

Building our Meridian With Clear Vision – Together

State of the City February 4, 2015

Meridian has transformed over the last two decades, from a small town dependent on others, to a full-service community. Once in the top 15 of Idaho's largest cities; today, we are in the top three, maybe even the top two.

What is undeniable is that we are one of Idaho's most vibrant cities. Ronald Reagan's belief about America as "a shining city on a hill", I relate to Meridian: its promise, as well as its people, are boundless.

You see this in our numbers: people moving here; businesses investing; increased events and entertainment; the wide variety of shopping and dining choices. It's evident by the generous giving of our citizens, a primary reason Meridian was recognized among the top "50 Best Places to Live" by *Money Magazine*.

It's our nationally recognized parks, the national recognition of several of our prevention programs, and our outstanding young philanthropists! Undoubtedly, we are blessed by our central location in the Valley, Idaho's great outdoors are on our doorstep, rail access is abundant, and the airport is just minutes away. And it's the necessary transportation improvements completed at key intersections, roadways, pathways, and soon the Meridian Road interchange.

Meridian's vision is to be "a premiere place to live, work, and raise a family". The City, along with our community partners, remain focused on this vision. Over the last ten years, this has been the foundation of decisions we make, how we commit resources and conduct business. It's our vision; we believe in our vision and this is why we are finding success.

Meridian, the city people love to call home; to do business. And, our families, this is most frequent comment I hear when I knock on doors about the 'why' people live here. Their parents are here; or, the reverse, their kids are here. They want to raise their children here because it's safe, the schools are great, and the people are friendly! If you ask our Youth Council members, it's a place that embraces you; a community that, if you are willing to 'serve' gives you every opportunity to make a difference, to leave your legacy. And they have.

Many of these reasons are why Meridian has received recognition as ‘a best place to live’ four times in the last decade, three of those just in the last four years. The main reason is simple. It’s our ‘people’. We have people that care - our City Council members, our employees, our volunteers. It is the people in neighborhoods and our business community, business owners and employees, who give their time and resources for the good of the whole. These "people" work together, they collaborate.

This is how we work in partnership with the faith community – where people of all faiths come together for the common good putting differences aside. Our collaborative network includes developers, builders, non-profit organizations, schools, and places of higher learning - people of all ages and all walks of life, all ‘shades’, all beliefs. It’s community.

We collaborate. That’s our special 'sauce' that sets us apart. We not only believe in our vision as a ‘premiere’ city; the key to reaching our vision is through collaboration and working together. It’s how we leverage efforts and resources, create synergy, prevent duplication, bring diverse opinions, and build on each other’s strengths. It’s our secret ingredient to our success towards our vision.

You have heard about the 'why'. During the next 30 minutes, I will talk about the 'how' and the 'what'. The 'how' is our process of getting there and the 'what' - what we have done and what we have yet to do. Our strategic plan outlines what we will focus on for the next five years.

We truly believe if we can measure, we can manage; if we manage, we can get better. Collaboration and leveraging resources are principles by which we operate. This is how we win in Meridian - measuring, managing, leveraging, and collaborating.

In our strategic plan we have five areas of focus - **Strategic Growth; Economic Vibrancy; Responsive Government; Safe & Healthy; Culture, Arts, & Recreation**. These have evolved over the last nine years; we sharpened our focus through town halls and the citywide citizen survey conducted this last year.

Let's begin...

Strategic focus area #1. Strategic Growth – Our City has long believed that quality, planned growth fuels a 'premiere' city. Meridian guides its growth from the inside out to foster efficient and sustainable services and support the redevelopment of our 'heart', our downtown.

This last year we completed the Existing Conditions Report for the Comprehensive Plan. This is the result of months of collaboration with City departments and outside agencies to tell Meridian's story from demographic, land use, and cultural perspectives. It is a critical document to help us better plan, guide growth, fill the gaps for a balance of rooftops and commercial, and ensure what is yet to come is sustainable and will pay for itself.

This will assist our Public Works with master planning. This department will be very busy focusing on ensuring we meet the new stringent regulatory levels we just received from the EPA. This, in and of itself, would take the next hour to speak of this unfunded mandate, however, I will leave you with this: Our community, our environment that we pass to our youth, is in very good hands. Our Public Works staff has spent countless hours seeking solutions that are cost effective and nets us the long term results we desire.

Moving forward, I am excited about our relationship with our neighbors to our west - the City of Nampa. Mayor Henry and I have our planning and economic development staffs working with each other as we look at where our cities will grow together. We both want to bring employment options closer to where our citizens live. We'd like to examine a regional employment area that will bring many stakeholders to the discussion table, and ultimately, part of making it happen.

I would be remiss, if I didn't talk about the rebuild of the Meridian Interchange, which is important for both south and north Meridian. This area is a critical transportation and economic corridor. The interchange itself will be completed this Fall! We continue to work with surrounding properties to identify the economic opportunities in attracting family wage jobs and needed services to the area.

