

**STEP 3: Three team members answered the Newberry questions
(Steps 1 & 2 are outlined on pp 5–10)**

Would you go to Newberry?

If NO, why not?

If YES, what would you do? How long would you stay?

Charles—No

“I don’t see anything here that looks interesting, just a few random things.”

Denise—No

“This may be a charming town to live in, but I couldn’t find anything that would make it worth the trip, even if I was only coming from Gainesville or Jacksonville.”

Rock—Maybe

“Not much to do there. The website is out of date and I wonder if places listed are still open or have the same hours. Dudley Farm State Park looks interesting. GoNewberry.com needs to look more professional, especially since it claims to be for visitors.”

Search Terms Used

Newberry Florida
Dudley Farm Park
Things to do Newberry FL
B & B Newberry FL
Geocaching Newberry Florida (a few found)

Websites Visited

<http://gonewberry.com>
<http://visitnewberryfl.com>
tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g34472-d2469825-Reviews-Main_Street-Newberry_Florida.html
visitgainesville.com/attractions/dudley-farm-state-park/
tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g34472-Activites-Newberry_Florida.html
www.floridastateparks.org/dudleyfarm
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newberry_Florida
www.newberryjonesvillechamber.com
tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g34472-Newberry_Florida-Vacations.html
www.bedandbreakfast.com/gainesville-florida.html
www.geocaching.com/adventures/geotours/operation-recreation



Onsite Assessment

A team of six conducted the on-site assessment of Alachua County on October 4–13, 2014 and November 8–12, 2014. The purpose of this phase was to experience the community the same way a first-time visitor might. No one knew who we were (not even the *Visit Gainesville* staff).

Team members visited Newberry multiple times to understand what visitors experience. These visits took place on various days and at different times of day. We took pictures, explored, visited attractions, made purchases, ate in restaurants and talked to business owners, residents and other visitors.

Finding Newberry

Finding the city of Newberry and downtown are both easy whether on Newberry Road or US 41.

Both routes are well signed between communities with both mileage and directionals.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Gateways are a community's front door. They say "Welcome. We're glad you're here. Let us show you around." Be sure to maintain the area around your signs to keep them visible and next time you're driving past, see if you can read anything but the word "Newberry" on the sign. At speeds over 25 mph, letters need to be at least 6" high for legibility.

A sign directing people to "historic downtown" at the intersection shown below will keep people from thinking this is all there is to Newberry's business district.



WHERE CAN I GET INFORMATION?

Making information available to visitors when and where they need it is a tough job. Digital marketing has made it easier in some respects, but not everyone is looking online.

We were surprised at the size of the Newberry Tourism Center and could see the brochures racks and office through the window. We were there during the posted hours and the door was locked. We returned later and on another day and the door was still locked.

With the amount of information we could see through the window, it gave the impression that there was more to Newberry that we hadn't discovered yet. Maybe that was true but we couldn't access the information to find out.

We also saw the Visit Newberry Florida office. This seemed odd because Newberry didn't appear large enough to warrant two visitor centers. No one was at this office either.

[The materials shown below were all gathered in places other than Newberry]



WHERE CAN I GET INFORMATION?

Newberry has a designated page on the *Visit Gainesville* website and the community description is shown to the right. Someone should be assigned to update the description and individual listings and keep the event information flowing at least three months in advance.

The listings are free and, at a minimum, all downtown restaurants and shops should be included.

The VisitNewberryFlorida.com website was confusing. It claimed to be oriented to visitors, but it didn't list the Watermelon Festival (highlighted on the *Visit Gainesville* website), and it talked about a "new" restaurant that is no longer in existence.

Our favorite resource is always asking others. In Newberry we encountered friendly people who appeared genuinely interested in providing directions, making suggestions, and sharing both their life stories and their opinions. We visited around the time of the Fall Festival that did not happen and even though no one knew we were working on this assessment, they freely shared their frustrations.

A small town with a distinctive small town charm, Newberry, Florida maintains a Historic District and has itself been placed on the National Register of Historic places.

