



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

First Impressions

Brookings, SD

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The Process

1. A community requests First Impressions. A second community of similar size and proximity agrees to partner. Both communities complete an application and acquire relevant signatures.
2. Volunteer visitors are gathered by the participating communities. Extension then trains these visitors for their trip to their partner community.
3. Visitors make their trips over an agreed upon time frame. They record their impressions and collect photographs.
4. The communities organize an all-inclusive meeting, and Extension presents key findings from the visitors' trips.
5. The communities use these results for further discussion and action planning.

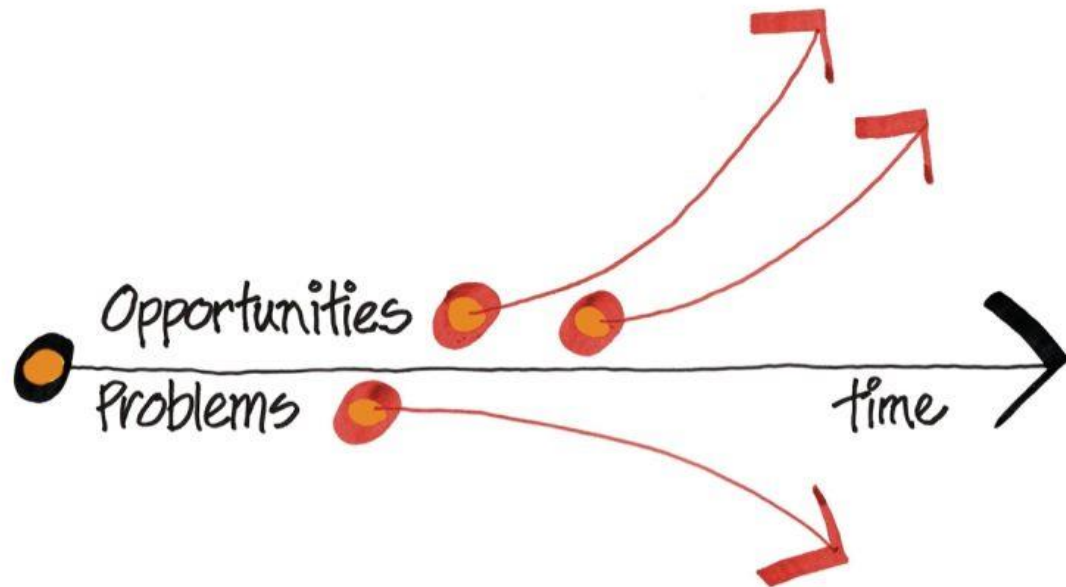


Why First Impressions

- Feedback based assessment:
 - How does a first-time visitor view my town?
 - Evaluate success and strengths
 - Set goals and priorities for next steps
- If you don't agree with the observations:
 - Be curious and inquisitive: Why does the visitor see it this way?
 - Is the observation worth considering?
 - What can we do to change the obstacle or the perception?



Asset Based Community Development



ooo We move in the direction of our conversations ooo

- Conversations Create Momentum
- Communities move in the direction of their conversations



Ben Winchester: Research on Brain Gain of Rural America

Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, University of MN

In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons people move to a rural community are:

- Simpler pace of life
- Safety and security
- Affordable housing
- Outdoor recreation
- “A job” isn’t in the top 10 reasons

We live in the middle of everywhere! How to work on attracting newcomers and create quality of life for everyone when it is not just your community where they live, work and shop in?

Find out about your community through the eyes of your newcomers. Ask them, what pushed them away from where they were. What pulled them into the community they’re moving to?





Ben Winchester: Research on Brain Gain of Rural America

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“In small towns everyone knows each other.” **FALSE!**

- Get to know each other - Invite them to a newcomers' meal.
- If you bring 7 people to a 700-citizen town every year in 10 years, you'll have a 10% increase. It matters!
- It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
 - Housing will be freed up as the Baby Boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
 - Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.
- We are our own worst enemies.
 - We must monitor our customer service and what we say. It matters!
 - Don't say, “You have to live here twenty years to be an insider.” And don't act like it either.



SDSU Extension SD Newcomer's Survey

Goals:

- Understand reasons people move to SD
- Understand experiences in their new community
- Identify current strengths
- Learn what improvements will be the most impactful
- Help residents create communities people want to live in.
- Help retain people in their communities

Ben Winchester was our guest on
The Brain Gain of Rural America:
[https://extension.sdstate.edu/
newcomers-survey](https://extension.sdstate.edu/newcomers-survey)

View our published SD
Newcomer's survey report:
[https://extension.sdstate.edu/
community](https://extension.sdstate.edu/community)



Report



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Census data on community and stats

• 2023 U.S. Census Population:	23,710	
• Median Household Income:	\$61,979	\$71,810
• High School or GED:	96.7%	93.5%
• At least a B.S. Degree:	49.7%	33.3%
• Median Age:	24.7	38.5
• Persons 65 and Over:	12%	18%

Blue: South Dakota Comparison Data

Source: Census.gov



Pre-Visit: Web Presence

- Strong online presence through well-linked City, Visit Brookings, and Chamber websites, all with a cohesive brand voice and consistent updates
- Comprehensive information available on events, parks, maps, civic meetings, and community services
- User friendly website designs
- Effective event promotion across multiple calendars and social media outlets
- Some visitors struggled to find parking details
- A few felt promotion was more geared towards family-oriented content versus local businesses or college-town offerings



“Five-Minute” Impression

- Clean and well-kept community with abundant flowers, greenery, and eye-catching landscaping
- Charming historic neighborhoods with visible home improvements reflecting community reinvestment and care
- Downtown area is central and easily navigable, though some buildings and sidewalks show wear and tear
- Entrances offer mostly positive impressions, especially via Pioneer Park, though some commercial areas and signage could be updated
- Intentional land use and visible construction was viewed favorably, showing ongoing growth



"Five-Minute" Impression

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

- Attractive welcome signage with consistent municipal branding, complemented by colorful landscaping
- Strong visual appeal from well-maintained greenery along major roads and entrances
- Minor maintenance needs noted in a few areas near I-29 and some aging infrastructure
- Entrances easy to navigate with clear signage and generally smooth traffic flow
- Gateway corridor offers convenient services but felt overly commercial to some visitors



Downtown Business Area

- Downtown impressed visitors with historic charm, cleanliness, and lively atmosphere
- Beautiful landscaping and flowers added visual appeal
- Architectural character stood out with well-maintained historic facades and visible reinvestment
- Signage and navigation were clear and cohesive
- Infrastructure and accessibility were generally strong, though some uneven sidewalks and limited transit options were noted
- Parking was convenient overall, though larger vehicles and busy weekends created occasional challenges



Downtown Business Area: Merchandise Quality

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

- Vibrant mix of boutiques, cafes, restaurants, antique stores, and specialty shops
- Restaurants and coffee shops like Cubby's Kool Beans, and The Nook were praised for variety and local flavor
- Boutiques and specialty retailers like Socialight, The Carrot Seed, and Jackrabbit Central stood out for stylish merchandise and friendly service
- Merchandise and interiors were noted for creativity and local character
- Farmers Market was a highlight, adding energy and foot traffic
- A few stores appeared understocked or had dated window displays. Some minor air quality issues were mentioned



Downtown Business Area: Customer Service

Describe the customer service received.

