that were not as immediately visible (but would probably be readily identifiable if you lived there): Auto parts/hardware, party room of the restaurant, medical clinic, trucking company.
- Signage on downtown businesses like the grocery store or the restaurant could be made more attractive by giving it a more "historical" style in keeping with the buildings.
- **Seemed OK. Historical timeline signs were nice but needed to be re-done or repainted (looked a little faded) and also hung securely – one was upside down.**
- **Signs were appropriate for the business, clean easy to read. Knew what the business was when you read the sign.**

The variety of shopping:

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

- Checked out the grocery store and it seemed to have a really good variety. The produce looked really great and lots of variety there, too. It didn't seem like they carried many "organic" things - it didn't look like it in the dry goods, but they probably don't have a lot of demand for it. The meat locker had a modest selection at their counter but seemed to provide a good list of custom slaughter & cutting services.
- **Not a lot of variety – no where to buy clothes or shoes etc. No gift store. Not a lot of shopping options, just necessities.**
- **When we went into the grocery store, as far as food items – whatever you can buy in Walmart, you can get it in Deshler. It seemed the same with the auto-hardware -- it looked like you could get about any item that you could get in Lincoln. (Wish we**

had a hardware store.)

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

- The people at the grocery store were very friendly and open when I asked about the Cannibal Meat (new to me.)
- I would not be afraid to ask questions at the meat locker if I did not know what to get right off. I felt like the owner there was someone who definitely knew his field and could help me out, and it did not seem to matter that I wasn't from around there.
- Reception at the bank and the newspaper was very friendly - the people seemed genial after we'd all gotten over our initial hesitancy. We certainly weren't able to stay "under cover" with our "mission". They were all too nice, and perceptive, for that. The reception one receives in many small towns is guarded and sometimes a little chilly if you have not been a lifetime resident. That was not a problem in Deshler.



- **Very good at the grocery store.**
- Very good customer service – people were eager to help you. They were eager to answer your questions. Nice to see grocery sackers carry out groceries for the customers....we don't see that in Lincoln.

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

- The municipal building was downtown near the bank, and not far from the grocery store. One could stop to drop off the water/electric/garbage bill and run some other errands at the same time.
- **Didn't see any**
- I saw a senior center and in the newspaper office, I saw evidence that they have a Lions club, and on a bench outside indicated a Boy Scout troop,



Were there the following public amenities?

Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!):

• There was a payphone that seemed clean enough and out in the open enough that I would not be afraid to use it on a dark night, but I did not see a phone book with it.

- **One pay phone – no phone book**
- Pay phone with no phone books

Drinking fountains: did not see

- **Didn't see any**
- Saw some at the park – but not down town



Benches:

- Those Boy Scouts have been busy. I noted several sturdy-looking, well-painted wooden benches outside various downtown businesses.
- **Good number of benches**
- Benches and restrooms at the ballpark

Public restrooms: did not see

- **Just at the park and Isaac Walton roadside area – didn't see anything downtown**
- Restrooms were down at park and benches. I looked like they were handicap accessible, which is so important. I see it every year down at Firth ball field – we have handicapped restrooms, but there is not a paved way to get there. It is important for youngsters who can't get around easily, to feel that they are a part of the ball team... It is so important for those kids not to feel left out.

Appealing landscaping:

- Loved the concrete planters on the corners and the boulevard. As noted earlier, the landscaping & hardscaping in the little lot where plants are sold in season was very pleasant.



- **Very nice planters downtown, the flagpole in the intersection is very appealing and a beautiful addition to the downtown area. The boulevard is very nice and the lights with Deshler flags are appealing too. The new subdivision on the west side of town has been nicely planned too with islands in the street etc.**
- Extremely impressed at how well the park looked – they did a very good job at planting trees and making things look eye appealing. (We saw a picture in the news paper office of what it looked like before the tornado.)

Did you have any difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- No difficulty, and access to many services from one space.
- **Seemed fine**
- Plenty of places to park and everything was easily accessible. You could drive up anywhere in the park and not drive more than 100 feet to get to where you wanted to go.

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”?

N/A
N/A
N/A

7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate and/or

expand?

