



First Impressions Community & Tourism  
Assessment Program

# MAQUOKETA

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 Maquoketa 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.

## 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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Community and Economic Development



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.

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

# Assessment Team

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## Visitor/Assessment Team Profiles

Seven assessment team members visited Maquoketa and the surrounding area over a five month period from May through September 2024.

- Assessment team members travel independently to the community and conduct onsite visits on different days, months and times.
- Days of the week assessors visited included Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.
- Assessors spent 24 to 58 hours in Maquoketa during their visits.
- Overnight accommodations used included camping and hotels.
- Assessors were selected representing different areas of expertise related to community & economic development, natural resources, planning, marketing, and tourism, along with diverse visitor perspectives and demographics.
- Two assessors were male and five female. One assessor identified as Generation Z, two as Millennials, three as Generation X, and one as a Baby Boomer.
- Four assessors visited Maquoketa with their spouse or partner; one assessor with their family, including children; and two 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 Maquoketa.

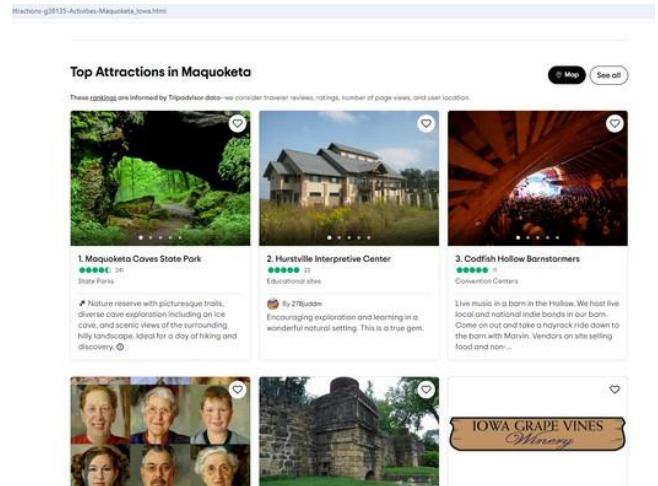
- Two assessors spent 1-2 hours researching and planning their trip.
- Three assessors spent 2-4 hours researching and planning their trip.
- Two assessors spent 4+ hours researching and planning their trip.

# Pre-Visit Research

Assessment team members spent between 1 to 4 plus hours researching the community using their computer or mobile devices to plan their trip. Assessors were asked to identify the website they found most helpful in planning a trip to Maquoketa, and to **explain why**.

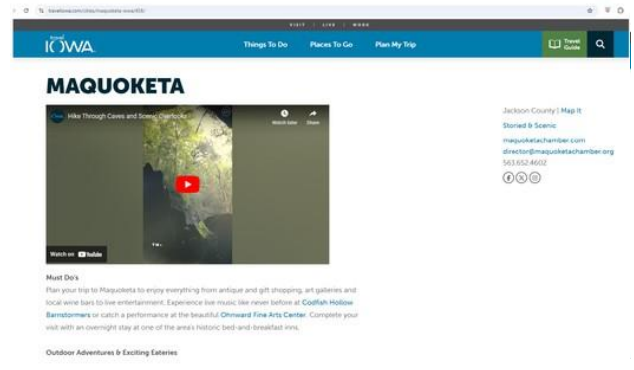
## ✓ Trip Advisor

- Trip advisor had information helpful for trip planning. Things to do section provided list of top attractions, hotels, and restaurants that are helpful to visitors when planning a trip.
- TripAdvisor. Provided things to do, lodging and dining that other sites do not mention. Visitor reviews and comments are helpful.
- Trip Advisor - we needed it in order to book our room at The Decker Hotel, and it had some ideas of places to visit. The Travel Iowa website was also top of the list, as they have events, activities, etc. that were not showing up elsewhere, and was easy to navigate.



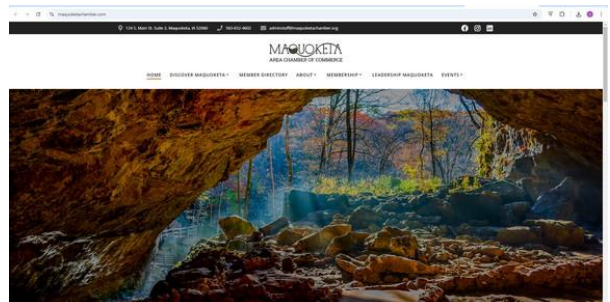
## ✓ Travel Iowa

- I started with the Travel Iowa website as I was curious how that looked for potential visitors. That was a great intro, and I also found the Chamber website good to fill in some blanks (food options, etc.)
- I used Travel Iowa's website to plan my trip. Travel Iowa's page is laid out more cleanly and just straightforwardly presents the relevant information (attraction type, event versus ongoing attraction, etc.)



## ✓ Maquoketa Chamber of Commerce

- maquoketachamber.com - was helpful, but still very limited in information.



# 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**

6 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 0 Disagreed

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

5 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 1 Disagreed

**Web pages were visually appealing**

5 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 0 Disagreed

**More information is needed on this site**

5 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 0 Disagreed

**I noticed typographical errors**

1 Agreed, 0 Neutral, 6 Disagreed

## Assessor Comments - tripadvisor.com

- Adding **more details for listings** that come up under Trip Advisor to provide more comprehensive information for visitors planning or considering a trip to Maquoketa.
- Figuring out how to **book the Decker House was a little challenging**. The owner and I had to go back and forth several times via phone to secure a reservation.

## Assessor Comments - traveliowa.com

- Travelliowa.com had a good description of the city, gave me a flavor of Maquoketa. Listings showed farmer's market and some events. There were lots of listings, but many did not include photos. Very few food options were listed, which is what prompted me to look at the Chamber for planning purposes.
- **Fully utilize all free listing opportunities available through Travel Iowa.**

## Assessor Comments - maquoketachamber.com

- The homepage was lovely and the navigation broke things down for visitors very nicely, but the actual information was lacking since not all locations are listed. **It would be so helpful to have some inspirational or itinerary content - even just a "weekend trip to Maquoketa" blog/story would be awesome.** The site overall felt very focused on residents and local businesses.
- It would be great to **have attraction listings on your actual site** rather than routing to the attraction's external website. Some attractions have lower quality websites that can make it difficult to find information, so it would be easier to have all the necessary information in one place on the Chamber's site rather than have to search through several different webpages.
- **Adding photos of locations/restaurants** (logos don't do much to help a visitor understand the attraction). Linking off to individual attraction's websites makes it difficult to plan and provides inconsistent and sometimes conflicting information, broken links, etc.