Developed as a mining town after phosphate was discovered, Newberry turned to agriculture in 1914 when war was declared against its primary customer for phosphate, Germany. To this day, agriculture remains a focus in Newberry, marked by its annual Watermelon Festival held in mid-May. The event includes free watermelons from a local grower along with a beauty pageant, seed spitting contest, hog calling, pie and cake baking, and of course a Big Melon contest worth seeing.

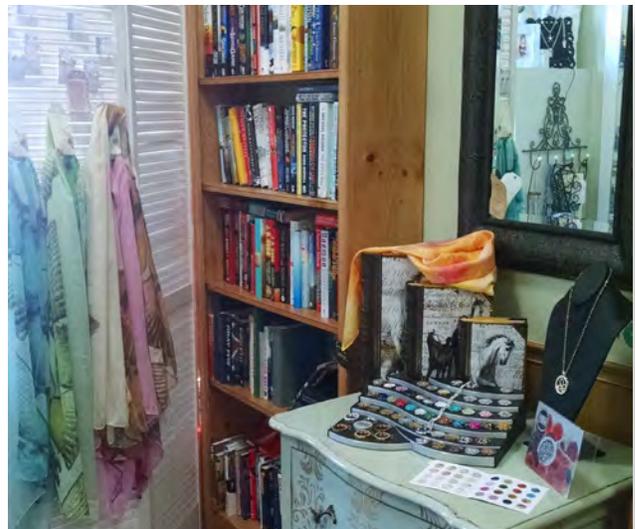


WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Remember, to draw visitors, you must offer something worth the trip and it has to be something people can't get closer to home.

The setting in downtown Newberry is delightful. Increasing the number of shops and utilizing some of the historic buildings that are falling into disrepair will help preserve what you've already established. It will also make a trip more worthwhile.

The 3-D Fluorescent Art Museum is a quirky addition that could attract visitors. Some merchants complained about the banner sign being out of place, but as the museum becomes established a more appropriate, permanent sign could be installed.



WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Dudley Farm State Park is a primary draw to the area. It showed up in the initial marketing research as an interesting destination when the team was researching the state as a whole and was a top recommendation no matter where we went in the area. It is truly a stellar asset and the directional signage helps visitors navigate to the Park from wherever they are.

The challenge for Newberry is that visitors can come from Gainesville, go to Dudley Farm and return to Gainesville without driving through Newberry or having the opportunity to spend any money in the area.

Finding ways to partner and cross-promote with the state park will help both the community and the park drive visitation and increase revenue.



WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Throughout our visits to Newberry there was no mention by anyone of the sports complex. This makes sense because it's not necessarily an activity for day trip visitors. In fact, it appears that the community is counting on the opposite effect—that those who are participating in activities at the sports complex will also visit downtown.

Currently, there isn't much in downtown Newberry to draw visitors from the sports complex, and due to its location, participants never even have to drive through Newberry.

Increasing the critical mass of shops and restaurants will help, but they will need to be open when participants and their families are visiting. This may not be feasible based upon the needs and desires of the shop owners.

At the community presentation there was discussion about recruiting a hotel. Waldo has been successful in recruiting one to serve the motorsports facility and the flea market, both weekend draws. Connecting with those who made this happen in Waldo might be a good resource for how to move forward in Newberry.



WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Based upon the reviews on Yelp and UrbanSpoon, Newberry's Backyard Bar-B-Q is a destination restaurant for the area. This brings people to Newberry and gives them the opportunity to see what else is available. It's large enough to serve teams participating at the Sports Complex and should be promoted as an alternative to the concession stands whenever possible.



Cupcakes and a down-home option for breakfast and lunch make sense in a community of this size. As participation at the sports complex increases, the potential that teams will take over all of the booths at Country Kitchen and leave no room for the locals is a possibility.



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Learning about and understanding Newberry's story was not easy. We could see the historic architecture in the downtown area but were at a loss when it came to finding information.

Telling your story is important: we accidentally found out that the Watermelon Festival is a big part of your history. The only reference to it we found in the entire community was this sign at the Little Red Schoolhouse.