It is important to point out that the work that has been done over the past number of years is about more than just the interchange and overpass itself. It's about moving goods and services, and people – whether in cars, on bikes or on foot – safely and efficiently. Other improvements to this area include landscaping, signage, and public art; a welcoming entrance to our community. It also serves as an important gateway to our downtown and is critical to our downtown redevelopment, which is ripe with opportunity as a regional destination.

Strategic focus area #2. Economic Vibrancy: “Jobs make a city vibrant” -

Our top priorities are 'job growth' and average income improvement. Over the last year the Dept. of Labor reported that we added 2,000 jobs here in Meridian! These weren't low paying jobs because we grew our average individual income by 2%.

We are also measuring timelines for how long it takes to get a permit for residential, new commercial, and tenant improvements. Meridian has one of the most aggressive permit timelines in the State. We seek continuous improvement and have set our goal to shorten overall permit turnaround times by 20% over the next year. This will assure that Meridian continues to be one of the best places to do business in the state.

As we continue our focus on being a best place to do business, we conducted an intensive economic audit this last year. We brought all stakeholders to the table, identified roles, and have a collective vision of where we are going. This process created energy and passion which brought our 'stakeholders' back to the table – under the leadership of Rob McCarvel. These folks have developed a number of steps and are delivering results!

The first step was to complete a Project Development Plan which examined the need and feasibility for conference, performing arts, and sports facilities in our downtown. Last night before the city council meeting, a vision and justification for a performing arts center and hotel conference center was presented. This project has created buy-in, energy, and a vision of the tremendous possibilities! Stay tuned.

The second step is looking toward the Downtown Ventures Lab which will turn ideas into businesses. What is unique? The partners and what has become a true collaboration. Two partners - the Chamber and School District - will bring a focus on engaging high school students and youth groups in entrepreneurial activities. The Ventures Lab is geared toward accelerating the idea of early stage technology companies and growing them in our downtown.

The third step is developing tools to retain and attract – including a new economic video we put together that was funded by a grant from Idaho Power.

While we are talking economic vibrancy in Meridian – what better place demonstrates this than, The Village at Meridian?

The Village at Meridian this last year opened 35 businesses, 30 retail, and 5 office spaces. Their success is making the retail world sit up and take notice, with more than a few of their stores reaching over \$600 in sales per square foot. This is significant and is making Meridian a retailers first choice when thinking of opening in the Treasure Valley.

The last project to mention is Idaho State University's AP Lab, which will open in March, with their Bioskills Learning Center to be online in August. These will be important assets to our health science and technology corridor – The Core - in both education and research. It also, provides a location for medical technology companies to demonstrate new and emerging technologies to physicians, surgeons, dentists, veterinarians, and educators.

Strategic focus area #3. Responsive Government - To be responsive we need to hire and retain employees that are friendly and service driven. We will use technology for communication, transparency, effective service delivery, and greater citizen engagement.

We are moving the dial in customer satisfaction, through training and retaining great employees, as shown through our city-wide citizen survey. We had a 94% level of confidence in the city; and Meridian rated 19% higher than the national average in overall quality of city services provided.

We are building a quality technology 'spine'. This last year we completed a fiber network ring connecting all city facilities in partnership with Syringa Networks.

We will use this to bring training to remote sites, enhance facility security and improve internal communication.

Using technology to communicate ‘externally’ is critical. Our citizen survey showed that citizens use our website and social media to get their information. We are revamping our website to make it easier to navigate. We have also added to our social media menu – options like Nextdoor, bringing neighbor-to-neighbor information exchange, and a platform for the city to relay critical information on emergencies, road closures, crime, and other items to specific areas of town. Our target is to triple the use of this tool in the next two years.

Community engagement and involvement is a priority. Citizen involvement can be seen the moment you walk in the front door of city hall, visitors are greeted by citizen volunteers at our ‘help desk’; in our Parks, Park Ambassadors greet those passing by with a smile and a wave. I can’t think of a better example of engagement than the Mayors Youth Advisory Council – which has doubled in the last year! These MYAC members are amazing and totally engaged! Thank you for all that you do.

Up next – we want to connect more intimately with our 55 and older community, and will be forming the Mayor’s Senior Advisory Board – look for information in the next couple of weeks in CityNews and on our website.

Strategic Focus Area #4. Safe & Healthy - For a community to prosper, it must be safe, secure, and healthy. Meridian remains one of Idaho’s safest communities.

Last year I talked about the Police Training Center which should open in August. The next phase to this is the Scenario Village – a training facility that will be built through community partnerships. The Meridian Police Department is working with students from the West Ada Technical School's pre-engineering and construction program who are designing the buildings. They are currently designing a convenience store prop and a restaurant that is envisioned to be sponsored by local companies. This will be used to not only train public safety professionals but to assist companies with emergency preparedness.

Another exciting public safety focus is Heartsafe Meridian – An initiative to increase cardiac arrest survivability in Meridian.

