

First Impressions

Team Report Form



Community Visited: Argonia

Dates Visited: **3/24/24 (2)**
5/17/24
7/29/24

1. **Pre-visit web search:** How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

- Argonia has a very nice web page, very informative. Lots of information about the town, employment, places of interest, police, government and cemetery and much more.
- The web page for the city was very informative and user friendly.
- The historical information was interesting.
- First female politician in the US was elected in Argonia.
- Information on where the town got its name.
- The first and last menu item are slightly cut off on the sides of the screen, but still work.

2. **The "Five-Minute" Impression:** After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted.

- Argonia is a mixture of a really nice small town with great amenities, nice schools and housing but also has areas of the town that are in poor condition. Businesses on the main street are limited. Several empty buildings. There are several really nice houses with well maintained yards.
- There was some good met with some bad. Part of the town were nice and clean while others needed some attention, much like all small towns.
- Coming in from the east of town, two beautiful and palatial properties set the expectation for what town will look like. The cemetery is lovely and well kept. Definitely a gem and continues the thought that this town is a place to stop.
- As you continue through town there are some great opportunities for murals and signage to really draw people in.
- The new homes north of town are really something to brag about.

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)

- Good signage directing to historical buildings and amenities around town. There was a nice, large convenience store.
- There was one house on the northeast side of town that was non-descript but not rundown. It's an opportunity for some landscaping.

3. Downtown Business Area Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc.

- The downtown has some businesses but also has some empty buildings that were not maintained. Those that house a business are well kept.
- Many of the buildings were rundown. Some were well kept and occupied by businesses.

Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed.

- There are several businesses in Argonia. XO Boutique, Quilters Nook (on a search on Google it says it is permanently closed), Conway Bank, Carwash, Ox Bar & Grill, R Greene Photography and Sarah Jane's. Cenex gas station that has Hunt Brothers Pizza and Krispy Krunchy Chicken.
- Most stores were closed while we were there. The ones we did visit were well kept. Businesses seen include: car wash, 2 retail businesses, very nice bar and grill, large quick shop, nice bank, library, elevator, feed store. No grocery store was seen.
- Sarah Jane's was a nice place to stop. There was really nowhere to get coffee or breakfast in town besides the gas station. The gutting and redo of Sarah Jane's is pretty great!

Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)

- Due to timing of visit, I was only able to go into the Cenex gas station. The workers were nice and friendly.
- We had a great experience at the Ox Bar and Grill. Everyone was friendly and willing to have a conversation. The convenience store workers were very nice as well.

What public amenities (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, trash receptacles and wi-fi, etc.) were available?

- We saw some trash cans downtown and public bathrooms at the RV park.
- There were some trash cans downtown. Did not see any public restrooms with the exception of at the park. Not sure if they were open or not.

Comment on landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?

- Parking was good. There was a little streetscaping downtown.
- Noted the light posts.
- Parking was easy. Plenty of spaces to park on the downtown area. I was able to park and walk to any business in the downtown area.
- The street downtown was very wide – kind of amazing!

4. Other Retail Shopping Areas

Describe other retail shopping areas. Were the areas attractive and easy to access?

- Shopping was either located downtown or on the highway coming into Argonia.
- Most shopping was on the main street or highway.
- We would have liked to have visited the Sarah Jane's store. Their products are sold at our local grocery store.

5. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand? If so, describe.

- No areas defined for industrial parks.
- No industrial park observed but plenty of room for expansion by the elevator was seen.

6. Health Care Services

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

- No hospital.
- No hospital, but there was EMS, a police department, and volunteer fire department.

Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers.

- They have the Argonia Clinic – dental office. The building looks very nice well maintained. It was located downtown.
- We saw there was a dentist office at one time but were told it is no longer in operation. Nothing else seen.

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

- No long term care services, assisted living or nursing facilities.
- We didn't see a nursing home but did see a community house – is that assisted living?

7. Housing

Give a brief description of the existing mix of housing stock. Does the local market have housing that would appeal to all income wages? What challenges do you see in regards to finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)

- There are some really nice houses in Argonia that are well kept. Looking at the various styles, sizes of houses, I think there would be options for a new family wanting to move to Argonia. They have the Argonia Housing Authority for low income housing. Driving around the community, there are several houses for sale. A Zillow search showed there were 6 house listed for sale. Two of the house were country properties. Price ranging from \$52,900 - \$79,900.
- There were several houses for sale. Some outside investors purchase homes like this for much more than community members can afford.
- There were also some rundown properties that may be violating codes for overgrown grass and plants.

What kind of rental properties did you observe for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?

- I didn't see any signs that suggested the house could be rented.
- There were a few potential rental properties.
- No motels or short term rentals like AirBnB from what was observed during the visit.

8. Schools

What schools are present? (Head Start, Preschool, K-8, High School, Post-Secondary, etc.)
Do the schools appear to be adequate in size? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?

