

Washington, Iowa

First Impressions Community Report

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Executive Summary

This First Impressions Report analysed Washington's digital presence, looking at thirteen different websites and social media platforms. This allowed us to obtain an understanding of how someone attempting to learn about Washington might go about doing so, and their potential impressions. This project looked at Google Images, Wikipedia, TikTok, the Washington City Website, KCII Radio, Airbnb, Travel Iowa, Facebook and MoveMap. Additionally, we planned to consider Pinterest, Niche, NextDoor, BestPlace, but we were unable to find any information about Washington, Iowa from those platforms.

This project likely ran into a limitation in what we were able to find on several sites due to the city's name. "Washington" is a very patriotic name for a place to hold, reflecting the pride people have in the man who was both a founding father and the country's first president. However, the quality of the name also means that many other places share the name. Washington state and Washington, D.C. are particularly famous places with a shared namesake. This becomes an issue in the online age when people search "washington, Iowa" into a search engine and find results that are not about the city, but that instead contain general fun facts about all the states in America. Search engines on social media platforms, which may not be very refined, take the terms "Washington" and "Iowa" and consider them states. A majority of the results will then be either about all the states or will return anything that contains the words "Washington, Iowa" in close succession.

Washington, Iowa, the county seat of Washington County, was founded in 1839, making it one of the oldest cities in the state. Its rich history is reflected in its charming downtown area, where beautifully preserved architecture showcases the city's long standing heritage. Walking through the city, visitors can admire historic buildings that have been very well maintained, reflecting architectural styles from the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is the center for local culture and community life, and quaint streets create a welcoming atmosphere that attracts residents and visitors. The city's legacy as one of Iowa's earliest settlements is not only evident in its architecture but also in its vibrant community events that celebrate its roots.

Google Images

Naomi:

There are a lot of classic Midwestern Gothic Revival style buildings, as well as a few interesting Queen Anne buildings, most of which are centered along main street and the closely surrounding areas. The city Courthouse is the most impactful building I've seen so far, with a tall clock tower. The landscape is very typically Iowan; flat and corn. There is one image of a bridge with trees that might be next to an interesting park. There's also evidence of a mural that shows its cultural values. There are more trees than average for a midwestern city. Some notable takeaways from this section are the: Built Beauty and Green Growth, Historic Buildings, Typifies the idyllic Midwestern Town.

Claire:

Viewing Washington, Iowa through Google Images gives the town a distinct old-town charm. Many of the photos feature historic brick buildings (like the movie theater), well-kept streets, and attractive curb appeal, creating an overall inviting vibe. The town immediately reminded me of where I grew up, a small, rural community that feels safe and welcoming. It is clear from the images that Washington residents take pride in maintaining its appearance and preserving its charm. The visuals reflect a community that values its history and works hard to keep the town both functional and appealing.

Louie:

When scrolling through Google Images of Washington, the words that come to mind are: "historic, proud, old, and small." The town's identity seems tightly tied to its Main Street, which dominates nearly every image in search results. It gives the appearance that the town is built around just one street, which can unintentionally make the community seem smaller. The lack of visual representation of other parts of the town may lead outsiders to overlook its diversity.



Washington Courthouse
Page 2 Image 1



Historical Building
Page 2 Image 2



Walking Bridge
Page 2 Image 3

Wikipedia

Naomi:

The town motto is "Onward! To the Salt Mines!" This seems like somewhat of an unfortunate motto, though I am not very familiar with the meaning. Furthermore, I could not find any other source claiming to know the city's motto, nor even whether the city has a motto. The Wikipedia article mentions that the city is known for having the "world's oldest continually operating cinema theatre," according to Guinness' World Records.

Claire:

My first impression of Washington, Iowa, based on its Wikipedia page, is that it is a historic, traditional town with a focus on basic community information. The page provides standard data such as population, location, and basic demographics, but does not offer much depth beyond the essentials. The town's motto stands out as somewhat unusual, feeling a bit disconnected from the limited information available. Additionally, it is clear that Washington has a long history, with many references to its founding and older establishments.

Louie:

The town's Wikipedia page emphasizes Washington's long-standing history and offers a helpful overview of key facts about the community. It includes demographic statistics, climate data, and historical context that give readers a foundational understanding of the area. While informative, the page could be enhanced by incorporating more current community highlights.