- Friendly and welcoming service; staff often greeted customers upon entry and offered help
- Many noted that friendliness extended beyond business, with residents offering compliments and holding open doors
- Even when no purchases were made, staff were courteous and wished visitors a good day
- A few businesses had less engaged staff, with delayed greetings or distracted employees
- Some staff struggled to suggest local attractions/experiences, occasionally referring visitors to Sioux Falls instead



Downtown Business Area: Public Amenities

What public amenities were available downtown?

- Abundant seating noted, with benches that were in good condition
- Trash receptacles were reported as plentiful and clean, though a few visitors suggested more/clearer placement
- Public restroom access was limited, with most facilities inside restaurants or shops
- Visitors noted difficulty finding water fountains, or observed older ones that appeared rusty
- Public Wi-Fi was primarily found in cafes or private businesses, but cell service throughout downtown was strong



Downtown Business Area: Landscaping & Streetscaping

Comment on landscaping, streetscaping, and parking:

- Visitors praised Brookings' colorful flowers, planters, and tree-lined streets
- Streets were described as tidy, easy to navigate, and clearly signed
- Pedestrian-friendly design; crosswalks were well-marked and respected by drivers
- Downtown accessible for pedestrians and cyclists
- Most visitors found parking easy and close to destinations
- Some noted limited accessible parking and tight spaces during busy hours



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Visitors praised the redeveloped mall area and Village Square for being clean, well-landscaped, and easily accessible stores
- Retail areas near major roads and the interstate were easy to find with abundant parking
- Good variety of national chains and local shops
- Some visitors noted the lack of a traditional mall or major anchors like Target
- Retail areas were described as car dependent



Other Retail Shopping Areas

What does food availability look like?

- Strong local food scene, with visitors praising local favorites like Nick's, Cubby's, Kool Beans, Flavor, and Cottonwood Coffeehouse
- Dining options located at convenient locations along main corridors and near attractions
- Multiple grocery stores (Hy-Vee, Walmart) and weekly farmers markets
- Some visitors wished for more higher-end dining options or diverse ethnic cuisine
- A few local restaurants weren't promoted as well as chain options, and some participants suggested more food options near campus



Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

- Visitors identified industrial zones on the east and southeast sides of Brookings
- Major employers such as 3M, Daktronics, Larson, and Bel anchor thriving industrial base
- Ongoing construction signal continue economic expansion
- Areas were seen as thoughtfully separated from residential and university zones
- Some structures described as plain or outdated



Health Care Services: Hospitals & Emergency Medical Services

- Strong provider network with Brookings Health System, Avera, and Sanford
- Convenient location and easy to find facilities
- Buildings appear modern and well-maintained
- Visiting specialists were seen as a major benefit, expanding local access to advanced medical care
- Some visitors noted limited signage and confusion about hospital access points
- Minor traffic congestion near the hospital was also noted



Health Care Services: Other Health Care Providers

- Comprehensive range of services – visitors noted dentists, optometrists, chiropractors, physical therapists and other specialists
- Well-maintained facilities that were easy to locate, especially near the hospital
- Some visitors noticed limited availability of highly specialized care and that some buildings appeared a little dated



Health Care Services: Long-Term Care

- Visitors noticed multiple long-term care facilities available for aging residents
- Facilities were described as newer, clean, and attractive, with welcoming designs and good signage
- Some variation in online reviews were noted, and participants had limited insight into capacity, affordability, or staffing levels



Housing

- Visitors noted a diverse housing stock, from historic homes near downtown to modern developments on city's edges, with multiple options for apartments or single family homes
- Historic districts and mature areas were praised for their character, tree-lined streets, and proximity to amenities, though some may need updates
- Ongoing residential growth was noted positively
- Some visitors noticed limited affordable or entry-level housing, with few listings under \$200k
- Higher housing costs may present challenges for recent graduates and young families, though condos and townhomes were viewed as attainable and visually appealing options



Housing: Rentals

- Participants observed numerous "for rent" signs and over 200 active listings
- Recent apartment and condo developments help meet demand
- Newer rentals were described as attractive
- While newer units appeared well-maintained, older or student-targeted rentals were sometimes noted as needing better upkeep
- Rent prices ranged from \$988-\$1900 for apartments and up to \$2600 for single family homes; this was considered reasonable by national standards, but visitors noted it may be difficult for entry-level renters



Housing: Census Data

	South Dakota
• Occupied Housing Units: 15,025 (90%)	402,364(89%)
• Owner Occupied: 49%	69%
• Renter Occupied: 51%	31%
• Vacant Housing Units: 10%	9%
• Average Household Size: 2.3	2.3

Blue: South Dakota Comparison Data

Data Source: Census.gov



Schools

**What schools are present? Do the schools appear to be adequate in size?
Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?**

- Participants were generally impressed with the quality, upkeep, and variety of schools in the community
 - Medary and Hillcrest Elementary, noted for beautiful, well-maintained grounds
- Many noted a good distribution of schools across the community, ensuring accessibility suggesting good coverage across grade levels
- Participants observed a strong presence of preschools and early learning options
- Some participants mentioned that if the community continues to grow, additional schools may be needed in the future



Schools

High School:

- The Brookings High School received numerous mentions:
 - Described as well-kept, with attractive landscaping and athletic facilities
 - Grounds and nearby parks added to the positive impression
 - Some found the architecture mixed, with both modern and dated elements
- Participants noted that the high school's location is central but not near major industrial areas, which was seen as a positive
- One participant commented that the facilities were appropriately sized and provided ample outdoor space for recreation and sports



