



## FIRST IMPRESSIONS TOURISM & COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

# CORNING

## COMMUNITY REPORT

2024



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Extension and Outreach  
Community and Economic Development

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# Introduction

Iowa's First Impressions Community & Tourism Assessment Program began in 2024 as a partnership between Iowa State University and Travel Iowa. Participation is by application and Corning was selected as one of two pilot communities for the program.

First Impressions identifies a community's assets and opportunities through a research-based assessment conducted by a specially trained team. Tailored to each community, the assessment results in a comprehensive report outlining specific action steps to enhance community vitality, elevate visitor experiences, and improve overall quality of life.

## How it works:

- **Pre-Visit Research:** Assessment team members engage in extensive online research, exploring websites and social media to gather preliminary insights about the community before their visits.
- **Unannounced Visits:** To ensure authenticity and capture real experiences, team members visit the community unannounced at various times, days, and places.
- **Fresh Perspectives:** Assessment team members view the community with new eyes to identify strengths, opportunities, and suggest specific action steps for improvement.
- **Valuable Insights:** The assessment team provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the community's hospitality, customer service, vitality, infrastructure, visitor services, and overall appeal.
- **Actionable Recommendations:** The assessment process results in a comprehensive report with recommendations specific to the community and shared with stakeholders in a community forum.

More information at [www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/firstimpressions](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/firstimpressions)

## What is First Impressions

First Impressions is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by a trained team of unannounced visitors to a community.

The program helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

First Impressions fosters solutions to strengthen Iowa communities and provides specific short and long-term action steps for creating places where people want to visit and live.

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Participation is by application and available to Iowa communities through a partnership between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development and Iowa Economic Development Authority/Iowa Tourism Office.

# Assessment Team

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## Visitor/Assessment Team Profiles

Seven assessment team members visited Corning and the surrounding area over a three month period from June through August 2024.

- Assessment team members travel independently to the community and conduct onsite visits on different days and times.
- Days of the week assessors visited included Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.
- Assessors spent 24 to 32 hours in Corning during their visits.
- All assessors spent the night and accommodations included camping, cabin, and hotel.
- Assessors were selected representing different areas of expertise related to community & economic development, natural resources, historic preservation, planning, marketing, and tourism, along with diverse visitor perspectives and demographics.
- Two assessors were male and five female. One assessor identified as a Millennial, four as Generation X, and two as Baby Boomers.
- Two assessors visited Corning with their spouse or partner; two assessors visited with their family, including children; and three assessors visited the community alone.

Assessment team members spent time researching the community on computer or mobile devices to plan their trip using various websites and social media prior to visiting Corning.

- One assessors spent 1-2 hours researching and planning their trip.
- Three assessors spent 2-4 hours researching and planning their trip.
- Three assessors spent 4+ hours researching and planning their trip.



# Pre-Visit Research

Assessors identified four websites as most helpful for trip planning, including:

- [iowaroadtrip.net/things-to-do-in-corning-iowa](http://iowaroadtrip.net/things-to-do-in-corning-iowa)
- [www.adamscountyiowa.com/main-street/](http://www.adamscountyiowa.com/main-street/)
- Travel Iowa (Corning Page)
- Wikipedia

Assessors were asked to identify the website they found most helpful in planning a trip to Corning, and to explain **why**.

## ✓ IowaRoadTrip.net

- [iowaroadtrip.net/things-to-do-in-corning-iowa](http://iowaroadtrip.net/things-to-do-in-corning-iowa) was the most useful for planning my trip
  - Linked to an article with specific suggestions and supporting information, photos, hours, and prices.
  - Wonderful narrative about what visitors can see, do, and experience and told story of each attraction from perspective of travel bloggers visiting the community in partnership with Adams County Economic Development Corporation.

## ✓ Adams County

- The Adams County site was helpful, but it would be nice if the open hours of the points of interest were listed there.
- Adams Community Chamber was the most helpful, but no single website provided the information I felt I needed to visit Corning. I utilized several websites to prepare.
  - Travel Iowa had some good info, but not enough to prepare my visit.
  - Adams Community Chamber/Tourism link was #14 on search results. Took a very long time to find, but was helpful.
  - TripAdvisor is my usual visit prep site, but Corning's TripAdvisor site needs much updating. Travelers want to see reviews before visiting new places and it is important to encourage visitors to post positive reviews on TripAdvisor.

## ✓ Travel Iowa - Corning Page

- The Travel Iowa website was helpful because it covered both attractions and retail and included addresses and directions.
- It also had good pictures that made it easy to get your eye on something while driving having seen it on the website first.

## ✓ Wikipedia

- Wikipedia had the most information, but Google Maps - showed more of what was in the town than any other website.

# Pre-Visit Research

Assessors were asked to indicate the following about the website they found most helpful and to provide comments about the comments for the site.

**The information was well presented**

4 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 1 Disagreed

**The information was useful for planning a trip**

4 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 1 Disagreed

**Web pages were visually appealing**

6 Agreed, 0 Neutral, 1 Disagreed

**More information is needed on this site**

5 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 1 Disagreed

**I noticed typographical errors**

0 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 6 Disagreed

## Additional Assessor Comments - Websites

- Adams County-Tourism/Main Street Website
  - I recommend changing the Main Street Corning page to be more specific to Corning itself rather than generic information about the main street program.
  - It would be good to have the link to the attraction's website with the listing and updated hours of operation or days when an attraction is open.
  - Some pages did not have good links to others.
  - Camping information was not clear and it was scarce
- Travel Iowa Website
  - We wanted to experience many of the sites, museums, restaurants and shops in the community. Unfortunately, the hours and days of operation were not listed on the Travellowa.com website and there were not links to places with those hours and times. We had to wait until we got to the community to get that information either by driving to each site and looking for information on their window/door or by finding the information in a travel brochure we picked up at the hotel as the visitor center/chamber was closed.
  - Especially since on-line information about businesses/museums etc. is not available anywhere else, every Travellowa.com listing should include hours of operation.
  - I would suggest adding more photos on the listings that include people and other photos that show atmosphere. Some of the individual listings on Travellowa.com are "expired" or older than 12 months - not updated in the past 12 months, which also made us nervous - what if they aren't open?
  - Fully utilize all free listing opportunities available through Travellowa.com.
- City of Corning - Assessors mentioned as an additional site that came up higher when searching for Corning tourism
  - While I did not rely on the city government site, I did notice most of the links on their "Useful Links" tab that were supposed to be connecting to these other sites are broken and need to be updated.
  - I would have expected the Corning city website to be the most useful, there was no info for visitors, community calendar was blank. No events?

# Pre-Visit Research

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Which forms of social media did you use prior to your visit, if any?

- Google Maps 7 assessors used
- Facebook 6 assessors used
- Trip Advisor 4 assessors used
- YouTube 2 assessors used
- \*Other 1 assessor used

\*Apple Maps for navigation.

**If you used social media to help plan your visit, share how it was used, and if you felt it was helpful.**

- Trip advisor - travelers often use to help determine plans and worth a stop; Google listings - to confirm hours, ratings, directions/mapping; Facebook - to learn about special activities or promotions.
- I used Google Maps to look up locations of interest once I was in town. Unfortunately, the hours were wrong for both bait shops, so I could never buy bait for fishing while staying at the cabin!
- We found Facebook helpful to get additional information about some businesses, as most didn't have websites and the city website was not helpful, Facebook was very helpful.
- I was looking to see if there was an event or concert or show to book my travel around and I didn't find anything quite like that. This would be particularly helpful to help fill a weekend of things to do in Corning.
- I watched several videos to get the information that should be available on quick link sites, such as business hours, what I can see inside, contact info, etc.
- The Marina only has a Facebook page. It was nicely updated but it had no information on options for rentals or pricing, so we did not rent anything.
- Google Maps - showed more of what was in the town than any other website. Only Facebook page I found for Corning was for the Fire Dept.

# Pre-Visit Research

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**Based on your overall research, how did you visualize the destination prior to visiting?  
What impression did your research give you of the community before visiting?**

- I visualized a bustling, historic, small town that feels bigger than its size, plus a scenic lake with diverse outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Honestly, the community surpassed my expectations. I also had my 20-year-old son with me, and he was impressed with the appearance and vibrancy of the downtown in particular.
- It seemed like we would visit a small rural town with a few things to do downtown and great natural resources where we could have fun.
- I was expecting to see a charming small Iowa town with personality in a surrounding of rural beauty.
- The online presence did not encourage me to visit Corning. Information was very limited. More photos and links to more information would be appreciated.
- TripAdvisor is the #1 website for travel reviews, but very few reviews of Corning exist. This is a huge missed opportunity. Corning needs new TripAdvisor reviews with more positive comments and nicer photos!
- Wikipedia and Google Maps seemed to be my best source of information, but neither made me feel like I must visit.