# Pre-Visit Research

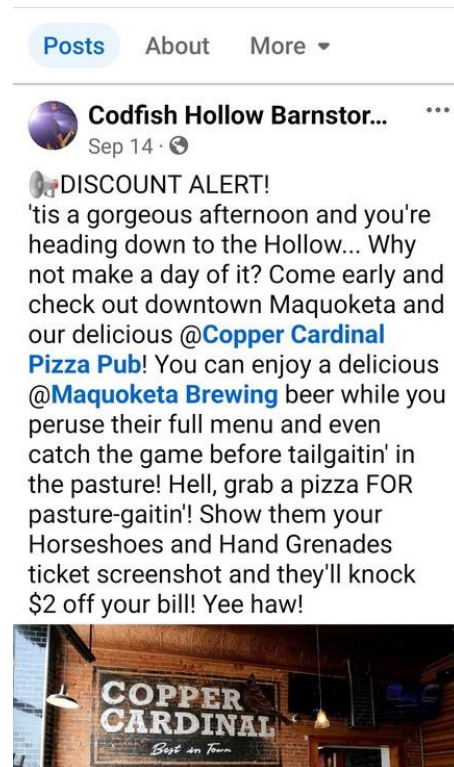
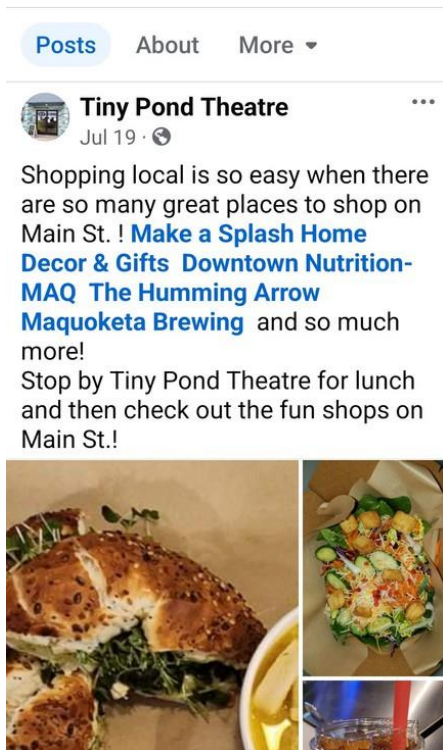
Which forms of social media did you use prior to your visit, if any?

- ✓ Google Maps 6 assessors used
- ✓ Facebook 4 assessors used
- ✓ YouTube 1 assessor used

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

- These were helpful to confirm hours and to navigate to specific locations. We also used to see if there were any special events happening when we would be in town.
- Facebook provided more current hours and photos than other sites.
- I just used Google Maps to plan out the sequencing of my day so that I visited several attractions in the same area on foot before getting back in my car and going to a different area.
- I was looking through posts to try to find live music, and information on any special events in town. I was hoping to attend a concert on the Green, but unfortunately it was the following week.
- Checking hours, menus, looking for potential special events or updates for the time period we were visiting.

## Excellent Cross-Marketing Efforts!



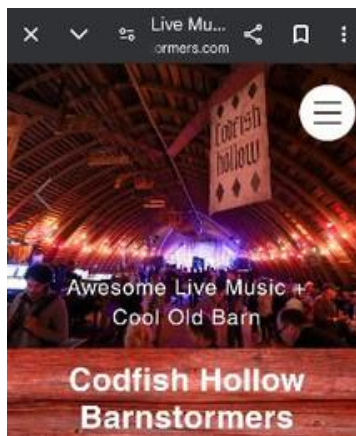
# Pre-Visit Impressions

Assessors were asked to indicate if there are any tourist attractions, assets, and/or special events Maquoketa is known for, and if so, which ones.

- Maquoketa Caves
- Codfish Hollow Barnstormers
- Hurstville Lime Kilns

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 community with beautiful scenery, an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities, interesting historic attractions, and a focus on the arts.
- Passion for natural and outdoor recreation, plus appreciation for the arts and community's history.
- I pictured an artsy community that was proud of the caves, and a community that had a lot of history.
- Pictures online feature the caves prominently, and downtown looked good for brewery and eateries, shopping. Seems like a great little town to visit after doing some outdoor recreation and hanging out at the caves.
- My initial impression was that, while there are several worthwhile attractions, it was much harder to find locally-owned restaurants. So, I went into the trip planning to scout what was available in person rather than finding that information online. Otherwise, the community's overall history and collection of businesses indicate the obvious - that it's a small town. But there did not appear to be a shortage of things to do.
- I visualized the destination as a quiet, peaceful, and "standard" Iowa Driftless town (kind of earthy crunchy). My research of the community gave me the impression that Maquoketa does not have much going on event-wise during the week, but that weekends in the summer are pretty busy.





# Community Gateway

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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.

- There appears to be an effort to create a sense of when you enter the downtown area with signage and the stone pillars. These create a positive impression but adding some additional art could make the area feel more distinctive.
- Yes, nice city sign as approaching the town, plus a stone bench and lighting as entered the downtown is attractive.
- There is a stone Maquoketa sign, but I did not see any other welcoming signage. There is a mural on the Main Street, but it was a standalone piece without any words.
- Yes, there were some pillars on E Platt Street that I didn't notice since I came in from the west.
- Not the way I came into town! I did notice another highway entrance was better - a nice city sign and lovely event center that would have been a better first impressions.
- Not really... there is a large stone sign (at least off of Hwy 64) and it's nice, but nothing drawing you in to the main portion of the town.
- The pillars were really nice indicating we were reaching downtown. With all of the chain restaurants, gas stations, etc. at the entrance, I would imagine a lot of traffic stops here, but does not come all the way into downtown.



# First 5 Minute Impressions

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

- We arrived from Hwy 64 from the west. Cute stone signage on the highway coming in, and some nice looking businesses (Tada Meats stood out as something very attractive). From this end and then going north on Hwy 61 to Hurstville and the caves, the town would seem INCREDIBLY small. No mention of a downtown business district or that there are other things to do.
- Coming from the south (Hwy 61), exit signs list Anamosa, Wyoming, but NOT Maquoketa. Have heard in the past people who visit the caves “didn't even realize there was a town” - that comment makes a lot of sense now. There isn't an obvious “go this way for more” sign.
- Very positive impression as entered from the south, with modern hospital and attractive businesses as entered town. Downtown has beautiful historic architecture.
- The drive into town for me was strange as I did not see any welcome sign, and the few signs I saw were very small (Veterans Park sign was tiny). I passed a park immediately by the river but saw no signs on the road or otherwise to tell me what that was, or what amenities that park had (fishing, picnic, hiking, etc.).
- We liked the entrance leading into town with the stone pillars and nice pedestrian crossing. When we got out of the car, ready to walk down the main drag towards the Chamber - “Hell's Bells” by AC/DC was playing loudly over speakers on the sidewalk. It seemed like an odd music playlist for visitors.
- We arrived on Business 61 from the north. The Hurstville Lime Kilns caught our eye when we exited the 4-lane highway and we decided to come back to visit after checking into our hotel. The observation area by the Hurstville marsh also peaked our interest. This road into town has an industrial feel initially but then you arrive to the downtown with beautiful, historic architecture. The banners and flowers create a welcoming feel.
- My first glance of Maquoketa was into the newer section of town where all the chain businesses are located. It seemed clean and fairly unbusy - both positives for me. Upon entering the Main Street district, I was sad to see more empty storefronts than filled ones. But the stores that are there seemed charming and like places I wanted to visit. The streetscaping is beautiful, there's plenty of stone benches and flower pots to spruce it up. They have one mural that I saw that is beautifully done. You can tell it's a town that is trying to attract more visitors.