Sketched Courthouse
 Page 3 Image 1

Month	Climate data for Washington, Iowa, 1991–2020 normals, extremes 1893–present												[View]
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Record high °F (°C)	70 (21)	76 (24)	89 (32)	94 (34)	103 (39)	107 (42)	113 (43)	109 (40)	102 (38)	96 (29)	82 (23)	74 (23)	113 (45)
Mean maximum °F (°C)	53.1 (11.8)	55.3 (12.8)	62.7 (17.0)	67.1 (19.4)	82.6 (27.5)	94.7 (34.3)	94.6 (34.4)	91.2 (27.3)	83.8 (23.3)	57.6 (13.9)	36.8 (2.2)	26.0 (-3.9)	53.1 (11.8)
Mean daily maximum °F (°C)	36.2 (1.0)	35.0 (-1.0)	48.9 (7.7)	62.0 (16.7)	72.2 (22.3)	81.4 (27.4)	86.0 (29.4)	83.9 (28.9)	77.9 (25.2)	64.2 (17.9)	48.7 (9.3)	35.6 (2.0)	36.2 (1.0)
Daily mean °F (°C)	20.8 (-6.2)	25.1 (-3.8)	37.4 (3.0)	49.7 (9.8)	60.9 (16.1)	70.9 (21.4)	74.1 (23.4)	77.0 (22.2)	64.3 (17.9)	52.0 (11.1)	38.2 (3.4)	26.7 (-2.9)	49.3 (9.8)
Mean daily minimum °F (°C)	11.5 (-11.4)	15.3 (-9.3)	26.5 (-3.1)	37.5 (3.1)	49.7 (9.8)	59.9 (15.4)	63.1 (17.3)	60.7 (15.9)	51.4 (10.8)	39.9 (4.4)	27.7 (-2.4)	17.9 (-7.8)	38.4 (3.8)
Mean minimum °F (°C)	-16.7 (-23.7)	-4.6 (-20.3)	6.3 (-14.3)	23.2 (-4.9)	35.0 (1.7)	47.7 (8.7)	52.8 (11.6)	50.2 (10.1)	37.3 (2.9)	24.7 (-4.1)	12.1 (-11.1)	-2.1 (-18.9)	-14.6 (-26.0)
Record low °F (°C)	-32 (-36)	-29 (-34)	-16 (-27)	7 (-14)	23 (-5)	35 (2)	45 (7)	38 (4)	23 (-5)	6 (-14)	-7 (-22)	-25 (-32)	-30 (-36)

Climate Data
 Page 3 Image 2



City Logo
 Page 3 Image 3

Tik Tok

Naomi:

Upon searching for the city, many of the videos were created by people talking about how their days were, recording in a car. The second most common subject also appeared to be a discussion of the restaurants in the area, either reviews made by those who visited the establishments or advertisements made by the establishments themselves.

Claire:

Based on what I have seen on TikTok, Washington, Iowa gives off the impression of a quiet, small town with limited attractions. Much of the content highlights recent additions like new Scooters or McDonalds, which seem to be a major event for the community, as new chain restaurants normally are for small towns. There are also several videos advertising local housing and restaurants, suggesting an effort to attract more residents and visitors. Additionally, a number of posts focus on high school graduation celebrations, emphasizing the town's close knit, family-oriented atmosphere. Overall, while Washington appears to be a friendly and community driven place, it may not offer enough excitement or activities to make it a top destination for visitors seeking a livelier experience.

Louie:

The top TikTok search results for Washington often feature local residents sharing their complaints about the town. These posts offer an unfiltered look at how some community members view their surroundings, which can influence outside perceptions. One video that stood out highlighted the lack of a "Scooter's Coffee," reflecting how even small amenities can shape public perception.



Review of a stay at an Airbnb
Page 4 Image 1



Showcasing a listing of a home for sale
Page 4 Image 2



Expressing the lack of chain restaurants
Page 4 Image 3

City Website

Naomi:

The news section is nice and provides a clean and comprehensive idea of recent events in the city. I like the active event calendar which seems to have several events for every day. It's great to see so many opportunities for engagement. This is an amazing city website, and it's so easy to navigate, which is really encouraging. The footer bar at the bottom only has a copyright tag and a few pieces of information on the right. I think it would be really nice if a 'contact us' section was added there at the bottom of every page to help encourage engagement. There's a section that says "Barn Quilt County Capital." Are there any barn quilts in Washington? A list of Washington's barn quilts with maybe an audio guide could be a fun free activity that requires little upfront to encourage engagement in the community (but would only work if Washington had barn quilts).