**Are there any tourist attractions, assets, and/or special events Corning is known for?**

- Lake Icaria
- Adams County Raceway
- Johnny Carson Birthplace
- Icarian Village but I could not find evidence of current activity there



# Pre-Visit Research

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## Did online information match what you found? If no, explain.

Yes - 5 Assessors and No - 2 Assessors

*Corning has so much more to offer than I found online*

## How did your internet research prior to your visit help or hinder your visit?

- Helped with developing plans and my itinerary for visiting Corning. The article from the bloggers was helpful.
- My search prior to visiting actually undersold the community. Focus more on visuals and less on logos and text. Really showcase with images what your attractions, restaurants, and shops look like on the inside and outside. Take the focus off the four points of Main Street, and put it on what that methodology has produced for you. Don't rely on people leaving your travel site to go to the destination websites for everything.
- We always plan our trips, including where to stay, shop, eat and recreate, on-line. The Travellowa.com and Iowa County Conservation Boards sites were extremely helpful, but I kept wanting to go to the community's website to get more detailed information - that wasn't there. The hotel staff provided a couple of brochures with Facebook pages for businesses, which was very helpful.
- I think it truthfully raised expectations that might be hard for the community to deliver upon on a daily basis. I think it probably works when there is a big community event, though.
- Internet research definitely helped me plan my visit, but the real Corning is so much better than what I found online! Some of the existing Internet photos and videos are very good, but others present a negative impression of Corning. Other listings offer no photo or other information at all.
- It was a little difficult. A lot of information but not sure there is a one central place. The County webpage was the most useful but was the last one that we found. The camping website was not easy - I realize that this is a statewide reservation system.
- The internet search did not make me excited about visiting, Corning could definitely use more online presence. But once I was in town and meet some locals, I was overwhelmed with how much there was to see and do.

# Community Gateway

Is there a gateway point as you enter/leave town (piece of art, mural, sign, etc. If so, what first impression does it create? Assessor opinions varied depending on route used.

- Gateway points varied by roadway. Coming from west on Hwy 34 - sign that references Great American Main Street Community and the visitor center is nice. Other entry points a little lacking.
- Not from the side of town where we entered, but when we drove around the community we saw there were entrance signs at other locations. Since a lot of your visitors may be coming from the lake like we did, it would be good to focus on some creative placemaking along that corridor.
- No, there was not a distinctive gateway point. There was the regular highway sign but no distinctive signage that I saw. The entry point to the community seemed to be in one of the most impoverished parts of the community.
- I think there was a sign, but it must have been understated. I think the community would benefit by participating in the Iowa's Living Roadways program to address this and several other visual identification issues.
- The small, simple, white "Corning" sign at the north entry provided low expectations.
- Just the welcome signs, kind of bland but nice and visible
- Coming from the north there was a simple white "Corning" sign. Coming from the west there was a much nicer sign.



# First 5 Minute Impressions

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Assessors were asked to share their initial “five minute” impression upon entering Corning.

- Coming from the highway 146, there is beautiful, scenic, rolling countryside before you arrive to town. The Corning community sign is easy to read but a little underwhelming. As you enter the community has an agricultural and rural feeling with farm equipment businesses. Directional signage key to draw attention to the historic downtown - made me want to go explore!
- We came into town from Lake Icaria, so at first, we noticed a lot of equipment and implement dealers and auto shops, but then we saw the racetrack and the aquatic center and eventually turned onto the main street, which we LOVED. Right away, we could appreciate the historic architecture and thought that having it on a hill like it is really added to the charm. Overall, the community looked clean and lively, especially for a Tuesday!
- My route took me into town through a (primarily) residential area, just a few blocks over from the downtown district. There was good way-finding signage. The town appeared to be very impoverished. It had many dilapidated houses visible from the main highway entrance, including one that had the porch roof collapsing and several that needed major work to the house or had yards that were overgrown. It appeared some of the houses may have been abandoned. We easily navigated to the downtown district and the downtown area was easily identified. With a few critical exceptions, the businesses, restaurants and shops that we had read about were fairly easy to find and appeared well cared for. I noticed well-maintained flower planters up and down the main business district and a really nice city park at the end of the district. The downtown street was extremely wide, more like a parking lot. It seemed excessively wide and when I got out of my car and walk a few blocks around the downtown, the concrete seemed to have held all the heat from the day and radiated it back at me. There was really no way to get out of the heat as there were no trees in the downtown and the awnings were basically just over entrances.
- You don't see the downtown right away and it is a little hard to tell where you officially enter the "town." I came in from the west on Hwy 34. There was even less coming from the north which I noticed coming back from a visit to Lake Icaria.
- Entering from the North.... The community appears to be very rural, with farm implement businesses as the primary focus. Not a very interesting, pretty, or exciting community entrance.
- Charming. Both entrances that I entered from (north and east) had some farm buildings that would benefit from paint or could be used as welcoming murals. I never saw the Lake Icaria signs until I was almost to the lake. There are no signs to the lake when coming from the east. You would never know that there is a beautiful lake there. The downtown was beautiful and busy.
- Driving into town, I was greeted with the "Iowa Wave" from a passing driver. Got into town and pulled over for a passing funeral procession, someone yelled "Thank you!" for simply showing respect. The downtown area is beautiful, great, architecture.

# Community Information

Assessors were asked to identify how much they agree or disagreed with the following:

**It was easy to find information for visitors (flyers, brochures, etc.)**

4 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 2 Disagreed

**Information available was useful for visitors**

4 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 2 Disagreed

**Locals were helpful when asked questions**

6 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 0 Disagreed

**Information booths/kiosks exist to help visitors locate attractions & services**

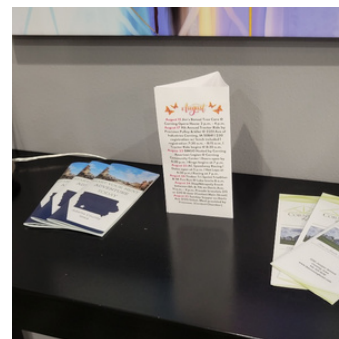
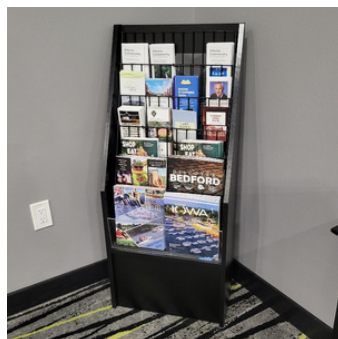
1 Agreed, 3 Neutral, 3 Disagreed

**Information booths/kiosks were helpful**

1 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 4 Disagreed

**Assessor Comments:**

- Some assessors found brochures at most places visited while others did not find community information readily available at campgrounds, hotel, retail, dining, attractions.
- Adding visitor information to the kiosks at the lake would be helpful and weather-proof brochure holders so visitors can access information 24/7.
- Visitors Center – brochures and information needs to be featured more prominently, in addition to resident focused brochures. Add a weather-proof brochure holder on the exterior so visitors can access information when you are closed.



*Hotel lobby - nice collection of Corning and area brochures displayed.*



# Community Information

**What resources (visitor organizations, locations, mobile device, locals, etc) did you find most helpful during your visit in deciding how to spend your time.**

- Create Your Own Adventure brochure is well done. Other specific attraction brochures, websites, and Google listings. Additional kiosks at the lakes with community information would be helpful.
- We found brochures at most places we visited. I do think the websites could use some improvement. It took several clicks to reach the tourism related information, and our web search didn't lead us there right away.
- Travellowa.com and Facebook. The Chamber was closed. Most business owners/ workers were great!
- Mostly websites. There wasn't much on their Facebook page. An overall event calendar for all community sites wasn't something I found.
- MANY individual Facebook pages of businesses & attractions were the most helpful when organizational marketing websites did not provide the information I needed (hours, addresses, etc.).
- Online research and also the local residents
- The locals in the businesses do a great job promoting each other and local attractions.

## Wayfinding Signage

- Corning has signage along the main road and throughout town helping to direct visitors to community attractions and businesses.