# 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.)**

5 Agreed, 1 Neutral, 1 Disagreed

**Information available was useful for visitors**

4 Agreed, 3 Neutral, 0 Disagreed

**Locals were helpful when asked questions**

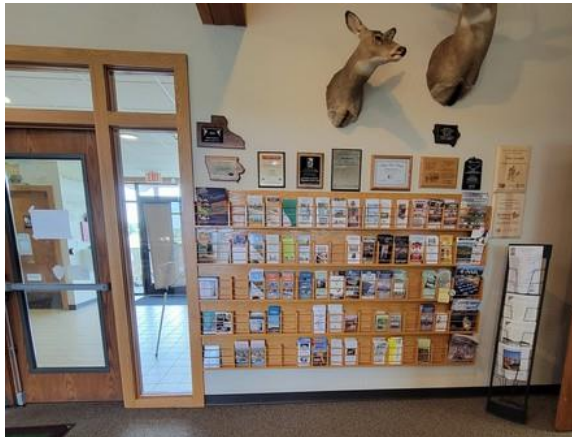
5 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 0 Disagreed

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

3 Agreed, 2 Neutral, 2 Disagreed

**Information booths/kiosks were helpful**

1 Agreed, 3 Neutral, 3 Disagreed



- *We were sent to Hurstville Interpretive Center for information. Signage on the highway letting visitors know information is available here 7 days/week would be helpful since hours are limited at the Chamber and at the Visitors Center at the State Park.*
- *We tried to navigate using the map on the kiosk on the Green, and it was pretty confusing - was that number purple or blue? Why do they use the same numbers and different colors?*
- *Adding weather-proof brochure holder(s) for visitors to access information 24/7 is needed.*

***We could not find community information for Maquoketa at the state park that can be accessed by visitors 24/7 - this is a missed opportunity!***

# 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?**

- We picked up brochures at the Brewery, Jackson County Historical Museum and Hurstville Interpretive Center. Used phone to review and confirm business hours and to navigate to some locations that we planned to visit.
- My phone: TripAdvisor and Google Business provided the most helpful information about things to do, candid reviews, locations, and hours. Google Maps showed me how to find them.
- My time spent before going out there on the Travellowa site and my talks with locals about where to see art, where to eat, and where to go hiking.
- Jackson County Staff at the Hurstville Interpretive Center, and their brochure rack. Google Maps.
- Websites. We did pick up several brochures from Hurstville Interpretive Center as well. Conversations with locals.
- The Chamber was helpful, and most places had visitor information. We used Google Maps, mostly, to get around and find restaurants.



*Cross-promotion at Maquoketa Brewery!*

# 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

- Maquoketa Caves State Park
- Maquoketa State Park Visitors Center
- Prairie Creek Recreation Area
- Lake Hurst Dam
- Maquoketa River
- Bike & Hiking Trails
- Grant Wood Scenic Byway
- Hurstville Interpretive Center
- Hurstville Lime Kilns
- Jackson County Historical Museum
- Clinton Engines Museum
- Maquoketa Art Experience
- Chamber Office/Art Experience
- Old City Hall Gallery
- Main Street, Downtown
- Jackson County Fair
- Codfish Hollow Barnstormers

## Lodging

- AmericInn
- Decker Hotel
- Maquoketa Caves State Park Campground
- 6 B's Campground

## Eating & Drinking

- Bluff Lake Catfish Farm
- China Cafe
- City Limits Family Restaurant
- Copper Cardinal Pizza Pub
- Iowa Grape Vines Winery
- LaCasa De Pancho
- Maquoketa Brewing
- Mega's Grill & Eatery
- Moore Local
- Tada Meats
- Timber Lanes
- Tiny Pond Theatre

## Shopping/Retail

- Gifts on Main
- Humming Arrow Boutique
- Kwik Star
- Make a Splash Home Decor & Gifts
- Max Ray Jeweler
- Moore Local
- Wal-Mart

# Visitor Motives

Assessors were asked to select the top 3 reasons they think visitors come to Maquoketa from a list of 17 reasons, plus other.

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

Outdoor recreation (biking, hiking, hunting, fishing, etc)	7
Wineries, breweries, distilleries, etc.	4
Visit historical sites	3
In transit to somewhere else	2
Get entertained/ for entertainment	2
Special events and festivals	2
Relax	1
Get away from people	0
Visit friends and family	0
Agritourism	0
Dining	0
Racing	0
Sports Activities	0
Experience a unique culture	0
Engage in business activities	0
Engage in religious activities	0
Other (specify)	0

## Attractions or special events Maquoketa is known for

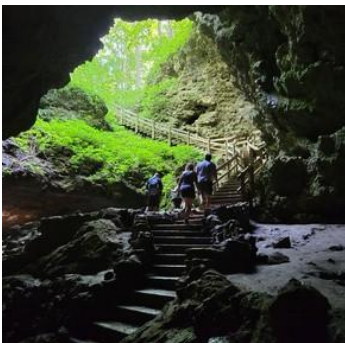
- ✓ Maquoketa Caves
- ✓ Codfish Hollow Barnstormers
- ✓ Hurstville Lime Kilns



# 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:

- **Moore Local** is a delight! Also **Tada Meats**. Both provided delicious experiences and went out of their way to be welcoming and helpful. Both offer unique experiences that will bring us back!
- Performance at **Codfish Hollow Barnstormers**. Multiple people told me that I should come back for a show and after seeing the line-ups, I agree!
- **Maquoketa Caves State Park**, and I'd definitely stop at **Moore Local** if I was in the area.
- The **Decker Hotel** is a gem!
- **Codfish Hollow** and would return to **Bluff Lake Catfish Farm** as well.
- Would like to check out **Music on the Green** and the **adventure race**. **Maquoketa Brewing** was great as well, I would swing in there for a beer after visiting the caves.
- Show at **Codfish Hollow Barnstormers**. Would stop at **Moore Local**, **Maquoketa Brewing**, **Iowa Grape Vines** and explore the caves again.



# Destination Attributes

**Assessors were asked to rate the destination's attributes.**

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

Attribute	Average Rating
Nature-based activities	4.00
Road conditions	3.57
Authenticity of attractions	3.57
Hospitality and friendliness of residents	3.43
Customer service	3.43
Adventure-based activities	3.29
Well known landmarks	3.29
Safety and security	3.29
Cleanliness	3.29
Dedicated tourism attractions	3.00
Conveniently located	3.00
Value for money in tourism experiences	2.86
Historic/heritage attractions	2.71
Pedestrian travel infrastructure	2.71
Community involvement	2.71
Interesting architecture	2.57
Communication infrastructure (phone, internet)	2.57
Activities for children	2.43
Shopping facilities	2.43
Special events	2.43
Variety and quality of restaurants	2.29
Cultural attractions	2.29
Variety of activities to do	2.29
Well marked roads/attractions	2.00
Variety and quality of shopping options	1.86
Directional signage	1.57
Variety and quality of accommodations	1.57



# Destination Attributes

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## Assessor comments:

- Staff and volunteers at the places we visited were helpful and welcoming.
- Retailers, restaurants, and hoteliers were very friendly and welcoming.
- The Decker House Hotel is a gem!
- Iowa Grape Vines Winery and City Limits stood out for their customer service/friendliness.
- Enhance interpretation and storytelling.
- Wayfinding on trails is challenging.
- Inconsistent and inaccurate business hours made it difficult to shop, or find restaurants open.
- Having a variety of lodging options is first and foremost, otherwise I think people are more likely to just do a day trip here.

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

- Quiet, natural resources, recreation, clean, untapped potential, historic
- Downtown has beautiful bone structure with sagging skin.
- Charming, quiet, peaceful, clean, friendly, historic, outdoorsy, nature
- Humble, generic, car-centric, beautiful, small, isolated, lush, quiet
- Great outdoor recreation hub, fading downtown, friendly people.
- Outdoors, hiking, caves, camping, diamond in the rough
- Charming, gardens, friendly, potential, community, quiet, historic, too-humble.