Schools

Private Schools:

- St. Thomas Catholic School was specifically mentioned as very nice and well-kept
- Some mentioned that private K–12 schools were not highly visible, suggesting an opportunity for improved public awareness or signage

Higher Education:

- South Dakota State University (SDSU) was identified as a major educational asset and central part of the community
- Information about SDSU was abundant and accessible online
- Participants noted SDSU's global reach and strong online presence



Schools – Online information

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

- The school district website was easy to locate, informative, clean, well-organized and functional
- While some thought it was easy to navigate, one participant mentioned it could be a bit more intuitive
- School information also accessible through city's website and community organization pages
- Participants appreciated that each school has its own webpage
- Features key resources such as back-to-school shopping lists, activity offerings, and district news updates



Schools – Online information

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

- One participant highlighted an effective feature on liveinbrookings.com, where clicking “New in Town” prompted a “Let’s Connect” link to the school page — praised as excellent marketing for newcomers
- Online resources provided sufficient detail on school options, enrollment, and district structure
- Some found general performance information (e.g., test scores, ratings) available online, though not always comprehensive
- One participant felt that data on educational quality was harder to locate, though enrollment and logistics information were easy to access



Childcare

What childcare services are available? Do the facilities look safe and welcoming?

- Brookings offers a variety of childcare options, including both private centers and programs connected to community organizations
- Childcare centers were noted throughout the city, often near schools, parks, and playgrounds
- One participant's research found 29 total childcare options, of which 12 were licensed
- Some participants mentioned that while options exist, the number of available spots may be limited relative to community size



Childcare

Facility Conditions & Appearance:

- Facilities were generally described as well-kept, clean, and inviting, noting fenced yards, colorful playgrounds, and safe-looking environments
- Buildings appeared modern or in good repair, with one exception noting an older facility that still seemed functional

• Childcare Options:

- Visitors observed a variety of settings available, including: Church-based programs, Secular childcare centers and university-affiliated programs, Small, locally run facilities alongside larger, more structured centers, Early childhood programs offering preschool-level instruction
- The Brookings Child Care Collaborative (BCCC) was highlighted for its: Extended hours (6 a.m. – 6 p.m.), supporting working parents and Scholarship opportunities, making it an affordable option for families



Faith/Religion

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

- A strong presence and wide variety of churches and faith-based organizations noted throughout
- Online searches revealed over 70 places of worship in and around Brookings
- Churches were spread across the city and visible from main routes
- Newman Center and Lutheran Center on SDSU campus were mentioned specifically
- Overall impression that Brookings is open, accepting, and community-minded, which visitors found refreshing and positive.



Faith/Religion

Appearance & Facilities:

- Many churches were described as well-kept, attractive, and welcoming with a mix of historic architecture and modern buildings, providing visual variety

Community Engagement & Visibility:

- Signs of active, inclusive outreach suggesting welcoming attitudes
- Others remarked that while faith-based community activities likely exist, they were not immediately visible to visitors.
 - Several suggested that greater visibility or promotion of community outreach (e.g., food pantries, events, youth programs) could enhance awareness.

Online Presence & Information:

- Participants' impressions of church websites were mixed
- Social media at times provided a better impression



Civic

Overall Presence & Variety:

- Brookings appears to have a strong network of civic and nonprofit organizations
- Seems to be a club or organization for nearly every interest: community, cultural, educational, advocacy, and service-focused missions
- Online searches reveal an extensive list of civic, religious, and nonprofit groups, though participants noted that some may be harder to identify in person
- Public art, murals, and downtown activity show signs of strong civic engagement
- Participants noted SDSU hosts student and service organizations that engage with the wider community contributing to civic life



Civic



Did you observe any evidence of civic organization activity?

- While direct observation was limited, indirect signs of engagement—such as flyers, plaques, and community postings—suggest a thriving civic environment behind the scenes
- The lack of visible activity attributed to the timing of the visit rather than a lack of engagement overall
- Bulletin boards around town praised for helping promote events, classes, and volunteer opportunities
- Participants appreciated these traditional posting methods alongside online promotion via social media and community websites

Civic

Opportunities:

- A few participants suggested improving public visibility for nonprofits and civic groups through:
 - Better signage or downtown displays highlighting local organizations
 - More cross-promotion through murals, public art, or community events to show civic support
 - Some felt that online lists could be expanded or kept up-to-date to better represent the full range of local organizations



Public Infrastructure:

Streets & Road Conditions

- Streets described as well-kept, clean, and in good condition
- Downtown roads pedestrian-friendly and well-marked with clear zebra crossings
- Several highlighted adequate parking - the absence of meters a plus
- Entry into the city described as attractive and welcoming

Areas for Opportunity

- Some rough patches noted downtown alleys and connecting lanes between parking lots



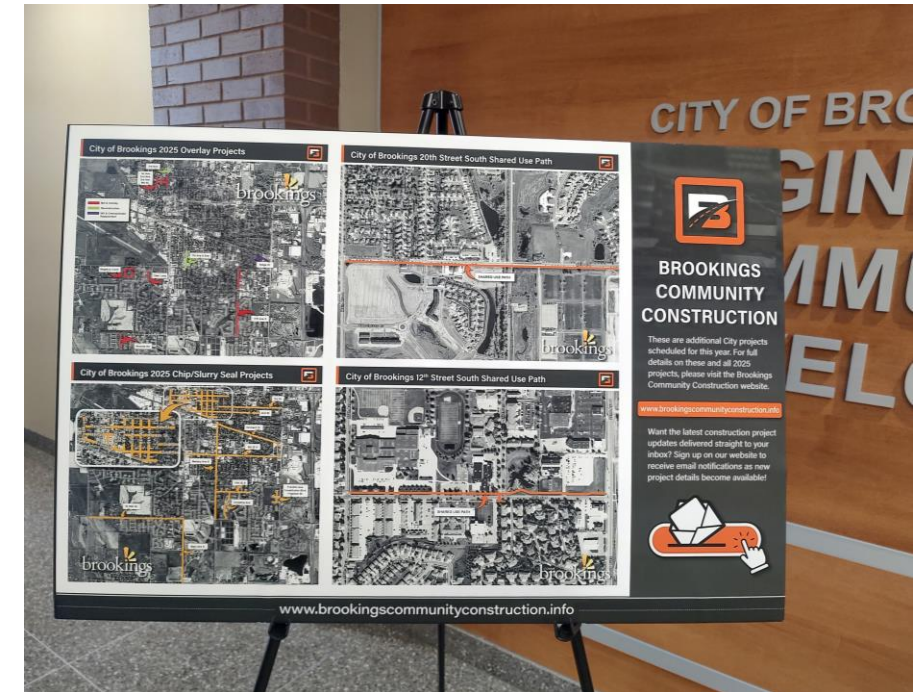
Public Infrastructure

Signage

- Signage across the city praised for being visible, consistent, and informative
- Schools, museums, and parks all noted for clear and attractive signage
- Veterans Memorial specifically mentioned as being well-marked and impressive