# Assets Visited

Assessors intentionally experience a variety of public and private assets during their First Impressions visits. Specific assets visited by assessment team members included:

## Attractions/Activities

- Adams Community Aquatic Center
- Adams County Fairgrounds
- Adams County Speedway
- Bobbers Down Marina
- Central Park
- Corning American Movie Theater
- Corning Center for the Fine Arts
- Corning Opera House
- Corning Public Library
- Downtown Corning
- Icarian Village
- Lake Binder
- Lake Icaria
- Lauvstad Visitor Center
- R&S Collectibles
- Salley's Alley

## Lodging

- Lake Icaria Sleeper Cabin #8
- Tent Area - Lake Icaria
- The Corning Hotel

## Eating & Drinking

- Backgrounds Coffee Bar & Boutique
- Bredeaux Pizza
- Lake Icaria Food Truck
- Los Catrines
- Primose
- Sweet Desires Bakery
- The Floating Vine
- Three C's Diner
- The Corning Hotel

## Shopping/Retail

- Casey's
- Corning Center for the Fine Arts
- Fire & Salt Co.
- Hy-Vee Drug Store/Gift Shop
- Hy-Vee Grocery
- Lake Icaria Marina
- Lone Arranger
- Pillow Pets
- Real Deals
- St. Patrick's Thrift Shop
- Vogel & Thomas Mercantile

# Visitor Motives

Assessors were asked to select the top 3 reasons they think visitors come to Corning from a list of 17 reasons

- *Outdoor Recreation was the top reason for visiting with 100% of assessors selecting.*

Outdoor recreation (biking, boating, geocaching, hunting, fishing, etc)	7
Racing	5
Shopping	4
Dining	3
Get away from people	1
Visit historical sites	1
Relax	
Get away from people	
Visit friends and family	
Agritourism	
Sports Activities	
Experience a unique culture	
Get entertained/for entertainment	
Engage in business activities	
In transit to somewhere else	
Engage in religious activities	
Special events and festivals	
Wineries, breweries, distilleries, cideries, etc.	

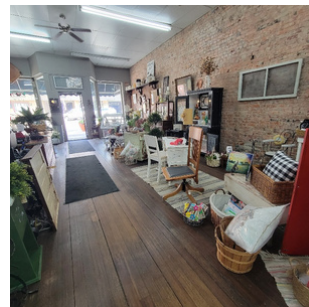
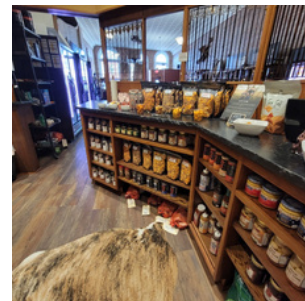
**Assessors were asked if there were any attractions or special events Corning is known for:**

- ☒ Lake Icaria
- ☒ Adams County Raceway
- ☒ Johnny Carson Birthplace
- ☒ Icarian Village but I could not find evidence of current activity there

# Destination Highlights

Assessors were asked if there specialty shops, activities, events, dining, lodging, and/or attractions that would bring you back to visit? If yes, which ones:

- **Primrose** provided a delightful patio dining experience on a lovely summer evening. My steak was perfectly prepared, paired with a delicious fresh chopped salad unlike any I've tasted before. My husband enjoyed his porkbelly entree with zucchini salad. Simple, but creative and delicious. Guests at other patio tables were a mix of locals and visitors. We exchanged comments about our meals and other stories, as we formed an impromptu communal dining experience in this charming small Iowa town.
- **Fire and Salt. Primrose, Lake Icaria**, and I am curious to see evolution of **Vogel & Thompson**.
- I would go out of my way to repeat the dining experience at **Primrose** again or to pick up a gift from **Fire & Salt Co**.
- I think if we were closer, we would go back for the **racetrack** or the **opera house** if there was a performance I really wanted to see. Any time I am near, I will detour to eat at **Primrose** and pick up a few things at **Fire and Salt**.
- If I were driving through, I'd stop at **Sweet Desires Bakery** if it was open.
- **Lake Icaria**, and the stores and food places (all of them really).
- **Three C's Diner** (I love small town diners) and **Real Deals**. They were exceptionally friendly and workers at both locations made me want to see more places in town. They are true ambassadors for Corning.





# Destination Attributes

**Assessors were asked to rate the twenty-seven destination attributes for Corning.**

- Scale from poor to excellent Best = 4, Lowest = 1.
- Excellent (4), Good (3), Fair (3), Poor (1)

Attribute	Average
Safety and security	3.86
Hospitality and friendliness of residents	3.57
Customer service	3.57
Nature-based activities	3.57
Cleanliness	3.57
Variety and quality of restaurants	3.43
Variety and quality of shopping options	3.29
Directional signage	3.29
Value for money in tourism experiences	3.29
Authenticity of attractions	3.29
Well marked roads/attractions	3.14
Interesting architecture	3.14
Community involvement	3.14
Shopping facilities	3.14
Cultural attractions	3
Dedicated tourism attractions	3
Variety and quality of accommodations	3
Special events	3
Activities for children	2.86
Road conditions	2.86
Historic/heritage attractions	2.86
Variety of activities to do	2.86
Conveniently located	2.71
Well known landmarks	2.57
Adventure-based activities	2.43
Communication infrastructure (phone, internet)	2.14
Pedestrian travel infrastructure	2.14

# Destination Attributes

## Assessor comments:

- The community has a unique charm but has not taken full advantage of its tourism potential. Lack of bike trails connecting the lake to the community. Lack of community (dining, shopping etc.) information at the lake to bring people into town and vice-versa.
- The community or partners have implemented a few projects that are important to their tourism capacity, including the opera house renovation, aquatic center development and the purchase of a large vacant historic building in the main downtown district for renovation. Some unique high-end businesses that appeal to travelers have opened, downtown beautification efforts are ongoing - flower planters are well kept and wayfinding signage has been installed. However, major projects that have the potential to make the community a destination for visitors have never been implemented. i.e. downtown streetscaping, housing improvements to reduce the blighted look of the community, community entrance signage, trails from town to outlying tourism businesses and parks. Also, businesses may not understand how their hours of operation are greatly impacting the ability of the community to attract and retain visitation.
- Clearly, the community wants to be a tourist destination and has assets to build upon, but may be missing some buy-in from the larger population.
- Tourism has been recognized enough to be included among the many tabs on the Chamber's website, but provides only limited information, indicating a low priority. A group of local residents are actively investing in community improvement, and their efforts/ financial support/accomplishments are impressive. However, more needs to happen to bring Corning to the visitor level it can achieve, which will require many more locals to become involved in other ways.

## Assessors were asked to list 8 words that describe Corning

- Charming, historic, thriving, welcoming, creative, authentic, community pride
- Historic, picturesque, friendly, clean, well-appointed, thriving, potential, scenic.
- Untapped potential, rundown, unkept, identity confusion, closed, concrete
- Rural, slow-paced, quiet, economically-viable, church-y, proud.
- Welcoming, creative, resourceful, "The Little Engine That Could"
- Charming, sleepy, fortunate to have the lake so close, great potential.
- FRIENDLY! Inviting, clean, architecture, creative, shopping, warm, nature.

# Downtown Business Area

Assessors were asked to rate the following downtown attributes.

- Scale from agree to disagree Best = 4, Lowest = 1.
- Agree (4), Somewhat Agree (3), Somewhat Disagree (2), Disagree (1)

Attribute	Average Rating
Parking is conveniently located near businesses	3.86
Parking is secure	3.86
This is a welcoming downtown	3.71
Parking charges are reasonable	3.57
There is a mix of ages	3.57
There is pedestrian traffic (foot)	3.43
The main downtown business area feels distinct or special	3.43
The main downtown business area is a major tourists draw for the area	3.43
Inviting signs are displayed on the exterior of businesses	3.43
Business information is displayed on the exterior of businesses	3
There are areas of green space	3
Vehicle traffic is managed to encourage pedestrian movement	3
The Downtown area is attractively landscaped - flowers, etc.	2.86
There is a mix of ethnic groups	2
The downtown business area is handicapped accessible	1.86
There are walker/biker friendly signs	1.86
Bike lanes exist on roadways	1.14



# Downtown Business Area

## Assessor comments:

- Important action required - the sidewalks and business entrances are treacherous!
- Sidewalks are in very poor condition and need replacing.
- Step-up to several businesses could be a tripping concern if not paying attention.
- Handicapped accessibility was minimal.
- Add some pedestrian crossing signs, especially at the intersection where the side street has the right of way for cars.
- Also recommend bike racks and lanes. Don't underestimate the hills that bike riders are willing to climb for attractive sites!
- Bike trails or lanes - connect the downtown with other tourist attractions, like the aquatic center, lake and hotel.
- Large expanse of cement and wide road is not welcoming. These large expanses of concrete are opportunities to create unique, inviting gathering spaces that would draw visitors to the community and serve the local residents as well. Given the age of the community, it is possible they may want or need to implement these projects in conjunction with replacement of aging sewer and water infrastructure in this part of town.
- Please provide more seating - both for shoppers and for shopper companions. I searched for a place to sit and enjoy my coffee from Backgrounds & Croissant from Sweet Desires, but no benches or inviting space to sit. I kept walking and found a lovely spot by the fountain of the park. That was very nice, but the distance from stores did not encourage more shopping.
- Add branded banners to light poles for extra touch of color
- Limited hours at some businesses – none open on Sunday.
- The large bird mural is spectacular.
- There were some beautiful historic buildings - some restored, others not.
- Downtown is a definite draw, I noticed out of state and out of county vehicles.
- Lights could be transitioned to decorative lighting, banners.
- Music in downtown - some assessors liked the music playing, others not as much or had recommendations for music type.
- Welcoming – assessments were mixed on how welcoming the downtown was. Most assessors said it felt very welcoming, but not all. Several praised front line staff efforts on customer service and business cross-promotion : “Every business I went into had friendly workers who also promoted other businesses and made me want to see and do more while I was there.”