# 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	4.00
Parking is secure	4.00
Parking charges are reasonable	4.00
There are areas of green space	3.57
The downtown business area is handicapped accessible	3.43
The Downtown area is attractively landscaped with flowers, trees, etc.	3.29
Vehicle traffic is managed to encourage pedestrian movement, via foot or	3.14
Inviting signs are displayed on the exterior of businesses	3.00
There is a mix of ages	3.00
There is pedestrian traffic (foot and bike)	2.86
This is a welcoming downtown	2.86
Business information is appropriately displayed on exterior of businesses	2.71
There is a mix of ethnic groups	2.43
There are walker/biker friendly signs	2.29
The main downtown business area feels distinct or special	2.14
The main downtown business area is a major tourists draw for the area	1.86
Bike lanes exist on roadways	1.43

**Assessor comments:**

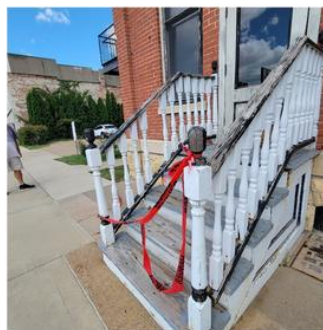
- First impressions when entering the downtown is very impressive, with beautiful historic architecture. However, closer looks while driving and walking the sidewalks creates a different story of many vacant buildings and buildings in poor repair.
- We learned some buildings that appear empty are not. Adding signage with a business name would make the downtown appear more "alive", rather than "everything is empty".
- My greatest challenge was my goal to visit five retail shops, but the lack of very limited and inconsistent business hours made that impossible, even with return visits to the downtown.
- Inconsistent and limited hours. Several businesses closed at 3:00 or 4:00, makes difficult to shop before or after dinner.
- Very cute downtown as you are driving into it with the flags and flowers. Parking is easy to manage and plentiful.
- We loved being able to walk from our downtown hotel location to shops and brewery.
- Music playing in the downtown helps make the area feel vibrant and less empty. One assessor noted specific music selection could be off-putting for some.
- It seems like there is a disconnect between the main attraction of the area - the caves and natural resources - and the downtown. We ran into other visitors and chatted with them, who also struggled to find things to do or places to eat. One family we met at the caves came down from MN for three nights to explore the caves, but were staying in Bellevue.

# Downtown Business Area



- We loved being able to walk from our downtown hotel location to shops and brewery.
- Very cute downtown as you are driving into it with the flags and flowers.
- Excited to see what the greenspace will become!

- First impressions when entering the downtown is very impressive, with beautiful historic architecture. However, closer looks while driving and walking the sidewalks reveals many vacant buildings and buildings in poor repair.
- Some buildings that appear empty are not. Adding signage with a business name would make the downtown appear more "alive." Music playing in the downtown helps make the area feel vibrant and less empty.



# Outdoor Recreation

**Assessors were asked to rate Maquoketa's Outdoor Recreation Attributes.**

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

Attribute	Average Rating
Outdoor Area Cleanliness	4.00
Walking and/or Hiking Trails	3.71
Playgrounds	3.71
Water-based Retail/Rental	3.43
Canoe/ Kayak Friendliness	3.14
Fishing Areas	3.00
Wayfinding Signage	2.43
Athletic Fields (baseball, soccer, etc)	2.29
Boat Launch	1.86
Marina - did not find	n/a
Swimming Beach - did not find	n/a

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

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

## Strengths

- Maquoketa Caves State Park
- Walking & Hiking Trails
- Prairie Creek Recreation Area
- Hurstville Interpretive Center
- Water Trails
- Kayak and other rentals available
- Rock climbing areas nearby
- Active Friends of Maquoketa Caves State Group

## Challenges

- Additional wayfinding signage needed at caves and trails
- Improve maps for hiking trails
- Improve bike infrastructure and trails

# Outdoor Recreation

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

- The caves are a definite hook/draw to the community but once you get here, there is a variety of trails for outdoor enthusiasts for walking, hiking and water trails.
- Maquoketa Caves and Hurstville Interpretive Center are strong attractions.
- I think the caves are an excellent draw to the community, as are the water trail and kayak rentals available.
- Maquoketa Caves State Park is clearly the crown jewel of the area. I was fortunate enough to get the caves to myself since I stayed overnight in the campground and explored the caves first thing in the morning. I can imagine on the weekends and during the middle of the day it gets pretty crazy, but that wasn't my experience.
- Hiking trails! The mowed trails are extensive at the Prairie Creek Rec Area, and at the Hurstville Interpretive Center. I really loved exploring both, and then adding on the caves nearby...there are just a wonderful variety of trails to explore.
- Caves and hiking at the state park. Lots of camping opportunities and the landscapes are beautiful.
- The caves are a major draw, and for good reason.

## What is one area of outdoor recreation you think could be improved?

- Improved wayfinding signage along hiking trails at Maquoketa Caves and Prairie Creek Recreation Area.
- Maquoketa Caves and Hurstville Interpretive Center are strong attractions. However, they both need better maps for visitors to fully enjoy these gems. Offer these onsite and in businesses as a strong incentive for visitors to come to Maquoketa.
- Information to better prepare visitor for exploring caves - define level of difficulty and what this means for visitors who have less outdoor experience.
- Signage for bike trails and overall bike infrastructure would be a worthwhile improvement. Simply providing signage to trails and adding bike racks to the downtown could make a big impact.
- If there is any way to mimic Decorah's loop trail, Maquoketa should try to build out its bike network a little bit. Moving around in anything other than a car is very difficult.
- Signs. If there's not good phone network, and without physical maps it can be daunting to just start wandering down an unfamiliar trail. I realize the DNR manages the caves but it's unfortunate the trails are not better marked. It only takes one wrong decision to get lost and feel unsafe.
- Bike trail. We did see one, but it wasn't signed or marketed to us as visitors.
- Place some focus on the river! Develop resources for folks who bike, paddle, and run - we are always looking for new places to explore.
- Better promote rock climbing opportunities near Maquoketa. More information about these at <https://www.mountainproject.com/area/110548916/joinerville-bouldering>

# Maquoketa State Park



Good signage and well-maintained wooden boardwalks in Maquoketa Caves State Park. Signs to caves is more extensive.



Nice interpretive signage at caves



Caves are impressive! Draws diverse range of visitors including families, couples, teenagers, mixed generations, college and young adults.



Maps in park are confusing.



Easy to get lost on hiking trails - there is so little signage once you get on the trails. More signage is needed! We encountered MANY visitors who were lost and not sure how to get back to their vehicles.



- Connect Maquoketa to the caves. We enjoy exploring caves, but the map in this state park is confusing. We heard there was a way to walk underground from one cave to another, but we could not find it, and there was no trail signage for that. Other visitors were equally confused and frustrated.
- We were invited to join a school group caves tour led by a naturalist from Hurstville Interpretive Center, and that was wonderful! She led us on an adventure of fun-filled learning. I realize this is a state park and signage is out of local hands, but visitors need help to enjoy this place - and Maquoketa businesses can provide that!
- A simple map showing a basic cave walk with stops would be very helpful. "Free Maquoketa Caves Map" would provide a huge incentive for visitors to stop in Maquoketa businesses to pick up a map.