- Argonia has a nice High School/Middle School and grade school. They have a football field with a dirt track. There is a fairly new concession stand building by the football field. The school has a digital sign out front of the school. The district has a web page. Lots of information. They have a tab for Summer rec programs. They also have a wellness committee that works to improve student and staff health and wellness.
- K-8. Small classes – maybe will have to consolidate in the future.
- The buildings were well maintained.
- The high school is also small. A local person mentioned they’ve had to consolidate for sports.
- The schools are lovely. They have a weightlifting building!
- Kids were observed to be playing on the playground equipment at school during the summer.

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

- Yes – information was found about the school system itself, but nothing that suggested the quality of education.

9. Childcare

What childcare service are available? Is it affordable?

- On the schools web page, they have the Sunflower Station childcare center. Posted that they would open June 1, 2024. I do not know if they met this goal or not. They have lots of information on the web page.
Below is the cost

Current weekly rates are:

- Before/after school --- \$50
- Attending preschool and older --- \$100
- 3 and 4 year olds (must be pottytrained) --- \$125
- Toddlers and pre-pottytrained --- \$150
- Infants --- \$200

Current daily drop-in rates (subject to staffing availability) are:

- Before/after school --- \$12.50
- Attending preschool and older --- \$25
- 3 and 4 year olds (must be pottytrained) --- \$31.50

- Toddlers and pre-pottytrained --- \$37.50
- Infants --- \$50
- There was one daycare observed, but did not see information on affordability.

10. Faith/Religion

Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the places of worship represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of faith-based community services?

- Argonia has several churches within their community: Argonia Bible Church, Friends Church (sign lists Pastor and service times), Corner Stone Church (looks like a fairly new metal building), Plains Church, UMC, 1st Baptist Church (sign says Sunday Worship 1pm) and Zion Lutheran Church.
- Many church buildings and all looked to be well maintained.
- No observations noted of any faith-based activities in town.

11. Civic

Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.

- I didn't see any signs of nonprofit organizations/clubs.
- There was an economic development committee and an active city council.

Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- No
- There was a city-wide cleanup happening and the Argonia Days festival was about to happen.

12. Public Infrastructure

Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas **other than downtown**.

- Street signs, no benches in the downtown area. There is no Welcome to Argonia sign coming into the town. The paved roads were in good shape. Some of the side streets were a little rough.
- There were some curb guttering issues.
- No public restrooms in town other than at the RV park.
- Paved roads were good and dirt roads were in bad condition.

Comment on city/town hall (How were you received? Was there information about the town available?)

- They have a city hall. They were closed when I visited.
- City Hall was closed but they had community activities posted in the window.
- City Hall staff told me to drive outside of town to see the River Park and Memorial Walk. Had they not mentioned it, I wouldn't have known it was there. This might be an opportunity for better advertising. It's a great park and the walk is really nice also.

Police/fire protection:

- They have the Argonia/Dixon Township Volunteer Fire department. I did not see any sign of a police department.
- Another observation of the fire department, but no police department was noted, though one local person said there was one.

Library:

- They have the Dixon Township library and also have a web site for it. The site lists hours and contact info. They have programming for the summer and has links to the City of Argonia and the school districts web pages.
- The library was very small but it looked like a nice facility.

City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sports complex)

- They have a playground with some older equipment but looks well maintained. They have a swimming pool, picnic area, and an armored tank on display. They have a nice baseball field with a batting cage.
- There's a nice sports complex area and a small camping area by the river.

13. Recreation/Tourism

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

- They host Argonia Days every year
- They have the Salter Museum-Susanna Madora Salter 1st woman mayor in 1887
- RV campsite outside of town
- Argonia Days and a Rocket launching event – both held yearly.

- There were a lot of basketball goals in the streets, bikes everywhere – this leads me to believe there are a lot of kids in town and that they are a focus. This bodes well for growth.

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

- None observed.

Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community. (Public art, museums, lakes, campgrounds, regional heritage locations).

- They have the Salter Museum-Susanna Madora Salter 1st women mayor in 1887.
- The town has an interesting history. A nice, small museum and a campgrounds outside of town.

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

- They have a community center.
- None that was seen, but the city hall might fit this role and it's on the main street.

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

- Ox Bar and Grill, Sarah Jane's, XO Boutique.
- The Ox was the only restaurant. It was very nice and clean. There was a small hot sauce shop and a boutique. Both were closed during the time of the visit.

14. Wrap-up

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

- Argonia is a small town. The community feels safe and there are some really nice features-park, housing, school. The history of the community is very interesting.
- Argonia has a great history. It's very laid back and friendly.
- Everyone encountered waved a smiled giving the city a friendly feel.

What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- No grocery store, doctors, nursing facilities. The community is already small. Limited businesses.
- Shrinking population.
- Possibility of losing their school due to small enrollment.
- No grocery store.
- Lack of industrial jobs.

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

- I will remember the Salter Museum and the history of the 1st woman mayor. Several really nice houses/yards.
- The unique history.
- Many people out mowing and taking care of their properties.
- Everyone was very friendly!
- The Ox was amazing.

How much money did you spend while you were in the city you visited? \$0; \$60; \$65
(Please include total purchases: Gas, soft drinks, food, purchases. No detail necessary.)



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