I did not note a defined area for manufacturing. We drove out to see Reinke's. The following notes pertain to that:

- Approach from south and west is pretty blah - north/west entrance is much more imposing and appealing, noting all the new trees planted along the entrance road and the wetland area down to the north left natural.
- The white fencing gives it a clean, well-maintained pastoral look.
- The office entrance looks a little stark. Maybe they have flower planters out there during the summer and we were too late for it. A few different shrubs might soften the entrance if the starkness is a concern for them.
- The signage on the road from the north approach is more visible and more appealing than from the south. They probably don't have a lot of people coming in from the south and west.
- **Yes**
- **Yes – they are lucky – it looks like where the tornado went through....there is great potential for more industry. They have a ton of area for expansion -- depends whether or not it is zoned.**

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

- **Easily accessible**
- **There was a lot of room....that is uncommon in many towns.**

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

- The more we talked with Phyllis, the more I became aware that there are many small manufacturing businesses in Deshler that are not evident to people like me. It sounds like it's becoming a good central location for businesses of that nature, which could be a real asset.
- **Reinke looked very healthy.**
- **Looked healthy. One thing that Deshler and Firth have in common Reinke is to Deshler what the Norris School district is to Firth. I would think that without them the town would not be like it is today. In Firth, it is Norris school district that makes the town.**

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?

- **I would think the city hall would be a good place to begin.**
- **Yes – just by going down to the village office, it was nice to have someone to talk to. Everyone in the bank was available to help, and willing to do so. I didn't find written information.**

8. Health Care Services

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

- Didn't see much for emergency medical services - looked like they have volunteer fire and rescue for such emergencies.
- **Just fire/rescue.**

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



- Clinic downtown listed hours out front - nice to have access to medical services in a small community
- Not sure what types of medical professionals were available through the clinic.
- Saw no dental.
- **Saw one medical clinic. Would be positive to draw an eye clinic and dentist – a one day a week clinic for these services would be positive. Perhaps a pharmacy in cooperation with the nursing home could work.**
- Two clinics building in town – neither one were open on full time basis and not the day we were there. They looked very clean and professional.
-

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

- Lovely assisted living residences to the south of the business district.
- Nursing home looked well-maintained. Nice to have it and the assisted living right next to the schools and not way out on the edge of town somewhere - keeps older residents integrated in the community and in contact with younger residents.
- As we were going by, a group of grade school students were being shepherded into the nursing home, probably for a program of some sort. That was very enjoyable to see.
- **Nursing home, assisted living. Both very nicely maintained. Showed the town places high value on these things.**



- There was a nursing home and an assisted living facility which was very nice -- very well kept. What stood out in my mind is, that when we drove by, I noticed it is in close proximity to the school and there were kids were walking to the nursing home to put on some type of program. I think it so very important for youngsters to be involved with older people. It is so easy for younger kids forget how to respect the older generation...and visa versa. What I saw was a very good idea.

9. Housing

In general, is the housing stock appearance clean, repaired, painted?

- See notes on approaches from East, South, and West. Most of the houses in Deshler looked pretty good, probably a little better than what I would expect for a local, non-commuter population in a rural community economy.



- There is at least one trailer that seems to be in an odd spot - see photos. It might be fine if it were maintained and on a residential lot. It just looks like it's hanging around behind a business.

- For the most part – still some tornado reconstruction/repair going on. Seemed to be a large number of homes in the town that needed scraped and repainted.

- Housing stock did appear real clean and painted, much similar to Firth. There were a handful of house that were not very pleasant to work at, and some looked like they were in the process of refurbishing



How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock? (Individual homes, multi-family housing, etc.?)

- Many individual homes with a pretty good variety in the small to medium range, with a few larger homes.
- Saw no evidence (or missed) of duplexes, four-plexes, or other apartments that were not subsidized/low income housing. Not sure what the market would be in Deshler for something of this nature.
- Mostly individual homes – small number of low income housing and apts. Might be a positive to have some nice apartments for Reinke workers to rent – especially if they are new to the area. It could help them decide to live in Deshler for the long run instead of elsewhere.



- Mixture of stock was really good – some very good houses...some in between houses and some older house....a great mix for anyone that might want to come to Deshler to live.

Is there historic and interesting housing? (Architectural and design details preserved, enhanced or covered up?)

- We took pictures of a beautiful old brick home on the east side of town that seemed to be undergoing some major renovations.
- There do seem to be some really neat older homes - I was particularly attracted by the bungalows on the west side of town, both frame and brick.
- Yes – evidence of some renovation work on houses. Lots of different housing styles so would appeal to lots of people.
- One house I remember....it was in the process of being rebuilt



Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed?

- There was not an overabundance of “for sale” signs.
 - Just the fact that housing doesn't move quickly in



small towns.