# Maquoketa State Park



Campground and cave visitor parking was full on a Thursday (above and below pics), with no information on events, activities, restaurants, or other places to visit other than a full Travel Iowa brochure (not Maquoketa specific)



The campground facility was lovely, packed with happy families and grandparents. The tent sites were very private – as a camping family, these are excellent facilities and make for a great place to stay.



My campsite at the state park. Clean, simple, and decently far away from the neighbors!

# Prairie Creek Rec Area



Beautiful trails & peaceful area. Better wayfinding needed though.



I thought Prairie Creek Recreation Area was a beautiful place! I thought this informational kiosk was wonderful - there are so many trails there and this kiosk is very well done.



Signage at Prairie Creek Recreational Area discussing the importance of riparian areas. Good piece of potamology and limnology.

As previously mentioned, I got good and lost here for some time. I'm fine with that, as I am used to longer hikes/walks, but I ended up walking close to 8 miles in the park before making my way out. I could see that being less okay if the weather wasn't so perfect that day or if I was older/had a disability. I think some signage indicating mileage of various trail segments and/or distance to parking areas is needed here.



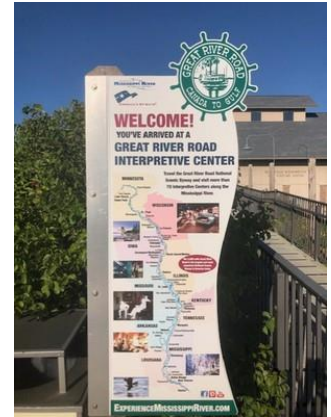
# Hurstville Interpretive Center



The Hurstville Interpretive Center is a wonderful place, and I loved this beautiful photo. This location had the BEST signage in the town. Informative, well done, descriptive. All outdoor rec amenities need this level of signage.



Kiosk is well done with more information about this attraction.



Good signage linking Maquoketa to the Great River Road network. Interesting historically and a good reminder of the region's place in history, to go along with the lime kilns.



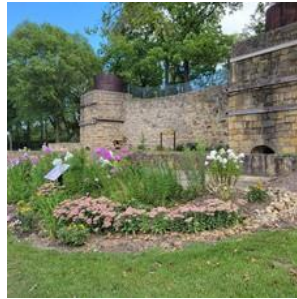
The Hurstville Interpretive Center was gorgeous, full of interesting information and captivating exhibits. They are currently working on a walk-through cave exhibit which will connect the popular local landmark to the community. We felt like more of this type of connection, in town, would be helpful.



This was the best place to learn the history of the lime kilns. More interpretive panels at the historic site would be helpful.



# Hurstville Lime Kilns



Sign contextualizing the historic lime kilns. A little bit faded by sun, as will happen with outdoor signage. Pretty plantings around this area, seem to be maintained by a group of committed volunteers? If so, make sure there are volunteer appreciation events held in their honor! If it's paid staff, kudos to them for doing a great job too!



Lovely path leads you to explore this area. Additional signage would help provide more interpretation about the kilns and what visitors are seeing up here.



- The friendly woman tending to the garden at the lime kilns was very welcoming and the man working on the fence had no problem taking a moment to share some history with us.
- Nancy's welcoming and warm hospitality at Hurstville Kilns made for an excellent experience

# Agritourism

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

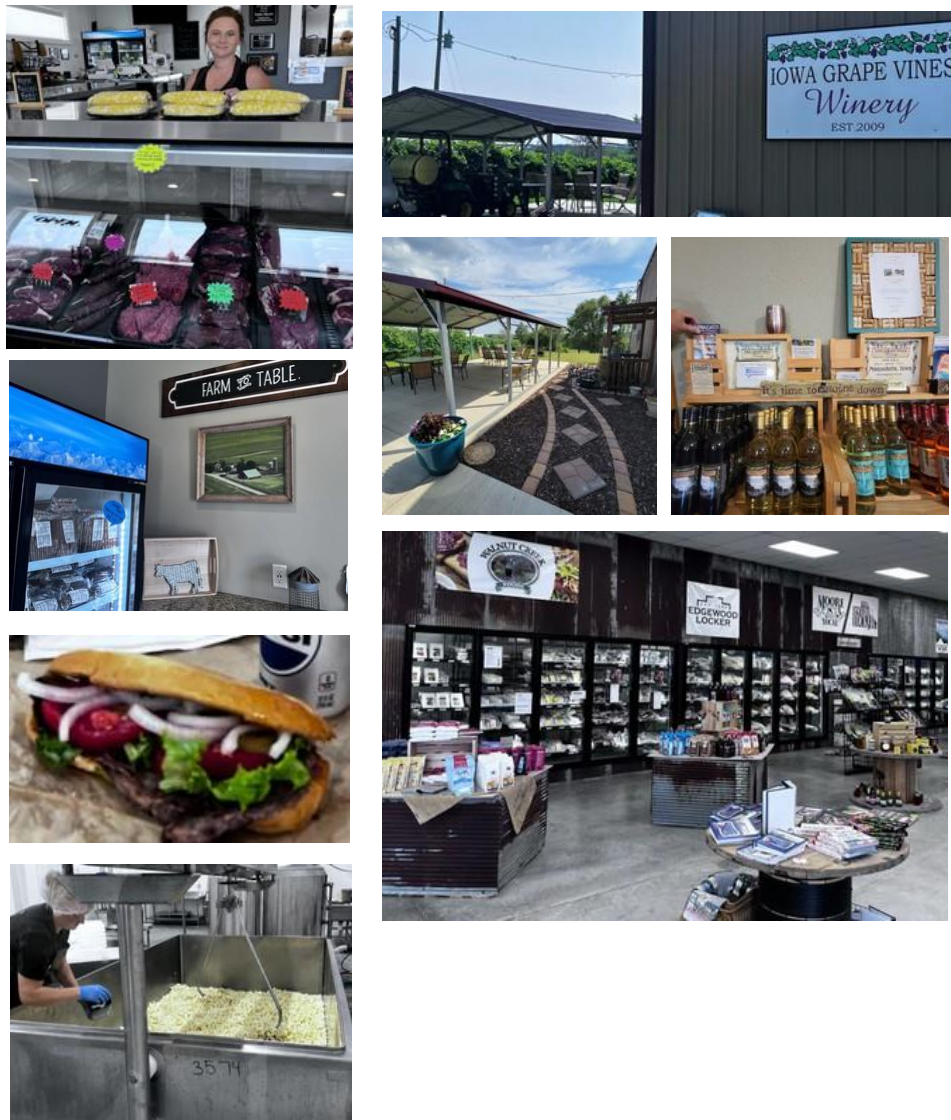
- Awesome experiences at Moore Local and Iowa Vines Winery. The people and customer service stood out at both places. We enjoyed the tasting experience at the winery and hearing more about their wines and other offerings including their jellies, wine shakes and cones. We were impressed to see the variety of local products and items at Moore Local.
- I found only three agritourism businesses, but they were all excellent - Moore Local, Tada Meats, Iowa Grape Vines Winery. They all provide what visitors are seeking - unique experiences with outstanding customer service and quality products. The fact that they are local foods raises the bar even higher.
- Iowa Grape Vines Winery - it was excellent! The wine is good and the root beer (also made by them) is excellent. Very friendly. No opportunities to see vineyards or anything though.
- Catfish Farm - SO beautiful and cool, but I guess I'm just assuming the lakes around it were farming the catfish? You can feed the fish, but otherwise, there was no info about the location's history or how it works.
- We visited Moore Local, and really appreciated their selection of specialty foods and freshly processed meat and dairy. They had a fun shop and a wide selection of items.

