

Meridian's State of the City
Wednesday, Feb. 6th 3:29 pm
Galaxy Event Center

(This is The Greatest Home Video): <https://youtu.be/xRAnUUkeS4w>

This is where you want to be – the greatest home for residents and businesses doesn't happen by itself. It takes partnerships, collaboration, and a community vision. It takes well thought out plans and investment. I am honored to serve a community that works together.

It is a privilege to stand in front of you today - as your Mayor, in my 16th State of the City - to share the accomplishments and achievements of 2018. I'm excited to share what 2019 will bring and projects that will get started. 2019 is full of promise.

The State of Meridian is strong. We are debt free. We have one of the lowest tax-levies for full service cities. Our City services of public safety, parks, community development, sewer and water, are keeping pace with our growth. We are among the top safest cities in Idaho. We continue to rate among the best places to live.

With the great, however, come the challenges - "Perils that come with success". Traffic and crowded schools are top concerns, areas we do not oversee, but are engaged with these agencies on. The State funding for both roads and schools are not keeping pace – we need them to step up. We are in this together - we all must care!

The State of the City format changed a couple of years ago to more of a report to our shareholders – you, our citizens and businesses – using the City's five focus areas. Our City's strategic plan develops objectives and tactics centered on these areas - and our vision to be a premiere place to live, work, and raise our families. We are moving the needle as the greatest home for our residents and businesses alike.

With two years to complete our five-year plan, we are on-target with great achievements and have learned a few important lessons along the way. We do things a little differently in Meridian, because as they said in *The Greatest Showman*, "Who has ever made a difference by being like everyone else?"

Focus area #1: Strategic Growth:

Last year I announced the launch of our Comprehensive Plan update a number of years ahead of schedule. Meridian's rapid growth means we continue to see significant change. Well-managed growth can be good for city residents, business, and related infrastructure. Having a community-vested vision helps guide and inform the decision-making process to manage the city's future.

This update began last May and should wrap up this fall. We are pleased with our community engagement to date with more than 4,500 participants engaged collectively, in person, at events and online. They shared what they loved including, safety, parks and recreation, family friendly, and overall quality of life. They listed what they would improve - our transportation network, preservation of farmland and open space, balanced density, as well, connected sidewalks and

pathways. In addition, they provided comments on a vision statement for the plan - “Meridian is a premier, evolving, livable, vibrant, and connected community”.

We are currently wrapping up round-table discussions focused on economic development, transportation, housing, and community design and character. This feedback will be included in the plan narrative and inform the land-use sections as well. We still have a number of months to go before we wrap up the update, but we are thrilled with the feedback so far. It really is a plan designed by the community for the community.

In our efforts to ensure public infrastructure stays ahead of growth, our Public Works staff were busy executing the largest Capital Projects portfolio ever managed. In 2018, they had 50 projects with a capital value of over \$70 million. These projects allow us to meet the needs of our growing community and comply with the ever-increasing regulatory requirements. Thanks to staff foresight, we have been preparing and saving for this day.

Notable projects include the Wastewater Facility capacity and headworks projects. These critical projects set the foundation for meeting our needs for the next decade and will be coming online in the next year.

On the water side we just commissioned our fourth water treatment facility at the Bear Creek Well, furthering our commitment to providing quality water.

Our teams completed our newest well, Well 32. We also have ongoing extension of water and sewer trunk lines to serve growth; and we replaced the water and sewer mainlines along Pine Avenue in partnership with the Ada County Highway District.

Our Public Works crews are focused on delivering premier services to this community and in some cases it can be dirty work! Here’s a look at one of many examples of what our team does to protect one of our city’s greatest assets.

(Undercover Ross Video): https://youtu.be/YRlwe-07k_Q

Thank you, ‘Ross’, Nate and the Public Works team for all you do!

The challenge in ‘Strategic Growth’ is ensuring that Meridian’s growth is the right growth and that we are growing where we have services. Citizen feedback indicates a desire for less density and to preserve farm land and open space. Our community survey results in 2017 showed fifty percent of respondents willing to support a levy for ‘open space’ without even knowing a plan. However, environmentally responsible and sustainable growth requires density. I’m committed to lead the discussion to better define ‘density’ and ‘open space’ and to address these competing needs.