- Didn't look like it to me...didn't see very many for sale signs

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

- See above. If I were relocating to Deshler and driving through looking for houses, I might have been a little concerned because I didn't see a large variety of houses for sale, and most of the signs I saw were on properties that looked like they'd need a lot of work. However, see below:

- Perhaps to rent – didn't see any "for rent" signs. There was a good variety of housing sizes and pricing.
- Wasn't very much for sale....a few places you could rent...for someone new coming to town...you will have to take what you can get.

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?



- We spoke with a local realtor who indicated that, even though there don't seem to be many apartments for rent, people are sometimes willing to rent houses that are waiting to be sold.
- Also, she directed us to her bulletin board of listings, and I found several properties there that I would have gladly considered looking at, were I to move there, at very reasonable prices. We commented to each other that the cost of housing is definitely much more affordable in Thayer County than in southern Lancaster County.

- Seems to appeal to all income levels – not sufficient rentals.

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:

- We did not go into the schools but they looked well-maintained. The grounds were clean and well-kept and the playground equipment looked brand new and in good repair. The school must draw from a relatively large surrounding area to be able to support itself. I was surprised to hear it had enough students that it was Class C.

- There seems to be a lot of community spirit and support for the school, at least in terms of sports teams. Does the high school offer activities other than sports and are these supported by the community, e.g. school plays and events of that nature?

- Seemed adequate and well maintained. Parking lots could be weed-eated better and graveled more.

- Didn't go into the school...probably should of It looked like it was adequate in size, and very clean and professional. It looked welcoming. Nice looking football field and track.



Pre-School/Kindergarten/Head Start/Day Care facilities:

- Didn't see evidence of any

Elementary School:

- Nice that all can be on same campus.
- Assume that all are like in location, like in Norris. All are close in proximity. Also the parochial school on the north side of town.



Middle School/Junior High:

- Seemed fine.

Higher Education (Community College, Technical College, University):

- Does Southeast Community College offer classes locally, say, in the Thayer County Community Center by the fairgrounds? Is that building set up for satellite learning opportunities?
- N/A
- None – Beatrice would be the closest or something in Kansas. Hastings?

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

- No
- Didn't see anything.

11. Faith/Religion



Comment on the number of denominations represented in the community:

- Predominantly Lutheran.
- Only Lutheran – 3 churches. Seems exclusive. Might attract more new people to live in the town if there was more choice of church

denominations.

- Only one - Lutheran

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

- Very well-maintained, and in one case, appearing to be thriving as the church we saw was undergoing some renovation.
- As noted earlier, the old Presbyterian church looked like an interesting building, but seemed abandoned.
- Very nice and well maintained – very visible as well.
- Churches looked very cleaned...very well kept up. They were working on one of the churches the day we were in town. Churches looked pretty big.



Are there any signs of church-sponsored community services?



- Parochial school
- The parochial school - Got the impression that the churches might not work together – each had own youth group etc. Might help to have cooperative activities and events.
- I specifically looked for that and didn't see anything.

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?

- One would not have any doubt upon approaching Deshler that the majority of churches there were Lutheran. However, in the short interactions I had with the residents, and in any of the signage, I did not find any reason to believe I would be targeted if I were of another faith, e.g. Buddhist, Muslim. I would feel very inclined to keep my religious affiliation to myself until I got to know people, though.
- Possibly just the fact there are no other denominations. Could feel that other denominations aren't welcome there.
- There were no statements. But the fact that there is only one domination to go to town might make a difference if you were thinking of moving to town. If you belonged to another church, you would have to drive elsewhere to go to church.

12. Civic

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

- I noticed evidence of the Boy Scouts, (and possibly Lions' Club?) If I had more closely read the bulletin board in the bank, I suspect I would have seen others.
- Other than the Chamber – seemed to just be the churches. Didn't see any evidence of other clubs etc, other than the senior center.
- Senior center, boys scouts, Lions club

13. Residents

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

- The lady working at the Deshler Rustler freely provided information on town activities and the realtor was helpful in answering our questions about housing in Deshler. The lady working at the municipal office (also the CPA, we found out) answered our questions very willingly and let us wander around the council room. There, it was interesting for us to see the aerial photos of Deshler before the tornado. I was able to get an idea of just how many large trees had originally been in the park area before the storm.
- I found the bank more of a community gathering place than one would expect. It felt



very welcoming and not at all forbidding, and that community bulletin board was a great connecting point. The smell of fresh popcorn didn't hurt, either.

