

# **OSU COMMUNITY AWARENESS TEAM OBSERVATIONS**

## **Oberlin visiting Granville – 2014**

The following report presents observations from the OSU Team's review of Oberlin's responses to their visit to Granville. Photographic images have been added to emphasize key points in the Oberlin Team's impressions of Granville.

### **Community of Granville Overview:**

Before visiting, the Oberlin Team anticipated that Granville would be a small, college town with a historic, New England feel, attractive green spaces and interesting downtown. This impression was supported by Granville's web site, which was rich with information about the community. What they found during their visit supported this anticipated experience.

Oberlin's impression of Granville is that it is a historic, clean and well-planned community with a definable main street/downtown surrounded by well-maintained and attractive residential housing. When approaching town from the various entrances it was clear that the visitor had reached a population center in contrast to the surrounding rural countryside. There was little sprawl and little additional commercial development, such as big box retailers or fast food restaurants on the outskirts of Granville that might have blurred the community's boundaries and conflicted with the community's overall impression. Mature trees and attractive landscaping were present throughout the village. Both residential and business structures were well maintained, demonstrating a pride of ownership and contribution to the community.

The attractive well-marked Denison University campus is enhanced by the area's rolling terrain. The university is located on a hill overlooking the community. While Denison is contiguous to the downtown, the hilly topography does somewhat separate the campus from the center of the community.



***Denison University  
is well marked...***



***And is on a hill overlooking the community.***

The Oberlin Team found Granville's residents and businesses to be friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable about the community and what it had to offer.

The following provides more detail about key attributes and the Oberlin Team's first impressions of the Village of Granville.

#### **Downtown Business Area:**

Granville's compact (two block) downtown is well defined, clean and attractive with a consistent small town New England feel. Most buildings were well-maintained although a few could benefit from some minor repair. Business signage and window displays showed the commitment of many storeowners to create an attractive space, as did the interiors of their businesses. Signs on the sidewalk outside of businesses invited potential shoppers to enter. The wide sidewalks provided both a positive visual impact and practical advantage, allowing the opportunity for restaurants and coffee shops to have outside seating during warm weather. Benches surrounded by plantings provided places for shoppers to rest.



***Signs on sidewalk invited shoppers to enter. Wide sidewalks allow outdoor seating during warm weather.***

15/2013



***History of the area is celebrated through historic markers and information.***

***Pedestrian benches were readily available and attractively surrounded by trees. The downtown was festively decorated for the holidays.***



As home to Denison University, the Oberlin Team expected to see a mix of retail and service businesses that catered to college students needs, offering less expensive options. This did not appear to be overly evident in the mix and type of businesses in the downtown area.

**Other Business Areas:**

One entrance into town did include additional business usage, with a grain elevator and a few newer and older businesses. The visitors felt that while much less %organized+than the rest of the community, this area did not detract greatly from the overall impression of the community.

**Residential Areas:**

Housing in Granville was very well maintained and attractive, demonstrating an overall pride of ownership among residents. The older housing stock contiguous to the downtown was quaint and well cared for, and was consistent with the community's historic feel. Newer housing developments surrounding Granville were attractive and appeared expensive. Landscaping was attractive throughout residential areas, and streets and sidewalks were in good shape.

***Housing was well cared for and reinforced historic feel of community. Streets and sidewalks were in good condition.***



Oberlin visitors found that there appeared to be little to no affordable housing for low income with the exception of a trailer park on Columbus Road from the west. The Team wondered where lower income community residents lived.

**Infrastructure:**

Streets were well maintained and in good shape with few potholes. It was easy to navigate around town. The visitors particularly enjoyed the wide main street (Broadway) with wide sidewalks, plantings, benches and well-marked pedestrian crossings. Other streets were somewhat narrow as would be expected in an older town. It appeared to the visitors that alternative means of transportation, such as walking and biking, were encouraged through bike paths, well-maintained sidewalks, and ample pedestrian crossings.

