Introduction
The First Impressions community exchange program was designed to help communities learn about their strengths and shortcomings through the eyes of first-time visitors. Volunteer teams undertake unannounced visits, record observations, and give constructive feedback to the exchange community. These reports are often used as part of broader community assessment or planning processes to inform community policy and action.

On June 13, 2017, five volunteers from Windsor visited Enfield on a very hot and sunny Tuesday morning. Everyone on the team was familiar with the old mall and big box commercial area but they didn’t know much else about Enfield. They were excited to learn more about the rest of the community. The team conducted upfront online research. They found the town’s website very easy to use and informative and liked the direct links to social media. Overall the Windsor team was pleasantly surprised about many things they discovered in Enfield although they did have some concerns. The following is an overview of the highlights and recurring themes of the visit. Additional detail can be found in the raw data report available from members of the visit team.

First Impressions Visit
The Windsor team’s initial reaction to Enfield was mixed depending in part on where they entered the town. Team members acknowledged the value of the larger commercial areas in terms of meeting everyday needs. Some were pleasantly surprised by the very nice historic areas. This contrast and many others were a recurring theme of this First Impression’s visit. The team noted commercial areas that are well kept and organized and other areas that are run down and vacant. Similar comments were made about the residential areas, which range from beautiful historic structures to
middle of the road neighborhoods and older neighborhoods that are in need of significant attention.

Overall the team felt that there is a good variety of commercial establishments. One team member noted that the town has “...has pretty much everything folks need.” They noted the value of the “big box” area and the nice small businesses along Route 5. Although these businesses are a little tired looking, they have quality products and very good customer service. One team member called the mall depressing but also commented on the opportunity it presented for mixed use redevelopment. The team was surprised by the presence of local brewery and felt there were local “gems” scattered throughout town.

Some of the team members visited the Chamber of Commerce which they found very hard to find and “not inviting at all.” Other community services received much more positive comments. The new high school, police/fire station and health care facilities received high marks, as did the town hall. The team loved the computer station at the main entrance with options for translation to multiple languages. Although the town hall seemed chopped up with closed office doors, once the team entered they got great customer service. They were also impressed with the veterans parking area.

The team had mixed reactions to the various town centers. Those who visited Hazardville found it very nice and quaint. Although the group noted there is a significant amount of work that needs to be done in Thompsonville in terms of the condition of the many commercial and residential structures, they found that this area has many assets as well. The team liked the reuse of the historic mill complex for apartments and were very impressed by the community gardens. They also like the walkability of this area and commented on the value of sidewalks throughout much of the community.

One team member said he was surprised by the amount and quality of greenspace throughout the community. They commented on the nice farms in the eastern part of town. The team suggested that the Connecticut River is a lost opportunity since it borders the entire western edge of town but it is hidden from view in many places. They really liked the town pond and fountain.
In terms of the overall atmosphere in town team members noted that although the people were very friendly, they did not feel a real sense of community. People didn’t seem to know what was going on in town and didn’t have many suggestions about what to do. But everyone likes the annual Fourth of July Celebration!

**Wrap up**

In the final section of the report the team was asked to sum it all up with the following questions:

**List three positive things you observed about this community:**
1. Great customer service and availability of services
2. Nice variety of retail and restaurants
3. Wonderful green/open spaces

**What are three potential opportunities available to this community?**
1. Mall redevelopment
2. More publicity for small businesses
3. Take advantage of historic centers

**What are three biggest obstacles or challenges facing the community?**
1. Redevelopment of downtown area to compete with mall
2. Need to better promote events and have more activities
3. The mall and changing face of retail

The teams from Enfield and Windsor met together in Windsor on Thursday, September 21 to informally share the results of their visits. They both felt this program was a great learning opportunity. They also learned something about their own community by participating in this program. One team member commented that, “Windsor has such a diverse population, and we might not be making the accommodations like we should. The treatment of veterans in Enfield...”
is admirable, and the language accommodations are very useful.”

The teams really enjoyed meeting each other at the wrap up luncheon and learning more about their first impressions. They hope to maintain this connection and to continue to learn from each other in the future.

This report was prepared October 2017 by Laura Brown, UConn Extension, and Susan Westa, Connecticut Main Street Center based on raw data from team visits and notes from the community debrief session held on September 21, 2017. For more information visit

http://communities.extension.uconn.edu/connecticut-first-impressions-program/