# Downtown Business Area

## Assessor Comments:

- We loved the mural, and the park with the fountain in front of the courthouse. Add some pedestrian crossing signs, especially at the intersection where the side street has the right of way for cars. I would also recommend bike racks and lanes. Don't underestimate the hills that bike riders are willing to climb for attractive sites!
- I liked how busy their downtown was during the day. It is very hilly and big trucks park in the center of the street making it a little hard to see from side-to-side what stores are there. You have to kind of loop around to see everything. It was easy to miss things on the side streets. Beautiful landscaping. Lovely park in front of the Courthouse. There was a lot of street construction going on.
- The sidewalks and business entrances are treacherous! I have taken many visitors to emergency rooms after tripping on less dangerous sidewalks. The sloping concrete ramps to doorways may be known to locals, but serious accidents are waiting to happen to visitors. The sloped stepdown when leaving a store is not obvious in some locations. There is no paint or marking on some. A serious injury/lawsuit can result from lack of action on this. Fire & Salt has a protective railing to prevent falls, but did not find similar protection at any other business entries.
- The small downtown was clean and well maintained with pretty flower planters and there was one bench at one of the businesses.
- Unfortunately, the main downtown business area does not feel welcoming. The wide road with angle parking on both sides combined with the lack of trees makes it feel like a large parking lot with some businesses on either side, rather than a cozy downtown I might want to spend time in.
- There was a beautiful city park at the end of the business district, but it did not feel like part of the business district
- The cement radiated heat and since there were no shade trees and only small business awnings, it was impossible to escape the heat and physically uncomfortable to be downtown, even though it wasn't as hot as it would be later in the summer.
- Downtown can use some small "welcoming" and "belonging" signs or art. There is only one mural (beautiful) and many unused walls.
- There are no bike parking locations except in front of the library, but the community feels safe leaving the bikes out. I left mine out in multiple places with no concern.
- I LOVE that retailers left products outside overnight (for example, Lone Arranger); it gave the community a sense of safety.
- We arrived Friday late afternoon and all the businesses were closed except a couple of restaurants. On Saturday, all but a few businesses and attractions had limited business hours or were closed. No businesses were open on Sunday.
- Closed signs, late starts, and limited hours are a huge opportunity lost. If the community wants tourists, they need to have tourist hours. At the very least, be open all day on Saturday. Late Friday would also help but Saturday for sure. Why would anyone visit if businesses and attractions aren't open? If a restaurant was open for breakfast only on Sunday, it would be full because any visitor at the packed hotel that wanted a decent breakfast had to leave town. The hotel staff recommended we drive to Creston.
- Staff was friendly and worked to cross-promote other businesses. Downtown is a definite draw, I noticed out of state and out of county vehicles. Downtown felt alive and vibrant. Music playing added a nice atmosphere.

# Outdoor Recreation

## Assessors were asked to rate Corning's Outdoor Recreation Attributes.

- Scale from poor to excellent Best = 4, Lowest = 1.
- Excellent (4), Good (3), Fair (3), Poor (1)

Attribute	Average Rating
Other (Aquatics Center)	4
Outdoor Area Cleanliness	3.86
Canoe/ Kayak Friendliness	3.86
Playground(s)	3.71
Boat Launch	3.71
Swimming Beach	3.71
Fishing Areas	3.71
Marina	3.71
Playground(s)	3.57
Water-based Retail/Rental	3.57
Hiking/Biking Trails	3.43
Wayfinding Signage	3.14
Athletic Fields (baseball, soccer, etc)	3.14

## Assessor Comments

- Aquatics Center is impressive!
- Lake Icaria is lovely and looks like it gets a lot of good usage.
- We found unpaved walking trails near the lake, but did not find any paved bike trails. Do they exist?
- A bike trail from lake to town would be a draw to link community with lake areas.
- Bike trails have become one of those standard community amenities people are looking for.
- How bike friendly is Corning? Are there established bike trails? Bicycling is a very popular Iowa activity, but I saw no bicyclists during my entire visit, which is unusual.

## Assessors were asked rate the overall quality of Corning's outdoor recreation on a scale of excellent, good, fair or poor.

- 4 assessors - 43% Rated Excellent
- 3 assessors - 57% Rated Good

# Outdoor Recreation



Better explanation of hunting areas and what that means so visitors feel more comfortable hiking/walking these areas.



View from the fishing jetty noting lack of walking path to jetty and kayak launch.



Nice shelter at beach. Could a small stage be added for musical performances?



Food truck is nice amenity at beach.



Scenic view from cabin



Lake Binder - Adding running water service would allow you to charge more for the camp sites and improve the seasonal camping experience. Add in some tenting sites, and maybe build some yurts for short term rentals. Kayak and canoe rentals would also be good at that location.



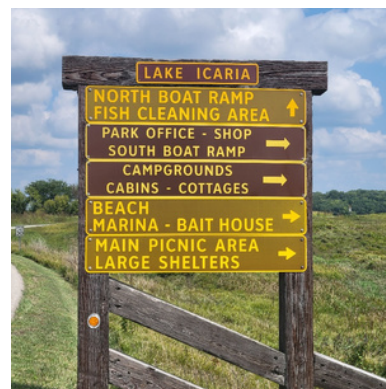
Disc Golf Course



# Outdoor Recreation

**What is one area of outdoor recreation you think is excellent?**

- Lake Icaria is beautiful with impressive array of outdoor recreation options. Adams County Aquatic Center - well designed.
- Although it wasn't open when we visited, we loved that there is a food truck and covered picnic shelter right by the beach! Adding a little platform stage for outdoor entertainment would make for some awesome beachside events!
- The Aquatic Center/pool was the most amazing example of a small town aquatic center I have seen. It was so well laid out, attractive, inclusive, inviting and clean that it should be a showcase for the community.
- Definitely, Lake Icaria, but there were a couple nice parks right in town, too.
- Lakeside picnic/shelter areas. Nice facilities and fantastic views.
- Lake Icaria - it has everything! Fishing, boating, boat rentals, camping, hiking, beach (with food truck!), sand volleyball, playground, and disk golf.
- Tina at Bobbers Down Marina is a community champion. She shared information about their services, the lake activities, cabins and cross promoted areas shops and restaurants.
- Aquatics Center is impressive!
- Lake Icaria is lovely and looks like it gets a lot of good usage.



# Outdoor Recreation

**What is one area of outdoor recreation you think could be improved.**

- Informational and wayfinding kiosks in the park would be extremely helpful for visitors - with a map of the park and park amenities. Provide a park brochure with a good map, park rules and amenities (in an outdoor kiosk since park personnel are scarce).
- A bike trail from lakes to town would be a draw to link community with the two lake areas.
- Adding multi-purpose paved trails from the two parks to Corning, and to and from the hotel and downtown area. This could be a game changer to better connect visitors to the lakes and surrounding area to all that Corning has to offer.
- With the proximity of Lake Binder in particular, a trail that connects downtown out to the lake, while a costly investment, would pay off, especially since it would also pass by the water park, giving families a bike friendly path to both attractions.
- Lake Binder is beautiful. Consider paving the road surrounding. Adding running water service would allow you to charge more for the camp sites and improve the seasonal camping experience. Add in some tenting sites, and maybe build some yurts for short term rentals. Kayak and canoe rentals would also be good at that location.
- Assessors wondered how many campers at Lake Icaria and Lake Binder were visitors versus long-term stays? Is there sufficient availability for visitors to find and reserve open spots? If not, can a percentage be set aside for first-come, first-serve reservation?
- Accessibility is an issue at both lakes and throughout the town. Making sure there are level walking paths is really crucial for inclusivity of differently abled people and senior citizens.
- Better explanation of hunting areas along trails at Lake Icaria so visitors feel more comfortable hiking/walking these areas.
- Bike route signage could be added between the lake and Corning. Drivers were courteous when I rode the bike from the lake to town and inside the city. There are no bike parking locations except in front of the library, but the community feels safe leaving the bikes out. I left mine out in multiple places with no concern.
- The county park with Lake Icaria just outside of town has phenomenal potential to impact the community. Developing a multi-use trail from town to the park, around the lake and also connecting to the only hotel and downtown would drive business to the downtown and give visitors a reason to visit and stay overnight. It would also encourage boaters and campers to travel to town for a meal or entertainment.
- Pet Friendly Policies - rather than just posting NO dogs, which turns visitors away, the park should embrace visitors with dogs just have some rules - not on the beach, or clean-up after your pet etc. All the campers have dogs, locals bring dogs and park personnel even drive around with a dog. Why restrict visitors?