Later, we asked merchants for more information and they told us the festival had been moved outside of town for ease of parking and more space. This defeats one of the primary reasons for hosting events—driving visitors to places in your community where they can spend money with local merchants.



The Little Red Schoolhouse Museum was charming but since we aren't local residents, we had no idea who the people were or why they were significant. The Museum is another opportunity to go beyond names and dates and tell the stories.

In addition to the historical marker sign in front of City Hall, we found a wall of historic photos in the back room of Old F.A.R.T. Studios. The photos were fascinating especially with the accompanying documentation on the other side of the room. You're fortunate someone preserved these photos.



HOW WERE WE TREATED?

In nearly every situation—asking for directions, eating in restaurants, walking down the street, visiting shops and attractions—we were treated with kindness, respect and sincere friendliness. We felt safe and welcome. Well done!

As mentioned earlier, many shopowners and residents shared with us about their frustrations with local organizations or their neighbors. They didn't know we were doing an assessment and we assume we weren't the only ones they shared their concerns with. Some of this may have been an anomaly due to the timing of our visit in relation to the postponed Fall Festival, but there were several other topics that had nothing to do with the Festival. Try to find opportunities for owners and residents to voice and resolve their issues with one another.

WAS OUR #1 NEED MET?

Clean, accessible restrooms are the #1 need for visitors. Some businesses were accommodating even if we were not paying customers, while others apologized and said they had no public facilities.

When visitors need to use a restroom and can't find one they're likely to get in their car and drive to a gas station or other facility. Once they've left, they're unlikely to return. If building and maintaining public restrooms is not in the budget, try to find alternatives and communicate the options to your visitors.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. **Visitors are on vacation.**

They want things to be easy, they want to enjoy themselves. They're looking for experiences and opportunities that they can't get closer to home.

2. **Not everyone uses a smartphone.**

Even if your visitors have smartphones, they're not necessarily using them for anything other than phone calls, texting, taking pictures and checking email. Don't assume they'll be looking online for information, be sure to provide alternatives that are available beyond business hours on weekdays.

3. **You love your town but visitors don't know your town like you do.**

It can be difficult to see your community through fresh eyes. Can visitors navigate easily? Do they feel welcome? Are your "hidden gems" too well hidden?

Shop and restaurant owners should stand across the street from their businesses at least once a week and look at the impression their business makes. Are the windows clean? Are displays (including menus) fresh, attractive and inviting? Can people tell you're open?

4. **Your visitors have interesting places and cool shops and restaurants in their towns too.**

People travel—whether for the afternoon or the week—to see and experience something different. Every community has its own sense of place, its own personality. Help visitors experience and appreciate what makes your community different, what makes it worth their time and money. Don't try to be everything to everyone and don't create experiential expectations that you can't meet. Not every town will appeal to everyone and that's okay.

5. **A number of your visitors may have disabilities related to vision, hearing or mobility.**

There are little things you can do to provide accessibility. Making sure the videos are closed-captioned and that written materials can be accessed in auditory format goes a long way toward providing a rich experience.

Historic buildings and communities often have uneven surfaces and awkward transitions. Do what you can to mitigate these or provide alternatives.



NEWBERRY AS A VISITOR DESTINATION TODAY

Strengths & Opportunities

- Interesting, charming downtown
- Easton Sports Complex
- Lois Forte Park
- Little Red Schoolhouse

Challenges & Threats

- Lack of cohesive identity
- Shops/restaurants not open on Sunday
- Limited retail/restaurant offerings
- Maintaining buildings, especially empty ones
- No lodging options
- No directional signage to Easton complex

NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED WITHIN THE REPORT

- Maintain area around Welcome signs
- Add "historic downtown" directional signs
- Accurate visitor center hours
- Update information on VisitGainesville.com
- Update VisitNewberryFlorida.com information
- Maintain vacant buildings
- More appropriate signage for 3-D Fluorescent Art Museum
- Partner with and cross-promote Dudley Farm
- Contact Waldo about successful hotel recruitment
- Bring Watermelon Festival back into downtown.
- Add more stories to Little Red Schoolhouse interpretation
- Address concerns of business owners



NEXT STEPS

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Identify Who You Are

This process will be the foundation for everything else as you move forward. This isn't about a logo or a tagline. It's stepping back and thinking about who the community is, at its core.