Claire:

My first impression was that it is a small town, but has a variety of things to offer and to do. It seems like the type of place that values community, and they have a cool downtown area with different shops, restaurants, farmers' markets, parades, and concerts. I was very impressed by the webpage and the way it was organized. It offered up to date events and things going on within the town. This gave me the idea that they have good management within the town government, and this was a priority for them to have a strong city website. They highlighted downtown Washington with a special page for it, showing pictures and giving dates for things going on in the future. I also thoroughly enjoyed how they had a city government page giving easy access to boards, commission, city council, the mayor, public works, and utilities, showing they have nothing to hide and are proud of their leaders. Overall, this webpage had tons of information and made the town very appealing to me.

Louie:

When you open the Washington, Iowa website, you're met with a welcoming and intentional design that reflects the community's character. Six thoughtfully selected categories under the "Welcome to Washington" tab highlight the town's core values; worship, education, childcare, healthcare, local organizations, and real estate. Together, these areas make it especially appealing to potential new residents



Barn Quilt
Page 5 Image 1



Climate Data
Page 5 Image 2



Historical Theatre
Page 5 Image 3

KCII News

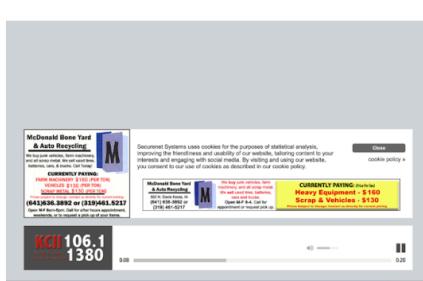
Naomi:

The radio seems to run a good balance between national and local news. In the half hour that I listened to the radio, there were two ads for businesses in Kalona and one for a business in Winfield. The other five ads all appeared to be about Washington. Additionally, several of the ads the station ran congratulated this year's graduating high school class, which seemed like a nice celebration.

Claire:

This local news channel has tons of current information going on in the news in Washington, Iowa or things important and relevant to the town. Things are updated multiple times a day, and the website even has a community calendar, the weather, obituaries, and sports. This shows that once again, Washington keeps busy and there are constantly things going on within the town. I thought this was a great asset to the community to be able to check, as it will keep people informed on what is going on in the town, making participation and community connections more likely to be strong.

Louie: needs to still add?



Option to listen to the radio live
 Page 6 Image 1

Local news on home page
 Page 6 Image 2

Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club	Washington County Hospital and Clinics Diabetes Coffee Club
View All 22 Events	View All 26 Events	View All 24 Events	View All 22 Events	View All 23 Events	View All 30 Events	View All 22 Events	View All 23 Events	View All 30 Events	View All 22 Events

Week of events from community calendar
 Page 6 Image 3

Travel Iowa

Naomi:

The issues that occasionally appear on other sites based on the other places that share a name with the city don't show up here because the whole search range is all of Iowa. It recommends shopping, casual dining, family entertainment, events and various attractions. These attractions often have links to the appropriate websites and phone numbers, for those that have them. There is also a map with the location and addresses. Overall, it appears to be a great resource for anybody interested in finding information about things to do in Washington. Furthermore, the website doesn't appear to recommend chain businesses, which helps direct people to things which are unique to Washington.

Claire:

Travel Iowa shared a lot of information on specific places in Washington to eat, shop, events going on locally, and things to do. It showed many places that I had not yet heard about in Washington, such as Jaz it Up! a boutique, a Barn Quilt shop, and Earthly Blessings which is a non-profit gift shop. I was impressed by the variety of things Washington has within the town, showing that unique small businesses can still thrive within Washington, which can sometimes be a major issue in rural communities. The website even had links to the different place's webpage or phone number, which could be very beneficial for people visiting and curious about places to go within the town, helping keep the businesses and places running.