We used to hear ‘we aren’t in a hurry, we have one chance at doing this right’ as part of City Council discussions and decisions. Developments should benefit our community vision to be ‘premier’ and the rights of property owners must align with this vision. At the same time, we need to continue to attract family-wage jobs and housing choices that meet the needs of all of our

citizens. We aren't in a hurry however the Valley has been discovered. Our growth must be responsible and occur where we have services in order to continue to be the greatest home!

Focus area #2: Economic Vibrancy

There are so many exciting projects in Meridian - a great example of the strength of partnerships, collaboration, and working together.

Ten Mile Crossing off Interstate-84, has been the talk of the valley and continues to be. Paylocity, Horrock Engineers, Ball Ventures Ahlquist opened in 2018. Zennify recently moved its operations there, as the company outgrew the downtown location. 2019 will see Kristin Armstrong's Pivot wellness center open along with three other health-related businesses. We will also see the first hotel, a Marriott, in this area. AmeriBen, the first to open at Ten Mile Crossing, is already expanding! They have started construction on a four-story building next door and, initially, will occupy two floors.

Did you hear this list? When I started as Mayor 16 years ago just one of these projects would have been a big deal! And this is just what's happening in one area.

We have seen steady job growth for several years with over 2,200 jobs added in 2018. The *Meridian Press* recently reported that Department of Labor data showed a steep growth rate in Meridian jobs during a five-year period at 34 percent. The state's job growth was just under 16 percent and the nation was 9 percent.

Other projects of notable size that will bring even more family wage jobs should be in front of City Council in 2019. These include Central Valley Plaza, a medical and retail complex that includes senior living, proposed in the northwest, off of Chinden. The Idaho Central Credit Union campus development, known as Eagle View Landing, in the southeast, will have Class A office space, a 'main street' with high end restaurants and entertainment (that can't be named at this time). This campus is just north of the new 87,000 square foot Norco Office Building that opened this last year, off Overland.

Now, when you talk about health and science opportunities in our valley we had a 'game-changer' open its doors this last August. The Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine welcomed its first class and has already received nearly 3,000 applications for next year! Recently, they received formal occupancy for their research lab, providing access to exploring cutting-edge research. Students now have research opportunities involving the biomedical sciences, clinical trials, patient care, and medical education through a variety of avenues.

Next door, Idaho State University continues to expand graduate level degrees at their campus, such as their Doctor of Physical Therapy program. They have started a \$3.4 million, 30,000 square foot build-out on the second floor of the Skaggs Health Science Center. One of the improvements will expand the Anatomy and Physiology Lab which is important to many entities.

There are transformations about to happen in the heart of our community. Our downtown will see a major project begin this spring. Downtown champion, Josh Evarts and Pacific Companies plan to break ground on two, four-story buildings. This is at the former city hall site

on Idaho Avenue, and at Main and Broadway. Plans call for 103 residential units, and about 16,000 square feet of retail and office space.

This project and others become more viable in our downtown and the district to the east in what is called an Opportunity Zone. This was created by the federal ‘tax cuts and jobs act’ of 2017 to encourage long-term investments in certain census-tract areas. Opportunity Zones provide a tax incentive for investors to re-invest their unrealized capital gains into opportunity funds. These dedicated investments can either defer or eliminate capital gains taxes. Bottom line: Invest in the future of our community and pay less in taxes. Our Opportunity Zone is ready for investment and we are ready to talk about it!

Adequate transportation infrastructure is an ongoing challenge for Meridian, as the center of the Valley because all cars travel through us. Critical transportation areas such as the Union Pacific Rail corridor, Linder Overpass, State Highway 16 corridor, and Eagle Road need a comprehensive plan for moving cars and commerce that supports our employment centers. We will continue working with our transportation agencies to find funding solutions, needed now more than ever to further our road priorities and address our traffic challenges.