Currently, you are a community with a charming, though underused, downtown that reflects Old Florida. You also have the Easton Sports Complex and a proposed Newberry Town Center lifestyle/retail development away from the downtown.

What does Newberry want to be? Old Florida? Sports? Upscale retail? Is there a way to combine them in a way that doesn't negatively impact your quality of life?

Your goal is to define an identity that clarifies:

- Why it's an appealing place to live
- Why anyone want to visit
- Why a business should locate here
- What needs to be preserved

There are many ways of approaching this including traditional visioning and planning or innovative processes that begin with mapping your sense of place and building upon it.

It's important to embrace a process that provides the greatest opportunity for participation and collaboration in a format best suited for Newberry.

Once you have a defined identity built upon existing authenticity and assets, everything else should be positioned to support and enhance that identity.

Business Recruitment/Critical Mass Development

In order for downtown to become a more attractive destination, it needs a critical mass of shopping, restaurants and/or activities. The more complementary they are, the better. It's also important that the merchandise be items visitors need or want and can't find closer to home.

Drawing people for a day trip is the goal and whatever niche you choose, it should appeal to enough people not working 9 to 5 to sustain your business owners during the week.

Ultimately, the focus for downtown should align with and support your identity. For now, working with what you have and supporting your existing businesses makes sense and should be part of any identity discussion.

Newberry Town Center

At the community presentation, there was conversation about new residents not being aware Newberry has a downtown. The new Town Center development will continue to shift the perception and whether intentional or not, it will become the new downtown in many people's minds.

What does this mean for your historic downtown? What does it mean for your small business owners? These are questions that should be addressed now. Waiting until the development is completed will be too late. It's important to be proactive, to be realistic about the impact and be a part of the decision-making process.

Easton Sports Complex

This is another development that is not and will not have an impact on downtown under the current structure. When teams and their families participate in tournaments, there is no reason for them to go into or through Newberry. Most of them probably won't even know there is a town nearby.

With the lack of critical mass in terms of shopping, there isn't much of a reason for them to discover Newberry. That doesn't mean the situation can't change, in fact, it provides opportunity for growth.



NEXT STEPS

Digital Presence

STEP 1: Determine if VisitNewberryFlorida.com will be the community's visitor resource. If so, update it and keep it current. If not, define another resource (maybe the Chamber of Commerce) and keep it current. It could be as simple as linking to the *Visit Gainesville* page for Newberry.

STEP 2: Help small businesses and restaurants create websites, claim local listings, verify accounts on review sites and determine if any social media platforms make sense for their business is a critical first step.

Small, hands-on sessions aren't expensive, but providing the tools and basic knowledge will be extremely valuable. Owners don't need more sessions about why they need to be on-line, they need help with HOW to be on-line.

Monthly workshops, email tips, and technical follow up can be used to create a stronger overall presence. Collectively hiring a consultant to provide the training and assistance would reduce the overall cost. For example, you provide monthly workshops where owners walk through:

- Website basics
- Setting up/updating the website
- Claiming local and review site listings
- Creating a dedicated email address
- Email marketing basics

This model helps small businesses who don't know where to start while helping them to pace themselves so they don't get overwhelmed.

Wayfinding

It's important to have signs letting people know your Main Street exists. Call it "Historic Downtown" and use an engaging design. Currently, there is no directional signage to the Easton Complex. Think about adding some and put a sign to "Historic Downtown Newberry" as they come out of the complex.

Public Restrooms

Currently, the expense of building public restrooms downtown is not warranted. Identifying public restrooms for use in the downtown area may be as simple as an informal agreement with downtown businesses to allow visitors to use their restrooms when requested.