The Heartsafe Meridian Program is a long term plan to increase the public's awareness of Sudden Cardiac Arrest and promote early access to EMS, provide CPR Education for city employees and citizens, facilitate access to AED's, and continue to expand and enhance Early Advanced Care based on the American Heart Association's "Chain of Survival".

Nationally the survival rate from cardiac arrest tends to be between 2 and 25 percent. HeartSafe cities such as Seattle and San Diego have reported survival rates as high as 56 percent. That's our target for our community.

Our youth are getting engaged in 'safe and healthy' Meridian too. They want to ensure 'emotional' health for all by creating a movement of compassion called "Do the Right". Our teens are troubled by the loss of even one life to suicide and we all should be. Suicide doesn't discriminate on age – people of all ages are taken.

It became very personal for me right before Thanksgiving. A Meridian High alumni and solid Meridian believer took his life. He had endeared himself to many and left a void that will be hard to fill. We all have the ability to impact another person – let's make it positive.

"Do the Right" is scheduled for Wednesday, April 8th. It's a community wide day and we encourage everyone to do something nice for the person to their right.

Strategic focus area #5. Culture, Arts & Recreation - The process of improving a community's well-being is not just through job creation and business growth - but also improvements to the quality of place that strengthens the economy. Meridian is "Built for Business; Designed for Living"

The "Designed for Living" includes preserving our history. Our downtown Walking Tour does just that, by utilizing QR codes and logo marks on the sidewalk, giving families, students, and visitors a chance to learn our story walking our downtown or in the comfort of their home through our website. Kudos to the drivers of this program – Jacy Jones, Brian McClure and the Historical Preservation Commission! The next cool thing is John Nesbit's vision that has the Meridian Historical Society, MDC, and West Ada School District working on specific curriculum to integrate Meridian's story into 3rd grade history lessons. Coming soon to a school near you!

Our community is focused on ‘signature events’ like these popular favorites. Our community has long asked for a farmers market, but there are many around the valley so ours must be unique. We will be convening a working group to focus on bringing a “Youth Farmers Market” to our downtown. We will utilize funds from our Blue Cross High Five grant to make this happen; giving kids an opportunity to profit from their hobbies, projects and their passions!

Lastly, recreation opportunities are needed year round; this includes indoor facilities. Partnerships are critical here! I am proud to say our city council, our citizens, businesses, and foundations stepped up and the Meridian Boys & Girls Club gymnasium project will be turning dirt this spring! We know once people see it’s actually happening, they will help raise the last ten percent of their fundraising goal. A second partnership is progressing. A long-time Meridian family, the Hill family, and local developer, David Turnbull have stepped forward, donating land for a south Meridian/south Ada County YMCA. This land donation includes a West Ada elementary school site and land for a community park. The J.A. Kathryn Albertsons Foundation announced a YMCA record-breaking \$4 million pledge because, as they cited, the collaborative nature that this project represents.

This is an exciting project that needs Ada County stakeholders to step up and make it happen sooner rather than later; bringing year-round, family focused recreation to our community!

We are proud of where we have come. We have stood shoulder to shoulder with our community to get where we are today. More so, we are excited about the next five years and continuing to build our Meridian together!

[Legacy Award] That brings us to the perfect time to recognize our Legacy Award recipients! These individuals have left their Legacy in our Meridian. From 1999 when they first ‘conspired’ on their vision that no one would go to bed hungry; to 2004 when the Meridian Food Bank was first started; to today, having served close to 60,000 individuals and just under 1 million pounds of food last year – to continuing this mission of feeding the hungry along with their 50 partners and generous donors of the Meridian Food Bank. It gives me great honor to present our Legacy Award to Joann and Mike Myers, the family of ‘the late’ Bert Myers – who was a co-founder and one of our dreamers; and to a great friend of our community,

dreamer and co-founder, Dan Clark. Please join me in recognizing our Legacy Award recipients.

In closing, we've accomplished many things over the last year...over the last decade! This is what we know we can only accomplish 'great things' by working together. We all want the 'best' community to live in, to do business in, to raise our families with every opportunity available to them.

Our hope in planning for the next five years is that we continue the great work that those before us started, that our current leaders are progressing, and that our community not only demands but is standing shoulder to shoulder with our city to deliver.

That in the end, successful cities are focused on building a community that bring people together who otherwise would never meet. Our growth plan should not only bring jobs and services closer to where we live, but we also need to connect people to places. Economic vibrancy will nurture and encourage job and business growth that is 'built for business'; but also include a focus on 'designed for living' where people of different ages, backgrounds, and incomes interact; that we will be responsive to our 'customers' and open in our communication. We will stay focused on keeping 'safe and healthy' as a top priority. We know "cities are not just about building, they're about people."

I am honored to serve, and continue to serve, a community - of 'people'; and working with a community that is focused on a common vision of Meridian - our Meridian - a "premiere place to live, work, and raise a family.

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