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

- These businesses do cross-promote other local food businesses, but can step up even more. Two of these businesses are located near each other, and need to especially promote each other to customers. A bookmark-size coupon at the cash register for the other businesses brings more customers to all of their doors. The wines are sold in Tada, but the winery needs to share information about Tada Meats and Moore Local to its visitors, and perhaps offer their products to pair with the wines. And the business cross-promotion must not stop there! ALL Maquoketa retailers need to greatly step up their promotion of other retailers. This was an obvious gap during our visits.
- Continue to cross market and promote each other. Has a farm-to-table type of community event been held featuring local meats, wines, and other products?
- A good start might be moving the farmers' market to later in the week or the weekend so that visitors can also enjoy the area's growers. Otherwise, having the downtown businesses connect with local farms to source their produce or flowers can also play a vital role in improving locals and visitors connections with the agriculture world.
- One thing we noticed - there were not many places to eat that had more healthy or locally-sourced foods available - which are of importance to folks who are interested in outdoor recreation. Bringing in an establishment, or working with an existing restaurant to source local produce and meats would be great. We also asked a waitress if there was a Farmer's Market, the response was "yes, but it's really really small, like really small." Again - it just kind of felt like while folks were super friendly and kind, they weren't very enthusiastic about what to do in town - or as another person put it, "I guess when you live here your whole life, you kind of take it for granted."

# Agritourism

- Maquoketa’s Agritourism Businesses are Excellent – Capitalize on them! Visitors especially like the unique experiences that agritourism businesses provide, especially when combined with great customer service, quality products, and locally grown foods.
- These and ALL Maquoketa businesses need to cross-promote each other to generate larger customer bases for each. Help shoppers spend more dollars in the community and help businesses cross-promote by creating a Business Bookmark with business listings & place by the cash register of every retail shop.
- Also create a single-page printable MAP of “Things to Do” & place near the cash register of all businesses. Include a photo, brief description, location, and hours of each, so visitors will keep & use as a reference. Make it simple and easy to update.



# Arts and Culture

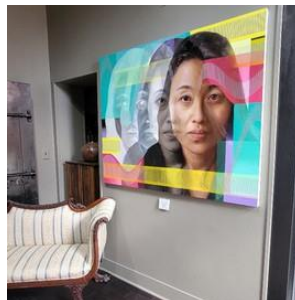
*Maquoketa was recently selected for Iowa Arts Council's new Creative Places Accelerator Program. We suggest sharing the following comments with those leading this effort.*

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

- Learning more about Rose Frantzen's artwork and the inspiration behind her work was a highlight.
- I did peek into the Maquoketa Art Experience's building (it was not open at the time), but the collection appeared to be stunning, and I would have loved to get a closer look.
- Getting a personal studio tour from one of the artists at the Old City Hall Gallery was a highlight for me. All I had to do was ask some questions and he was more than happy to chat with me about history, creative process, etc.
- The Chamber/Art Experience facility was gorgeous, inviting, and interesting. It made us excited to start exploring the community.

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

- The murals in the downtown help tell the story of the community. More public art would reinforce image Maquoketa has a vibrant arts community. Sac City, Jefferson, Webster City, and Perry have created public art with sculptures in their parks, along trails, downtown business area, and gateway points into their community.
- I was blown away by the art of Rose Frantzen. Amazing talent and also a fascinating story of the local portraits. Locals know this story but visitors do not. How can it be shared more extensively?
- Adding more murals is always a right step in the direction, along with street art like sculptures and art alleys.
- If it isn't happening already, there should be some sponsored/structured events to get plein air painting groups/sessions going in the state park area.
- It would be great to see some public art. There are great trails - what about adding some pieces alongside those? I believe there are some art events held but the way things were displayed at the Chamber/Maquoketa Art Experience didn't lead me to read every flyer put on the counter so maybe there are events I wasn't aware of.
- More regular hours (especially in evening and weekends), more consistent schedule.
- Bring the rich history of the community into the downtown pedestrian area. It seemed like art is an important component to the culture, and we really appreciated the Art Experience.



# Residential Areas

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

- 100% of the Assessors rated the overall appearance of the destination's residential areas Good.

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

- Community felt well-kept and safe. Most homes were nicely maintained. We noticed the historic district signs and explored this area of stately, historic homes. It made us wonder about the "stories" of the people who built and lived in these homes.
- Maquoketa has a nicer mix of housing in comparison with many Iowa towns of its size. Especially notable are the outstanding examples of historic homes. Also impressive are the well-kept yards and maintenance of residences. I always ask myself when visiting a town if I would be willing to live in a neighborhood here. In Maquoketa - Yes!
- Overall, it seemed like the residential areas were well maintained and a calm place to call home.

# Lasting Impressions

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

- The wonderful outdoor experiences provided by the **naturalists at Hurstville Interpretive Center**. Other visitors told me they follow this center's Facebook page to learn about new things to drive to this Interpretive Center to do. Also, the **three agritourism businesses**, because they provided unique and tasty experiences. I would turn off the highway just for that rhubarb crisp ice cream.
- **Chatting with some of the locals** was great, and that's coming from someone who is an introvert by nature. The **friendly woman tending to the garden at the lime kilns** was very welcoming and the man working on the fence there had no problem taking a moment to share some history with us.
- **Exploring the caves by myself in the early morning as mist filled the valley**. Stopping and just listening to the water dripping down and echoing throughout the cave network.
- **Hurstville Interpretive Center**. I was awed by the beautiful building and loved the trails outside with all the lovely flowers and birds. The visitor center had a lot of great brochures and info, and the staff person was so friendly. We had a great conversation, and she recommended a lot of other places for me.
- **Grape Vines Winery**. They just were so friendly.
- **Hurstville Interpretive Center** is a true gem! Exhibits are well done and interpret the story of the area's natural and historic resources. The trails through the prairie and wetlands are easy to navigate and made for a relaxing stroll. It is a beautiful facility and also provides important visitor services with public restrooms and brochures and is open 7 days a week.
- **Dinner at Maquoketa Brewing**, with a large group of locals and visitors. It had a great ambiance and vibe; we loved it there.



# Lasting Impressions

## **Assessors were asked to share their most negative experience.**

- We planned to eat at a couple of restaurants, but they were not open when we visited. They did not have accurate hours or information posted online so we were disappointed we were not able to check those out.
- I was disappointed to discover that after 5 p.m., there is very little to do in Maquoketa. All the attractions are closed, the shops had closed a couple hours ago, the local movie theater was closed.
- Trying to find a place to eat dinner and several places being closed for the entire week/several weeks in early August.
- Road to the hotel is full of semitrucks lining both sides of the street so it makes a dangerous situation coming and going.
- I think struggling to find places that were open, feeling like it was a scavenger hunt to find something to do and each time we arrived it was closed.

## **Senses & Safety**

Assessors were asked if they experienced any pleasant or unpleasant smells in the community and to elaborate - *2 assessors said yes and 5 said no*

Assessors were asked if they experienced any pleasant or unpleasant sounds in the community and to elaborate, if yes. - *3 assessors said yes and 4 said no*

- Music playing in the downtown area is a nice touch and helps make the area feel more vibrant.
- The music from downtown speakers made the streets feel not quite as empty.