# Arts and Culture

**Did you observe and/or experience anything memorable relative to Arts and Culture in the host community?**

- Adams County Arts Center - staff gave me personal tour and shared information. Learned about their artist in residence program. Small signs/notes near art explains more about artist and their process.
- Corning Opera House - De gave me a personal tour and shared stories that made this facility come to life, even though I was not there for a performance.
- Unfortunately, we were not there during any community events (a day late for the fair!), but we loved the tour of the opera house, and definitely got the sense that this is a community that supports and invests in the arts, which greatly adds to its appeal and overall character.
- I LOVED the large mural of birds downtown. It was definitely a photo op. We were able to see and purchase local art at the gallery downtown. I appreciated the opportunity as I always like to take something local home with me when I travel. We were also able to see the opera house, which was beautiful. There was an evening performance but we were unable to attend. It looked fun though!
- Beautiful downtown mural. There were quite a few buildings where a big mural would look great. Good focus on arts downtown with the Opera House, Art Center, Theatre.
- The Opera House is an outstanding asset, especially for a community of this size. I love the children's theater camps and public First Friday Friends' events. Are there ways that more community events can partner with this gem?
- We loved the downtown mural. We saw a started but not finished (and no signs of any work on it) mural downtown. no other art in the community. One idea would be to have a Johnny Carson mural or art somewhere. We did not notice any community events but saw signs with events posted (plays, concerts etc.).





# Arts and Culture

## Are there ways that Arts and Culture can be strengthened in this community?

- Keep building on what you have going. Look for other opportunities to incorporate the arts into placemaking.
  - Have small music events in your downtown park or by the lakes.
  - Find some local artists and involve youth with painting more murals. Panel murals are a great way to get more hands involved and create that sense of ownership and pride.
  - Think about commissioning sculptures for your outdoor recreation areas and parks.
  - It's great that you have a full time manager for the opera house, but perhaps bring in some trainings for volunteers to learn how to fulfill the different roles of the theater so you can add more shows without adding more workload on one person. Start a capital campaign to seed an endowment fund to support its long-term sustainability.
- Add another bird mural that is just as dramatic as the first! I loved the mural!
  - Run with the bird theme and contract some local artists to develop one or more large bird sculptures to parks. They could even develop an art sculpture area downtown next to the mural in that vacant lot.
- I would figure out how to make the gallery more inviting. It seems like too big of space for the amount of art.
  - If you could incorporate larger art, mobile walls, unique art stands or hang art from the ceiling, even colorful fabric from the ceiling to help break-up space and make it more inviting and more dynamic.
  - Have one or more of the artists help design the area so it is creative in its own right. This would attract more people and help with local art sales. I understand the space needs to be cleared out for events but if that is the issue, think about how the design of the new space could incorporate mobile components that are used for displaying local art, but then can be easily moved to the back of the room and partitioned off.
- The alley mural is a fantastic start. Can murals be expanded? I like that the mural artist is a nearby Iowa native. Can other local artists be featured to demonstrate local talent?
- Murals are always a great choice.
- There are no sculptures; intersections are very bland. There is a community amateur art showcase once a year at the gallery so that is really good.
- Sally's Alley - mural is impressive. Know this is still in development and furnishings and landscaping will strengthen this delightful spot.

# Agritourism

## Did you observe or experience anything memorable relative to Agritourism?

- Primrose - farm to table focus. Fire & Salt - 100% local beef and other product sampling.
- Fire and Salt was a great agritourism experience as they made local beef and other food available in a super trendy store that incorporated supporting and complimentary inventory. It was an absolutely amazing atmosphere, great products and wonderful customer service.
- I thought the Floating Vine was a winery and it may have been in the past, but it is just a bar now.
- I searched for agritourism experiences, but found none. Do they not exist? This seems to be a huge missed opportunity for this scenic rural Iowa region.
- Primrose served food from their farm. No other agritourism experiences that we found or heard of.
- Primrose is a farm to table restaurant. Great food and service! I saw a winery at the edge of town but did not stop there.

## Are there ways that Agritourism can be strengthened in this community/area?

- Corning has a commercial kitchen at the Icarian Village. This is a rare asset for a small community. Can a new small business take advantage of this to provide farm to table products?
- French Icaria Village was not open, but I drove out to the site. This seems to be underutilized. Could there be food contest that ties in with their rhubarb patch referenced in the article by the bloggers since the Icarians were known for bringing rhubarb to this area of the United States. Community Garden Opportunity with classes or workshops on canning fruits, vegetables, jams, or pickles.
- More local food and drink in the restaurants.
- Farmers Market - add if there is not already one.
- Prior to arrival, I found a Corning Farmers Market Facebook page, advertising the event at Central Park on Thursday evenings. I was in town on a Thursday, but found no market. I asked employees of a convenience store where to find "Central Park", but they did not know. I asked if there was a farmers' market in Corning anywhere, but they did not know. I asked several locals, but nobody knew of a market.
- Absolutely. Trails and maybe farms along the trail. Icaria village was not well advertised and was not open on the weekends.
- I did not see anything advertising a farmer's market. If they have one, promote it. If they don't, seems like a great place to have one.
- Are there other county or area agritourism opportunities - connect/create "Farm Trail"



# Senses and Safety

**Did you experience any pleasant or unpleasant SMELLS in the community?: Yes (please elaborate)**

**Yes - 1 Assessors No - 6 Assessors**

- Fire & Salt! The scent of wood smoke pulled us down the street and into this shop. Genius use of "Esthetic experience" (The 4 E's, Harvard Business School, Pine & Gilmore). We learned that only wood pellets were on the smoker, but this is a clever way to lure us in. Their cleverness worked. We bought a large selection of vinegars, mustards, and seasonings.

**Did you experience any pleasant or unpleasant SOUNDS in the community?: Yes (please elaborate)**

**Yes - 3 Assessors No - 4 Assessors**

- Music in downtown area was nice.
- I appreciated the effort to increase esthetics through music in the downtown district, and imagined a delightful time of Christmas shopping with carols. But I heard only country western music and questioned this choice. Would this be every visitor's first choice? Would a music genre mix appeal to more visitors? I was thankful the music was not playing during our patio dinner at Primrose, so we could enjoy a quiet conversation and relaxing evening.

**Did you feel welcomed in the community at all times?**

**Yes - 7 Assessors No - 0 Assessors**

- Staff and locals were super friendly, helpful and seemed proud of their community.
- Everyone was friendly, if not very talkative.
- Everyone was friendly and eager to help at all times. A local even stopped his car in the middle of the street and gave directions when he saw my challenge in trying to get to the coffee shop when the beauty shop was closed.
- Everyone was wonderful and asked where we were from.
- People are so friendly in Corning. Even strangers on the street will smile and say "hi."

**Did you feel safe & secure in the community at all times?**

**Yes - 7 Assessors No - 0 Assessors**

# Residential Areas

**Assessors were asked to rate the overall appearance of the destination's residential areas on a scale from poor, fair, good or excellent.**

- Poor - 1 Assessor, Fair - 3 Assessors, Good - 1 Assessor, Excellent - 2 Assessors

**Please share comments, suggestions, or helpful information about the residential areas.**

- Mix of well-kept and not so well-kept homes. There are some lovely historic homes and also new developments.
- It looked like there was a broad range in the style and quality of homes, which is good. Overall it appeared that most were kept in pretty good condition, so our impression was that it is a clean and well-maintained town. Of course, we loved some of the really grand historic homes most of all, but it is good to see some "newer" (post WWII) homes. All of the hills really enhance the beauty of the town and the neighborhoods.
- Quite a few nuisance properties with cars parked in the yard and houses looking a little derelict, but also a lot of homes with beautiful landscaping and well-maintained houses. Looks like infrastructure has been problematic (graveled intersections, unpaved portions of streets).
- Beautiful homes. like every town there are good and bad areas but the general area looks nice. Quite a few dilapidated homes.
- There did seem to be a lack of sidewalks in residential areas, but I'm not sure if they are needed in such a small town.
- Our first impression of the town was that it was impoverished and run down. We entered via a residential area, and the houses weren't just dilapidated and unkept, many needed major repairs - portions collapsed or frankly needed to be torn down. Lawns and landscaping was overgrown or out of control in several instances. We did find some nicer neighborhoods, but they were tucked away in places that visitors would not typically see. There are housing programs available to help low-income homeowners with repairs. There are also programs that can be established to help communities purchase abandoned houses and tear them down to prepare lots for new housing. Other communities have successfully used these and other programs to improve residential areas. City ordinances should probably also be reviewed to see if enforcement could help solve some of the worst issues.
- Within residential areas near the downtown, there were amazing historic church buildings. The architecture of these churches was striking, beautiful and compelling. They could be included in a self-guided tour. Even if the active churches do not want visitors inside their buildings, perhaps they would allow informational kiosks about these historic structures to be developed and placed outside the churches as part of a larger historic tour.