Areas for Opportunity

- Some visitors wanted additional directional or wayfinding signs, particularly guiding visitors toward downtown or key amenities
- One visitor suggested adding more directional signage (“Downtown this way”) to help visitors navigate through mixed-use residential/commercial areas



Public Infrastructure

Sidewalk & Pedestrian Accessibility:

- Sidewalks were generally well-maintained, especially downtown
- Participants appreciated that crosswalks were clearly visible and freshly painted, enhancing pedestrian safety

Areas for Opportunity

- A few visitors noticed poor sidewalk conditions in certain areas, both within and outside of downtown
- Minor leveling issues in grassy transitions near civic buildings were mentioned as potential safety hazards

Lighting & Public Amenities:

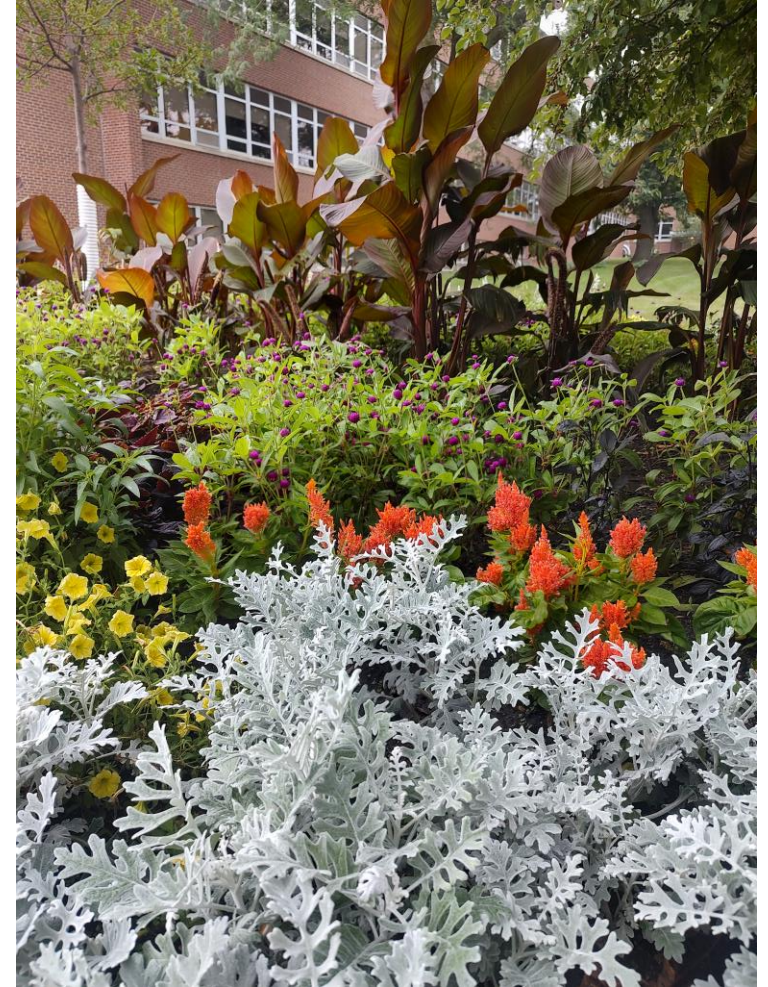
- A few visitors mentioned they left before dark and couldn't assess street or public lighting
- Public restrooms were seen as somewhat limited, though major parks and public buildings did provide facilities



Public Infrastructure

Landscaping: *Strong Positive Feedback!*

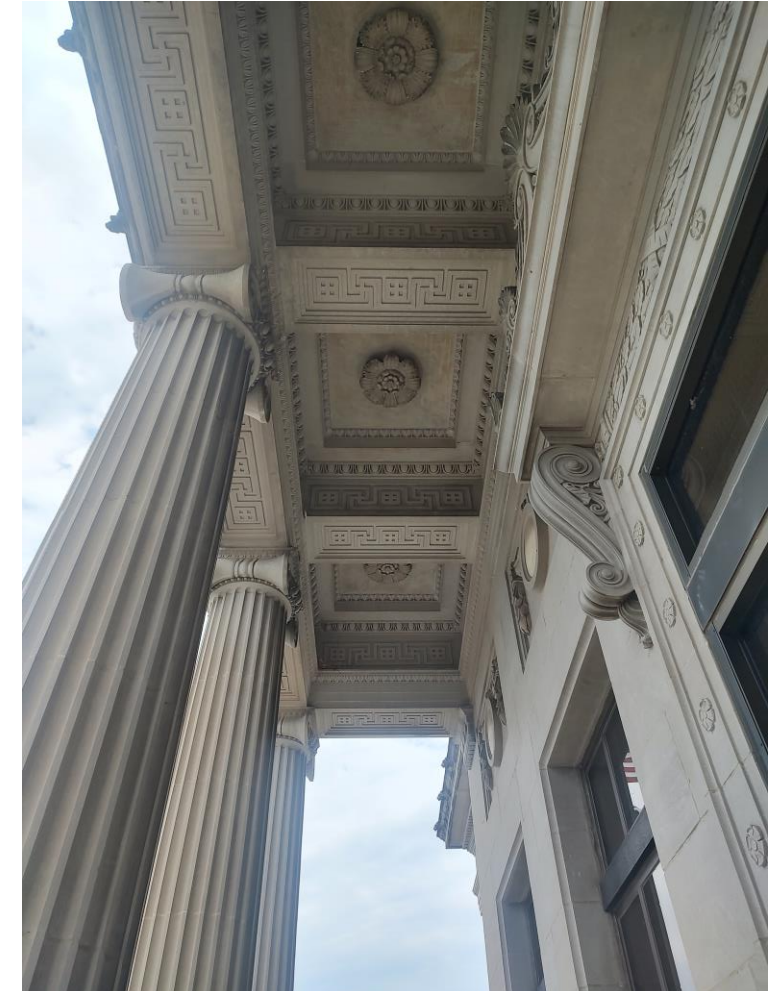
- Landscaping received widespread praise from nearly every participant
- The city's flowers, planters, and greenery were described as vibrant, well-tended, and adding to community charm
- Park entrances were noted for their matching signage and appealing landscaping
- Median planters, public gardens, and overall greenery created a welcoming and well-cared-for environment
- One participant credited city employees or volunteers for maintaining beautiful planters and parks