Focus area #3: Responsive Government

To be responsive as a city, it starts with excellent employees. Take a listen and you’ll realize WE have a team proud to serve this community.

(Premier Employees Video): <https://youtu.be/Ia2VkeZuZuc>

Our employees are constantly looking for ways to provide better service. One area of focus is on finding efficiencies in how we do business. This past year, our Clerks office made it easier to access public records, public hearing notices, City Council agendas and a new online form to sign up to testify at public hearings. Citizens can also sign up for notifications on certain developments.

Social media has been effective in educating our citizens, such as the numerous changes in recycling, including our Hefty Energy Bag program and the addition of glass recycling. Thanks to the efforts of our Solid Waste Advisory Commission and our partners, the Hefty Energy Bag program has diverted 190 tons of plastic to-date, and from October through December, 7.5 tons of glass was removed from the waste stream.

Our Information Technology team and Community Development created an online suite of maps that allows the public to access information about properties. The most frequently used is the “Active Hearing map” that displays where active development applications are occurring. Additionally, Building Division customers can now submit building plans electronically, streamlining both the plan review and inspection process.

We hold financial security and transparency as a high priority. Led by our Finance Department, we have developed a financial model that projects city resource needs and a revenue forecast consolidated into a 10-year comprehensive financial plan used for budgeting and planning.

The city has also embarked on a culture shift, moving from a line-item approach to program-based in budgeting. This is a priority-based budgeting practice, which doesn't eliminate line-item costing, but identifies costs and groups into services and programs. This brings greater transparency to the cost of doing business and delivering city services.

There is so much I could share when it comes to what our employees are doing, all of which make for a great Meridian. We are committed to system improvements and efficiencies to better serve you.

Our ongoing challenge and commitment to be responsive, is to maintain a positive work culture and retain and attract employees that are exemplary in serving our community. Our culture is important and, equally so, the City's compensation and benefit programs, which are currently under review this year. The best community deserves the best employees. I'm biased but we are doing pretty darn good in this area!

Before we wrap up my responsive government update, here's something to celebrate, the eight year courthouse issue has been resolved! If you'll recall, it was based upon a 1994 court order for Meridian to provide a court facility. This court order has been dismissed. Collaboration with other cities, counties, courts, and the legislature brought a solution that all parties could agree on. It's a win for everyone.

Focus area #4: Safe, Healthy, Secure

Planning for the short and long term health and safety of our community is essential to continue to rank as one of the safest cities in Idaho, not only in police and fire. We must consider other areas of risk, such as the safety of our built community.

A city's health depends greatly on the long-term safety of our community's buildings and our Building Division takes this very seriously. Our building, mechanical, and electrical plan review and inspections, once a contracted service, are transitioning to be done in-house. This creates a more seamless and efficient process for our customers and it means we will deliver services our way, 'The Meridian Way'. The Meridian Way is to provide C.A.R.E. to our citizens in a timely, friendly, professional, and solution-oriented manner. Adding this component to any service we provide contributes to being "The Greatest Home".

School safety and security is a top priority and we have made meaningful progress toward a solid regional plan, thanks to the leadership of the Meridian Police and Fire Departments.

Their work to keep kids safe and give teachers the reassurance they need has received attention from across the state and beyond! Our heartfelt thanks to our first responders and the West Ada School District for this critical focus!

Our challenge to be safe, healthy, and secure depends on all of us. The recent murder-suicide in our community has had a tremendous impact. It has shined a spotlight on mental and behavioral health and the need for community engagement. One of our newest businesses, Cottonwood Creek Behavioral Hospital, will offer hope as a place to get help. We are proud of the Mayor's

Youth Advisory Council as they have recognized teen depression and suicide as an issue they must talk about. Their Pointe of Hope Run raised awareness and funds for the Suicide Prevention Hotline. These teens are playing an important role in finding solutions. We must all take responsibility to know the signs of mental illness and behavioral disorders and where to get help. As an employer we have that same responsibility to ensure our employees are safe and healthy - this is essential in every regard.

Focus area #5: Arts, Culture, Recreation

There is energy and activity in our last focus area, creating great excitement and buzz.