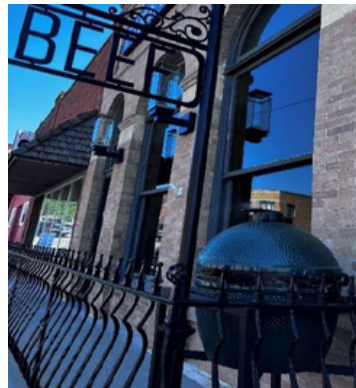
**Corning was recently awarded grant funding for two housing programs to address issues with struggling properties. This funding includes:**

- \$100,000 owner occupied housing rehabilitation grant to assist owners with larger projects such as roofs or windows and exterior repairs.
- \$100,000 rental occupied housing rehabilitation grant to assist with larger projects such as roofs or windows and exterior repairs.

# Lasting Impressions

## Assessors were asked to share their most positive experience.

- It's hard to pick one, but Primrose really stands out for us as an exceptional dining experience.
- Fire and Salt
- I enjoyed the whole downtown vibe. It was easy to go from store to store and there was a lot of variety.
- Visiting with Tina at Bobber's Down Marina. She asked good questions about what I was interested in doing, shared information about their services and the lake overall. Referred me to websites and Facebook pages and gave me brochures and information. Shared information about shopping opportunities, restaurants and other things to do in town.
- I was pleasantly surprised by the downtown's food and retail quality and variety of unique inventory.
- Dinner at Primrose and movie at the movie theater after.
- The friendliness of the people! People would wave as they drove past, smile and say "Hi" while walking past. Everywhere I went people made me feel welcomed and would chat me up and tell me about other great things to see and do. And not once but TWICE people offered to call someone with a key to open a tourist attraction that was closed for me.



## Assessors were asked to share their most negative experience?

- Some attractions only open by appointment. Some visitors would be unlikely to call to request appointment.
- Nothing terribly negative, but one person did try to start a conversation about politics which we quickly diverted.
- The community/area is not dog friendly - even when advance arrangements were made.
- Trying to find business hours and information about local attractions and downtown shops. We had to physically walk up to each location to find out they were closed. Some sites had no posted or contact information at all. We wished for a website that provided a one-stop information access to all - retail, attractions, dining, lodging, events.
- Stress around camping reservation - information was not clear.
- If I had to nitpick, maybe the lack of healthy options for the free continental breakfast at the hotel. But that is every hotel.

# Lasting Impressions

## **Assessors were asked to share what they will remember most about the destination six months from now?**

- Warm customer service and the strong sense of community pride of this historic small town. How they have grown businesses as Fire & Salt and Primrose.
- I'm impressed with their commitment to historical preservation and an attractive main street. It obviously is working to bring in businesses like Primrose and Fire & Salt which are the elevated kinds of experiences that people will travel to enjoy. Keep pushing for more of the same.
- Great! Fire and Salt - If I'm ever nearby I will take a detour to go back to this store. I've told everyone I've talked to about it! Great customer service, good hours, and great inventory. I loved it! I'll probably stay and have Mexican if I go to Fire and Salt, as that restaurant had awesome AUTHENTIC Mexican, they were clean, and the staff was all very nice.
- I'll remember the pretty lake and the pretty downtown.
- "WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE?" While walking downtown, I came along a young boy holding his skateboard and staring at a large vacant building. "What's happening here?" the boy asked. I peered through the doorway with the boy to see a workman tearing out a ceiling panel. Located diagonally across from the Opera House, this building's downtown location and historic architecture was significant, but needed much attention. "I've never seen anyone come out of that building the whole time I've lived here," the boy continued. I was immediately interested and suggested to my new young friend that we find out together. We learned that the local investment group who built the Corning Hotel has now taken on this significant downtown building, each contributing \$25,000 towards the project. Their plan is to renovate the building for second story housing, and to create several street level offices as opportunity for new small business startups. The longer we listened, the more impressed I became by the vision and community commitment of these local residents. I am eager to return to Corning someday, and I very much hope to see this building's beauty and usefulness restored. My favorite memory of Corning is a ten-year-old boy showing keen interest in improving his own downtown, and his fellow residents showing how it can be done.
- Our time together. My kids were initially hesitant and clearly pleased after the visit.
- The friendliness. As they say, people will always remember how you made them feel. And the people of Corning made me feel welcomed and that makes me want to go back.

## **Assessors were asked to respond to the following:**

- **I would recommend this destination to my friends and family**
  - 5 assessors said definitely, 0 Maybe and 2 probably not
- **I would visit this destination on a pleasure trip in the future**
  - 5 assessors said definitely, 1 said maybe, 1 probably not
- **I would feel compelled to stop in this community if randomly passing by**
  - 3 assessors said definitely, 4 said maybe, 0 said probably not



# Lasting Impressions

## What could Corning do differently to market themselves and/or assets better to attract visitors

- Add online version of the Create Your Own Adventure brochure, in addition to the Creative Community brochure to your website.
- Update your county website! The listings were there, but not enough visuals to really draw my interest if I hadn't already planned on going. You want people to make the decision to come based off their research, not just after they are already committed to coming. I think you just need to do an updated inventory of your assets and take some fresh photos. Your colorful mural could be the first image you see on the tourist page. The inside of Fire and Salt and Primrose should be featured on your places to dine page. Don't make people dig too hard, and make sure you are participating in statewide marketing campaigns because your assets are worth highlighting at that level.
- Website that provides a one-stop information access to all - retail, attractions, dining, lodging, events. A great start would be to add "SHOP" to the Chamber's web menu, with individual retail listings and photos, each with a link to more info, including hours. A good example is [visitpella.com/shop](http://visitpella.com/shop). Corning doesn't have as many retail shops as Pella, but does match the same high retail quality, and deserves visitors wanting to know when they can come and leave their dollars with you.
- The community has a good presence on the Travellowa.com website but it could be better. Include photos with people on listings so the "Also in the Area" shows a lot of happy people doing fun things. Additional community listings like the city park and the mural could also be added to Travellowa.com. A presence on Traveliowa.com is extremely important. However, it should be a jumping block to a local/community tourism website that has even more detail and photos about the community's tourism assets.
- Corning could add a gallery of Localhood stories to their city website to showcase their top attractions, outdoor rec/parks, restaurants, events, and businesses. The Localhood stories could have links to businesses and partner Facebook pages for additional information. Visitors drill down to find out more information from you and then even further to the businesses themselves.
- Prior to my visit, I felt forced to use many different internet sites to gather the information I needed before coming to visit Corning. Make it easy for people to come! Create a single one-stop website that provides links to all the information visitors need to enjoy Corning's attractions, lodging, dining, and things to do.
- After arriving, help visitors know what they can do, and when they can do it. I saw event table toppers in many locations, but no events were held during my visit. Also provide a map of shopping and dining listings with HOURS. Provide this at the hotel and other visitor locations
- Better capitalize downtown charm and old neighborhoods. More signs of welcome through out community.
- Be pet friendly - this is a huge missed opportunity for the town and the businesses, as a large percentage of travelers want to take their pets with them on their travels.
- Improved community entrance signs - if well-kept would be a great addition.