Louie:

Travel Iowa showcases a mix of places and events for Washington, Iowa. The site highlights the typical attractions you find when searching Washington online, but it also provides details about upcoming events, making it more current and dynamic. One thing that stood out to me was the mention of the Washington Aquatic Center, this was the first time I had seen it brought up, which added a new layer to what I knew about the town.



Old Theater
Page 7 Image 1



Flightline Line Band
Page 7 Image 2



Gallagher Painted Barn
Page 7 Image 3

Air BnB

Naomi:

There are 12 places to stay in Washington, Iowa. The lowest cost house is \$215 for two nights, and the highest is \$698 for the same time period. The lowest rated house was 4.82 / 5.0 stars, with most houses rated at greater than 4.90 / 5.0 stars. There were a few houses in the reformed Victorian architectural style, and a few only available as a single room. The average cost appeared to be around \$350 for 2 nights. Everything looked very polished and beautiful. I could find no flaws in the presentation, but I also know there are those who would not want to spend almost \$200 on a place to sleep for one night. Many of the reviews talk about how the customers were glad the house gave them access to the community.

Claire:

On AirBnB, there were a variety of different places to stay (entire houses, condos, one bedrooms), aesthetics of them, and pricing. I was shocked at how expensive some of the places were to rent, making me believe that people are traveling to Washington and willing to pay this amount. The 'guest favorite' houses had great reviews and everyone seemed to enjoy their time there. There were no reviews lower than a 4 star on each of the available listings. Many of the reviews expressed how at home they felt and how great with communication the hosts were, giving insight into what it feels like to live in Washington.

Louie:

While searching on Airbnb, I found nine available house listings, all clustered near Main Street and the Downtown. The prices range from \$500 to \$1,500 for a five-night stay. All the listings had 4.8+ star ratings. Most of the properties are within walking distance of restaurants, shops, and local attractions, making the location convenient for visitors.



Older Building
Page 8 Image 1



Chairs and Fireplace
Page 8 Image 2



Living Room
Page 8 Image 3

Facebook

Naomi:

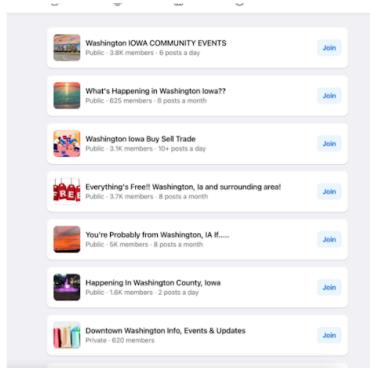
The account advertises the events happening across Washington, at a rate which implies there's some event happening at least once each week. There are a lot of different types of events that are posted, with a broad range in the quality of each post. While the wide range of events means the page can appeal to almost anyone, it also means it can take some time to sort through the page before finding something truly interesting to any one person.

Claire:

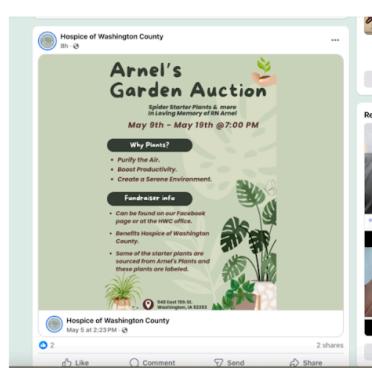
The downtown Facebook page made me want to visit Washington. They had recent posts about a half marathon, art activities for kids downtown, and did an excellent job highlighting the different businesses that were open downtown. It showed how close the community was, by small businesses offering discounts for events when they happened downtown. There were various pictures of different community members coming together to plan these events and make them happen.

Louie:

Looking at "Main Street Washington," you can see the pride the community has in its downtown and how it serves as a lifeline for the town. On their Facebook page, they showcase events happening and businesses downtown. The consistent activity and engagement on social media also demonstrate a strong sense of civic involvement and a community that actively supports its local economy.