Public Infrastructure

Historic & Community Features:

- Several participants appreciated the historic post office remains downtown, serving as a visible landmark and point of pride
- The Veterans Memorial and other civic markers were noted as examples of well-presented, accessible public spaces



Public Infrastructure

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

Overall Impressions:

- Visitors generally found City Hall to be welcoming, accessible, and visually appealing
- When open, staff were described as friendly, helpful, and proactive in providing materials
- Several participants noted that City Hall and nearby civic buildings (like the library) were centrally located and attractive
- Some participants visited on the weekend when the building was closed, but they still commented positively on appearance and online resources

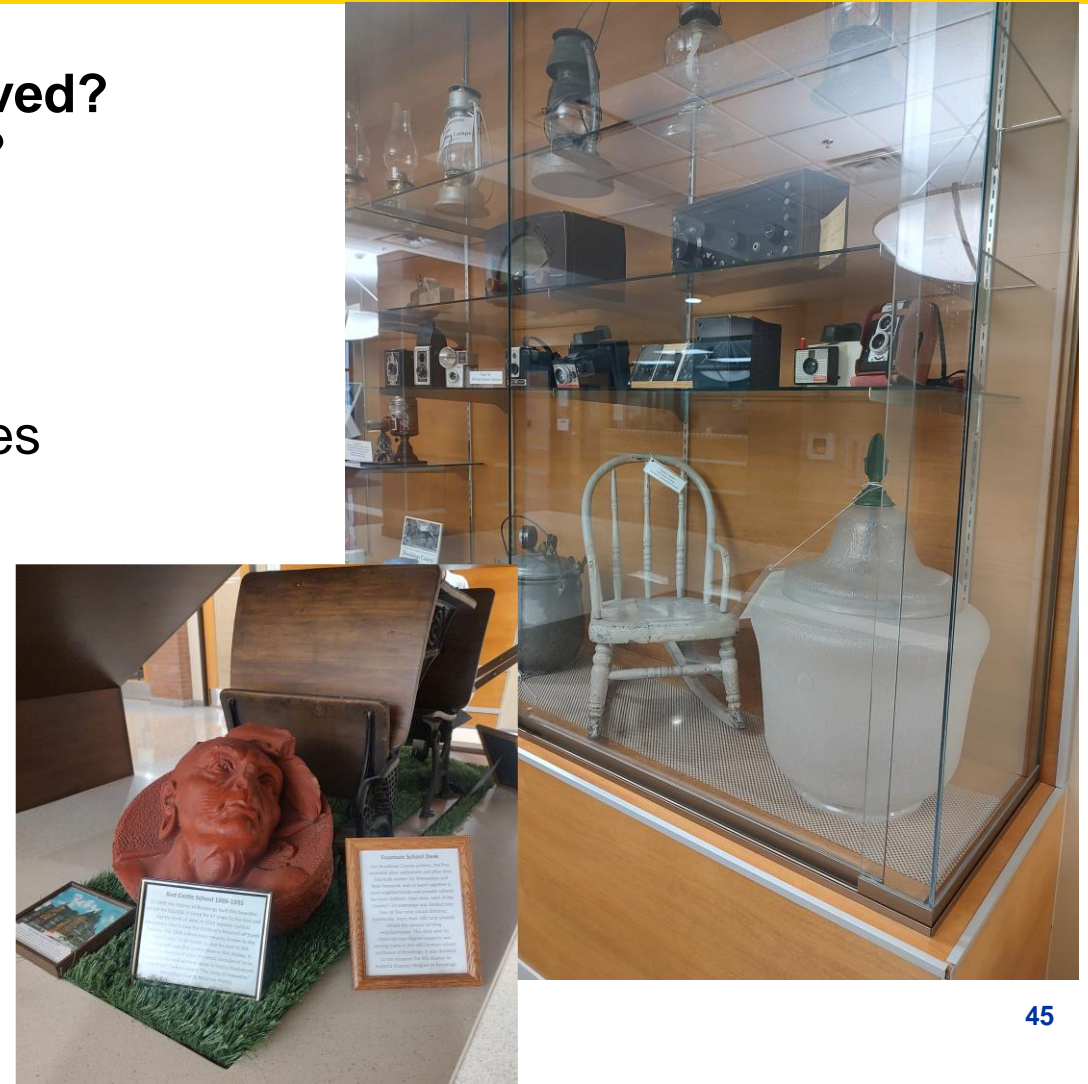


Public Infrastructure

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

Staff & Visitor Experience:

- Participants who entered City Hall found staff welcoming, approachable, and informative
- Visitors appreciated that staff offered brochures and maps proactively
- One visitor highlighted staff were helpful and directed them to the Chamber for newcomer information



Public Infrastructure

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

Accessibility & Hours: Weekend Closures

- City Hall was closed on Saturday, limiting in-person engagement - led some to explore the city's website or nearby brochure stands instead
- Availability of Information
 - Visitors appreciated local information and brochures available elsewhere, e.g. businesses and visitor kiosks
 - City's website was up-to-date, clear, and helpful, offering solid resources for residents and newcomers



Public Infrastructure

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

Building Design & Location:

- Several remarked on the attractive design and functional layout of City Hall and surrounding civic buildings
- The building was described as simple, functional, and well-maintained — not flashy, but welcoming and effective.
- Central location of City Hall and the nearby library was seen as convenient and visually cohesive
- The historic Post Office nearby also added to the civic area's appeal



Public Infrastructure

Public Safety General Impressions:

- Visitors consistently observed strong, visible police and fire presence
- Facilities appeared modern, well-maintained, and centrally located, contributing to a general sense of safety and security throughout the community
- Several participants described the fire stations as attractive and well landscaped, and the police as approachable and community-oriented



Public Infrastructure

Fire Department:

- Fire stations were easy to find and located in multiple parts of town. Described as large, modern, and well kept, with good landscaping and a clean appearance
- South Main Fire Station's old fire truck display stood out as welcoming, family-friendly
- The downtown fire station was highlighted as particularly striking, beautiful and emblematic of Brookings' character

Police Department:

- Police station easy to identify and intuitively located near downtown and close to campus
- Several visitors noticed patrol cars around town, providing a visible and reassuring presence
- Comments reflected friendly and approachable officers, with one visitor noting that patrol officers waved as they passed
- Overall impression was of professionalism and accessibility



Public Infrastructure

Library:

- Widely viewed as a well-maintained, active, and welcoming facility and easy to locate and access, both by car and on foot
- Landscaping and grassy areas around the building highlighted as adding to the welcoming atmosphere
- Visitors appreciated its central location
- Appears to be well-used by residents, with good attendance and programming
- Multiple participants noted a variety of events, activities, and classes for all ages, especially for children and families
- Offers a large selection of books, computers, and interactive areas for kids
- A few participants mentioned that while the facility was good overall, they did not notice dedicated study rooms or private spaces, which some other libraries offer



Public Infrastructure

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

- Visitors consistently impressed with the number, quality, and variety of parks
- Evenly distributed throughout the city, offering recreation for all ages and interests
- Parks, playgrounds, and green spaces were clean, attractive, and well landscaped
- Athletic facilities such as baseball and softball complexes, soccer fields, and golf courses were frequently praised for being well kept and modern
- Brookings has an extensive system of walking and biking trails throughout the city, described as well marked and maintained
- Several visitors specifically noted bike lanes downtown, contributing to the city's accessibility and outdoor-friendly culture
- A couple visitors noted that while the parks looked excellent, few people were using them during certain visits, possibly due to the time of day or weekday timing



Public Infrastructure

City parks (key parks/features visitors highlighted)

- Dakota Nature Park – Mentioned as a standout attraction with excellent trails, canoe and kayak rentals, fishing piers, and a welcoming visitor center. The area was described as peaceful, scenic, and well maintained
- McCrory Gardens – Recognized as a beautiful addition to the community's outdoor spaces, though not officially a city park
- Waterpark/Aquatic Center – Frequently mentioned as centrally located, busy, and well used, with several participants emphasizing its value for families
- Skate Park – Described as active and popular, with many locals gathered there
- Sports Complexes – The SDSU sports complex and city baseball and soccer fields were praised for their high quality and excellent maintenance
- Golf Courses – Two were mentioned, including one municipal course, both described as immaculate



Recreation/Tourism

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

Overall Impressions:

- Visitors viewed Brookings as a vibrant, welcoming community with strong tourism and recreational assets, closely tied to SDSU
- The city's branding slogan "Bring Your Dreams" was recognized by some visitors, though others felt it was not prominently displayed or unclear in meaning
- Brookings' attractions reflect a balance of educational, family-friendly, and arts-oriented experiences



Recreation/Tourism

Signature Attractions:

- **Children's Museum of South Dakota:**
 - Brookings' best-known feature statewide
 - Defining element of Brookings' identity
- **McCrory Gardens and Arboretum:**
 - Highlight of the community
 - Recognized appeal to locals and tourists
- **Brookings Arts Festival, Farmer's Market, and Hobo Day:**
 - Recurring events attracting regional attention
 - Showcase Brookings' arts, culture, and community pride



Recreation/Tourism

Signature Attractions, cont.:

- **South Dakota State University:**
 - Community's most recognizable feature
 - Pervasive Jackrabbit spirit
 - Popular campus-related attractions - SDSU Ice Cream Bar, Agricultural Heritage Museum, South Dakota Art Museum, and McCrory Gardens
 - Athletic events -particularly football and Pride of the Dakotas - significant community draws



Recreation/Tourism



Other Notable Attractions:

- **Dakota Nature Park** – Fun, scenic outdoor destination. One visitor noted it wasn't easy to find in tourism materials
- **Aquatic Center, golf courses, and parks system** – Part of Brookings' strong recreation infrastructure
- **Downtown Murals and Arts District** – Added color and local personality to the city
- **Coffee shops and nightlife** (like Kool Beans and local bars) contribute to a college-town vibe and appeal to young adults
- **Nick's Hamburgers and local eateries** - memorable, authentic spots



Recreation/Tourism

Community Branding:

- “Bring Your Dreams” slogan known by some visitors, appreciated for aligning with educational and aspirational themes, others found it unclear or not well promoted
- Town’s reputation tied strongly to education, affordability, and safety, giving it an image of a thriving, family-friendly, and opportunity-rich community

Opportunities:

- Better visibility and promotion of attractions (like Dakota Nature Park and smaller sites) could help visitors discover more of what Brookings offers
- Consistent integration of the city’s slogan could strengthen community identity



Recreation/Tourism

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

Overall Impressions:

- Visitors observed a vibrant calendar of local events catering to both residents and visitors, though awareness varied depending on the timing of each visit
- Events were well-promoted through signage, bulletin boards, and social media, particularly downtown and at community hubs like the library and McCrory Gardens



Recreation/Tourism

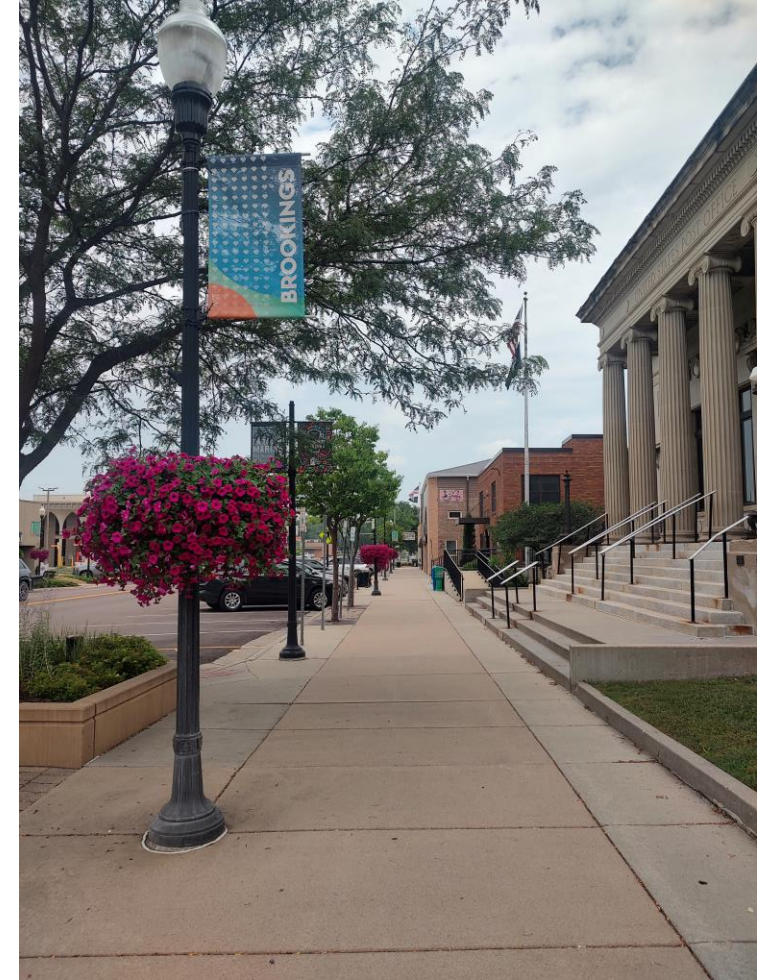
Types of Events Observed:

- **Arts, Music, and Community Gatherings**
 - Summer Music Series, Thursday night music events, and Downtown at Sundown
 - Live music and food truck events at the South Dakota Agricultural Heritage Museum added cultural vibrancy.
- **Festivals and Markets**
 - Farmers Market a regularly occurring, well-advertised community event.
 - Brookings Summer Arts Festival noted on signage downtown.
 - Some visitors observed field day and farm-related events targeting families and children.
- **University and Sports Events**
 - SDSU football game advertisements were visible on electronic billboards downtown, signaling strong town-grown connections
 - Visitors appreciated that university events were included in local promotions, creating crossover appeal for residents and visitors alike
- **Attractions Hosting Events**
 - McCrory Gardens promoted special weekend workshops and motorcyclist specials around the Sturgis Rally
 - Children's Museum stood out as a major ongoing attraction and hub for family-friendly programming
 - Brookings Arts Council advertised summer events and exhibits, reinforcing the town's arts culture



Recreation/Tourism

- **Community Engagement:**
 - Signage and Banners downtown highlighted upcoming events
 - Bulletin boards in local businesses, restaurants, and the library were filled with information on local happenings, creating a sense of community connectedness
 - Event awareness could be improved as a few did not see clear signage or learn about events until after the fact



Recreation/Tourism



Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community

- Key highlights: SDSU landmarks, McCrory Gardens, the Children's Museum, public art and murals, and outdoor recreation areas like Dakota Nature Park
- Several participants noted that more signage and wayfinding could help visitors more easily discover these assets

Natural Attractions:

- Dakota Nature Park & Larson Nature Center – praised for outdoor recreation opportunities such as fishing, kayaking, hiking, and wildlife observation.
- Golf courses and bike/walking trails
- Interstate Lake mentioned as potential attraction



Recreation/Tourism

Manmade Attractions & Cultural Features:

- Children's Museum of South Dakota –praised for design and outdoor play space
- SDSU Coughlin Campanile – an iconic and visible symbol of the city
- SD Art Museum and Agricultural Heritage Museum
- SDSU sporting events
- McCrory Gardens and Arboretum
- Downtown Murals & Public Art
- Main Street Boutiques and Downtown Area
- Future Feature Idea: One visitor suggested integrating history with tourism and transform historic Sexauer grain elevator into a gastropub, brewery, or event space



Recreation/Tourism

Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce or other facility that serves the needs of visitors?

Visibility & Location:

- The Visit Brookings visitor center easy to spot
 - Wish it were closer to downtown/centrally located for pedestrian and tourist access
- Downtown Brookings information office was harder to locate
 - A few noticed signage for visitor information but did not stop or found offices closed

Facility & Maintenance:

- Main visitor center described as attractive, appealing, and outside
- Minimally staffed but welcoming - Able to pick up brochures, maps, and local info



Recreation/Tourism

Staffing & Visitor Experience:

- Experiences with staff were positive when available
 - Greeted warmly and provided with useful materials
- However, limited staffing (especially on weekends) was a recurring issue — multiple visitors found the center closed on Saturdays
- The downtown office representative was specifically described as welcoming and informative

Supplemental Information Access:

- Beyond the main visitor centers, brochures and materials in local businesses, boutiques, or public spaces, helped fill gaps when offices were closed
- The McCrory Gardens information building was also mentioned as an additional resource for visitors exploring that attraction



Recreation/Tourism

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

Restaurants, Cafes, and Food Experiences - Local Favorites Mentioned:

- Flavor and Nick's Burgers – highlighted as fun, memorable dining spots that would encourage a return visit
- Kool Beans Coffee & Roasterie – repeatedly praised, especially for its Peach Cobbler Chai Latte and friendly service
- Local pizza restaurants were noted for excellent quality



Recreation/Tourism



Shops & Boutiques - Local Favorites Mentioned:

- Seven Songbirds Boutique
- Antique stores, although several were closed on certain days—visitors said they would plan future trips to visit when open
- Party Depot

Attractions & Activities - Major Draws Mentioned by Most Visitors:

- Children's Museum—interactive, family-friendly, worth multiple visits
- McCrory Gardens and Arboretum –beautiful and a recurring stop
- SDSU Athletics and Hobo Days –major draw, strong local spirit and energy
- Museums (Art Museum, Agricultural Heritage, etc.) –would return to see new exhibits or installations



Recreation/Tourism

Other Return Mentions / Motivations:

- Brookings Pool, Hockey Arena, Bike Trails, Disc Golf Course, and Dakota Nature Park
- Several visitors highlighted the kindness and friendliness of residents as a major reason to return — small gestures like compliments and helpfulness left lasting impressions
- The family-friendly environment, walkable downtown, and university energy were appealing for both repeat visits and potential relocation
- A few participants said they'd consider returning when they have children or for specific seasonal events



Wrap-up: Key Themes - Positive

Welcoming & Friendly Atmosphere:

- Residents/business owners kind, approachable, and genuinely welcoming
- Strong sense of community and family-friendly environment, with active participation in local events
- Safe with a comfortable, neighborly feel
- Visible signs signaling a welcoming, progressive community culture

Downtown & Local Businesses:

- The downtown area beautifully landscaped, vibrant, and walkable
- Flower displays, boutiques, coffee shops, and restaurants - Strong retail mix and a commitment to visual appeal and upkeep
- Downtown easy to navigate (despite ongoing construction)



Wrap-up: Key Themes - Positive

Cleanliness & Aesthetics:

- Strong impression for its cleanliness, well-maintained infrastructure, and consistent curb appeal across homes, parks, and business districts
- Landscaping and green spaces carefully maintained/visually appealing

Attractions & Parks:

- Abundant parks, trails, and green spaces support an active lifestyle and community gatherings
- Children's Museum, community parks, and outdoor events assets for families and visitors

Navigation:

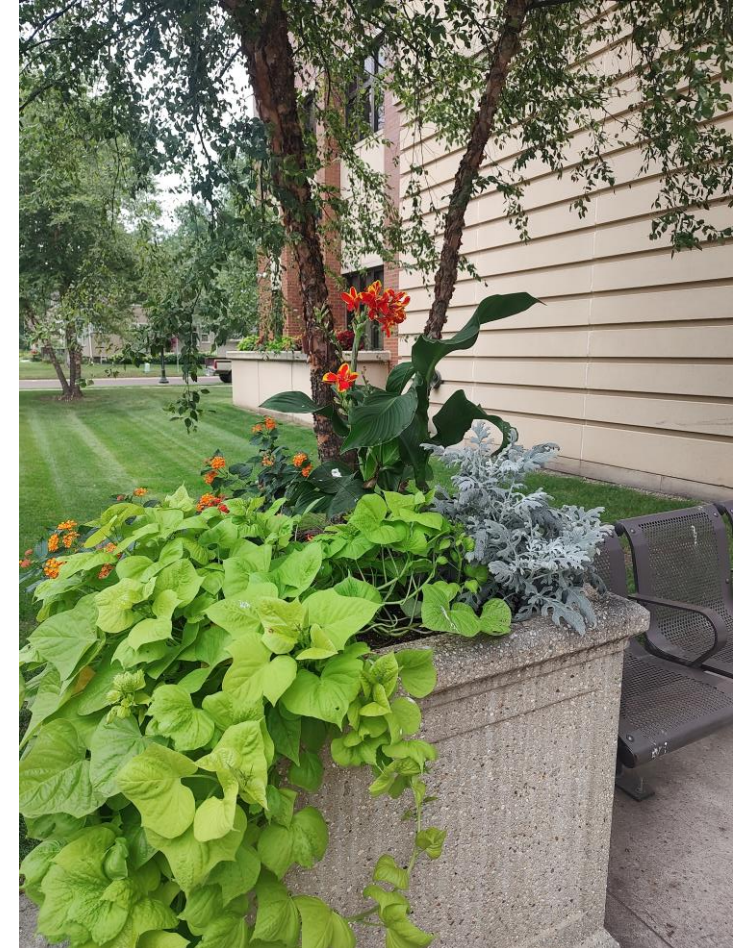
- Easy to get around, with good infrastructure and parking



Wrap-up: Frequently Mentioned Positives

Most Frequently Mentioned Positives:

- Friendly, safe, and family-oriented community
- Vibrant and attractive downtown district
- Clean, well-maintained public spaces/streetscapes
- Abundance of parks, trails, and outdoor activities
- Strong community engagement and events
- Inclusive and welcoming atmosphere
- Excellent curb appeal and cohesive aesthetic
- Active local economy with quality businesses and restaurants
- Strong university-community connection



Wrap-up:

Key Themes - Obstacles/Challenges

Housing Availability & Affordability:

- Limited housing supply, particularly entry-level or affordable homes
- Older homes in historic areas may need reinvestment or updates
- Newer developments may be priced out of reach for many
- Rental prices and limited availability could deter long –term settlement

Public Transportation:

- Lack of public transportation a significant barrier
- Brookings was described as car-dependent
- Parts of the city lacked walkability, with older sidewalks and infrastructure needing improvement.



Wrap-up:

Key Themes - Obstacles/Challenges

Economic & Cultural Opportunities:

- Need more youth-oriented culture and entertainment to appeal to younger demographics or creative communities
- Encouraging grassroots arts and cultural programming to retain/attract younger visitors seeking a more dynamic experience
- Lack of major attractions

Growth & Planning:

- Visible signs of expansion in industrial and residential areas
- Challenge of managing growth while maintaining community character and ensuring services, like housing, schools, and infrastructure, keep pace
- Balancing new development with preservation of small-town charm seen as a delicate but important task



Wrap-up: Frequently Mentioned Obstacles/Challenges

Most Frequently Mentioned Challenges:

- Housing shortages, particularly affordable and entry-level homes
- Options for public transportation and pedestrian infrastructure
- Focus on strong community identity to compete with proximity to Sioux Falls
- Limited youth-oriented entertainment or cultural opportunities
- Older infrastructure and uneven neighborhood upkeep
- Managing growth while maintaining small-town character



Wrap-up: Most Remembered

What visitors will remember most about Brookings six months from now (positive or negative)



- The museums and galleries: McCrory Gardens, Dakota Nature Park, etc.
- Downtown and variety of stores and businesses
- The outdoor areas and flowers/landscaping
- Great opportunities for young children
- Farmers Market
- Downtown concerts
- Shopping, dining, and friendly business owners
- Warm and welcoming community members
- The energy of downtown
- Family oriented attractions

Wrap-up: 3 Adjectives

How visitors described Brookings using 3 adjectives

- Clean, friendly, natural
- Welcoming, clean
- Welcoming, kid-friendly, college town
- Historic, beautiful, spirit (Jacks Pride)
- Warm, emerging, optimistic
- Kind, invested, warm
- Impressive, clean, progressive
- Welcoming, vibrant, family-friendly



Next Steps



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Next Steps



- Consider a planning session within the next month to set goals and priorities
- Keep these discussions alive to keep our communities growing and prospering
- An extension specialist will do a 6-month follow-up with the exchange community committee

Recommendations



- Consider ways you can help
- Remember potential new residents are researching online before they come
- What are you as residents most proud of? Tell your positive stories online
- Use your city and school website to highlight your many assets in addition to the go-to tourism/chamber websites.

Thank You
to Our
Volunteer
Visitors



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

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To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at [AD-3027](#) (PDF, 351 KB), from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

mail:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
email: program.intake@usda.gov

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Program information is available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication (e.g., braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language) should contact the responsible State or local Agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Federal Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY).

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