# Lasting Impressions

## In Your Opinion What are Corning's Strengths

- Lake Icaria is a draw to the area. Fire & Ice and Primrose are huge draws to Corning. Adams County Speedway. Aquatics Center.
- Lake Icaria is a strong draw for the community. Make a greater effort at connecting with the lake to advertise community offerings. Think about the types of services and experiences will add to their stay at the lake.
- The Racetrack. This venue already brings people to town who, if provided with additional information and opportunities, might stay longer or spend more money in the community if they were specifically invited. The antique car showroom is a related/supporting strength that could help draw the people from the races but it is currently untapped with limited hours.
- The Aquatic Center. This is an amazing facility that is a destination for the region. It could be part of a fun family itinerary that brings families to town for a day to relax/have fun at the pool and then eat out at the Mexican restaurant and catch a movie.
- Nearby outdoor recreation/parks - The parks and lakes were packed with people who could fill restaurants and shops. They are not too far away to develop trails from town to parks. The proximity of the natural areas and outdoor rec to the community are a phenomenal opportunity/strength that would increase tourism exponentially if connected by multi-use trail system.
- Downtown Hotspots: Opera House events, Fire and Salt, Primrose and the Mexican Restaurant. The fact that you have entertainment, eclectic and high end/one-of-a-kind shopping plus good upscale or family dining could be promoted together in an itinerary. Not every small town has this combination.
- Primrose appears to be a strong regional draw as a dining destination. I was surprised how busy this small town restaurant was on a Thursday evening. I arrived at 7:00 PM when stores were closed, and the closest parking was 3 blocks away. Guests at a nearby table were from Des Moines, who traveled 100 miles to enjoy a pretty summer evening drive and delicious meal.
- People, downtown, lake, charm, shopping and food
- Again, the friendliness. But there is also great shopping, great architecture, historical sites, great outdoor recreation.

## In Your Opinion What are Corning's Weaknesses

- Sidewalks in downtown area and some roads are not in very good shape. Lack of hours at some attractions.
- Lack of bike trails and infrastructure.
- The main street is an oversized parking lot with no trees or landscaping, and sidewalks that are in poor condition.
- The business and museum hours are not visitor friendly - why come if nothing is open.
- The community is not walkable/bikeable, but even more significant, the parks/outdoor recreation/activities are not connected to the downtown through multi-use trails that would encourage visitors to move back and forth between assets.
- Not enough volunteers have stepped up to provide all the great experiences that are possible here.
- Making sure all visitors welcomed.
- They need more online presence. The town has so much to offer, and I learned so much from word-of-mouth.
- The vast majority of the campers at the park had dogs. Can you appeal to them by making the downtown more dog friendly?

# Lasting Impressions

**Suggestions for what Corning needs or could do to be appealing to new visitors, repeat visitors, and/or new residents.**

- Bike Trail connecting to Lakes to community - Webster City/Briggs Woods Park & Lake is example. Kiosks at Lake Icaria with community information and 24/7 brochure rack. Conservation Office has rack but could other weather proof versions be added at key points. QR code to tourism brochure - Create Your Own Adventure. Sidewalks are in terrible shape in the downtown and need repair.
- Town to lake trail example: Boone River Trail <https://webstercity.com/our-community/parks-recreation/recreational-trails/>
- I recommend working to add more programming to the Opera House, either through touring acts or local talent <https://rosemaryclausencenter.com/>  
<https://webstercitycommunitytheatre.org/>
- Adopt a unique community identity or theme/s that will appeal to a target tourism audience/s. Base this on strengths you already have that you can build on - cars, birds, etc.
  - Could Corning play off the car theme in murals, benches, selfie stations or other car themed items. For example, a 'antique car' themed seating in a restaurant like the bakery or at Three Cs. The car sticking out of the storefront was cool and caught our attention. Could this idea be implemented somewhere else - maybe its part of a mural and selfie station.
  - Fly Away for a weekend in Corning - build on the bird mural. Become a Bird Friendly Community (this is a designation), incorporate birds into everything. Partner with the County Conservation Board, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and/or Iowa Department of Natural Resources to identify birds or conduct a bird survey (if they haven't). Promote birding in and around Corning, especially during migration. Encourage birding at nearby natural areas. Create unique bird themed signage, murals, local art, awnings sculptures, unique bird gifts, restaurant specials or drinks named after birds etc. If you select this option, have the downtown street project incorporate more trees and flowers to draw birds and butterflies.
  - Be the place to go to have fun. Critical to this theme is that you connect outdoor recreation sites with multi-use trails that make it easy for visitors to move from one park to another and very importantly from parks to the downtown. Decorah, Iowa has done this extremely well. They specifically developed trails to connect parks and outdoor recreation venues - streams, river - to each other and to businesses, then marketed themselves with this in mind. This would build on the existing popularity at Lake Icaria and other county parks/lakes. These parks are packed during the season. Work with partners to expand and promote the season. Build winter activities to help with winter visitation.
  - The downtown street project should include bike lanes and wayfinding for walkers/bikers, benches and bike racks outside of businesses and near shade trees so people can take a break and wait for their partner to shop, areas for people to eat outside, bicycle murals, kiosks with maps of trails, trail wayfinding and interpretation.
  - Identify the visual corridor of major entry points to town and work on improving the community's 'first impression' by implementing projects that reflect your new theme or themes.

# Lasting Impressions

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## **Suggestions for what Corning needs or could do to be appealing to new visitors, repeat visitors, and/or new residents - Continued**

- Create spaces, community entrance signage or arch, art wayfinding etc. that encourages travelers to detour or stop and explore the community because it seems like a creative and happy town.
- Start with the visually appealing entrance sign and consider making entrance signage "dynamic" - exp. City of Volga incorporated a small waterfall into their entrance signage because water recreation is a strength for them. Your community entrance sign should appeal to your target audiences. An Iowa Tourism Grant could be written for design and fabrication of new signage, distinctive lighting, hanging flowers and/or banners along the entrance route.
- There needs to be some outdoor interpretive signage or something at the Johnny Carson birthplace if it is only going to be open one day. Norfolk, Nebraska has the Johnny Carson Theatre and an annual comedy show, but there doesn't appear to be any programming affiliated with the Corning Johnny Carson Birthplace.
- Develop community programs to help local homeowners fix up their porches and the front entries of their homes - or even more of their home. Work with the homeowners in this corridor to maximize landscaping. You may need to start with one neighborhood at a time. You could partner with or start a master gardener's group to work with landowners to plant flowers and work on landscaping projects with private landowners. Trees forever grants could help with trees plantings.

# Corning's Community Team

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As part of the First Impressions Program the community is required to form a local Community Team. Teams are determined by communities themselves with public and private industry partnerships encouraged.

The Community Team plans and hosts the Community Forum and helps guide, with input from stakeholders, any initiatives to pursue based on the assessment results.

- Raelynne Risser, Adams County Economic Development Corporation
- Bobbi Maynes, Adams County Iowa Board of Supervisors
- Jami Fletchall, Main Street Corning
- Jess Armstrong, Corning Chamber of Commerce
- Kenya Haffner, Corning City Council



# Corning's Strengths, Challenges & Opportunities

## Assessor Identified Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities

### Strengths

- Great Outdoor Recreation
- Lake Icaria
- Lake Binder
- Marina Services
- Aquatics Center
- Friendliness of People
- Adams County Speedway
- Primrose
- Fire & Salt Co.
- Charming Downtown
- Shopping
- Historical Sites
- Opera House

### Challenges

- Poor condition of sidewalks in downtown area
- Downtown lacks trees, landscaping, shade, etc.
- Some roads are not in good shape
- Lack of bike infrastructure
- Community is not walkable/bikeable
- Improved online presence
- Make all visitors feel welcomed
- More volunteers needed
- Lack of regular hours at some locations
- Pet friendliness

### Opportunities/Recommendations

- Trail Development - Link Corning's Tourism Assets Together
- Streetscaping - Sidewalks Need Immediate Attention
- Capitalize on Corning's Existing Strengths of Dining and Décor
- Better Utilize Central Park
- Utilize the Alley to the Fullest
- Let Your History Work for You
- Help Visitors Find Your Gems and Spend Their Dollars

# Recommendations

## Trail Development - Link Corning's Tourism Assets Together

- Bike trails have become one of those standard community amenities people are looking for.
- Develop multi-use paved trails - the county park with Lake Icaria and with Lake Binder, just outside of town has phenomenal potential by developing a multi-use trail from town to the parks, and around the lake, and to and from the hotel and the community.
- Start planning and implementing a paved bike trail that connects the community to the county park. Take it past the aquatic center so county park users could bike to the pool. Also connect it to the downtown and extend the sidewalk/trail that already leads out of town to the hotel. Connecting trail from the hotel to downtown would drive business to the downtown and give visitors a reason to visit and stay overnight.
- The Boone River Bike Trail is a 5.6 mile trail that connects Webster City to Briggs Woods Lake and Briggs Woods County Park outside of town. This is an example of the type of bike trail that could connect to Lake Binder.

## Outdoor Recreation - Lake Binder

- Lake Binder - another step would be to pave the road the circles all the way around Lake Binder. Adding running water service out to the lake would allow you to charge more for the camp sites and improve the seasonal camping experience. Also add in some tenting sites, and maybe build some yurts for short term rentals. Kayak and canoe rentals would also be good at that location too.