**Wide main street – Broadway - and wide sidewalks**



On-street parking availability did not appear to be a problem on the day the visit was conducted and the location of public lots were well marked. The visitors noted the parking garage on the Denison University campus and thought that was an excellent way to relieve parking and traffic congestion by providing options for students.

**Availability of parking did not appear to be a problem**



***Public parking was well marked***



**Signage:**

Signage throughout the community was attractive, easy to read and effectively provided needed information and directional assistance to the visitor. In the downtown district the design of street and informational signs, colonial style, was in keeping with the historic flavor of the community, contributing to the New England small town charm. Features in the community, such as parks, were easy to find. With the exception of the elementary building, directions to schools were clearly marked (possibly intentional for security reasons?). While directional signage was very good in the downtown, it was less so outside of the downtown and some destinations, such as the Bryn Du Mansion, were found because of suggestions from Village staff. Community entrance signs clearly announced when you entered Granville and with the exception of one Ohio-shaped sign, were in good repair.

Granville leaders should be commended for their recognition of the importance of attractive, easily readable signage that provides needed information and ease of way finding to visitors. This is a feature that many communities struggle with, and Granville provides a model that others can benefit from.

***Design of signage was in keeping with New England feel of community. Signage was easy to read and provided needed information about community features and amenities.***



### **Parks and Recreation:**

There were numerous parks and recreation facilities in the community. It was unclear with some, such as the Bryn Du Mansion field house, whether they were available to the public. The park on the west end with the community gardens was well-maintained but did not appear to be handicapped accessible in the parking lot, gardens and play equipment.

### **Information and Hospitality:**

Persons encountered in the shops and on the street were ambassadors for Granville, eagerly providing information about what to do and see. Many promoted the Candlelight Walking Tour and people in shops provided information about other stores to visit. One visitor commented that it was the friendliest downtown they had ever visited. With Granville's tourism orientation, friendly, knowledgeable locals are critical to the success of that economic strategy, and Granville scores high marks on customer relations.

Brochures about the community and information on businesses and events was accessible through the Village Hall Visitor Center and the Chamber of Commerce. The visitors commented that the Granville Magazine was attractive and provided useful community and university information. The walking map of the downtown, which was offered to the visitors readily, was useful for locating shops and restaurants and attractions. The visitors did not find a community profile with demographics. A publication of this type can be useful for businesses or families who are considering Granville as a place to open up shop or live.

The Village Hall was inviting and in a convenient location in the center of town. The public restrooms were clean and well marked. Village staff were friendly and offered information about the community and places to visit, such as the Bryn Du Mansion. The Chamber was prominently marked and centrally located. Staff was friendly and suggested visitors return for the Candlelight Tour downtown.

***Village Hall was inviting and centrally located***



**Additional Comments:**

While Granville's web site was a good source of information, one enhancement that the Oberlin Team suggested was the inclusion of an easily printable map of the community that visitors could bring with them.

The Oberlin Team found little social and economic diversity present in Granville, as evidenced by a lack of affordable housing and lower cost shopping opportunities. One observation from the OSU Team's review of Oberlin's report was that the types of businesses in the downtown (more expensive goods and services), the types of housing in residential areas of the village (more expensive, historic) and the absence of students in the downtown area raises a question about the degree of interaction between the town and the campus. It might be that when the Oberlin Team visited the students were on break. Or it might be that students do not frequent the existing downtown establishments and there are no student-friendly places to gather, so they spend time on campus instead of in the community. Having worked with college towns in the past (Athens, Kent, Gambier), we found that community leaders saw their college as a potential/existing economic asset, providing stable economic activity. These communities sought to develop collaborative strategies to benefit the town and university's goals. Not knowing the intricacies of town-gown relations in Granville it is difficult to comment on this with certainty, but the absence of the college

influence in the downtown was an observation that we thought needed to be mentioned. This did appear as an impression that was left with Oberlin visitors to Granville.