A variety of different groups within Washington
Page 9 Image 1



A community event happening in a few weeks
Page 9 Image 2



Residents working hard to keep streets beautiful
Page 9 Image 3

Move Map

Naomi:

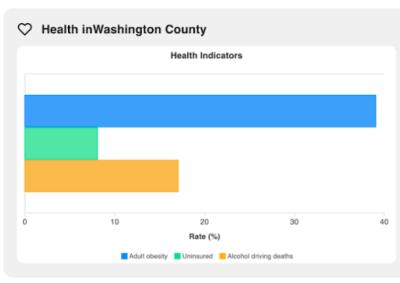
According to this website, the average home price is \$167k and the nearest metropolitan city is Iowa City. The website provides some extraneous information (we are told that the city is not near the coast, which is information one may consider basic knowledge about Iowa). Furthermore, some of the information provided seems unlikely, to say the least. For example, the website claims that 17% of the population dies annually due to "alcohol driving" which seems highly unlikely. Furthermore, some of the statistics are decidedly unhelpful. Arson is stated to be 0.00036%. That means absolutely nothing, and is visual clutter at best and dangerously misleading at the worst.

Claire:

MoveMap provided a lot of statistics regarding things like weather, home pricing, laws, poverty, and obesity. I enjoyed how it addressed income for individuals in Washington, as you can see how a town functions to some degree based on this data. While it provided great ideas for things to get data on, a lot of this information seemed unfit compared to the other cites we have visited with information on Washington. I do not know if I would call this a reliable source to make an impression on Washington.

Louie:

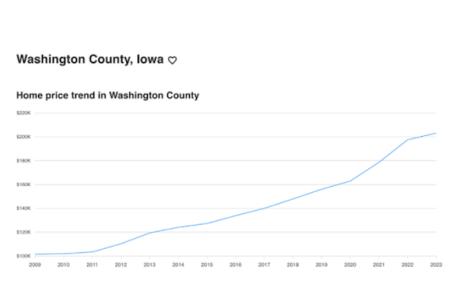
When searching for Washington, Iowa, on MoveMap, the first thing that stood out to me was the steady increase in average home prices, which may reflect growth or rising demand in the area. The site also strongly focuses on demographics, providing detailed information about age, income, and household composition. Additionally, MoveMap highlights the town's low crime rate, reinforcing the impression of Washington as a safe and stable community. However, beyond these data points, the website does not offer much additional insight into the town's character, culture, or sense of community.



Obesity, uninsured, and alcohol driving rates in Washington
 Page 10 Image 1



Location of Washington
 Page 10 Image 2



Steady increase of home prices
 Page 10 Image 3

Recommendations

This team has three primary recommendations. First, the city should consider changing their motto. Second, the city should work to improve their online branding. Specifically, changing what they are called. Third, the city should consider taking steps to emphasize how Washington is a great place for young families.

The city's motto, as stated on Wikipedia is, "Onward! To the salt mines!" This means a return to one's (possibly boring) daily work, with the caveat that the phrase can be used in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Regardless of how the phrase is used, we asked 37 college students whether or not they had heard the phrase before, and they all said they had not. This implies that the phrase is, at the very least, outdated, and, at the worst, actively harmful to the town's reputation. The town may have a different motto, or there may be no motto at all. However, as long as there is nothing to replace what is currently on Wikipedia, this phrase will likely remain something that people will see and consider strange.

The primary issue which appeared multiple times over the course of this project is that search engines do not consistently return results for the city of Washington, Iowa. This is almost certainly due to the fact that the city shares the same name as a state, the capital of the United States, and several other small cities across the country. An inability to properly search for or find information about Washington limits what people are able to learn about the city, and potentially means they might hear things about Washington which actually apply to other places. This could inadvertently harm the reputation of the city of Washington, Iowa. To fix this issue, we suggest that the city works to create an online "handle" or "hashtag" by which people agree to use to refer to the city online. Potentially, the city might put together an event where they ask citizens to submit their ideas for a handle or hashtag, in order to increase public engagement. If the city could then consistently use that hashtag or handle on any online accounts run by the city and encourage the use of the hashtag via social media campaigns, that would likely help solidify the concept in people's minds. An example of a social media campaign might be encouraging people to post pictures of themselves doing something outside in the community with the chosen hashtag, so that they could then be entered into a raffle if they tag the city and use the hashtag.

Finally, the city might not be properly presenting all of its assets to their fullest potential. To some extent, this is a good issue to have. There are so many different things to do and see in Washington that ensuring everything gets the representation it deserves appears to be a somewhat Sisyphean task. However, one group member went to the town and observed that it appears to be a very good place for young families, which is not reflected in its online presence as much as might be ideal.