# Recommendations

## Sidewalks Need Immediate Attention

- The sloped concrete steps to downtown entries are treacherous. Some of the steps have safety rails or painted edges to warn pedestrians of the drop-off, but not all.



*This is the view when leaving this business - the sudden drop-off is unseen and potentially unexpected by visitors.*



*This view is the same building but viewed from the street and shows the drop-off.*



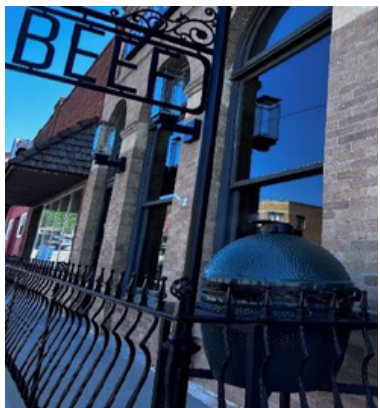
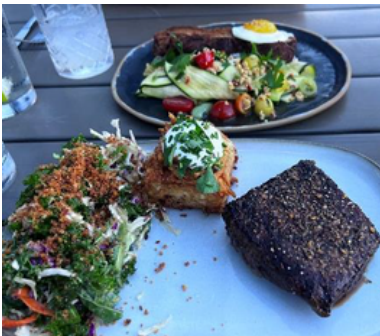
*Some entries have safety rails or painted edges and barriers to warn pedestrians of the drop-off. When sidewalk streetscaping occurs, it should incorporate a solution to business entries that provides a safer environment. Until then, painting all drop-off edges is an immediate need and minimum recommendation.*

## Complete Corning's Streetscape Renovation Project

- Corning was recently awarded grant funding for a downtown streetscape project. This project is a total renovation of Davis Ave from 5th Street through 9th Street and includes:
  - Replacing and widening sidewalks by three feet to allow more space for outdoor seating and dining.
  - New street lights and posts, seating, and greenery on Davis Avenue to help soften the downtown.
  - New bump outs at intersections that help pedestrian safety when crossing Corning's wide streets.
  - All new storm water system to help collect rain water because an existing structure for this collection does not exist.

# Recommendations

## Capitalize on Corning's Existing Retail Strengths of "Dining and Décor"



- Capitalize on Corning's destination dining. The downtown was filled with vehicles on a weeknight after stores were closed. Most of the downtown traffic seemed to be dining at Primrose. Our closest parking was a 3-block walk to this restaurant. After one bite we understood why!
- Fire & Salt Co. - the scent of wood smoke pulled us down the street and into this shop. This is a genius use of "Esthetic Experience." We learned that only wood pellets were on the smoker, but this is a clever way to lure us in. Their cleverness worked. We bought a large selection of vinegars, mustards, and seasonings.
- Corning also has very nice variety of home décor retail, including new and repurposed decor. While shopping in one home décor store, staff directed me to their annual "warehouse sale" in the next block. As I walked around the corner, I felt I was in a scene from an alien movie – people were walking in lines from all directions to the doorway of an unmarked building, similar to earthlings drawn to a mother ship. Car license plates featured counties from near and far. Inside were rooms of shoppers with arms filled with purchases. Another shop is replacing hardware with creative repurposed home décor.

Utilize Corning's existing retail strengths of "Dining and Décor" to generate a larger retail customer base and fill downtown vacancies with additional businesses through targeted themed retail marketing and events. Expand existing dining and home décor marketing by adding special events, such as:

### Dining:

- Block off a street section for smoked meats demonstrations, Dutch oven cooking, BBQ contests
- At the Opera House -- creative cooking talks, a speaker about the MIND diet (to prevent Alzheimer's), a naturalist teaching wild edibles, or creative salads that taste great.
- Turn Corning into a FOOD CITY. Generate and attract new businesses related to food. ISU Extension has a new priority to help Iowans with "Farm to Food" business initiatives. Corning's commercial kitchen at Icarian Village could be a key asset in that business startup process.

### Décor:

- At the Corning Center for the Fine Arts -- "Make & Take" canvas paintings and home décor classes
- At the Opera House -- speakers about home design, repurposed décor, decorating trends, etc.



# Recommendations

## Better Utilize Central Park



- *Central Park is a gem! The shaded seating and gentle fountain provided the perfect spot to enjoy my Backgrounds coffee and Sweet Desires croissant. The columned shelter is also classy. Few small Iowa towns have a downtown park this lovely and with these amenities. Is this space fully utilized? I saw no other people in this park during my entire visit.*
- *Holding "Art in the Park" and special food events here would link this space with downtown shops, and enhance a Corning "Dining and Décor" retail theme.*



# Recommendations

## Utilize the Alley to the Fullest

- Salley's Alley is off to a beautiful start. Utilize the pocket park to the fullest!



*When developing this gathering space, think beyond seating, shade, and lighting. Enhance the alley wall opposite the mural in an artistic and thought-filled way.*



*Corning Chamber's office walls feature Icarian storyboards. Create an alley montage with an abbreviated version of this unique history plus other notable Corning information to educate, enlighten, and entertain both locals and visitors.*

*Incorporate family activities, such as a downtown scavenger hunt of Icarian/French influence in building facades. For historical montage examples see Oskaloosa's alleys. For a family activity QR code example see Jefferson's alley.*

# Recommendations

## Let Your History Work for You



*History happens here! Corning is a Main Street rock star, including historic preservation. Encourage and incentivize all downtown renovation to comply with Main Street's historic preservation standards, including muted color palettes and architectural tricks that deceive the eye.*

*But do not stop there. Re-evaluate Corning's events and their marketing to feature Corning's fascinating history.*

*Let the Historical Society be the organization that makes really fun things happen to attract volunteers of all backgrounds and ages. Could you change the name of the "Lazy Days" festival to "Icarian Days", and add fun Icarian hallmarks into the festival – music, art, and performances. (Even a rhubarb pie eating contest?)*

*Draw people downtown for a scavenger hunt of Icarian/French accents on building facades, and offer prizes. Offer short, lively tours at the village or a special farm-to-table communal dinner to grow this annual festival into a larger draw for visitors, plus educational opportunity for everyone.*

# Recommendations

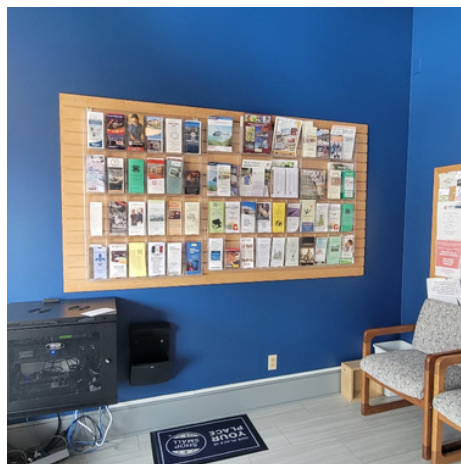
## Help Visitors Find Your Gems and Spend Their Dollars

*Let visitors know what they can do, and when they can do it. I saw event table toppers in many locations, but no events were held during my visit.*

*It was difficult to find business hours and information about local attractions. We had to physically walk up to each location to find out they were closed. Some sites had no posted information at all.*

*I wanted to shop, but locals could not tell me when downtown stores opened. I thought something would be open by 9 AM, but was wrong. So I sat and waited an hour for stores to open.*

*Provide a map of shopping and dining listings with HOURS at businesses, and all visitor locations throughout the community, plus at Lake Icaria and Lake Binder (kiosks/self-serve all-weather brochure holders).*



*A few simple improvements would make the downtown visitor center lobby more welcoming to visitors for quick access to collect brochures and go.*

- Place visitor focused brochures and materials front and center, add signage indicating which section of the rack is VISITOR INFORMATION so can easily identify and collect visitor related brochures and materials.
- Offer shopping bags for visitors to place brochures and items in.
- Add a bell with signage letting visitors know staff is available if they have questions.
- Add exterior weatherproof brochure holders so visitors can pick up information about your local attractions and businesses even when the visitors center is not open.

# Next Steps

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- Identify projects from list of recommendations, picking one or two items that can be accomplished quickly to help build momentum.
- Determine priority projects for the short, mid and long-term.
- Review the full data files and identify additional issues of importance to your community.
- Facilitate discussions with tourism assets visited by assessors and share comments and suggestions with these stakeholders.
- Hold additional discussions among your Community Team, stakeholders and citizens. Discuss strategies to work together.
- Schedule a follow-up discussion with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach if you need assistance or have questions.

**Contact:**

Iowa State University Extension & Outreach  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/firstimpressions](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/firstimpressions)

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