- All the people we talked with were very friendly and helpful. More than happy to answer our questions and visit with us. Seemed happy to welcome visitors into town. Knowledgeable about both their particular business area and about the town as a whole as well.

- Everybody that we talked to was very helpful and very knowledgeable. They were eager to answer questions.....almost like they wanted you to stay and ask more questions, especially the lady at the real estate business.

How did people talk about their community? What were their attitudes about their schools, public leaders, and community services?

- People were helpful and enjoyable and ready to talk about their community and their businesses. They seemed to be optimistic, for the most part, about the direction of the community. All I met were pleasant, and I noticed teachers and children walking along the sidewalk near the school did not hesitate to smile and wave.

- Very positive. Wanting to progress and make the town better and more inviting to outsiders and more accommodating to peoples needs etc. Very positive about the school. Seem to place high value on the assisted living center (very nice building) and also nursing home. Perhaps would like to see more services available in town – i.e. medical.



- They were very proud of their community...proud of schools, didn't talk much about public leaders or services.

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

- Yes.
- Very
- Yes...yes

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?

- The population seems to be predominantly white and of European descent. I do not know how people of Asian, African or Latino descent would be received here. There was no opportunity to get a read on this. My assumption would be that it would require some patience and open-mindedness on the part of both parties.

- No diversity was seen.
- I didn't see any diversity—but judging the character of the community I would think they would welcome people with open arms.

14. Public Infrastructure

Streets, street signing and lighting:



- Streets looked in good shape except for the gravel roads on the south/southeast corner of town which were pretty rough. Brick streets downtown add a lot of charm and echo the historical charm of the buildings.
- Beautiful Boulevard, nice lights, good street signs and very nice streets w/ curbs etc. Some sections of town (particularly to the east) could be paved to maintain the general appearance and usefulness. The City Park sign was rusty – would look much nicer if re-painted.
- All the streets looked paved or brick....and gravel coming into the park. I made the comment that the city employees have to take cares of 3 different kinds of streets

Land Use Planning:

- Don't know of particular land use plans but the town seemed to have a definite commercial/industrial section and definite residential sections. A major plus for the town is that it is in no way landlocked. There is open land to grow in every direction.



- One observation was regarding the park – it is on the edge of town and there are no other playgrounds anywhere else other than the school – which is right across the street from the park. Might be good to use an open lot in another section of town for a small playground so smaller kids would not have to go all the way to the big park. (The lot next to the library might be a good choice).
- Also – there seems to be no overall building code – there were trailer homes interspersed with regular housing. Didn't seem to “fit” the style etc. Disrupts the uniformity of the residential areas.
- Didn't see any signs that indicated where the park was. The park is separated from the down town, but how would people find it?. I like the banners that they had I the boulevard ...all the street signs easy to read and well kept up.

Sidewalks:

- Seemed to be in good shape in the business district. I did not look closely enough at sidewalks in the residential areas.
- All sidewalks in town seemed well care for.

Public Restrooms:

- No evidence of such - except in businesses. The one in the restaurant was clean, well-supplied, and in good working order.
- Observed them at the park and also the Isaac Walton roadside area.
- Saw them.

Recycling Center:

- Did not notice a recycling center. I would encourage one if there isn't one.
- Didn't see one

- Didn't see any

Village/Town Hall:

- Impressive council room for a town that size. Nice to have a dedicated space for municipal duties and the night-time drop box is a real plus.
- **Nice facility and easily accessible to the public – bill drop box a nice feature.**
- Very impressed with the way it looked. I like their council room -- I like the half moon table, which looked professional. I like the fact that there was someone there when we went in.

Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities:

- Fire department looked to be in good repair from the outside - we did not go in.
- **Fire and rescue. Seemed to be a good facility and easily accessible to the town and surrounding area. Nicely maintained.**
- No police office. The volunteer fire department looked very nice, looked new and adequate in size. Didn't see anything for emergencies...unless when clinics were open

Public Parking:

- No shortage of public parking - and FREE! That's a bonus to someone used to parking in downtown Lincoln.
- **Plenty downtown. Good amount at park/swimming area. Seems like possibly could use more by fair grounds.**
- Plenty



Library:

- It was closed at the time of our visit. Does it have Internet that the public can use? Liked the little park space outside the library under the great big tree.
- **Weren't able to get into Library – but seems to be a nice facility and has good hours to accommodate the public. Very nice asset to the town.**
- Did have that. It was not open when we were there, but noticed it would open at 3:30 which is convenient when kids come out of school

Environmental respectful community: (Tree retention, natural landscape features, water features, etc. taken advantage of. Are these features included into a retention policy and/or conservation efforts?)