Assessors were asked if they felt welcomed in the community at all times. - *6 assessors said yes and 1 said no*

- Staff and volunteers at the places we visited were helpful and welcoming.
- All retailers, restaurants, and hoteliers were very friendly and welcoming.
- People smiled at me on the street when I smiled at them, servers/business proprietors answered my questions and gave me information and directions.
- Someone literally stopped their car in the middle of the street so we could cross. Everyone was extremely friendly; in every interaction and conversation we had.



# Lasting Impressions

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

- The beautiful scenery, trails and exploring the caves. Nancy's welcoming and warm hospitality when we stopped at the Hurstville Kilns.
- Hope! I watched a local resident reading the sign posted at Greenspace, and I asked if he knew what was happening. He enthusiastically told me the plan is to build a stage, plus "very nice restrooms", and a play area for families. He said the space will become an attractive spot with trees and plants. I was encouraged by his tone of excitement, and his understanding this would happen next year. I want to return to Maquoketa and see this investment that Maquoketa is making to enhance its residents' quality of life and attract more visitors.
- Six months from now, I'll definitely remember how beautiful the caves were and Maquoketa's intriguing history in the limestone industry. I'll also remember both restaurants we ate at - the food was great and the staff was friendly.
- The cave system.
- The delicious meal I had at La Casa de Pacho. The caves exploration. Quiet morning with the birds at the Prairie Creek Rec Area.
- Caves & Catfish Farm.
- The Decker House! Seriously, every corner of that place was like a little step-back in time. Please, somebody document and help them share the rich history of the hotel, there have to be so many stories and interesting history!

# Lasting Impressions

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

- The Chamber website was helpful for some of our initial planning, but soon realized some categories had limited listings, possibly due to membership. This required searching other sites for amenities such as lodging. Visited the DNR site to research the caves and used MyCountyParks.com to plan some of our other outdoor activities.
- The Community Guide is a beautiful piece and available online and in print but has more of a resident focus. When we were in Maquoketa we found a large tear off style map in one of the brochure racks. This featured a list of “things to do and see in and around Maquoketa” that was visitor focused with more comprehensive listings geared toward visitors. We also found a fold-out brochure with similar information - dining, Points of Interest, Lodging/Camping, specialty shopping, coffee shops, breweries, wineries, and annual events. Unfortunately some sections of the fold-out brochure are in small font which made some information difficult to read.
- The Chamber's guide is very well done, and is a wonderful resource for persons interested in moving to the area. However, it wasn't very helpful in finding information about attractions while visiting. All community information is combined, requiring too much time to distill visitor information out of the mix. A website with photos, hours and brief descriptions, plus weblinks would be greatly appreciated. I also wished for a one-page printable map listing only Things to Do, with photos, addresses, hours and websites that I could easily carry and reference.
- I would say my research was somewhat helpful, but I didn't have a lot of time to research heavily. Therefore, I think signage to other attractions (like the bowling alley) would be extremely helpful to visitors.
- My internet search gave me an idea of how many things I could do in a given afternoon/morning on a weekday. Looking at distances and clusters of activities helped me get oriented before getting into town.
- It helped a lot. I had no knowledge of what was in Maquoketa outside the caves (which I knew weren't in town). I think they can definitely improve their digital presence especially for visitors.
- Hindered. There wasn't enough inspiration. Seemed like visitors/tourists are an afterthought.
- We were excited to visit so many businesses and restaurants, all showing "open" on Google Maps...but then stop after stop...closed. It was fairly challenging to secure a room at the Decker House, not much available online to help.

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

### ***3 assessors said yes and 4 said no***

- Some information and hours were inaccurate.
- Some business Facebook and Google Business pages had wrong hours and info. Updates are needed. Google Maps is outdated and photos show a more vibrant downtown, with more businesses open than I found.
- Several of the restaurants that were closed for longer periods of time showed up as "Open Now" on Google Maps.
- Hours of many places were too limited, places were unexpectedly closed. Nothing on the main websites had info about the county fair, which would have been good to know.

# Lasting Impressions

## **What could Maquoketa do differently to market themselves and/or assets better to attract visitors?**

- Connect with visitors to the state park.
- Help businesses cross-promote. This is greatly needed! Create a downloadable/printable "Things to Do" map with photos, addresses, hours and websites. Have these by the cash register of EVERY business, including retail, restaurants, hotels.
- Signage to other attractions and promoting other attractions through the downtown businesses would be a great and fairly simple improvement.
- More connectivity between amenities. Everything feels separate.
- Signage and website presence is number one. Develop itineraries. Take more/better photos. Connect to the huge amount of visitors that the Caves get and pull people in - tell the community's story. There was also a website listed on banners downtown - it redirects to the Chamber site, but there's HUGE opportunity here.
- Make an effort to connect the caves to the community. Develop resources for folks interested in outdoor recreation so that they can explore and stay in town. If you have people driving in from out of state (we met multiple) - they might be interested in exploring the town, eating out, or staying in town. But as is, the visitor really has to put in a lot of effort to find things to do and places to go.

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

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

# Maquoketa's Community Team

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.

- Erin McCaulley, Maquoketa Area Chamber of Commerce
- Josh Boldt, City of Maquoketa
- Ben Davison, Maquoketa Betterment Corporation
- Kelley Brown, Jackson County Economic Alliance
- Chuck Current, Community Volunteer
- Tom Devine, Jackson County Tourism
- Mark Lyon, Maquoketa Brewing
- Stephanie Sagers, Maquoketa Art Experience

# Maquoketa's Strengths, Challenges & Opportunities

## Assessor Identified Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities

### Strengths

- Outdoor recreation
- Hiking trails
- River trails
- Fishing areas
- Proximity to caves & state park
- Professional interpreters that enhance outdoor experiences
- River rentals are a great asset as well
- Waterways for boating
- Natural resources
- Proximity to other Driftless area attractions
- Farm to table stores - local meats, etc.
- Brewery & Wineries
- Camping
- Small town charm
- Arts amenities
- Rich history
- Cute and quaint downtown

### Challenges

- Connecting visitors to caves with things to do, see and experience in Maquoketa
- Limited hours at State Park Visitor Center
- A lack of a cohesive marketing/ advertising strategy that emphasizes the caves.
- Better wayfinding signage needed
- Additional billboards or signs to direct people to town
- Limited lodging options
- Retail is spread out, rather than being in concentrated area
- Business cross-promotion needed
- Businesses need to help each other survive before a retail district can grow
- More "farm to table" or "health food" vibe restaurants.
- Limited and inconsistent hours.