The opening of the first-of-its-kind The Hill, which includes the South Meridian YMCA, is a hit - exceeding projected participation. Phase two of the 'Y' for an indoor pool is in an active fundraising campaign. When this project happens, depends on the generosity of those who want it. They need your help, so they can turn dirt on this project sooner rather than later.

'South side' residents are excited and eagerly awaiting the opening of the first phase of Discovery Park - 27 acres of the eventual 77 acres planned. The City's third regional park will emphasize hands-on experiential learning and play. Attractions include sand and water play, dual zip lines, and a climbing map of Idaho. It has nature themed selfie stations, a pollinator garden, softball fields, an off-leash dog area and more. This first phase will open this summer!

The City will gain another park through a decision made to transfer the operation of the 22 acre Fuller Park, from Western Ada Recreation District (WARD) to the city. This was effective last October, with full ownership to be completed October 2019. This change should result in a tax decrease from WARD and will gain efficiencies in park operations under the City's care. Upon ownership of the park, the city will dedicate its primary baseball field as the "Charlie Rountree Field". Charlie was instrumental in the development and operation of this park for years as a WARD Board Member, and as a City Councilman, helping to create the first official City Parks Department and the Parks Commission.

2019 will bring two art-in-park projects to Champion Park in the northeast and Renaissance Park in the south. These public art pieces were recommended by the selection panel consisting of citizens including both Meridian Arts and Parks Commission representatives, and approved by Council. The projects are designed to strengthen these two park identities and create a greater sense of place.

We are looking forward to increased opportunities in arts and culture that will be offered with programs and projects, like the West Ada School District Idaho Fine Arts Academy. The Children's Museum of Idaho, opened in November to the delight of children and their parents, providing learning and discovery opportunities through hands-on interactive exhibits and activities. We are excited that the Treasure Valley Children's Theater found a new home in Meridian, however with the growth of their programs, they still might need more space.

The Meridian Library District, through extensive community outreach, has refined their plans for locations and are hopeful to receive community support in May to fund facilities to serve

growth. Our challenge in this art, culture and recreation area is to fully engage our citizens in planning and funding these critical quality of life areas.

This is where you come in: Funding community priorities such as a pool, libraries, the performing arts, needs public support from businesses and individuals alike. All will benefit.

2018 has been a great year! What I have shared today is the tip of the iceberg of the many accomplishments. We stay focused on our vision and know that doing the right thing is not always easy. It's not always done in a moment, some things take time. Most importantly, it takes us all working together to make good things happen.

This approach is also embraced by our 2019 legacy award recipient. This year's winner believed that you had one chance to do things right, there were too many ways to do them wrong, so take your time and don't settle for mediocrity. He served the city officially for 24 years; unofficially many more and counting! He has inspired many of us to be better people. He demonstrated what a public servant truly is, and has been instrumental in building our Meridian community to be "The Greatest Home".

Thank you Charlie - who is watching from afar - for your decades of service to our community!

Meridian...

It's everything you ever want

Everything you ever need

It's here right in front of you

THIS IS the greatest home

(Choir Performance and The Greatest Home Video): <https://youtu.be/CkoKaw2E4-0>

Thank you to the Meridian, Centennial and Rocky Mountain High School choirs.

Meridian really is the greatest home! It's amazing what we can accomplish working together. 2019 will be Meridian's best year yet and it will be my last year as your Mayor. I will not be running for re-election. My role as your Mayor has been the highest honor I could imagine. Serving alongside our employees, leadership team, City Councilmembers, and City volunteers is so rewarding - beyond expectations!

The question I get asked most often is, "What do you love about your job?". The answer is the people - our citizens, our business community, our faith community, our schools and so many more. It is YOU. I am grateful and humbled to have the privilege to serve you. I will be working hard until I turn this over to our next Mayor. There is work to be done.

The State of Meridian is strong because of what we collectively accomplish by working together!

So, the show must go on. What's next for me? As *The Greatest Showman* said in the final scene, "I'm going to watch my girls grow up". So true. It's time for my family.