- As noted earlier, I was glad to see the wetland to the north of the Reinke plant had been retained.
- The community obviously put a lot of resources, time and effort into restoring their park. There are many many new trees. It is attractive now, but will be beautiful in coming years.
- **The planters downtown and on the boulevard were quite nice. Lots of nice trees and the evidence of replacement of trees lost to the tornado.**
- Environmental respectful community with lots of trees -- especially considering

tornado coming into town. The arboretum is very nice feature of town. Isaac Walton pack is a nice feature, and they are all well kept.

Bike and walking paths (usable by children and elderly?)

- We noticed there is a bike rack available at the Library - not sure if there are elsewhere downtown. I would probably feel safe biking on the streets of Deshler.
- **No**
- Didn't see any in town, but from talking to lady at newspaper office, we were told that people can walk on the school track in the morning.

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

- The drinking fountain outside at the library looked like it needed some maintenance.
- **Yes – saw one pay phone, many benches downtown as well as the park area and a sitting area near library.**

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?

- Deshler Daze and the Thayer County Fair, and their races, which were mentioned by several people. I have to admit that after visiting, I am intending to come back to visit the fair. Many urbanites are seeking "rural charm" and I feel like county fairs embody that better than almost anything else.



- I understand that the racing is decreasing in popularity. It might be a possibility to just keep it as part of events like Deshler Daze and the fair and capitalize on it then, rather than trying to keep it going on its own.
- **They do have a slogan – printed on flags. Also have Deshler Days and the county fair. The race track too – although we heard this might not continue in the future.**
- Thayer county fair...sounds like it is a good time. They do have their community slogan...and it is very fitting for the town.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations:

- Nothing there, but Hebron is close and has several motels I would probably be comfortable staying in. A B&B would be nice, but I understood from one of the local residents that the regulations on such can be cost-prohibitive.
- **N/A other than camping available at park.**
- **None – assume Hebron has something.**

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

- As noted above - County Fair.
- Race track and the county fair. I did notice that one of the bars was going to have a Halloween celebration with a band. One thing that I really like about Deshler -- they are

much more tightly knit community. I could tell that the first 20 minutes I was in town. The person we talked to who owns the restaurant -- sounds like they do have a lot of activities for young adults. Firth does not have a place for middle aged adults to socialize on a regular basis...I think that sometimes -- if you can have that, you can probably separate yourself from a bedroom community to a thriving community -- you can get a lot more people on the same page if you can interact together.

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

- Proximity to Little Blue River valley - would there be potential to draw bird-watchers (Audubon), is it along a particular migratory path? It certainly is pretty country.
- Just being in a small town of NE.

Are there any significant man-made attractions?

- The swimming pool, park, and ball-diamonds all seem to be in great shape and very attractive as a destination. It is really great to see all the picnic shelters to provide shade until the trees gain some size. Abundance of new and well-kept playground equipment in park by ball diamonds.
- The ball field and pool are good attractions as well as the fair grounds.
- I would think the local newspaper would be a draw to attract people from the surrounding area as well.
- I would imagine that Reinke brings people to town. They also have a nice park and nice fairgrounds.

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.

- I didn't notice one. Maybe part of the old broom factory would be a good place for a chamber office / visitor's center. It is an imposing building. Or the mill; but that looks like it is still a working site, though maybe you could share the space.
- Since there is so much historical reference downtown, as a visitor, I would welcome a marker to tell me about who and how and why the town was established and note some of the points of historical interest.
- City Hall was very visible and staffed during business hours. The bank seemed friendly and informed of things a visitor might want to know.
- I didn't see any visitor's center, but village office was open. Chamber of commerce doesn't have office, but knew it existed. Didn't see any other office.

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

- I might be convinced to come back and try the Cannibal Meat - my curiosity is definitely aroused there. I noted an artist is in the process of refurbishing a building along the boulevard - a foundry. I will probably visit that in the future. Does Deshler have other artists besides the metalworker and the photographer? Perhaps they could display work in some of the storefronts downtown to give the windows a little more visual appeal. It may also draw visitors in.
- As noted earlier, the County Fair has the potential to bring me back. And Deshler

Daze sounds like fun, too.