### Opportunities/Recommendations

- Connecting with Visitors to Maquoketa State Park
- Promotion & Cross Marketing
- Downtown & Retail
- Lodging
- Attractions
- Trails - Wayfinding
- Outdoor Recreation
- Biking
- Arts & Culture

# Recommendations

## Ideas to Connect with Visitors to Maquoketa State Park

- Add kiosks with visitor focused information and self-serve, weatherproof brochure holders so information is available when the Visitor Center is not open.
  - Locate near parking area by the caves and outside state park visitors center for 24/7 access.
  - Decorah example - has outdoor space with community information, trail maps, campgrounds, fishing maps, etc. so passers-by can pick up the guides even after-hours.
- Connect with campers - develop relationship with the campground hosts.
  - Welcome bags for campers with materials about what to see & do in Maquoketa and special offers to help entice to the community. Share events, shopping, dining, and attraction info.
  - Add kiosk and self-serve, weatherproof brochure holders so campers can pick up information.
- Expand days the state park visitors center is open if possible.
- Add more community information to DNR's webpage for Maquoketa State Park highlighting your opportunities.
- Highlight events and activities, if people are setting up their RV's for multiple nights, chances are they would come in town for a meal or to do some shopping.
- Create a simple, updated map showing a basic cave walk with stops would be very helpful. "Free Maquoketa Caves Map" would provide an incentive for visitors to stop in Maquoketa businesses to pick up a map.
- Provide opportunities for those who work or volunteer at the state park to experience the community if they are not familiar with the restaurants, attractions, shopping, and things to do.
  - Could offer as a familiarization (FAM) tour for park volunteers, staff, and even expand to other front-line employees and volunteers at local businesses and attractions.
- Is visitor info available from DNR - identify where current visitors coming from.
  - Zip codes of where campers are from.
  - Observe license plates at Visitors Center and parking areas near caves.
- Partner with outdoor travel writers and influencers to help package caves with other things to do in Maquoketa for full weekend (or longer).
- Embrace being home to some of the largest/coolest cave systems in the United States.
  - Could the brewery have a beer named after the caves?
  - Can local retail shops add product lines or stock items that compliment hiking and outdoor recreation activities?
  - Could you offer guided cave hikes with recommendations for where to stay, dine, visit?
  - Can there be a cave-themed park installation in town, a climbing wall, large rocks...some sort of connection to the natural resources?
  - Could there be large rocks or cave formation added to the Green Space downtown? Winterset added miniature Clark Tower and covered bridge at new playground.

# Recommendations

## Promotion & Cross Marketing

- Create/update downloadable/printable "Things to Do" map with photos, addresses, hours and websites.
  - Have these by the cash register of EVERY business, including retail, restaurants, hotels. Place everywhere to cross-market each other.
- Make it easy to find visitor information on your websites - accurate hours, more photos, add videos, and sample itineraries.
  - There was also a website listed on banners downtown - it redirects to the Chamber site, but there's HUGE opportunity here.
- Utilize free services from Travel Iowa - <https://industrypartners.traveliowa.com/>
- Provide kiosks with tourism information and self-serve, weatherproof brochure holders so visitors can pick up information 24/7.
- Promote local food products, farm to table offerings and healthier options which are likely to appeal to outdoor recreation enthusiasts.
- More connectivity between amenities. Everything feels separate. Encourage businesses to cross-promote.
- Develop resources for folks interested in outdoor recreation so they can explore and stay in town. If you have people driving in from out of state (we met multiple) - they might be interested in exploring the town, eating out, or staying in town. But as is, the visitor really has to put in a lot of effort to find things to do and places to go.
- Community branding would be a great thing to do. Make sure there's consistency, appealing signage that's readable (often signs were too small). Speaking with other smaller towns who have gone through branding practices can help (Emmetsburg comes to mind).
- I didn't see much in the way of photos/videos showing off the great things to see/do here. I also didn't see any signs like digital billboards announcing things going on. I think with a Chamber that has limited opening hours to visitors, perhaps a central location that shares things going on could help.

# Recommendations

## Downtown & Retail

- Greenspace Development – visitor information kiosk with weather proof brochure holder for 24/7 visitor information.
- Sidewalk signs to help draw attention to tourism/visitor businesses.
- We discovered some buildings looked empty but had businesses in them. Add signage or window displays so downtown feels less empty.
- Buildings under renovation - add signage or information to share what's coming or how building could be used.
- Showcase vacant buildings as an opportunity. Webster City hosted a Vacant Buildings Tour several years ago. More information at <https://buildingpossibility.com/articles/the-tour-of-empty-buildings-long-story/> and <https://www.beckymccray.com/the-tour-of-empty-buildings/>
- Visitor friendly hours - aim for consistent, core hours where all or majority of businesses are open.
- Cross marketing of each other with referrals, dedicated tourism piece everyone has, continue joint promotions, etc.
- Maquoketa needs a downtown coffee shop that provides a limited but tasty menu in an attractive historic setting, and most importantly – a community gathering destination that provides year-around cozy space to build Maquoketa's social community and the downtown! This requires quiet spaces for individuals to study or read, comfy spaces for couples to converse, and larger spaces for groups. The outdoor Greenspace will be a wonderful gathering space for families and larger crowds in summer months, but Maquoketa deserves a community asset that generates social connections year-around. And it needs to be downtown. Scooters has great coffee, but no social benefits can generate in a drive through.

Moore Local has the specialty coffee and dining space, but the downtown needs a destination point to keep it alive and help it thrive. Most communities benefit by having an attractive downtown business with great coffee, light lunches and cozy conversation or meeting areas. A wonderful example is Smokey Row (has 13 locations including Des Moines, Pella, Oskaloosa, Ankeny, Pleasantville, and Carlisle). These have become the meeting destination for many individuals and organizations – and the number of locations keeps expanding, providing greater social networks for community residents. <https://smokeyrow.com/> Ask Moore Local to add a Maquoketa downtown location like their Bellevue site, but with cozy and larger gathering spaces with attractive historic décor, to create a premier community social asset. Or work with another existing business who has the space and desire to expand their offerings to fulfil this need.



# Recommendations

## Lodging

- Does current lodging meet visitor needs? Overnight stays increase local spending by visitors. Assessors met visitors from other states who were at Maquoketa State Park, and many were staying in other communities.
- Decker Hotel is a gem! Connect with Iowa Historic & Boutique Hotels group for networking and sharing of information such as reservation systems, etc.

## Attractions

- Enhance interpretation and storytelling. Hurstville Interpretive Center is a great model.
- Utilize resources including Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area.
- Connect with other resources, experts, peers including Iowa Museums Association at [www.iowamuseums.org](http://www.iowamuseums.org)
- Visitor friendly hours.

## Trails - Wayfinding

- Conduct comprehensive assessment of existing trail signage to identify how to improve wayfinding at area trails and supporting maps and materials to enhance the visitor experience.
- Trail signage. If there's not good phone network, and without physical maps it can be daunting to just start wandering down an unfamiliar trail. It is unfortunate the trails are not better marked. It only takes one wrong decision to get lost and feel unsafe.

## Outdoor Recreation

- Place some focus on the river! Develop resource materials for folks who bike, paddle, and run - we are always looking for new places to explore!
- Promote area rock climbing opportunities to enthusiasts.  
<https://www.mountainproject.com/area/110548916/joinerville-bouldering>

## Biking

- Signage for bike trails and overall bike infrastructure would be a worthwhile improvement.
  - Simply providing signage to trails and adding bike racks to the downtown could make a big impact.
- Is there any way to mimic Decorah's loop trail - Maquoketa should try to build out its bike network a little bit. Moving around in anything other than a car would be very difficult.
- Complete trail to Hurstville Interpretive Center.
- Longer bike trail - ideally to Maquoketa State Park.

## Arts & Culture

- Additional public art to reinforce Maquoketa as a vibrant arts community. Sac City, Jefferson, Webster City, and Perry have public art with sculptures in their parks, along trails, downtown business area, alleys, and gateway points into their community.
- I was blown away by the art of Rose Frantzen. Amazing talent and a fascinating story of the local portraits. Locals know this story, but visitors do not. How can it be shared more extensively?
- If it isn't happening already, there should be some sponsored/structured events to get plein air painting groups/sessions going in the state park area.

# 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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