Methodology

Google Images:

We went to Google and searched the phrase: washington iowa. We then looked at the first few hundred results on the Images tab, then took note of our observations after spending a few minutes searching.

Wikipedia:

We all searched “City of Washington Iowa Wikipedia,” which directed us to the city’s Wikipedia page. We then spent several minutes looking at the page, eventually writing down our thoughts. The website can be found at the following address: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington,_Iowa

Tik-tok:

We all went to Tik-tok, searched “washington iowa,” then spent several minutes looking at the videos which popped up under that tab.

City Website:

We all went to the Washington City website and observed what was available to view. The website can be found at the following address: <https://streamdb6web.securenetsystems.net/cirrusencore/KCII>

KCII:

We all listened to the Kalona radio for approximately half an hour, taking notes on the news, songs, and ads run on the radio. The website hosting the radio can be found at the following address:
<https://streamdb6web.securenetsystems.net/cirrusencore/KCII>

Travel Iowa:

We went to Travel Iowa and searched for Washington, then clicked on the appropriate search result. We then spent around 15 minutes looking at all the cards associated with the city. The city can be found at: <https://www.traveliowa.com/cities/washington-iowa/890>

Air BnB:

We went to Air BnB and searched for all houses in the city of washington, Iowa available to rent for a 2-day period some time in the next year. We then looked at all the results, as well as their reviews. The page can be found at: https://www.airbnb.com/s/Washington--IA/homes?place_id=ChIJGeFayWeo5lCr6l_c2SoPa_0&refinement_paths%5B%5D=%2Fhomes&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=may&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=june&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=july&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=august&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=september&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=october&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=november&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=december&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=january&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=february&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=march&flexible_trip_dates%5B%5D=april&flexible_trip_lengths%5B%5D=weekend_trip&date_picker_type=flexible_dates&search_type=user_map_move&query=Washington%2C%20IA&monthly_start_date=2025-06-01&monthly_length=3&monthly_end_date=2025-09-01&search_mode=regular_search&price_filter_input_type=2&price_filter_num_nights=2&channel=EXPLORE&ne_lat=41.36390166372249&ne_lng=-91.606910559913&sw_lat=41.20851812044464&sw_lng=-91.74166304961346&zoom=11.51607128087625&zoom_level=11.51607128087625&search_by_map=true

Facebook:

We went to facebook and looked at the “Washington Community Events” webpage, which can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/washingtoncountyevents>

MoveMap: We went to MoveMap and navigated to their webpage on washington iowa. The link is as follows: https://www.movemap.io/explore/us/ia/washington_county/washington

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Page 4 Image 2 - @jennymorgan

Page 4 Image 3 - @caslarowitz

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Page 8 Image 3 - *Home in Washington · 4.94 · 2 bedrooms · 3 beds · 2 baths*. Airbnb. (n.d.-b). https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/1239099674928095546?search_mode=regular_search&adults=1&check_in=2025-07-11&check_out=2025-07-13&children=0&infants=0&pets=0&source_impression_id=p3_1746679192_P3VFWQqTdYcu1_Yj&previous_page_section_name=1000&federated_search_id=SKELETON

Page 9 Image 1 - <https://www.facebook.com/search/groups/?q=washington%20iowa&sde=Abo6mQGTwumSH8ghiQqAvvjPX7NFviMO4wSBhxr6grlQwUayjg5k0ye5FNdIS2HClLkkJOB-Tfp5YV29IVJ9zt3H>

Page 9 Image 2 - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/washingtoncountyevents>

Page 9 Image 3 - <https://www.facebook.com/MainStreetWashington>

Page 10 Image 1 and 3 - *Movemap - explore where to live next.* Culture, Weather, Cost, Top Cities. (n.d.).
https://www.movemap.io/explore/us/ia/washington_county

Page 10 Image 2 - *Washington, Iowa.* Washington, Iowa (IA 52353) profile: population, maps, real estate, averages, homes, statistics, relocation, travel, jobs, hospitals, schools, crime, moving, houses, news, sex offenders. (n.d.). <https://www.city-data.com/city/Washington-Iowa.html>