- No – but there were local events like the pumpkin festival that would get local people out and involved.
- Yes – the restaurant – it was great with good food and good portions. I'll be sure to be back to the meat locker.

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?

- The restaurant was simple good hometown food. It would be fun to have a specialty store/coffee house of some sort that would feature locally produced bakery or candy or preserved items - it would probably need to have more than a local market and I would recommend Grow Nebraska for assistance on that account. It could possibly just have a storefront open seasonally.
- The restaurant was very good and seemed welcoming – food was good.
- Food was good – home made cooking.

What did the community smell like?

- Not so much what it smelled like as what it DIDN'T smell like. I have relatives in Broken Bow, surrounded by feedlots. It has done horrible things to the home values there. It is a good thing not to have to deal with that.
- Popcorn in the bank - a very good thing.
- ?
- Like Nebraska....fresh air

What sounds did you hear?

- It was relatively quiet. I did not hear anything that I found objectionable while we were there.
- The kids were quite visible. We saw/heard the elementary kids going over to the nursing home in the morning. It is refreshing to see the crossover of generations in town.
- Very quiet town...not a lot of traffic or truck traffic.

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

- I'd go back there - I know there's a good place to eat, a place where I can have a cocktail, a decent grocery store, and I'd probably check out the meat locker again too, to see what they had on hand. Locally produced products, where one can actually determine the origin of one's food, etc. are becoming very popular.
- It was a very close knit town...and you can feel it at the time you got into town. L just by talking to the people.

16. Wrap-up

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

- Friendly people with a positive attitude and a sense that their community meant something to them.
- Tidy
- Historical references and buildings
- Amenities - medical, car dealership, school, library, recreation, local industries
- Visually attractive rural location

1. Self Contained
2. vision to move ahead and help town to progress
3. Reinke manufacturing
4. nice park/pool/fair facilities
5. Library

- Very clean
- People were very nice and knowledgeable
- A lot more businesses than Firth has
- Nice school and nursing home/assisted living close togethervery positive
- Housing looked nice
- I could tell that they are really progressive in trying to get young people back to town

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

- Location - how to draw people there.
- Economic opportunity
- Maintaining / utilizing / selling declining buildings that could be construed as having historical value
- Cleanup of large damaged / unused items from the tornado, e.g. grain bins, concrete pads, scrap metal and equipment
- Getting and keeping people of all ages involved in the community

It may be cost-prohibitive to tear down the old water tower, but what about painting it? If feasible, it might even be fun to have a design contest for residents of Deshler to design something to paint onto the old water tower to make it more of an attraction and maybe even a landmark.

1. Getting new people to move into the community
2. Attracting new businesses to the community
3. Tornado clean-up
4. Keeping young people in the community – offering youth activities so teenagers don't have to go elsewhere for entertainment/recreation on weekend and in summer. Also offering a town that they want to come back to raise their families, etc.
5. Offering more church options – not just Lutheran.

- More tornado clean up needs to be done
- Fact that there is only one denomination of church can be an obstacle
- Being away from a big city – 2 hours from major cit
- Challenge to get young families back to town

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

- The flag in the middle of the intersection downtown, the boulevard with its flags and planters, the fact that there are two artists making homes & studios there and the fact that I want to visit the fair.
- The big flag pole downtown – and also all the flags throughout the town – very pretty.
- Deshler seemed to be a nice community with some vision for the future. Friendly people and very self-contained.
- I really liked the downtown area...I would like to come back and see it at Christmas to see what the town looks like...I really like the center piece flag pole...it is a good reminder of what is going on in the world today.

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!

- Civic involvement - I will agree to attend more town meetings in Firth and be more involved with the future of the community.
- Name plates for board members at meetings – Also – want to see if there is a way we could install a big flag pole in a similar fashion in downtown Firth.
- I'd really like to start a Chamber of Commerce...Firth that has the community association and a business that puts on a car show. I'd like to see if a Chamber can help with better communication between groups of people in town....and a Chamber would help the businesses in Firth. I think 95% of the business owners live outside of the village limits and they don't feel that they have a say in the town. It is important for our town to realize – that without the businesses – Firth will go in a different direction really fast...we need respect them and we need to help them have a say of what goes on in town.

You might want to consider tracking purchases (perhaps even finding a sponsor to provide \$50 to each participant). It would be useful to report where any money was spent within the community.

- I purchased a newspaper at their office and an apple at the grocery store and we had lunch in town. Next time I will try the buffet. I regret missing the Macaroni & Cheese.